Role of the chorus in the Oedipus tyrannus: the tragic conflict

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1960

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THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS IN THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS:
THE TRAGIC CONFLICT

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Senior Scholar Program

1960
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PREFACE

Conflict produces effective dramatic action, and a certain species of conflict seems requisite to tragedy. Whether this conflict takes the form of play, epic, poem or prose narrative, nevertheless it is the same conflict; a manifestation of the same tragic "vision": it is a philosophy which sees the infinite capabilities of man limited by a power which is absolute and subject only to itself. This is not a malevolent force, but is inscrutable. Man is well advised to avoid extremes, to demur from an encounter with this power; yet a hero because of his very nature cannot elude engagement. He may not be destroyed by this force--as were Hamlet and Oedipus--but he will certainly be diverted from his course.

By "tragedy" I mean those works which embody this conflict and which affirm the existence and value of the absolute force, while also recognizing the noble and infinite abilities of man: his heroic nature.
This thesis attempts to state the conflict as it is manifest in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*; to indicate the nature of the hero and the absolute force opposing him. It also attempts to define, in terms of this play, the nature of the resolution of the conflict, and the underlying tragic view which demands this resolution.

For reference and accuracy, I have prepared a new translation of the play from Jebb's Cambridge edition of the text. My numbering follows that edition, except in the odes and the kommoi, where in addition to the irregular numbering of Jebb's edition, I have on the left hand side of the page numbered each ode in a regular fashion. It is to these numbers that I refer in this paper.
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It is necessary to realize that there is an absolute, and not a relative, difference between humanism (which we can take to be the highest expression of the vital), and the religious spirit. The divine is not life at its intensest. It contains in a way an almost anti-vital element.... The attempt to explain the absolute of religious and ethical values in terms of the categories appropriate to the essentially relative and non-absolute vital zone, leads to the entire misunderstanding of these values, and to the creation of a series of mixed or bastard phenomena.... Romanticism, for example, confuses both human and divine things, by not clearly separating them.... It blurs the clear outlines of human relations...by introducing in them the Perfection that properly belongs to the non-human.

(T.E. Hulme, Speculations)
THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS IN THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS:

THE TRAGIC CONFLICT

PART ONE—
To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries--this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval....

(T.S. Eliot: "Ben Jonson")

Critical opinion since Aristotle has tended to consider the chorus either as actor or alien ornament. Aristotle in the Poetics conceives of their function as one of the actors; "an integral part of the whole...in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles" (XVIII, 7). Generally, however, modern critics view the chorus as "curtain," interlude, or scenery-like ornament.

S.M. Adams introduces his discussion of the parodos with an apology: "The chorus of fifteen Theban elders who now enter are perhaps the finest example of Sophocles' use of an instrument no longer really necessary to drama." Five more lines dismiss the entire ode. In this extreme
interpretation, the chorus is neither integral nor even relevant to the play.

J.T. Sheppard, while following the same point of view, softens this judgement and concludes that the chorus is never irrelevant, though it "is generally not essential to the main dramatic end."² It does add to the drama:

It is used indeed with consummate skill to accompany, express, and heighten the emotional phases through which the drama moves. By its sympathy or its failure to understand it is kept within the drama, and it actually helps the drama when it throws into relief the central character.

But he qualifies his admiration. Commenting on the skill of Sophocles in keeping the chorus from irrelevance, he observes that "it remains essentially undramatic, a charming and appropriate ornament, but still an ornament, not an indispensable part of the play." For Sheppard, though an Aeschylean drama would cease to be drama at all without the chorus, a Sophoclean play would lose only a grace. It would remain essentially great drama, "and the grace which it loses is really an additional and alien grace."

The modern critical attitude is best found in Yeats' translation of the play. This handling
has been the standard acting version of the tragedy for many years and is well received by audiences. But the translation does not reflect what Sophocles wrote. Compare, for example, Yeats' version of the second stasimon with the fairly literal version on page 132, below.

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

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

And all men honour such; but should a man forget
The holy images, the Delphian Sybil's trance
And the world's navel stone, and not be punished for it
And seem most fortunate, or even blessed perchance,
Why should we honour the gods, or join the sacred dance?\(^3\)

Yeats uses in part the words of the original, though they are unfamiliar in his hands. While the stasimon is lyrical, as the Greek certainly
is, Yeats has compressed and twisted the original clear and crisp poetry into a musty and "poetic" interlude to fit his conception of Sophocles' play. Yeats infers that it is God who flings the tyrant from the summit. For Sophocles, it was the ἁβρατικός of the tyrant which according to natural and irrevocable laws leads to his destruction. Yeats transmutes these sacred laws into a Christian deity, responsible for over-seeing the moral nature of man. But Sophocles is cold and unsentimental in his theology; where he addresses this ode to divine laws, Yeats makes his translation a prayer to a modern Zeus.

The Yeats translation uses the chorus in this way throughout to provide the sentimental modern background (as opposed to the objective Attic view) which his translation demands. He doesn't hide this sentimentalization. He mentions that a man may "in his death be blessed." Of course Sophocles would only say that he might be called blessed, providing he has lived a fortunate life, but there is no way of really knowing about his death.
Actually, Yeats is a quite good example of most modern criticism; his translation is not a translation at all, but an interpretation. Though Sophocles' play serves Yeats as a basis from which to construct his own version of the Oedipus myth, still, despite the fact that the Irish author has written in terms completely foreign to the original, in the relation of chorus and dramatic action can be seen the point of view of the "alien ornament" school of modern criticism. Not only is Yeats' translation alien to Sophocles, but his own choral odes are also only interludes and ornaments to his play.

At the opposite extreme are those critics who see Sophocles' chorus as an integral element. But even they, in general, are not willing to accept the play on its own terms, they make of the chorus a neutral thing; it is there, and neither particularly adds nor detracts from the general value of the play. Often for these men the play is so different from our accepted dramatic forms, that the use of a chorus suggests some exotic, some mystic, purpose on the part of the playwright.
The most interesting major critic who talks at length of the chorus as integral to the action is Cedric Whitman. To him, the chorus in Sophocles represents "the somewhat confused morality of the bourgeoisie." They understand what is happening on the most obvious level of the play, but cannot see the real implications of the scene or understand "the genuine intelligence that is guiding the King and Queen." To the chorus, since they lack the knowledge of any rational order, the world of the play would appear to be irrationally ordered. Whitman understands this attitude and concludes that in such a world the tragedy is that man must endure the "irrational evil" of our universe. For Whitman, the humanistic enthusiasm of Oedipus is the only stability in a world in which the normal people, represented by the chorus, do not and probably cannot understand or accept the conditions governing their lives.

The above views, of course, are extreme, and are therefore in their own way valuable. While an extreme in this world is apt to be wrong, it is very often the only means by
which critical inertia can be overcome. Unfortunately, most critics who discuss the O.T. spend little time on the chorus, and much of that is to little avail. But those critics who represent the extremes above would nearly all agree that the function of the chorus is a mysterious and plaguing block to a clear understanding of the play. In fact, they manufacture their own block. By refusing to accept the play on its own grounds, they assume that the chorus is an exotic element in an otherwise noble and valuable national art. Thus they construct a theory of Greek drama which is alien to the terms of that drama. We do not now know anything about the dramatic capabilities of a tragic chorus, though a few poets have tried to use one at various times. But in order to understand just what the choruses are meant to do, it is immediately necessary to admit that Sophocles knew what he was doing, to accept the fact that he included a chorus in his plays, and to try to understand how the chorus fits in from his point of view. To throw them out without this sort of examination is sheer perversity—though it must be
admitted, that by inversion even perversity can be useful.

II

An approach to the O.T. which regards the chorus as alien is hard to understand in the light of the beginnings of tragedy, as far as they are known. Tragedy seems to stem from the dithyrambs dedicated to the very popular god, Dionysus (or Bacchus). These hymns were danced and sung to the accompaniment of a flute. They were given a regular lyric form by Arion in the 7th century, and the number of dancers was fixed at 50.

Near the middle of the 6th century Thespis, in Attica, seems to have arranged the presentation of the dithyramb so that, in addition to a dialogue of some sort between the leader of the chorus and the chorus itself, the leader could also converse with a single member of the chorus itself. This man was called the answerer (ἀποκριτής), later the regular name for "actor." By this time, as well, the large chorus may have broken into smaller groups which would then be able to act out in gross simple
dramatic scenes. If to this dithyrambic chorus is added the mimetic ritual of the Dionysiac festivals and local cults, the various forms of hero worship then current, and the Homeric recitations, then this is the material from which was fashioned both the great 5th century tragedy, and the various types of classical comedy.

It was with Aeschylus, at the beginning of the 5th century, that Tragedy came into its own place. He is said to have created drama by adding a second actor to the choral song and dance. And he first made the dialogue independent of the chorus.

Sophocles was born about 495, nearly 30 years after Aeschylus. In 486 he competed against the older poet and won. From that time until his death, nearly 60 years later, he was the favourite tragic poet of Athens, and seems never to have won less than the second prize in dramatic competition. (As some indication of the quality of his work, the Oedipus Tyrannus won only a second prize). Sophocles seems to have introduced scene painting to the drama,
as well as a third actor, and possibly a fourth.

Euripides was born in 480, and died before Sophocles. He has been the most popular of the three great tragedians, but his appeal is probably the result of a lowering of the ideal beauty of tragedy under Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripides (to do him a great injustice) is a "beat" type; his poetry is often exquisite, but his subject matter too often depends on abnegation of hope and value in life, and this merely for the melodramatic effects possible with such an outlook. His attitude might be compared (in places) with the attitude which would be found in a King Lear with no change and recognition on the part of Lear. Under Euripides, the chorus— in general— became in fact little more than interlude.

New tragedies were acted only at the Great Dionysia in March and the Lenaea (Feast of the wine press) in January; both were held at the theatre in Athens. This theatre was in its finished form cut into the Acropolis. Its seats were arranged in semi-circular rows of stone and marble. The seats came down to the level of
the dancing floor of the chorus, the ὄρχηστρα. A slight elevation separated this from the acting area which was a long and narrow rectangle at the base of the stage building. Steps joined the two areas. The stage building probably had wide central doors and one small door on either side. There were various sorts of stage machinery for showing inside scenes and flying gods through the air.

The presentation by each dramatist of the four plays which were customary for the competition, whether a tetralogy or four separate plays, was a religious event. The bottom row of seats were all reserved for dignitaries, and the three middle seats of the row were thrones for two priests and the god himself. In the centre of the orchestra was an altar dedicated to Dionysus. The audience, often more than 20,000 strong, while demanding and highly critical of the performances in front of them, nevertheless were undergoing a religious experience probably similar to the feeling of people who listen to some of the glorious church music of Bach and Mozart, Handel and Berlioz.
Sophocles' chorus consisted of 15 trained amateurs. They wore the same clothing and masks and spoke as a group, in divided groups, or occasionally as individuals. Commonly they would sing their odes. In the O.T. these are constructed in stanzas which are paired rhythmically. But as in commenting on most things Greek, it is impossible to generalize. Usually, the chorus comes on stage and doesn't leave until they sing their last ode. Usually their first ode is chanted or sung as they march on stage. Usually, but not always.

In this play there are four stasima and the parodos, as well as two kommoi. The parodos is the longest, with three paired stanzas, and the third stasimon is the shortest, with only one pair.

Altogether, the effect possible with this combination of speech, action, song, dance, music, and religious and moral subject matter is probably best compared to what Richard Wagner wanted from his ideal medium of art, his "music-drama," which was to combine all the forms of art into one whole which would be more beautiful and meaningful than any of
its parts.

III

But of course the entire effect is more than a combination of elements. Without actors, scenery--any physical effects except the printed page or the spoken word--the Oedipus Tyrannus makes its impact. The peculiar tragic effect of the play is not produced by external form, though this is important and provides a vehicle for the drama; this tragic effect is the result of a philosophy of interplay and tension--in this case manifested in the relation between the hero and what has been called an "alien" element, the chorus.

But the chorus isn't alien; it is the critic who is alien to the play, who sees it from a preconceived viewpoint. The chorus is integral to the plot action and to the moral framework of the play. Without the chorus as foil, or antagonist, to Oedipus, the conflict of the play becomes a tension between the hero and the secret of his birth, or between Oedipus and his desire to rid the city of the plague.
This is not tragedy; the conflict involving the secret of the hero's birth is, in fact, the basis of Oscar Wilde's extremely funny comedy of manners, *The Importance of Being Ernest*. Tragedy, like the poetry of Donne, gains its universal effect by investing or thrusting a universal connotation on a particular dramatic experience. Wilde is concerned only with the foolishness and vulnerability of a certain portion of society in the terms of that society; Sophocles, as any great tragic dramatist, is concerned with the most far-reaching implications of a given act. It is not the act of incest that he sees, for example, but the meaning of that act as a transgression of universal moral law.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the conflict (and tension) which is basic to the tragic effect is the result of the essentially different, yet equally valid, attitudes of the chorus and Oedipus. Though in the resolution of these the chorus triumphs, yet the attitude represented by Oedipus does not die, rather, it is symbolically elevated far beyond the normal possibilities of physical man.
The conflict is in terms of the dichotomy between the divine law appealed to by the chorus and the natural law adhered to by Oedipus. They do not fit with each other, nor at any time are they the same. Yet it is through the one that the value of the other is apparent. In the eyes of the chorus, the actions of Oedipus are not clear; they are afraid, perhaps confused: "What rulers do I do not see" (530). They do not and cannot understand the force guiding or being guided by Oedipus. Their cosmos is true and orderly and right, albeit only for them (and Sophocles). The cosmos of Oedipus, on the other hand, is just as true and orderly; hence springs the tragedy. In the conflict between the beliefs of the chorus and the actions of Oedipus, it is more important that the law of the chorus is triumphant; that it is shown to be dominant in the world of the play. Nevertheless, as this dominance is demonstrated in the fact of Oedipus' fall, so it is also proved in the fall that his actions and laws are true and valuable as well. The play is tragic, because though Oedipus must fall, the reason for his fall stems from
his own greatness.

This is not to say that Oedipus is "morally" better at the end of the O.T. He is neither rewarded, as in the O.C., nor does he appear to have learned moderation (σωφροσύνη) from the fact of his fall. There is no Jobian restitution made to the tyrannus after his destruction, nor can one be assumed. He, the "all-renowned" Oedipus, is at the play's end, the "most wretched of men". He is blinded, banished, parted from his children and his long standing prosperity. Creon does say that Oedipus will now "nourish the truth of the gods," but the last words of the chorus leave little doubt that what the chorus see is the utter destruction of the hero. There is no doubt that Oedipus is a hero, but:

... This is Oedipus,
who knew the famous riddle and was most powerful of men,
on whose fortune no citizen did not look with envy;
into what a sea of terrible events he has come.

The word for "events" is συμφόρας. As early as line 33 Oedipus was described as "the first of men in life's events and in the dealings with the gods". Again, "events" is συμφόρας.
At the beginning, Oedipus is the best of men; he can handle all the chances of life. At the end of the play, there has been a complete reversal; he has found that he could not control these events. What seemed happy and prosperous at the start is shown to be—and to have been at the start—terrible and fearful at the end; proof of the frailty of man as opposed to the absolute power of the gods.

Critics, however, do not like to recognize that Sophocles' plays on the Oedipus myth were not written as a trilogy. They wish to interpret the ending of the O.T. in the light of "poetic justice"—especially, these critics wish to read into the O.T. the morality of the O.C. But the Oedipus at Colonus was not written to end the story of Oedipus in the same way that the Eumenides of Aeschylus was written to end the Orestes myth in the Oresteia. Of course the O.C. seems to end the story, and in one sense it does. It does complete the narrative line; that is, it tells what happens to Oedipus after he leaves Thebes. But the actual story isn't very important with Sophocles; It is what was done with the basic story that held the attention
of Sophocles and his audience. While the O.C. might end the Oedipus myth, what is done with that story in that play is very different from what Sophocles does with the story in the Oedipus Tyrannus. Here, Oedipus is completely ruined; as far as Sophocles or his audience is concerned Oedipus is utterly and irrevocably destroyed. The resolution recognizes an absolute and self-responsible force which is inscrutable to man and entirely independent of him. There is no pressure on the divine laws to make a restitution to a man who has broken these very laws. The Oedipus at Colonus assumes a different moral framework.

Sophocles' last play is a possible solution to the problem expressed in the O.T., but it is not the solution that Sophocles chooses. This latter solution is a resolution in humanistic terms--its framework assumes that man is the centre of the universe, that god is personally concerned for man, and especially, that a hero is never really destroyed. Oedipus becomes a divinity; this apparently makes up for his earlier losses. But the resolution of the O.T. is an anti-humanistic one. At the end the chorus
is left alone on stage to speak the final words of the play; perhaps they speak an epitaph for Oedipus, but their words are less a comment on Oedipus than they are an affirmation of the absolute power of that absolute force which is the moral framework of the play. In fact, while the O.C. has certainly at its point of focus the particular man, Oedipus, the emphasis of the O.T. is not on the particular man, Oedipus, but on the universal problem, man; and by implication of his reaction, the universal laws in which man must operate.

IV

But that the tragic conflict is the means whereby Sophocles lifts the simple plot onto the plane of true tragedy (as differentiated from "serious" drama in general) is not of itself proof that the chorus is both integral with the action and also that particular element which allows or embodies that transformation. King Lear is over twice as long as the O.T., and is far more complex. Like the O.T. there is no wasted dialogue or action. And the two plays
are equally effective. I would posit that it is Sophocles' chorus which takes the place of divers sub-plots, tens of actors, and elaborate plot structure.

The chorus draws together and gives meaning to elements which would not otherwise be in harmony. It provides the only explanation of certain attitudes and attitude changes by the protagonist. It is foil to Oedipus and provides one extreme of the moral conflict that is the driving force and real meaning of the play. The chorus has assigned to it a little over one fifth of the lines. Their odes are so positioned as to break the play into six distinct divisions which might be considered parallel to our acts. But they are not really acts, and the chorus does not merely signal the end of a segment; it is part of the role of the chorus to add to and gain by the segment it succeeds, and to prepare in advance for the action which follows.

The chorus often fill the role of actor, but they are always more, and legitimately so. Shakespeare must carefully build his stairway to the universal, because he must make a case for its presence; Sophocles can take a more
direct path. Shakespeare cannot be so concise as Sophocles; he has to weave his background and framework, and this often necessitates the use of material irrelevant to the theme of the play. This is not to say that Sophocles is the better playwright, but only that, though the two men finish with equally powerful visions, they are quite different in their approach, and that difference must be understood and appreciated in order to see Sophocles as he is. A play of Hamlet's complexity and circumlocution would be as unthinkable to Sophocles as a direct and open familiarity with the universal world would be to Shakespeare. Sophocles can be and is direct—through the use of the chorus—and Shakespeare cannot be and is not direct, because he lacks the culture and peculiar vision of life which permits a tragic chorus.
TWO: THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS

But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked with violence together....

(Johnson's *Life* of Cowley)

I

Poetry may well be, as Cleanth Brooks suggests in *The Well Wrought Urn*, the language of paradox. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* illustrates this proposition in the fullest sense of the word "poetry." Not only is the language of the play couched in terms of paradox and contrast, but the dramatic action of the play faithfully reflects or is reflected by that language.

If the conflict is between the absolute divine law of the chorus and the heroic nature of Oedipus, for example, we are forced to see that at the same time the divine law must "win" while the rationalistic human law must not lose. And within the scope of the over-all conflict there
is a complex of inter-related themes and images which reiterate the tragic conflict on many different levels and with constantly modulated themes. These thematic variations all have some influence on the development of the major conflict, and play as well on each other in the same manner as Johnson accused the metaphysical poets of working. Tragedy is indeed looking in all directions at the same time, as Joyce comments in the Portrait, and each direction of sight is apt to modify the receiving organ in a different manner--hence the multifarious permutations wrought within the basic language of the tragedy.

Some of the paradox is well known as the "light-dark," "blindness-sight" imagery. Basic to the plot is the paradox of the well-minded messenger from Corinth who, reminding us of a certain "person from Porlock," brings only destruction. A partial list of words, images, and ideas which in the course of the play change into their opposites follows:
II

Prologue and Parodos Ll. 1-215

A prologue need not be expository, and was
defined by Aristotle simply as that part of the
tragedy which precedes the parodos. The play
begins with the greeting of Oedipus to the group
of people kneeling at the shrine before his
palace: "My children." Oedipus is, as a good
king, father to all his people. He establishes
the background of the citizens (and of the curae
which is part of the story of Oedipus, though
not particularly emphasized by Sophocles),5
by his reference to Cadmus, the founder of Thebes.
Oedipus has come himself to discover their
wishes, rather than sending someone else. As
he makes a point of this himself, it is clear
that by this action Sophocles would have him
seen as a "good" ruler, a man who has a real
and personal concern for the welfare of his people. This concern for the city is apparent throughout the play, until Oedipus discovers that the answer to the city's problem is the answer to his own; then the city and the plague fade from the surface of the drama.

