

Oedipus at Colonus Book Notes

Oedipus at Colonus by Sophocles

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Author/Context

Greek drama has a long evolution, but the great tragic playwright Sophocles played a key role in this process by adding a third actor to the stage, and minimalizing the role of the Chorus that had always had a central role in the earlier plays of his predecessor, Aeschylus. Born around 495 B.C. in the very same Colonus region seen in *Oedipus at Colonus*, part of the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, Sophocles began writing early on in life. He continually entered the annual drama contest held in nearby Athens until he won first place in 468, shortly before he was thirty years old, taking popularity away from Aeschylus, the first great Greek tragedian who had until then reigned supreme.

Sophocles' work added to the technical elements of playwriting, but his thematic content is much more immediate to the opinions of Athenians as well. Rather than focusing on the archaic perspective that gods control all human events, Sophocles gives responsibility to humans and holds them accountable for their actions based upon the decisions they make. This theme is seen in *Oedipus at Colonus* when Oedipus suffers because of his actions and can only find peace when he accepts responsibility and renews his faith in the gods. In addition, previous traditions partly established by Aeschylus dictated that tragedies would be divided into a series of three plays, called a trilogy, which was usually followed by a fourth, lighthearted Satyr play. In contrast, Sophocles condensed the meaning of each play he wrote into a self-contained unit in and of itself, without any need to compare. His plays are thus each to be interpreted as independent from any other work.

After achieving his celebrity status in 468, success would follow Sophocles for the next twenty years until he would be beaten at the Athenian drama contest in 441 B.C. by the third and last great Athenian playwright, Euripides, who humanizes his characters to an extent even further than Sophocles to the point that the role of the gods becomes minimal. Euripides would reign supreme until his death in 406, a year before that of Sophocles. When not busy writing and entering competitions, Sophocles himself was also a successful statesman, serving as treasurer of the Athenian democracy from 443-442 B.C., and as a military general from 441-440, and much later he served as an Athenian magistrate in 413. This political experience certainly gives much of the inspiration for his themes, such as how to properly rule a city or the capacity for corruption that rulers of cities and those in power may face. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Theseus' governance of Athens is a stark contrast to the self-serving chaos and corruption that is seen in Thebes.

Sophocles and his plays form a keystone of Greek drama as it moves from an archaic world of fear and powerlessness toward a growing sense of humanity and enlightenment. He lived through the Golden Age of Athenian democracy when such notable persons such as Pericles and Socrates walked the earth, and he died in 405 B.C. just before this period of greatness would be brought to a nitemarish end with the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, causing a deep historical tragedy that Sophocles did not live long enough to write.



It also must be pointed out that although loosely connected, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* do not form a cohesive trilogy at all; the plays were not even written in this chronological order. Instead, it was the famous *Antigone* that was written first, presumably around 441 B.C. when he was fifty-four years old; following this came *Oedipus the King* fifteen years later in 426, and finally came *Oedipus at Colonus*, written very close to when Sophocles died in 405 and produced posthumously a year later. The first two plays deal very much with affairs of governing a city and the tendency towards corruption and ignorance that political power can bring, corresponding to the years when Sophocles was serving in public offices; however this last play portrays a suffering, lonely old man who arrives at Colonus of all places -- Sophocles' birthplace -- in order to die.

For this reason, the play is considered to be largely autobiographical, reflecting Sophocles' own unease as an eighty-nine year-old man. It may appear that the play pays a final tribute and good-bye to Athens with Oedipus' many compliments and praises for its citizens and its leadership. Just as he had spent his entire life writing, now Sophocles ends his life perhaps allegorically through the mystical death of Oedipus who is swallowed by the earth at Colonus, thus preserving the city of Athens from enemies for all of time. Certainly he could not know that Athens would be defeated by Sparta a couple years later, yet through these vivid images and sweet words, Sophocles has preserved the city of Athens as it was and will be for all time, forever frozen between the lips of his characters.

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Plot Summary

Blind, old Oedipus, a former king of Thebes, wanders for many years guided by his daughter, Antigone. Although once successful as a ruler, he was exiled after the gods sent sickness to the city because Oedipus had killed his father Laius, the prior king, and he committed incest with his mother, Jocasta, after he becoming king of Thebes. Now he and Antigone end their journey near the Greek city-state of Athens at a place called Colonus. There, Oedipus offends the Eumenides -- goddesses of the underworld -- and he must make offerings later to avoid punishment. His youngest daughter, Ismene, joins them at Colonus, bearing news from Thebes that her brothers are fighting over the kingship and that the younger Eteocles exiled his older brother Polyneices from the city.

Oedipus is stunned to hear this, but she also reveals the oracle's prediction that the each of the sons will soon seek Oedipus' support to win the battle for the throne. Disgusted, he refuses to help either of them because Theban citizens had treated him so poorly before. He asks for the help of Theseus, King of Athens, to protect him and his daughters, and the wise king agrees. Later, Creon, Jocasta's brother, finds Oedipus at Colonus and kidnaps his daughters to force Oedipus to return to Thebes, so that the younger Eteocles can win the war. Thankfully, Theseus comes to the rescue by retrieving the two girls and sending Creon back to Thebes empty-handed. Next, the exiled older son Polyneices comes seeking Oedipus' support, yet the old man is angered at his son's request and condemns both of his sons to death because they are so selfish.

After praising the Athenians for their kindness, thunder in the sky summons Oedipus into the wilderness to die. Accompanied by his children and King Theseus, he walks off toward death, declaring that Athens will forever be protected by the gods as long as Theseus does not reveal the location of his grave to anyone. Oedipus thus dies after a long life filled with suffering that is cured only by forgiveness and acknowledging the supremacy of the gods. Because of his return to faith, he is absolved from the crimes he committed so many years before. After their father's death, Antigone and Ismene return to Thebes, hoping to prevent the deaths of their two brothers that Oedipus had predicted.

Overall, the story of *Oedipus at Colonus* is about opposites: how a good ruler should behave compared to a poor ruler, how a good city should be compared to a bad city, and how the gods should be worshiped compared to how they should not. After leaving these negatives behind while seeing the fine example of Athens as a model city, Oedipus finally discovers inner peace. However, the suffering of his children shall only continue as the daughters try to stop their brothers' unsuccessful battle for the Theban throne.



Major Characters

Oedipus: A former king of Thebes. He blinded himself after learning that he had unknowingly killed his father and had sexual intercourse with his mother. His name in Greek means 'limping foot' (oido = limping, pous = foot) because his ankles were sliced as a boy by his father. Disabled, he was thus sent to die in the hills because the oracle at Delphi predicted that Oedipus would one day kill his father. The father had tried to avoid this fate, although his actions were actually a part of it. After being exiled from Thebes for his crimes, Oedipus wanders for many years, lamenting about his great suffering and how the gods have punished him for no reason, guided by his daughter Antigone. He finally dies near Athens; his grave spot remains a secret to all except Theseus, whom Oedipus has rewarded for his kindness by giving divine protection to Athens.

Antigone: A daughter of Oedipus. She guides her father during his final years as he wanders in exile throughout Greece. When people approach such as Creon, Ismene, or Polyneices, it is Antigone who announces their approach, for she is Oedipus's eyes. After her father's death, Antigone plans to return to Thebes to stop her brothers from battling each other. Her name in Greek is similar to a word meaning 'of the opposite opinion' (anti = against, gnome = opinion).

Theseus: A king of Athens and of Colonus. Theseus comes to Oedipus' rescue by stopping Creon from kidnapping his daughters. As a result, Oedipus rewards him with unending protection for his city of Athens as long as he keeps the site of his grave a secret. His daughters Antigone and Ismene are left in Theseus' care.

Creon: Antigone's uncle and regent of Thebes. His sister Jocasta was Oedipus' mother; Creon dislikes Oedipus, blaming him for her death. Creon kidnaps Antigone and Ismene to force Oedipus to return to Thebes so that his city will be given Oedipus' divine protection instead of Athens. Theseus prevents him from succeeding, and Creon is forced to return to Thebes empty-handed. In the battle for the Theban kingship, Creon supports Oedipus' youngest son Eteocles.

