

## *Oedipus the Tyrant*

*The play is set outside the palace of Oedipus in central Thebes. A shrine of Apollo, perhaps with a statue of him, is nearby. There is a chorus of elite Theban male citizens. Oedipus emerges from the doors and addresses the Priest of Zeus. This elderly man leads Theban male citizens of all ages, including other priests, who have adopted the posture of suppliants, holding suppliant branches, at the gates.*

### **Oedipus**

O children, young offspring of ancient Cadmus,

why are you taking up these seats like this

with wreathed suppliant branches?

Why at the same time is the city full of incense,

along with healing hymns and groans? 5

I don't think it right to hear about these things

from messengers—from others—and have come here myself,

I, who am called by all the famous Oedipus.

So come, old man, speak, since it's appropriate for you

to represent these men: how is it that you sit here— 10

in fear or in entreaty? You should know that I want

to help in any way. I'd be hard-hearted if I didn't

feel pity at such an act of supplication as this.

### **Priest**

So, O Oedipus, ruler of my country,

you can tell how old those of us

who sit at your altars are: some are fledglings 15

not yet strong enough to fly, some are weighed down with age,

priests as I am priest of Zeus, and others are

the elite young men. On the other hand, the rest of the tribe

sits garlanded in the market squares, at the twin temples

of Pallas, and the oracular ashes of Ismenus.<sup>1</sup> 20

For our city, as you can see yourself, is  
already reeling too much and still can't lift her head  
from the depths of bloody agitation.

The fruitful blossoms of her land are blighted;  
the herds of grazing cattle are blighted, 25

as are the labour pains of women, which produce nothing. The fire-bringing  
god, the most hostile plague, has struck and is in control of the city;<sup>2</sup>

by him is the House of Cadmus emptied out, and black  
Hades is enriched with groans and laments.

These children of yours don't sit in supplication 30

because we equate you with a god,

but because we judge you the first of men

in life's vicissitudes and in dealings with the gods.

It was you who came to the Cadmean city and delivered it  
from paying the tribute which we owed to the harsh songstress.<sup>3</sup> 35

And you did this without knowing any more than we did,  
nor through acquiring any knowledge, but, as it is said and believed,  
you set our life straight with additional help from some god.

And now, dear Oedipus, most universally powerful one,  
all of us here have turned to you to supplicate you 40

to find some way of defending us, whether you've

heard some saying from the gods or know something from some man.

I'm aware that the results of deliberation  
are most effective when they come from men of experience. 45

So come, best of men, save your city.

Come, take care of your reputation, since this land  
names you her saviour on account of your past readiness to act.

Let our recollections of your reign never be

that we once stood upright only later to collapse. 50

So raise up this city so it cannot fall.

It was with good omen then that you furnished  
us with good fortune, so do the same again.

If you're going to rule this land as you rule it now,  
it would be better to command it with men in it than void. 55

No fortified city nor ship is anything if it's empty  
and uninhabited by men.

### **Oedipus**

My pitiable children, the things you've come to me desiring  
are all too well known to me. I'm quite aware  
that you're all sick, and that, while you sicken, 60  
not one of you is as ill as I am.

Your suffering afflicts you each individually,  
affecting no one else, but my soul cries out  
for the city, and for myself and for you alike.

That's why you don't find me asleep as you come to wake me; 65  
you can be sure I've already wept many times,  
and tried out many different trains of thought.

On close consideration I thought up an expedient,  
and implemented it: I sent Creon,  
son of Menoecus, my brother-in-law, 70  
to the Pythian residence of Phoebus,<sup>4</sup> to ask  
what I must do or say to protect this town.

But as I count the days I'm already concerned  
about how he's doing. He's been absent  
for longer than is to be expected or appropriate. 75

When he arrives, if at that point I didn't do everything  
the god discloses, I'd be in the wrong.

**Priest**

Your words are timely. These men here are  
indicating to me that Creon is approaching.

**Oedipus**

O Lord Apollo, may he come glowing with fortune  
that can save us, with a gleam in his eye. 80

**Chorus**

To hazard a guess, the news is heartening. Otherwise  
he wouldn't come so richly crowned with laurel leaves and berries.

*[Enter Creon, garlanded]*

**Oedipus**

We'll soon know, because he's in hearing distance.  
My lord, my in-law, son of Meneoceus, 85  
what word from the god do you bring us?

**Creon**

Good news. I say that even hardships, if  
they find a successful outcome, result in good fortune.

**Oedipus**

What kind of statement is it? What you've just said  
fills me with neither confidence nor misgivings. 90

**Creon**

If you want these bystanders to hear,  
I'm ready, or otherwise to go inside.

**Oedipus**

Say it in front of everyone, because I'm grieving  
more for them than even for my own life.

**Creon**

I'll report what I heard from the god. 95  
Lord Phoebus clearly commands us

to drive out of our land the pollution  
reared in it, and not to nurture it so it's incurable.

**Oedipus**

By what rite of purification? What's the nature of the problem?

**Creon**

We need to drive a man out or solve the problem by paying back slaughter 100  
with slaughter, since that bloodshed is the cause of the tempest afflicting the city.

**Oedipus**

So who is the man whose fate he's revealing here?

**Creon**

My lord, we in this country once had a leader,  
Laius, before you took charge of the city.

**Oedipus**

I know. I heard. But I never laid eyes on him. 105

**Creon**

He was killed, and the god now clearly tells us  
to take revenge on whoever his murderers may be.

**Oedipus**

Wherever are they? Where will the trail  
of this old felony be discovered, when the clues are so faint?

**Creon**

He said it was in this land. What's sought 110  
can be found; only what's overlooked escapes.

**Oedipus**

Was it at home, in the countryside,  
or in some other land that Laius was slaughtered?

**Creon**

He said he was going out of town to visit the oracle,  
but once he'd left, he never came back home again. 115

**Oedipus**

And was there no-one to report it, a fellow traveller  
who witnessed it, who might be questioned and his information used?

**Creon**

They all died except for one, who ran away terrified,  
and he had only one thing to say that he knew for sure.

**Oedipus**

What thing? If we can receive even the faintest glimmer of hope, 120  
one thing might reveal many others.

**Creon**

He said that robbers encountered them and  
killed him—a mass of hands, not just one.

**Oedipus**

So how would a robber do anything so audacious  
if he hadn't been bribed somehow here in Thebes? 125

**Creon**

That's what people thought. But after Laius died  
nobody came to our defence in the crisis.

**Oedipus**

But with the ruler passing away in such a manner,  
what problem could prevent a thorough investigation?

**Creon**

The Sphinx with her varied songs compelled us 130  
to let go of inscrutable problems and concentrate on those at hand.

**Oedipus**

So I'll make a fresh start and once again bring illumination.

It's quite appropriate for you and Phoebus

to lay on me this responsibility on behalf of the dead man.

So therefore, fittingly, you'll discover I'm your ally 135

in getting revenge for this country and for the god too.  
I'll dispel this defilement on my own account,  
not on behalf of friends far away.  
For whoever killed that man, he might want to  
take revenge just as violently on me as well. 140  
In doing something for Laius I'll benefit myself.  
So, my children, get up as fast as you can from these altar-steps,  
picking up the suppliant branches.  
Someone go and gather Cadmus' people here,  
saying that I'll leave no stone unturned.  
With god's help, it will be clear whether we are fortunate or doomed. 145

**Priest**

O children, let's get up. The things we came  
here to ask for, this man announces of his own accord.  
And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles,  
become our saviour and deliver us from disease. 150

*[Exit Creon and the Priest with the other suppliants]*

**Chorus** *[sings and dances]*

O sweetly speaking word of Zeus, what is your attitude  
in coming from golden Pytho to glorious Thebes?  
I'm rigid with mental terror, shaking in fear,  
*Iēie* Delian Healer.<sup>5</sup> I'm in awe of you as I wonder  
what debt you will demand of me, 155  
whether it's a new one,  
or coming back after years have passed.  
Tell me, immortal voice, child of golden Hope.<sup>6</sup>

First I call on you, immortal Athena,  
daughter of Zeus, 160

and on your sister, possessor of our land,  
Artemis, who sits on her golden throne curving around the marketplace.  
And Phoebus, far-shooter: light my way, O you three,  
and defend me from death.

If you've ever previously sent a fiery pestilence away from here 165  
to stop ruin racing against her city, then come again now.

Alas, the agonies I'm suffering  
are countless. My entire community is diseased,  
and thinking doesn't provide  
any weapon with which to defend oneself. 170

The goods produced by the celebrated earth don't grow.

For women, the screams don't culminate in live births.

You can see one life after another

dart away,

like a winged bird, 175

with a force stronger than irresistible fire,

to the headland of the western god.<sup>7</sup>

These countless deaths are destroying the city.

Her pitiable children lie unlamented on the ground

spreading death. 180

Meanwhile, wives

and grey-haired mothers

wail in supplication for their dismal plight

beside the scattered altars,

The appeal to the Healer sounds brightly 185

alongside intoned lamentations.

So send us, O golden daughter of Zeus,



assistance, fair of face.<sup>8</sup>

I entreat you: may raging Ares--

who's now blasting me with fire as if I'm in the din of combat, 190

although there are no bronze arms or shields—

may he take a backwards leap, turn around,

and charge away, from my fatherland.<sup>9</sup>

He can go to the great chamber of Amphitrite,<sup>10</sup>

or to the inhospitable waves of Thrace where no ship can moor. 195

For if night leaves any destruction unfinished,

it's completed during the daytime.

O father Zeus,

you wield the force

of the lightning that brings fire. 200

Lycian lord,<sup>11</sup> I long for the arrows

shot from your curving golden bow

to go unconquered in every direction

marshalled in our defence. 205

And for the gleam of Artemis' torches,

with which she darts through the Lycian mountains.

