

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF W. B. YEATS

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THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
W. B. YEATS

Volume II: The Plays



EDITED BY

David R. Clark AND Rosalind E. Clark

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DECIMA. He must not return upon pain of death. He has wronged me, and I will never look upon his face again. 620

PRIME MINISTER. Away with him.

DECIMA. My good name is dearer than my life, but I will see the players before they go.

PRIME MINISTER. Sleep of Adam! What has she got into her head? Fetch the players. 625

DECIMA [*picking up the mask of the sister of Noah*]. My loyal subjects must forgive me if I hide my face—it is not yet used to the light of day, it is a modest face. I will be much happier if His Holiness will help me to tie the mask. 630

PRIME MINISTER. The players come.

Enter Players, who all bow to the new Queen

DECIMA. They had some play they were to perform, but I will make them dance instead, and after that they must be richly rewarded.

PRIME MINISTER. It shall be as you will.

DECIMA. You are banished and must not return upon pain of death, and yet not one of you shall be poorer because banished. That I promise. But you have lost one thing that I will not restore. A woman player has left you. Do not mourn her. She was a bad, headstrong, cruel woman, and seeks destruction somewhere and with some man she knows nothing of; such a woman they tell me that this mask would well become, this foolish, smiling face! Come, dance. 640

[*They dance, and at certain moments she cries 'Good-bye, good-bye' or else 'Farewell'. And she throws them money.*]

The End

SOPHOCLES' KING OEDIPUS*

A VERSION FOR THE MODERN STAGE

1928

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Oedipus, King of Thebes	Tiresias, a seer
Jocasta, wife of Oedipus	A Priest
Antigone, daughter of Oedipus	Messengers
Ismene, daughter of Oedipus	A Herdsman
Creon, brother-in-law of Oedipus	
Chorus	

Scene: Outside the Palace of King Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Children, descendants of old Cadmus, why do you come before me, why do you carry the branches of suppliants, while the city smokes with incense and murmurs with prayer and lamentation? I would not learn from any mouth but yours, old man, therefore I question you myself. Do you know of anything that I can do and have not done? How can I, being the man I am, being King Oedipus, do other than all I know? I were indeed hard of heart did I not pity such suppliants. 5

PRIEST. Oedipus, King of my country, we who stand before your door are of all ages, some too young to have walked so many miles, some—priests of Zeus such as I—too old. Among us stand the pick of the young men, and behind in the market-places the people throng, carrying suppliant branches. We all stand here because the city stumbles towards death, hardly able to raise up its 10

*See explanatory notes p. 883.

head. A blight has fallen upon the fruitful blossoms of the land, a blight upon flock and field and upon the bed of marriage—plague ravages the city. Oedipus, King, not God but foremost of living men, seeing that when you first came to this town of Thebes you freed us from that harsh singer, the riddling Sphinx, we beseech you, all we suppliants, to find some help; whether you find it by your power as a man, or because, being near the Gods, a God has whispered you. Uplift our State; think upon your fame; your coming brought us luck, be lucky to us still; remember that it is better to rule over men than over a waste place, since neither walled town nor ship is anything if it be empty and no man within it.

OEDIPUS. My unhappy children! I know well what need has brought you, what suffering you endure; yet, sufferers though you be, there is not a single one whose suffering is as mine—each mourns himself, but my soul mourns the city, myself, and you. It is not therefore as if you came to arouse a sleeping man. No! Be certain that I have wept many tears and searched hither and thither for some remedy. I have already done the only thing that came into my head for all my search. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, my own wife's brother, to the Pythian House of Phoebus, to hear if deed or word of mine may yet deliver this town. I am troubled, for he is a long time away—a longer time than should be—but when he comes I shall not be an honest man unless I do whatever the God commands.

PRIEST. You have spoken at the right time. They have just signalled to us that Creon has arrived.

OEDIPUS. O King Apollo, may he bring brighter fortune, for his face is shining!

PRIEST. He brings good news, for he is crowned with bay.

OEDIPUS. We shall know soon. Brother-in-law, Menoeceus' son, what news from the God?

CREON. Good news; for pain turns to pleasure when we have set the crooked straight.

OEDIPUS. But what is the oracle?—so far the news is neither good nor bad.

CREON. If you would hear it with all these about you, I am ready to speak. Or do we go within?

OEDIPUS. Speak before all. The sorrow I endure is less for my own life than these.

CREON. Then, with your leave, I speak. Our lord Phoebus bids us drive out a defiling thing that has been cherished in this land.

OEDIPUS. By what purification? 55

CREON. King Laius was our King before you came to pilot us.

OEDIPUS. I know—but not of my own knowledge, for I never saw him.

CREON. He was killed; and the God now bids us revenge it on his murderers, whoever they be.

OEDIPUS. Where shall we come upon their track after all these years? Did he meet his death in house or field, at home or in some foreign land? 60

CREON. In a foreign land: he was journeying to Delphi.

OEDIPUS. Did no fellow-traveller see the deed? Was there none there who could be questioned? 65

CREON. All perished but one man who fled in terror and could tell for certain but one thing of all he had seen.

OEDIPUS. One thing might be a clue to many things.

CREON. He said that they were fallen upon by a great troop of robbers. 70

OEDIPUS. What robbers would be so daring unless bribed from here?

CREON. Such things were indeed guessed at, but Laius once dead no avenger arose. We were amid our troubles.

OEDIPUS. But when royalty had fallen what troubles could have hindered search? 75

CREON. The riddling Sphinx put those dark things out of our thoughts—we thought of what had come to our own doors.

OEDIPUS. But I will start afresh and make the dark things plain. In doing right by Laius I protect myself, for whoever slew Laius might turn a hand against me. Come, my children, rise up from the altar steps; lift up these suppliant boughs and let all the children of Cadmus be called hither that I may search out everything and find for all happiness or misery as God wills. 80

PRIEST. May Phoebus, sender of the oracle, come with it and be our saviour and deliverer! 85

The Chorus enter

What message comes to famous Thebes from the Golden House?

What message of disaster from that sweet-throated Zeus?

What monstrous thing our fathers saw do the seasons bring?

Or what that no man ever saw, what new monstrous thing? 90

Trembling in every limb I raise my loud importunate cry,

And in a sacred terror wait the Delian God's reply.

Apollo chase the God of Death that leads no shouting men,

Bears no rattling shield and yet consumes this form with pain.

Famine takes what the plague spares, and all the crops are lost; 95

No new life fills the empty place—ghost flits after ghost

To that God-trodden western shore, as flit benighted birds.

Sorrow speaks to sorrow, but no comfort finds in words.

Hurry him from the land of Thebes with a fair wind behind

Out on to that formless deep where not a man can find 100

Hold for an anchor-fluke, for all is world-enfolding sea;

Master of the thunder-cloud, set the lightning free,

And add the thunder-stone to that and fling them on his head,

For death is all the fashion now, till even Death be dead.

We call against the pallid face of this God-hated God 105

The springing heel of Artemis in the hunting sandal shod,

The tousel-headed Maenads, blown torch and drunken sound,

The stately Lysian king himself with golden fillet crowned,

And in his hands the golden bow and the stretched golden string,

And Bacchus' wine-ensanguined face that all the Maenads sing. 110

OEDIPUS. You are praying, and it may be that your prayer will be answered; that if you hear my words and do my bidding you may find help out of all your trouble. This is my proclamation, children of Cadmus. Whoever among you knows by what man Laius, son of Labdacus, was killed, must tell all he knows. If he fear for himself and being guilty denounce himself, he shall be in the less danger, suffering no worse thing than banishment. If on the other hand there be one that knows that a foreigner did the deed, let him speak, and I shall give him a reward and my thanks; but if any man keep silent from fear or to screen a friend, hear all what I will do to that man. No one in this land shall speak to him, nor offer sacrifice beside him; but he shall be driven from their homes as if he himself had done the deed. And in this I am the ally of the Pythian God and of the murdered man, and I pray that the murderer's life may, should he be so hidden and screened, drop from him and perish 125

away, whoever he may be, whether he did the deed with others or by himself alone: and on you I lay it to make—so far as man may—these words good, for my sake, and for the God's sake, and for the sake of this land. And even if the God had not spurred us to it, it were a wrong to leave the guilt unpurged, when one so noble, and he your King, had perished; and all have sinned that could have searched it out and did not: and now since it is I who hold the power which he held once, and have his wife for wife—she who would have borne him heirs had he but lived—I take up this cause even as I would were it that of my own father. And if there be any who do not obey me in it, I pray that the Gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb; but let them be wasted by this plague, or by one more dreadful still. But may all be blessed for ever who hear my words and do my will! 130 135

CHORUS. We do not know the murderer, and it were indeed more fitting that Phoebus, who laid the task upon us, should name the man. 140

OEDIPUS. No man can make the Gods speak against their will.

CHORUS. Then I will say what seems the next best thing.

OEDIPUS. If there is a third course, show it.

CHORUS. I know that our lord Tiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus, and through him we may unravel all. 145

OEDIPUS. So I was advised by Creon, and twice already have I sent to bring him.

CHORUS. If we lack his help we have nothing but vague and ancient rumours. 150

OEDIPUS. What rumours are they? I would examine every story.

CHORUS. Certain wayfarers were said to have killed the King.

OEDIPUS. I know, I know. But who was there that saw it?

CHORUS. If there is such a man, and terror can move him, he will not keep silence when they have told him of your curses. 155

OEDIPUS. He that such a deed did not terrify will not be terrified because of a word.

CHORUS. But there is one who shall convict him. For the blind

prophet comes at last—in whom alone of all men the truth lives.

Enter Tiresias, led by a boy

OEDIPUS. Tiresias, master of all knowledge, whatever may be spoken, whatever is unspeakable, whatever omens of earth and sky reveal, the plague is among us, and from that plague, Great Prophet, protect us and save us. Phoebus in answer to our question says that it will not leave us till we have found the murderers of Laius, and driven them into exile or put them to death. Do you therefore neglect neither the voice of birds, nor any other sort of wisdom, but rescue yourself, rescue the State, rescue me, rescue all that are defiled by the deed. For we are in your hands, and what greater task falls to a man than to help other men with all he knows and has? 160 165 170

TIRESIAS. Aye, and what worse task than to be wise and suffer for it? I know this well; it slipped out of mind, or I would never have come.