Minor Characters

Stranger: The first person who meets Oedipus and Antigone at Colonus. He tells them to leave the grove because it is sacred to the Eumenides, but Oedipus doesn't listen to him and demands that he go and get King Theseus from nearby Athens. The Stranger decides instead to tell some common citizens and let them decide if he is worthy.

Chorus of Athenian elders: A group of old Athenian citizens who come to see Oedipus after the Stranger told them he was in the sacred grove. Throughout the story, the Chorus constantly offers advice and opinions about events that are occurring; these range from praising the gods to reprimanding Oedipus for his past crimes.



Ismene: Oedipus' youngest daughter. While her sister Antigone stayed with Oedipus to be his guide, Ismene remained in Thebes. She flees to find her father at Colonus when her brothers are fighting over the city's kingship; later she is chosen to perform a ritual that will appease the Eumenides after Oedipus trespassed in their sacred grove. After her father's death, she returns with Antigone to Thebes.

Polyneices: The oldest son of Oedipus. He is exiled from Thebes by his younger brother Eteocles, who has crowned himself king with the support of Creon. Angry, Polyneices gathers together seven armies from Greece to march against Thebes and return the throne to him; he finds Oedipus at Colonus, hoping that his father will return to Thebes with him and give his support. Oedipus refuses because Polyneices once exiled him from Thebes; he curses both of his sons, declaring that they will both die in battle. After his father's death, Polyneices returns to Thebes to fight against his younger brother.

Eteocles: The youngest son of Oedipus. Eteocles crowned himself king of Thebes with the support of Creon, exiling his older brother Polyneices from the city. Creon goes to Colonus to seek Oedipus' support for Eteocles, but Oedipus refuses to help because he will not be given burial on Theban soil. Creon returns to Thebes empty-handed as a result. Oedipus curses both of his sons, declaring that they will both die in battle.

Jocasta: The mother of Oedipus. She married Oedipus when he arrived in Thebes without realizing that he was her own son; after many years Thebes is filled with sickness because the gods are angry that Jocasta and Oedipus have an incestuous marriage. Disgusted to learn that he is her own son, Jocasta commits suicide.

Messenger: A man who describes the events before Oedipus' death. He arrives before Antigone, Ismene, and Theseus return from the wilderness. He describes to the Chorus how Oedipus walked off into the wilderness, washed himself with water from the stream, and was swallowed by the earth after leaving his daughters. Only Theseus observes his final moments, the Messenger says.

Laius: The father of Oedipus. When Oedipus was a baby, Laius heard a prophecy that one day his son would murder him; trying to avoid this fate, he sliced his son's ankles and abandoned him in the wilderness. Found by a shepherd, Oedipus survived until much later when, running into an arrogant King Laius on the road to Thebes, Oedipus unknowingly killed him after being hit with a stick. Arriving at Thebes, he saves the city and unknowingly marries his own mother, taking his father's place as king.



Objects/Places

Thebes: A city on the Greek mainland northwest of Athens. Oedipus was once king of Thebes before his exile. Afterwards, his sons Eteocles and Polyneices battle to win the kingship; Polyneices gathers seven armies together and plans to attack Thebes. The oracle at Delphi predicts that Thebes will be destroyed by Athens in the future. Antigone and Ismene return to Thebes after their father's death.

Grove: A sacred place in Colonus surrounded by trees. It is here that Oedipus rests with Antigone when he arrives at Colonus; it is sacred to the Eumenides, Prometheus is said to dwell here, and there is an altar in this grove sacred to Poseidon. Oedipus must make an offering later to appease the gods, since he defiled their holy spot by sitting there on a rock; Ismene helps out by making the offerings for him because he is blind.

Eumenides: Goddesses of the Underworld. Once called the Furies, these vengeful goddesses were transformed into goddesses of forgiveness, 'protectors of the suppliant'. It is in their sacred grove that Oedipus' long life of suffering ends at last, and he must make offerings to appease them. Soon after the offering is made, Oedipus dies peacefully, his sins of incest and patricide forgiven by these benevolent goddesses.

Bronze Road: The road that runs from Colonus into the city of Athens. Oedipus follows this road before resting in the sacred grove.

Poseidon: God of the sea and horses. An altar in the sacred grove is dedicated to Poseidon, and Poseidon owns the land around the grove. Theseus rushes away from the altar to stop Creon during a sacrifice to Poseidon.

Prometheus: An ancient Titan who gave humans fire and the ability to think. He is said to live in the sacred grove. Perhaps he is mentioned because many of so many of Oedipus' stupid mistakes in the past. This was the reason why he had blinded himself originally, due to the shame that he was so blind and ignorant of these mistakes. The fact that Oedipus ends his life in a place sacred to Prometheus suggests that he found wisdom at last.

(Knight) Colonus: A 'suburb' of Athens. A smaller community surrounding this larger city in the Greek mainland, it is here that Oedipus' life of suffering ends at last. Its name comes from a man named 'Knight Colonus' who protects this place.

Oracle of Phoebus Apollo at Delphi: A divine woman in the city of Delphi who could predict the future with the help of Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun and prophesy, brother of the goddess Athene. Located northwest of Thebes, many people from all over Greece would journey to Delphi to hear predictions about the future. The oracle told Laius that his son Oedipus would kill him one day, and he tried unsuccessfully to prevent this by killing his son first. The oracle later predicted that the location of Oedipus' grave would be a sacred; that Oedipus would end his journey after offending the Eumenides at Colonus; and that Athens would one day conquer the city of Thebes.



Athens: A large city on the Greek mainland. After being exiled from Thebes, Oedipus ends his journey near Athens; Theseus, who helps Oedipus, is king of this city. Oedipus rewards the Athenian citizens for their kindness by making his grave near their city, swearing that Athens will be protected as long as his grave remains a secret. The oracle's prophesy declares that Athens will one day conquer Thebes.

Altar: A sacred place in the grove that is used to make offerings to the gods; the altar is said to be dedicated to the god Poseidon. Later, Polyneices throws himself down at this altar, begging to see Oedipus. Theseus makes sacrifices to Poseidon at this altar before he pauses to stop Creon.

Seven armies: A group of soldiers led by seven different chieftains. The elder brother Polyneices put these armies together to help him to reclaim the kingship of Thebes from his younger brother Eteocles. Antigone advises him to send the soldiers back to their homes because she worries about his safety, but Polyneices refuses and marches on to Thebes.

Athene: Goddess of war and wisdom; sister of the god Apollo. Athens is protected by Athene, and the city is named in her honor. When Creon kidnaps Antigone, the Chorus prays that Athene will aid King Theseus in bringing her back safely.

Hermes: God of messengers and luck. As Oedipus prepares to die, he walks unaided because Hermes, the messenger god called the 'Conductor', is said to guide him and show the way. This suggests that the gods have forgiven Oedipus and are now helping him by putting an end to his suffering.

Underworld: The Greek land of the dead, also called Hades. All persons good and bad go to Hades after death where they must first pass Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards Hades' gates. Then a ferryman named Charon carries souls to the other side of the river Styx, where they are then judged to see if they will suffer in the afterlife in Tartarus, the lowest, darkest depths of Hades, or if they will be rewarded by dwelling in the blessed Elysium Fields. As Oedipus dies, the Chorus hopes that his soul will have a safe journey through Hades. The underworld is also the Eumenides' home.