Oedipus is the "all-renowned" ruler, and he is proud of his reputation, just as he is proud of his power. He asks the citizens around the altar why they are supplicating him, an assumption which, while true, is unusual enough to warrant a close watch on the man. And this will appear again shortly. He pledges to do all that he can to help his suppliants for, as he later says to Teiresias (314ff), "To help all men with all you have and you can do is the very best of labours."

The Priest and citizens have come to ask Oedipus for help against the plague. He has rid the city of suffering before, and the advice of a tested man is always more valuable than that of another in this sort of situation. But the attitude of the Priest is not entirely based on good sense; to the people of Thebes Oedipus is more than ruler. The Priest makes
a point of claiming that he is not asking Oedipus for help as he would pray to a god, nor for the same purpose, but his words belie his stated attitude:

Not now equalling you to the gods do I nor these children sit at your hearth, but judging you the first of men in life's events, and in the dealings with the gods. (31-34)

This is what he says, but in view of his first words, those above do not convince.

Oedipus, most powerful of my country, you see us here of varied ages around these your altars.... (14-16)

The key phrase is "these your altars." Of course the altar is not ostensibly dedicated to Oedipus, and the statement means 'these altars in front of your palace." But there is no way to dodge the ambiguity. It is also clear that these particular altars are to be paralleled with "the twin shrines of Pallas and...the oracle-giving embers of Ismenus," at which other groups pray "like-wreathed." Along with this evidence, the heavy alliteration of the Greek (βωυοῖς τοῖς χοῖς), drawing attention to the phrase, shows that the attitude of the priest towards Oedipus is very close to that of a worshipper to a god.
And it is a fact that Oedipus in ridding the city of the Sphinx had performed something close to a miracle:

You released us—just come to Cadmus' city—from the toll which we furnished to the harsh songstress: and this, even, with no knowledge from us nor anything taught; but with the aid of the god, it is thought and said, you righted our life. (35-39)

Aid or no aid, it is Oedipus who aided the city. When the wheel comes full circle, much later, the chorus will say that it is Oedipus who has also put the city to sleep.

Oedipus is concerned more for his city than for himself; in this, as in all else, he is the man of action.

But know that I have wept much, and have traveled many roads in wandering thought. And having well considered, I found only one remedy: this I have done. (66-69)

He doesn't give time to idle thought or supposition. When the Priest has caught sight of Creon returning from the oracle and begins to muse on the possible contents of the message, Oedipus stops all conjecture with a curt, "Soon we shall know."

And Oedipus is also the man of knowledge.
He knows all that the Priest relates to him about the plague on the city. It is "known, and not unknown." One of the best illustrations of Sophoclean irony involves the verb "to know." The perfect form of a second root of ὁράω (to see) is ὁδο, which is used as a present and means "I know." "Oedipus" is made of ὀἶδα- (from ὀἴδω, to swell) and πόδι (foot). The similarity of ὀἶδα- to ὀἶδαι is not accidental, and is developed as a metaphor for something like 'the present situation.' 'I look at my feet' would mean that I am too busy looking at something in particular to notice any other or larger issue. Creon uses it in this way at l. 130. Oedipus thinks he 'knows his own foot,' that he knows what is going on around him. He prides himself on his knowledge, but never until the end does he understand the real meaning of both the facts of the murder and his birth and of his mortality; both are represented by νοῦς, which is, despite the metaphor, a physical and mortal thing. (A reading of the play and the riddle shows countless variations on this one figure).

When Creon enters, Oedipus must work to find the nature of the Oracle, and he uses the same
techniques that later both blind Oedipus to the facts and antagonize the "witnesses" while they forward the action. The interview with Creon is a harbinger of the interviews which follow between Oedipus and Teiresias, the Messenger from Corinth, and the Herdsman.

Creon introduces clearly the theme of fortune, τόχη. When Oedipus asks what news he has brought from the oracle, Creon answers, "Good, for things hard to bear, if they chance (τόχοι) to come out/in the end set right, all will call good fortune (εὐτυχεῖν)." Τυχή is probably the single most important word in the play, and at the same time it is the most difficult to exactly define. It is in good τόχη that Oedipus originally came to the city of Cadmus (52); it is Τόχη whom Oedipus claims as his mother (1080)—a fortune which gives good; and yet it is the natural result of this force which eventually destroys him. It is part of a complex which includes time, fortune, and justice; forces which form the core and rationale of the resolution of the conflict. In the play it stands for what we would call luck, for the favour of the gods, and for the natural flow of things as illustrated
by the concept of the wax and wane of the seasons.

With Creon's information, Oedipus decides to act: he will "light this anew." He concludes his final speech of the prologue with a nod to the aid of the gods, but he first states clearly that:

Not on behalf or some far-off friend, but for myself I shall disperse this defilement. For whoever murdered might very well wreak vengeance on me with the same swift hand. helping the murdered King, I help myself. (137-141)

And his final words are both bold and ominous:

I will do all; for either in good fortune, with the aid of the god, we will bring this to light, or in disaster. (145,6)

This, then, is Oedipus. Bernard Knox characterizes him in many roles; in the course of the play he is a hunter, hunting for the unknown murdered of Laius; he is the hunted; he is the helmsman of the city, steering it through its sea of troubles, though he does not understand "into what a sea of terrible events" he himself will come; he is the cultivator of the resources of the land, presumably, but also of his mother; as physician he will help the citizens if they will minister to their own disease. Finally, he is involved in mathematical imagery and method,
and he is portrayed as well in the role of a legal
prosecutor. Oedipus is the perfect Greek citizen
or Renaissance man. And beside these qualities,
he is a tender man; he loves his children and
his people. He is completely selfless. His com­
plete confidence in himself is easily caught
by others, as both the prologue and the third
stasimon witness.

The parodos, beginning at l. 151, must have
been an intricately staged and awe-inspiring
religious procession. The stage has been emp­
tied, and the chorus files in executing formal
dance motions appropriate to their song. This
ode is the longest in the tragedy, and serves,
in one primary function, to introduce the chorus
and those ideas which are to be opposed to Oedi­
pus' actions. In this parodos are included all
the important themes and images thus far intro­
duced, as well as most which will be later seen.
But the ode is a hymn and a poem in its own
right. It is unified and, of course, lyrical;
it is clear and meaningful even without ref­
erence to the rest of the play. Though it can
be read alone, however, the meaning of the poem
is given a wider range and greater depth in the context of the play and its dramatic conflict. And from the opposite point of view, the play is itself more meaningful and effective because of this ode, and because of the stasima in general.

The parodos is constructed in three thematic sections which divide nearly along the natural pauses between the antistrophic and the following strophe. The first part is an invocation, the second sets forth the grounds for the prayer, and the third part is a prayer for divine action. As in a well-constructed sonata-allegro movement (the first movement of a concerto or symphony), the thematic material is presented first, then developed, then concluded in recapitulation.

The curious fact about the invocation is that it is addressed primarily to the oracle, which Creon has just brought from the priestess of Apollo at Delphi, and which the chorus have not yet heard. The first strophe begins and ends with this message. Since Apollo is the god whose special province is prophecy (law and order), the chorus addresses him as well, the source of the message. As seen in this
strophe, Zeus is the ultimate father of the message, but it comes directly from Apollo. And since the oracle is that part of divinity which, like the top fifth of an iceberg, is tangible to mortals, it is the direct object of the invocation of this hymn. In fact, just as Athena is both a character and the quality of good sense and cleverness in the Odyssey, so we can see from this strophe that not only does the message come from Apollo, but it is the same thing as Apollo. It is the "daughter of golden Hope, Message eternal." In this sense, "hope" is the mother of the message because it is through hope that Creon was sent to the oracle; the hope that he would learn how to dispel the plague. And the daughter of "hope" is "hope" as well; the oracle represents the hope and faith of the chorus in the wisdom of the gods. This is what the oracle stands for, and this is why the chorus later in the play will lament to Zeus:

Your oracles, already are ignored,
And nowhere is Apollo shining in honour!
Divinity wanders haltingly about.
(2nd Stas. 40-42)

The oracles are the only tangible evidences of divinity. When the hope represented in them
is betrayed, then what proof is there in universal law and order: "Why should I dance?"

Reference, is also made in this strophe to the fear of the chorus. This is not a confusion, as Whitman would have us believe. There is nothing yet to confuse the chorus. The awe with which they stand before (the statue of?) Apollo is a religious and reverent fear. The chorus cannot see into the future, but their comments clearly refer to a certain necessity in the patterns of futurity. The talk about the revolving seasons, the inevitability of the passage of time, is to be an important theme in the following odes, and in the action of the drama: ("Against your will, all-seeing Time has found you;" 4th Stas. 28).

The first antistrophe continues the invocation. Apparently the gods called on by the chorus for help are traditional for such a prayer. They call on Athena, the patron goddess of Athens,* and her sister Artemis, whom the chorus call the

*Though this play ostensibly takes place in Thebes, clearly Sophocles has created a familiar Thebes for his audience; whether consciously or not—as in this prayer to Athena—his Thebes is much like Athens.
"guardian" of our land. Artemis is the goddess of chastity, but in her complex of roles she has also been the goddess of child-birth and of youth in general. She, therefore, is a goddess well worth worship in a time when the youth are dying as well as the older citizens and at the same time child-birth has ceased. Apollo is, of course, the god of Law and Order and divine justice; he also represents wisdom and medicine, and he would be an automatic object of prayer. The invocation ends with a formula calling upon the gods to help as they have helped before.

It is interesting to note, that Oedipus is asked to help by the Priest for exactly the same reason (47ff.).

The second part of the parodos sets the grounds for the prayer of invocation and the final prayer for help. The chorus lament the lack of a spear for defence in their thoughts. Traditionally, this would refer to the special domain of Athena. They sing of the sterility of the land:

Neither seed are produced
From the glorious Earth, nor children's births
End the labour shrieks of women. (17-19)

This is the proper area of Artemis. And the disease on "all my host" can be tended by the help of Apollo.
The second antistrophe of the parodos repeats and enforces. Where the strophe began "O Life, Without number are these sorrows I bear," the antistrophe begins "By such, without number, the city dies." From disease and sorrows to the more absolute and striking image of the death of the entire city, the antistrophe sharpens images and builds the terror of the plague first introduced by the Priest. The last lines of the second antistrophe also are the beginning of the final prayer; with these things as causes, "O golden daughter of Zeus,/Send the fair face of resistance...."

Who or what is the golden daughter of Zeus? The daughter of Zeus is specifically Athena in line 8, but gold is part of the image of Pytho and the oracle. And, actually, the chorus here are most probably addressing themselves once again to the message, which was, after all, the subject of the hymn’s invocation. Jebb is absolutely silent on this point, and Sheppard makes the obvious comment: Athena "is the Daughter of Zeus, because we are to be moved by the reminiscence of 151, 159 (1,8) : she is 'golden' to recall 'golden hope.'" But, beside the fact
that gold is only used in reference to the oracle and the hope which it represents, we must notice that the message, like Athena, is eternal; in other words, the message is divine, and only the gods are divine! The father of all the divinities is Zeus, and the message is called a daughter. Therefore, it is altogether possible for the golden daughter of Zeus to be the message. It is actually a daughter of Zeus, and it is actually the object of the invocation. Since the divinities in the Oedipus Tyrannus are more conceptual than actual, the might of Athena becomes less the strength of steel than the ability to stand up under the torture and terror of the plague. And in this case, the might comes, once again, from the hope which is the message from Delphi. It is only fitting, and artistically effective, that as the hymn began with the message of Zeus, so the final prayer for aid should also begin with the appeal to the basic giver—the knowledge and courage they desire—to the eternal prophecy, "the golden daughter of Zeus."

The final prayer is to send Ares, the "fire-bearing god" of the plague, away from Thebes. The chorus hope that Zeus will back up what he
has sent in the oracle, and rid the land of "that god unhonoured by the gods." And, fittingly, as the hymn called in the first section on the patroness of the land (Thebea-Athens), it ends invoking the god in whose festival the chorus now dances.

The imagery of the ode is most strikingly that of fire and light. In the first antistrophe the chorus asks for the three "Averters of death... (to) shine forth (προφάνετε) on me with care."

This shining is developed in two ways, and is opposed to the single-fold blazing fire of the plague. This fire, "the blazing of sorrows," is the irresistible fire which is a metaphor for the dying people, who rush "like well-feathered birds" faster than the fire, to Hades. And it is this fire which burns the chorus, at their encounter with Ares.

But the fire of the plague is opposed both by the knowledge which the three averters of death can shine forth (243, 790), and by the actual fire of Zeus, who is also a fire-bearing god. The chorus ask for the "blazing torches of divine Artemis," and for Bacchus to "draw
near blazing/As an ally, with his bright-burning/
Torch, against that god unhonoured by the gods."

Closely tied in with the fire and light
imagery, the hunting-military metaphor lends
an urgency to the forwarding of the dramatic
action. The priest first introduces the theme at
line 56:

For a mighty ship or tower is nothing
empty of men, with no one inside.

At 108 Oedipus asks about the murderers of Laius:

And where are they on this earth? Where shall be found
the ever-dimming track of the ancient guilt?

The tracking of the quarry, the instruments of
war and defence—all these are developed in the play
and often by the chorus. They call on the "guard-
ian," Artemis. They complain of a lack of a "spear
of defence." Of course these are needed, because
their adversary is "Ares the mighty, who now
without bronzen shield/Burns me, amidst shouts,
at his encounter." Ares' role as the god of war
is not forgotten. The ode ends with an appeal
to Bacchus to draw near as an "ally," to bring
his fire against the fire of the plague.

Though all these are complete, as it were,
within the poem, they also all have reference
to images which have gone before and those which
will follow. And it is not only by reference
to lines or single images that the parodos is
vitaly connected with the dialogue. The second
strophe, for example, virtually repeats that
part of the Priest's first speech in which he
describes the effect of the plague on the crops
and on the women and on the cattle. Whereas
at the beginning we accepted the description
of the plague with little emotional reaction,
when the situation is described by the chorus
we actively react. The Priest had said what
was happening, the chorus makes us feel their
attitude. As opposed to the matter-of-fact
speech of the Priest, the chorus can present a
sustained image with a far-reaching effect.
The chorus speak, for example, in line 13 of
"the suffering having rushed upon the city."
This is elaborated, and then the second strophe
closes with the image of the lives, "like well-
feathered birds,/Rushing faster than irresistible
fire,/To the brink of the Western god." The
plague rushes upon the city, and the results
of the plague rush to Hades. A simple picture,
its total effect is to call attention to itself.
By so doing, it succeeds in dramatizing a
situation that dialogue, with its relative informality, cannot successfully accomplish.

This is the most crucial role of the chorus in the parodos, and throughout the drama. Dialogue is snappy, it allows faster and more plausible exposition and dramatic action than a formal chorus. But it has limitations. Dialogue has rarely succeeded in transcending its own medium to a universal, formal, and therefore more significant (in terms of the breadth of emotional response and understanding) level of communication. And in those rare occasions when dialogue does reach that level, such as Lear's great outburst on the heath, the audience is perfectly aware that no man could ever talk that way; that this in effect is a revelation in the man of something greater than man. Thereby are revealed new and more magnificent reaches. This is exactly the role played by Sophocles' chorus in the Oedipus Tyrannus, and particularly in the parodos.

From the beginning of the prologue the two forces which are to clash so resoundingly have been presented as they essentially are. While
Oedipus has claimed that he will do all, will bring the murder to light, the chorus put their faith in the divine. This is the consistent position of both. Oedipus, as will be apparent, is respected and loved by the chorus, as he is by the Priest and citizens. The chorus, however, never lose their essential devotion and trust in the divine. The chorus is here in awe of the forces represented by the oracle, but it is neither confused nor does it express the "somewhat confused morality of the bourgeoisie."

Their beliefs are as logical and strong for them as Oedipus' self-confidence is right for him. Oedipus has proof of his own ability, and with reason does he make his claims; the chorus, as seen so far, may well respect him, but they believe in and are supported by the longer absolute religious tradition which eventually dominates the moral framework of the play.

III

First Episode and Stasimon Ll. 216-512

The parodos is a hymn; a formal and eloquent paean. Against that fabric Oedipus enters
You pray: and for your wish, if you will listen clearly to my words and serve your sickness, you could be helped and lifted from your woes.

The chorus has prayed to divinity, Oedipus answers. He is a stranger to the murder, but he will speak out. He calls himself an ally of Apollo and of the slain King. He will "reach to everything, searching to seize the very murderer." The chorus steadfastly refuses the implications of his speech, and express their trust in Apollo:

Since you put me under a curse, Lord, I shall speak; for I neither killed nor can point to him who did. And for the question, it is for Phoebus, who sent it, to speak about who did this deed.

They are committed to the belief in the gods that they express; they are loyal to Oedipus and want to help him as much as they can, but their real hope is in Phoebus. There is no question of a love of the gods. Gods are too distant, too powerful; they are immortal, and therefore they have nothing to lose by their actions. The chorus suggest a consultation with Teiresias, not because they distrust or dislike Oedipus, but because the old man is the "sacred prophet... in whom alone of all mankind is implanted Truth."

(Sée Trans. note to l. 284)
When Teiresias enters, he and Oedipus begin to argue. The seer does not want to say what he knows about Oedipus' connection with the murder and the plague. Oedipus does not anger from pride, but because of the words by which Teiresias will "dishonour the city." Concerned with the welfare of his city, Oedipus is naturally sensitive to any plots against his rule; Teiresias has accused him of being a murderer, of committing incest, and Oedipus can only think that the seer is lying for the sake of some plot. Because of his earlier dialogue with Creon, Oedipus also feels that his brother-in-law is involved (124, 128, 130). And, as a tyrannus, he is well aware of the nature of such plots, though he himself did not gain his power in the usual manner of usurpation. His conclusion, then, while frightening, is not unsupported.

O wealth, and power, and craft above craft
rising in the rivalries of life,
how much of envy is contained in you
if because of this reign, which the city has given
into my hands, unasked for,
this Creon-the-true, the friend from the start,
has come in secret, wishing to throw
me out, sending this crafty imposter,
a scheming vagabond, who for his gain
alone has eyes, but in his craft is blind?

(380ff.)

Oedipus is the rationalist; he can see things
only in terms of human ambition and rivalry.
He is a pragmatist who is a king, but he is a
king who is a tyrannus, not a hereditary ruler,
and he sees all around him the ambition and
craft which would normally be his. This is what
Oedipus has to draw on; he is convinced of his
own intelligence and of Teiresias' past failure:

"Where are you a clear prophet?
Why, when the riddling watch-dog was here,
did you not speak for release of these citizens?
And indeed, the riddle was not
for chance declaration, but needed prophetic skill.
You brought no light before, having
knowledge from neither gods nor men; but I,
know-nothing Oedipus, stopped her,
hitting the mark with intelligence; not learning
from birds!" (390ff.)

It is both the glory and tragedy of Oedipus that
he did not and could not learn from birds. And
still, after Teiresias warns him that "no man
shall be so miserably destroyed as you," Oedipus
replies as always; "If I have saved the city,
it is no care to me." (443)

Teiresias has been called a traitor; Oedipus
has been accused of being the murderer of Laius,
of having committed incest with his mother, and
he has been told of his future, when "blind, who
had sight, a beggar, who had wealth, he shall
leave this land/feeling his way on the ground
before him with a stick." (454) Against this terrible turn of events the chorus sing their first stasimon. Both of their respected leaders have been badly treated. Teiresias represents all that they believe, and Oedipus all that they love and have trusted. Their religious faith depends on what Teiresias represents, but the worth of living at all depends a great deal on the nature of the man whom they loved and admired so long. The pressure on the chorus causes them to reach a resolution which favours Oedipus in this stasimon, but it is a resolution which is hastily reached and one which cannot be held.

