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TRANSLATION: Elsa Morante's *The Evening at Colonus - A Parody*

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Introduction

In her book jacket presentation of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*, Elsa Morante calls her experimental collection of poems, songs, and one unique theatrical work, *La serata a Colono*, a “magic key” to her philosophical opinions on the social situation that defined the cultural revolution of 1968.

As the protagonist in Morante’s sober parody of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, the Italian Oedipus of the Sixties is the sum of his extensive, worldly war experience and the cultural knowledge that he has accumulated by reading books. After blinding himself, Oedipus becomes a mental patient and ultimately accepts a “treatment” requested by his mother-wife that will “erase all of those books” and therefore also his sense of guilt. Thematically and chronologically complementing Franco Basaglia’s 1968 call for psychiatric treatment reform, *L’istituzione negata*, Morante gives her Oedipus more than Antigone as a companion: she completely reworks the Sophoclean chorus to accompany him in his delusional monologies.

The institution’s incessant Chorus of inmate-patients is a major font of illogically juxtaposed citations that make of modern cultural memory and social responsibility a constant background noise that frames Oedipus’ mythical sense of guilt. The only silence in the play occurs when Jocasta arrives to administer a drug and sign a document that will relieve him of his personal “evils, brought on by Apollo.” The Chorus ceases shouting such phrases as “by order of the Generalissimo all of the numbers must be rewritten in Roman numerals” and “set sail with the crusader ship and with the British steamship and the atomic mushroom cloud and the Olympic cart to highlight this turning point.”

Oedipus accepts his final turn of fate with his doubly significant last words: “yes yes/ it was this/ that I always/ wanted/ I wanted/ to return to the body/ where I was born.” Ginsberg’s verses are just one segment of a radiant web of direct and indirect citations from many sources such as Hölderlin, at least four of Sophocles’ plays, the Bible, the Veda, a Jewish hymn, and ancient Aztec songs, all of which I translated from Morante’s own rendering rather than reproduce the originals. This rich intertextuality was one of two methodological challenges that I encountered while translating *La serata*; the second was interpreting the distinct class registers that Morante gave to each of her characters.

As a well-read Southern Italian landowner, Oedipus speaks much like his Sophoclean inspiration; however, the most complex register is Antigone's. Although her lexicon changes slightly throughout the play as a result of influences from the adults around her, she never alters her semi-dialect, the translation of which into an American semi-dialect would have suffocated Morante's intentions with a superimposed layer of U.S.-specific culture. I therefore found it more appropriate and faithful to the original Italian to focus on Antigone's colloquial tone, her repetition of words like *since* or *dad* as rhythmic markers, and her tendency to speak in one long breath rather than in structured sentences. In addition to Antigone's ever-present grammatical errors, Morante transcribed what would have been her spelling errors, were she literate.

An interesting comparison that the author makes for readers of the play arises from the direct opposition of Antigone's complex combination of illiteracy and firm grasp of reality with Oedipus' high literacy and insanity. Despite his education and experience, Oedipus remains a "fantastical" lunatic, while his daughter-sister is the only voice in the play not affected by an ulterior motive or the misconception of reality. She, an innocent and ignorant child, is one of the most memorable protagonists in *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. She elegantly symbolizes Morante's preference for the company of children and segues to the introductory quote of her subsequent book, *La Storia*: "Por el analfabeto a quien escribo."

Kristina Bigdeli

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The Evening at Colonus

A Parody¹

Long-haired star,
Rushing nowhere
From a terrible nowhere.
MARINA TSVETAeva

oh cats,
oh beloved cats!
TORQUATO TASSO
in the asylum of St. Anna

BACKGROUND

The religion of the Sun (god of light, beauty, prophecy, and pestilence, also called—among other innumerable names—Apollo, or Phoebus), through some of the god's disturbing oracular responses, first persuaded Laius, king of Thebes, that he should do away with his own newborn son Oedipus, later determining that the same young Oedipus should flee from his presumed family. The family had, through mere coincidence, saved him (an anonymous and unwitting baby at the time) from being sacrificed by his own father. But, as is widely known, the flight did not serve to save Oedipus from his destiny. It was his fate to become parricidal, incestuous, and the king of the city of the seven gates; until one day, recognizing in the plague that devastated the city the sign of his own guilt and the Sun's curse, Oedipus blinded himself with a pin from his suicidal mother-wife's dress. He subsequently condemned himself to beggary and exile, dragging himself wherever the road may take him, accompanied by his daughter Antigone.

His last predestined stop, where he found an end and a burial, was Colonus, a site consecrated to the Furies, daughters of the Night (*also called the Eumenides, that is, the Kindly Ones*).

¹ Morante, Elsa. *La serata a Colono: Parodia*. In *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*. Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore s.p.a., 1968.

It is from Him, oh friends, that all of my evils come.

Oedipus Rex.

It is almost evening, the end of a pleasant, mild November day, around the year 1960. We are in a hospital in a southern European city, in a corridor adjacent to the Neuro-delirium ward, situated on the ground floor. The whitewashed corridor measures about eleven by three meters. On the left side, large, white, free-swinging double doors lead to the next section and to the other wards. On the right side (towards the extreme northern boundary of the hospital), an empty room leads to a downward staircase, whose first steps are visible.

The area is illuminated by the bluish light of a long neon tube, installed on the left side above the double doors. A different type of electric light, a pale reddish glimmer, shines forth from the adjacent ward through the bars of two internal lunettes, placed high on the shared wall. Leaning against this wall, under the windows, runs a long bench (the only furniture in the corridor) on which are seated **THREE WARDENS**, robust, ordinary men wearing hospital garb.

There are no doors or windows to the outside, but through the walls, from the other side of the building's enclosure, the dampened sounds of the street traffic can be heard; meanwhile, the **CHORUS OF THE INMATES** echoes incessantly through the wall from the adjacent ward. It is a confusion of voices, stunned by tranquilizers and medicinal substances, all monologizing at once (among yawns, fits of coughing, etc.) in a sort of dissonant and senseless prayer.

CHORUS

And the house, kaput! Hello how's it going? Hello how's it going?
Of four hundred and fifty competitors—Fire!—Hello how's it going?
You didn't stop at the stop sign—I must not think I must not think I
must not think—

Of four hundred and fifty competitors—The heart has stopped. I must
not think I must not think I must not think I must not think—

Because the pasta was overcooked. Just a moment. May I take a deep
breath please? Thank you. Just a moment. Now it's better. And the
house, kaput! Hello how's it going?

We are all soldiers!!! Just a moment TB—because when the Host bleeds
it's an important sign.—What do you want from me?! Just a moment
just a moment just a moment. Just a moment. Just a moment.

What notary deed? The heart has stopped—Hello how's it going?—
With the machine gun. Lake Tana we are in Africa Siberia blockhouse
in Africa—I want to drive the Vespa a whole stage like at the Giro
d'Italia—Fire!—May I breathe please? Thank you. Should I cut a piece?
These beautiful memories of youth Bambi Disney. Just a moment just a
moment. For reasons of security.—There's a holograph here with the
next date. With the machine gun. Monday evening.

The American skeletons, do you recognize them?

Oh! Oh! AT TLATELOLCO. What do you want from me?! Just a moment just a moment—May I take a breath please? Thank you. Now it's better—

I must not think I must not think.

etc. While the CHORUS proceeds as above, an electric bell rings and the FIRST WARDEN leaves the room temporarily.

A little later, the door opens and two men enter carrying a stretcher, upon which OEDIPUS is lying, restrained by straps. His forehead and eyes are wrapped in gauze stained near the edge by a few blood spots; and his head is turned backwards, in a mess of abundant, wooly, grey-white and curly hair. With his lips relaxed, he breathes heavily in a morbid, almost indecent, old man's slumber.

Behind the stretcher hurries ANTIGONE, a wild and trembling girl, about fourteen years old, but underdeveloped for her age. The FIRST WARDEN returns behind her.

ANTIGONE (*in a low voice to the men, who meanwhile place the stretcher on the ground*)

...Please, sirs, go slow and try not to shake him
since it does him good to sleep because of his sickness since
we're lucky he was able to fall asleep because insomnia
it's his worst trouble and he can't
sleep...

The two stretcher-bearers exit.

FIRST WARDEN (*to the other two who are seated*)

This is the daughter.
The Doctor gave her permission
to stay overnight because his condition is
critical...

He sits down near the others.

ANTIGONE

What?... you're gonna leave him here on the ground, in this corridor?!

FIRST WARDEN

Where if not here?
Due to the usual epidemics of the season
there isn't a free bed in the whole hospital.
We had to set up cots
and lay mattresses on the ground,

even in the bathrooms and in the corridors.
There are no more cots or mattresses left
due to the crowd.

SECOND WARDEN

For this time of year, it's normal.
When winter begins,—like the song says—
the flies fall.

FIRST WARDEN

And then, among other things, a man like this, obviously,
presents a doubly special case.
It's clear that he can't be admitted in the ward.
Out of the question. And where? Here, in the dormitory?!

SECOND WARDEN

With the gang!!

FIRST WARDEN

Out of the question.

THIRD WARDEN

His case requires special
isolation.

FIRST WARDEN

Exactly.

ANTIGONE

But there's too many voices here, too many voices,
and they're gonna wake him up...

FIRST WARDEN

For that, you can count on the effect of the injection
that the doctor gave him in the reception ward.

SECOND WARDEN

It's guaranteed that not even a
carpet bombing could wake him.

ANTIGONE

Medicine has little effect on him sirs
since now for him it's like he's standing in a room with the blinds wide
open where you can't sleep at all because for him

even at night when he sleeps he dreams that it's always daytime sirs and so he can't sleep at all...

FIRST WARDEN

For now,
given the hospital's emergency situation
the orders are to leave him here outside, awaiting
his destination.

It's only a provisional arrangement.
We'll definitely come up with a place for him
by tonight.

ANTIGONE

Please, sirs, at least do me the favor of not leaving him this way
with his feet towards the exit
because when somebody's sick it ain't good to be like this because it's
bad luck.

SECOND WARDEN

It's better to leave him comfortable where he is.
Anyway, the unlucky exit here
is neither the door nor the main entrance,
but that hole down the secondary staircase, down there.

ANTIGONE

Where's it go?

THIRD WARDEN

Well, it goes to the rooms down there...

SECOND WARDEN

...where it's nice and cool.

CHORUS *(continuing as above, from the adjacent ward)*

A whole stage with the Vespa, like at the Giro d'Italia—What do you want? —Just a moment
just a moment just a moment—An automatic cipher-switch. And now
friends allow me to tell you a little tale—Just a moment—The heart
has stopped—TB that damned tube—I destroyed a painting—
Do you know the multiplication tables?—Honor thy father and thy
mother—A blockhouse-church in Africa Lake Tana...—I don't want
to think I don't want to think—What do you want?—May I breathe
please? Thank you...

etc.

ANTIGONE *(to the wardens)*

It's too bad that our house is so far
 but if he could be taken to our house
 since I kind of think he should go there so
 as soon as he wakes up maybe he'll feel like walking since we walked
 kilometers and kilometers together and us
 sirs if you could make it so we can go back
 to our house
 we could reward you sirs since my dad up by our house has two pieces
 of land one with olive trees
 and the other with a vineyard and an orange grove
 dad he's not really a beggar sirs my dad he's got
 property he's got his property he owns his stuff
 and he's respectable more than a teacher more than a baron and him
 he ain't like some people that depend on others and he can do what
 he wants with his things and
 property and as the owner he doesn't have to kiss anybody's
 ass.