OEDIPUS. What now?

TIRESIAS. Let me go home. You will bear your burden to the end more easily, and I bear mine—if you but give me leave for that. 175

OEDIPUS. Your words are strange and unkind to the State that bred you.

TIRESIAS. I see that you, on your part, keep your lips tight shut, and therefore I have shut mine that I may come to no misfortune. 180

OEDIPUS. For God's love do not turn away—if you have knowledge. We suppliants implore you on our knees.

TIRESIAS. You are fools—I will bring misfortune neither upon you nor upon myself.

OEDIPUS. What is this? You know all and will say nothing? You are minded to betray me and Thebes? 185

TIRESIAS. Why do you ask these things? You will not learn them from me.

OEDIPUS. What! Basest of the base! You would enrage the very stones. Will you never speak out? Cannot anything touch you? 190

TIRESIAS. The future will come of itself though I keep silent.

OEDIPUS. Then seeing that come it must, you had best speak out.

TIRESIAS. I will speak no further. Rage if you have a mind to; bring out all the fierceness that is in your heart.

OEDIPUS. That will I. I will not spare to speak my thoughts. Listen to what I have to say. It seems to me that you have helped to plot the deed; and, short of doing it with your own hands, have done the deed yourself. Had you eyesight I would declare that you alone had done it. 195

TIRESIAS. So that is what you say? I charge you to obey the decree that you yourself have made, and from this day out to speak neither to these nor to me. You are the defiler of this land. 200

OEDIPUS. So brazen in your impudence? How do you hope to escape punishment?

TIRESIAS. I have escaped; my strength is in my truth. 205

OEDIPUS. Who taught you this? You never got it by your art.

TIRESIAS. You, because you have spurred me to speech against my will.

OEDIPUS. What speech? Speak it again that I may learn it better.

TIRESIAS. You are but tempting me—you understood me well enough. 210

OEDIPUS. No; not so that I can say I know it; speak it again.

TIRESIAS. I say that you are yourself the murderer that you seek.

OEDIPUS. You shall rue it for having spoken twice such outrageous words. 215

TIRESIAS. Would you that I say more that you may be still angrier?

OEDIPUS. Say what you will. I will not let it move me.

TIRESIAS. I say that you are living with your next of kin in unimagined shame.

OEDIPUS. Do you think you can say such things and never smart for it? 220

TIRESIAS. Yes, if there be strength in truth.

OEDIPUS. There is; yes—for everyone but you. But not for you that are maimed in ear and in eye and in wit.

TIRESIAS. You are but a poor wretch flinging taunts that in a little 225 while everyone shall fling at you.

OEDIPUS. Night, endless night has covered you up so that you can neither hurt me nor any man that looks upon the sun.

TIRESIAS. Your doom is not to fall by me. Apollo is enough: it is his 230 business to work out your doom.

OEDIPUS. Was it Creon that planned this or you yourself?

TIRESIAS. Creon is not your enemy; you are your own enemy.

OEDIPUS. Power, ability, position, you bear all burdens, and yet what envy you create! Great must that envy be if envy of my power in this town—a power put into my hands unsought—has made trusty 235 Creon, my old friend Creon, secretly long to take that power from me; if he has suborned this scheming juggler, this quack and trickster, this man with eyes for his gains and blindness in his art. Come, come, where did you prove yourself a seer? Why did you say nothing to set the townsmen free when the riddling Sphinx was here? 240 Yet that riddle was not for the first-comer to read; it needed the skill of a seer. And none such had you! Neither found by help of birds, nor straight from any God. No, I came; I silenced her, I the ignorant Oedipus; it was I that found the answer in my mother-wit, untaught by any birds. And it is I that you would pluck out of my 245 place, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. But you and the plotter of all this shall mourn despite your zeal to purge the land. Were you not an old man, you had already learnt how bold you are and learnt it to your cost.

CHORUS. Both this man's words and yours, Oedipus, have been said 250 in anger. Such words cannot help us here, nor any but those that teach us to obey the oracle.

TIRESIAS. King though you are, the right to answer when attacked belongs to both alike. I am not subject to you, but to Loxias; and therefore I shall never be Creon's subject. And I tell you, since you 255 have taunted me with blindness, that though you have your sight, you cannot see in what misery you stand, nor where you are living, nor with whom, unknowing what you do—for you do not know

the stock you come of—you have been your own kin's enemy be they living or be they dead. And one day a mother's curse and 260 father's curse alike shall drive you from this land in dreadful haste with darkness upon those eyes. Therefore, heap your scorn on Creon and on my message if you have a mind to; for no one of living men shall be crushed as you shall be crushed.

OEDIPUS. Begone this instant! Away, away! Get you from these 265 doors!

TIRESIAS. I had never come but that you sent for me.

OEDIPUS. I did not know you were mad.

TIRESIAS. I may seem mad to you, but your parents thought me sane.

OEDIPUS. My parents! Stop! Who was my father? 270

TIRESIAS. This day shall you know your birth; and it will ruin you.

OEDIPUS. What dark words you always speak!

TIRESIAS. But are you not most skilful in the unravelling of dark words?

OEDIPUS. You mock me for that which made me great? 275

TIRESIAS. It was that fortune that undid you.

OEDIPUS. What do I care? For I delivered all this town.

TIRESIAS. Then I will go: boy, lead me out of this.

OEDIPUS. Yes, let him lead you. You take vexation with you.

TIRESIAS. I will go: but first I will do my errand. For frown though 280 you may you cannot destroy me. The man for whom you look, the man you have been threatening in all the proclamations about the death of Laius, that man is here. He seems, so far as looks go, an alien; yet he shall be found a native Theban and shall nowise be glad of that fortune. A blind man, though now he has his sight; a 285 beggar, though now he is most rich; he shall go forth feeling the ground before him with his stick; so you go in and think on that, and if you find I am in fault say that I have no skill in prophecy.

[Tiresias is led out by the boy. Oedipus enters the palace.]

CHORUS. The Delphian rock has spoken out, now must a wicked mind,
Planner of things I dare not speak and of this bloody wrack, 290
Pray for feet that are as fast as the four hoofs of the wind:
Cloudy Parnassus and the Fates thunder at his back.

That sacred crossing-place of lines upon Parnassus' head,
Lines that have run through North and South, and run through
West and East,
That navel of the world bids all men search the mountain wood, 295
The solitary cavern, till they have found that infamous beast.
Creon enters from the house

CREON. Fellow-citizens, having heard that King Oedipus accuses me
of dreadful things, I come in my indignation. Does he think that he
has suffered wrong from me in these present troubles, or anything 300
that could lead to wrong, whether in word or deed? How can I live
under blame like that? What life would be worth having if by you
here, and by my nearest friends, called a traitor through the town?

CHORUS. He said it in anger, and not from his heart out.

CREON. He said it was I put up the seer to speak those falsehoods.

CHORUS. Such things were said. 305

CREON. And had he his right mind saying it?

CHORUS. I do not know—I do not know what my masters do.
Oedipus enters.

OEDIPUS. What brought you here? Have you a face so brazen that
you come to my house—you, the proved assassin of its master—the 310
certain robber of my crown? Come, tell me in the face of the Gods
what cowardice, or folly, did you discover in me that you plotted
this? Did you think that I would not see what you were at till you
had crept upon me, or seeing it would not ward it off? What mad-
ness to seek a throne, having neither friends nor followers!

CREON. Now listen, hear my answer, and then you may with knowl- 315
edge judge between us.

OEDIPUS. You are plausible, but waste words now that I know you.

CREON. Hear what I have to say. I can explain it all.

OEDIPUS. One thing you will not explain away—that you are my enemy.

CREON. You are a fool to imagine that senseless stubbornness sits 320
well upon you.

OEDIPUS. And you to imagine that you can wrong a kinsman and
escape the penalty.

CREON. That is justly said, I grant you; but what is this wrong that
you complain of? 325

OEDIPUS. Did you advise, or not, that I should send for that notori-
ous prophet?

CREON. And I am of the same mind still.

OEDIPUS. How long is it, then, since Laius—

CREON. What, what about him? 330

OEDIPUS. Since Laius was killed by an unknown hand?

CREON. That was many years ago.

OEDIPUS. Was this prophet at his trade in those days?

CREON. Yes; skilled as now and in equal honour.

OEDIPUS. Did he ever speak of me? 335

CREON. Never certainly when I was within earshot.

OEDIPUS. And did you enquire into the murder?

CREON. We did enquire but learnt nothing.

OEDIPUS. And why did he not tell out his story then?

CREON. I do not know. When I know nothing I say nothing. 340

OEDIPUS. This much at least you know and can say out.

CREON. What is that? If I know it I will say it.

OEDIPUS. That if he had not consulted you he would never have said
that it was I who killed Laius.

CREON. You know best what he said; but now, question for question. 345

OEDIPUS. Question your fill—I cannot be proved guilty of that blood.

CREON. Answer me then. Are you not married to my sister?

OEDIPUS. That cannot be denied.

CREON. And do you not rule as she does? And with a like power? 350

OEDIPUS. I give her all she asks for.

CREON. And am not I the equal of you both?

OEDIPUS. Yes: and that is why you are so false a friend.

