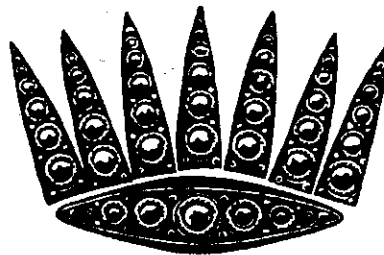


SOPHOCLES  
THE THREE  
THEBAN PLAYS

ANTIGONE · OEDIPUS THE KING  
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS



TRANSLATED BY  
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INTRODUCTIONS AND  
NOTES BY  
BERNARD KNOX



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*OEDIPUS enters from the palace to  
address the CHORUS, as if addressing  
the entire city of Thebes.*

OEDIPUS:

You pray to the gods? Let me grant your prayers. 245  
Come, listen to me—do what the plague demands:  
you'll find relief and lift your head from the depths.

I will speak out now as a stranger to the story,  
a stranger to the crime. If I'd been present then,  
there would have been no mystery, no long hunt 250  
without a clue in hand. So now, counted  
a native Theban years after the murder,  
to all of Thebes I make this proclamation:  
if any one of you knows who murdered Laius,  
the son of Labdacus, I order him to reveal 255  
the whole truth to me. Nothing to fear,  
even if he must denounce himself,  
let him speak up  
and so escape the brunt of the charge—  
he will suffer no unbearable punishment, 260  
nothing worse than exile, totally unharmed.

*OEDIPUS pauses, waiting for a reply.*

Next,

if anyone knows the murderer is a stranger,  
a man from alien soil, come, speak up.  
I will give him a handsome reward, and lay up  
gratitude in my heart for him besides. 265

*Silence again, no reply.*

But if you keep silent, if anyone panicking,  
trying to shield himself or friend or kin,  
rejects my offer, then hear what I will do.  
I order you, every citizen of the state  
where I hold throne and power: banish this man— 270  
whoever he may be—never shelter him, never  
speak a word to him, never make him partner  
to your prayers, your victims burned to the gods.  
Never let the holy water touch his hands.  
Drive him out, each of you, from every home. 275  
*He* is the plague, the heart of our corruption,  
as Apollo's oracle has just revealed to me.  
So I honor my obligations:  
I fight for the god and for the murdered man.

Now my curse on the murderer. Whoever he is, 280  
a lone man unknown in his crime  
or one among many, let that man drag out  
his life in agony, step by painful step—  
I curse myself as well . . . if by any chance  
he proves to be an intimate of our house, 285  
here at my hearth, with my full knowledge,  
may the curse I just called down on him strike me!

OEDIPUS:

O Tiresias, 340

master of all the mysteries of our life,  
 all you teach and all you dare not tell,  
 signs in the heavens, signs that walk the earth!  
 Blind as you are, you can feel all the more  
 what sickness haunts our city. You, my lord, 345  
 are the one shield, the one savior we can find.

We asked Apollo—perhaps the messengers  
 haven't told you—he sent his answer back:  
 "Relief from the plague can only come one way.  
 Uncover the murderers of Laius, 350  
 put them to death or drive them into exile."  
 So I beg you, grudge us nothing now, no voice,  
 no message plucked from the birds, the embers  
 or the other mantic ways within your grasp.  
 Rescue yourself, your city, rescue me— 355  
 rescue everything infected by the dead.  
 We are in your hands. For a man to help others  
 with all his gifts and native strength:  
 that is the noblest work.

TIRESIAS:

How terrible—to see the truth

when the truth is only pain to him who sees! 360  
 I knew it well, but I put it from my mind,  
 else I never would have come.

OEDIPUS:

What's this? Why so grim, so dire?

TIRESIAS:

Just send me home. You bear your burdens,  
I'll bear mine. It's better that way,  
please believe me.

365

OEDIPUS:

Strange response . . . unlawful,  
unfriendly too to the state that bred and reared you—  
you withhold the word of god.