And I call upon the god of the golden head-band,

the one who takes his title from our land,<sup>12</sup> 210

wine-faced Bacchus of the loud ritual cry,

with your company of maenads,

draw near with your flaming pinewood torches,

against the god not honoured by the gods.<sup>13</sup>

### **Oedipus**

You make your prayers. And if you'll hear and take in 215

what I say, and do something to alleviate the plague,  
you may get help and relieve your misery.  
I'll make this proclamation publicly, as someone not involved  
in either the report or the deed, since I'd not follow the trail far 220  
in possession of no clue.  
Yet now, since I've joined your citizenry subsequently,  
I make this proclamation to all Cadmeans:  
If any one of you knows what man was the killer  
of Laius son of Labdacus, 225  
I command him to give me all the information.  
If he's frightened that by expunging the city's guilt  
he'll indict himself on a capital charge, I tell him he'll suffer  
nothing more unpleasant than to leave this land unhurt.  
But then again, if someone knows that the murderer 230  
came from another country, let him not stay silent,  
since I'll give him a reward and owe him a favour, too.  
But if you stay silent, or if anyone is too frightened on his own  
or a friend's behalf to respond to these orders of mine,  
then you need to listen to what I shall do. 235  
I prohibit everyone belonging to this land,  
of which I possess the sovereignty and the throne,  
to host or speak to the murderer,  
or let him take part in prayers  
or sacrifices to the gods, or touch sacred chalices. 240  
Everyone must keep him from their houses, since  
the Pythian oracle of the god  
has just disclosed to me that we are polluted.  
This is how I'll fight as an ally with the god  
and with the man who died. 245

And I pray that the perpetrator, if he remains unknown,  
and whether he acted alone or with others,  
will miserably eke out a miserable, luckless life.  
And I also pray that if he comes  
to share my home, and I'm aware of it, 250  
I'll suffer the very things which my curse has just dictated.  
I order you to bring all this about,  
for my sake, for the sake of the god, and  
of this country, wrecked by infertility and impiety.  
For even if this issue had not been propelled by a god, 255  
you still shouldn't have left the impurity uncleansed,  
when a noble man, your monarch, had died:  
you should have solved the case. But now,  
I hold the status of ruler which he held before,  
and I possess the marriage bed and same wife to father children on, 260  
and would indeed have had children born of the same mother  
if he'd not unfortunately failed to become a parent.  
But now fate has leapt on him with lethal force.  
In return, as if on behalf of my own father,  
I'll fight on behalf of this cause and leave no stone unturned 265  
as I seek to arrest the one who committed the murder,  
for the son of Labdacus and for Polydorus  
and Cadmus before that and Agenor of old.<sup>14</sup>  
And as to those who fail to comply, I pray  
that the gods bestow on them neither crops from the earth 270  
nor children by their wives, but that they are destroyed  
by the fate now threatening us or one even more hateful.  
And as for you other Cadmeans, all those  
who are pleased by these measures, may your ally Justice

and all the gods be benevolent towards you always. 275

**Chorus**

My king, I'll speak according to the oath you have laid on me.

I did not do the killing, nor am I able to point to the killer.

As far as the enquiry is concerned, it was for Phoebus,  
who ordered it, to say who is the perpetrator.

**Oedipus**

What you've said is right. But there's no individual 280  
who can force the gods to do what they don't want to.

**Chorus**

I'd like to say what I think is the second best course.

**Oedipus**

Please feel free to talk about a third course, too.

**Chorus**

My understanding is that our Lord Teiresias  
bears most affinity with Lord Phoebus; anyone investigating this 285  
might acquire the clearest information from him.

**Oedipus**

I haven't been slack even about doing this.

Creon suggested it, and I sent for him twice  
to be escorted here. I'm surprised he wasn't here ages ago.

**Chorus**

Yes. But the other accounts are fatuous and antiquated. 290

**Oedipus**

Which ones do you mean? I'm examining everything reported.

**Chorus**

It was said that he was killed by some wayfarers.

**Oedipus**

I heard that too. But no-one can point out the witness.

**Chorus**

Yet if he's at all capable of fear, when he hears  
such curses from you, he'll not be able to stay put. 295

**Oedipus**

A man who doesn't fear to act isn't scared by words.

**Chorus**

There's no-one to convict him. But these men here  
are at last bringing the divine prophet, the only person  
with innate knowledge of the truth.

*[Enter Teiresias accompanied by his child-guide and other attendants]*

**Oedipus**

O Teiresias, you observe everything that can be learned 300  
or is not to be spoken about, that is heavenly or earthbound.

Even though you are blind, you nonetheless know  
what plague besets the city. From this plague, my lord,  
we identify you as our protector and only saviour.

For in case you've heard nothing of what the messengers said, 305  
when we sent to Apollo for a response, he responded that  
the only remedy for this plague would be for us  
to learn for sure who killed Laius, and kill them  
or send them away from this country into exile.

So don't grudge us any communication from the birds, 310  
or any other type of divination in your repertoire,  
but rescue yourself and the city, rescue me,  
and rescue us from the entire pollution caused by the death.

We are in your hands. For a man to do good where he can  
and has capability is the finest type of labour. 315

**Teiresias**

Alas, alas, it's a terrible thing to have wisdom where

it does no service to the man possessing it. Although I knew  
this well I failed to remember it. Otherwise I wouldn't have come here.

**Oedipus**

What's the matter? You've arrived very despondent.

**Teiresias**

Send me home. Both you and I will cope with our lot 320  
most easily if you do as I say.

**Oedipus**

What you've said is in accordance with neither  
this city's law nor its best interests, if you deprive her of this statement.

**Teiresias**

I see that you, for your part, are speaking inappropriately.  
So, since I don't want the same to happen to me... 325

**Oedipus**

In the gods' name, don't turn away if you have any awareness,  
since all of us here prostrate ourselves before you as suppliants!

**Teiresias**

None of you has any awareness. I'll never disclose  
my troubles, not to mention yours.

**Oedipus**

What are you saying? Although you know, you won't tell, 330  
but have it in mind to betray us and destroy the state?

**Teiresias**

I'll give neither myself nor you grief. Why are you doing  
this futile cross-examination? You'd never get it out of me.

**Oedipus**

You're the worst of the worst, and would infuriate  
even a character of stone. Will you never speak out, 335  
but insist on this unfeeling and uncompromising attitude?

**Teiresias**

You put the blame on my anger. You don't  
realise the anger inherent in yourself, but abuse me instead.

**Oedipus**

Yes, because who wouldn't get angry if he heard  
the kind of words which you just dishonoured the city with? 340

**Teiresias**

What will be will be, even if I hush it in silence.

**Oedipus**

Since it will happen anyway, you should tell me.

**Teiresias**

I won't speak any further. Get as angry and rage  
in as furious a passion as you want.

**Oedipus**

Indeed, in my fury I'll omit nothing of what 345  
I'm thinking. Know this: I think you helped plot  
and carry out the deed, short of  
killing him with your own hands. If you could see,  
I'd even say that you'd done the deed all by yourself.

**Teiresias**

Really? I bid you to abide by the very proclamation 350  
you delivered earlier, and from this day forth speak neither to  
these people here nor to me,  
since you are the sacrilegious polluter of this land.

**Oedipus**

What kind of outrageous speech have you just fired off?  
Where are you going to escape from this to? 355

**Teiresias**

I *have* escaped. I'm looking after the truth and making it strong.

**Oedipus**

Who did you learn this from? It has nothing to do with skill.

**Teiresias**

From you. You provoked me into speaking although I didn't want to.

**Oedipus**

What was it that you said? Say it again so I can better understand.

**Teiresias**

Didn't you understand earlier? Or do you say that to test me?

360

**Oedipus**

I didn't understand it fully, as it were. So tell me again.

**Teiresias**

I say that you are the murderer of Laius that you're looking for.

**Oedipus**

You're not going to say such dire things twice and not regret it.

**Teiresias**

Shall I speak of some other things too, so you can get even angrier?

**Oedipus**

Go ahead as much as you like. It will be said in vain.

365

**Teiresias**

I say that you have no idea that your intimacy with those you love most is utterly shameful, and that you have no idea how bad your situation is.

**Oedipus**

You think you can carry on talking like this forever with impunity?

**Teiresias**

Yes, if there is any strength in the truth.

**Oedipus**

There is, except in your case. It doesn't apply to you because you're deaf and stupid as well as blind.

370

**Teiresias**



And you are abject despite reprimanding me  
in ways which everyone will soon be doing to you.

**Oedipus**

Your experience is of one endless night, so you  
can't harm me nor anyone else with the faculty of sight.

375

**Teiresias**

Your destined fall is not down to me, since  
Apollo, whose responsibility it is, is up to the task.

**Oedipus**

Did Creon think this up, or you?

**Teiresias**

Creon isn't your problem. You are.

**Oedipus**

O wealth and tyranny and expertise  
outdoing expertise in the many rivalries of life!

380

What great envy do you foster  
if, for the sake of sovereignty here, which the state  
placed in my hands as an unrequested gift,

Creon the faithful, my friend from the outset,

385

has secretly sabotaged me because he longs to throw me out.

He's sent in against me this wile-weaving wizard,  
a crafty beggar, who's only interested in profit  
and was born with no insight into the mantic art.

So come on, tell us when you proved you were a seer?

390

Can you claim that when the song-stitching she-dog was here  
you said anything to these citizens to liberate them?<sup>15</sup>

And yet the riddle was not for the any man who turned up  
to solve. It needed skill in prophecy,  
and you were shown up as lacking it in terms both of

bird-signs and information from the gods. But I came along, 395

Oedipus who knows nothing, and put a stop to her,  
using brainpower rather than lessons taught by birds.

