

A COMPANION READER

OEDIPUS THE KING

Sophocles

Translated by Richard Claverhouse Jebb

RAVENSEDGE PUBLISHING

OCTOBER 2026

CONTENTS

About This Edition	3
Preface	6
Introduction	9
<i>Oedipus the King</i>	45
Prologue	45
Parodos (entrance song of the Chorus)	50
First Episode	52
First Stasimon	60
Second Episode (with the First Kommos, 649–697)	62
Second Stasimon	74
Third Episode	76
Third Stasimon	84
Fourth Episode	85
Fourth Stasimon	89
Exodos (with the Second Kommos, 1297–1368)	90
A Companion to the Play	97
Scene-by-Scene Synopsis	98
Characters and Names	104
The House of Laius	109
The Theban Myths	115
Athens and the Theater	122
Key Terms Glossary	126
Aristotle to the Modern Stage	131
About This Site	136

ABOUT THIS EDITION

The play is printed in the English translation of Richard Claverhouse Jebb, with material from his own edition of the play. The translation and that material are Jebb's work; the site's reference pages are kept separate from them.

THE TRANSLATION

The play is printed in the prose translation by R. C. Jebb (1841–1905), Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Cambridge. The translation belongs to *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, published by Cambridge University Press in 1904, which renders the seven surviving plays of Sophocles into English. The volume is in the public domain.

The edition uses this translation as an original public-domain rendering, not a modernized adaptation. Jebb also edited the Greek text of the play with a commentary, so the translation and his Introduction share one scholar's terminology and name forms, for example Laius and Iocasta.

JEBB'S EDITION OF THE PLAY

Jebb's edition of the Greek text, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*, Part I, *The Oedipus Tyrannus*, appeared in a third edition from Cambridge University Press in 1893. From that edition come the Preface, the Introduction, and the notes on each scene and ode that stand at the head of the scenes.

The Introduction is divided into numbered sections. It sets out the earlier forms of the Oedipus story in epic, lyric and prose writers and in Aeschylus, and it reconstructs the events that precede the action of the play. It then gives an analysis of the plot, describes Aristotle's comments on the play and discusses the characters. It goes on to treat the date of the play, the actor Polus, the later versions by Seneca, Corneille, Dryden and Voltaire, and the modern revivals of 1881 at Harvard and in Paris.

On the date, Jebb states that there is no external evidence for the time at which the play was first acted. He places its composition between roughly 439 and 412 BC on internal grounds.

HOW THIS EDITION WAS PREPARED

Jebb's translation is the work of the leading English editor of Sophocles in his time, and it is in the public domain. It is presented here for readers of the play in English. The text is set as a script, speech by speech, with each speaker named and the Greek line numbers in the margin. Jebb's introductions to the scenes and choral odes stand at the head of each part. His line-by-line commentary, written for readers of the Greek, is kept apart from the text: it is printed in full at the end of the complete edition, and as a separate free PDF.

The text was taken from scans of the 1904 volume, *The Tragedies of Sophocles*, whose margins carry the Greek line numbers. The translation was divided into its 441 speeches across all 1,530 lines of the Greek, each with its line range. Errors introduced by the optical character recognition of the scans were then corrected: stray digits and marginal numbers were removed, and misread words were changed only where an independent printing of the translation (Jebb's 1893 edition) or the image of the printed page confirmed the reading. There were 95 corrections in all, and the name Laius was restored to Jebb's printed form throughout. The wording of the translation is otherwise unchanged.

Jebb's Preface, Introduction and commentary were transcribed from page images of the third edition of his *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1893), and every page was compared word by word with the scan's own text layer. In the notes printed with the scenes, his abbreviations are written out (*cp.*, "compare"; *O. C.*, *Oedipus at Colonus*); the complete commentary keeps them as printed.

The companion pages that follow the play were written for this edition from the ancient sources themselves and from standard reference works, not from Jebb's edition. Every factual statement was recorded with the source it rests on and checked against it, and a statement no source confirmed was softened or removed. The pages were then reviewed and approved by the editors.

CONVENTIONS

The wording of Jebb's translation is not changed. The only alterations are corrected transcription errors, restored paragraphing, and abbreviations written out in Jebb's notes. Each alteration is recorded.

GREEK LINE NUMBERS

Line numbers are those of the Greek text, not of the English. Jebb's translation is in prose, so each speech carries the range of Greek lines it renders. Where a Greek line is divided between speakers, the same number appears for both speeches. Jebb's Introduction uses the same numbering.

DIVISIONS OF THE PLAY

Jebb's divisions are followed: prologue (1–150), parodos, the entrance song of the Chorus (151–215), first episode (216–462), first stasimon (463–512), second episode (513–862), second stasimon (863–910), third episode (911–1085), third stasimon (1086–1109), fourth episode (1110–1185), fourth stasimon (1186–1222) and exodos (1223–1530). Within these, two passages of lyric exchange between actor and Chorus, each a *kommos*, are marked: the first within the second episode (649–697) and the second within the exodos (1297–1368). Jebb's Introduction groups the divisions into six main parts.

SPEAKERS AND STAGE DIRECTIONS

The speaker is named before each speech. The Corinthian visitor is labeled Messenger (from Corinth) and the man who reports the death of Iocasta is labeled Second Messenger. Jebb's stage directions are printed with the speeches, as in "Enter Teiresias, led by a Boy" and "Exit".

NOTES ON THE PLAY

The notes printed at the head of the scenes and choral odes are Jebb's, from his edition of 1893, unless otherwise stated.

JEBB'S NAME FORMS

Jebb's spellings of Greek names are kept: Laius, Teiresias, Iocasta, Polybus and Merope. They follow the Greek forms *Λαῖος*, *Τειρεσίας*, *Ιοκάστη*, *Πόλυβος* and *Μερόπη* closely, whereas later English usage commonly has Jocasta and Tiresias. The diaeresis in Laius marks the *a* and the *i* as separate syllables. The Introduction prints the name of Polybus's wife with a grave accent, Meropè, where the play text has none. The play text calls the god Apollo by the names Phoebus and Loxias as well as Apollo. The Introduction refers to the play by its Latin title, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which the edition gives in English as *Oedipus the King*.

JEBB'S OLDER ENGLISH

The translation is in the literary English of the late nineteenth century and keeps forms that have since dropped out of use: "thou", "thee" and "thy" for the singular "you", "ye" for the plural, and verb endings such as "hath" and "-est". Examples include "well wot I that ye suffer, all", where "wot" is an old form of the verb "to know"; "Sirrah, how camest thou here?", where "sirrah" is a contemptuous form of address; and "avaunt thee from these doors!", where "avaunt" is an archaic command to depart. Other words are "guerdon" (reward) and "wottest". Contractions such as "'Twas" belong to the same register.

PREFACE

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

In preparing a second edition of this volume, I have profited by several criticisms with which the work has been favoured, and by various other contributions to the study of Sophocles which have come into my hands since 1883. The modification of detail which is chiefly noticeable in the present edition is the substitution of English for Latin as the language of the critical notes on the text. Without having altered the opinion which I formerly expressed, that Latin possesses unequalled merits for this purpose, I had been led to feel that a combination of Latin critical notes with an English commentary on the same page suffered from a certain want of unity and harmony. There seemed to be also a practical objection, viz., that some readers were harassed by the change of mental attitude involved in turning from a Latin to an English note on the same passage. The intrinsic superiority of Latin as a vehicle of textual criticism could hardly be deemed to outweigh these disadvantages; and it is by this consideration that my choice has now been decided.

The Autotype Facsimile of the Laurentian MS. of Sophocles, published in 1885 by the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, is by far the most important boon ever conferred on students of the text. A possessor of this perfectly executed and durable photograph commands an aid of indefinitely greater value than the most minute and most exact collation; so far, indeed, as the purposes of textual criticism are concerned, he has the manuscript itself before him. I have used the facsimile in carefully verifying the report of the Laurentian readings given in my first edition, and on a few points have been enabled to supplement it, or to render it more precise. In this connection I may briefly advert to another point of detail which distinguishes the present re-issue. Some of my friendly critics in Germany have observed that those MSS. which are later than the Laurentian, and which are all more or less signally inferior to it, were reported in my first edition with a superfluous fulness, which somewhat encumbered the critical apparatus, and also tended to obscure the leading facts. The view which, for a long period of time, has been steadily gaining ground in Germany is that, whether the Laurentian MS. is or is not actually the sole source of all the other MSS. of Sophocles now extant, at least the cases are very rare in which any correction of the Laurentian by another MS. is of a higher order than could have been furnished by a grammarian's conjecture. The difficulties in the way of supposing the Laurentian to be, in fact, the unique source still seem to me very considerable. But the experience gradually gained in the progress of this work has impressed

me, more and more, with the truth of the other proposition just noticed,—viz., that the positive worth of the corrections supplied by the other MSS. is no greater than it easily might have been if the Laurentian were their common parent. Forty years have passed since Cobet first maintained that the Laurentian is the MS. from which all the rest have been immediately or indirectly transcribed; and, though I cannot share the confidence with which that view has since been defended by such scholars as Dindorf and Moriz Seyffert, I can now comprehend it, at least, better than formerly. Be our view of the genealogical facts what it may, it cannot be questioned that, in critical notes on the text of Sophocles, the paramount significance of the Laurentian MS. must be brought into clear and bold relief. Dindorf effects this by referring to the later MSS. under the generic name of ‘apographa.’ Mekler, in the 6th Teubner edition of Dindorf’s text (1885) uses the letter ‘r’ to denote ‘lectio e recentiorum librorum consensu aut uno alterove ducta.’ This symbol, ‘r,’ has been adopted by me in the critical notes of this edition to denote ‘one or more of the MSS. other than the Laurentian’; but it is used only in those cases where a more specific statement was unnecessary. By thus combining the use of a general symbol with occasional recourse to more particular statement, I have sought to exhibit the relative importance of the documents in a just perspective, without any undue sacrifice of precision.

The commentary, as it is now set forth, will furnish sufficient evidence of the desire which I have felt to profit by any criticism which has convinced my own judgment, and to express gratitude for such criticism in the most practical form. Among my foreign reviewers, mention is due to Professor Wecklein, and to Dr Kaibel, the editor of the *Epigrammata Graeca*. To the latter I am indebted for calling my attention to epigraphic evidence of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. in regard to the Attic orthography of certain words. The *Grammatik der Attischen Inschriften*, by Professor Meisterhans (1885), is an excellent hand-book of reference on this subject¹. Among English critics, I owe grateful acknowledgments to the authors of unsigned reviews in several journals, as well as to some eminent scholars whom I am permitted to thank by name,—Professor Butcher,—whose examination of this work, in the *Fortnightly Review*, has been to me an exceptionally valuable source alike of instruction and of stimulus,—Professor Tyrrell, Mr A. Sidgwick, and Mr R. Whitelaw. The criticisms of Mr Whitelaw occupy a large space in the Transactions of the Cambridge Philological Society for 1886. Although I have not always been able to agree with his views, I have been indebted to them for amendments on some points, and have never differed from them without careful consideration; nor has anything given me more pleasure in connection with this book than the very kind and generous manner in which he has referred to it.

1. In v. 68 I should have given *ἡῤῥισκον*, not *εῤῥισκον*, had I then known the evidence collected by Meisterhans from Attic inscriptions of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. for the temporal augment in the historical tenses of verbs beginning with *εὐ*. Following that evidence, I have given *ἡῤῥηκ'* in 546 and *ἡῤῥῆσθαι* in 1050.

I must once again express my best thanks to the Managers and staff of the Cambridge University Press.

THE COLLEGE, GLASGOW,

November, 1887.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is in one sense the masterpiece of Attic Tragedy. No other shows an equal degree of art in the development of the plot; and this excellence depends on the powerful and subtle drawing of the characters. Modern drama, where minor parts can be multiplied and scene changed at will, can more easily divorce the two kinds of merit. Some of Voltaire's plays, for instance, not first-rate in other ways, are models of ingenious construction. The conditions of the Greek stage left less room for such a result. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the highest constructive skill is seen to be intimately and necessarily allied with the vivid delineation of a few persons.

Here it is peculiarly interesting to recover, so far as we can, the form in which the story of Oedipus came to Sophocles ; to remark what he has altered or added ; and to see how the same subject has been handled by other dramatists.

The essence of the myth is the son slaying his unknown father, and thereby fulfilling a decree of fate. The subsequent marriage, if not an original part of the story, seems to have been an early addition. The central ideas are, (1) the irresistible power of destiny, and (2) the sacredness of the primary natural ties, as measured by the horror of an unconscious sin against it. The direct and simple form in which these ideas are embodied gives the legend an impress of high antiquity. This might be illustrated by a comparison with the story of Sohrab and Rustum as told in Mr Matthew Arnold's beautiful poem. The slaying of the unknown son by the father is there surrounded with a pathos and a chivalrous tenderness which have no counterpart in the grim simplicity of the Oedipus myth, as it appears in its earliest known shape.

HOMERIC POEMS.

§ 2. The *Iliad*, which knows the war of Polyneices and his allies against Thebes (4. 378), once glances at the tale of Oedipus—where Mecisteus, father of Euryalus, is said to have visited Thebes in order to attend the funeral games which were celebrated after the death of Oedipus (23. 679 f.):

—

ὅς ποτε Θήβαςδ' ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο

ἐς τάφον,—

—‘who came to Thebes of yore, when Oedipus had fallen, to his burying.’

The word *δεδουπότος* plainly refers to a violent death in fight, or at the hand of an assassin; it would not be in accord with the tone of epic language to understand it as a figurative phrase for a sudden fall from greatness. But more than this the *Iliad* does not tell. The poet of the 23rd book imagines Oedipus as having died by violence, and received burial at Thebes, in the generation before the Trojan war.

The Nekyia in the *Odyssey* gives the earliest sketch of an integral story (11. 271 ff.):—

Μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἶδον, καλήν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρεΐησι νόοιο
γημαμένη ᾧ υἱεῖ· ὁ δ' ὃν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας
γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλὰς·
ἣ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἴδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὕψηλοιο μελάθρου,
ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.

‘And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicastè, who wrought a dread deed with unwitting mind, in that she wedded her son; but he had slain his father ere he wedded her; and presently the gods made these things known among men. Yet he still ruled over the Cadmeans in lovely Thebes, suffering anguish by the dire counsels of the gods; but she went to the house of Hades, the strong warder, when she had fastened a noose on high from the roof-beam, possessed by her pain; and to him she bequeathed sorrows full many, even all that a mother’s Avengers bring to pass.’

With regard to this outline in the *Odyssey*, it is to be noted that it ignores (*a*) the deliverance of Thebes from the Sphinx—though this may be implied in the marriage with Epicastè: (*b*) the self-blinding of Oedipus: (*c*) the expulsion of Oedipus from Thebes—herein agreeing with the indication in the *Iliad*. It further seems to exclude the notion of Epicastè having borne children to Oedipus, since the discovery followed ‘presently’ on the union,—unless, indeed, by *ἄφαρ* the poet merely meant ‘suddenly.’

§ 3. Lost poems of Hesiod may have touched on the story of Oedipus; but in his extant work there is only a passing reference to the war at Thebes (between Polyneices and Eteocles), in which heroes fell, ‘fighting for the flocks of Oedipus.’ Hesiod knows the Sphinx as the daughter of Echidna and as the pest of Thebes¹.

1. Hes. *Op.* 162: war slew the heroes, *τοὺς μὲν ἐφ’ ἑπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ...μαρναμένους μῆλων ἔνεκ’ Οἰδιπόδαο*. The Sphinx: *Theog.* 326, *ἡ δ’* (Echidna) *ἄρα Φῖκ’ ὀλοήν τέκε, Καδμείοισιν ὄλεθρον*. The hill near Thebes on which the Sphinx sat was called *Φίκειον ὄρος*. References in lost Hesiodic poems: schol. on *Il.* 23. 680.

But the story of Oedipus was fully treated in some of those lost epics which dealt with the Theban cycle of myths. One of these was the ‘*Oedipodeia*,’ *Οἰδιπόδεια* (ἔπη). According to this, the four children of Oedipus were not borne by Iocasta, but by a second wife, Euryganeia. Pausanias, who follows this account, does not know the author of the poem². It will be observed that this epic agrees with the *Odyssey* in not making Iocasta bear issue to Oedipus. It is by Attic writers, so far as we know, that she was first described as doing so. Poets or logographers who desired to preserve the favour of Dorians had a reason for avoiding that version. There were houses which traced their line from the children of Oedipus,—as Theron, tyrant of Acragas, claimed descent from Thersandros, son of Polyneices³. To represent these children as the offspring of an incestuous union would have been to declare the stream polluted at its source.

2. He speaks merely of *δὲ τὰ ἔπη ποιήσας ἃ Οἰδιπόδεια ὀνομάζουσι* (9. 5. 11). But the inscription known as the ‘marmor Borgianum’ refers it to Cinaethon, a Lacedaemonian poet who treated epically the Dorian family legends, and who is said to have flourished about 775 B.C. Pausanias, however, who quotes Cinaethon on several points of genealogy, certainly did not regard the *Oedipodeia* as his work.

3. Pind. *Ol.* 2. 35.

We learn from Proclus that in the epic called the *Cyprian Lays* (*Κύπρια*), which included the preparations for the Trojan war, Nestor related ‘the story of Oedipus’ (*τὰ περὶ Οἰδίπουν*) in the course of a digression (*ἐν παρεκβάσει*) which comprised also the madness of Heracles, as well as the story of Theseus and Ariadne. This was probably one of the sources used by the Attic dramatists. Another source, doubtless more fertile in detail, was the epic entitled the *Thebaid* (*Θηβαΐς*), and now usually designated as the ‘Cyclic Thebaid,’ to distinguish it from a later epic of the same name by Antimachus of Colophon, the contemporary of Euripides. Only about 20 verses remain from it⁴. The chief fragment relates to the curse pronounced by Oedipus on his sons. They had broken

his strict command by setting on his table the wine-cups (*ἐκπάματα*) used by Laius; and he invoked a curse upon them:—

αἶψα δὲ παισὶν ἐοῖσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπαράς
ἀργαλέας ἤρατο· θεὸν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινῦν.
ὥς οὐδ' οἱ πατρῷ' ἐννεΐη φιλόπητος
δάσσαντ', ἀμφοτέροισι δ' ἔοι πόλεμος τε μάχαι τε.

‘And straightway, while his two sons were by, he uttered dire curses,—and the Avenging goddess failed not to hear them,—that they should divide their heritage in no kindly spirit, but that war and strife should be ever between them.’

4. See the Didot ed. of the Cyclic fragments, p. 587.

This *Thebaid*—tracing the operation of a curse through the whole history of the house—must have had an important share in moulding the conception of the Aeschylean trilogy.

§ 4. Pindar touches on the story of Oedipus in *Ol.* 2. 42 ff. Destiny has often brought evil fortune after good,—

ἐξ οὗπερ ἔκτεινε Λαῖον μόριμος υἱὸς
συναντόμενος, ἐν δὲ Πυθῶνι χρησθέν
παλαίφατον τέλεσσεν·
ἰδοῖσα δ' ὄξεϊ' Ἐρινὺς

ἔπεφνέ οἱ σὺν ἀλλαλοφονίᾳ γένος ἀρήϊον— ‘—from the day when his doomed son met Laius and killed him, and accomplished the word given aforetime at Pytho. But the swift Erinys beheld it, and slew his warlike sons, each by the other’s sword.’

Here the Fury is represented as destroying the sons in direct retribution for the parricide, not in answer to the imprecation of Oedipus. A fragment of Pindar alludes to the riddle of the Sphinx, and he uses ‘the wisdom of Oedipus’ to denote counsel wrapped in dark sayings,—since the skill which solves riddling speech can weave it⁵.

5. Pind. fr. 62 αἶνιγμα παρθένου | ἐξ ἀγριᾶν γνάθων: *Pyth.* 4. 263 τὰν Οἰδιπόδα σοφίαν. Pindar’s elder contemporary Corinna had sung of Oedipus as delivering Thebes not only from the Sphinx but also from τὴν Τευμησσίαν ἀλώπεκα—a fox from the Boeotian village of Teumessus: but we hear no more of this less formidable pest. (Bergk, *Poet. Lyr.* p. 949.)

§ 5. The logographers could not omit the story of Oedipus in a systematic treatment of the Theban myths. Hellanicus of Mitylene (circ. 450 B.C.) is mentioned by the Scholiast on the *Phoenissae* (61)

as agreeing with Euripides in regard to the self-blinding of Oedipus⁶. The contemporary Pherecydes of Leros (usually called 'Athenian' since Athens was his home) treated the legends of Thebes in the fifth of ten books forming a comprehensive survey of Greek tradition⁷. According to him, Iocasta bore two sons to Oedipus, who were slain by the Minyae: but, as in the *Oedipodeia*, his second wife Euryganeia bore Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone and Ismene. This seems to be the earliest known version which ascribes issue to the marriage of Iocasta with Oedipus.

6. Müller, *Frag. Histor.* I. 85.

7. Müller, *ib.* I. 48.

§ 6. However incomplete this sketch may be relatively to the materials which existed in the early part of the fifth century B.C., it may at least serve to suggest the general conditions under which Tragedy entered on the treatment of the subject. The story of Oedipus, defined in its main features by a tradition older than the *Odyssey*, had been elaborated in the epics of later poets and the prose of chroniclers. There were versions differing in detail, and allowing scope for selection. While the great outlines were constant, minor circumstances might be adapted to the dramatist's chosen view.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides agree in a trait which does not belong to any extant version before theirs. Iocasta, not Euryganeia, is the mother of Eteocles and Polyneices, Antigone and Ismene. They agree also in connecting the doom of the two brothers with a curse pronounced by Oedipus. Neither the scanty fragments⁸ which alone represent the *Oedipus* of Euripides, nor the hints in the *Phoenissae*, enable us to determine the distinctive features of his treatment. With regard to Aeschylus, though our knowledge is very meagre, it suffices at least to show the broad difference between his plan and that of Sophocles.

8. Nauck *Eur. Fragm.* 541—561, to which Unger adds Soph. *fr. incert.* 663, Meineke *adespota* 107, 309, others *adesp.* 6. Almost all the verses are commonplaces. From fr. 546, 547 I should conjecture that the Creon of Eur. defended himself against a charge of treason in a passage parallel with Soph. *O. T.* 583—615. One fragment of two lines is curious (545): *ἡμεῖς δὲ Πολύβου παῖδ' ἐρείσαντες πέδῳ | ἐξομματοῦμεν καὶ διόλλυμεν κόρας*. Quoting these, the Schol. on Eur. *Ph.* 61 says: *ἐν δὲ τῷ Οἰδίποδι οἱ Λαῖου θεράποντες ἐτύφλωσαν αὐτόν*. This would seem to mean that, after the discovery, the old retainers of Laius blinded Oedipus—for the Schol. is commenting on the verse which says that he was blinded by *himself*. But the tragic force of the incident depends wholly on its being the king's own frantic act. I incline to suspect some error on the Scholiast's part, which a knowledge of the context might possibly have disclosed.

From the prologue of the *Phoenissae* it appears that Eur. imagined Oedipus to have been found on Cithaeron by the *ἵπποβούκοι* of Polybus, and taken by them to the latter's wife. The Iocasta of Eur. herself relates in that play how, when the sons of Oed. grew up, they held him a prisoner in the palace at Thebes—that the disgrace might be hidden from men's eyes. It was then that he pronounced a curse upon them. When they have fallen, fighting for the throne, Iocasta kills herself over their bodies, and Creon then expels Oedipus from Thebes. The mutilated *ὑπόθεσις* to the *Phoenissae* does not warrant us in supposing that the *Oenomaus* and *Chrysippus* of Eur.,—the latter containing the curse of Pelops on Laius—formed a trilogy with his *Oedipus*.

Aeschylus treated the story of Oedipus as he treated the story of Agamemnon. Oedipus became the foremost figure of a trilogy which traced the action of an inherited curse in the house of Labdacus, even as the *Oresteia* traced the action of such a curse in the house of Pelops. That trilogy consisted of the *Laius*, the *Oedipus*, and the extant *Seven against Thebes*; the satyric drama being the *Sphinx*. From the *Laius* only a few words remain; from the *Oedipus*, three verses; but some general idea of the *Oedipus* may be gathered from a passage in the *Seven against Thebes* (772—791). Oedipus had been pictured by Aeschylus, as he is pictured by Sophocles, at the height of fame and power. He who had delivered Thebes from 'the devouring pest' (*τὰν ἀρπαξάνδραν κῆρα*) was admired by all Thebans as the first of men. 'But when, hapless one, he came to knowledge of his ill-starred marriage, impatient of his pain, with frenzied heart he wrought a twofold ill': he blinded himself, and called down on his sons this curse, that one day they should divide their heritage with the sword. 'And now I tremble lest the swift Erinnyes bring it to pass.'

Hence we see that the *Oedipus* of Aeschylus included the imprecation of Oedipus upon his sons. This was essential to the poet's main purpose, which was to exhibit the continuous action of the Erinnyes in the house. Similarly the *Laius* doubtless included the curse called down on Laius by Pelops, when bereft by him of his son Chrysippus. The true climax of the Aeschylean *Oedipus* would thus have consisted, not in the discovery alone, but in the discovery followed by the curse.

And we may safely infer that the process of discovery indicated in the *Seven against Thebes* by the words *ἐπεὶ δ' ἀρτίφρων | ἐγένετο...γάμων* (778) was not comparable with that in the play of Sophocles. It was probably much more abrupt, and due to some of those more mechanical devices which were ordinarily employed to bring about a 'recognition' on the stage. The *Oedipus* of Aeschylus, however brilliant, was only a link in a chain which derived its essential unity from 'the mindful Erinnys.'

§ 7. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles was not part of a trilogy, but a work complete in itself. The proper climax of such a work was the discovery, considered in its immediate effects, not in its ulterior consequences. Here the constructive art of the dramatist would be successful in proportion as the discovery was naturally prepared, approached by a process of rising interest, and attended in the moment of fulfilment with the most astounding reversal of a previous situation. In regard to the structure of the plot, this is what Sophocles has achieved. Before giving an analysis of his plot, we must notice two features of it which are due to his own invention.

(1) According to previous accounts, the infant Oedipus, when exposed on Mount Cithaeron, had been found by herdsmen, and reared either in Southern Boeotia, or at Sicyon, a place associated with the worship of the Eumenides. Sophocles makes the Theban herd of Laius give the babe to the herd of Polybus, king of Corinth, who rears it as his own. Thus are prepared the two convergent threads of evidence which meet in the final discovery. And thus, too, the belief of Oedipus concerning his own parentage becomes to him a source, first of anxiety, then of dread, then of hope—in contrast, at successive moments, with that reality which the spectators know.

(2) The only verses remaining from the *Oedipus* of Aeschylus show that in that drama Oedipus encountered and slew Laius at a meeting of three roads near Potniae, a place in Boeotia, on the road leading from Thebes to Plataea. At the ruins of this place Pausanias saw 'a grove of Demeter and Persephone'.

It appears to have been sacred also to those other and more terrible goddesses who shared with these the epithet of *πότνιαι*,—the Eumenides (*ποτνιαδες θεαί*, Eur. *Or.* 318). For the purpose of Aeschylus, no choice of a scene could have been more fitting. The father and son, doomed by the curse in their house, are brought together at a spot sacred to the Erinyes:—

*ἐπῆμεν τῆς ὁδοῦ τροχόλατον
σχιστῆς κελεύθου τρίοδον, ἔνθα συμβολὰς
τριῶν κελεύθων Ποτνιαδων ἡμείβομεν*¹⁰.

‘We were coming in our journey to the spot from which three high-roads part, where we must pass by the junction of triple ways at Potniae.’

9. ἄλλος Δῆμητρος καὶ Κόρης, 9. 8. 1.

10. *Aesch.* fr. 173 (Nauck).

But for Sophocles this local fitness did not exist. For him, the supernatural agency which dominates the drama is not that of the Furies, but of Apollo. He transfers the scene of the encounter from the ‘three roads’ at Potniae to the ‘three roads’ near Daulia¹¹ in Phocis. The ‘branching ways’ of Potniae can no longer be traced. But in the Phocian pass a visitor can still feel how the aspect of nature is in unison with the deed of which Sophocles has made it the theatre¹². This change of locality has something more than the significance of a detail. It symbolises the removal of the action from the control of the dark Avenging Powers to a region within the influence of that Delphian god who is able to disclose and to punish impurity, but who will also give final rest to the wanderer, final absolution to the weary mourner of unconscious sin.

11. *Daulis* was the Homeric form of the name, *Daulia* the post-homeric (Strabo 9. 423).

12. See the note on verse 733.

§ 8. The events which had preceded the action of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* are not set forth, after the fashion of Euripides, in a formal prologue. They have to be gathered from incidental hints in the play itself. It is an indispensable aid to the full comprehension of the drama that we should first connect these hints into a brief narrative of its antecedents as imagined by Sophocles.

Laïus, king of Thebes, being childless, asked the oracle of Apollo at Delphi whether it was fated that a son should be born to him. The answer was, ‘I will give thee a son, but it is doomed that thou leave the sunlight by the hands of thy child: for thus hath spoken Zeus, son of Cronus, moved by the dread curse of Pelops, whose own son (Chrysippus) thou didst snatch from him; and he prayed all this for thee.’ When a son was indeed born to Laïus of Iocasta his wife, three days after the birth he caused it to be exposed in the wilds of Mount Cithaeron. An iron pin was driven through the feet of the babe, fastening them together—that, if perchance it should live to be found by a stranger, he might have the less mind to rear a child so maimed; from which maiming the child was afterwards called *Oedipus*¹³.

13. The incident of the pierced feet was evidently invented to explain the name *Οιδίπους* ('Swellfoot,' as Shelley renders it). In v. 397 *ὁ μὴ δὲν εἰδὼς Οιδίπους* suggests a play on *οἶδα*.

The man chosen to expose the babe received it from the hands of the mother, Iocasta herself, with the charge to destroy it. This man was a slave born in the house of Laius, and so belonging to the class of slaves whom their masters usually treated with most confidence. He was employed in tending the flocks of Laius on Mount Cithaeron, where they were pastured during the half-year from March to September.

In the glens of Cithaeron he had consorted with another herdsman, servant to Polybus, king of Corinth. Seized with pity for the babe, the Theban gave it to this herdsman of Polybus, who took it to Corinth. Polybus and his wife Meropè were childless. They reared the child as their own; the Corinthians regarded him as heir to the throne; and he grew to a man's estate without doubting that he was the true son of the Corinthian king and queen.

