

CHORUS: How can we say that your design was good?  
To live in blindness? Better live no longer.

OEDIPUS: Enough of this! Enough of your advice!  
It was a good design. Don't tell me other-  
wise.  
My best design! What kind of eyes should I  
need  
to gaze upon my father's face  
in Hades Halls, or my unhappy mother's?  
Or eyes that could be eyes that saw  
my children's faces? Joy? No, no—a sight  
of pain

Translated by:

Paul Roche

engendered from these loins.

Or eyes to see  
citadel and tower and holy idoled shrine  
I cast away?—most cursed I  
the Prince of princes here in Thebes  
and now self-damned and self-appointed  
pariah,  
the refuse-heap of heaven on display as son  
of Laius;  
parading and self-dyed in sin. . . .

What! Eyes to lift and gaze at these?  
O no, none, none! Rather plug my ears  
and choke that stream of sound,  
stuff the senses of my carcass dumb—  
glad to stifle voices with my vision;  
sweet to lift away the soul from hurt!

Pity you, Cithaeron, that you gave me har-  
bor,  
took me in and did not kill me straight;  
that you did not hush my birth from man.

Pity you, Polybus, and Corinth,  
age-old home I called my father's.

What fair skin you housed around what foul-  
ness!

A prince of sin revealed and son of sinners.

And you three roads and dell concealed,  
you copse of oak and straitened triple  
ways!

I handed you my blood to drink—the chalice  
of my father's. O what memories have you  
of my manners then, or what I did  
when after that I came here?

Yes, you batch of weddings! Birthdays breed-  
ing  
seedlings from their very seed.

Fathers, sons and brothers flourishing in foul-  
ness  
with brides and wives and mothers in a  
monstrous coupling;  
unfit to tell what's too unfit to touch.

By all the gods, then, hide me somewhere far  
and soon, or kill me, drown me in the seas,  
away forever from your vision. Come!

Take the broken man. Don't shrink from  
touch.

My load is mine, don't fear. No man could  
bear so much.

CHORUS: Wait! Here Creon comes to hear your woes  
and deal with your designs. He takes your  
place  
as sole custodian of the State.

OEDIPUS: Ah! What words are left for me to him?  
What title to sincerity and trust  
when all my past behavior's proved so  
wrong?

[Enter CREON]

CHORUS: Yet to my thinking this act was ill-advised;  
It would have been better to die than live in blindness.

OEDIPUS: I will not believe that this was not the best  
That could have been done. Teach me no other lesson.  
How could I meet my father beyond the grave  
With seeing eyes; or my unhappy mother,  
Against whom I have committed such heinous sin  
As no mere death could pay for? Could I still love  
To look at my children, begotten as they were begotten?  
Could I want eyes to see that pretty sight?  
To see the towers of Thebes, her holy images,  
Which I, her noblest, most unhappy son  
Have forbidden myself to see – having commanded  
All men to cast away the offence, the unclean,  
Whom the gods have declared accursed, the son of Laius,  
And, having proved myself that branded man,  
Could I want sight to face this people's stare?  
No! Hearing neither! Had I any way  
To dam that channel too, I would not rest  
Till I had prisoned up this body of shame  
In total blankness. For the mind to dwell  
Beyond the reach of pain, were peace indeed.

Cithaeron! Foster-mother! Did you shelter me  
For this? Could you not let me die that instant,  
Instead of saving me to tell the world  
How I was got? Corinth, and Polybus,  
My seeming home and parent, did you think  
What foul corruption festered under the bloom  
Of your adopted son's young loveliness? –  
Now found all evil and of evil born.

That silent crossroad in the forest clearing –  
That copse beside the place where three roads met,  
Whose soil I watered with my father's blood,  
My blood – will they remember what they saw,  
And what I came that way to Thebes to do?  
Incestuous sin! Breeding where I was bred!  
Father, brother, and son; bride, wife, and mother;  
Confounded in one monstrous matrimony!  
All human filthiness in one crime compounded!  
Unspeakable acts – I speak no more of them.  
Hide me at once, for God's love, hide me away,  
Away! Kill me! Drown me in the depths of the sea!  
Take me! (*The CHORUS shrink from his groping hands*)  
For pity, touch me, and take me away!  
Touch me, and have no fear. On no man else  
But on me alone is the scourge of my punishment.

CHORUS: Creon comes here. On him will now depend,  
In act and counsel, the answer to your desires.  
He stands our sole protector in your stead.

OEDIPUS: What can I say to him? What plea of mine  
Can now have any justice in his eyes,  
Whom I, as now is seen, have wronged so utterly?