It's me that you're trying to throw out, thinking that  
you'll be on intimate terms with Creon's henchmen. 400

But I think that you and your fellow schemer  
will regret trying to drive me out as accursed. If you didn't seem  
elderly, you'd have learned to your cost the extent of your arrogance.

### **Chorus**

We're of the view that what both he and you  
have spoken has been in anger. 405

There's no need for this kind of thing; what's needed  
is to focus on how to discharge the oracles of the god.

Teiresias

Ruler you may be, but I too am possessed  
of an equal right of reply.

I do not live as a slave of yours, but of Loxias.<sup>16</sup> 410

Nor shall I be reckoned as one under the patronage of Creon.

I tell you, since you insult me as a blind man,  
that you may have sight but cannot see the extent of your predicament,  
nor where it is you live, nor with whom you keep house.

Are you aware of who your parents are? Undetected, you've 415

been an enemy of your own people, both beneath and upon the earth.

And the double-edged weapon of your maternal and paternal curse  
will one day hound you dreadfully and drive you from this land,  
and although you can see well now, your eyes will be dark.

What safe harbour will there be for you to scream in, 420

what part of Cithaeron will not soon resound,<sup>17</sup>

when you realise what kind of marriage, what foul haven

you sailed into in this house after your voyage began so well?  
Nor do you have any sense of the many tribulations  
which will bring you and your children down to the same level. 425

So hurl your filth at Creon and at what I say,  
for no mortal exists who'll ever  
suffer worse annihilation than you.

**Oedipus**

Am I to put up with hearing such things from him?  
Why don't you go to hell, and quickly? Why don't 430  
you turn around and get away from this house?

**Teiresias**

I wouldn't have come if you hadn't summoned me.

**Oedipus**

I didn't think you'd talk nonsense, or I'd  
have taken my time calling you to my home.

**Teiresias**

I am what I am—according to you, nonsensical, 435  
but the parents who brought you into the world thought me discerning.

**Oedipus**

Which ones? Stay. Who is my parent?

**Teiresias**

This very day will be your parent and your destroyer.

**Oedipus**

Everything you say is too riddling and obscure.

**Teiresias**

Aren't you naturally preeminent in solving these things? 440

**Oedipus**

You taunt me about the very things which you'll see I am great at.

**Teiresias**

It was, however, exactly that part of your destiny that destroyed you.

**Oedipus**

If I saved the city, I don't care.

**Teiresias**

I'll leave now. Child, be my guide.

**Oedipus**

Let him indeed guide you. Your presence here is obstructive 445  
and aggravating. Once you've left, you'll not irritate me any more.

**Teiresias**

I'll leave when I've said what I came to say, not because  
I fear your face. There is now way for you to destroy me.  
I tell you this: the man you've been seeking for a while,  
with threats and proclamations about the murder 450  
of Laius, that man is here,  
officially a resident alien, but subsequently he's be  
revealed as native Theban, but he won't take pleasure  
in the outcomes. Blind when he had been able to seem  
poor instead of rich, he'll make his way to a foreign land, 455  
feeling his way with a stick.

He'll be revealed as both brother and father  
to the very children whose company he keeps,  
son and husband to the woman who gave him birth,  
as having impregnated the same woman as the father he killed. 460

Think about this as you go inside, too. If you discover I've spoken falsehoods,  
then it will be time to say I have no skill in prophecy.

*[Exit Teiresias and his child guide and attendants]*

**Chorus** *[sings and dances]*

Who is it that the Delphic rock's oracular voice  
said had committed the most unspeakable crimes

with blood-soaked hands? 465

It's time for him to escape

on feet more powerful

than those of storm-swift horses.

The son of Zeus leaps against him,

armed with fire and lightning,<sup>18</sup> 470

in company with the dreadful,

infallible spirits of Death.<sup>19</sup>

Word has just spread like light

shining from snowy Parnassus

that the unknown man must by all means be traced.<sup>20</sup> 475

He's lurking under cover of the wild woods,

among the caves and rocks, like a bull,

desolate as he treads his desolate path,

trying to put space between himself

and the oracles from the central navel 480

of the earth. But they live forever,

flapping around him.

The wise augur disturbs me

terribly — terribly —

and I can't confirm or deny his words. 485

I have no idea what to say.

My expectations set me flying; I can see neither the present nor the future.

In the past I never learned

of any conflict existing between the Labdacids

and the son of Polybus<sup>21</sup> 490

that I could use as sure proof

in attacking  
the public reputation of Oedipus,  
while acting on behalf of the Labdacids  
and their unexplained deaths. 495

But Zeus and Apollo are certainly intelligent  
and know about mortal affairs.  
But whether a prophet  
knows more than I do  
is a question that cannot be truly tested;  
one man may have a greater or lesser share of wisdom.

But before I'd seen direct evidence,  
I'd never acquiesce 500  
if people blame Oedipus.

Everyone saw  
the winged maiden  
once came against him.

He was seen to be wise, 505  
and, when tested,  
performed a welcome service

to the state,  
so in my mind

I'll never judge him 510  
guilty of evildoing.

[*Enter Creon*]

**Creon** [*speaks*]

Gentlemen, citizens, I've heard that the tyrant Oedipus  
has laid monstrous charges against me,  
and have come since they are insufferable. If he believes 515

that in the present crisis he has been harmed  
by anything I have said or done,  
I have no desire to live a long life  
under the burden of this allegation.

The damage done to me by this rumour  
is no slight matter, but of the gravest kind,  
since it means I shall be called harmful  
not only to the city but to you and to my friends.

**Chorus**

But perhaps this allegation was forced from him  
by his anger rather than intentionally from his rational mind.

**Creon**

Was the statement made that the prophet had told lies  
because he had been persuaded by my proposals?

**Chorus**

This was said, but I don't know for what reason.

**Creon**

Was this charge laid against me  
with a steady gaze and in his right mind?

**Chorus**

I don't know. I do not see what our rulers do.  
But look, he is coming outside himself now.

*[Enter Oedipus]*

**Oedipus**

You there, what are you here for? Do you have  
the face and audacity to come to my roof  
when you are obviously that man's killer  
and manifestly trying to steal my kingship?

So come on, by the gods, tell me whether it was cowardice

520

525

530

535

or stupidity you saw in me that made you conceive this plot?

What did you think? That I'd not notice your activity

as it cunningly crept up on me, or that I'd not protect myself from it if I had?

Isn't your attempt to take the throne, without

540

help from the people and accomplices, stupid,

when it takes popular and financial support to win?

**Creon**

Know this from me. Hear my response on equal terms

to what you've said; once you've heard, then be the judge.

**Oedipus**

You're very good at talking. But I'm bad at listening

545

to you, because I've discovered you're my grievous enemy.

**Creon**

That is the very thing you need to hear me speak about first.

**Oedipus**

The one thing you shouldn't say is that you aren't trouble.

**Creon**

If you think that mindless recalcitrance

is an advantage, then you're not thinking straight.

550

**Oedipus**

If you think that damaging a kinsman won't

incur a penalty, then you're not in your right mind.

**Creon**

I agree with the justice of what you say. But

please inform me what harm you say you're suffering?

**Oedipus**

Did you or did you not persuade me

555

that I ought to send for that venerated seer?

**Creon**



I stand by that plan even now.

**Oedipus**

So how long is it since Laius...

**Creon**

Since he did what? I don't understand.

**Oedipus**

...disappeared from the land of the living after being lethally assaulted? 560

**Creon**

Many long years have passed since then.

**Oedipus**

So was the seer practising his craft at that time?

**Creon**

Yes, with the same expertise and held in the same honour.

**Oedipus**

Did he mention me at all at that time?

**Creon**

Certainly not when I was in his proximity. 565

**Oedipus**

But didn't you hold a murder enquiry?

**Creon**

Of course we did. Why wouldn't we? And we heard nothing.

**Oedipus**

So why didn't this expert speak up about this then?

**Creon**

I don't know. When I don't know about something I prefer to keep quiet.

**Oedipus**

Well, this much at least you could say without compromising your judgement.

**Creon**

What? If I know, I won't refuse to say.

**Oedipus**

That if he hadn't pooled resources with you, he'd never  
have named me in connection with Laius' demise

**Creon**

You know best if he says this. But I think it right that I should get  
as much information from you as you did just now from me. 575

**Oedipus**

Ask away. I'll never be convicted of the murder.

**Creon**

So then, is my sister your wedded wife?

**Oedipus**

What you say can't be denied.

**Creon**

And you govern this country with her on equal terms?

**Oedipus**

She gets everything she might want from me. 580

**Creon**

And don't I, as number three, share equal status with you two?

**Oedipus**

That's exactly why you're revealed to be a false friend.

**Creon**

That's not the case, if you applied reason, as I do.

First, consider this. Do you think that anyone  
would choose to rule, with the terrors that entails, rather than 585  
sleep fearlessly at night, if he had the same level of power?

Like everyone else with any sense, I prefer

to behave like a ruler rather than be one.

For as it is, I get everything from you, free from fear, 590

whereas if I were myself the ruler, I'd have to do much I didn't want to.

Why would ruling be more pleasurable  
than misery=free power and supremacy?  
I've not yet become so misguided as to  
hanker after benefits that don't bring me a profit. 595

As it is now, everyone greets me, everyone keeps me close,  
everyone who wants something from you approaches me first,  
because that is the best way for them to succeed.

So why would I relinquish this for those other things?  
A mind that is thinking straight would never play it false. 600

I've never desired to implement such a policy,  
and couldn't bear to go along with someone else who did.