Quotes

Quote 1: "I am blind and old, Antigone, my child./What country have we come to? Whose is this city.../My sufferings have taught me to endure--/and how long these sufferings have lasted!" Line 1-8

Quote 2: "[T]here are towers here that protect the city; they look,/to my eyes, far off. This place is sacred--as I would guess--it's thick with laurel, with olives and with vines; the nightingales are singing,/thick-feathered, happily, inside the grove." Line 16-21

Quote 3: "Father, we must do as other citizens here,/yielding in what is dutiful, hearing with obedience." Line 174-175

Quote 4: "You are a stranger in a strange land,/poor man. Make your mind up/to reject what this city dislikes,/and reverence what she loves." Line 189-193

Quote 5: "Ismene, in the old time came to me/unknown to the [Thebans], with all their oracles/that spoke about this carcass of mine./You were my trusted guard when I was hunted/out of Theban land." Line 383-387

Quote 6: "It is a poor thing to exalt the old/when he fell in his youth." Line 437-438

Quote 7: "Make an atonement to those deities/you came to first,/when you trespassed on their ground." Line 521-522

Quote 8: "It was the city bound me,/in utter ignorance, in a deadly marriage,/in fated ruin, that came with my wife." Line 588-590

Quote 9: "I received a gift/for serving the city--would to God I had never won it!--/for my heart is broken." Line 610-612

Quote 10: "Those that I killed would have killed me./So in law I am innocent and came to all this/in ignorance." Line 624-625

Quote 11: "For my part I know what it means,/to be brought up in exile,/as you are an exile. I too in a foreign country/wrestled with dangers to my life, more than anyone else." Line 640-642

Quote 12: "I was banished from my own country/by my sons, return forever denied to me,/because I killed my father." Line 683-685

Quote 13: "Here are the fairest homesteads of the world,/here in this country, famed for its horses, stranger,/where you have come:/ Here to Colonus, gleaming white,/where the nightingale in constant trilling song/cries from beneath the green leaves,/where she lives in the wine dark ivy.../safe from the sun, safe from the wind/of every storm, god's place, inviolable." Line 665-674



Quote 14: "Yet another matter of praise have I/for this my mother city,/gift of a great god, our land's boast,/that it is a horse master, colt breaker, master of the sea." Line 803-804

Quote 15: "You have come to bring me, yes, but not to bring me home/but to set me in a dwelling apart -- but near you,/so there will be no trouble with Athens for your city./You will not succeed, no, instead/my spirit shall dwell forever, a curse,/a curse upon your country." Line 889-894

Quote 16: "You miserable creature, clearly you haven't/been able to grow wise, with all your years." Line 913-914

Quote 17: "May the gods of this place/not take away my tongue from uttering this curse!/You villain: after the violence to my onetime eyes,/you have wrenched from me the one poor eye I had left./May the Sun-God [Apollo] that sees all give you and your seed/an old age like this of mine!" Line 995-1000

Quote 18: "If you are right [that Oedipus is the criminal], I will no longer think/Athens [to be] a city." Line 1010-1011

Quote 19: "What you have done/is a disgrace to me, and your own blood,/and to your country. You came within this city/that makes a practice of justice and determines/nothing without a law. You then throw aside her lawful institutions by your invasion./You take what you want, making them yours by force." Line 1049-1055

Quote 20: "But you dishonor/a city that has not merited dishonor --/your own city; and your years, so many,/show you to be an old man still empty of wisdom." Line 1068-1072

Quote 21: "May the gods grant all that I wish for you./for you and for this country! Only in this people/of yours have I found piety towards the gods,/and human feeling and no hypocrisy./...I have/all that I have through you and no one else." Line 1290-1296

Quote 22: "He is my son, prince, he is my hated son,/whose words would hurt my ears more than all others." Line 1350-1351

Quote 23: "I do not want to boast, but you,/you know you are safe -- if a god keeps me safe." Line 1392-1393

Quote 24: "Not to be born is best of all.../For when youth with its gift of light heart/has come and gone, what grievous stroke/is spared to a man, what agony/is he without? Envy, and faction,/strife and fighting and murders are his.../old age at the last, most hated,/without power, without comrades, and friends,/when every ill, all ills,/take up their dwelling with him." Line 1410-1423

Quote 25: "Here I find him in a foreign country,/an exile banished here, with clothes upon him/where the foul ancient dirt has lived so long/that it infects his old body,/and his uncombed hair floats in the wind/about his eyeless face.../Why are you silent?/Say something! Do not turn away from me giving no answer." Line 1445-1461



Quote 26: "You scoundrel, you, with your scepter and your throne --/held now by your blood brother in Thebes --/you chased me out, your father, made me cityless;/these are clothes you made me wear,/the sight of which now brings tears to your eyes,/when you have come to the same stress of misery./I may not weep, I must put up with it." Line 1548-1554

Quote 27: "Here are other new ills that have come/just now, of evil doom,/from the blind stranger.../For I cannot recall any decision of God/a vain thing./Time watches constantly those decisions;/Some fortunes it destroys, and others,/on the day following, lifts up again//There is the thunder! Zeus!" Line 1662-1671

Quote 28: "Look at it! rolling down, crashing,/the thunderbolt unspeakable, hurled by Zeus./Terror has raised the hair on my head;/my heart is trembling.../I am all fear." Line 1677-1683

Quote 29: "Yes; I will direct you, son of Aegeus,/in what shall be a treasure for this city./Old age shall not decay it. Immediately/I will show the way without a hand to guide me/to the place where I must die./And you, describe this to no man, ever,/neither where it is hidden nor in what region,/that doing so may make you a defense/beyond the worth of many shield, or many neighbors' help." Line 1732-1740

Quote 30: "Let us go from this place -- a pressing summons/from the gods forces me -- and delay no more./My children, follow me -- so. In a strange way/I have become your guide; you were once mine./Come on, but touch me not.../This way, this way, like this! For this way Hermes,/the Conductor, leads me, and the goddess of the dead." Line 1758-1766

Quote 31: "He was himself the guide to all of us./When he came to the steep road, rooted in earth/by brazen steps, he stood in one of the many branching paths.../Then he sat down and loosed his filthy robes.../[then] Zeus/of the Underworld thundered. [The daughters] fell to their father's knees/and cried, unceasingly, beating their breasts." Line 1810-1829

Quote 32: "It was the god who called them, over and over,/You, Oedipus, Oedipus, why are you hesitating/to go our way? You have been too slow, too long." Line 1846-1848

Quote 33: "And he died in a foreign land,/but one he yearned for. He has his bed/below in the shadowy grass/forever./He has left behind him a mourning sorrow --/these eyes of mine with their tears/bewail you.../Yes, you chose in a foreign land/to die. I find it a lonely death." Line 1941-1951

Quote 34: "He/has forbidden approach to the place,/nor may any voice invoke/the sacred tomb where he lies./he said, if I truly did this,/I should have forever a land unharmed./These pledges the God heard from me/and Oath, Zeus' servant, all seeing." Line 2003-2010



Quote 35: "If this was, then, the mind of Him,/the dead, I must be content./Send us, then, to our ancient Thebes/that perhaps we may prevent/the murder that comes to our brothers." Line 2011-2015



Topic Tracking: City

City 1: The Chorus of Athenian elders tells Oedipus to listen to rules from the city of Athens because he is a guest in a new land. The customs of a city are very important for all citizens and guests to follow, because it maintains the law and order that a city creates. If people did not follow the rules of a city, then the city would fall apart.

City 2: The fact that Oedipus does not belong to any city because he has been exiled from his home of Thebes is very embarrassing to him. Exile from one's city is a worst punishment than death itself, as Oedipus himself later explains. Belonging to a city is very important for people living in ancient Greece.

City 3: The situation of civil war and conflict over the kingship seen in Thebes is a sharp contrast to the peaceful, smoothly-run machine seen in Athens, led by King Theseus. In Athens, two brothers cannot agree about who should be king. Instead of thinking about what is best for the city like the Athenians do, in Thebes the brothers Polyneices and Eteocles choose to just worry about themselves having the power to rule.

City 4: When Oedipus is denied the chance to be buried on Theban soil, he refuses to return to this city of his birth. Instead, he chooses to remain in Athens where he is welcome to be buried there. It is very important for Oedipus to have a city that he can belong to.

City 5: Oedipus does not accept responsibility for his actions of incest and patricide. Instead, he blames all of his suffering on the city of Thebes and all of the people within this city. It is the city that has unjustly caused him to suffer because of the circumstances that made him mistakenly marry his mother and kill his father; if he had not saved Thebes and become king as a reward, none of his suffering would have happened.

City 6: Oedipus complains that he does not have a city to call his home, for he was exiled from Thebes by his own sons. Theseus also relates to Oedipus' situation, claiming that he too had wandered as an exile far from his home during times past. His words do not seem to comfort Oedipus at first, however.

City 7: Trying to heal some of Oedipus' pain, King Theseus offers to give Oedipus citizenship to Athens, since he is so unhappy that he is an exile. Oedipus is pleased to hear this news, although he turns down Theseus' offer, claiming that he does not want to go into the city of Athens. He desires to remain at Colonus.