THREE WARDENS *(by now indifferent, relaxed in indolent postures on the bench, do not answer her).*

ANTIGONE

Sirs!

I have a letter of recommendation and this letter
 is a letter of recommendation from that other doctor
 who saw him at that other hospital that other time a while ago and
 the doctor
 he wrote this with his own hand because he remembers my dad and
 that he had met him
 that he had made his acquaintance before during the time
 of his military service.

She pulls a filthy, creased note out of her sleeve.

FIRST WARDEN *((taking the note and eyeing it without much interest)*

This

you should have turned this in to the assistant, not to us...

He passes the note to **SECOND WARDEN**.

SECOND WARDEN (*giving a sidelong, unwilling glance at the note which he holds between his fingertips*)

But

you should have taken better care of it because when you touch it, the way you've messed it up it gets you dirty...

ANTIGONE

That's because of the sweat sirs

because we walked kilometers and kilometers after he my dad ruined his eyes with his own hands and he

as long as he's like this he can't see anything anymore (the impression that he's been having of truly seeing certain things

as if they were really there in front of him—and he really argues with them and talks to them—but that's the fever

because actually

he doesn't see the street

or the places

or anything and he doesn't see at all anymore) and so

it was his bad luck, it turned out that that he needed to hang on to someone because otherwise what would he do? luckily I was there!

and of course I was sweating and that was when I had that letter with me

in my sleeve

since when we left the house during the night suddenly he didn't leave me the time to get anything

not even a bag or a suitcase and he told me Ninetta let's go let's go and luckily

that this letter I had it saved in the little drawer of my nightstand and this way when we left I took it with me and

of course with the sweat it got messed up... And so what do you think sirs that now

it's too gross and it won't work.

THIRD WARDEN (*considering what is written, with an opaque laugh*)

Sure, as a document

it works...

ANTIGONE

And what's written there sir? huh? what does it say?

SECOND WARDEN (*throws the note to the THIRD WARDEN that barely looks at it and holds it in his hand passively, not knowing what to do with it*).

ANTIGONE

huh? what does it say? sirs?

THIRD WARDEN

What?... you don't know how to read?...

ANTIGONE

Just a little... really little... because school things... things that you need to remember

I have a hard time remembering...

THIRD WARDEN (*unwilling, reads laboriously, without expression, as if reciting a school lesson whose meaning remains alien to him*)

... here it's half erased... Age... 63... well-to-do small

landowner... Widower

with four children... a case of interdiction open against him on behalf of two male children... both of age...

Diagnosis... paranoid delirium

syndrome... Psychotoxic... ex-ogen-ous? end-ogen-ous? Alcoholic...

Suspected...

use of narcotics... drug addict... Serious uremic disturbances due to alcoholism... Serious

insomnia... Little or no reaction to tranquilizers or sleeping pills...

Status! Visual and

aural hallucinations non-acknowledgement of people and places dis-oriented

in time... filthy... clastomantic... Logorrhic... magniloquent...

verbal stereotypes of pseudo-literary style... embellished with clas-

sical citations... Verbal flow cha-rac-ter-ized by long mon-o-dies

with pseudo-litur-gical or epic intonation... Structured de-lirious

content... Aggressive attacks... mytho-manias... Mannerisms...

ideational fugues ...

Precedents! peasant family... Father died

in World War I... Mother suicide soon after in

psychiatric hospital... As a child the subject manifested religious

inclinations... Accepted at seminary... Studies interrupted... escape...

Emigrated

Worker in colonies... farmer... South America... Noncommissioned
officer combatant

World War II in Africa... There it seems that he was unfortunately
noted for

excesses of cruelty and violence against prisoners and
natives... Subsequently captured transferred to various
prison camps... wounded by a sentinel during
attempted escape... Injury received was cause of bone deformation...

tarsal... metatarsal... Returned
to homeland. 1945-46 upset by various
domestic misfortunes... first signs of derangement culminated in last
crisis after

recent widowhood... already taken
into observation...

ANTIGONE

That's all because of bad luck sirs!!

and he everyone always knew him and that he
never did anything cruel!!! that he never stole
anything from anybody!!! that he has a vineyard and
an orange grove and the house and everything and he
earned it working down in America with all his sacrifices
he earned the land

and if it wasn't for the bad luck sirs because all of that happened
because of the sadness for that terrible thing that happened
because my mother Sandoro Agnese flew away to heaven it was a
Sunday evening when she died and it was a blow

that he didn't expect because for thirty years she was close to
him and they were two bodies and one soul and he stood in front of
the poor corpse speechless

and he looked like a poor puppet and then after
he went down to the cave and drained at least two or three flasks of
wine

and then he fell asleep for a day and a night and more
and because of this he lost his memory about everything and so one
night

he got up and he woke me up and he told me let's go let's go and me
and him

we walked a lot—kilometers and kilometers
and kilometers

'cause my dad sirs! he's a walker and even though he has that problem
with his feet it doesn't matter
because sirs it's not something he was born with
it was for the heroic decoration for his country because he was called
to war
and that was wartimes and I wasn't even born, sirs, luckily! Because if
I were I would
have suffered to see him leave
healthy and come back crippled but him he is a walker all the same
because we walked kilometers and kilometers and my dad explained
to me that there ain't no other remedy for the ancient disgrace and
he was born
under the curse of Pheobus lord of the earth and of the heavens
and so he has to be a gypsy begging always hunting for that ferocious
lamb
because that would be the ancient debt that: either he pays the sacrifice
of the debt
or if not he will always be in trouble! what do I know?! he knows
everything
since he read all the books that other people hardly get and he
ain't like the other people who always stay in the country eating goat
cheese 'cause he
has been everywhere even Merica and all over because he is a traveler
and he was even a commander with the grade of sargeant and at home
he even has his badge since he sirs
he even learned all the languages of all the places but now he because
of the effect of the thoughts that he's got
he's started talking another different language that's like music and he
seems like a foreigner
and like a singer
and like that walking for kilometers and kilometers
and then
that morning around eleven or noon
he went behind that wall and I thought he was going there for a bodily
function
but then I saw him come out with his face all bloody and broken glass
from a bottle in his hand
that he says were two nails but to me it seemed like the broken glass
from a bottle and the fear of that moment

made me see wrong and I was screaming louder than him and I screamed: Dad what did you do?!
 but then after I saw that he was stunned I washed him with water and he recovered a little and so afterwards I told him that it ain't nothing that I'm here so rely on me because it ain't nothing and actually he really trusts me and actually even though our house is so far away I think I could make it to take him back up to our house if it weren't that the other people were afraid of him and if it weren't that they'd take him by force even though he is reduced to this in his blindness he wouldn't have let himself be taken because it took seven or eight people to get him and instead maybe by now we could be there at our house and not in here because his worst nightmare was always this! to end up in the hospital in the neuro-delirium ward to him it was the most awful thing worse than prison but luckily they gave me permission to stay here over night here with him because even though the help I can give him is just a little at least this way he isn't alone because the worst torture of the humiliation of being sick is this thing of being alone because when you are sick the most important thing is to have someone from the family close by for assistance.

The **THREE WARDENS**, who by now do not care to listen to her anymore, remain mute and inexpressive, in their indolent pose; while on the other side of the dividing wall, the **CHORUS** does not cease chatting as above. Alone and timid, Antigone approaches the bench; and with the sudden swiftness of a cat, takes back her famous letter "of recommendation," left there by the guards; and she jealousy returns it to safety, inside her sleeve. Then she resolves to sit on the far corner of the bench, on the very edge; but quickly reconsidering, she gets up again and takes off her jacket; and having spread it out on the ground next to the stretcher, she sits on top of it.

ANTIGONE (*talking to herself*)

Anyway, it's not cold here and it's even heated and it's not even cold outside because luckily even though it's winter weather is good and then in here I shouldn't be afraid because the most important thing is to not be afraid because you need to be patient.

Pretending to be rather busy, she arranges herself better on her little coat.

CHORUS (*as above*)

Dislocated bones... You need to write all the numbers in Roman numerals—Of four hundred competitors and zero fifty...—Just a moment just a moment just a moment...—At Tlatelolco at Tlate lo co...—There is an odor of asphyxiating gas—Show your badge—Fire!!!—We all need to change into machines to kill—to kill—Here we are in the country of the bells—Just a moment just a moment—

May I breathe please? May I

take a deep breath please? Thank you—Let me see this photograph!! three dimensions—At

Tlatelolco...—With the machine gun—There are cars

following me...—A movie theater in four dimensions...—Should I cut a piece?

etc.

OEDIPUS (*begins to awaken with a whine of cowardice that is almost indecent*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

In the same, precise instant of OEDIPUS' awakening, the preceding "real" shouts of the CHORUS change into an enormous unison, that echoes the lament of OEDIPUS: resounding noisily, but indefinite and "disturbed" by unnatural interferences, as if produced by a gramophone disc set at the highest volume, that is worn out from use and sometimes gets stuck.

CHORUS (*in a mechanical echo, in unison*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

OEDIPUS (*struggling in a disordered agitation, hindered by the straps that secure him to the stretcher*)

Ohhhhhhhhh ohhhhhh oh

ugly sun oh damned sun intoxicated sun fanatic

sun ruffled drunk drugged demented sun who writhe

in the heavens. Go away

you heinous sun you pandering assassin sun who fling yourself around

tied up in the sky

go away enough

enough enough...

ANTIGONE

Dad!

Don't bang yourself around like this Dad because this way your
wounds will open again and your bandage
it's gotten wet with blood Dad! rest your head
on the cushion and I promise you that the sun isn't here anymore
believe my eyes Dad believe my voice because it's probably more
than an hour since
it's become night.

OEDIPUS

No! HE is bound up there always fixed in the middle of the sky.
It is always noon, always the fixed hour
of his ugly specters with horses' hooves
that block any escape through the fence. HE keeps me
caught in his barbed wire... with the accusation of default .
I must drive the default from the den...

(turning himself in the direction of the THREE WARDENS)

...Who are you, who are you there in front, barking
with three mouths and only one body?

THREE WARDENS *(they jump to their feet, stiff and tight, as if tied together, and begin enunciating syllable by syllable, all in one voice, with a strange, robotic accent)*

I am

the dog with three heads who guards the river that runs under the
earth.

You may not pass through here, without the certificates of baptism
and burial.

OEDIPUS *(still addressing the three)*

By chance have you seen pass by
a wolf puppy, crippled, marked by two crosses on his forehead?

THREE WARDENS *(together as above)*

Yes, I saw him running and he hid himself
there
among
the wreckage.

OEDIPUS

On him! Get him! He's
the assassin! Get him!

THREE WARDENS (*as above*)

You cannot catch him. He's mimetic. He blends in well in this sun that makes everything white.

OEDIPUS

Hunt him! Get him!

ANTIGONE

Dad! listen to me Dad! Rest your head on the pillow Dad don't wear yourself out anymore
with this hunt because anyway
now isn't the time because it's dark and the animals have all gone back to go to sleep.
Believe me because what I'm telling you is the truth that it's probably more than an hour
since night fell.

