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The Merit of Adaptation: An Exploration of Adaptation in Regard to Sophocles' Theban plays and the Role of Antigone within the Story

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Abstract

The creation of an adaptation is extremely challenging and time-consuming, but with the right tools and inspiration, that task of creation can be eased. By looking at three different adaptations of the Theban plays, the goal of creating a new adaptation of this series of plays can be achieved. At the same time, this adaptation can achieve a goal of highlighting an important character from the original set of plays, Antigone, and give her a role that elevates her to the main protagonist across all three plays, thus allowing the Theban plays to become a more feminine piece that works well in our modern society.

Introduction

When looking at the classics that have shaped theatre as a whole, one would be hard pressed to find a group of plays more influential than Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and its two following plays: *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. These plays are collectively known as the Theban plays detailing the rise and fall of Oedipus, the ancient king of Thebes, and his children as they struggle with the concept of fate and harmful ties to family. The story mostly centers on Oedipus, the king of Thebes, who is fated to fail the city and his family, eventually leading to his death at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*. However, I find Antigone to be the most interesting character of the story. In my creative adaptation, I have decided to make Antigone, his eldest daughter and titular character of the narrative's finale, the focus of the story for the entire set of plays. Her character arc involves learning the horrific things that plague her family and her reaction to that knowledge, making her arc more active than Oedipus' arc, as everything that Oedipus does is done offstage or in the time before the play takes place, while Antigone is still growing and changing and actively affecting her story. Oedipus' story is about the fallout of his actions while Antigone's story shows her dealing with her own troubles and issues in real time.

In Allison Horsley's and Jacqueline Goldfinger's book *Writing Adaptations and Translations for the Stage*, the two authors interview many artists to help illuminate aspects of writing an adaptation, one of whom is Tim J. Lord, a playwright who has worked with The Public Theater among other prestigious institutions. In his short interview, he specifically discusses his adaptations of several Greek plays, one of which is actually *Oedipus Rex*, wherein he dispenses some excellent advice: "I always start by reading the original several times and really tearing them apart, examining them piece by piece. I identify which characters are essential. I research the settings and ask why it's important that the play was set in that particular

place. I interrogate the play's themes and I ask, do these speak to the present moment? If they do, I keep them. If they don't, I explore whether or not they can be transformed into something that does speak to now. And if they still don't fly, I toss them. Specifically with Oedipus, themes about fate being predetermined by the gods just don't translate well to contemporary, Western audiences" (33). It is important to have the truest understanding of these plays and how they might fit well into our modern society. And maybe some aspects of the three plays really need a complete overhaul. Does the idea of Antigone's devotion to the gods still work well in our increasingly secularized society? Should that change to an essential part of her character be made or should I work to be able to fit it in a way that works well with our modern audiences? These are the questions that I need to ask and will continue to ask in the future as I continue to mold and shape this adapted set of plays. As this adaptation will be more additive in nature, I think that nothing from the original needs to be held onto tightly enough to avoid even considering getting rid of it. To me, everything can be on the chopping block, and I need to be able to make those cuts and changes in order to serve the goal of promoting Antigone throughout the timeline of these three plays.

The goal of this thesis is to take the original Theban plays and cut/adapt them, allowing me to shift the focus of the story from Oedipus to Antigone, making that focus true and consistent for all three of the plays. By shifting the focus to her through a cut/light adaptation of the original plays, the overall story of the plays will focus on a more active character and could breathe a breath of fresh air into these ancient plays. Not to say that these plays are stale in our modern time, but having a young, female character become the focus of the male-dominated original narrative, provides a different perspective in the world of adaptation of these Greek plays.

Within this study, I will be actively cutting and adapting the plays to suit this narrative purpose while trying not to deviate from the source material too far. The story must still be similar, just to be able to focus on Antigone more than she was in the original writing of the plays. This study will go through each of the major changes made to the script and explain why I have changed it in such a way, showing the necessity and how it highlights Antigone. Then I will analyze Antigone's character, along with an exploration of adaptation as a whole, drawing from sources such as *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* and *Writing Adaptation and Translations for the Stage* and observations made from specific adaptations of the Theban plays, such as *Gospel at Colonus,* Jean Anouilh's controversial adaptation of *Antigone*, and Rita Dove's work *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Next, I will be moving on to a detailed look at what a production of this adaptation might look like, from casting and acting styles to set and lighting, further reinforcing some of the themes through the performance side of theatre. At the end will be the cut of the three plays, which I am treating as a trilogy although Sophocles did not write them as one continuous narrative, with all of the changes indicated in order to highlight the extent to the adaptation/cut. It's important to note that the goal is to recut and textualize the play in order to showcase Antigone and her character while still allowing for a similar topic and narrative through-line to be similar enough to the original narrative. That's why this is leaning more towards using existing text for this adaptation rather than writing the whole narrative from scratch, so as to not deviate too much from the source material. There might be new lines or reassigned lines, but much of the original text will be present in order to show just how much we can do with this text without spinning off to create a whole new piece of literature devoid from the words of Sophocles.

Rationale for this Study

Before we delve into the concept of adaptation and a discussion of my adaptation of these plays, I want to first discuss why I am choosing to adapt the Theban plays to be looked at as a whole through this more female-focus lens. Well, I have given some thought as to why this series of plays is the perfect candidate for this analysis on adaptation and I believe that Antigone being the central character to the whole of the trilogy makes a great deal of sense and is something that tends to get lost when producing these plays. I have both seen and been a part of productions of *Antigone* that incorrectly assume that the story is about Creon and his growth rather than the steadfast resolve of Antigone and witnessing these multiple misunderstandings of that play lead me to wanting to adapt/cut it in a way that makes it impossible to view anyone but Antigone as the central character within the play. Eventually, that blossomed to wanting to do the same but with the other two plays within the Theban plays, despite it taking much more work and leaning much more into adaptation rather than a cut, which is how I initially believed that it would be. I believe that by making the story show the importance of Antigone and give her a much more defined and fleshed-out character arc within the first two plays of the trilogy, it would make it even easier to show audiences and readers that *Antigone* is entirely about her, not Creon. That's not to say that I am throwing both Creon and Oedipus to the side, they are still very important, but they are used to help Antigone's growth and her eventual blossoming into the strong woman that we see within *Antigone* itself. And I think that a refocus of the entire trilogy, along with a cutting to make the plays able to be performed within a single night without going overboard in length, is something that could be incredibly important and interesting to watch. And while these texts of the plays that I will be providing at the end of this thesis are not the finished products, (a rationale that will become apparent in a discussion on adaptation as a whole) this is simply the

start of this creative endeavor, and this thesis will help me solidify and strengthen the text as a whole.

Summary of The Theban Plays

Sophocles' most well-known series of plays, the Theban plays, includes *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and finally *Antigone*, detailing the fall of the house of Laius at the ways that Fate has impacted the lives of all these characters involved within the story, from the king of Thebes to even a lowly peasant trying to save a child's life. The story mainly follows that of Oedipus, king of Thebes and exalted hero to his people after saving them from a deadly monster years ago. As it is revealed, the king is actually responsible for a plague being brought up in his city, as he unknowingly murdered his father years ago and is now married to his mother, fathering four children with her. He is banished and winds up at Colonus in Athens with his daughter Antigone, who guides him due to the fact that he blinded himself in grief. He eventually dies within Colonus, thus not allowing his body to be recovered by Thebes, as one of Oedipus' sons wants to use his body and the power it will have to defeat the other son in war and claim the throne of Thebes. Antigone then returns home and finds that Creon, the new king, has forbidden the burial of her dead brother as he tried to attack the city in a war fought between him and the ruling king (Antigone's other brother). Antigone defies this order and gives him the rights of burial, which in turns angers Creon, who entombs her in a cave for her act of defiance. He is warned that his actions go against the gods and will bring ruin to him and his family. His heart changes too late as he finds his son (Antigone's betrothed) kills himself after Antigone had done the same, thus ending the cycle of violence that the family has brought upon the city. The series of three plays are an intense drama that deals with many aspects of the human condition, which

might be why it has survived all this time and is still well-regarded and "producible" in our modern theatrical climate.

Analysis of Adaptation

The concept of adaptation is one that has been defined by many different authors on many different subjects ranging from literature to film to theatre itself. Before diving headfirst into different adaptations of the Theban plays, I must explore what makes an adaptation a strong adaptation. By dissecting and defining the goal of this style of art, I can more clearly go forth in determining what I would like this change of the trilogy to look like, whether it is a small adaptation more akin to a recutting of the original text or something much larger that will result in more and more of the original text begin rewritten to suit the change in story. In addition, I will extend this by looking at other types of adaptations of these three plays and how their take on the classic trilogy might in turn inspire changes for this new take on the trilogy. For these adaptations, I will be looking at one adaptation of each of the three plays: Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth* (an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*), *The Gospel of Colonus* (an adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*), and finally the controversial adaptation of *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh during the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. By looking at these adaptations along with a more comprehensive overview of what adaptation truly means, I will be able to hone and refine the thesis and argument of the changes proposed by this thesis and adaptation in order to transform the text into something worthwhile and impactful to the standard theatergoing audience.

In exploring this idea of adaptation, I found Sarah Cardwell's chapter "Pause, rewind, replay: Adaptation, intertextuality and (re)defining adaptation studies" from *The Routledge*

Companion to Adaptation very useful. Her work is helpful in determining how to study the intertextuality between the original source material and this new adaptation, but she also notes that "intertextuality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for adaptation" (12). In fact, she argues that adaptations can "be examined as independent artworks" (16). When looking at this new adaptation of the Theban plays that aims to tell the story putting more of a focus on Antigone, I believe that some knowledge of the original is important but not crucial to the viewing of this new trilogy. This will align with Cardwell's acknowledgement that it is possible to disassociate from the original text when looking at adaptations. There is an understanding that the original is important, but I need to not focus on my connection to the original and instead focus on why my interpretation differs and how that is important when crafting this story and world for Antigone. In my adaptation, I am trying to tell the story with a new focus by allowing one of the most important characters, who does tend to be sidelined within the original text, stand out and have her own character arc. Thus, meriting the necessity for this adaptation to stand on its own and not be tied so much to the original that it fails to prove itself as its own piece of art.

. One aspect of adaptation of my new take on the trilogy will not be is a translation, which agrees with author Patrick Cattrysse as he argues for the difference between an adaptation and a translation. This trilogy is not going to be taking the original text within Greek and translating it to be the same story with some minor tweaks. It will be transformative enough to be able to take a wholly unique viewing experience when compared to other, more standard viewings of the Theban plays. To borrow from Cattrysse, this adaptation will be more 'additive' than 'ipsative'. Cattrysse categorizes adaptations as comprising both 'ipsative' and 'additive' processes, whereas translation studies scholars have abandoned the ipsative translation in favor of the additive one (41). While the base structure and text for the trilogy will largely remain the

same, it's the changes made and the additions to the characters and roles that will be transformative in nature, thus leading it to be more classified as an additive adaptation rather than an ipsative adaption, despite its closer adherence to the text than one would think from an additive adaptation. The goal is not the ipsative translation that Cattrysse seems to champion, but rather an additive and transformative peace that transcends the need for ipsative techniques derailed by Cattrysse. An ipsative translation allows for the author to try and remain as true to the original story and goals of the piece that is being adapted while the additive translation allows for a more complete transformation. While, yes, the base of my text is being pulled from a source that sticks much closer to this idea of ipsative rather than additive, I believe that the work of pulling Antigone forward allows for my own adaption to become additive. This viewpoint allows me to make those bigger changes within the text, rather than trying to keep the spirit of the original alive in a similar sense to how ipsative translations handle the original works.

Since the goal of my adaptation is a producible text for performance, I also found Allison Horsley's and Jacqueline Goldfinger's book *Writing Adaptations and Translations for the Stage*, very useful as a guide for the creation of an adapted play intended to be produced on stage. Writing an adaptation is a process that takes time and isn't truly done until the work has been shown onstage. Even the text that I will be providing within this thesis isn't going to be the final draft of this adaptation since I won't have been able to produce this adaptation on stage. As Goldfinger points out, "[w]riting for the stage often means seeing a work on its feet (putting words in the air) before you know whether or not it will work" (25). This sentiment is hugely important for the work that I am doing on this piece as it is something that, while the work and thought and effort have been there, needs time to breathe and be experimented on the stage. The final product may not be done for a long time after this thesis is completed and published, but the

start here is strong and worth doing and exploring and explaining within this thesis. I want to make sure that, using the analysis that I can glean from some examples of adaptation, I can create the best piece of work to highlight the goals of promoting Antigone and her struggle within this story. By using all of the evidence and analysis, then I can begin to work on what I need for my own adaptation and that will then require the extensive process of rough drafts and stage readings and final drafts and all the steps that Horsley and Goldfinger lay out within their guide to creating an adaptation.

The Darker Face of the Earth

In the creation of our own adaptation of *The Theban Plays*, it helps to look to other adaptations and discuss and analyze them so that the changes they have made can influence the work that I am doing on the trilogy. As stated before, we will be looking at an example of each play within the trilogy not only to see how much the adaptation can differ while still remaining true to the original, but also how close it can stick to the source material while still allowing itself to be a wholly unique and worthwhile piece of literature. For *Oedipus Rex*, I will be looking at and analyzing Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth*, which sets the play on a slave plantation in 19th century antebellum South Carolina. For *Oedipus at Colonus*, I will be watching a production of *The Gospel at Colonus*, which reimagines the play as a service at a black Southern Baptist church and retells the story mostly through song and choir singing. Finally, for *Antigone*, we will be looking at a controversial adaptation by Jean Anouilh, which uses the story to comment on the government of France during World War II as the Nazi forces

were occupying the country. All three of these plays do something different from one another and by looking at them both individually and as a whole, I can use that information to shape how I would make my adaptation of these plays different and unique. Some aspects of some of these plays might give me inspiration within my own adaptation, such as *The Gospel at Colonus* helping me in shaping the chorus sections of the trilogy or *The Darker Face of the Earth* shaping just how much I'd like to change of the original while still making it its own adaptation. All these ideas and more could be discovered when diving into these plays so we will go through them one by one in order to pull out as much inspiration and information on how to adapt these plays as possible.

The Darker Face of the Earth takes some interesting deviations from the original *Oedipus Rex*, adapting the play to focus more on the concept of American slavery and the tragedies that can arise from the horrible way the slavery system and slave trade operated. The play opens with the birth of a mixed-race child by Amalia, the baby, obviously not related to her husband, is quickly sold and the rest of the people on the plantation are informed that the baby died in childbirth. Years later, a slave named August is brought onto the plantation, who gets caught up in a rebellion that the slaves are planning. He joins them, as the heads of the house have become increasingly cruel towards the slaves in the years since and Augustus is an incredibly intelligent and rebellious man. However, upon hearing about the rebellion, Amalia orders Augustus up to her house. At the house, they discover that they are intensely attracted to each other and begin to have an affair, wherein Amalia begins to fall deeply in love with Augustus. Meanwhile, the slaves, including Augustus, are meeting in the swamp to discuss the rebellion. A mentally unhinged slave named Hector (who incidentally is Augustus' father) threatens to reveal that there is a rebellion about to take place, forcing Augustus to kill him to

preserve the rebellion. As time goes on, the slaves in the rebellion demand that Augustus kill the masters of the house in order to prove that he hasn't betrayed the cause due to his feelings. Louis, the head of the household and husband to Amalia, discusses the baby that Amalia had with Hector and, upon hearing this, Augustus realizes that he is the baby that Louis is talking about, but getting it wrong and thinking that he is Louis' son. He kills Louis and Louis begs Augustus to ask Amalia about his own mother. Upon confronting her, both he and Amalia realize that Augustus is the child that she had with Hector, prompting Amalia to kill herself. The play ends with the slave celebrating the deaths of their former masters, lifting Augustus into the air as he spirals into sorrow and despair. The play ends with the plantation house being set on fire and the crowd of slaves chanting "Freedom" over the crying of Augustus.

***Oedipus* in Antebellum South**

Rita Dove does a fascinating job with this concept of adapting *Oedipus Rex* as it isn't a complete one-to-one adaptation of the source material, rather it overhauls the setting, characters, and specific story beats to tell a new story with the same concepts and themes in a refreshing and heartbreaking way. The parallels between the concept of Fate within the original play and the institution of slavery is such a fascinating and powerful comparison that works so well and really highlights the lengths that one can go to when adapting a play in such a drastic deviation from the original source such as Dove's work does. I want to analyze specifically the ending of each play as it shows an interesting comparison between the two and one that can be beneficial when studying adaptation as a whole and how it might influence this own adaptation of mine. The endings of both plays are truly heartbreaking in every sense of the word. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus realizes that, despite trying to live a good life, he has been unexpectedly ruined by both the will of the gods and the unrelenting force that is Fate itself. His self-mutilation is testament to

that, as it shows the audience how truly lost the man is and how little he values himself as a person in that instance after discovering the horrible fate that has befallen him and his family. It doesn't help that he has a brief glimmer of hope before he learns that his wife is actually his mother, as a messenger comes and informs him that the man who raised him (his adoptive father) has died and the prophecy that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother did not come true. This is seen as a triumph for Oedipus in that moment as he, incorrectly, believes that he outwitted Fate and his safe from the horrible things that were prophesied to befall him. Only for, moments later, the horrible reality to crash around him. It's a haunting moment, when the audience first sees Oedipus after it's revealed that he gouged his own eyes out offstage, and the care and importance of this reveal is something that needs to be taken account when producing this play. It's what helps begin this moment of catharsis for the audience, as Oedipus is getting what he deserves in the eyes of the gods and Fate with all the things that he has done throughout his life and it's pitiable as he truly was not a bad man, father, husband, or king. This ending is the culmination of this feeling of dread that is built up throughout the whole of the play, what with the plague being a looming force since the beginning and the slight feeling that something is incredibly wrong with what is going on in the city of Thebes. Dove does something interesting with the catharsis of the original in *The Darker Face of the Earth* and the ending that Augustus has to deal with in comparison to the ordeal that Oedipus had to go through. Augustus does get a very similar glimmer of hope as Oedipus does, as the revelation that he was born on this plantation that he is attempting to overthrow leads him to believe that his father is Louis, the owner of the plantation, and some random slave woman. He feels a sense of satisfaction in knowing that he knows his father, but then is forced to kill him as Louis is trying to shoot him first. There is this sadness as Augustus had to kill his father but then there is the twinge of

curiosity as Louis's dying request is for Augustus to ask Amalia (Louis's wife and Augustus's current lover) about who Augustus's mother is. Augustus, still believing Louis to be his father, does so and is hit with the revelation from Amalia and Phebe (a fellow slave) that Amalia is his mother and that Hector, the slave that Augustus murdered, is his father. Then, much like the original, Amalia kills herself. However, where the original Oedipus stabs his eyes out, Augustus does not get the chance to do so as he is interrupted before having a chance to react properly and act on his despair that he feels in the moment. That is because the slave revolt bursts into the room and finds that both masters of the plantation have been killed, assumedly by Augustus, and the slave cheer and celebrate Augustus. The cathartic moment of this ending the sight of a man, mourning the loss of his family and the possibilities of his future, being carried around by those simply wishing to become free and seeing the opportunity for them to do so in this moment. One does feel happy as these people have worked hard to ensure that they are free and can take steps to solidify that freedom, however, one also feels horrible for the tragedy that has befallen Augustus. Much like Oedipus, Augustus was a good man who was torn apart emotionally, not by the whims of Fate (although prophecy and Fate do play a part within this adaptation), but by the cruel and inhumane system of slavery. Both plays employ that sense of catharsis in different ways, but Dove's adaptation remains true to the spirit of the original due to this feeling of a catharsis in a similar way to *Oedipus Rex*.

***The Darker Face of the Earth*'s Ending**

Now, it is interesting to note some of the changes that Dove had to make between the first draft and the final draft, namely the ending. As discussed before, Dove keeps that sense of catharsis that the original *Oedipus Rex* created and implemented, but it was not always the case. In her original draft, Dove actually had the character of Augustus die at the end of the play, but it

didn't feel right. She looked at the original text and describes Oedipus as a "living dead man" (137) and realized that it would be more nihilistic and more tragic for him to have lived throughout this and came out physically okay, but mentally destroyed. It honestly strengthens the play as a whole because, after the horrors that Augustus had to be witness to, death would almost seem like a release from all of those actions that he had both caused and that had been enacted upon him, much like the original Oedipus. This was not the only change and I believe that it is imperative and helpful to look at some of the other notable changes and how it might help me with my own adaptation when looking for aspects of the original plays to differ from. One of the other notable changes was to flesh out the characters of Hector and Amalia, adding a three-dimensional feel to them in order to strengthen the themes of the play. And that aspect of strengthening more than just Antigone is something that I need to hold onto and make sure that I allow with my adaptation these side characters to maintain or even surpass the characterization in the original trilogy. I will discuss that more in depth in the next section, but I wanted to set the precedent now so I can tie it back to Dove's work specifically as the inspiration for this goal. In some instances, whole characters are changed in a drastic way between the two iterations, such as Amalia becoming a bit softer and more feminine in the second draft of the play. She also strengthens relationships, particularly between Hector and Amalia, which creates this amazing conflict between Hector and Augustus throughout the course of the play as Augustus and Amalia begin their wild romance. It is also prudent to mention, while not being applicable to my adaption, the change that Dove made in between the two versions, which is the introduction of the idea of "double-consciousness." Double-consciousness, a term defined by W.E.B. Du Bois, details how Black Americans see the society of America through two different lenses: "as an American and then also as black person." (3) This comes into the final play with Augustus as he

technically belongs to two different worlds and often has the most sense of double-consciousness out of anyone within the whole cast of characters. Now, I won't be able to include this idea of double-consciousness within my script because, as a white person, I am wholly unqualified to write about such topics, but it helps to see that whole ideas and themes can change from one draft to another, simply through more research into several different sources of inspiration.

Characters: Original vs. Adaptation

One aspect of the analysis of Dove's play that I want to go into further, both for her adaptation as well as my own later on when I am discussing it, is how much her work, and eventually my own, embraces the original and how much it "disturbs" the work of the original to make itself wholly its own thing. The importance of analyzing Dove's work, as well as my own, is to be able to accurately understand the differences and degree to which the original play of *Oedipus Rex* is changed in order to get a feel for how drastically I wish my own adaptation to change and to what degree. It is stated that adaptation is a sort of revival, a piece that both embraces the celebrated aspects of the source material while being able to update it to our modern time and our modern way of viewing the world. Not to say that those originals are outdated, far from it, it is more that they are being brought into our modern world in a way that might reach larger audiences than it would have with a simple staging of the appropriate text. In looking at the characters, Augustus actually is remarkedly similar to Oedipus, albeit with a vast difference in their status within the worlds of both of these plays. Both are incredibly intelligent and witty, Oedipus with the Sphinx and Augustus when he calms his people out of their superstitions and their fears of a rebellion. They also are prone to anger and murder, some might say quite easily and unexpectedly, with each's murder of their own father done out of both anger but also to protect themselves (or in Augustus's case, both himself and his cause). There is a very

interesting parallel and difference in how both plays handle the source of this plague upon the land. In *Oedipus Rex,* the plague is just that, a plague, brought upon due to Oedipus's actions with both his father and mother, mainly his father though. In *The Darker Face of the Earth*, the plague isn't just affecting the people of the Jennings Plantation, but all of America, as the plague is symbolized as the concept of slavery. In that, there is a distinction between the two "plagues" as Dove's plague only affects one group of the population while Sophocles' plague effects all without distinction. Dove used the concept of the plague to comment on the inequality, making Augustus's struggle to overcome it that much more personal compared to Oedipus's, from a certain point of view. Augustus's role as protagonist is also not as set in stone as the only protagonist in the piece, wherein Oedipus is clearly the protagonist of his own play.

Within Dove's work, three female counterparts for Augustus are highlighted and can be interpreted as protagonists just as much as Augustus is. Firstly, is Amalia, the plays counterpart for Jocasta. Amalia has a much more expanded role in the play when compared with Jocasta, who in the original, simply commented on the events and usually was only there to be an ally to Oedipus and prop up his story. In *Darker Face*, we see the courtship of Amalia and Augustus and see the active role she takes in both his life and the life of the plantation around her. There are also very interesting parallels between Augustus and Amalia, albeit reversed for the two; whereas Augustus was raised "white" by his foster father and owner after he was sent away from the Jennings Plantation as a child, Amalia could be considered as being raised "black" as a child due to her being allowed to interact and play with the slaves much more than is usual for that time period. (142) "Amalia belongs to that group of women who dominate so much of Western literature, women who are at once strong and fiercely independent yet at the same time enslaved by the rules of their society which has forced a feminine script upon them." (779) This parallel

gives Amalia much more to work with in terms of story and themes than Jocasta had in Sophocles' work and allows herself to fill in a protagonist role within Dove's story, allowing her to somewhat compete with Augustus for that role. Now, I want to make it clear that I am not insinuating that Jocasta is a bad character or that Dove's play surpasses Sophocles' in quality, I am simply noting the difference in mindset behind the two characters. Another of these competing protagonist characters is Phebe, the slave girl that has hopelessly fallen in love with Augustus, even despite the tragedy that happens to him in the finale of the play. Phebe is this emotionally resilient, strong woman who cares deeply for both Augustus and the slaves around her, but not allowing her emotions to get the better of her, much like how Augustus does throughout the play. And the unfortunate situation befalling her is that she is held back by this institution of slavery and that her tragic end is tied with Augustus's end. Phebe does seem like she would be a caring and devoted partner to Augustus were he not struggling for freedom in this unjust world. The tragedy comes from the realization that nothing like a happy ending for the two could ever happen due to this barbaric institution. The last character that has a claim to "protagonist" is Scylla, the most spiritual of all the characters within the play. She is the character who is most connected to her African roots and contrasts nicely with Augustus, who seems to have either rejected his African roots or been raised in a manner that would cause him to reject those roots. In some ways, Scylla is the character that has the biggest understanding of the devastation that slavery has caused upon her people, and, in some ways, that puts her at odds with Augustus, despite both wanting to free their people. She wants to return her people to the ways that were stripped from them while Augustus only knows this European-America way of life that he was taught growing up. And while Scylla does not act upon this as she doesn't have the connection to her fellow slaves like Augustus might have, that does not dimmish her role

within the story and themes of this play, bringing her to the forefront of the narrative, at least from the spiritual sense. All three of these women have hugely important roles within the themes and story of this play and all are elevated to share the role of protagonist with Augustus. This is important to note because I am virtually trying to do the same with Antigone and thus, these examples have been hugely beneficial to helping me accomplish that for my own style of adaptation. I will of course detail how I will accomplish this in my own way later on, but laying out these examples helps me look at what might inspire me in my attempt, maybe even pulling ideas from all three examples or going somewhere wholly unique but still in the same spirit as these three women.

Rita Dove's Poetic Structure

Dove's work also, notably, uses a very similar poetic structure when compared to the original, further connecting it to Sophocles' work. She is able to accomplish this due to the fact that Dove considers herself a poet and has a background and education in poetry, allowing her to create beautiful imagery and structure within the poetic form of *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Moreover, she claims in an interview with Therese Steffen on her work that her "puzzle fetish has something to do with the way [my] poems are constructed." (107) She views the work that she does with poems are often similar to how she constructs puzzles, in her own words she will "make a poem's world cohere only at the very end, like the final piece in a jigsaw puzzle." (107) She wants to focus much on the world and story of her poetic works, and allow that to influence her poetic structure, allowing it to come together seamlessly in the end. It takes talent and while I do not have anywhere close to the experience or talent of Dove, her take and style could help inspire my own, in addition to the fact that I am sticking much closer to the source material and could always simply tweak the base verse to fit my new adaptation. One notable difference

between Dove's work and Sophocles' is that Dove uses an extensive amount of stage directions. Not overbearing or to a degree that is distracting, but it is a substantial amount more than the original and allows much more physical action to take place onstage instead of just relaying the information through messengers. The play, thanks to these stage directions, is much more action oriented than *Oedipus Rex* and the inclusion of my own amount of stage directions could help me find a happy medium between these two plays, as I would want to stick a little more to the spirit of the original than Dove does. But again, I will detail that more extensively later on, I just wanted to point out the differences in style as I am wrapping up here.

Rita Dove's *The Darker Face of the Earth* is a harrowing adaptation of *Oedipus Rex* that uses the style and story of the original to comment on the tragedy that is American slavery. In some ways, it surpasses the original in terms of tragic story beats, but both have their own merit and stand on their own without the influence of the other. The play has given me much to think about with my own adaptation and, in studying this play, I have changed my entire outlook on how I will be approaching these plays. What I thought was going to be more of a simple adaptation has changed and morphed into what I will be attempting to do with both the trilogy and Antigone as a character. While my adaptations won't be as extensive as Dove's take on the tragedy, I feel the desire to go further than I thought I had all because I have been studying this play and its themes exhaustively.

My Adaptation for *Oedipus Rex*

But what does all this discussion of Dove's adaptation mean for my own adaptation of this trilogy of plays? Well, there are two goals: to expand the role of Antigone to make her the

most central character of both this play and the trilogy as a whole and to shorten the play enough to be able to produce all three plays within one evening without the runtime being extraordinarily long. The latter goal is easy, simply trim some of the fat of the (admittedly already short) play while still retaining the language, spirit, themes, and characters. The former, however, requires some thoughtful and specific changes in order to bring the character of Antigone forward within the trilogy. It is important to note that Antigone isn't really in the original text of *Oedipus Rex*, she and her sister Ismene are only briefly mentioned and not even shown in the original version of the play. Now, as more translations and adaptations are written and produced, there is a bit of a precedent to show the two sisters at the very end before Oedipus leaves, but that is often times the extent of their role in this particular story. So, the question is, how do we bring these two forward within the play? And I want to emphasize that both of them need to have their roles expanded upon as it will create a satisfying and complete character arch between the sisters as their relationship changes throughout the trilogy. Obviously, Antigone will be more prominent, but that doesn't mean that I will forget all about Ismene when writing. Circling back to my initial question, the answer that I find satisfying is to incorporate the two into the chorus, making them prominent members of said chorus and giving them opportunities to interact with both their father and the people of the city of Thebes. It is important to note that the two are supposed to be children in the original text, but I have decided to age them up a bit into their mid-teens. They can still be referred to as children, but maybe with a more condescending tone now that they are older than their original counterparts. This could create more conflict between Antigone and the people of Thebes, which will help in defining the themes and characterization of Antigone as we progress father into her story, setting the stage for her disillusionment with the people of Thebes that we see from her in the next plays in the trilogy. But this placement of Antigone and Ismene

as members, or even leaders, of the chorus allows them to interact with Oedipus even more and start to develop and strengthen that bond between them, specifically Antigone and Oedipus. With this bond already established and developed by the end of *Oedipus Rex*, it will help when that bond is tested in *Oedipus at Colonus* and raise the stakes within that play for Antigone. With the leaders of the chorus being the daughters of Oedipus, obviously there is now more of a connection and that would change the relationship between the two. I want nice, tender moments between Oedipus and his daughters so that both the character of Antigone and the audience as a whole can endear themselves to our titular character in a rapid, yet natural fashion, allowing the harrowing events that occur toward the end of the play to hit harder for both the audience and Antigone, bringing up those feelings of catharsis that *Oedipus Rex* is known for effectively and intensely, while also allowing that feeling to be directed more towards Antigone.

And that is one other major aspect of the play that I need to discuss: this idea of catharsis and how important it is to the spirit of *Oedipus Rex*. I think that it is incredibly important to show this concept when adapting the trilogy and how that feeling must be kept in order to remain true, despite changing things around. Catharsis, according to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his book *Poetics*, is the purification or purging of emotions through art, specifically theatre. The reason why I bring it up and will continue to bring it up when discussing these plays and my own adaptation is because when Aristotle was writing about catharsis in his book, he used *The Theban Plays*, more specifically *Oedipus Rex*, as an example. So, while this concept of catharsis was defined and articulated years after the plays were written, I would still argue that it is an important concept to these plays and one that must be preserved when making an adaptation. With this maintaining of catharsis, however, I want to change a few things, specifically with *Oedipus Rex*, as the center point of catharsis in the original play was Oedipus. However, as I am

changing the main subject of each play to be Antigone, I think that it would be interesting to attempt to make her the center point of the catharsis. It's actually a bigger undertaking than I first believed, but I think that in order to make the story of the trilogy about Antigone, I must allow the catharsis stem from her, at least she will be the biggest source of catharsis from the audience. A possible idea to focus this catharsis on Antigone, (in addition to building up that relationship between Oedipus and Antigone as discussed earlier) is to have the remaining members of the chorus focus more on her than Oedipus when commenting on the reveal of incest, as she is the most prominent product of that incest between Oedipus and Jocasta. In my mind, as soon as it is revealed that Oedipus and Jocasta are mother and son, there is a long and palpable silence onstage. Slowly, in a manner that would convey horror at this revelation, the entirety of the chorus would turn and stare at Antigone (and to a lesser extent, Ismene) as it dawns on both them and the audience that she is a direct result of this incestual marriage. The lighting would only accentuate the despair and otherness that Antigone might feel, as the lights slowly go down except an extremely bright, harsh spotlight on her, making her seem completely alone with this horrible realization. Of course, the actor playing Antigone has to sell it through mostly silence and nonverbal acting, but that's the job of the actor and director, not of the writer. And while Antigone stands there in shock and horror, those feelings would quickly overwhelm Ismene, who will stumble out of the spotlight that both of them are standing in, truly leaving Antigone all alone onstage, almost abandoned by the people that she cares about. I like the image of her being stuck there, unable to come to terms with the horror of her lineage, and maybe the idea of her still being frozen until the sight of her father blinded might shake her free from the hold that this revelation has on her. That might work, as the flocking to Antigone as being the biggest victim is incredibly tragic and can lead to that sense of catharsis. There is also the question of whether or

not we need a concrete feeling of catharsis at the end of *Oedipus Rex* as the plays are meant to be shown back-to-back-to-back in a single evening of performance. However, I think the catharsis at the end of *Oedipus Rex* is important, even if it ends up being smaller than if one were to observe *Oedipus Rex* on its own, as there won't be much downtime in between each play, maybe a short intermission. This interruption of the feeling of catharsis could be a very helpful tool to promoting Antigone as a whole, since the only meaningful time the audience will be able to sit and stew in their catharsis will be at the end of *Antigone*, which already has a feeling of catharsis that is a result of Antigone already. But even so, I do want to make each feeling of catharsis at the end of each of the plays as much focused-on Antigone as possible.

As I also discussed with Dove's adaptation, I will be adding a large amount of stage directions to the play so as to give future directors and actors the tools that they might need in order to successfully bring to life this specific vision for the trilogy. This will admittedly take a lot of work but one major aspect that I would like to incorporate is more choreography and movement during the choral sections, almost evoking how it would've been performed in the ancient world. One notable moment is right after Oedipus learns of his true origins and flees into the palace to find Jocasta. As I detailed before, there will be the long pause and horrified looks by the chorus as the lights dim around Antigone and Ismene before Ismene stumbles back and leaves Antigone all alone. Eventually, the lights will rise, and the chorus will then launch into their climatic chorus of the play, detailing and exclaiming their shock and sadness. The vision for this hugely important moment in the play is the chorus to swirl around Antigone, still stuck in horror at what she has learned, so that they are physically portraying the emotional and mental torment that Antigone is going through at this very moment. It should be chaotic and intense, requiring huge amounts of choreography and movement training. I want everything to be chaos,

except for Antigone, stuck in the center of this human storm, still unable to recover from the shock and pain. It will require a huge amount of effort by everyone involved by the image of the storm of people swirling around our lead as she realizes what she truly is could be so impactful and beautiful. After the first half of that choral section, Antigone takes over with a powerful first line for her section of the chorus: "Oh heavy hand of fate!" The rest of the passage is a mournful plea, wondering why things had to turn out this way and how this information revealed feels like, to Antigone, "a second death".

O heavy hand of fate!
Who now more desolate,
Whose tale more sad than thine, whose lot more dire?
O Oedipus, discrowned head,
Thy cradle was thy marriage bed;
One harborage sufficed for son and sire.
How could the soil thy father eared so long
Endure to bear in silence such a wrong?

All-seeing Time hath caught
Guilt, and to justice brought
The son and sire commingled in one bed.
O child of Laius' ill-starred race
Would I had ne'er beheld thy face;
I raise for thee a dirge as o'er the dead.
Yet, sooth to say, through thee I drew new breath,
And now through thee I feel a second death. (45)

It's powerful and I want, at the moment of her first line, for the entirety of this human storm to instantly stop in its place. It needs to be sudden and jarring, so sudden that it almost takes your breath away. And then that's where the chorus remains throughout the rest of her section of this chorus: stuck and frozen because the world needs to focus on Antigone for that entire duration of her grappling with this realization. And within this section, I think we need to see anger as much as we see despair. This moment is the first step in Antigone's disillusionment with Theban society and Thebes as a whole. She and her family have been so ruined because of both fate and the actions of this city that this must be the moment wherein she vows to follow her

father, no matter where he goes or what he does. I don't believe that this section is a defense of what has happened but more like a eulogy for the man that Oedipus was and the family that Antigone once had. While this section was never written or intended to be recited by Antigone, I think it works marvelously and can really help add to the themes of Antigone's journey and the characterization of the character as a whole. This is just one aspect of the chorus choreography that I want to implement, but I wanted to detail it and show that there will be moments of this kind of movement in the chorus that I want to add within each play within the trilogy.

In these changes for *Oedipus Rex*, the thing I need and plan to change the most is Antigone and her journey throughout the play and how it would lead into the other parts of this trilogy. As I mentioned earlier, Antigone is upset and hurt by what Thebes has done to her family and there is one question that must be answered. At the end of the play, Oedipus is forced to leave the city of Thebes and wander Greece as a blind man. Antigone, of course, goes with him and we have to ponder this: is she more upset with having to leave the city with Oedipus or the fact that they are forced to leave by those remaining? It's an interesting question. But only one answer fits well with the rest of Antigone's story and her character development throughout the trilogy. It is my firm opinion and belief that she is upset with the powers that be, namely the men of the chorus and Creon himself, that Oedipus was forced from his home and city due to the threat of plague that is being caused. Now we must note that the men and Creon are doing what they think is right in order to protect the city, as they must remove the source of this plague, but sending him on his own without any say. It also should be noted that they didn't need to send Oedipus away, just the fact that discovered the truth about his situation could be cause enough to end the plague. However, the men decide it is best for him to leave, and Oedipus is too broken by what transpired to fight against their wishes. Antigone, still in shock, does agree to stay with

him, but the confusion and pain that those in charge are willingly inflicting upon their former king and savior of their city from the sphinx should change the way that Antigone views the city and people who now rule it. I don't know if there is any hatred towards them yet, that should be left up to interpretation by the director and actor, but it does change her and causes this disillusionment with the whole of the city of Thebes. I also want to make an important note that Ismene needs to remain in Thebes at the end of the play for multiple reasons. Firstly, she has to meet up with Antigone and Oedipus during the events of *Oedipus at Colonus* as it is stated that she is coming from Thebes to warn her father and sister. Secondly, and more importantly, she has to have this disconnect with both Antigone and Oedipus to drive further the divide between the two sisters. Antigone needs to see that Ismene didn't step up when she needed to and does retain some bitterness towards her throughout the course of *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. I don't think there is any hatred, again, as Antigone isn't and shouldn't be characterized as a hateful person, but there still needs to be a bit of disconnect. It could serve as an interesting parallel between the two to show what might've happened to Antigone had she not gone with her father and allowed her disillusionment with Thebes to grow and help drive her actions. This will help her get to the point where, in *Antigone*, she willing acts against Creon and the city of Thebes in order to protect her family and do what is right. That's a hugely important place that she needs to arrive at in her final play, and the seeds of that are sowed right here in the last actions of the chorus and of Creon at the end of *Oedipus Rex*.