CREON. Not so; reason this out as I reason it, and first weigh this; who would prefer to lie awake amid terrors rather than to sleep in 355
peace, granting that his power is equal in both cases? Neither I nor any sober-minded man. You give me what I ask and let me do what I want, but were I King I would have to do things I did not want to do. Is not influence and no trouble with it better than any throne, am I such a fool as to hunger after unprofitable honours? 360
Now all are glad to see me, everyone wishes me well, all that want a favour from you ask speech of me—finding in that their hope. Why should I give up these things and take those? No wise mind is treacherous. I am no contriver of plots, and if another took to them he would not come to me for help. And in proof of this go to 365
the Pythian Oracle, and ask if I have truly told what the Gods said; and after that, if you have found that I have plotted with the Soothsayer, take me and kill me; not by the sentence of one mouth only—but of two mouths, yours and my own. But do not condemn me in a corner, upon some fancy and without proof. What 370
right have you to declare a good man bad or a bad good? It is as bad a thing to cast off a true friend as it is for a man to cast away his own life—but you will learn these things with certainty when the time comes; for time alone shows a just man; though a day can show a knave. 375

CHORUS. King! He has spoken well, he gives himself time to think; a headlong talker does not know what he is saying.

OEDIPUS. The plotter is at his work, and I must counterplot headlong, or he will get his ends and I miss mine.

CREON. What will you do then? Drive me from the land? 380

OEDIPUS. Not so; I do not desire your banishment—but your death.

CREON. You are not sane.

OEDIPUS. I am sane at least in my own interest.

CREON. You should be in mine also.

OEDIPUS. No, for you are false. 385

CREON. But if you understand nothing?

OEDIPUS. Yet I must rule.

CREON. Not if you rule badly.

OEDIPUS. Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON. Thebes is for me also, not for you alone. 390

CHORUS. Cease, princes: I see Jocasta coming out of the house; she comes just in time to quench the quarrel.

Jocasta enters

JOCASTA. Unhappy men! Why have you made this crazy uproar? Are you not ashamed to quarrel about your own affairs when the whole country is in trouble? Go back into the palace, Oedipus, 395
and you, Creon, to your own house. Stop making all this noise about some petty thing.

CREON. Your husband is about to kill me—or to drive me from the land of my fathers.

OEDIPUS. Yes: for I have convicted him of treachery against me. 400

CREON. Now may I perish accursed if I have done such a thing!

JOCASTA. For God's love believe it, Oedipus. First, for the sake of his oath, and then for my sake, and for the sake of these people here.

CHORUS [*all*]. King, do what she asks.

OEDIPUS. What would you have me do? 405

CHORUS. Not to make a dishonourable charge, with no more evidence than rumour, against a friend who has bound himself with an oath.

OEDIPUS. Do you desire my exile or my death?

CHORUS. No, by Helios, by the first of all the Gods, may I die abandoned by Heaven and earth if I have that thought! What breaks my heart is that our public griefs should be increased by your quarrels. 410

OEDIPUS. Then let him go, though I am doomed thereby to death or to be thrust dishonoured from the land; it is your lips, not his, that move me to compassion; wherever he goes my hatred follows him. 415

CREON. You are as sullen in yielding as you were vehement in anger, but such natures are their own heaviest burden.

OEDIPUS. Why will you not leave me in peace and begone?

CREON. I will go away; what is your hatred to me? In the eyes of all here I am a just man. 420
[He goes.]

CHORUS. Lady, why do you not take your man in to the house?

JOCASTA. I will do so when I have learned what has happened.

CHORUS. The half of it was blind suspicion bred of talk; the rest the wounds left by injustice. 425

JOCASTA. It was on both sides?

CHORUS. Yes.

JOCASTA. What was it?

CHORUS. Our land is vexed enough. Let the thing alone now that it is over. 430

JOCASTA. In the name of the Gods, King, what put you in this anger?

OEDIPUS. I will tell you; for I honour you more than these men do. The cause is Creon and his plots against me.

JOCASTA. Speak on, if you can tell clearly how this quarrel arose.

OEDIPUS. He says that I am guilty of the blood of Laius. 435

JOCASTA. On his own knowledge, or on hearsay?

OEDIPUS. He has made a rascal of a seer his mouthpiece.

JOCASTA. Do not fear that there is truth in what he says. Listen to me, and learn to your comfort that nothing born of woman can know what is to come. I will give you proof of that. An oracle came to Laius once, I will not say from Phoebus, but from his ministers, that he was doomed to die by the hand of his own child sprung from him and me. When his child was but three days old, Laius bound its feet together and had it thrown by sure hands upon a trackless mountain; and when Laius was murdered at the place where three highways meet, it was, or so at least the rumour says, by foreign robbers. So Apollo did not bring it about that the child should kill its father, nor did Laius die in the dreadful way he feared by his child's hand. Yet that was how the message of the seers mapped out the future. Pay no attention to such things. What the God would show he will need no help to show it, but bring it to light himself. 440 445 450

OEDIPUS. What restlessness of soul, lady, has come upon me since I heard you speak, what a tumult of the mind!

JOCASTA. What is this new anxiety? What has startled you? 455

OEDIPUS. You said that Laius was killed where three highways meet.

JOCASTA. Yes; that was the story.

OEDIPUS. And where is the place?

JOCASTA. In Phocis where the road divides branching off to Delphi and to Daulia. 460

OEDIPUS. And when did it happen? How many years ago?

JOCASTA. News was published in this town just before you came into power.

OEDIPUS. O Zeus! What have you planned to do unto me?

JOCASTA. He was tall; the silver had just come into his hair; and in shape not greatly unlike to you. 465

OEDIPUS. Unhappy that I am! It seems that I have laid a dreadful curse upon myself, and did not know it.

JOCASTA. What do you say? I tremble when I look on you, my King.

OEDIPUS. And I have a misgiving that the seer can see indeed. But I will know it all more clearly, if you tell me one thing more. 470

JOCASTA. Indeed, though I tremble I will answer whatever you ask.

OEDIPUS. Had he but a small troop with him; or did he travel like a great man with many followers?

JOCASTA. There were but five in all—one of them a herald; and there was one carriage with Laius in it. 475

OEDIPUS. Alas! It is now clear indeed. Who was it brought the news, lady?

JOCASTA. A servant—the one survivor.

OEDIPUS. Is he by chance in the house now? 480

JOCASTA. No; for when he found you reigning instead of Laius he besought me, his hand clasped in mine, to send him to the fields among the cattle that he might be far from the sight of this town; and I sent him. He was a worthy man for a slave and might have asked a bigger thing. 485

OEDIPUS. I would have him return to us without delay.

JOCASTA. Oedipus, it is easy. But why do you ask this?

OEDIPUS. I fear that I have said too much, and therefore I would question him.

JOCASTA. He shall come, but I too have a right to know what lies so heavy upon your heart, my King. 490

OEDIPUS. Yes: and it shall not be kept from you now that my fear has grown so heavy. Nobody is more to me than you, nobody has the same right to learn my good or evil luck. My father was Polybus of Corinth, my mother the Dorian Merope, and I was held the foremost man in all that town until a thing happened—a thing to startle a man, though not to make him angry as it made me. We were sitting at the table, and a man who had drunk too much cried out that I was not my father's son—and I, though angry, restrained my anger for that day; but the next day went to my father and my mother and questioned them. They were indignant at the taunt and that comforted me—and yet the man's words rankled, for they had spread a rumour through the town. Without consulting my father or my mother I went to Delphi, but Phoebus told me nothing of the thing for which I came, but much of other things— 505

things of sorrow and of terror: that I should live in incest with my mother, and beget a brood that men would shudder to look upon; that I should be my father's murderer. Hearing those words I fled out of Corinth, and from that day have but known where it lies when I have found its direction by the stars. I sought where I might escape those infamous things—the doom that was laid upon me. I came in my flight to that very spot where you tell me this king perished. Now, lady, I will tell you the truth. When I had come close up to those three roads, I came upon a herald, and a man like him you have described seated in a carriage. The man who held the reins and the old man himself would not give me room, but thought to force me from the path, and I struck the driver in my anger. The old man, seeing what I had done, waited till I was passing him and then struck me upon the head. I paid him back in full, for I knocked him out of the carriage with a blow of my stick. He rolled on his back, and after that I killed them all. If this stranger were indeed Laius, is there a more miserable man in the world than the man before you? Is there a man more hated of Heaven? No stranger, no citizen, may receive him into his house, not a soul may speak to him, and no mouth but my own mouth has laid this curse upon me. Am I not wretched? May I be swept from this world before I have endured this doom! 510 515 520 525

CHORUS. These things, O King, fill us with terror; yet hope till you speak with him that saw the deed, and have learnt all.

OEDIPUS. Till I have learnt all, I may hope. I await the man that is coming from the pastures. 530

JOCASTA. What is it that you hope to learn?

OEDIPUS. I will tell you. If his tale agrees with yours, then I am clear.

JOCASTA. What tale of mine?

OEDIPUS. He told you that Laius met his death from robbers; if he keeps to that tale now and speaks of several slayers, I am not the slayer. But if he says one lonely wayfarer, then beyond a doubt the scale dips to me. 535

JOCASTA. Be certain of this much at least, his first tale was of robbers. He cannot revoke that tale—the city heard it and not I alone. Yet, if he should somewhat change his story, King, at least he cannot make the murder of Laius square with prophecy; for Loxias plainly said of Laius that he would die by the hand of my child. 540

That poor innocent did not kill him, for it died before him. Therefore from this out I would not, for all divination can do, so much as look to my right hand or to my left hand, or fear at all. 545

OEDIPUS. You have judged well; and yet for all that, send and bring this peasant to me.

JOCASTA. I will send without delay. I will do all that you would have of me—but let us come in to the house. 550
[They go in to the house.]

CHORUS. For this one thing above all I would be praised as a man, That in my words and my deeds I have kept those laws in mind Olympian Zeus, and that high clear Empyrean, Fashioned, and not some man or people of mankind, Even those sacred laws nor age nor sleep can blind. 555

A man becomes a tyrant out of insolence,
 He climbs and climbs, until all people call him great,
 He seems upon the summit, and God flings him thence;
 Yet an ambitious man may lift up a whole State,
 And in his death be blessed, in his life fortunate. 560

And all men honour such; but should a man forget
 The holy images, the Delphian Sybil's trance,
 And the world's navel-stone, and not be punished for it
 And seem most fortunate, or even blessed perchance,
 Why should we honour the Gods, or join the sacred dance? 565
Jocasta enters from the palace

JOCASTA. It has come into my head, citizens of Thebes, to visit every altar of the Gods, a wreath in my hand and a dish of incense. For all manner of alarms trouble the soul of Oedipus, who instead of weighing new oracles by old, like a man of sense, is at the mercy of every mouth that speaks terror. Seeing that my words are nothing to him, I cry to you, Lysian Apollo, whose altar is the first I meet: I come, a suppliant, bearing symbols of prayer; O, make us clean, for now we are all afraid; seeing him afraid, even as they who see the helmsman afraid. 570

Enter Messenger

MESSENGER. May I learn from you, strangers, where is the home of King Oedipus? Or better still, tell me where he himself is, if you know. 575

CHORUS. This is his house, and he himself, stranger, is within it, and this lady is the mother of his children.