City 8: Oedipus is very upset that Creon wants to take him back to his city, Thebes, even after he had exiled him for many years. He claims that Creon is very cruel because now, when he wants to stay in the city of Athens, Creon wants to ruin his happiness again by taking him back to Thebes. Belonging to a city remains very important for Oedipus.



City 9: Theseus explains that the true purpose of a city such as Athens is to provide for "lawful institutions" and to give order to people. Creon, acting on behalf of Thebes, is everything that a city is not: selfish, arrogant, and reckless. Theseus reprimands him for kidnapping Antigone and Ismene, although Creon does not accept responsibility, claiming foolishly that he is right and Theseus is wrong.

City 10: The oldest son of Oedipus, Polyneices, is guilty of the same selfishness that Creon showed to everyone, and he wishes to bring Oedipus back to Thebes for the same purpose, so that he can win the battle for the kingship. Oedipus is disgusted at this behavior and refuses to help out at all; only Theseus' selflessness and the wisdom with which he rules Athens seem to demonstrate how a true city should be governed, unlike the injustice found in Thebes.

City 11: Although it is certain that he will fail and die, Polyneices insists on returning to attack Thebes with his seven armies because the pain of exile is too much to bear. He would rather die in battle fighting than live in exile peacefully. This reflects the same feelings of Oedipus, who wished that he had been stoned to death rather than endure so many years of exile.

City 12: Oedipus is so overjoyed with the kindness and sense of belonging that Theseus and the Athenian citizens have given to him, that Oedipus decides to reward Athens as he is dying. His grave will protect the city as long as its location is not revealed to anyone. Thus, belonging to a city is very important to people because without a city or a home, one is lost and forced to wander.

City 13: Antigone thinks that Oedipus died a lonely man because he was not on his home soil of Thebes. Antigone thus misses her home and plans to return soon after, but she does not realize that Oedipus refused to return to Thebes when given the chance by both Creon and Polyneices, because he was disgusted with the city's people and its government. Athens is a lawful city ruled by a just king, Theseus.



Topic Tracking: Old Age

Old Age 1: For Oedipus, old age brings a great deal of suffering because of the past events he has experienced after being exiled from Thebes, but also his body is more tired now than it used to be. He is very tired from walking and needs to sit down on a rock. Old age has also taught Oedipus to be a stronger person because he's lived through so much.

Old Age 2: The Chorus is composed of old men from Athens; these men advise Oedipus that he needs to move away from the grove because it is sacred; they address him continually as "Old man" because of his old age, suggesting that they pity him a bit because he is so old, for he's called a "poor old man" as well. Certainly, after wandering for so long, Oedipus must look like a beggar, thus their reaction is understandable.

Old Age 3: Oedipus speaks the words, "It is a poor thing to exalt the old when he fell in his youth," meaning that an old man's mistakes are not so easily forgotten. Oedipus feels guilty for the crimes of incest and patricide he committed when a much younger man, and the passage of time has not caused him to forget. He feels unworthy to be praised by anyone because of his past mistakes.

Old Age 4: Creon, who is also an old man, accuses Oedipus of not having any wisdom. Wisdom usually comes gradually as a person gets older, but Creon states that Oedipus has not learned any wisdom at all, as old as he is because Oedipus refuses to return to Thebes.

Old Age 5: Theseus accuses Creon of the very same mistake that Creon had previously accused Oedipus of, declaring that he lacks wisdom in old age. Creon does not listen and becomes violent and irrational, insisting that Oedipus must return to Thebes with him.

Old Age 6: Defending himself, Creon insists that it is his own anger that causes him to try to take Oedipus back to Thebes with him because "Anger knows no old age, except in death." Although many years have passed since the death of his sister Jocasta, he still blames Oedipus for her death. The passage of time has not caused his anger to go away or to let him forgive.

Old Age 7: The Chorus describes old age as a time of great suffering and pain, because an old man is "most hated, without power, without comrades, without friends, when every ill and all ills take up their dwelling within him." Being old is terrible because it is lonely since many friends have already died, and the body becomes ill and filled with pains.

Old Age 8: Oedipus' son Polyneices says that his father looks like a wretched man and does not show a lot of respect for him since his hair is not combed and his skin is so dirty. Old age has taken away a lot of Oedipus' dignity and grace, especially because of the way he looks now.



Old Age 9: When Oedipus knows that he is finally going to die, he is filled with energy once again and no longer needs a guide to show him the way as he walks. This is a big change from his behavior earlier when he complains a lot about how tired and frail he is. he walks toward his death eagerly and willingly, because it means that his suffering will end.

Old Age 10: Antigone and Ismene are very sad that their father has died and the older sister even wishes to die herself as a result. They do not understand the pains of being an old man, nor did they consider how happy Oedipus was to die. It is difficult for young children such as this to even understand what it is like to be old unless they experience it for themselves as their father had done.



Topic Tracking: Religion

Religion 1: After wandering for many years, Oedipus sits down in a sacred place at Colonus; a grove of trees there is sacred to goddesses called the Eumenides, the land in Colonus is owned by the god Poseidon, and the ancient Titan, Prometheus, lives there as well. Oedipus violates the sanctity of the grove by sitting in it, however, and showing little respect that it is a holy place.

Religion 2: Antigone blames the gods for causing Oedipus' suffering. This opinion is different than the Chorus, which believes that Oedipus caused his own suffering because of bad decisions, but Antigone declares that he did not know Laius was his father, nor did he know that Jocasta was his mother; she blames the gods for torturing Oedipus unjustly.

Religion 3: Ismene tells about the predictions for the future that come from the god Apollo; these prophecies warn Oedipus that his sons will come soon to try to take him back to Thebes. The oracle also long ago caused Laius to abandon his son, fearing that Oedipus would one day kill him as he would eventually do.

Religion 4: Oedipus must make offerings to ask for the goddesses called the Eumenides to forgive him for trespassing in their sacred grove. He must pour water with honey and recite a prayer; Ismene volunteers to go perform this task because Oedipus is so blind and old. The Eumenides are goddesses of forgiveness, and it is forgiveness for all of his sins of patricide and incest that Oedipus seeks to obtain.

Religion 5: With the help of the god Apollo, the oracle predicts that Athens will one day conquer the city of Thebes. Other predictions have been true before, such as how Laius will be killed by his son Oedipus. After hearing about the future from the god Apollo, citizens in Thebes try to prevent their city from destruction by bringing Oedipus back.

Religion 6: As Theseus goes off to sacrifice to the gods at the altar, the Chorus calls Colonus "god's place" because it is so sacred; it is home to the Eumenides, Prometheus, and Poseidon. These citizens of Athens respect the gods very much.

Religion 7: Oedipus has reverence for the gods, hoping that they do not punish him for cursing Creon because he is so angry. He wishes that Apollo will punish Creon and all of his children, although Creon is not affected at all by his words except to become even angrier himself.

Religion 8: Overjoyed to have his daughters Ismene and Antigone returned safely thanks to the help of Theseus, Oedipus prays that the gods will reward Athens for its kindness. He is also very happy to see that the Athenians have loyalty to the gods, unlike the lawlessness and selfishness he had witnessed in Thebes from Creon and his sons.



Religion 9: As great of a hero and a king that he is, Theseus nevertheless does not equate himself to be one with the gods; he recognizes that he rules with the support of the gods helping him. If the gods do not help him, then Theseus is nothing at all. He is thus very wise and humble, a quality which was not seen in Creon from Thebes. Creon was irrational and selfish.

Religion 10: Zeus, the king of the gods, sends thunder rumbling through the sky to announce that it is time for Oedipus to die; the Chorus of Athenians elders is humbles, acknowledging that Zeus is very powerful because he is a god, and they are afraid of him. Theseus is making sacrifices to the god Poseidon while this is occurring.

Religion 11: When the gods announce it is time for him to die, Oedipus doesn't argue at all and merely lets himself be guided by them. Recognizing the power of the gods and believing in them, Oedipus finds his peace at last. The Chorus prays that the gods will be kind to Oedipus as his spirit ventures down into the underworld after he dies

Religion 12: A god's voice calls Oedipus to die because he takes too long while saying good-bye to his children, asking him "Why do you wait so long?" and declaring that he has been too slow for his entire life. Oedipus follows the voice until he is swallowed by the earth and disappears, taken away by the gods. His death is thus very unusual because of the gods' involvement.