OEDIPUS (*daydreaming*)

There is a ransom for the murderer on the run...I want to buy myself a tent in the shade...
Here under the sun, the channels for the pestilence are multiplying...
But all the blame is on that marked cocky one who is hiding!
It's him, the epidemic that has stained all of this wreckage with blood. You need to look for him
among the wreckage. He's alive, he breathes.

ANTIGONE

There's no wreckage here because we're in a beautiful place in a beautiful night and we're
in a beautiful garden in a beautiful night believe my eyes my dear father that these things that you're saying
ain't the truth it's all one of your ecstasies from the wounds of your poor mutilated eyes
and it's like you're half asleep
Dad.

OEDIPUS

What's down there?
What is that pit?

ANTIGONE

That...?

That

is a beautiful fountain with statues
with electric lighting hidden in it
that makes the water all beautiful colors!

OEDIPUS

Ah, look, they're returning
the buildings, the rails, the people...

ANTIGONE

That's all because it's like you're half asleep
Dad.

In the meantime the **THREE WARDENS** have reseated themselves on the bench, back to their normal shape and the same indolent posture as before.

CHORUS

Of four hundred and fifty competitors... I shouldn't think I shouldn't think I shouldn't think—Hello how's it going?—Hello how's it going?—Fire!—You need to write all the numbers in Roman numerals—I bought a red ribbon—I bought—When the Host bleeds it's an important sign—a red ribbon—Show your badge—of four hundred and fifty thousand competitors—I bought a red ribbon—Just a moment—May I breathe please? Just a moment just a moment—You didn't stop at the stop sign—**AT TLATELOLCO**—With the machine gun—May I take a deep breath please? Thank you.

OEDIPUS

These enormous crossings of so many equators
interchange for me with another nausea: the flat measurements of an
insect
that walks in a crevice.

I don't want this slanting wall of cracked lime in front of me any-
more

all streaked with stains and buzzing
with words... What language do they speak?

Where am I?!...

Where did you bring me?!

ANTIGONE

That's not a wall Dad
 That
 is a beautiful trellis of roses
 and you shouldn't believe your own impressions
 because it's all the fever that makes you confuse
 things and sounds but because that
 Dad is the fever
 that makes you confuse them.

A DOCTOR enters hastily accompanied by an assistant.

THREE WARDENS (*lazily lifting themselves to their feet*)

Good evening doctor.

DOCTOR (*responds to the greeting with a rapid motion of his hand*)

Nothing new?

THREE WARDENS

Nothing.

CHORUS

Of four hundred and fifty competitors—For reasons of security.—I
 bought a red ribbon—Just a moment just a moment—Thank you—I
 bought a red ribbon—I want to go all in one stage with the Vespa—
 Where are you parked?—I bought a red ribbon—Hello how's it
 going?—Just a moment just a moment—AT TLATELOLCO—OH!
 OH!—Of four competitors—AT TLATELOLCO

THE FIRE TURNS BLACK

The DOCTOR, having just taken a look at OEDIPUS, exchanges a few words in a low voice with the assistant and raises his shoulder in a gesture of pointlessness. Then he begins to write a quick note on a prescription book while the Assistant exits.

ANTIGONE (*with both timidity and diffidence, approaches the DOCTOR and pulls on his sleeve*)

Doc...

DOCTOR (*turns distractedly to look at her*)

ANTIGONE

Please Doctor if his straps could
 be loosened a little... at least the ones on his arms? Because for him
 staying like that even that's another burden for him.

DOCTOR (*makes a dry and impatient sign of negation with his head*)

We are dealing with a precaution that is elementary
and indispensable, in the interest of the
patient himself.

He continues to write.

ANTIGONE (*hesitates for an instant whether or not to give him the "letter of recommendation" but holds back in diffidence. Then she moves in haste to the bedside of OEDIPUS, who has begun to moan again, rocking his head in a kind of stupor*)

OEDIPUS (*he moans*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

CHORUS (*suddenly erupts with the same moan, in the voice of OEDIPUS himself, multiplied in unison and with a very high range, as if from a loudspeaker*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

OEDIPUS (*turned in the direction of the DOCTOR*)

Who are you?

I think I recognize you
from the golden crown
that you wear...

DOCTOR (*suddenly straightening himself like a wooden dummy, and in a syncopated and mechanical voice, with a different timbre from before*)

I am

the king of this country. I also recognize you, from your empty and
bloody eye sockets

Oh punisher of yourself, disgraceful son of Laius.

Your story has been related to me by many, with the news
of your arrival at hand.

OEDIPUS

Which kingdom is this of yours?...

KING

It is the kingdom consecrated to the holy daughters of darkness
of many names.

They live down here, this is their church.

Around here they are known by the name

the Kindly Ones
 or even the Erinyes,
 and elsewhere
 some call them the Furies, others, Insult, and others, Fear.

OEDIPUS

Oh Merciful Ones
 have I
 arrived at the unknown terminus that was promised to me long ago:
 perhaps to be at rest? In HIS oracle, that same one
 where all of my toil without peace
 was already determined,
 already clear in his reading since the very beginning
 —now I recognize it!—
 there is still under the sign
 of your august name an erased detail.
 What that detail may have announced to me, I
 can never remember,
 and by now that detail of uncertainty remains the only nest
 for my hope.
 Oh creatures of the night,
 you who in your mantle made of eyes
 have always seen every script already deciphered,
 you eternal witnesses, noiseless escape, vibrating hair, small, velvety
 foot,
 sanctuary for assassins, guardians of the hidden tombs, you,
 divine and night-blind, I beg you, receive this old man
 in your kingdom.

From somewhere in the hospital, a bell rings. The DOCTOR, returned to his normal appearance and regular tasks, leaves the corridor, followed by the THREE WARDENS.

CHORUS

Dislocated bones...—Hello how's it going?—The one who shadowed me, that rings the bells...—Show your badge—Here we are in the country of the bells—We are all soldiers—Just a moment just a moment—I want to do it all in one stage like at the Giro d'Italia...—I bought a red ribbon for good luck...—Show your badge—

etc.

OEDIPUS (*cries silently*)

ANTIGONE (*crouching next to him again, on her little coat*)

Dad

if I could Dad I would take this trouble of yours on myself

because to see you like this breaks my heart and

I don't know what I'd give to make that day arrive soon

when I'll see you in good health like before and when I'll look into

your eyes and see two big stars just like before because I

Dad I always have hope that even the fact that you'll never get your

vision back

maybe it's all the doctors' mistake because sometimes they make

mistakes

like that time Dad do you remember

that the doctor said that the fever I had he said it was a contagious

epidemic

but instead it was because I had eaten too many sea urchins

right Dad that for example is a example

right Dad?

OEDIPUS dozes off again, so ANTIGONE leaves the room for a moment and returns with a bottle of water and a glass, which she sets down on the ground next to the invalid. Then, having seated herself again, she rummages underneath herself in her little coat pocket and pulls out a small bag with bread and cheese, which she begins to eat (turned towards the corner for fear of disturbing the patient), even eating the crumbs that have fallen on her. Afterwards she settles herself again, in the usual posture as before. There is no one else in the corridor.

CHORUS (*continuing as above*)

We are all soldiers—With the machine gun—This is the

country of the

bells—I bought a red ribbon

You need to write all the numbers in Roman numerals—Just a

moment just a moment

etc.

The double doors open again, and two men enter carrying a stretcher, upon which is lying a body completely covered by a sheet. In the empty space opposite the stairs a neon light turns on. The stretcher-bearers set out down the stairs with the body. Immediately after, the empty space opposite the stairs becomes dark again.

Starting now and continuing on, in the corridor there will be all the activities and movements that are normal in any hospital. Every few minutes, The **THREE WARDENS** will

exit and return, sometimes taking turns, other times all three finding themselves seated on the bench again, sometimes climbing—one or the other—onto the bench to survey the adjacent ward through the lunettes etc. Nurses, attendants, etc. etc. will walk by periodically.

But OEDIPUS remains for the most part unresponsive to these “current” forms of events. Only every once in a while does he reacquire a fragmentary perception of things; and these fragments of “normal reality” seem to scare him more than anything else.

Not far from the corridor a slamming door is heard; then, sounds of an electric bell from some other ward etc.

CHORUS (*always continuing, as above*)

The one that shadowed me, that rang the bells...—Here we are in the country of the bells.—There are many cars following me—Hello how’s it going?—Show your badge—I bought a lucky red ribbon, and I tried to eat it, but I was only able to chew it.

Whistles, fits of cough etc.

OEDIPUS (*recovering consciousness in a start*)

Where am I?!

ANTIGONE

Dad are you thirsty? Want to drink? here I’ve brought you water

She slowly lifts his head from the pillow, bringing the water close to his lips. But OEDIPUS makes a convulsive movement that causes some of the water to spill on the sheet.

OEDIPUS

Whose shouts are these? Why is everyone rushing? What does this mob want from me?!

ANTIGONE

No Dad don’t agitate yourself like that because this way it’ll get worse and I even told you this before Dad do you remember? Because you need to believe me that here there ain’t nothing bad and don’t start getting scary ideas Dad because that it’s the fever that makes you confuse everything and that Dad it’s the fever that makes you confused.

CHORUS (*always continuing as above*)

Just a moment just a moment just a moment—You didn't stop at the stop sign!—Just a moment—Let me see this three dimensional picture!—Let's make a four dimensional character and go far away from the Roman forums!!—May I breathe please? Thank you.

etc.

OEDIPUS (*calling in a loud voice*)

Antigone!
Antigone!!

ANTIGONE

I'm here close to you Dad listen this is my voice
this is my hand that is caressing your hair Dad and there is no one here
besides me by myself
your daughter Ninetta
and here there's nothing you should be afraid of since all that is your
own imagination and Dad that
ain't nothing at all.

CHORUS (*as above*)

I want to go all in one stage with the Vespa—With the machine gun—
Like at the Giro d'Italia!—For reasons of security—Just a moment just
a moment—Because the pasta was overcooked—Just a moment just
a moment just a moment—Of four hundred fifty thousand competi-
tors—OH! OH! ASSIST ME
DIVINE WATER STAKE!

OEDIPUS

Where
are we?...

ANTIGONE (*in a frightened, chanting voice*)

We are
under a beautiful vine-covered trellis Dad
inside of a beautiful foreign square that I don't even know what it's
called because it's
foreign
and here this square is all made of beautiful gardens and now during
the evenings
it's all a big illumination with merry-go-rounds and little orchestras

and fortune-tellers and little carts!
 and everything! and there's even a little puppet theater like down at
 Pescheria
 and even the roller coaster with the electric cars with lots of colors
 and there's even the lottery where they pull out prizes and there's a
 crowd of people
 that buys everything and comes and goes and they talk with their
 families
 and they group together and joke with friends and have fun
 and they come and go.

CHORUS (*as above*)

There's a holograph here with a later date—Do you know the multiplication tables?—I don't want to think I don't want to think—It's an automatic cipher-switch—Please may I breathe? May I take a deep breath? oh thank you—Just a moment just a moment—On the next date—You need to write all the numbers in Roman numerals—Where are you parked? It needs to be printed in the newspaper—Just a moment—

GO DOWN LOW GRANDPA
 GO DOWN LOW MASTER OF THE HEAVENS
 AND DON'T RISE AGAIN!