And while these examples aren't the only notable changes being made, both in the rough draft and planned for as I continue to work on this endeavor, I think that I have summed up my goals with specifically *Oedipus Rex* in this adaptation. It was admittedly the most difficult to adapt, having to bring a character that, at best, only runs onstage in the final 5 minutes of the

play and bring her to the forefront. However, I am satisfied that my work is yielding a new and interesting take on the classic play and is helping give this classic character more to work with within her own story. It starts to show the dangers of patriarchy and how Antigone fights against it; a theme of the trilogy that while is present in *Antigone*, is certainly not an aspect of this play and its sequel *Oedipus at Colonus*. The core tenants of introducing more movement aspects to the play, giving Antigone a larger and more active role in the story of her father's downfall, and setting up the character arch of her disillusion with Theban society are all there and will help make the transition to the next two plays stronger and more worthwhile as an audience will sit through the trilogy as a whole during a performance.

Before we leave *The Darker Face of the Earth* and *Oedipus Rex*, I want to state that I truly believe that Dove's work is a masterful adaptation that helps me set the limits and extent to which I will adapt the trilogy. While my adaptation won't be as huge of an overhaul as this work, it still helps me in deciding how to maintain tone and themes without sticking too heavily to the source material. It's also incredibly helpful in maintaining the poetic language and structure of the piece, as Dove's adaptation is similarly wiring in the poetic style as the original. Some of the lines within the text will have to be altered in order to better serve the story of Antigone so seeing another author, granted one with considerably more experience with writing in a poetic language than I, helps give me a little more guidance when having to make such changes. While the play has no mention at all of the children like Antigone, I think that this effort and research into this play has yielded some important inspirations and thoughts considering my own work. If Dove can take out the, admittedly minor, character of Antigone while overhauling the setting, story, and characters, I believe that I can do something just as successful while not changing too much of the setting or characters, just highlighting and emphasizing the role that Antigone has to

play within the whole story of *The Theban Plays*. Dove's work does a truly masterful job at keeping the themes but changing the world to something completely different and her work has helped me when it comes to maintaining that sense of catharsis within my work and doing my best in order to make the focus of this catharsis to Antigone.

The Gospel at Colonus

The Gospel at Colonus is a piece of theatre that was devised by director Lee Breuer and composer Bob Telson that is an adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*. However, where this adaptation deviates from the original is in the presentation and ideas of spirituality. The play is retold through the idea that this is a black Pentecostal church and the preacher of this church, alongside the choir, recreate the story of *Oedipus at Colonus* through song and the recreation of scenes within this church setting. It latches onto both the idea of how these plays used to be an act of worship for the god Dionysius (thus giving it a more religious setting and framework) and how this is really the most spiritual of the whole trilogy within *The Theban Plays*. The play starts out much like how a sermon would, with reading from a scripture and a welcome and a recapping of *Oedipus Rex* as if it was told by a Bible story. The play is more of a spectacle to behold rather than a work of literature, like how some could see the original plays. The characters are brought to life from performances, from the subdued and reserved Oedipus to the intense passion that the chorus feels throughout the course of the play. The play follows a similar story as it is much more interested in retelling the story in this new method of storytelling rather than changing the story itself to suit the style that it is going for, which is an interesting comparison to our previous adaptation: *The Darker Face of the Earth*. It really takes the idea that the original concept of theatre was created for, a form of worship, and dials that up to 11, stretching out many of the chorus moments into massive undertakings of song and dance and

even incorporating the non-chorus scenes in order to serve the more musically inclined production. The production takes interesting twists and turns, with a standout being the introduction and interpretation of Creon within this story. Right before the arrival of Creon, the tone is much lighter and happier, with joyous gospel music celebrating life and that arrival of Oedipus. However, once Creon enters, a pall is cast over the chorus as they go deadly silent, all the while Creon is trying to assert that he has a right to be here. The music afterwards is slower and more tense until Creon kidnaps both Ismene and Antigone, which transforms the music into almost a funeral procession as the chorus and Oedipus are thrown into turmoil and despair. The play then follows much of the same story, with Polynices entering and pleading with everyone for his father's blessing and Oedipus' eventual death. The curious fact to mention about the death of Oedipus is that it is not considered to be a negative within the play. Yes, there is a brief period of mourning, but then they go on and celebrate his life in a very joyous and righteous manner. The climax of the play has almost been changed and moved, as in the original, it absolutely culminates with Oedipus' death but, in this adaptation, I firmly believe that the climax is the celebration afterwards. Not only is it easily the highest energy found within the production that I was able to watch, but it feels like that's where this adaptation has been building to not the death, but the celebration of Oedipus' life. I find it fascinating, and I have no idea if that is international or is just a product of this idea of celebration instead of grief, but I genuinely love and respect this change. It's an interesting fact about this adaptation to note because often times there is a large focus on grief within stagings of *Oedipus at Colonus* despite the fact that Oedipus is eventually redeemed in his and his peers' eyes. It might be something interesting to keep in my when devising and discussing my own adaptation of this particular play. How dour should the ending of my *Oedipus at Colonus* be? Is there a celebration in my own vision? Should I be

inspired by *Gospel*'s ending or use the grief that Antigone is feeling to fuel her into the start of *Antigone*? All important questions that I will absolutely discuss later but want to pose now while I am inspired by Breuer's work. (Breuer, Lee, Bob Telson, and Sophocles. *The Gospel at Colonus*.)

Black Morality Plays and their Influence on *Gospel at Colonus*

Mimi D'Aponte writes about *The Gospel at Colonus* and attempts to claim that it is "an energizing, liberating, communal, participatory, redemptive, alternative theatrically." (101.) Those are big words of praise and D'Aponte does put in the work to prove this claim as true, all while discussing the history of American Black theatre. Looking into the historical background, American Black theatre began in the late-1800s as they performed minstrel shows and abolitionist dramas. Relating to *The Gospel at Colonus*, there were two major subgenres rising up in the theatrical world during the 60s and 70s that had a major influence on the style that *Gospel* is steeped in: the gospel musical and the wave of postmodernist adaptations of classical plays and texts. And that marriage is clear to any audience member or member of the production team, as it is a beautiful marriage between these two differing styles that finds the similarities between the two and focuses on the religiousness of the original play. It genuinely does take this idea of a "morality play" that was so integral to the formation of Black theatre within America and allows the feelings and style of morality plays to come through, despite the fact that the inspiration for this piece did not come from local or traditionally black tales like so many other of these black morality plays. It embraces what makes Black theatre in America so great while also not being tied to these tales and allowing a claiming of what is seen as a "Western" play within the canon of theatre. Not that plays like *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, or *Joe*

Turner's Come and Gone, just a few plays that are considered instrumental in the formation of modern Black theatre, aren't considered "Western" or are lesser than ancient Greek works. It's just that general audiences don't often see these works as similar or compliments to each other, despite themes and characters being closer than what some would initially believe. Breuer was able to take these two differing styles and marry them through music and style, creating a new cornerstone in what Black America theatre could be.

Critical Reception and its Impact on *Gospel's* Legacy

The critical reception to the initial tour and run of *The Gospel at Colonus* is notable when it comes to a discuss on *The Gospel at Colonus* because it taps into a feeling and reaction that is important to note. This truly did effect communities and the world of Black American theatre in ways that cement it as a classic of American theatre in general. One important aspect of the initial run of *Gospel* is that it was televised, both in America and in England as well. In fact, that is how I was able to experience this play, as there are viewings that you can find online in great quality, especially for the time. This opened up *Gospel* to a wider audience than it initially would have received, further cementing its place within the canon of American theatre. Critical reception was always glowing for this initial run, with some reviewers claiming that it is "a turning point for the theater as a whole." (104) That is massive praise and speaks to what Breuer and the entire team working on this production were trying to do: create something wholly new and wholly unique despite being and adaptation. Michael Feingold, the same man who that quote above can be attributed to, praises Breuer, stating that he is "not a deconstructionist but a reconstructionist, trying to fit all the pieces back together." And that idea of trying to construct the pieces back together is an interesting idea for this adaptation as I do agree that this is what Breuer was attempting to achieve with this adaptation. He is trying to bring back the worship

part of the original theatrical practice that took place back in ancient Greece. And he absolutely succeeds in that regard as this is an incredibly religious piece and does harken back to what these theatrical festivals would've been like, to some extent. The idea of reconstructing, though, is something that I want to make sure that I am not trying to do with my own adaptation, however. I want to try to make something new but old without having to look at the ideas and styles of old. Not that there is anything wrong with that, it obviously works with immense success with *Gospel*, but it is simply another style of adaptation that aims to change how we view the play, rather than the story and characters. Whereas with my adaptation, I am changing the story and characters to focus on Antigone while still maintaining this standard of theatrical presentation. And there is no correct way to adapt a story, Breuer and I are just simply taking different approaches to how we tell these stories and it's not like I am completely disregarding what I am taking away from this adaptation. The idea of a prominent and vocal chorus is an aspect of this play that I want to try and emulate, to different degrees, but I still want to highlight the importance of the chorus and choral sections.

Before I move on, I do want to mention one other reaction to *The Gospel at Colonus* that came from my research into this piece. Tom Disch of *The Nation* wrote his reaction to seeing the production multiple times: "each time my heart has swelled, my throat has lumped, and I've cried a steady flow of wedding-march tears, feeling foolish and elevated and swept away. I'd happily go back and see it again tomorrow. I love it. I hope it runs forever. And mine has been a typical reaction." (689) It's such a powerful reaction and reactions like this are why I love creating theatre and being a part of important productions. Now, while I don't know if my adaptations will ever live up to the level of important that *The Gospel at Colonus* will have, I do think that I am doing something important. By taking this male-dominated trilogy and allowing the most important

female character stand up and allow her the leading role that I believe that she has always deserved, I think that it will be important to people. Seeing the character of Antigone fight and grow as a person to the point where she gives her own life to what she believes in, in a way that hasn't been done for all three plays like this, is important and will be an important story. While I don't know how successful it will, especially compared to the high heights that Breuer has elevated the concept of adapting ancient Greek plays, I do think that this is important enough to try and allow a more feminine perspective been taken for all three plays within this trilogy. Will I be able to garner similar reactions as Tom Disch's? I have no idea. It's certainly not what I am going for, just a single reaction, but I do believe that the work that I am doing will lead to a powerful take on this trilogy and might be able to speak to others in ways I can't fathom right now. These possibilities make it exciting to work on this project and will absolutely keep up my drive as I continue to work on it in the future.

Co-Creator Lee Breuer's Viewpoints on *The Gospel at Colonus*

In 1984, a year after the initial run of *The Gospel at Colonus*, Lee Breuer, the director and co-creator of the play, sat down with an interviewer in order to highlight some of his thought processes when creating this piece. The points he lists, and his inspiration are incredibly useful in the way that I will shape my own trilogy of plays, so I will take the time to go through what he has to say and pull what helps best in order to form some basis for my adaptations. One of the first interesting revelations is right at the beginning, wherein Breuer reveals that "Oedipus is being played by a man who is really blind." (48) I had no earthly idea that this was the case and truly thought that the actor's performance in being blind was just that convincing. Obviously, this doesn't influence how I adapt the piece, I can't readily cast a blind man as Oedipus since he has to be able to see in *Oedipus Rex*, but I thought that this casting was important enough to mention.

Breuer also has some interesting thoughts about the original *Oedipus at Colonus* and the merits of the original. He describes it as "a sermon on death" (48) and notes that Sophocles was in his 90s by the time he had finished this play, only a few years before he dies. Before we dissect the idea of *Colonus* being this "sermon on death", I want to analyze Sophocles and how he wrote the plays as I think that the relationship between the art and the playwright might help in analyzing these plays. As Breuer mentioned, Sophocles wrote *Oedipus at Colonus* at the end of his life. Expanding upon that, he actually wrote *Antigone*, the final in the trilogy, first and *Oedipus Rex* second, years after *Antigone*. It actually makes sense as *Antigone* details the struggles of a young person against society, *Oedipus Rex* is about a man who is already established and older, and then *Oedipus at Colonus* is about an old man in the last stages of his life. I think that it's important enough to note that he wrote this trilogy out of order and that I must take care to understand that fact while I am stitching these plays together to be produced in one sitting.

Anyways, back to Breuer and this idea of the "sermon on death". He claims that the original was not entirely well constructed from a dramatic sense, despite the brilliant poetry. He states that a little under half of the play is essentially constructed like a sermon, specifically a sermon about dying happy. Oedipus was cursed throughout his life and has lived an aggressive tragic and unhappy life, who now finds himself blinded by his own hand and wandering the world with his daughter to guide him. And yet, when he dies, it is imperative that it be seen as a positive moment in his story, that he finally is able to be redeemed and is able to do some good with his final act of protecting Athens from his homeland. Breuer then goes on and gives his viewpoint on the idea of catharsis, which is clearly something that I have been focusing on with these adaptations. To use his words: "I really feel that if you go one step further with cathartic theatre you might find pity and terror turning into joy and ecstasy." And he describes the scene at

the end of *The Gospel at Colonus* as a "jubilee" and claims that the catharsis is intact because catharsis doesn't need to be just the negative overwhelming feelings, that you can achieve a cathartic ending through happiness and celebration. It is a fascinating take on the idea of catharsis that I often don't see attempted very often and might be something to look into, as I also believe that the ending of *Oedipus at Colonus* is a happy one where the audience finally gets to see something positive happen to Oedipus, despite his death. Will the celebration at the end of the play be as high and joyous as the one in *The Gospel at Colonus*, probably not as that ending really fit perfectly with this Pentecostal setting that the play takes place in, but maybe indicating that there is a celebration while also attempting this feeling of catharsis might be an idea that would prove useful in playing around with in the writing process.

Breuer then goes on to explain that a lot of his inspiration in terms of structure in balancing out the music and the dialogue comes from Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre. He explains how in those styles of theatre, the narration of the scene is sung while the acting bits are peppered in throughout the music. So, what Breuer did was adapt that style of theatre and combine it with both Greek theatre and Pentecostal gospel church productions. He marries all three styles into one massive production that focuses on spectacle through performance, rather than through onstage devices like sets and special effects. He wanted to use the rhythm of how pastors preach in South black Baptist and Pentecostal churches to essentially create a new way to tell an existing story. And, while we might never know exactly how they performed these ancient Greek plays back in the day, Breuer likes to think that this style of the religious combined with the acting brings us closer to what it might've been like to see something like *Oedipus at Colonus* in the ancient Greek theatres of 400 BC. Breuer's take is something similar to what I mentioned before that how the marrying of the religious and performative aspects of these

ancient Greek plays might get us closer to what we could've seen back during Sophocles' time, and I have tremendous respect for what he is trying to achieve. His interpretation of what theatre used to have been also very fascinating to consider. Essentially, he states that "some scholars now feel the tragedies were close to rock concerts, that there were responses from the audience like choral or choir responses in the church." (pp. 49) And, while I had always understood that these theatre festivals that produced these ancient plays were religious in nature, I never understood how religious. Obviously, it is impossible to know, but Breuer uses his beliefs in what he thinks they felt like and weaves that into his own adaptation, creating something that is divorced from our modern ways of digesting these ancient Greek plays. Is it the right way to experience these works? No, simply because there is no correct way to experience theatre. But is it something that breaks through many standard adaptations in order to give the audience a new way to feel about a centuries old play? Yes, it absolutely succeeds in that regard and Breuer's beliefs are translated beautifully from his brain to the page and eventually to the stage.

The Importance of Religion to Classical Greek Plays

Breuer also wholeheartedly believes in the importance of religion in shaping a specific culture's theatre and theatrical practices. He cites Noh theatre, which grew up out of the Buddhist beliefs and how Shakespeare (and all of Elizabethan theatre really) came from the way that Anglican services were performed in the churches of those times. While I do understand where he is coming from and I love the idea that we can help shape our culture and theatre based on the uniquely American churches found in black communities, particularly in the South, I believe that we need not rely too much on religion to form our culture. And looking more into the history of black Baptist gospel music and its relationship to our modern American theatre, there seem to be pitfalls that, while Breuer doesn't fall into, are there, nevertheless. This idea of considering

audiences with the attempt to "convert" them to one's own religion as some claim that Breuer is doing with *Gospel* sets a precedent that can lead to theatre, specifically theatre that uses the ideas and general theatricality inherit in our American culture, into becoming a tool to for conversion. It's a slippery slope and not one that I believe that Breuer is attempting to do, but there are those who seem to be wanting plays like *Gospel* to become more sermon-focused and less theatrical. (82.) We are entering a new age in terms of religion's relationship to culture, specifically in America where the rate of religious people is declining year after year. While this idea may have been true back in the 80s when this play was being developed and this interview took place, I think that we are at an interesting crossroads in our culture where we need no grasp so closely to religion and religious traditions in order to make something wholly unique. I'm not saying that it doesn't work, it has clearly worked here with *The Gospel at Colonus,* but I am saying that the need to recontextualize everything with religion is starting to wane. It is important to think about, as Breuer has brought up the importance of religion to these plays. And, while I am taking that into account and especially into account with *Oedipus at Colonus*, I want to try to make it so that my adaptation doesn't feel the need to talk to the audience so much and treat the words as if they are a sermon. It is a pitfall with adaptations of this play as it is easily the wordiest of Sophocles' trilogy, but I want to be able to impose upon the audience the themes of this play without having them check out due to this "sermon-style" writing that Breuer claims the play to have. So, while I don't exactly agree with all of his notions about theatre and the original plays he is adapting, Lee Breuer does have some important insights and beliefs that I will take seriously and reflect upon while I am busy crafting my own adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*.

My Adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*

In turning towards my own adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*, I want to mention the role of Antigone in the original and what I am going to be doing in order to maintain the place as protagonist that I have established in *Oedipus Rex*. To remind, we added Antigone to the chorus and made her the de facto leader of the chorus, in a sense. It allowed her a reason to stay onstage throughout the course of the play and we were able to give her some moments of defending Oedipus that the chorus had in the original text, making it seem like she was struggling against the other members of the chorus and fight for the honor of both her father and her family. It also gave her this sense of loss when Oedipus left with her, as she wasn't able to do anything to save him and show that she failed too. Not only did she fail, but I think it was important to stress that Antigone felt as if the city had failed both her father and her at the end of the play as it helps build up some themes and the character arch for Antigone that will continue for this play. I also want to make a huge note and mention that during the end of *Oedipus Rex*, Antigone has to leave Thebes with Oedipus alone, leaving Ismene behind. I think that not only does it make sense as Ismene enters during the course of *Oedipus at Colonus* and explains the situation in Thebes while both have been away, but it helps develop the character dynamic between the two sisters. This is truer for *Antigone*, but there are moments where Antigone's view of her sister is skewed due to the fact that it was only Antigone that left with Oedipus and not Ismene. She views that choice as Ismene taking the easier way out and helps her feel even more isolated from the whole society of Thebes, which is a huge driving force of her actions within *Antigone* itself. However, we will table that discussion for later once I have a chance to talk about *Antigone*.

Lee Breuer described *Oedipus at Colonus* as "a sermon" and in some ways, that is a fair description of what the play can feel like to both a reader and an audience member. However, I would like to fight back against that and try to make sure that the audience doesn't feel like the

play is dragging on, especially when it is part two of a three-part play that will be produced all in one evening. So, one of my goals is to avoid it feeling like a sermon to the audience and cause their minds to drift and wander during this pivotal play. Part of that will rely heavily on the actors playing some of the key roles within the production, Antigone, Oedipus, and Theseus most importantly. But also, part of it, actually a majority of it, will fall on my shoulders to be able to streamline the wording and pace of this story while also being able to accurately capture the characters and their struggles in a way that is reminiscent of the original version. If you notice in the copy of the first (and very rough) draft of what I am going forth with this adaptation, I think that this might have the greatest number of cuts to the text when compared to the other two plays in the trilogy. And that obviously makes sense, as the wordiest play in the trilogy, things do need to be trimmed in order to fit it both into the timeframe that I am striving for while also developing the characters of Antigone, Oedipus, Ismene, Creon, etc. *Oedipus at Colonus* was always going to be the most difficult play in the trilogy to adapt, especially given my attempt to bring Antigone forward as the main protagonist of the trilogy. However, given the tools and inspirations from Breuer and the other authors that I have been able to pull from, I think that, while still the biggest challenge, this has the chance to be the most transformative and influential piece within the whole of the trilogy. Now that I've gotten all the introductory information and baselines that I wanted to establish, we can look at my own text of *Oedipus at Colonus* and discuss the changes and inspirations that I was able to pull after viewing and researching *The Gospel at Colonus*.

So, as we start out, we should discuss Antigone and her expanded role in this story, especially compared to the original. Everything else that we need to discuss will all stem from this and I believe that this is always the most important part to get right, doubly so with this

challenging play. As we discussed in *Oedipus Rex*, Antigone really completes her character arc by the end of this play because in *Antigone*, she really doesn't grow or change much in her characterizations and convictions. She has already grown into the character that she needs to be so there doesn't need to be any additional growth for the character in *Antigone*. So, the question is: where do we find Antigone at the start of this play and where does she end up being the protagonist that we observe throughout the course of *Antigone*? At the end of *Oedipus Rex*, we saw that Antigone left with Oedipus as he was exiled from the city. It's important to note that she goes on her own volition and should not hold any ill-will towards her father. Her despair that is shown throughout this trilogy is the result of the situation that he was forced into by Fate, not the fact that Oedipus himself murdered his father and slept with his mother. Yes, there is shock at the fact of both his fate and her origin, but none of that shock and anger is directed towards him. Her anger and disappointment are mainly focused on the Theban government and society, particularly Creon, as they were the ones who forced him from the city. He did not have to leave, as the prophecy and plague would've been lifted just by exposing this horrible truth, but the Theban society essentially refused to help him in his time of great need. And that's what is kicking off Antigone's character progression as she sees that they rejected him and cast him out, causing her to hold a grudge and see that the Theban government and society wouldn't dare help someone who has been such a huge help for their city already. She became bitter and hostile towards the city and its people as she was the only one who was willing to help their former king when he was at his lowest, doing more for him at the end of *Oedipus Rex* and in between the two plays than we had seen anyone do over the course of this trilogy. How to show this is actually to change the lines of the Chorus so that they are spoken by Antigone instead. After Creon has attempted the kidnapping of Antigone, an event we will discuss in a moment, that is the moment

where Antigone has truly renounced Thebes, especially when compared to the kindness the people of Athens have shown her and Oedipus. A moment from the Chorus that I will reassign is as follows:

Fight they or now prepare
To fight? a vision rare
Tells me that soon again
I shall behold the twain
Maidens so ill bestead,
By their kin buffeted.
Today, today Zeus worketh some great thing
This day shall victory bring.
O for the wings, the wings of a dove,
To be borne with the speed of the gale,
Up and still upwards to sail
And gaze on the fray from the clouds above.
All-seeing Zeus, O lord of heaven,
To our guardian host be given
Might triumphant to surprise
Flying foes and win their prize.
Hear us, Zeus, and hear us, child
Of Zeus, Athene undefiled,
Hear, Apollo, hunter, hear,
Huntress, sister of Apollo,
Who the dappled swift-foot deer
O'er the wooded glade dost follow;
Help with your two-fold power
Athens in danger's hour! (42-43)

This is, in a sense, a battle cry for the people of Athens as the war with Thebes seems unavoidable after the actions of Creon. And it should be Antigone, not the people of Athens, pleading to the gods to side with them in this coming war. This is the change that needs to be seen by the audience in order to show that the person who Antigone used to be, the one trying to help Thebes and protect its people from the plague, has fully given up on the city and its people. While there is more growth for her to have throughout the rest of the play, this must be one of the most pivotal moments in the whole trilogy, highlighted through every avenue that we have as theatre practitioners: lighting, sound, set design, costume design, staging, etc.

Oedipus should come onstage at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus* a broken, beat down man. But Antigone should have her resolve strengthened by the passage of time and truly be the one leading this duo, despite the fact that she might be a bit too headstrong at the moment. She should be too willing to do whatever it is to help her father, even if it's not in her best interest to do so. A prime example is how Oedipus must make an atonement to the gods in order to stay within the land of Athens. Oedipus explains that he can't do so and must have someone do it on his behalf. Immediately Ismene pipes up and volunteers herself and I added some stage directions and indications that Antigone was gunning for this task to do for her father. So, when Ismene is chosen for the task, we see Antigone's disappointment with being unable to help her father in this regard, despite being by his side is arguably the best course of action for her. She needs to be with him to learn what he has to say and be there when the Chorus begins to question and prod him, so that she can be there to defend her father, something that Ismene is not the best at doing. It then leads into this beautiful moment where Oedipus reveals to these men of Athens that he fathered children with his mother, which allows for the shame and discomfort that Antigone feels about her origin to take form as the Chorus begin to swirl around her and look at her with new eyes. Antigone has to be here as her shame and confusion about her whole upbringing and beginning needs to be able to give way into confidence that she is able to do what is right and help those that she knows need help. She learns a lot throughout the course of the play, from the kindness that Theseus shows her father when none would to her father's acceptance and realization that Thebes is a place that is not worth saving or protecting at this point. I do want to touch upon this moment of kindness that Theseus shows Oedipus and how that truly impacts Antigone and further increases this divide between her and Thebes, as she is able to see what a true king should do in the face of such a tragic tale as Oedipus. When Theseus

enters about halfway through the play, it's immediate that he carries himself with a different kind of air than Creon or even Oedipus himself when he was king. He is calm, thoughtful, and immediately pities Oedipus but not to a degree that seems demeaning. Theseus allows Oedipus to share his story and what he has learned and truly respects the man, treating Oedipus and Antigone both with kindness and compassion. This should strike Antigone as strange, as she had only seen her father act this way as king and, even then, never to the extent that Theseus is doing at the moment. Theseus should be held up as the example of what a ruler should try to do: lead with compassion and respect. I think the fact that Antigone is onstage to see what kind of king Theseus is further shows her that the home she left was not the pristine place that she used to feel. And this worldview is shattered even more with the entrance of Creon, as the man tries to solve his problems with violence and kidnapping of Antigone, which we will discuss further. Creon will largely be unchanged as I don't feel that he needs to as he serves his purpose as an antagonistic force within Antigone's story, and he cements it within the scenes that he is present in within this play. The contrast that is shown between the people of Athens and the people of Thebes should be stark and highlight the realization that Antigone had started to come to at the end of *Oedipus Rex*: that Thebes is failing as a city and a people.

Another major reason for Ismene needing to go off and perform this ritual instead of Antigone is because, in doing so, Ismene is captured by Creon offstage and comes looking to capture Antigone and Oedipus as well. In the original play, Antigone is captured by Creon's guards but returns at a later point. However, in my adaptation that is not the case. She stands her ground, even pulling a dagger from off a member of the Chorus in order to defend herself. While she is quickly disarmed and seized, she fights back, eventually freeing herself from the grasp of the guards and taking shelter within the Chorus, all of whom are firmly on the side of Oedipus

and Antigone and are willing to shield the two from any harm. Not only does this act help Antigone remain present in the action of the play, but it again paints the people of Athens in a noble and selfless light compared to the selfish actions of these men of Thebes as the try to force her and Oedipus back to Thebes only when it benefits the city. And, when it comes down to it, that's the main fact of the world that Antigone needs to learn and have her already growing suspicions confirmed: that the people of Thebes are not worth saving. She learns that it is fully corrupt and self-serving and that the only ones that she knows she can trust and care about are the members of her family. Even when Polynices enters to try and earn his father's favor in taking his rightful seat of power within Thebes, I want Antigone to care more about the possibility of her brothers killing each other to be the real reason for her to plead with him to give up his ambitions, not to protect the city. In the original text, there are some lines that hint to that being a reason for her to urge him to stop, but I don't think that those thoughts lend themselves to building up her character and reasons for her actions in *Antigone*. I believe that there is a point in this play when she fully gives up on the city of Thebes and it is the moment when she sees Creon and Theseus interacting about Oedipus. She sees the difference in how these cities are governed and realizes that Thebes is both run poorly and filled with people not worth saving. So, the change to make her colder and fully done with Thebes and its people needs to happen towards the last third of this play and will extend to the character of Antigone that we see throughout the course of *Antigone*.

Now that we've discussed Antigone's role at length in this play, I want to bring over what I talked about when discussing *The Gospel at Colonus* and see if any inspiration can be gleaned from the topics brought up by that adaptation. I want to push back on this idea that *Oedipus at Colonus* is a sermon, as Lee Breuer claimed when analyzing his own adaptation. In my mind,

sermons are all about talking at an audience rather than talking to them and with them. Sermons require very little action on the part of the audience and require them to think very little as what they need to know is being told to them in ways that don't truly require any further thought or analysis. I think that, while that isn't an inherently bad way to present a story or piece of theatre, I would argue that there are inherently more engaging ways to present the themes of a piece to the audience and I believe that this is what Sophocles was attempting with his *Oedipus at Colonus* and its message. In the play, Oedipus is so resolute in what he knows is right and what has been done to him that there really isn't much change that occurs to the character throughout the course of the play. Things and events happen to him, yes, but they don't change who this man has become between *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. He has to convince the men of Athens and Theseus that he isn't truly a bad man for the way his life played out, explaining that he is not responsible for the moral quandary of his crimes since he did murder his father, but it was in self-defense and then the rest of his unfortunate life fell into place after that one altercation. So, a sermon is not something that I would particularly call *Oedipus at Colonus*, I view it more as a defense case for a man who is already beaten and broken down to the point where he is no threat to anyone, despite what people might fear of him. This change in the definition of what the play is allows it to become more active of a play and allow more audience engagement. I understand what Breuer was getting at with the whole "sermon of death" viewpoint that he has, and it certainly works for his adaptation, but I want to ensure that the pitfalls that people can fall into when producing and adapting *Oedipus at Colonus* is not present with this adaptation and I believe that this starts with a fundamental change in how we view the play as I have discussed right now. So, how do we accomplish this in terms of my own adaptation? Well, in order to tighten up the action, we will have to take away some of the more

oppressive monologues in the play as Oedipus does happen to go on with some long speeches detailing every minutia of his point of view. So, tightening up those monologues and allowing him to get his point across succinctly while peppering in moments for him to truly have a dialogue with either Antigone, Ismene, or Theseus will allow it to transform into a more actionable play and action-oriented story instead of what might be considered a sermon-style approach to storytelling. Again, not that there is anything wrong with that approach, but I do not believe that it lends to both producing the play within one evening and centering the whole of the story on Antigone as she would not be the one who would be delivering many of the important lines and themes to the story. We have to be able to break free from this preconceived notion of what *Oedipus at Colonus* is in the cultural eye in order to change the nature of the story and who it is focusing on. And, I will be honest, in the example that I have given on this roughest of drafts that I have attached below, I don't believe I have fully accomplished that task as I have simply worked on trimming down the play in order to take some of the dead air out of these long moments of speech from several characters. I still need to add in dialogue to break up these long sections, but I need to be able to sit down and work with actors and producers to be able to see what will work and what won't in the case of this adaptation.

And lastly, before we move on from *Oedipus at Colonus*, we must tackle that ending because, as I mentioned before, I am incredibly inspired by that idea of the catharsis at the end of the play to come from a place of happiness rather than any negative emotions, which is what *Oedipus at Colonus* is often seen to have, at least in general. So, I think that the major aspect of the ending that we have to change is the fact that Antigone feels such sorrow and even says to Ismene that she wishes to be killed in the spot where Oedipus died. I am absolutely removing that aspect of the ending due to the fact that, in my adaptation, Antigone is not ready to die just

yet and also that she shouldn't see this as a negative aspect within the context of the story. In her eyes, her father is redeemed and has achieved the peace and honor that he has deserved for so long. Through Antigone, the audience will be able to interpret this ending as one of joy, rather than sorrow. I think there are two lines that I can reassign to Antigone from the Chorus that might aid in achieving this sense of happiness that stems from Antigone. The first is as such:

> His end was blessed; therefore, sister, stay
> Your sorrow. Man is born to fate a prey. (60)

I think that this line, originally referring to both Antigone and Ismene, could be one that simply is Antigone consoling her more sorrowful sister. I think that having Ismene still show her inner devastation and letting Antigone see that this was a moment of good in Oedipus's life will show how much she has grown in this play, especially when compared to Ismene. It also sets up much of the rest of this denouement in tone, allowing it to be one filled more with joy and celebration rather than of sorrow and mourning. The other notable line that I want to be given to Antigone is actually the final line of the play, which involves Antigone standing tall and proud while consoling her still emotional sister as they head back to what they need to do in order to protect their family:

> Wail no more, let sorrow rest,
> All is ordered for the best. (63)

This line could be surrounded by the fading cheers and sounds of celebration from Theseus and the Chorus, allowing those moments to still be present within the scene but setting up the darker and more intense story of Antigone. While still being a moment that helps set up the next play, it's still a moment of reassurance and joy that the events that transpired within the play were ultimately those of good and justice for a man who tried his best to stay a good man despite the plans that Fate had for his life from the beginning. There is more that will be done with the

ending, as I'd like there to be more aspects of celebration within the stage directions and even dance included, but those are to be done when thinking about staging this adaptation. It will be something that will be celebrated by those in the Chorus and Antigone, while Ismene is still overcome by her emotions. However, I don't want it to seem like Ismene is a weak, emotional woman, just that she can't see that the story of Oedipus ends on a happy note. She doesn't have that viewpoint because she hasn't finished maturing as a character, while Antigone has. This Antigone that we see at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus* is the same woman that we see at the start of *Antigone* and the same one who is so resolute in her convictions and viewpoint on morality that she is willing to sacrifice everything because she knows that she is in the right.

Oedipus at Colonus was always going to be the most difficult to tackle for this adaptation as it is the adaptation that requires the heaviest lifting in order to get it into a place where I am truly happy with the outcome. And, while I do still have a way to go, I'm happy with what I was able to accomplish, and I do believe that this is an adaptation that has the ability to stand the test of time. I'm in love with this idea of a joyous catharsis (that I am still working on) that was put forth by Lee Breuer and his work on *The Gospel of Colonus* and, while I don't agree with every viewpoint that he has on this play, I still feel so inspired with the work he has done and truly felt that it had bettered my own work. It, as I have said numerous times before, is still in a process that will require more people to look at and revise, but the basis is still there, and I am still proud of all that I have been able to do with this admittedly difficult play.

Antigone (by Jean Anouilh)

The Life of Anouilh

Jean Anouilh was a French dramatist who was alive and active during the period of the Nazi occupation of France from 1940 to 1944. He's considered to be "less experimental" than his counterparts in French drama as his plays were simpler, having plots that are easily followed by general audiences. Still, his work is still extremely notable, particularly this adaptation of *Antigone*, due to the boldness of his critique of both the Vichy Regime set up by the Nazis to monitor and puppet the country of France during World War II and the people of France that were suffering underneath its rule. This particular adaptation was notable due to the interesting way that Anouilh interpreted the Vichy government. For some, the play was an outright critique of both the Vichy government and the Nazi occupation as a whole, with Antigone serving as the virtuous leader of an anti-Nazi movement. For others, it humanized both the Vichy officials and the Nazis through Creon, who "pleads movingly for a compromise that will allow him to continue steering the ship of state, an eloquent champion of the Vichy government's thesis of expediency." (32) While in the moment there was debate for which side of the Vichy coin Anouilh fell, many look back on and can infer from some of his other works throughout his life that Anouilh was incredibly apathetic towards the people of France during one of their darkest hours through the humanization of Creon and the callousness that Antigone is viewed with. It is also important to note that the play worked more in favor of the anti-Nazi movement and Antigone, as the play was able to galvanize many Parisians throughout the occupation until the eventual fall of the Vichy Regime and Nazi Germany as a whole, even if that wasn't Anouilh's intent. The outrage of the anti-Nazi movement in regard to the stripping of Antigone's virtuosity

and the propping up of Creon's humanity helped people within the movement denounce the play and, in turn, united them in their hatred for a particular work. I want it to be clear that I am delving into Jean Anouilh's life more compared to previous adaptations' authors due to complex nature of this adaptation. Compared to *The Darker Face of the Earth* and *The Gospel of Colonus*, understanding the historical context that this adaptation is written helps to understand the effectiveness of the adaptation as a whole and glean the important takeaways that might help my own adaptation succeed.