TIRESIAS:

I fail to see  
that your own words are so well-timed.  
I'd rather not have the same thing said of me . . .

370

OEDIPUS:

For the love of god, don't turn away,  
not if you know something. We beg you,  
all of us on our knees.

TIRESIAS:

None of you knows—  
and I will never reveal my dreadful secrets,  
not to say your own.

375

OEDIPUS:

What? You know and you won't tell?  
You're bent on betraying us, destroying Thebes?

TIRESIAS:

I'd rather not cause pain for you or me.  
So why this . . . useless interrogation?  
You'll get nothing from me.

OEDIPUS:

Nothing! You,  
you scum of the earth, you'd enrage a heart of stone!  
You won't talk? Nothing moves you?  
Out with it, once and for all!

380

TIRESIAS:

You criticize my temper . . . unaware  
of the one *you* live with, you revile me.

385

OEDIPUS:

Who could restrain his anger hearing you?  
What outrage—you spurn the city!

TIRESIAS:

What will come will come.  
Even if I shroud it all in silence.

OEDIPUS:

What will come? You're bound to *tell* me that.

390

TIRESIAS:

I will say no more. Do as you like, build your anger  
to whatever pitch you please, rage your worst—

OEDIPUS:

Oh I'll let loose, I have such fury in me—  
now I see it all. You helped hatch the plot,  
you did the work, yes, short of killing him  
with your own hands—and given eyes I'd say  
you did the killing single-handed!

395

TIRESIAS:

Is that so!

I charge you, then, submit to that decree  
you just laid down: from this day onward  
speak to no one, not these citizens, not myself. 400  
You are the curse, the corruption of the land!

OEDIPUS:

You, shameless—  
aren't you appalled to start up such a story?  
You think you can get away with this?

TIRESIAS:

I have already.

The truth with all its power lives inside me. 405

OEDIPUS:

Who primed you for this? Not your prophet's trade.

TIRESIAS:

You did, you forced me, twisted it out of me.

OEDIPUS:

What? Say it again—I'll understand it better.

TIRESIAS:

Didn't you understand, just now?  
Or are you tempting me to talk? 410



OEDIPUS:

No, I can't say I grasped your meaning.  
Out with it, again!

TIRESIAS:

I say you are the murderer you hunt.

OEDIPUS:

That obscenity, twice—by god, you'll pay.

TIRESIAS:

Shall I say more, so you can really rage?

415

OEDIPUS:

Much as you want. Your words are nothing—  
futile.

TIRESIAS:

You cannot imagine . . . I tell you,  
you and your loved ones live together in infamy,  
you cannot see how far you've gone in guilt.

OEDIPUS:

You think you can keep this up and never suffer?

420

TIRESIAS:

Indeed, if the truth has any power.

OEDIPUS:

O power—

wealth and empire, skill outstripping skill  
 in the heady rivalries of life,  
 what envy lurks inside you! Just for this, 435  
 the crown the city gave me—I never sought it,  
 they laid it in my hands—for this alone, Creon,  
 the soul of trust, my loyal friend from the start  
 steals against me . . . so hungry to overthrow me  
 he sets this wizard on me, this scheming quack, 440  
 this fortune-teller peddling lies, eyes peeled  
 for his own profit—seer blind in his craft!

Come here, you pious fraud. Tell me,  
 when did you ever prove yourself a prophet?  
 When the Sphinx, that chanting Fury kept her deathwatch here,  
 why silent then, not a word to set our people free?  
 There was a riddle, not for some passer-by to solve—  
 it cried out for a prophet. Where were you?  
 Did you rise to the crisis? Not a word,  
 you and your birds, your gods—nothing. 450  
 No, but I came by, Oedipus the ignorant,  
 I stopped the Sphinx! With no help from the birds,  
 the flight of my own intelligence hit the mark.

And this is the man you'd try to overthrow?  
 You think you'll stand by Creon when he's king? 455  
 You and the great mastermind—  
 you'll pay in tears, I promise you, for this,  
 this witch-hunt. If you didn't look so senile  
 the lash would teach you what your scheming means!