This ode is quite different from the parodos both in structure and tone; it is not a prayer, but a meditation. The first two stanzas are an image of the murderer fleeing from the oracles, and the last two express their feelings about the argument between Oedipus and Teiresias. Both Jebb and Sheppard begin their comments on this ode with the same statement: "Teiresias has just denounced Oedipus. Why do not the chorus at once express their horror?" Jebb explains this in the light of custom; "In accordance with the conception of the chorus as
personified reflection, it must comment on all that has been most stirring in the interval," in that order. He therefore sees two main themes to the ode. Sheppard admits that the formal order "corresponds to the order of the events witnessed since 215;" but this is not the entire explanation. "The chorus go back to the problem set by Apollo, not because they are unmoved by the last speeches of Teiresias, but because they have not understood them."

No doubt, the chorus are now confused, but it is just that which makes of the ode a unified poem. The second strophe and antistrophe set the grounds for the first two stanzas. They speak of the results of the oracle first not because they heard of the oracle before the argument, but because the argument has made the results of the oracle much more important to them. During the second half of the ode the chorus chose to believe Oedipus in the light of what they have heard from Teiresias. If Teiresias can be wrong, it is doubly important that the oracle be very right, and that it have the effects which the chorus hopefully describe.

The first strophe of the stasimon reminds us
of the parodos. There, the chorus asked about the nature of the oracle, here they ask about the object of the oracle, the hunted man. It is a natural progression from the earlier ode, and it tends to set that ode into a perspective which we did not have before. The connection is established by the imagery. In the stasimon the chorus have asked the various gods to help with their fire against the fire of the plague; here, they imagine Apollo leaping on the murderer "with fire and lightning." This is the answer to the first prayer. In the first ode we saw two types of fire, the destructive fire of the plague and the fire of the gods against the plague. This latter fire becomes, in the stasimon, the oracle itself, as "hope" was the oracle in the parodos: "For flashing brightly from the snowy peaks fitting shines the word of Parnassus to track down the unknown man in every way." This repetition of "flashing" intensifies the image and heightens it. This, along with the heavier rhythm of this ode, makes it seem much more ominous than did even the intricate parodos. The last word of the first strophe is heavy
and powerful; the Fates do not miss; the word order demands a pause after the word "unerring." Its effect is to remind the audience that this is true in the normal sense, but, because of its emphasis, it is also going to be true for Oedipus.

The first antistrophe pictures the flight of the fugitive. He is pictured as a bull "raging under the wild/Forest and over the caves/And amid rocks." He is on "wretched foot," with an obvious reference to the play on Oedipus' name. He is fleeing from the prophecy which itself has issued from the omphalos of the earth, the oracle at Delphi, but cannot escape. The prophecy, like the counsel of tested men, is "always living." Ironically, both the prophecy, which is always living, and the counsel of Oedipus, which is most alive because of his past action, are accurate and will both be effective and fulfilled.

Here also, the hunting metaphor is continued with the image of the running bull, and the Fates who chase with no missing. The oracle tells the people "to track the unknown man." This will be amplified in the following episode, especially in Oedipus’ speech, 538ff., where he talks about Creon’s treachery "stalking up
on him."

It is not until the second strophe of the stasimon that the chorus mentions the quarrel which is the basis of the intensity of the first half of the ode. Teiresias stirs them up, but "for what I shall say, I am at a loss." They "flutter with hope." In view of the connotation of flight and hovering (Parodos, 20; 1st. Stas., 18), the future of their hope seems insecure. Like most of the thematic words of the play, its progress is pejorative.

The chorus try to make some sense out of the argument between Oedipus and Teiresias, but cannot think of any feud between the "son of Polybus," whom they think is Oedipus, and the Labdacidae. Of course there is none; Oedipus himself is one of the Labdacidae. Because they cannot think of any good reason for Teiresias' indictment, and because they admire Oedipus, they will not go against Oedipus; he will have the benefit of the doubt. Once the chorus reach that stage of reasoning, they are ready to go on; they begin to question even the medium of the prophecies, the seers:
But in truth Zeus and Apollo have intelligence and the deeds of men know; but that of men this seer has greater power than me. There is no power of decision, though in wisdom a man might surpass the wisdom of another. (28ff.)

This is not an easy step for the chorus, who must believe in the oracles, and thus in the seers, but it does show their attitude towards Oedipus, and it is the foundation for the terrible strain which they will later feel when they learn the truth:

For visibly against him came the winged maid once, and he was shown wise in the test, and dear to the city; for this, in my heart, he shall never be liable to the name of evil. (34-36)

Yet they will learn that he is base. This ode serves, primarily, as a measure, first, of the absolute greatness of Oedipus and, second, of the depth of his fall and its ensuing completeness.

IV

Second Episode and Stasimon ll. 513-910

First Kommos

The entrance of Creon just after the first stasimon adds a new element to the play. Oedipus is the humanist-rationalist who is opposed
thematically by the absolutist orientation of the chorus (and of the moral framework of the play). Creon belongs to neither camp; he is what we would call a middle-of-the-roader; he neither proposes nor denies, but lives according to what he sees around him. He makes little reference to matters moral or religious. He believes in the "all nourishing/fire of the lord the sun" and in the purity of the "earth and holy rain." (1425ff.) He believes in the omnipotence of the gods, though his faith is more or less perfunctory in tone, and that life is more or less subject to the whims of the gods, or chance. (1523)

Jebb's characterization of Creon is different from this. That he is "a man of somewhat rigid nature, and essentially matter-of-fact," is fair. But Jebb goes further, and runs into trouble. "In his reasonable indignation, he bases his argument on a calculation of interest (583), insisting on the substance in contrast with the show of power, as in the Antigone his vindication of the written law ignores the unwritten." Having made the leap to the Antigone, Jebb goes even further:
His blunt anger at a positive wrong is softened by no power of imagining the mental condition in which it was done. He cannot allow for the tumult which the seer's terrible charge excited in the mind of Oedipus more than for the conflict of duties in the mind of Antigone.

(Jebb's note to ll. 513ff.)

Creon (Κρόνως) is a term of honour: king, lord, master. That in the three plays of Sophocles' "Oedipus cycle" there is a Creon is no proof that the character is the same. Jebb does not mention the Creon of the Oedipus at Colonus, though he has no trouble in using the Oedipus of the Antigone to explain the Oedipus of the Oedipus Tyrannus. He does not mention Creon in the O.C. because there he is a different man from the other two plays. In fact, in this play there is little delineation of character of Creon. Where the Creon of the other two plays is often autocratic and overbearing, in the O.T. he is only sincere and humble. We sympathize with his intelligence—his life is enviable—and we certainly do not feel that he is interested only in himself and that he is completely insensitive to the feelings of others. Sophocles' emphasis is rather on his recognition of his position and his complete satisfaction.
Were he the sort of man that both Oedipus and Jebb would make him out to be, then he would have taken advantage of the kingdom at any number of points, and he would have used his power over Oedipus at the end in less considerate ways. In fact, he is not that kind of man, as a good part of the play is expended to prove.

Creon is so far from being simply indignant that he is willing to give up his life if he has harmed Oedipus in any way:

For if in these events he thinks to have suffered anything from me pointing in either word or deed toward harm, then I have no yearning in this life for long years. (515-518)

When Oedipus passes out from his house, he is surprised to see Creon there, and he angrily lists accusations against Creon that apply exactly to himself. Creon only wants to clear himself from these false charges, but Oedipus will give him no opportunity:

CR: First hear this from me, as I shall explain!

OE: Do not tell this to me, that you are not evil! (547,548)

Creon claims, as did Teiresias, the right of equal speech: "Do you know what you are doing? Against your speech hear equal/reply. And then,
understanding, judge for yourself." Oedipus is less than reasonable in his reply: "You are marvelous in speech, but I am bad at learning."

Throughout this dialogue Oedipus' tone is sarcastic and insulting, and Creon is reasonable, aware of his position, and solicitous of Oedipus' appearance and well-being.

It takes the intervention of Jocasta and the chorus to convince Oedipus, in the first kommos, to give up his accusations. The first line of the kommos strikes a new note in the tragedy: "Be persuaded, consent, and have understanding, Lord, I beseech you." Oedipus has been shown lacking. He did not understand Creon's earlier speech:

It is unjust both to think evil men falsely good, or good men, in the same way, evil. To cast away a good friend is equal, I say, to doing the same thing with your life, which is most loved. But in time you will know these things without a slip, since time alone reveals a good man; though you could know an evil man in just one day. (611-615)

The chorus then is asking Oedipus, the man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx, to be wise and understanding. Their purpose in pleading for Creon again is based on their belief in divinity;
their wish is "never to cast a friend under oath/
Unhonoured, by unknown reports, into guilt."

Oedipus accuses the chorus of being in league
with Creon, and they reply as Creon did:

No, by the god who stands before all the gods,
Helios; since godless, friendless, whatever is the
worst
May I die, if I have this idea;
But now the land decays in terrible fate;
This hurts my soul, and also if evils on evils
Are heaped, from you two to those of long ago.

(9ff.)

Creon's comment, shortly thereafter, is revealing:

You are shown hateful in yielding; but violent, whenever
your passion goes too far. And natures like this
are themselves, with reason, hardest to bear.

(19-21)

The kommos ends with the statement of the chorus
that they would be insane if they were to forsake
Oedipus. Jocasta tries to set her husband's mind
at rest, convincing him that since her child
had been killed on Cithaeron, he could not
possibly have killed Laius. She exults over the
apparent lack of validity of the earlier oracles:

Apollo failed to bring to pass for him
to become the slayer of his father; nor for Laius,
the terrible thing which he feared, to be killed by
his son;
thus did messages of the seers determine.
No longer give them heed; for what the god
searches to use, he will easily bring to light

(721-725)

At this revelation, Oedipus begins to understand
what is happening: "As I hear this, wife, what a wandering soul and excited mind I have!" And he asks about Laius, and about his trip, and he explains to Jocasta why he feels as he does. The one hope he feels he has left depends on the number of men who killed Laius; Oedipus will send for the servant who escaped and question him. If this man still claims that there were several robbers, then despite the similarity of Oedipus' experience to Jocasta's tale and the report, he will not be guilty of the murder of the king (he is still unaware that Laius might have been his father). Jocasta speaks to reassure her husband, a counterpoint to his unrelieved gloom:

And if he should turn away from his early words, o Lord, he can never show the murder of Laius to be right with the prophecy, since Loxias said he was to die by my child. And indeed, that wretched one never killed him, but he had perished before. So, for seer-craft, I would have sight neither to one side nor the other. (851-858)

The following stasimon is the credo of the chorus, and it appears when it is very much needed. During this episode Oedipus has found his position weakening under him; his brother-in-law has, as
he thinks, turned against him, his wife re-enforces Teiresias' earlier accusations about his being the murderer, and the city is still in the throes of the plague. But Oedipus' philosophy is as yet untouched. His concern is still with the right, with the best interest of the city. As he said to Teiresias (314,315), "To help all men with all/ you have and can do is the very best of labours," so he is still concerned first for the city:

CR: Then what do you wish, to cast me out of the land?
OE: I want to kill you, not to let you flee!
CR: And thus you would show what sort of thing is envy?
OE: Do you speak neither yielding nor complying?
CR: No, for I see your lack of sense.
OE: Enough for me!
CR: It should be equally for me.
OE: But your nature is evil.
CR: And if you perceive nothing?
OE: One must nevertheless rule.
CR: Not when you rule evilly!
OE: O city, city!
CR: And my city as well, not yours alone.

(621ff.)

Can any cry be more convincing than the last of Oedipus, "O city, city"? And any retort more
poignant than Creon's, "And my city as well, not yours alone"? This is all that Oedipus has to show for his reign besides his wife and children whom he dearly loves, but who must come after the primary responsibility of the city. When this decays or is threatened, so is Oedipus hurt or destroyed.

The chorus have seen the paradigm of heroism and greatness challenged by evil; he has made promises reserved for the gods alone; he has accused the representative of Apollo of being false. They have seen Jocasta first doubt the absolute application of the oracles, then challenge their validity in general. From the point of view of the chorus as well as the audience, the system of the world of the play is collapsing. Oedipus is circling closer and closer to a truth which will completely destroy his world, and the closer he gets the less there is that he can do about it. Around his one-track mind circle the image of the furies and the oracles as well as his own tested counsels. We see that he carries the city with him and the sympathies of all. But he seems to be acting very like the unknown
man who in the first stasimon was "ranging under the wild forest and over the caves and amid rocks."

The second stasimon is the most beautiful and moving of the lyric passages of this greatest and most beautiful of tragedies. Jebb is willing to see the ode as not primarily directed towards Oedipus, but Sheppard accepts the common and obvious relation of the ode's implied censure for the Tyrannus as actual. The main problem of the ode is its completeness within itself as a poem. It is both a beautifully lyric prayer with no reference to what surrounds it, and it is a withering comment on the relation of the characters to the play's moral framework.

As a prayer, or more exactly a lament, the ode has three thematic sections, like the parodos. The first section coincides with the first strophe, and is a simple prayer: "May my destiny let me bear/Reverent purity in all speaking/And doing." The second section is in two parts and includes all of the first antistrophe and part of the second strophe. This section is a definition of pride (ὕβρις); the first part describes pride which, "if it satiate itself of much in vain...thrusts
into necessity/Where his foot is useless to use."
But there is also the pride which is the rivalry
of any great city; the competition which keeps
the city strong. This sort of pride is necessary
and valuable. The second part of the section
describes the pride which demands total destruction;
if a "man disdainfully goes in word or deed,/
Unfearful of Justice, nor/Worshipping images of
the gods." The third section is the final prayer.
"If such deeds are honoured,/Why should I dance?"
The chorus pray that the decay of religion may
not escape the "ever-deathless reign" of Zeus,
for "nowhere is Apollo shining in honour!/Divinity
wanders haltingly about." The poem, then, begins
with a prayer to divine law (vōµος), gives the
grounds for that prayer—the result of excess
pride, and prays that the father of these laws,
Zeus, will not let them die.

The conflict of the prayer is clearly stated
in the first stanza. Divine law (vōµος) is
opposed to mortality or human nature (φύσις).
This is the basis of the rest of the ode, as
well as of the entire play. Divinity never dies;
it never sleeps. Human beings do die and sleep.
They walk on four legs and two and three, with
single voice. When Oedipus answered the riddle he characterized man, and himself. The entire pattern of imagery in the play of time and fortune further expresses the temporality of man.

Sleep implies humanity. The chorus will say in the fourth stasimon of Oedipus, that "All-seeing Time has found you....To speak uprightly, I revived because of you,/But now I have closed my eyes in sleep." Pride is also a human attribute, and being such, it is a chancy quality. Pride is the quality of a tyrannus, and most tyrannoi were not ideal rulers. Pride, if it goes too far, causes destruction; but who is to say when it goes too far? Creon has said earlier to Oedipus, "You are shown hateful in yielding, but violent, whenever/your passion goes too far." (673-674)

A certain amount of passion is evidently valuable, for the chorus pray never to lose the good "rivalry" of the city. And the line where rivalry becomes excessive pride is never defined.

Applied to the context of the play, the major statement of the chorus here takes on a startling significance. Oedipus is a mortal. He is not a bad tyrannus and his natural pride
is not excessive as a ruler. Oedipus rather
fits the other fatal mistake; he goes too far in
the rivalry. A sanction like that would stop
most men from working to capacity, but the hero
could never control himself. So it is that man
who does the most for the city, for the people,
who will naturally and tragically cross the
undefined line. He knows that it is there, but
if he observes the chance of its presence, then
he is more or less inactive and denies his po­
tential. Oedipus is aware that he is taking a
chance all through the drama. This is why he
will make his famous statement that he is the
child of Fortune. Being the man he is, the
only way that he thinks to escape the fate of
any man who climbs too high, is to be lucky.
He knows his position is not natural. He is the
child, he says, of that fortune which gives good.
It is unobservant to say that Oedipus is unaware
of the other quality of fortune; he knows what
he is doing. The chorus here have given the
grounds for that knowledge; they have placed
what has gone before and what will now happen
into a new and terrifying perspective, much
as the first stasimon. But this ode has an
even wider significance than the earlier poem. This is the ultimate statement of the fate which determines Oedipus' destruction. Here his end is certain, as is the fate of Jocasta, or any heroic individual who cannot stay within the boundaries of normal existence. This poem, with and without the context, teaches that the great "golden mean," propounded by the Sophists and by Creon in the play, may be safe, but it is not life. The city needs its rivalry to exist, and that rivalry is always dangerous. A man has to take a chance to make his life worthwhile; the men who take that chance are great men, all the more great because of the probable result of that chance. When they lose their loss cannot be questioned; they deserve whatever they get because they knew what they were getting into. But this is the glory as well as the tragedy of man. Bernard Knox sees it and expresses the problem clearly:

The proud tragic view of Sophocles sees in the fragility and inevitable defeat of human greatness the possibility of a purely human heroism which the gods can never attain, for the condition of their existence is everlasting victory.
III

Third Episode and Stasimon Ll. 911-1109

Against the impact of the central second stasimon, the suppliant figure of Jocasta stands out in pathetic relief. She who has blasphemed the truth of the oracles and therefore the very gods themselves, who has called Apollo a liar, in effect, now comes to pray to that god to save the city from the pollution which was actually the fault of her and of Laius. Her prayer recalls earlier imagery, and most importantly the ship imagery. Oedipus has been compared before with the captain of a ship, but now the captain is in panic. The early picture of the ship of state, too much tossing "to raise her prow from the bloody-waved tossing sea," was soon forgotten; now, once more, the fearful plague is brought to the attention of the audience, and once more they are reminded that outside this personal tragedy is a disaster of the most horrifying dimensions. And, of course, with the usual efficacy of Sophoclean irony, everything that Jocasta prays for is granted.

With the Messenger from Corinth is presented
the play's comic relief. He is no Falstaff, but he nevertheless serves a comic need. Of course, he is not all sweetness and light; in fact, the garrulous old man is the perfect example of the tragi-comic figure: the surface of his speech is laugh provoking, the effect of his speech is destruction. His opening lines set the tone:

Might I from you, o Strangers, learn where is the house of the tyrannus, Oedipus? Or better yet, tell his present place, if you know where?

The Greek is enlightening:

Ar' an par' hymŏn, ὀ κανοὶ μαθοίμ' hopou?
ta tou turannou dōmat' estin Oidipou,
malista d' auton earat' kataiath' hopou.?

The steady machine-gun rattle of the three line endings cannot fail to make its point. Here is the climax of the paradox of Oedipus' name; it is a terrible counterpoint to the surface banter of the innocent messenger. He is a combination of Coleridge's "Person on business from Porlock," and one of the messengers from the "Book of Job." The puns on "Oedipus" would be rib-splitting, if we did not know about the meaning of that name. The old saw about 'what's in a name?' here has its fullest answer; the entire tragedy is in the name of its hero.

The Messenger from Corinth predicts happiness
for the house and husband of Jocasta, and also

grief; we must be aware that all through the play
the characters and the chorus speak more than
they know. This is no exception. Happiness
will come, the plague will be lifted from the
city when the murder is solved; but of course
the solution of the murder will bring grief.
The foundation for this dual reaction is already
apparent in the chorus.

Jocasta summons Oedipus to hear from the

messenger that Polybus is dead. In the light
of what Jocasta has said before, this seems to
be just more proof to Oedipus that the oracles
may not be accurate:

So!...Why, then, wife, should one look
to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or up to
screeching birds, by whose guiding
I was to kill my father.

He is dead,
hidden under the ground, and I am here,
without touching a weapon.

But Oedipus will not accept the proof without a

qualification:

Unless he wasted
away longing for his son--then he would have died by me.
But for the oracles as they are, at least,
Polybus is in Hades, and the worthless oracles are with him.
(964 ff.)

He is still worried, however, by the second half
of the oracle, that he still will lie with his
mother. Jocasta tries to ease his fears. Now
she is worried, and would just as soon have
Oedipus drop his search.

Why should man fear, who is ruled by fortune
and has clear foresight of nothing?
It is best to live without purpose, as you are able.
Do not fear of marriage to your mother,
for many men already in dreams
have lain with their mothers. That man to whom
these are as nothing; most easily does he bear his life.

(977 ff.)