Summary of *Antigone (1944)*

In looking at Jean Anouilh's adaptation of *Antigone*, the first aspect that jumps out at me is the fact that it is not in the verse style that the previous two adaptations that we've looked at but rather a standard prose with no poetic meter to it. An interesting aspect to note and will definitely take into consideration how this exactly changes the whole feel of the play. Moving on, the story centers around, of course, the struggle between Antigone and Creon. It is introduced by the Chorus, which details the play and the history of each character as they are presenting to the audience, with all characters onstage, each leaving as they are called out. A notable inclusion is a Nurse, which was a character that was not in the original play by Sophocles. Many of the same story beats occur, with a notable inclusion that Haemon, who was truly only in one scene in the original play, has more interaction with both Ismene and Antigone. I do enjoy this aspect of the play as it further adds to the tragedy of the character of Antigone as we get to see that the two truly care for each other by their interactions, not just their words. As the play goes on and Antigone is captured for the burial of her brother Polynices, we see a very interesting and different Creon than most interpret and perform. In this adaptation, Creon doesn't feel rage or annoyance towards Antigone when he first learns that she is responsible for disobeying him. In

fact, he attempts to shield her from the law and brush everything off in order to save her, wanting her to pretend to be ill in order to wave of any suspicions. It is only after she refuses to cooperate that he starts to show his anger and annoyance towards her, but still wishing that she accepts his offer so that he does not wish to carry out the punishment that he has decreed must take place. In fact, the majority of the play is just these two characters debating on what is the moral thing to do and which of them is right when it comes to the actions that Creon and Antigone must take. It really lengthens the scene between he two and truly delves into the moral quandary that they have in the original and Anouilh is clearly able to pull the debate between the two in order to highlight the situation occurring within his home country at this point in his life. Eventually, Creon does decide to follow the proclamation set forward and seals her within a cave, much like the original. Much of the same story beats follow, with Haemon killing himself and Creon becoming the shamed king that he was destined to become. Interestingly, the most notable exclusion from this adaptation is Tiresias, as there is no mention of him within the play and no appearance. Instead, the role of pleading with Creon not to punish Antigone falls to the Chorus, with much the same effect as the original. In the end, everyone who was supposed to die, did die, according to the Chorus. According to them: 'Only the guards are left, and none of this matters to them. It's no skin off their noses. The go on playing cards.". (61)

Anouilh's Antigone (The Character)

I feel like the most important aspect of Anouilh's *Antigone* that must be discussed and dissected is the character of Antigone herself. One aspect of the adaptation that is hugely important to what I want to do is that Anouilh greatly expands the role of Antigone and allows her much more of a voice and action when compared to the original. This is not a complaint or

critique of Sophocles' original work, but there is a distinct lack of Antigone in most interpretations of the play and a great focus on talking about Antigone. What Anouilh does is give her the ability to talk more for herself and, by expanding the role and, specifically, the scene between her and Creon, it allows for her to be able to have more of a presence within her play and gives her the ability to stand up for herself and her beliefs. In much the same way as what I am trying to do, Anouilh attempts to let Antigone shine within her own play, albeit in ways that might differ from my own tactics. The importance of Antigone and her role as a disruptor must be stressed, as she is well known for her civil disobedience. Henry David Thoreau even cited her as "a stirring example of civil disobedience" and that men live with "too passive a regard for the moral of laws." (232) So needless to say, in the times of the Vichy Regime, Anouilh was able to heighten that feeling of civil disobedience and use Antigone as a sort of vessel to embody the French people, particularly those who were living in Paris. The Antigone of Anouilh differs from the Antigone of Sophocles in several ways, despite both truly embracing this idea of civil disobedience that the play and character seem to be known for. However, Anouilh's Antigone seems to differ slightly when compared to original in that Anouilh's Antigone seems to be in more of an "existential revolt". To quote Susan Tiefenbrun on her analysis of Anouilh's *Antigone*: "The existential rebel is a Neo Romantic raging against existence, ashamed of being human, revolted by the body itself." (45) And this is particularly true specifically for Anouilh's Antigone as she embodies this idea of revolt against the destruction of the body of Polyneices as a metaphor for the destruction that Germany is causing the people of Paris and France as a whole. Antigone must rage against Creon because she is almost disgusted with the way that the people that she cares about have been destroyed by his actions. And she remains very true to her convictions up until the end due top the fact that she is acting more upon the fact that burying the

body was a personal choice, not one that was influenced by the belief that this is what the gods want. By putting the ownership of these ideas solely upon Antigone and her desires instead of a religious belief, it creates this sense of desperation and want that wasn't really present in the original Antigone. It makes the struggle a little bit more personal and even changes the characteristic regret that Antigone can tend to feel in many adaptations of the play. Because Antigone is acting through a sense of religion and duty, there always seems to be a slight hint of regret from the character and idea that maybe if she wasn't too headstrong and devout, that she may have lived a happier life. However, that sense isn't really present within Anouilh's Antigone, at least to the degree that there is in some other adaptations. Antigone does have fears when it is revealed that she will be sealed inside the cave alive, but I believe that there doesn't seem to be much regret for her actions. To quote one of the last lines that Antigone says in the play as she is writing a letter to Haemon: "Forgive me, my darling. You would all have been so happy except for Antigone." (50) And then she is lead offstage to die. That last reassertion that, even if she were to live that everyone around her would be happy except her, shows that she truly doesn't think that she could've done anything else other than stick to the way she views the world. She has no regrets, no wondering that maybe she should've done something different so that she could escape her fate, she simply knows what she needed to have done and walks into that cave with the same conviction that she buried her brother's body with. And I'd argue that this is the difference compared to Sophocles' Antigone. While there are some notable differences, including Antigone being rather plain looking in Anouilh's where there is no mention of her looks in Sophocles' or the extreme sense of disillusion with reality, I believe that this difference in how she views the world and how she accepts her own fate is what distinguishes these two takes on the character. With both ways to view Antigone being

completely valid, it helps to show me how much I want to stray from this idea of regret that is so present within adaptations of *Antigone*. Do I want to keep that sense of regret within the character? Do I take the Anouilh approach and try my best to strip that from Antigone? Or maybe it's another avenue that I want to take with this aspect of the character? To be honest, I think that there shouldn't be this moment of regret. I think that yes, there should be sorrow at the life she could've led, but there must be this resolve that we see within Antigone that must not be undercut by any moments of thinking about her life. For example, I want to discuss a portion of her final monologue that I have cut and why I have cut it as I feel like it's important enough of a section to justify my reasonings. The small section is as follows:

> Had it been a husband dead
> I might have wed another, and have borne
> Another child, to take the dead child's place.
> But, now my sire and mother both are dead,
> No second brother can be born for me.

I think that it is unnecessary as it, personally, feels as though she is disregarding the people around her, and I think that it does uncut some of the sorrow that she would be feeling in this monologue. I want it to feel as though there was nothing that could change the outcome for her and that, even had it been someone like a husband or child dead and in a similar situation, her resolve to do the right thing would not have changed. There can be no option for going back and, had the circumstances been different, her hatred of Thebes and the people who have ruined her city must be at the forefront of her mind.

Anouilh's Creon

We can't discuss and adaptation of *Antigone* without talking about the driving antagonistic force, the king of Thebes Creon. I want to make it clear right from the get-go: Creon

is not the primary character of this play. I have seen a lot of adaptations (even acting in a few) where either the director or the playwright believes that Creon is the primary character within the play. I wholeheartedly disagree. While Creon may have a huge amount of stage time within the text and while he does go through a significant character arc, that does not make him the primary character. It's still Antigone as she is the one who drives the plot, and she is the one who has fought throughout the trilogy. Just because Antigone doesn't have too many changes in her character, it doesn't mean that she isn't our protagonist. That being said, Creon still is a hugely important character to this play, and I want to take the time to analyze the character from Anouilh's perspective and see what has changed, either for the better or for the worse. Anouilh's Creon finds himself in a very interesting situation within the context of this play, especially compared to Sophocles' Creon. Still pulling from Teifenburn, Creon in this adaptation is "a leader in an ambiguous role, a leader without freedom in a state governed by the Rule of Law." (46). He seems as much of a prisoner to the Fates and Law as Antigone or any other character within the play. He even breaks certain laws in order to help those and himself, such as when he was incredibly willing to dismiss the charges leveled at Antigone for burying her brother. The parallels to the Vichy Regime are clear, as they were rulers that were in a very similar predicament as Creon finds himself in within the play's story. However, this does not mean that he is a sympathetic figure. Part of the reason for Creon to help Antigone is simply to help him not look like a fool as his niece being the perpetrator of this crime that Creon himself set forward would make him look both foolish and incompetent within the public eye. In fact, that seems to be the reason that ends up following through with his punishment of Antigone. Not because of any sense of duty to uphold the law and justice, like Sophocles' Creon believes, but only to simply save face and show the people that he is the absolute authority in the land. He's almost a

pathetic person, sometimes pitiable but mostly a man that you wouldn't want to run the country. He does not care for his position or the role that he has in society, simply that he is able to preserve his rule without having to get his hands too dirty. It's a far cry from Sophocles' Creon, a man who would stop at nothing to see what he believes justice to be and willing to sacrifice what he wants in order to do right by his people, as flawed as that may obviously be to the average person. And, at the end of the day, Creon in Anouilh's play has lost everything due to his own incompetence as a leader, essentially learning nothing. Comparing this to my own rendition of Creon, I think that he takes a more active role in ruining him and the audience does get to see the man ruined. We've seen him start as the good-natured man trying to help his siter and brother-in-law in *Oedipus Rex*, to the aggressive and manipulative man in *Oedipus at Colonus* that seems to have started his corruption at the hands of the power that befell him as King of Thebes, to here, simply trying to pick up the pieces that he helped shatter. And I think that this is important to note about Creon: he is an antagonist, but he's not a villain. While we are focusing heavily on Antigone (and we will absolutely circle back around to her and the second moment of sorrow that she feels in this adaptation), Creon still is a heavily important character to this play, and we need to be able to create a true and interesting character that feels real. Yes, Creon is the antagonist, but isn't an evil man and I want to make strides to show that this is the case in this adaptation. While too many people view him as the protagonist of this play, I don't want to overcorrect and show him only in the harshest, most negative light. The important aspect of his character is that he truly thinks that he is doing the right thing, at least when it comes to his actions in *Antigone*. *Oedipus at Colonus* is a different story and I think that going a little hard on him in that adaptation is warranted, but this Creon is a bit older and much wiser than either of his previous appearances in the trilogy. While he is harsh and can be cruel at times, there is a good

man underneath and I think that will come from helping actors portray this complex character. I think that this has to be done with portions of his dialogue rewritten and stage directions that would help the actor show more of a feeling of trying to be just in an unjust society. Unfortunately, I'm not at the stage of these adaptations to start with rewriting dialogue in order to fit within the story, but there are some steps that I am taking with stage directions to help create a more morally grey character. Performance above all else is highly important with Creon in this adaptation as there's only so much that I can do with stage directions and rewriting his dialogue in order to achieve this antagonistic yet morally confused character. But be assured that there will come a point when I am at the stage where I can rewrite dialogue and, when that day comes, I will be making some major changes to Creon and this idea that he is a good man but with some extreme antagonistic tendencies that cause him his own downfall. However, one group of people that are antagonistic and teetering on the edge of villainy is the Chorus. I want them to almost be whispering in Creon's ear and encouraging him to stick to his guns and continue to pursue Antigone. This change of the Chorus will help emphasize that idea that I've been building up that Thebes as a whole is rotten, full of terrible people who care only for themselves and their desires. Like I've stated, Creon is not a villain, but the Chorus is clearly leading him astray and acting villainous in their own right.

Civil Disobedience in Anouilh's and Sophocles' *Antigone*

I want to go on a quick tangent about this idea of civil disobedience that has been discussed prevalently within both this adaptation and in observation written about both this adaptation and the original. So, in *Antigone*, there is a notable difference in who changes throughout the course of the play and how that impacts this idea of civil disobedience. In

Sophocles' work, it is actually Creon who goes through his own character arc and becomes "enlightened", to borrow a phrase, with Antigone maintaining her character through due to the fact that she already has gone through her character arc and growth in the previous two plays within the trilogy. In Anouilh's play, it's the opposite, as Antigone is seeing how her civil disobedience has ruined so many lives and becomes that enlightened person, Creon simply learns nothing and is only punished for his horrible rule. While some claim that this leads to a more pessimistic play and one that discourages this idea of civil disobedience, such as Conor Cruise O'Brien claims that ruining several lives is "a stiff price for that handful of dust on Polyneices" (190), I wholeheartedly disagree. I think that what Anouilh is attempting to state with this play is that sometimes, non-violent civil disobedience is not enough, not that it is never useful and only leads to these extremes that we see at the end of *Antigone*. Sometimes, people need to take a step farther in casting out tyranny from society. And clearly, this got through to the people of Paris, as historically, the people believed similar to how I believe that Anouilh is speaking about the play. While there is no actual evidence that this led to more violent uprisings against the Vichy Regime and Nazi occupation, it helped spur the people to be ready and willing to fight and aid the Resistance in those waning hours of the end of World War 2. That's my belief and I do think that it is backed up by some historical data. Back to the adaptation, I just simply wanted to discuss this idea further and put my own thoughts and opinions in the mix when it comes to Anouilh's view of civil disobedience. When looking towards my own adaptation and what this idea of civil disobedience is, I think I've mentioned that I want Antigone to be in the right. She is standing up for what she believes in against a group of people who have shown time and time again that they are morally bankrupt. They have lost the right to be men in power and are using that power to destroy their enemies and those that they deem unhealthy to society. Antigone is

simply showing them and the citizens of Thebes that haven't lost their way that these men, both Creon and those in the Chorus, aren't omnipotent and not all-powerful. She won, in the end. Her brother has been put to rest and while Antigone's life doesn't turn out to be as joyful as it could have been, she has done what she wanted and allows others to see the horrors of the people of Thebes. In my adaptation, there shouldn't be a hint of indication that she isn't in the right, as that would undermine the goal of lifting up women and giving them a voice in these traditionally male-dominated Greek plays and adaptations, particularly this set of three plays in the Theban cycle.

The Overall Theatricality of Anouilh's *Antigone*

To close out our viewing and analysis of Jean Anouilh's adaptation of *Antigone*, I wanted to look more closely at the theatricality to the piece. Compared to the other two adaptations that I've looked at, this piece specifically seems like the most abstract in both its presentation and its ideas and I believe that it is important that we analyze the theatrical elements to the play to possibly bolster my own adaptation in some way, shape, or form. Obviously, the most important theatrical aspect of this play is the time and place that it was written and performed, as that obviously has an impact on the theatrical nature of this play and any possible productions of it since the opening run. We've already stated this before, so it needs not repeating, but the play was written for Vichy France during the height of World War II and that does impact how we need to view the theatricality. This is important with the fact that Anouilh has a history of writing plays specifically for an audience, rather than a reader. While it is difficult to imagine a play with the same sense while reading it, this is purposeful and much to Anouilh's style. *Antigone* was not

Anouilh's first adaptation of a Greek play. In fact, he had many different adaptations preceding this specific work. And one constant between them all is this sense of timelessness, which is always something that Anouilh held to high regard when he was creating these adaptations. To quote Murray Sachs when he discussed this exact topic of *Antigone*'s theatricality: "Ever since the first production, and probably on Anouilh's initiative, all actors have been dressed in modern evening clothes. The plain intent of the stage directions and costumes is to plant in the minds of the audience the idea that the time of the action is very much the present, though not in any specifically identifiable time or place." (5-6) Even though it seems like there isn't much going on with theatricality within the script, the fact that there isn't much going on is absolutely intentional and mirrors what I am going for with my own adaptation in terms of allowing for a specific time and place to be used when constructing a specific time and place for a specific production. Continuing on with aspects of theatricality, I want to dive deeper into an aspect of the play that I mentioned earlier: the omission of Tiresias. Tiresias severs two functions within the plot of Sophocles' *Antigone*: to provide more tension to lead up to the tragic moment of Antigone's, Haemon's, and Eurydice's deaths and to provide a sense of dramatic irony in the fact that, despite being blind, he can see the situation clearer than Creon. For the first aspect of Tiresias, Anouilh believed that tragedy doesn't need a character like Tiresias and, as a discussion of tragedy and the nature of tragedy is a major aspect to the Chorus and themes of the play as a whole, it would only undercut the message and themes Anouilh is trying to get across. There doesn't need to be this buildup of great tension because Anouilh has changed the nature of the play to both be a tragedy and comment on the nature of tragedies. In terms of the irony of Creon's blindness, the simple fact of this adaptation is that Creon isn't blind to what he's doing in this adaptation. He knows what he is doing is wrong and that he is doing what he needs in

order to maintain his rule without any notable incidents. To quote from Keri Walsh in her article "Allied Antigone: Jean Anouilh in America and England": "Before he departs, Creon asks the audience not to think of him as a villain, arguing that he was only carrying out the menial, unheroic, and unflattering day-to-day work of governing: "They say it's a dirty job, but if you don't do it, who will?"" (283) So, the irony would be lost on such a morally reprehensible character. And it is in that mundanity that really shows the horrors of what Creon is capable of when looking at it through the lens of the Vichy regime. Creon is not an over-the-top evil, but a bland, mundane evil that feels nothing for those around him and believes he is simply doing his job. While Anouilh was tolerant of the Vichy regime, there is a reading of this play that allows for the mundane horrors of Creon to be translated to the real world, albeit somewhat unintentionally by Anouilh.

In conclusion, Anouilh's adaptation of *Antigone* takes the ideas set forth within the original play and expands on them. Not only to comment on the modern sociopolitical climate that Jean Anouilh found himself in during the Vichy Regime in Paris, but to comment on the nature of theatre and tragedy as a whole. I think the ending of the play is something that really sums up the whole essence of this adaptation. With everything falling apart and Creon being ruined by his own actions, we see the soldiers and guards playing cards. The play seems to comment on this, saying that the tragedy doesn't matter to them. I find it so fascinating that the ending of this "tragedy" comments on the pointlessness of this concept. And yet, we can't help but feel moved by Antigone's plot to help her brother. So, the question we are left with is this: If the tragedy doesn't matter, then why do we still care? The answer can be anything that you can imagine but I like to look at it as that we as people care about others innately and will empathize with as much as we can as best as we can. And, personally, I like that as a concept and theme of

Anouilh's *Antigone*. It fits the chaotic and horrific world that he was living in at the time, and it gives this often-hopeless play some hope to cling on to at the end of it all. Will I have an optimistic view at the end of my adaptation? I'm still not sure, but I do know that it is possible and I'm happy to test the concept with my adaptation.

My Adaptation of *Antigone*

Antigone is, in some ways, the most challenging and yet most rewarding play to tackle. Yes, *Oedipus at Colonus* was a dense play and *Oedipus Rex* required the most upheaval to include Antigone in any meaningful way, but *Antigone* must balance the fact that we want Antigone as present as possible within the play, despite the fact that there is the tendency for her to be overshadowed by Creon (especially when it comes to adaptations of *Antigone*). It's a careful balance to keep Creon as a huge antagonistic force while not allowing him to overshadowing Antigone and her impact on her own story, but I feel as though I have achieved that and kept the story centered around Antigone with Creon being a secondary character. Is it perfect? Not yet but I am confident that the more I work on it over the years, the better it will become until it meets my lofty expectations. So, with all that being said, let's dive into what I have changed and how I think that it helps center the end of this trilogy solely on the shoulders of Antigone.

I think the first and most important change will involve how the stage is set up and how the blocking of Antigone shows her throughout her own story. I have devised a platform, raised slightly above the stage and clearly disconnected from the events and setting of the main stage, for which Antigone retires when she is not currently onstage. I want her to watch the proceedings

with disdain and contempt, as she is fully accepting her role as disruptor and allowing herself to feel the rage and pain that she has felt throughout the course of the story. It also allows Antigone to be present and almost omniscient within the story, as she is watching over the events that will dictate the end of her life. The platform is also a moment where we as the audience can see moments that are only described offstage. I'm not sure exactly if this will stick but maybe the idea that we see both Antigone burying the body of Polyneices and her capture are taking place on this platform during either a Chorus section or a moment of silence on the main stage. I know for sure that we do see the moment where Antigone is sealed within the cave on that upper stage, which then leads to a slow light fade on that stage as Antigone's life comes to an end. While we won't see her hang herself or Haemon kill himself, we will see those last moments of her life as she finally retires from the stage for almost the first time within the adaptation of the trilogy.

One point that I want to go back to that I mentioned earlier is this idea that Antigone feels disdain and contempt for the proceedings of this play, fully giving herself into this idea of her as a disruptor for the greater good. Crucially, Antigone needs to be angry over the course of this play. And not only anger, but rage against a system that has treated her and her family so poorly over the course of these three plays that it can't help but boil over at this latest slight against her brother. She has gone through the range of emotions throughout the rest of the trilogy, from shock and denial in *Oedipus Rex* to sorrow and loss in *Oedipus at Colonus*. I believe that *Antigone* is the time that we see the rage that she rightly deserves to feel. And I truly think that it will work better because we will see the harrowing experience that Antigone has gone through throughout her own life, which will let the audience empathize with her rage. Had we just adapted *Antigone*, I think it would be a harder sell for the audience to understand that sense of rage that Antigone is feeling, rather than showing them her horrible life that she has had to live.

Now, there isn't only rage that Antigone feels, she's not a flat character, there are moments of sorrow and loss. I think the greatest moment of showing that duality that Antigone is feeling in this adaptation is actually in the first Chorus section. So, what I have done is that I have the majority of that Chorus section, which details the sieging of Thebes by Polyneices, being directed at Antigone almost as if the Chorus, and by extension the whole of Thebes, blames Antigone and the whole of the remaining family of Oedipus for the destruction caused by this war. Bu then, Antigone takes over when the section of the chorus turns towards the fates of both Polyneices and Eteocles:

Seven captains at our seven gates
Thundered; for each a champion waits,
Each left behind his armor bright,
Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;
Save two alone, that ill-starred pair
One mother to one father bare,
Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other
Drave, and both perished, brother slain by brother.

I want this moment to be incredibly somber and taken seriously by both Antigone and the Chorus as a whole. There needs to be an extended pause as Antigone is clearly upset, barely holding back the tears for her dead brothers. And then, that moment is broken in the worst way possible as the Chorus breaks out in cheers, clearly mocking Antigone and Polyneices, as the move into the final section of this Chorus piece, which details the celebrations and joy that the city is experiencing. I want Antigone to feel almost othered by the Chorus as they clearly know that she is there and clearly blame her and her whole family for the woes and war that have been thrust upon this city. I think that this will be only one of two moments where we see Antigone feel any sadness or pain, as this reaction by the Chorus will spur her on to do what she feels like she

needs to do and harden her heart to any consequences that might occur because of her own actions. I also like that this moment make Antigone feel othered as she retreats back to the upper stage that she will spend all of her offstage time on, as because right after this, Creon enters and begins to proclaim how great things are now that the war is over and how Eteocles is being given all the rights and proper burial treatments while Polyneices is being left out to rot away in the harsh sun with scavengers picking at his remains. I really enjoy this moment with the Chorus section and Creon's entrance because it really helps set up the anger that we feel towards this man and helps the audience empathize more with Antigone rather than Creon. Because we have seen his morally unjust actions that he committed in *Oedipus at Colonus*, coupled with this distinct tonal shift between Antigone's mourning of her brothers and Creon's and the Chorus's celebration of the end of the war, the antagonistic side of Creon is shown full force without having to make him a stereotypical hang-wringing evil villain.

But I want to go back to the point that I made earlier when I stated that the instance when she mourns her brothers in the beginning of the play was one of two moments of sorrow that I will allow Antigone to have. The second is, fittingly, the final large monologue that she has before she is led to be sealed up in her cave:

Thus by the law of conscience I was led
To honor thee, dear brother, and was judged
By Creon guilty of a heinous crime.
And now he drags me like a criminal,
A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song
And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood,
By friends deserted to a living grave.
What ordinance of heaven have I transgressed?
Hereafter can I look to any god
For succor, call on any man for help?
Alas, my piety is impious deemed.
Well, if such justice is approved of heaven,
I shall be taught by suffering my sin;
But if the sin is theirs, O may they suffer
No worse ills than the wrongs they do to me

And the way that she shows her sorrow should be extremely important as she is not sorrowful because she regrets her actions, far from it. I think that it is clear that she feels no remorse for her actions but simply the fact that Creon essentially forced her hand. She doesn't believe that she had any choice in honoring and saving her brother's soul by burying him and performing the funeral rights. She wishes she could've lived the life that she deserves after so much hardship, but she knows that due to Creon's rash decision and inability to admit his wrongdoings that he took the chance of all the things she lists, marriage, children, family, from happening. It's sorrow but it is still a rage-fueled sorrow. She is essentially hate-crying in this moment, and it needs to have that huge emotional event for Antigone because this is it. After this monologue, she is gone from the main action of the play for the first time in this adapted trilogy, only allowing to remain there through the theatrical mechations that I have devised through this adaptation.

Quick note about her exit after this monologue. I have it changed so that Antigone retreats to her back platform raised up above the stage where she has been spending all of her "offstage" time on throughout the course of this specific play. This will allow the audience to see that she is still alive and maybe give them hope after Tiresias's warning that she can be saved. It also allows her to be able to have some interesting interactions with Tiresias as he is essentially channeling the gods with his warning. That's something for future directors and producers to devise as I don't want everything to be dictated in the script, but it allows them to have some interesting interactions with those two characters. And then there is the last spoken words from Antigone in this trilogy that I have given her. I gave her a majority of the Chorus section after Creon exits to try and save Antigone. I have it indicated that I want this section to read as though Antigone is laying on a curse over Thebes, showering them with the hate and anger that these people rightfully deserve:

Thou by many names adored,

Child of Zeus the God of thunder,
Of a Theban bride the wonder,
Fair Italia's guardian lord;

In the deep-embosomed glades
Of the Eleusinian Queen
Haunt of revelers, men and maids,
Dionysus, thou art seen.

Where Ismenus rolls his waters,
Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,
Where the Bacchanals thy daughters
Round thee roam,
There thy home;
Thebes, O Bacchus, is thine own.

Thee on the two-crested rock
Lurid-flaming torches see;
Where Corisian maidens flock,
Thee the springs of Castaly.

By Nysa's bastion ivy-clad,
By shores with clustered vineyards glad,
There to thee the hymn rings out,
And through our streets we Thebans shout,
All hall to thee
Evoe, Evoe!

To me, this is the last action that Antigone takes before taking her own life and I want the producers when they bring this adaptation to life to go wild with lighting and sounds and let her pleas to the gods have a true impact on the remaining members of the Chorus. I want them terrified of what is happening around them and to give them this feeling of dread that they have not felt before. I think that it will help the audience and Antigone both achieve a sense of satisfaction in being able to strike back at these men who have been so callous and cruel to her throughout the course of this play in specific. This is also a nice payoff to the villainous Chorus idea that I presented earlier. In the original play, Creon kind of is the only person to have lived and suffered for it, while the others who live just seem to have seen these tragic events and moved on, presumably, after the play ends. In this adaptation, I want the idea that nothing good will happen to the city of Thebes and that Antigone is the one who truly exposed the city for what it is: full of horrible people. Now, the text doesn't exactly hold up this idea of Antigone

cursing the city and Chorus, but I think that there is a sort of tempo and rhythm that I want to go with that fits well with this section. All that I have to do is tweak some of the wording in order to fit, which will again happen later on in the process of adapting this play.

And now all that is left is to discuss the ending of not only this play, but the trilogy as a whole. Where I am attempting to give *Oedipus at Colonus* a happier and more optimistic ending, the same can't be said for *Antigone*. There is nothing but dismay and emptiness that needs to be felt at the end. But, backing up, after Antigone is escorted to her cave and then resides up on her own raised platform, we see the scene where the Messenger comes in and informs both Eurydice and the Chorus about the events that transpired at Antigone's cave. I want Antigone throughout this to look down upon the people onstage and slowly glide back into the darkness after Creon enters. There should be a quick moment when Creon enters with the body of Haemon and makes clear and unbroken eye contact with Antigone before she disappears into the darkness. This'll be the only time that any character is able to look at Antigone on this platform. The reason is that I want it to be shown to Creon that he is the cause and that there is no forgiveness from Antigone in the afterlife. Just because he came to his senses does not mean that she can forgive him for the actions that he caused. After that moment of eye contact, she will vanish, or the production will try its best to make it appear like she has vanished. I still would like to have the light remain on that platform, just that Antigone is gone forever now. Then the play will end as normal, with Creon being broken and leaving the city due to his own failures as king.

I have this idea for an additional scene after the play would normally end, but I keep going back and forth on whether it undermines the catharsis of the ending of the play or not. I had the idea way on that there's just a quick moment of Antigone embracing Oedipus, with a simple spotlight on the two as the embrace in what seems like a void. It would provide a nice

moment of closure for the two and could end the trilogy on a note of happiness that both were able to fight for what they believe in, Antigone for her brother and Oedipus for aiding Athens against Thebes. And while it would be a nice moment, I do wonder if it would undermine that feeling of catharsis that ends the whole trilogy. It probably does but it might actually work. I think that this is something that would have to be tested with different runs and see what works out best for different audiences. I can see both endings having a better impact, so I am torn between the two. On one hand, I understand that this could interrupt that flowing sense of catharsis that we have been building up to for the entirety of the trilogy now that we've shifted the focus to be on Antigone. However, I can also see that this would help center the ending of *Antigone* back to Antigone as she will no longer be present in her own story after she leaves that upper platform. After she's gone, it is kind of the Creon show as the rest of the story happens to him and him alone. While yes, Antigone is still mentioned and the weight of her decision is still felt by both characters and the audience, nothing really happens concerning Antigone after I have extended her stay on that platform. By adding this ending in, it allows for the trilogy to close on the two main characters instead on the antagonist of the final two plays. So, there are strong arguments in favor of either ending, so it will have to be a decision that I make when seeing my adaptations up on their feet with an actual cast and crew.

And that is *Antigone*. While there isn't as much overhauling of the story and characters as the previous two plays within the trilogy, there was still a lot of work and thought that I put into crafting this adaptation and there's still a lot to be done. But I'm happy with the ideas and changes that I've implemented into the story, from the villainizing of the Chorus to Antigone's platform that gives her a way to be more present in her story, there are many small changes that add up to a worthwhile adaptation in its own right. And I think that this play and the changes that

I've made and have yet to make are truly beneficial when put into the context of producing this whole trilogy over the course of one evening. The impact of Antigone and the results of what she has learned with Oedipus are shown in much clearer terms when her entire life's story has been shown in the same production. It allows for her actions to be seen by audiences as more justifiable and prevents this play from being the "Creon show" as so many productions and adaptations can tend to be. That's the greatest achievement that has come out of this attempt to adapt this trilogy. While Creon is a fantastic character, *Antigone* is not his play. And I believe that putting the focus on Antigone throughout the trilogy as a whole helps prevent *Antigone* from feeling like Creon's story and Creon's story alone.

Conclusion

Sophocles' Theban plays stands as an important pillar when it comes to analyzing the history of theatre and the importance that Greek theatre specifically has when looking at the influences of historical theatre on modern theatre. There are still echoes of this play that serve as inspiration from everything Japanese anime and manga to psychological theories. This series of plays is still considered one of the best that has survived these thousands of years since their initial writing. With something so notable and recognizable, an adaptation is difficult to achieve. However, as I have explored the ideas of adaptation and specific adaptations that have achieved their author's goals, I believe that this first step that I have taken will lead to something that will be notable and could have an impact. This still is the first step in creating this adaptation as I have simply laid the groundwork for a piece that will require more of my own original voice and original writing. While these pieces are not the final product, the importance of the cutting that I have done will allow me to more easily add in my own voice and make this adaptation transform from a simple cutting to a piece that distinctly is my own. The framework is there, all I have to do is add in what I believe will achieve my vision. And I think that this vision that I have is important. Antigone is a massively important character to this story and, sadly, is often forgotten next to the powerful male characters like Oedipus or Creon. We as a society love these powerfully written men that go through these extremely profound character arcs that rock them to their very core. But with this idolization of these male characters, it allows the female characters to be more easily brushed aside. One of the reasons that I feel so passionate about promoting Antigone is that I was once in a production of *Antigone* where the male director stated that "this is Creon's story, despite the play being about Antigone." It never sat right with me, and

I've carried that frustration for all these years, which spurred me on to trying my best to lay out the reasons and groundwork for why Antigone is actually the main character of not only her play, but the whole of the Theban plays. And I believe that I have begun to achieve that vision with these adaptations. I will be the first to admit that I am not a writer, but I think that specifically the words from Rita Dove and her work have been hugely influential on me and my confidence with writing. She's a talented poet and her work stands as one of the biggest inspirations for what I eventually want to achieve with my adaptations. I would love to be able to achieve a complete and total change of the writing and allow the transformation to continue to highlight the importance of Antigone even beyond what I have already laid out. With the inspirational words of encouragement and advice from people such as Rita Dove, I believe that I can take this cutting and transform it to an adaptation that is wholly unique. Would we even end the play when *Antigone* ends in the series of plays? Or will the story end when Antigone's story truly ends, either when she finally is able to bury her brother or when she is banished into the cave and takes her own life? I'm not sure, but these are the questions that I must answer as I continue to write and evolve this story beyond this simple cutting that I have pieced together. It is a daunting task, especially for one who sticks more towards acting and not writing like myself. But the time that I have spent working and researching this piece and these authors has shown me that this is truly what I need to do and it is worth putting years of effort into it.

For the time being, this is what I need to have in order to take that next step. All I have is this cutting and that is what I need at this moment. And who knows? Maybe my end goals will evolve as I continue to work on this piece, which is why I'm happy keeping this as a cutting right now and then using the work that I have done with my research and writing to allow for an easier transition to something more. As of right now, I have accomplished what I have set out to do.

The series of plays is now Antigone's. Oedipus and Creon and all the other major characters are still there, but Antigone is the one that stands higher than all of them. I think that it brings a more grounded feeling to the plays. Instead of following this doomed king that at time feels larger than life, the audience gets to follow a young girl that evolves from naïve and loyal to those around her to someone who is willing to put her life and world on the line in order to do what is right. Centering the play on her pulls this huge story and allows it to be simpler, which I fully believe is a good aspect of this adaptation. Now, the audience doesn't need to care about the politics of ancient Greece or what the body of a dead man means to a war, they simply need to understand what the death of a father means to a daughter who has devoted her whole life to her family. It allows them to care about smaller things and brings the scope of the whole of the plays inward. Not every story about Oedipus and his family needs to be this grand journey with the highest stakes for Greece as a whole, now it can be a simple family drama with the only one who seems to care, Antigone, being slowly hardened by the trauma. In the end, she fights for her family and does what she can in order to let all of them be at peace. She always was the hero of these plays and now she can be seen as that through this adaptation of them.

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Text of *Oedipus Rex*

OEDIPUS THE KING

Translation by F. Storr, BA
Formerly Scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge
From the Loeb Library Edition
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and
William Heinemann Ltd, London
First published in 1912

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Oedipus.
Antigone.
Ismene.
The Priest of Zeus.
Creon.
Chorus of Theban Elders.
Teiresias.
Jocasta.
Messenger.
Herd of Laius.
Second Messenger.

Scene: Thebes. Before the Palace of Oedipus.

Red Text – Cut lines
Green Text – Additional lines/stage directions
Blue Text – Reassigned lines

OEDIPUS THE KING

Suppliants of all ages are seated round the altar at the palace doors,
at their head a PRIEST OF ZEUS. To them enter OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS.
My children, latest born to Cadmus old,
Why sit ye here as suppliants, in your hands
Branches of olive filleted with wool?
What means this reek of incense everywhere,
And everywhere laments and litanies?
Children, it were not meet that I should learn
From others, and am hither come, myself,
I Oedipus, your world-renowned king.
Ho! aged sire, whose venerable locks
Proclaim thee spokesman of this company,
Explain your mood and purport. Is it dread
Of ill that moves you or a boon ye crave?
My zeal in your behalf ye cannot doubt;
Ruthless indeed were I and obdurate
If such petitioners as you I spurned.

PRIEST.
Yea, Oedipus, my sovereign lord and king,
Thou seest how both extremes of age besiege
Thy palace altars—fledglings hardly winged,
and greybeards bowed with years; priests, as am I
of Zeus, and these the flower of our youth.
Meanwhile, the common folk, with wreathed boughs
Crowd our two market-places, or before
Both shrines of Pallas congregate, or where
Ismenus gives his oracles by fire.
For, as thou seest thyself, our ship of State,
Sore buffeted, can no more lift her head,
Foundered beneath a weltering surge of blood.
A blight is on our harvest in the ear,
A blight upon the grazing flocks and herds,
A blight on wives in travail; and withal
Armed with his blazing torch the God of Plague
Hath swooped upon our city emptying
The house of Cadmus, and the murky realm
Of Pluto is full fed with groans and tears.
Therefore, O King, here at thy hearth we sit,
I and these children; not as deeming thee
A new divinity, but the first of men;
First in the common accidents of life,
And first in visitations of the Gods.
Art thou not he who coming to the town

of Cadmus freed us from the tax we paid
To the fell songstress? Nor hadst thou received
Prompting from us or been by others schooled;
No, by a god inspired (so all men deem,
And testify) didst thou renew our life.
And now, O Oedipus, our peerless king,
All we thy votaries beseech thee, find
Some succor, whether by a voice from heaven
Whispered, or haply known by human wit.
Tried counselors, methinks, are aptest found1
To furnish for the future pregnant rede.
Upraise, O chief of men, upraise our State!
Look to thy laurels! for thy zeal of yore
Our country's savior thou art justly hailed:
O never may we thus record thy reign:—
"He raised us up only to cast us down."
Uplift us, build our city on a rock.
Thy happy star ascendant brought us luck,
O let it not decline! If thou wouldst rule
This land, as now thou reignest, better sure
To rule a peopled than a desert realm.
Nor battlements nor galleys aught avail,
If men to man and guards to guard them tail.

OEDIPUS.
Ah! my poor children, known, ah, known too well,
The quest that brings you hither and your need.
Ye sicken all, well wot I, yet my pain,
How great soever yours, outtops it all.
Your sorrow touches each man severally,
Him and none other, but I grieve at once
Both for the general and myself and you.
Therefore ye rouse no sluggard from day-dreams.
Many, my children, are the tears I've wept,
And threaded many a maze of weary thought.
Thus pondering one clue of hope I caught,
And tracked it up; I have sent Menoeceus' son,
Creon, my consort's brother, to inquire
Of Pythian Phoebus at his Delphic shrine,
How I might save the State by act or word.
And now I reckon up the tale of days
Since he set forth, and marvel how he fares.
'Tis strange, this endless tarrying, passing strange.
But when he comes, then I were base indeed,
If I perform not all the god declares.

PRIEST.
Thy words are well timed; even as thou speakest
That shouting tells me Creon is at hand.

OEDIPUS.
O King Apollo! may his joyous looks
Be presage of the joyous news he brings!

PRIEST.
As I surmise, 'tis welcome; else his head
Had scarce been crowned with berry-laden bays.

OEDIPUS.
We soon shall know; he's now in earshot range.
[Enter CREON]
My royal cousin, say, Menoeceus' child,
What message hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON.
Good news, for e'en intolerable ills,
Finding right issue, tend to naught but good.

OEDIPUS.
How runs the oracle? thus far thy words
Give me no ground for confidence or fear.

CREON.
If thou wouldst hear my message publicly,
I'll tell thee straight, or with thee pass within.

OEDIPUS.
Speak before all; the burden that I bear
Is more for these my subjects than myself.

CREON.
Let me report then all the god declared.
King Phoebus bids us straitly extirpate
A fell pollution that infests the land,
And no more harbor an inveterate sore.

OEDIPUS.
What expiation means he? What's amiss?

CREON.
Banishment, or the shedding blood for blood.
This stain of blood makes shipwreck of our state.

OEDIPUS.
Whom can he mean, the miscreant thus denounced?

CREON.
Before thou didst assume the helm of State,

The sovereign of this land was Laius.