If you want proof of this, then go to Pytho,  
and find out whether I reported the oracle to you accurately.

After that, if you discover that I collaborated in any plot 605  
with the prophet, put me death, sentenced not  
by one vote but two, my own as well as yours.

But don't convict me without evidence, on the basis of vague inference.

It's an injustice to decide haphazardly 610  
that bad men are good or good men bad.

I deem throwing away a good friend is like  
thrusting your own beloved life from your body.

There's no doubt that in time you will realise this,  
since only time reveals a man to be just,

but you could spot a bad one in just a single day. 615

### **Chorus**

He has spoken well, as one taking care not to be ruined,  
my lord. It's hazardous to react too quickly.

### **Oedipus**

When someone who plots against me makes

a speedy secret move, I need to think fast in response.

If I wait around calmly, his interests

620

will have been served, and I'll have failed in mine.

**Creon**

So what do you want? To throw me out of the country?

**Oedipus**

No way. I want you to die, not escape.

That way you can provide an example of where envy leads.

**Creon**

You're insisting on being intransigent and distrustful?

625

**Oedipus**

[You don't deserve to be trusted by me]<sup>22</sup>

**Creon**

No, since I can see you're not in your right mind.

**Oedipus**

I actually am, where my interests are concerned.

**Creon**

You should care about mine the same.

**Oedipus**

But you were born evil.

**Creon**

And if you understand nothing?

**Oedipus**

I still have to run the country

**Creon**

Not if you're running it badly.

**Oedipus**

O my city, do you hear?

**Creon**

The city is mine too, not just yours.

630

**Chorus**

Stop it, my lords. I see Jocasta here  
coming just in time from the house; she needs  
to calm this quarrel of yours down properly.

*[Enter Jocasta from the palace]*

**Jocasta**

O foolish men, why are your voices raised  
in such a misguided conflict? Aren't you ashamed  
to make a stir out of your personal issues when the land is so diseased?  
Why don't *you* go indoors, and you, Creon, go home?  
Stop turning a trivial irritation into a major issue.

635

**Creon**

Sister, your husband Oedipus thinks it right  
to do one of two dire things to me,  
either to exile me from my fatherland or to arrest and kill me.

640

**Oedipus**

Agreed, lady, because I apprehended him  
wronging my person with malicious cunning.

**Creon**

May I profit nothing, but die accursed,  
if I have done any of the things which he accuses me of doing.

645

**Jocasta**

Oedipus, by the gods, believe what he says,  
especially out of respect for this oath of his,  
but also for me and those who are here for you.

**Chorus**

I implore you, my lord, willingly to obey and see sense.

**Oedipus**

What is that you want me to concede then?

650

**Chorus**

Be respectful to a man who's never been foolish and has now taken a serious oath.

**Oedipus**

You do realise what you're asking for?

**Chorus**

I do.

**Oedipus**

So explain what you mean.

**Chorus**

On the basis of an unproved rumour, you should never lay  
an allegation that brings dishonour against a friend under oath.

**Oedipus**

Then you must know that this objective of yours  
means either death or national exile for you.

**Chorus**

No, by the foremost god of all the gods,  
by Helios!<sup>23</sup> May I die without the gods,  
without friends, by the worst of deaths,  
if this is in my mind. My despondent soul

660

is worn down by the way

the land is withering,

665

with the problems caused by you two  
on top of our longstanding ones.

**Oedipus**

So let him go, even if I must die for certain,  
or be driven by force, dishonoured, from this land.

670

Your words, not his, have aroused my pity.

He shall incur my hatred wherever he may be.

**Creon**

You're clearly as full of hate when you yield as you're oppressive  
when you're overfull of rage. Such temperaments  
hurt their owners most, and quite right too.

675

**Oedipus**

Why don't you go away and let me be?

**Creon**

I'm going.

unrecognised by you but acknowledged as an equal by them.

[Exit Creon]

**Chorus**

My lady, why do you hesitate to take your husband here inside?

**Jocasta**

The time to go in will be when I've found out what's going on.

680

**Chorus**

Ignorance, guesswork, and rumour.

Voracious injustice, too.

**Jocasta**

From both of them?

**Chorus**

Yes.

**Jocasta**

What did they say?

**Chorus**

When the country is in already struggling, I think  
that there's more than enough reason for the matter to stay closed.

685

**Oedipus**

Do you see where you've brought us, despite your good intentions,  
by trying to soothe me and take the edge off my state of mind?

**Chorus**

My lord, I've said it more than once: 690

you can be sure that it would clearly be senseless

and completely irrational for me to turn my back on you,

because when my beloved land was benighted by misery

you set her on a straight course, 695

and are likely to guide us well out of our current plight.

**Jocasta**

By the gods tell me, too, Lord, why you've become

so very angry and won't let it go?

**Oedipus**

I'll tell you, because I respect you, wife, more than these men: 700

the reason is Creon, for the things he has plotted against me.

**Jocasta**

Speak, so long as you're about to tell me clearly the cause of the argument.

**Oedipus**

He says that I'm the murderer of Laius.

**Jocasta**

Based on his own knowledge or did he get the information from someone else?

**Oedipus**

He sent me that evil prophet, because he prefers, as a freeman, 705

to stay silent when it comes to allegations.

**Jocasta**

So stop worrying about these things you're talking about

and listen to me; learn for yourself that

nothing human has anything to do with the mantic art.

I'll reveal concise evidence of these things to you. 710

For an oracle once came to Laius—I'll not say that

it was from Phoebus himself, but from his attendants:



a fate decreed that he'd die at the hands of a child,  
if ever one should be born to me and him.

On the other hand, the rumour goes that at some point 715  
foreign robbers killed him at the triple carriage-way;  
only three days had passed after the child's birth  
when Laius tied his ankles together  
and by the hands of others cast him on the pathless mountain.

And Apollo didn't bring it about then 720  
that he should be the murder of his father, nor  
that Laius should die at his son's hands—the dreadful thing he feared.

Those were the things the oracles ordained,  
so fear none of them. Whatever the god wants  
and requires must happen, he'll reveal it himself. 725

**Oedipus**

What psychological distraction and mental agitation  
has just afflicted me as I listen to you, wife!

**Jocasta**

What's causing you this anxiety?

**Oedipus**

I thought I heard you say that Laius was killed  
at the place where the three thoroughfares meet? 730

**Jocasta**

Yes, because that was what people heard, as remains the case.

**Oedipus**

And where is this place where this disaster occurred?

**Jocasta**

The place is called Phocis, and the two separate roads,  
from Delphi and from Daulia, meet at the same spot.

**Oedipus**

And how much time has elapsed since these things happened?

735

**Jocasta**

It was announced to the city  
just a bit before you took power in this land.

**Oedipus**

O Zeus, what plan have you devised for me?

**Jocasta**

What is this that weighs on your mind, Oedipus?

**Oedipus**

Don't ask me! But tell me what Laius  
looked like, and how old he was.

740

**Jocasta**

He was big, his hair was recently sprinkled with grey,  
and his figure didn't differ much from yours.

**Oedipus**

Alas, I am wretched. It seems that I've just  
unwittingly imposed a terrible curse upon myself.

745

**Jocasta**

What are you saying? I shrink back from looking at you, my lord.

**Oedipus**

I'm terribly afraid that the prophet can see.  
But you'll make it clearer if you tell me one more thing.

**Jocasta**

Even though I shrink from you, I'll listen and tell you what you ask.

**Oedipus**

Did he travel unaccompanied, or with  
many guards, as a chief of men?

750

**Jocasta**

There were five altogether, and one of them was a herald.  
A single carriage carried Laius.

**Oedipus**

Alas! It's now clear. Whoever was it  
who delivered this report to you, wife?

755

**Jocasta**

One of this household, the only one who survived to return.

**Oedipus**

And does he happen to be here now?

**Jocasta**

No, because when he came back from there  
and saw you in power, with Laius dead,  
he begged me as a suppliant, touching my hand,  
to send him to the fields where the flocks graze  
so that he could be far from the sight of this town.  
And I sent him: for a slave, he was worthy  
of a greater favour even than this.

760

**Oedipus**

Is there a way he can return to us quickly?

765

**Jocasta**

There is indeed; but why are you giving this instruction?

**Oedipus**

I fear that I've said more than I should,  
and that is why I want to see him.

**Jocasta**

Well, he'll come. But I think that I, too, deserve to  
learn what it is that's troubling you, my lord.

770

**Oedipus**

You'll not be deprived of that, since my expectations  
have been so far fulfilled. Whom would I speak to  
rather than you, when I'm running into such misfortune?  
My father was Polybus of Corinth,  
and my mother Merope, a Dorian. I was held

775

to be the most important of the townsmen there,  
until by chance something happened, worthy of astonishment,  
but which didn't merit such an earnest reaction from me.

For at a feast, a man who'd drunk too much wine  
called me out, saying that my paternity was fabricated. 780

And I was riled. I just about controlled myself  
that day, but on the next I went to my mother  
and father and questioned them. They were angry  
at the insult that the drunken man had spoken.

And I was pleased by what they said, but, nevertheless, 754  
it constantly grated on me, since the rumour spread widely.

Keeping it secret from my mother and father, I travelled  
to Delphi, and Phoebus sent me away  
frustrated of my aim, but in his response spoke of  
many other dreadful, dismal miseries— 790

that I was fated to mate with my mother, thus bringing into view  
a family that would be unbearable for people to look upon,  
and that I'd become the murderer of the man that fathered me.

On hearing this, I ran away from Corinth,  
from then on only thinking of it as somewhere locatable by the stars, 795  
seeking a place where I'd never witness the fulfilment  
of the disgraceful things foretold by the foul oracles.