MESSENGER. Then I call a blessing upon her, seeing what man she has married. 580

JOCASTA. May God reward those words with a like blessing, stranger! But what have you come to seek or to tell?

MESSENGER. Good news for your house, lady, and for your husband.

JOCASTA. What news? From whence have you come? 585

MESSENGER. From Corinth, and you will rejoice at the message I am about to give you; yet, maybe, it will grieve you.

JOCASTA. What is it? How can it have this double power?

MESSENGER. The people of Corinth, they say, will take him for king.

JOCASTA. How then? Is old Polybus no longer on the throne? 590

MESSENGER. No. He is in his tomb.

JOCASTA. What do you say? Is Polybus dead, old man?

MESSENGER. May I drop dead if it is not the truth.

JOCASTA. Away! Hurry to your master with this news. O oracle of the Gods, where are you now? This is the man whom Oedipus feared and shunned lest he should murder him, and now this man has died a natural death, and not by the hand of Oedipus. 595
Enter Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Jocasta, dearest wife, why have you called me from the house?

JOCASTA. Listen to this man, and judge to what the oracles of the Gods have come. 600

OEDIPUS. And he—who may he be? And what news has he?

JOCASTA. He has come from Corinth to tell you that your father, Polybus, is dead.

OEDIPUS. How, stranger? Let me have it from your own mouth. 605

MESSENGER. If I am to tell the story, the first thing is that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS. By some sickness or by treachery?

MESSENGER. A little thing can bring the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS. Ah! He died, it seems, from sickness? 610

MESSENGER. Yes; and of old age.

OEDIPUS. Alas! Alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to that Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads? For they would have it that I was doomed to kill my father. And now he is dead—hid already beneath the earth. And here am I—who had no part in it, unless indeed he died from longing for me. If that were so, I may have caused his death; but Polybus has carried the oracles with him into Hades—the oracles as men have understood them—and they are worth nothing. 615

JOCASTA. Did I not tell you so, long since? 620

OEDIPUS. You did, but fear misled me.

JOCASTA. Put this trouble from you.

OEDIPUS. Those bold words would sound better, were not my mother living. But as it is—I have some grounds for fear; yet you have said well. 625

JOCASTA. Yet your father's death is a sign that all is well.

OEDIPUS. I know that; but I fear because of her who lives.

MESSENGER. Who is this woman who makes you afraid?

OEDIPUS. Merope, old man, the wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER. What is there in her to make you afraid? 630

OEDIPUS. A dreadful oracle sent from Heaven, stranger.

MESSENGER. Is it a secret, or can you speak it out?

OEDIPUS. Loxias said that I was doomed to marry my own mother, and to shed my father's blood. For that reason I fled from my house in Corinth; and I did right, though there is great comfort in familiar faces. 635

MESSENGER. Was it indeed for that reason that you went into exile?

OEDIPUS. I did not wish, old man, to shed my father's blood.

MESSENGER. King, have I not freed you from that fear?

OEDIPUS. You shall be fittingly rewarded. 640

MESSENGER. Indeed, to tell the truth, it was for that I came; to bring you home and be the better for it—

OEDIPUS. No! I will never go to my parents' home.

MESSENGER. Ah, my son, it is plain enough, you do not know what you do. 645

OEDIPUS. How, old man? For God's love, tell me.

MESSENGER. If for these reasons you shrink from going home.

OEDIPUS. I am afraid lest Phoebus has spoken true.

MESSENGER. You are afraid of being made guilty through Merope?

OEDIPUS. That is my constant fear. 650

MESSENGER. A vain fear.

OEDIPUS. How so, if I was born of that father and mother?

MESSENGER. Because they were nothing to you in blood.

OEDIPUS. What do you say? Was Polybus not my father?

MESSENGER. No more nor less than myself. 655

OEDIPUS. How can my father be no more to me than you who are nothing to me?

MESSENGER. He did not beget you any more than I.

OEDIPUS. No? Then why did he call me his son?

MESSENGER. He took you as a gift from these hands of mine. 660

OEDIPUS. How could he love so dearly what came from another's hands?

MESSENGER. He had been childless.

OEDIPUS. If I am not your son, where did you get me?

MESSENGER. In a wooded valley of Cithaeron.

665

OEDIPUS. What brought you wandering there?

MESSENGER. I was in charge of mountain sheep.

OEDIPUS. A shepherd—a wandering, hired man.

MESSENGER. A hired man who came just in time.

OEDIPUS. Just in time—had it come to that?

670

MESSENGER. Have not the cords left their marks upon your ankles?

OEDIPUS. Yes, that is an old trouble.

MESSENGER. I took your feet out of the spangle.

OEDIPUS. I have had those marks from the cradle.

MESSENGER. They have given you the name you bear.

675

OEDIPUS. Tell me, for God's sake, was that deed my mother's or my father's?

MESSENGER. I do not know—he who gave you to me knows more of that than I.

OEDIPUS. What? You had me from another? You did not chance on me yourself?

680

MESSENGER. No. Another shepherd gave you to me.

OEDIPUS. Who was he? Can you tell me who he was?

MESSENGER. I think that he was said to be of Laius' household.

OEDIPUS. The king who ruled this country long ago?

685

MESSENGER. The same—the man was herdsman in his service.

OEDIPUS. Is he alive, that I might speak with him?

MESSENGER. You people of this country should know that.

OEDIPUS. Is there anyone here present who knows the herd he speaks of? Anyone who has seen him in the town pastures? The hour has come when all must be made clear.

690

CHORUS. I think he is the very herd you sent for but now; Jocasta can tell you better than I.

JOCASTA. Why ask about that man? Why think about him? Why waste a thought on what this man has said? What he has said is of no account.

695

OEDIPUS. What, with a clue like that in my hands and fail to find out my birth?

JOCASTA. For God's sake, if you set any value upon your life, give up this search—my misery is enough.

700

OEDIPUS. Though I be proved the son of a slave, yes, even of three generations of slaves, you cannot be made base-born.

JOCASTA. Yet, hear me, I implore you. Give up this search.

OEDIPUS. I will not hear of anything but searching the whole thing out.

705

JOCASTA. I am only thinking of your good—I have advised you for the best.

OEDIPUS. Your advice makes me impatient.

JOCASTA. May you never come to know who you are, unhappy man!

OEDIPUS. Go, someone, bring the herdsman here—and let that woman glory in her noble blood.

710

JOCASTA. Alas, alas, miserable man! Miserable! That is all that I can call you now or for ever.

[She goes out.]

CHORUS. Why has the lady gone, Oedipus, in such a transport of despair? Out of this silence will burst a storm of sorrows.

715

OEDIPUS. Let come what will. However lowly my origin I will discover it. That woman, with all a woman's pride, grows red with shame at my base birth. I think myself the child of Good Luck, and that the years are my foster-brothers. Sometimes they have set me

up, and sometimes thrown me down, but he that has Good Luck 720
for mother can suffer no dishonour. That is my origin, nothing can
change it, so why should I renounce this search into my birth?

CHORUS. Oedipus' nurse, mountain of many a hidden glen,
Be honoured among men;
A famous man, deep-thoughted, and his body strong; 725
Be honoured in dance and song.

Who met in the hidden glen? Who let his fancy run
Upon nymph of Helicon?
Lord Pan or Lord Apollo or the mountain Lord
By the Bacchantes adored? 730

OEDIPUS. If I, who have never met the man, may venture to say so, I
think that the herdsman we await approaches; his venerable age
matches with this stranger's, and I recognise as servants of mine
those who bring him. But you, if you have seen the man before,
will know the man better than I. 735

CHORUS. Yes, I know the man who is coming; he was indeed in
Laius' service, and is still the most trusted of the herdsmen.

OEDIPUS. I ask you first, Corinthian stranger, is this the man you
mean?

MESSENGER. He is the very man. 740

OEDIPUS. Look at me, old man! Answer my questions. Were you
once in Laius' service?

HERDSMAN. I was: not a bought slave, but reared up in the house.

OEDIPUS. What was your work—your manner of life?

HERDSMAN. For the best part of my life I have tended flocks. 745

OEDIPUS. Where, mainly?

HERDSMAN. Cithaeron or its neighbourhood.

OEDIPUS. Do you remember meeting with this man there?

HERDSMAN. What man do you mean?

OEDIPUS. This man. Did you ever meet him? 750

HERDSMAN. I cannot recall him to mind.

MESSENGER. No wonder in that, master; but I will bring back his
memory. He and I lived side by side upon Cithaeron. I had but one
flock and he had two. Three full half-years we lived there, from
spring to autumn, and every winter I drove my flock to my own 755
fold, while he drove his to the fold of Laius. Is that right? Was it
not so?

HERDSMAN. True enough; though it was long ago.

MESSENGER. Come, tell me now—do you remember giving me a boy
to rear as my own foster-son? 760

HERDSMAN. What are you saying? Why do you ask me that?

MESSENGER. Look at that man, my friend, he is the child you gave me.

HERDSMAN. A plague upon you! Cannot you hold your tongue?

OEDIPUS. Do not blame him, old man; your own words are more
blameable. 765

HERDSMAN. And how have I offended, master?

OEDIPUS. In not telling of that boy he asks of.

HERDSMAN. He speaks from ignorance, and does not know what he
is saying.