But one day it chanced that at a feast a man heated with wine threw out a word which sank into the young prince's mind; he questioned the king and queen, whose resentment of the taunt comforted him; yet he felt that a whisper was creeping abroad; and he resolved to ask the truth from Apollo himself at Delphi. Apollo gave him no answer to the question touching his parentage, but told him these things—that he was doomed to slay his father, and to defile his mother's bed.

He turned away from Delphi with the resolve never again to see his home in Corinth; and took the road which leads eastward through Phocis to Boeotia.

At that moment Laius was on his way from Thebes to Delphi, where he wished to consult the oracle. He was not escorted by the usual armed following of a king, but only by four attendants. The party of five met Oedipus at a narrow place near the 'Branching Roads' in Phocis; a quarrel occurred; and Oedipus slew Laius, with three of his four attendants. The fourth escaped, and fled to Thebes with the tale that *a band of robbers* had fallen upon their company. This sole survivor was the very man who, long years before, had been charged by Laius and Iocasta to expose their infant son on Cithaeron.

The Thebans vainly endeavoured to find some clue to the murderer of Laius. But, soon after his death, their attention was distracted by a new trouble. The goddess Hera—hostile to Thebes as the city of her rival Semelè—sent the Sphinx to afflict it,—a monster with the face of a maiden and the body of a winged lion; who sat on a hill near Thebes (the *Φίκειον ὄρος*), and chanted a riddle. 'What

is the creature which is two-footed, three-footed, and four-footed; and weakest when it has most feet?' Every failure to find the answer cost the Thebans a life. Hope was deserting them; even the seer Teiresias had no help to give; when the wandering stranger, Oedipus, arrived. He solved the enigma by the word *man*: the Sphinx hurled herself from a rock; and the grateful Thebans gave the vacant throne to their deliverer as a free gift. At the same time he married Iocasta, the widow of Laius, and sister of Creon son of Menoeceus.

The sole survivor from the slaughter of Laius and his company was at Thebes when the young stranger Oedipus ascended the throne. The man presently sought an audience of the queen Iocasta, knelt to her, and, touching her hand in earnest supplication, entreated that he might be sent to his old occupation of tending flocks in far-off pastures. It seemed a small thing for so old and faithful a servant to ask; and it was readily granted.

An interval of about sixteen years may be assumed between these events and the moment at which the *Oedipus Tyrannus* opens. Iocasta has borne four children to Oedipus: Eteocles, Polyneices, Antigone, Ismene. Touches in the closing scene of the play forbid us to suppose that the poet imagines the daughters as much above the age of thirteen and twelve respectively. Oedipus has become thoroughly established as the great king, the first of men, to whose wisdom Thebans turn in every trouble.

And now a great calamity has visited them. A blight is upon the fruits of the earth; cattle are perishing in the pastures; the increase of the womb is denied; and a fiery pestilence is ravaging the town. While the fumes of incense are rising to the gods from every altar, and cries of anguish fill the air, a body of suppliants—aged priests, youths, and children—present themselves before the wise king. He, if any mortal, can help them. It is here that the action opens.

§ 9. The drama falls into six main divisions or chapters. The following analysis exhibits in outline the mechanism of the plot, which deserves study.

I. *Prologue*: 1—150. Oedipus appears as the great prince whom the Thebans rank second only to the gods. He pledges himself to relieve his afflicted people by seeking the murderer of Laius.

Parodos: 151—215. The Chorus bewail the pestilence and invoke the gods.

II. *First Episode*: 216—462. Oedipus publicly invokes a solemn curse upon the unknown murderer of Laius. At Creon's suggestion he sends for the seer Teiresias, who refuses to speak, but finally,

stung by taunts, denounces Oedipus himself as the slayer.

First Stasimon: 463—512. The Chorus forebode that the unknown murderer is doomed; they refuse to believe the unproved charge brought by the seer.

III. *Second Episode*: 513—862. Creon protests against the suspicion that he has suborned Teiresias to accuse Oedipus. Oedipus is unconvinced. Iocasta stops the quarrel, and Creon departs. Oedipus then tells her that he has been charged with the murder of Laius. She replies that he need feel no disquietude. Laius, according to an oracle, was to have been slain by his own son; but the babe was exposed on the hills; and Laius was actually slain by *robbers, at the meeting of three roads*.

This mention of *three roads* (v. 716) strikes the first note of alarm in the mind of Oedipus.

He questions her as to (1) the place, (2) the time, (3) the person and the company of Laius. All confirm his fear that *he* has unwittingly done the deed.

He tells her his whole story—the taunt at Corinth—the visit to Delphi—the encounter in Phocis. But he has still one hope. The attendant of Laius who escaped spoke of *robbers*, not of one robber.

Let this survivor—now a herdsman—be summoned and questioned.

Second Stasimon: 863—910. The Chorus utter a prayer against arrogance—such as the king's towards Creon; and impiety—such as they find in Iocasta's mistrust of oracles.

IV. *Third Episode*: 911—1085. A messenger from Corinth announces that Polybus is dead, and that Oedipus is now king designate. Iocasta and Oedipus exult in the refutation of the oracle which had destined Oedipus to slay his sire.

But Oedipus still dreads the other predicted horror—union with his mother.

The messenger, on learning this, discloses that Polybus and Meropè were not the parents of Oedipus. The messenger himself, when a herdsman in the service of Polybus, had found the infant Oedipus on Cithaeron, and had brought him to Corinth. Yet no—not *found* him; had *received him from another herdsman* (v. 1040).

Who was this other herdsman? The Corinthian replies:—He was said to be one of the people of Laius.

Iocasta implores Oedipus to search no further. He answers that he cares not how lowly his birth may prove to be—he will search to the end. With a cry of despair, Iocasta rushes away.

Third Stasimon: 1086—1109. The Chorus joyously foretell that Oedipus will prove to be a native of the land—perchance of seed divine.

V. *Fourth Episode:* 1110—1185. The Theban herdsman is brought in¹⁴.

14. The original object of sending for him had been to ask,—‘Was it the deed of several men, or of one?’—a last refuge. But he is not interrogated on that point. Voltaire criticised this as inconsistent. It is better than consistent; it is natural. A more urgent question has thrust the other out of sight.

‘There,’ says the Corinthian, ‘is the man who gave me the child.’ Bit by bit, the whole truth is wrung from the Theban. ‘The babe was the son of Laius; the wife of Laius gave him to me.’ Oedipus knows all, and with a shriek of misery he rushes away.

Fourth Stasimon: 1186—1222. The Chorus bewail the great king’s fall.

VI. *Exodos:* 1223—1530. A messenger from the house announces that Iocasta has hanged herself, and that Oedipus has put out his eyes. Presently Oedipus is led forth. With passionate lamentation he beseeches the Chorus of Theban Elders to banish or slay him. Creon comes to lead him into the house. Oedipus obtains from him a promise of care for his young daughters; they are presently brought to their father, who takes what he intends to be a last farewell. For he craves to be sent out of the land; but Creon replies that Apollo must pronounce.

As Creon leads Oedipus within, the Chorus speak the closing words: No mortal must be called happy on this side death.

With reference to the general structure of the plot, the first point to observe is the skill with which Sophocles has managed those two threads of proof which he created by his invention of the second herdsman.

We have:—

(1) The thread of evidence from the reported statement of the Theban herdsman as to the *place* of the murder, in connection with Iocasta’s statement as to the *time*, the person of Laius, and the retinue. This tends to show that Oedipus has slain Laius—*being presumably in no wise his kinsman*.

The proof of Oedipus having slain Laius is so far completed at 754 (*αἰαῖ, τὰδ' ἤδη διαφανῆ*) as to leave no longer any moral doubt on the mind of Oedipus himself.

(2) The thread of evidence from the Corinthian, showing, in the first instance, that Oedipus is *not* the son of Polybus and Meropè, and so relieving him from the fear of parricide and incest. Hence the confident tone of Oedipus (1076 ff.), which so powerfully contrasts with the despair of Iocasta: *she has known the worst from v. 1044*.

(3) The convergence of these two threads, when the Theban herdsman is confronted with the Corinthian. This immediately follows the moment of relief just noticed. It now appears that the slayer of Laius has *also* committed parricide and incest.

§ 10. The frequent references of Aristotle to the *Oedipus Tyrannus* indicate its value for him as a typical masterpiece, though the points for which he commends it concern general analysis of form, not the essence of its distinctive excellence. The points are these:—

1. The ‘recognition’ (*ἀναγνώρισις*) is contrived in the best way; *i.e.*, it is coincident with a reversal of fortunes (*περιπέτεια*).
2. This reversal is peculiarly impressive, because the Corinthian messenger had come to bring tidings of the honour in store for Oedipus.
3. Oedipus is the most effective kind of subject for such a reversal, because he had been (*a*) great and glorious, (*b*) *not* preeminently virtuous or just, (*c*) and, again, one whose reverses are not due to crime, but only to unconscious error.
4. The story is told in such a manner as to excite pity and terror by hearing without seeing (as in regard to the exposure of the child, the killing of Laius, the death of Iocasta).
5. If there is any improbability in the story, this is not in the plot itself (*ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν*), but in the supposed antecedents (*ἔξω τῆς τραγωδίας*).

In this last comment, Aristotle indicates a trait which is certainly open to criticism—the ignorance of Oedipus as to the story of Laius. He knows, indeed, the name of his predecessor—though Creon does not think it unnecessary to remind him of the name (103). He also knows that Laius had met a violent death: but he does not know whether this had befallen at Thebes, or in its neighbourhood, or abroad (109—113). Nor does he know that Laius was reported to have been

slain by robbers, and that only one of his followers had escaped (116—123): and he asks if no search had been made at the time (128, 566). Iocasta, who has now been his wife for many years, tells him, as if for the first time, the story of the oracle given to Laius, and he tells her the story of his own early fortunes—though here we need not press the fact that he even names to her his Corinthian parents: that may be regarded as merely a formal preface to a connected narrative. It may be conceded that the matters of which Oedipus is supposed ignorant were themes of which Iocasta, and all the persons about the new king, might well have been reluctant to speak. Still it is evident that the measure of past reticence imagined, both on their part and on his, exceeds the limit of verisimilitude. The true defence of this improbability consists in frankly recognising it. Exquisite as was the dramatic art exercised within the scope of the action (*ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι*), this art was still so far naïve as to feel no offence at some degree of freedom in the treatment of that which did not come within the framework,—of that which, in Aristotle’s phrase, lay ‘outside the piece,’ *ἔξω τῆς τραγωδίας*. It is as if a sculptor neglected to remove some roughness of support or environment which, he felt, would not come into account against the effect of a highly finished group.

§ 11. A drama is itself the only adequate commentary on its persons. It makes them live for us, or it does not. If we submit them to ethical analysis, this may be interesting to *us*, and instructive to those who have not seen or read the piece. But, for a spectator or reader of the play, the men and women must be those whom he finds there. When we personally know a character in real life, another’s estimate of it is seldom more than a key to his point of view—rarely a mental light which we feel that we can appropriate. And it may be permitted to say in passing that this is a reason why the reviving taste for good drama—a result for which, in this country, so much is due to Mr Irving—seems likely to aid in correcting a literary fault of the day which is frequently acknowledged—the tendency to adopt ready-made critical estimates of books which the adopter, at least, has not read. No one who sees a play can help forming *some impression of his own* about the characters. If he reports it honestly, that is criticism; not necessarily good, but not sham. To any one who reads this play of Sophocles with even moderate attention and sympathy, how living is Oedipus! Common experience proves so much; but almost every reader will probably feel that by no attempt at analysis or description could he enable another to see precisely *his* Oedipus: no, though the effort should bring out ‘a point or two as yet unseized by the Germans.’ The case is somewhat different, however, when a particular reading of certain characters in a play is the ground for the attribution to it of a tendency; then it is useful to inquire whether this reading is right—whether, that is, these persons of the drama do indeed speak and act in the tone ascribed to them.

And certainly one of the most interesting questions in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* concerns the intellectual position of Oedipus and Iocasta towards that divine power of which the hand is laid so heavily upon both. Sophocles had found in human nature itself the sanction of 'the unwritten laws,' and the seal of faith in a beneficence immortal and eternal; but his personal attitude towards the 'sceptical' currents of thought in his age was never, so far as we can judge, that of admonitory protest or dogmatic reproof. It was his temperament to look around him for elements of conciliation, to evoke gentle and mediating influences, rather than to make war on the forces which he regarded as sinister:—it might be said of him, as of a person in one of his own plays, *οὔτοι συνέχθην ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν*. But is there any reason to think that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* marks a moment when this mind—'which saw life steadily, and saw it whole'—was partly shaken in its self-centred calm by the consciousness of a spiritual anarchy around it which seemed fraught with ultimate danger to the cohesion of society, and that a note of solemn warning, addressed to Athens and to Greece, is meant to be heard throughout the drama? Our answer must depend upon the sense in which we conceive that he places Oedipus or Iocasta at issue with religion.

§ 12. As regards Oedipus, it might be said that, in this particular aspect, he is a modern character, and more especially, perhaps, a character of the nineteenth century. The instinct of reverence for the gods was originally fundamental in his nature: it appears in the first act of his manhood—the journey to Delphi. Nor did he for a moment mistrust the gods because the doom assigned to him was bitter. Then he achieved a great intellectual success, reached the most brilliant prosperity, and was ranked by his fellow-men as second to the gods alone. He is not spoiled by his good fortune. We find him, at the opening of the play, neither arrogant nor irreverent; full, rather, of tenderness for his people, full of reverence for the word of Apollo. Suddenly, however, the prophet of Apollo denounces *him*. Instantly his appeal is to the intellect. If it comes to that, what claim has any other human mind to interpose between *his* mind and Heaven? Is he not Oedipus, who silenced the Sphinx? Yes, but presently, gradually, his own mind begins to argue on the other side. No one is so acute as he, and of course he must be the first to see any facts which tell against himself. And now, when he is face to face with the gods, and no prophet stands between, the instinct of reverence inborn in his noble nature finds voice in the prayer, 'Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that I should see that day!' After varying hopes and fears, his own mind is convinced of the worst. Reason, which had been the arbiter of faith, now becomes the inexorable judge of sin, the most instant and most rigorous claimant for his absolute abasement before the gods.

§ 13. Plainly, it would be a misreading to construe the fate of Oedipus as a dramatic nemesis of impiety; but the case of Iocasta is at first sight less clear. She, at least, is one who openly avows scorn for oracles, and urges her lord to share it. It may often be noticed—where the dramatist has known how to draw from life—that the true key-note of a dominant mood is struck by a short utterance on which no special emphasis is thrown, just as, in life itself, the sayings most truly significant of character are not always long or marked. For Iocasta, such a key-note is given in the passage where she is telling Oedipus that a response from the Delphian temple had warned Laius that he was destined to be slain by the child whom she bore to him. ‘An oracle came to Laius once—I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers’ (v. 712). Iocasta thoroughly believes in the power of the gods to effect their will (724),—to punish or to save (921). But she does not believe that any mortal—be he priest or prophet—is permitted by them to read the future. Had not the Delphian priests doomed her to sacrifice her first-born child,—and this, without saving the life of her husband, Laius? The iron which years ago had entered into the soul of the wife and mother has wrought in her a result similar to that which pride of intellect has produced in Oedipus. Like Oedipus, she still believes in the wise omnipotence of the gods; like him also, she is no longer prepared to accept any mortal interpreter of their decrees. Thus are the two foremost persons of this tragedy separated from the offices of human intercession, and directly confronted in spirit—one by his self-reliance, the other by her remembered anguish—with the inscrutable powers which control their fate. It is as a study of the human heart, true for every age, not as a protest against tendencies of the poet's own, that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* illustrates the relation of faith to reason.

§ 14. The central figure of the drama is brought into clearer relief by the characters of Teiresias and Creon. Teiresias exists only for the god whom he serves. Through him Apollo speaks. As opposed to Oedipus, he *is* the divine knowledge of Apollo, opposed to human ignorance and blindness. While ‘the servant of Loxias’ thus stands above the king of Thebes, Creon stands below him, on the humbler but safer ground of ordinary humanity. Creon is shrewd, cautious, practical, not sentimental or demonstrative, yet of a fervid self-respect, and with a strong and manly kindliness which comes out in the hour of need¹⁵. It might be said that the Creon of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* embodies a good type of Scottish character, as the Creon of the *Antigone*—an earlier sketch—is rather of the Prussian type, as it is popularly idealised by some of its neighbours. Teiresias is the gauge of human insight matched against divine; Creon, of fortune's heights and depths, compared with the less brilliant but more stable lot of commoner men. ‘Crave not to be master in all things; for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life’—are his words to

Oedipus at the end; and his own position at the moment exemplifies the sense in which 'the god ever gives the mastery to the middle state'¹⁶.

15. Lest it should be thought that in the note on p. 77 the harsher aspect of Creon's character is unduly prominent, I may observe that this note relates to vv. 512—862, and deals with Creon only as he appears *there*. The scene which begins at v. 1422—and more especially vv. 1476 f.—must of course be taken into account when we offer, as here, a more general estimate of the character.

16. παντὶ μέσῳ τὸ κράτος θεὸς ὥπασεν, Aesch. *Eum.* 528.

§ 15. There is no external evidence for the time at which the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was first acted. Internal evidence warrants the belief that it was composed after the *Antigone*, and before the *Oedipus Coloneus*. The probable limits thus indicated might be roughly given as about 439—412 B.C. More than this we cannot say. Modern ingenuity has recognised Pericles in Oedipus,—the stain of Alcmaeonid lineage in his guilt as the slayer of Laius,—the 'Dorian war, and a pestilence therewith' in the afflictions of Thebes. This allegorical hypothesis need not detain us. But it may be well briefly to remark the difference, for drama, between association of ideas and direct allusion. If Sophocles had set himself to describe the plague at Athens as he had known it, it might have been held that, in an artistic sense, his fault was graver than that of Phrynichus, when, by representing the capture of Miletus, he 'reminded the Athenians of their own misfortunes.' If, however, writing at a time subsequent to the pestilence which he had survived, he wished to give an ideal picture of a plague-stricken town, it would have been natural and fitting that he should borrow some touches from his own experience. But the sketch in the play is far too slight to warrant us in saying that he even did this; perhaps the reference to the victims of pestilence *tainting the air* (θανατοφόρα v. 180) is the only trait that might suggest it. Thucydides (II. 50), in describing the plague of 430 B.C., notices the number of the unburied dead. The remarks just made apply equally to the supposed allusion in vv. 883 ff. to the mutilation of the Hermae (see the note on 886).

A tradition, dating at least from the 2nd century B.C.¹⁷, affirmed that, when Sophocles produced the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he was defeated for the first prize by Philocles,—a poet of whose work we know nothing. Philocles was a nephew of Aeschylus, and, as Aristeides observes¹⁸, achieved an honour which had been denied to his uncle. The surprise which has been expressed by some modern writers appears unnecessary; the composition of Philocles was probably good, and it has never been held that the judges of such prizes were infallible.

17. The words in the prose *ὑπόθεσις* (given on p. 4) are simply, *ἡττηθέντα ὑπὸ Φιλοκλέους, ὥς φησι Δικαίάρχος*. The Dicaearchus who wrote *ὑποθέσεις τῶν Εὐριπίδου καὶ Σοφοκλέους μύθων* has been generally identified with Dicaearchus of Messana, the Peripatetic, a pupil of Aristotle and a friend of Theophrastus. We might place his ‘floruit,’ then, somewhere about 310 B.C.; there are indications that he survived 296 B.C. If, on the other hand, the *ὑποθέσεις* were ascribed to the grammarian Dicaearchus of Lacedaemon, a pupil of Aristarchus, this would bring us to about 140 B.C.

18. II. 256.

§ 16. The name of an actor, once famous in the chief part of this play, is of interest also on more general grounds. Polus, a native of Aegina, is said to have been the pupil of another tragic actor, Archias of Thurii¹⁹. He flourished, then, in the middle or latter part of the 4th century B.C.—only some 50 or 60 years after the death of Sophocles. Physically well-gifted, and of versatile grace, he was equally successful as Oedipus the King, and in the very different but not less difficult part of Oedipus at Colonus²⁰. Like the poet whose masterpieces he interpreted, he enjoyed a vigorous old age; and it is recorded that, at seventy, he acted ‘eight tragedies in four days’²¹. In the *Electra* of Sophocles, an urn, supposed to contain the ashes of Orestes, is placed in the hands of his sister, who makes a lament over it. Polus once acted Electra not long after the death of his son. An urn, containing the youth’s ashes, was brought from the tomb; the actor received it, and, on the scene, suffered a natural grief to have vehement course²².

19. Plut. *Dem.* 28 τοῦτον δὲ [Archias] Θούριον ὄντα τῷ γένει λόγος ἔχει τραγωδίας ὑποκρίνεσθαι ποτε, καὶ τὸν Αἰγινήτην Πῶλον, τὸν ὑπερβαλόντα τῇ τέχνῃ πάντας, ἐκείνου γενέσθαι μαθητὴν ἱστοροῦσιν. —Schaefer (*Dem. u. s. Zeit*, I. 219 f.) and A. Müller (*Gr. Bühnenalterthümer*, p. 186, n. 3) distinguish this Polus from an elder, whom they place in the time of Socrates. They seem mistaken. In Plut. *περὶ φιλίας*, fr. 16 (p. 833 ed. Wyttenbach), Socrates is quoted, and then Polus is mentioned; but not as contemporary with Socrates. As to Lucian calling Polus *ὁ Σουινεύς*, see below, note 4.

20. Stobaeus *Floril.* p. 522 (XCVII. 28), in an extract from the *προτρεπτικαὶ δμιλῖαι* of Arrian: ἢ οὐχ ὁρᾷς ὅτι οὐκ εὐφωνότερον οὐδὲ ἥδιον ὁ Πῶλος τὸν τύραννον Οἰδίποδα ὑπεκρίνετο ἢ τὸν ἐπὶ Κολωνῷ ἀλήτην καὶ πτωχόν; (οὐδὲ ἥδιον is Gaisford’s emendation of οὐδὲν δι’ ἃν.)

21. Plut. *Mor.* 785 C Πῶλον δὲ τὸν τραγῳδὸν Ἐρατοσθένης καὶ Φιλόχορος ἱστοροῦσιν ἑβδομήκοντα ἔτη γεγενημένον ὁκτῶ τραγωδίας ἐν τέτταρσιν ἡμέραις διαγωνίσασθαι μικρὸν ἔμπροσθεν τῆς τελευτῆς.

22. Aulus Gellius 7. 5 *Histrion in terra Graecia fuit fama celebri qui gestus et vocis claritudine ceteris antestabat....Polus lugubri habitu Electrae indutus ossa atque urnam a sepulcro tulit filii, et quasi Orestis amplexus opplevit omnia non simulacris neque imitamentis sed luctu atque lamentis veris et spirantibus.*

Lucian *Iupp. Tragoed.* § 3 οὐχ ὁρώ...ἐφ' ὅτῳ Πῶλος ἢ Ἀριστόδημος ἀντὶ Διὸς ἡμῖν ἀναπέφνηας. Id. *Menippus* § 16 (on the contrast between the life of actors on and off the stage) ἤδη δὲ πέρας ἔχοντος τοῦ δράματος, ἀποδυσάμενος ἕκαστος αὐτῶν τὴν χρυσόπαστον ἐκείνην ἐσθῆτα καὶ τὸ προσωπεῖον ἀποθέμενος καὶ καταβὰς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐμβατῶν πένης καὶ ταπεινὸς περιέρχεται, οὐκέτ' Ἀγαμέμνων ὁ Ἀτρέως οὐδὲ Κρέων ὁ Μενοικέως, ἀλλὰ Πῶλος Χαρικλέους Σουνιεύς ὀνομαζόμενος ἢ Σάτυρος Θεογεΐτονος Μαραθώνιος. [‘Polus, son of Charicles, of Sunium,’ is not inconsistent with τὸν Αἰγινήτην in Plut. *Dem.* 28, for the great actor may have been a native of Aegina who was afterwards enrolled in the Attic deme of Sunium.] Id. *De mercede conduct.* § 5 τοῖς τραγικοῖς ὑποκριταῖς...οἳ ἐπὶ μὲν τῆς σκηνῆς Ἀγαμέμνων ἕκαστος αὐτῶν ἢ Κρέων ἢ αὐτὸς Ἡρακλῆς εἰσιν, ἔξω δὲ Πῶλος ἢ Ἀριστόδημος, ἀποθέμενοι τὰ προσωπεῖα, γίνονται.

The Aristodemus coupled by Lucian with Polus is the actor mentioned by Aeschines and Demosthenes; the latter specially notices that he and Theodorus had both often acted the Antigone of Sophocles (or. 19. § 246): Satyrus is the comic actor mentioned by the same orators (Aeschin. 2. § 156, Dem. or. 19. § 193). Thus we see how, in later Greek literature, Polus had become one of a small group of names typical of the best histrionic art of the classical age.

Little as such an incident may accord with modern feeling or taste, it is at least of very clear significance in relation to the tone of the Attic stage as it existed for a generation whose grandfathers were contemporary with Sophocles. Whether the story was true or not, it must have been conceived as possible. And, this being so, nothing could better show the error of supposing that the old Greek acting of tragedy was statuesque in a cold or rigid sense,—in a sense excluding declamation and movement suitable to the passions which the words expressed. Play of feature, indeed, was excluded by the use of masks; but this very fact would have increased the need for appropriate gesture. The simple grouping—as recent revivals have helped us to feel—must have constantly had a plastic beauty rarely seen on our more crowded stage²³; but it is inconceivable, and the story just noticed affords some direct ground for denying, that this result was obtained at any sacrifice of life and truth in the portrayal of emotion. Demosthenes tells us that some of the inferior tragedians of his time were called ‘ranters’,²⁴. It might be said, of course, that this indicates a popular preference for an undemonstrative style. But it might with more force be replied that ‘ranting’ is not a fault which a coldly ‘statuesque’ tradition would have generated.

23. On the sense in which a ‘plastic’ character is common to Greek Sculpture, Tragedy, and Oratory, cp. my *Attic Orators*, vol. I. pp. xcvi—ciii.

24. Dem. or. 18. § 262 μισθώσας αὐτὸν τοῖς βαρυστόνοις ἐπικαλουμένοις ἐκείνοις ὑποκριταῖς, Σιμύλῳ καὶ Σωκράτει, ἐτριταγωνίστεις.

§ 17. The story of Oedipus was one of a few subjects which the Greek dramatists never tired of handling. Some eight or nine tragedies, entitled *Oedipus*, are known by the names of their authors, and by nothing else²⁵. Plato, the poet of the Old Comedy, wrote a *Laius*, which was perhaps a parody of the Aeschylean play; and the Middle Comedy was indebted to Eubulus for an *Oedipus* from which a few verses are left—a travesty of the curse pronounced upon the unknown criminal²⁶. Julius Caesar, like the younger Pitt, was a precocious dramatist, and Oedipus was his theme²⁷. The self-blinded Oedipus was a part which Nero loved to act²⁸, and the last public recitation which he ever gave, we are told, was in this character. The Greek verse at which he stopped is on record : whose it was, we know not²⁹. Of all the Greek versions, not one remains by which to gauge the excellence of Sophocles. But the literatures of other languages make some amends.

25. An *Οἰδίπους* by the Carcinus whom Aristophanes ridicules is quoted by Arist. *Rhet.* 5. 16. 11. Xenocles is said to have been victorious, with a series of plays including an *Οἰδίπους*, against Euripides, one of whose pieces on that occasion was the *Troades*, probably in 415 B.C. An *Οἰδίπους* is also ascribed to Achaeus (Nauck *Trag. fr.* p. 584), Theodectes (p. 623), and, more doubtfully, to Diogenes of Sinope (p. 627); also by Suidas to Philocles, and to each of two poets named Nicomachus (one of Athens, the other of the Troad).

26. Meineke *Com. Frag.* pp. 231 (Plato), Eubulus (451). Of the latter's five verses, the last three are—*ὅστις δ' ἐπὶ δείπνον ἢ φίλον τιν' ἢ ξένον | καλέσας ἔπειτα συμβολὰς ἐπράξατο, | φυγὰς γένοιτο μηδὲν οἴκοθεν λαβών*. It seems quite possible, as has been suggested, that Eubulus was parodying verses from the *Oedipus* of Euripides.

27. Sueton. *Iul. Caes.* 56 Feruntur et a puero et ab adolescentulo quaedam scripta, ut laudes Herculis, tragoedia Oedipus.

28. Sueton. *Nero* 21 Tragoedias quoque cantavit personatus. Inter cetera cantavit Canacen parturientem, Orestem matricidam, Oedipodem excaecatum, Herculem insanum.

29. *ib.* 46 Observatum etiam fuerat novissimam fabulam cantasse eum [Neronem] publice *Oedipum exsulem*, atque in hoc desisse versu, *οἴκτρῳς θανεῖν μ' ἄνωγε σύγγραμος πατήρ*. Dio Cassius (63. 28) also quotes the verse as one on which Nero's mind dwelt: *τὸ ἔπος ἐκείνο συνεχῶς ἐνενόει*.

Nothing can better illustrate the distinctive qualities of the Sophoclean Oedipus than to compare it with the treatment of the same theme by Seneca, Corneille, Dryden and Voltaire. So far as the last three are concerned, the comparison has a larger value. The differences between the spirit of the best Greek Tragedy and that of modern drama are not easily expressed in formulas, but can be

made clearer by a particular example. Perhaps the literature of drama hardly affords any example so apposite for this purpose as the story of Oedipus.

§ 18. Seneca has followed, and sometimes paraphrased, Sophocles with sufficient fidelity to heighten the contrast between the original and the rhetorical transcript. For the comparative student of drama, however, the Roman piece is by no means devoid of instruction or of interest. Seneca's plot diverges from that of Sophocles in three main points. (i) Teiresias does not intuitively know the murderer of Laius. When his aid is invoked by Oedipus, he has recourse to the arts of divination. Manto, the daughter of the blind seer, reports the signs to him, and he declares that neither voice of birds nor inspection of victims can reveal the name. Laius himself must be called up from the shades. In a grove near Thebes, Teiresias performs the awful rites which evoke the dead; the ghastly shape of Laius rises—

Stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus—

and denounces his son. This scene is related to Oedipus by Creon in a long and highly-wrought speech (530—658). Here, as in the earlier scene with Manto (303—402), copious use is made of detail from Roman augural lore, as well as of the Nekyia in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*—suggesting a contrast with the lightness of touch which marks that passage of the Sophoclean *Antigone* (998—1011) where Teiresias describes the failure of his appeal to augury. There, the technical signs are briefly but vividly indicated; in Seneca, the erudition is heavy and obtrusive.