As I wended my way I came to these parts,  
where you say that this ruler died.

I'll tell you the truth, my wife. 800

When as I travelled I came near these three highways, there a herald and a man  
mounted in a colt-drawn carriage, as you say,  
came upon me. The one in front and the old man himself

both drove me violently off the road, 805

and I, in anger, struck the one forcing me aside,  
the driver. And when the old man saw,

he watched out for the moment I passed by the vehicle,  
and came down on the centre of my head with his double whip.  
Yet he paid more than the equivalent penalty. Straightaway 810  
he was struck by the staff in this hand of mine,  
and immediately rolled out from inside the carriage flat on his back.  
I killed them all. But if this stranger  
was any kind of relative of Laius,  
who is more wretched than me, this man here? 815  
What man could be more hated by the gods?  
Neither strangers nor townsmen may receive him  
in their homes; they may not speak to him  
but must push him away from their houses. And it was  
I, nobody else, who laid this curse on me. 820  
And I pollute the bed of the dead man with the very hands  
that killed him. Am I not abhorrent?  
Am I not utterly defiled if I must run away  
and as a fugitive be able neither to see my own people,  
nor set foot in my fatherland? Or must I mate 825  
with my mother and kill my father  
Polybus, who fathered me and brought me up?  
So wouldn't someone who judged that these things  
were sent upon me by a cruel deity be correct?  
May I never, ever see that day, O you pure 830  
and revered gods; but may I disappear before  
I witness myself stained by such dire defilement.

**Chorus**

O King, these things make us shrink back with fear. But until  
you learn about them from the one who was present, stay hopeful. 835

**Oedipus**

This is indeed my last and only hope,  
to wait for the man from the pastureland.

**Jocasta**

And what are you keen to do when he's arrived?

**Oedipus**

I'll explain to you. If he's found to say

the same as you, then I at least have avoided harm.

840

**Jocasta**

And what was the special thing you heard me say?

**Oedipus**

You said that he named robbers

as Laius' killers. If on the one hand he still

says that they were several, I did not kill him,

because one man is not the same as many,

845

But if he specifies a lone traveller,

responsibility for this deed now rests on me.

**Jocasta**

You can be sure that this was the report that came to light.

He surely can't repudiate this now,

because the whole city heard it, not just I alone.

850

So even if he should deviate somehow from what he said before,

he can never show that your killing of Laius

is aligned rightly with the prophecy, because

Loxias clearly decreed he would die at the hand of my child.

And yet that poor boy never killed him,

855

but expired himself beforehand.

Where divination is concerned, the right

hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.

**Oedipus**

You're right. But send someone to get the countryman

nevertheless, and don't neglect it.

860

**Jocasta**

I'll make haste to send for him. But let's go inside the house,

because I would do nothing that was unpleasing to you.

*[Jocasta and Oedipus enter the palace]*

**Chorus** *[sings and dances]*

May fate hear my reputation

for purity and piety in all the words

and deeds sanctioned by the laws that

865

walk on high, procreated

in ethereal heaven. Their father

is Olympus alone. Their parent was

not of the nature of mortal men,

and nor will oblivion ever lull them so sleep.

870

God's presence is great in them and does not grow old.

Hubris begets the tyrant.

Hubris, if glutted in vain excess,

inopportunistly and unfittingly,

875

climbers onto the topmost heights

and lunges precipitously into affliction,

where no foot can serve

a useful purpose. But I pray that gods will never

put a stop to the sort of contest that benefits the state.

880

I will never cease to retain god as my protector.

But if anyone conducts himself arrogantly in word or deed,

without fear of justice or reverence for the seats of the gods,

885

may a harsh fate overtake him,

in return for his ill-omened decadence,

if he doesn't reap his profits rightfully,

and abstain from unholy deeds,

890

but irresponsibly touches what is untouchable.

In these circumstances, what man shall aver

that he can defend his life against godsent missiles?  
If actions such as these are to receive honour, 895  
why should I perform choruses?

I'll go no more to worship at the earth's inviolate navel,  
nor to the temple at Abae, nor to Olympia,<sup>24</sup> 900  
if these oracles do not match with what happens  
in a way that all mortals can point to.

So, Lord Zeus—if that is the correct way to name you, 905  
King of All—let it not escape your notice,  
nor that of your immortal, eternal supremacy.

The oracles spoken of old about Laius  
are in decline; people already think them invalid.  
And Apollo is nowhere displayed with honours.  
Worship of the gods is on the wane. 910

*[Enter Jocasta with a woman attendant]*

**Jocasta** *[speaks]*

Lords of this land, the plan has come to me  
to tend the shrines of the gods, carrying in my hands  
these garlands and offerings of incense.

For Oedipus is disturbing his mind too much  
with all kinds of distress. He doesn't, like a man in his senses, 915  
assess new developments according to old evidence,  
but is at the mercy of anyone speaking of fearful things.

And so, since by advising him I can achieve nothing,  
I come to supplicate you with these prayer-offerings,  
O Lycian Apollo, since you are closest—<sup>25</sup> 920  
asking for some solution for us that is free from defilement.

We are all cowering now like people  
who see the helmsman of a ship is terrified.

*[Enter a Messenger who has travelled some distance, from Corinth]*



**Messenger** *[speaks]*

O strangers, I'd like to find out from you  
where the palace of the tyrant Oedipus is? 925

Best of all, tell me his whereabouts, if you know them.

**Chorus**

These are the buildings, O stranger; he himself is inside.

This woman here is the mother of his children,

**Messenger**

May she always prosper in prosperity,  
as fully recognised consort of that man. 930

**Jocasta**

And the same goes for you too, stranger. You deserve it  
in return for your fine greeting. But tell me, what's the aim  
of your visit and what you want to communicate.

**Messenger**

Good news for your household and your husband, my lady.

**Jocasta**

What news is that? Who have you come from? 935

**Messenger**

From Corinth. You will be pleased by what I'm about to say,  
to be sure, but perhaps upset.

**Jocasta**

What is it? Why would it have this double effect?

**Messenger**

The people of the Isthmian land will make him their tyrant,  
as the word is there. 940

**Jocasta**

Why? Isn't the elderly Polybus still in power?

**Messenger**

No he isn't, since he is dead and buried.

**Jocasta**

What did you say? Old man, has Polybus died?

**Messenger**

I deserve to die if I'm not telling the truth.

**Jocasta** [*to her woman attendant, who enters the palace as she speaks*]

Attendant, why don't you hurry to tell 945

the master this? O prophecies of the gods,

where are you now? Oedipus, long an exile

so terrified was he of killing this man, and now

he has passed away through fate and not at Oedipus' hands.

[*enter Oedipus from palace*]

**Oedipus**

My dearest wife, Jocasta 950

Why have you sent for me to come here out of the house?

**Jocasta**

Listen to this man here, and as you hear him,

think what has become of the revered oracles of the god.

**Oedipus**

So whoever is he and what is he telling me?

**Jocasta**

He's from Corinth, with the news that your father 955

Polybus is no more, but has died.

**Oedipus**

What do you mean, stranger? Give me the information yourself.

**Messenger**

If I am to report the primary news with clarity,

be sure that that man is dead and gone.

**Oedipus**

Did he die because of treachery, or from disease? 960

**Messenger**

A slight shift of the scale-pan brings elderly bodies to rest.

**Oedipus**

The poor man died of an ailment, as it seems.

**Messenger**

Of that and of the old age he had reached.

**Oedipus**

Alas, alas, why then, O my wife, should any notice be taken  
of the hearth of the Pythian prophet or of the cries 965  
of birds above, under whose guidance

I was supposed to kill my father? He has died  
and lies hidden beneath the earth. But I am here  
and have touched no weapon; unless perhaps he died out of longing  
for me. That way his death would have been caused by me. 970

But as for the oracles in question, Polybus has gathered them up  
and lies with them in Hades. They're worthless.

**Jocasta**

Didn't I tell you that long before?

**Oedipus**

You did, but I was led astray by terror.

**Jocasta**

So don't take any of those things to heart any more. 975

**Oedipus**

But how am I not to dread my mother's bed?

**Jocasta**

What should a human being be afraid of, when the workings of fate  
control him, and there is no clear foreknowledge of anything?  
It's best to live without a plan, however one can.  
But don't you be afraid of marrying your mother. 980

Many men before have slept with their mother  
in their dreams. But the one who is unconcerned  
about these things will live the easiest life.

**Oedipus**

I approve of everything you've said, except that my mother

happens to be alive. And now, since she lives, it is absolutely necessary  
to evade her, even though your words hold good.

985

**Jocasta**

Your father's funeral brings enormous comfort.

**Oedipus**

Enormous, I know, but while *she* lives there's fear.

**Messenger**

And which woman is it that you are so afraid of?

**Oedipus**

Merope, old man, whom Polybus used to live with.

990

**Messenger**

What makes you fear her?

**Oedipus**

A godsent prophecy, a terrifying one, stranger.

**Messenger**

Can it be repeated? Or is it unsanctioned for someone else to know?

**Oedipus**

It certainly can. Loxias once told me

that I must have sex with my mother and

995

shed my father's blood with my own hands.

For that reason my Corinthian home has long been put

at a great distance from me. The result has been good,

yet looking parents in the face is still the most delightful thing.

**Messenger**

Was it really the fear of this that made you an exile from your city?

1000

**Oedipus**

I was keen not to be my father's murderer, old man.

**Messenger**

Why then have I not released you from this fear, lord,

since I came out of goodwill to you.

**Oedipus**

And indeed you deserve my gratitude.

**Messenger**

And indeed this in particular was why I came,

1005

so that when you came home I might have some benefit.

**Oedipus**

Nevertheless I will never return to my parents.