The Messenger questions him, and with one
terribly ironic statement begins the downward
plunge of the action (though this episode ends
on a false peak of hope): "O child, surely
you do not know what you are doing!" If Oedipus
does not know, being a man of knowledge and
intellect, what he is doing, being the man of
action and decision, who does? The following
stichomythia throws Oedipus into one more blind
alley. The city is now forgotten, and it is the
question of Oedipus' birth which is the concern
of the rest of the play. Oedipus begins to
believe, that, if Polybus and Merope were not
his father and mother, then all the reluctance
to tell him his real birth must result from a
shame because he was born of slaves or base
parents. Jocasta becomes incoherent and hysterical to Oedipus, and rushes off in grief to the palace. Oedipus believes that having been herself of royal blood she is ashamed to be married to him. The chorus is not so sure:

Oedipus, why has the woman gone, dashing away in wild grief? I fear that from this silence will burst out only evil! (1073-1075)

Oedipus takes the position that is uniquely his throughout the play. It is the summary of his glory, and the reason for his tragedy:

Whatever must be, let it burst forth; and I even if I am low born, still wish to learn my origin. Perhaps she is ashamed of my base birth, for she is high-strung, more than a woman's spirit.

But I, holding myself a child of Fortune which gives good, will not be dishonoured. For I was born of that mother, and my relations, the months, have defined me in turn, small and great. Having been born of such, I could never come out such another man that I would not learn my birth! (1076 ff.)

This is the height of Oedipus' resounding self-confidence, though it is obviously a false peak; this is the precipice, perhaps, of the second stasimon. The chorus, grasping at straws, echo his extravagant claim in their third stasimon with two highly lyrical and almost jocular stanzas.

The ease with which they follow his confident lead is a demonstration of their desperation.
This is a radical change of their attitude and, by its very swiftness, shows both their love and respect for Oedipus—and the extent to which they are willing to take any shred of evidence in his favour in lieu of real and satisfying proof. Oedipus has compared himself with the seasons; he is the son of Fortune. The not too veiled implication is that he is greater than man, more like god; or perhaps that man is greatest, and god is only a function of man. The chorus pictures Oedipus as honouring Cithaeron—with unmistakable, if unknown, irony—as "Native and as nurse and mother," and because of "kindnesses to my lord." They then picture him as being the child of some god, perhaps Bacchus, the god most foreign to the fate immediately reserved for Oedipus.

VI

Fourth Episode and Stasimon Ll. 1110-1222

The fourth episode is very short and destructive. The Herdsman, the one man who escaped from the party of the murdered King, enters and confirms Oedipus' fate. He, like Teiresias, is reluctant to speak, once he learns the matter of his summons.
But in his case Oedipus is not afraid of physical harm (see my note on 376), and the Herdsman is subjected to a mild torture. In 50 lines Oedipus knows the truth. His reaction to this information is in character; he realizes what he has done and what he must do:

HE: O Gods, I am near in this to speaking a terrible thing.

OE: And I to hearing: but, nevertheless, one must hear. "One must hear," just as "one must rule." This is his duty, both to himself and to the city, and there is no choice. There is a third stage to the progression, for, at the end of the play, Oedipus will say, "one must obey." In the final lines of the stasimon, Oedipus states the justification for his fall:

Gods! Gods, all this is come out true.
O light! For the last time I look upon you.
I am shown born of unfitting parents,
and accursed in marriage, and in my un-natural murder.
(1182-1185)

The subject of what Knox calls the "great ode" is Oedipus in particular and man in general. There is no reference to the plague, for that is no longer relevant to the play. The emphasis is shifted completely to Oedipus, the man and hero. The ode is a lament. The first strophe presents
the despair of the chorus for the conditions of man, which Oedipus has illustrated. The first antistrophes and second strophe relate the grounds of this disillusionment. These two stanzas demonstrate clearly the dual attitude of the chorus which makes their despair so effective. The first antistrophe tells all the things that the chorus admire, though they start with an unambiguous censure:

*Having shot too High, he became master of prosperity, happy in all things. O Zeus, he caused to destroy herself The crooked-talon oracle- Chanting maiden; and against death, He stood up as a strong tower for my land.*

For these things, the chorus greatly honour him. But they are aware now, and have been before, that Oedipus truly has "shot too high." And part of their concern throughout the play has been that the effects of this excess will not be properly punished. The second antistrophe describes the punishment or result of his earlier excess. But they certainly do not exult. The punishment is necessary, if there is a divine law and power, but it is not pleasant to accept the result of their prayers and expectations wreaked on a man whom they also love and admire above all others.
This terrible division of feelings is expressed most movingly in the second antistrophe, the final lament.

Against your will, all-seeing Time has found You; He judges the marriage which is no marriage, wherein too long
Begotten is also begetter.

Alas, o child of Laius,
Would that, o would that
I had never seen you.
I lament exceeding lamentation from my lips. To speak uprightly, I revived because of you,
But now I have closed my eyes in sleep.

They have won their point, but it was at the expense of Oedipus. The attitude of the chorus shows primarily why Oedipus does not really lose, though the chorus certainly win. Obviously excess is punished, whether it be the excess of outrageous pride or the possible but unknown excess from "the good rivalry which the city needs." But by their reaction to the actual punishment for the excess, the chorus does not deny by any means the value of the excess itself; in fact, by its misery, the chorus affirms in some measure the value of Oedipus' actions.

The stasimon closes several thematic patterns of imagery, bringing them together in the same way that the preceding episode brought together the truth of Oedipus' birth and the murder of Laius.
Of course the idea of "equality," with all it has stood for in the play, is pinched off by the first two lines of the ode: "O generations of mortals,/As equal to nothing do I consider your living." Oedipus, who was at first equalled in mind, if not in speech, to the gods themselves, here is equal to nothing. Teiresias had told him, earlier, that he would be equal to himself and to his children (425); here is the sum total; nothing. It is hard to believe, for the chorus as well as us of a different age; but the chorus, unlike modern critics in general, are willing--while not being entirely pleased--to accept what must be.

Here too, is the summation of the riddle of the Sphinx. Oedipus destroyed her, as we are told several times in the play, by giving the correct answer to the riddle. But this ode demonstrates the real meaning of that answer, for Oedipus' fate is a paradigm of mortality; all of mankind are equal to nothing, not just Oedipus who happened to shoot "too high." Man is a creature who walks on four feet, and two and three, and though Teiresias clearly stated that Oedipus would leave his land, "feeling his way
on the ground before him with a stick (456)," the truth of that prophecy was not clear until this final ode.

Along with the answer to the riddle, the ode emphasizes the parallel imagery of growth and birth. This culminates in the last lines of the second strophe:

The bounteous harbour--
The self-same--was sufficient,
child and father, for the husband.
How on this earth were the furrows plowed by your father able to bear you, wretched one,
And hold you so long in silence?

But the most important fact to notice about this ode is that it is entirely unified, thematically as well as poetically. Poetically, the structure is as above; but it should be noticed that the themes so far mentioned are the most important in terms of the full "meaning" of the tragedy. Gone, now, is the fire imagery; in its place is the vast complex of growth, life, and death. The final truth of the ode is that "Against your will all-seeing Time has found you." This is what Oedipus would not see; time, in the form of the natural passage of seasons, demonstrated by the riddle, exemplified in the growth of Oedipus--and thereby of necessity the one factor
which must bring change, is triumphant. Time represents the gods as well as the wishes of the chorus. The play, as explained in this lament, this very moving poem, is not a play of fate, not a play of ἀμαρτία. It is merely, like Oedipus, a paradigm of the real passage of life.

VII

Exodus Ll. 1223ff.

Second Kommos

The remaining 300 lines do not further the plot, but re-enforce what has gone before; structurally and thematically they balance the hope of strength and the overwhelming confidence of the prologue with a graphic image of the real basis of man's life. The exodus shows, that though man has infinite capabilities, as demonstrated by Oedipus' heroic nature, he nevertheless is limited by a divine law or necessity or nature, whatever one would name this absolute force.

The closing metaphor of sleep is not accidental. Oedipus introduced it himself earlier in the play (65). It is his contention that he is always awake and alert, and his following
of this belief, true as it may be, causes the chorus to finally close its eyes in sleep. As terrible as the image is, the last stasimon closes quietly. When the servant, the messenger from the house, comes on stage, the audience is ready to accept the horror, the necessary conclusion to Oedipus' discovery of the truth. His speech is long, and it builds up to a climax which is too strong for language to express. After speaking of the terrible hanging of Jocasta and the blinding of Oedipus, in the most vivid speech, he concludes:

The long standing prosperity of before
was justly happiness; but now, today,
sighing, ruin, death, shame, all evils
which can be names--none of them are not here! (1282-1285)

His final lines state the element which makes the tragedy of Oedipus so powerful:

The bars of the gate are opening.

You shall soon see a sight
such that even he who abhors it, must still have compassion. (1294-1296)

He is completely and deservedly ruined, yet there is that in him which merits, even demands, pity.

The chorus are especially caught by the implications of the dilemma. In the second kommos,
they fulfil the promise of the parodos ("I am stretched on the rack, shaking my heart, for fear of terrible things):

O gods! Gods, nor am I able to look upon You; wishing to ask much, to learn much,
And having much to consider;
What a shuddering holds me!

(7-10)

The terrible things of which the chorus could only have a premonition are now unveiled before their eyes. They ask Oedipus why the misfortune has happened, what god caused him to act as he did, and in the fallen hero's answer we see the fine but all-important distinction made between a play of fate and a drama, like the O.T., in which it is not the fate which is the active and inciting force, but the nature of the free individual.

From Apollo this was; from Apollo, friends. He brought to pass these my evil, evil sufferings!
But no-one raised his hand but I, the sufferer, myself!
What was fit for me to see;
for whose seeing there was nothing sweet to see?

And what is Apollo, for Oedipus? It is fairly clear from what has gone before, and what has been said by both the chorus and Oedipus, that Apollo is mentioned here as the author of the deed in the same way that knowledge leads to action.
For Oedipus is blaming himself for the deed, and
it is only through knowledge, or supposed knowledge, that the deed could become manifest. He is no puppet; his tragedy is his own. If it were not, there would be no tragedy. (see chapter III).

He asks to see his children, after the lyrical exchange of the kommos has softened the physical shock of Oedipus' appearance. Creon, still the sympathetic and understanding man of before (who, despite Jebb's characterization, does not take advantage of Oedipus), has already sent for them to ease the sorrow of their brother-father.

He delineates their future as his children, and advises them to "wish to live where fitness allows, to chance/upon a life more sweet than that of your sire." Sheppard's translation of these lines is revealing of the trend of modern criticism, where the idea of the "golden mean" has been transferred to situations where it does not apply.

He translates,

Be your prayer to live,
Where fortune's modest measure is, a life
That shall be better than your father's was.
(1512-1514)

"That the right reading is οὐ καὶ ὡς ἀεὶ ζῇν,
βίον," he says in his note, "I hope that my whole commentary has proved." The manuscript
reads as I have translated, τοῦ βίου. When a
hero of the stature and strength of Oedipus is
presented, though sinning, in a light as favourable
as is, under the condition, possible, it is
untenable and unwise to hold that the meaning
of the play is to live reasonably quietly and
reasonably inconspicuously; a mean produces
obviously no extremes, and it is only by extremes
that a man can demonstrate and fulfil his own
infinite promise. The man who will not "engage,"
who keeps to his modest measure, does not really
live. Sophocles has shown that a hero can and
will be destroyed, and that the destruction is
deserved. But in that destruction, Sophocles
also shows a nobility and value that can be
proven no other way.

Oedipus finishes his advice to his daughters
in this fashion, and is ready to leave the country,
fulfilling the terms of his own curse. He becomes
so insistent, that he must be reminded by Creon--
with a now terrible connotation--"Do not wish
to have power in everything, for your power did
not remain constant to your life."

Here, Bernard Knox would have the play end.
In essence, he doubts that the lines after Creon's
statement are genuine. As a basis to his argument, presumably, he follows the judgement of the Scholiast, who would give lines 1524-1530 to Oedipus, but thinks that the play would be better if it ended with 1523. The manuscripts all contain the lines and give them to Oedipus. Knox's real reason is, I think, outside of the notation of the Scholiast, whose evidence is at best weak.

The final phrase of Creon--"Do not wish to exercise power in everything"--brings us full circle; it is an echo of the first words addressed to Oedipus in the play; "Oedipus, you who exercise power in this country," the priest said to him at the beginning (kratynôn 14).... The swiftness of Oedipus' recovery from the shock of self-recognition can be gauged from the fact that in the very last line of the play Oedipus has to be reminded of his reversal. Knox would have the play end on Creon's line because of the effect of "power;" but he does not recognize the real significance of that resemblance, and it is here that his reasoning leads him astray. He is right, that this line from Creon brings the play "full circle;" but the play is not primarily concerned with Oedipus, the particular man. It is concerned with an ideal, and ideals do not exist. Creon's lines illustrate not the progress of Oedipus, but the
necessary course of the life of man, the ideal. This is why the play does not end with 1523; it ends rather with the chorus, who from the terrible fate of Oedipus move on to the terrible fate of any man. Their lines move, as the entire play moves, from the particular example to the universe of which that particular is the paradigm. For, we must never forget, Oedipus is an example; the play is not a biography, but an allegory, in the sense that it is a sustained metaphor in which the existence of man is described in terms of a particular man. The play must end with the lines of the chorus rather than with the lines of Creon, because the effect of the play is finally universal rather than particular. To end with Creon is to destroy this play.
Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause.... The tragic emotion, in fact, is a face looking two ways, towards terror and towards pity, both of which are phases of it. You see I use the word "arrest." I mean that the tragic emotion is static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing. (Joyce, Portrait, 204, 205)

I

The effect of a given tragedy is a direct function of the tragic philosophy from which it springs. By "philosophy" I mean the point of view of the author towards the rationale of the moral framework of his play. It is within this tragic philosophy that the tragic conflict is formed. Obviously, the actual plot conflict will vary as the subject matter and the times change, so there can be neither a typical tragic hero nor a typical tragedy. But the tragic philosophy is the same, and the basic conflict does not change. The purpose of this chapter,
then, is to define or describe the nature of this tragic philosophy and its related tragic effect.

Certain things about Sophocles' masterwork are, in the light of the previous chapters, fairly obvious. The hero must fall. As I hope has been convincingly demonstrated, Oedipus does not fall because of a tragic "flaw," but because of his own heroic nature. His whole being promises that he will not and cannot remain powerful, but must in the end fail. This is seen through the time and growth imagery, as well as in the system of divine law revealed by the chorus. Furthermore, the conditions surrounding and leading to his fall are prophesied and are therefore fated. But the place of fate in the tragedy is not, to us, an entirely comprehensible concept. That he is fated to act in certain ways does not mean that he must act in that way, but that he will. And for Sophocles, there was a difference.

Fate in the Oedipus Tyrannus is a combination of what we would call luck or chance and predestination. The former is best seen as fortune, τοξίη; the latter, destiny, μοῖρα. Of the two, destiny is the clearer concept. It is destiny
to which the chorus pray in the central second stasimon:

May my destiny let me bear
Reverend purity in all speaking
And doing, whose primary laws are before us
High-footed; laws born
Through the aether of heaven, of which Olympus
Alone is father. Neither was their's
A mortal birth, brought forth
From men; and may forgetfulness never put them to sleep;
Great in them is the god, nor will he grow old.

Destiny is the framework of the play. It is as
cold as an absolute and non-rational force can be.
It is represented by divine laws, whose enforcement
is the job of the gods, but it is itself superior
to the gods. It is not therefore the will of
the gods, but it is a necessity unto itself.
It is because of the inscrutability of destiny
that the chorus can only say at the end of the play:

Call no mortal happy who is still looking
forward to his final day; not until
he passes the limit of his life, suffering nothing of pain.

This is the force that is regular, like the seasons—
and like the natural course of a man's birth,
life, and death. Part of destiny can be seen
by the gods, then related by Apollo to Teiresias.
Since the seer only sees what the gods allow,
and they themselves do not originate destiny,
it is not altogether unreasonable that Jocasta
and Oedipus, as well as the chorus, should doubt
the readings of omens and the utterances of the oracles. One can never really know all of what is going to happen; hence the storied ambiguity of classical oracles. The final attitude of the chorus towards destiny, as quoted above, must also satisfy the reader; that it is the framework of the play is clear from both the evidence of the chorus and the final outcome of the drama. From this fact comes the desperation which is part of the tragic philosophy. From destiny there comes the limits of man's capabilities. But in terms of the pity of the play, its warmth, the key concept is fortune, and this is much less clear than destiny.

Fortune is mutable, as destiny never is. Oedipus can not hope that the destiny of his daughters is better than his, all he can ask is (1478,1479):

May you have good fortune, and may the gods chance to guard your path better than they did mine.

Oedipus is not the son of Destiny, but "the son of Fortune/which gives good." It is through fortune that Oedipus leaves Corinth to avoid his destiny; it is fortune that he kills his father in the way that he does, thus gaining
for himself the kingdom. It is left to human beings to act within the framework of fate, and inside this destiny their actions are directed only by their own free will and the workings of fortune. The outlines of a man's life may be destined, but it is always up to the individual to bring about through his own free will this destiny.

The concept is no more foreign than orthodox Christian theology; Adam is created in the image of God, and he will fall from his happy state. Yet, there is no question of fate here; he is warned of his future if he is unaware of the lies and deceits of Satan. Though he must fall in order for Christ to be crucified, yet Adam's fall must be seen as the result of his own action. It is seen, in fact, as a direct result of his own free will. Though I do not suggest any other relations between Christian theology and Greek tragedy, the parallel of these two concepts is striking. Of course there is a difference in the character of the absolute portrayed by Sophocles and, for example, Milton. The god of the poet of *Paradise Lost* is warm, though just; Sophocles has gods, but the real force
behind the workings of the universe is not anything so approachable as an anthropomorphic (or at least actual) god; it is a force pure and simple, rather non-human than inhuman. To apply a Greek concept to the seventeenth century, the will of God is destiny; fortune makes Eve finally taste and eat the apple.

Bowra sees the fall "as a lesson to men not to trust in their happiness or their knowledge." In this acceptance, he says, Oedipus shows himself to be greater even "than when he read the riddle of the sphinx and became the king of Thebes."

Bernard Knox, in disallowing the final lines of the chorus, insists on an Oedipus entirely different from the humble Job figure of Bowra who demonstrates that "through resignation and suffering the rightful harmony of things is restored." On the contrary, he conceives of the character of Oedipus at the end as "the reconstruction of the imperious, dynamic, intelligent figure of the opening scenes." Referring to line 1187, Knox sees Oedipus "so far from being zero that in the last line of the play Creon has to tell him not to try to rule in everything." Oedipus "surmounts the catastrophe, and reasserts himself."
The destruction of Oedipus is certainly a paradigm, warning man not to trust in his knowledge, but the "rightful harmony of things" is not re-established because of resignation; as Knox points out, Oedipus is not essentially different in character at the end from what he was at the beginning. There is an order of things, and the fault with the order was originally the failure of Laius and Jocasta to observe the oracle warning them against having a child. But the fault is also Oedipus, who himself ignores the oracles of the gods, and this is the fault which the play examines. When Oedipus is punished, the scale is balanced. The real concern of the play, however, is not the particular fault (though Oedipus is the central character of the plot, and his search and fall provides the real concern of the play), but the general flow and ebb of man's existence. The biggest single fact of destiny is that man must die; this is the real answer to the riddle of the sphinx; the meaning of the time and growth imagery; the fact which the gods most signify. And man can not be called happy because he is limited, first by birth and death, and second by the force
of fortune within these limits. All men are subject to these limitations, and which they are not always predictable. If a man stays within certain limits he is safe, but these limits are not always known. He can err through excess pride, but when is pride excessive? Yet—the paradox of the tragedy—the Oedipus Tyrannus is an affirmation that despite these limits or because of them, life has a meaning and value which is only illustrated by the tragic destruction of a heroic man.

The difficulty of the play comes from distance; the society of fifth-century Athens is very different from ours. It was different even for Aristotle, less than a century later. Our culture, since the end of the fifth century, B.C., has generally been in accordance with Pope’s advice: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/The proper study of Mankind is Man." The Oedipus Tyrannus was written to reaffirm the value of a different concept; Sophocles created his play as an affirmation of a culture in which divine law was absolute, and man was absolutely regulated by this, be his capabilities ever so
But even as he wrote, Greek culture had begun to decay to that more comforting and easily understood doctrine of Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things."

In this sense Oedipus is a humanist, a rationalist. For him, being the man he was, nothing was impossible: "Having been born of such a mother, I could never come out of such another man that I would not learn my birth." His speech is full of such statements as, "I will do all;" "I will reach to all;" "I will light this anew!"

It is this cocky humanism that is destroyed along with Oedipus by the divine laws. If we will accept the nature of these absolute laws, then we can feel the tragedy as Sophocles' audience must have understood it. The power of the sophists and the mystery cults was strong enough so that the audience would easily sympathize with the very human Oedipus, though they would also recognize that he must be destroyed.