(ii) After the discovery of the parricide and the incest, and when Oedipus has now blinded himself, Iocasta meets and thus accosts him:—

Quid te vocem?

Natumne? dubitas? natus es, natum pudet.

Invite, loquere, nate: quo avertis caput

Vacuosque vultus? *Oed.* Quis frui et tenebris vetat?

Quis reddit oculos? matris, heu, matris sonus.

Perdidimus operam. Congredi fas amplius

Haud est. Nefandos dividat vastum mare...

Iocasta presently kills herself on the stage. Here, at least, Seneca has the advantage of Euripides, whose Iocasta speaks the prologue of the *Phoenissae*, and coldly recites the horrors of her past life,

—adding that Oedipus has been imprisoned by his sons, ‘in order that his fate might be forgotten —for it needs much art to hide it’³⁰. The Iocasta of Sophocles rushes from the scene, not to re-appear, at the moment when she finds Oedipus resolved to unbare that truth of which she herself is already certain, and leaves the terrible cry thrilling in our ears—

Ιού, Ιού, δύστηνε· τοῦτο γάρ σ’ ἔχω
μόνον προσειπεῖν, ἄλλο δ’ οὔποθ’ ὕστερον.

30. Eur. *Phoen.* 64 ἔν’ ἀμνήμων τύχη | γένοιτο, πολλῶν δεομένη σοφισμάτων.

In the truth and power of this touch, Sophocles is alone. Neither Seneca, nor any later dramatist, has managed this situation so as to express with a similar union of delicacy and strength the desperate anguish of a woman whom fate has condemned to unconscious crime.

(iii) Seneca had no ‘Oedipus at Colonus’ in view. He was free to disregard that part of the legend according to which Oedipus was expelled from Thebes by Eteocles and Polyneices, and can therefore close his play by making Oedipus go forth into voluntary exile:—

Mortifera mecum vitia terrarum extraho.

Violenta fata et horridus morbi tremor

Maciesque et atra pestis et tabidus dolor

Mecum ite, mecum: ducibus his uti libet.

§ 19. The closeness with which Seneca has studied Sophocles Seneca’s relation to Sophocles. can be judged from several passages³¹. It is instructive to notice that, while Seneca has invented rhetorical ornament (as in the opening dialogue, 1—105, and the Nekyia, 530—568), he has not known how to vary the natural development of the action. He has compressed the incidents of Sophocles into the smallest compass; and hence, notwithstanding the rhetorical episodes, the whole play consists only of 1060 lines, and would not have occupied more than an hour and a half in representation. Seneca is thus a negative witness to the mastery shown by the artist who could construct such a drama as the *Oedipus Tyrannus* with such materials. The modern dramatists, as we shall see, teach the same lesson in a more positive form. Walter Scott’s estimate of Seneca’s *Oedipus* needs modification, but is just in the main. ‘Though devoid of fancy and of genius,’ he says, it ‘displays the masculine eloquence and high moral sentiment of its author; and if it does not interest us in the scene of fiction, it often compels us to turn our thoughts inward, and to study our own hearts.’ Seneca’s fault, however, so far as the plot is concerned, seems less that he fails to interest, than that,

by introducing the necromantic machinery, and by obliterating the finer moral traits of his Greek original, he has rendered the interest rather 'sensational' than properly dramatic³².

31. Such are, the scene in which Oedipus upbraids Creon (Sen. 678—708, cp. Soph. 532—630); the questioning of Iocasta by Oedipus (Sen. 773—783, cp. Soph. 740—755); the scene with the messenger from Corinth, and the final discovery (Sen. 783—881. Cp. Soph. 955—1185).

32. A small trait may be noticed as amusingly characteristic of the Roman poet of the Empire. The Laïus of Sophocles goes to Delphi βαίος—with only four attendants (752). Seneca makes Laïus *set out* with the proper retinue of a king;—but most of them lose their way. *Plures fefellit error ancipitis viae: Paucos fidelis curribus iunxit labor.*

§ 20. The *Oedipe* of Corneille was produced at Paris in 1657. After an interval which followed the unfavourable reception of his *Pertbarite* in 1653, it was with the *Oedipe* that Corneille returned to the theatre, at the instance of his patron, Nicolas Fouquet, to whom it is dedicated. It is immaterial for our purpose that this play is far from exhibiting Corneille at his best; nor need we here inquire what precise rank is to be assigned to it among his less successful works. For the student of Sophocles, it has the permanent interest of showing how the subject of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was adapted to the modern stage by a typical artist of the French classical school. The severely simple theme of Sophocles, with its natural elements of pity and terror, is found too meagre by the modern dramatist. He cannot trust to that alone; he feels that he needs some further source of variety and relief. To supply this, he interweaves an underplot of secondary persons—‘the happy episode of the loves of Theseus and Dircè.’ Theseus is the king of Athens; Dircè is a daughter of the deceased Laïus.

The drama opens with a love-scene, in which Theseus is urging Dircè not to banish him from her presence at Thebes:—

N’écoutez plus, madame, une pitié cruelle,
Qui d’un fidèle amant vous feroit un rebelle...

To the end, the fortunes of this pair divide our attention with those of Oedipus and Iocasta. Corneille does not bring Teiresias on the scene; but Nérine, ‘lady of honour to Iocasta,’ relates how the seer has called forth the shade of Laïus. The ghost does not (as with Seneca) denounce Oedipus, but declares that the woes of Thebes shall cease only ‘when the blood of Laïus shall have done its duty.’ The discovery is brought about nearly as in Sophocles, though the management of the process is inferior in a marked degree. The herdsman of Laïus—whom Corneille, like Dryden and

Voltaire, names Phorbas, after Seneca's example—kills himself on the stage; Iocasta, snatching the poniard from him, plunges it in her own breast. Oedipus blinds himself. No sooner have the gory drops flowed from his eyes, than the pest which is ravaging Thebes ceases: the message of the spirit is fulfilled:—'the blood of Laius has done its duty.' Theseus and Dircè, we understand, are made happy.

The chief character, as drawn by Corneille, shows how an artificial stoicism can destroy tragic pathos. The Oedipus of Corneille is an idealised French king of the seventeenth century—one of those monarchs concerning whom Dircè says,

Le peuple est trop heureux quand il meurt pour ses rois;

he learns the worst with a lofty serenity; and his first thought is to administer a stately rebuke to the persons whose misdirected forethought had saved him from perishing in infancy:—

Voyez où m'a plongé votre fausse prudence.

Dircè admires his impassive fortitude:— La surprenante horreur de cet accablement
Ne coûte à sa grande âme aucun égarement.

Contrast with this the life-like and terrible power of the delineation in Sophocles, from the moment when the cry of despair bursts from the lips of Oedipus (1182), to the end.

§ 21. Twenty-two years after Corneille, Dryden essayed the same theme. His view was that his French predecessor had failed through not rendering the character of Oedipus more noble and attractive. On the other hand, he follows Corneille in the essential point of introducing an underplot. Dryden's Eurydicè answers to Corneille's Dircè, being, like her, the daughter of Laius. Corneille's Theseus is replaced by Adrastus, king of Argos,—a personage less likely, in Dryden's opinion, to eclipse Oedipus. When the play opens, Oedipus is absent from Thebes, and engaged in war with Argos. Meanwhile plots are being laid against his throne by Creon—a hunch-backed villain who makes love to Eurydicè, and is rejected by her much as Shakspeare's Richard, Duke of Gloster—who has obviously suggested some traits—is repulsed by the Lady Ann. Presently Oedipus returns, bringing the captive Adrastus, whom he chivalrously sets free to woo Eurydicè. From this point, the piece follows the general lines of Sophocles, so far as the discovery is

concerned. Oedipus is denounced, however, not by Teiresias, but, as in Seneca, by the ghost,—which Dryden, unlike Seneca, brings on the stage.

It is singular that Dryden should have committed the same mistake which he perceived so clearly in Corneille. Eurydicè and Adrastus are less tiresome than Dircè and Theseus, but their effect is the same. The underplot spoils the main plot. The tragic climax is the death of Eurydicè, who is stabbed by Creon. Creon and Adrastus next kill each other; then Iocasta slays herself and her children; and finally Oedipus throws himself from an upper window of the palace. ‘Sophocles,’ says Dryden, ‘is admirable everywhere; and therefore we have followed him as close as we possibly could.’ In a limited verbal sense, this is true. There are several scenes, or parts of scenes, in which Dryden has almost transcribed Sophocles³³. But the difference of general result is complete. The *Oedipus* of Sophocles does perfectly that which Tragedy, according to Aristotle, ought to do. It effects, by pity and terror, the ‘purgation’ of such feelings; that is, it separates them from the alloy of mean accident, and exercises them, in their pure essence, on great objects—here, on the primary instincts of natural affection. In relation to pity and terror, Tragedy should be as the purgatorial fire,—

exempt labem, purumque reliquit
Aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem.

33. As in the scene with the suppliants (Act I. Sc. i.); that between Oedipus and Iocasta (Act III. Sc. i.); and that between Oedipus and Aegeon (the messenger from Corinth, Act IV. Sc. i.).

Now, Dryden’s play first divides our sympathy between the fate of Eurydicè and that of Oedipus; next, it involves it with feelings of a different order,—loathing for the villainy of Creon, and disgust at the wholesale butchery of the end. Instead of ‘purging’ pity and terror, it stupefies them; and the contrast is the more instructive because the textual debt of Dryden to Sophocles has been so large.

It is right to add that, while the best parts of the play—the first and third acts—are wholly Dryden’s, in the rest he was assisted by an inferior hand³⁴. And, among the places where Dryden’s genius flashes through, it is interesting to remark one in which he has invented a really Greek touch,—not in the manner of Sophocles, certainly, yet such as might occur in Euripides. Oedipus is pronouncing the curse on the unknown murderer:—

But for the murderer’s self, unfound by man,
Find him, ye powers celestial and infernal!

And the same fate, or worse than Laius met,
Let be his lot: his children be accurst;
His wife and kindred, all of his, be cursed!

Both Priests. Confirm it, heaven! Enter JOCASTA, *attended by Women.*

Joc. At your devotions? Heaven succeed your wishes;
And bring the effect of these your pious prayers
On you, and me, and all.

Pr. Avert this omen, heaven!

Oedip. O fatal sound! unfortunate Jocasta!

What hast thou said? an ill hour hast thou chosen
For these foreboding words! why, we were cursing!

Joc. Then may that curse fall only where you laid it.

Oedip. Speak no more!

For all thou say'st is ominous: we were cursing;
And that dire imprecation hast thou fasten'd
On Thebes, and thee, and me, and all of us.

34. 'What Sophocles could undertake alone, Our poets found a work for more than one' (Epilogue). Lee must be held accountable for the worst rant of Acts IV. and V.; but we are not concerned here with the details of execution, either in its merits or in its defects.

§ 22. More than either Dryden or Corneille, Voltaire has treated this subject in the spirit of the antique. His *Oedipe* was composed when he was only nineteen. It was produced in 1718 (when he was twenty-four), and played forty-six times consecutively—a proof, for those days, of marked success. In 1729, the piece having kept its place on the stage meanwhile, a new edition was published. It is not merely a remarkable work for so young a man; its intrinsic merit, notwithstanding obvious defects, is, I venture to think, much greater than has usually been recognised. The distinctive 'note' of the modern versions—the underplot—is there, no doubt; but, unlike Corneille and Dryden, Voltaire has not allowed it to overshadow the main action.

The hero Philoctetes revisits Thebes, after a long absence, to find Oedipus reigning in the seat of Laius. The Thebans are vexed by pestilence, and are fain to find a victim for the angry god; Philoctetes was known to have been the foe of the late king, and is now accused of his murder. Iocasta had been betrothed to Philoctetes in youth, and loves him still. She urges him to fly, but he resolves to remain and confront the false charge. At this moment, the seer Teiresias denounces

Oedipus as the criminal. Philoctetes generously protests his belief in the king's innocence; and from this point (the end of the third Act) appears no more.

Thenceforth, the plot is mainly that of Sophocles. The first scene of the fourth Act, in which Iocasta and Oedipus inform each other of the past, is modelled on *Oed. Tyr.* 698—862, with some characteristic differences. Thus, in Sophocles, the first doubt of Oedipus as to his parentage springs from a taunt uttered at a feast (779). Here is Voltaire's substitute for that incident (the scene, of course, being Corinth):—

Un jour, ce jour affreux, présent à ma pensée,
Jette encor la terreur dans mon âme glacée;
Pour la première fois, par un don solennel,
Mes mains, jeunes encore, enrichissaient l'autel:
Du temple tout-à-coup les combles s'entr'ouvrirent;
De traits affreux de sang les marbres se couvrirent;
De l'autel, ébranlé par de longs tremblemens,
Une invisible main repoussait mes présens;
Et les vents, au milieu de la foudre éclatante,
Portèrent jusqu'à moi cette voix effrayante:
"Ne viens plus des lieux saints souiller la pureté;
"Du nombre des vivans les dieux t'ont rejeté;
"Ils ne reçoivent point tes offrandes impies;
"Va porter tes présens aux autels des Furies;
"Conjure leurs serpens prêts à te déchirer;
"Va, ce sont là les dieux que tu dois implorer."

This is powerful in its way. But where Voltaire has introduced a prodigy—the supernatural voice heard amid lightnings—Sophocles was content to draw from common life, and to mark how a random word could sink into the mind with an effect as terrible as that of any portent. Voltaire has managed the final situation on Corneille's plan, but with infinitely better effect. The High Priest announces that Oedipus has blinded himself, thereby appeasing the gods; and the play closes with the death of Iocasta:

IOCASTE.

O mon fils! hélas! dirai-je mon époux?
 O des noms les plus chers assemblage effroyable!
 Il est donc mort? LE GRAND PRÊTRE.
 Il vit, et le sort qui l'accable
 Des morts et des vivans semble le séparer³⁵;
 Il s'est privé du jour avant que d'expirer.
 Je l'ai vu dans ses yeux enfoncer cette épée,
 Qui du sang de son père avait été trempée;
 Il a rempli son sort, et ce moment fatal
 Du salut des Thébains est le premier signal.
 Tel est l'ordre du ciel, dont la fureur se lasse;
 Comme il veut, aux mortels il fait justice ou grâce;
 Ses traits sont épuisés sur ce malheureux fils:
 Vivez, il vous pardonne.

35. Voltaire borrowed this verse from Corneille,—‘parce qu’ayant précisément la même chose à dire,...il m’était impossible de l’exprimer mieux’; and Corneille was himself translating Seneca’s ‘*nec vivis mixtus, nec sepultis*.’ Voltaire was perhaps unconscious that the ground which he assigns here was exactly that on which the repetition of passages in the Greek orators was defended—viz. that τὸ καλῶς εἰπεῖν ἀπαξ περιγίγνεται, δις δὲ οὐκ ἐνδέχεται (Theon, προγυμνάσματα 1: see my *Attic Orators*, vol. I. p. lxxii).

IOCASTE.

Et moi je me punis. (*Elle se frappe.*)
 Par un pouvoir affreux réservée à l'inceste,
 La mort est le seul bien, le seul dieu qui me reste.
 Laïus, reçois mon sang, je te suis chez les morts:
 J'ai vécu vertueuse, et je meurs sans remords.

LE CHOEUR.

O malheureuse reine! ô destin que j'abhorre!

IOCASTE.

Ne plaignez que mon fils, puisqu'il respire encore.
 Prêtres, et vous Thébains qui fûtes mes sujets,

Honorez mon bûcher, et songez à jamais
Qu'au milieu des horreurs du destin qui m'opprime
J'ai fait rougir les dieux qui m'ont forcée au crime.

§ 23. Voltaire was conscious of the objections to his own episode of Philoctetes; no one, indeed, could have criticised it with more wit or force. 'Philoctetes seems to have visited Thebes only for the purpose of being accused': not a word is said of him after the third Act, and the catastrophe is absolutely independent of him. In a letter to the Jesuit Porée, with whom he had read the classics, Voltaire apologises for Philoctetes by saying that the Parisian actors would not hear of an *Oedipus* with no love in it; 'I spoiled my piece,' he says, 'to please them.'

But it is certain, from what he says more than once elsewhere, that he regarded *some* underplot as a necessity. His remarks on this point are worth noting, because they touch an essential difference between the old Greek view of drama and that which has prevailed on our stage. 'The subject (Oedipus) did not, in itself, furnish me with matter for the first three Acts; indeed, it scarcely gave me enough for the last two. Those who know the theatre—that is, who are as much alive to the difficulties as to the defects of composition—will agree with what I say.' 'In strictness, the play of Oedipus ought to end with the first Act.' Oedipus is one of those ancient subjects 'which afford only one scene each, or two at most—not an entire tragedy.' In short, to demand a modern drama on the *simple* story of Oedipus was like setting one to make bricks without straw. Corneille found himself constrained to add the episode of Theseus and Dircè; Dryden introduced Adrastus and Eurydice³⁶.

36. 'All we could gather out of Corneille,' says Dryden, 'was that an episode must be, but not his way.' Dryden seems to have felt, however, that it was demanded rather by convention than by artistic necessity. The following passage is interesting as an indication that his instinct was better than his practice:—'The Athenian theatre (whether more perfect than ours, is not now disputed), had a perfection differing from ours. You see there in every act a single scene, (or two at most), which manage the business of the play; and after that succeeds the chorus, which commonly takes up more time in singing, than there has been employed in speaking. The principal person appears almost constantly through the play; but the inferior parts seldom above once in the whole tragedy.. The conduct of our stage is much more difficult, where we are obliged never to lose any considerable character, which we have once presented.' [Voltaire's *Philoctetes* broke this rule.] 'Custom likewise has obtained, that we must form an underplot of second persons, which must be depending on the first; and their bye-walks must be like those in a labyrinth, which all of them lead into the great parterre; or like so many several lodging chambers, which have their outlets into the same gallery. Perhaps, after all, if we could think so, the ancient method, as it is the easiest, is also the most natural and the best. For variety, as it is managed, is too often subject to breed distraction; and while we would please too many ways, for want of art in the conduct, we please in none.' (*Preface to Oedipus*.)

§ 24. Now, why could Sophocles dispense with any such addition, and yet produce a drama incomparably more powerful? The masterly art of Sophocles in the structure and development of the plot has already been examined, and is properly the first attribute of his work which claims attention. But this is not the only, or the principal, source to which the *Oedipus Tyrannus* owes its greatness; the deeper cause is, that Sophocles, in the spirit of Greek Tragedy, has known how to make the story of Oedipus an ideal study of character and passion. Corneille, Dryden, Voltaire—each in his own way—were thinking, 'How am I to keep the audience amused? Will they not find this horrible story of Oedipus rather too painful and monotonous? Will they not desire something lighter and pleasanter—some love-making, for instance, or some intrigue?' 'What an insipid part would Iocasta have played,' exclaims Voltaire, 'had she not retained at least the memory of a lawful attachment, and trembled for the existence of a man whom she had once loved!' There is the secret frankly told.

Sophocles, on the other hand, *concentrates* the attention of the audience on the destiny of Oedipus and Iocasta. The spectators are enchained by the feelings which this destiny moves at each step in its course. They are made to see into the depths of two human souls. It is no more possible for them to crave minor distractions than it would be for our eyes or thoughts to wander, if we were watching, without the power of arresting, a man who was moving blindfold towards a precipice. The interest by which Sophocles holds us is continuous and intense; but it is not monotonous,

because alternations of fear lead up to the worst; the exciting causes of pity and terror are not unworthy or merely repulsive, for the spectacle offered is that of a noble and innocent nature, a victim to unknown and terrible forces which must be counted among the permanent conditions of life, since the best of mankind can never be sure of escaping them. When the worst has befallen, *then* Sophocles knows how to relieve the strain; but it is a relief of another order from that which Corneille affords by the prospect of Theseus being made happy with Dircè. It is drawn from the natural sources of the tragedy itself; the blind king hears the voices of his children.

§ 25. A comparison may fitly close with a glance at two points in which the modern dramas illustrate Sophocles, and which have more than the meaning of details. Dryden has represented Oedipus and Iocasta as haunted, from the first, by a mysterious instinct of their true relationship. Thus she says to him:—

When you chid, methought
A mother's love start³⁷ up in your defence,
And bade me not be angry. Be not you;
For I love Laius still, as wives should love,
But you more tenderly, as part of me³⁸.

37. = 'started,' as again in this scene: 'Nature herself start back when thou wert born.'

38. Act I. Sc. i.: cp. what Oedipus says in Act II. Sc. i.

Voltaire has the same thought (Act II. Sc. ii.), where Iocasta is speaking of her marriage with Oedipus:

je sentis dans mon âme étonnée
Des transports inconnus que je ne conçus pas:
Avec horreur enfin je me vis dans ses bras.

There is a similar touch in Corneille. Oedipus is watching Dircè—whom he believes to be his step-daughter, but who is in fact his sister—with her lover Theseus (Act III. Sc. iv.):

Je ne sais quelle horreur me trouble à leur aspect;
Ma raison la repousse, et ne m'en peut défendre.

Such blind warnings of nature are indeed fitted to make the spectator shudder; but they increase the difficulty of explaining why the truth was not divined sooner; and they also tend to lessen the shock of the discovery. In other words, they may be poetical,—they may be even, in the abstract,

tragic,—but they are not, for this situation, dramatic; and it is due to the art of Sophocles to observe that he has nowhere admitted any hint of this kind.

§ 26. Next, it should be noticed that no one of the later dramatists has been able to avoid leaving a certain element of improbability in the story. We saw above that Aristotle alludes to the presence of such an element, not in the plot itself, but in the supposed antecedents. It consists in the presumed ignorance of Oedipus and Iocasta regarding facts with which they ought to have been familiar. Sophocles tacitly accepts this condition, and, by doing so, minimizes its prominence; so much so, that it may be doubted whether many readers or spectators of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* would think of it, if their attention had not been drawn to it previously. Seneca has not attempted to improve on that example. But the moderns have sought various ways of evading a critical censure which they foresaw; and it is instructive to consider the result. The Oedipus of Corneille knows that Laius was said to have been killed by robbers; he also knows the place and the date. Further, he distinctly remembers that, at the same place and at the same date, he himself had slain three wayfarers. Strange to say, however, it never occurs to him that these wayfarers could possibly have been Laius and his attendants. He mildly suggests to Iocasta that they may have been *the robbers* (Act I. Sc. i.); though, as appears from the circumstances which he himself afterwards relates (Act IV. Sc. iv.), he had not the slightest ground for such a supposition. This device cannot be deemed an improvement on Sophocles. Dryden's expedient is simpler:—

'Tell me, Thebans,
How Laius fell; for a confused report
Pass'd through my ears, when first I took the crown;
But full of hurry, like a morning dream,
It vanish'd in the business of the day.

That only serves to show us that the dramatist has an uneasy conscience. Voltaire's method is subtler. Oedipus thus excuses himself for having to question Iocasta concerning the death of Laius:

—

Madame, jusqu'ici, respectant vos douleurs,
Je n'ai point rappelé le sujet de vos pleurs;
Et de vos seuls périls chaque jour alarmée
Mon âme à d'autres soins semblait être fermée.

But, as the author admits, the king ought not to have been so long deterred, by the fear of displeasing his wife, from informing himself as to the death of his predecessor: 'this is to have too much discretion and too little curiosity.' Sophocles, according to Voltaire, ought to have suggested some explanation of the circumstance that Oedipus, on hearing how Laius perished, does not at once recollect his own adventure in the narrow pass. The French poet seeks to explain it by hinting at a miraculous suspension of memory in Oedipus:—

Et je ne conçois pas par quel enchantement
J'oubliais jusqu'ici ce grand événement;
La main des dieux sur moi si long-temps suspendue
Semble ôter le bandeau qu'ils mettaient sur ma vue.

But this touch, though bold and not unhappy, must be classed with the transparent artifices of the stage. The true answer to the criticisms on this score which Voltaire directs against Sophocles, Corneille, and himself is contained in a remark of his own, that a certain amount of improbability is inherent in the story of Oedipus³⁹. If that improbability is excluded at one point, it will appear at another. This being so, it is not difficult to choose between the frank treatment of the material by Sophocles, and the ingenious but ineffectual compromises of later art.

39. In the fifth letter to M. de Genonville:—'Il est vrai qu'il y a des sujets de tragédie où l'on est tellement gêné par la bizarrerie des événements, qu'il est presque impossible de réduire l'exposition de sa pièce à ce point de sagesse et de vraisemblance. Je crois, pour mon bonheur, que le sujet d'Œdipe est de ce genre.'

§ 27. The recent revivals of Greek plays have had their great reward in proving how powerfully the best Greek Tragedy can appeal to modern audiences. Those who are furthest from being surprised by the result will be among the first to allow that the demonstration was needed. The tendency of modern study had been too much to fix attention on external contrasts between the old Greek theatre and our own. Nor was an adequate corrective of this tendency supplied by the manner in which the plays have usually been studied; a manner more favourable to a minute appreciation of the text than to apprehension of the play as a work of art. The form had been understood better than the spirit. A vague feeling might sometimes be perceived that the effectiveness of the old Greek dramas, *as such*, had depended essentially on the manners and beliefs of the people for whom they were written, and that a successful Sophocles presupposed a Periclean Athens. Some wonderment appeared to greet the discovery that a masterpiece of Aeschylus, when acted, could move the men and women of to-day. Now that this truth has been so profoundly impressed on the

most cultivated audiences which England or America could furnish,—in Germany and France it had been less unfamiliar,—it is not too much to say that a new life has been breathed into the modern study of the Greek drama.

§ 28. Recent representations of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* have a peculiar significance, which claims notice here. The incestuous relationship—the entrance of Oedipus with bleeding eyes—these are incidents than which none could be imagined more fitted to revolt a modern audience. Neither Corneille nor Voltaire had the courage to bring the self-blinded king on the stage; his deed is related by others. Voltaire, indeed, suggested⁴⁰ that the spectacle might be rendered supportable by a skilful disposition of lights,—Oedipus, with his gore-stained face, being kept in the dim back-ground, and his passion being expressed by action rather than declamation, while the scene should resound with the cries of Iocasta and the laments of the Thebans. Dryden dared what the others declined; but his play was soon pronounced impossible for the theatre. Scott quotes a contemporary witness to the effect that, when Dryden's *Oedipus* was revived about the year 1790, 'the audience were unable to support it to an end; the boxes being all emptied before the third act was concluded.'

40. In one of his notes on Corneille's Preface to the *Oedipe* (*Oeuvres de Corneille*, vol. VII. p. 262, ed. 1817).

§ 29. In May, 1881, after seven months of preparation, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was acted in the original Greek by members of Harvard University. Archaeology, scholarship, and art had conspired to make the presentation perfect in every detail; and the admirable record of the performance which has been published has a permanent value for every student of Sophocles⁴¹. References to it will be found in the following commentary. But it is the impression which the whole work made on the spectators of which we would speak here. Nothing of the original was altered or omitted; and at the last Oedipus was brought on the scene, 'his pale face marred with bloody stains.' The performances were seen by about six thousand persons,—the Harvard theatre holding about a thousand at a time. As an English version was provided for those who needed it, it cannot be said that the language veiled what might else have offended. From first to last, these great audiences, thoroughly representative of the most cultivated and critical judgment, were held spell-bound. 'The ethical situation was so overwhelming, that they listened with bated breath, and separated in silence.' 'The play is over. There is a moment's silence, and then the theatre rings with applause. It seems inappropriate, however, and ceases almost as suddenly as it began. The play has left such a solemn impression that the usual customs seem unfitting, and the audience disperses quietly'⁴².

There is the nineteenth century's practical interpretation of Aristotle. This is Tragedy, 'effecting, by means of pity and terror, the *purgation* of such feelings.'

41. *An Account of the Harvard Greek Play*. By Henry Norman. Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1882. The account is illustrated by 15 photographs of characters and groups, and is dedicated by the Author (who acted the part of Creon) to Professor J. W. White. See Appendix, p. 201.

42. *Account of the Harvard Greek Play*, pp. 36, 103.

§ 30. A few months later in the same year (1881), the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was revived in a fairly close French translation at the Théâtre Français. When the version of Jules Lacroix was played there in 1858, the part of Oedipus was filled by Geoffroy; but on this occasion an artist was available whose powers were even more congenial. Probably no actor of modern times has excelled M. Mounet-Sully in the union of all the qualities required for a living impersonation of the Sophoclean Oedipus in the entire series of moods and range of passions which the part comprises; as the great king, at once mighty and tender; the earnest and zealous champion of the State in the search for hidden guilt; the proud man startled by a charge which he indignantly repels, and embittered by the supposed treason of a friend; tortured by slowly increasing fears, alternating with moments of reassurance; stung to frenzy by the proof of his unspeakable wretchedness; subdued to a calmer despair; finally softened by the meeting with his young daughters. The scene between Oedipus and Iocasta (vv. 700—862) should be especially noticed as one in which the genius of Sophocles received the fullest justice from that of M. Mounet-Sully. In the words of a critic who has finely described the performance⁴³:—

43. *Saturday Review*, Nov. 19, 1881.

'Every trait of the tragedian's countenance is now a witness to the inward dread, always increasing upon him, as he relates his own adventure, and questions her for more minute details of the death of Laius. His voice sometimes sinks to a trembling gasp of apprehension, as the identity of the two events becomes more and more evident. He seems to be battling with fate.'

With a modern audience, the moment at which the self-blinded Oedipus comes forth is that which tests the power of the ancient dramatist; if, at that sight, repugnance overpowers compassion, the spell has been imperfect; if all other feelings are absorbed in the profound pathos of the situation, then Sophocles has triumphed. We have seen the issue of the ordeal in the case of the representation at Harvard. On the Paris stage, the traditions of the French classical drama (represented on this

point by Corneille and Voltaire) were apt to make the test peculiarly severe. It is the more significant that the moment is thus described in the excellent account which we have cited above:—

‘Oedipus enters, and in the aspect of the man, his whole history is told. It is not the adjunct of the bleeding eyes which now most deeply stirs the spectators. It is the intensity of woe which is revealed in every movement of the altered features and of the tottering figure whose bearing had been so majestic, and the tone of the voice,—hoarse, yet articulate. The inward struggle is recognised in its necessary outward signs. The strain on the audience might now become too great but for the relief of tenderness which almost immediately succeeds in the parting of Oedipus from his children. Often as pathetic farewells of a similar kind have been presented on the stage, seldom has any made an appeal so forcible.’