**Messenger**

My son, you manifestly have no idea what you are doing.

**Oedipus**

How so, old man? By the gods, tell me.

**Messenger**

If these are the reasons why you evade going home.

1010

**Oedipus**

Out of fear that Phoebus should turn out to have been right about me.

**Messenger**

Fear that you might incur pollution from your parents?

**Oedipus**

This very thing, old man, is what eternally frightens me.

**Messenger**

You do realise that your fear is entirely unjustified?

**Oedipus**

How so, if I was a child born to these parents?

1015

**Messenger**

Because Polybus was not related to you at all.

**Oedipus**

What are you saying? Didn't Polybus father me?

**Messenger**

No more than I did, and to an equivalent extent.

**Oedipus**

And how can my father be equivalent to one who is nothing to me?

**Messenger**

Since neither he nor I was your biological father.

1020

**Oedipus**

So why did he call me his son?

**Messenger**

Know this: long ago he took you as a gift from my hands.

**Oedipus**

Yet he loved me so much, although I came from the hand of someone else?

**Messenger**

Yes, because his previous childlessness swayed him.

**Oedipus**

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

**Messenger**

I'd found you in the woods in the Cithaeron valleys.

**Oedipus**

Why were you on the move in those parts?

**Messenger**

I was overseeing mountain flocks there.

**Oedipus**

As a shepherd, an itinerant working for hire?

**Messenger**

At that point in time, my child, I was your saviour.

1030

**Oedipus**

What pain was I suffering when you took me in your arms?

**Messenger**

The ankles above your feet might bear witness to that.

**Oedipus**

Ah, why do you allude to that ancient problem?

**Messenger**

I freed you from the pins boring your feet together.

**Oedipus**

It was a terrible mark of disgrace that I took from my swaddling bands.

1035

**Messenger**

That misfortune was why you were given the name that you still bear.

**Oedipus**

O by the gods, was it my mother or father who did it? Tell me!

**Messenger**

I don't know. The man who gave you to me is in a better position to know.

**Oedipus**

So you got me from someone else and didn't chance upon me yourself?

**Messenger**

No. Another shepherd gave you to me. 1040

**Oedipus**

Who was it? Do you know well enough to be clear?

**Messenger**

I guess he was said to be one of Laius' people.

**Oedipus**

You mean the man who once long ago ruled this land?

**Messenger**

Exactly. That was the man the herdsman worked for.

**Oedipus**

And is he still alive so I can see him? 1045

**Messenger**

You people who live locally would know that best.

**Oedipus**

Is there anyone amongst you bystanders  
who knows the herdsman he speaks of  
and so has seen him in the fields or hereabouts?

Give me an answer! It's time for the matter to be brought to light. 1050

**Chorus**

I think it's precisely the same peasant  
that you were already wanting to see earlier. But  
Jocasta might well be able to tell you.

**Oedipus**

Wife, do you know that man, the one  
we recently sent for to come? Is this the man he speaks of? 1055

**Jocasta**

Why do ask about him? Don't be concerned.  
Don't dwell on what he said. It would be futile.

**Oedipus**

There is no way that when I have received this kind of evidence  
I'm not going to find out my ancestry.

**Jocasta**

By the gods, if you have any concern for your own life,  
do not continue this search. I've been afflicted enough. 1060

**Oedipus**

Be strong. Even if *I* turn out to be a third-generation slave  
by maternal descent, *you* won't be shown to be lower-class.

**Jocasta**

Still, let me persuade you, I entreat you. Don't do it.

**Oedipus**

I couldn't be persuaded out of looking for a clear answer to this question. 1065

**Jocasta**

And yet I am giving you the best advice and with goodwill

**Oedipus**

This best advice has been irritating me for a while.

**Jocasta**

You ill-fated man, may you never know who you are.

**Oedipus**

Will someone go and bring the herdsman to me?  
As for her, let her gloat on her wealthy ancestry. 1070

**Jocasta**

Alas, alas, you miserable man. That is the only  
way I have to address you, and no other way again.



*[Exit Jocasta]*

**Chorus**

Oedipus, why has your wife rushed off  
in such fierce despair? I'm afraid that  
a terrible flood of sorrows will burst out from this silence. 1075

**Oedipus**

Let it burst if it wants. *I'll* want to  
know my lineage, however humble it is.  
Perhaps she is ashamed of my low birth,  
thinking rather highly of herself for a woman.  
But since I regard myself as the child of Fortune 1080  
the benefactress, I'll not be dishonoured.

That is the mother I was born from,  
and my kindred months have given me status both humble and great.  
Since this is who I am, I could never  
turn into someone else and not search for my own ancestry. 1085

**Chorus**

If I am a prophet  
and possess good judgement,  
O Cithaeron, on tomorrow's full moon  
you will know, by Olympus,  
that Oedipus is native to you 1090  
and honours you  
as his nurse and mother.

And you are honoured by our choruses,  
because you bestow gifts  
on our royal family. 1095

*Iēie* Phoebus,

May these things be pleasing to you.

Who was it, child,  
who of the everlasting ones  
bore you after union 1100  
with your father,  
Pan who roams the mountains?  
Or was it one of Loxias's lovers?  
For he loves all the highland pastures.  
Or perhaps it was the ruler of Cyllene,<sup>26</sup> 1105  
or the Bacchic god, inhabitant of mountain summits,  
who obtained you as a foundling  
from the Nymphs of Helicon,<sup>27</sup> his most frequent playmates.

*[Enter the Theban shepherd from the mountains]*

**Oedipus** *[speaks]*

Elders, if it is right for me to hazard a guess 1110  
when I've never met him, I think I see the herdsman  
we've long been seeking. The herdsman's advanced years  
match the age of this man, and moreover,  
I recognise those bringing him as some house slaves  
of my own. But your understanding may perhaps 1115  
be better than mine, since you've seen the herdsman before.

**Chorus** *[speaks]*

You can be sure that I have recognised him. If anyone  
was Laius' trusty herdsman it was this man.

**Oedipus**

You I ask first, Corinthian stranger—is this the man you mean?

**Messenger**

Yes, this one you're looking at. 1120

**Oedipus**

And you, old man, look at me here and tell me  
everything I ask. Were you once in Laius' household?

**Shepherd**

Yes, a slave, but not a purchased one. I was born into the household.

**Oedipus**

What work was your responsibility? What was your way of life?

**Shepherd**

For most of my life I looked after the flocks. 1125

**Oedipus**

And in what parts were the pastures you frequented?

**Shepherd**

At times Cithaeron, and at times the neighbouring areas,

**Oedipus**

And do you know this man, having perhaps encountered him there?

**Shepherd**

What was he doing? Which man do you mean?

**Oedipus**

This one who's present. Have you ever met him? 1130

**Shepherd**

Not so that I could say so immediately from memory.

**Messenger**

It's no wonder, master. But I'll make him remember clearly

despite his ignorance. For I'm sure that

he's aware of when I three times spent time near him

in the Cithaeron region for whole sixth-month periods, 1135

he with two flocks and I with one,

from spring until Arktouros;<sup>28</sup>

then for the winter I would drive my flocks

to their folds and he'd drive his to those of Laius.

Did any of these things happen in the way I say or not? 1140

**Shepherd**

You're telling the truth, although it was a long time ago.

**Messenger**

Come now, speak of this: you know that you gave me

a child for me to foster and bring up?

**Shepherd**

What's the matter? Why are you asking me this question?

**Messenger**

This man here, my friend, was that one when he was young. 1145

**Shepherd**

Damn you; why don't you stay silent?

**Oedipus**

Oh, don't chastise him, old man, since  
your words need chastisement more than his.

**Shepherd**

In what way, O best of masters, am I doing wrong?

**Oedipus**

By not addressing the matter of the child he's talking about. 1150

**Shepherd**

Because he doesn't know what he is talking about. His efforts are futile.

**Oedipus**

You won't speak as a favour, but you will speak if you're hurting.

**Shepherd**

By the gods, don't maltreat me—I'm an old man.

**Oedipus**

Someone be quick and twist his arms behind his back!

**Shepherd**

Alas, what have I done? What is it you want to find out? 1155

**Oedipus**

Did you give the child the man is talking about to him?

**Shepherd**

Yes I did. I wish that I had died that day.

**Oedipus**

You'll come to that if you do not speak the rightful truth.

**Shepherd**

But if I speak I will suffer much greater destruction.

**Oedipus**

This man seems determined to waste time.

1160

**Shepherd**

I'm certainly not. I said a while ago that I handed him over.

**Oedipus**

Where did you get him from? Was he yours or from someone else?

**Shepherd**

He was not mine. I got him from someone else.

**Oedipus**

From which of the citizens here and from which house?

**Shepherd**

By the gods, master, don't enquire any further.

1165

**Oedipus**

If I have to ask you again, you're a dead man.

**Shepherd**

He was one of those sprung from Laius' household.

**Oedipus**

A slave? Or was he related to Laius?

**Shepherd**

Alas, I am on the verge of saying the dreaded words.

**Oedipus**

And I hearing them. But nevertheless it must be heard.

1170

**Shepherd**

He was said to be Laius' child. But your wife inside  
would best be able to speak about that issue.

**Oedipus**

Because she gave me to you?

**Shepherd**

Yes indeed, my lord

**Oedipus**

To what end?

**Shepherd**

For me to destroy him.

**Oedipus**

After giving birth to him?

**Shepherd**

She was frightened of the bad prophecies. 1175

**Oedipus**

Which ones?

**Shepherd**

It was said that he would kill his parents.

**Oedipus**

So why did you hand him over to this old man?

**Shepherd**

I felt sorry for him, master, and thought he would take him away  
to another country, the one he came from. But he saved you  
for the worst of calamities, because if you are the man 1180  
he says you are, be sure that were born to an evil fate.