OEDIPUS. If you will not speak with a good grace you shall be made 770
to speak.

HERDSMAN. Do not hurt me for the love of God, I am an old man.

OEDIPUS. Someone there, tie his hands behind his back.

HERDSMAN. Alas! Wherefore! What more would you learn?

OEDIPUS. Did you give this man the child he speaks of? 775

HERDSMAN. I did: would I had died that day!

OEDIPUS. Well, you may come to that unless you speak the truth.

HERDSMAN. Much more am I lost if I speak it.

OEDIPUS. What! Would the fellow make more delay?

HERDSMAN. No, no. I said before that I gave it to him. 780

OEDIPUS. Where did you come by it?—Your own child, or another?

HERDSMAN. It was not my own child—I had it from another.

OEDIPUS. From any of those here?—From what house?

HERDSMAN. Do not ask any more, master; for the love of God do not ask. 785

OEDIPUS. You are lost if I have to question you again.

HERDSMAN. It was a child from the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS. A slave? Or one of his own race?

HERDSMAN. Alas! I am on the edge of dreadful words.

OEDIPUS. And I of hearing: yet hear I must. 790

HERDSMAN. It was said to have been his own child. But your lady within can tell you of these things best.

OEDIPUS. How? It was she who gave it to you?

HERDSMAN. Yes, King.

OEDIPUS. To what end? 795

HERDSMAN. That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS. Her own child?

HERDSMAN. Yes: from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS. What prophecies?

HERDSMAN. That he should kill his father. 800

OEDIPUS. Why, then, did you give him up to this old man?

HERDSMAN. Through pity, master, believing that he would carry him to whatever land he had himself come from—but he saved him for

dreadful misery; for if you are what this man says, you are the most miserable of all men. 805

OEDIPUS. O! O! All brought to pass! All truth! Now, O light, may I look my last upon you, having been found accursed in bloodshed, accursed in marriage, and in my coming into the world accursed!

[He rushes into the palace.]

CHORUS. What can the shadow-like generations of man attain 810
But build up a dazzling mockery of delight that under their touch dissolves again?
Oedipus seemed blessed, but there is no man blessed amongst men.

Oedipus overcame the woman-breasted Fate;
He seemed like a strong tower against Death and first among the fortunate;
He sat upon the ancient throne of Thebes, and all men called him great. 815

But, looking for a marriage-bed, he found the bed of his birth,
Tilled the field his father had tilled, cast seed into the same abounding earth;
Entered through the door that had sent him wailing forth.

Begetter and begot as one! How could that be hid?
What darkness cover up that marriage-bed? Time watches, he is eagle-eyed, 820
And all the works of man are known and every soul is tried.

Would you had never come to Thebes, nor to this house,
Nor riddled with the woman-breasted Fate, beaten off Death and succoured us,
That I had never raised this song, heartbroken Oedipus!

SECOND MESSENGER [coming from the house]. Friends and kinsmen 825
of this house! What deeds must you look upon, what burden of sorrow bear, if true to race you still love the House of Labdacus.
For not Ister nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many misfortunes have been brought upon it, so many has it brought upon itself, and those misfortunes are always the worst that a man brings upon himself. 830

CHORUS. Great already are the misfortunes of this house, and you bring us a new tale.

SECOND MESSENGER. A short tale in the telling: Jocasta, our Queen, is dead. 835

CHORUS. Alas, miserable woman, how did she die?

SECOND MESSENGER. By her own hand. It cannot be as terrible to you as to one that saw it with his eyes, yet so far as words can serve, you shall see it. When she had come into the vestibule, she ran half crazed towards her marriage-bed, clutching at her hair with the fingers of both hands, and once within the chamber dashed the doors together behind her. Then called upon the name of Laius, long since dead, remembering that son who killed the father and upon the mother begot an accursed race. And wailed because of that marriage wherein she had borne a twofold race—husband by husband, children by her child. Then Oedipus with a shriek burst in and rushing here and there asked for a sword, asked where he would find the wife that was no wife but a mother who had borne his children and himself. Nobody answered him, we all stood dumb; but supernatural power helped him, for, with a dreadful shriek, as though beckoned, he sprang at the double doors, drove them in, burst the bolts out of their sockets, and ran into the room. There we saw the woman hanging in a swinging halter, and with a terrible cry he loosened the halter from her neck. When that unhappiest woman lay stretched upon the ground, we saw another dreadful sight. He dragged the golden brooches from her dress and lifting them struck them upon his eyeballs, crying out, 'You have looked enough upon those you ought never to have looked upon, failed long enough to know those that you should have known; henceforth you shall be dark'. He struck his eyes, not once, but many times, lifting his hands and speaking such or like words. The blood poured down and not with a few slow drops, but all at once over his beard in a dark shower as it were hail. 840 845 850 855 860

[The Chorus wails and he steps further on to the stage.]

Such evils have come forth from the deeds of those two and fallen not on one alone but upon husband and wife. They inherited much happiness, much good fortune; but to-day, ruin, shame, death, and loud crying, all evils that can be counted up, all, all are theirs. 865

CHORUS. Is he any quieter? 870

SECOND MESSENGER. He cries for someone to unbar the gates and to show to all the men of Thebes his father's murderer, his mother's—the unholy word must not be spoken. It is his purpose to cast himself out of the land that he may not bring all this house under his

curse. But he has not the strength to do it. He must be supported and led away. The curtain is parting; you are going to look upon a sight which even those who shudder must pity. 875

Enter Oedipus

OEDIPUS. Woe, woe is me! Miserable, miserable that I am! Where am I? Where am I going? Where am I cast away? Who hears my words?

CHORUS. Cast away indeed, dreadful to the sight of the eye, dreadful to the ear. 880

OEDIPUS. Ah, friend, the only friend left to me, friend still faithful to the blind man! I know that you are there; blind though I am, I recognise your voice.

CHORUS. Where did you get the courage to put out your eyes? What unearthly power drove you to that? 885

OEDIPUS. Apollo, friends, Apollo, but it was my own hand alone, wretched that I am, that quenched these eyes.

CHORUS. You were better dead than blind.

OEDIPUS. No, it is better to be blind. What sight is there that could give me joy? How could I have looked into the face of my father when I came among the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against them both I sinned such things that no halter can punish? And what to me this spectacle, town, statue, wall, and what to me this people, since I, thrice wretched, I, noblest of Theban men, have doomed myself to banishment, doomed myself when I commanded all to thrust out the unclean thing? 890 895

CHORUS. It had indeed been better if that herdsman had never taken your feet out of the spancel or brought you back to life.

OEDIPUS. O three roads, O secret glen; O coppice and narrow way where three roads met; you that drank up the blood I spilt, the blood that was my own, my father's blood: remember what deeds I wrought for you to look upon, and then, when I had come hither, the new deeds that I wrought. O marriage-bed that gave me birth and after that gave children to your child, creating an incestuous kindred of fathers, brothers, sons, wives, and mothers. Yes, all the shame and the uncleanness that I have wrought among men. 900 905

CHORUS. For all my pity I shudder and turn away.

OEDIPUS. Come near, condescend to lay your hands upon a wretched man; listen, do not fear. My plague can touch no man but me. Hide me somewhere out of this land for God's sake, or kill me, or throw me into the sea where you shall never look upon me more. 910

Enter Creon and attendants

CHORUS. Here Creon comes at a fit moment; you can ask of him what you will, help or counsel, for he is now in your place. He is King.

OEDIPUS. What can I say to him? What can I claim, having been altogether unjust to him? 915

CREON. I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach you. Lead him in to the house as quickly as you can. Do not let him display his misery before strangers.

OEDIPUS. I must obey, but first, since you have come in so noble a spirit, you will hear me. 920

CREON. Say what you will.

OEDIPUS. I know that you will give her that lies within such a tomb as befits your own blood, but there is something more, Creon. My sons are men and can take care of themselves, but my daughters, my two unhappy daughters, that have ever eaten at my own table and shared my food, watch over my daughters, Creon. If it is lawful, let me touch them with my hands. Grant it, Prince, grant it, noble heart. I would believe, could I touch them, that I still saw them. [*Ismene and Antigone are led in by attendants.*] But do I hear them sobbing? Has Creon pitied me and sent my children, my darlings? Has he done this? 925

CREON. Yes, I ordered it, for I know how greatly you have always loved them.

OEDIPUS. Then may you be blessed, and may Heaven be kinder to you than it has been to me! My children, where are you? Come hither—hither—come to the hands of him whose mother was your mother; the hands that put out your father's eyes, eyes once as bright as your own; his who, understanding nothing, seeing nothing, became your father by her that bore him. I weep when I think of the bitter life that men will make you live, and the days that are to come. Into what company dare you go, to what festival, but that you shall return home from it not sharing in the joys, but bathed in tears? When you are old enough to be married, what 930

man dare face the reproach that must cling to you and to your children? What misery is there lacking? Your father killed his father, he begat you at the spring of his own being, offspring of her that bore him. That is the taunt that would be cast upon you and on the man that you should marry. That man is not alive; my children, you must wither away in barrenness. Ah, son of Menoeceus, listen. Seeing that you are the only father now left to them, for we their parents are lost, both of us lost, do not let them wander in beggary—are they not your own kindred?—do not let them sink down into my misery. No, pity them, seeing them utterly wretched in helpless childhood if you do not protect them. Show me that you promise, generous man, by touching me with your hand. [*Creon touches him.*] My children, there is much advice that I would give you were you but old enough to understand, but all I can do now is bid you pray that you may live wherever you are let live, and that your life be happier than your father's. 945 950 955 960

CREON. Enough of tears. Pass into the house.

OEDIPUS. I will obey, though upon conditions.

CREON. Conditions?

OEDIPUS. Banish me from this country. I know that nothing can destroy me, for I wait some incredible fate; yet cast me upon Cithaeron, chosen by my father and my mother for my tomb. 965

CREON. Only the Gods can say yes or no to that.

OEDIPUS. No, for I am hateful to the Gods.