OEDIPUS.
I heard as much, but never saw the man.

CREON.
He fell; and now the god's command is plain:
Punish his takers-off, whoe'er they be.

OEDIPUS.
Where are they? Where in the wide world to find
The far, faint traces of a bygone crime?

CREON.
In this land, said the god; "who seeks shall find;
Who sits with folded hands or sleeps is blind."

OEDIPUS.
Was he within his palace, or afield,
Or traveling, when Laius met his fate?

CREON.
Abroad; he started, so he told us, bound
For Delphi, but he never thence returned.

OEDIPUS.
Came there no news, no fellow-traveler
To give some clue that might be followed up?

CREON.
But one escape, who flying for dear life,
Could tell of all he saw but one thing sure.

OEDIPUS.
And what was that? One clue might lead us far,
With but a spark of hope to guide our quest.

CREON.
Robbers, he told us, not one bandit but
A troop of knaves, attacked and murdered him.

OEDIPUS.
Did any bandit dare so bold a stroke,
Unless indeed he were suborned from Thebes?

CREON.
So 'twas surmised, but none was found to avenge
His murder mid the trouble that ensued.

OEDIPUS.
What trouble can have hindered a full quest,
When royalty had fallen thus miserably?

CREON.
The riddling Sphinx compelled us to let slide
The dim past and attend to instant needs.

OEDIPUS.
Well, I will start afresh and once again
Make dark things clear. Right worthy the concern
Of Phoebus, worthy thine too, for the dead;
I also, as is meet, will lend my aid
To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god.
Not for some far-off kinsman, but myself,
Shall I expel this poison in the blood;
For whoso slew that king might have a mind
To strike me too with his assassin hand.
Therefore in righting him I serve myself.
Up, children, haste ye, quit these altar stairs,
Take hence your suppliant wands, go summon hither
The Theban commons. With the god's good help
Success is sure; 'tis ruin if we fail.
[Exeunt OEDIPUS and CREON]

[Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE, who have been hiding behind a pillar throughout the scene]

PRIEST.
Come, children, let us hence; these gracious words
Forestall the very purpose of our suit.
And may the god who sent this oracle
Save us withal and rid us of this pest.
[Exeunt PRIEST and SUPPLIANTS]

ISMENE
Sweet-voiced daughter of Zeus from thy gold-paved Pythian shrine
Wafted to Thebes divine,
What dost thou bring me? My soul is racked and shivers with fear.
(Healer of Delos, hear!)
Hast thou some pain unknown before,
Or with the circling years renewest a penance of yore?
Offspring of golden Hope, thou voice immortal, O tell me.

ANTIGONE
First on Athene I call; O Zeus-born goddess, defend!
Goddess and sister, befriend,

Artemis, Lady of Thebes, high-throned in the midst of our mart!
Lord of the death-winged dart!
Your threefold aid I crave
From death and ruin our city to save.
If in the days of old when we nigh had perished, ye drave
From our land the fiery plague, be near us now and defend us!

CHORUS
Ah me, what countless woes are mine!
All our host is in decline;
Weaponless my spirit lies.
Earth her gracious fruits denies;
Women wail in barren throes;
Life on life downstriken goes,
Swifter than the wind bird's flight,
Swifter than the Fire-God's might,
To the westering shores of Night.

Wasted thus by death on death
All our city perisheth.
Corpses spread infection round;
None to tend or mourn is found.
Wailing on the altar stair
Wives and grandams rend the air—
Long-drawn moans and piercing cries
Blent with prayers and litanies.
Golden child of Zeus, O hear
Let thine angel face appear!

ANTIGONE
And grant that Ares whose hot breath I feel,
Though without targe or steel
He stalks, whose voice is as the battle shout,
May turn in sudden rout,
To the unharbored Thracian waters sped,
Or Amphitrite's bed.
For what night leaves undone,
Smit by the morrow's sun
Perisheth. Father Zeus, whose hand
Doth wield the lightning brand,
Slay him beneath thy levin bold, we pray,
Slay him, O slay!

O that thine arrows too, Lycean King,
From that taut bow's gold string,
Might fly abroad, the champions of our rights;
Yea, and the flashing lights
Of Artemis, wherewith the huntress sweeps
Across the Lycian steeps.
Thee too I call with golden-snooded hair,
Whose name our land doth bear,
Bacchus to whom thy Maenads Evoe shout;
Come with thy bright torch, rout,
Blithe god whom we adore,
The god whom gods abhor.

[Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS. (embracing ANTIGONE)
Ye pray; 'tis well, but would ye hear my words
And heed them and apply the remedy,
Ye might perchance find comfort and relief.
Mind you, I speak as one who comes a stranger
To this report, no less than to the crime;
For how unaided could I track it far
Without a clue? Which lacking (for too late
Was I enrolled a citizen of Thebes)
This proclamation I address to all: —
Thebans, if any knows the man by whom
Laius, son of Labdacus, was slain,
I summon him to make clean shrift to me.
And if he shrinks, let him reflect that thus
Confessing he shall 'scape the capital charge;
For the worst penalty that shall befall him
Is banishment—unscathed he shall depart.
But if an alien from a foreign land
Be known to any as the murderer,
Let him who knows speak out, and he shall have
Due recompense from me and thanks to boot.
But if ye still keep silence, if through fear
For self or friends ye disregard my hest,
Hear what I then resolve; I lay my ban
On the assassin whosoe'er he be.
Let no man in this land, whereof I hold
The sovereign rule, harbor or speak to him;
Give him no part in prayer or sacrifice
Or lustral rites, but hound him from your homes.
For this is our defilement, so the god
Hath lately shown to me by oracles.
Thus as their champion I maintain the cause
Both of the god and of the murdered King.
And on the murderer this curse I lay
(On him and all the partners in his guilt):—
Wretch, may he pine in utter wretchedness!
And for myself, if with my privity
He gain admittance to my hearth, I pray
The curse I laid on others fall on me.
See that ye give effect to all my hest,
For my sake and the god's and for our land,
A desert blasted by the wrath of heaven.
For, let alone the god's express command,
It were a scandal ye should leave unpurged
The murder of a great man and your king,
Nor track it home. And now that I am lord,
Successor to his throne, his bed, his wife,
(And had he not been frustrate in the hope
Of issue, common children of one womb
Had forced a closer bond twixt him and me,
But Fate swooped down upon him), therefore I
His blood-avenger will maintain his cause
As though he were my sire, and leave no stone
Unturned to track the assassin or avenge

The son of Labdacus, of Polydore,
Of Cadmus, and Agenor first of the race.
And for the disobedient thus I pray:
May the gods send them neither timely fruits
Of earth, nor teeming increase of the womb,
But may they waste and pine, as now they waste,
Aye and worse stricken; but to all of you,
My loyal subjects who approve my acts,
May Justice, our ally, and all the gods
Be gracious and attend you evermore.

CHORUS.
The oath thou profferest, sire, I take and swear.
I slew him not myself, nor can I name
The slayer. For the quest, 'twere well, methinks
That Phoebus, who proposed the riddle, himself
Should give the answer—who the murderer was.

OEDIPUS.
Well argued; but no living man can hope
To force the gods to speak against their will.

CHORUS.
May I then say what seems next best to me?

OEDIPUS.
Aye, if there be a third best, tell it too.

CHORUS.
My liege, if any man sees eye to eye
With our lord Phoebus, 'tis our prophet, lord
Teiresias; he of all men best might guide
A searcher of this matter to the light.

OEDIPUS.
Here too my zeal has nothing lagged, for twice
At Creon's instance have I sent to fetch him,
And long I marvel why he is not here.

CHORUS.
I mind me too of rumors long ago—
Mere gossip.

OEDIPUS.
Tell them, I would fain know all.

CHORUS.

’Twas said he fell by travelers.

OEDIPUS.
So I heard,
But none has seen the man who saw him fall.

CHORUS.
Well, if he knows what fear is, he will quail
And flee before the terror of thy curse.

OEDIPUS.
Words scare not him who blenches not at deeds.

CHORUS.
But here is one to arraign him. Lo, at length
They bring the god-inspired seer in whom
Above all other men is truth inborn.
[Enter TEIRESIAS, led by a boy.]

OEDIPUS.
Teiresias, seer who comprehendest all,
Lore of the wise and hidden mysteries,
High things of heaven and low things of the earth,
Thou knowest, though thy blinded eyes see naught,
What plague infects our city; and we turn
To thee, O seer, our one defense and shield.
The purport of the answer that the God
Returned to us who sought his oracle,
The messengers have doubtless told thee—how
One course alone could rid us of the pest,
To find the murderers of Laius,
And slay them or expel them from the land.
Therefore begrudging neither augury
Nor other divination that is thine,
O save thyself, thy country, and thy king,
Save all from this defilement of blood shed.
On thee we rest. This is man’s highest end,
To others’ service all his powers to lend.

TEIRESIAS.
Alas, alas, what misery to be wise
When wisdom profits nothing! This old lore
I had forgotten; else I were not here.

OEDIPUS.
What ails thee? Why this melancholy mood?

TEIRESIAS.

Let me go home; prevent me not; 'twere best
That thou shouldst bear thy burden and I mine.

ANTIGONE.
For shame! no true-born Theban patriot
Would thus withhold the word of prophecy.

TEIRESIAS.
Thy words, O child, are wide of the mark, and I
For fear lest I too trip like thee...

OEDIPUS.
Oh speak,
Withhold not, I adjure thee, if thou know'st,
Thy knowledge. We are all thy suppliants.

TEIRESIAS.
Aye, for ye all are witless, but my voice
Will ne'er reveal my miseries—or thine.

OEDIPUS.
What then, thou knowest, and yet willst not speak!
Wouldst thou betray us and destroy the State?

TEIRESIAS.
I will not vex myself nor thee. Why ask
Thus idly what from me thou shalt not learn?

OEDIPUS.
Monster! thy silence would incense a flint.
Will nothing loose thy tongue? Can nothing melt thee,
Or shake thy dogged taciturnity?

TEIRESIAS.
Thou blam'st my mood and seest not thine own
Wherewith thou art mated; no, thou taxest me.

OEDIPUS.
And who could stay his choler when he heard
How insolently thou dost flout the State?

TEIRESIAS.
Well, it will come what will, though I be mute.

OEDIPUS.

Since come it must, thy duty is to tell me.

TEIRESIAS.
I have no more to say; storm as thou willst,
And give the rein to all thy pent-up rage.

OEDIPUS.
Yea, I am wroth, and will not stint my words,
But speak my whole mind. Thou methinks thou art he,
Who planned the crime, aye, and performed it too,
All save the assassination; and if thou
Hadst not been blind, I had been sworn to boot
That thou alone didst do the bloody deed.

TEIRESIAS.
Is it so? Then I charge thee to abide
By thine own proclamation; from this day
Speak not to these or me. Thou art the man,
Thou the accursed polluter of this land.

OEDIPUS.
Vile slanderer, thou blurtest forth these taunts,
And think'st forsooth as seer to go scot free.

TEIRESIAS.
Yea, I am free, strong in the strength of truth.

OEDIPUS.
Who was thy teacher? not methinks thy art.

TEIRESIAS.
Thou, goading me against my will to speak.

OEDIPUS.
What speech? repeat it and resolve my doubt.

TEIRESIAS.
Didst miss my sense wouldst thou goad me on?

OEDIPUS.
I but half caught thy meaning; say it again.

TEIRESIAS.
I say thou art the murderer of the man

Whose murderer thou pursuest.

OEDIPUS.
Thou shalt rue it
Twice to repeat so gross a calumny.

TEIRESIAS.
Must I say more to aggravate thy rage?

OEDIPUS.
Say all thou wilt; it will be but waste of breath.

TEIRESIAS.
I say thou livest with thy nearest kin
In infamy, unwitting in thy shame.

OEDIPUS.
Think'st thou for aye unscathed to wag thy tongue?

TEIRESIAS.
Yea, if the might of truth can aught prevail.

OEDIPUS.
With other men, but not with thee, for thou
In ear, wit, eye, in everything art blind.

TEIRESIAS.
Poor fool to utter gibes at me which all
Here present will cast back on thee ere long.

OEDIPUS.
Offspring of endless Night, thou hast no power
O'er me or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS.
No, for thy weird is not to fall by me.
I leave to Apollo what concerns the god.

OEDIPUS.
Is this a plot of Creon, or thine own?

TEIRESIAS.
Not Creon, thou thyself art thine own bane.

OEDIPUS.
O wealth and empiry and skill by skill
Outwitted in the battlefield of life,
What spite and envy follow in your train!
See, for this crown the State conferred on me.
A gift, a thing I sought not, for this crown
The trusty Creon, my familiar friend,
Hath lain in wait to oust me and suborned
This mountebank, this juggling charlatan,
This tricksy beggar-priest, for gain alone
Keen-eyed, but in his proper art stone-blind.
Say, sirrah, hast thou ever proved thyself
A prophet? When the riddling Sphinx was here
Why hadst thou no deliverance for this folk?
And yet the riddle was not to be solved
By guess-work but required the prophet's art;
Wherein thou wast found lacking; neither birds
Nor sign from heaven helped thee, but _ came,
The simple Oedipus; I stopped her mouth
By mother wit, untaught of auguries.
This is the man whom thou wouldst undermine,
In hope to reign with Creon in my stead.
Methinks that thou and thine abettor soon
Will rue your plot to drive the scapegoat out.
Thank thy grey hairs that thou hast still to learn
What chastisement such arrogance deserves.

ISMENE.
To us it seems that both the seer and thou,
O father, have spoken angry words.
This is no time to wrangle but consult
How best we may fulfill the oracle.

TEIRESIAS.
King as thou art, free speech at least is mine
To make reply; in this I am thy peer.
I own no lord but Loxias; him I serve
And ne'er can stand enrolled as Creon's man.
Thus then I answer: since thou hast not spared
To twit me with my blindness—thou hast eyes,
Yet see'st not in what misery thou art fallen,
Nor where thou dwellest nor with whom for mate.
Dost know thy lineage? Nay, thou know'st it not,
And all unwitting art a double foe
To thine own kin, the living and the dead;
Aye and the dogging curse of mother and sire
One day shall drive thee, like a two-edged sword,
Beyond our borders, and the eyes that now
See clear shall henceforward endless night.
Ah whither shall thy bitter cry not reach,
What crag in all Cithaeron but shall then
Reverberate thy wail, when thou hast found
With what a hymeneal thou wast borne

Home, but to no fair haven, on the gale!
Aye, and a flood of ills thou guessest not
Shall set thyself and children in one line.
Flout then both Creon and my words, for none
Of mortals shall be striken worse than thou.

OEDIPUS.
Must I endure this fellow's insolence?
A murrain on thee! Get thee hence! Begone
Avaunt! and never cross my threshold more.

TEIRESIAS.
I ne'er had come hadst thou not bidden me.

OEDIPUS.
I know not thou wouldst utter folly, else
Long hadst thou waited to be summoned here.

TEIRESIAS.
Such am I—as it seems to thee a fool,
But to the parents who begat thee, wise.

OEDIPUS.
What sayest thou—"parents"? Who begat me, speak?

TEIRESIAS.
This day shall be thy birth-day, and thy grave.

OEDIPUS.
Thou lov'st to speak in riddles and dark words.

TEIRESIAS.
In reading riddles who so skilled as thou?

OEDIPUS.
Twit me with that wherein my greatness lies.

TEIRESIAS.
And yet this very greatness proved thy bane.

OEDIPUS.
No matter if I saved the commonwealth.

TEIRESIAS.

’Tis time I left thee. Come, boy, take me home.

OEDIPUS.
Aye, take him quickly, for his presence irks
And lets me; gone, thou canst not plague me more.

TEIRESIAS.
I go, but first will tell thee why I came.
Thy frown I dread not, for thou canst not harm me.
Hear then: this man whom thou hast sought to arrest
With threats and warrants this long while, the wretch
Who murdered Laius—that man is here.
He passes for an alien in the land
But soon shall prove a Theban, native born.
And yet his fortune brings him little joy;
For blind of seeing, clad in beggar’s weeds,
For purple robes, and leaning on his staff,
To a strange land he soon shall grope his way.
[turns and slowly approaches ANTIGONE]
And of the children, inmates of his home,
He shall be proved the brother and the sire,
Of her who bare him son and husband both,
Co-partner, and assassin of his sire.
Go in and ponder this, and if thou find
That I have missed the mark, henceforth declare
I have no wit nor skill in prophecy.
[Exeunt TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS]

CHORUS.
Who is he by voice immortal named from Pythia’s rocky cell,
Doer of foul deeds of bloodshed, horrors that no tongue can tell?
A foot for flight he needs
Fleeter than storm-swift steeds,
For on his heels doth follow,
Armed with the lightnings of his Sire, Apollo.
Like sleuth-hounds too
The Fates pursue.

Yea, but now flashed forth the summons from Parnassus’ snowy peak,
“Near and far the undiscovered doer of this murder seek!”
Now like a sullen bull he roves
Through forest brakes and upland groves,
And vainly seeks to fly
The doom that ever nigh
Flits o’er his head,
Still by the avenging Phoebus sped,
The voice divine,
From Earth’s mid shrine.

ANTIGONE
Sore perplexed am I by the words of the master seer.
Are they true, are they false? I know not and bridle my tongue for

fear,
Fluttered with vague surmise; nor present nor future is clear.
Quarrel of ancient date or in days still near know I none
Twixt the Labdacidan house and our ruler, Polybus' son.
Proof is there none: how then can I challenge our King's good name,
How in a blood-feud join for an untracked deed of shame?

CHORUS
All wise are Zeus and Apollo, and nothing is hid from their ken;
They are gods; and in wits a man may surpass his fellow men;
But that a mortal seer knows more than I know—where
Hath this been proven? Or how without sign assured, can I blame
Him who saved our State when the winged songstress came,
Tested and tried in the light of us all, like gold assayed?
How can I now assent when a crime is on Oedipus laid?
[Enter CREON]

CREON.
Friends, countrymen, I learn King Oedipus
Hath laid against me a most grievous charge,
And come to you protesting. If he deems
That I have harmed or injured him in aught
By word or deed in this our present trouble,
I care not to prolong the span of life,
Thus ill-reputed; for the calumny
Hits not a single blot, but blasts my name,
If by the general voice I am denounced
False to the State and false by you my friends.

CHORUS.
This taunt, it well may be, was blurted out
In petulance, not spoken advisedly.

CREON.
Did any dare pretend that it was I
Prompted the seer to utter a forged charge?

CHORUS.
Such things were said; with what intent I know not.

CREON.
Were not his wits and vision all astray
When upon me he fixed this monstrous charge?

CHORUS.
I know not; to my sovereign's acts I am blind.
But lo, he comes to answer for himself.
[Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS.

Sirrah, what mak'st thou here? Dost thou presume
To approach my doors, thou brazen-faced rogue,
My murderer and the filcher of my crown?
Come, answer this, didst thou detect in me
Some touch of cowardice or witlessness,
That made thee undertake this enterprise?
I seemed forsooth too simple to perceive
The serpent stealing on me in the dark,
Or else too weak to scotch it when I saw.
This thou art witless seeking to possess
Without a following or friends the crown,
A prize that followers and wealth must win.

CREON.
Attend me. Thou hast spoken, 'tis my turn
To make reply. Then having heard me, judge.

OEDIPUS.
Thou art glib of tongue, but I am slow to learn
Of thee; I know too well thy venomous hate.

CREON.
First I would argue out this very point.

OEDIPUS.
O argue not that thou art not a rogue.

CREON.
If thou dost count a virtue stubbornness,
Unschooled by reason, thou art much astray.

OEDIPUS.
If thou dost hold a kinsman may be wronged,
And no pains follow, thou art much to seek.

CREON.
Therein thou judgest rightly, but this wrong
That thou allegest—tell me what it is.

OEDIPUS.
Didst thou or didst thou not advise that I
Should call the priest?

CREON.
Yes, and I stand to it.

OEDIPUS.
Tell me how long is it since Laius...

CREON.
Since Laius...? I follow not thy drift.

OEDIPUS.
By violent hands was spirited away.

CREON.
In the dim past, a many years agone.

OEDIPUS.
Did the same prophet then pursue his craft?

CREON.
Yes, skilled as now and in no less repute.

OEDIPUS.
Did he at that time ever glance at me?

CREON.
Not to my knowledge, not when I was by.

OEDIPUS.
But was no search and inquisition made?

CREON.
Surely full quest was made, but nothing learnt.

OEDIPUS.
Why failed the seer to tell his story then?

CREON.
I know not, and not knowing hold my tongue.

OEDIPUS.
This much thou knowest and canst surely tell.

CREON.
What's mean'st thou? All I know I will declare.

OEDIPUS.
But for thy prompting never had the seer
Ascribed to me the death of Laius.

CREON.
If so he thou knowest best; but I
Would put thee to the question in my turn.

OEDIPUS.
Question and prove me murderer if thou canst.

CREON.
Then let me ask thee, didst thou wed my sister?

OEDIPUS.
A fact so plain I cannot well deny.

CREON.
And as thy consort queen she shares the throne?

OEDIPUS.
I grant her freely all her heart desires.

CREON.
And with you twain I share the triple rule?

OEDIPUS.
Yea, and it is that proves thee a false friend.

CREON.
Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thyself,
As I with myself. First, I bid thee think,
Would any mortal choose a troubled reign
Of terrors rather than secure repose,
If the same power were given him? As for me,
I have no natural craving for the name
Of king, preferring to do kingly deeds,
And so thinks every sober-minded man.
Now all my needs are satisfied through thee,
And I have naught to fear; but were I king,
My acts would oft run counter to my will.
How could a title then have charms for me
Above the sweets of boundless influence?
I am not so infatuate as to grasp
The shadow when I hold the substance fast.
Now all men cry me Godspeed! wish me well,
And every suitor seeks to gain my ear,

If he would hope to win a grace from thee.
Why should I leave the better, choose the worse?
That were sheer madness, and I am not mad.
No such ambition ever tempted me,
Nor would I have a share in such intrigue.
And if thou doubt me, first to Delphi go,
There ascertain if my report was true.
Of the god's answer; next investigate
If with the seer I plotted or conspired,
And if it prove so, sentence me to death,
Not by thy voice alone, but mine and thine.
But O condemn me not, without appeal,
On bare suspicion. 'Tis not right to adjudge
Bad men at random good, or good men bad.
I would as lief a man should cast away
The thing he counts most precious, his own life,
As spurn a true friend. Thou wilt learn in time
The truth, for time alone reveals the just;
A villain is detected in a day.

CHORUS.
To one who walketh warily his words
Commend themselves; swift counsels are not sure.

OEDIPUS.
When with swift strides the stealthy plotter stalks
I must be quick too with my counterplot.
To wait his onset passively, for him
Is sure success, for me assured defeat.

CREON.
What then's thy will? To banish me the land?

OEDIPUS.
I would not have thee banished, no, but dead,
That men may mark the wages envy reaps.

CREON.
I see thou wilt not yield, nor credit me.

OEDIPUS.
None but a fool would credit such as thou.

CREON.
Thou art not wise.

OEDIPUS.
Wise for myself at least.

CREON.
Why not for me too?

OEDIPUS.
Why for such a knave?

CREON.
Suppose thou lackest sense.

OEDIPUS.
Yet kings must rule.

CREON.
Not if they rule ill.

OEDIPUS.
Oh my Thebans, hear him!

CREON.
Thy Thebans? am not I a Theban too?

CHORUS.
Cease, princes; lo there comes, and none too soon,
Jocasta from the palace. Who so fit
As peacemaker to reconcile your feud?
[Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA.
Misguided princes, why have ye upraised
This wordy wrangle? Are ye not ashamed,
While the whole land lies striken, thus to voice
Your private injuries? Go in, my lord;
Go home, my brother, and forebear to make
A public scandal of a petty grief.

CREON.
My royal sister, Oedipus, thy lord,
Hath bid me choose (O dread alternative!)
An outlaw's exile or a felon's death.

OEDIPUS.
Yes, lady; I have caught him practicing
Against my royal person his vile arts.

CREON.
May I ne'er speed but die accursed, if I
In any way am guilty of this charge.

JOCASTA.
Believe him, I adjure thee, Oedipus,
First for his solemn oath's sake, then for mine,
And for thine elders' sake who wait on thee.

ANTIGONE.
Hearken, King, reflect, we pray thee, but not stubborn but relent.

OEDIPUS.
Say to what should I consent?

CHORUS.
Respect a man whose probity and troth
Are known to all and now confirmed by oath.

OEDIPUS.
Dost know what grace thou cravest?

CHORUS.
Yea, I know.

OEDIPUS.
Declare it then and make thy meaning plain.

ANTIGONE.
Brand not a friend whom babbling tongues assail;
Let not suspicion 'gainst his oath prevail.

OEDIPUS.
Bethink you that in seeking this ye seek
In very sooth my death or banishment?

ANTIGONE.
No, by the leader of the host divine!
Witness, thou Sun, such thought was never mine,
Unblest, unfriended may I perish,
If ever I such wish did cherish!
But O my heart is desolate
Musing on our striken State,
Doubly fall'n should discord grow
Twixt you twain, to crown our woe.

OEDIPUS.
Well, let him go, no matter what it cost me,
Or certain death or shameful banishment,
For your sake I relent, not his; and him,
Where'er he be, my heart shall still abhor.

CREON.
Thou art as sullen in thy yielding mood
As in thine anger thou wast truculent.
Such tempers justly plague themselves the most.

OEDIPUS.
Leave me in peace and get thee gone.

CREON.
I go,
By thee misjudged, but justified by her.
[Exeunt CREON]

CHORUS.
Lady, lead indoors thy consort; wherefore longer here delay?

JOCASTA.
Tell me first how rose the fray.

CHORUS.
Rumors bred unjust suspicious and injustice rankles sore.

JOCASTA.
Were both at fault?

CHORUS.
Both.

JOCASTA.
What was the tale?

CHORUS.
Ask me no more. The land is sore distressed;
'Twere better sleeping ills to leave at rest.

OEDIPUS.
Strange counsel, friend! I know thou mean'st me well,

And yet would'st mitigate and blunt my zeal.

ANTIGONE.
Father, I say it once again,
Witless were I proved, insane,
If I lightly put away
Thee my country's prop and stay,
Pilot who, in danger sought,
To a quiet haven brought
Our distracted State; and now
Who can guide us right but thou?

JOCASTA.
Let me too, I adjure thee, know, O king,
What cause has stirred this unrelenting wrath.

OEDIPUS.
I will, for thou art more to me than these.
Lady, the cause is Creon and his plots.

JOCASTA.
But what provoked the quarrel? make this clear.

OEDIPUS.
He points me out as Laius' murderer.

JOCASTA.
Of his own knowledge or upon report?

OEDIPUS.
He is too cunning to commit himself,
And makes a mouthpiece of a knavish seer.

JOCASTA.
Then thou mayest ease thy conscience on that score.
Listen and I'll convince thee that no man
Hath scot or lot in the prophetic art.
Here is the proof in brief. An oracle
Once came to Laius (I will not say
'Twas from the Delphic god himself, but from
His ministers) declaring he was doomed
To perish by the hand of his own son,
A child that should be born to him by me.
Now Laius—so at least report affirmed—
Was murdered on a day by highwaymen,
No natives, at a spot where three roads meet.
As for the child, it was but three days old,

When Laius, its ankles pierced and pinned
Together, gave it to be cast away
By others on the trackless mountain side.
So then Apollo brought it not to pass
The child should be his father's murderer,
Or the dread terror find accomplishment,
And Laius be slain by his own son.
Such was the prophet's horoscope. O king,
Regard it not. Whate'er the god deems fit
To search, himself unaided will reveal.

OEDIPUS.
What memories, what wild tumult of the soul
Came o'er me, lady, as I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA.
What mean'st thou? What has shocked and startled thee?

OEDIPUS.
Methought I heard thee say that Laius
Was murdered at the meeting of three roads.

JOCASTA.
So ran the story that is current still.

OEDIPUS.
Where did this happen? Dost thou know the place?

JOCASTA.
Phocis the land is called; the spot is where
Branch roads from Delphi and from Daulis meet.

OEDIPUS.
And how long is it since these things befell?

JOCASTA.
'Twas but a brief while were thou wast proclaimed
Our country's ruler that the news was brought.

OEDIPUS.
O Zeus, what hast thou willed to do with me!

JOCASTA.
What is it, Oedipus, that moves thee so?

OEDIPUS.
Ask me not yet; tell me the build and height
Of Laius? Was he still in manhood's prime?

JOCASTA.
Tall was he, and his hair was lightly strewn
With silver; and not unlike thee in form.

OEDIPUS.
O woe is me! Mehtinks unwittingly
I laid but now a dread curse on myself.

JOCASTA.
What say'st thou? When I look upon thee, my king,
I tremble.

OEDIPUS.
'Tis a dread presentiment
That in the end the seer will prove not blind.
One further question to resolve my doubt.

JOCASTA.
I quail; but ask, and I will answer all.

OEDIPUS.
Had he but few attendants or a train
Of armed retainers with him, like a prince?

JOCASTA.
They were but five in all, and one of them
A herald; Laius in a mule-car rode.

OEDIPUS.
Alas! 'tis clear as noonday now. But say,
Lady, who carried this report to Thebes?

JOCASTA.
A serf, the sole survivor who returned.

OEDIPUS.
Haply he is at hand or in the house?

JOCASTA.
No, for as soon as he returned and found
Thee reigning in the stead of Laius slain,

He clasped my hand and supplicated me
To send him to the alps and pastures, where
He might be farthest from the sight of Thebes.
And so I sent him. 'Twas an honest slave
And well deserved some better recompense.

OEDIPUS.
Fetch him at once. I fain would see the man.

JOCASTA.
He shall be brought; but wherefore summon him?

OEDIPUS.
Lady, I fear my tongue has overrun
Discretion; therefore I would question him.

JOCASTA.
Well, he shall come, but may not I too claim
To share the burden of thy heart, my king?

OEDIPUS.
And thou shalt not be frustrate of thy wish.
Now my imaginings have gone so far.
Who has a higher claim that thou to hear
My tale of dire adventures? Listen then.
My sire was Polybus of Corinth, and
My mother Merope, a Dorian;
And I was held the foremost citizen,
Till a strange thing befell me, strange indeed,
Yet scarce deserving all the heat it stirred.
A roisterer at some banquet, flown with wine,
Shouted "Thou art not true son of thy sire."
It irked me, but I stomached for the nonce
The insult; on the morrow I sought out
My mother and my sire and questioned them.
They were indignant at the random slur
Cast on my parentage and did their best
To comfort me, but still the venomed barb
Rankled, for still the scandal spread and grew.
So privily without their leave I went
To Delphi, and Apollo sent me back
Baulked of the knowledge that I came to seek.
But other grievous things he prophesied,
Woes, lamentations, mourning, portents dire;
To wit I should defile my mother's bed
And raise up seed too loathsome to behold,
And slay the father from whose loins I sprang.
Then, lady,—thou shalt hear the very truth—
As I drew near the triple-branching roads,
A herald met me and a man who sat
In a car drawn by colts—as in thy tale—

The man in front and the old man himself
Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path,
Then jostled by the charioteer in wrath
I struck him, and the old man, seeing this,
Watched till I passed and from his car brought down
Full on my head the double-pointed goad.
    Yet was I quits with him and more; one stroke
Of my good staff sufficed to fling him clean
Out of the chariot seat and laid him prone.
And so I slew them every one. But if
Betwixt this stranger there was aught in common
With Laius, who more miserable than I,
What mortal could you find more god-abhorred?
Wretch whom no sojourner, no citizen
May harbor or address, whom all are bound
To harry from their homes. And this same curse
Was laid on me, and laid by none but me.
Yea with these hands all gory I pollute
The bed of him I slew. Say, am I vile?
Am I not utterly unclean, a wretch
Doomed to be banished, and in banishment
Forgo the sight of all my dearest ones,
And never tread again my native earth;
Or else to wed my mother and slay my sire,
Polybus, who begat me and upreared?
If one should say, this is the handiwork
Of some inhuman power, who could blame
His judgment? But, ye pure and awful gods,
Forbid, forbid that I should see that day!
May I be blotted out from living men
Ere such a plague spot set on me its brand!

ANTIGONE.
We too, father, are troubled; but till thou
Hast questioned the survivor, still hope on.

OEDIPUS.
My hope is faint, but still enough survives
To bid me bide the coming of this herd.

JOCASTA.
Suppose him here, what wouldst thou learn of him?

OEDIPUS.
I'll tell thee, lady; if his tale agrees
With thine, I shall have 'scaped calamity.

JOCASTA.
And what of special import did I say?

OEDIPUS.
In thy report of what the herdsman said
Laius was slain by robbers; now if he
Still speaks of robbers, not a robber, I
Slew him not; “one” with “many” cannot square.
But if he says one lonely wayfarer,
The last link wanting to my guilt is forged.

JOCASTA.
Well, rest assured, his tale ran thus at first,
Nor can he now retract what then he said;
Not I alone but all our townsfolk heard it.
E’en should he vary somewhat in his story,
He cannot make the death of Laius
In any wise jump with the oracle.
For Loxias said expressly he was doomed
To die by my child’s hand, but he, poor babe,
He shed no blood, but perished first himself.
So much for divination. Henceforth I
Will look for signs neither to right nor left.

OEDIPUS.
Thou reasonest well. Still I would have thee send
And fetch the bondsman hither. See to it.

JOCASTA.
That will I straightway. Come, let us within.
I would do nothing that my lord mislikes.
[Exeunt OEDIPUS and JOCASTA]

ANTIGONE.
My lot be still to lead
    The life of innocence and fly
Irreverence in word or deed,
    To follow still those laws ordained on high
Whose birthplace is the bright ethereal sky
    No mortal birth they own,
    Olympus their progenitor alone:
Ne’er shall they slumber in oblivion cold,
The god in them is strong and grows not old.

CHORUS
    Of insolence is bred
The tyrant; insolence full blown,
    With empty riches surfeited,
Scales the precipitous height and grasps the throne.
    Then topples o’er and lies in ruin prone;
    No foothold on that dizzy steep.
But O may Heaven the true patriot keep
Who burns with emulous zeal to serve the State.
God is my help and hope, on him I wait.

But the proud sinner, or in word or deed,
That will not Justice heed,
Nor reverence the shrine
Of images divine,
Perdition seize his vain imaginings,
If, urged by greed profane,
He grasps at ill-got gain,
And lays an impious hand on holiest things.
Who when such deeds are done
Can hope heaven's bolts to shun?
If sin like this to honor can aspire,
Why dance I still and lead the sacred choir?

ANTIGONE.
No more I'll seek earth's central oracle,
Or Abae's hallowed cell,
Nor to Olympia bring
My votive offering.
If before all God's truth be not bade plain.
O Zeus, reveal thy might,
King, if thou'rt named aright
Omnipotent, all-seeing, as of old;
For Laius is forgot;
His weird, men heed it not;
Apollo is forsook and faith grows cold.
[Enter JOCASTA.]

JOCASTA.
My lords, ye look amazed to see your queen
With wreaths and gifts of incense in her hands.
I had a mind to visit the high shrines,
For Oedipus is overwrought, alarmed
With terrors manifold. He will not use
His past experience, like a man of sense,
To judge the present need, but lends an ear
To any croaker if he augurs ill.
Since then my counsels naught avail, I turn
To thee, our present help in time of trouble,
Apollo, Lord Lycean, and to thee
My prayers and supplications here I bring.
Lighten us, lord, and cleanse us from this curse!
For now we all are cowed like mariners
Who see their helmsman dumbstruck in the storm.
[Enter Corinthian MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.
My masters, tell me where the palace is
Of Oedipus; or better, where's the king.

CHORUS.
Here is the palace and he bides within;
This is his queen the mother of his children.

MESSENGER.
All happiness attend her and the house,
Blessed is her husband and her marriage-bed.

JOCASTA.
My greetings to thee, stranger; thy fair words
Deserve a like response. But tell me why
Thou comest—what thy need or what thy news.

MESSENGER.
Good for thy consort and the royal house.

JOCASTA.
What may it be? Whose messenger art thou?

MESSENGER.
The Isthmian commons have resolved to make
Thy husband king—so 'twas reported there.

JOCASTA.
What! is not aged Polybus still king?

MESSENGER.
No, verily; he's dead and in his grave.

JOCASTA.
What! is he dead, the sire of Oedipus?

MESSENGER.
If I speak falsely, may I die myself.

JOCASTA. [To ANTIGONE]
Quick, maiden, bear these tidings to my lord.
Ye god-sent oracles, where stand ye now!
This is the man whom Oedipus long shunned,
In dread to prove his murderer; and now
He dies in nature's course, not by his hand.
[Enter OEDIPUS.]

OEDIPUS.
My wife, my queen, Jocasta, why hast thou
Summoned me from my palace?

JOCASTA.

Hear this man,
And as thou hearest judge what has become
Of all those awe-inspiring oracles.

OEDIPUS.
Who is this man, and what his news for me?

JOCASTA.
He comes from Corinth and his message this:
Thy father Polybus hath passed away.

OEDIPUS.
What? let me have it, stranger, from thy mouth.

MESSENGER.
If I must first make plain beyond a doubt
My message, know that Polybus is dead.

OEDIPUS.
By treachery, or by sickness visited?

MESSENGER.
One touch will send an old man to his rest.

OEDIPUS.
So of some malady he died, poor man.

MESSENGER.
Yes, having measured the full span of years.

OEDIPUS.
Out on it, lady! why should one regard
The Pythian hearth or birds that scream i' the air?
Did they not point at me as doomed to slay
My father? but he's dead and in his grave
And here am I who ne'er unsheathed a sword;
Unless the longing for his absent son
Killed him and so _I_ slew him in a sense.
But, as they stand, the oracles are dead—
Dust, ashes, nothing, dead as Polybus.

JOCASTA.
Say, did not I foretell this long ago?

OEDIPUS.

Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA.
Then let I no more weigh upon thy soul.

OEDIPUS.
Must I not fear my mother's marriage bed.

JOCASTA.
Why should a mortal man, the sport of chance,
With no assured foreknowledge, be afraid?
Best live a careless life from hand to mouth.
This wedlock with thy mother fear not thou.
How oft it chances that in dreams a man
Has wed his mother! He who least regards
Such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease.

OEDIPUS.
I should have shared in full thy confidence,
Were not my mother living; since she lives
Though half convinced I still must live in dread.

JOCASTA.
And yet thy sire's death lights out darkness much.

OEDIPUS.
Much, but my fear is touching her who lives.

MESSENGER.
Who may this woman be whom thus you fear?

OEDIPUS.
Merope, stranger, wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER.
And what of her can cause you any fear?

OEDIPUS.
A heaven-sent oracle of dread import.

MESSENGER.
A mystery, or may a stranger hear it?