OEDIPUS (*daydreaming, rocking his head*)

They are all ghosts. If they were alive
 they would stop and stare at us, frightened
 by this exotic couple, so strange to see:
 an old beggar, a mass of heinous miseries,
 who instead of eyes has two blood clots,
 accompanied by a half-savage gypsy with dark skin like him
 poor little girl underdeveloped because of her birth
 with on her face that sweet and off-putting expression of children
 who are a little slow . . .

ANTIGONE

...yes here it's really like
 as if no one has noticed us two! they pass by in a hurry and don't
 stop
 they appear for a moment at the door and then they go back
 like the room's empty...

OEDIPUS (*as above*)

The brain is a crafty and foolish machine, which nature built for us,
to exclude us on purpose from the real spectacle, and to amuse itself
with our misunderstandings.

Only when the machine breaks down—in fevers, in agony—do we begin
to catch a glimpse of the forbidden scenery.

In my spasmodic and corrupt blindness now I see
things hidden from innocent health,
from intact eyes...

CHORUS (*as above*)

IT NEEDS TO BE PRINTED IN THE NEWSPAPER—The one
that shadowed me... The American skeletons, do you recognize
them?—Show your badge—My worker's hands need to be printed in
the newspaper—Show your badge—Should I cut a piece?—THIS IS
A PAGE OF GLORY

IN OUR HISTORY. THOSE FROM AIMANTLA ARE OUR
ENEMIES

HELP OUR GENTLEMEN DRESSED IN IRON.

Do you know the multiplication tables?—ES PANTAS AUDA!—
Ninety-six centuries...—The battleships...—WE WILL ELIMINATE
THEM WE WILL LIQUIDATE THEM IT'S EASY—Dislocated
bones...—ES PANTAS AUDA!!—I bought a lucky red ribbon...

Whistles, curses etc.

Periodically, the usual shouts of the **CHORUS** seem to change origin and distance, but in a random incongruous and way. For example, the most trite and gossipy sentences may sound like the battle cries (or rejoicing or revolt) of immense remote populations, rumbling among expanses of vacant buildings or enormous cliffs. Or even, on the contrary, "historical," solemn, archaic, or incomprehensible sentences are whispered confidentially close by, or they sound like thunder near **OEDIPUS**, as if emanating from a loudspeaker situated on his pillow. Even the intonation is completely arbitrary and illogical. Catastrophic announcements (like "The heart has stopped!" or even "And the house, kaput!" etc.) sound like cheerful surprises... and allowing for all the possible combinations.

OEDIPUS (*rocking his head with a slight smile*)

So many people! The theater is full!

TODAY TOMORROW AND YESTERDAY...

I act because they pay me...

CHORUS

You didn't stop at the stop sign!—You are one that has shadowed me, one that rings the bells...—You didn't stop at the sign!!—This is the country of the bells...

etc.

OEDIPUS (*takes a deep breath—and rocks his head to rhythm, starting to SING with an inspired theatrical air, and in a monotonous voice, a slow melody, like at certain village “vigils”*)

...TODAY TOMORROW AND YESTERDAY are three horses that chase each other around the track of a circus.

The whole event always takes place in the vertiginous halo with a fixed and mutating order always escaping in reverse.

And here and there and nowhere in eternity and in never Thebes and Jerusalem already buried appear just born

at the moment when Polis and City, at the end of the fall of the millennium-light-years,

have already fused into a single variable phantom like the double Algol demon in the heavens.

And the Christian cavalry precedes the towers of the giants and the sodoms and the olympuses and the elysiums

yet still it follows them in the same merry-go-round.

There is no beginning or end or order to sentences like in writing

with logical syntax.

AND DEATH AND BIRTH AND DEATH AND BIRTH AND DEATH AND BIRTH

this motto repeated like this with identical letters without commas or periods

is printed along the circle of a wheel.

But the mind, restricted in its fragmentary linear grasp, manufactures its geographies and its histories

like an inmate going back and forth in his hospital ward, believes to be traveling to discover unexplored regions.

CHORUS (*continuing as above*)

This needs to be printed in the newspaper—There are cars following me...

etc.

Whistles, etc. as above

OEDIPUS (*continuing to sing as above*)

... I alone, dragged by a furious and impossible pain
 around the track of multiple dimensions
 on the whirling wheel of generations
 see all of the cities rise and fall at the same point,
 and the architectures transform as if by the nauseas of a drunkard,
 and mixed bloods and pollens, and the crowds join together and scuffle
 and dance

on the voracious sepulcher where their bones are pulverized,
 while they have already recomposed themselves in skeletons, and they
 dress themselves again in flesh and hair

even in the same moment as they twist themselves into corpses
 and undo themselves again into dust. I see the boats of the oarsmen
 make their way on the cold and green current
 of the black steppe-like plain—and the aquatic fins beat in myriads
 among the submerged hivas of the emerged volcanoes—and the disheveled
 forebears of the lymph and seeds and humors

that scaddle:

the sierra of the glass skyscrapers—and the comets of the Magi
 that run along the course of the lunar ships
 indistinct in the dust of galaxies
 and of Hiroshimas—all perpetually
 in an uproar of languages and steps and construction sites
 that has the horror of negative numbers, a tornado emerging from
 silence.

But the point of continual pain
 that nails me to the center of the wheel through the ineradicable cords
 of my sinews,

is always there, one, always
 the same: the city
 of the plague.

Under the watch of the sepulchral fairy
 that entices the passerby with the trick of her childish enigma
 there at the crossroads,
 still lies the gate to the Orient,
 the cradle

the promised kingdom!
Shuttle of eternal monotony
always reweaving the arabesqued plot of the same anguish:
the end of the paternal kingdoms already written on the small unborn
hands;
and the paternal wars that send sons to slaughter in order to cheat
destiny;
and the angels that tie the threads of the oblique oracles and alluring
alibis
around the unrecognizable consummation
at the crossroads of three streets. For the returning necessity
that binds evil, grown unscathed and bloodthirsty
from the broken root of nature,
to the contaminated marriage of double disgrace
and to the incurable farewell from the dead.
Oh Maia oh Maria!
Now I no longer know whether this scene identical to my evil
is a memory of something I've already seen
or an omen of something I have yet to see.
I do not know if the plague is a consequence of the disgrace, or its
cause, or its pretext, or one of its dreams.
I do not know if Laius is to blame for Oedipus, or Oedipus for his
father, or if Jocasta is to blame,
Or if this old age that cries here is Laius, or Oedipus, or the mother,
or all of them, or all of the others.
Perhaps, I am the body of every ancestor and every progeny
the blind and fixed place of all temporal rotations
and the harmful swarm of every contamination.
It is true that this malignant midday theater
that makes me spiral in its uninterrupted whirl of events
is perhaps nothing but an illusionist construction of senile insanity
and in front of me there is nothing but a scribble without meaning
traced on the wall of the hospital by a lunatic.
But the pain is certain.
It is my presence. It is mine.
I am not one who witnesses the pain
of a certain Oedipus. I am
this pain...

CHORUS

Obhhhhhhhhhh... Obhhhhhhhhhh...

OEDIPUS (*continuing as above*)

... But the certainty of the pain is inexplicable
to the tragic ear, where all the walls
of sound are crumbling.

In the inaccessible barren abysses that are nearer than the beat of my
pulse

and farther away than the nebulas
my calls resonate and clash through the vestibules and labyrinths
of deaf canyons

and inaudible they roar inside a sphere
without bones or cortex.

A hundred thousand rainbows color the vibrating scale
of all the longitudes

and all the words of my song, illustrated
with circuses and horses and islands and tombs and arthurs and
mothers,

they are the flimsy little pictures of a poor make-do jargon
that has no equivalent in the fantastical scriptures
of Thrones and Dominations.

Pain and beatitude—the others and myself
all of these names are fictitious differences
that I can invert and change when I want.

I can call waking *sleeping*; myself *Legion*,
and the others *Swollenfoot*. I can say: *tomorrow was*
and entitle this whitewashed wall: *the Kingdom of Thebes*.

I can dismember all the names and recompose them randomly, creating
from them monsters more strange
than chimaeras and centaurs.

I can abolish the languages used and invent other languages that are
totally new. Plunder the necropolises or the barbarians
of their names.

I can organize hierarchies of names,
venerating some of them as sacred, scorning others as rubbish,
and afterwards subvert the orders. Mix together the entries of all the
dictionaries

creating a chorale of blasphemy or supplication,
or meditate on a single name, reducing the others to silence.

I can estrange myself from every verbal definition.
 Shout in a language of mysteries like the possessed and the sibyls.
 Or emit syllables without meaning. Or utter only numbers.
 I can, rejecting articulated voices forever,
 scream like the mute, bark like the dogs or whistle like the wind...
 ... But these are all revolutions of a certain class
 of whom in the unreachable levels of the court
 —remote unreachable very close unreachable—
 there is no news.
 The place of grace is absence of every news
 and every presence is an inferior place.
 Memory
 is a sin like prophecy.
 Evil is a solitary question mark
 in the emptiness, a voice out of tune in the silence of the answers,
 the only survival of the deaths and births and deaths.
 I am that point of the blame.
 One does not negate death with impunity. The grace of eternal
 death
 belongs only to the unborn.
 And the penalty that you pay for being born
 is never being able to die again.

CHORUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh...
 Show your badge—My respects—Hello how's it going?
 Is this transfusion really necessary?
 The mirrors are covered by a sheet.—This is a military zone—This is
 the property of the state.

ANTIGONE

O dear Dad what do you blame yourself for
 there is no other father as good as you
 because you've always forgiven me
 when I didn't want my hair to be combed and when I forgot things
 and when I stole my godmother's pearls
 and when I gave the fresh sardines to the cats
 and you beat my brothers when they beat me
 what bad thing have you ever done my poor old man
 you've always worked for the family

and if it weren't for this illness
 at this hour we'd all be eating dinner together
 with our brothers and our sister at home
 you the only bad thing you've done
 you did it to your poor eyes
 but even that is due to the illness
 and the illness isn't your fault but bad luck
 and bad luck can hit you just like it can hit
 anybody else.

CHORUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh...
 Is this transfusion really necessary?
 There is no smoking here—This is the property of the state.
 The mirrors are covered
 by a sheet.

OEDIPUS

Farewell. FAREWELL
 is the only legible writing on this scribbled wall
 that is my last home,—eternal prison
 where there is no more domestic fire, or a room for meetings or
 homecomings.
 Were I to be at least the heart of hearts
 the gift of the awaited and perishable consolation
 the fraud of beauty that one thanks as if it were mercy.
 Were I to be the standard-bearer boy that runs ignorant and radiant to
 battles without meaning
 followed by bands of lunatics in love.
 Were I the music of a little organ, wandering bard of childish fairs,
 or the festive hymns of a poor far-away altar!
 But to be the nerve of laceration
 the blinded forehead that bemoans the loss of children and mothers
 and rooms,
 the damned Oedipus...

CHORUS

Here the transfusion is obligatory—This is a military
 zone—Ha ha I'm ticklish—The fee for the transfusion
 is four hundred and fifty per liter—The zeros don't count—Of four
 hundred and a half competitors,

that makes five desks—You didn't stop at the stop sign—this is a military zone—Show the badge.—Ha ha ha I'm ticklish—The transfusion is at a fixed price it is a kind of monopoly...