By the time of the Oedipus Colonus, near the end of his life (he died in 406--the play was produced in 401), even Sophocles had so far changed as to allow a humanistic solution to the Oedipus Problem. Socrates died in 399, and after
that time, Greek tragedy in the sense I have used in this paper was no longer written. "If you have a contented mind at peace with itself," says Cephalus at the beginning of the Republic, "age is no intolerable burden; without that, Socrates, age and youth will be equally painful." When the implications of this innocuous seeming statement were understood, Classical tragedy could not be written, for the spirit behind Plato's philosophy was entirely humanistic. Greek tragedy was concerned with an external morality, honour and power; the Republic describes an inner morality which twisted the culture from which Sophocles' tragic philosophy had sprung; not until Shakespeare would that philosophy, though couched in different terms, be expressed in drama.

Sheppard, in assuming that the moral of the O.T. is σωφροσύνη, temperance, a due measure in all things, reads the play through Plato's eyes and philosophy. As an example of his attitude he quotes Plato's anecdote about Sophocles: "How well I remember the aged poet, Sophocles, when in answer to the question, how does love suit with age, Sophocles--are you still the man
you were? Peace, he replied, most gladly have I escaped the thing of which you speak; I feel as if I had escaped from a hard and furious master." Actually, as Whitman points out, it is not that Sophocles had a mind at peace with itself that is important, but that throughout the greatest part of his life he was tormented by passions and excesses. A peaceful mind, the quality which Plato makes "justice," can never create the tragedies of an Aeschylus, a Sophocles or Euripides. When Plato insisted on this harmony as the right and proper life, when science became detached and enjoyed or followed only for itself and for no personal driving reason, when society "satiates itself with much in vain," then that society is dead or dying. The creative element is subjugated and the critical and reflectively philosophic elements gain precedence, as they did at the beginning of the fourth (B.C.), seventeenth, and possibly the twentieth, centuries.

In the effort to describe the tragic philosophy from which Sophocles drew his great drama, Nietzsche can be a valuable commentator, if only because he is anti-Christian.

Those agencies that had proved fatal to
tragedy: Socratic ethics, dialectics, the temperance and cheerfulness of the pure scholar—couldn’t these, rather than their opposites, be viewed as symptoms of decline, fatigue, distemper, or instincts caught in anarchic dissolution? Or the "Greek Serenity" of the later period as, simply, the glow of a sun about to set? Or, the Epicurean animus against pessimism merely as a sort of precaution a suffering man might use? And as for "disinterested inquiry," so-called: what, in the last analysis, did inquiry come to when judged as a symptom of the life process? What were we to say of the end (or, worse, of the beginning) of all inquiry? Might it be that the "inquiring mind" was simply the human mind terrified by pessimism and trying to escape from it, a clever bulwark erected against the truth?14

The point is, as Lucas points out, that "perhaps the most important single fact about the "Age of Enlightenment" is just this, that traditional values were regarded as open to question and the authority of men or antiquity was not enough."15 Nietzsche concludes the passage above with a perfect twist: "Had this perhaps been your secret, great Socrates? Most secretive of ironists, had this been your deepest irony?"

Had it indeed? Is a healthy and growing society ever serene and content? Must it not be that a young and vital society always doubts and tries to forge some pattern out of the chaos which confronts the imagination of any youth? The Oedipus Tyrannus shows, proves, insists upon,
man's nobility and greatness, even in the face of destiny and chance. But more, it proves the universal validity of those divine laws which over all things guide and order the pre-Socratic universe. When the Greek society stopped trying to strive for man's nobility in opposition to the limits of divine limitations, and began to accept that nobility as a fact which needed no proof—and hence no divine law; when it became afraid of change and free expression, when tragedy decayed into ritual grotesque, then the culture no longer supported the true tragic art and vision.

Sophocles had the task of proving the ways of divinity and man to man; now this is very strange, and we are more apt to justify the ways of man to god. In terms of this discussion, this means that to compare a Greek drama to Shakespeare, we can not talk in terms of the fall, since the terms are different; Oedipus is destroyed in external ways, while Hamlet is both physically destroyed and mentally beaten down. Two such products of dissimilar traditions are only the same in the basic tragic outlook of their authors, and in their tragic effect.
Forces in conflict, and a peculiar resolution to that conflict, produce the tragic effect of the Oedipus Tyrannus. These forces are represented in turn by Oedipus and the chorus, and the resolution is necessary in the framework of the play. The chorus has the last word, and their primary laws are re-affirmed, in terms of the world of the play. Oedipus acts in opposition to these laws, more or less consciously, and falls victim to them. Yet we never feel that he has been wrong, that he should have acted otherwise. Indeed, being Oedipus—a hero and a paradigm of mankind—he could not act otherwise, just as Hamlet could not act differently from what we see in that play. Enormous sympathy is generated by these two men, but the final effect of their plays is neither despondency nor frustration for the reader or viewer, but satisfaction. Although the question of the cause of the fall of the hero is never far from the mind of the audience, yet we are not dissatisfied by the respective resolutions. Hamlet is noble and obviously not wrong nor weak in his
indecision, and Oedipus is hardly a weak man. Their falls are not merely pathetic, but tragic, and this is something else.

"Pity" and "fear" are no longer meaningful because they have so long been considered as mere effects. Their proper place is causal. In other words, the tragedy of the O.T. does not take place in the audience, but is an integral part of the mechanism of the play. Aristotle posited the peculiar pleasure of tragedy as the end of that art, and said that pleasure is produced through the catharsis of pity and fear which, according to one translation (Bywater) "arouse this pity and fear in the audience...in such a way as to effect that special purging off and relief of these two emotions which is the characteristic of tragedy."\(^{16}\) Here, pity and fear are results. This is not, I think, what Aristotle was saying. Else translates the same passage as showing that tragedy works "through a course of events involving pity and fear, the purification of those painful or fatal acts which have that quality" being the action of the play. This is not the usual reading, but it is an interpretation that is consistent with what is found in the plays.
Pity and fear are not produced by the tragedy, but they are actually part of it, come in conflict in the course of the play, and are somehow resolved in terms which leave the peculiar pleasure of tragedy.

The obvious criticism of the standard interpretation that pity and fear are produced in the audience and react against each other and disappear is that nobody can explain convincingly how this happens. People manage to laugh and cry at the same time, and there seems to be no reason why they should not be able to feel fear and pity together.

In the Oedipus Tyrannus the pity and fear are part of the conflicting elements, and these emotions are written into the play as the emotions of the actors (including the chorus). The force to which the chorus appeal and which they emotionally represent is the divine and absolute law. It is because of this force that certain acts, whether intended or not, become signs for blind terror (which, itself, is a product of the natural religious fear and belief of the chorus). The chorus stands in awe before Apollo in the first strophe of the parodos. Their attitude of
hesitation and apprehension is based almost entirely on this fear, a fear of what Apollo may be doing now, and why, and what he will do in the future. The chorus becomes afraid when they learn the truth of Oedipus' birth. They are afraid when Jocasta runs into the palace. But this is not the fear of cowardice, it is a fear of the unknown; it is a fear which all men have precisely because the future is always unknown. Man has free choice, but he can not know the results, often, of his choice. This is a cold fear, not a terror in our sense of the word--an emotional dread. Terror controls absolutely; the fear of the chorus has an element of physical fear, but it is more intellectual than emotional.

Under these circumstances, Oedipus becomes the personification of pity. Pity is an emotion, like fear, but it is also predominately intellectual. Oedipus is a clever and deeply sincere man, but he has lived in complete prosperity for many years, having before committed a crime, and it is just that he pay for this crime and for the sin of incest with his mother. It is just, but it is not pleasant. "Pity is the feeling which
arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer." Joyce defines pity as a feeling, but it is a feeling that affects the mind, not the body. It is a feeling, but it is a feeling from something grave in suffering. This is an intellectual identification of the audience with something which is the object of attention; it is not merely a reaction to a sad story, as Bywater's translation of Aristotle might suggest. There is a communication between the play's action and the understanding of that action. Pity is a common recognition of those things that are "grave and constant in human sufferings," and results in an intellectual sympathy.

What is it that is grave and constant in human suffering? "L'homme est né libre, et partout il est dans les fers," wrote Rousseau in Du Contrat Social. And in Eliot's "The Hollow Men," the same problem is stated, though more effectively through the use of poetry:

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow

"For Thine is the Kingdom"
Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the shadow
"Life is very long"

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the shadow
"For Thine is the Kingdom"

The problem of Rousseau and Eliot is the same
problem that Sophocles tried to solve in the O.T.
Man has free will, he has infinite capabilities—
but there is often no choice to make and no
chance to prove those capabilities. Sophocles
grasps the dilemma by both horns and demonstrates,
that paradoxically man can be limited and still
remain free. It is a difficult concept to grasp,
but without an absolute with which to contend,
there is no such thing as heroism. A man who
has nothing to lose takes no risk and gains
no glory and has no reason to live. There is no
way to pity a man in a situation which involves
no risk, for there is then nothing to pity.
Conversely, without the risk there are no
capabilities to be fulfilled; with no risk a capability is immediately a fait accompli. Joyce's tragic emotion is "a face looking two ways," towards the terror of absolutely ordained limitations and powers, and towards the realization that man is still not a puppet of a disinterested god. Pity is the common understanding between man and man, that life is noble and worthwhile, and that it is so only because of its limitation. A clear statement of this doctrine is found in Kitto's The Greeks: Tragedy was, for the Greeks,

The product of...two great qualities..., intellectualism and humanity. The former allowed the Greek...to see more clearly than some the great framework which Homer expressed partly as the will and the activities of the gods, partly as a shadowy Necessity to which even the gods must bow.... One can imagine such an outlook...developing into an arid religion and breeding a resigned and hopeless fatalism; but it was combined with this almost fierce joy in life, the exultation in human achievement and in human personality.... The tragic note which we hear...in most of Greek literature was produced by the tension between these two forces, passionate delight in life, and clear apprehension of its unalterable framework.17

This is a concept that is more easily ridiculed than understood; without a clear understanding of this dual concept, Greek tragedy is alien and susceptible to various mis-readings. It is
because of this "face looking two ways" that the chorus and what they represent is shown as a real force, while at the same time the purely human nobility which Oedipus represents is not lost, but is actually proved and strengthened by the necessity and fact of his absolute destruction.
NOTES

5. Laius was told by the oracle that if he had children his son would murder him and marry Jocasta. There was also a curse associated with the house of Cadmus. Unlike the Creteia of Aeschylus, this curse has no importance in the play.
12. --------. The Republic 329b-d.
13. Ibid.
THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS IN THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS:

THE TRAGIC CONFLICT

PART TWO
FOREWORD

The following translation is based on Jebb's text. Where I do not agree with his text, I have noted my reading in notes after the text. I have numbered the dialogue in accordance with Jebb's scheme, but I have numbered each kommos as ode separately, at five line intervals. This separate numbering of the lyrics is for easier reference, since the manuscript line division is in these passages irregular.

In general, my idea has been to provide a readable and accurate rendition, with the emphasis on precise and consistent translation of the imagery of the play. There are certain difficulties in translating which ought to be mentioned. The language is highly fraught with overtones of which we can have only the slightest glimmer, and these of course are lost by and large in the translation. Greek is more dramatically charged than present-day English (American), and much of the explosive quality of certain expletives, for example, sound merely fatuous when replaced with modern oaths.

I have tried to use a four or five beat line for the dialogue, while in the lyrics I have tried to follow as much as possible the rhythm of the original
and, failing that, at least to match the broad accen-
tuation of the paired stanzas.

For peculiar problems of interest, see the notes
at the end.
THE PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

Oedipus, Tyrannus of Thebes

Jocasta, Wife of Oedipus

Priest, of Zeus

Messenger, From Corinth

Creon, Brother of Jocasta

Herdman, Servant of Laius

Chorus, of Theban Men

Servant, Messenger from the House

Teiresias, Blind Seer

(Boy, Antigone & Ismene, Guards, Citizens, etc.)

SETTING

The scene is before the palace of Oedipus, ruler of Thebes. In the centre of the orchestra will be an altar; at least two others are near-by, and there may be also a statue of Apollo. The action takes one day, and is all in this location. At the beginning of the drama there is a group of suppliants around the central altar, with their traditional wreaths. The Priest stands off to one side, alone. He will turn to face Oedipus when he comes out of the central doors. One side exit is understood to lead to the city, the other out of the city to the pastures and to the oracle at Delphi as well as to Corinth.
THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

ON EARTH, whose feet are two and four and three,
Is one with single voice; a changing form
Unique in life of earth and sky and sea.
And when supported by most feet goes he,
His speed is slow, his motions are least free.
THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS
OEDIPUS: (Striding through the double doors, Centre)

My children, newest born of Cadmus' ancient line,
why are you seated here thus before me
wreathed with holy suppliant's branches?
The city around us is filled with burning offerings
and swells with sacred paeans--and sighs and groans.

I think it just to hear from no-one else,
So I have come to hear these things myself.
I who am called wide-renowned Oedipus. (Turns to Priest
So speak old man, since clearly you are fit
to talk of these. Where is your leaning,
to fear or desire? For know well, that I wish
to help you all; surely I would be hard
of heart, did I not pity suppliants.

PRIEST:

Oedipus, most powerful of all my land,
you see us here of varied ages around
these, your alters; some not yet grown enough
to fly with strength, some heavy with age:
there are priests--I, of Zeus--and these chosen
youths. And still another group, like wreathed,
sits in the markets; at the twin shrines of Pallas
and the oracle-giving embers of Ismenus.

For the city, as you yourself can see, too much
now tosses to lift her battered prow from out
the bloody-waved tossing sea.
Waste are the fruitful seeds of the Earth.
Waste are her grazing herds; and the child-labour
of our women is barren. The Fire-bearing God
falls upon the city; a hateful plague
by which is emptied the House of Cadmus, while
black Hades is by sighs and groans enriched.

Not now equalling you to the gods do I
nor these children sit at your fires,
but judging you the first of men in life's
events and in the dealings with the gods;
for you released us--just come to Cadmus' city--
from the toll we furnished the scabrous songstress.
And this, even, with no knowledge from us
nor anything taught; but with the aid of a god,
as it is thought and said, you righted our life.
(40) So now, most powerful of rulers, Oedipus, we beseech you, suppliants all, to find some aid for us, if either from the gods you hear some words, or know a plan from men. When men have been tested by past events, I know their present counsel is most alive.

Come, o best of mortals, right our city. Come, take every care, for now this land honours you as a saviour, for your former zeal; let it not be the memory of this, your reign, that as you righted us, so we later fell, but right this city so it will never slip. With good portent you brought this fortune to us; now be equal to the beginning. If you will rule in this land, as now, it is better to govern it with men, than hollow. For a mighty ship or tower is nothing empty of men, with no one inside.

OE: My piteous children; known and not unknown are the desires with which you have come. I know well you are all diseased; but being ill, none of you can have sickness equal to mine. For all of you, pain comes as to one alone by himself, and to nobody else; but my soul pains for the city and me as well as for you. So you do not wake me as from a heavy sleep, but know that I have wept much, and have gone many roads in wandering thought. And having considered, I found only one remedy: this I have done. The son of Menoeceus, Creon, my own wife's brother, I have sent to the Pythian house of Phoebus to learn how, by word or deed, I might save this city. And even now, when I reckon the passage of days, his doings are disturbing; he stays unreasonably late beyond the fitting time. But whenever he comes, I should do wrong lest I do all that the god reveal.

PR: You have spoken well, for these people indicate to me that Creon nears.

OE: King Apollo, may he come in fortune as saving as his appearance shines.

PR: And, to all seeming, he is pleased. For else his head would not be wreathed with fruitful laurel.
OE: Soon we shall know. His distance will be right for for hearing.
Prince, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus,
Bearing what words have you come from the god?

CREON: (Enters from the side)
Good! For things hard to bear, if they chance to come out in the end set right, all will call good fortune.

OE: What is the nature of the oracle? I am neither bold nor apprehensive by your words up to now.

CR: If you wish to hear me with these me around I am ready to speak; or else to go within.

OE: Speak out before all. I bear more sorrow for these than for my own soul.

CR: Then I would speak of what I learned from the gods. Lord Phoebus clearly commands us to drive away our country's pollution which long has been nursed in this ground, not to nourish it longer, beyond a cure.

OE: What is the means of catharsis? What sort of causal event?

CR: Banishing a man; or with blood by blood again let loose, since this old murder raises the city's tempest.

OE: And who is the man whose fortune he makes known?

CR: Laius was once, o Lord, the leader of this land, before you began to steer the city.

OE: I know, having heard; for I never say him.

CR: He was slain. And now, the god enjoins revenge upon the murderers, whoever they are.

OE: And where are they on this earth? Where shall be found the ever-dimming track of the ancient guilt?

CR: He said in this same land. What is sought for is attainable; what is overlooked, escapes.

OE: Was it in a house, the fields, or another land, that Laius encountered death?
OR: As ambassador to the oracle long ago; having ventured abroad, he never came back to the house which he left.

OE: Was there no messenger, no journey’s companion, who saw the deed, from whom you might learn?

CR: All died, save only one who fled in fear of what he saw: no thing but one would he tell.

OE: What? For one thing found might lead to much, could we but seize a small beginning for hope.

CR: Robbers, he said they were who met and killed them; not with one man’s might but with many hands.

OE: How should a robber have dared this—unless a bribe were sent from the city?

CR: Such things were thought, but Laius having perished, no avenger rose amid our troubles.

OE: What trouble at your feet could hold you from revenge, royal power having fallen thus?

CR: The riddling Sphinx made us look at our feet and ignore those things that were dark.

OE: Starting afresh I will light this anew. For rightly have Phoebus and you given attention to this death. And thus, rightly, you shall see me help with vengeance for the land and also for the god.

Not on behalf of some far-off friend, but for myself I will disperse this defilement. For whoever murdered might very well wreak vengeance on me with the same swift hand: helping the murdered king, I help myself.

But swiftly, children, stand up from your places and take these suppliant branches. Let some-one gather together the people of Cadmus. I will do all. For either in good fortune, with the aid of the god, we will bring this to light, or in disaster. (Exit

PR: My children, let us rise. This was the favour for which we came; that which he now has announced.
And may you come, o Phoebus, the sender of this word, as a saviour, and relieve us of sickness. (Exeunt)

(The stage now being empty, the "people of Cadmus" enter the orchestra, where they will remain throughout the drama. As they enter, they sing the πάροδος; at the same time they execute some sort of formal dance. Their number is fifteen.)
CHORUS: (Enter from the side)

Str. --O sweet-speaking message of Zeus, what form do you wear from golden Pytho, coming to splendid Thebes. I am stretched on the rack, shaking my heart, in fear of terrible things.

O Delian Healer, to whom go cries, (154) Before you I stand in awe, wondering what you will newly bring,
Or in the revolving seasons, what ancient debt you will drive to an end.
Tell me o daughter of golden Hope, Message eternal.

Ant. --First I call you, daughter of Zeus, Athena eternal;
Your sister also, the guardian
10) Artemis. In the bounds of our market she sits on a throne of good fame.
And Apollo who throws from afar I call;
Averters of death, all three, shine forth on me with care.
If ever before, suffering having rushed upon the city,(165)
The blazing of sorrows you drove away, come also now.

Str. --O Life! Without number are the sorrows I bear; sick is all my host, and for my thoughts there is no spear
Of defence. Neither seed are produced (171)
From the glorious earth, nor children's births
End the labour shrieks of women.
20) One after another lives may be seen, like well-feathered birds,
Rushing faster than irresistible fire
To the brink of the Western god:
ant. --By such, without number, the city dies.
Unpitied, the race, spreading death, is stretched
ungrieved on the ground,
25) And also wives and white-haired mothers
At the brinks of the various altars' steps (182
Beg for an end to their weary toil with groans. (185
Paeans, flashing brightly, and mournful speech,
sound in concert.
For these things, o golden daughter of Zeus,
30) Send the fair face of strength;

str. --And Ares the mighty, who now without bronzen shield
Burns me, amidst shouts, at his encounter, (191
Send back in hurried flight from my fatherland
Blown by a fair wind, to the great
35) Chamber of Amphitrite,
Or to the inhospitable haven
Of the Thracian waves:
For it is accomplished, if night leaves aught,
By the coming day.
40) Him, o bearer of fire
Having command over the lightning's power,
O Father Zeus, slay by the bolts of your thunder.

ant. --Lycian King, from your string of braided gold,
I would wish your arrows unconquered to be showered (205
45) In protection before us, and the blazing torches
Of Divine Artemis, with which
She lights the Lycian hills;
I call as well him of the golden mitre,
Named as this land,
50) Wine-stained Bacchus, to whom go cries,
The Maenad's comrade,
To draw near blazing
As an ally, with his bright-burning
Torch, against that god unhonoured by the gods. (215

(OEDIPUS enters towards the end of the last antistrophe)
OEDIPUS:

You pray: and for your wish, if you will listen
clearly to my words and serve your sickness,
you could be helped and lifted from your evils.
Though a stranger both to word and deed,

220) I shall speak on this, since I can not be long
on this trail unless I have some clue.
And only afterwards did I become
a citizen.