In the presence of such testimonies, it can no longer be deemed that the Tragedy of ancient Greece has lost its virtue for the modern world. And, speaking merely as a student of Sophocles, I can bear witness that the representation of the *Ajax* at Cambridge (1882) was to me a new revelation of meaning and power. Of that performance, remarkable in so many aspects, I hope to say something in a later part of this edition. Here it must suffice to record a conviction that such revivals, apart from their literary and artistic interest, have also an educational value of the very highest order.

PROLOGUE

Lines 1–150

Scene:—Before the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. In front of the large central doors (βασιλειος θύρα) there is an altar; a smaller altar stands also near each of the two side-doors: see verse 16. Suppliants—old men, youths, and young children—are seated on the steps of the altars. They are dressed in white tunics and cloaks,—their hair bound with white fillets. On the altars they have laid down olive-branches wreathed with fillets of wool. The Priest of Zeus, a venerable man, is alone standing, facing the central doors of the palace. These are now thrown open: followed by two attendants (πρόσπολοι), who place themselves on either side of the doors, Oedipus enters, in the robes of a king: for a moment he gazes silently on the groups at the altars, and then speaks. See Appendix, Note 1, § 1.

Oedipus asks why they are suppliants. The Priest of Zeus, speaking for the rest, prays him to save them, with the gods' help, from the blight and the plague. Oedipus answers that he has already sent Creon to consult Apollo at Delphi, and will do whatever the god shall bid.

1–13

OEDIPUS. My children, latest-born to Cadmus who was of old, why are ye set before me thus with wreathed branches of suppliants, while the city reeks with incense, rings with prayers for health and cries of woe? I deemed it unmeet, my children, to hear these things at the mouth of others, and have come hither myself, I, Oedipus renowned of all. Tell me, then, thou venerable man — since it is thy natural part to speak for these — in what mood are ye placed here, with what dread or what desire? Be sure that I would gladly give all aid; hard of heart were I, did I not pity such suppliants as these.

14–57

PRIEST OF ZEUS. Nay, Oedipus, ruler of my land, thou seest of what years we are who beset thy altars, — some, nestlings still too tender for far flights, — some, bowed with age, priests, as I of Zeus, — and these, the chosen youth; while the rest of the folk sit with wreathed branches in the marketplaces, and before the two shrines of Pallas, and where Ismenus gives answer by fire. For the city, as thou thyself seest, is now too sorely vexed, and can no more lift her head from beneath the angry waves of death; a blight is on her in the fruitful blossoms of the land, in the herds among the pastures, in the barren pangs of women; and withal the flaming god, the malign plague, hath swooped on us, and ravages the town; by whom the house of Cadmus is made waste, but dark Hades rich in groans and tears. It is not as deeming thee ranked with gods that I and these children are suppliants at thy hearth, but as deeming thee first of men, both in life's common chances, and when mortals have to do with more than man: seeing that thou earnest to the town of Cadmus, and didst quit us of the tax that we

rendered to the hard songstress; and this, though thou knewest nothing from us that could avail thee, nor hadst been schooled; no, by a god's aid, 'tis said and believed, didst thou uplift our life. And now, Oedipus, king glorious in all eyes, we beseech thee, all we suppliants, to find for us some succour, whether by the whisper of a god thou knowest it, or haply as in the power of man; for I see that, when men have been proved in deeds past, the issues of their counsels, too, most often have effect. On, best of mortals, again uplift our State! On, guard thy fame, — since now this land calls thee saviour for thy former zeal; and never be it our memory of thy reign that we were first restored and afterward cast down: nay, lift up this State in such wise that it fall no more! With good omen didst thou give us that past happiness; now also show thyself the same. For if thou art to rule this land, even as thou art now its lord, 'tis better to be lord of men than of a waste: since neither walled town nor ship is anything, if it is void and no men dwell with thee therein.

58–77

OEDIPUS. Oh my piteous children, known, well known to me are the desires wherewith ye have come: well wot I that ye suffer, all; yet, sufferers as ye are, there is not one of you whose suffering is as mine. Your pain comes on each one of you for himself alone, and for no other; but my soul mourns at once for the city, and for myself, and for thee. So that ye rouse me not, truly, as one sunk in sleep: no, be sure that I have wept full many tears, gone many ways in wanderings of thought. And the sole remedy which, well pondering, I could find, this I have put into act. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, mine own wife's brother, to the Pythian house of Phoebus, to learn by what deed or word I might deliver this town. And already, when the lapse of days is reckoned, it troubles me what he doth; for he tarries strangely, beyond the fitting space. But when he comes, then shall I be no true man if I do not all that the god shows.

78–79

PRIEST OF ZEUS. Nay, in season hast thou spoken; at this moment these sign to me that Creon draws near.

80–81

OEDIPUS. O king Apollo, may he come to us in the brightness of saving fortune, even as his face is bright!

82–83

PRIEST OF ZEUS. Nay, to all seeming, he brings comfort; else would he not be coming crowned thus thickly with berry-laden bay.

84–86

OEDIPUS. We shall know soon: he is at range to hear. — Prince, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus, what news hast thou brought us from the god?

87–88

CREON. Good news: I tell thee that even troubles hard to bear, — if haply they find the right issue,
— will end in perfect peace.

89–90

OEDIPUS. But what is the oracle? So far, thy words make me neither bold nor yet afraid.

91–92

CREON. If thou wouldest hear while these are nigh, I am ready to speak; or else to go within.

93–94

OEDIPUS. Speak before all: the sorrow which I bear is for these more than for mine own life.

95–98

CREON. With thy leave, I will tell what I heard from the god. Phoebus our lord bids us plainly to
drive out a defiling thing, which (he saith) hath been harboured in this land, and not to harbour it, so
that it cannot be healed.

99

OEDIPUS. By what rite shall we cleanse us? What is the manner of the misfortune?

100–101

CREON. By banishing a man, or by bloodshed in quittance of bloodshed, since it is that blood which
brings the tempest on our city.

102

OEDIPUS. And who is the man whose fate he thus reveals?

103–104

CREON. Laius, king, was lord of our land before thou wast pilot of this State.

105

OEDIPUS. I know it well — by hearsay, for I saw him never.

106–107

CREON. He was slain; and the god now bids us plainly to wreak vengeance on his murderers —
whosoever they be.

108–109

OEDIPUS. And where are they upon the earth? Where shall the dim track of this old crime be found?

110–111

CREON. In this land, — said the god. What is sought for can be caught; only that which is not
watched escapes.

112–113

OEDIPUS. And was it in the house, or in the field, or on strange soil that Laius met this bloody end?

114–115

CREON. 'Twas on a visit to Delphi, as he said, that he had left our land; and he came home no more, after he had once set forth.

116–117

OEDIPUS. And was there none to tell? Was there no comrade of his journey who saw the deed, from whom tidings might have been gained, and used?

118–119

CREON. All perished, save one who fled in fear, and could tell for certain but one thing of all that he saw.

120–121

OEDIPUS. And what was that? One thing might show the clue to many, could we get but a small beginning for hope.

122–123

CREON. He said that robbers met and fell on them, not in one man's might, but with full many hands.

124–125

OEDIPUS. How, then, unless there was some trafficking in bribes from here, should the robber have dared thus far?

126–127

CREON. Such things were surmised; but, Laius once slain, amid our troubles no avenger arose.

128–129

OEDIPUS. But, when royalty had fallen thus, what trouble in your path can have hindered a full search?

130–131

CREON. The riddling Sphinx had made us let dark things go, and was inviting us to think of what lay at our doors.

132–146

OEDIPUS. Nay, I will start afresh, and once more make dark things plain. Right worthily hath Phoebus, and worthily hast thou, bestowed this care on the cause of the dead; and so, as is meet, ye shall find me too leagued with you in seeking vengeance for this land, and for the god besides. On behalf of no far-off friend, no, but in mine own cause, shall I dispel this taint. For whoever was the slayer of Laius might wish to take vengeance on me also with a hand as fierce. Therefore, in doing right to Laius, I serve myself. Come, haste ye, my children, rise from the altar-steps, and lift these suppliant boughs; and let some other summon hither the folk of Cadmus, warned that I mean to leave nought untried; for our health (with the god's help) shall be made certain — or our ruin.

147–150

PRIEST OF ZEUS. My children, let us rise; we came at first to seek what this man promises of himself. And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles, come to us therewith, our saviour and deliverer from the pest.

PARODOS (ENTRANCE SONG OF THE CHORUS)

Lines 151–215

The Chorus consists of Theban elders—men of noble birth, ‘the foremost in honour of the land’ (1223)—who represent the *Κάδμου λαός* just summoned by Oedipus (144). Oedipus having now retired into the palace, and the suppliants having left the stage, the Chorus make their entrance (*πάροδος*) into the hitherto vacant *ὄρχήστρα*. For the metres see the Analysis which follows the Introduction.

1st strophe (151—158). Is the god’s message indeed a harbinger of health? Or has Apollo some further pain in store for us?

1st antistrophe (159—166). May Athene, Artemis, and Apollo succour us!

2nd strophe (167—178). The fruits of the earth and the womb perish.

2nd antistrophe (179—189). The unburied dead taint the air: wives and mothers are wailing at the altars.

3rd strophe (190—202). May Ares, the god of death, be driven hence: may thy lightnings, O Zeus, destroy him.

3rd antistrophe (203—215). May the Lycean Apollo, and Artemis, and Dionysus fight for us against the evil god.

151–215

CHORUS. O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit hast thou come from golden Pytho unto glorious Thebes? I am on the rack, terror shakes my soul, O thou Delian healer to whom wild cries rise, in holy fear of thee, what thing thou wilt work for me, perchance unknown before, perchance renewed with the revolving years: tell me, thou immortal Voice, born of Golden Hope! First call I on thee, daughter of Zeus, divine Athena, and on thy sister, guardian of our land, Artemis, who sits on her throne of fame, above the circle of our Agora, and on Phoebus the far-darter: O shine forth on me, my three-fold help against death! If ever aforetime, in arrest of ruin hurrying on the city, ye drove a fiery pest beyond our borders, come now also! Woe is me, countless are the sorrows that I bear; a plague is on all our host, and thought can find no weapon for defence. The fruits of the glorious earth grow not; by no birth of children do women surmount the pangs in which they shriek; and life on life mayest thou see sped, like bird on nimble wing, aye, swifter than resistless fire, to the shore of the western god. By such deaths, past numbering, the city perishes: unpitied, her children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence, with none to mourn: and meanwhile young wives, and gray-haired mothers with them, uplift a wail at the steps of the altars, some here, some there, entreating for

their weary woes. The prayer to the Healer rings clear, and, blent therewith, the voice of lamentation: for these things, golden daughter of Zeus, send us the bright face of comfort. And grant that the fierce god of death, who now with no brazen shields, yet amid cries as of battle, wraps me in the flame of his onset, may turn his back in speedy flight from our land, borne by a fair wind to the great deep of Amphitrite, or to those waters in which none find haven, even to the Thracian wave; for if night leave aught undone, day follows to accomplish this. O thou who wieldest the powers of the fire-fraught lightning, O Zeus our father, slay him beneath thy thunderbolt! Lycean King, fain were I that thy shafts also, from thy bent bow's string of woven gold, should go abroad in their might, our champions in the face of the foe; yea, and the flashing fires of Artemis wherewith she glances through the Lycian hills. And I call him whose locks are bound with gold, who is named with the name of this land, ruddy Bacchus to whom Bacchants cry, the comrade of the Maenads, to draw near with the blaze of his blithe torch, our ally against the god unhonoured among gods.

FIRST EPISODE

Lines 216–462

First *ἐπεισόδιον*. Oedipus re-enters from the palace. He solemnly denounces a curse on the unknown murderer of Laïus. The prophet Teiresias declares that the murderer is Oedipus.

216–275

OEDIPUS. Thou prayest: and in answer to thy prayer, — if thou wilt give a loyal welcome to my words and minister to thine own disease, — thou mayest hope to find succour and relief from woes. These words will I speak publicly, as one who has been a stranger to this report, a stranger to the deed; for I should not be far on the track, if I were tracing it alone, without a clue. But as it is, — since it was only after the time of the deed that I was numbered a Theban among Thebans, — to you, the Cadmeans all, I do thus proclaim. Whosoever of you knows by whom Laïus son of Labdacus was slain, I bid him to declare all to me. And if he is afraid, I tell him to remove the danger of the charge from his path by denouncing himself; for he shall suffer nothing else unlovely, but only leave the land, unhurt. Or if any one knows an alien, from another land, as the assassin, let him not keep silence; for I will pay his guerdon, and my thanks shall rest with him besides. But if ye keep silence — if any one, through fear, shall seek to screen friend or self from my behest — hear ye what I then shall do. I charge you that no one of this land, whereof I hold the empire and the throne, give shelter or speak word unto that murderer, whosoever he be, — make him partner of his prayer or sacrifice, or serve him with the lustral rite; but that all ban him their homes, knowing that this is our defiling thing, as the oracle of the Pythian god hath newly shown me. I then am on this wise the ally of the god and of the slain. And I pray solemnly that the slayer, whoso he be, whether his hidden guilt is lonely or hath partners, evilly, as he is evil, may wear out his unblest life. And for myself I pray that if, with my privity, he should become an inmate of my house, I may suffer the same things which even now I called down upon others. And on you I lay it to make all these words good, for my sake, and for the sake of the god, and for our land's, thus blasted with barrenness by angry heaven. For even if the matter had not been urged on us by a god, it was not meet that ye should leave the guilt thus unpurged, when one so noble, and he your king, had perished; rather were ye bound to search it out. And now, since 'tis I who hold the powers which once he held, who possess his bed and the wife who bare seed to him; and since, had his hope of issue not been frustrate, children born of one mother would have made ties betwixt him and me — but, as it was, fate swooped upon his head; by reason of these things will I uphold this cause, even as the cause of mine own sire, and will leave nought untried in seeking to find him whose hand shed that blood, for the honour of the son of Labdacus and of

Polydorus and elder Cadmus and Agenor who was of old. And for those who obey me not, I pray that the gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb, but that they be wasted by their lot that now is, or by one yet more dire. But for all you, the loyal folk of Cadmus to whom these things seem good, may Justice, our ally, and all the gods be with you graciously for ever.

276–279

CHORUS. As thou hast put me on my oath, on my oath, O king, I will speak. I am not the slayer, nor can I point to him who slew. As for the question, it was for Phoebus, who sent it, to tell us this thing — who can have wrought the deed.

280–281

OEDIPUS. Justly said; but no man on the earth can force the gods to what they will not

282

CHORUS. I would fain say what seems to me next best after this.

283

OEDIPUS. If there is yet a third course, spare not to show it.

284–286

CHORUS. I know that our lord Teiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus; from whom, O king, a searcher of these things might learn them most clearly.

287–289

OEDIPUS. Not even this have I left out of my cares. On the hint of Creon, I have twice sent a man to bring him; and this long while I marvel why he is not here.

290

CHORUS. Indeed (his skill apart) the rumours are but faint and old.

291

OEDIPUS. What rumours are they? I look to every story.

292

CHORUS. Certain wayfarers were said to have killed him.

293

OEDIPUS. I, too, have heard it, but none sees him who saw it.

294–295

CHORUS. Nay, if he knows what fear is, he will not stay when he hears thy curses, so dire as they are.

296

OEDIPUS. When a man shrinks not from a deed, neither is he scared by a word.

297–299

CHORUS. But there is one to convict him. For here they bring at last the godlike prophet, in whom alone of men doth live the truth. Enter Teiresias, led by a Boy.

300–315

OEDIPUS. Teiresias, whose soul grasps all things, the lore that may be told and the unspeakable, the secrets of heaven and the low things of earth, — thou feelest, though thou canst not see, what a plague doth haunt our State, — from which, great prophet, we find in thee our protector and only saviour. Now, Phoebus — if indeed thou knowest it not from the messengers — sent answer to our question that the only riddance from this pest which could come was if we should learn aright the slayers of Laius, and slay them, or send them into exile from our land. Do thou, then, grudge neither voice of birds nor any other way of seer-lore that thou hast, but rescue thyself and the State, rescue me, rescue all that is defiled by the dead. For we are in thy hand; and man's noblest task is to help others by his best means and powers.

316–318

TEIRESIAS. Alas, how dreadful to have wisdom where it profits not the wise! Aye, I knew this well, but let it slip out of mind; else would I never have come here.

319

OEDIPUS. What now? How sad thou hast come in!

320–321

TEIRESIAS. Let me go home; most easily wilt thou bear thine own burden to the end, and I mine, if thou wilt consent.

322–323

OEDIPUS. Thy words are strange, nor kindly to this State which nurtured thee, when thou withholdest this response.

324–325

TEIRESIAS. Nay, I see that thou, on thy part, openest not thy lips in season: therefore I speak not, that neither may I have thy mishap.

326–327

OEDIPUS. For the love of the gods, turn not away, if thou hast knowledge: all we suppliants implore thee on our knees.

328–329

TEIRESIAS. Aye, for ye are all without knowledge; but never will I reveal my griefs — that I say not thine.

330–331

OEDIPUS. How sayest thou? Thou knowest the secret, and wilt not tell it, but art minded to betray us and to destroy the State?

332–333

TEIRESIAS. I will pain neither myself nor thee. Why vainly ask these things? Thou wilt not learn them from me.

334–336

OEDIPUS. What, basest of the base, — for thou wouldest anger a very stone, — wilt thou never speak out? Can nothing touch thee? Wilt thou never make an end?

337–338

TEIRESIAS. Thou blamest my temper, but seest not that to which thou thyself art wedded: no, thou findest fault with me.

339–340

OEDIPUS. And who would not be angry to hear the words with which thou now dost slight this city?

341

TEIRESIAS. The future will come of itself, though I shroud it in silence.

342

OEDIPUS. Then, seeing that it must come, thou on thy part shouldst tell me thereof.

343–344

TEIRESIAS. I will speak no further; rage, then, if thou wilt, with the fiercest wrath thy heart doth know.

345–349

OEDIPUS. Aye, verily, I will not spare — so wroth I am — to speak all my thought. Know that thou seemest to me e'en to have helped in plotting the deed, and to have done it, short of slaying with thy hands. Hadst thou eyesight, I would have said that the doing, also, of this thing was thine alone.

350–353

TEIRESIAS. In sooth? — I charge thee that thou abide by the decree of thine own mouth, and from this day speak neither to these nor to me: thou art the accursed defiler of this land.

354–355

OEDIPUS. So brazen with thy blustering taunt? And wherein dost thou trust to escape thy due?

356

TEIRESIAS. I have escaped: in my truth is my strength.

357

OEDIPUS. Who taught thee this? It was not, at least, thine art. '

358

TEIRESIAS. Thou: for thou didst spur me into speech against my will.

359

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

360

TEIRESIAS. Didst thou not take my sense before? Or art thou tempting me in talk?

361

OEDIPUS. No, I took it not so that I can call it known: — speak again.

362

TEIRESIAS. I say that thou art the slayer of the man whose slayer thou seekest.

363

OEDIPUS. Now thou shalt rue that thou hast twice said words so dire.

364

TEIRESIAS. Wouldst thou have me say more, that thou mayest be more wroth?

365

OEDIPUS. What thou wilt; it will be said in vain.

366–367

TEIRESIAS. I say that thou hast been living in unguessed shame with thy nearest kin, and seest not to what woe thou hast come.

368

OEDIPUS. Dost thou indeed think that thou shalt always speak thus without smarting?

369

TEIRESIAS. Yes, if there is any strength in truth.

370–371

OEDIPUS. Nay, there is, — for all save thee; for thee that strength is not, since thou art maimed in ear, and in wit, and in eye.

372–373

TEIRESIAS. Aye, and thou art a poor wretch to utter taunts which every man here will soon hurl at thee.

374–375

OEDIPUS. Night, endless night hath thee in her keeping, so that thou canst never hurt me, or any man who sees the sun.

376–377

TEIRESIAS. No, thy doom is not to fall by me: Apollo is enough, whose care it is to work that out.

378

OEDIPUS. Are these Creon's devices, or thine?

379

TEIRESIAS. Nay, Creon is no plague to thee; thou art thine own.

380–403

OEDIPUS. O wealth, and empire, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy that cleaves to you, if for the sake, yea, of this power which the city hath put into my hands, a gift unsought, Creon the trusty, Creon mine old friend, hath crept on me by stealth, yearning to thrust me out of it, and hath suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who hath eyes only for his gains, but in his art is blind! Come, now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher was here who wove dark song, didst thou say nothing that could free this folk? Yet the riddle, at least, was not for the first comer to read; there was need of a seer's skill; and none such thou wast found to have, either by help of birds, or as known from any god: no, I came, I, Oedipus the ignorant, and made her mute, when I had seized the answer by my wit, untaught of birds. And it is I whom thou art trying to oust, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. Methinks thou and the plotter of these things will rue your zeal to purge the land. Nay, didst thou not seem to be an old man, thou shouldst have learned to thy cost how bold thou art.

404–407

CHORUS. To our thinking, both this man's words and thine, Oedipus, have been said in anger. Not for such words is our need, but to seek how we shall best discharge the mandates of the god.

408–428

TEIRESIAS. King though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord. Not to thee do I live servant, but to Loxias; and so I shall not stand enrolled under Creon for my patron. And I tell thee — since thou hast taunted me even with blindness — that thou hast sight, yet seest not in what misery thou art, nor where thou dwellest, nor with whom. Dost thou know of what stock thou art? And thou hast been an unwitting foe to thine own kin, in the shades, and on the earth above; and the double lash of thy mother's and thy father's curse shall one day drive thee from this land in dreadful haste, with darkness then on the eyes that now see true. And what place shall not be harbour to thy shriek, what of all Cithaeron shall not ring with it soon, when thou hast learnt the meaning of the nuptials in which, within that house, thou didst find a fatal haven, after a voyage so fair? And a throng of other ills thou guessest not, which shall make thee level with thy true self and with thine own brood. Therefore heap thy scorn on Creon and on my message: for no one among men shall ever be crushed more miserably than thou.

429–431

OEDIPUS. Are these taunts to be indeed borne from him? — Hence, ruin take thee! Hence, this instant! Back! — away! — avaunt thee from these doors!

432

TEIRESIAS. I had never come, not I, hadst thou not called me.

433–434

OEDIPUS. I knew not that thou wast about to speak folly, or it had been long ere I had sent for thee to my house.

435–436

TEIRESIAS. Such am I, — as thou thinkest, a fool; but for the parents who begat thee, sane.

437

OEDIPUS. What parents? Stay... and who of men is my sire?

438

TEIRESIAS. This day shall show thy birth and shall bring thy ruin.

439

OEDIPUS. What riddles, what dark words thou always speakest!

440

TEIRESIAS. Nay, art not thou most skilled to unravel dark speech?

441

OEDIPUS. Make that my reproach in which thou shalt find me great.

442

TEIRESIAS. Yet 'twas just that fortune that undid thee.

443

OEDIPUS. Nay, if I delivered this town, I care not.

444

TEIRESIAS. Then I will go: so do thou, boy, take me hence.

445–446

OEDIPUS. Aye, let him take thee: while here, thou art a hindrance, thou, a trouble: when thou hast vanished, thou wilt not vex me more.

447–462

TEIRESIAS. I will go when I have done mine errand, fearless of thy frown: for thou canst never destroy me. And I tell thee — the man of whom thou hast this long while been in quest, uttering threats, and proclaiming a search into the murder of Lai'us — that man is here, — in seeming, an alien sojourner, but anon he shall be found a native Theban, and shall not be glad of his fortune. A blind man, he who now hath sight, a beggar, who now is rich, he shall make his way to a strange land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he shall be found at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; heir to his father's bed,

shedder of his father's blood. So go thou in and think on that; and if thou find that I have been at fault, say thenceforth that I have no wit in prophecy. [Teiresias is led out by the Boy.— Oedipus enters the palace.

FIRST STASIMON

Lines 463–512

First *στάσιμον*. Teiresias has just denounced Oedipus. Why do not the Chorus at once express their horror? This ode is the first since verse 215, and therefore, in accordance with the conception of the Chorus as personified reflection, it must comment on all that has been most stirring in the interval. Hence it has two leading themes: (1) 'Who can be the murderer?': 1st strophe and antistrophe, referring to verses 216—315. (2) 'I will not believe that it is Oedipus': 2nd strophe and antistrophe, referring to verses 316—462.

1st strophe (463—472). Who is the murderer at whom the Delphic oracle hints? He should fly: Apollo and the Fates are upon him.

1st antistrophe (473—482). The word has gone forth to search for him. Doubtless he is hiding in waste places, but he cannot flee his doom.

2nd strophe (483—497). Teiresias troubles me with his charge against Oedipus: but I know nothing that confirms it.

2nd antistrophe (498—512). Only gods are infallible; a mortal, though a seer, may be wrong. Oedipus has given proof of worth. Without proof, I will not believe him guilty.

463–512

CHORUS. Who is he of whom the divine voice from the Delphian rock hath spoken, as having wrought with red hands horrors that no tongue can tell? It is time that he ply in flight a foot stronger than the feet of storm-swift steeds: for the son of Zeus is springing on him, all armed with fiery lightnings, and with him come the dread, unerring Fates. ant.i. Yea, newly given from snowy Parnassus, the message hath flashed forth to make all search for the unknown man. Into the wild wood's covert, among caves and rocks he is roaming, fierce as a bull, wretched and forlorn on his joyless path, still seeking to put from him the doom spoken at Earth's central shrine: but that doom ever lives, ever flits around him. Dreadly, in sooth, dreadly doth the wise augur move me, who approve not, nor am able to deny. How to speak, I know not; I am fluttered with forebodings; neither in the present have I clear vision, nor of the future. Never in past days, nor in these, have I heard how the house of Labdacus or the son of Polybus had, either against other, any grief that I could bring as proof in assailing the public fame of Oedipus, and seeking to avenge the line of Labdacus for the undiscovered murder. Nay, Zeus indeed and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test; though man may surpass man in lore. Yet, until I see the word made good, never will I assent when men blame

Oedipus. Before all eyes, the winged maiden came against him of old, and he was seen to be wise; he bore the test, in welcome service to our State; never, therefore, by the verdict of my heart shall he be adjudged guilty of crime.

SECOND EPISODE (WITH THE FIRST KOMMOS, 649–697)

Lines 513–862

The mention of ‘*three roads*’ (716) has startled Oedipus. He now asks concerning (1) the place, (2) the time, (3) the person. The agreement of (1) with (2) dismays him; that of both with (3) flashes conviction to his mind.

The *κῆρυξ* is, I think, identical with the *ἡγεμών*, and distinct from the *τροχηλάτης*. I understand the scene thus. Oedipus was coming down the steep narrow road when he met the *herald* (to be known for such by his stave, *κηρύκειον*) walking in front of the carriage (*ἡγεμών*). The herald rudely bade him stand aside; and Laïus, from the carriage, gave a like command. (With the imperfect *ἤλαυνέτην*, ‘were for driving,’ *πρὸς βίαν* need not mean more than a threat or gesture.) The driver (*τροχηλάτης*), who was walking at his horses’ heads up the hill, then did his lord’s bidding by actually jostling the wayfarer (*ἐκτρέποντα*). Oedipus, who had forbore to strike the sacred herald, now struck the *driver*; in another moment, while passing the carriage, he was himself struck on the head by Laïus. He dashed Laïus from the carriage; the herald, turning back, came to the rescue; and Oedipus slew Laïus, herald, driver, and one of two servants who had been walking by or behind the carriage; the other servant (unperceived by Oedipus) escaped to Thebes with the news.

513–522

CREON. Fellow-citizens, having learned that Oedipus the king lays dire charges against me, I am here, indignant. If, in the present troubles, he thinks that he has suffered from me, by word or deed, aught that tends to harm, in truth I crave not my full term of years, when I must bear such blame as this. The wrong of this rumour touches me not in one point alone, but has the largest scope, if I am to be called a traitor in the city, a traitor too by thee and by my friends.

523–524

CHORUS. Nay, but this taunt came under stress, perchance, of anger, rather than from the purpose of the heart.

525–526

CREON. And the saying was uttered, that my counsels won the seer to utter his falsehoods?

527

CHORUS. Such things were said — I know not with what meaning.

528–529

CREON. And was this charge laid against me with steady eyes and steady mind?

530–531

CHORUS. I know not; I see not what my masters do: but here comes our lord forth from the house.

532–542

OEDIPUS. Sirrah, how camest thou here? Hast thou a front so bold that thou hast come to my house, who art the proved assassin of its master, — the palpable robber of my crown? Come, tell me, in the name of the gods, was it cowardice or folly that thou sawest in me, that thou didst plot to do this thing? Didst thou think that I would not note this deed of thine creeping on me by stealth, or, aware, would not ward it off? Now is not thine attempt foolish, — to seek, without followers or friends, a throne, — a prize which followers and wealth must win?

543–544

CREON. Mark me now, — in answer to thy words, hear a fair reply, and then judge for thyself on knowledge.

545–546

OEDIPUS. Thou art apt in speech, but I have a poor wit for thy lessons, since I have found thee my malignant foe.

547

CREON. Now first hear how I will explain this very thing —

548

OEDIPUS. Explain me not one thing — that thou art not false.

549–550

CREON. If thou deemest that stubbornness without sense is a good gift, thou art not wise.

551–552

OEDIPUS. If thou deemest that thou canst wrong a kinsman and escape the penalty, thou art not sane.

553–554

CREON. Justly said, I grant thee: but tell me what is the wrong that thou sayest thou hast suffered from me.

555–556

OEDIPUS. Didst thou advise, or didst thou not, that I should send for that reverend seer?

557

CREON. And now I am still of the same mind.

558

OEDIPUS. How long is it, then, since Lai'us —

559

CREON. Since Lai'us...? I take not thy drift...

560

OEDIPUS. — was swept from men's sight by a deadly violence?

561

CREON. The count of years would run far into the past.

562

OEDIPUS. Was this seer, then, of the craft in those days?

563

CREON. Yea, skilled as now, and in equal honour.

564

OEDIPUS. Made he, then, any mention of me at that time?

565

CREON. Never, certainly, when I was within hearing.

566

OEDIPUS. But held ye not a search touching the murder?

567

CREON. Due search we held, of course — and learned nothing.

568

OEDIPUS. And how was it that this sage did not tell his story then?