Whistles, laughs, sighs etc.

ANTIGONE

You Dad these thoughts about the dead are because you have those memories Dad
and you shouldn't cry about them! because in fact the poor deceased of your memories are happy
because you mourn for the memories because that would be like a sign turned on to let them know that even the deceased
they're always in the family there just like before
with us like members of the family the same as before so in this way even they
won't forget about us so for them the mourning is good and it makes them stay
more secure and blessed
right
and anyways in this world you know that death has different times when it comes
and that it's a natural thing because even at home in the evening one person goes to bed early and another later
and sometimes maybe you have a fight about this but you don't even cry about it because anyways a half hour more or a half hour less around eleven or midnight everyone finds themselves asleep
and I
Dad sometimes I think and I see our life like a day
like early in the morning one leaves the house like a little animal on 4 legs
because a small child can't walk on its own it needs the mother to hold it
but then later at midday and in the afternoon 2 legs are enough
because the young man is safe on his own
but then but around the evening he just can't stand on his 2 legs anymore because old age cripples him with the rheumatic artery
and so at worst he fixes it with a cane but even better

he has a young man in other words a son or even a daughter to be
 able to lean on
 and consoled in this way at dinnertime he returns home and then at
 night
 everyone sleeps resting together because the day is over
 because bedtime comes for everyone and not just for people
 but even animals and so even vegetables and woods and cow meat
 and birds
 in the end everything just as it's born needs to die like the goat sur-
 vives on grass
 so death survives on people oh all right even I
 if I was born to die
 I am happy to be born because if I hadn't been born
 I'd have to remain alone without any family I
 am happy and specially for you Dad since now you're old
 and I think that if I hadn't been born then who would stay with you
 to look after you because that's a disaster
 in old age not to have any company because an old man
 can't be a gypsy and alone and specially if he has mental derange-
 ment
 and I sometimes think about it again
 and I say what luck! that at least I am close by!! because I for me
 Dad be sure that I
 will always be close to you and I
 won't leave you.

CHORUS

He's one that shadowed me...—Who's there?—This is a military
 zone—For this the password is needed with the radio signal—Here we
 are in the country of the bells...—Zimzimzim tararà tarapum da—
 YIGDAL VEYITKADASH SHEMEH RABAH...
 This is the sung Mass it's a danceable Texan tune...

OEDIPUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...
 ... And it always starts again
 this disgusting moaning! Who is it? are there many voices
 or one?...
 ...WHERE am I?!
 Who's there, over there, that yells, bound to a camp bed?!

Away with those ropes! Let him loose! Saw off his chains! There, the whistles of the guards who arrive with handcuffs... Down! shoot at the guards! ... WHERE am I? where did you bring me!? Antigone! Antigone!!

Through the exit doors one of the THREE WARDENS appears from outside. Sound of footsteps. Ringing of bells.

ANTIGONE

DAD! I'm here close to you Dad!! Listen this is my voice this is my hand that's caressing your hair Dad in here there's nobody else but me alone me Ninetta your daughter and we're in a room that has a window with a balcony that faces the street and those voices that you talk about don't believe them Dad because it's all your imagination and instead those are the street noises the people passing by the bicycles with bells the traffic policemen that whistle and the car horns it ain't nothing at all.

A NUN enters carrying a syringe, medicine, etc., which she lies on a white cloth on the ground near OEDIPUS.

CHORUS

We are all soldiers.—Show your badge.—GO DOWN LOW, GRANDPA!—This is the property of the state—Since they demoted the Generalissimo THERE IS NO ONE HERE ANYMORE, WE ARE NOW ORPHANS—This is a Texan blues tune...

OEDIPUS (*has turned his head at the entrance of the NUN. He turns around again, towards ANTIGONE. In a low voice of uncertain stupor*)
...Antigone?...

ANTIGONE

Yes Dad

OEDIPUS (*turning again in the direction of the NUN, daydreaming*)
Who is that woman, down there,
that heads toward us?...
SHE RIDES A MULE FROM ETNA!... A LARGE THESSALIAN

HAT PROTECTS HER FROM THE SUN!... Ah,
 I wouldn't want to be mistaken... Look she signals to me... Ah,
 (*happily*)
 I recognize her!...

NUN (*in the meantime has already been bustling around him, self-assured, and quickly winks at Antigone to make her an accomplice in her expedient deception of the old man*)

But most certainly! Of course! Naturally
 we know each other!

Meanwhile she shakes the thermometer and slips it under Oedipus' shirt, after having loosened the strap on his arm, etc.

OEDIPUS (*continuing as above*)

... I recognize her! Antigone? isn't it really her? Isn't it your older
 sister
 my eldest little daughter my
 Ismene?...

NUN (*as above nodding hastily—with a malicious and admonishing smile at Antigone—and in her natural voice, only slightly affected*)

Yes yes it's me! here I am! I am your very own daughter Ismene!
 here I am!

OEDIPUS

Ah, yes, I even recognize your voice...
 What news do you bring us?

NUN (*as above*)

All good news, don't worry!
 All good news!
 Everyone in the family is well! And they remember you,
 and they await your return home, as soon as
 you are back
 in good health...

OEDIPUS

Why do you lie to an old man? You know that my sickness
 is incurable.

Meanwhile the **NUN** has removed the thermometer, and while considering its reading she moves her head in a gesture of resigned commiseration.

ANTIGONE (*pulling the NUN by her sleeve—in a low voice*)

What does
the thermometer say? that he's got a high fever? huh?
Sister, excuse me... what's it say?!...

NUN (*elusive and false, in a voice of cheerful ostentation, meant to distract OEDIPUS with cajolery*)

We're doing better... we're already doing better... we should
always trust in Our Lord... in His good
presence...

She begins to shake the syringe, to massage OEDIPUS's arm for the injection, etc.

CHORUS

By order of the Generalissimo all of the numbers must be rewritten in
Roman numerals—Hello how's it going?—This badge is expired.—I
spit a lucky red ribbon a whole two meters forty.—Hello how's it
going? There is no one here anymore, we are now orphans—Ohhh-
hhhhh... Ohhhhhh...

WILL I STILL RIPEN INTO A COB?
WILL I STILL SOW MYSELF LIKE WHEAT?

OEDIPUS (*tossing and turning again*)

It is this sun, that brings infection to the dormitories... Always there,
nailed
to the skull of the sky... It is HE who has turned the cities into sick
houses...

Always nailed to this little skull...
He does nothing but shadow me... His cars follow me
everywhere I go...

NUN (*authoritatively*)

Be good, now, be good...
(*persuasive and encouraging, injecting the liquid in his vein*)
You'll see you'll see that now
with this medicine
you'll feel better...

OEDIPUS

And the child, where is she?

ANTIGONE

I'm here close to you Dad I'm here

close...

OEDIPUS (*with agitation*)

Turn around!

It's shameful! I don't want you to see!

NUN

Don't worry. She's turned around!

She's turned around! She didn't see anything!

OEDIPUS

And that medicine that you brought me, is it the good kind?
the right kind, that lets you rest?

NUN (*in a honeyed tone meant for madmen or children*)

But certainly of course! You'll see you'll see

that now you will sleep well... Here, we're done, everything's okay,
and now

our Daddy will sleep well, because he was good
in taking that good medicine that's good for him...

OEDIPUS

I want the real one!

the one that I said!

not this one...!

NUN

What? Oh, you don't trust

me? Naturally

the one I gave you really is the good
medicine, that's good for you...

OEDIPUS (*flaring up, with senile spite*)

I don't believe you!

It's probably the same dirty water that does nothing!

Always the same trick!

Even if it makes me fall asleep for a while, this sleep, in sleep, it has
no duration

and suddenly you find yourself in the same day without an end and
without a beginning!

I want the other medicine! the forbidden one! The doctors stole it
from me out of envy

and you are in on it with the doctors! All in on it

to leave the lepers in agony outside the front door...

It was my stuff, it was! I want it back! Where'd you hide it from me?

(furious, all sweaty)

Perhaps you threw it away?!

Go away! Go away!

NUN *(in a sweet voice, securing the belts on his arm again)*

But no... what are you thinking?

be good... like this... good... You'll see!

you'll see that right away now

you'll have a nice rest...

you'll see...

OEDIPUS *(trying to get near the NUN's car—in confidence)*

Why don't you bring it to me, that medicine, that one
that lets you rest...

NUN

Yes, I'll bring it to you... if you're good,

I'll bring it to you...

OEDIPUS

Do you promise me?

NUN

Yes yes I promise...

OEDIPUS *(lying down, calmer, daydreaming)*

... This street, here,

what's it called?

NUN

...Ascent

of Saint Rosalia...

Tiptoeing, she starts for the door. Antigone, with a worried expression, joins her in a leap.

ANTIGONE

Sister excuse me

couldya insist, huh, on making him eat? at least

a little soup? because for him the worst thing is eating because he
doesn't want to eat anything at all and like this

he always ends up getting more weak and how's he supposed to go
on?

because he hasn't touched a thing in almost thirty-six hours... that little teeny bit that he ate yesterday he didn't keep it down...

NUN

Why do you talk so much? What do you know about it, you? Leave it to those who know. Your father, given his state, for now we'll nourish him with an IV...

ANTIGONE (*diffident*)

Is it... good stuff?

NUN (*about to leave, hurriedly*)

Of course!

ANTIGONE (*holding on to her, almost desperate*)

What's in it? huh?

NUN

Tsk tsk... I don't have time now. We'll talk about it in about an hour, when I come back, after my rounds.

ANTIGONE

I... here I have a letter of recommendation, for him!

She pulls the famous piece of paper out of her sleeve, which the **NUN**, as she moves away hastily, shoves into the pocket of her apron. **ANTIGONE** goes back to her usual place next to **OEDIPUS**. Meanwhile, the **THREE WARDENS** have all returned to sit in a line on the bench.

CHORUS

WILL I STILL SOW MYSELF? WILL I STILL SPROUT
LIKE A FLOWER?

OEDIPUS

... Ah, Ascent of Saint Rosalia... I remember... First there was the open countryside... Then, in the hollow they set up the shacks of the Municipal Dog Pound where the dogs that belong to no one are gathered, awaiting their elimination. Ah, it is them (now I understand) this barking chorus that is with me here, uninterrupted, together with the sun.

Just as vision and hearing are for me so is smelling
 given to them to fill them with FEAR. (Hope
 is nothing but a pretense of fear).

They already smell their imminent end
 a fear without delay or explanation
 and they bark to implore
 no one.

(beginning to sing again as above)

Now, even they, there, are a site of pain.
 And even this imperceptible minimum site of pain
 is another measureless entity
 added to increase the sum of all the pains
 that unfathomable and impossible sum, that has more numbers
 than there are atoms in all the bodies and stars together!

...perhaps
 whoever is able to count the number backwards
 until zero, could
 enter again into the night of Eden...
 ...perhaps he could
 enter again into the night of Eden
 whoever is able to count the number backwards
 until zero...

CHORUS

...whoever is able to count the number backwards until zero
 could perhaps...
 Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

OEDIPUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

(as if to himself)

...Look they always start over, with their obscene
 lament, and their idiotic psalms...