Religion 13: It is very sacred to swear an oath to the gods as Theseus has done in promising to keep the location of Oedipus' grave a secret. To break an oath made in the name of the gods means that he would be punished harshly by the gods themselves. Realizing this, Antigone does not try to find out where her father is buried any longer and chooses instead to return to Thebes.



Line 1-341

Oedipus is led into a grove of trees by his daughter Antigone and remembers his tormented past. Much time has passed since he was the king of Thebes, a large city-state in Greece. Oedipus was forced to leave the city after he unknowingly killed his father Laius and fathered children with his own mother, Jocasta. Ashamed at his ignorance, Oedipus blinded himself. Having wandered for many years, Oedipus now laments, "I am blind and old, Antigone, my child./What country have we come to? Whose is this city.../My sufferings have taught me to endure--/and how long these sufferings have lasted!" Line 1-8. However, his suffering in life has caused Oedipus to be a stronger person, even though his pain has lasted for a long time. Oedipus is very weary from walking, and he asks Antigone, who shows the way since her father is blind, if there is anywhere that he can sit down and rest his body. Noting the beauty of the grove they are standing in, Antigone describes it to her father, "there are towers here that protect the city; they look,/to my eyes, far off. This place is sacred--as I would guess--it's thick with laurel, with olives and with vines; the nightingales are singing,/thick-feathered, happily, inside the grove" Line 16-21. She urges him to sit down on a nearby rock, ignoring the fact that the grove is sacred to the gods.

Topic Tracking: Old Age 1

Oedipus asks Antigone where they are, and she states that they are right outside of the city of Athens. Antigone prepares to go find out the name where they are when a Stranger approaches them along the road. Before the two wanderers can speak to him, he warns them that they are standing on sacred ground, because the grove is sacred to the "Goddesses most dreadful, the daughters of Earth and Darkness." These goddesses are called the Eumenides. However, Oedipus refuses to listen to that warning and swears that he shall never leave from that very spot and asks the Stranger where they are. The man replies that the path they follow is called the Bronze Road and the land around it is owned by Poseidon. Also, another divinity named Prometheus lives there as well, in this land that surrounds the city of Athens; the mortal man named Knight Colonus controls the land around the city and the place is named Colonus because of this man. Oedipus asks the Stranger to go into Athens to ask the king Theseus to come to talk to Oedipus in Colonus, because Oedipus would like to ask for Theseus' assistance and give him a reward. Uncertain of what a blind beggar such as Oedipus could possibly give to the great Theseus, the Stranger declares that he will first tell his fellow citizens about Oedipus' request, to see if Oedipus' request will be honored. Otherwise he will be asked to leave that place and continue on his journey. He departs.

Topic Tracking: Religion 1

After the Stranger leaves, Oedipus asks the Eumenides to excuse him for trespassing upon their sacred ground, recalling that the oracle of Phoebus Apollo at Delphi had prophesied that he would find an escape to his suffering through death only after he had offended the Eumenides in Colonus. Having understood this, Oedipus is somewhat



joyful that his wandering has nearly reached its end. A group of old men, nobles of Athens known as the Chorus, approaches the grove as Antigone warns Oedipus, trying to hide him, even as he remains standing out in plain sight. Surely, the Stranger is the cause of these men's arrival, as they demand to know if Oedipus is the irreverent man who had trespassed on the holy ground of the Eumenides. He admits that he is that man, and the Chorus at once asks him to move away from the grove, for Oedipus already stands too close to where the "mixing bowl mixes its water with the stream that runs sweetened with honey." Resisting at first, Antigone convinces her father to move saying "Father, we must do as other citizens here,/yielding in what is dutiful, hearing with obedience" Line 174-175. He steps away with Antigone's guiding hand, but still the Chorus, addressing him as "Old man," asks him to move further and still further away from the sacred grove. Reprimanding him, the Chorus declares "You are a stranger in a strange land,/poor man. Make your mind up/to reject what this city dislikes,/and reverence what she loves" Line 189-193. The men urge Oedipus to conform to their rules quickly, since he is in a new land.

Topic Tracking: City 1

Topic Tracking: Old Age 2

Finally, Oedipus has moved far enough away from the sacred grove and the Chorus asks who he is and where he is from. Initially, he declares "Sirs, I have no city" hesitantly, afraid of their questions at what his identity is. Ashamed, he does not want them to know that he is the famous Oedipus, known for killing his father and having sex with his own mother. Beginning to cry, he asks Antigone for advice, who urges him to tell the truth since she knows that his life is near its end anyway. He admits that he is Laius' son, the "miserable Oedipus." The Chorus of old men is repulsed to learn of this and urges him to leave at once, fearing that his bad luck will be spread to their city, Athens. Antigone comes to her father's defense again, telling them that he was ignorant that it was his own father he was killing or that the woman he married was his own mother, calling them deeds of unconsciousness. She blames Oedipus' bad fortune on the gods.

Topic Tracking: City 2

Topic Tracking: Religion 2

Oedipus repeats the same idea, saying also that his parents had planned to murder him in the first place by maiming his ankles and leaving him outside in the woods to die, and he is thus a victim of his parents and of the gods alike. Invoking the name of Athens again, he expresses extreme interest in talking to Theseus again. He states that he wants to help Athens, not to harm it. Oedipus asks again where Theseus is and if he will come to Colonus. The Chorus assures him not to worry, for the word of his presence near the city shall be brought to Theseus by the travelers going into Athens, and he shall come at once when he hears Oedipus' name, since he is a very renowned man. The Chorus tells him not to worry, for Theseus will come soon enough. Oedipus replies merely that he hopes to see him, for he will offer a reward to Athens if Theseus will help him. Antigone interrupts suddenly, remarking that she sees a girl approaching them from the distance on horseback, exclaiming that it is her own sister, Ismene.



Line 342-627

Arriving on the scene, Ismene greets both her blind father, Oedipus, and her sister, Antigone, since it has evidently been a long time since she has seen them. Oedipus asks Ismene where her brothers Polyneices and Eteocles are, assuming that the two of them are staying indoors like women while the two daughters are wandering about to help out their father. Oedipus recalls "Ismene, in the old time came to me/unknown to the [Thebans], with all their oracles/that spoke about this carcass of mine./You were my trusted guard when I was hunted/out of Theban land" Line 183-187. Ismene explains, however, that her reason for coming is to inform him about the bad luck of his two sons. At first content to allow Jocasta's brother Creon to rule over the city of Thebes, the two brothers later changed their minds. After this, although the elder brother Polyneices was deserving by birth to hold the throne, it was the younger brother Eteocles who took it from him by force and exiled Polyneices from Thebes, just as Oedipus himself had been exiled.

Topic Tracking: City 3

Ismene continues with news from the oracle of Phoebus Apollo at Delphi that Oedipus shall soon be sought out by people in Thebes, because his pattern of bringing misfortune wherever he goes can be used as a weapon against Thebes' enemies. These people in Thebes want him to live outside of the city's gates in case he is needed to help them. Disgusted to hear this, he laments "It is a poor thing to exalt the old/when he fell in his youth" Line 437-438. Oedipus is repulsed at the idea that he is wanted now when he is old and near death, in spite of how he had made so many mistakes as a younger man. He does not believe that he should help Thebes, especially since the city had exiled him before for his crime of murdering his own father and having sex with his own mother. His refusal to return to Thebes is decided when Ismene tells him that he still will not be allowed burial on Theban soil because "the guilt of family bloodletting/debars it." The fact that he murdered his own father makes him ineligible for burial on Theban soil. This upsets Oedipus a great deal, for Oedipus bears a great deal of resentment because he was forced to leave the place that he had once ruled and protected.