*Enter CREON.*

Translated by

E. F. Watling

CHORUS How can I say that you have counseled well?  
Better not to be than live a blind man.

Translated by:  
Thomas Gould

OEDIPUS That this was not the best thing I could do—  
don't tell me that, or advise me any more!

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Should I descend to Hades and endure  
to see my father with these eyes? Or see  
my poor unhappy mother? For I have done,  
to both of these, things too great for hanging.  
Or is the sight of children to be yearned for,  
to see new shoots that sprouted as these did?  
Never, never with these eyes of mine!  
Nor city, nor tower, nor holy images  
of the divinities! For I, all-wretched,  
most nobly raised—as no one else in Thebes—  
deprived myself of these when I ordained  
that all expel the impious one—god-shown  
to be polluted, and the dead king's son!  
Once I exposed this great stain upon me,  
could I have looked on these with steady eyes?

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No! No! And if there were a way to block  
the source of hearing in my ears, I'd gladly  
have locked up my pitiable body,  
so I'd be blind and deaf. Evils shut out—  
that way my mind could live in sweetness.  
Alas, Cithaeron, why did you receive me?  
Or when you had me, not killed me instantly?  
I'd not have had to show my birth to mankind.  
Polybus, Corinth, halls—ancestral,  
they told me—how beautiful was your ward,  
a scar that held back festering disease!  
Evil my nature, evil my origin.  
You, three roads, and you, secret ravine,  
you oak grove, narrow place of those three paths

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that drank my blood from these my hands, from him  
who fathered me, do you remember still  
the things I did to you? When I'd come here,

1400

what I then did once more? Oh marriages! Marriages!  
You gave us life and when you'd planted us  
you sent the same seed up, and then revealed  
fathers, brothers, sons, and kinsman's blood,  
and brides, and wives, and mothers, all the most  
atrocious things that happen to mankind!  
One should not name what never should have been.  
Somewhere out there, then, quickly, by the gods,  
cover me up, or murder me, or throw me  
to the ocean where you will never see me more!  
Come! Don't shrink to touch this wretched man!

1405

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Believe me, do not be frightened! I alone  
of all mankind can carry these afflictions.

1415

CHORUS Tell Creon what you wish for. Just when we need him  
he's here. He can act, he can advise you.  
He's now the land's sole guardian in your place.

OEDIPUS Ah! Are there words that I can speak to him?  
What ground for trust can I present? It's proved  
that I was false to him in everything.

1420

Translated by:  
Sudley Fitts

CHORAGOS:

I do not know what words to offer you.  
You were better dead than alive and blind.

OEDIPUS:

Do not counsel me any more. This punishment  
That I have laid upon myself is just.  
If I had eyes,  
I do not know how I could bear the sight  
Of my father, when I came to the house of Death,  
Or my mother: for I have sinned against them both  
So vilely that I could not make my peace  
By strangling my own life.

Or do you think my children,  
Born as they were born, would be sweet to my eyes?  
Ah never, never! Nor this town with its high walls,  
Nor the holy images of the gods.

For I,  
Thrice miserable!—Oedipus, noblest of all the line  
Of Kadmos, have condemned myself to enjoy  
These things no more, by my own malediction  
Expelling that man whom the gods declared

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To be a defilement in the house of Laïos.  
After exposing the rankness of my own guilt,  
How could I look men frankly in the eyes?  
No, I swear it,  
If I could have stifled my hearing at its source,  
I would have done it and made all this body  
A tight cell of misery, blank to light and sound:  
So I should have been safe in my dark mind  
Beyond external evil.

Ah Kithairon!

Why did you shelter me? When I was cast upon you,  
Why did I not die? Then I should never  
Have shown the world my execrable birth.

Ah Polybos! Corinth, city that I believed  
The ancient seat of my ancestors: how fair  
I seemed, your child! And all the while this evil  
Was cancerous within me!

For I am sick

In my own being, sick in my origin.

O three roads, dark ravine, woodland and way  
Where three roads met: you, drinking my father's blood,  
My own blood, spilled by my own hand: can you remem-  
ber

The unspeakable things I did there, and the things  
I went on from there to do?

O marriage, marriage!

The act that engendered me, and again the act  
Performed by the son in the same bed--

Ah, the net

Of incest, mingling fathers, brothers, sons,  
With brides, wives, mothers: the last evil  
That can be known by men: no tongue can say  
How evil!

No. For the love of God, conceal me  
Somewhere far from Thebes; or kill me; or hurl me  
Into the sea, away from men's eyes for ever.

Come, lead me. You need not fear to touch me.  
Of all men, I alone can bear this guilt.

[Enter KREON