

All the suffering men have a name for  
Will make their names notorious forever.

CHORUS: Has he any relief? Or is the pain getting worse?

MESSENGER: He's yelling for someone to unbolt the doors  
And drag him out, so that all Thebes will see  
The father-killer and mother....  
I can't say that word in public. He's shouting  
Repeatedly that he must be kicked out of the city.  
He's exiled by his own decree, he mustn't  
Stay long enough to bring down the curse  
On his own family. But he's in pain,  
And half his strength has gone, poor man.  
He can't see, he needs someone to guide him,  
And the physical agony must be much worse  
Than any man can bear. You'll see yourself.  
The doors are opening. Sorrow and pity  
You must feel, when you see with your own eyes.  
His worst enemy couldn't wish him this.

(enter Oedipus, blinded)

CHORUS: Have any man's eyes ever seen  
Sufferings more terrible? Mine have not.  
What mania, what insanity has turned your brain  
Man of all sorrows? Some demon of the night,  
Some destructive impulse in man, prowling  
Silently round you, waiting its chance,  
Has sprung with inhuman strength, howling  
At your throat. I'm fascinated and repelled, in a trance  
Of horror and pity. I want to watch your pain,  
And to turn from it. I want to learn from your torments  
But I shudder at what that knowledge might mean.

OEDIPUS: Anguish, ah, agony. . .  
Pity, someone. I can't see  
Where my legs are taking me. Is that my voice,  
Floating like a ghost in front of my face?  
The punishment begins here. Where will the end be?

CHORUS: A place unspeakable to men' ears:  
Horrors too dreadful for human eyes to see.

**excerpt from *Sophocles: Plays 1: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*; edited and translated by Don Taylor, commissioned by BBC Television for a 1986 production featuring Michael Pennington, John Gielgud, and Claire Bloom. (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1986, reissued by Methuen Drama, 1998.)**

Will always be with me now. I was there,  
And I'll tell you what happened, as accurately as I can.  
When she rushed into the palace, in anguish,  
She went straight into the bedroom, tearing  
Her hair out in handfuls, and muttering  
Like a madwoman. She slammed the door,  
And locked herself in: and we heard her shouting,  
Something about Laius, her first husband,  
Who's been dead for years, and the night  
They conceived the son who was to kill him  
And breed misbegotten children on his own mother.  
Then it became confused. She screamed,  
And beat upon the bed, where she had conceived  
A husband by a husband, and children by a child.  
I heard all that. Her actual death  
Was behind the locked door: and Oedipus  
Broke in at that point, raving up and down  
The hall and howling for a sword,  
So that all our eyes were fixed on him  
And we all forgot what she was doing.  
'That wife of mine, that wife and mother,'  
He shouted, 'her fertile belly,  
Twice it's been harvested, me and my children!'  
Then he suddenly made for the door--  
None of us told him-- as though some premonition  
Suddenly told him she was there. He bellowed  
And shouted and shoulder-charged the doors,  
And kicked them, till the bolts and hinges  
Shattered, and he stumbled in. . .  
We saw her, slowly turning in the air,  
Swinging slightly, like a pendulum,  
Strung up by the neck. She'd hanged herself.  
The King ran to her, loosed the rope  
And lifted her down, all the while groaning  
Heartbreakingly, like an animal.  
He laid her gently on the floor,  
And then -- this was unbearable, the worst  
Of all -- there were two golden brooches,  
Pinned on her dress. He opened them up,  
Held them high in the air, at arm's length,  
And plunged them down into his eyeballs,  
Screaming and groaning that his own guilt  
And suffering were too great for his eyes to see it.  
That now they would both be in darkness forever,  
That he would never see again  
Those that he should never have seen, nor ever  
Love those he should never have loved.  
That's the way he went on, cursing himself  
And stabbing his eyelids again and again,  
Till his face was a mask of blood and tears,,  
Not drops of blood, but like a thunderstorm  
Or cloudbursts, gushing down his cheeks! . . .  
In the punishment too, man and wife together,  
They were happy you know, for a long time.  
The family was famous, and considered fortunate,  
But from today, horror, pain and grief,

## Excerpt from *Oedipus the King*, by Sophocles, c. 430 BC

*Background and Plot Synopsis: As a baby Oedipus had been put out to die on a mountain because a prophecy had foretold that he would kill his father and marry his mother. As a young man he also heard this prophecy, so he left home to save his father, the King of Corinth. He met and challenged an old man on the road; in the resulting fight he killed him, and proceeded on to Thebes where the newly widowed Queen Jocasta, seeking a strong man to rule her kingdom, married him. They lived happily for some years and had four children together; then a terrible plague strikes Thebes, and it is at this point that the play begins. The people of Thebes have gathered to pray, and King Oedipus assures them that he has already sent his brother in law, Creon, to the oracle at Delphi to find out what must be done. Creon returns with the word that the plague will vanish as soon as Thebes finds and casts out the murderer of the late king, Laius; Oedipus consults the blind prophet Tiresias, who tells him that he is himself the unclean creature and that he is furthermore guilty of both patricide and incest. Oedipus accuses Tiresias of plotting with Creon and is only saved from rash action by the intervention of Jocasta, to whom he secretly confesses that he fears he might indeed be Laius' murderer. Just then a man from Corinth arrives and relates that Polybus, the King of Corinth and Oedipus' father, is dead, so he needn't ever worry about the prophecy being fulfilled; he goes on to say that he had given a baby to the childless King of Corinth to raise, and that baby was Oedipus. He reveals that this infant had been given him to raise by a fellow shepherd in the hills near Thebes-- with both his heels pierced and tied together to ensure that he would die--thus the name Oedipus, or 'swollen feet'. Then an old shepherd, a former servant of Laius', is sent for by Jocasta, hoping to prove it wasn't Oedipus who killed her first husband-- and he turns out to be the person to whom Jocasta had given a new born baby, and identifies that baby as her son-- and then reluctantly admits that this was the same baby he had given to the man from Corinth, and that Laius had in fact been killed by Oedipus, not by robbers. Upon realizing that she has married her husband's killer and committed incest, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus puts out his own eyes. Then he comes before the people and beg them to exile him in fulfillment of the curse he had laid upon the killer of Laius. Although not written as a trilogy originally, eventually this became part one of The Theban Plays, followed by Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. This is both the most famous of the Greek tragedies and one of the most skillfully plotted plays ever written.*

*(enter the MESSENGER, running from the palace, terrified and desperate)*

MESSENGER: Senators! Counsellors! Wise men of the city!  
If you have any feeling at all  
For the royal family of Thebes, those descendents of Labdacus,  
You can't hold back your tears, not when you hear  
What I have to tell you, and see yourself  
The terrible scene in the palace! In there  
Things have been done, deliberate things  
Of such horror, such self-mutilations,  
That rivers could not wash away the blood,  
And the stain on the family will be everlasting!

CHORUS: Haven't we seen and suffered enough?  
What more is there to say?

MESSENGER: First of all,  
In the plainest language, the Queen is dead.

CHORUS: Dead? How can she be dead? Poor woman!

MESSENGER: I'll tell you. She killed herself!  
You haven't seen it, and count yourselves lucky!  
I shall never be able to forget it. That image