Topic Tracking: City 4

Topic Tracking: Old Age 3

Topic Tracking: Religion 3

Oedipus asks what his sons' reactions were when they heard this news from the oracle at Delphi, and Ismene tells him that they both had chosen to remain in Thebes to wage their fight for the kingship. Disgusted, he wishes a curse upon the two young men, wishing that neither son will win the battle for the throne of Thebes. Oedipus remembers how his two sons both had expelled him from the city, although he himself had wished instead to be put to death by stoning. Death is something he looks forward to even now, as an only escape to his suffering. His sons chose to exile him from the city rather than granting him the death he wanted to have. Oedipus rejoices only in remembering the



help that his daughters Antigone and Ismene have given during the years passed. Oedipus says again that only misfortune shall befall these two sons for their selfishness. Neither of them shall win the throne of Thebes when the fighting is done, according to these new oracles that Ismene has told him about.

Observing all of this conversation, the Chorus becomes sympathetic and offers advice for how Oedipus can help himself out. They declare that he should "Make an atonement to those deities/you came to first,/when you trespassed on their ground" Line 521-522. Curious and willing, Oedipus asks how he can do this and appease the Eumenides, whose sacred grove he violated after first entering Colonus. The Chorus replies that he must fill a bowl from the grove with sacred water from a nearby stream, covering it with newly cut wool. Then he must face the east and pour the water three times, the last time adding honey to it as well. No wine is to be used for the ritual. After the water is absorbed into the ground, Oedipus must place nine olive sprigs on that spot and recite a prayer to these Goddesses. Hearing all of this, Oedipus turns to his daughters and asks if they both understand what must be done, explaining that one of them must perform this ritual because he is too frail and weak, nor can he see what he is doing due to his blindness. Ismene volunteers herself, asking Antigone to remain behind to guard their father. Oedipus sends her in the direction of the sacred grove so that the task can be done.

Topic Tracking: Religion 4

After Ismene's departure, the Chorus changes its initially fearful demeanor. Now these old men are fascinated by Oedipus' fate, demanding to know the details of his fate. At first he resists and appears ashamed, as he had been when first asked about his identity, yet he gives in at the Chorus' insistence that they had helped him already and he owed it to them to speak. Beginning to answer, Oedipus blames his fate upon all of Thebes, "It was the city bound me,/in utter ignorance, in a deadly marriage,/in fated ruin, that came with my wife" Line 588-590. The Chorus is stunned to learn that both these two women, Antigone and Ismene, are the products of his incest, stating in disgust that they are both his daughters and his sisters. Lamenting upon his fate, he states again that "I received a gift/for serving the city--would to God I had never won it!--/for my heart is broken" Line 610-612. Oedipus appears to be very bitter that he was rewarded with a punishment from the gods even after he had saved Thebes from destruction by becoming king. Oedipus wishes he had never gone there in the first place.

Topic Tracking: City 5

The Chorus reminds Oedipus that he deserved punishment because it was he who first killed his own father Laius on the road to Thebes, committing the same crime of patricide that prohibits him from being buried on Theban soil. Yet Oedipus justifies his actions because he did not know that the man was his father and even so, Laius had originally maimed his son's ankles and cast him out into the forest, hoping that he would die. Thus, he replies that his actions were fully justified, "Those that I killed would have killed me./So in law I am innocent and came to all this/in ignorance" Line 624-625. Oedipus refuses to accept responsibility and continually affirms his innocence,



remaining guilt-free from any crime. His past ignorance is his defense. His father's death was just because his father had originally plotted to kill him as a young child after hearing prophecies from the oracle of Delphi that his son would murder him one day. To prevent this, the father tried to murder his son first.



Line 628-1020

Abruptly, Theseus, king of Athens appears, just as the Chorus had predicted he would once he heard of Oedipus' arrival. Theseus immediately addresses Oedipus and Antigone, asking why they want to speak with him, nor does he show any fear or repulsion as the Chorus had done. Instead, the wise king relates to Oedipus' situation, explaining "For my part I know what it means,/to be brought up in exile,/as you are an exile. I too in a foreign country/wrestled with dangers to my life, more than anyone else" Line 640-642. Oedipus is flattered by the Athenian king's words and states only that he wishes to give Theseus his "wretched carcass," which means he wants to offer himself as a gift. Theseus shall be his "burial man" when he dies, he says. Confused at the mysteriousness of these words, Theseus wishes to know how he may benefit from this, yet Oedipus only says that he will learn that secret later. Oedipus does openly ask for another favor from Theseus: to protect him from his sons Polyneices and Eteocles, as well as those who want to carry him away to Thebes.

Theseus is confused by these words, for Oedipus had complained that he had been exiled from Thebes, and now he complains again when he is given an opportunity to return to the city. He criticizes Oedipus for being so angry. In reply, the blind man states that his suffering has made him become a bitter man, yet it is not his suffering in killing his own father Laius and having sex with his mother Jocasta that bothers him. Instead, it is because "I was banished from my own country/by my sons, return forever denied to me,/because I killed my father" Line 683-685. Being exiled from Thebes is more suffering than the crimes he had unknowingly committed against his parents. Oedipus explains the news that Ismene had brought to him, that his sons wish to use him as a weapon to keep enemies away from the city of Thebes by having him live nearby. It was the prophesy of the oracle of Phebus Apollo at Delphi that made the prediction that one day Athens would conquer Thebes. Thebes wants to use Oedipus to protect against Athens.

Topic Tracking: City 6

Topic Tracking: Religion 5

Stunned to hear this news, Theseus does not understand how such an event might happen, since Thebes and Athens are two cities that are allies and have never had any bad blood between them. Oedipus explains that everything is always changing and that trust can easily die over time. Thoughtful, Theseus then offers Oedipus the chance to have Athenian citizenship, asking for him to go to his own home in the city. Oedipus explains that he must stay there at Colonus, for it is there that he shall defeat his enemies, those who wish to carry him back to Thebes. Theseus reasserts his promise to care for Oedipus and protect him, even if he wishes to stay there in the grove. Theseus goes to make an offering to the gods nearby, leaving Oedipus and Antigone alone.

Topic Tracking: City 7



The Chorus of Athenian elders speaks about the joys of Athens, praising the city and the surrounding area for its beauty, stating "Here are the fairest homesteads of the world,/here in this country, famed for its horses, stranger,/where you have come:/ Here to Colonus, gleaming white,/where the nightingale in constant trilling song/cries from beneath the green leaves,/where she lives in the wine dark ivy.../safe from the sun, safe from the wind/of every storm, god's place, inviolable" Line 665-674. The Chorus notes that the spot where they all stand is protected from all danger by the gods. Continuing, they make another reference to the city of Athens, named after grey-eyed Athene, for "Yet another matter of praise have I/for this my mother city,/gift of a great god, our land's boast,/that it is a horse master, colt breaker, master of the sea" Line 803-804. Athens has a very skilled navy, for the city is "master of the sea," and also the city has a very skilled cavalry, for it is "the horse master." Antigone speaks suddenly, warning that Creon is approaching them with his followers.

Topic Tracking: Religion 6

Arriving, Creon greets the Chorus and Oedipus with a pleasant tone, noting that Athens is known to be the most powerful city in Greece. He declares that has come there in order to convince Oedipus to return to Thebes with him because he feels badly for Oedipus' suffering and also because everyone in Thebes would like Oedipus to return. Creon urges Oedipus to remember their kinship, since he should wish to return to the city that is his city, Thebes, for in Athens he is merely a guest. Oedipus replies with anger, stating that he wishes to trick him to return to Thebes; he reminds Creon about how he was not allowed to remain in Thebes when he wanted to stay, but he was simply thrown out of the city. Similarly, now when Oedipus wants to remain in Athens, Creon wishes to take him away from there, too. The reason for this is because of the oracle's prophecy, for "You have come to bring me, yes, but not to bring me home/but to set me in a dwelling apart -- but near you,/so there will be no trouble with Athens for your city./You will not succeed, no, instead/my spirit shall dwell forever, a curse,/a curse upon your country" Line 889-894. Oedipus states that he and Antigone shall live there in Athens. Angered, Creon says "You miserable creature, clearly you haven't/been able to grow wise, with all your years" Line 913-914. Creon tries to trap Oedipus by moving closer to him, telling the Chorus to witness Oedipus' refusal to return to Thebes. He says that he will force Oedipus to come with him, for he has already taken his daughter Ismene as a hostage, and he also plans to take Antigone next.