CREON. If that be so you will get your wish the quicker. They will banish that which they hate. 970

OEDIPUS. Are you certain of that?

CREON. I would not say it if I did not mean it.

OEDIPUS. Then it is time to lead me within.

CREON. Come, but let your children go.

OEDIPUS. No, do not take them from me. 975

CREON. Do not seek to be master; you won the mastery but could

not keep it to the end.

[He leads Oedipus into the palace, followed by Ismene, Antigone, and attendants.]

CHORUS. Make way for Oedipus. All people said,
 'That is a fortunate man';
 And now what storms are beating on his head!
 Call no man fortunate that is not dead.
 The dead are free from pain.

980

The End

SOPHOCLES' OEDIPUS AT COLONUS*

A VERSION FOR THE MODERN STAGE

1934

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Oedipus	Creon, King of Thebes,
Antigone	<i>brother-in-law of Oedipus</i>
Ismene	A Stranger
Polyneices, <i>son of Oedipus</i>	A Messenger
Theseus, King of Athens	Chorus
	Servants and Soldiers

SCENE: *The neighbourhood of Athens, near a shrine*

OEDIPUS. To what town or country have we come, Antigone? Who to-day gives alms to the blind man, to wandering Oedipus? I ask little and get less and am content; where there is nobility of character suffering teaches patience, and we have been long enough together to learn that lesson. Bring me, daughter, to some place, to some sacred place perhaps, where we can rest and speak to a passer-by, and find out where we are and what we are to do. We must do whatever they bid us.

ANTIGONE. I can see the distant towers of a city, and this place seems to be sacred; it is shaded with laurels, olives and vines, and nightingales are singing. So sit down upon this stone; you have travelled far for an old man.

OEDIPUS. Seat me upon it and keep a watch over the blind man.

* See explanatory notes p. 890.

- caught" (T. H. White, *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts*. New York: Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1960, p. 21).
- I.210. the **Great Bestery of Paris**: Bestiaries, or books containing the supposed natural history of animals interpreted allegorically, were popular in the Middle Ages. "The Great Bestery" may refer to the fourteenth-century French *Bestiaire d'amour*, or it may simply be Yeats's invention.
- I.243-44. the **Great Bear**: the constellation Ursa Major; the Big Dipper.
- I.270-71. the **donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem**: Matt. 21, Mark 11, Luke 19: 29ff., John 12.
- I.294-95. **camphor, Peruvian bark, spurge and mandrake**: medicinal herbs. Peruvian bark is the bark of cinchona, a tree or shrub native to the Andes. The bark yields quinine and other alkaloids.
- I.314. **Asphodels**: in classical mythology, flowers that grow in the Elysian fields, the abode of the blessed after death.

Scene II

- II.2. "The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge": In the Middle Ages, plays of Noah's ark were popular, largely for the reason alleged by the Prime Minister. The title is Yeats's own invention. For the story of Noah, see Gen. 6-9.
- II.29. **Adam**: While Adam was sleeping, God formed the first woman, Eve, out of Adam's rib (Gen. 2:20-25).
- II.38-39. **Saint Octema**: invented by Yeats.
- II.39. **Antioch**: a city in southern Turkey, capital of ancient Syria. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26).
- II.41. **caracole**: a half turn to left or right executed by a mounted horse.
- II.101. the **golden top of care**: the crown.
- II.302. **Pasiphaë**: In classical mythology, Pasiphaë was the wife of Minos and the mother, by a white bull, of the Minotaur.
- II.304. **Leda**: In classical mythology, Leda was raped by Jupiter in the form of a swan. Helen of Troy was their daughter.
- II.307-20. **Wherefore spin ye . . .**: Yeats is imitating a game called "Frimsy-Framsy," often played at wakes. In Frimisy-Framsy, a woman sits in the middle, the men walk around her, and she is asked "Frimsy-Framsy, what's your fancy?" She chooses a man and kisses him. He then takes her place, and the women walk around him. The game was disapproved of by the clergy, who considered it frivolous and immoral.
- II.323. the **New Adam**: Traditionally, Jesus Christ.
- II.340. **Cato**: Marcus Porcius Cato "the Younger" (95-46 B.C.), Roman statesman and Stoic philosopher.
- II.340. **Cicero**: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), Roman statesman, writer, and orator.
- II.340. **Demosthenes** (384?-322 B.C.): Athenian statesman and orator.
- II.341. **Petronius Arbiter** (d. A.D. 66?): Roman satirist.
- II.358. **Xanadu**: a residence of Kubla Khan in southeastern Mongolia, immortalized in Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" as an exotic place of idyllic beauty.

- II.358. "The Fall of Troy": a popular dramatic subject. Cf. the First Player's speech in *Hamlet* 2.2.468ff.
- II.359. **Kubla Khan** (1215-1294): Mongolian general and statesman who conquered China and became the first emperor of the Mongol dynasty. See note to II. 358 on Xanadu, above.
- II.361-62. **Agamemnon**: King of Mycenae; leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War; **Helen**: wife of King Menelaus of Sparta; her elopement with Paris caused the Trojan War.
- II.396. the **sister of Noah**: not in the Bible; Yeats's invention.
- II.409-10. **Ionian music; Dorian scale**: scales in ancient Greek music were in various modes. The Dorian mode is the ascending scale played on the white keys of a piano beginning at D; the Ionian mode uses the white notes from C to C.
- II.412. **Delphi. The oracle**: See *Sophocles' King Oedipus*, note to line 34.
- II.614. the **Oracle**: here, the old man's braying.

Sophocles' King Oedipus

First published in 1928. First presented by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., at the Abbey Theatre, 7 December 1926: Cast: Oedipus, F. J. McCormick (Peter Judge); Jocasta, Eileen Crowe; Creon, Barry Fitzgerald; Priest, Eric Gorman; Tiresias, Michael J. Dolan; Boy, D. Breen; First Messenger, Arthur Shields; Herdsman, Gabriel J. Fallon; Second Messenger, P. J. Carolan; Nurse, May Craig; Children (Antigone and Ismene), Raymond and Edna Fardy; Servants, Tony Quinn, Michael Scott, C. Haughton; Leader of the Chorus, J. Stephenson; Chorus, Peter Nolan, Walter Dillon, T. Moran, M. Finn, D. Williams. Produced by Lennox Robinson; choruses set to music by J. F. Larchet; set in an arrangement of Gordon Craig screens.

The manuscripts are studied in *W. B. Yeats: The Writing of Sophocles' King Oedipus*, ed. David R. Clark and James B. McGuire (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989), cited as SKO Manuscripts.

In the preface to the 1928 edition, Yeats explained that "this version of Sophocles play was written for Dublin players, for Dublin liturgical singers, for a small auditorium, for a chorus that must stand stock still where the orchestra are accustomed to put their chairs, for an audience where nobody comes for self-improvement or for anything but emotion. In other words, I put readers and scholars out of my mind and wrote to be sung and spoken. The one thing that I kept in mind was that a word unfitted for living speech, out of its natural order, or unnecessary to our modern technique, would check emotion and tire attention.

"Years ago I persuaded Florence Farr to so train the chorus for a Greek play that the sung words were almost as intelligible and dramatic as the spoken; and I have commended that art of hers in *Speaking to the Psalter*. I asked my Dublin producer Lennox Robinson to disregard that essay, partly because liturgical singers were there to his hand, but mainly because if a chorus stands still in half shadow music and singing should, perhaps, possess a variety of rhythm and pitch incompatible with dramatic intelligible words. The main purpose of the chorus is to preserve the mood while it

rests the mind by change of attention. A producer who has a space below the level of the stage, where a chorus can move about an altar, may do well to experiment with that old thought of mine and keep his singers as much in the range of the speaking voice as if they sang 'The west's awake,' or sang round a binnacle. However, he has his own singers to think of and must be content with what comes to hand" (VPI, p. 851).

Notes: The liturgical singers were from the choir of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Mrs. Florence (Farr) Emery had led the chorus in Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, directed by Granville Barker at the Lyric Theatre, London, 1904 (L, p. 435). In 1906, Yeats praised her for making "the chorus of *Hippolytus* and of *The Trojan Women*, at the Court Theatre or the Lyric, intelligible speech, even when several voices spoke together" (Ex, p. 219). Yeats's ideas about "cantilation" appear in his 1907 essay "Speaking to the Psaltery" with a note by Florence Farr and musical scores of her settings (E&I, pp. 13-27). "The West's Asleep" by Thomas Davis (1814-1845), set to a Munster air, ends with a rousing "The West's awake! the West's awake! Sing, oh! hurragh! let England quake; We'll watch till death for Erin's sake!" (*The Irish Song Book*, ed. Albert Percival Graves [London: T. Fisher Unwin; Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker; New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1894], pp. 58-59).

Yeats told how he came to translate Sophocles in a 9 September 1931 broadcast from Belfast: "Nearly thirty years ago I was at the Catholic University of Notre Dame. . . . A certain monk . . . told me . . . that 'Oedipus the King' had just been performed under the auspices of his University. 'Oedipus the King' was at that time forbidden by the English censor, and I thought that if we could play it at the Abbey Theatre, which was to open on our return, we might make our audience proud of its liberty, and take a noble view of the stage and its mission.

"Some three or four years passed, and I began my version with the help of Mr. Nugent Monk [*sic*], who was at the time helping us at the Abbey, and has since established a famous theatre in Norwich, and a young Greek scholar, then one of our actors, but now a Circuit Judge; and half a dozen translations. . . . I finished my first rough draft and began to look for an actor; but before I had found one the English censorship withdrew its ban, and when the pleasure of mocking it and affirming the freedom of our Irish uncensored stage was taken from me, I lost interest in the play. I put it into the file with my letters and forgot it, and then four or five years ago my wife found it and persuaded me to finish it and put it on to the Abbey Stage.