569

CREON. I know not; where I lack light, 'tis my wont to be silent.

570

OEDIPUS. Thus much, at least, thou knowest, and couldst declare with light enough.

571

CREON. What is that? If I know it, I will not deny.

572–573

OEDIPUS. That, if he had not conferred with thee, he would never have named my slaying of Laius.

574–575

CREON. If so he speaks, thou best knowest; but I claim to learn from thee as much as thou hast now from me.

576

OEDIPUS. Learn thy fill: I shall never be found guilty of the blood.

577

CREON. Say, then — thou hast married my sister?

578

OEDIPUS. The question allows not of denial.

579

CREON. And thou rulest the land as she doth, with like sway?

580

OEDIPUS. She obtains from me all her desire.

581

CREON. And rank not I as a third peer of you twain?

582

OEDIPUS. Aye, 'tis just therein that thou art seen a false friend.

583–615

CREON. Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thine own heart as I with mine. And first weigh this, — whether thou thinkest that any one would choose to rule amid terrors rather than in unruffled peace, — granting that he is to have the same powers. Now I, for one, have no yearning in my nature to be a king rather than to do kingly deeds, no, nor hath any man who knows how to keep a sober mind. For now I win all boons from thee without fear; but, were I ruler myself, I should be doing much e'en against mine own pleasure. How, then, could royalty be sweeter for me to have than painless rule and influence? Not yet am I so misguided as to desire other honours than those which profit. Now, all wish me joy; now, every man has a greeting for me; now, those who have a suit to thee crave speech with me, since therein is all their hope of success. Then why should I resign these things, and take those? No mind will become false, while it is wise. Nay, I am no lover of such policy, and, if another put it into deed, never could I bear to act with him. And, in proof of this, first, go to Pytho, and ask if I brought thee true word of the oracle; then next, if thou find that I have planned aught in concert with the soothsayer, take and slay me, by the sentence not of one mouth, but of twain — by mine own, no less than thine. But make me not guilty in a corner, on unproved surmise. It is not right to adjudge bad men good at random, or good men bad. I count it a like thing for a man to cast off a true friend as to cast away the life in his own bosom, which most he loves. Nay, thou wilt learn these things with sureness in time, for time alone shows a just man; but thou couldst discern a knave even in one day.

616–617

CHORUS. Well hath he spoken, O king, for one who giveth heed not to fall: the quick in counsel are not sure.

618–621

OEDIPUS. When the stealthy plotter is moving on me in quick sort, I, too, must be quick with my counterplot. If I await him in repose, his ends will have been gained, and mine missed.

622

CREON. What wouldst thou, then? Cast me out of the land?

623–624

OEDIPUS. Not so: I desire thy death — not thy banishment— that thou mayest show forth what manner of thing is envy.

625

CREON. Thou speakest as resolved not to yield or to believe?

625

OEDIPUS. [No; for thou persuadest me not that thou art worthy of belief.]

626

CREON. No, for I find thee not sane.

626

OEDIPUS. Sane, at least, in mine own interest.

627

CREON. Nay, thou shouldst be so in mine also.

627

OEDIPUS. Nay, thou art false.

628

CREON. But if thou understandest nought?

628

OEDIPUS. Yet must I rule.

629

CREON. Not if thou rule ill.

629

OEDIPUS. Hear him, O Thebes!

630

CREON. Thebes is for me also — not for thee alone.

631–633

CHORUS. Cease, princes; and in good time for you I see Iocasta coming yonder from the house, with whose help ye should compose your present feud.

634–638

IOCASTA. Misguided men, why have ye raised such foolish strife of tongues? Are ye not ashamed, while the land is thus sick, to stir up troubles of your own? Come, go thou into the house, — and thou, Creon, to thy home, — and forbear to make much of a petty grief.

639–641

CREON. Kinswoman, Oedipus thy lord claims to do dread things unto me, even one or other of two ills, — to thrust me from the land of my fathers, or to slay me amain.

642–643

OEDIPUS. Yea; for I have caught him, lady, working evil, by ill arts, against my person.

644–645

CREON. Now may I see no good, but perish accursed, if I have done aught to thee of that wherewith thou chargest me!

646–648

IOCASTA. O, for the gods' love, believe it, Oedipus — first, for the awful sake of this oath unto the gods, — then for my sake and for theirs who stand before thee?

649

CHORUS. Consent, reflect, hearken, O my king, I pray thee!

650

OEDIPUS. What grace, then, wouldest thou have me grant thee?

651

CHORUS. Respect him who aforetime was not foolish, and who now is strong in his oath.

652

OEDIPUS. Now dost thou know what thou cravest?

653

CHORUS. Yea.

654

OEDIPUS. Declare, then, what thou meanest

655–656

CHORUS. That thou shouldest never use an unproved rumour to cast a dishonouring charge on the friend who has bound himself with a curse.

657–659

OEDIPUS. Then be very sure that, when thou seekest this, for me thou art seeking destruction, or exile from this land.

660–667

CHORUS. No, by him who stands in the front of all the heavenly host, no, by the Sun! Unblest, unfriended, may I die by the uttermost doom, if I have that thought! But my unhappy soul is worn by the withering of the land, and again by the thought that our old sorrows should be crowned by sorrows springing from you twain.

668–672

OEDIPUS. Then let him go, though I am surely doomed to death, or to be thrust dishonoured from the land. Thy lips, not his, move my compassion by their plaint; but he, where'er he be, shall be hated.

673–675

CREON. Sullen in yielding art thou seen, even as vehement in the excesses of thy wrath; but such natures are justly sorest for themselves to bear.

676

OEDIPUS. Then wilt thou not leave me in peace, and get thee gone?

677–678

CREON. I will go my way; I have found thee undiscerning, but in the sight of these I am just. [Exit.

679

CHORUS. Lady, why dost thou delay to take yon man into the house?

680

IOCASTA. I will do so, when I have learned what hath chanced.

681

CHORUS. Blind suspicion, bred of talk, arose; and, on the other part, injustice wounds.

682

IOCASTA. It was on both sides?

683

CHORUS. Aye.

684

IOCASTA. And what was the story?

685–686

CHORUS. Enough, methinks, enough — when our land is already vexed — that the matter should rest where it ceased.

687–689

OEDIPUS. Seest thou to what thou hast come, for all thy honest purpose, in seeking to slack and blunt my zeal?

690–696

CHORUS. King, I have said it not once alone — be sure that I should have been shown a madman, bankrupt in sane counsel, if I put thee away — thee, who gavest a true course to my beloved country when distraught by troubles — thee, who now also art like to prove our prospering guide.

697–699

IOCASTA. In the name of the gods, tell me also, O king, on what account thou hast conceived this steadfast wrath.

700–701

OEDIPUS. That will I; for I honour thee, lady, above yonder men: — the cause is Creon, and the plots that he hath laid against me.

702

IOCASTA. Speak on — if thou canst tell clearly how the feud began.

703

OEDIPUS. He says that I stand guilty of the blood of Laius.

704

IOCASTA. As on his own knowledge? Or on hearsay from another?

705–706

OEDIPUS. Nay, he hath made a rascal seer his mouthpiece; as for himself, he keeps his lips wholly pure.

707–725

IOCASTA. Then absolve thyself of the things whereof thou speakest; hearken to me, and learn for thy comfort that nought of mortal birth is a sharer in the science of the seer. I will give thee pithy proof of that. An oracle came to Laius once — I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers — that the doom should overtake him to die by the hand of his child, who should spring from him and me. Now Laius, — as, at least, the rumour saith, — was murdered one day by foreign robbers at a place where three highways meet. And the child's birth was not three days past, when Laius pinned its ankles together, and had it thrown, by others' hands, on a trackless mountain. So, in that case, Apollo brought it not to pass that the babe should become the slayer of his sire, or that Laius should die — the dread thing which he feared — by his child's hand. Thus did the messages of seer-craft map out the future. Regard them, thou, not at all. Whatsoever needful things the god seeks, he himself will easily bring to light.

726–727

OEDIPUS. What restlessness of soul, lady, what tumult of the mind hath just come upon me since I heard thee speak!

728

IOCASTA. What anxiety hath startled thee, that thou sayest this?

729–730

OEDIPUS. Methought I heard this from thee, — that Laius was slain where three highways meet.

731

IOCASTA. Yea, that was the story; nor hath it ceased yet.

732

OEDIPUS. And where is the place where this befell?

733–734

IOCASTA. The land is called Phocis; and branching roads lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulia.

735

OEDIPUS. And what is the time that hath passed since these things were?

736–737

IOCASTA. The news was published to the town shortly before thou wast first seen in power over this land.

738

OEDIPUS. O Zeus, what hast thou decreed to do unto me?

739

IOCASTA. And wherefore, Oedipus, doth this thing weigh upon thy soul?

740–741

OEDIPUS. Ask me not yet; but say what was the stature of Laius, and how ripe his manhood.

742–743

IOCASTA. He was tall, — the silver just lightly strewn among his hair; and his form was not greatly unlike to thine.

744–745

OEDIPUS. Unhappy that I am! Methinks I have been laying myself even now under a dread curse, and knew it not.

746

IOCASTA. How sayest thou? I tremble when I look on thee, my king.

747–748

OEDIPUS. Dread misgivings have I that the seer can see. But thou wilt show better if thou wilt tell me one thing more.

749

IOCASTA. Indeed — though I tremble — I will answer all thou askest, when I hear it.

750–751

OEDIPUS. Went he in small force, or with many armed followers, like a chieftain?

752–753

IOCASTA. Five they were in all, — a herald one of them; and there was one carriage, which bore Laius.

754–755

OEDIPUS. Alas! 'Tis now clear indeed. — Who was he who gave you these tidings, lady?

756

IOCASTA. A servant — the sole survivor who came home.

757

OEDIPUS. Is he haply at hand in the house now?

758–764

IOCASTA. No, truly; so soon as he came thence, and found thee reigning in the stead of Laius, he supplicated me, with hand laid on mine, that I would send him to the fields, to the pastures of the flocks, that he might be far from the sight of this town. And I sent him; he was worthy, for a slave, to win e'en a larger boon than that.

765

OEDIPUS. Would, then, that he could return to us without delay!

766

IOCASTA. It is easy: but wherefore dost thou enjoin this?

767–768

OEDIPUS. I fear, lady, that mine own lips have been unguarded; and therefore am I fain to behold him.

769–770

IOCASTA. Nay, he shall come. But I too, methinks, have a claim to learn what lies heavy on thy heart, my king.

771–833

OEDIPUS. Yea, and it shall not be kept from thee, now that my forebodings have advanced so far. Who, indeed, is more to me than thou, to whom I should speak in passing through such a fortune as this? My father was Polybus of Corinth, — my mother, the Dorian Merope; and I was held the first of all the folk in that town, until a chance befell me, worthy, indeed, of wonder, though not worthy of mine own heat concerning it. At a banquet, a man full of wine cast it at me in his cups that I was not the true son of my sire. And I, vexed, restrained myself for that day as best I might; but on the next I went to my mother and father, and questioned them; and they were wroth for the taunt with him who had let that word fly. So on their part I had comfort; yet was this thing ever rankling in my heart; for it still crept abroad with strong rumour. And, unknown to mother or father, I went to

Delphi; and Phoebus sent me forth disappointed of that knowledge for which I came, but in his response set forth other things, full of sorrow and terror and woe; even that I was fated to defile my mother's bed; and that I should show unto men a brood which they could not endure to behold; and that I should be the slayer of the sire who begat me. And I, when I had listened to this, turned to flight from the land of Corinth, thenceforth wotting of its region by the stars alone, to some spot where I should never see fulfilment of the infamies foretold in mine evil doom. And on my way I came to the regions in which thou sayest that this prince perished. Now, lady, I will tell thee the truth. When in my journey I was near to those three roads, there met me a herald, and a man seated in a carriage drawn by colts, as thou hast described; and he who was in front, and the old man himself, were for thrusting me rudely from the path. Then, in anger, I struck him who pushed me aside — the driver; and the old man, seeing it, watched the moment when I was passing, and, from the carriage, brought his goad with two teeth down full upon my head. Yet was he paid with interest; by one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled right out of the carriage, on his back; and I slew every man of them. But if this stranger had any tie of kinship with Laius, who is now more wretched than the man before thee? What mortal could prove more hated of heaven? Whom no stranger, no citizen, is allowed to receive in his house; whom it is unlawful that any one accost; whom all must repel from their homes! And this — this curse — was laid on me by no mouth but mine own! And I pollute the bed of the slain man with the hands by which he perished. Say, am I vile? Oh, am I not utterly unclean? — seeing that I must be banished, and in banishment see not mine own people, nor set foot in mine own land, or else be joined in wedlock to my mother, and slay my sire, even Polybus, who begat and reared me. Then would not he speak aright of Oedipus, who judged these things sent by some cruel power above man? Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that I should see that day! No, may I be swept from among men, ere, I behold myself visited with the brand of such a doom!

834–835

CHORUS. To us, indeed, these things, O king, are fraught with fear; yet have hope, until at least thou hast gained full knowledge from him who saw the deed.

836–837

OEDIPUS. Hope, in truth, rests with me thus far alone; I can await the man summoned from the pastures.

838

IOCASTA. And when he has appeared — what wouldst thou have of him?

839–840

OEDIPUS. I will tell thee. If his story be found to tally with thine, I, at least, shall stand clear of disaster.

841

IOCASTA. And what of special note didst thou hear from me?

842–847

OEDIPUS. Thou wast saying that he spoke of Laius as slain by robbers. If, then, he still speaks, as before, of several, I was not the slayer: a solitary man could not be held the same with that band. But if he names one lonely wayfarer, then beyond doubt this guilt leans to me.

848–858

IOCASTA. Nay, be assured that thus, at least, the tale was first told; he cannot revoke that, for the city heard it, not I alone. But even if he should diverge somewhat from his former story, never, king, can he show that the murder of Laius, at least, is truly square to prophecy; of whom Loxias plainly said that he must die by the hand of my child. Howbeit that poor innocent never slew him, but perished first itself. So henceforth, for what touches divination, I would not look to my right hand or my left.

859–860

OEDIPUS. Thou judgest well. But nevertheless send some one to fetch the peasant, and neglect not this matter.

861–862

IOCASTA. I will send without delay. But let us come into the house: nothing will I do save at thy good pleasure.

SECOND STASIMON

Lines 863–910

Second *στάσιμον*. The second *ἐπεισόδιον* (512—862) has been marked by the overbearing harshness of Oedipus towards Creon; by the rise of a dreadful suspicion that Oedipus is *ἄναγνος*—blood-guilty for Laïus; and by the avowed contempt of Iocasta, not, indeed, for Apollo himself, but for the *μαντική* of his ministers. These traits furnish the two interwoven themes of the second stasimon: (1) the prayer for *purity* in word as in deed: (2) the deprecation of that *pride* which goes before a fall;—whether it be the insolence of the *τύραννος*, or such intellectual arrogance as Iocasta's speech bewrays (*λόγω*, verse 884). The tone of warning reproof towards Oedipus, while only allusive, is yet in contrast with the firm though anxious sympathy of the former ode, and serves to attune the feeling of the spectators for the approach of the catastrophe.

1st strophe (863—872). May I ever be pure in word and deed, loyal to the unwritten and eternal laws.

1st antistrophe (873—882). A tyrant's selfish insolence hurls him to ruin. But may the gods prosper all emulous effort for the good of the State.

2nd strophe (883—896). Irreverence in word or deed shall not escape: the wrath of the gods shall find it out.

2nd antistrophe (897—910). Surely the oracles concerning Laïus will yet be justified: O Zeus, suffer not Apollo's worship to fail.

863–910

CHORUS. May destiny still find me winning the praise of reverent purity in all words and deeds sanctioned by those laws of range sublime, called into life throughout the high clear heaven, whose father is Olympus alone; their parent was no race of mortal men, no, nor shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep; the god is mighty in them, and he grows not old. Insolence breeds the tyrant; Insolence, once vainly surfeited on wealth that is not meet nor good for it, when it hath scaled the topmost ramparts, is hurled to a dire doom, wherein no service of the feet can serve. But I pray that the god never quell such rivalry as benefits the State; the god will I ever hold for our protector. But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities. Where such things are, what mortal shall boast any more that he can ward the arrows of the gods from his life? Nay, if such deeds are in honour, wherefore should we join in the sacred dance? No more will I go reverently to earth's central

and inviolate shrine, no more to Abae's temple or Olympia, if these oracles fit not the issue, so that all men shall point at them with the finger. Nay, king, — if thou art rightly called, — Zeus all-ruling, may it not escape thee and thine ever-deathless power! The old prophecies concerning Laius are fading; already men are setting them at nought, and nowhere is Apollo glorified with honours; the worship of the gods is perishing.

THIRD EPISODE

Lines 911–1085

Iocasta comes forth, bearing a branch (*ἵκετηρία*), wreathed with festoons of wool (*στέφη*), which, as a suppliant, she is about to lay on the altar of the household god, Apollo *Λύκειος*, in front of the palace. The state of Oedipus frightens her. His mind has been growing more and more excited. It is not that she herself has much fear for the future. What alarms her is to see ‘the pilot of the ship’ (923) thus unnerved. Though she can believe no longer in *human μαντική*, she has never ceased to revere the *gods* (708); and to them she turns for help in her need.

911–923

IOCASTA. Princes of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the gods, with this wreathed branch in my hands, and these gifts of incense. For Oedipus excites his soul overmuch with all manner of alarms, nor, like a man of sense, judges the new things by the old, but is at the will of the speaker, if he speak terrors. Since, then, by counsel I can do no good, to thee, Lycean Apollo, for thou art nearest, I have come, a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, that thou mayest find us some riddance, from uncleanness. For now we are all afraid, seeing him affrighted, even as they who see fear in the helmsman of their ship.

924–926

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Might I learn from you, strangers, where is the house of the king Oedipus? Or, better still, tell me where he himself is — if ye know.

927–928

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

929–930

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Then may she be ever happy in a happy home, since she is his heaven-blest queen.

931–933

IOCASTA. Happiness to thee also, stranger! 'tis the due of thy fair greeting. — But say what thou hast come to seek or to tell.

934

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Good tidings, lady, for thy house and for thy husband.

935

IOCASTA. What are they? And from whom hast thou come?

936–937

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). From Corinth: and at the message which I will speak anon thou wilt rejoice — doubtless; yet haply grieve.

938

IOCASTA. And what is it? How hath it thus a double potency?

939–940

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). The people will make him king of the Isthmian land, as 'twas said there.

941

IOCASTA. How then? Is the aged Polybus no more in power?

942

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). No, verily: for death holds him in the tomb.

943

IOCASTA. How sayest thou? Is Polybus dead, old man?

944

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). If I speak not the truth, I am content to die.

945–949

IOCASTA. O handmaid, away with all speed, and tell this to thy master! O ye oracles of the gods, where stand ye now! This is the man whom Oedipus long feared and shunned, lest he should slay him; and now this man hath died in the course of destiny, not by his hand. [Enter OEDIPUS.]

950–951

OEDIPUS. Iocasta, dearest wife, why hast thou summoned me forth from these doors?

952–953

IOCASTA. Hear this man, and judge, as thou listenest, to what the awful oracles of the gods have come.

954

OEDIPUS. And he — who may he be, and what news hath he for me?

955–956

IOCASTA. He is from Corinth, to tell that thy father Polybus lives no longer, but hath perished.

957

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

958–959

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). If I must first make these tidings plain, know indeed that he is dead and gone.

960

OEDIPUS. By treachery, or by visit of disease?

961

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). A light thing in the scale brings the aged to their rest.

962

OEDIPUS. Ah, he died, it seems, of sickness?

963

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Yea, and of the long years that he had told.

964–972

OEDIPUS. Alas, alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads, on whose showing I was doomed to slay my sire? But he is dead, and hid already beneath the earth; and here am I, who have not put hand to spear.— Unless, perchance, he was killed by longing for me: thus, indeed, I should be the cause of his death. But the oracles as they stand, at least, Polybus hath swept with him to his rest in Hades: they are worth nought.

973

IOCASTA. Nay, did I not so foretell to thee long since?

974

OEDIPUS. Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

975

IOCASTA. Now no more lay aught of those things to heart.

976

OEDIPUS. But surely I must needs fear my mother's bed?

977–983

IOCASTA. Nay, what should mortal fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who hath clear foresight of nothing? 'Tis best to live at random, as one may. But fear not thou touching wedlock With thy mother. Many men ere now have so fared in dreams also: but he to whom these things are as nought bears his life most easily.

984–986

OEDIPUS. All these bold words of thine would have been well, were not my mother living; but as it is, since she lives, I must needs fear — though thou sayest well.

987

IOCASTA. Howbeit thy father's death is a great sign to cheer us.

988

OEDIPUS. Great, I know; but my fear is of her who lives.

989

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). And who is the woman about whom ye fear?

990

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

991

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). And what is it in her that moves your fear?

992

OEDIPUS. A heaven-sent oracle of dread import, stranger.

993

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Lawful, or unlawful, for another to know?

994–999

OEDIPUS. Lawful, surely. Loxias once said that I was doomed to espouse mine own mother, and to shed with mine own hands my father's blood. Wherefore my home in Corinth was long kept by me afar; with happy event, indeed, — yet still 'tis sweet to see the face of parents.

1000

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Was it indeed for fear of this that thou wast an exile from that city?

1001

OEDIPUS. And because I wished not, old man, to be the slayer of my sire.

1002–1003

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Then why have I not freed thee, king, from this fear, seeing that I came with friendly purpose?

1004

OEDIPUS. Indeed thou shouldst have guerdon due from me.

1005–1006

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Indeed 'twas chiefly for this that I came — that, on thy return home, I might reap some good.

1007

OEDIPUS. Nay, I will never go near my parents.

1008

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Ah my son, 'tis plain enough that thou knowest not what thou doest.

1009

OEDIPUS. How, old man? For the gods' love, tell me.

1010

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). If for these reasons thou shrinkest from going home.

1011

OEDIPUS. Aye, I dread lest Phoebus prove himself true for me.

1012

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Thou darest to be stained with guilt through thy parents?

1013

OEDIPUS. Even so, old man — this it is that ever affrights me.

1014

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Dost thou know, then, that thy fears are wholly vain?

1015

OEDIPUS. How so, if I was born of those parents?

1016

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Because Polybus was nothing to thee in blood.

1017

OEDIPUS. What sayest thou? Was Polybus not my sire?

1018

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). No more than he who speaks to thee, but just so much.

1019

OEDIPUS. And how can my sire be level with him who is as nought to me?

1020

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Nay, he begat thee not, any more than I.

1021

OEDIPUS. Nay, wherefore, then, called he me his son?

1022

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Know that he had received thee as a gift from my hands of yore.

1023

OEDIPUS. And yet he loved me so dearly, who came from another's hand?

1024

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Yea, his former childlessness won him thereto.

1025

OEDIPUS. And thou — hadst thou bought me or found me by chance, when thou gavest me to him?

1026

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Found thee in Cithaeron's winding glens.

1027

OEDIPUS. And wherefore wast thou roaming in those regions?

1028

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). I was there in charge of mountain flocks.

1029

OEDIPUS. What, thou wast a shepherd — a vagrant hireling?

1030

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). But thy preserver, my son, in that hour.

1031

OEDIPUS. And what pain was mine when thou didst take me in thine arms?

1032

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). The ankles of thy feet might witness.

1033

OEDIPUS. Ah me, why dost thou speak of that old trouble?

1034

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). I freed thee when thou hadst thine ankles pinned together.

1035

OEDIPUS. Aye, 'twas a dreadbrand of shame that I took from my cradle.

1036

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Such, that from that fortune thou wast called by the name which still is thine.

1037

OEDIPUS. Oh, for the gods' love — was the deed my mother's or father's? Speak!

1038

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). I know not; he who gave thee to me wots better of that than I.

1039

OEDIPUS. What, thou hadst me from another? Thou didst not light on me thyself?

1040

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). No: another shepherd gave thee up to me.

1041

OEDIPUS. Who was he? Art thou in case to tell clearly?

1042

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). I think he was called one of the household of Laius.

1043

OEDIPUS. The king who ruled this country long ago?

1044

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). The same: 'twas in his service that the man was a herd.

1045

OEDIPUS. Is he still alive, that I might see him?

1046

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Nay, ye folk of the country should know best.

1047–1050

OEDIPUS. Is there any of you here present that knows the herd of whom he speaks — that hath seen him in the pastures or the town? Answer! The hour hath come that these things should be finally revealed.

1051–1053

CHORUS. Methinks he speaks of no other than the peasant whom thou wast already fain to see; but our lady Iocasta might best tell that.

1054–1055

OEDIPUS. Lady, wottest thou of him whom we lately summoned? Is it of him that this man speaks?

1056–1057

IOCASTA. Why ask of whom he spoke? Regard it not... waste not a thought on what he said... 'twere idle.

1058–1059

OEDIPUS. It must not be that, with such clues in my grasp, I should fail to bring my birth to light.

1060–1061

IOCASTA. For the gods' sake, if thou hast any care for thine own life, forbear this search! My anguish is enough.

1062–1063

OEDIPUS. Be of good courage; though I be found the son of servile mother, — aye, a slave by three descents, — thou wilt not be proved base-born.

1064

IOCASTA. Yet hear me, I implore thee: do not thus.

1065

OEDIPUS. I must not hear of not discovering the whole truth.

1066

IOCASTA. Yet I wish thee well — I counsel thee for the best.

1067

OEDIPUS. These best counsels, then, vex my patience.

1068

IOCASTA. Ill-fated one! Mayst thou never come to know who thou art!

1069–1070

OEDIPUS. Go, some one, fetch me the herdsman hither, — and leave yon woman to glory in her princely stock.

1071–1072

IOCASTA. Alas, alas, miserable! — that word alone can I say unto thee, and no other word henceforth for ever. [She rushes into the palace.

1073–1075

CHORUS. Why hath the lady gone, Oedipus, in a transport of wild grief? I misdoubt, a storm of sorrow will break forth from this silence.

1076–1085

OEDIPUS. Break forth what will! Be my race never so lowly, I must crave to learn it. Yon woman, perchance, — for she is proud with more than a woman's pride — thinks shame of my base source. But I, who hold myself son of Fortune that gives good, will not be dishonoured. She is the mother from whom I spring; and the months, my kinsmen, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great. Such being my lineage, never more can I prove false to it, or spare to search out the secret of my birth.

THIRD STASIMON

Lines 1086–1109

This short ode holds the place of the third *στάσιμον*. But it has the character of a 'dance-song' or *ὑπόρχημα*, a melody of livelier movement, expressing joyous excitement. The process of discovery now approaches its final phase. The substitution of a hyporcheme for a regular stasimon has here a twofold dramatic convenience. It shortens the interval of suspense; and it prepares a more forcible contrast. For the sake of thus heightening the contrast, Sophocles has made a slight sacrifice of probability. The sudden exit of Iocasta has just affected the Chorus with a dark presentiment of evil (1075). We are now required to suppose that the spirited words of Oedipus (1076—1085) have completely effaced this impression, leaving only delight in the prospect that he will prove to be a native of the land. A hyporcheme is substituted for a stasimon with similar effect in the *Ajax*, where the short and joyous invocation of Pan immediately precedes the catastrophe (693—717); and in the *Antigone*, 1115—1154. The stasimon in the *Trachiniae* 633—662 may also be compared, in so far as its glad anticipations usher in the beginning of the end.

Strophe (1086—1097). Our joyous songs will soon be celebrating Cithaeron as native to Oedipus.

Antistrophe (1098—1109). Is he a son of some god,—of Pan or Apollo, of Hermes or Dionysus?

1086–1109

CHORUS. If I am a seer or wise of heart, O Cithaeron, thou shalt not fail — by yon heaven, thou shalt not! — to know at tomorrow's full moon that Oedipus honours thee as native to him, as his nurse, and his mother, and that thou art celebrated in our dance and song, because thou art well-pleasing to our prince. O Phoebus to whom we cry, may these things find favour in thy sight! Who was it, my son, who of the race whose years are many that bore thee in wedlock with Pan, the mountain-roaming father? Or was it a bride of Loxias that bore thee? For dear to him are all the upland pastures. Or perchance 'twas Cyllene's lord, or the Bacchants' god, dweller on the hill-tops, that received thee, a new-born joy, from one of the Nymphs of Helicon, with whom he most doth sport.

FOURTH EPISODE

Lines 1110–1185

The *οἰκεύς*, who alone escaped from the slaughter of Laïus and his following, had at his own request been sent away from Thebes to do the work of a herdsman (761). Oedipus had summoned him in order to see whether he would speak of *λησταιί*, or of one *ληστής* (842). But meanwhile a further question has arisen. Is he identical with that herdsman of Laïus (1040) who had given up the infant Oedipus to the Corinthian shepherd? He is now seen approaching. With his coming, the two threads of discovery are brought together.

1110–1116

OEDIPUS. Elders, if 'tis for me to guess, who have never met with him, I think I see the herdsman of whom we have long been in quest; for in his venerable age he tallies with yon stranger's years, and withal I know those who bring him, methinks, as servants of mine own. But perchance thou mayest have the advantage of me in knowledge, if thou hast seen the herdsman before.

1117–1118

CHORUS. Aye, I know him, be sure; he was in the service of Laïus — trusty as any man, in his shepherd's place. [The herdsman is brought in.

1119

OEDIPUS. I ask thee first, Corinthian stranger, is this he whom thou meanest?

1120

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). This man whom thou beholdest.

1121–1122

OEDIPUS. Ho thou, old man — I would have thee look this way, and answer all that I ask thee. — Thou wast once in the service of Laïus?

1123

HERDSMAN. I was — a slave not bought, but reared in his house.

1124

OEDIPUS. Employed in what labour, or what way of life?

1125

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

1126

OEDIPUS. And what the regions that thou didst chiefly haunt?

1127

HERDSMAN. Sometimes it was Cithaeron, sometimes the neighbouring ground.

1128

OEDIPUS. Then wottest thou of having noted yon man in these parts —

1129

HERDSMAN. Doing what?...What man dost thou mean?...

1130

OEDIPUS. This man here — or of having ever met him before?

1131

HERDSMAN. Not so that I could speak at once from memory.

1132–1140

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). And no wonder, master. But I will bring clear recollection to his ignorance. I am sure that he well wots of the time when we abode in the region of Cithaeron, — he with two flocks, I, his comrade, with one, — three full half-years, from spring to Arcturus; and then for the winter I used to drive my flock to mine own fold, and he took his to the fold of Laius. Did aught of this happen as I tell, or did it not?