*(with a sententious and very strange tone of voice, as if delivering a judgment
 in his sleep)*

No sound
 is more horrendous than human voices
 when they are beyond nature and reason.

CHORUS

...No sound

is uglier, no sound...

OEDIPUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

CHORUS (*resounding, louder*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... ohhhhhhhhhhh ...

The **FIRST WARDEN** steps on the bench to look out through the lunette.

OEDIPUS

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh ... And now they are starting again...

(*with a jolt*)

WHERE AM I?!

Why these shouts?...Someone's wheezing, over there...

A quarrel!? Careful, they are hiding knives, nails...

Who fell?...

ANTIGONE

Nobody fell, Dad

it's that this loud noise we heard in the wall was a truck braking down below in the street no one

shouted because all the voices that you hear that's the fever

Dad.

SECOND WARDEN (*to his neighbor, in a low but audible voice, nodding towards Oedipus*)

This guy

what's he doing? Will he ever die?!

The **CHORUS** in the meantime has burst into an uproar of laughter. The **FIRST GUARDIAN** descends from the bench, signaling to the **SECOND GUARDIAN**, and together they leave for a brief interval.

OEDIPUS (*agitated, begins his lament again*)

Ohhhhhhhhhhh... ohhhh...

CHORUS (*in an uproar of laughter as above*)

This is a military zone—Whoever stops is lost—This year for the strait-jackets the style is flag red...—We are all soldiers—Next Monday I had bought myself a lucky ribbon—The downfall was TB—We are all soldiers!—Just a moment just a moment just a moment may I breathe? thank you—Ha ha ha ha! here we are in the country of the

bells—

IT IS READY

THIS THIN ROBE WOVEN BY THE NUNS...

OEDIPUS (*tossing and turning*)

I will never finish atoning for all those lights! It is HE... what's he called? The

SAINTOFSAINTS—the NAME—the STATUE...

it is HE, who puts the spells on me, he puts machines in people's brains

and the drug that doesn't let you sleep in the syringes...

It is HE who seized me by my feet...

The day that I blinded myself with the nails, I believed I was putting out his star

but instead I walled it in with me

inside of this tomb.

There were too many lights, I will never finish atoning for them.

It is HIM . . . what's his name? . . . THE CRIPPLE . . .

HE is the one who ordered that I be followed...HE is the one who created me!

I had false documents made for myself . . .what were they good for?

It is HE

who put the secret police on my trail!

He knows the technique...

And he always changes... He is an artist of transformations!

He changes... he always changes! now

he is a lame bastard dog...a bleeding lamb...

He is a spider, that multiplies in the eye of a fly!...

He is a barbed-wire fence... He is

a bone cage, too tight for my soul!

CHORUS (*laughing loudly*)

IT IS READY!

THIS VESTMENT WOVEN BY THE FURIES

THAT ENVELOPES ME

AND CLINGS TO ME WITH ITS THREADS!

OEDIPUS (*continuing as above*)

...But I recognize him

in all of his disguises! He is the RADIANT, it is HIM,

the same one who has ruled over me since the beginning.

... I will never finish atoning for all the colors and the lights
that I had invented under HIS RULE
like a promised gift under HIS RULE...

CHORUS (*singing hosannas, like a rowdy mob in a square celebrating a tribune*)

Oe-di-pus!
Oe-di-pus!
Oe-di-pus!

OEDIPUS (*engrossed, declaiming*)

All of my innumerable births
were under his rule. And from one into another, it is for HIM
that I took bodily form in this last kind of pain.
Already since my initial childhoods
when my body was a thread of aquatic algae
or a drop in a shell,
there was in me ANOTHER anxiety, that made me go in search of
HIM!
and this movement became an insect's antenna,
a tentacle: a first nerve of pain
that cannot be excised!
From the crown of the sea anemone
to the smallest wail of the acrobat toad
to the exultant burst
of the small airy skeleton that opens itself up sprouting wings and
feathers
for the mad fall in reverse down the precipice of the sky:
I no longer know how many strange forms of limbs and tongues
I attempted to grow in my desperate effort to move towards HIM;
perennial genesis, where pain
ferments into wheats and honeys and embers before the trans-
formation
into blood.

CHORUS (*among maniacal and triumphant laughs*)

IT IS READY! THE MORTUARY SHROUD IS READY!
IT IS HERE, GLUED TO ME
IT CLINGS TO MY LUNGS, AND IT GNAWS
WITH ITS TOOTHED THREADS!
MY WHOLE BODY BURNS

IN THE BITE OF THIS THING
WITHOUT A NAME!

In the meantime the two absent wardens have entered again and seated themselves on the bench, next to the third warden.

OEDIPUS (*engrossed in himself, in a singsong voice*)

...And today memory, my parasite,
resumes pulsating, emerging from its mythical lethargies.
Like a barbarian maidservant singing to her spoiled little patient, it
resumes
the lullaby
about my prehistories... Before being born into blood
the last season of my cycle was
a poor VEGETABLE
summer...I was stuck in the earth like one of the damned.
I was perhaps one and a half meters tall.
I had ALL five senses, all five senses were rolled into one,
all in each of my leaves... I was made of a saline humor
that was still unripe...I was I was a TREE
in a growth period...I was I was I was
a fruit sapling of an ordinary species...

CHORUS (*celebrating, like a buffoon court in a puppet theater*)

A tree—a sapling—a tree
a sapling—a sapling—a sapling!
A
sapling!

ANTIGONE (*intrigued*)

...and THEN
Dad?
huh?...

OEDIPUS (*striking up a kind of airy recitative, in an absurd register evoking vivacity and health*)

I was a dwarf olive tree, randomly begotten by the Ionic winds
on an uninhabited coast between the East and Greece
alone and common like an orphan.
And I grew half wild, stretching out towards HIM
from my slim little stem, with my branches crooked from puberty
and my dusty, silvery, nearly white forelocks

always uncertain whether to boast or be ashamed of myself
since I did not know if I was ugly or beautiful, and not even
if I were a girl or a boy! All of my nights were agitated
with the expectation of morning, when HE
would return, with kisses and caresses. Certainly unaware and indif-
ferent

were his kisses and his caresses, since HE gave them to all
like a marvelous whore
without ever wasting the smallest sliver of his golden body, his golden
hair, his golden fingernails.

But I asked myself nothing about HIM: not even who he was:
perhaps I believed him to be an animal.

And in my desperate pubescence of love
my unripe roots twisted themselves with impatience
eager to break the hold of the earth.

Along all of the branches that grew out of me
in the clumsiness of my eager development
my childish muscles

quivered with the desire for an animal race
so intense that they almost pawed the ground.

My body's pulsating lymph burst through the bark
with tears and lacerations that felt like burns,

and speckled my bitter little fruits
with blood-like color. It was HE

who from the summery autumn sky

inflamed me, stirring me to the extraordinary adventure,

hitting me with his blazing whip, and bathing me in his honey saliva
and his golden seed!

and when, turned into a trembling and ferocious little animal, I finally
broke through my vegetable bark,

HE picked me up in his divine hand, warm like maternal flesh and
bejeweled with all the splendors of the mines!

AND to HIM

I appealed with my newborn voice: exclaiming with a love
that sounded like a cry of fierce chastity.

Thus I found myself alone in my nativity
abandoned to the noisy cradle of the undergrowth

and to the poor wrinkled udders of the goats.

Propelled by HIS star, baptismal angels

had already come down to pierce my feet with a sword
like an animal marked for the offering. And since then
I have always had this crippled foot.

I was a hybrid

with goat curls and small carnivorous teeth,
and I found happiness in the hunt: because in all blood
I would always recognize HIM: his color and taste.

HE was certainly a male like me. A rogue that covers the moons with
blood and then leaves them bled dry.

Perhaps also a hybrid himself?

A cross between a tiger with red stripes and a vulture with bright
orange and yellow feathers
that devours the living and the dead.

A cannibal child that eats all of the stars in the morning.

Perhaps his coat of arms is imprinted
in my goat-like, curly face,

in my brown eyes, and my shiny hands?

Ah, bitter distance! blissful identification!

I did not know HIS name, but HE knew mine...

I was anxious for his call.

And it was in the attempt to reach HIM
that I launched myself on my first limping race
with my small injured feet.

It was the longing for his name that made my tongue able to speak
for the first time.

HE played at being chased

calling me: "Oedipus! hey boy! king Oedipus! hey!" From everywhere,
in his multiform tongues:

"Oedipus!" From the bottom of a puddle, from inside a walnut:
"Oedipus!"

In a swarm of gnats, in a flake: "Oedipus! hey dark-skinned boy!" In
the odor of a decomposed hide,
of a rotten bunch of grapes. In smoke rings: "Oedipus! Swollenfoot!
hey!"

In the terrible din of my pulsating chest: "Oedipus! king Oedipus!"

And it was in order to look at his adored body, that I first lifted up
my forehead.

And I called him! but in prayer,

like a vassal calls the king of kings.

And in response HE began to sing
to tell me that I am the deformed bastard
the ugliness of nature
and that it would have been better for me
to have never been born.

CHORUS (*laughing as above*)

NOW IT IS STARTING AGAIN
IT IS ANOTHER ATTACK
OF THAT UNBEARABLE FEROCIOUS ILLNESS! IT IS HERE
GLUED TO ME, IT IS DIGGING INTO ME ALL THE WAY
INTO MY RIBS, AND IT CLINGS TO ME
TO MY BRONCHI, AND
IT GNAWS...

OEDIPUS (*continuing as above*)

...And in vain, at the end of his song, frightened like an animal,
jumping up and down through the slopes of that steep undergrowth,
glancing occasionally and fearfully at the golden curve of the air,
I waited there for him to add some other word, at least
a last one! a word that could suffice as reassuring explanation
for my trusting and bewildered heart.

But with his unresponsive silence,
I fell into a drowsy stupor, and then fell once again to my knees
startled in a great fright.

That amphibious temptation that through all of my births
has kept pushing me blindly towards him
like an imaginary root,
always bitter

once again roused every cell in my body, taking over my will, which
started stretching towards HIM
with the instinct of sunflowers.

And almost unbeknownst to me
my tongue started moving, stammering to spell out for him
my first
prayer
of adoration:

"Oh e-ter-nal love

star of the stars

praise be to you, for the ab-surd and mag-i-cal masks that you wear

to cover your un-know-a-ble beauty
 and for the count-er-feit titles and pseudonyms that you take to hide
 your name-less maj-es-ty.
 Oh pre-text and con-tradic-tion
 mys-tery of mysteries
 you who withhold in order to give of your-self, you who humili-a-te in order
 to teach victory,
 who will un-derstand your tragic jargon?
 you send en-cod-ed mes-sages, from king to king
 so that your sec-ret al-liance may be recognized
 only by he who knows how to read your
 non-com-municable and
 dif-ficult signals...
 Oh mythical
 ambiguity!...
 Blessed is the seraph angel that you trouble with the anguish of Gehenna
 and the peaceful man that you provoke to a brawl with your arrogant call:
 "I'll await you in the street!"
 Blessed is the mother's boy whom you throw out of the house into danger
 and the lover who hearing the night whistle of your gang leaves his dear
 little bed
 and the novice trapeze artist who at the sound of your fanfare dares to throw
 himself into his first triple somersault
 "that of death!"
 Ah blessed is he who becomes a rogue for you
 and transgresses your official orders to listen to your clandestine command
 or heavenly mystification.
 I give thanks to you for your song
 that is now finally clear to me in its duplicity and in its splendid
 benevolence,
 like certain dreadful dreams, that are discovered to be signs from heaven
 sent to illuminate the cursed point
 before you set off the trap.
 Oh holy holy holy!
 You
 denounced my wretched disgrace to myself
 because you want to restore me to my other
 Self! to that future already promised by the mysteries
 and which you also divulged to me, in our moments of shared happiness,

when you, joking, called me: king Oedipus!