LEADER:

I would suggest his words were spoken in anger, 460  
 Oedipus . . . yours too, and it isn't what we need.  
 The best solution to the oracle, the riddle  
 posed by god—we should look for that.

TIRESIAS:

You are the king no doubt, but in one respect,  
at least, I am your equal: the right to reply. 465

I claim that privilege too.

I am not your slave. I serve Apollo.

I don't need Creon to speak for me in public.

So,

you mock my blindness? Let me tell you this.

You with your precious eyes, 470

you're blind to the corruption of your life,

to the house you live in, those you live with—

who *are* your parents? Do you know? All unknowing

you are the scourge of your own flesh and blood,

the dead below the earth and the living here above, 475

and the double lash of your mother and your father's curse

will whip you from this land one day, their footfall

treading you down in terror, darkness shrouding

your eyes that now can see the light!

Soon, soon

you'll scream aloud—what haven won't reverberate? 480

What rock of Cithaeron won't scream back in echo?

That day you learn the truth about your marriage,

the wedding-march that sang you into your halls,

the lusty voyage home to the fatal harbor!

And a crowd of other horrors you'd never dream 485

will level you with yourself and all your children.

There. Now smear us with insults—Creon, myself

and every word I've said. No man will ever

be rooted from the earth as brutally as you.

OEDIPUS:

Enough! Such filth from him? Insufferable— 490

what, still alive? Get out—

faster, back where you came from—vanish!

JOCASTA:

A prophet?

Well then, free yourself of every charge!  
Listen to me and learn some peace of mind: 780  
no skill in the world,  
nothing human can penetrate the future.  
Here is proof, quick and to the point.

An oracle came to Laius one fine day  
(I won't say from Apollo himself 785  
but his underlings his priests) and it declared  
that doom would strike him down at the hands of a son,  
our son, to be born of our own flesh and blood. But Laius,  
so the report goes at least, was killed by strangers,  
thieves, at a place where three roads meet . . . my son— 790  
he wasn't three days old and the boy's father  
fastened his ankles, had a henchman fling him away  
on a barren, trackless mountain.

There, you see?

Apollo brought neither thing to pass. My baby  
no more murdered his father than Laius suffered— 795  
his wildest fear—death at his own son's hands.  
That's how the seers and all their revelations  
mapped out the future. Brush them from your mind.  
Whatever the god needs and seeks  
he'll bring to light himself, with ease. 800

OEDIPUS:

Strange,

hearing you just now . . . my mind wandered,  
my thoughts racing back and forth.

JOCASTA:

What do you mean? Why so anxious, startled?

OEDIPUS:

I thought I heard you say that Laius  
was cut down at a place where three roads meet.

805

JOCASTA:

That was the story. It hasn't died out yet.

OEDIPUS:

Where did this thing happen? Be precise.

JOCASTA:

A place called Phocis, where two branching roads,  
one from Daulia, one from Delphi,  
come together—a crossroads.

810

OEDIPUS:

When? How long ago?

JOCASTA:

The heralds no sooner reported Laius dead  
than you appeared and they hailed you king of Thebes.

OEDIPUS:

My god, my god—what have you planned to do to me?

JOCASTA:

What, Oedipus? What haunts you so?

OEDIPUS:

Laius—how did he look? Describe him.  
Had he reached his prime?

Not yet.

815

Now, Jocasta, I will tell you all.  
 Making my way toward this triple crossroad  
 I began to see a herald, then a brace of colts 885  
 drawing a wagon, and mounted on the bench . . . a man,  
 just as you've described him, coming face-to-face,  
 and the one in the lead and the old man himself  
 were about to thrust me off the road—brute force—  
 and the one shouldering me aside, the driver, 890  
 I strike him in anger!—and the old man, watching me  
 coming up along his wheels—he brings down  
 his prod, two prongs straight at my head!  
 I paid him back with interest!  
 Short work, by god—with one blow of the staff 895  
 in this right hand I knock him out of his high seat,  
 roll him out of the wagon, sprawling headlong—  
 I killed them all—every mother's son!