1141

HERDSMAN. Thou speakest the truth — though 'tis long ago.

1142–1143

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Come, tell me now — wottest thou of having / given me a boy in those days, to be reared as mine own foster-son?

1144

HERDSMAN. What now? Why dost thou ask the question?

1145

MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH). Yonder man, my friend, is he who then was young.

1146

HERDSMAN. Plague seize thee — be silent once for all!

1147–1148

OEDIPUS. Ha! chide him not, old man — thy words need chiding more than his.

1149

HERDSMAN. And wherein, most noble master, do I offend?

1150

OEDIPUS. In not telling of the boy concerning whom he asks.

1151

HERDSMAN. He speaks without knowledge — he is busy to no purpose.

1152

OEDIPUS. Thou wilt not speak with a good grace, but thou shalt on pain.

1153

HERDSMAN. Nay, for the gods' love, misuse not an old man!

1154

OEDIPUS. Ho, some one — pinion him this instant!

1155

HERDSMAN. Alas, wherefore? what more wouldst thou learn?

1156

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

1157

HERDSMAN. I did, — and would I had perished that day!

1158

OEDIPUS. Well, thou wilt come to that, unless thou tell the honest truth.

1159

HERDSMAN. Nay, much more am I lost, if I speak.

1160

OEDIPUS. The fellow is bent, methinks, on more delays...

1161

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

1162

OEDIPUS. Whence hadst thou got it? In thine own house, or from another?

1163

HERDSMAN. Mine own it was not — I had received it from a man.

1164

OEDIPUS. From whom of the citizens here? from what home?

1165

HERDSMAN. Forbear, for the gods' love, master, forbear to ask more!

1166

OEDIPUS. Thou art lost if I have to question thee again.

1167

HERDSMAN. It was a child, then, of the house of Laius.

1168

OEDIPUS. A slave? or one born of his own race?

1169

HERDSMAN. Ah me — I am on the dreaded brink of speech.

1170

OEDIPUS. And I of hearing; yet must I hear.

1171–1172

HERDSMAN. Thou must know, then, that 'twas said to be his own child — but thy lady within could best say how these things are.

1173

OEDIPUS. How? She gave it to thee?

1173

HERDSMAN. Yea, O king.

1174

OEDIPUS. For what end?

1174

HERDSMAN. That I should make away with it.

1175

OEDIPUS. Her own child, the wretch?

1175

HERDSMAN. Aye, from fear of evil prophecies.

1176

OEDIPUS. What were they?

1176

HERDSMAN. The tale ran that he must slay his sire.

1177

OEDIPUS. Why, then, didst thou give him up to this old man?

1178–1181

HERDSMAN. Through pity, master, as deeming that he would bear him away to another land, whence he himself came; but he saved him for the direst woe. For if thou art what this man saith, know that thou wast born to misery.

1182–1185

OEDIPUS. Oh, oh! All brought to pass — all true! Thou light, may I now look my last on thee — I who have been found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood! [He rushes into the palace.

FOURTH STASIMON

Lines 1186–1222

1186–1222

CHORUS. Alas, ye generations of men, how mere a shadow do I count your life! Where, where is the mortal who wins more of happiness than just the seeming, and, after the semblance, a falling away? Thine is a fate that warns me, — thine, thine, unhappy Oedipus — to call no earthly creature blest. For he, O Zeus, sped his shaft with peerless skill, and won the prize of an all-prosperous fortune; he slew the maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly; he arose for our land as a tower against death. And from that time, Oedipus, thou hast been called our king, and hast been honoured supremely, bearing sway in great Thebes. But now whose story is more grievous in men's ears? Who is a more wretched captive to fierce plagues and troubles, with all his life reversed? Alas, renowned Oedipus! The same bounteous place of rest sufficed thee, as child and as sire also, that thou shouldst make thereon thy nuptial couch. Oh, how can the soil wherein thy father sowed, unhappy one, have suffered thee in silence so long? Time the all-seeing hath found thee out in thy despite: he judgeth the monstrous marriage wherein begetter and begotten have long been one. Alas, thou child of Laius, would, would that I had never seen thee! I wail as one who pours a dirge from his lips; sooth to speak, 'twas thou that gavest me new life, and through thee darkness hath fallen upon mine eyes.

EXODOS (WITH THE SECOND KOMMOS, 1297–1368)

Lines 1223–1530

1223–1231

SECOND MESSENGER. Ye who are ever most honoured in this land, what deeds shall ye hear, what deeds behold, what burden of sorrow shall be yours, if, true to your race, ye still care for the house of Labdacus! For I ween that not Ister nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many are the ills that it shrouds, or will soon bring to light, — ills wrought not unwittingly, but of purpose. And those griefs smart most which are seen to be of our own choice.

1232–1233

CHORUS. Indeed those which we knew before fall not short of claiming sore lamentation: besides them, what dost thou announce?

1234–1235

SECOND MESSENGER. This is the shortest tale to tell and to hear: our royal lady Iocasta is dead.

1236

CHORUS. Alas, hapless one! From what cause?

1237–1284

SECOND MESSENGER. By her own hand. The worst pain in what hath chanced is not for you, for yours it is not to behold. Nevertheless, so far as mine own memory serves, ye shall learn that unhappy woman's fate. When, frantic, she had passed within the vestibule, she rushed straight towards her nuptial couch, clutching her hair with the fingers of both hands; once within the chamber, she dashed the doors together at her back; then called on the name of Laius, long since a corpse, mindful of that son, begotten long ago, by whom the sire was slain, leaving the mother to breed accursed offspring with his own. And she bewailed the wedlock wherein, wretched, she had borne a twofold brood, husband by husband, children by her child. And how thereafter she perished, is more than I know. For with a shriek Oedipus burst in, and suffered us not to watch her woe unto the end; on him, as he rushed around, our eyes were set. To and fro he went, asking us to give him a sword, — asking where he should find the wife who was no wife, but a mother whose womb had borne alike himself and his children. And, in his frenzy, a power above man was his guide; for 'twas none of us mortals who were nigh. And with a dread shriek, as though some one beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, and from their sockets forced the bending bolts, and rushed into the room. There beheld we the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. But he, when he saw her, with a dread, deep cry of misery, loosed the halter whereby she hung. And when the hapless

woman was stretched upon the ground, then was the sequel dread to see. For he tore from her raiment the golden brooches wherewith she was decked, and lifted them, and smote full on his own eye-balls, uttering words like these: ' No more shall ye behold such horrors as I was suffering and working! long enough have ye looked on those whom ye ought never to have seen, failed in knowledge of those whom I yearned to know — henceforth ye shall be dark!' To such dire refrain, not once alone but oft struck he his eyes with lifted hand; and at each blow the ensanguined eye-balls bedewed his beard, nor sent forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail. From the deeds of twain such ills have broken forth, not on one alone, but with mingled woe for man and wife. The old happiness of their ancestral fortune was aforetime happiness indeed; but to-day — lamentation, ruin, death, shame, all earthly ills that can be named — all, all are theirs.

1285

CHORUS. And hath the sufferer now any respite from pain?

1286–1296

SECOND MESSENGER. He cries for some one to unbar the gates and show to all the Cadmeans his father's slayer, his mother's — the unholy word must not pass my lips, — as purposing to cast himself out of the land, and abide no more, to make the house accursed under his own curse. Howbeit he lacks strength, and one to guide his steps; for the anguish is more than man may bear. And he will show this to thee also; for lo, the bars of the gates are withdrawn, and soon thou shalt behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity. Enter OEDIPUS.

1297–1307

CHORUS. O dread fate for men to see, O most dreadful of all that have met mine eyes! Unhappy one, what madness hath come on thee? Who is the unearthly foe that, with a bound of more than mortal range, hath made thine ill-starred life his prey? Alas, alas, thou hapless one! Nay, I cannot e'en look on thee, though there is much that I would fain ask, fain learn, much that draws my wistful gaze, — with such a shuddering dost thou fill me!

1308–1311

OEDIPUS. Woe is me! Alas, alas, wretched that I am! Whither, whither am I borne in my misery? How is my voice swept abroad on the wings of the air? Oh my Fate, how far hast thou sprung!

1312

CHORUS. To a dread place, dire in men's ears, dire in their sight.

1313–1318

OEDIPUS. O thou horror of darkness that enfolded me, visitant unspeakable, resistless, sped by a wind too fair! Ay me! and once again, ay me! How is my soul pierced by the stab of these goads, and withal by the memory of sorrows!

1319–1320

CHORUS. Yea, amid woes so many a twofold pain may well be thine to mourn and to bear.

1321–1326

OEDIPUS. Ah, friend, thou still art steadfast in thy tendance of me, — thou still hast patience to care for the blind man! Ah me! Thy presence is not hid from me — no, dark though I am, yet know I thy voice full well.

1327–1328

CHORUS. Man of dread deeds, how couldst thou in such wise quench thy vision? What more than human power urged thee?

1329–1335

OEDIPUS. Apollo, friends, Apollo was he that brought these my woes to pass, these my sore, sore woes: but the hand that struck the eyes was none save mine, wretched that I am! Why was I to see, when sight could show me nothing sweet?

1336

CHORUS. These things were even as thou sayest.

1337–1345

OEDIPUS. Say, friends, what can I more behold, what can I love, what greeting can touch mine ear with joy? Haste, lead me from the land, friends, lead me hence, the utterly lost, the thrice accursed, yea, the mortal most abhorred of heaven!

1346–1348

CHORUS. Wretched alike for thy fortune and for thy sense thereof, would that I had never so much as known thee!

1349–1355

OEDIPUS. Perish the man, whoe'er he was, that freed me in the pastures from the cruel shackle on my feet, and saved me from death, and gave me back to life, — a thankless deed! Had I died then, to my friends and to mine own soul I had not been so sore a grief.

1356

CHORUS. I also would have had it thus.

1357–1366

OEDIPUS. So had I not come to shed my father's blood, nor been called among men the spouse of her from whom I sprang: but now am I forsaken of the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to his bed who gave me mine own wretched being: and if there be yet a woe surpassing woes, it hath become the portion of

1367–1368

CHORUS. I know not how I can say that thou hast counselled well: for thou wert better dead than living and blind.

1369–1415

OEDIPUS. Show me not at large that these things are not best done thus: give me counsel no more. For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes I could e'en have looked on my father, when I came to the place of the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against both I have sinned such sins as strangling could not punish. But deem ye that the sight of children, born as mine were born, was lovely for me to look upon? No, no, not lovely to mine eyes for ever! No, nor was this town with its towered walls, nor the sacred statues of the gods, since I, thrice wretched that I am, — I, noblest of the sons of Thebes, — have doomed myself to know these no more, by mine own command that all should thrust away the impious one, — even him whom gods have shown to be unholy — and of the race of Laius! After bearing such a stain upon me, was I to look with steady eyes on this folk? No, verily: no, were there yet a way to choke the fount of hearing, I had not spared to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, that so I should have known nor sight nor sound; for 'tis sweet that our thought should dwell beyond the sphere of griefs. Alas, Cithaeron, why hadst thou a shelter for me? When I was given to thee, why didst thou not slay me straightway, that so I might never have revealed my source to men? Ah, Polybus, — ah, Corinth, and thou that wast called the ancient house of my fathers, how seeming-fair was I your nurseling, and what ills were festering beneath! For now I am found evil, and of evil birth. O ye three roads, and thou secret glen, — thou coppice, and narrow way where three paths met — ye who drank from my hands that father's blood which was mine own, — remember ye, perchance, what deeds I wrought for you to see, — and then, when I came hither, what fresh deeds I went on to do? O marriage-rites, ye gave me birth, and when ye had brought me forth, again ye bore children to your child, ye created an incestuous kinship of fathers, brothers, sons, — brides, wives, mothers, — yea, all the foulest shame that is wrought among men! Nay, but 'tis unmeet to name what 'tis unmeet to do: — haste ye, for the gods' love, hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where ye shall never behold me more! Approach, — deign to lay your hands on a wretched man; — hearken, fear not, — my plague can rest on no mortal beside.

1416–1418

CHORUS. Nay, here is Creon, in meet season for thy requests, crave they act or counsel; for he alone is left to guard the land in thy stead.

1419–1421

OEDIPUS. Ah me, how indeed shall I accost him? What claim to credence can be shown on my part? For in the past I have been found wholly false to him.

1422–1431

CREON. I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach thee with any bygone fault. — (To the attendants.) But ye, if ye respect the children of men no more, revere at least the all-nurturing flame of our lord the Sun, — spare to show thus nakedly a pollution such as this, — one which neither earth can welcome, nor the holy rain, nor the light. Nay, take him into the house as quickly as ye may; for it best accords with piety that kinsfolk alone should see and hear a kinsman's woes.

1432–1434

OEDIPUS. For the gods' love — since thou hast done a gentle violence to my presage, who hast come in a spirit so noble to me, a man most vile — grant me a boon: — for thy good I will speak, not for mine own.

1435

CREON. And what wish art thou so fain to have of me?

1436–1437

OEDIPUS. Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me more.

1438–1439

CREON. This would I have done, be thou sure, but that I craved first to learn all my duty from the god.

1440–1441

OEDIPUS. Nay, his behest hath been set forth in full, — to let me perish, the parricide, the unholy one, that I am.

1442–1443

CREON. Such was the purport; yet, seeing to what a pass we have come, 'tis better to learn clearly what should be done.

1444

OEDIPUS. Will ye, then, seek a response on behalf of such a wretch as I am?

1445

CREON. Aye, for thou thyself wilt now surely put faith in the god.

1446–1475

OEDIPUS. Yea; and on thee lay I this charge, to thee will I make this entreaty: — give to her who is within such burial as thou thyself wouldest; for thou wilt meetly render the last rites to thine own. But for me — never let this city of my sire be condemned to have me dwelling therein, while I live: no, suffer me to abide on the hills, where yonder is Cithaeron, famed as mine, — which my mother and sire, while they lived, set for my appointed tomb, — that so I may die by their decree who sought to slay me. Howbeit of thus much am I sure, — that neither sickness nor aught else can destroy me;

for never had I been snatched from death, but in reserve for some strange doom. Nay, let my fate go whither it will: but as touching my children, — I pray thee, Creon, take no care on thee for my sons; they are men, so that, be they where they may, they can never lack the means to live. But my two girls, poor hapless ones, — who never knew my table spread apart, or lacked their father's presence, but ever in all things shared my daily bread, — I pray thee, care for them.; and — if thou canst — suffer me to touch them with my hands, and to indulge my grief. Grant it, prince, grant it, thou noble heart! Ah, could I but once touch them with my hands, I should think that they were with me, even as when I had sight... [CREON's attendants lead in the children Antigone and Ismene. Ha? O ye gods, can it be my loved ones that I hear sobbing, — can Creon have taken pity on me and sent me my children — my darlings? Am I right?

1476–1477

CREON. Yea: 'tis of my contriving, for I knew thy joy in them of old, — the joy that now is thine.

1478–1514

OEDIPUS. Then blessed be thou, and, for guerdon of this errand, may heaven prove to thee a kinder guardian than it hath to me! My children, where are ye? Come hither, — hither to the hands of him whose mother was your own, the hands whose offices have wrought that your sire's once bright eyes should be such orbs as these, — his, who seeing nought, knowing nought, became your father by her from whom he sprang! For you also do I weep — behold you I cannot — when I think of the bitter life in days to come which men will make you live. To what company of the citizens will ye go, to what festival, from which ye shall not return home in tears, instead of sharing in the holiday? But when ye are now come to years ripe for marriage, who shall he be, who shall be the man, my daughters, that will hazard taking unto him such reproaches as must be baneful alike to my offspring and to yours? For what misery is wanting? Your sire slew his sire, he had seed of her who bare him, and begat you at the sources of his own being! Such are the taunts that will be cast at you; and who then will wed? The man lives not, no, it cannot be, my children, but ye must wither in barren maidenhood. Ah, son of Menoeceus, hear me — since thou art the only father left to them, for we, their parents, are lost, both of us, — allow them not to wander poor and unwed, who are thy kinswomen, nor abase them to the level of my woes. Nay, pity them, when thou seest them at this tender age so utterly forlorn, save for thee. Signify thy promise, generous man, by the touch of thy hand! To you, my children, I would have given much counsel, were your minds mature; but now I would have this to be your prayer — that ye live where occasion suffers, and that the life which is your portion may be happier than your sire's.

1515

CREON. Thy grief hath had large scope enough: nay, pass into the house.

1516

OEDIPUS. I must obey, though 'tis in no wise sweet.

1516

CREON. Yea: for it is in season that all things are good.

1517

OEDIPUS. Knowest thou, then, on what conditions I will go?

1517

CREON. Thou shalt name them; so shall I know them when I hear.

1518

OEDIPUS. See that thou send me to dwell beyond this land.

1518

CREON. Thou askest me for what the god must give.

1519

OEDIPUS. Nay, to the gods I have become most hateful.

1519

CREON. Then shalt thou have thy wish anon.

1520

OEDIPUS. So thou consentest?

1520

CREON. 'Tis not my wont to speak idly what I do not mean.

1521

OEDIPUS. Then 'tis time to lead me hence.

1521

CREON. Come, then, — but let thy children go.

1522

OEDIPUS. Nay, take not these from me!

1522–1523

CREON. Crave not to be master in all things: for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life.

1524–1530

CHORUS. Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a man most mighty; on whose fortunes what citizen did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come! Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.

A COMPANION TO THE PLAY

Reference pages for readers of the play, from the companion site Reading Sophocles (readingsophocles.com): the story scene by scene, the persons of the play and their family, the Theban myths, the places and the Athenian theater, the terms of Greek tragedy, and the play's later history.

SCENE-BY-SCENE SYNOPSIS

Oedipus the King (Greek title *Oedipus Tyrannus*) is a tragedy by Sophocles, the Athenian dramatist of the fifth century B.C. The play is set in Thebes, where the king, Oedipus, seeks to end a plague by discovering the murderer of Laius, the city's earlier king.

A prologue is the opening scene, and a parodos is the entrance song of the Chorus. An episode is a spoken scene between choral songs. A stasimon is a choral ode sung between episodes, and a kommos is a lyric lament shared between the Chorus and one or more actors. The exodos is the final scene. The Chorus consists of Theban elders.

PROLOGUE (1-150)

Oedipus, king of Thebes, comes out to find a crowd of suppliants holding wreathed branches, and asks why they have come. The Priest of Zeus speaks for them. He describes a plague in which the crops, the herds and the births of women are blighted, and a fiery pestilence ravages the town. He recalls that Oedipus once freed the city from the tribute it paid to the "hard songstress," the Sphinx, and asks him to find relief again. Oedipus answers that he grieves for the city as well as for himself. He has already sent Creon, son of Menoeceus and brother of Oedipus's wife, to the Pythian house of Phoebus, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, to learn how the town may be delivered.

Creon arrives crowned with bay and reports the god's reply. The land is harbouring a defiling thing, and Laius's murderers must be banished or punished with bloodshed. Laius was king before Oedipus, and Oedipus knows of him only by hearsay. In answer to Oedipus's questions, Creon says that Laius left Thebes on a visit to Delphi and never returned. All his companions died except one, who fled and reported that robbers attacked in force. No avenger arose at the time, because the riddling Sphinx occupied the city's attention. Oedipus declares that he will begin the inquiry afresh and that in avenging Laius he serves himself, since the murderer might turn on him too. He tells the suppliants to rise and orders the people of Thebes to be summoned. The Priest and the suppliants rise, and the Priest prays that Phoebus will come as their saviour.

PARODOS (151–215)

The Chorus, the elders of Thebes, sings the entrance song. It asks in fear what the oracle from Pytho (Delphi) will bring. It then calls on Athena, on Artemis, who sits enthroned above the Agora, and on Phoebus to help the city. It describes the plague: the earth bears no fruit, women do not come through the pangs of childbirth, and the dead lie on the ground unpitied, with none to mourn, while women lament at the altars. The Chorus prays that the god of death may be driven from the land, and it calls on Zeus to strike him with his thunderbolt. It also invokes Lycean Apollo, Artemis, and Bacchus, whom it names as the god of the land, as allies against him.

FIRST EPISODE (216–462)

Oedipus proclaims to the Thebans that anyone who knows who killed Laius, son of Labdacus, must declare it. A self-accuser is promised exile without other punishment, and an informant is promised a reward. He forbids anyone in the land to shelter the murderer or share prayer or sacrifice with him, and he pronounces a curse on the slayer and on himself should the slayer be admitted to his house. He adds that he holds the throne and the wife once Laius's. The Chorus answers that it neither killed Laius nor can name the killer, and it suggests the seer Teiresias. Oedipus says he has twice sent for him at Creon's suggestion. Teiresias, blind, is led in by a Boy.

Teiresias at first refuses to speak and asks to go home. Provoked by Oedipus's anger and by his charge that the seer helped plot the deed, he says that Oedipus is the slayer and that he is living in unguessed shame with his nearest kin. Oedipus suspects that Creon has suborned him, and he taunts the seer with his blindness and with his failure to answer the Sphinx's riddle. Teiresias replies that Oedipus sees yet does not see his misery. He foretells that the curse of his mother and father will drive him from the land, that he will be found to be a native Theban, and that he will be revealed as brother and father of his children and as son and husband of the woman who bore him. Teiresias is led out by the Boy, and Oedipus enters the palace.

FIRST STASIMON (463–512)

The Chorus sings of the unknown man whom the Delphic oracle has marked as the doer of unspeakable deeds. It says that he must flee, pursued by Apollo and the Fates, and that he wanders in the wilds, unable to escape the doom spoken at the earth's central shrine. The Chorus is troubled by the seer's words. It can neither approve nor deny them and does not know what to say. It has never heard of any quarrel between the house of Labdacus and Oedipus, son of Polybus, that could

serve as proof against Oedipus. It says that it will not assent to blame of Oedipus until the charge is proved, recalling that he was tested by the winged maiden, the Sphinx, and served the city well.

SECOND EPISODE (513–862)

Creon comes indignant at the rumour that he has brought false charges against Oedipus. Oedipus returns from the palace and accuses him of plotting to take the throne, and of suborning the seer. Creon argues that he has no wish to be king, since he already has the benefits of power without its burdens, and he offers to be tested by an inquiry at Pytho. Oedipus answers that he must act quickly against a plotter, and he says he desires Creon's death, not his banishment. Iocasta, the wife of Oedipus and the widow of Laius, comes from the palace and rebukes both men for quarrelling while the land is sick. In the First Kommos (649–697) the Chorus urges Oedipus to spare Creon, who has bound himself with an oath. Oedipus yields, saying that he does so for the Chorus's sake and Iocasta's, and Creon departs.

Iocasta asks what has happened, and Oedipus says that Creon, through Teiresias, charges him with the blood of Laius. She tells him that seers cannot foresee. An oracle told Laius that he would die at the hand of his child by her, but the child was exposed on a mountain when only days old, and Laius was killed by robbers at a place where three roads meet. Oedipus, disturbed, questions her about the place, the time, and Laius's appearance and following. She replies that it was in Phocis, where roads lead from Delphi and Daulia, and that it happened shortly before he took power in Thebes. Laius was tall and grey-haired, and five men were with him, including a herald, with one carriage. A servant, the sole survivor, asked to be sent to the pastures when he found Oedipus reigning. Oedipus then tells her that his father is Polybus of Corinth and his mother Merope, a Dorian. A drunken man at a banquet said he was not his father's true son. His parents were angry at the taunt, but he went to Delphi and was told that he would defile his mother's bed and kill his father. He fled from Corinth. At a place where three roads meet he was pushed aside by a herald and an old man in a carriage, and he killed the old man and his company. His one hope is that the survivor will say that robbers, not one man, killed Laius. Iocasta says the survivor cannot retract what the city heard, and she agrees to send for him.

SECOND STASIMON (863–910)

The Chorus prays to keep a reverent purity in word and deed, in obedience to the laws that Olympus fathered. It says that insolence breeds the tyrant and that the proud man who does not

fear Justice or revere the images of the gods deserves an evil doom. It says that it will no longer visit the sacred shrines, at Delphi, Abae and Olympia, if the oracles do not come true. It appeals to Zeus, observing that the old prophecies about Laius are fading, that men are setting them at naught, and that worship of the gods is perishing.

THIRD EPISODE (911–1085)

Iocasta comes with a wreathed branch and incense to pray to Lycean Apollo, because Oedipus is overwrought with fears. A messenger from Corinth arrives and asks for the house of Oedipus. He reports that Polybus is dead and that the Corinthians will make Oedipus their king. Iocasta sends for Oedipus, who comes out and hears the news. He is relieved that the oracle has not been fulfilled, since Polybus has died a natural death, but he still fears the prophecy of marriage with his mother while Merope lives. To ease this fear the messenger tells him that Polybus was not his father. He himself had received the infant from a shepherd of the household of Laius, and he had found the child's ankles pinned together, which is the origin of Oedipus's name.

Oedipus asks who the shepherd was, and the Chorus says that he is the peasant whom Oedipus had already sent for. Iocasta, who has understood, implores Oedipus to give up the search, and then leaves with the cry that this is the only word she can say to him. Oedipus, undeterred, says that he must learn his origin, however humble it may prove.

THIRD STASIMON (1086–1109)

The Chorus sings that, if it is a seer, Mount Cithaeron will be honoured at the next full moon as Oedipus's native place, nurse and mother. It asks who bore Oedipus: it names the mountain-roaming Pan, Loxias (Apollo), Cyllene's lord, and the god of the Bacchants as possible fathers, each with one of the nymphs of the mountains.

FOURTH EPISODE (1110–1185)

The herdsman is brought in. The Chorus confirms that he was a servant of Laius, and the Corinthian identifies him as the man he means. The herdsman says he was born in Laius's house and tended flocks around Cithaeron. The Corinthian reminds him that they pastured their flocks together there for three half-years and asks whether he once gave him a boy to rear. The herdsman tells him to be silent, but Oedipus orders him bound, and he admits that he gave the child away.

Pressed further, the herdsman says that the child was said to be the son of Laius and that Iocasta could best explain it. She gave the child to him to make away with it, out of fear of prophecies that he would kill his father. He gave the child to the Corinthian out of pity. Oedipus cries out that everything has come true, that he is accursed in birth, in wedlock and in bloodshed, and he rushes into the palace.

FOURTH STASIMON (1186–1222)

The Chorus laments the brevity of human happiness and takes Oedipus's fate as a warning to call no mortal blessed. It recalls that Oedipus slew the crooked-taloned maiden of the riddle, became a tower of defense for the land and was honored as king. It now asks whose story is more grievous. Time has found him out, and the same place sufficed for father and child. The Chorus wishes that it had never seen him, and says that he once gave it new life.

EXODOS (1223–1530)

A Second Messenger announces that Iocasta is dead by her own hand. She rushed to her chamber, called on Laius, and lamented her marriage. Oedipus burst in, asking for a sword and for the wife who was no wife, and he forced the doors. Iocasta was hanging by the neck. Oedipus loosed the cord, took the golden brooches from her dress, and struck his own eyeballs with them, saying that they would no longer see what he suffered and did. The messenger adds that Oedipus asks that the gates be opened so that he may show the Cadmeans his father's slayer, and that he intends to cast himself out of the land. Oedipus is then led in.

The Second Kommos (1297–1368) follows. The Chorus is horrified, and Oedipus laments and says that Apollo brought his woes to pass but that his own hand struck the eyes. He asks to be led from the land, and he curses the man who freed him from the shackles on his feet in the pastures. The Chorus says it would be better for him to be dead than living and blind. Oedipus defends the deed. He says he could not have faced his father and mother among the dead or looked upon his children, the city, or the statues of the gods, and he apostrophizes Cithaeron, Corinth and the three roads. He asks to be hidden away, killed, or thrown into the sea.

Creon enters and tells his attendants to take Oedipus into the house, so that only kinsmen see a kinsman's woes. Oedipus asks to be cast out of the land, but Creon says he first wishes to learn the god's will. Oedipus asks that Iocasta receive burial and that he himself may live on Cithaeron. He commends his daughters to Creon and says his sons can look after themselves. Creon has the

daughters, Antigone and Ismene, led in. Oedipus weeps for them, thinks of the life they face, and asks Creon to promise by the touch of his hand that he will protect them. Creon tells him to go into the house, and Oedipus obeys, asking to be sent beyond the land; Creon says this is for the god to give. When Oedipus asks not to have his children taken from him, Creon tells him not to try to be master in all things, since the mastery he won has not followed him through life. In the closing lines the Chorus tells the Thebans to look at Oedipus, who solved the famed riddle and was once envied, and says that no mortal should be called happy until he has crossed the border of life free from pain.

CHARACTERS AND NAMES

The persons of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (*Oedipus Tyrannus*) and the figures named in it, with the gods the characters call on.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

OEDIPUS

I, 58, 1182

Oedipus is the king of Thebes and the central figure of the play. He addresses the suppliants in the opening speech and describes himself as renowned of all. According to the Thebans he freed the city from the Sphinx by solving her riddle. In the play he learns that he is the son of Laius and Iocasta, that he killed Laius, and that he married his own mother. He puts out his own eyes. As an infant he was exposed on Mount Cithaeron with his ankles pinned together, and the Corinthian messenger says his name comes from that injury.

PRIEST OF ZEUS

14, 78, 147

The Priest of Zeus is an elderly man who speaks for the suppliants at the altars. He describes the blight on crops, herds and births, and the plague. He asks Oedipus to find help for the city, and he announces the approach of Creon.

THE SUPPLIANTS

I, 143

The suppliants are a silent group of priests, young men and children who sit at the altars with wreathed branches. Oedipus addresses them as his children, and later tells them to rise and take up the boughs.

CREON

70, 85, 513

Creon is the brother of Iocasta and so the brother-in-law of Oedipus. Oedipus calls him the son of Menoeceus. He brings back from Delphi the oracle that the killer of Laius must be driven out. Oedipus later accuses him of conspiring with Teiresias to seize the throne, and Creon denies it. At the end of the play he is left to guard the land and takes charge of Oedipus and his daughters.

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS

151, 276, 463

The Chorus consists of elders of Thebes. It sings the entrance song and the four stasima, and speaks with Oedipus in the episodes. It defends Oedipus against the seer's charge and urges him to spare Creon.

TEIRESIAS**284, 297, 316**

Teiresias is the blind seer of Thebes. The Chorus proposes him as the seer most like Phoebus, and Oedipus has sent for him at Creon's suggestion. He is led in by a Boy. At first he refuses to speak, and when Oedipus taunts him he says that Oedipus is the slayer of Laius. He also says that Oedipus lives in shame with his nearest kin.