"Joking"... ?... ?... I recognize you! I recognize you

Oh jealous confidence!

And while you are silent I sing to myself once again your song, now

d e c i p h e r e d ! ! Here it is:

THIS OTHER SELF OF MINE
 REJECTED BY THE SKY, THIS
 BASTARD AND DEFORMED BOY,
 IS NONE OTHER THAN THE UGLY, DEGRADED
 REVERSE
 OF MY TRUE SELF: OEDIPUS THE K I N G !
 AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER FOR ME HAD I
 NOT BEEN BORN, RATHER THAN TO LIVE
 THIS CURSED BETRAYAL.
 H O W E V E R
 IF I SHUN THIS FOREIGN NEST, THIS FERAL FAMILY,
 AND I START SEARCHING, MAYBE
 I CAN FIND IT AGAIN, THAT MYSELF THAT IS
 REAL
 AND INCREDIBLE...

...

that luminous Double of mine, your beloved,

Your fellow human!

Golden like your eyelashes

deep blue like your room.

Male and female like you,

oh hermaphrodite love! both father and mother,

oh single star! you, who invent the innumerable creation!

In your name, Ayin,

under the guidance of your zodiac fires and your comets,

I want to find him again.

I'll live like an outlaw,

I'll beg,

I'll sell myself in the brothels,

I'll be a monk and a guerrilla fighter

and a pirate,

on the condition that I find him again.

*Praise and thanks be upon you
for this trial that you impose upon me, whatever the labor or the torment
may be.*

*And for every accomplishment and conquest of mine until the marvelous
reward,*

glory be to you!

glory!

glory!

And thus, without a farewell,
with my dirty overalls on—and my little switchblade
as my only luggage,
I found myself already prepared
for the great escape.

CHORUS (*in unison*)

Away!

Walk walk walk little soldier full of valor
little illiterate prince, little mafioso.

Fly fly fly

little dark pheasant, lame, little mountain cock,
mad swarm, Word, magic filter, rocket, sweet, vulnerable fauna,
motor at a hundred thousand revolutions, bandolero, owl,
fly fly.

Follow

all the itineraries that are on the school atlas
and on the atlas of adventures
fly to the Caribbean to the Philippines to Beverly Hills
over the Great Urals to Monte Carlo to Jerusalem
and to where Sitting Bull grumbles and moos and thunders
and where Pinocchio buries his gold coins for the sowing
and where Diabolik forms an alliance with Batman
and where Saint Michael rides among bells and leaves
fly

fly lambretta fly peyote

among Tartars and Malays

and Eskimos and Moroccans

and Egyptians

set sail with the crusader ship

and with the British steamship and the atomic mushroom cloud and

the Olympic cart
 and riding a donkey
 and on three hundred dromedaries
 go and turn turn and go
 flash jig autocross supersonic sound
 unique and crazy adventure
 brave Oedipus
 run
 to find your resplendent flesh
 to finally double yourself in your single body
 of a king
 the only body worthy of death.
 Run run fly to that extreme orgasm—scream of sweetness without
 comparison—
 sigh of recovery after the raving disease
 of carnal separation.
 Through north winds and siroccos
 to the Kremlin and to Mecca in the Atlantic caverns and in the lunar
 mines
 and to Thule and in the Cimmerian
 leap, hobble, Swollenfoot!
 look for him
 the fugitive unrecognizable duplicate
 the angel with blue-white eyes and winged heels
 the boy with the soles of wind.

OEDIPUS

In the Upanishads and in the Kabbalah
 and in the blues and in the agitprops
 and in the numbers and in the quanta and in the proverbs and in the
 comic strips and in the magic flutes
 from Golgotha to Tenochtitlán and from the palace of Menelik to
 White Horse Tavern
 and in the jails and in the dance halls and on the film set and in the
 ring and in the nights
 and among doctors, and militiamen, and assassins,
 and among the ruins and in the ditches and in the lagers, through the
 whole world through the whole anti-world

CHORUS

to find my treasure the wedding ring lost in the current
 the Host of the scarred altar
 the bloodied rib of the laceration.

OEDIPUS

Perhaps at the cost of walking three thousand years
 I was almost certain that I would find it,
 my happiness. And thus
 filled with joy for my free adventure, not bound by itineraries, open
 to endless chance,
 humming and whistling softly
 I went on my way.

Without knowing
 that all of my roads—main roads and side roads, shortcuts and
 deviations,
 were already charted by HIM
 in accordance with his preordained design.
 Every one of my steps, was calculated. Every one of my movements,
 maneuvered by his thugs.
 Mere falsehoods, arranged to bewitch me, were my victorious trials!
 The Sphinx, a corrupt procuress. The whole game, fixed to cheat me.
 And my departure could be called a consequence of the arrival
 just as it could be the contrary
 because the branches of the cross meet at a point
 also from infinity
 and that fixed point
 is the room assigned by HIM in the beginning equal to the end.
 In fact, that first prayer of adoration that I uttered
 must not have meant anything to HIM,
 the same as if it had been the lament of a frog or of a little donkey.
 Just like ancient voices of HIS
 those games and calls—and even that last dreadful chant of his—
 must have been nothing other
 than echoes and hallucinations
 of my nerves. Since HE for sure—and not those whom we call
 “the dead”—
 is in the celebrated periods of death: blind, there
 in the middle of the enormous light of the stellar cemetery,

unharméd by the incurable wound of mothers,
deaf-mute.

And now I am here, held fast to his cross with ropes
such that my veins twist together with the veins of this wood
and at times I seem to halve myself, we are two in one
I—HE.

But HE, unborn, shines impassive in the affirmation of his eternal
death,
while I burn in my desperate negation. Oh night
night, my blessed house, night my first milk my sweetness, why
don't you return to console me? at least for one night? You, oh mercy,
you, oh repose,
help me. JOCASTA!!
Jocasta help me
you
dear mother!!

A YOUNG MAN'S VOICE FROM OUTSIDE (*healthy and fresh, with
the tone of a bully*)

Oh! Oh! Oh!
he calls his mama now
the hoodlum, the teddy-boy, the hooligan!
THE HERO!
ah! ah!
he calls his mama!

The VOICE dissolves.

CHORUS (*among wild fits of laughter as above*)

AND HERE I AM STILL
HERE IN THE PINNERS OF THIS INSATIABLE RABID
ILLNESS
THAT FEEDS ON ME, AND DOES NOT LOOSEN ITS GRIP!
EVERYONE, LOOK AT IT, THIS BODY OF MISERY! AH
MY HANDS, MY ARMS, THAT USED TO ENDURE THE
LABORS OF GIANTS! HERE I AM
OVERWHELMED BY A DISASTER BEYOND MY SENSES,
REDUCED TO SCREAMING...

ANTIGONE

Dad!!

Don't cry like this father because seeing your bloody crying
 I, it breaks my heart father and I'd give you the vision from my own
 eyes to see you happy
 Dad find some courage Dad because these bad times will pass
 and soon you'll be cured
 another couple of days and then you'll be healed
 and about me Dad don't doubt me since I will always be near you
 because even if you have to stay blind don't worry! Anyway there isn't
 much worth seeing
 and when there's something nice to see I'll tell you about it
 when there's something nice
 to see.

OEDIPUS

Why
 do you call me father? No one is the father of another. From the same
 mother
 everyone is born. I don't want
 to be called father. I want to forget
 this name...

ANTIGONE

Yes Dad yes Dad whatever you want Dad...

OEDIPUS

And now, take care, you need to pray with me. Repeat
 these words after me: "Oh Holy
 Ladies, oh Blessed Mothers,
 oh merciful Furies..."

ANTIGONE

Oh Holy Ladies
 Oh blessed Mothers...

OEDIPUS

...Oh merciful Furies!
 You who accompany Oedipus on his automaton's course
 consuming him like sand in your fantastic flying about,
 I beg you, for the angelic aberration of mercy, invert this race, take
 me back.
 Let me find that small off-road den,
 where the child marked on his forehead with two crosses lies hidden,

the kid with deformed feet,
 and there, as was promised, let us slaughter him, the bastard, as soon as
 he is soaked in his first cry,
 before he can utter his comic, out of tune request
 that will offend the secrets
 of the radiant throne.

His newborn blood will be offered in sacrifice to the radiant ghost
 —Phoebus—
 or Ra—or Yahweh—or Coatl—or whatever other name he desires
 to have.

And then on his little broken heart “*ah, I have been created!*”
 the sweet, forgiving solar rain of the equinox will fall
 to make the wonderful cactus sprout from it
 that gives nocturnal consolations to those who drink from it.
 It is said that this fruit is one of the mysteries
 buried in the decayed garden.

That Janardana, the shining coachman, gave to the boy Arjuna.
 That the lily of the Annunciation was one of its flowers.
 That the Magi carried one of its seeds (it was the hidden fourth gift).
 That the Memory-of-the-archangels, Socrates, drank a drop of it in
 his hemlock
 laughing in the beatitude of his subversive death.
 That the luminous shadow of Milarepa whispered the secret in the
 ear

of Rechungpa, the evangelist, his most dear...
 et cetera et cetera.

Naturally these are all barbarous rumors and tall tales.
 But I believe in the gossip of barbarians and in children's lies.
 I believe in the Minotaur and in Hydra and in Chimera and in Puss
 in Boots
 and in the wandering Jew and in Cagliostro who winks from the
 moon
 and in the conversations of Mohammed with Gabriel
 and in the hundred baskets of Cana and in the sweated blood in the
 olive grove
 and in the talking statue
 and in the woods of the suicides.

CHORUS

I believe in the fables of the nannies in fairies and in ogresses

and in phantoms and in demons and in all the levels of the angels
and in the writing of lightning and in the voices of thunder

OEDIPUS

I believe in ignorance and in dreams and in delirium
I believe in all the most prodigious and idolatrous stories
and in all impossible things.

Only in my death, do I
not believe.

Oh Holy Mothers of fear
you who restore to mythical anarchy
the corrupted visions of temporal order,
I beg you at least console me with your small death.

I believe in you.

I beg you.

Listen to me.

...Antigone!! where are you?? Antigone?...

ANTIGONE

Yes Dad

I'm here close to you Dad don't you worry about anything because I
am always here close to you
and all of those bad impressions that you you get scared Dad that ain't
nothing Dad don't believe it because that
it's the fever
and you that it's the fever that makes you like you're inside of a
dream

Dad

now I'll wet your face and hair with some water
so you'll have some rest.

She does this, moistening his lips and headband with water from the bottle.

OEDIPUS

...WHERE are we?...

ANTIGONE

We are

...at our house!

Dad!

we're up in the bedroom since it's night and it's probably around

seven—seven fifteen...