Oh, but if there is any blood-tie  
 between Laius and this stranger . . . 900  
 what man alive more miserable than I?  
 More hated by the gods? *I* am the man  
 no alien, no citizen welcomes to his house,  
 law forbids it—not a word to me in public,  
 driven out of every hearth and home. . . . 905  
 And all these curses I—no one but I  
 brought down these piling curses on myself!  
 And you, his wife, I've touched your body with these,  
 the hands that killed your husband cover you with blood.

Wasn't I born for torment? Look me in the eyes! 910  
 I am abomination—heart and soul!  
 I must be exiled, and even in exile  
 never see my parents, never set foot  
 on native ground again. Else I am doomed  
 to couple with my mother and cut my father down . . . 915  
 Polybus who reared me, gave me life.

But why, why?  
Wouldn't a man of judgment say—and wouldn't he be right—  
some savage power has brought this down upon my head?

Oh no, not that, you pure and awesome gods,  
never let me see that day! Let me slip 920  
from the world of men, vanish without a trace  
before I see myself stained with such corruption,  
stained to the heart.

LEADER:  
My lord, you fill our hearts with fear.  
But at least until you question the witness, 925  
do take hope.

OEDIPUS:  
Exactly. He is my last hope—  
I am waiting for the shepherd. He is crucial.

JOCASTA:  
And once he appears, what then? Why so urgent?

OEDIPUS:  
I will tell you. If it turns out that his story  
matches yours, I've escaped the worst. 930

JOCASTA:  
What did I say? What struck you so?





OEDIPUS:

*Wheeling on the MESSENGER.*

What? Let me have it from your lips.

MESSENGER:

Well,

if that's what you want first, then here it is:  
make no mistake, Polybus is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS:

How—murder? sickness?—what? what killed him? 1050

MESSENGER:

A light tip of the scales can put old bones to rest.

OEDIPUS:

Sickness then—poor man, it wore him down.

MESSENGER:

That,

and the long count of years he'd measured out.

OEDIPUS:

So!

Jocasta, why, why look to the Prophet's hearth,  
 the fires of the future? Why scan the birds 1055  
 that scream above our heads? They winged me on  
 to the murder of my father, did they? That was my doom?  
 Well look, he's dead and buried, hidden under the earth,  
 and here I am in Thebes, I never put hand to sword—  
 unless some longing for me wasted him away, 1060  
 then in a sense you'd say I caused his death.  
 But now, all those prophecies I feared—Polybus  
 packs them off to sleep with him in hell!  
 They're nothing, worthless.

JOCASTA:

There.

Didn't I tell you from the start?

1065

OEDIPUS:

So you did. I was lost in fear.

JOCASTA:

No more, sweep it from your mind forever.

OEDIPUS:

But my mother's bed, surely I must fear—

JOCASTA:

Fear?

What should a man fear? It's all chance,  
chance rules our lives. Not a man on earth  
can see a day ahead, groping through the dark.

1070

Better to live at random, best we can.

And as for this marriage with your mother—

have no fear. Many a man before you,  
in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed.

1075

Take such things for shadows, nothing at all—

Live, Oedipus,

as if there's no tomorrow!

OEDIPUS:

Brave words,

and you'd persuade me if mother weren't alive.

But mother lives, so for all your reassurances

1080

I live in fear, I must.

JOCASTA:

But your father's death,

that, at least, is a great blessing, joy to the eyes!

OEDIPUS:

That's right, old man, that fear is always with me. 1110

MESSENGER:

Don't you know? You've really nothing to fear.

OEDIPUS:

But why? If I'm their son—Merope, Polybus?

MESSENGER:

Polybus was nothing to you, that's why, not in blood.

OEDIPUS:

What are you saying—Polybus was not my father?