"It was a very great success there. Mr. P. J. McCormick showed himself a great tragic actor, and though no other actor had an equal opportunity, the whole performance was powerful and harmonious. Just as I had had to put that dialogue into whatever form could be best spoken, so I had to put the choruses into whatever form could be best sung, and sung by singers from the Choir of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"When the play was performed in Athens there was a place in front of the stage like half a circus ring with an altar in the middle, and the chorus had moved in some kind of pantomimic dance round that altar; but in Dublin they would have to stand side by side in the narrow space where the

orchestra sits in ordinary plays, and sing almost lost in shadow.

"There were other differences. When the Abbey Company broadcast the play next week from Belfast these differences, dependent on sight, will not be apparent, and you should try and call up not the little Abbey Theatre, but an open air Greek Theatre, with its high pillared stage, and yourselves all sitting tier above tier upon marble seats in some great amphitheatre cut out of a hillside. If the wireless can be got to work in the country house where I shall be staying I shall be listening, too, and as I have never heard a play broadcast I do not know whether I shall succeed in calling into my imagination that ancient theatre.

"Probably the first thing that will seem to you very strange, as very unlike anything seen on the English stage, is that every few minutes a number of persons who are called citizens of Thebes sing their comments upon the actors. I never understood the dramatic value of their singing, perhaps the sole reason for its existence from the point of view of a theatrical producer, until I attended a meeting of the Salvation Army in Dublin. They had hired the Abbey Theatre for a Sunday evening, and unnoticed by anybody I went to a little window high up above the stage platform among the pulleys and ropes that lower the stage scenes, and stood there listening.

"There were, I think, five sermons, all with a single idea—Christ's presence in the world—and between every sermon came a hymn. And I found that, rested by the change of attention made possible by the hymn, the change to a different kind of attention, I listened to the exposition of one idea taken up by speaker after speaker, without any sense of monotony.

"A Greek play, unlike a Shakespearian play, is the exposition of one idea: in the case of King Oedipus, fate closing in upon one man who is almost continuously upon the stage. There is no comic relief, no Polonius with his worldly wisdom and his absurdity, no gravedigger taking off, perhaps in accordance to an ancient stage tradition, innumerable waistcoats, no sub-plot, no Fortinbrass [*sic*] (Fortinbras) with his filibustering army, but the Chorus is there so that we may sit back and relax our strained attention. Not that we must cease to listen, for the Chorus is beautiful, past ages are called up before us, vast emotions are aroused, and our attention is no longer concentrated upon a single spot, a single man.

"But what of the play itself? There is a consensus of opinion that Oedipus the King is the greatest dramatic masterpiece of antiquity. Sophocles was as voluminous a writer as Shakespeare, but only five of his plays have reached us, probably those that were most often acted and, therefore, most often copied out, and of these Oedipus the King is the most concentrated, the most logical" ("The Story of 'Oedipus the King' as Told by W. B. Yeats," *The Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner* [12 September 1931], p. 9).

Notes: The students of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, performed their own translation of *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles* on 15 May 1899. The well-worn copy of *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles: as Performed at Cambridge, November 22-26, 1887, with a Translation in Prose by R. C. Jebb, and a Translation of the Songs of the Chorus in Verse adapted to the Music of C. Villiers Stanford, M.A., by A. W. Verrall, M.A.* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Bowes, 1887) is still in Yeats's

library (O'Shea, 1962). Yeats attempted to get translations from Oliver Gogarty in 1904–05, Gilbert Murray in 1905, and William Kirkpatrick Magee between 1906 and 1909. In 1909, when Dublin Castle threatened to revoke the theatre's license if G. B. Shaw's *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet* were produced, Yeats countered with a threat to produce *Oedipus*, the greatest Greek tragedy, along with it. Both plays were banned in England. When the English ban was lifted in December 1910, Yeats did not lose interest immediately but continued his efforts toward a production and brought the play, as translated by Sir Richard Jebb (1841–1905), to rehearsal under the direction of Nugent Monck in October 1911. With the help of the Jebb and other translations, he began his own version on 7 January 1912. Yeats's 'young Greek scholar' was probably Charles Stewart Wyse Power (1892–1950), who played at the Abbey from 1911 to 1914 and was a Circuit Judge when Yeats wrote in 1931, but it has not been established that he knew Greek. He was a candidate for the role of Oedipus. Nugent Monck (1878–1958) directed plays at the Abbey from 1911 to 1912; he was associated with theatre at Norwich, England, from 1908, and made famous the Maddermarket Theatre there in the years 1921 to 1952. Contributing factors to Yeats's losing interest in *Oedipus* after the spring of 1912 may include his belated reactions to the dropping of the ban and to the overwhelming success of the production by Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) of Gilbert Murray's translation beginning 12 January 1912 at Covent Garden. Probably more important, however, was the return of the Abbey Theatre's first company from their American tour on 12 March and the return to Norwich of Monck, who had organized the second company and was to have produced *Oedipus* with them. On 18 March, Yeats invited Monck to do *Oedipus* with the second company in May, but though Monck produced Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* with the Abbey players at the Royal Court Theatre in London on 11 July, returned to Dublin with the company in late August to be Lennox Robinson's assistant, to produce *The Countess Cathleen* again there in September and a revision of *The Hourglass* on 21 November, he left on the Abbey's second American tour on 20 December and we hear no more of *Oedipus* until 1926.

Notes: P. J. McCormick is a mistake for F. J. McCormick, stage name of Peter Judge (1889–1947), Abbey player from 1918 on, who became the theatre's most versatile leading actor. St. Patrick's Cathedral, begun in the twelfth century, is the national cathedral of the (Protestant) Church of Ireland. The Salvation Army, an evangelical and charitable organization, was founded in London in 1865 by William Booth. Polonius, the gravedigger, and Fortinbras are in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Lear and Cordelia, in his *King Lear*. Yeats and his contemporaries viewed Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), author of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), as a misanthrope. Yeats describes blessings and cursings by the Gaelic poet Anthony Raftery, Antoine O Reachtabhra (1784–1835) in *The Celtic Twilight* (1902) (see Myrth pp. 23–24, 28–30). County Galway is in the province of Connacht, western Ireland. The Eumenides (Greek for "the gracious ones") are female deities to whom a grove near Colonus was sacred. The Irish fairies are called the Good People.

Yeats again recounted his writing of the play in "Plain Man's *Oedipus*," a note in the *New York Times* of 15 January 1933. "Lady Gregory and I went through it all, altering every sentence that might not be intelligible on the Blasket Islands" (L, p. 537n.). Lady Gregory helped Yeats with *Oedipus* off and on from 2 to 22 February 1912. They used a French translation to help them get away from conventional English phraseology. Still in Yeats's library (O'Shea, 1964 and 1965) are Paul Masqueray's French editions and translations of Sophocles (Tome 1: *Ajax—Antigone—Oedipe-Roi—Électre* [Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1922]; Tome 2: *Les Trachiniennes—Philoctète—Oedipe à Colone/Les Limiers* [1924]). The islanders of the Blasket Islands, off the Atlantic coast of Kerry, were "plain men" with a difference, having a rich and complex language and culture, a heritage of poetry, the purest Irish spoken, little English, and an almost entirely oral tradition. Only the Great Blasket was inhabited in 1933 and the people left that in 1953.

On 7 December (postmarked 8 December 1926), Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespeare: "My version of *Oedipus* comes on to-night. I think my shaping of the speech will prove powerful on the stage, for I have made it bare, hard and natural like a saga, and that it will be well, though not greatly, acted—it is all too new to our people. I am more anxious about the audience, who will have to sustain an hour and a half of tension. The actor who plays Oedipus [F. J. McCormick, i.e., Peter Judge] felt the strain at dress rehearsal so much that he could hardly act in the last great moments—a good audience will give him life, but how will the Catholics take it? In rehearsal I had but one overwhelming emotion, a sense as of the actual presence in a terrible sacrament of the god. But I have got that always, though never before so strongly, from Greek drama." On the envelope he wrote "*Oedipus* great success. Critics and audience enthusiastic" (L, p. 720).

Yeats wrote again to Olivia Shakespeare on 13 March [postmarked 1927]: "You speak of the long speech in *Oedipus the King* as being unactable. It is so on our stage but I cut all of it out but a few lines" (L, p. 722). See lines 890–897, p. 397, and SKO Manuscripts, pp. 400–414.

Thebes: chief city of Boeotia, a district of Greece surrounded by Helicon and Parnassus on the west, Cithaeron and Parnes on the south, the Opuntian Mountains on the north, and a range along the seacoast on the east.

1. **Cadmus**: In Greek mythology, Cadmus, searching for his sister Europa, who had been carried off by the god Zeus, was told by an oracle to follow a certain cow and to build a city (Cadmea, later Thebes) where the cow stopped. Near there Cadmus slew a dragon and sowed its teeth. Armed men sprang from the sown teeth and killed each other, all but five, who became the ancestors of the Thebans.
11. **Zeus**: wielder of the thunderbolt and father (or brother) and king of the family of Greek gods. See note to line 88, below.
19. **Sphinx**: The Theban sphinx had wings, a lion's body, and a woman's breasts and head. She asked this riddle of passersby and killed them if they could not answer: What walks on four legs in the morning,