OEDIPUS.
Aye, 'tis no secret. Loxias once foretold
That I should mate with mine own mother, and shed
With my own hands the blood of my own sire.
Hence Corinth was for many a year to me
A home distant; and I trove abroad,
But missed the sweetest sight, my parents' face.

MESSENGER.
Was this the fear that exiled thee from home?

OEDIPUS.
Yea, and the dread of slaying my own sire.

MESSENGER.
Why, since I came to give thee pleasure, King,
Have I not rid thee of this second fear?

OEDIPUS.
Well, thou shalt have due guerdon for thy pains.

MESSENGER.
Well, I confess what chiefly made me come
Was hope to profit by thy coming home.

OEDIPUS.
Nay, I will ne'er go near my parents more.

MESSENGER.
My son, 'tis plain, thou know'st not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS.
How so, old man? For heaven's sake tell me all.

MESSENGER.
If this is why thou dreadest to return.

OEDIPUS.
Yea, lest the god's word be fulfilled in me.

MESSENGER.
Lest through thy parents thou shouldst be accursed?

OEDIPUS.

This and none other is my constant dread.

MESSENGER.
Dost thou not know thy fears are baseless all?

OEDIPUS.
How baseless, if I am their very son?

MESSENGER.
Since Polybus was naught to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS.
What say'st thou? was not Polybus my sire?

MESSENGER.
As much thy sire as I am, and no more.

OEDIPUS.
My sire no more to me than one who is naught?

MESSENGER.
Since I begat thee not, no more did he.

OEDIPUS.
What reason had he then to call me son?

MESSENGER.
Know that he took thee from my hands, a gift.

OEDIPUS.
Yet, if no child of his, he loved me well.

MESSENGER.
A childless man till then, he warmed to thee.

OEDIPUS.
A foundling or a purchased slave, this child?

MESSENGER.
I found thee in Cithaeron's wooded glens.

OEDIPUS.
What led thee to explore those upland glades?

MESSENGER.
My business was to tend the mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS.
A vagrant shepherd journeying for hire?

MESSENGER.
True, but thy savior in that hour, my son.

OEDIPUS.
My savior? from what harm? what ailed me then?

MESSENGER.
Those ankle joints are evidence enow.

OEDIPUS.
Ah, why remind me of that ancient sore?

MESSENGER.
I loosed the pin that riveted thy feet.

OEDIPUS.
Yes, from my cradle that dread brand I bore.

MESSENGER.
Whence thou deriv'st the name that still is thine.

OEDIPUS.
Who did it? I adjure thee, tell me who
Say, was it father, mother?

MESSENGER.
I know not.
The man from whom I had thee may know more.

OEDIPUS.
What, did another find me, not thyself?

MESSENGER.
Not I; another shepherd gave thee me.

OEDIPUS.
Who was he? Would'st thou know again the man?

MESSENGER.
He passed indeed for one of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS.
The king who ruled the country long ago?

MESSENGER.
The same: he was a herdsman of the king.

OEDIPUS.
And is he living still for me to see him?

MESSENGER.
His fellow-countrymen should best know that.

OEDIPUS.
Doth any bystander among you know
The herd he speaks of, or by seeing him
Afield or in the city? answer straight!
The hour hath come to clear this business up.

CHORUS.
Methinks he means none other than the hind
Whom thou anon wert fain to see; but that
Our queen Jocasta best of all could tell.

OEDIPUS.
Madam, dost know the man we sent to fetch?
Is the same of whom the stranger speaks?

JOCASTA.
Who is the man? What matter? Let it be.
'Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words.

OEDIPUS.
No, with such guiding clues I cannot fail
To bring to light the secret of my birth.

JOCASTA.
Oh, as thou carest for thy life, give o'er

This quest. Enough the anguish I endure.

OEDIPUS.
Be of good cheer; though I be proved the son
Of a bondwoman, aye, through three descents
Triply a slave, thy honor is unsmirched.

JOCASTA.
Yet humor me, I pray thee; do not this.

OEDIPUS.
I cannot; I must probe this matter home.

JOCASTA.
'Tis for thy sake I advise thee for the best.

OEDIPUS.
I grow impatient of this best advice.

JOCASTA.
Ah mayst thou ne'er discover who thou art!

OEDIPUS.
Go, fetch me here the herd, and leave yon woman
To glory in her pride of ancestry.

JOCASTA.
O woe is thee, poor wretch! With that last word
I leave thee, henceforth silent evermore.
[Exit JOCASTA]

ANTIGONE.
Why, my father, why stung with passionate grief
Hath the queen thus departed? Much I fear
From this dead calm will burst a storm of woes.

OEDIPUS.
Let the storm burst, my fixed resolve still holds,
To learn my lineage, be it ne'er so low.
It may be she with all a woman's pride
Thinks scorn of my base parentage. But I
Who rank myself as Fortune's favorite child,
The giver of good gifts, shall not be shamed.
She is my mother and the changing moons
My brethren, and with them I wax and wane.

Thus sprung why should I fear to trace my birth?
Nothing can make me other than I am.

CHORUS.
If my soul prophetic err not, if my wisdom aught avail,
Thee, Cithaeron, I shall hail,
As the nurse and foster-mother of our Oedipus shall greet
Ere tomorrow's full moon rises, and exalt thee as is meet.
Dance and song shall hymn thy praises, lover of our royal race.
Phoebus, may my words find grace!

Child, who bare thee, nymph or goddess? sure thy sure was more than man,
Haply the hill-roamer Pan.
Of did Loxias beget thee, for he haunts the upland wold;
Or Cyllene's lord, or Bacchus, dweller on the hilltops cold?
Did some Heliconian Oread give him thee, a new-born joy?
Nymphs with whom he love to toy?

OEDIPUS.
Elders, if I, who never yet before
Have met the man, may make a guess, methinks
I see the herdsman who we long have sought;
His time-worn aspect matches with the years
Of yonder aged messenger; besides
I seem to recognize the men who bring him
As servants of my own. But you, perchance,
Having in past days known or seen the herd,
May better by sure knowledge my surmise.

CHORUS.
I recognize him; one of Laius' house;
A simple hind, but true as any man.
[Enter HERDSMAN.]

OEDIPUS.
Corinthian, stranger, I address thee first,
Is this the man thou meanest!

MESSENGER.
This is he.

OEDIPUS.
And now old man, look up and answer all
I ask thee. Wast thou once of Laius' house?

HERDSMAN.
I was, a thrall, not purchased but home-bred.

OEDIPUS.
What was thy business? how wast thou employed?

HERDSMAN.
The best part of my life I tended sheep.

OEDIPUS.
What were the pastures thou didst most frequent?

HERDSMAN.
Cithaeron and the neighboring alps.

OEDIPUS.
Then there
Thou must have known yon man, at least by fame?

HERDSMAN.
Yon man? in what way? what man dost thou mean?

OEDIPUS.
The man here, having met him in past times...

HERDSMAN.
Off-hand I cannot call him well to mind.

MESSENGER.
No wonder, master. But I will revive
His blunted memories. Sure he can recall
What time together both we drove our flocks,
He two, I one, on the Cithaeron range,
For three long summers; I his mate from spring
Till rose Arcturus; then in winter time
I led mine home, he his to Laius' folds.
Did these things happen as I say, or no?

HERDSMAN.
'Tis long ago, but all thou say'st is true.

MESSENGER.
Well, thou mast then remember giving me
A child to rear as my own foster-son?

HERDSMAN.
Why dost thou ask this question? What of that?

MESSENGER.
Friend, he that stands before thee was that child.

HERDSMAN.
A plague upon thee! Hold thy wanton tongue!

OEDIPUS.
Softly, old man, rebuke him not; thy words
Are more deserving chastisement than his.

HERDSMAN.
O best of masters, what is my offense?

OEDIPUS.
Not answering what he asks about the child.

HERDSMAN.
He speaks at random, babbles like a fool.

OEDIPUS.
If thou lack'st grace to speak, I'll loose thy tongue.

HERDSMAN.
For mercy's sake abuse not an old man.

OEDIPUS.
Arrest the villain, seize and pinion him!

HERDSMAN.
Alack, alack!
What have I done? what wouldst thou further learn?

OEDIPUS.
Didst give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN.
I did; and would that I had died that day!

OEDIPUS.
And die thou shalt unless thou tell the truth.

HERDSMAN.
But, if I tell it, I am doubly lost.

OEDIPUS.
The knave methinks will still prevaricate.

HERDSMAN.
Nay, I confessed I gave it long ago.

OEDIPUS.
Whence came it? was it thine, or given to thee?

HERDSMAN.
I had it from another, 'twas not mine.

OEDIPUS.
From whom of these our townsmen, and what house?

HERDSMAN.
Forbear for God's sake, master, ask no more.

OEDIPUS.
If I must question thee again, thou'rt lost.

HERDSMAN.
Well then—it was a child of Laius' house.

OEDIPUS.
Slave-born or one of Laius' own race?

HERDSMAN.
Ah me!
I stand upon the perilous edge of speech.

OEDIPUS.
And I of hearing, but I still must hear.

HERDSMAN.
Know then the child was by repute his own,
But she within, thy consort best could tell.

OEDIPUS.
What! she, she gave it thee?

HERDSMAN.
'Tis so, my king.

OEDIPUS.
With what intent?

HERDSMAN.
To make away with it.

OEDIPUS.
What, she its mother.

HERDSMAN.
Fearing a dread weird.

OEDIPUS.
What weird?

HERDSMAN.
'Twas told that he should slay his sire.

OEDIPUS.
What didst thou give it then to this old man?

HERDSMAN.
Through pity, master, for the babe. I thought
He'd take it to the country whence he came;
But he preserved it for the worst of woes.
For if thou art in sooth what this man saith,
God pity thee! thou wast to misery born.

OEDIPUS.
Ah me! ah me! all brought to pass, all true!
O light, may I behold thee nevermore!
I stand a wretch, in birth, in wedlock cursed,
A parricide, incestuously, triply cursed!
[Exit OEDIPUS]

[extended pause as all members of the chorus turn and stare at ANTIGONE and ISMENE. Lights slowly fade to darkness as one spotlight remains on the two. Eventually, ISMENE is overcome by emotions and stumbles back into the darkness, leaving ANTIGONE alone grappling with the revelation. Eventually, the lights slowly raise]

CHORUS. [swirling around Antigone, appearing random and chaotic]
Races of mortal man
Whose life is but a span,

I count ye but the shadow of a shade!
For he who most doth know
Of bliss, hath but the show;
A moment, and the visions pale and fade.
Thy fall, O Oedipus, thy piteous fall
Warns me none born of women blest to call.

For he of marksmen best,
O Zeus, outshot the rest,
And won the prize supreme of wealth and power.
By him the vulture maid
Was quelled, her witchery laid;
He rose our savior and the land's strong tower.
We hailed thee king and from that day adored
Of mighty Thebes the universal lord.

ANTIGONE [the chorus stops instantly in their place]
O heavy hand of fate!
Who now more desolate,
Whose tale more sad than thine, whose lot more dire?
O Oedipus, discrowned head,
Thy cradle was thy marriage bed;
One harborage sufficed for son and sire.
How could the soil thy father eared so long
Endure to bear in silence such a wrong?

All-seeing Time hath caught
Guilt, and to justice brought
The son and sire commingled in one bed.
O child of Laius' ill-starred race
Would I had ne'er beheld thy face;
I raise for thee a dirge as o'er the dead.
Yet, sooth to say, through thee I drew new breath,
And now through thee I feel a second death.

[Enter SECOND MESSENGER.]

SECOND MESSENGER.
Most grave and reverend senators of Thebes,
What Deeds ye soon must hear, what sights behold
How will ye mourn, if, true-born patriots,
Ye reverence still the race of Labdacus!
Not Ister nor all Phasis' flood, I ween,
Could wash away the blood-stains from this house,
The ills it shrouds or soon will bring to light,
Ills wrought of malice, not unwittingly.
The worst to bear are self-inflicted wounds.

CHORUS.
Grievous enough for all our tears and groans
Our past calamities; what canst thou add?

SECOND MESSENGER.

My tale is quickly told and quickly heard.
Our sovereign lady queen Jocasta's dead.

[Notable pause as the Chorus all turn towards ANTIGONE and ISMENE]
ANTIGONE.
Alas, poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER.
By her own hand. And all the horror of it,
Not having seen, yet cannot comprehend.
Nathless, as far as my poor memory serves,
I will relate the unhappy lady's woe.
When in her frenzy she had passed inside
The vestibule, she hurried straight to win
The bridal-chamber, clutching at her hair
With both her hands, and, once within the room,
She shut the doors behind her with a crash.
"Laius," she cried, and called her husband dead
Long, long ago; her thought was of that child
By him begot, the son by whom the sire
Was murdered and the mother left to breed
With her own seed, a monstrous progeny.
Then she bewailed the marriage bed whereon
Poor wretch, she had conceived a double brood,
Husband by husband, children by her child.
What happened after that I cannot tell,
Nor how the end befell, for with a shriek
Burst on us Oedipus; all eyes were fixed
On Oedipus, as up and down he strode,
Nor could we mark her agony to the end.
For stalking to and fro "A sword!" he cried,
"Where is the wife, no wife, the teeming womb
That bore a double harvest, me and mine?"
And in his frenzy some supernal power
(No mortal, surely, none of us who watched him)
Guided his footsteps; with a terrible shriek,
As though one beckoned him, he crashed against
The folding doors, and from their staples forced
The wrenched bolts and hurled himself within.
Then we beheld the woman hanging there,
A running noose entwined about her neck.
But when he saw her, with a maddened roar
He loosed the cord; and when her wretched corpse
Lay stretched on earth, what followed—O 'twas dread!
He tore the golden brooches that upheld
Her queenly robes, upraised them high and smote
Full on his eye-balls, uttering words like these:
"No more shall ye behold such sights of woe,
Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought;
Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see
Those ye should ne'er have seen; now blind to those
Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know."
    Such was the burden of his moan, whereto,
Not once but oft, he struck with his hand uplift
His eyes, and at each stroke the ensanguined orbs

Bedewed his beard, not oozing drop by drop,
But one black gory downpour, thick as hail.
Such evils, issuing from the double source,
Have whelmed them both, confounding man and wife.
Till now the storied fortune of this house
Was fortunate indeed; but from this day
Woe, lamentation, ruin, death, disgrace,
All ills that can be named, all, all are theirs.

ANTIGONE.
But hath he still no respite from his pain?

SECOND MESSENGER.
He cries, "Unbar the doors and let all Thebes
Behold the slayer of his sire, his mother's—"
That shameful word my lips may not repeat.
He vows to fly self-banished from the land,
Nor stay to bring upon his house the curse
Himself had uttered; but he has no strength
Nor one to guide him, and his torture's more
Than man can suffer, as yourselves will see.
For lo, the palace portals are unbarred,
And soon ye shall behold a sight so sad
That he who must abhorred would pity it.
[Enter OEDIPUS blinded.]

ANTIGONE.
Woeful sight! more woeful none
These sad eyes have looked upon.
Whence this madness? None can tell
Who did cast on thee his spell,
prowling all thy life around,
Leaping with a demon bound.
Hapless wretch! how can I brook
On thy misery to look?
Though to gaze on thee I yearn,
Much to question, much to learn,
Horror-struck away I turn.

OEDIPUS.
Ah me! ah woe is me!
Ah whither am I borne!
How like a ghost forlorn
My voice flits from me on the air!
On, on the demon goads. The end, ah where?

ANTIGONE.
An end too dread to tell, too dark to see.

OEDIPUS.

Dark, dark! The horror of darkness, like a shroud,
Wraps me and bears me on through mist and cloud.
Ah me, ah me! What spasms athwart me shoot,
What pangs of agonizing memory?

ANTIGONE.
No marvel if in such a plight thou feel'st
The double weight of past and present woes.

OEDIPUS.
Ah child, still loyal, constant still and kind,
Thou carest for the blind.
I know thee near, and though bereft of eyes,
Thy voice I recognize.

CHORUS.
O doer of dread deeds, how couldst thou mar
Thy vision thus? What demon goaded thee?

OEDIPUS.
Apollo, friend, Apollo, he it was
That brought these ills to pass;
But the right hand that dealt the blow
Was mine, none other. How,
How, could I longer see when sight
Brought no delight?

CHORUS.
Alas! 'tis as thou sayest.

OEDIPUS.
Say, friends, can any look or voice
Or touch of love henceforth my heart rejoice?
Haste, friends, no fond delay,
Take the twice cursed away
Far from all ken,
The man abhorred of gods, accursed of men.

CHORUS.
O thy despair well suits thy desperate case.
Would I had never looked upon thy face!

OEDIPUS.
My curse on him whoe'er unrived
The waif's fell fetters and my life revived!
He meant me well, yet had he left me there,
He had saved my friends and me a world of care.

CHORUS.
I too had wished it so.

OEDIPUS.
Then had I never come to shed
My father's blood nor climbed my mother's bed;
The monstrous offspring of a womb defiled,
Co-mate of him who gendered me, and child.
Was ever man before afflicted thus,
Like Oedipus.

CHORUS.
I cannot say that thou hast counseled well,
For thou wert better dead than living blind.

OEDIPUS.
What's done was well done. Thou canst never shake
My firm belief. A truce to argument.
For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes
I could have met my father in the shades,
Or my poor mother, since against the twain
I sinned, a sin no gallows could atone.
Aye, but, ye say, the sight of children joys
A parent's eyes. What, born as mine were born?
No, such a sight could never bring me joy;
Nor this fair city with its battlements,
Its temples and the statues of its gods,
Sights from which I, now wretchedst of all,
Once ranked the foremost Theban in all Thebes,
By my own sentence am cut off, condemned
By my own proclamation 'gainst the wretch,
The miscreant by heaven itself declared
Unclean—and of the race of Laius.
Thus branded as a felon by myself,
How had I dared to look you in the face?
Nay, had I known a way to choke the springs
Of hearing, I had never shrunk to make
A dungeon of this miserable frame,
Cut off from sight and hearing; for 'tis bliss
to bide in regions sorrow cannot reach.
Why didst thou harbor me, Cithaeron, why
Didst thou not take and slay me? Then I never
Had shown to men the secret of my birth.
O Polybus, O Corinth, O my home,
Home of my ancestors (so wast thou called)
How fair a nursling then I seemed, how foul
The canker that lay festering in the bud!
Now is the blight revealed of root and fruit.
Ye triple high-roads, and thou hidden glen,
Coppice, and pass where meet the three-branched ways,

Ye drank my blood, the life-blood these hands spilt,
My father's; do ye call to mind perchance
Those deeds of mine ye witnessed and the work
I wrought thereafter when I came to Thebes?
O fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth,
And, having borne me, sowed again my seed,
Mingling the blood of fathers, brothers, children,
Brides, wives and mothers, an incestuous brood,
All horrors that are wrought beneath the sun,
Horrors so foul to name them were unmeet.
O, I adjure you, hide me anywhere
Far from this land, or slay me straight, or cast me
Down to the depths of ocean out of sight.
Come hither, deign to touch an abject wretch;
Draw near and fear not; I myself must bear
The load of guilt that none but I can share.
[Enter CREON.]

CREON.
Lo, here is Creon, the one man to grant
Thy prayer by action or advice, for he
Is left the State's sole guardian in thy stead.

OEDIPUS.
Ah me! what words to accost him can I find?
What cause has he to trust me? In the past
I have bee proved his rancorous enemy.

CREON.
Not in derision, Oedipus, I come
Nor to upbraid thee with thy past misdeeds.
(To BYSTANDERS)
But shame upon you! if ye feel no sense
Of human decencies, at least revere
The Sun whose light beholds and nurtures all.
Leave not thus nakedly for all to gaze at
A horror neither earth nor rain from heaven
Nor light will suffer. Lead him straight within,
For it is seemly that a kinsman's woes
Be heard by kin and seen by kin alone.

OEDIPUS.
O listen, since thy presence comes to me
A shock of glad surprise—so noble thou,
And I so vile—O grant me one small boon.
I ask it not on my behalf, but thine.

CREON.
And what the favor thou wouldst crave of me?

OEDIPUS.
Forth from thy borders thrust me with all speed;
Set me within some vasty desert where
No mortal voice shall greet me any more.

CREON.
This had I done already, but I deemed
It first behooved me to consult the god.

OEDIPUS.
His will was set forth fully—to destroy
The parricide, the scoundrel; and I am he.

CREON.
Yea, so he spake, but in our present plight
'Twere better to consult the god anew.

OEDIPUS.
Dare ye inquire concerning such a wretch?

CREON.
Yea, for thyself wouldst credit now his word.

OEDIPUS.
Aye, and on thee in all humility
I lay this charge: let her who lies within
Receive such burial as thou shalt ordain;
Such rites 'tis thine, as brother, to perform.
But for myself, O never let my Thebes,
The city of my sires, be doomed to bear
The burden of my presence while I live.
No, let me be a dweller on the hills,
On yonder mount Cithaeron, famed as mine,
My tomb predestined for me by my sire
And mother, while they lived, that I may die
Slain as they sought to slay me, when alive.
This much I know full surely, nor disease
Shall end my days, nor any common chance;
For I had ne'er been snatched from death, unless
I was predestined to some awful doom.
So be it. I reck not how Fate deals with me
But my unhappy children—for my sons
Be not concerned, O Creon, they are men,
And for themselves, where'er they be, can fend.
But for my daughters twain, poor innocent maids,
Who ever sat beside me at the board
Sharing my viands, drinking of my cup,
For them, I pray thee, care, and, if thou willst,
O might I feel their touch and make my moan.

Hear me, O prince, my noble-hearted prince!
Could I but blindly touch them with my hands
I'd think they still were mine, as when I saw.
[ANTIGONE and ISMENE are brought forth by CREON.]
What say I? can it be my pretty ones
Whose sobs I hear? Has Creon pitied me
And sent me my two darlings? Can this be?

CREON.
'Tis true; 'twas I procured thee this delight,
Knowing the joy they were to thee of old.

OEDIPUS.
God speed thee! and as meed for bringing them
May Providence deal with thee kindlier
Than it has dealt with me! O children mine,
Where are ye? Let me clasp you with these hands,
A brother's hands, a father's; hands that made
Lack-luster sockets of his once bright eyes;
Hands of a man who blindly, recklessly,
Became your sire by her from whom he sprang.
Though I cannot behold you, I must weep
In thinking of the evil days to come,
The slights and wrongs that men will put upon you.
Where'er ye go to feast or festival,
No merrymaking will it prove for you,
But oft abashed in tears ye will return.
And when ye come to marriageable years,
Where's the bold wooers who will jeopardize
To take unto himself such disrepute
As to my children's children still must cling,
For what of infamy is lacking here?
"Their father slew his father, sowed the seed
Where he himself was gendered, and begat
These maidens at the source wherefrom he sprang."
Such are the gibes that men will cast at you.
Who then will wed you? None, I ween, but ye
Must pine, poor maids, in single barrenness.
O Prince, Menoeceus' son, to thee, I turn,
With the it rests to father them, for we
Their natural parents, both of us, are lost.
O leave them not to wander poor, unwed,
Thy kin, nor let them share my low estate.
O pity them so young, and but for thee
All destitute. Thy hand upon it, Prince.
To you, my children I had much to say,
Were ye but ripe to hear. Let this suffice:
Pray ye may find some home and live content,
And may your lot prove happier than your sire's.

CREON.
Thou hast had enough of weeping; pass within.

OEDIPUS.
I must obey,
Though 'tis grievous.

CREON.
Weep not, everything must have its day.

OEDIPUS.
Well I go, but on conditions.

CREON.
What thy terms for going, say.

OEDIPUS.
Send me from the land an exile.

CREON.
Ask this of the gods, not me.

OEDIPUS.
But I am the gods' abhorrence.

CREON.
Then they soon will grant thy plea.

OEDIPUS.
Lead me hence, then, I am willing.

CREON.
Come, but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS.
Rob me not of these my children!

CREON.
Crave not mastery in all,
For the mastery that raised thee was thy bane and wrought thy fall.

ANTIGONE.
Look ye, countrymen and Thebans, this is Oedipus the great,
He who knew the Sphinx's riddle and was mightiest in our state.
Who of all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes?

Now, in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies!
Therefore wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest;
Wait till free from pain and sorrow he has gained his final rest.

[ANTIGONE leads OEDIPUS out by the hand]

Text of *Oedipus as Colonus*

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

OEDIPUS, banished King of Thebes.
ANTIGONE, his daughter.
ISMENE, his daughter.
THESEUS, King of Athens.
CREON, brother of Jocasta, now reigning at Thebes.
POLYNEICES, elder son of Oedipus.
STRANGER, a native of Colonus.
MESSENGER, an attendant of Theseus.
CHORUS, citizens of Colonus.

Scene: In front of the grove of the Eumenides.

Red Text – Cut lines
Green Text – Additional lines/stage directions
Blue Text – Reassigned lines

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Enter the blind OEDIPUS led by his daughter, ANTIGONE.

OEDIPUS.
Child of an old blind sire, Antigone,
What region, say, whose city have we reached?
Who will provide today with scanted dole
This wanderer? 'Tis little that he craves,
And less obtains—that less enough for me;
For I am taught by suffering to endure,
And the long years that have grown old with me,
And last not least, by true nobility.
My daughter, if thou seest a resting place
On common ground or by some sacred grove,
Stay me and set me down. Let us discover
Where we have come, for strangers must inquire
Of denizens, and do as they are bid.

ANTIGONE.
Long-suffering father, Oedipus, the towers
That fence the city still are faint and far;
But where we stand is surely holy ground;
A wilderness of laurel, olive, vine;
Within a choir or songster nightingales
Are warbling. On this native seat of rock
Rest; for an old man thou hast traveled far.

OEDIPUS.
Guide these dark steps and seat me there secure.

ANTIGONE.
If time can teach, I need not to be told.

OEDIPUS.
Say, prithee, if thou knowest, where we are.

ANTIGONE.
Athens I recognize, but not the spot.

OEDIPUS.
That much we heard from every wayfarer.

ANTIGONE.
Shall I go on and ask about the place?

OEDIPUS.
Yes, daughter, if it be inhabited.

ANTIGONE.
Sure there are habitations; but no need
To leave thee; yonder is a man hard by.

OEDIPUS.
What, moving hitherward and on his way?

ANTIGONE.
Say rather, here already. Ask him straight
The needful questions, for the man is here.
[Enter STRANGER]

OEDIPUS.
O stranger, as I learn from her whose eyes
Must serve both her and me, that thou art here
Sent by some happy chance to serve our doubts—

STRANGER.
First quit that seat, then question me at large:
The spot thou treadest on is holy ground.

OEDIPUS.
What is the site, to what god dedicate?

STRANGER.
Inviolable, untrod; goddesses,
Dread brood of Earth and Darkness, here abide.

OEDIPUS.
Tell me the awful name I should invoke?

STRANGER.
The Gracious Ones, All-seeing, so our folk
Call them, but elsewhere other names are rife.

OEDIPUS.
Then may they show their suppliant grace, for I
From this your sanctuary will ne'er depart.

STRANGER.
What word is this?

OEDIPUS.
The watchword of my fate.

STRANGER.
Nay, 'tis not mine to bid thee hence without
Due warrant and instruction from the State.

OEDIPUS.
Now in God's name, O stranger, scorn me not
As a wayfarer; tell me what I crave.

STRANGER.
Ask; your request shall not be scorned by me.

OEDIPUS.
How call you then the place wherein we bide?

STRANGER.
Whate'er I know thou too shalt know; the place
Is all to great Poseidon consecrate.
Hard by, the Titan, he who bears the torch,
Prometheus, has his worship; but the spot
Thou treadest, the Brass-footed Threshold named,
Is Athens' bastion, and the neighboring lands
Claim as their chief and patron yonder knight
Colonus, and in common bear his name.
Such, stranger, is the spot, to fame unknown,
But dear to us its native worshipers.

OEDIPUS.
Thou sayest there are dwellers in these parts?

STRANGER.
Surely; they bear the name of yonder god.

OEDIPUS.
Ruled by a king or by the general voice?

STRANGER.
The lord of Athens is our over-lord.

OEDIPUS.
Who is this monarch, great in word and might?

STRANGER.
Theseus, the son of Aegeus our late king.

OEDIPUS.
Might one be sent from you to summon him?

STRANGER.
Wherefore? To tell him aught or urge his coming?

OEDIPUS.
Say a slight service may avail him much.

STRANGER.
How can he profit from a sightless man?

OEDIPUS.
The blind man's words will be instinct with sight.

STRANGER.
Heed then; I fain would see thee out of harm;
For by the looks, marred though they be by fate,
I judge thee noble; tarry where thou art,
While I go seek the burghers—those at hand,
Not in the city. They will soon decide
Whether thou art to rest or go thy way.
[Exit STRANGER]

OEDIPUS.
Tell me, my daughter, has the stranger gone?

ANTIGONE.
Yes, he has gone; now we are all alone,
And thou may'st speak, dear father, without fear.

OEDIPUS.
Stern-visaged queens, since coming to this land
First in your sanctuary I bent the knee,
Frown not on me or Phoebus, who, when erst
He told me all my miseries to come,
Spake of this respite after many years,
Some haven in a far-off land, a rest
Vouchsafed at last by dread divinities.

"There," said he, "shalt thou round thy weary life,
A blessing to the land wherein thou dwell'st,
But to the land that cast thee forth, a curse."
And of my weird he promised signs should come,
Earthquake, or thunderclap, or lightning flash.
And now I recognize as yours the sign
That led my wanderings to this your grove;
Else had I never lighted on you first,
A wineless man on your seat of native rock.
O goddesses, fulfill Apollo's word,
Grant me some consummation of my life,
If haply I appear not all too vile,
A thrall to sorrow worse than any slave.
Hear, gentle daughters of primeval Night,
Hear, namesake of great Pallas; Athens, first
Of cities, pity this dishonored shade,
The ghost of him who once was Oedipus.

ANTIGONE.
Hush! for I see some grey-beards on their way,
Their errand to spy out our resting-place.

OEDIPUS.
I will be mute, and thou shalt guide my steps
Into the covert from the public road,
Till I have learned their drift. A prudent man
Will ever shape his course by what he learns.
[Enter CHORUS]

CHORUS.
Ha! Where is he? Look around!
Every nook and corner scan!
He the all-presumptuous man,
Whither vanished? search the ground!
A wayfarer, I ween,
A wayfarer, no countryman of ours,
That old man must have been;
Never had native dared to tempt the Powers,
Or enter their demesne,
The Maids in awe of whom each mortal cowers,
Whose name no voice betrays nor cry,
And as we pass them with averted eye,
We move hushed lips in reverent piety.
But now some godless man,
'Tis rumored, here abides;
The precincts through I scan,
Yet wot not where he hides,
The wretch profane!
I search and search in vain.

OEDIPUS.
I am that man; I know you near

Ears to the blind, they say, are eyes.

CHORUS.
O dread to see and dread to hear!

OEDIPUS.
Oh sirs, I am no outlaw under ban.

CHORUS.
Who can he be—Zeus save us!—this old man?

OEDIPUS.
No favorite of fate,
That ye should envy his estate,
O, Sirs, would any happy mortal, say,
Grope by the light of other eyes his way,
Or face the storm upon so frail a stay?

CHORUS.
Wast thou then sightless from thy birth?
Evil, methinks, and long
Thy pilgrimage on earth.
Yet add not curse to curse and wrong to wrong.
I warn thee, trespass not
Within this hallowed spot,
Lest thou shouldst find the silent grassy glade
Where offerings are laid,
Bowls of spring water mingled with sweet mead.
Thou must not stay,
Come, come away,
Tired wanderer, dost thou heed?
(We are far off, but sure our voice can reach.)
If aught thou wouldst beseech,
Speak where 'tis right; till then refrain from speech.

OEDIPUS.
Daughter, what counsel should we now pursue?

ANTIGONE.
We must obey and do as here they do.

OEDIPUS.
Thy hand then!

ANTIGONE.
Here, O father, is my hand,

OEDIPUS.
O Sirs, if I come forth at your command,
Let me not suffer for my confidence.

CHORUS.
Against thy will no man shall drive thee hence.

OEDIPUS.
Shall I go further?

CHORUS.
Aye.

OEDIPUS.
What further still?

CHORUS.
Lead maiden, thou canst guide him where we will.

ANTIGONE
Follow with blind steps, father, as I lead.

CHORUS.
In a strange land strange thou art;
To her will incline thy heart;
Honor whatso'er the State
Honors, all she frowns on hate.

OEDIPUS.
Guide me child, where we may range
Safe within the paths of right;
Counsel freely may exchange
Nor with fate and fortune fight.

CHORUS.
Halt! Go no further than that rocky floor.

OEDIPUS.
Stay where I now am?

CHORUS.
Yes, advance no more.

OEDIPUS.
May I sit down?

CHORUS.
Move sideways towards the ledge,
And sit thee crouching on the scarped edge.

ANTIGONE.
This is my office, father, O incline—

OEDIPUS.
Ah me! ah me!

ANTIGONE.
Thy steps to my steps, lean thine aged frame on mine.

OEDIPUS.
Woe on my fate unblest!

CHORUS.
Wanderer, now thou art at rest,
Tell me of thy birth and home,
From what far country art thou come,
Led on thy weary way, declare!

OEDIPUS.
Strangers, I have no country. O forbear—

CHORUS.
What is it, old man, that thou wouldst conceal?

OEDIPUS.
Forbear, nor urge me further to reveal—

ANTIGONE.
Why this reluctance?

OEDIPUS.
Dread my lineage.

CHORUS.
Say!

OEDIPUS.
What must I answer, child, ah welladay!

CHORUS.
Say of what stock thou comest, what man's son—

OEDIPUS.
Ah me, my daughter, now we are undone!

ANTIGONE.
Speak, for thou standest on the slippery verge.

OEDIPUS.
I will; no plea for silence can I urge.

CHORUS.
Will neither speak? Come, Sir, why dally thus!

OEDIPUS.
Know'st one of Laius'—

CHORUS.
Ha? Who!

OEDIPUS.
Seed of Labdacus—

CHORUS.
Oh Zeus!

OEDIPUS.
The hapless Oedipus.

CHORUS.
Art he?

OEDIPUS.
Whate'er I utter, have no fear of me.

CHORUS.
Begone!

OEDIPUS.
O wretched me!

CHORUS.
Begone!

OEDIPUS.
O daughter, what will hap anon?

CHORUS.
Forth from our borders speed ye both!

ANTIGONE.
How keep you then your troth?

CHORUS.
Heaven's justice never smites
Him who ill with ill requites.
But if guile with guile contend,
Bane, not blessing, is the end.
Arise, begone and take thee hence straightway,
Lest on our land a heavier curse thou lay.

ANTIGONE.
O sirs! ye suffered not my father blind,
Albeit gracious and to ruth inclined,
Knowing the deeds he wrought, not innocent,
But with no ill intent;
Yet heed a maiden's moan
Who pleads for him alone;
My eyes, not reft of sight,
Plead with you as a daughter's might
You are our providence,
O make us not go hence!
O with a gracious nod
Grant us the nigh despaired-of boon we crave?
Hear us, O hear,
But all that ye hold dear,
Wife, children, homestead, hearth and God!
Where will you find one, search ye ne'er so well.
Who 'scapes perdition if a god impel!

CHORUS.
Surely we pity thee and him alike
Daughter of Oedipus, for your distress;
But as we reverence the decrees of Heaven
We cannot say aught other than we said.

OEDIPUS.
O what avails renown or fair repute?
Are they not vanity? For, look you, now
Athens is held of States the most devout,
Athens alone gives hospitality
And shelters the vexed stranger, so men say.
Have I found so? I whom ye dislodged
First from my seat of rock and now would drive
Forth from your land, dreading my name alone.
For me you surely dread not, nor my deeds,
Deeds of a man more sinned against than sinning,
As I might well convince you, were it meet
To tell my mother's story and my sire's,
The cause of this your fear. Yet am I then
A villain born because in self-defense,
Striken, I struck the striker back again?
E'en had I known, no villainy 'twould prove:
But all unwitting whither I went, I went—
To ruin; my destroyers knew it well,
Wherefore, I pray you, sirs, in Heaven's name,
Even as ye bade me quit my seat, defend me.
O pay not a lip service to the gods
And wrong them of their dues. Bethink ye well,
The eye of Heaven beholds the just of men,
And the unjust, nor ever in this world
Has one sole godless sinner found escape.
Stand then on Heaven's side and never blot
Athens' fair scutcheon by abetting wrong.
I came to you a suppliant, and you pledged
Your honor; O preserve me to the end,
O let not this marred visage do me wrong!

ANTIGONE.
A holy and god-fearing man is here
Whose coming purports comfort for your folk.
And when your chief arrives, whoe'er he be,
Then shall ye have my story and know all.
Meanwhile I pray you do him no despite.

CHORUS.
The plea thou urgest, needs must give us pause,
Set forth in weighty argument, but we
Must leave the issue with the ruling powers.

OEDIPUS.
Where is he, strangers, he who sways the realm?

CHORUS.
In his ancestral seat; a messenger,
The same who sent us here, is gone for him.

OEDIPUS.

And think you he will have such care or thought
For the blind stranger as to come himself?

CHORUS.
Aye, that he will, when once he learns thy name.

OEDIPUS.
But who will bear him word!

CHORUS.
The way is long,
And many travelers pass to speed the news.
Be sure he'll hear and hasten, never fear;
So wide and far thy name is noised abroad,
That, were he ne'er so spent and loth to move,
He would bestir him when he hears of thee.

OEDIPUS.
Well, may he come with blessing to his State
And me! Who serves his neighbor serves himself.

ANTIGONE.
Zeus! What is this? What can I say or think?

OEDIPUS.
What now, Antigone?

ANTIGONE.
I see a woman
Riding upon a colt of Aetna's breed;
She wears for headgear a Thessalian hat
To shade her from the sun. Who can it be?
She or a stranger? Do I wake or dream?
'Tis she; 'tis not—I cannot tell, alack;
It is no other! Now her bright'ning glance
Greets me with recognition, yes, 'tis she,
Herself, Ismene!

OEDIPUS.
Ha! what say ye, child?

ANTIGONE.
That I behold thy daughter and my sister,
And thou wilt know her straightway by her voice.
[Enter ISMENE]

ISMENE.
Father and sister, names to me most sweet,
How hardly have I found you, hardly now
When found at last can see you through my tears!

OEDIPUS.
Art come, my child?

ISMENE.
O father, sad thy plight!

OEDIPUS.
Child, thou art here?

ISMENE.
Yes, 'twas a weary way.

OEDIPUS.
Touch me, my child.

ISMENE.
I give a hand to both.

OEDIPUS.
O children—sisters!

ISMENE.
O disastrous plight!

OEDIPUS.
Her plight and mine?

ISMENE.
Aye, and my own no less.