Topic Tracking: City 8

Topic Tracking: Old Age 4

Oedipus appeals to the Chorus to help him out as Antigone is already being dragged away by Creon's servants. The Chorus tries to stop them, but Creon warns that the entire city of Thebes shall attack Athens if anyone attacks him; Oedipus laments "O city of Athens!" and he tries to grab his daughter's hands as she is dragged away; her hands cannot reach him. Creon orders the servants away, and Antigone disappears; he next affirms that he is the "sovereign lord" -- the ruler -- of Oedipus' royal family in Thebes, and he says that without Antigone to guide him, Oedipus won't be able to go anywhere. He states again that "It is your temper which constantly ruins you." He believes that



Oedipus has a really large temper that causes him to make the mistakes that he has made in the past.

The Chorus warns Creon to return Antigone and Ismene, although Creon is carefree, gloating that he will be taking Oedipus away next. Oedipus appeals to the gods, cursing Creon for his actions, "May the gods of this place/not take away my tongue from uttering this curse!/You villain: after the violence to my onetime eyes,/you have wrenched from me the one poor eye I had left./May the Sun-God [Apollo] that sees all give you and your seed/an old age like this of mine!" Line 995-1000. Creon screams maniacally to the Chorus to witness Oedipus' temper, and he tries to grab Oedipus himself and drag him away. The Chorus replies, "If you are right [that Oedipus is the criminal], I will no longer think/Athens [to be] a city" Line 1010-1011. As Creon drags Oedipus away, the Chorus cries aloud for someone to stop Creon and his servants before they reach the city's borders. If they aren't stopped in time, then they will succeed in kidnapping Ismene, Antigone, and Oedipus next.

Topic Tracking: Religion 7



Line 1021-1440

Hearing the Chorus' cries, Theseus returns to the grove, demanding to know what has happened, for he was disturbed from making an important sacrifice to the sea-god Poseidon at the altar.

Oedipus explains that Creon has kidnapped his daughters Antigone and Ismene. Stunned, the king of Athens sends some of his servants to go off to the altar again to send the people there in pursuit of Creon's men. He then tells Creon how unjust his actions are, "What you have done/is a disgrace to me, and your own blood,/and to your country. You came within this city/that makes a practice of justice and determines/nothing without a law. You then throw aside her lawful institutions by your invasion./You take what you want, making them yours by force" Line 1049-1055. Theseus perceives Creon to be a force acting against the function of a city, which is to provide law and order for society. Creon has used the law to serve only himself. Continuing, he states that Creon is a foolish man who has no wisdom, saying "But you dishonor/a city that has not merited dishonor --/your own city; and your years, so many,/show you to be an old man still empty of wisdom" Line 1068-1072.

Topic Tracking: City 9

Topic Tracking: Old Age 5

Creon replies by criticizing Oedipus again for killing his father and having an unholy marriage with his own mother. He states that Oedipus deserves his suffering. He thought that Theseus would have understood that Oedipus is an unclean man. "Anger knows no old age, except in death," Creon says about himself. Oedipus dismisses his words as name-calling, saying that he is not guilty of these crimes because they were committed in ignorance. The death of his father Laius was dealt in self-defense, because Laius had wishes to kill him. The marriage to his mother Jocasta was done in ignorance, for he did not know that she was his own mother until it was too late. Indeed, it was she who had sent him away from Thebes to die when he was only a baby. As such, Oedipus sees himself to be an innocent man who has suffered unjustly. Finally, Oedipus invokes the names of the Eumenides who live in the grove to aid Athens and protect it from Creon and Thebes. Theseus adds that they must begin their pursuit so that Antigone and Ismene are not taken away. Creon is now his hostage and shall lead the way to his servants. Oedipus remains behind, nervous, although Theseus tells him not to worry.

Topic Tracking: Old Age 6

The Chorus comments on the events that are occurring. They recall that Athens is very strong and it shall defeat Creon, retrieving the two daughters that his men have kidnapped. Invoking the gods, the Chorus prays that Athene will help them all as well as her brother, the god Apollo. Overjoyed, the Chorus observes Antigone and Ismene as they approach, accompanied by Theseus. Reunited, the three hug one another and celebrate. Thanking Theseus many times, Oedipus wishes for the gods to bless Athens,



noting how nice the Athenians have treated him compared with the hatred of the Thebans, "May the gods grant all that I wish for you./for you and for this country! Only in this people/of yours have I found piety towards the gods,/and human feeling and no hypocrisy./...I have/all that I have through you and no one else" Line 1290-1296. Oedipus is a changed man because these Athenians under the leadership of Theseus have been so kind to him. After being friendless for so long, the sudden protection that these men give is comforting, and it awakens his heart again. Now he is not so bitter, nor does he distrust the Athenians any longer.

Topic Tracking: Religion 8

Theseus mentions another odd occurrence that has happened, however. He tells Oedipus that a strange man has hurled himself to the ground in front of the altar of Poseidon, where Theseus had been sacrificing before coming to Oedipus' aid. Curious, Oedipus wonders who this man could be, for he claims to be his relative and wishes to speak to Oedipus. The blind old man, realizing suddenly who this man is, wishes to hear nothing more about it, stating "He is my son, prince, he is my hated son,/whose words would hurt my ears more than all others" Line 1350-1351. Oedipus bears hatred towards both of his sons Polyneices and Eteocles. Yet it is Polyneices who has come to Athens now to request the same that Creon had asked: will Oedipus return to Thebes with him? Oedipus, hearing that his son is nearby, does not want to see him because he is disgusted with his past actions.

Antigone speaks up, persuading her father to give in. She reminds him that, as much as he may hate him, Polyneices is still his own son, his own flesh and blood, and even though he was wronged by this son, Oedipus should not wrong his son in return by denying his request to speak with him. She reminds him to lay his anger aside and listen to Theseus, who wishes to allow Polyneices' request to be granted. Convinced, Oedipus agrees, as long as Theseus promises to protect him from being kidnapped again. The Athenian king assures him, acknowledging that the gods determine his destiny and choose to aid him, "I do not want to boast, but you,/you know you are safe -- if a god keeps me safe" Line 1392-1393.

Topic Tracking: Religion 9

While they are all waiting for Oedipus' son to arrive, the Chorus speaks about the need to have moderation in life and about the sufferings of old age: "Not to be born is best of all.../For when youth with its gift of light heart/has come and gone, what grievous stroke/is spared to a man, what agony/is he without? Envy, and faction,/strife and fighting and murders are his.../old age at the last, most hated,/without power, without comrades, and friends,/when every ill, all ills,/take up their dwelling with him" Line 1410-1423. These are all sufferings of Oedipus especially, who has suffered a great deal during his life and has come into old age without a city and without his old friends from Thebes. Antigone speaks up by telling what she sees, as she has done in the past at the early arrival of Ismene and the later approach of Creon. Now it is the approach of Oedipus' son, Polyneices, which she announces to everyone.

Topic Tracking: Old Age 7



Line 1441-1711

Oedipus' son Polyneices appears and speaks about his reason for coming to this place at Colonus outside of Athens in search of his father. Polyneices laments that Oedipus does not respond to his arrival at all, "Here I find him in a foreign country,/an exile banished here, with clothes upon him/where the foul ancient dirt has lived so long/that it infects his old body,/and his uncombed hair floats in the wind/about his eyeless face.../Why are you silent?/Say something! Do not turn away from me giving no answer" Line 1445-1461. The son grows angry at his father for ignoring him, since he has made such a long journey to find him. Antigone urges Polyneices simply to speak, since his words will help to generate a reaction from Oedipus. The son tells a long story about how he is exiled from the city of Thebes by his younger brother Eteocles because he wanted to be the king. After he was exiled, Polyneices went to find allies who would help him to attack Thebes and win back the throne; he managed to gather a total of seven armies, including one of his own. Each army is led by a powerful Greek chieftain who aides Polyneices in regaining the kingship. Finally, he explains that the oracle of Apollo at Delphi declared that whatever side Oedipus chose to join in this conflict would be the side that will win the war. As a result, Polyneices wants Oedipus to join his army so that he will be guaranteed a victory.