IOCASTA**631, 634, 707**

Iocasta is the queen of Thebes, the widow of Laius and the wife of Oedipus. She stops the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon. She tells Oedipus of the oracle given to Laius and of the exposure of their child, and offers this as proof that seers cannot foretell the future. When the truth emerges she begs Oedipus to stop his search and leaves the stage. A messenger later reports that she has hanged herself. Homer's *Odyssey* calls the mother of Oedipus Epicaste.

MESSENGER FROM CORINTH**924, 1016, 1022**

The messenger from Corinth is an old man who arrives to report that Polybus is dead. He also says that the people will make Oedipus king. He tells Oedipus that Polybus was not his father, and that he himself received the infant from a Theban herdsman on Cithaeron and brought him to Polybus. He identifies the herdsman in the fourth episode.

HERDSMAN OF LAÏUS**1123, 1167**

The herdsman is a slave reared in the house of Laius who tended flocks on Cithaeron. He is brought in at the request of Oedipus and admits that he gave the child to the Corinthian. He says the child was said to be the son of Laius and that Iocasta gave it to him to be destroyed. He is also the one survivor of the attack on Laius.

SECOND MESSENGER**1223, 1234**

The second messenger comes from the house and reports that Iocasta has hanged herself. He also reports that Oedipus, finding her dead, struck his own eyes with the golden brooches from her dress.

ANTIGONE AND ISMENE**1478**

Antigone and Ismene are the young daughters of Oedipus and Iocasta. They are silent characters, brought in at the end. Oedipus speaks to them and asks Creon to care for them.

ATTENDANTS AND THE BOY**297, 444, 1422**

The Boy leads the blind Teiresias in and out. Creon's attendants lead the children to Oedipus and are addressed by Creon in the last scene. They do not speak.

NAMED IN THE PLAY

LAÏUS

103, 224, 713

Laïus was king of Thebes before Oedipus and was the husband of Iocasta. Creon names him in the prologue as the man whose killers the oracle bids the Thebans find. According to Iocasta, an oracle told him that he would die by the hand of his own child. She says that he pinned the infant's ankles and had it thrown on a mountain. The Thebans believed that robbers killed him at a place where three roads meet. Oedipus learns that he himself killed Laïus.

POLYBUS

490, 774, 941

Polybus is the king of Corinth, whom Oedipus believes to be his father. He is described as the son's supposed father in the story that Oedipus tells to Iocasta. The Corinthian messenger reports his death of old age. The messenger also says that Polybus had received Oedipus as a gift and had no blood tie to him. In the play the Theban herdsman gave the child to the Corinthian, and Polybus, being childless, reared it as his own.

MEROPE

775, 990

Merope is the wife of Polybus. Oedipus calls her the Dorian Merope and names her as his mother. After the death of Polybus he still fears the prophecy because she is alive.

LABDACUS

224, 267, 489

Labdacus is the father of Laïus and an ancestor of the royal house of Thebes. Oedipus names Laïus as the son of Labdacus in his proclamation. The Chorus also speaks of the house of Labdacus. Standard reference works give him as the son of Polydorus.

POLYDORUS

267

Polydorus is an early king of Thebes. In the proclamation Oedipus names him among the ancestors of Laïus, after Labdacus. Standard reference works give him as the son of Cadmus.

CADMUS

1, 267

Cadmus is the legendary founder of Thebes. Oedipus addresses the Thebans as the latest-born of Cadmus, and the people are called Cadmeans in the play. Standard reference works give him as the son of Agenor.

AGENOR

268

Agenor is a legendary king, remembered in the play as the ancestor named at the end of the list of the royal line. He is called Agenor who was of old. Standard reference works give him as the father of Cadmus.

MENOECEUS

69, 85, 1503

Menoeceus is the father of Creon. Oedipus speaks of Creon as the son of Menoeceus in the prologue and again in the final scene. Iocasta is Creon's sister, and Euripides' *Phoenissae* makes her a daughter of Menoeceus.

THE SPHINX

36, 130, 391

The Sphinx is a monster who afflicted Thebes before Oedipus arrived. The Priest calls her the hard songstress, and Creon the riddling Sphinx. Oedipus says that he solved her riddle. Apollodorus gives her a woman's face, a lion's breast, feet and tail, and a bird's wings, and says that Hera sent her. The answer to her riddle was "man."

OTHER PERSONS ALLUDED TO

118, 761, 779

The play refers to persons without giving names. These include the slave who was the sole survivor of Laius's company, the attendant sent to the fields, and the drunken man at Corinth who taunted Oedipus about his birth.

THE GODS

ZEUS

151, 202, 738

Zeus is the chief of the gods. The Chorus addresses him as Zeus our father and asks him to strike the plague god with his thunderbolt. The Priest is his priest. Oedipus calls on him after Iocasta mentions the place where three roads meet.

APOLLO (PHOEBUS, LOXIAS)

80, 96, 149, 410

Apollo is the god of the oracle at Delphi. The play also calls him Phoebus, Loxias, Lycean King and Delian healer. The oracle he gives commands the Thebans to punish the killer of Laius. Teiresias serves him, and Oedipus attributes his own sufferings to him.

ATHENA (PALLAS)

20, 159

Athena is called Pallas in the Priest's speech, where two shrines of Pallas are mentioned in Thebes. The Chorus invokes her as the daughter of Zeus.

ARTEMIS

161, 206

Artemis is the sister of Apollo. The Chorus invokes her as guardian of the land, seated above the Agora, and speaks of her fires in the Lycian hills.

BACCHUS (DIONYSUS)**211**

Bacchus is invoked by the Chorus as the god named for Thebes, the comrade of the Maenads, who carries a blazing torch. The Chorus asks him to help against the god who is unhonoured among gods.

HADES**30, 972**

Hades is the god of the dead and the name of the underworld. The Priest says that Hades grows rich in groans and tears from the plague, and Oedipus says that Polybus has taken the oracles with him to Hades.

PAN, HERMES AND THE NYMPHS OF HELICON**1100, 1104, 1109**

The Chorus wonders in the third stasimon which god fathered Oedipus. It names Pan, the mountain-roaming father, and Cyllene's lord, who is Hermes. It also names the Bacchants' god and the Nymphs of Helicon. Cithaeron is addressed as the mountain where the child was found.

AMPHITRITE, THE FATES AND THE SUN**194, 472, 660**

Amphitrite is the sea goddess, and the Chorus asks that the plague be carried to her waters. The Fates are described as unerring and are said to accompany the son of Zeus against the murderer. The Chorus swears by the Sun, called the foremost of the heavenly host, and Creon later asks that the light of the Sun be respected.

THE HOUSE OF LAÏUS

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the royal house of Thebes descends from Cadmus, the founder of the city, through Polydorus, Labdacus and Laïus to Oedipus. The play names the four ancestors in Oedipus's proclamation against the slayer of Laïus, and it names Creon as the son of Menoeceus. Other members of the family appear in the play unnamed or in stage directions only. Oedipus was reared at Corinth by Polybus and Merope. Iocasta, his mother and wife, was the sister of Creon. Hesiod, Homer, Apollodorus, Pausanias, the *Oedipodeia*, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles' own *Antigone* add names and offer differing versions of the mother's name, the mother of Oedipus's children and the fate of the house.

THE LINE OF CADMUS

Oedipus names four forebears of Laïus in reverse order: Laïus is the son of Labdacus, and Labdacus's line runs back through Polydorus and Cadmus to Agenor.

AGENOR

Agenor is the earliest ancestor named in the play, where Oedipus swears to act for the honour of Laïus, Labdacus, Polydorus, elder Cadmus and "Agenor who was of old" (267–268). The play does not state how Agenor is related to Cadmus. The *Library* attributed to Apollodorus makes Agenor a son of Libya and Poseidon, who settled in Phoenicia, married Telephassa and had a daughter Europa and three sons, Cadmus, Phoenix and Cilix. It says he sent his sons to search for Europa.

CADMUS

Oedipus opens the play by addressing the suppliants as "latest-born to Cadmus" (1), and the Thebans are called Cadmeans throughout. According to Apollodorus, Cadmus came to Delphi while searching for Europa and was told to follow a cow and found a city where she lay down. That city was Thebes, and he married Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite. Pausanias says Cadmus built the Cadmeia, later the citadel of Thebes. Hesiod's *Theogony* says Harmonia bore Cadmus four daughters, Ino, Semele, Agave and Autonoe, and a son Polydorus. Apollodorus and Pausanias agree that Cadmus later went to the Encheleans in Illyria.

POLYDORUS

Polydorus is named once in the play, as one of the forebears in Oedipus's oath. Hesiod's *Theogony* places his birth "in rich-crowned Thebes". Apollodorus makes him the son of Cadmus, who married Nycteis, daughter of Nycteus, and fathered Labdacus. Pausanias says he received the kingdom when Cadmus left for Illyria and that he entrusted the child Labdacus and the government to Nycteus at his death.

LABDACUS

The play calls Laius "son of Labdacus" (224) and names the palace family "the house of Labdacus" (1223–1231). Apollodorus says Labdacus died after Pentheus, leaving a one-year-old son, Laius, and that Lycus, brother of Nycteus, usurped the government. Pausanias gives a different account, in which Lycus handed the government to Labdacus when he grew up, but Labdacus died soon afterwards and Lycus again became guardian, this time of Laius.

LAÏUS

Laius was lord of Thebes before Oedipus. Iocasta reports that an oracle told him he would die by the hand of a child born of himself and her, that the child was exposed on a trackless mountain with its ankles pinned together when three days old, and that Laius was said to have been killed by foreign robbers where three roads meet. She places the spot in Phocis, on roads from Delphi and Daulia, and says his party numbered five, including a herald, with one carriage. Apollodorus says Laius was driven from Thebes as a child by Amphion and Zethus and was received by Pelops, whose son Chrysippus he carried off. He later returned, married a daughter of Menoeceus, and disregarded an oracle not to beget a child. Pausanias also has Laius removed in childhood and restored after the deaths of Amphion and Zethus. In Euripides' *Phoenissae* the oracle warns that a son would kill him and that all the house would wade through blood. Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* says Apollo had told Laius three times that he would save the city if he died childless.

OEDIPUS

The play presents Oedipus as king by reputation for having saved the city from the Sphinx. Laius had died long before, and the years since are said to run "far into the past" (558–561). Oedipus holds the throne, the bed and the wife of Laius. He tells Iocasta that he was reared in Corinth as the son of Polybus and Merope, fled after Apollo's oracle at Delphi, and killed a man at the three roads. The Corinthian messenger says a herdsman of Laius gave him the infant on Cithaeron and that the ankles bore the mark from which the name came. Teiresias foretells that Oedipus will be found "brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him" (447–462). After the discovery he blinds himself and asks to be cast out or left on Cithaeron. Apollodorus agrees that the name comes from his swollen feet and names his foster mother Periboea. He adds that Oedipus killed Laius and the herald Polyphontes, and that Oedipus, blinded and driven out, came with Antigone to Colonus in Attica, where Theseus received him. The *Iliad* has Mecisteus come to Thebes for the funeral games after the fall of Oedipus, which places his death and burial at Thebes.

ETEOCLES

The play does not name Eteocles. Oedipus speaks of his sons only as men who need no care, and asks Creon to look after his daughters. Euripides' *Phoenissae* names Eteocles and Polyneices as sons of Iocasta and Oedipus. Apollodorus reports that the brothers agreed to rule in alternate years and that accounts differ on which ruled first. Euripides' *Phoenissae* has Eteocles refuse to give up the throne. Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Apollodorus have the brothers kill each other. Pindar's second *Olympian* ode says the Fury slew Oedipus's sons, each by the other's hand. Pausanias adds that Laodamas, son of Eteocles, became king, with Creon as regent.

POLYNEICES

Polyneices is likewise not named in the play. The *Iliad* refers to his expedition against Thebes. Hesiod's *Works and Days* speaks of heroes who fell at seven-gated Thebes fighting for the flocks of Oedipus. In Pausanias, Polyneices left Thebes while Oedipus was still alive and reigning, in fear that his father's curses would take effect, and married a daughter of Adrastus at Argos. Apollodorus gives his wife as Argia, and Euripides' *Phoenissae* has him lead an Argive force against Thebes. Pausanias says Polyneices's son Thersander was placed on the throne of Thebes by the Argives.

ANTIGONE

Antigone is named in the play only in the stage direction that brings her and Ismene on with Creon near the end of the play. Oedipus addresses them as his daughters and foresees that no man will marry them. In Euripides' *Phoenissae* Iocasta names Antigone the elder of the two daughters. In Sophocles' *Antigone* she speaks to Ismene of "the evils bequeathed by Oedipus". Apollodorus has her accompany Oedipus to Colonus, and later bury Polyneices against Creon's edict and be entombed alive.

ISMENE

Ismene is named only in the stage direction and appears with Antigone in the closing scene. In Sophocles' *Antigone* her sister addresses her as "true child of my own mother". Euripides' *Phoenissae* and Apollodorus list her among the children of Oedipus.

THE FOSTER PARENTS AT CORINTH

Polybus and Merope reared Oedipus as their son, and he believed himself their child until the Corinthian messenger's disclosure.

POLYBUS

Oedipus names Polybus of Corinth as his father. The Corinthian messenger reports that Polybus is dead and that he was "nothing to thee in blood", having received the child as a gift because he was childless. Apollodorus and Euripides' *Phoenissae* both have herdsmen of Polybus find the infant on Cithaeron. In the play a herdsman of Laius hands him to the Corinthian.

MEROPE

Oedipus calls his mother "the Dorian Merope" (775). He fears the oracle about the marriage bed so long as she lives. Apollodorus gives the wife of Polybus as Periboea, and Euripides' *Phoenissae* leaves her unnamed.

THE LINE OF MENOECEUS

Menoceus is named in the play only as the father of Creon, who is Iocasta's brother.

MENOECEUS

The play calls Creon the "son of Menoeceus" (69, 85, 1503). Euripides' *Phoenissae* makes Jocasta a daughter of Menoeceus and Creon her brother, and Apollodorus says Laius married a daughter of Menoeceus. Menoeceus's grandson of the same name, son of Creon, died for the city in the war of the Seven, as Apollodorus and Pausanias report.

IOCASTA

Creon confirms that Oedipus married his sister, and the Chorus calls her "the mother of his children" (927–928). Iocasta recounts the oracle given to Laius, urges Oedipus not to pursue his birth, and hangs herself. The Second Messenger reports her lament for a "twofold brood", "husband by husband, children by her child". In the *Odyssey* the mother of Oedipus is Epicaste, who hangs herself. Apollodorus says some call the wife of Laius Jocasta and some Epicasta. Euripides' *Phoenissae* gives the name Jocasta as her father's choice.

CREON

Creon is Iocasta's brother and Oedipus's brother-in-law. Oedipus sends him to Delphi, and at the end he alone is left to guard the land. Apollodorus says Creon succeeded Laius, proclaimed the kingdom and the wife of Laius as the prize for solving the riddle, and lost his son Haemon to the Sphinx. Euripides' *Phoenissae* also has Creon make the proclamation. Pausanias makes him regent for Laodamas. In Sophocles' *Antigone* he rules after the war.

CHILDREN OF CREON

The play names none of Creon's children. Haemon, betrothed to Antigone in Sophocles' *Antigone*, is listed as Sphinx's victim in Apollodorus and in the *Oedipodeia*, as a scholiast on Euripides' *Phoenissae* quotes it. Sophocles' *Antigone* also refers to a son Megareus who died earlier. The *Odyssey* names Creon's daughter Megara as the wife of Heracles. Menoeceus, son of Creon, gives his life for Thebes in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Apollodorus and Pausanias.

WHERE THE SOURCES DIFFER

The mother of Oedipus is Epicaste in the *Odyssey*, Jocasta or Epicasta in Apollodorus, and Jocasta in the play and in Euripides. The *Odyssey* says the gods made the marriage known soon after it took place, and Pausanias concludes from this that Epicaste bore Oedipus no children. He says the children's mother was Euryganeia, daughter of Hyperphas, and names the *Oedipodeia* and a painting by Onasias at Plataea as evidence. The *Oedipodeia*, as Pausanias cites it, gives the same account. Apollodorus has Jocasta bear the four children but adds that "some say" Eurygania, daughter of Hyperphas, bore them. In the play Iocasta is their mother, as in Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

Another ancient account has Iocasta bear two sons, who were killed by the Minyae, and Euryganeia bear the other four.

The sources also differ on where Oedipus died and on how the child was reared. The *Iliad* places his burial at Thebes, Apollodorus has him die at Colonus, and in the play he asks to live on

Cithaeron. On rearing, Apollodorus and Euripides' *Phoenissae* have Polybus's herdsmen find the child, whereas the play has a herdsman of Laius give him to the Corinthian. Apollodorus and Pausanias also disagree on whether Labdacus ever reigned.

THE THEBAN MYTHS

The Theban myths are the Greek stories of the royal house of Thebes, a city in Boeotia. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* dramatizes only the last day of one part of that history. The story extends back to the founding of the city by Cadmus and forward through the exile of Oedipus, the war of his sons and the burial of Polyneices.

The ancient sources agree on the main line: an oracle, an exposed child, a killing on a road, a riddle-monster, a marriage with a mother, and a later curse on the sons. They differ on the details. Those include who bore the children of Oedipus, where the child was found, how the discovery came, and how Oedipus died.

CADMUS AND THE FOUNDING OF THEBES

Cadmus, a Phoenician prince, is the founder in Greek tradition. Pausanias reports that his Phoenician army defeated the earlier Hyantes and Aones in Boeotia. He built the city later called the Cadmeia, which became the citadel of the lower city of Thebes. Apollodorus' *Library*, a mythographic handbook, adds that Cadmus went to Delphi to ask about his sister Europa. The god told him to follow a cow and found a city where she lay down. Cadmus killed a dragon that guarded the spring of Ares and sowed its teeth on Athena's advice. The armed men who sprang up, the Sparti ("sown men"), fought one another until five were left: Echion, Udaeus, Chthonius, Hyperenor and Pelorus. Apollodorus has Cadmus marry Harmonia, daughter of Aphrodite and Ares, and name a son Polydorus among his children.

The play preserves this ancestry. Oedipus opens by addressing the Thebans as the "latest-born to Cadmus who was of old" (1–13), and the Priest of Zeus calls Thebes "the town of Cadmus" (14–57). In his proclamation Oedipus names the line of the murdered king as the son of Labdacus, of Polydorus, of Cadmus and of Agenor. Pausanias gives the succession from Cadmus to Polydorus and then Labdacus. Labdacus died leaving Laius a child, and the regency passed to Nycteus and then to Lycus. According to Apollodorus, Amphion and Zethus, sons of Antiope, killed Lycus, fortified the city and drove out the young Laius. Laius was received by Pelops in the Peloponnese, where he taught Pelops' son Chrysippus to drive a chariot and carried him off. Pausanias says instead that Laius was restored by the Thebans after the deaths of Zethus and Amphion's house.

Every ancient source that tells the story has an oracle warning Laius that a son would kill him. In the play Iocasta reports that it came “not from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers” (707–725). She says it declared that Laius would die by the hand of his child, and that the child’s ankles were pinned together and the child thrown on a trackless mountain when it was not three days old. The Corinthian messenger names the place as Cithaeron. The Theban herdsman says Iocasta herself gave him the child to destroy, from fear of the prophecy, and that he handed it over through pity. Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes* has Apollo tell Laius three times that he would save the city if he died childless. Euripides’ *Phoenissae* has the god tell Laius not to sow a furrow of children, and has Laius beget the child in a drunken fit. Apollodorus also has Laius disobey the oracle while flushed with wine. He pierces the child’s ankles with brooches and gives it to a herdsman.

The sources differ on who reared the child. In the play a Theban shepherd gave the infant to a Corinthian shepherd, who gave him to Polybus, and Polybus and Merope reared him. In the *Phoenissae* the horsemen of Polybus themselves find the child and bring it to their mistress. In Apollodorus the neatherds of Polybus find him and bring him to Periboea, who passes him off as her own. Merope in the play corresponds to this Periboea. All three account for the name from the swollen feet. In the play the Corinthian ties the name to the pinned ankles, and Apollodorus derives it from the swelling. Pausanias lists Oedipus’ misfortunes by place. The ankles were pierced at his birth and he was exposed on Cithaeron, in Plataean territory. Corinth and the Isthmus were the scene of his upbringing, and Phocis received the blood of his father.

The killing of Laius is told in the play by Oedipus himself. A man at a Corinthian banquet said he was not his father’s true son. He went to Delphi and was told that he would defile his mother’s bed and kill his father. He then left Corinth, and at the meeting of three roads a herald and an old man in a carriage tried to thrust him aside. He struck the driver, the old man struck him on the head with a goad, and Oedipus threw the old man from the carriage. He says he slew every man of them. Iocasta adds that the place is in Phocis, where roads lead from Delphi and from Daulia, and that there were five in Laius’ party. In the play Creon says only that Laius went to Delphi “as he said” (114–115). In the *Phoenissae* Laius is seeking to learn whether the exposed child is dead, and Oedipus is going to Delphi to learn who his parents are. Apollodorus names the herald Polyphontes and has Oedipus kill him and Laius. Pausanias describes the Cleft Road and says the graves of Laius and his servant lay at the meeting of the three roads. In his account Damasistratus, king of Plataea, found the bodies and buried them.

THE SPHINX AND HER RIDDLE

The Sphinx is a monster who plagued Thebes after the death of Laius. Hesiod's *Theogony* says Echidna bore “the deadly Sphinx which destroyed the Cadmeans.” Apollodorus makes Echidna and Typhon her parents, and gives her a woman's face, a lion's breast, feet and tail, and a bird's wings. He adds that she learned her riddle from the Muses and sat on Mount Phicium. A prophecy said the Thebans would be rid of her when they solved it, and she carried off one of them each time they failed. When Creon's son Haemon was among the dead, Creon offered the kingdom and the wife of Laius to whoever solved it. Oedipus answered that it was man, and the Sphinx threw herself from the citadel.

Pausanias records two other accounts. In one she was a pirate who seized the mountain from Anthedon. In the other she was a natural daughter of Laius who knew an oracle given to Cadmus and killed any claimant who could not repeat it. Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* gives the riddle as quoted from Asclepiades in the wording of an animal with two feet, four feet and three, and a single voice. It is weakest when it has the most feet. Apollodorus words it as one voice and four, two and three feet.

The play refers to the Sphinx repeatedly but never gives the riddle. She is “the hard songstress” (14–57), “the riddling Sphinx” who diverted the Thebans from the murder, “the Watcher” who “wove dark song” (380–403), and the “maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly” (1186–1222). Oedipus claims to have answered her by his own wit, “untaught of birds” (380–403). In the play the city gives him the throne as “a gift unsought” (380–403), and the play does not say how the marriage was arranged. In the *Phoenissae* Creon proclaims that whoever solves the riddle will marry Iocasta.

THE EVENTS OF THE PLAY

The play opens with a plague on Thebes. Creon returns from Delphi with the god's command to drive out or avenge the blood of Laius. Oedipus curses the unknown killer. Teiresias, the blind seer, at first refuses to speak, then names Oedipus as the killer and says he lives in unguessed shame with his nearest kin. Oedipus accuses Creon of a plot, and Iocasta stops the quarrel. In telling of the oracle to Laius she mentions the crossroads, and this alarms Oedipus, who sends for the surviving servant. A messenger from Corinth reports the death of Polybus and then says that Polybus was not Oedipus' father. Iocasta begs Oedipus to stop, and goes into the palace. The Theban herdsman

is forced to say that the child came from the house of Laïus, and Oedipus cries out that all is true. A second messenger reports that Iocasta has hanged herself and that Oedipus has struck his own eyes with the golden brooches from her dress. Oedipus, blind, asks to be sent out of the land. Creon replies that the god must first be consulted, and lets him take leave of his daughters. The Chorus ends by saying that no mortal should be called happy before he has crossed life's border free from pain.

OEDIPUS AFTERWARDS: OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

The play ends with Oedipus' fate undecided. He asks to live on Cithaeron, the mountain his parents had set for his tomb, and says his sons can look after themselves. Creon says the god must decide. Apollodorus has Iocasta hang herself and Oedipus, after blinding himself and cursing his sons, be driven out. His sons watched him go without helping him. He came with Antigone to Colonus in Attica, where the precinct of the Eumenides stands. He was received by Theseus and died soon after. In the *Phoenissae* Creon expels him from Thebes after the brothers' deaths, citing Teiresias' statement that the city would not prosper while he lived there.

Sophocles' own later treatment, *Oedipus at Colonus*, was produced after his death, in 401 B.C. The tradition of his death in Attica is not the only one. Homer's *Iliad* has Mecisteus come to Thebes for Oedipus' funeral games "when he had fallen," and Pausanias rejects the account in Sophocles' play on that ground. He reports a monument to Oedipus at Athens, whose bones he says were brought from Thebes.

THE WAR OF THE SONS AND ANTIGONE

The ancient sources agree that the sons of Oedipus quarrelled over the kingdom, and Homer already knows a war of Polyneices and his allies against Thebes in the *Iliad*. Hesiod's *Works and Days* has heroes fall at seven-gated Thebes "when they fought for the flocks of Oedipus."

Apollodorus and Euripides' *Phoenissae* agree that the brothers agreed to rule in turn. The two accounts differ on what followed. Apollodorus says some report that Polyneices ruled first, others that Eteocles did. In the *Phoenissae* Polyneices leaves first and Eteocles then refuses to yield.

Polyneices went to Argos, married a daughter of Adrastus, and gathered an army led by seven champions, as Apollodorus tells it. Pausanias has Polyneices leave Thebes while Oedipus still lived, fearing his father's curses, and return after Oedipus' death.

In Apollodorus and Pausanias the brothers kill each other in single combat, and the attackers are defeated. Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* attributes their end to the Erinyes and the curses Oedipus spoke in madness. In Pindar's second *Olympian* ode the Erinyes kills them in retribution for the parricide. The Cyclic *Thebaid*, in a fragment quoted by Athenaeus, makes the curse follow a slight at table, and the *Phoenissae* says the sons shut their father away and he cursed them. The play itself does not mention such a curse. Oedipus there says only that his sons are men and can provide for themselves.

Creon then ruled Thebes. In Apollodorus he forbade burial of the Argive dead. Antigone buried Polyneices, was discovered by Creon and was shut alive in a grave, and the Athenians under Theseus later took Thebes to recover the dead. Sophocles' *Antigone*, produced before *Oedipus the King*, is the best-known dramatization of this episode.

EARLIER VERSIONS OF THE STORY

The earliest sources for Oedipus are the Homeric poems, and the tragedians drew on lost epics and on early prose writers as well.

HOMER

In the *Iliad* Euryalus' father Mecisteus went to Thebes "for the burial of Oedipus, when he had fallen." The poem does not say how Oedipus died, and it is the earliest reference to his death. The *Odyssey* gives the earliest outline of the story. Odysseus sees "the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicaste," who "wrought a dreadful deed unwittingly" by marrying her son after he had killed his father. The gods soon made the matter known, but Oedipus went on ruling the Cadmeans in Thebes "suffering woes," while she hanged herself. The passage says nothing of the Sphinx, of the self-blinding or of exile. It also leaves out children born of the marriage, and Pausanias argues from "forthwith" that Epicaste bore Oedipus none. The name Epicaste differs from Sophocles' Iocasta, though Apollodorus says some give Epicasta.

HESIOD

Hesiod's *Works and Days* refers to the war at Thebes, in which heroes died "fighting for the flocks of Oedipus." The *Theogony* makes the Sphinx the offspring of Echidna. The surviving poems do not tell the story of Oedipus.

THE OEDIPODEIA

This lost epic, the *Oedipodeia* or “Story of Oedipus,” is cited by Pausanias for the statement that the children of Oedipus were borne by Euryganeia, daughter of Hyperphas, and not by Iocasta. Pausanias adds that Onasias painted Euryganeia grieving for the fight between her sons at Plataea. An inscription ascribes the poem to Cinaethon in 6,600 verses. Pausanias does not name an author. A scholiast on Euripides quotes the poem for the Sphinx killing Haemon, son of Creon. Apollodorus records the same variant of Euryganeia as mother, in agreement with this tradition and against Sophocles.

THE THEBAID

The Cyclic *Thebaid*, an epic on the war of the seven, survives in fragments. In the longest, quoted by Athenaeus, Polyneices sets before Oedipus the silver table and golden cup of Cadmus. Oedipus is grieved by “these treasures of his father” and calls down curses that his sons never divide their inheritance in brotherhood, but have war and fighting. In another, quoted by a scholiast on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, he curses them for sending him a haunch of meat, and prays that each fall by his brother's hand. In both the curse rests on a slight at table and not on the parricide. The Loeb translator lists further fragments on Adrastus and on the death of Parthenopaeus.

THE CYPRIA

Proclus' summary of the *Cypria*, another poem of the Epic Cycle, says that in a digression Nestor told Menelaus the story of Oedipus, the madness of Heracles and the story of Theseus and Ariadne. The summary gives nothing further of the version told.

PINDAR

In *Olympian* 2 Pindar says that the “destined son met and killed Laius, and fulfilled the oracle of Pytho, spoken long before.” The sharp-eyed Erinys saw it and destroyed his warlike sons through mutual slaughter. Polyneices left a son, Thersander, from whom the ode's honorand Theron of Acragas claimed descent by way of the house of Adrastus. The ode connects the fate of the sons directly with the parricide and does not mention a curse spoken by Oedipus.

THE EARLY PROSE MYTHOGRAPHERS

Pherecydes of Athens, writing in the fifth century B.C., is cited by Apollodorus for details of the Theban story: the stones Cadmus threw among the Sparti, the necklace of Harmonia and the blinding of Teiresias by Athena. Another ancient account has Iocasta's two sons by Oedipus killed by the Minyae, and a second wife, Euryganeia, bear the four other children. The reference is second-hand. Apollodorus (*Library*, probably of the first or second century A.D.) collects the Theban story in a single continuous account and notes variants such as Euryganeia.

AESCHYLUS

Aeschylus' Theban trilogy, of which only the *Seven against Thebes* survives, treated the story as an inherited curse. In the *Seven* the Chorus traces the trouble to Laius, who fathered a child against Apollo's warning given three times. It tells of Oedipus honoured after removing the "man-seizing plague" (772–777). It then tells how he grew miserable on learning of his marriage, struck out his eyes with the hand that killed his father, and cursed his sons. The *Seven* also has Oedipus blind himself once he learns the truth.