OEDIPUS.
What brought thee, daughter?

ISMENE.
Father, care for thee.

OEDIPUS.
A daughter's yearning?

ISMENE.
Yes, and I had news
I would myself deliver, so I came
With the one thrall who yet is true to me.

OEDIPUS.
Thy valiant brothers, where are they at need?

ISMENE.
They are—enough, 'tis now their darkest hour.

OEDIPUS.
Out on the twain! The thoughts and actions all
Are framed and modeled on Egyptian ways.
For there the men sit at the loom indoors
While the wives slave abroad for daily bread.
So you, my children—those whom I behooved
To bear the burden, stay at home like girls,
While in their stead my daughters moil and drudge,
Lightening their father's misery. The one
Since first she grew from girlish feebleness
To womanhood has been the old man's guide
And shared my weary wandering, roaming oft
Hungry and footsore through wild forest ways,
In drenching rains and under scorching suns,
Careless herself of home and ease, if so
Her sire might have her tender ministry.
And thou, my child, whilom thou wentest forth,
Eluding the Cadmeians' vigilance,
To bring thy father all the oracles
Concerning Oedipus, and didst make thyself
My faithful lieger, when they banished me.
And now what mission summons thee from home,
What news, Ismene, hast thou for thy father?
This much I know, thou com'st not empty-handed,
Without a warning of some new alarm.

ISMENE.
The toil and trouble, father, that I bore
To find thy lodging-place and how thou faredst,
I spare thee; surely 'twere a double pain
To suffer, first in act and then in telling;
'Tis the misfortune of thine ill-starred sons
I come to tell thee. At the first they willed
To leave the throne to Creon, minded well
Thus to remove the inveterate curse of old,
A canker that infected all thy race.
But now some god and an infatuate soul
Have stirred betwixt them a mad rivalry
To grasp at sovereignty and kingly power.

Today the hot-branded youth, the younger born,
Is keeping Polyneices from the throne,
His elder, and has thrust him from the land.
The banished brother (so all Thebes reports)
Fled to the vale of Argos, and by help
Of new alliance there and friends in arms,
Swears he will stablish Argos straight as lord
Of the Cadmeian land, or, if he fail,
Exalt the victor to the stars of heaven.
This is no empty tale, but deadly truth,
My father; and how long thy agony,
Ere the gods pity thee, I cannot tell.

OEDIPUS.
Hast thou indeed then entertained a hope
The gods at last will turn and rescue me?

ISMENE.
Yea, so I read these latest oracles.

OEDIPUS.
What oracles? What hath been uttered, child?

ISMENE.
Thy country (so it runs) shall yearn in time
To have thee for their weal alive or dead.

OEDIPUS.
And who could gain by such a one as I?

ISMENE.
On thee, ’tis said, their sovereignty depends.

OEDIPUS.
So, when I cease to be, my worth begins.

ISMENE.
The gods, who once abased, uplift thee now.

OEDIPUS.
Poor help to raise an old man fallen in youth.

ISMENE.
Howe’er that be, ’tis for this cause alone
That Creon comes to thee—and comes anon.

OEDIPUS.
With what intent, my daughter? Tell me plainly.

ISMENE.
To plant thee near the Theban land, and so
Keep thee within their grasp, yet now allow
Thy foot to pass beyond their boundaries.

OEDIPUS.
What gain they, if I lay outside?

OEDIPUS.
Thy tomb,
If disappointed, brings on them a curse.

ANTIGONE.
It needs no god to tell what's plain to sense.

ISMENE.
Therefore they fain would have thee close at hand,
Not where thou wouldst be master of thyself.

OEDIPUS.
Mean they to shroud my bones in Theban dust?

ISMENE.
Nay, father, guilt of kinsman's blood forbids.

OEDIPUS.
Then never shall they be my masters, never!

ISMENE.
Thebes, thou shalt rue this bitterly some day!

OEDIPUS.
When what conjunction comes to pass, my child?

ISMENE.
Thy angry wraith, when at thy tomb they stand.

OEDIPUS.
And who hath told thee what thou tell'st me, child?

ISMENE.
Envoys who visited the Delphic hearth.

ANTIGONE.
Hath Phoebus spoken thus concerning him?

ISMENE.
So say the envoys who returned to Thebes.

OEDIPUS.
And can a son of mine have heard of this?

ISMENE.
Yea, both alike, and know its import well.

OEDIPUS.
They knew it, yet the ignoble greed of rule
Outweighed all longing for their sire's return.

ISMENE.
Grievous thy words, yet I must own them true.

OEDIPUS.
Then may the gods ne'er quench their fatal feud,
And mine be the arbitrament of the fight,
For which they now are arming, spear to spear;
That neither he who holds the scepter now
May keep this throne, nor he who fled the realm
Return again. They never raised a hand,
When I their sire was thrust from hearth and home,
When I was banned and banished, what recked they?
Say you 'twas done at my desire, a grace
Which the state, yielding to my wish, allowed?
Not so; for, mark you, on that very day
When in the tempest of my soul I craved
Death, even death by stoning, none appeared
To further that wild longing, but anon,
When time had numbed my anguish and I felt
My wrath had all outrun those errors past,
Then, then it was the city went about
By force to oust me, respited for years;
And then my sons, who should as sons have helped,
Did nothing: and, one little word from them
Was all I needed, and they spoke no word,
But let me wander on for evermore,
A banished man, a beggar. These two maids
Their sisters, girls, gave all their sex could give,
Food and safe harborage and filial care;

While their two brethren sacrificed their sire
For lust of power and sceptred sovereignty.
No! me they ne'er shall win for an ally,
Nor will this Theban kingship bring them gain;
That know I from this maiden's oracles,
And those old prophecies concerning me,
Which Phoebus now at length has brought to pass.
Come Creon then, come all the mightiest
In Thebes to seek me; for if ye my friends,
Championed by those dread Powers indigenous,
Espouse my cause; then for the State ye gain
A great deliverer, for my foemen bane.

CHORUS.
Our pity, Oedipus, thou needs must move,
Thou and these maidens; and the stronger plea
Thou urgest, as the savior of our land,
Disposes me to counsel for thy weal.

OEDIPUS.
Aid me, kind sirs; I will do all you bid.

CHORUS.
First make atonement to the deities,
Whose grove by trespass thou didst first profane.

OEDIPUS.
After what manner, stranger? Teach me, pray.

CHORUS.
Make a libation first of water fetched
With undefiled hands from living spring.

OEDIPUS.
And after I have gotten this pure draught?

CHORUS.
Bowls thou wilt find, the carver's handiwork;
Crown thou the rims and both the handles crown—

OEDIPUS.
With olive shoots or blocks of wool, or how?

CHORUS.
With wool from fleece of yearling freshly shorn.

OEDIPUS.
What next? how must I end the ritual?

CHORUS.
Pour thy libation, turning to the dawn.

OEDIPUS.
Pouring it from the urns whereof ye spake?

CHORUS.
Yea, in three streams; and be the last bowl drained
To the last drop.

OEDIPUS.
And wherewith shall I fill it,
Ere in its place I set it? This too tell.

CHORUS.
With water and with honey; add no wine.

OEDIPUS.
And when the embowered earth hath drunk thereof?

CHORUS.
Then lay upon it thrice nine olive sprays
With both thy hands, and offer up this prayer.

OEDIPUS.
I fain would hear it; that imports the most.

CHORUS.
That, as we call them Gracious, they would deign
To grant the suppliant their saving grace.
So pray thyself or whoso pray for thee,
In whispered accents, not with lifted voice;
Then go and look back. Do as I bid,
And I shall then be bold to stand thy friend;
Else, stranger, I should have my fears for thee.

OEDIPUS.
Hear ye, my daughters, what these strangers say?

ANTIGONE.
We listened, and attend thy bidding, father.

OEDIPUS.
I cannot go, disabled as I am
Doubly, by lack of strength and lack of sight;
But one of you may do it in my stead;
For one, I trow, may pay the sacrifice
Of thousands, if his heart be leal and true.
So to your work with speed, but leave me not
Untended; for this frame is all too week
To move without the help of guiding hand.

[ANTIGONE begins to speak up and volunteer, but is quickly cut off by Ismene]

ISMENE.
Then I will go perform these rites, but where
To find the spot, this have I yet to learn.

CHORUS.
Beyond this grove; if thou hast need of aught,
The guardian of the close will lend his aid.

ISMENE.
I go, and thou, Antigone, meanwhile
Must guard our father. In a parent's cause
Toil, if there be toil, is of no account.
[Exit ISMENE]

CHORUS.
Ill it is, stranger, to awake
Pain that long since has ceased to ache,
And yet I fain would hear—

OEDIPUS.
What thing?

CHORUS.
Thy tale of cruel suffering
For which no cure was found,
The fate that held thee bound.

OEDIPUS.
O bid me not (as guest I claim
This grace) expose my shame.

CHORUS.
The tale is bruited far and near,
And echoes still from ear to ear.
The truth, I fain would hear.

OEDIPUS.
Ah me!

CHORUS.
I prithee yield.

OEDIPUS.
Ah me!

CHORUS.
Grant my request, I granted all to thee.

ANTIGONE.
Know then he suffered ills most vile, but none
(So help me Heaven!) from acts in malice done.

CHORUS.
Say how.

ANTIGONE.
The State around
An all unwitting bridegroom bound
An impious marriage chain;
That was his bane.

CHORUS. [to OEDIPUS]
Didst thou in sooth then share
A bed incestuous with her that bare—

OEDIPUS.
It stabs me like a sword,
That two-edged word,
O stranger, but these maids—my own—

CHORUS.
Say on.

OEDIPUS.
Two daughters, curses twain.

[The CHORUS begins to swirl and circle around ANITGONE, focused on her while OEDIPUS answers them]

CHORUS.
Oh God!

OEDIPUS.
Sprang from the wife and mother's travail-pain.

CHORUS.
What, then thy offspring are at once—

OEDIPUS.
Too true.
Their father's very sister's too.

CHORUS.
Oh horror!

OEDIPUS.
Horrors from the boundless deep
Back on my soul in refluent surges sweep.

CHORUS.
Thou hast endured—

OEDIPUS.
Intolerable woe.

CHORUS.
And sinned—

OEDIPUS.
I sinned not.

CHORUS.
How so?

OEDIPUS.
I served the State; would I had never won
That graceless grace by which I was undone.

[The CHORUS returns to OEDIPUS]

CHORUS.
And next, unhappy man, thou hast shed blood?

OEDIPUS.
Must ye hear more?

CHORUS.
A father's?

OEDIPUS.
Flood on flood
Whelms me; that word's a second mortal blow.

CHORUS.
Murderer!

OEDIPUS.
Yes, a murderer, but know—

CHORUS.
What canst thou plead?

OEDIPUS.
A plea of justice.

CHORUS.
How?

OEDIPUS.
I slew who else would me have slain;
I slew without intent,
A wretch, but innocent
In the law's eye, I stand, without a stain.

CHORUS.
Behold our sovereign, Theseus, Aegeus' son,
Comes at thy summons to perform his part.
[Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS.
Oft had I heard of thee in times gone by—
The bloody mutilation of thine eyes—
And therefore know thee, son of Laius.
All that I lately gathered on the way
Made my conjecture doubly sure; and now
Thy garb and that marred visage prove to me
That thou art he. So pitying thine estate,
Most ill-starred Oedipus, I fain would know
What is the suit ye urge on me and Athens,
Thou and the helpless maiden at thy side.
Declare it; dire indeed must be the tale
Whereat _I_ should recoil. I too was reared,

Like thee, in exile, and in foreign lands
Wrestled with many perils, no man more.
Wherefore no alien in adversity
Shall seek in vain my succor, nor shalt thou;
I know myself a mortal, and my share
In what the morrow brings no more than thine.

OEDIPUS.
Theseus, thy words so apt, so generous
So comfortable, need no long reply
Both who I am and of what lineage sprung,
And from what land I came, thou hast declared.
So without prologue I may utter now
My brief petition, and the tale is told.

THESEUS.
Say on, and tell me what I fain would learn.

OEDIPUS.
I come to offer thee this woe-worn frame,
A gift not fair to look on; yet its worth
More precious far than any outward show.

THESEUS.
What profit dost thou proffer to have brought?

OEDIPUS.
Hereafter thou shalt learn, not yet, methinks.

THESEUS.
When may we hope to reap the benefit?

OEDIPUS.
When I am dead and thou hast buried me.

THESEUS.
Thou cravest life's last service; all before—
Is it forgotten or of no account?

OEDIPUS.
Yea, the last boon is warrant for the rest.

THESEUS.
The grace thou cravest then is small indeed.

OEDIPUS.
Nay, weigh it well; the issue is not slight.

THESEUS.
Thou meanest that betwixt thy sons and me?

ANTIGONE.
Prince, they would fain convey him back to Thebes.

THESEUS.
If there be no compulsion, then methinks
To rest in banishment befits not thee.

OEDIPUS.
Nay, when I wished it they would not consent.

THESEUS.
For shame! such temper misbecomes the faller.

OEDIPUS.
Chide if thou wilt, but first attend my plea.

THESEUS.
Say on, I wait full knowledge ere I judge.

OEDIPUS.
O Theseus, I have suffered wrongs on wrongs.

THESEUS.
Wouldst tell the old misfortune of thy race?

OEDIPUS.
No, that has grown a byword throughout Greece.

THESEUS.
What then can be this more than mortal grief?

OEDIPUS.
My case stands thus; by my own flesh and blood
I was expelled my country, and can ne'er
Thither return again, a parricide.

THESEUS.

Why fetch thee home if thou must needs obey.

THESEUS.
What are they threatened by the oracle?

OEDIPUS.
Destruction that awaits them in this land.

THESEUS.
What can beget ill blood ’twixt them and me?

OEDIPUS.
Dear son of Aegeus, to the gods alone
Is given immunity from eld and death;
But nothing else escapes all-ruinous time.
Earth’s might decays, the might of men decays,
Honor grows cold, dishonor flourishes,
There is no constancy ’twixt friend and friend,
Or city and city; be it soon or late,
Sweet turns to bitter, hate once more to love.
If now ’tis sunshine betwixt Thebes and thee
And not a cloud, Time in his endless course
Gives birth to endless days and nights, wherein
The merest nothing shall suffice to cut
With serried spears your bonds of amity.
Then shall my slumbering and buried corpse
In its cold grave drink their warm life-blood up,
If Zeus be Zeus and Phoebus still speak true.
No more: ’tis ill to tear aside the veil
Of mysteries; let me cease as I began:
Enough if thou wilt keep thy plighted troth,
Then shall thou ne’er complain that Oedipus
Proved an unprofitable and thankless guest,
Except the gods themselves shall play me false.

CHORUS.
The man, my lord, has from the very first
Declared his power to offer to our land
These and like benefits.

THESEUS.
Who could reject
The proffered amity of such a friend?
First, he can claim the hospitality
To which by mutual contract we stand pledged:
Next, coming here, a suppliant to the gods,
He pays full tribute to the State and me;
His favors therefore never will I spurn,
But grant him the full rights of citizen;

And, if it suits the stranger here to bide,
I place him in your charge, or if he please
Rather to come with me—choose, Oedipus,
Which of the two thou wilt. Thy choice is mine.

OEDIPUS.
Zeus, may the blessing fall on men like these!

THESEUS.
What dost thou then decide—to come with me?

OEDIPUS.
Yea, were it lawful—but 'tis rather here—

THESEUS.
What wouldst thou here? I shall not thwart thy wish.

OEDIPUS.
Here shall I vanquish those who cast me forth.

THESEUS.
Then were thy presence here a boon indeed.

OEDIPUS.
Such shall it prove, if thou fulfill'st thy pledge.

THESEUS.
Fear not for me; I shall not play thee false.

OEDIPUS.
No need to back thy promise with an oath.

THESEUS.
An oath would be no surer than my word.

OEDIPUS.
How wilt thou act then?

THESEUS.
What is it thou fear'st?

OEDIPUS.
My foes will come—

THESEUS.
Our friends will look to that.

OEDIPUS.
But if thou leave me?

THESEUS.
Teach me not my duty.

OEDIPUS.
'Tis fear constrains me.

THESEUS.
_My_ soul knows no fear!

OEDIPUS.
Thou knowest not what threats—

THESEUS.
I know that none
Shall hale thee hence in my despite. Such threats
Vented in anger oft, are blusterers,
An idle breath, forgot when sense returns.
And for thy foemen, though their words were brave,
Boasting to bring thee back, they are like to find
The seas between us wide and hard to sail.
Such my firm purpose, but in any case
Take heart, since Phoebus sent thee here. My name,
Though I be distant, warrants thee from harm.

CHORUS.
Thou hast come to a steed-famed land for rest,
O stranger worn with toil,
To a land of all lands the goodliest
Colonus' glistening soil.
'Tis the haunt of the clear-voiced nightingale,
Who hid in her bower, among
The wine-dark ivy that wreathes the vale,
Trilleth her ceaseless song;
And she loves, where the clustering berries nod
O'er a sunless, windless glade,
The spot by no mortal footstep trod,
The pleasance kept for the Bacchic god,
Where he holds each night his revels wild
With the nymphs who fostered the lusty child.

And fed each morn by the pearly dew

The starred narcissi shine,
And a wreath with the crocus' golden hue
For the Mother and Daughter twine.
And never the sleepless fountains cease
That feed Cephisus' stream,
But they swell earth's bosom with quick increase,
And their wave hath a crystal gleam.
And the Muses' quire will never disdain
To visit this heaven-favored plain,
Nor the Cyprian queen of the golden rein.

And here there grows, unpruned, untamed,
Terror to foemen's spear,
A tree in Asian soil unnamed,
By Pelops' Dorian isle unclaimed,
Self-nurtured year by year;
'Tis the grey-leaved olive that feeds our boys;
Nor youth nor withering age destroys
The plant that the Olive Planter tends
And the Grey-eyed Goddess herself defends.

Yet another gift, of all gifts the most
Prized by our fatherland, we boast—
The might of the horse, the might of the sea;
Our fame, Poseidon, we owe to thee,
Son of Kronos, our king divine,
Who in these highways first didst fit
For the mouth of horses the iron bit;
Thou too hast taught us to fashion meet
For the arm of the rower the oar-blade fleet,
Swift as the Nereids' hundred feet
As they dance along the brine.

ANTIGONE.
Oh land extolled above all lands, 'tis now
For thee to make these glorious titles good.

OEDIPUS.
Why this appeal, my daughter?

ANTIGONE.
Father, lo!
Creon approaches with his company.

OEDIPUS.
Fear not, it shall be so; if we are old,
This country's vigor has no touch of age.
[Enter CREON with attendants]

CREON.
Burghers, my noble friends, ye take alarm

At my approach (I read it in your eyes),
Fear nothing and refrain from angry words.
I come with no ill purpose; I am old,
And know the city whither I am come,
Without a peer amongst the powers of Greece.
It was by reason of my years that I
Was chosen to persuade your guest and bring
Him back to Thebes; not the delegate
Of one man, but commissioned by the State,
Since of all Thebans I have most bewailed,
Being his kinsman, his most grievous woes.
O listen to me, luckless Oedipus,
Come home! The whole Cadmeian people claim
With right to have thee back, I most of all,
For most of all (else were I vile indeed)
I mourn for thy misfortunes, seeing thee
An aged outcast, wandering on and on,
A beggar with one handmaid for thy stay.
Ah! who had e'er imagined she could fall
To such a depth of misery as this,
To tend in penury thy stricken frame,
A virgin ripe for wedlock, but unwed,
A prey for any wanton ravisher?
Seems it not cruel this reproach I cast
On thee and on myself and all the race?
Aye, but an open shame cannot be hid.
Hide it, O hide it, Oedipus, thou canst.
O, by our fathers' gods, consent I pray;
Come back to Thebes, come to thy father's home,
Bid Athens, as is meet, a fond farewell;
Thebes thy old foster-mother claims thee first.

OEDIPUS.
O front of brass, thy subtle tongue would twist
To thy advantage every plea of right
Why try thy arts on me, why spread again
Toils where 'twould gall me sorest to be snared?
In old days when by self-wrought woes distraught,
I yearned for exile as a glad release,
Thy will refused the favor then I craved.
But when my frenzied grief had spent its force,
And I was fain to taste the sweets of home,
Then thou wouldst thrust me from my country, then
These ties of kindred were by thee ignored;
And now again when thou behold'st this State
And all its kindly people welcome me,
Thou seek'st to part us, wrapping in soft words
Hard thoughts. And yet what pleasure canst thou find
In forcing friendship on unwilling foes?
Suppose a man refused to grant some boon
When you importuned him, and afterwards
When you had got your heart's desire, consented,
Granting a grace from which all grace had fled,
Would not such favor seem an empty boon?
Yet such the boon thou profferest now to me,

Fair in appearance, but when tested false.
Yea, I will proved thee false, that these may hear;
Thou art come to take me, not to take me home,
But plant me on thy borders, that thy State
May so escape annoyance from this land.
That thou shalt never gain, but this instead—
My ghost to haunt thy country without end;
And for my sons, this heritage—no more—
Just room to die in. Have not I more skill
Than thou to draw the horoscope of Thebes?
Are not my teachers surer guides than thine—
Great Phoebus and the sire of Phoebus, Zeus?
Thou art a messenger suborned, thy tongue
Is sharper than a sword's edge, yet thy speech
Will bring thee more defeats than victories.
Howbeit, I know I waste my words—begone,
And leave me here; whate'er may be my lot,
He lives not ill who lives withal content.

CREON.
Which loses in this parley, I o'erthrown
By thee, or thou who overthrow'st thyself?

OEDIPUS.
I shall be well contented if thy suit
Fails with these strangers, as it has with me.

CREON.
Unhappy man, will years ne'er make thee wise?
Must thou live on to cast a slur on age?

ANTIGONE.
Thou hast a glib tongue, but no honest man,
Methinks, can argue well on any side.

CREON.
'Tis one thing to speak much, another well.

OEDIPUS.
Thy words, forsooth, are few and all well aimed!

CREON.
Not for a man indeed with wits like thine.

OEDIPUS.
Depart! I bid thee in these burghers' name,
And prowl no longer round me to blockade
My destined harbor.

CREON.
I protest to these,
Not thee, and for thine answer to thy kin,
If e'er I take thee—

OEDIPUS.
Who against their will
Could take me?

CREON.
Though untaken thou shalt smart.

OEDIPUS.
What power hast thou to execute this threat?

CREON.
One of thy daughters is already seized,
The other I will carry off anon.

OEDIPUS and ANTIGONE.
Woe, woe!

CREON.
This is but prelude to thy woes.

OEDIPUS.
Hast thou my child?

CREON.
And soon shall have the other.

OEDIPUS.
Ho, friends! ye will not surely play me false?
Chase this ungodly villain from your land.

[ANTIGONE shakes off the guards, who in turn back off from her]
ANTIGONE.
Hence, stranger, hence avaunt! Thou doest wrong
In this, and wrong in all that thou hast done.

CREON (to his guards).
'Tis time by force to carry off the girl,
If she refuse of her free will to go.

ANTIGONE.
Ah, woe is me! where shall I fly, where find
Succor from gods or men?
[ANTIGONE draws a dagger from one of the CHORUS and holds it firmly in front of her, causing the guards to retreat]

CHORUS.
What would'st thou, stranger?

CREON.
I meddle not with him, but her who is mine.

OEDIPUS.
O princes of the land!

CHORUS.
Sir, thou dost wrong.

CREON.
Nay, right.

CHORUS.
How right?

CREON.
I take but what is mine.

OEDIPUS and ANTIGONE.
Help, Athens!

CHORUS.
What means this, sirrah? quick unhand her, or
We'll fight it out.

CREON.
Back!

CHORUS.
Not till thou forbear.

CREON.
'Tis war with Thebes if I am touched or harmed.

OEDIPUS.
Did I not warn thee?

CHORUS.
Quick, unhand the maid!

CREON.
Command your minions; I am not your slave.

CHORUS.
Desist, I bid thee.

CREON (to the guard)
And O bid thee march!

CHORUS.
To the rescue, one and all!
Rally, neighbors to my call!
See, the foe is at the gate!
Rally to defend the State.

[The guards stand between ANTIGONE and OEDIPUS, blocking her from reaching her father]
ANTIGONE.
Ah, woe is me, they drag me hence, O friends.

OEDIPUS.
Where art thou, daughter?

ANTIGONE.
Haled along by force.

OEDIPUS.
Thy hands, my child!

ANTIGONE.
They will not let me, father.

[The guards disarm ANTIGONE and pick her up by the arms]
CREON.
Away with her!

OEDIPUS.
Ah, woe is me, ah woe!

CREON.

So those two crutches shall no longer serve thee
For further roaming. Since it pleaseth thee
To triumph o'er thy country and thy friends
Who mandate, though a prince, I here discharge,
Enjoy thy triumph; soon or late thou'lt find
Thou art an enemy to thyself, both now
And in time past, when in despite of friends
Thou gav'st the rein to passion, still thy bane.

CHORUS.
Hold there, sir stranger!

CREON.
Hands off, have a care.

CHORUS.
Restore the maidens, else thou goest not.

[ANTIGONE shakes free from the guards and hides behind the wall of men in the CHORUS]
CREON.
Then Thebes will take a dearer surety soon;
I will lay hands on more than these two maids.

CHORUS.
What canst thou further?

CREON.
Carry off this man.

CHORUS.
Brave words!

CREON.
And deeds forthwith shall make them good.

CHORUS.
Unless perchance our sovereign intervene.

ANTIGONE.
O shameless voice! Would'st lay an hand on me?

CREON.
Silence, I bid thee!

OEDIPUS.

Goddesses, allow
Thy suppliant to utter yet one curse!
Wretch, now my eyes are gone thou hast torn away
The helpless maiden who was eyes to me;
For these to thee and all thy cursed race
May the great Sun, whose eye is everywhere,
Grant length of days and old age like to mine.

CREON.
Listen, O men of Athens, mark ye this?

OEDIPUS.
They mark us both and understand that I
Wronged by the deeds defend myself with words.

CREON.
Nothing shall curb my will; though I be old
And single-handed, I will have this man.

OEDIPUS.
O woe is me!

CHORUS.
Thou art a bold man, stranger, if thou think'st
To execute thy purpose.

CREON.
So I do.

CHORUS.
Then shall I deem this State no more a State.

CREON.
With a just quarrel weakness conquers might.

OEDIPUS.
Ye hear his words?

CHORUS.
Aye words, but not yet deeds,
Zeus knoweth!

CREON.
Zeus may haply know, not thou.

CHORUS.
Insolence!

CREON.
Insolence that thou must bear.

CHORUS.
Haste ye princes, sound the alarm!
Men of Athens, arm ye, arm!
Quickly to the rescue come
Ere the robbers get them home.
[Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS.
Why this outcry? What is forward? wherefore was I called away
From the altar of Poseidon, lord of your Colonus? Say!
On what errand have I hurried hither without stop or stay.

OEDIPUS.
Dear friend—those accents tell me who thou art—
Yon man but now hath done me a foul wrong.

THESEUS.
What is this wrong and who hath wrought it? Speak.

OEDIPUS.
Creon who stands before thee. He it is
Hath robbed me of my all, my daughters twain.

THESEUS.
What means this?

OEDIPUS.
Thou hast heard my tale of wrongs.

THESEUS.
Ho! hasten to the altars, one of you.
Command my liegemen leave the sacrifice
And hurry, foot and horse, with rein unchecked,
To where the paths that packmen use diverge,
Lest the two maidens slip away, and I
Become a mockery to this my guest,
As one despoiled by force. Quick, as I bid.
As for this stranger, had I let my rage,
Justly provoked, have play, he had not 'scaped
Scathless and uncorrected at my hands.

But now the laws to which himself appealed,
These and none others shall adjudicate.
Thou shalt not quit this land, till thou hast fetched
The maidens and produced them in my sight.
Thou hast offended both against myself
And thine own race and country. Having come
Unto a State that champions right and asks
For every action warranty of law,
Thou hast set aside the custom of the land,
And like some freebooter art carrying off
What plunder pleases thee, as if forsooth
Thou thoughtest this a city without men,
Or manned by slaves, and me a thing of naught.
Yet not from Thebes this villainy was learnt;
Thebes is not wont to breed unrighteous sons,
Nor would she praise thee, if she learnt that thou
Wert robbing me—aye and the gods to boot,
Haling by force their suppliants, poor maids.
Were I on Theban soil, to prosecute
The justest claim imaginable, I
Would never wrest by violence my own
Without sanction of your State or King;
I should behave as fits an outlander
Living amongst a foreign folk, but thou
Shamest a city that deserves it not,
Even thine own, and plentitude of years
Have made of thee an old man and a fool.
Therefore again I charge thee as before,
See that the maidens are restored at once,
Unless thou would'st continue here by force
And not by choice a sojourner; so much
I tell thee home and what I say, I mean.

ANTIGONE.
Thy case is perilous; though by birth and race
Thou should'st be just, thou plainly doest wrong.

CREON.
Not deeming this city void of men
Or counsel, son of Aegeus, as thou say'st
I did what I have done; rather I thought
Your people were not like to set such store
by kin of mine and keep them 'gainst my will.
Nor would they harbor, so I stood assured,
A godless parricide, a reprobate
Convicted of incestuous marriage ties.
For on her native hill of Ares here
(I knew your far-famed Areopagus)
Sits Justice, and permits not vagrant folk
To stay within your borders. In that faith
I hunted down my quarry; and e'en then
I had refrained but for the curses dire
Wherewith he banned my kinsfolk and myself:
Such wrong, methought, had warrant for my act.

Anger has no old age but only death;
The dead alone can feel no touch of spite.
So thou must work thy will; my cause is just
But weak without allies; yet will I try,
Old as I am, to answer deeds with deeds.

OEDIPUS.
O shameless railer, think'st thou this abuse
Defames my grey hairs rather than thine own?
Murder and incest, deeds of horror, all
Thou blurtest forth against me, all I have borne,
No willing sinner; so it pleased the gods
Wrath haply with my sinful race of old,
Since thou could'st find no sin in me myself
For which in retribution I was doomed
To trespass thus against myself and mine.
Answer me now, if by some oracle
My sire was destined to a bloody end
By a son's hand, can this reflect on me,
Me then unborn, begotten by no sire,
Conceived in no mother's womb? And if
When born to misery, as born I was,
I met my sire, not knowing whom I met
or what I did, and slew him, how canst thou
With justice blame the all-unconscious hand?
And for my mother, wretch, art not ashamed,
Seeing she was thy sister, to extort
From me the story of her marriage, such
A marriage as I straightway will proclaim.
For I will speak; thy lewd and impious speech
Has broken all the bonds of reticence.
She was, ah woe is me! she was my mother;
I knew it not, nor she; and she my mother
Bare children to the son whom she had borne,
A birth of shame. But this at least I know
Wittingly thou aspersest her and me;
But I unwitting wed, unwilling speak.
Nay neither in this marriage or this deed
Which thou art ever casting in my teeth—
A murdered sire—shall I be held to blame.
Come, answer me one question, if thou canst:
If one should presently attempt thy life,
Would'st thou, O man of justice, first inquire
If the assassin was perchance thy sire,
Or turn upon him? As thou lov'st thy life,
On thy aggressor thou would'st turn, no stay
Debating, if the law would bear thee out.
Such was my case, and such the pass whereto
The gods reduced me; and methinks my sire,
Could he come back to life, would not dissent.
Yet thou, for just thou art not, but a man
Who sticks at nothing, if it serve his plea,
Reproachest me with this before these men.
It serves thy turn to laud great Theseus' name,
And Athens as a wisely governed State;

Yet in thy flatteries one thing is to seek:
If any land knows how to pay the gods
Their proper rites, 'tis Athens most of all.
This is the land whence thou wast fain to steal
Their aged suppliant and hast carried off
My daughters. Therefore to yon goddesses,
I turn, adjure them and invoke their aid
To champion my cause, that thou mayest learn
What is the breed of men who guard this State.

ANTIGONE.
An honest man, my liege, one sore bestead
By fortune, and so worthy your support.

THESEUS.
Enough of words; the captors speed amain,
While we the victims stand debating here.

CREON.
What would'st thou? What can I, a feeble man?

THESEUS.
Show us the trail, and I'll attend thee too,
That, if thou hast the maidens hereabouts,
Thou mayest thyself discover them to me;
But if thy guards outstrip us with their spoil,
We may draw rein; for others speed, from whom
They will not 'scape to thank the gods at home.
Lead on, I say, the captor's caught, and fate
Hath ta'en the fowler in the toils he spread;
So soon are lost gains gotten by deceit.
And look not for allies; I know indeed
Such height of insolence was never reached
Without abettors or accomplices;
Thou hast some backer in thy bold essay,
But I will search this matter home and see
One man doth not prevail against the State.
Dost take my drift, or seem these words as vain
As seemed our warnings when the plot was hatched?

CREON.
Nothing thou sayest can I here dispute,
But once at home I too shall act my part.

THESEUS.
Threaten us and—begone! Thou, Oedipus,
Stay here assured that nothing save my death
Will stay my purpose to restore the maids.

OEDIPUS.
Heaven bless thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness
And all thy loving care in my behalf.
[Exeunt THESEUS and CREON]

ANTIGONE.
O when the flying foe,
Turning at last to bay,
Soon will give blow for blow,
Might I behold the fray;
Hear the loud battle roar
Swell, on the Pythian shore,
Or by the torch-lit bay,
Where the dread Queen and Maid
Cherish the mystic rites,
Rites they to none betray,
Ere on his lips is laid
Secrecy's golden key
By their own acolytes,
Priestly Eumolpidae.

There I might chance behold
Theseus our captain bold
Meet with the robber band,
Ere they have fled the land,
Rescue by might and main
Maidens, the captives twain.

CHORUS
Haply on swiftest steed,
Or in the flying car,
Now they approach the glen,
West of white Oea's scaur.
They will be vanquished:
Dread are our warriors, dread
Theseus our chieftain's men.
Flashes each bridle bright,
Charges each gallant knight,
All that our Queen adore,
Pallas their patron, or
Him whose wide floods enring
Earth, the great Ocean-king
Whom Rhea bore.

ANTIGONE
Fight they or now prepare
To fight? a vision rare
Tells me that soon again
I shall behold the twain
Maidens so ill bestead,
By their kin buffeted.
Today, today Zeus worketh some great thing
This day shall victory bring.
O for the wings, the wings of a dove,
To be borne with the speed of the gale,

Up and still upwards to sail
And gaze on the fray from the clouds above.
All-seeing Zeus, O lord of heaven,
To our guardian host be given
Might triumphant to surprise
Flying foes and win their prize.
Hear us, Zeus, and hear us, child
Of Zeus, Athene undefiled,
Hear, Apollo, hunter, hear,
Huntress, sister of Apollo,
Who the dappled swift-foot deer
O'er the wooded glade dost follow;
Help with your two-fold power
Athens in danger's hour!

CHORUS
O wayfarer, thou wilt not have to tax
The friends who watch for thee with false presage,
For lo, an escort with the maid draws near.
[Enter ISMENE with THESEUS]

OEDIPUS.
Where, where? what sayest thou?

ANTIGONE.
O father, father,
Would that some god might grant thee eyes to see
This best of men who brings her back again.

OEDIPUS.
My child! and are ye back indeed!

ANTIGONE.
Yes, saved
By Theseus and his gallant followers.

OEDIPUS.
Come to your father's arms, O let me feel
A child's embrace I never hoped for more.

ANTIGONE.
Thou askest what is doubly sweet to give.

OEDIPUS.
Where are ye then?

ANTIGONE.
We come together both.

OEDIPUS.
My precious nurslings!

ANTIGONE.
Fathers aye were fond.

OEDIPUS.
Props of my age!

ANTIGONE.
So sorrow sorrow props.

OEDIPUS.
I have my darlings, and if death should come,
Death were not wholly bitter with you near.
Cling to me, press me close on either side,
There rest ye from your dreary wayfaring.
Now tell me of your ventures, but in brief;
Brief speech suffices for young maids like you.

ANTIGONE.
Here is her savior; thou should'st hear the tale
From his own lips; so shall my part be brief.

OEDIPUS.
I pray thee do not wonder if the sight
Of children, given o'er for lost, has made
My converse somewhat long and tedious.
Full well I know the joy I have of them
Is due to thee, to thee and no man else;
Thou wast their sole deliverer, none else.
The gods deal with thee after my desire,
With thee and with this land! for fear of heaven
I found above all peoples most with you,
And righteousness and lips that cannot lie.
I speak in gratitude of what I know,
For all I have I owe to thee alone.
Give me thy hand, O Prince, that I may touch it,
And if thou wilt permit me, kiss thy cheek.
What say I? Can I wish that thou should'st touch
One fallen like me to utter wretchedness,
Corrupt and tainted with a thousand ills?
Oh no, I would not let thee if thou would'st.
They only who have known calamity
Can share it. Let me greet thee where thou art,
And still befriend me as thou hast till now.

THESEUS.
I marvel not if thou hast dallied long
In converse with thy children and preferred
Their speech to mine; I feel no jealousy,
I would be famous more by deeds than words.
Of this, old friend, thou hast had proof; my oath
I have fulfilled and brought thee back the maids
Alive and nothing harmed for all those threats.
And how the fight was won, 'twere waste of words
To boast—thy daughters here will tell thee all.
But of a matter that has lately chanced
On my way hitherward, I fain would have
Thy counsel—slight 'twould seem, yet worthy thought.
A wise man heeds all matters great or small.

OEDIPUS.
What is it, son of Aegeus? Let me hear.
Of what thou askest I myself know naught.

THESEUS.
'Tis said a man, no countryman of thine,
But of thy kin, hath taken sanctuary
Beside the altar of Poseidon, where
I was at sacrifice when called away.

OEDIPUS.
What is his country? what the suitor's prayer?

THESEUS.
I know but one thing; he implores, I am told,
A word with thee—he will not trouble thee.

OEDIPUS.
What seeks he? If a suppliant, something grave.

THESEUS.
He only waits, they say, to speak with thee,
And then unharmed to go upon his way.

OEDIPUS.
I marvel who is this petitioner.

THESEUS.
Think if there be not any of thy kin
At Argos who might claim this boon of thee.

OEDIPUS.

Dear friend, forbear, I pray.

THESEUS.
What ails thee now?

OEDIPUS.
Ask it not of me.

THESEUS.
Ask not what? explain.

OEDIPUS.
Thy words have told me who the suppliant is.

THESEUS.
Who can he be that I should frown on him?

OEDIPUS.
My son, O king, my hateful son, whose words
Of all men's most would jar upon my ears.

THESEUS.
Thou sure mightest listen. If his suit offend,
No need to grant it. Why so loth to hear him?

OEDIPUS.
That voice, O king, grates on a father's ears;
I have come to loathe it. Force me not to yield.