Topic Tracking: City 10

Topic Tracking: Old Age 8

Responding, Oedipus mocks Polyneices with very angry words, "You scoundrel, you, with your scepter and your throne --/held now by your blood brother in Thebes --/you chased me out, your father, made me cityless;/these are clothes you made me wear,/the sight of which now brings tears to your eyes,/when you have come to the same stress of misery./I may not weep, I must put up with it" Line 1548-1554. He is upset that his son originally had no problem with exiling him from Thebes after it was learned that Oedipus had mistakenly killed his father Laius and had sex with his mother Jocasta. However, now Polyneices dares to come to ask for help when the same circumstances of exile from Thebes have happened to him. Oedipus declares that he cannot weep like his son does because he has more dignity than that. The father shows complete disgust toward this son. Oedipus goes further and curses both of his sons, saying that both shall die and neither one shall win the kingship of Thebes. He disowns both of them, "You are no sons of mine," and praises his two daughters, Antigone and Ismene for the help that they have given to him.

Topic Tracking: City 11

In response to these words, Polyneices is deeply hurt, but he does not argue. Knowing that he is destined to die, he asks his sisters Antigone and Ismene to honor him properly if he dies by giving a proper burial with funeral rites. Antigone speaks up, asking that he abandon his plan to attack Thebes, but he refuses to do this. Polyneices doesn't want anyone calling him a coward, and he was dishonored by being exiled from his city by a younger brother. Convinced that no one can help him and that he must go onwards to



Thebes without his father's aid, Polyneices prepares to leave. Antigone continues to argue in vain, for she cares about her brother very much. She laments to him, "I am utterly destroyed/if I must lose you." Nevertheless, Polyneices prepares to leave.

The Chorus becomes worried as thunder booms up in the sky, "Here are other new ills that have come/just now, of evil doom,/from the blind stranger.../For I cannot recall any decision of God/a vain thing./Time watches constantly those decisions;/Some fortunes it destroys, and others,/on the day following, lifts up again/There is the thunder! Zeus!" Line 1662-1671. The Chorus of Athenian elders defends the actions of the gods, even though Oedipus perceives his own fate to be cruel and unjust. The blind man becomes very excited, asking for Theseus to be brought there to the grove right away. The thunder rumbles throughout the sky as they wait for Theseus, and the Chorus grows very fearful about what is going to happen as the men speak, "Look at it! Rolling down, crashing,/the thunderbolt unspeakable, hurled by Zeus./Terror has raised the hair on my head;/my heart is trembling.../I am all fear" Line 1677-1683. The thunder grows worse and worse. Oedipus tells a very confused Antigone that it is time for him to die because the gods are calling him. The Chorus calls out to Theseus, declaring that it is time for him and Athens to receive Oedipus' promised gift for the protection he has given to him. Hearing these words, the Athenian king comes over from the altar of Poseidon, demanding to know what is happening.

Topic Tracking: Religion 10



Line 1712-2022

Theseus asks if the sudden thunder is why the Chorus is calling him into the grove at Colonus. Oedipus replies to his words, stating that it is time for him to die, and he will reward Theseus and the city of Athens for its kindness. He explains, "Yes; I will direct you, son of Aegeus,/in what shall be a treasure for this city./Old age shall not decay it. Immediately/I will show the way without a hand to guide me/to the place where I must die./And you, describe this to no man, ever,/neither where it is hidden nor in what region,/that doing so may make you a defense/beyond the worth of many shield, or many neighbors' help" Line 1732-1740. Theseus' task is to keep the location of Oedipus' grave a secret and his city will always be protected from enemies. This is the reason why Polyneices and Creon both tried to convince Oedipus to return to Thebes, in order that their city would be protected by Oedipus. Yet he has sent a curse upon Thebes for the ill treatment he received there, exactly the opposite of how Athens aided him when Theseus protected Oedipus from Creon.

Topic Tracking: City 12

Topic Tracking: Old Age 9

Continuing, Oedipus feels rushed away to walk away now to die in the forest. Reminding Theseus to always remain wise and to reveal his secret grave location only to his successor -- whoever the next ruler of Athens shall be. Continuing, Oedipus says "Let us go from this place -- a pressing summons/from the gods forces me -- and delay no more./My children, follow me -- so. In a strange way/I have become your guide; you were once mine./Come on, but touch me not.../This way, this way, like this! For this way Hermes,/the Conductor, leads me, and the goddess of the dead" Line 1758-1766. Feeling the presence of the gods, Oedipus walks off to die in the forest. His daughters Antigone, Ismene, his son Polyneices, and the Athenian king Theseus follow. The Chorus prays to the goddesses of the underworld and to Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the underworld, to treat Oedipus well when he dies and his spirit enters the underworld. The Chorus of Athenian elders has become very respectful of Oedipus, in spite of the fear that they experienced after first meeting him. In return for their respect, Athens will be rewarded with good fortune in the future.

Topic Tracking: Religion 11

A Messenger appears and explains his version of events that have just occurred as Oedipus died. The Chorus grows excited, and the man describes how Oedipus led the group of people with him, sat on the ground at a certain spot, and told his daughters to bring him water and drink offerings for the gods from a nearby stream, for "He was himself the guide to all of us./When he came to the steep road, rooted in earth/by brazen steps, he stood in one of the many branching paths.../Then he sat down and loosed his filthy robes.../[then] Zeus/of the Underworld thundered. [The daughters] fell to their father's knees/and cried, unceasingly, beating their breasts" Line 1810-1829. Old, blind Oedipus had once been led around by his daughters, yet now he behaves as if he can see once again, nor do his daughter's tears or those of his own son accomplish



anything. Oedipus says good-bye to his children and he is called by a voice from the heavens as "It was the god who called them, over and over,/You, Oedipus, Oedipus, why are you hesitating/to go our way? You have been too slow, too long" Line 1846-1848. Old Oedipus asks Theseus to guard his children and to never betray them, and he sends his children away, telling them to never ask where his grave will be. The children leave the scene, and Oedipus is left alone with Theseus. This Athenian king is soon left alone after Oedipus is swallowed up by the earth. That is the end of the Messenger's story.

Topic Tracking: Religion 12

Stunned, the Chorus sees the two daughters and the others returning to the grove at Colonus where they are standing. Polyneices is gone, for he has returned to Thebes. Antigone explains that what she witnessed was very horrible, as her father suddenly disappeared; she is very sad and wonders how she can continue to live now that he is gone. Ismene tries to comfort her sister, but Antigone becomes very emotional, "And he died in a foreign land,/but one he yearned for. He has his bed/below in the shadowy grass/forever./He has left behind him a mourning sorrow --/these eyes of mine with their tears/bewail you.../Yes, you chose in a foreign land/to die. I find it a lonely death" Line 1941-1951. Antigone feels badly for her father because he has not died in his home city of Thebes. Suddenly, she tells Ismene that they must go back to find Oedipus' grave. Ismene warns her sister that it is unlawful, but Antigone says she cannot live any longer, and she tells Ismene to kill her in the spot where Oedipus died. Ismene becomes upset because she will be lonely if Antigone dies, and the Chorus comforts both children, saying that they are safe and there is no need to worry, for Theseus has promised to protect them now.

Topic Tracking: City 13

Topic Tracking: Old Age 10

Theseus himself arrives again and reminds Antigone that it is forbidden to seek Oedipus' grave, for "He/has forbidden approach to the place,/nor may any voice invoke/the sacred tomb where he lies./he said, if I truly did this,/I should have forever a land unharmed./These pledges the God heard from me/and Oath, Zeus' servant, all seeing" Line 2003-2010. Theseus says that he has sworn a sacred oath to the gods that he will not reveal the secret of where Oedipus is buried. Reminded of this, Antigone is content and decides to return to Thebes with her sister, asking for Theseus' permission and help, "If this was, then, the mind of Him,/the dead, I must be content./Send us, then, to our ancient Thebes/that perhaps we may prevent/the murder that comes to our brothers" Line 2011-2015. Antigone remembers that Oedipus cast a curse upon his sons Polyneices and the younger Eteocles, and she hopes to save them from killing each other. Theseus agrees to allow the two daughters to return to Thebes, and the Chorus urges everyone to stop feeling unhappy because Oedipus' long life of suffering has ended at last. He has been released from the pain of living, for it was in those final few moments before death that Oedipus showed more strength than he had shown in many years. Oedipus went towards death eagerly, knowing that his long, sightless life would finally end there, on the road to Colonus.

Topic Tracking: Religion 13