So Cadmeans all, I proclaim this to you:
Whoever of you knows by whom was slain
Laius, son of Labdacus,
him I command to make all known to me;
if he is afraid, let him drive away the fear
by speaking against himself. He shall suffer
nothing hateful, but unsuffering leave the land.

230) Or, if anyone knows another from another land
as the murderer, let him not be silent, for I
shall pay to advantage, and my thanks shall be with him.

But, if you keep silent, and either fearing for
a friend or yourself you thrust away my words,
what I then shall do, hear me:
You I forbid—wherever he is in this land
of which I command the power and the throne—
to give to this man either hospitality or speech;

239) or either in prayer to the gods or in sacrifices
to let him share; or to allow him to join the lustral rites:
But all must drive him from your houses, since he is
the plague on us, as the oracle from the Pythian
god has just shown to me.

Accordingly, of this god
and of the slain man I am become an ally.
And I pray out that the doer of this deed, whether
alone and unknown, or one among many,
as worst of men in worst of plight, drag out his lonely
life to its end.
And I vow, if he comes here with my knowledge

250) to share the hearth in my walls, to suffer, myself,
these things now invoked for another.

I charge you to fulfill all this
on behalf of myself, the god, and this
ruined land; fruitless and godless.
For even if this were not urged by a god,
it should never fitly remain unpurified,
but searched out, when a man, the best of kings,
is perished.
Since the authority now 
unfortunately is mine, which once he wielded before 
and since we have a common wife and bed, 
and we would share kindred children, if his family 
were not barren—were there generation: 
since fortune has rushed upon his head 
therefore, I for him, as if he were my father, 
will fight out this battle; I will reach to everything, 
searching to seize the very murderer 
of the child of Labdacus and Polydorus 
and before that of Cadmus and Agenor of old.

And for those who do not do this, I pray to the gods 
to send forth neither any crops from the earth 
nor children from women; but let their destiny be, 
as now for us, ruin; or worse than this. 
And you, the other, Cadmeans, who 
are pleased by these things, may justice our ally 
stand well with you always, and all the ever-lasting gods.

CH: Since you put me under a curse, Lord, 
I shall speak, for I neither killed nor can point to him 
who did. And for the question, it is for Phoebus, 
who sent it, to speak about who did this deed.

OE: What you say is just; but no single man 
is able to compel the gods against their wish.

CH: The next best thing to this... If I could speak my thoughts...

OE: And if a third, do not pass it over without speaking.

CH: I know a seer, a lord to Lord 
Phoebus most like, from whom 
a searcher, a Master, might learn most clearly.

OE: Nor have I left this thing idle in my 
actions. Twice, by Creon’s words, I have sent 
a messenger. That he is not already here is strange.

CH: Indeed, the other reports are blunted, and ancient.

OE: What sort of things are these? I hear all words.

CH: He was said to have been killed by travelers.

OE: I have also heard this; but no one is seen who saw it.
CH: And if he has any share of fear, he will not stay under your curses long after hearing them.

OE: If he does not fear the deed, he will have no fear of words.

CH: But here is one to speak about him, for they already bring the sacred prophet here, in whom alone of all mankind is implanted truth.

(Enter the blind Teiresias led by a small boy, from the side)

OE: O Teiresias, who observes all things learnable and unspeakable, in heaven and walking on the Earth; though you cannot see, you nevertheless understand with what a disease this city is coupled. Against this you stand as saviour, O Lord; we find you alone. For Phoebus—if you have not heard from a messenger—who sent to us, who sent, only one release from this suffering: we must learn the murderers of Laius and either kill them or send them into exile from this land.

310) Do not refuse either the voice of the birds nor any other road of prophecy; take under care yourself and the city and me, and take under your care the pollution from the death: for we are yours, and to help all men with all you have and you can do is the very best of labours.

TE: How dreadful it is to have wisdom when it is no profit to the man who is wise. Knowing this well I let it slip; for otherwise, I would not have come.

OE: What is this? You have come so heavy-spirited?

TE: Let me go back to my house. Most easily you will bear your burden, and I mine, if you are persuaded by me.

OE: These words are neither fitting nor friendly to the city which nursed, when you hold back this message.

TE: I see that your speech is not fitting; let me not make the same mistake.

OE: For the sake of the gods, do not turn away with knowledge, since all of us beseech you as suppliants.
TE: But none of you have knowledge, and I shall not bring to light my evil, not to speak of yours!

OE: What? You will not speak your knowledge, but think to betray us and destroy the city?

TE: I shall neither torment myself nor you. Why do you vainly ask: You can not learn from me.

OE: No? 0 worst of evil men! You could anger a stone. You will not speak, but thus unsoftened you will show yourself unbending?

TE: You blame my disposition, and yet you are unaware of yours; so you scorn me.

OE: Who would not be angry, hearing the words by which you dishonour the city?

TE: These things will come of themselves, though I cover them in silence.

OE: Things which will come, then, you must tell me.

TE: I can speak no more. For this, if you wish, be angry. Rage most savagely.

OE: I, however, since I am angry, shall speak all I know. For know that you do seem to me to be a party to the deed, even the doer--short of killing with your hands. If you chanced to have sight, I would also say the doing to be yours, alone.

TE: Truly? I tell you to abide by the proclamation which you spoke out, and from this day to speak to none, since you are the unholy pollutor of this land.

OE: Do you stir up these words so shamelessly? And how do you think to escape them?

TE: I have escaped, for my truth is strength.

OE: From whom did you learn? Certainly not from your craft.

TE: From you. Unwilling, I turned to speak for you!

TE: Did you not perceive before? Or, do you taunt me to speak?

OE: Not so as to say it is known; so speak again.

TE: I say you are the murderer; the man whom you seek to find.

OE: You shall not say such insufferable things twice!

TE: Shall I say something else, then, that you may be angrier?

OE: As much as you want. It is said in vain.

TE: Unknowing, I say, you have been in shameful union with your loved ones; not seeing your fearful state.

OE: Do you think to keep saying this so easily?

TE: If there is any strength in truth.

OE: There is for others; not for you, since you are blind in ear and mind, as well as eye.

TE: You are wretched, casting these reproaches, which every man soon shall throw at you.

OE: You are nourished by a single night; neither I nor any other who sees light, can harm you at any time.

TE: It is not my fate to fall by you, since Apollo suffices, whose care it is to bring this about.

OE: Are these inventions from you or Creon?

TE: Creon is no danger to you, but you are to yourself!

OE: O wealth, and power, and craft above craft rising in the rivalries of life, how much of envy is contained in you, if because of this reign, which the city has given into my hands, unasked for, this Creon-the-true, the friend from the start, has come in secret, wishing to throw me out, sending this crafty impostor, a scheming vagabond, who for his gain alone has eyes, but in his craft is blind?
390) Come tell me, where are you a clear prophet?
   Why, when the riddling watch-dog was here,
   did you not speak for release of these citizens?
   And indeed, the riddle was not
   for chance declaration, but needed prophetic skill.
   You brought no light before, having
   knowledge from neither gods nor men. But I,
   knowing Oedipus, stopped her,
   hitting the mark with intelligence; not learning
   from birds!
   I, whom you are now trying to ruin,
   400) thinking to stand close by Creon's throne.
   I think you and your partner will weep, when the
   pollution
   is driven out; if you did not seem too old,
   you would learn to know wisdom by pain.

CH: To us, both this man's words and yours as well,
   o Oedipus, seem to be spoken in anger;
   and such are not needed: far better to look after how
   the god's oracle is best fulfilled by us.

TE: And even if you are the Tyrannus, it is equal at least
   to reply with equality; for of this I have power as well.

410) For I do not live as a servant to you, but to Loxias;
   nor have I been written under Creon's name.
   And even though you have reproached me with blindness,
   I say
   your eyes can not see in what evil you are,
   nor where you dwell, nor with whom you live.
   Do you know your parents? Not having known,
   you are hostile to your race underneath and above the
   earth;
   and the double edge of the terrible-footed curse
   of your mother and father shall someday drive you
   from this land.
   Now seeing straight, soon will be darkness;

420) where shall there not be a port for you cry;
   where on Cithaeron shall not give it echo,
   when you understand that wedding with which you sailed
   into your house; an untrue haven, despite a fortunate
   sail.
   And of many other woes you have no knowledge,
   which will make you equal to yourself and to these,
   your children.
   Because of these things you abuse both Creon and
   my words. But, nevertheless, no mortal
   shall ever be so miserably destroyed as you!
OE: Is it bearable to hear this from him?

TE: I would not have come, had you not summoned me.

OE: I did not know then you would speak like a fool, or I would have sent with great trepidation.

TE: Then, as you think, I am foolish: But for the parents who bore you, wise.

OE: What? Wait! Who are my parents?

TE: This day shall both beget you and destroy you.

OE: You always speak dark riddles.

TE: Are you not the best to discover their essence?

OE: You reproach me where you will find me great.

TE: Fortune, however, has ruined you!

OE: If I have saved this city, it is no care to me.

TE: Then I shall go. You, boy, lead me.

OE: Let him lead you. Here, you are a trouble at my feet; away, you would annoy me no more.

TE: Since I have spoken on that for which I came, I shall go, though not fearing your looks, for you can not destroy me.

And I say to you, this man for whom you have searched at length, threatening, proclaiming out the murder of Laius; he is here, in the pretense of a foreign guest, but soon he shall be brought to light as a native of Thebes, nor will this event please him: for blind, who had sight, a beggar, who had wealth, he shall leave this land feeling his way on the ground before him with a stick. And he shall be brought to light as living with his own children, himself brother and father; and with his wife, son and mate; and of his father, sharer of a bed and murderer. So go inside and think of that. If I have lied, say hence, that of prophecy I have no understanding.

(Exit Teiresias and Oedipus)
CHORUS:

First Stasimon

Str. --Who is it of whom the oracle-giving Delphian rock
spoke
As unspeakable things having done, with bloody hands? (465
It is time that he, stronger
Than storm-swift steeds
5) Move his foot in flight.
For armed upon him leaps
With fire and lightning the son of Zeus,
And at the same time there follow the
Fearful Fates unerring.

Ant. --For bright-flashing fittingly shines from the
snowy peaks
11) The Message of Parnassus to track the unknown man:
Ranging under the wild
Forest and over the caves
And amid rocks, the bull,
15) Miserable, is widowed on wretched foot,
From the very centre of the Earth fleeing
From the prophecies; but these, always
Living, hover about him.

Str. --Terribly, terribly the wise interpreter of signs
arouse me,
20) I neither approve nor decry, but for what I shall say
I am at a loss.
I flutter with hope, with not sight in the future or now.
For, of a quarrel between
The Labdacidae and the son of Polybus, neither in past
days
Nor in these do I
25) Have understanding, because of which I might go with
proofs
Against the popular fame of Oedipus, for the Labdacidae (495
An ally against the unknown murderer.
Ant. --But in truth, Zeus and Apollo have intelligence and
the deeds of men
Know; but that of men this seer has greater power
than me,
(500)
There is no power of decision, though in wisdom
A man might surpass the wisdom of another.
Yet, never would I, before I see the message set right,
Show myself blaming.
For visibly against him came the winged maid
35) Once, and he was shown wise in the test, and dear to
the city.
For this, in my
Heart, he shall never be liable to the name of evil.
CREON: (Enters immediately)

Men, fellow citizens, I have learned that terrible words are charged against me by the Tyrannus, Oedipus. I am here, unable to bear this. For, if in these events he thinks to have suffered anything from me pointing in either word or deed toward harm, then I have no yearning in this life for long years, under the force of his words. For not singlefold is the damage for me which the rumour must carry, but in the greatest amount, if by the city, and you, and my friends, I shall have been called evil.

CH: But perhaps this insult has come by force of anger instead of reasoning of the heart.

CR: And the words were brought to light that by my thoughts the seer was persuaded to speak his lying words?

CH: These things were said, but I know not from what thoughts.

CR: And were his eyes right, and mind the same, when this accusation was charged upon me?

CH: I know not, for what rulers do, I do not see.

OEDIPUS: (Enters from the double doors, Centre)

You? So! Why have you come here? Are you so bold as to come to my house, having been shown a murderer and the palpable robber of my rule? Come, speak, for the gods! Did you see some cowardice or stupidity in me, thus plotting to do this? Or did you think I would not comprehend this deed stalking up by guile—or knowing, would not ward it off?

Is not your attempt stupid, then, both without numbers and the power of friends to hunt my rule, a thing to capture with numbers and wealth?

CR: Do you know what you are doing? Against your speech hear equal reply. And then, understanding, judge for yourself.

OE: You are great in speech; but at learning, I am bad. I have found you hostile and oppressive to me.
CR: First hear this from me, as I shall explain.

OE: Do not tell this to me, that you are not evil!

CR: If you think stubbornness a good possession separate from reason, you are not rightly wise.

OE: If you think that a kinsman doing evil will not suffer, your wisdom is worthless!

CR: I concede you have spoken this justly. But what is the suffering you said you have suffered? Teach me.

OE: Did you or not persuade me to send for the seer; that this was for my good?

CR: And now, I am still the same about the advice.

OE: How much, then, time; since Laius—

CR: ——did what deed? I do not understand.

OE: ——was swept away from sight by violence?

CR: Long and ancient times would needs be measured.

OE: Was this seer at his craft then?

CR: Similarly in wisdom, and equal in honour.

OE: Did he mention aught about me at that time?

CR: Never anything when he was standing near to me.

OE: Did you never have a search because of the murder?

CR: We did, how could we not? But we heard nothing from this.

OE: And why did this wise man not speak of this then?

CR: I do not know. What I do not understand, I keep in silence.

OE: This much you know and could speak with good knowledge.

CR: What is it? For, if I know, I shall not deny.

OE: That, if he had not dealt with you, he would not have said that I killed Laius!
CR: If he says this, you know it. But I deem it just to learn as much from you as you from me.

OE: Learn well. I shall never be found the murderer.

CR: Well, then, have you married my sister?

OE: You question where there can stand no denial.

CR: And do you rule equally with her in this land?

OE: All she wishes is provided by me.

CR: And am I not equal to you two as a third?

OE: In this, exactly, you are shown evil.

CR: No, if you would consider clearly, as I do, and first consider this; do you think that one would rather rule with fears than sleep untroubled, if he would wield the same power? I have no yearning in my nature to be a ruler, but rather to do royal deeds, like any other who knows how to be temperate.

For now I have everything from you without fear; if I were ruler, I should do much against my will. How much sweeter can it be for me to have the throne than my present painless influence and power. Not yet am I so much misguided as to yearn for other than things with fine advantage. Now I am delighted with everything; all greet me; now all have need of you, first call me out, for therein are all their hopes of good fortune.

Why then should I take that, and give this up?

No mind would ever turn evil, knowing good. But I do not love a thought of this nature, nor could I submit to work at this with another. For proof of this, that all I told you is right, go to Pytho yourself, and ask of the oracle. Then, from this, if you find that the seer and I have planned together, slay me not with a single vote, but take me with two; yours and mine. But do not convict me privately, with a secret decision. It is unjust both to think evil men falsely good, or good men, in the same way, evil. To cast away a good friend is equal, I say, to doing the same thing with your life, which most is loved.
But in time you will know these things without a slip, since time alone reveals a good man; but you could know an evil man in just one day.

CH: He has spoken well for one who cares not to fall, Lord, for those swift to think do not fail to slip.

OE: When some swift plotter swiftly moves, then I must be swift to plot in return.
620) For, if I wait for him at rest, his ends will be gained, and mine missed the mark.

CR: Then what do you wish, to cast me out of the land?

OE: I want to kill you, not to let you flee.

CR: And thus you would show what sort of thing is envy?

OE: Do you speak as neither yielding nor complying?

CR: No, for I see your lack of sense.

OE: Enough for me.

CR: It should be equally for me.

OE: But your nature is evil.

CR: And if you perceive nothing?

OE: One must nonetheless rule.

CR: Not when you rule evilly.

OE: O City. City!

CR: And my city as well, not yours alone.

CH: Stop, Lords. In fit time I see Jocasta coming to us from her palace. With her, you should put down this present strife.

JOCASTA: (Enters from double doors, Centre)

Why this ill-advised discord, o miserable ones, have you raised with your tongues? Are you not ashamed, this land being sick, to stir up merely personal baseness? Come into the palace, and you, Creon, go to your house
and do not make a small suffering large!

CR: Sister, your husband thinks it just to do
terrible things to me; two separate evils:
either to banish me from my fatherland, or to slay me.

OE: I concede that fully. I have caught him, wife, doing evil to me with his evil craft.

CR: May I not have advantage, but be cursed, if I have done any of the deeds with which you charged me; let me die!

JO: O, for the sake of the gods, believe this, Oedipus; most of all for this fearful oath by the gods, and then for my sake and those who stand before you.

First Kommos

Str. --CH: Be persuaded, consent, and have understanding, Lord, I beseech you.

OE: What do you wish that I yield to you?

CH: To respect who never before was childish, and who now by his oath is strong.

OE: Do you know what you ask?

CH: I know.

OE: Tell me your thoughts.

CH: Never to cast a friend under oath unhonoured, by unknown reports, into guilt.

OE: Be well assured that, in asking this, for me you are seeking ruin, or exile from this land.

Str. --CH: No, by the god who stands before all the gods, Helios; since godless, friendless, whatever is the worst may I die, if I have this idea. But now the land decays in terrible fate; this hurts my soul, and also if evils on evils are heaped, from you two to those of long ago.

OE: Then let him go, even if I must die, or be thrust dishonourably from this land by force.
For your piteous voice, not his, I have compassion. And he, no matter where he is, shall be hated.

CR: You are shown hateful in yielding, but violent, whenever your passion goes too far. And natures like this are themselves, with reason, the hardest to bear.

OE: Leave me and go away.

CR: I shall go. (676

In you I find prejudice; though in these men, equality. (Exit, Creon)

Ant. --CH: Woman, why do you delay to bring him into the house? (678

JO: I shall, when I have learned this fortune. (680

CH: Unknowing belief came from speech, and injustice hurts the heart.

JO: These by both?

CH: Yes.

JO: And what was the speech?

CH: Sufficient for me, the land being shown diseased, to leave it where it has ceased.

OE: Do you see that you have come, a man being good in your mind, to letting this drop and blunting my heart?

Ant. --CH: O Lord, I have spoken before, not once alone: (689 know that deranged, devoid of wisdom I will have been shown, if I should forsake you, who--my beloved land wandering around with troubles--have brought a wind to set it right, (693 and who now, if you will, would become a safe guide.

JO: For the sake of the gods also tell me, Lord, for what deed you made this wrath to stand? (699

OE: I will tell; for I honour you more than these men, my wife: because of Creon, who has plotted against me.
JO: Speak, if you will tell of the accusing of the strife.

OE: He says that I am the murderer of Laius.

JO: From his own knowledge, or that of another?

OE: He sent that knavish seer, since he himself keeps his tongue free of guilt.

JO: Release yourself of this about which you speak; listen to me and learn how no mortal has anything of the seer’s craft.

OE: and I will show you a proof of this. An oracle came to Laius once, I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his sergeants, that his fate would be to die from his son, who would be born from me and by him.

Now he, by report, once by alien robbers was killed where the three roads meet. From the birth of the child not three days were passed and his ankles were bound and he was cast by another’s hands onto the untrodden mountain.

Apolly failed to bring it to pass for him to become the slayer of his father; nor for Laius, the terrible thing which he feared, to be killed by his son. Thus did messages of the seers determine. No longer give them heed; for what the god searches to use, he will easily bring to light.

OE: As I hear this clearly, wife, what a wandering soul and excited mind I have!

JO: What care has turned you around to say this?

OE: I thought I hear this from you, that Laius was murdered where the three roads meet.

JO: You heard that, nor has it ever ceased.

OE: And where stands the place of this misfortune?

JO: Phocis the land is called, and a divided road leads to this from Delphi and from Daulia.

OE: And how much time has passed since this?