- two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening? Oedipus gave the answer: man—a man crawls as a child, walks as an adult, and leans on a stick in old age. The Sphinx slew herself and Oedipus was made king for ridding Thebes of the monster.
33. **Menoceus:** a Theban, father of Jocasta and Creon and great-great-grandson of Cadmus.
34. **Pythian House:** the temple of Apollo on Mount Parnassus at Delphi, where the Pythia, or priestess, prophesied from a tripod over a cleft in the rock from which intoxicating fumes arose. Pytho was the ancient name of Delphi, in Phocis, Greece, where the god Apollo slew the great serpent Python, founded the Pythian games, and received the surname Pythius.
34. **Phoebus:** the forename of Apollo, meaning "bright" or "pure."
40. **Apollo:** Greek god, son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis (the huntress goddess), and god of punishment, of help from evil, of prophecy, of song, of protection of flocks, of civic life, and of the sun.
56. **King Laius:** King of Thebes, son of Labdacus, husband of Jocasta, father of Oedipus.
63. **Delphi:** See note to line 34, above.
87. **the Golden House:** the temple of Apollo at Delphi, rich in gold because of the immense deposits in its treasury.
88. **sweet-throated Zeus:** ruler of the gods, Apollo's king and father, and ultimate source of the oracle. "Sweet-throated" is propitiatory.
92. **Delian:** referring to Delos, a small island in the Aegean Sea, where Apollo and Artemis, his sister, were born.
97. **God-trodden western shore:** where the sun sets; a death symbol.
102. **Master of the thunder cloud:** Zeus.
105. **this God-hated God:** Death.
106. **Artemis:** goddess of the moon, of the hunt, of beasts, and of childbirth; sister of Apollo.
107. **Maenads:** The intoxicated frenzy of the Maenads or Bacchae, female companions of Dionysus or Bacchus, god of wine, was dangerous to that god's enemies.
108. **Lysian:** from Lyseus, a surname of Apollo, which, by its relation to the word for light, names him god of light and which, by association with the word for wolf, suggests wolf-killer, destroyer of enemies.
110. **Bacchus:** god of wine, son of Zeus and Cadmus's daughter Semele.
115. **Labdacus:** son of Polydorus and grandson of Cadmus.
123. **the Pythian God:** Apollo. See note to line 34, above.
128. **the God:** Apollo.
145. **Tiresias:** a renowned Theban soothsayer, descended from one of the Spartae, the five sons of the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus. Seeing two snakes mating, Tiresias killed the female and was turned into a woman. Later he saw two more snakes mating and turned back to a man. When Zeus and his queen Hera argued about who got more pleasure from sex, a man or a woman, Tiresias, as the expert, sided with Zeus, holding that women get more pleasure. Hera, angry,

- struck him blind, but Zeus compensated by giving him prophetic wisdom and long life.
166. **birds:** The ancient seers found omens not only in the voices of birds but also in their flights, in the positions in which they settled, in their modes of feeding, and in their feuds and friendships. Other sorts of wisdom included studying the way a sacrificed animal burned and inspecting its entrails.
254. **Loxias:** epithet of Apollo as god of the oracle, meaning either "the Ambiguous" or "the Speaker."
- 273-74. **dark words:** see note to line 19, above.
284. **a native Theban:** Oedipus is descended from Cadmus, founder of Thebes, through both father and mother.
289. **the Delphian rock:** the oracle. See note to line 34, above.
289. **wicked mind:** the murderer of Laius.
292. **Parnassus:** mountain, sacred to Apollo and the Muses. The Delphic oracle was on its slope. Thus Apollo, with Zeus's lightnings, thunders at the murderer's back.
292. **the Fates:** here, avenging spirits who pursue the guilty and bring about the doom predicted at Delphi.
293. **crossing-place:** The spot at which, according to tradition, Zeus's two eagles had met, flying from east and west, was marked in the temple at Delphi by the omphalos (navel), a large white stone. Delphi was thought to be the navel, or central point, of the earth.
296. **beast:** the murderer.
410. **Helios:** the sun, first of all the gods in being most conspicuous.
- 459-60. **Phocis . . . Delphi . . . Daulia:** Phocis, north central Greece, included Daulia, Delphi, and Mount Parnassus. Oedipus, leaving Delphi and not wanting to return south to his foster home, Corinth, turned east toward Boeotia and thus met Laius's solemn little procession, complete with herald, as it journeyed toward Delphi to offer sacrifice and consult the oracle.
- 494-95. **Polybus of Corinth:** Oedipus's foster father, king of the Greek city of Corinth on the Isthmus of Corinth, south of Thebes.
495. **Dorian Merope:** Oedipus's foster mother, who was of a distinguished old family claiming direct descent from Dorus, ancestor of the Dorians.
553. **Olympian:** i.e., from Mount Olympus, or pertaining to it as to the abode of the gods; unearthly. The laws are absolute.
553. **Empyrean:** the Empyrean is the highest heaven; in ancient cosmology, a sphere of fire.
562. **Delphian Sybil's trance:** the Pythia. See note to line 34, above.
563. **the world's navel-stone:** see note to lines 293, above.
613. **Pythian seer:** Tiresias.
613. **the birds:** see lines 167 and 245.
618. **Hades:** the abode of the dead.
665. **Cithaeron:** the mountain, southeast of Thebes, on which Oedipus was exposed by his parents.
673. **spancel:** a hobble. Yeats imagines Oedipus's feet bound with a hob-

- ble, or spancel, as horses are hobbled to keep them from straying.
675. the name you bear: the name Oedipus means "swollen-footed."
720. Good Luck: Oedipus says that Fortune is his mother and the years his playmates, some treating him well, some badly.
723. Oedipus' nurse: the mountain Cithaeron.
728. nymph of Helicon: Mount Helicon, sacred to Apollo and the Muses, was northeast of Cithaeron.
729. Pan: god of flocks and shepherds; with goat horns and feet, always playing on reeds, dancing, or making love.
729. the mountain Lord: Bacchus or Dionysus, god of wine.
730. Bacchantes: see Maenads, note to line 107, above.
813. woman-breasted Fate: the Sphinx.
817. Tilled the field: impregnated Jocasta, as Laius had.
818. the door: Jocasta's womb.
827. House of Labdacus: The line was Cadmus, Polydorus, Labdacus, Menoecus, Jocasta, and her brother, Creon. Labdacus was also the father of Laius, who married Jocasta, who bore Oedipus.
828. Ister: Thracian name for the lower course of the river Danube, the most important river of central and southeastern Europe, emptying into the Black Sea from the west.
828. Phasis: ancient name of the river Rion in western Georgia (ancient Colchis, where Jason stole the Golden Fleece), emptying into the Black Sea from the east and dividing Europe from Asia.
856. brooches: The brooches had long pins like small daggers which fastened Jocasta's garments at the shoulders.
876. curtain: There is, of course, no curtain in the Greek. Robinson's set had a curtained background through which Oedipus entered.
900. secret glen: Oedipus remembers his first glimpse of the three roads meeting in a deep glen as he saw them on his way from Delphi, and then the closer view as he arrived at the coppice (clump of trees) and crossroads just before his encounter with Laius.
- 924-25. my sons: Eteocles and Polyneices, who later kill each other fighting over the crown of Thebes.

Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus

First published in *Collected Plays* (1934). First presented by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., at the Abbey Theatre, 12 September 1927. Cast: Oedipus, F. J. McCormick; Antigone, Shelah Richards; Ismene, K. Curling; Polyneices, Gabriel T. Fallon; Theseus, Michael J. Dolan; Creon, Barry Fitzgerald; A Stranger, Arthur Shields; A Messenger, P. J. Carolan; Leader of the Chorus, J. Stephenson; Chorus, Peter Nolan, Walter Dillon, T. Moran, M. Finn, M. Scott; Servants and Soldiers, U. Wright, C. Culhane, G. Green, J. Breen, P. Raymond, W. J. Scott. Produced by Lennox Robinson.

On 6 January 1927, Yeats asserted to Olivia Shakespeare: "My work on *Oedipus at Colonus* has made me bolder and when I look back at *King Oedipus* I am shocked at my moderation. I want to be less literal and more idiomatic and modern. I shall finish tonight all the dialogue for *Oedipus at*

Colonus and then will come six weeks' work at the lyrical choruses, two of which are very famous" (letter misdated "Dec 6 [1926]"; L, p. 721). Yeats's "Come praise Colonus' horses, and come praise" (pp. 419-20) and "Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span. . . ." (pp. 431-32) are his versions of the two "very famous" choruses.

"*Oedipus* is haunted," Yeats wrote to her again on 2 or 4 October. "During *Colonus* George and I were infuriated by the loud barking of a dog apparently in the gallery. We were surprised that nobody laughed. I went out after the play to find who had brought the dog. Person after person said they had heard no dog, then I met two people who had, but each heard it in a different place. It had barked, I heard, in the middle of a performance of *The King*, a week before. One chorus appeals to Cerberus not to disturb Oedipus with its barking. The company think it is a dog that starved to death in the theatre once, when it was closed for the summer. Poems seem to disturb the spirits. . . ." (L, p. 729). Cerberus is the dog that guards the entrance of Hades in Greek mythology.

Yeats broadcast from Belfast on 9 September 1931, "Oedipus . . . wanders an outcast from road to road, a blind old man, attended and protected by his two daughters as Lear was protected by Cordelia. So great has been his suffering that the gods have come over to his side and those that he curses perish, and those that he blesses prosper.

"He becomes to us the representative of human genius. We think perhaps of Jonathan Swift hating himself first of all, and then mankind until suffering has made him half divine. And then perhaps by a strange freak of imagination we think of our blind Gaelic poet, Raftery, wandering with his blessings and his cursings from road to road. There is an old thorn tree pointed out on a Galway road to this day that Raftery is said to have withered with a curse.

"When Oedipus takes refuge in a wood beside the road it is just such a wood as blind Raftery might have found, for it is sacred to certain spirits called Eumenides, which means Good People. I think those great scholars of the last century who translated Sophocles into an English full of Latinised constructions and Latinised habits of thought, were all wrong—and the schoolmasters are wrong who make us approach Greek through Latin. Nobody ever trembled on a dark road because he was afraid of meeting the nymphs and satyrs of Latin literature, but men have trembled on dark roads in Ireland and in Greece. Latin literature was founded upon documents, but Greek literature came, like old Irish literature, out of the beliefs of the common people" (*The Irish Weekly and Ulster Examiner* [12 September 1931], p. 9; see also *On the Boiler* [1939], p. 28 [VPI, p. 899]).

SCENE: *The neighbourhood of Athens*: Athens is the capital of Greece, in southeast Greece, named for the goddess Athena.

30. the Dreadful Goddesses: the Furies (also called Erinyes, Dirae, Eumenides, Semnae): Alecto, Tisiphone, Megaera. Uranus (Heaven) married Gaea (Earth); Cronus, their son, slew his father with an iron sickle, and from the blood of Uranus sprang the Furies. The Furies punish sinners in Hades and pursue guilt-ridden persons with vengeance.