**Oedipus**

Alas, alas. The whole clear truth has come out.

O daylight, may I now see you for the final time, now  
that I have been revealed as blighted in my parentage,  
blighted in my consort and blighted in the people I have killed. 1185

*[Exit Oedipus into palace. Exeunt Messenger and Shepherd]*

**Chorus** *[sings and dances]*

Alas, generations of men,

I regard you as equivalent to not having life at all.

For what man— who?—has a share of happiness 1190  
any greater than to have some obvious blessings

but for them to disappear?  
I take your fate, yours, as my example,  
O miserable Oedipus,  
to call nobody blessed amongst men.

For he shot from his bow with utmost skill  
and successfully won great prosperity,  
O Zeus, destroying the crooked-taloned maid,  
the oracle-singer,  
rising up for my country 1200  
like a tower against death.

Because of that you also have the title of  
my king, and have been held in supreme honour,  
ruling over great Thebes.

But now whose story is more miserable to hear?  
Who lives alongside bitter calamities and suffering, 1205  
his life turned upside-down?  
Alas, dear, famous Oedipus,  
the same dwelling served as harbour  
to you as a son  
and as a bridegroom to bed down in.

How, how can the same furrows as your father ploughed 1210  
ever have been able to tolerate you in silence for so long, poor man?  
Time, who sees everything, has found you out against your will.

He gives judgement on the longstanding marriage that is no marriage,  
in which you are both begetter and begotten. 1215

Alas, O child of Laius,  
I wish, I wish  
I had never laid eyes on you.  
I lament as one who pours forth a dirge

from my mouth. To put it accurately,  
I was revived by you 1220  
and close my eyes in sleep because of you.

*[Enter a second messenger from the palace]*

**Second Messenger**

O you who are ever the most greatly honoured in this land,  
what acts you will hear about, what acts you will lay eyes on,  
what a burden of grief you will assume, if as their kinsfolk 1225  
you still hold the Labdacid household in high regard.

For neither the Ister nor the Phasis,<sup>29</sup> I think,  
could wash this building clean, so many horrors  
does it hide and will soon reveal to the light.

These are deliberate and not done unwittingly.

The painful things that people are shown to choose themselves 1230  
are the ones that hurt the most.

**Chorus**

The ones we knew about before were  
lamentable enough. What additional ones do you mean?

**Second Messenger**

To put it in the quickest way to say and  
to learn, dear, divine Jocasta has died. 1235

**Chorus**

O poor woman? What was the cause?

**Second Messenger**

She did it herself. You won't witness the most painful part  
of what happened, since you are not seeing it.

And yet, as far as my memory serves,  
you will learn what that wretched woman suffered. 1240

When in her distraught state she had gone into  
the antechamber, she shot straight to the bridal bed,  
tearing her hair with the fingers of both hands.



As soon as she was inside, she slammed the doors  
and called on Laius, now long since dead, 1245  
recalling the offspring of long ago, at whose hands he'd died,  
and left the mother who bore the child  
to make abominable children with his own.  
She bewailed the marriage in which she, poor thing, gave birth  
to double progeny, husband from husband, children from child. 1250  
I don't yet know the manner of her death after this,  
because Oedipus yelled and burst in, and blocked  
the evil sight of what had happened to her.  
We were watching him as he hovered round her.  
He kept approaching us, demanding that we get him a sword, 1255  
with which to reach his wife who was not wife,  
the body that had been mothered twice, both him and his children.  
Some god showed him the way as he raved;  
it was none of us men who were present nearby.  
With a terrible shout, as if someone led him on, 1260  
he sprang at the double doors,  
wrenched the curved bolts from their sockets  
and fell into the room.  
There we caught sight of his wife, hanged,  
caught aloft in a twisted noose  
And he, when he saw her, bellowing fearfully, the poor man, 1265  
undid the noose she hung by. When she was lying  
on the ground, poor woman, it was dreadful to see what happened next.  
He ripped from her clothes the golden brooches  
she had used as ornaments,  
raised them high and struck his own eye-balls, 1270  
saying words like this: they should never see  
what horrifying things he was suffering and doing.  
He'd looked on those he should not have seen, and he'd failed to recognise

those he'd longed to know, and for the future must live in darkness.  
Intoning this kind of thing, he was pounding his eyes repeatedly, 1275  
not just once, with upraised hand. With each strike, his bloody eyeballs  
drenched his beard, pouring forth not single sticky drops,  
but a rainstorm of gory hail suddenly  
broke out. It is from the pair of them, not one alone,  
that these disasters have erupted,  
blending misery for man and wife. 1280  
Their former prosperity was prosperity  
rightly theirs. But now,  
lamentation, destruction, death, disgrace—of every  
evil that has a name, not one is absent on this day.

**Chorus**

And does the poor man now have any respite from his suffering? 1285

**Second Messenger**

He's yelling for someone to unbar the gates and reveal  
to all the Cadmean people the man who killed his father,  
and as for his mother—I can't name the profanity.  
He wants to cast himself outside the land so that 1290  
he doesn't remain a curse, having inflicted the curse.  
But he lacks strength and a guide,  
because his affliction is more than he can bear.  
He will soon make this apparent to you too; he's  
unbarring the gates. You will soon see a sight 1295  
to evoke pity even in the man who finds it detestable.

*[Exit the second Messenger]*

**Chorus** *[sings and dances]*

O suffering dreadful for humans to see,  
O the most terrible suffering I've  
ever yet encountered. What madness, 1300  
O wretched one, came upon you? What god, with a leap higher

than the tallest man could make, has attacked  
your ill-starred destiny?

Alas, alas, miserable man.

I can't even look at you, although I have  
many questions, many things I want to learn,  
many I want to observe.

1305

How you make me shudder!

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

*Aagh, aagh*, alas, alas, I am wretched.

Where am I drifting in my misery? How  
is my voice winging its way through the air?

1310

O my fate, how you've leapt off track.

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

To a terrible place, unbearable to the senses both of sound and sight.

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

Alas, the horrible cloud of darkness that assaults me—it can't be spoken of,  
can't be controlled, a wind that can't be resisted.

1315

Alas,

and alas again. The stinging pain of the piercing  
and the memory of the horror come upon me together.

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

And it's no wonder that in such traumas as these  
you reiterate your mourning and intolerance of the pain

1320

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

*Aagh*, my friend

you still look after me loyally.

You carry on caring for me in my blindness,

Alas, alas

You will not escape my notice, because, although I'm blind,

1325

I clearly recognise your voice nevertheless.

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

Oh it was a terrible thing you did. How could you  
put out your own eyes? Which god drove you to it?

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

It was Apollo, friends, Apollo,  
fulfilling in the worst possible way the suffering I endure. 1330

But the blow was struck by the hand of none other than myself.

For why should I have sight,  
when nothing I could see would give me any gratification? 1335

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

The situation was just as you say.

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

What is there that I can still see

or love or be addressed as

or listen to with pleasure, friends.

Take me away, get me out of here as quickly as possible. 1340

Take me away, O friends. I am the most deadly,

accursed, and the most god-hated

of all mankind. 1345

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

Oh, you are wretched equally in your predicament and your intellect

How I wish I had never known you.

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

May the man perish who released me when I was stranded alone

from the cruel fetter on my feet, prevented me from dying 1350

and saved me. He did me no favour,

for if I'd died then

I'd not have brought such grief on my friends or on myself. 1355

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

I'd have wished that too.

**Oedipus** [*sings*]

Then I'd never have come

to murder my father

nor be known to men as the bridegroom

of the woman I was born to.

But now I am abandoned by the gods, child of a defiled mother, 1360

sharer of a bed, miserable me, with him from whom I sprang.

If there is any calamity of a higher grade than others, 1365

then Oedipus has been allotted it.

**Chorus** [*speaks*]

I don't know that I can say you've given yourself good advice,

since it's better not to be alive any more than to live as a blind man.

**Oedipus**

Don't lecture me, saying that this was not done

for the best, and don't carry on giving me more advice. 1370

I've no idea what eyes I could ever arrive in Hades

and look at my father with,

nor again my poor mother. Against those two

I committed acts too heinous for the noose.

And how could the sight of children 1375

brought forth as mine were, be pleasing to my gaze?

No indeed, to my eyes, never.

Not my city nor its fortifications nor the sacred images

of its gods, which I, the most wretched of men,

who was treated as the single most privileged man in Thebes, 1380

have deprived myself of, since I myself pronounced

that everyone should throw out the impious one,

the man revealed by gods as polluted member of the house of Laius.

After disclosing this kind of stain on myself,

was I supposed to look them straight in the eye? 1385

No indeed. If there were also a way to block my ears

from hearing sounds, I'd not have held back

from cutting off the senses from wretched body completely,

so as to be blind and absolutely deaf. It's sweet  
for thoughts to dwell on things beyond one's miseries. 1390

Ah, Cithaeron, why did you take me in? Why didn't you reject  
and kill me straightaway, so that I could never  
reveal my origin to humankind?

O Polybus, and Corinth and my so-called  
ancestral residence, you raised me, thinking me beautiful, 1395  
but terrible things were festering beneath my surface.

I'm now found out to be a bad man born to bad people.

O you three highways, you hidden valley,  
you narrow scrubland where the three roads meet.

You drank from my own hands 1400  
my father's blood: do you still recall  
what I did in your presence, and again

what further deeds when I came here? O marriages  
that gave birth to me, and as parents

then again gave birth to your child's children; you made 1405  
inbred kin of fathers, brothers, sons, brides,  
wives and mothers—all the worst atrocities

that occur amongst mankind.