JO: Just before you were shown ruling this land this was announced to the city.
OE: O Zeus, what have you planned to do with me?

JO: And why does this burden your heart, O Oedipus?

OE: Do not yet speak of that, but say something of Laius; what point of manhood was he at?

JO: Tall, white just sprinkling his hair, and his form not much removed from yours.

OE: O gods, gods! I think I have cast myself under a terrible curse just now, and did not know it!

JO: What? I shrink from looking upon you, Lord.

OE: I am fearfully heavy-spirited, lest the seer is not blind. But you would show more, if you would speak out once again.

JO: Though I shrink back; learning your speech, I shall speak.

OE: Did he go with just a few, or having many men, with a captain and a guard?

JO: There were five altogether, and one of them was a herald; Laius had also one wagon.

OE: Great gods! Now this shines clear. Who was it who spoke these words to you, my wife?

JO: A servant who came back, alone having fled.

OE: Might he, in fortune, be in this house?

JO: No. For when he came back, and saw you in power, Laius being dead, he entreated me, embracing my hand to send him to the pastures of the sheep, where he might be far from the sight of the city: and I sent him. For he, though a slave, was worthy to deserve even more than this favour.

OE: How might he come back most quickly?

JO: Easily, but why do you send for him thus?

OE: I fear, lest I have said too much, because of which, I wish to see him.

JO: He will come. But it is just for me to learn
what is born so heavily in you, Lord.

OE: It shall not be kept from you, these hopes having come to me. For who is better for me to talk to than you in this fortune?

My father was Polybus of Corinth, my mother the Dorian Merope. And I lived as the greatest of citizens, until this fortune fell—unusual, though hardly worth the trouble I took; a man at dinner, full of drink, said that I was a counterfeit son of my father. And I, being oppressed, that day could hardly hold back, but the next day coming I asked my mother and father. They took the insult hard from him who cast it, and I was pleased by them. But nevertheless, this pressed on me, for the rumour crept far about. Unknown of my mother and father I journeyed to Pytho and Phoebus, and I was sent away dissatisfied. But speaking other miserable and terrible things, he revealed that it was fated for me to lie with my mother, that I would show an insufferable family to the sight of men, that I would murder the father who begot me. And having heard this, I fled from Corinth, henceforth measuring its location by the stars, to where I should never see the disgrace fo the evil oracle accomplished by me. And walking along, I came to that place in which you said your ruler died.

And to you, my wife, I shall truly speak; when I traveled near to those three roads, I met a herald and a man upon a horse-drawn cart, as you have said. And from the road the leader and the man were driving me by force when I struck in anger the driver who was pushing me; the old man seeing me, watched me pass by the carriage, and brought down a two-pointed goad in the middle of my head.

I did not pay him merely with an equal penalty, but I struck him with the staff in this hand, and flat on his back he straightaway rolled from the seat of the carriage; and I killed all the rest.
But if this stranger
is any blood relation to Laius,
What man is more wretched than this now before you?
What man could be more hated by the gods?
One whom no stranger nor citizen
can receive into his house, nor address any words,
but must thrust from his home. And this curse
is put on by me on myself.
By my own hands I defile the bed of the corpse;
those hands by which he was slain. Am I evil?
Am I not most unclean if I must flee,
and also in my flight not see my people.
nor step in my native land; or else in wedlock
join with my mother, and kill my father
Polybus, who begot and reared me?
Would not these things be judged to come
from a cruel divinity, by men who speak rightly?
No! Not, o pure glory of the gods,
may I see this day, but let me go
unnnoticed from mortals before I see
attached to me the terrible stains of this event!
These are terrible things to me, o Lord;
until true knowledge has come to you, have hope.
And truly, hope is with me just this much;
the man--the shepherd--to await: this alone.
And when he is shown, what is your purpose?
I will teach you; if his story is found to be
as yours, I may escape this calamity.
And what unusual words did you hear from me?
You said he told you the man was killed
by robbers; if then he speaks of the same
number, I am not the slayer.
For one can not be equal to many.
But if he speaks of one man, a single traveler,
then plainly this deed must fall to me.
But as this word shone, it now is thus;
and he can not cast it out.
The city heard this too, not I alone.
And if he should turn away from his early words,
o Lord, he can never show the murder of Laius
to be right with the prophecy, since Loxias
said he was to die by my child.
And indeed that wretched one never killed him, but he had perished before. So, for seer-craft, I would have sight neither to one side nor the other.

OE: You think well, but nevertheless send someone to summon the shepherd, and do not let this go.

JO: I shall send at once; but let us go into the house, for I would do nothing that was not dear to you.

(Exit Jocasta and Oedipus)
CHORUS:

Second Stasimon

Str. --May my destiny let me bear
Rev. purity in all speaking
And doing, whose primary laws are before us (865)
High-footed; laws born
5) Through the aether of heaven, of which Olympus
   Alone is father. Neither was their's
   A mortal birth brought forth
   From men; and may forgetfulness never put them to sleep: (870)
   Great in them is the god, nor will he grow old!

Ant. --Pride gives birth to the tyrant; (873)
11) Pride, if it satiate itself of much in vain
   That is neither fitting nor suitable,
   Climbs to the highest peak
   And, at the edge of the precipice, thrusts into necessity
15) Where his foot is useless
   To use. But the good
   Rivalry which the city has, I pray to the god never
   to lose; (880)
   Never will I let go the god, holding him my protector!

Str. --And if any man disdainfully goes in word or deed, (883)
20) Unfearful of Justice, nor
   Worshipping images of the gods,
   May an evil destiny take him
   In return for his wretched indulgences;
   If he will not justly gain his gains
25) And keep himself from unholy deeds (890)
   Or if, acting vainly, he touches of untouchables:
   In this, what man will claim to ward off
   The shafts of the gods from his soul?
   And if such deeds are honoured, (895)
   Why should I dance?

Ant. --No longer at the untouchable centre of the earth
   Nor at the temple of Abae (900)
   Nor Olympia, shall I worship,
   If the oracles are not manifest
35) To all men as fitting together.
   But, o most powerful, if you are rightly called,
   Zeus, all-ruling, may it not escape
   You Sire, and your ever-deathless reign; (905)
   The decaying ancient utterances about Laius,
40) Your oracles, already are ignored,
   And nowhere is Apollo shining in honour!
   Divinity wanders haltingly about. (910)
Third Episode

JOCASTA: (Enters alone, from central doors)

911) Lords of this land, a thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the gods, bringing this wreath in my hands and these offerings of incense. Oedipus lifts his spirit too much on high with excess passion; nor, like a man of intelligence, does he judge the new things by the old, but believes the speaker, if he says terrible things.

Since, accordingly, my advising does nothing very much, to you, o Lycian Apollo—for you are most near--

920) I have come as suppliant with these prayers, that you may find some way to free us from pollution. Now we all shrink back, seeing him in panic, who is the helmsman of our ship.

MESSENGER, From Corinth: (Enters from side)

Might I from you, o Strangers, learn where is the house of the tyrannus, Oedipus? Or better yet, tell his present place, if you know where.

CH: This is the palace and he is within, o Stranger; this woman is mother of his children.

ME: Then may she be happy and always live

930) with happy people, being his wife.

JO: The same to you, stranger, for you deserve it because of your fair words. But speak of what you have come to find out, and what you wish to reveal.

ME: Good for your house and your husband, Lady.

JO: What is this good? From whom do you come?

ME: From Corinth. And you will be pleased at the words I shall speak. How could you not? But also equally unhappy.

JO: How does this have a double power?

ME: The people of the Isthmian land wish to place him

940) as tyrannus; as it was said there, to me.

JO: Is not the aged Polybus still in power?
ME: No longer, since death now has him in his grave.

JO: What are you saying? Is Polybus dead, old man?

ME: If I do not speak the truth, I deserve to die!

JO: Girl, go and tell this to your master. Quickly! O, prophecies of the gods, where are you? Oedipus fled long ago, fearing to kill this man, and now he has died by fortune; not by that prophecy.

OE: Wife, dear to my heart, Jocasta, why have you summoned me from the palace?

JO: Listen to this man, and see to where the holy prophecies of the gods have come.

OE: Just who is he, and what does he have to say to me?

JO: He is from Corinth, announcing your father Polybus as no longer being; he has died.

OE: What is this stranger? Be an interpreter to me.

ME: If first it is necessary to announce this clearly, know well he has gone to death.

OE: By which, treachery or intervention of disease?

ME: A slight sinking in the balance lays an ancient body to rest.

OE: Then it seems he was taken, having been made wretched by disease.

ME: And by a long measure of time.

OE: So. O gods... Why, then, wife, should one look to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or up to screeching birds, by whose guiding I was to kill my father.

He is dead, hidden under the ground, and I am here, without touching a weapon; unless he wasted away longing for his son—then he would have died by me. But for the oracles as they are, at least,
Polybus is in Hades, and the worthless oracles are with him.

JO: Did I not tell you that, long ago?

OE: You spoke, but I was misled by fear.

JO: Then no longer take any of these things to heart.

OE: But still, I must surely shrink from my mother's bed?

JO: Why should man fear, who is ruled by fortune and has clear foresight of nothing? It is best to live without purpose, as you are able.

OE: Do not fear of marriage to your mother, for many men already, in dreams, have lain with their mothers. That man to whom these are as nothing; most easily does he bear his life.

OE: These outspoken words of yours would all be fine if she who bore me, her child, were not alive. But she lives, and though you speak well, I must shrink back.

JO: But the burial of your father is a beacon to us.

OE: Important, I understand; but my fear is of the living.

ME: And who is the woman whom you so much fear?

OE: Merope, old man, who lived with Polybus.

ME: And what is it about her that bears you in fear?

OE: A fearful oracle sent from the gods, o Stranger.

ME: May it be spoken, or is it nor right for another to know?

OE: Yes; for Loxias once said that for me it would be necessary to sleep with my mother and take with my hands the blood of my father. Because of this I have lived far from Corinth for years. This was fortunate, but still it is joyful to see the eyes of parents.

ME: And shrinking back from this you went from there an exile?
OE: And not wishing to be a murderer, old man!

ME: Then why have I not released you, Lord, from this fear, since I have come well-minded?

OE: Indeed, you justly receive my gratitude.

ME: Indeed, I came mostly for that, so when you came home, I should have some fine advantage!

OE: But I shall never come close to my parents.

ME: O, child, surely you do not know what you are doing....

OE: In what way, old man; for the sake of the gods, teach me.

ME: --If for this you flee, never again to go home.

OE: I fear, lest Phoebus come out true for me.

ME: Lest, in truth, you receive a pollution from your parents?

OE: Just that, old man. This must always frighten me.

ME: Do you know, then, that you have nothing to fear?

OE: Why nothing, if I am a child born of these parents?

ME: Since Polybus was no relation to you in blood.

OE: What? Was not Polybus my father?

ME: No more than this man who speaks, but equally so.

OE: And how is my father equal to one who is nothing to me?

ME: Since he was not your father; neither he nor I.

OE: Then, why did he call me his son?

ME: Know, that he took you as a gift from my hands.

OE: Could he love one who came from another's hands?

ME: Yes, for his former lack of sons persuaded him.

OE: Did you buy me, or give me to him through fortune?
ME: I found you in a wooded glen of Cithaeron.
OE: Why were you in that place?
ME: I had charge of the flocks of the mountain.
OE: You were a shepherd, a wanderer for hire?
ME: And of you, child, at that time a saviour as well.
OE: And what was my misfortune when you took me in your arms?
ME: The ankles of your feet might be witness to that.
OE: O gods! Why do you speak of those ancient evils?
ME: I loosed you when your feet were pinned together.
OE: A fearful disgrace I carried from my swaddling clothes.
ME: So, from your fortune you were called this which you are now?
OE: For the sake of the gods! Was this from my mother or father?
ME: I do not know. He who gave you knows better than I.
OE: You took me from another? You did not find me through fortune?
ME: No, another shepherd had given you to me.
OE: Who? Do you know well enough to reveal by speech?
ME: I suppose that he was some servant of Lalus.
OE: He who was ruler of this land long ago?
ME: The same; he was a shepherd for that Lord.
OE: And is he still living, that I might see him?
ME: You people of this land should know best.
OE: Is there any one of you close by here who knows of the shepherd of whom he speaks? Have you seen him in the fields or close by here?
1050) Tell me! It is fitting time for these things to have been discovered.

CH: I think him to be no other than the man from the fields for whom you searched to see before. But Jocasta might tell this now.

OE: Wife, what do you know about him whom we have just summoned to come? Is he the man spoken of?

JO: Why speak of him at all? Disregard it. On what he said keep no idle thoughts in your mind.

OE: This must not be. Holding these clues I will bring my birth to light!

JO: Do not search for this, for the sake of the gods; or if you care for your own life; I am sick enough.

OE: Take courage. Even if I shall show myself thrice a slave of three mothers, you shall not be shown base.

JO: Be persuaded by me, I beg you; do not do this!

OE: I can not be persuaded not to learn this clearly!

JO: But truly, having true intelligence, I speak the best for you.

OE: These best words just now grieve me.

JO: O unlucky one, may you never know who you are!

OE: Someone go and lead the herdsman here to me.

1070) Let her sit, taking pleasure from her noble family.

JO: Gods, my gods! Wretched one! This alone can I say to you! Nothing else; never again.

(Exit, rushes inside)

CH: Oedipus, why has the woman gone, dashing away in wild grief? I fear that from this silence will burst out only evil!

OE: Whatever must be, let it burst forth; and I even if I am low-born, still wish to learn my origin. Perhaps she is ashamed of my base birth,
for she is high strung, more than a woman's spirit.

1080) But holding myself a child of Fortune
which gives good, will not be dishonoured.
For I was born of that mother, and my relations,
the months, have defined me in turn, small and great.
Having been born of such, I could never come out
such another man that I would not learn my birth.

CHORUS: (During this ode the characters remain on stage.
It is more properly a διπόρχιμα, a 'dance-song' which
is livelier and more lyrical than the ordinary στάσιμον.)

Third Stasimon

Str. --If I am a prophet and skillful in understanding
Then, by Olympus, not shall you fail
O Cithaeron, by the morrow's
Full moon, to be honoured by Oedipus both as fellow
5) Native and as nurse and mother,
And to be celebrated by us in dance, because of
kindnesses to my Lord.
Phoebus, to whom go cries, may these be pleasing to you.

Ant. --Child, who bore you of the long-lived ones?(1098
Who, with the mountain-roaming Pan
10) As father, conceived you? Or are you from some mate
Of Loxias, for all the highland pastures are dear to him:
Or either from Cyllene's king, (1104
Or the god of the Bacchants, dwelling on the mountain tops;
a good "find" from one of the
Nymphs of Helicon, with whom he sports the most!}
Fourth Episode

OE: If I may guess, who have never seen the man, elders, I think I see the shepherd for whom we have searched a long time. In his age, he seems right, and is commensurate with this man's words; and, moreover, I recognize his leaders as men of my house. But you might know the truth better than I, perhaps, since you have seen the man before.

CH: Yes, I am sure that I know him; he was one of Laius' men; a man as trustworthy as any shepherd.

(The HERDSMAN now enters from the side)

OE: First I ask you, Corinthian stranger, were you speaking of him?

ME: This very one, whom you see.

OE: You there, old man! Look here and answer what I shall ask. Were you a servant of Laius?

HE: I was; not a bought slave, but raised in his house.

OE: Doing what, in what sort of life?

HE: For the greatest part of my life I tended sheep.

OE: Where did you pasture the most?

HE: On Cithaeron some, and some on nearby fields.

OE: Do you remember seeing this man at those places?

HE: Doing what? Of what man are you speaking?

OE: This one here. Or have you associated with him before now?

HE: Not that I could speak of, at once, from memory.

ME: And it is no wonder, master; but I shall clearly recall to his mind the unknown. For I know that he can remember when he had two flocks on Cithaeron himself, and I had one; and when he lived with me three six-month seasons
altogether, from Spring to Arcturus.
For the winter I drove my herd into
my fold, and he drove his to that of Laius.
Am I speaking this right, or do I not say what happened?

HE: You speak truthfully, though after a long span of time.
ME: Tell me now, do you know of the child you gave me
then, which I was to nurse as my own, a foster child?
HE: What is it? Why do you ask this?
ME: This is he, old friend; he who was then so young.
HE: Ruin take you! Be silent!
OE: Ah, do not correct him, old man, since your
speech wants correcting more than his.
HE: And in what, o best of masters, do I miss the mark?
OE: Not telling of the boy, as he asks.
HE: He speaks with no knowledge; he talks without purpose.
OE: You may not speak from gratitude, but you shall speak
through groans!
HE: Surely, for the sake of the gods, you would not
torture an old man?
OE: Someone, swiftly; bend back his arms!
HE: O wretched one! In front of you? What do you want
to learn?
OE: Did you give the child to him?
HE: I gave it; it would have been better to have died on
that day.
OE: You will be led to that yet, unless you speak the truth.
HE: I am destroyed much more if I do speak.
OE: This man, it seems, is driven to delays.
HE: No! I am not! I said before that I gave him the child.
OE: From what source did you take it; from your family, or another?

HE: Not from my own. I received it from a man.

OE: From which of these citizens; what house?

HE: For the gods' sake, Master; do not, do not ask further!

OE: You are destroyed if I ask this again.

HE: He was one of the children of Laius' house.

OE: A slave, or one of his own begotten sons?

HE: O gods! I am near in this to speaking a terrible thing.

OE: And I to hearing: but nonetheless, one must hear.

HE: The child was said to be his own. But she inside could tell you better than I.

OE: Then, did she give it to you?

HE: Exactly, Lord.

OE: For what purpose?

HE: That I should destroy the child.

OE: Wretched! Her own child?

HE: She shrank from evil prophecies.

OE: What sort?

HE: The message was for him to kill his own father.

OE: Then why did you give him to this man?

HE: Through compassion, o Master, thinking he would be carried to another land; from whence he came.

OE: But he saved him for the worst evil. If you are who he said, know that you were born to misery.

OE: Gods! Gods, all this is come out true.

OE: O Light! For the last time I look upon you. I am shown both of unfitting parents, and accursed in marriage, and in my un-natural murder. (Exit)
Fourth Stasimon

CHORUS:

Str. --O generations of mortals
As equal to nothing do I consider your living.
For who—what man—bears
More of happiness (1190)

5) Than so much as only to seem,
And seeming, to turn away?
This of yours is held a paradigm,
This, your daemon, yours, o wretched Oedipus; of mortals (1195)
I pronounce no one blessed.

Ant. --Having shot too
11) High, he became master of prosperity, happy in all things.
O Zeus, he caused to destroy herself
The crooked-taloned oracle—
Chanting maiden; and against death (1200)

15) He stood up as a strong tower for my land.
For this you are called King
By me, and most honoured, in great
Thebes holding the reign.

Str. --But now, of whom is it more miserable to hear? (1204)
20) Who, in savage ruin, in suffering
A dweller, in an exchange of life?
Alas, revered Oedipus,
The bounteous harbour—
the self-same—was sufficient, (1208)

25) child and father, for the husband.
How on this earth were the furrows ploughed by your
father able to bear you, wretched one,
And hold you so long in silence?

Ant. --Against your will, all-seeing Time has found you; (1213)
He judges the marriage which is no marriage, wherein
too long

30) Begotten is also begetter.
Alas, o child of Laius,
Would that, o would that
I had never seen you.
I lament exceeding lamentation

35) from my lips. To speak uprightly, I revived
because of you,
But now I have closed my eyes in sleep.
SERVANT: (A messenger from the palace)

1223) O you who are most honoured of this land,
what deeds you shall see, shall hear, and how much grief
shall be aroused in you, if kinsman-like still
you have respect for the house of Labdacus!
For, I believe that neither Laius nor Phasis
could purify this palace, so much evil
it conceals, and soon will bring into light
1230) willingly and not unwillingly. And of these griefs
they will pain most which are brought to light as
self-chosen.

CH: We knew what went before was not without
heavy suffering; what can you add to this?

SE: The swiftest of the words to speak, and so
to learn.... Our great Jocasta is dead.

CH: O most miserable! From what cause?

SE: She, by herself. And of what has happened, the worst
of the pain is forbidden you; your sight was not there.
But nevertheless, as far as my memory remains,
1240) you will learn the pitiful disaster of the woman.

When, subject to passion, she entered the hall,
she came straight to her bridal bed,
tearing her hair with the fingers of both her hands.
And as she came in, she slammed the doors together
behind her.