MESSENGER:

No more than I am. He and I are equals. 1115

OEDIPUS:

My father—  
how can my father equal nothing? You're nothing to me!

MESSENGER:

Neither was he, no more your father than I am.

OEDIPUS:

Then why did he call me his son?

MESSENGER:

You were a gift,  
years ago—know for a fact he took you  
from my hands.

OEDIPUS:

No, from another's hands? 1120  
Then how could he love me so? He loved me, deeply . . .

MESSENGER:

True, and his early years without a child  
made him love you all the more.

OEDIPUS:

And you, did you . . .  
buy me? find me by accident?

MESSENGER:

I stumbled on you,  
down the woody flanks of Mount Cithaeron.

OEDIPUS:

So close, 1125  
what were you doing here, just passing through?

MESSENGER:

Watching over my flocks, grazing them on the slopes.

OEDIPUS:

A herdsman, were you? A vagabond, scraping for wages?

MESSENGER:

Your savior too, my son, in your worst hour.

OEDIPUS:

Oh—  
when you picked me up, was I in pain? What exactly? 1130

MESSENGER:

Your ankles . . . they tell the story. Look at them.

OEDIPUS:

Why remind me of that, that old affliction?

MESSENGER:

Your ankles were pinned together. I set you free.

OEDIPUS:

That dreadful mark—I've had it from the cradle.

MESSENGER:

And you got your name from that misfortune too,  
the name's still with you.

1135

OEDIPUS:

Dear god, who did it?—  
mother? father? Tell me.

MESSENGER:

I don't know.  
The one who gave you to me, he'd know more.

OEDIPUS:

What? You took me from someone else?  
You didn't find me yourself?

MESSENGER:

No sir,  
another shepherd passed you on to me.

1140

OEDIPUS:  
Who? Do you know? Describe him.

MESSENGER:  
He called himself a servant of . . .  
if I remember rightly—Laius.

*JOCASTA turns sharply.*

OEDIPUS:  
The king of the land who ruled here long ago? 1145

MESSENGER:  
That's the one. That herdsman was *his* man.

OEDIPUS:  
Is he still alive? Can I see him?

MESSENGER:  
They'd know best, the people of these parts.

*OEDIPUS and the MESSENGER turn to  
the CHORUS.*

OEDIPUS:  
Does anyone know that herdsman,  
the one he mentioned? Anyone seen him 1150  
in the fields, here in the city? Out with it!  
The time has come to reveal this once for all.

LEADER:  
I think he's the very shepherd you wanted to see,  
a moment ago. But the queen, Jocasta,  
she's the one to say.

SHEPHERD:

It wasn't mine, no, I got it from . . . someone.

OEDIPUS:

Which one of them?

*Looking at the citizens.*

Whose house?

SHEPHERD:

No—

god's sake, master, no more questions!

1280

OEDIPUS:

You're a dead man if I have to ask again.

SHEPHERD:

Then—the child came from the house . . .  
of Laius.

OEDIPUS:

A slave? or born of his own blood?

SHEPHERD:

Oh no,

I'm right at the edge, the horrible truth—I've got to say it!

OEDIPUS:

And I'm at the edge of hearing horrors, yes, but I must hear!

SHEPHERD:

All right! His son, they said it was—his son!  
But the one inside, your wife,  
she'd tell it best.

OEDIPUS:

My wife—  
she gave it to you?

1290

SHEPHERD:

Yes, yes, my king.

OEDIPUS:

Why, what for?

SHEPHERD:

To kill it.

OEDIPUS:

Her own child,  
how could she?

1295

SHEPHERD:

She was afraid—  
frightening prophecies.

OEDIPUS:

What?



SHEPHERD:

They said—  
he'd kill his parents.