But one must speak of what one must not do

By the gods, take me urgently and hide me somewhere 1410  
beyond the border, or kill me and throw me in the sea,  
where you'll never see me again.

Come on, assent to physical contact with a wretched man.

Do what I say and don't be afraid. My trouble  
can afflict no other mortal than myself. 1415

[Enter Creon]

### **Chorus**

But here comes Creon, in a timely way, to do  
and make plans about what you request, since

he's left in your place as sole guardian of our land.

**Oedipus**

Alas, what words shall I address to him?

What proof of my credibility can I offer, after 1420  
proving in the past to be wholly damaging to him.

**Creon**

I've not come to mock, Oedipus,  
nor to reprove you for any earlier damage,  
Come now, you may no longer feel shame in front of  
children of men, but at least respect the flames of Helios, 1425  
the lord who nurtures all, and don't display such pollution  
out in the open. It's acceptable neither to earth,  
nor to holy rainfall nor to light itself.

*[Addressing attendants]*

Take him with all speed inside the house.  
Piety requires that it's best for only kinfolk 1430  
to see and hear a kinsman's afflictions.

**Oedipus**

In the name of the gods, since you've defied my expectation  
in coming so virtuously to me, so full of vice,  
do what I now say. It's for your benefit, not mine.

**Creon**

What is it you're so insistent to get from me? 1435

**Oedipus**

Throw me out of this country as fast as possible,  
to somewhere where I can be spoken to by no human being.

**Creon**

I might have done that, be sure, had I not wanted first  
to find out from the god exactly what to do.

**Oedipus**

But his utterance has been fully disclosed—

to put an end to me, the unholy father-killer. 1440

**Creon**

Yes, that was said. But given the predicament we're in,  
it's better to find out exactly what must be done.

**Oedipus**

So will you make an enquiry on the behalf of such a pathetic man as I man?

**Creon**

Yes, because even now you have faith in the god. 1445

**Oedipus**

And I enjoin you and shall entreat you, give the woman  
inside the house the grave of your choosing.

You'll fulfil the rites correctly on behalf of your own kin.

But never consent to this ancestral city

having to tolerate my residence here while I'm alive; 1450

let me live in the mountains instead,

where this Cithaeron, which people call mine, and which my mother  
and father, while alive, ordained as my appointed tomb,

so that I may die as intended by those responsible for my destruction.

Although I know this much, that neither disease

nor anything else can ruin me; I'd never

have been rescued from death except for some dreadful doom.

Let my fate take me wherever it will go.

But don't concern yourselves with my male children, 1460

Creon. They're men, and will never

lack a livelihood wherever they may be.

My two poor maiden daughters, however,

who never ate at table separately from me, but

always shared in whatever I laid my hands on-- 1465

take care of them. And, in particular, let me

touch them with my hands and weep for my calamity.

Come on, lord,



allow it, you of noble race. If I could touch them with my hands,  
I'd believe they were mine as they were when I could see. 1470

[*Creon's attendants lead in Antigone and Ismene from the house*]

What am I saying?

In the name of the gods, am I hearing my two darlings  
weep? Has Creon taken pity on me  
and sent my two dearest children to me?

Am I right? 1475

**Creon**

You are. I'm the one who brought this about,  
since I know the delight you have in them, and have long had.

**Oedipus**

So blessings on you. And for this mission  
may god protect you better than he has me.

O children, wherever are you? Come to me. Come 1480  
into my hands as those of your sibling.

These hands performed the office of making you see thus  
your own father's once shining eyes,

the man who, seeing nothing and questioning nothing,  
fathered you on her from whom he sprang. 1485

I weep for you as well, although I'm unable to see you,  
as I contemplate the bitter life

you must lead at men's hands in the future.

What citizens' gatherings will you attend,  
what festivals, and not return home 1490

in tears, instead of enjoying the spectacle?

And when you reach marriageable age, children,  
who'll be the man, who'll risk taking on himself

the rebukes that will certainly be hurtful to my offspring and yours? 1495

What hardship do we lack? Your father

killed his father, and impregnated the woman who gave birth to him,

from whom he had himself sprung, and obtained  
you from the same place as he had come from.

Those are the kind of gibes you'll face. And then who'll marry you?

1500

Nobody will, children, but you'll obviously  
wither away in barren spinsterhood.

O son of Menoecus, since you're the only father  
left to the girls as both of us, their parents,  
are destroyed, don't look on while your relatives  
become poor manless vagrants,  
nor reduce them to the same level of misery as me.

Take pity on them, at such an early age to be  
deprived of everything except what you can do for them.

Promise me, noble man, and touch them with your hand.

1510

I'd have liked to give you children much advice. But now  
make a prayer for me that you may live where opportunity arises,  
and are allotted a better life than your own father has been.

**Creon**

You've wept sufficiently. Now go inside.

**Oedipus**

I must obey, even though it gives me no pleasure.

**Creon**

There's a right time for everything. 1515

**Oedipus**

So do you know the terms I'm leaving on?

**Creon**

You'll tell me, and I'll know when I've heard them.

**Oedipus**

You must send me away from my homeland.

**Creon**

What you ask for is in the god's gift.

**Oedipus**

But I go most hateful to the gods.

**Creon**

Which is why you'll soon get what you want.

**Oedipus**

You really mean this?

**Creon**

I tend not to say futile things that I don't mean.

**Oedipus**

Take me away from here now.

**Creon**

So move, but let your children go.

**Oedipus**

Don't take the girls away from me!

**Creon**

Stop trying to give orders.

Your life has not been one of undiminished power.

[*Exeunt Oedipus, Creon, Antigone and Ismene*]

**Chorus**

O inhabitants of ancestral Thebes, see this man, Oedipus,  
who understood the famous riddle and was the most powerful of men. 1525

None of the citizens did not look enviously on his fortune.

What a wave of fearful disaster he has come across.

And so, while watching out for the sight of that  
final day, call no-one happy, until he's passed  
that final threshold without suffering any pain. 1530

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<sup>1</sup> Ismenus was the name of the river-god of the local river Ismenus. But this probably alludes to the sanctuary of Apollos Ismenios, on a hill outside the city walls, where Tiresias practised prophecy and from which he arrives at the palace later in the play.

<sup>2</sup> Here the plague itself is given the form of anthropomorphic god, but the audience will probably have visualised Apollo blasting the city with the plague as if putting it to the torch.

<sup>3</sup> The Sphinx.

<sup>4</sup> The oracular shrine at the Temple of Pythian Apollo in Delphi.

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<sup>5</sup> Apollo, born on Delos, was god of medicine. The cry *lēie* is associated with this aspect of Apollos' divinity.

<sup>6</sup> The divine voice or rumour, which the chorus beg to give them information about how to rid themselves of the plague, is personified as the child of Hope (also personified, as she is sometimes elsewhere in archaic Greek poetry).

<sup>7</sup> This probably means Hades, conceived as the god of the darkness that the sunset in the west brings on.

<sup>8</sup> Artemis. It is probably relevant that she was often represented as the god who assisted in childbirth and also brought death to women.

<sup>9</sup> The destruction caused by the plague is here likened to the destruction caused by war, symbolized by Ares.

<sup>10</sup> Amphitrite was a divinity who lived beneath the surface of the sea; the chorus wishfully envisage the destructive god Ares running far away, his danger extinguished by sea-water.

<sup>11</sup> 'Lycian' was a title of Apollo associated with his function as plague-bringer and plague-healer. It may mean 'wolfish', or 'from Lycia', an area in south-west Asia Minor where Apollo was worshipped from early times.

<sup>12</sup> Dionysus. One of his titles was *Bacchos*, and Thebes is sometimes called *Baccheia*. Both Dionysus and Thebes are sometimes also described as 'Cadmeian', after the founder of the city.

<sup>13</sup> Ares is criticised by other gods, especially Athena, Apollo and Zeus in the *Iliad*, for being indiscriminate in choosing the victims of his violence and despised by the other Olympians.

<sup>14</sup> Oedipus traces Laius' paternal ancestry back to his father Labdacus, his grandfather Polydorus, his great-grandfather Cadmus and even to his great-great-grandfather Agenor, King of Tyre in Phoenicia and sometimes said to be son of Poseidon.

<sup>15</sup> The Sphinx again, whose riddle Oedipus solved.

<sup>16</sup> Another epithet of Apollo.

<sup>17</sup> Cithaeron is the name of the mountain ridge south of Thebes where Oedipus was sent to be exposed as a baby.

<sup>18</sup> Apollo.

<sup>19</sup> The *Kēres* were female death spirits associated with violent and painful dying scenes, especially on the battlefield. They were closely associated with their sisters, the Fates.

<sup>20</sup> Parnassus is the mountain range on which Delphi is situated.

<sup>21</sup> The King of Corinth who brought Oedipus up.

<sup>22</sup> This meaning of this line has been conjectured and inserted where the original line has dropped out of the manuscripts

<sup>23</sup> It was standard practice to invoke the all-seeing Sun-God in oaths.

<sup>24</sup> Abae was a town in Phocis which housed an oracle of Apollo. Olympia in the Peloponnese is the most important cultic home of Zeus.

<sup>25</sup> Jocasta places her offerings at the shrine of Apollo, which seems to be physically closer to the palace than any other shrine.

<sup>26</sup> Hermes was born on Mount Cyllene in Arcadia.

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<sup>27</sup> Helicon is a mountain range in Boeotia, Greece

<sup>28</sup> Arktouros, the brightest star in the northern constellation of Boötes, rises in September.

<sup>29</sup> The modern rivers Danube in Germany and Dniester in Ukraine were both called Ister by the Greeks. The Phasis is now the Rioni, in the Republic of Georgia. They were all famed for their size and powerful currents.