Then she called Laius—long since an ancient corpse—
having her memory of the act of conception long ago
by which he was to die leaving a mother
to bear wretched fruit by his own child.
She lamented the marriage bed, then, wretched, the
two-fold
1250) brood she bore; a husband by a husband, children by
a child.
And after this, I know not how she perished,
for Cedipus rushed in with shouts; because of him
her misery was not to be seen to the end.
But we stared at him as he wandered about;
he dashed to and fro asking for a sword,
and where he would meet a wife and no wife,
the maternal
furrow of the two-fold seed—himself and his children.
Raging, some divinity showed him his way,
for no one of men was near.

With a fearful shout, as if let by some guide,
he drove at her doors, and out from their sockets
he bent in the bolts of the doors, and fell into
the room.
And there we saw the woman hanged,
entangled by a still-swinging twisted rope.

As soon as he saw, he undid the hanging noose
with a terrible and miserable cry. And when the woman
was stretched on the ground, the sight of the rest was
unbearable:

having torn from her garments the wrought-gold
pins, with which she had fastened her clothes,

he lifted them high, then struck down on his eyes
and spoke: 'no longer shall you see
neither such evils as I suffered, nor those I worked,
but from now what you should not have seen you shall
see in the dark; whom I longed for you shall not know!'

Along with this dirge many times, and not once alone,
with lifted hands he struck his eyes, and the bloody
eye-balls wet his beard, nor sent forth
drops of damp gore, but altogether a black
hail-storm of blood was shed.

These twin evils broke forth, not just one,
but for a man and wife a commingled evil.
The long-standing prosperity of before
was justly happiness; but now, today,
sighing, ruin, death, shame, all evils
which can be names--none of them are not here.

And is there now any respite from this evil for
the sufferer?

He calls out to open the bars, and thus make visible
to all Cadmeans the murderer of his father,
his mother--this unholy speech may not be spoken by me:

and he intends to cast himself from this land,
to remain no longer in his accursed house.
Yet, he lacks strength, and needs a guide,
for the sickness is too much to bear.
But this, he will show you. The bars of the gate are
opening.

You shall soon see a sight
such that even he who abhors it, must still have
compassion!
CH: O terrible misfortune for men to see;  
O most terrible of all that I have  
Ever chanced to hit; what frenzy has come  
Upon you, o Miserable! Which divinity  
Has leapt upon you, greater than the greatest  
Leap, with ill-starred fate?  

Oh! Gods, gods! Nor am I able to look upon  
You; wishing to ask much, to learn much,  
And having much to consider;  

What a shuddering holds me!  

OE: Oh! Oh!  
Gods! Gods! I am wretched, wretched!  
Where on this earth am I carried in suffering? Where  
Does my voice fly through the air?  

O divinity, where have you leapt?  

CH: Into a dreadful place; neither to be seen nor looked upon.  

str. --OE: O cloud  
Of Darkness, repulsing me, coming on me unspoken,  
Unconquered, and driven by an unfair wind.  

Oh! Oh!  
Again, again! How am I at the same time pierced  
By the biting of those points and also the memory  
of my evils.  

CH: It is no wonder that in such suffering  
You should both lament and suffer two evils.  

Ant. --OE: O friend,  
You are still my steadfast companion. For still  
You remain with me, attendant to a blind man.  

Gods! Gods!  
You are not unnoticd by me, I perceive  

Your voice clearly, despite the darkness.  

CH: O, who did terrible things, how could you bear  
To quench your sight? Who of the divinities induced you?  

Str. --OE: From Apollo this was; from Apollo, friends.  
He brought  
To pass these my evil, evil sufferings!  

But no one raised his hand but I, the sufferer, myself!
What was fit for me to see;  
For whose seeing there was nothing sweet to see? (1335)

CH: This was even as you say.

OE: What am I to see, or  
40) to love, or what address is  
Still pleasing to hear, friends?  
Lead me away from this place as swiftly as possible. (1340)  
Lead me away, friends, the utterly lost,  
Most accursed one, and by the gods  
45) The most hated of mortals.

CH: Wretched equally for your mind and for your experiences,  
So that I wish that you had never had knowledge.

Ant. --OE: Perish whoever it was who released me  
From the harsh shackles on my lonely feet, and saved me  
50) From being among the dead; a deed with no thanks!  
For, if I had died then,  
I were not such a grief to my friends and myself. (1355)

CH: This wish was also mine.

OE: Then I would not have become the murderer  
55) Of my father, nor would I have been called  
Husband of the mortal from whom I was born.  
But now I am abandoned by the gods, and am son of an  
unholy  
Mother, and a bed-sharer of him who conceived my  
wretched birth.  
And if there were any more ancient evil of evils, (1365)  
60) Oedipus had gained it as his portion.

CH: I know not how I said you to have counselled well,  
62) For you were better no longer being, than living blind.

OE: That this deed is not for the best  
neither teach nor counsel me. (1370)  
For I do not know with what eyes  
I could ever have looked on my father in Hades,  
nor, indeed, on my wretched mother.  
My deeds against both were too gross even for strangling.

Is the sight of my children desirable to look  
upon, born as they were born?  
No! Not ever that sight by these eyes;
nor towers, nor cities, nor the sacred statues
of the gods: from these things I, the most wretched

man of all who live in Thebes, I who have commanded
all to thrust away the pollution;
who am shown impure, the son of Laius.
And having disclosed my defilement,
was I to look uprightly on you with my eyes?
Not at all! If there were some gate in
this font of hearing I would not have failed
to thoroughly seal my miserable carcass,

so that blind, my hearing would also be nothing;
it is sweet for thoughts to live apart from these evils.
O Cithaeron, why did you take me? And taking me,
why did you not kill me outright, so that men would
never come to know me later as myself?

O Polybus and Corinth and that ancient
house I called my father's, how fine
was my youth, and under the surface what festering evil:
For now, I am found evil—from evils.
O triple roads, and hidden wooded
glen, and narrow crossroads junction

which drank the blood of my father from my
own hands! Do you remember what deeds
I did there with you, and next coming here
what I did again? O marriage, marriage,
you conceived me, and then in turn
you sent forth from this seed, exhibiting
fathers, brothers, children of the same blood;
brides, wives and mothers; the most
disgraceful actions which ever could be.

But what is unfit to do is unfit to speak.
So, swiftly, for the sake of the gods, lead me away
and hide me, or murder me, or cast me
into the sea, where you will see me never again.
Come, deign to touch a miserable man;
be persuaded, do not fear; for my evil
can be borne by no one else of mortal men.

And fittingly for what you ask, here is
Creon for its doing and counselling, since he
alone is left to guard this land in your place.

Oh! Creon; what shall I say to him?

What trust can be shown to be true? For,
in the past I am discovered wholly evil to him!
CREON: (Enters from the central doors)

I have not come to laugh, o Oedipus,
nor to reproach you for former evils.
But if you no longer feel shame for the sons
of mortals, at least respect the all-nourishing
fire of the Lord the Sun, and not display thus
unconcerned this pollution which neither earth
nor holy rain nor sun can receive with welcome.
Come into the house as swiftly as you can.

1430) It is fitting for his family, alone,
to see and hear the evil of their kin.

OE: For the sake of the gods, since you have torn me from
my hopes, and as the best of men have come for me
the worst, be persuaded by me. For your sake I shall
speak.

CR: And what is the fortune of which you ask me?

OE: Throw me out of this land as soon as you can,
where I shall be shown addressed by no mortal.

CR: Know that I would have done this already, if I had
not first wished to know from the gods just what to do.

OE: But his message has been made completely clear;
1441) to kill me, the parricide, the all-polluted.

CR: He has spoken thus; but nevertheless, as things stand,
it is better to learn exactly what is to be done.

OE: Will you inquire on behalf of such a wretched man?

CR: Yes, for you will now nourish the truth of the gods.

OE: And I shall charge you and beg of you,
bury her inside as you would wish,
for she is your own and you will rightly do it.
And never think it just for me, while alive,
1450) to dwell within the city of my fathers.
Let me dwell in the mountains where my Cithaeron
is made famous, which my mother and father
appointed to my tomb—who was still living—
that I might die from them who were to slay me first.

And, indeed, I know this much, that neither
disease nor anything else can destroy me; for never
had I been saved from death lest for a terrible evil.
But, of my fate, wherever it moves let it go;
and for my sons, O noble Creon, never
1460) take an anxious thought; they are men;
they will never lack a means of life, wherever
they are. But those poor miserable ones, my girls,
for whom the dining table was never placed
apart from me, but of all that I touched,
they always had a complete share;
for my sake have some care for them; and better,
let me touch them with my hands
and stop my grief. I beg you, Lord,
come, O noble-born; embracing them with my hands,
1470) I shall think to have them as when I had sight.

(Enter ANTIGONE and ISMENEL from the palace, Centre)

What is this?
Do I not hear the sobbing of my loved ones?
For the sake of the gods! Has Creon pitied me
and sent to me my dearly beloved children?
Do I speak right?

CR: You do; for I have provided this. I know
the delight in your children which formerly was yours.

OE: May you have good fortune, and may the gods chance
to guard your path better than they did mine.
1480) O children, where are you? Come here,
to these brother's hands which are mine,
who have brought it about that the father's eyes
which before shone so brightly now see thus;
and who was shown your father by her who was his
mother,
since he could neither see nor ask to learn.

I weep for you—I have no power to look at you—
when I think of the remaining bitter life
which men will make you live.
For with what group of citizens will you go;
1490) from what celebration will you not return
bathed in tears instead of watching the games?
And when you come to the point of marriage,
who will be he who will run the risk
of such insults which will be the bane
of both my children and yours as well?

What evil lacks? Your father killed
his father. He ploughed the begetter
in whom he was sown, and at an
equal source he begot where he was grown.

1500) Such are the taunts. Who will then wed you? There is no one, o children; you will die barren; you will be, of necessity, unwed.

O Son of Menoeceus, since you alone are left to them as father—for we who were their parents are destroyed, both of us—do not allow your kin to wander beggared and without a mate.
Do not make them equal to these, my evils, but pity them because of their tender age; they are alone, except in so far as you help them.

1510) Consent, o nobly-born, by a touch of your hand.
And you, children; I would give you much advice, if you could understand, but now, pray for this, for my sake:
 wish to live where fitness allows, to chance upon a life more sweet than that of your sire.

CR: Your weeping has run on enough, go into the house.
OE: One must obey, though displeased.
CR: In season, all is fine...
OE: Do you know my conditions to go?
CR: Speak; hearing, I shall know.
OE: That you shall banish me.
CR: You ask for a gift of the gods.
OE: I am now hateful to the gods.
CR: Then it shall soon be brought about.
OE: You consent?
OE: It is time to lead me from here.
CR: Then come, but let loose your children.
OE: Do not take them from me!
CR: Do not wish to have power in
for your powers did not remain constant to your life.

(The stage now empties, slowly. CREON and OEDIPUS, along with the two children, go into the palace, Centre. The MESSENGER from Corinth, the HERDSMAN and the SERVANT file off to the side along with the various citizens still on stage. As these all go slowly off, the chorus comes forward to chant or speak the last verses. This done, they turn and file off.)

CH: You who live in our native Thebes behold: This is Oedipus, who knew the famous riddle and was most powerful of men, on whose fortune no citizen did not look with envy; into what a sea of terrible events he has come. Call no mortal happy who is still looking forward to his final day: not until he passes the limit of his life, suffering nothing of pain.
NOTES

31. Of the many thematic words of the play, is one of the most frequent and important. Here "equal" refers to his relations to the gods. Later, Teiresias prophesies that knowledge will make Oedipus equal to himself and his children (425). And in the fourth stasimon the chorus will say of man, "As equal to nothing do I consider your living" (2). From a god to nothing; this is the fate of Oedipus.

122. Creon uses the plural, "robbers," as in line 107 he spoke of "murderers." Oedipus speaks of "a robber." He means, of course, the generic use of the term at this point. Later, the question of plural or singular will be crucial, and of course this irony is keen.

223ff. This proclamation and curse is highly formal. First is an appeal for cooperation, a preamble (224-232); next a warning and the dreadful royal and divinely supported curse on the murderer(s) (233-243). Oedipus then speaks as a citizen of Thebes and as a natural ally of the dead man. And he adds the formal speech of his own willingness to be responsible under this
curse (244-251). Then follows the basis of his authority (252-258), and the dreadfully ironic curse as a blood-relative (258-268). The closing is formulaic, setting forth the consequences to any who go against the proclamation.

284ff. The degree of divine knowledge to which Teiresias has access is a crucial question in the play. If Teiresias knows everything that is going to happen, and doesn't do anything to stop it—as in the appearance of the Sphinx—then clearly there is divine intervention to keep him from speaking. And if this is true, then this is in fact a play of fate. Actually, however, such is not the case. Teiresias represents divine knowledge, but he knows only as much as the gods happen to tell him. He is most like Apollo, but he does not share the god's knowledge. As Sheppard mentions in his note on this line, "Observe that Teiresias does not, because he is Apollo's prophet, see all things exactly as Apollo sees them: he sees more than other men, and is the most like to Apollo. That is all." He learns in the play, as does Oedipus. Jebb says that he sees in the same manner, "i.e. with equal clearness."

Such, of course, is not the case. The seer's first words indicate that he has forgotten why he has come! (316-318)
And Oedipus apparently cannot assume that Teiresias will have heard of the oracle that Creon brought from Delphi! There is no question of omniscience.

376. The ms. read as I translate:  οὗ γὰρ μὲ μοῖρα πρὸς γε σοῦ πεσεῖν  Sheppard probably speaks for Jebb (who is practically silent on this point) in his note: "Professor Murray's defence of the (manuscript) reading...is, at first sight, attractive. But I think it unlikely that Sophocles would be irrelevant, and, if this reading is right, irrelevant he must be." But Sheppard misses the point of the line. Oedipus has been scoffing at the seer and growing rapidly angry at his accusations. Teiresias is widely respected, and in his mind it is not far from this unheard of anger to an attempt at physical harm. When he realizes that Oedipus would not hurt him in any case, because of his blindness, Teiresias becomes a little more bold and throws out his taunt. Though Jebb says the ms. "make nonsense of the passage," there are several other lines which back up this reluctance of Oedipus to harm the seer. "If you did not seem too old," says Oedipus, "you would learn to know wisdom by pain" (402, 403). Teiresias backs up his claim: "For I do not live as a servant to you,
but to Loxias" (410). And the seer clearly states, "Since I have spoken on that for which I came, I shall go, though not fearing your looks, for you cannot destroy me" (448, 449). We might notice what happens when the former servant of Laius balks at talking (1152f).

406. Not only is Teiresias not an instrument of fate in any active sense, but the chorus refuse to believe in an interfering divinity. They know the oracle, and now they understand that they must take the responsibility for its fulfilment. There is a difference, illustrated by this play, between foretold and fated. The oracles only foresee the future, they do not themselves create it.

First Stasimon, 1. 14. With Sheppard, I read πέτραιος ὁ πάτρος. Jebb accepts the conjecture, πέτρας ἰσόταυρος, which has the effect of vitiating the beautiful metaphor.

624. Jebb expends an appendix on his reading of this and the next line. Though the ms. read as I have translated, he assumes a missing line, and gives 624 to Oedipus, 625 to Creon, and assumes that Oedipus' next line is lost. Sheppard transposes 624 and 625,
having Creon speak the manuscript. The whole thing seems more simple than that. Oedipus wants Creon to admit his guilt. Creon hears him speaking like a typical tyrannus; he has already explained to Oedipus his lack of motivation for such a murder as he is being accused of, and at this point he could very easily imagine Oedipus using the murder as an excuse to get rid of a non-producing third of the royal family.

790. The mss. read προδόφανη; both Jebb and Sheppard read προδοφηνεν. Jebb argues that with the original reading the metaphor is strained. Actually, the metaphor is used two other times in exactly the same way (164, 243) with startling and beautiful effect. The same thing should be true of this line.

1060. As Sheppard notes, this is the climax of the τόχη theme. Like "equal," "fire," "hope," and other words of the same sort, "fortune" runs through the play and changes in connotation as the play develops. Oedipus thinks at this point that fortune gives good to him, very shortly he will realize that in reality it also destroys those who live by it.
1280. Jebb changes ἄκατα to κατά. In the light of the endings of lines 1281, 1284, and 1286, the reading of the mss. seems more powerful than Jebb believes.

1524-1530. The mss. give these lines rightly to the chorus. Such an ending is not uncommon. Along with the scholiast, who gives the lines to Oedipus but thinks that the play would better end with 1523, Bernard Knox would leave these lines out. This, however, would not be consistent with the play as a whole, since it would change the resolution by putting the emphasis on Oedipus' growing powers.
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Conflict is the essence of dramatic action, and tragedy requires a conflict which embodies a certain basic "vision." In the Oedipus Tyrannus, this conflict is represented by Oedipus and the chorus. Oedipus is the universal man, an ideal, a man who acts according to his conception of what is right with complete integrity. The chorus, on the other hand, are far from "ideal spectators" or interludes, as some critics would criticise them, but are the dramatic foil to Oedipus; he represents the heroic in man, they stand for and call upon the absolute force which is the ordering power of the universe.

The tragic philosophy or vision sees the infinite capabilities of man limited by a power which is absolute and subject only to itself. This is not a malevolent force, but is inscrutable. Man is well advised to avoid extremes, yet a hero, because of his very nature, cannot elude engagement. He may not be destroyed by this force—not all tragedies end unhappily—but he certainly will be diverted from his course.

The Oedipus Tyrannus is tragedy because it embodies this conflict and affirms the existence and value of the absolute force, while also recognizing the noble and infinite capabilities
of man; his heroic nature. In the course of Oedipus's
discovery of his past crimes, in the conflict between the
decisive actions of Oedipus and the fervent beliefs of the
chorus, the divine laws appealed to by the chorus are shown
triumphant. Nevertheless, as this dominance is demonstrated
in the fact of Oedipus's fall, so it is also proved in the
fall that his actions and personal laws are true and valuable
as well. The play is tragic because of this paradox; because,
though Oedipus must fall, the reason for his fall stems from
his own demonstrated greatness.

The rôle of the chorus, however, is more than that of an
actor. They are the means whereby Sophocles would write in
a play of 1530 lines the beauty and effectiveness which has
since taken well over twice that length, where, indeed, such
has been written. Of course, skill is not the only factor in
the length of a play. Where plays were produced in sets of
four, during the festivals of Dionysus, they could not be
very long. But the most important factor, that which allows
the shortness without sacrifice of seriousness and depth, is
the tragic chorus. Shakespeare had to carefully construct
his stairway to the universal, because he was obligated to
make out a case for its presence in the play; Sophocles took
a more direct path, through the use of the chorus. Shakespeare
cannot be so concise as Sophocles; he has to weave his back-
ground and framework, and this often necessitates the use of material strictly irrelevant to the theme or action of the play. This is not to say that Sophocles is the better playwright, but only, that though the two men finish with equally powerful visions, they are quite different in their approaches, and that difference must be understood and appreciated in order to see Sophocles as he is. A play of the complexity of Hamlet would be as unthinkable to Sophocles as a direct and open familiarity with the universal would be to Shakespeare. Sophocles can be and is direct, through the use of the chorus; Shakespeare cannot be and is not direct, because he lacks the culture and peculiar vision of life within that tragic vision which would permit a tragic chorus.

The chorus draws together and gives meaning to elements which would not otherwise be in harmony. It provides the only explanation for certain attitudes and attitude changes by the protagonist. It is foil to Oedipus and provides one extreme of the moral conflict that is the driving force and real meaning of the play.

The second half of this thesis is the basis for the project. Not one of the translations which I have seen is satisfactory for the serious student. They are either inaccurate or, where more or less accurate, they are so inconsistent as to destroy any of the beauties of the original. Mr. Bernard Knox, in his
Oedipus at Thebes (Yale, 1957), has pointed out the importance of the continuing imagery and the patterns of development in the play. But a translation which incorporates consistent translation of these words and images is bound to be scholarly rather than artistic, for what is simple in Greek, and quickly grasped, is apt to be difficult and "fussy" in English. Therefore, I would not recommend the translation which is the second part of my project as a stage version. The phrasing is intricate and so constituted as to emphasize the key words, phrases, and images. This emphasis results in an unfortunate but nevertheless necessary exaggeration, and it is this quality which renders my translation rather unfit for stage presentation. But it is also this exaggeration which is, I believe, the major value of the translation. It has in any case been extremely helpful in the preparation of my paper, since a careful translation demonstrates the closeness of the choral odes to the intervening episodes, thereby backing my thesis that the chorus is an integral part of an absolutely unified work of art.