OEDIPUS:

But you gave him to this old man—why? 1300

SHEPHERD:

I pitied the little baby, master,  
hoped he'd take him off to his own country,  
far away, but he saved him for this, this fate.  
If you are the man he says you are, believe me,  
you were born for pain. 1305

OEDIPUS:

O god—  
all come true, all burst to light!  
O light—now let me look my last on you!  
I stand revealed at last—  
cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage,  
cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands! 1310

*Rushing through the doors with a  
great cry. The Corinthian  
MESSENGER, the SHEPHERD and  
attendants exit slowly to the side.*

CHORUS:

O the terror—  
the suffering, for all the world to see,  
the worst terror that ever met my eyes.  
What madness swept over you? What god, 1435  
what dark power leapt beyond all bounds,  
beyond belief, to crush your wretched life?—  
godforsaken, cursed by the gods!  
I pity you but I can't bear to look.  
I've much to ask, so much to learn, 1440  
so much fascinates my eyes,  
but you . . . I shudder at the sight.

OEDIPUS:

Oh, Ohh—  
the agony! I am agony—  
where am I going? where on earth?  
where does all this agony hurl me? 1445  
where's my voice?—  
winging, swept away on a dark tide—  
My destiny, my dark power, what a leap you made!

CHORUS:

To the depths of terror, too dark to hear, to see.

OEDIPUS:

Dark, horror of darkness 1450  
*my* darkness, drowning, swirling around me  
crashing wave on wave—unspeakable, irresistible  
    headwind, fatal harbor! Oh again,  
the misery, all at once, over and over  
the stabbing daggers, stab of memory 1455  
raking me insane.

CHORUS:

    No wonder you suffer  
twice over, the pain of your wounds,  
the lasting grief of pain.

OEDIPUS:

    Dear friend, still here?  
Standing by me, still with a care for me,  
the blind man? Such compassion, 1460  
    loyal to the last. Oh it's you,  
I know you're here, dark as it is  
I'd know you anywhere, your voice—  
it's yours, clearly yours.

CHORUS:

    Dreadful, what you've done . . .  
how could you bear it, gouging out your eyes? 1465  
What superhuman power drove you on?

OEDIPUS:

Apollo, friends, Apollo—  
he ordained my agonies—these, my pains on pains!  
But the hand that struck my eyes was mine,  
mine alone—no one else—  
I did it all myself!  
What good were eyes to me?  
Nothing I could see could bring me joy.

1470

CHORUS:

No, no, exactly as you say.

OEDIPUS:

What can I ever see?  
What love, what call of the heart  
can touch my ears with joy? Nothing, friends.  
Take me away, far, far from Thebes,  
quickly, cast me away, my friends—  
this great murderous ruin, this man cursed to heaven,  
the man the deathless gods hate most of all!

1475

1480

CHORUS:

Pitiful, you suffer so, you understand so much . . .  
I wish you had never known.

CREON:  
I haven't come to mock you, Oedipus,  
or to criticize your former failings.

*Turning to the guards.*

You there,  
have you lost all respect for human feelings?  
At least revere the Sun, the holy fire 1560  
that keeps us all alive. Never expose a thing  
of guilt and holy dread so great it appalls  
the earth, the rain from heaven, the light of day!  
Get him into the halls—quickly as you can.  
Piety demands no less. Kindred alone 1565  
should see a kinsman's shame. This is obscene.

OEDIPUS:  
Please, in god's name . . . you wipe my fears away,  
coming so generously to me, the worst of men.  
Do one thing more, for your sake, not mine.

CREON:  
What do you want? Why so insistent? 1570

OEDIPUS:  
Drive me out of the land at once, far from sight,  
where I can never hear a human voice.

CREON:  
I'd have done that already, I promise you.  
First I wanted the god to clarify my duties.

OEDIPUS:

The god? His command was clear, every word: 1575  
 death for the father-killer, the curse—  
 he said destroy me!

CREON:

So he did. Still, in such a crisis  
 it's better to ask precisely what to do.

OEDIPUS:

So miserable—  
 you would consult the god about a man like me? 1580

CREON:

By all means. And this time, I assume,  
 even you will obey the god's decrees.