THESEUS.
But he hath found asylum. O beware,
And fail not in due reverence to the god.

ANTIGONE.
O heed me, father, though I am young in years.
Let the prince have his will and pay withal
What in his eyes is service to the god;
For our sake also let our brother come.
If what he urges tend not to thy good
He cannot surely wrest perforce thy will.
To hear him then, what harm? By open words
A scheme of villainy is soon bewrayed.
Thou art his father, therefore canst not pay
In kind a son's most impious outrages.
O listen to him; other men like thee

Have thankless children and are choleric,
But yielding to persuasion's gentle spell
They let their savage mood be exorcised.
Look thou to the past, forget the present, think
On all the woe thy sire and mother brought thee;
Thence wilt thou draw this lesson without fail,
Of evil passion evil is the end.
Thou hast, alas, to prick thy memory,
Stern monitors, these ever-sightless orbs.
O yield to us; just suitors should not need
To be importunate, nor he that takes
A favor lack the grace to make return.

OEDIPUS.
Grievous to me, my child, the boon ye win
By pleading. Let it be then; have your way
Only if come he must, I beg thee, friend,
Let none have power to dispose of me.

THESEUS.
No need, Sir, to appeal a second time.
It likes me not to boast, but be assured
Thy life is safe while any god saves mine.
[Exit THESEUS]

CHORUS.
Who craves excess of days,
Scorning the common span
Of life, I judge that man
A giddy wight who walks in folly's ways.
For the long years heap up a grievous load,
Scant pleasures, heavier pains,
Till not one joy remains
For him who lingers on life's weary road
And come it slow or fast,
One doom of fate
Doth all await,
For dance and marriage bell,
The dirge and funeral knell.
Death the deliverer freeth all at last.

Not to be born at all
Is best, far best that can befall,
Next best, when born, with least delay
To trace the backward way.
For when youth passes with its giddy train,
Troubles on troubles follow, toils on toils,
Pain, pain for ever pain;
And none escapes life's coils.
Envy, sedition, strife,
Carnage and war, make up the tale of life.
Last comes the worst and most abhorred stage
Of unregarded age,

Joyless, companionless and slow,
Of woes the crowning woe.

ANTIGONE
Such ills not I alone,
He too our guest hath known,
E'en as some headland on an iron-bound shore,
Lashed by the wintry blasts and surge's roar,
So is he buffeted on every side
By drear misfortune's whelming tide,
By every wind of heaven o'erborne
Some from the sunset, some from orient morn,
Some from the noonday glow.
Some from Rhipean gloom of everlasting snow.

ANTIGONE.
Father, methinks I see the stranger coming,
Alone he comes and weeping plenteous tears.

OEDIPUS.
Who may he be?

ANTIGONE.
The same that we surmised.
From the outset—Polyneices. He is here.
[Enter POLYNEICES]

POLYNEICES.
Ah me, my sisters, shall I first lament
My own afflictions, or my aged sire's,
Whom here I find a castaway, with you,
In a strange land, an ancient beggar clad
In antic tatters, marring all his frame,
While o'er the sightless orbs his unkept locks
Float in the breeze; and, as it were to match,
He bears a wallet against hunger's pinch.
All this too late I learn, wretch that I am,
Alas! I own it, and am proved most vile
In my neglect of thee: I scorn myself.
But as almighty Zeus in all he doth
Hath Mercy for co-partner of this throne,
Let Mercy, father, also sit enthroned
In thy heart likewise. For transgressions past
May be amended, cannot be made worse.

Why silent? Father, speak, nor turn away,
Hast thou no word, wilt thou dismiss me then
In mute disdain, nor tell me why thou art wrath?
O ye his daughters, sisters mine, do ye
This sullen, obstinate silence try to move.
Let him not spurn, without a single word

Of answer, me the suppliant of the god.

ANTIGONE.
Tell him thyself, unhappy one, thine errand;
For large discourse may send a thrill of joy,
Or stir a chord of wrath or tenderness,
And to the tongue-tied somehow give a tongue.

POLYNEICES.
Well dost thou counsel, and I will speak out.
First will I call in aid the god himself,
Poseidon, from whose altar I was raised,
With warrant from the monarch of this land,
To parley with you, and depart unscathed.
These pledges, strangers, I would see observed
By you and by my sisters and my sire.
Now, father, let me tell thee why I came.
I have been banished from my native land
Because by right of primogeniture
I claimed possession of thy sovereign throne
Wherefrom Etocles, my younger brother,
Ousted me, not by weight of precedent,
Nor by the last arbitrament of war,
But by his popular acts; and the prime cause
Of this I deem the curse that rests on thee.
So likewise hold the soothsayers, for when
I came to Argos in the Dorian land
And took the king Adrastus' child to wife,
Under my standard I enlisted all
The foremost captains of the Apian isle,
To levy with their aid that sevenfold host
Of spearmen against Thebes, determining
To oust my foes or die in a just cause.
Why then, thou askest, am I here today?
Father, I come a suppliant to thee
Both for myself and my allies who now
With squadrons seven beneath their seven spears
Beleaguer all the plain that circles Thebes.
Foremost the peerless warrior, peerless seer,
Amphiaraiis with his lightning lance;
Next an Aetolian, Tydeus, Oeneus' son;
Eteoclus of Argive birth the third;
The fourth Hippomedon, sent to the war
By his sire Talaos; Capaneus, the fifth,
Vaunts he will fire and raze the town; the sixth
Parthenopaeus, an Arcadian born
Named of that maid, longtime a maid and late
Espoused, Atalanta's true-born child;
Last I thy son, or thine at least in name,
If but the bastard of an evil fate,
Lead against Thebes the fearless Argive host.
Thus by thy children and thy life, my sire,
We all adjure thee to remit thy wrath

And favor one who seeks a just revenge
Against a brother who has banned and robbed him.
For victory, if oracles speak true,
Will fall to those who have thee for ally.
So, by our fountains and familiar gods
I pray thee, yield and hear; a beggar I
And exile, thou an exile likewise; both
Involved in one misfortune find a home
As pensioners, while he, the lord of Thebes,
O agony! makes a mock of thee and me.
I'll scatter with a breath the upstart's might,
And bring thee home again and stablish thee,
And stablish, having cast him out, myself.
This will thy goodwill I will undertake,
Without it I can scare return alive.

CHORUS.
For the king's sake who sent him, Oedipus,
Dismiss him not without a meet reply.

OEDIPUS.
Nay, worthy seniors, but for Theseus' sake
Who sent him hither to have word of me.
Never again would he have heard my voice;
But now he shall obtain this parting grace,
An answer that will bring him little joy.
O villain, when thou hadst the sovereignty
That now thy brother holdeth in thy stead,
Didst thou not drive me, thine own father, out,
An exile, cityless, and make we wear
This beggar's garb thou weepest to behold,
Now thou art come thyself to my sad plight?
Nothing is here for tears; it must be borne
By me till death, and I shall think of thee
As of my murderer; thou didst thrust me out;
'Tis thou hast made me conversant with woe,
Through thee I beg my bread in a strange land;
And had not these my daughters tended me
I had been dead for aught of aid from thee.
They tend me, they preserve me, they are men
Not women in true service to their sire;
But ye are bastards, and no sons of mine.
Therefore just Heaven hath an eye on thee;
Howbeit not yet with aspect so austere
As thou shalt soon experience, if indeed
These banded hosts are moving against Thebes.
That city thou canst never storm, but first
Shall fall, thou and thy brother, blood-imbrued.
Such curse I lately launched against you twain,
Such curse I now invoke to fight for me,
That ye may learn to honor those who bear thee
Nor flout a sightless father who begat
Degenerate sons—these maidens did not so.
Therefore my curse is stronger than thy "throne,"

Thy “suppliance,” if by right of laws eterne
Primeval Justice sits enthroned with Zeus.
Begone, abhorred, disowned, no son of mine,
Thou vilest of the vile! and take with thee
This curse I leave thee as my last bequest: —
Never to win by arms thy native land,
No, nor return to Argos in the Vale,
But by a kinsman’s hand to die and slay
Him who expelled thee. So I pray and call
On the ancestral gloom of Tartarus
To snatch thee hence, on these dread goddesses
I call, and Ares who incensed you both
To mortal enmity. Go now proclaim
What thou hast heard to the Cadmeians all,
Thy staunch confederates—this the heritage
that Oedipus divideth to his sons.

CHORUS.
Thy errand, Polyneices, liked me not
From the beginning; now go back with speed.

POLYNEICES.
Woe worth my journey and my baffled hopes!
Woe worth my comrades! What a desperate end
To that glad march from Argos! Woe is me!
I dare not whisper it to my allies
Or turn them back, but mute must meet my doom.
My sisters, ye his daughters, ye have heard
The prayers of our stern father, if his curse
Should come to pass and ye some day return
To Thebes, O then disown me not, I pray,
But grant me burial and due funeral rites.
So shall the praise your filial care now wins
Be doubled for the service wrought for me.

ANTIGONE.
One boon, O Polyneices, let me crave.

POLYNEICES.
What would’st thou, sweet Antigone? Say on.

ANTIGONE.
Turn back thy host to Argos with all speed,
And ruin not thyself and Thebes as well.

POLYNEICES.
That cannot be. How could I lead again
An army that had seen their leader quail?

ANTIGONE.
But, brother, why shouldst thou be wroth again?
What profit from thy country's ruin comes?

POLYNEICES.
'Tis shame to live in exile, and shall I
The elder bear a younger brother's flouts?

ANTIGONE.
Wilt thou then bring to pass his prophecies
Who threatens mutual slaughter to you both?

POLYNEICES.
Aye, so he wishes:—but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE.
O woe is me! but say, will any dare,
Hearing his prophecy, to follow thee?

POLYNEICES.
I shall not tell it; a good general
Reports successes and conceals mishaps.

ANTIGONE.
Misguided youth, thy purpose then stands fast!

POLYNEICES.
'Tis so, and stay me not. The road I choose,
Dogged by my sire and his avenging spirit,
Leads me to ruin; but for you may Zeus
Make your path bright if ye fulfill my hest
When dead; in life ye cannot serve me more.
Now let me go, farewell, a long farewell!
Ye ne'er shall see my living face again.

ANTIGONE.
Ah me!

POLYNEICES.
Bewail me not.

ANTIGONE.
Who would not mourn
Thee, brother, hurrying to an open pit!

POLYNEICES.
If I must die, I must.

ANTIGONE.
Nay, hear me plead.

POLYNEICES.
It may not be; forbear.

ANTIGONE.
Then woe is me,
If I must lose thee.

POLYNEICES.
Nay, that rests with fate,
Whether I live or die; but for you both
I pray to heaven ye may escape all ill;
For ye are blameless in the eyes of all.
[Exit POLYNEICES]

CHORUS.
Ills on ills! no pause or rest!
Come they from our sightless guest?
Or haply now we see fulfilled
What fate long time hath willed?
For ne'er have I proved vain
Aught that the heavenly powers ordain.
Time with never sleeping eye
Watches what is writ on high,
Overthrowing now the great,
Raising now from low estate.
Hark! How the thunder rumbles! Zeus defend us!

OEDIPUS.
Children, my children! will no messenger
Go summon hither Theseus my best friend?

ANTIGONE.
And wherefore, father, dost thou summon him?

OEDIPUS.
This winged thunder of the god must bear me
Anon to Hades. Send and tarry not.

CHORUS.
Hark! with louder, nearer roar
The bolt of Zeus descends once more.

My spirit quails and cowers: my hair
Bristles for fear. Again that flare!
What doth the lightning-flash portend?
Ever it points to issues grave.
Dread powers of air! Save, Zeus, O save!

OEDIPUS.
Daughters, upon me the predestined end
Has come; no turning from it any more.

ANTIGONE.
How knowest thou? What sign convinces thee?

OEDIPUS.
I know full well. Let some one with all speed
Go summon hither the Athenian prince.

CHORUS.
Ha! once more the deafening sound
Peals yet louder all around
If thou darkenest our land,
Lightly, lightly lay thy hand;
Grace, not anger, let me win,
If upon a man of sin
I have looked with pitying eye,
Zeus, our king, to thee I cry!

OEDIPUS.
Is the prince coming? Will he when he comes
Find me yet living and my senses clear!

ANTIGONE.
What solemn charge would'st thou impress on him?

OEDIPUS.
For all his benefits I would perform
The promise made when I received them first.

CHORUS.
Hither haste, my son, arise,
Altar leave and sacrifice,
If haply to Poseidon now
In the far glade thou pay'st thy vow.
For our guest to thee would bring
And thy folk and offering,
Thy due guerdon. Haste, O King!
[Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS.
Wherefore again this general din? at once
My people call me and the stranger calls.
Is it a thunderbolt of Zeus or sleet
Of arrowy hail? a storm so fierce as this
Would warrant all surmises of mischance.

OEDIPUS.
Thou com'st much wished for, Prince, and sure some god
Hath bid good luck attend thee on thy way.

THESEUS.
What, son of Laius, hath chanced of new?

OEDIPUS.
My life hath turned the scale. I would do all
I promised thee and thine before I die.

THESEUS.
What sign assures thee that thine end is near?

OEDIPUS.
The gods themselves are heralds of my fate;
Of their appointed warnings nothing fails.

THESEUS.
How sayest thou they signify their will?

OEDIPUS.
This thunder, peal on peal, this lightning hurled
Flash upon flash, from the unconquered hand.

THESEUS.
I must believe thee, having found thee oft
A prophet true; then speak what must be done.

OEDIPUS.
O son of Aegeus, for this state will I
Unfold a treasure age cannot corrupt.
Myself anon without a guiding hand
Will take thee to the spot where I must end.
This secret ne'er reveal to mortal man,
Neither the spot nor whereabouts it lies,
So shall it ever serve thee for defense
Better than native shields and near allies.
But those dread mysteries speech may not profane

Thyself shalt gather coming there alone;
Since not to any of thy subjects, nor
To my own children, though I love them dearly,
Can I reveal what thou must guard alone,
And whisper to thy chosen heir alone,
So to be handed down from heir to heir.
Thus shalt thou hold this land inviolate
From the dread Dragon's brood. The justest State
By countless wanton neighbors may be wronged,
For the gods, though they tarry, mark for doom
The godless sinner in his mad career.
Far from thee, son of Aegeus, be such fate!
But to the spot—the god within me goads—
Let us set forth no longer hesitate.
Follow me, daughters, this way. Strange that I
Whom you have led so long should lead you now.
Oh, touch me not, but let me all alone
Find out the sepulcher that destiny
Appoints me in this land. Hither, this way,
For this way Hermes leads, the spirit guide,
And Persephassa, empress of the dead.
O light, no light to me, but mine erewhile,
Now the last time I feel thee palpable,
For I am drawing near the final gloom
Of Hades. Blessing on thee, dearest friend,
On thee and on thy land and followers!
Live prosperous and in your happy state
Still for your welfare think on me, the dead.
[Exit THESEUS followed by ANTIGONE and ISMENE]

CHORUS.

If mortal prayers are heard in hell,
Hear, Goddess dread, invisible!
Monarch of the regions drear,
Aidoneus, hear, O hear!
By a gentle, tearless doom
Speed this stranger to the gloom,
Let him enter without pain
The all-shrouding Stygian plain.
Wrongfully in life oppressed,
Be he now by Justice blessed.

Queen infernal, and thou fell
Watch-dog of the gates of hell,
Who, as legends tell, dost glare,
Gnarling in thy cavernous lair
At all comers, let him go
Scathless to the fields below.
For thy master orders thus,
The son of earth and Tartarus;
In his den the monster keep,
Giver of eternal sleep.
[Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER.
Friends, countrymen, my tidings are in sum
That Oedipus is gone, but the event
Was not so brief, nor can the tale be brief.

CHORUS.
What, has he gone, the unhappy man?

MESSENGER.
Know well
That he has passed away from life to death.

CHORUS.
How? By a god-sent, painless doom, poor soul?

MESSENGER.
Thy question hits the marvel of the tale.
How he moved hence, you saw him and must know;
Without a friend to lead the way, himself
Guiding us all. So having reached the abrupt
Earth-rooted Threshold with its brazen stairs,
He paused at one of the converging paths,
Hard by the rocky basin which records
The pact of Theseus and Peirithous.
Betwixt that rift and the Thorician rock,
The hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb,
Midway he sat and loosed his beggar's weeds;
Then calling to his daughters bade them fetch
Of running water, both to wash withal
And make libation; so they clomb the steep;
And in brief space brought what their father bade,
Then laved and dressed him with observance due.
But when he had his will in everything,
And no desire was left unsatisfied,
It thundered from the netherworld; the maids
Shivered, and crouching at their father's knees
Wept, beat their breast and uttered a long wail.
He, as he heard their sudden bitter cry,
Folded his arms about them both and said,
"My children, ye will lose your sire today,
For all of me has perished, and no more
Have ye to bear your long, long ministry;
A heavy load, I know, and yet one word
Wipes out all score of tribulations—love.
And love from me ye had—from no man more;
But now must live without me all your days."
So clinging to each other sobbed and wept
Father and daughters both, but when at last
Their mourning had an end and no wail rose,
A moment there was silence; suddenly
A voice that summoned him; with sudden dread
The hair of all stood up and all were 'mazed;

For the call came, now loud, now low, and oft.
"Oedipus, Oedipus, why tarry we?
Too long, too long thy passing is delayed."
But when he heard the summons of the god,
He prayed that Theseus might be brought, and when
The Prince came nearer: "O my friend," he cried,
"Pledge ye my daughters, giving thy right hand—
And, daughters, give him yours—and promise me
Thou never wilt forsake them, but do all
That time and friendship prompt in their behoof."
And he of his nobility repressed
His tears and swore to be their constant friend.
This promise given, Oedipus put forth
Blind hands and laid them on his children, saying,
"O children, prove your true nobility
And hence depart nor seek to witness sights
Unlawful or to hear unlawful words.
Nay, go with speed; let none but Theseus stay,
Our ruler, to behold what next shall hap."
So we all heard him speak, and weeping sore
We companied the maidens on their way.
After brief space we looked again, and lo
The man was gone, evanished from our eyes;
Only the king we saw with upraised hand
Shading his eyes as from some awful sight,
That no man might endure to look upon.
A moment later, and we saw him bend
In prayer to Earth and prayer to Heaven at once.
But by what doom the stranger met his end
No man save Theseus knoweth. For there fell
No fiery bold that reft him in that hour,
Nor whirlwind from the sea, but he was taken.
It was a messenger from heaven, or else
Some gentle, painless cleaving of earth's base;
For without wailing or disease or pain
He passed away—and end most marvelous.
And if to some my tale seems foolishness
I am content that such could count me fool.

CHORUS.
Where are the maids and their attendant friends?

MESSENGER.
They cannot be far off; the approaching sound
Of lamentation tells they come this way.
[Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENE]

ANTIGONE.
Woe, woe! on this sad day
    We sisters of one blasted stock
    must bow beneath the shock,
Must weep and weep the curse that lay
    On him our sire, for whom

In life, a life-long world of care
'Twas ours to bear,
In death must face the gloom
That wraps his tomb.
What tongue can tell
That sight ineffable?

CHORUS.
What mean ye, maidens?

ANTIGONE.
All is but surmise.

CHORUS.
Is he then gone?

ANTIGONE.
Gone as ye most might wish.
Not in battle or sea storm,
But reft from sight,
By hands invisible borne
To viewless fields of night.
Ah me! on us too night has come,
The night of mourning. Wither roam
O'er land or sea in our distress
Eating the bread of bitterness?

ISMENE.
I know not. O that Death
Might nip my breath,
And let me share my aged father's fate.
I cannot live a life thus desolate.

CHORUS.
Best of daughters, worthy pair,
What heaven brings ye needs must bear,
Fret no more 'gainst Heaven's will;
Fate hath dealt with you not ill.

ANTIGONE.
Love can turn past pain to bliss,
What seemed bitter now is sweet.
Ah me! that happy toil is sweet.
The guidance of those dear blind feet.
Dear father, wrapt for aye in nether gloom,
E'en in the tomb
Never shalt thou lack of love repine,
Her love and mine.

CHORUS.
His fate—

ANTIGONE.
Is even as he planned.

CHORUS.
How so?

ANTIGONE.
He died, so willed he, in a foreign land.
Lapped in kind earth he sleeps his long last sleep,
And o'er his grave friends weep.
How great our lost these streaming eyes can tell,
This sorrow naught can quell.
Thou hadst thy wish 'mid strangers thus to die,
But I, ah me, not by.

ISMENE.
Alas, my sister, what new fate
Befalls us orphans desolate?

ANTIGONE.
His end was blessed; therefore, sister, stay
Your sorrow. Man is born to fate a prey.

ANTIGONE.
Sister, let us back again.

ISMENE.
Why return?

ANTIGONE.
My soul is fain—

ISMENE.
Is fain?

ANTIGONE.
To see the earthy bed.

ISMENE.
Sayest thou?

ANTIGONE.
Where our sire is laid.

ISMENE.
Nay, thou can'st not, dost not see—

ANTIGONE.
Sister, wherefore wroth with me?

ISMENE.
Know'st not—beside—

ANTIGONE.
More must I hear?

ISMENE.
Tombless he died, none near.

ANTIGONE.
Lead me thither; slay me there.

ISMENE.
How shall I unhappy fare,
Friendless, helpless, how drag on
A life of misery alone?

CHORUS.
Fear not, maids—

ANTIGONE.
Ah, whither flee?

CHORUS.
Refuge hath been found.

ANTIGONE.
For me?

CHORUS.
Where thou shalt be safe from harm.

ANTIGONE.
I know it.

CHORUS.
Why then this alarm?

ANTIGONE.
How again to get us home
I know not.

CHORUS.
Why then this roam?

ANTIGONE.
Troubles whelm us—

CHORUS.
As of yore.

ANTIGONE.
Worse than what was worse before.

CHORUS.
Sure ye are driven on the breakers' surge.

ANTIGONE.
Alas! we are.

CHORUS.
Alas! 'tis so.

ANTIGONE.
Ah whither turn, O Zeus? No ray
Of hope to cheer the way
Whereon the fates our desperate voyage urge.
[Enter THESEUS]

THESEUS.
Dry your tears; when grace is shed
On the quick and on the dead
By dark Powers beneficent,
Over-grief they would resent.

ANTIGONE.
Aegeus' child, to thee we pray.

THESEUS.
What the boon, my children, say.

ANTIGONE.
With our own eyes we fain would see
Our father's tomb.

THESEUS.
That may not be.

ANTIGONE.
What say'st thou, King?

THESEUS.
My children, he
Charged me straitly that no mortal
Should approach the sacred portal,
Or greet with funeral litanies
The hidden tomb wherein he lies;
Saying, "If thou keep'st my hest
Thou shalt hold thy realm at rest."
The God of Oaths this promise heard,
And to Zeus I pledged my word.

ANTIGONE.
Well, if he would have it so,
We must yield. Then let us go
Back to Thebes, if yet we may
Heal this mortal feud and stay
The self-wrought doom
That drives our brothers to their tomb.

THESEUS.
Go in peace; nor will I spare
Ought of toil and zealous care,
But on all your needs attend,
Gladdening in his grave my friend.

[Lights go down, save for a spotlight on ANTIGONE, standing taller and prouder than we have seen her before, holding ISMENE's hand, who seems so much smaller in comparison]

ANTIGONE. [to ISMENE]
Wail no more, let sorrow rest,
All is ordered for the best.

Text of *Antigone*

ANTIGONE

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTIGONE and ISMENE—daughters of Oedipus and sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles.
CREON, King of Thebes.
HAEMON, Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.
EURYDICE, wife of Creon.
TEIRESIAS, the prophet.
CHORUS, of Theban elders.
A WATCHMAN
A MESSENGER
A SECOND MESSENGER

Red Text – Cut lines
Green Text – Additional lines/stage directions
Blue Text – Reassigned lines

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE and ISMENE before the Palace gates.

ANTIGONE.
Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,
See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill
The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes!
For what of pain, affliction, outrage, shame,
Is lacking in our fortunes, thine and mine?
And now this proclamation of today
Made by our Captain-General to the State,
What can its purport be? Didst hear and heed,
Or art thou deaf when friends are banned as foes?

ISMENE.
To me, Antigone, no word of friends
Has come, or glad or grievous, since we twain
Were reft of our two brethren in one day
By double fratricide; and since i' the night
Our Argive leaguers fled, no later news
Has reached me, to inspirit or deject.

ANTIGONE.
I know 'twas so, and therefore summoned thee
Beyond the gates to breathe it in thine ear.

ISMENE.
What is it? Some dark secret stirs thy breast.

ANTIGONE.
What but the thought of our two brothers dead,
The one by Creon graced with funeral rites,
The other disappointed? Eteocles
He hath consigned to earth (as fame reports)
With obsequies that use and wont ordain,
So gracing him among the dead below.
But Polyneices, a dishonored corpse,
(So by report the royal edict runs)
No man may bury him or make lament—
Must leave him tombless and unwept, a feast
For kites to scent afar and swoop upon.
Such is the edict (if report speak true)
Of Creon, our most noble Creon, aimed
At thee and me, aye me too; and anon
He will be here to promulgate, for such

As have not heard, his mandate; 'tis in sooth
No passing humor, for the edict says
Whoe'er transgresses shall be stoned to death.
So stands it with us; now 'tis thine to show
If thou art worthy of thy blood or base.

ISMENE.
But how, my rash, fond sister, in such case
Can I do anything to make or mar?

ANTIGONE.
Say, wilt thou aid me and abet? Decide.

ISMENE.
In what bold venture? What is in thy thought?

ANTIGONE.
Lend me a hand to bear the corpse away.

ISMENE.
What, bury him despite the interdict?

ANTIGONE.
My brother, and, though thou deny him, thine
No man shall say that I betrayed a brother.

ISMENE.
Wilt thou persist, though Creon has forbid?

ANTIGONE.
What right has he to keep me from my own?

ISMENE.
Bethink thee, sister, of our father's fate,
Abhorred, dishonored, self-convinced of sin,
Blinded, himself his executioner.
Think of his mother-wife (ill sorted names)
Done by a noose herself had twined to death
And last, our hapless brethren in one day,
Both in a mutual destiny involved,
Self-slaughtered, both the slayer and the slain.
Bethink thee, sister, we are left alone;
Shall we not perish wretchedest of all,
If in defiance of the law we cross
A monarch's will?—weak women, think of that,
Not framed by nature to contend with men.
Remember this too that the stronger rules;

We must obey his orders, these or worse.
Therefore I plead compulsion and entreat
The dead to pardon. I perforce obey
The powers that be. 'Tis foolishness, I ween,
To overstep in aught the golden mean.

ANTIGONE.
I urge no more; nay, wert thou willing still,
I would not welcome such a fellowship.
Go thine way; I myself will bury him.
How sweet to die in such employ, to rest, —
Sister and brother linked in love's embrace—
A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,
But by the dead commended; and with them
I shall abide forever. As for thee,
Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

ISMENE.
I scorn them not, but to defy the State
Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

ANTIGONE.
A specious pretext. I will go alone
To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

ISMENE.
My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE.
O waste no fears on me; look to thyself.

ISMENE.
At least let no man know of thine intent,
But keep it close and secret, as will I.

ANTIGONE.
O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more
If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

ISMENE.
Thou hast a fiery soul for numbing work.

ANTIGONE.
I pleasure those whom I would liefest please.

ISMENE.

If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE.
When strength shall fail me, yes, but not before.

ISMENE.
But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

ANTIGONE.
Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,
And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.
Say I am mad and give my madness rein
To wreck itself; the worst that can befall
Is but to die an honorable death.

ISMENE.
Have thine own way then; 'tis a mad endeavor,
Yet to thy lovers thou art dear as ever.

[Exit Ismene, Antigone remains]

CHORUS.

Swirling around Antigone as she stands stoically, the following passage should be accusatory towards her

Sunbeam, of all that ever dawn upon
Our seven-gated Thebes the brightest ray,
O eye of golden day,
How fair thy light o'er Dirce's fountain shone,
Speeding upon their headlong homeward course,
Far quicker than they came, the Argive force;
Putting to flight
The argent shields, the host with scutcheons white.
Against our land the proud invader came
To vindicate fell Polyneices' claim.
Like to an eagle swooping low,
On pinions white as new fall'n snow.
With clanging scream, a horsetail plume his crest,
The aspiring lord of Argos onward pressed.

Hovering around our city walls he waits,
His spearmen raven at our seven gates.
But ere a torch our crown of towers could burn,
Ere they had tasted of our blood, they turn
Forced by the Dragon; in their rear
The din of Ares panic-struck they hear.
For Zeus who hates the braggart's boast
Beheld that gold-bespangled host;
As at the goal the paean they upraise,
He struck them with his forked lightning blaze.

To earthy from earth rebounding, down he crashed;
The fire-brand from his impious hand was dashed,
As like a Bacchic reveler on he came,
Outbreathing hate and flame,
And tottered. Elsewhere in the field,
Here, there, great Area like a war-horse wheeled;
Beneath his car down thrust
Our foemen bit the dust.

ANTIGONE.
Seven captains at our seven gates
Thundered; for each a champion waits,
Each left behind his armor bright,
Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;
Save two alone, that ill-starred pair
One mother to one father bare,
Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other
Drave, and both perished, brother slain by brother.

Extended Pause

CHORUS. (*With great joy to mock Antigone)*
Now Victory to Thebes returns again
And smiles upon her chariot-circled plain.
Now let feast and festal should
Memories of war blot out.
Let us to the temples throng,
Dance and sing the live night long.
God of Thebes, lead thou the round.
Bacchus, shaker of the ground!
Let us end our revels here;
Lo! Creon our new lord draws near,
Crowned by this strange chance, our king.
What, I marvel, pondering?
Why this summons? Wherefore call
Us, his elders, one and all,
Bidding us with him debate,
On some grave concern of State?

[Exit ANTIGONE to the upper platform, almost melting into the shadows]

[Enter CREON]

CREON.
Elders, the gods have righted one again
Our storm-tossed ship of state, now safe in port.
But you by special summons I convened
As my most trusted councilors; first, because
I knew you loyal to Laius of old;
Again, when Oedipus restored our State,
Both while he ruled and when his rule was o'er,
Ye still were constant to the royal line.
Now that his two sons perished in one day,
Brother by brother murderously slain,

By right of kinship to the Princes dead,
I claim and hold the throne and sovereignty.
Yet 'tis no easy matter to discern
The temper of a man, his mind and will,
Till he be proved by exercise of power;
And in my case, if one who reigns supreme
Swerve from the highest policy, tongue-tied
By fear of consequence, that man I hold,
And ever held, the basest of the base.
And I condemn the man who sets his friend
Before his country. For myself, I call
To witness Zeus, whose eyes are everywhere,
If I perceive some mischievous design
To sap the State, I will not hold my tongue;
Nor would I reckon as my private friend
A public foe, well knowing that the State
Is the good ship that holds our fortunes all:
Farewell to friendship, if she suffers wreck.
Such is the policy by which I seek
To serve the Commons and conformably
I have proclaimed an edict as concerns
The sons of Oedipus; Eteocles
Who in his country's battle fought and fell,
The foremost champion—duly bury him
With all observances and ceremonies
That are the guerdon of the heroic dead.
But for the miscreant exile who returned
Minded in flames and ashes to blot out
His father's city and his father's gods,
And glut his vengeance with his kinsmen's blood,
Or drag them captive at his chariot wheels—
For Polyneices 'tis ordained that none
Shall give him burial or make mourn for him,
But leave his corpse unburied, to be meat
For dogs and carrion crows, a ghastly sight.
So am I purposed; never by my will
Shall miscreants take precedence of true men,
But all good patriots, alive or dead,
Shall be by me preferred and honored.

CHORUS.
Son of Menoeceus, thus thou will'st to deal
With him who loathed and him who loved our State.
Thy word is law; thou canst dispose of us
The living, as thou will'st, as of the dead.

CREON.
See then ye execute what I ordain.

CHORUS.
On younger shoulders lay this grievous charge.

CREON.
Fear not, I've posted guards to watch the corpse.

CHORUS.
What further duty would'st thou lay on us?

CREON.
Not to connive at disobedience.

CHORUS.
No man is mad enough to court his death.

CREON.
The penalty _is_ death: yet hope of gain
Hath lured men to their ruin oftentimes.
[Enter GUARD]

GUARD.
My lord, I will not make pretense to pant
And puff as some light-footed messenger.
In sooth my soul beneath its pack of thought
Made many a halt and turned and turned again;
For conscience plied her spur and curb by turns.
"Why hurry headlong to thy fate, poor fool?"
She whispered. Then again, "If Creon learn
This from another, thou wilt rue it worse."
Thus leisurely I hastened on my road;
Much thought extends a furlong to a league.
But in the end the forward voice prevailed,
To face thee. I will speak though I say nothing.
For plucking courage from despair methought,
'Let the worst hap, thou canst but meet thy fate.'

CREON.
What is thy news? Why this despondency?

GUARD.
Let me premise a word about myself?
I neither did the deed nor saw it done,
Nor were it just that I should come to harm.

CREON.
Thou art good at parry, and canst fence about
Some matter of grave import, as is plain.

GUARD.
The bearer of dread tidings needs must quake.

CREON.
Then, sirrah, shoot thy bolt and get thee gone.

GUARD.
Well, it must out; the corpse is buried; someone
E'en now besprinkled it with thirsty dust,
Performed the proper ritual—and was gone.

CREON.
What say'st thou? Who hath dared to do this thing?

GUARD.
I cannot tell, for there was ne'er a trace
Of pick or mattock—hard unbroken ground,
Without a scratch or rut of chariot wheels,
No sign that human hands had been at work.
When the first sentry of the morning watch
Gave the alarm, we all were terror-stricken.
The corpse had vanished, not interred in earth,
But strewn with dust, as if by one who sought
To avert the curse that haunts the unburied dead:
Of hound or ravening jackal, not a sign.
Thereat arose an angry war of words;
Guard railed at guard and blows were like to end it,
For none was there to part us, each in turn
Suspected, but the guilt brought home to none,
From lack of evidence. We challenged each
The ordeal, or to handle red-hot iron,
Or pass-through fire, affirming on our oath
Our innocence—we neither did the deed
Ourselves, nor know who did or compassed it.
Our quest was at a standstill, when one spake
And bowed us all to earth like quivering reeds,
For there was no gainsaying him nor way
To escape perdition: Ye are bound to tell
The King, ye cannot hide it; so he spake.
And he convinced us all; so lots were cast,
And I, unlucky scapegoat, drew the prize.
So here I am unwilling and withal
Unwelcome; no man cares to hear ill news.

CHORUS.
I had misgivings from the first, my liege,
Of something more than natural at work.

CREON.
O cease, you vex me with your babblement;
I am like to think you dote in your old age.
Is it not arrant folly to pretend

That gods would have a thought for this dead man?
Did they forsooth award him special grace,
And as some benefactor bury him,
Who came to fire their hallowed sanctuaries,
To sack their shrines, to desolate their land,
And scout their ordinances? Or perchance
The gods bestow their favors on the bad.
No! no! I have long noted malcontents
Who wagged their heads, and kicked against the yoke,
Misliking these my orders, and my rule.
'Tis they, I warrant, who suborned my guards
By bribes. Of evils current upon earth
The worst is money. Money 'tis that sacks
Cities, and drives men forth from hearth and home;
Warps and seduces native innocence,
And breeds a habit of dishonesty.
But they who sold themselves shall find their greed
Out-shot the mark and rue it soon or late.
Yea, as I still revere the dread of Zeus,
By Zeus I swear, except ye find and bring
Before my presence here the very man
Who carried out this lawless burial,
Death for your punishment shall not suffice.
Hanged on a cross, alive ye first shall make
Confession of this outrage. This will teach you
What practices are like to serve your turn.
There are some villainies that bring no gain.
For by dishonesty the few may thrive,
The many come to ruin and disgrace.

GUARD.
May I not speak, or must I turn and go
Without a word? —

CREON.
Begone! canst thou not see
That e'en this question irks me?

GUARD.
Where, my lord?
Is it thy ears that suffer, or thy heart?

CREON.
Why seek to probe and find the seat of pain?

GUARD.
I gall thine ears—this miscreant thy mind.

CREON.
What an inveterate babbler! get thee gone!

GUARD.
Babbler perchance, but innocent of the crime.

CREON.
Twice guilty, having sold thy soul for gain.

GUARD.
Alas! how sad when reasoners reason wrong.

CREON.
Go, quibble with thy reason. If thou fail'st
To find these malefactors, thou shalt own
The wages of ill-gotten gains is death.
[Exit CREON]

GUARD.
I pray he may be found. But caught or not
(And fortune must determine that) thou never
Shalt see me here returning; that is sure.
For past all hope or thought I have escaped,
And for my safety owe the gods much thanks.

ANTIGONE reenters

CHORUS.
Many wonders there be, but naught more wondrous than man;
Over the surging sea, with a whitening south wind wan,
Through the foam of the firth, man makes his perilous way;
And the eldest of deities Earth that knows not toil nor decay
Ever he furrows and scores, as his team, year in year out,
With breed of the yoked horse, the ploughshare turneth about.

ANTIGONE
The light-witted birds of the air, the beasts of the weald and the wood
He traps with his woven snare, and the brood of the briny flood.
Master of cunning he: the savage bull, and the hart
Who roams the mountain free, are tamed by his infinite art;
And the shaggy rough-maned steed is broken to bear the bit.

Speech and the wind-swift speed of counsel and civic wit,
He hath learnt for himself all these; and the arrowy rain to fly
And the nipping airs that freeze, 'neath the open winter sky.
He hath provision for all: fell plague he hath learnt to endure;
Safe whate'er may befall: yet for death he hath found no cure.

CHORUS
Passing the wildest flight thought are the cunning and skill,
That guide man now to the light, but now to counsels of ill.
If he honors the laws of the land, and reveres the Gods of the State
Proudly his city shall stand; but a cityless outcast I rate

Whoso bold in his pride from the path of right doth depart;
Ne'er may I sit by his side, or share the thoughts of his heart.

What strange vision meets my eyes,
Fills me with a wild surprise?
Sure I know her, sure 'tis she,
The maid Antigone.
Hapless child of hapless sire,
Didst thou recklessly conspire,
Madly brave the King's decree?
Therefore are they haling thee?

[Enter GUARD, who grabs ANTIGONE by the hair]

GUARD.
Here is the culprit taken in the act
Of giving burial. But where's the King?

CHORUS.
There from the palace he returns in time.
[Enter CREON]

CREON.
Why is my presence timely? What has chanced?