EURIPIDES

Euripides' *Oedipus* is lost, but the prologue of the *Phoenissae* gives his version of the past. Iocasta speaks it and is alive at the time of the play. The child is found by the horsemen of Polybus. The charioteer of Laius orders the young man aside, and the horses' hooves draw blood from his feet. Creon proclaims the marriage as the prize for solving the riddle. After the blinding the sons shut Oedipus away so that his misfortune might be forgotten, and he curses them. At the end, Creon banishes him. Oedipus there complains of a fate that began before his birth. In these points Euripides differs from Sophocles, whose Oedipus rules Thebes on his own decision, blinds himself and awaits his exile.

ATHENS AND THE THEATER

Sophocles (c. 496–406 B.C.), the Athenian tragic poet, wrote *Oedipus the King* for the Athenian stage, but the action takes place at Thebes, a city of Boeotia in central Greece. The play names places in Boeotia, Phocis, Corinth and the Peloponnese. Some of these were still visited and described in the second century A.D. by the travel writer Pausanias, whose *Description of Greece* is the fullest ancient account of them.

The play was first staged at the City Dionysia, the Athenian festival of Dionysus, in the Theater of Dionysus below the Acropolis. The evidence for its date is indirect. The ancient report of its defeat by Philocles rests on a single scholarly note. Aristotle's *Poetics* supplies the fourth-century account of the actors and of the parts of a tragedy.

PLACES OF THE PLAY

THEBES

A city of Boeotia, the setting of the play. Its people are called the children and folk of Cadmus, the legendary founder. The Priest of Zeus names the marketplaces, the two shrines of Pallas, and the place "where Ismenus gives answer by fire", the oracular sanctuary of Apollo beside the Theban stream Ismenus. The Chorus places Artemis on her throne "above the circle of our Agora" (161). The Sphinx, whose riddle held the city before Oedipus came, is named in the prologue and recalled by Oedipus in his quarrel with Teiresias. Pausanias locates the mountain from which the Sphinx sallied beyond Thebes and gives two accounts of her. In one she is a pirate who landed at Anthedon and was overcome by Oedipus with an army from Corinth. In the other she is a natural daughter of Laius who knew an oracle given to Cadmus. The play does not name the mountain or say where the Sphinx sat.

DELPHI (PYTHO)

The oracle of Apollo in Phocis. The play calls it the Pythian house of Phoebus, golden Pytho, the Delphian rock and "Earth's central shrine" (480). Creon is sent there in the prologue. He reports that Laius left Thebes on a visit to Delphi and did not return. Oedipus says that he went there in secret from his Corinthian parents. Pausanias reports that the oracle was said to have belonged first to Earth, then to Themis, who gave it to Apollo, and he cites the *Eumolpia* on a shared tenure of Earth and Poseidon. He records five temples of Apollo, the last built by the Amphictyons with Spintharus of Corinth as architect. He gives the ascent to Parnassus through Daulis as longer but easier than the ascent from Delphi.

PHOCIS AND THE PLACE WHERE THREE ROADS MEET

Iocasta reports that Laius was killed "where three highways meet" (716). She says that the land is Phocis and that roads to the spot lead from Delphi and from Daulia. Oedipus's account of the encounter follows, and in his final lament he addresses the three roads, the glen and the narrow way. Iocasta says the party was five, with a herald and one carriage. Pausanias calls the place the Cleft Road, the road on which Oedipus killed his father. He reports that the tombs of Laius and of the servant who followed him stood in the middle of the meeting of three roads under piles of unhewn stones, and that Damasistratus, king of Plataea, was said to have buried the bodies. Pausanias speaks of one servant's tomb, whereas the play counts four attendants.

DAULIA

A town of Phocis, named by Iocasta as one of the places from which roads lead to the spot where Laius died. Pausanias gives its name as Daulis and places it twenty-seven stades from Panopeus. He calls its men few but unsurpassed among the Phocians in size and strength. He offers two derivations of the name, from a nymph Daulis and from *daula*, an ancient word for shaggy, wooded ground. He connects the city with the story of Tereus. Strabo gives Daulis as the Homeric form and Daulia as the later one.

CORINTH

The city of the Isthmus, where Polybus was king and Merope queen. Oedipus gives his parentage as Polybus of Corinth and "the Dorian Merope" (774–775) and says that he left Corinth after the Delphic response. The Corinthian messenger announces that the people will make Oedipus king of the "Isthmian land" (939–940). He then reveals that Polybus was not his father. Pausanias names Corinth and the Isthmus as the scene of the upbringing of Oedipus.

MOUNT CITHAERON

The mountain range between Boeotia and Attica, close to Thebes. Teiresias predicts that all Cithaeron will ring with the cries of Oedipus. The Corinthian messenger says that he found the child in "Cithaeron's winding glens" (1026). The Theban herdsman names Cithaeron among his pastures. Their acquaintance covered three half-years there, "from spring to Arcturus" (1133–1139). In the third stasimon the Chorus addresses the mountain as native to Oedipus. In the exodos Oedipus asks why it sheltered him and asks to be allowed to live there, since his parents had set it as his tomb. Pausanias says that Oedipus was exposed on Cithaeron in Plataean territory, with his ankles pierced by goads.

ABAE

A town of Phocis. The Chorus in the second stasimon says it will no more go to "Abae's temple or Olympia" if the oracles are not fulfilled. Pausanias reports that Abae was held sacred to Apollo from of old and had an oracle of the god. The army of Xerxes burned the sanctuary. The Greeks resolved to leave the burnt shrines as memorials, and Rome later gave Abae self-government out of reverence for Apollo.

OLYMPIA

The sanctuary of Zeus in Elis in the Peloponnese, seat of the Olympic Games. It is named with Abae in the second stasimon, where the Chorus links the credit of Apollo's oracles to the reverence paid at such shrines.

OTHER PLACES NAMED

The Chorus calls Apollo the Delian healer, the island of Delos being his birthplace. It prays that the plague god may be driven to the "Thracian wave" (197) and speaks of Artemis in the Lycian hills. In the third stasimon it mentions "Cyllene's lord", Hermes, and the Nymphs of Helicon, the Boeotian mountain of the Muses. The Second Messenger says that neither the Ister (the lower Danube) nor the Phasis (a river of Colchis on the Black Sea) could wash the house of Labdacus clean.

THE FIRST PERFORMANCE

Athenian tragedy was performed in competition at festivals of Dionysus, chiefly the City Dionysia, held in spring. Each of the competing poets presented three tragedies and a satyr play. Pausanias places the oldest sanctuary of Dionysus near the theater, with two temples and statues of Dionysus Eleuthereus. He reports that the Athenians set up statues of poets in the theater, with Euripides and Sophocles named as the two illustrious tragic poets. The stone theater that survives dates largely from the fourth century B.C., after the lifetime of Sophocles.

No ancient source records the year or the festival of the first performance. Many later scholars place it in the 420s B.C., partly because of the plague in the play. The description of the epidemic in Thucydides records the outbreak at Athens in the second year of the war, and the oracular line "A Dorian war shall come and with it death" (2.54.2). Such a link is inference. The description of the plague in the play is brief.

The report of a defeat comes from the prose argument (hypothesis) to the play, which says that Sophocles was defeated by Philocles, on the authority of Dicaearchus. The Dicaearchus concerned is usually identified with the Peripatetic Dicaearchus of Messana, a pupil of Aristotle, active about 300 B.C. Philocles is reported to have been a nephew of Aeschylus and is known from very little of his work. The rhetorician Aristeides remarks that Philocles gained a distinction denied to his uncle. The hypothesis names neither the plays that competed nor the year.

STAGING

Aristotle's *Poetics* reports that Aeschylus raised the number of actors from one to two and that Sophocles introduced the third actor and scene-painting. The play has eight speaking parts besides the Chorus: the Priest of Zeus, Oedipus, Creon, Teiresias, Iocasta, the Corinthian messenger, the herdsman and the Second Messenger. The parts were therefore shared among three actors. The children Antigone and Ismene and the Boy who leads Teiresias are silent figures. The stage directions in the printed translation are editorial.

The action is set before the royal palace, whose doors serve for the exits and entrances. Suppliants with wreathed branches sit at the altars. Oedipus goes into the palace at the end of the first episode, and Iocasta rushes in during the third. Creon comes crowned with bay, and Iocasta carries a wreathed branch and incense. The self-blinding is reported by the Second Messenger. The bars of the doors are then withdrawn, and Oedipus is shown to the Chorus. The children are brought out and heard before they are seen.

The Chorus consists of Theban elders, addressed as "princes of the land" (911) and "elders" (1110). Aristotle's *Poetics* names the parts of a tragedy as prologue, episode, exodos and choral song, the last divided into parodos and stasimon, with the *kommos* as a lament shared by chorus and actors. The play has a parodos, four stasima and two passages of shared lament. Later sources give the number of choristers in tragedy as fifteen.

Actors wore masks. Lucian's *Menippus* refers to the actor laying aside costume and mask after the play. Arrian, quoted in Stobaeus' *Florilegium*, names the actor Polus as playing both Oedipus the King and the beggar Oedipus at Colonus.

KEY TERMS GLOSSARY

Oedipus the King is a tragedy by Sophocles, the Athenian tragic poet of the fifth century BC. It is also known by its Latin title, *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

The technical terms fall into three groups: the formal divisions of a Greek tragedy, the conventions of the Athenian theater, and the religious and legal ideas on which the plot depends. Greek terms are given in transliteration and in italics. Line numbers are those of the Greek text.

PARTS OF A TRAGEDY

The names of the divisions of a Greek tragedy come largely from Aristotle's *Poetics*.

PROLOGUE (*PROLOGOS*)

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the whole part of a tragedy that comes before the first song of the chorus. In *Oedipus the King* it occupies lines 1–150. Oedipus, king of Thebes, addresses a group of suppliants, and the Priest of Zeus describes the plague and the blight on land, herds and women. Creon, whom Oedipus calls his wife's brother, reports Apollo's response from Delphi: a defiling thing must be driven out, and the murderers of Laius, the former king, must be punished. Oedipus then pledges to seek them.

PARODOS

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the first whole utterance of the chorus; the Greek word is *parodos*, "entrance." In *Oedipus the King* it is lines 151–215, sung by the Chorus. It is a lament for the plague and a prayer to the gods. The Chorus calls on Athena, Artemis and Phoebus Apollo, then on Zeus, Apollo again and Artemis, and finally on Bacchus.

EPISODE (*EPEISODION*)

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the whole part of a tragedy that lies between complete choral songs. It is the part in which the actors speak. The play has four episodes: 216–462, 513–862, 911–1085 and 1110–1185. In the first, Oedipus proclaims a curse on the unknown murderer of Laius, and the seer Teiresias finally denounces Oedipus himself. In the second, Creon defends himself, Iocasta, the wife of Oedipus and widow of Laius, ends the quarrel, and Oedipus learns of the place where Laius died. In the third, a messenger from Corinth reports the death of Polybus, the Corinthian king who reared Oedipus, and discloses that Polybus and Merope were not the parents of Oedipus. In the fourth, the Theban herdsman is brought in and the truth is drawn from him.

STASIMON

A choral ode sung after the chorus has entered; the Greek word *stasimon* is literally "stationary (song)." The play has four: 463–512, 863–910, 1086–1109 and 1186–1222. The first forebodes the doom of the unknown murderer while refusing to credit the seer's unproved charge. The second is a prayer against arrogance and impiety. The third foretells that Oedipus will prove a native of the land. The fourth laments the king's fall.

KOMMOS

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, a lament shared by the chorus and the actors; the Greek word is *kommos*. The play has two. The first, at 649–697, lies within the Second Episode, in the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon in which the Chorus and Iocasta also take part. The second, at 1297–1368, lies within the Exodos. It follows the entrance of the self-blinded Oedipus, who laments in exchange with the Chorus.

EXODOS

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the whole part of a tragedy after which there is no further choral song; the Greek word is *exodos*, "exit." In *Oedipus the King* it is lines 1223–1530. A second messenger reports that Iocasta has hanged herself and that Oedipus has struck his own eyes. Oedipus is led out and asks to be sent from the land, and Creon replies that the god must decide. His daughters Antigone and Ismene are brought to him. The Chorus speaks the closing lines, which say that no one of mortal race is to be called happy until he has crossed life's border free from pain.

STROPHE AND ANTISTROPHE (*STROPHĒ*, *ANTISTROPHĒ*)

The Greek words are *strophē*, "turn," and *antistrophē*, "counter-turn." They name the paired stanzas of a choral ode, which correspond to each other in metrical pattern.

THEATER TERMS

Tragedies were performed at Athens at festivals of Dionysus. The terms in this group name the persons and places of that performance as they bear on *Oedipus the King*.

CHORUS (*CHOROS*)

The *choros* was the group of singers and dancers who performed the odes. In *Oedipus the King* it is a Chorus of Theban elders. It sings the parodos and the four stasima. It also speaks within the episodes: in the first, it tells Oedipus that it is not the slayer and cannot name him, and says that both Oedipus and Teiresias have spoken in anger. In the exodos the Chorus announces the entrance of Creon. The Chorus speaks the closing words of the play.

ORCHESTRA (*ORCHĒSTRA*)

The *orchēstra*, from a Greek verb for dancing, was the open area of an Athenian theater where the chorus sang and danced, in front of the stage building. The play alludes to choral dancing in the Second Stasimon, where the Chorus asks, if impious deeds are held in honour, "wherefore should we join in the sacred dance?"

SKENE (*SKĒNĒ*)

The *skēnē*, literally "tent" or "hut," was the stage building at the back of the acting area. In *Oedipus the King* it represents the palace of Oedipus; in the third episode the Chorus tells the Corinthian messenger, "This is his dwelling." Oedipus goes into the palace at the end of the first episode, Iocasta rushes into it in the third, and Oedipus rushes into it at the end of the fourth. Oedipus comes out of it, blinded, in the exodos. Events inside the palace are reported by a messenger.

PROTAGONIST (*PRŌTAGŌNISTĒS*)

The *prōtagōnistēs* was the "first actor," who took the principal role in a tragedy. Aristotle's *Poetics* states that Sophocles introduced the third actor. The protagonist of *Oedipus the King* is Oedipus. The actor Polus of Aegina, of the fourth century BC, was celebrated in the part: Arrian, quoted in Stobaeus' *Florilegium*, names him as playing both Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus.

STICHOMYTHIA

Stichomythia is dialogue in alternating single lines, from the Greek *stichos*, "line," and *mythos*, "speech." Examples in the play include the exchanges between Oedipus and Teiresias, between Oedipus and Creon, and between Oedipus and the Corinthian messenger. At 625–630 and 1173–1176 single verses are divided between the two speakers.

RELIGIOUS AND LEGAL IDEAS

The plot turns on Greek ideas of divine communication, ritual stain, its removal, and the penalties of banishment and curse.

ORACLE (*CHRĒSMOS*)

A *chrēsmos* is a response given by a god through an oracular shrine. The chief shrine in the play is that of Apollo at Delphi, called Pytho in poetry; the play also calls the god Phoebus and Loxias. The play refers to three oracles. The first is the response Creon brings, that the defilement in Thebes must be removed by dealing with the murderers of Laius. The second is the oracle given to Laius that he would die by the hand of his child, which Iocasta recounts. The third is the response Oedipus received at Delphi, that he would defile his mother's bed and kill his father. Iocasta cites the oracle to Laius to argue against seer-craft and again after the news of the death of Polybus. In the Second Stasimon the Chorus says it will no longer visit the shrines if the oracles do not fit the issue. Teiresias, the blind seer of Thebes, describes himself as servant of Loxias. At the end Creon says he wishes to learn from the god what should be done with Oedipus.

POLLUTION (*MIASMA*)

Miasma is ritual defilement, incurred especially through bloodshed and regarded as infecting the community around the person affected. Creon reports that Apollo commands the Thebans to drive out "a defiling thing" harboured in the land, and names the shedding of blood as the cause of the tempest on the city. In his proclamation Oedipus forbids anyone to shelter the murderer, to share prayer or sacrifice with him, or to serve him with the lustral rite. Teiresias calls Oedipus "the accursed defiler of this land" (350–353). Oedipus later says that he pollutes the bed of the slain man with the hands by which he perished. He asks the Chorus to approach him without fear, since his plague can rest on no mortal beside. Creon tells the attendants not to show "a pollution such as this" to the light, the rain or the earth.

SUPPLICATION (*HIKETEIA*)

Hiketeia is the act of a suppliant (*hiketēs*), who approaches an altar, a god or a person, often holding a wreathed branch, to ask for protection or help. The play opens with Theban suppliants at the altars of Oedipus, carrying wreathed branches, and Oedipus bids them rise and lift the suppliant boughs. At 326–327 Oedipus and the Chorus implore Teiresias on their knees. Iocasta reports that the surviving servant of Laius supplicated her, with his hand laid on hers, to be sent to the pastures. She herself comes as a suppliant to Apollo with a wreathed branch and incense.

PURIFICATION (*KATHARMOS*)

Katharmos is cleansing from ritual stain. Oedipus asks by what rite the city may cleanse itself. Creon answers that it is to be done by banishing a man or by bloodshed in quittance of bloodshed. In his proclamation Oedipus says the Thebans were bound not to leave the guilt "unpurged" (216–275), and he forbids anyone to serve the murderer with the lustral rite. Iocasta prays to Apollo for "some riddance, from uncleanness" (911–923). Oedipus finally asks to be hidden beyond the land, and says his plague can rest on no mortal beside him.

EXILE (*PHYGĒ*)

Phygē is flight or banishment from one's country. Creon names banishing a man as one way of dealing with the defilement, and Oedipus in turn promises the person who denounces himself that he will only leave the land, unhurt. Oedipus repeats the alternatives of slaying the murderers or sending them into exile when he addresses Teiresias. In the quarrel Oedipus says he wants Creon's death, not his banishment. After the discovery Oedipus asks Creon to cast him out to a place where no mortal will greet him. Creon replies that he first wishes to learn the duty from the god, and later that the god must give what Oedipus asks. Oedipus asks to live on the hills at Cithaeron. Seneca's *Oedipus* ends with his voluntary exile; in other versions he is expelled by his sons or by Creon.

CURSE (*ARA*)

Ara is a prayer, and in particular a prayer for harm, a curse. In the First Episode Oedipus invokes a solemn curse on the unknown murderer of Laius and on any who shelter him, and prays the same fate on himself if the murderer becomes an inmate of his house. Teiresias warns that the "double lash" of his mother's and his father's curse shall drive Oedipus from the land. Creon swears that he may perish accursed if he has plotted against Oedipus. When Iocasta describes the place of the death of Laius, Oedipus says he may have laid himself under a dread curse without knowing it. Later he says the curse was laid on him by no mouth but his own. In the epic *Thebaid* and in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, a curse pronounced by Oedipus on his sons is central. The play itself does not present a curse by Oedipus on his sons.

FATE AND DIVINE POWER (*DAIMŌN*)

Daimōn is a Greek word for a divine power, and also for the lot or destiny that such a power assigns. In translation it appears in several ways: as "some cruel power above man" when Oedipus considers whether his doom was sent by such a power, as "a fate that warns me" in the Fourth Stasimon, as "a power above man" that guided Oedipus into the chamber of Iocasta, and as "Fate" in his cry after the blinding. Iocasta expresses another view, that the decrees of Fortune are supreme and that it is best to live at random.

ARISTOTLE TO THE MODERN STAGE

Aristotle's *Poetics*, a fourth-century BC treatise on tragedy, cites Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* more often than any other play. Seneca made a Latin tragedy on the same story in the first century AD. French and English dramatists reworked it between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was acted in Greek and in translation in the nineteenth. In the twentieth century it was taken up in psychoanalytic writing, opera, drama and film.

The play's reception is documented in several kinds of source. There are the ancient critical text and the Latin adaptation, the printed plays of the early modern period, reports of performances, and Freud's account in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS* ON THE PLAY

The *Poetics* names the play in chapters 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 24. In chapter 11 it is the example of a reversal (*peripeteia*): the man who comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from anxiety about his mother reveals his parentage and changes the whole situation. In the play the Corinthian messenger learns of Oedipus's fear of Merope and tells him that Polybus was not his father. Aristotle adds that a discovery (*anagnōrisis*) is most effective when it coincides with a reversal, and cites the *Oedipus* again. In chapter 16 the discovery in the play is the best kind, because it arises from the incidents themselves and needs no external tokens.

Chapter 13 describes the best tragic plot as the fall from good fortune to bad of a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, who falls through some flaw (*hamartia*, in Fyfe's rendering "flaw") and not through villainy. Oedipus is named among such men of high station. The play presents him as the man the priest calls first of mortals, and the Chorus laments his fall in the fourth stasimon and again in the closing lines. In chapter 14 Aristotle says that a person who merely hears the story of Oedipus shudders and feels pity, so that the effect does not depend on spectacle. The play reports the exposure of the child, the killing of Laius and the death of Iocasta in narrative. Chapter 14 also lists Oedipus among those who act in ignorance and discover the relationship afterwards, and ranks such acts below the case where the discovery comes in time to prevent the deed.

In chapter 15 Aristotle says that anything inexplicable must lie outside the tragedy, and gives Sophocles' *Oedipus* as an example. Chapter 24 names it as Oedipus's not knowing how Laius died. In the play Oedipus knows of Laius only by hearsay, asks where and how he died, learns from Creon that one man escaped and spoke of robbers, and asks whether any search was made. Iocasta, his wife for many years, tells him the oracle given to Laius for the first time in the course of the action.

Chapter 6 defines tragedy as effecting, through pity and fear, relief (*katharsis*) of such emotions; Fyfe renders the term "relief". Other translators use "purgation" or "purification", and its meaning remains disputed.

SENECA'S *OEDIPUS*

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (died AD 65), the Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman, wrote a Latin *Oedipus* of about 1,060 lines, shorter than the 1,530 lines of the Greek play. Seneca's play keeps the main sequence of Sophocles' plot. Creon reports the oracle, and Laius is said to have been killed at a place where three roads meet, in Phocis. Oedipus quarrels with Creon and accuses him of conspiring with the seer. A Corinthian old man announces the death of Polybus, and Oedipus's pierced ankles establish his identity. The Theban herdsman is reluctant to speak and is compelled. In both plays Oedipus blinds himself and Iocasta dies.

The changes are considerable. Seneca's Oedipus states the oracle to himself in the opening speech, whereas in Sophocles he tells Iocasta of it in the second episode. Teiresias does not name the murderer at once, as he does at OT 362 and 449–460. He and his daughter Manto read the signs of a sacrifice. Creon then narrates a necromantic rite in a grove in which the ghost of Laius accuses Oedipus. Iocasta is present in the first scene, urging endurance. After the blinding, which Seneca's Oedipus performs with his fingers, she confronts him and stabs herself in the womb on the stage. In Sophocles she rushes from the stage in the third episode, and a messenger reports her hanging and the use of her brooches to blind Oedipus. Seneca's Oedipus goes out into voluntary exile, taking the pestilence with him. In Sophocles Creon defers to Apollo about banishment.

The choral songs also differ. Seneca's second song is a hymn to Bacchus that makes no reference to the action, a point F. J. Miller notes in his scene-by-scene comparison. The third song uses the story of Icarus as a warning against rising too high.

Three plays on the subject held the European stage from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. All three are by well-known writers, all add an underplot of secondary characters, and the herdsman is named Phorbas in each, following Seneca. Voltaire defended the underplot in his letters on his own *Œdipe*, arguing that the subject would not fill a modern five-act tragedy, and that the actors would not accept a play without love. Dryden's preface to his own version regards it as a convention, and suggests that the Greek method might be the more natural.

On the question of the blinded king on stage, the versions differ. Corneille and Voltaire report the blinding, and Dryden shows it.

Two performances of 1881, at Harvard and in Paris, are recorded by witnesses, above all in Henry Norman's account of the Harvard production, which also notes the new French production at the Théâtre Français.

PIERRE CORNEILLE, *ŒDIPE* (1659)

The French dramatist Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) wrote *Œdipe* at the urging of his patron, the superintendent Nicolas Fouquet, to whom it is dedicated, after the failure of *Pertharite*. It was first performed in January 1659. The play adds the love of Theseus for Dircé, a daughter of Laïus. Teiresias does not appear, and the shade of Laïus, called up by him, is reported by a lady-in-waiting, Nérine. In a reported scene the herdsman stabs himself, and Iocasta seizes his dagger and kills herself with it. When Oedipus blinds himself the plague ends.

JOHN DRYDEN AND NATHANIEL LEE, *OEDIPUS* (1678)

The poet John Dryden (1631–1700) and the dramatist Nathaniel Lee (c. 1653–1692) wrote *Oedipus* together; it was first performed in 1678 and printed in 1679. How the writing was divided between the two poets is uncertain. The underplot concerns Eurydicè, a daughter of Laïus, and Adrastus, king of Argos, and Creon is a scheming villain. As in Seneca, the ghost of Laïus and not Teiresias denounces Oedipus, and Dryden brings the ghost onto the stage. In the last act Creon stabs Eurydicè, Adrastus kills Creon and is killed by Creon's guards, Iocasta kills herself and her children, and Oedipus throws himself from a window. Dryden's preface says: "Sophocles is admirable everywhere; and therefore we have followed him as close as we possibly could."

VOLTAIRE, *ŒDIPE* (1718)

The French writer Voltaire (1694–1778) wrote *Œdipe* as a young man, and it was first staged in Paris in 1718. It was played forty-five times in succession in 1718. The underplot concerns Philoctetes, once betrothed to Iocasta, who returns to Thebes and is accused of the murder of Laïus. He drops out of the action after the third act, in which Teiresias denounces Oedipus. Voltaire's fourth-act scene between Oedipus and Iocasta is modelled on the Greek, but Oedipus recalls a portent in a temple in place of the taunt at the feast. The blinding is reported by the High Priest, and Iocasta stabs herself on the stage. In a letter to the Jesuit Porée, Voltaire says he spoiled his piece to please the Parisian actors, who would not hear of an *Oedipus* without love.

THE HARVARD PRODUCTION (1881)

In May 1881 members of Harvard University acted the play in Greek at Sanders Theatre, with music by John Knowles Paine. Henry Norman's *An Account of the Harvard Greek Play* (Boston, 1882) records that the blinded Oedipus entered "his pale face marred by bloody stains." Norman himself acted Creon. Norman reports that about six thousand people saw it and that they "listened with bated breath, and separated in silence."

MOUNET-SULLY AT THE COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE (1881)

In autumn 1881 the play was revived at the Théâtre Français, the house of the Comédie-Française in Paris, in a French translation, with the actor Jean Mounet-Sully (1841–1916) as Oedipus. The translation was Jules Lacroix's, first played there in 1858.

FREUD AND THE "OEDIPUS COMPLEX"

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the Viennese neurologist who founded psychoanalysis, first mentions Oedipus in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess of 15 October 1897. He develops the idea in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Die Traumdeutung*, published in November 1899 and dated 1900), in chapter V.

In A. A. Brill's translation (1913), Freud summarises the legend and the action of the play, which he describes as resembling a psychoanalysis in its gradual and delayed revelation. He rejects the view that the play's effect rests on the opposition between the will of the gods and human resistance. He argues instead that it moves modern audiences because the story realises a wish of childhood, the child's first sexual impulse toward the mother and hatred of the father, and that Oedipus is "the realised wish of our childhood." He cites Iocasta's remark that many men have dreamed of union with their mothers as an unmistakable reference in the text to this dream material. On his account

the dream of intercourse with the mother is the key to the tragedy, together with the dream of the father's death.

Freud used the term “Oedipus complex” (*Ödipuskomplex*) from about 1910, and it became a central concept of psychoanalytic theory. It is contested. The anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), questioned its universality. The classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant, in “Oedipus without the Complex” (1967), argued that the play's concerns are not those the psychoanalytic reading assigns to it.

THE MODERN STAGE AND SCREEN

Twentieth-century versions often depart from Sophocles' structure. Four are well documented.

IGOR STRAVINSKY, *OEDIPUS REX* (1927)

The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) wrote *Oedipus Rex* as an opera-oratorio in two acts. The text is by Jean Cocteau after Sophocles, translated into Latin by Jean Daniélou, with a narrator speaking in the language of the audience. It was first given in concert in Paris on 30 May 1927 and staged at the Vienna State Opera on 23 February 1928.

JEAN COCTEAU, *LA MACHINE INFERNALE* (1934)

The French writer Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) wrote *La Machine infernale* (“The Infernal Machine”) in four acts. It was first performed in Paris in April 1934. One act dramatises the encounter with the Sphinx, which the Greek play mentions only in retrospect.

TED HUGHES, *SENECA'S OEDIPUS* (1968)

The poet Ted Hughes made an English adaptation of Seneca's *Oedipus*, staged by the National Theatre at the Old Vic in 1968, directed by Peter Hall, with John Gielgud as Oedipus and Irene Worth as Iocasta.

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *EDIPO RE* (1967)

The Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975) made *Edipo re*, a film based on the play, with Franco Citti as Oedipus and Silvana Mangano as Iocasta. It has a prologue and epilogue set in modern Italy.

ABOUT THIS SITE

Reading Sophocles is a companion site to *Oedipus the King*, the tragedy by Sophocles, the Athenian dramatist of the fifth century BC. RavensEdge Publishing publishes the site. It prints the play in the English translation of Richard Claverhouse Jebb, with material from Jebb's own edition; how the text is presented is set out in the notes at the head of The Play.

WHAT THE SITE ADDS

Reading Sophocles adds reference pages on the play: a scene-by-scene synopsis, the characters and the house of Laius, the Theban myths, Athens and the theater, a glossary of terms, and the play's later history from Aristotle to the modern stage, with a guide to translations and books.

Jebb's Preface, Introduction and scene and ode notes are kept apart from these pages, which do not draw on his edition.

SOURCES FOR THE REFERENCE PAGES

The reference pages draw on the ancient sources themselves: the play, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Pausanias, Apollodorus and others, read in public-domain or openly licensed translations, mainly from the Perseus Digital Library and Project Gutenberg. The page on the play's later history also draws on the later works and witnesses themselves: Seneca's *Oedipus*, the versions of Corneille, Dryden and Lee, and Voltaire, Voltaire's letters on his play, and Henry Norman's account of the Harvard production of 1881.

Each statement on a reference page is checked against the source it rests on. Wikipedia is used only to find sources: a statement taken from it is checked against the reference the article cites.