OEDIPUS:

I will,  
 I will. And you, I command you—I beg you . . .  
 the woman inside, bury her as you see fit.  
 It's the only decent thing, 1585  
 to give your own the last rites. As for me,  
 never condemn the city of my fathers  
 to house my body, not while I'm alive, no,  
 let me live on the mountains, on Cithaeron,  
 my favorite haunt, I have made it famous. 1590  
 Mother and father marked out that rock  
 to be my everlasting tomb—buried alive.  
 Let me die there, where they tried to kill me.

Oh but this I know: no sickness can destroy me,  
 nothing can. I would never have been saved 1595  
 from death—I have been saved  
 for something great and terrible, something strange.  
 Well let my destiny come and take me on its way!

About my children, Creon, the boys at least,  
 don't burden yourself. They're men, 1600  
 wherever they go; they'll find the means to live.  
 But my two daughters, my poor helpless girls,  
 clustering at our table, never without me  
 hovering near them . . . whatever I touched,  
 they always had their share. Take care of them, 1605  
 I beg you. Wait, better—permit me, would you?  
 Just to touch them with my hands and take  
 our fill of tears. Please . . . my king.  
 Grant it, with all your noble heart.  
 If I could hold them, just once, I'd think 1610  
 I had them with me, like the early days  
 when I could see their eyes.

*ANTIGONE and ISMENE, two small  
 children, are led in from the palace  
 by a nurse.*

What's that?

O god! Do I really hear you sobbing?—  
 my two children. Creon, you've pitied me?  
 Sent me my darling girls, my own flesh and blood! 1615  
 Am I right?

CREON:

Yes, it's my doing.  
 I know the joy they gave you all these years,  
 the joy you must feel now.

OEDIPUS:

Bless you, Creon!  
 May god watch over you for this kindness,  
 better than he ever guarded me.  
 Children, where are you? 1620  
 Here, come quickly—

*Groping for ANTIGONE and ISMENE,  
who approach their father cautiously,  
then embrace him.*

Come to these hands of mine,  
your brother's hands, your own father's hands  
that served his once bright eyes so well—  
that made them blind. Seeing nothing, children,  
knowing nothing, I became your father, 1625  
I fathered you in the soil that gave me life.

How I weep for you—I cannot see you now . . .  
just thinking of all your days to come, the bitterness,  
the life that rough mankind will thrust upon you.  
Where are the public gatherings you can join, 1630  
the banquets of the clans? Home you'll come,  
in tears, cut off from the sight of it all,  
the brilliant rites unfinished.

And when you reach perfection, ripe for marriage,  
who will he be, my dear ones? Risking all 1635  
to shoulder the curse that weighs down my parents,  
yes and you too—that wounds us all together.

What more misery could you want?  
Your father killed his father, sowed his mother,  
one, one and the selfsame womb sprang you— 1640  
he cropped the very roots of his existence.

Such disgrace, and you must bear it all!  
Who will marry you then? Not a man on earth.  
Your doom is clear: you'll wither away to nothing,  
single, without a child.

*Turning to CREON.*



Oh Creon, 1645  
you are the only father they have now . . .  
we who brought them into the world  
are gone, both gone at a stroke—  
Don't let them go begging, abandoned,  
women without men. Your own flesh and blood! 1650  
Never bring them down to the level of my pains.  
Pity them. Look at them, so young, so vulnerable,  
shorn of everything—you're their only hope.  
Promise me, noble Creon, touch my hand!

*Reaching toward CREON, who  
draws back.*

You, little ones, if you were old enough 1655  
to understand, there is much I'd tell you.  
Now, as it is, I'd have you say a prayer.  
Pray for life, my children,  
live where you are free to grow and season.  
Pray god you find a better life than mine, 1660  
the father who begot you.

CREON:

Enough.

You've wept enough. Into the palace now.

OEDIPUS:

I must, but I find it very hard.

CREON:

Time is the great healer, you will see.

OEDIPUS:

I am going—you know on what condition? 1665

CREON:

Tell me. I'm listening.