GUARD.
No man, my lord, should make a vow, for if
He ever swears he will not do a thing,
His afterthoughts belie his first resolve.
When from the hailstorm of thy threats I fled
I sware thou wouldst not see me here again;
But the wild rapture of a glad surprise
Intoxicates, and so I'm here forsworn.
And here's my prisoner, caught in the very act,
Decking the grave. No lottery this time;
This prize is mine by right of treasure-trove.
So take her, judge her, rack her, if thou wilt.
She's thine, my liege; but I may rightly claim
Hence to depart well quit of all these ills.

CREON.
Say, how didst thou arrest the maid, and where?

GUARD.
Burying the man. There's nothing more to tell.

CREON.
Hast thou thy wits? Or know'st thou what thou say'st?

GUARD.
I saw this woman burying the corpse
Against thy orders. Is that clear and plain?

CREON.
But how was she surprised and caught in the act?

GUARD.
It happened thus. No sooner had we come,
Driven from thy presence by those awful threats,
Than straight we swept away all trace of dust,
And bared the clammy body. Then we sat
High on the ridge to windward of the stench,
While each man kept he fellow alert and rated
Roundly the sluggard if he chanced to nap.
So all night long we watched, until the sun
Stood high in heaven, and his blazing beams
Smote us. A sudden whirlwind then upraised
A cloud of dust that blotted out the sky,
And swept the plain, and stripped the woodlands bare,
And shook the firmament. We closed our eyes
And waited till the heaven-sent plague should pass.
At last it ceased, and lo! there stood this maid.
A piercing cry she uttered, sad and shrill,
As when the mother bird beholds her nest
Robbed of its nestlings; even so the maid
Wailed as she saw the body stripped and bare,
And cursed the ruffians who had done this deed.
Anon she gathered handfuls of dry dust,
Then, holding high a well-wrought brazen urn,
Thrice on the dead she poured a lustral stream.
We at the sight swooped down on her and seized
Our quarry. Undismayed she stood, and when
We taxed her with the former crime and this,
She disowned nothing. I was glad—and grieved;
For ’tis most sweet to ’scape oneself scot-free,
And yet to bring disaster to a friend
Is grievous. Take it all in all, I deem
A man’s first duty is to serve himself.

CREON.
Speak, girl, with head bent low and downcast eyes,
Does thou plead guilty or deny the deed?

ANTIGONE.
Guilty. I did it, I deny it not.

CREON (to GUARD)

Sirrah, begone whither thou wilt, and thank
Thy luck that thou hast 'scaped a heavy charge.

(To ANTIGONE)
Now answer this plain question, yes or no,
Wast thou acquainted with the interdict?

ANTIGONE.
I knew, all knew; how should I fail to know?

CREON.
And yet wert bold enough to break the law?

ANTIGONE.
Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,
And she who sits enthroned with gods below,
Justice, enacted not these human laws.
Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,
Could'st by a breath annul and override
The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.
They were not born today nor yesterday;
They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.
I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,
To disobey these laws and so provoke
The wrath of Heaven. I knew that I must die,
E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death
Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.
For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,
Is full of misery. Thus my lot appears
Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured
To leave my mother's son unburied there,
I should have grieved with reason, but not now.
And if in this thou judgest me a fool,
Methinks the judge of folly's not acquit.

CHORUS.
A stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire,
This ill-starred maiden kicks against the pricks.

CREON.
Well, let her know the stubbornest of wills
Are soonest bended, as the hardest iron,
O'er-heated in the fire to brittleness,
Flies soonest into fragments, shivered through.
A snaffle curbs the fieriest steed, and he
Who in subjection lives must needs be meek.
But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled,
First overstepped the established law, and then—
A second and worse act of insolence—
She boasts and glories in her wickedness.

Now if she thus can flout authority
Unpunished, I am woman, she the man.
But though she be my sister's child or nearer
Of kin than all who worship at my hearth,
Nor she nor yet her sister shall escape
The utmost penalty, for both I hold,
As arch-conspirators, of equal guilt.
Bring forth the older; even now I saw her
Within the palace, frenzied and distraught.
The workings of the mind discover oft
Dark deeds in darkness schemed, before the act.
More hateful still the miscreant who seeks
When caught, to make a virtue of a crime.

ANTIGONE.
Would'st thou do more than slay thy prisoner?

CREON.
Not I, thy life is mine, and that's enough.

ANTIGONE.
Why dally then? To me no word of thine
Is pleasant: God forbid it e'er should please;
Nor am I more acceptable to thee.
And yet how otherwise had I achieved
A name so glorious as by burying
A brother? so my townsmen all would say,
Where they not gagged by terror, Manifold
A king's prerogatives, and not the least
That all his acts and all his words are law.

CREON.
Of all these Thebans none so deems but thou.

ANTIGONE.
These think as I, but bate their breath to thee.

CREON.
Hast thou no shame to differ from all these?

ANTIGONE.
To reverence kith and kin can bring no shame.

CREON.
Was his dead foeman not thy kinsman too?

ANTIGONE.

One mother bare them and the self-same sire.

CREON.
Why cast a slur on one by honoring one?

ANTIGONE.
The dead man will not bear thee out in this.

CREON.
Surely, if good and evil fare alive.

ANTIGONE.
The slain man was no villain but a brother.

CREON.
The patriot perished by the outlaw's brand.

ANTIGONE.
Nathless the realms below these rites require.

CREON.
Not that the base should fare as do the brave.

ANTIGONE.
Who knows if this world's crimes are virtues there?

CREON.
Not even death can make a foe a friend.

ANTIGONE.
My nature is for mutual love, not hate.

CREON.
Die then, and love the dead if thou must;
No woman shall be the master while I live.
[Enter ISMENE]

CHORUS.
Lo from out the palace gate,
Weeping o'er her sister's fate,
Comes Ismene; see her brow,
Once serene, beclouded now,
See her beauteous face o'erspread

With a flush of angry red.

CREON. [with a sense of hurt and betrayal, not trying to be cruel]
Woman, who like a viper unperceived
Didst harbor in my house and drain my blood,
Two plagues I nurtured blindly, so it proved,
To sap my throne. Say, didst thou too abet
This crime, or dost abjure all privity?

ISMENE.
I did the deed, if she will have it so,
And with my sister claim to share the guilt.

ANTIGONE.
That were unjust. Thou would'st not act with me
At first, and I refused thy partnership.

ISMENE.
But now thy bark is stranded, I am bold
To claim my share as partner in the loss.

ANTIGONE.
Who did the deed the under-world knows well:
A friend in word is never friend of mine.

ISMENE.
O sister, scorn me not, let me but share
Thy work of piety, and with thee die.

ANTIGONE.
Claim not a work in which thou hadst no hand;
One death sufficeth. Wherefore should'st thou die?

ISMENE.
What would life profit me bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE.
Ask Creon, he's thy kinsman and best friend.

ISMENE.
Why taunt me? Find'st thou pleasure in these gibes?

ANTIGONE.
'Tis a sad mockery, if indeed I mock.

ISMENE.
O say if I can help thee even now.

ANTIGONE.
No, save thyself; I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE.
Is e'en this boon denied, to share thy lot?

ANTIGONE.
Yea, for thou chosed'st life, and I to die.

ISMENE.
Thou canst not say that I did not protest.

ANTIGONE.
Well, some approved thy wisdom, others mine.

ISMENE.
But now we stand convicted, both alike.

ANTIGONE.
Fear not; thou livest, I died long ago
Then when I gave my life to save the dead.

CREON.
Both maids, methinks, are crazed. One suddenly
Has lost her wits, the other was born mad.

ISMENE.
Yea, so it falls, sire, when misfortune comes,
The wisest even lose their mother wit.

CREON.
I' faith thy wit forsook thee when thou mad'st
Thy choice with evil-doers to do ill.

ISMENE.
What life for me without my sister here?

CREON.
Say not thy sister here: thy sister's dead.

ISMENE.
What, wilt thou slay thy own son's plighted bride?

CREON.
Aye, let him raise him seed from other fields.

ISMENE.
No new espousal can be like the old.

CREON.
A plague on trulls who court and woo our sons.

ANTIGONE.
O Haemon, how thy sire dishonors thee!

CREON.
A plague on thee and thy accursed bride!

ANTIGONE
What, wilt thou rob thine own son of his bride?

CREON.
'Tis death that bars this marriage, not his sire.

ANTIGONE
So my death-warrant, it would seem, is sealed.

CREON.
By you, as first by me; off with them, guards,
And keep them close. Henceforward let them learn
To live as women use, not roam at large.
For e'en the bravest spirits run away
When they perceive death pressing on life's heels.

ISMENE is escorted offstage while ANTIGONE is escorted to a raised platform above the stage, looking down at the events transpiring. The CHORUS should be the only people onstage to know of her presence

CHORUS.
Thrice blest are they who never tasted pain!
    If once the curse of Heaven attaint a race,
    The infection lingers on and speeds apace,
Age after age, and each the cup must drain.

So when Etesian blasts from Thrace downpour
    Sweep o'er the blackening main and whirl to land

From Ocean's cavernous depths his ooze and sand,
Billow on billow thunders on the shore.

ANTIGONE
On the Labdacidae I see descending
Woe upon woe; from days of old some god
Laid on the race a malison, and his rod
Scourges each age with sorrows never ending.

The light that dawned upon its last born son
Is vanished, and the bloody axe of Fate
Has felled the goodly tree that blossomed late.
O Oedipus, by reckless pride undone!

CHORUS
Thy might, O Zeus, what mortal power can quell?
Not sleep that lays all else beneath its spell,
Nor moons that never tire: untouched by Time,
Throned in the dazzling light
That crowns Olympus' height,
Thou reignest King, omnipotent, sublime.

Past, present, and to be,
All bow to thy decree,
All that exceeds the mean by Fate
Is punished, Love or Hate.

Hope flits about never-wearying wings;
Profit to some, to some light loves she brings,
But no man knoweth how her gifts may turn,
Till 'neath his feet the treacherous ashes burn.
Sure 'twas a sage inspired that spake this word;
If evil good appear
To any, Fate is near;
And brief the respite from her flaming sword.

Hither comes in angry mood
Haemon, latest of thy brood;
Is it for his bride he's grieved,
Or her marriage-bed deceived,
Doth he make his mourn for thee,
Maid forlorn, Antigone?

[Enter HAEMON]

CREON.
Soon shall we know, better than seer can tell.
Learning may fixed decree anent thy bride,
Thou mean'st not, son, to rave against thy sire?
Know'st not whate'er we do is done in love?

HAEMON.
O father, I am thine, and I will take

Thy wisdom as the helm to steer withal.
Therefore no wedlock shall by me be held
More precious than thy loving goverance.

CREON.
Well spoken: so right-minded sons should feel,
In all deferring to a father's will.
For 'tis the hope of parents they may rear
A brood of sons submissive, keen to avenge
Their father's wrongs, and count his friends their own.
But who begets unprofitable sons,
He verily breeds trouble for himself,
And for his foes much laughter. Son, be warned
And let no woman fool away thy wits.
Ill fares the husband mated with a shrew,
And her embraces very soon wax cold.
For what can wound so surely to the quick
As a false friend? So spue and cast her off,
Bid her go find a husband with the dead.
For since I caught her openly rebelling,
Of all my subjects the one malcontent,
I will not prove a traitor to the State.
She surely dies. Go, let her, if she will,
Appeal to Zeus the God of Kindred, for
If thus I nurse rebellion in my house,
Shall not I foster mutiny without?
For whoso rules his household worthily,
Will prove in civic matters no less wise.
But he who overbears the laws, or thinks
To overrule his rulers, such as one
I never will allow. Whome'er the State
Appoints must be obeyed in everything,
But small and great, just and unjust alike.
I warrant such a one in either case
Would shine, as King or subject; such a man
Would in the storm of battle stand his ground,
A comrade leal and true; but Anarchy—
What evils are not wrought by Anarchy!
She ruins States, and overthrows the home,
She dissipates and routs the embattled host;
While discipline preserves the ordered ranks.
Therefore we must maintain authority
And yield to title to a woman's will.
Better, if needs be, men should cast us out
Than hear it said, a woman proved his match.

CHORUS.
To me, unless old age have dulled wits,
Thy words appear both reasonable and wise.

HAEMON.
Father, the gods implant in mortal men
Reason, the choicest gift bestowed by heaven.

’Tis not for me to say thou errest, nor
Would I arraign thy wisdom, if I could;
And yet wise thoughts may come to other men
And, as thy son, it falls to me to mark
The acts, the words, the comments of the crowd.
The commons stand in terror of thy frown,
And dare not utter aught that might offend,
But I can overhear their muttered plaints,
Know how the people mourn this maiden doomed
For noblest deeds to die the worst of deaths.
When her own brother slain in battle lay
Unsepulchered, she suffered not his corpse
To lie for carrion birds and dogs to maul:
Should not her name (they cry) be writ in gold?
Such the low murmurings that reach my ear.
O father, nothing is by me more prized
Than thy well-being, for what higher good
Can children covet than their sire’s fair fame,
As fathers too take pride in glorious sons?
Therefore, my father, cling not to one mood,
And deemed not thou art right, all others wrong.
For whoso thinks that wisdom dwells with him,
That he alone can speak or think aright,
Such oracles are empty breath when tried.
The wisest man will let himself be swayed
By others’ wisdom and relax in time.
See how the trees beside a stream in flood
Save, if they yield to force, each spray unharmed,
But by resisting perish root and branch.
The mariner who keeps his mainsheet taut,
And will not slacken in the gale, is like
To sail with thwarts reversed, keel uppermost.
Relent then and repent thee of thy wrath;
For, if one young in years may claim some sense,
I’ll say ’tis best of all to be endowed
With absolute wisdom; but, if that’s denied,
(And nature takes not readily that ply)
Next wise is he who lists to sage advice.

CHORUS.
If he says aught in season, heed him, King.
(To HAEMON)
Heed thou thy sire too; both have spoken well.

CREON.
What, would you have us at our age be schooled,
Lessoned in prudence by a beardless boy?

HAEMON.
I plead for justice, father, nothing more.
Weigh me upon my merit, not my years.

CREON.
Strange merit this to sanction lawlessness!

HAEMON.
For evil-doers I would urge no plea.

CREON.
Is not this maid an arrant law-breaker?

HAEMON.
The Theban commons with one voice say, No.

CREON.
What, shall the mob dictate my policy?

HAEMON.
'Tis thou, methinks, who speakest like a boy.

CREON.
Am I to rule for others, or myself?

HAEMON.
A State for one man is no State at all.

CREON.
The State is his who rules it, so 'tis held.

HAEMON.
As monarch of a desert thou wouldst shine.

CREON.
This boy, methinks, maintains the woman's cause.

HAEMON.
If thou be'st woman, yes. My thought's for thee.

CREON.
O reprobate, would'st wrangle with thy sire?

HAEMON.
Because I see thee wrongfully perverse.

CREON.
And am I wrong, if I maintain my rights?

HAEMON.
Talk not of rights; thou spurn'st the due of Heaven

CREON.
O heart corrupt, a woman's minion thou!

HAEMON.
Slave to dishonor thou wilt never find me.

CREON.
Thy speech at least was all a plea for her.

HAEMON.
And thee and me, and for the gods below.

CREON.
Living the maid shall never be thy bride.

HAEMON.
So she shall die, but one will die with her.

CREON.
Hast come to such a pass as threaten me?

HAEMON.
What threat is this, vain counsels to reprove?

CREON.
Vain fool to instruct thy betters; thou shall rue it.

HAEMON.
Wert not my father, I had said thou err'st.

CREON.
Play not the spaniel, thou a woman's slave.

HAEMON.
When thou dost speak, must no man make reply?

CREON.
This passes bounds. By heaven, thou shalt not rate
And jeer and flout me with impunity.
Off with the hateful thing that she may die
At once, beside her bridegroom, in his sight.

HAEMON.
Think not that in my sight the maid shall die,
Or by my side; never shalt thou again
Behold my face hereafter. Go, consort
With friends who like a madman for their mate.
[Exit HAEMON]

CHORUS.
Thy son has gone, my liege, in angry haste.
Fell is the wrath of youth beneath a smart.

CREON.
Let him go vent his fury like a fiend:
These sisters twain he shall not save from death.

CHORUS.
Surely, thou meanest not to slay them both?

CREON.
I stand corrected; only her who touched
The body.

CHORUS.
And what death is she to die?

CREON.
She shall be taken to some desert place
By man untrod, and in a rock-hewn cave,
With food no more than to avoid the taint
That homicide might bring on all the State,
Buried alive. There let her call in aid
The King of Death, the one god she reveres,
Or learn too late a lesson learnt at last:
'Tis labor lost, to reverence the dead.

CHORUS.
Love resistless in fight, all yield at a glance of thine eye,
Love who pillowed all night on a maiden's cheek dost lie,
Over the upland holds. Shall mortals not yield to thee?

Mad are thy subjects all, and even the wisest heart
Straight to folly will fall, at a touch of thy poisoned dart.

Thou didst kindle the strife, this feud of kinsman with kin,
By the eyes of a winsome wife, and the yearning her heart to win.
For as her consort still, enthroned with Justice above,
Thou bendest man to thy will, O all invincible Love.

ANTIGONE

Lo I myself am borne aside,
From Justice, as I view this bride.
(O sight an eye in tears to drown)
Antigone, so young, so fair,
Thus hurried down
Death's bower with the dead to share.

ANTIGONE.

Friends, countrymen, my last farewell I make;
My journey's done.
One last fond, lingering, longing look I take
At the bright sun.
For Death who puts to sleep both young and old
Hales my young life,
And beckons me to Acheron's dark fold,
An unwed wife.
No youths have sung the marriage song for me,
My bridal bed
No maids have strewn with flowers from the lea,
'Tis Death I wed.

CHORUS.

But bethink thee, thou art sped,
Great and glorious, to the dead.
Thou the sword's edge hast not tasted,
No disease thy frame hath wasted.
Freely thou alone shalt go
Living to the dead below.

ANTIGONE.

Nay, but the piteous tale I've heard men tell
Of Tantalus' doomed child,
Chained upon Siphylus' high rocky fell,
That clung like ivy wild,
Drenched by the pelting rain and whirling snow,
Left there to pine,
While on her frozen breast the tears aye flow—
Her fate is mine.

CHORUS.

She was sprung of gods, divine,
Mortals we of mortal line.
Like renown with gods to gain
Recompenses all thy pain.
Take this solace to thy tomb
Hers in life and death thy doom.

ANTIGONE.
Alack, alack! Ye mock me. Is it meet
Thus to insult me living, to my face?
Cease, by our country's altars I entreat,
Ye lordly rulers of a lordly race.
O fount of Dirce, wood-embowered plain
Where Theban chariots to victory speed,
Mark ye the cruel laws that now have wrought my bane,
The friends who show no pity in my need!
Was ever fate like mine? O monstrous doom,
Within a rock-built prison sepulchered,
To fade and wither in a living tomb,
And alien midst the living and the dead.

CHORUS.
In thy boldness over-rash
Madly thou thy foot didst dash
'Gainst high Justice' altar stair.
Thou a father's guild dost bear.

ANTIGONE.
At this thou touchest my most poignant pain,
My ill-starred father's piteous disgrace,
The taint of blood, the hereditary stain,
That clings to all of Labdacus' famed race.
Woe worth the monstrous marriage-bed where lay
A mother with the son her womb had borne,
Therein I was conceived, woe worth the day,
Fruit of incestuous sheets, a maid forlorn,
And now I pass, accursed and unwed,
To meet them as an alien there below;
And thee, O brother, in marriage ill-bestead,
'Twas thy dead hand that dealt me this death-blow.

CHORUS.
Religion has her chains, 'tis true,
Let rite be paid when rites are due.
Yet is it ill to disobey
The powers who hold by might the sway.
Thou hast withstood authority,
A self-willed rebel, thou must die.

ANTIGONE.
Unwept, unwed, unfriended, hence I go,
No longer may I see the day's bright eye;
Not one friend left to share my bitter woe,
And o'er my ashes heave one passing sigh.

CREON.
If wail and lamentation aught availed

To stave off death, I trow they'd never end.
Away with her, and having walled her up
In a rock-vaulted tomb, as I ordained,
Leave her alone at liberty to die,
Or, if she choose, to live in solitude,
The tomb her dwelling. We in either case
Are guiltless as concerns this maiden's blood,
Only on earth no lodging shall she find.

ANTIGONE.
O grave, O bridal bower, O prison house
Hewn from the rock, my everlasting home,
Whither I go to join the mighty host
Of kinsfolk, Persephassa's guests long dead,
The last of all, of all more miserable,
I pass, my destined span of years cut short.
And yet good hope is mine that I shall find
A welcome from my sire, a welcome too,
From thee, my mother, and my brother dear;
From with these hands, I laved and decked your limbs
In death and poured libations on your grave.
And last, my Polyneices, unto thee
I paid due rites, and this my recompense!
Yet am I justified in wisdom's eyes.
For even had it been some child of mine,
Or husband mouldering in death's decay,
I had not wrought this deed despite the State.
What is the law I call in aid? 'Tis thus
I argue. Had it been a husband dead
I might have wed another, and have borne
Another child, to take the dead child's place.
But, now my sire and mother both are dead,
No second brother can be born for me.
Thus by the law of conscience I was led
To honor thee, dear brother, and was judged
By Creon guilty of a heinous crime.
And now he drags me like a criminal,
A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song
And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood,
By friends deserted to a living grave.
What ordinance of heaven have I transgressed?
Hereafter can I look to any god
For succor, call on any man for help?
Alas, my piety is impious deemed.
Well, if such justice is approved of heaven,
I shall be taught by suffering my sin;
But if the sin is theirs, O may they suffer
No worse ills than the wrongs they do to me.

CHORUS.
The same ungovernable will
Drives like a gale the maiden still.

CREON.
Therefore, my guards who let her stay
Shall smart full sore for their delay.

ANTIGONE.
Ah, woe is me! This word I hear
Brings death most near.

CHORUS.
I have no comfort. What he saith,
Portends no other thing than death.

ANTIGONE.
My fatherland, city of Thebes divine,
Ye gods of Thebes whence sprang my line,
Look, puissant lords of Thebes, on me;
The last of all your royal house ye see.
Martyred by men of sin, undone.
Such meed my piety hath won.

[Exit ANTIGONE, back up to the platform, staring at CREON]

CHORUS.
Like to thee that maiden bright,
Danae, in her brass-bound tower,
Once exchanged the glad sunlight
For a cell, her bridal bower.
And yet she sprang of royal line,
My child, like thine,
And nursed the seed
By her conceived
Of Zeus descending in a golden shower.
Strange are the ways of Fate, her power
Nor wealth, nor arms withstand, nor tower;
Nor brass-prowed ships, that breast the sea
From Fate can flee.

Thus Dryas' child, the rash Edonian King,
For words of high disdain
Did Bacchus to a rocky dungeon bring,
To cool the madness of a fevered brain.
His frenzy passed,
He learnt at last
'Twas madness gibes against a god to fling.
For once he fain had quenched the Maenad's fire;
And of the tuneful Nine provoked the ire.

By the Iron Rocks that guard the double main,
On Bosporus' lone strand,
Where stretcheth Salmydessus' plain
In the wild Thracian land,
There on his borders Ares witnessed
The vengeance by a jealous step-dame ta'en

The gore that trickled from a spindle red,
The sightless orbits of her step-sons twain.

Wasting away they mourned their piteous doom,
The blasted issue of their mother's womb.
But she her lineage could trace
To great Erecththeus' race;
Daughter of Boreas in her sire's vast caves
Reared, where the tempest raves,
Swift as his horses o'er the hills she sped;
A child of gods; yet she, my child, like thee,
By Destiny
That knows not death nor age—she too was vanquished.

[Enter TEIRESIAS and BOY]

TEIRESIAS.
Princes of Thebes, two wayfarers as one,
Having betwixt us eyes for one, we are here.
The blind man cannot move without a guide.

CREON.
Why tidings, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS.
I will tell thee;
And when thou hearest thou must heed the seer.

CREON.
Thus far I ne'er have disobeyed thy rede.

TEIRESIAS.
So hast thou steered the ship of State aright.

CREON.
I know it, and I gladly own my debt.

TEIRESIAS.
Bethink thee that thou treadest once again
The razor edge of peril.

CREON.
What is this?
Thy words inspire a dread presentiment.

TEIRESIAS.

The divination of my arts shall tell.
Sitting upon my throne of augury,
As is my wont, where every fowl of heaven
Find harborage, upon mine ears was borne
A jargon strange of twitterings, hoots, and screams;
So knew I that each bird at the other tare
With bloody talons, for the whirr of wings
Could signify naught else. Perturbed in soul,
I straight essayed the sacrifice by fire
On blazing altars, but the God of Fire
Came not in flame, and from the thigh bones dripped
And sputtered in the ashes a foul ooze;
Gall-bladders cracked and spurted up: the fat
Melted and fell and left the thigh bones bare.
Such are the signs, taught by this lad, I read—
As I guide others, so the boy guides me—
The frustrate signs of oracles grown dumb.
O King, thy willful temper ails the State,
For all our shrines and altars are profaned
By what has filled the maw of dogs and crows,
The flesh of Oedipus' unburied son.
Therefore the angry gods abominate
Our litanies and our burnt offerings;
Therefore no birds trill out a happy note,
Gorged with the carnival of human gore.
O ponder this, my son. To err is common
To all men, but the man who having erred
Hugs not his errors, but repents and seeks
The cure, is not a wastrel nor unwise.
No fool, the saw goes, like the obstinate fool.
Let death disarm thy vengeance. O forbear
To vex the dead. What glory wilt thou win
By slaying twice the slain? I mean thee well;
Counsel's most welcome if I promise gain.

CREON.
Old man, ye all let fly at me your shafts
Like anchors at a target; yea, ye set
Your soothsayer on me. Peddlers are ye all
And I the merchandise ye buy and sell.
Go to, and make your profit where ye will,
Silver of Sardis change for gold of Ind;
Ye will not purchase this man's burial,
Not though the winged ministers of Zeus
Should bear him in their talons to his throne;
Not e'en in awe of prodigy so dire
Would I permit his burial, for I know
No human soilure can assail the gods;
This too I know, Teiresias, dire's the fall
Of craft and cunning when it tries to gloss
Foul treachery with fair words for filthy gain.

TEIRESIAS.
Alas! doth any know and lay to heart—

CREON.
Is this the prelude to some hackneyed saw?

TEIRESIAS.
How far good counsel is the best of goods?

CREON.
True, as unwisdom is the worst of ills.

TEIRESIAS.
Thou art infected with that ill thyself.

CREON.
I will not bandy insults with thee, seer.

TEIRESIAS.
And yet thou say'st my prophesies are frauds.

CREON.
Prophets are all a money-getting tribe.

TEIRESIAS.
And kings are all a lucre-loving race.

CREON.
Dost know at whom thou glancest, me thy lord?

TEIRESIAS.
Lord of the State and savior, thanks to me.

CREON.
Skilled prophet art thou, but to wrong inclined.

TEIRESIAS.
Take heed, thou wilt provoke me to reveal
The mystery deep hidden in my breast.

CREON.
Say on, but see it be not said for gain.

TEIRESIAS.

Such thou, methinks, till now hast judged my words.

CREON.
Be sure thou wilt not traffic on my wits.

TEIRESIAS.
(now standing tall and proud, the former visage of an old man is completely gone, empowered by the gods)
Know then for sure, the coursers of the sun
Not many times shall run their race, before
Thou shalt have given the fruit of thine own loins
In quittance of thy murder, life for life;
For that thou hast entombed a living soul,
And sent below a denizen of earth,
And wronged the nether gods by leaving here
A corpse unlaved, unwept, unsepulchered.
Herein thou hast no part, nor e'en the gods
In heaven; and thou usurp'st a power not thine.
For this the avenging spirits of Heaven and Hell
Who dog the steps of sin are on thy trail:
What these have suffered thou shalt suffer too.
And now, consider whether bought by gold
I prophesy. For, yet a little while,
And sound of lamentation shall be heard,
Of men and women through thy desolate halls;
And all thy neighbor States are leagues to avenge
Their mangled warriors who have found a grave
I' the maw of wolf or hound, or winged bird
That flying homewards taints their city's air.
These are the shafts, that like a bowman I
Provoked to anger, loosen at thy breast,
Unerring, and their smart thou shalt not shun.
(Shrinks back into the old man)
Boy, lead me home, that he may vent his spleen
On younger men, and learn to curb his tongue
With gentler manners than his present mood.

[Exit TEIRESIAS]

CHORUS.
My liege, that man hath gone, foretelling woe.
And, O believe me, since these grizzled locks
Were like the raven, never have I known
The prophet's warning to the State to fail.

CREON.
I know it too, and it perplexes me.
To yield is grievous, but the obstinate soul
That fights with Fate, is smitten grievously.

CHORUS.

Son of Menoeceus, list to good advice.

CHORUS.
What should I do. Advise me. I will heed.

CHORUS.
Go, free the maiden from her rocky cell;
And for the unburied outlaw build a tomb.

CREON.
Is that your counsel? You would have me yield?

CHORUS.
Yea, king, this instant. Vengeance of the gods
Is swift to overtake the impenitent.

CREON.
Ah! what a wrench it is to sacrifice
My heart's resolve; but Fate is ill to fight.

CHORUS.
Go, trust not others. Do it quick thyself.

CREON.
I go hot-foot. Bestir ye one and all,
My henchmen! Get ye axes! Speed away
To yonder eminence! I too will go,
For all my resolution this way sways.
'Twas I that bound, I too will set her free.
Almost I am persuaded it is best
To keep through life the law ordained of old.
[Exit CREON]

ANTIGONE (as if laying down a curse)
Thou by many names adored,
Child of Zeus the God of thunder,
Of a Theban bride the wonder,
Fair Italia's guardian lord;

In the deep-embosomed glades
Of the Eleusinian Queen
Haunt of revelers, men and maids,
Dionysus, thou art seen.

Where Ismenus rolls his waters,
Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,
Where the Bacchanals thy daughters

Round thee roam,
There thy home;
Thebes, O Bacchus, is thine own.

Thee on the two-crested rock
Lurid-flaming torches see;
Where Corisian maidens flock,
Thee the springs of Castaly.

By Nysa's bastion ivy-clad,
By shores with clustered vineyards glad,
There to thee the hymn rings out,
And through our streets we Thebans shout,
All hail to thee
Evoe, Evoe!

CHORUS
Oh, as thou lov'st this city best of all,
To thee, and to thy Mother levin-stricken,
In our dire need we call;
Thou see'st with what a plague our townsfolk sicken.
Thy ready help we crave,
Whether adown Parnassian heights descending,
Or o'er the roaring straits thy swift was wending,
Save us, O save!

Brightest of all the orbs that breathe forth light,
Authentic son of Zeus, immortal king,
Leader of all the voices of the night,
Come, and thy train of Thyiads with thee bring,
Thy maddened rout
Who dance before thee all night long, and shout,
Thy handmaids we,
Evoe, Evoe!

[Enter MESSENGER]
[Slowly, over the course of the scene, ANTIGONE will fade into the shadows]

MESSENGER.
Attend all ye who dwell beside the halls
Of Cadmus and Amphion. No man's life
As of one tenor would I praise or blame,
For Fortune with a constant ebb and rise
Casts down and raises high and low alike,
And none can read a mortal's horoscope.
Take Creon; he, methought, if any man,
Was enviable. He had saved this land
Of Cadmus from our enemies and attained
A monarch's powers and ruled the state supreme,
While a right noble issue crowned his bliss.
Now all is gone and wasted, for a life
Without life's joys I count a living death.
You'll tell me he has ample store of wealth,
The pomp and circumstance of kings; but if
These give no pleasure, all the rest I count
The shadow of a shade, nor would I weigh

His wealth and power 'gainst a dram of joy.

CHORUS.
What fresh woes bring'st thou to the royal house?

MESSENGER.
Both dead, and they who live deserve to die.

CHORUS.
Who is the slayer, who the victim? speak.

MESSENGER.
Haemon; his blood shed by no stranger hand.

CHORUS.
What mean ye? by his father's or his own?

MESSENGER.
His own; in anger for his father's crime.

CHORUS.
O prophet, what thou spakest comes to pass.

MESSENGER.
So stands the case; now 'tis for you to act.

CHORUS.
Lo! from the palace gates I see approaching
Creon's unhappy wife, Eurydice.
Comes she by chance or learning her son's fate?
[Enter EURYDICE]

EURYDICE
Ye men of Thebes, I overheard your talk.
As I passed out to offer up my prayer
To Pallas, and was drawing back the bar
To open wide the door, upon my ears
There broke a wail that told of household woe
Stricken with terror in my handmaids' arms
I fell and fainted. But repeat your tale
To one not unacquaint with misery.

MESSENGER.
Dear mistress, I was there and will relate

The perfect truth, omitting not one word.
Why should we gloze and flatter, to be proved
Liars hereafter? Truth is ever best.
Well, in attendance on my liege, your lord,
I crossed the plain to its utmost margin, where
The corse of Polyneices, gnawn and mauled,
Was lying yet. We offered first a prayer
To Pluto and the goddess of cross-ways,
With contrite hearts, to deprecate their ire.
Then laved with lustral waves the mangled corse,
Laid it on fresh-lopped branches, lit a pyre,
And to his memory piled a mighty mound
Of mother earth. Then to the caverned rock,
The bridal chamber of the maid and Death,
We sped, about to enter. But a guard
Heard from that godless shrine a far shrill wail,
And ran back to our lord to tell the news.
But as he nearer drew a hollow sound
Of lamentation to the King was borne.
He groaned and uttered then this bitter plaint:
"Am I a prophet? miserable me!
Is this the saddest path I ever trod?
'Tis my son's voice that calls me. On press on,
My henchmen, haste with double speed to the tomb
Where rocks down-torn have made a gap, look in
And tell me if in truth I recognize
The voice of Haemon or am heaven-deceived."
So at the bidding of our distraught lord
We looked, and in the craven's vaulted gloom
I saw the maiden lying strangled there,
A noose of linen twined about her neck;
And hard beside her, clasping her cold form,
Her lover lay bewailing his dead bride
Death-wedded, and his father's cruelty.
When the King saw him, with a terrible groan
He moved towards him, crying, "O my son
What hast thou done? What ailed thee? What mischance
Has reft thee of thy reason? O come forth,
Come forth, my son; thy father supplicates."
But the son glared at him with tiger eyes,
Spat in his face, and then, without a word,
Drew his two-hilted sword and smote, but missed
His father flying backwards. Then the boy,
Wroth with himself, poor wretch, incontinent
Fell on his sword and drove it through his side
Home, but yet breathing clasped in his lax arms
The maid, her pallid cheek incarnadined
With his expiring gasps. So there they lay
Two corpses, one in death. His marriage rites
Are consummated in the halls of Death:
A witness that of ills whate'er befall
Mortals' unwisdom is the worst of all.

[Exit EURYDICE]

CHORUS.

What makest thou of this? The Queen has gone
Without a word importing good or ill.

MESSENGER.
I marvel too, but entertain good hope.
'Tis that she shrinks in public to lament
Her son's sad ending, and in privacy
Would with her maidens mourn a private loss.
Trust me, she is discreet and will not err.

CHORUS.
I know not, but strained silence, so I deem,
Is no less ominous than excessive grief.

MESSENGER.
Well, let us to the house and solve our doubts,
Whether the tumult of her heart conceals
Some fell design. It may be thou art right:
Unnatural silence signifies no good.

CHORUS.
Lo! the King himself appears.
Evidence he with him bears
'Gainst himself (ah me! I quake
'Gainst a king such charge to make)
But all must own,
The guilt is his and his alone.

[Creon enters and has a moment of unbroken eye contact with Antigone before she disappears into the shadows]

CREON.
Woe for sin of minds perverse,
Deadly fraught with mortal curse.
Behold us slain and slayers, all akin.
Woe for my counsel dire, conceived in sin.
Alas, my son,
Life scarce begun,
Thou wast undone.
The fault was mine, mine only, O my son!

CHORUS.
Too late thou seemest to perceive the truth.

CREON.
By sorrow schooled. Heavy the hand of God,
Thorny and rough the paths my feet have trod,
Humbled my pride, my pleasure turned to pain;
Poor mortals, how we labor all in vain!

[Enter SECOND MESSENGER]

SECOND MESSENGER.
Sorrows are thine, my lord, and more to come,
One lying at thy feet, another yet
More grievous waits thee, when thou comest home.

CREON.
What woe is lacking to my tale of woes?

SECOND MESSENGER.
Thy wife, the mother of thy dead son here,
Lies stricken by a fresh inflicted blow.

[ANTIGONE appears, in golden and purple robes, staring down at CREON, impartial and unmoving]

CREON.
How bottomless the pit!
Does claim me too, O Death?
What is this word he saith,
This woeful messenger? Say, is it fit
To slay anew a man already slain?
Is Death at work again,
Stroke upon stroke, first son, then mother slain?

CHORUS.
Look for thyself. She lies for all to view.

CREON.
(Ant. 2)
Alas! another added woe I see.
What more remains to crown my agony?
A minute past I clasped a lifeless son,
And now another victim Death hath won.
Unhappy mother, most unhappy son!

SECOND MESSENGER.
Beside the altar on a keen-edged sword
She fell and closed her eyes in night, but erst
She mourned for Megareus who nobly died
Long since, then for her son; with her last breath
She cursed thee, the slayer of her child.

CREON.
I shudder with affright
O for a two-edged sword to slay outright
A wretch like me,
Made one with misery.

ANTIGONE. [ANTIGONE speaks while the SECOND MESSENGER mouths along with the words]
'Tis true that thou wert charged by the dead Queen
As author of both deaths, hers and her son's.

CREON.
In what wise was her self-destruction wrought?

SECOND MESSENGER.
Hearing the loud lament above her son
With her own hand she stabbed herself to the heart.

CREON.
I am the guilty cause. I did the deed,
Thy murderer. Yea, I guilty plead.
My henchmen, lead me hence, away, away,
A cipher, less than nothing; no delay!

CHORUS.
Well said, if in disaster aught is well
His past endure demand the speediest cure.

CREON.
Come, Fate, a friend at need,
Come with all speed!
Come, my best friend,
And speed my end!
Away, away!
Let me not look upon another day!

CHORUS.
This for the morrow; to us are present needs
That they whom it concerns must take in hand.

CREON.
I join your prayer that echoes my desire.

CHORUS.
O pray not, prayers are idle; from the doom
Of fate for mortals refuge is there none.

CREON.
Away with me, a worthless wretch who slew
Unwitting thee, my son, thy mother too.

Whither to turn I know now; every way
Leads but astray,
And on my head I feel the heavy weight
Of crushing Fate.

ANTIGONE
Of happiness the chiefest part
Is a wise heart:
And to defraud the gods in aught
With peril's fraught.
Swelling words of high-flown might
Mightily the gods do smite.
Chastisement for errors past
Wisdom brings to age at last.

END