OEDIPUS (*not hearing her*)

...where are we?...

...don't leave...My illness is unbearable.

Give me a remedy, even a temporary one, that will interrupt the tormenting numbering

of this incalculable day without an end

that is all accounted for!

Any other state, as long as it is another one, would be rest for me.

Just one night is enough, at least. Just a break to rest.

...I'm thirsty...

ANTIGONE hurries to give him the glass of water, but he pushes it away violently. All of a sudden he begins to hum and sing in the hoarse voice of an old drunkard, accompanying himself by rocking his head:

That time that I returned home from Ethiopia

with a bunch of thalers alalà

I was so black in the face that they

nicknamed me the Abyssinian ah ah

ah ah the Abyssinian, Swollenfoot and the Lame One

what a nice group what a nice bunch...

CHORUS

What a nice group what a nice bunch

tralala.

OEDIPUS (*with corporal's authority*)

MOVE TO TIME SO YOU DON'T DISRUPT THE RHYTHM.

The neon light above the exit begins to lower in intensity. And the NUN enters again, but, in the poor lighting, she now appears much larger than normal, almost gigantic. Passing by, she signals with her chin to the THREE WARDENS, who exit in single file. The rustle of the enormous pleats of her slip—and the whiff of the wide starched wings of her headdress—produce a strange resonance, as if perceived by ears that have become unnaturally acute.

NUN

Shhh...

She leans over OEDIPUS

OEDIPUS

I'm thirsty...I'm thirsty...

CHORUS

GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY AND TO THOSE WHO
SUFFER AND HAVE A BITTER HEART.

GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY AND TO THOSE WHO
SUFFER AND

HAVE A BITTER
HEART.

MAY THEY DRINK
AND FORGET THEIR MISFORTUNE
AND NO LONGER HAVE
THE MEMORY OF THEIR LABOR.

After this, the CHORUS remains silent for the first time

OEDIPUS

...I'm thirsty...

...Who, are you?...

NUN

...Shhh...

OEDIPUS (*familiarly, with an eager tone*)

And the medicine

Did you bring it to me?

NUN (*nods. And naturally, her enormous, enlarged shadow simultaneously nods on the front wall*).

OEDIPUS

Which
medicine

NUN (*laughing benevolently, in the voice of a crazy old woman*)

That one!

that one!

OEDIPUS

I remember your laugh. You laughed like that
the last time I heard you.

So, is it you?

NUN (*as above*)

It is I

and it is not I.

OEDIPUS

Really, did you bring it to me? Are you really doing me this favor?

NUN *(as above)*

You were always like this: always suspicious. But drink it, and, by the taste, you yourself will recognize it...

OEDIPUS

By the taste, I can't guess anything. Now, everything that I drink and eat always has the same dirty flavor...

NUN *(as above)*

And you really think that I am lying to you? Who let you drink the first time you were thirsty? And to what end, then, did I wait for you until nighttime here at the psychiatric hospital?

OEDIPUS

But why did you dress up as a Medieval Empress?!

NUN *(as above)*

Empress!! The things you come up with, you! You were always like this: always fantastical. Fantastical and a reader. You read too many books. But luckily, marking a little X like a cross will be enough to erase all of those books. I'm an empress and I'm not. Some see it one way, others another. ...Here, lean on my arm...Did you forget the story about the giant that passes through the little magic ring?...Here, drink, my dear little son. Drink.

(While Oedipus opens his mouth to drink, she begins to sing to him in her crazy voice, gay and hoarse, in the inviting tone of a nursery rhyme for lulling babies to sleep):

Once upon a time there was a giant named Sacripant who was bigger than Saint Peter in the Vatican.

And he had to pass through a ring so small that not even his pinky
would fit in it.

But the ring was magic
and it changed him into a flying flea.

And the giant Sacripant
passed through it easier than reciting a Hail Mary!

Drink.

Drink.

OEDIPUS

Oh it's
so sweet.

NUN

Shhh...

In the silence, the only noises are those of OEDIPUS gulping, greedy and innocent like a breast-fed baby. In the meantime, the neon lighting continues to weaken. OEDIPUS, now full, lays his head back down on the pillow.

CHORUS (*singing*)

THE SKY AND THE EARTH HAVE GIVEN ME LIBERATION.
THE PLANTS
HAVE LIBERATED ME FROM DEATH THROUGH SOMA,
THEIR KING.

The NUN tiptoes away, down into the stairwell. As soon as she is gone, ANTIGONE sneakily draws near to OEDIPUS and hurriedly loosens the straps on his arms.

ANTIGONE (*softly, in a conspiring tone*)

Anyway there's nobody here now and here it's nighttime
and of course there'll be less surveillance
and this way Dad with your arms free at least
you can rest better

Dad

(The job done, she lifts his hands, shaking them gently to make him feel the advantages of the new situation)

(In an almost joyful tone)

Huh Dad

you feel more better
without your arms tied up huh
Dad?

OEDIPUS (*lets his limp hands fall back onto the sheet. Smiling*)

By now, luckily
I have no use
for these arms anymore.

The neon light has decreased to little more than a faint glimmer, and even through the lunettes only the feeble light of a dying ember is visible. Small colored lights, like those at a fair or on a Christmas tree, begin to move at the bottom of the stairwell, accompanied by children's laughs, similar to the shrieks of small wild animals. Among these laughs, three children's voices (one tenuous, one shrill, and the third one rather nasal) begin to emerge, and they sing a kind of discordant serenade, alternating or in chorus.

VOICES

A-di-ter dak-so a-ja-ya-ta
a-ja-ya-ta a-ja-ya-ta,
dak-sa u
u u u u u
a-di-tih pa-ri aditih tih tih tih tih pa-
-ri!

OEDIPUS (*laughs*).

VOICES

Oedipus!
Oedipus!
Oedipus!
Oedipus! Oedipus!
Oedipus!

OEDIPUS

Who
calls to me?

VOICES

It is we! the three fates of this place!
the Kindly Ones, adored at these underground altars!
your companions with the little velvet feet
and the savage fur made of whiskers and eyes!
We understood nothing of your supplications and prayers
but as it was written
it is here in our sanctuary that you will now sing
the evening Angelus, as you descend
the staircase of the seven gates.

OEDIPUS

I will not sing
ever again.

VOICES

You will sing
you will sing
you will sing you will sing you will sing and
you will sing AGAIN...

CHORUS (*in astonished, sleepy voices*)

...Behold. — Behold. — It opens.
the painted staircase of the seven gates!

VOICES

For each one you need to leave a part
of the radiant ghost.

CHORUS (*as above*)

and in exchange the gate opens. Seven degradations and seven
farewells
are the price of my passage.

VOICES

The body of the beloved was a festival of seven splendors.

CHORUS (*as above*)

All of his gates will be closed upon me again.
...here I am at the ramp, blind.

VOICES (*in exaltation*)

The FIRST
is the GREEN gate!

OEDIPUS (*singing in an enchanted voice, already almost asleep*)

Green. The returns!

I am the pupils of the swallow, the size of the eye of a needle
where the whole heavenly glass window of the return bursts open,
with the meadows of wheat, and the colored shadows that the wind
makes between one stem and the other,
changing at every instant, and never is one the same as another; and all
of the blades of grass, without end
and on every blade every smallest sprout of the unborn ear,

none identical to another.

THE VOICES

DEEP BLUE is the color
of the SECOND gate!

OEDIPUS

Deep blue. The house!

I am the nocturnal rhythm of the calm on the edge of the roadstead,
under the enclosures of the fort where the recruit sleeps, believing
in his dream that he is still with his family, sleeping in the stable, near
the breathing

mare

and foal, already grown,

that he himself saw being born, last winter,

and he was his midwife.

THE VOICES

The THIRD gate is the RED one!

OEDIPUS

Puberty!

I am the throbbing heart of the girl, who, trembling because she went
against the

prohibition

of keeping company with the boy

when returning from class in the evening,

at the moment of the secret parting by the front door of the house

abandons her mouth just touched by first love

to a stolen kiss, still chilly from childhood.

VOICES

The FOURTH is the YELLOW one!

OEDIPUS

The prayers!

I am the fog, the hundred thousand sparkles,

the celebrated sowing of early mornings from the Orient

that rises up to the windows with the first shiver and fills the bedroom,

and embroiders with its little icy shawls

two poor bigoted breasts, numb

under the raw wool undershirts, while bathing eyelashes

lowered during the Elevation of the Host.
 And I am the fog that suspended over the incenses and the flames that
 do not burn it,
 shifts with the polar current,
 and goes through the smog, lowering itself among the vapors of the
 ports with its fleet of a hundred thousand sailing ships
 mixing with the smoke at Buchenwald, and bandaging with its gauzes
 of ether
 the blood of agony.
 I am the fog that softly alights
 on the statues of Olympia
 like down on a child's tender skin.

VOICES

The WHITE
 gate!

OEDIPUS

HIS color! The ONE, the point of fire! The radiant circle!
 I am the cut of the buried diamond, to which all the stars shoot like
 arrows
 I am the drop where all the irises meet!
 I am the sprite of the invisible mirror that wriggles and jumps and flies
 around the terrace,
 and the maddened cat would like to catch it
 and the baby laughs.

VOICES

This
 is the sixth gate.
 Black.

OEDIPUS

yes yes
it was this
that I always
wanted
I wanted
to return to the body
where I was born.

VOICES

And this last one is the gate of emptiness.

OEDIPUS

The
gate
of
emptiness.

At this point, the corridor has become completely dark. And in the darkness, the CHORUS is heard again, but all of its voices are now the multiplied voice of OEDIPUS that moving away further and further.

CHORUS OF THE VOICE OF OEDIPUS

“Oh holy Being!
your divine, golden rest
I have disturbed too often. Of this dark pain hidden in life
you have learned too much from me.
Oh, forgive and forget!
Like that cloud there on the moon that shines in peace, thus
I pass, and you remain in the serene
repose of your beauty,
oh my light!”

Silence. Then a bell rings. In the corridor the normal lighting from before has returned, and the neon light in the stairwell has also returned. But there is no one left there. Strangely, from around the deserted corridor, comes the sound of the ticking of multiple clocks, some closer and some farther away. Then from the bottom of the stairs the crying voice of Antigone is heard screaming.

THE VOICE OF ANTIGONE

Dad! Daaad! Daaaaaad!

Author's Note

The fragmentary and repeated phrases of the Chorus are taken in part from documents from psychiatric hospitals, concentration camps, old and modern political and military speeches, etc. Other citations found scattered throughout the Chorus or lent to various characters' dialogues come from ancient Aztec songs,¹ Sophocles,² an old chain gang blues tune,³ the Jewish Hymn of the Dead,⁴ *Instructions for Recruits*,⁵ the Bible,⁶ and the Veda.⁷

The syllabified verses ("*A-di-ter*," etc.) on p. 311 are from the Rig Veda, and they mean: *From Aditi was born Daksha—and from Daksha was born Aditi.*

The verses in italics on p. 314 ("*yes yes / it was this*," etc.) are Allen Ginsberg's.

The poetry in quotation marks on p. 315 ("Oh holy Being!" etc.) is Hölderlin's.

¹ "At Tlatelolco / the fire turns black;" "Divine water stake!;" "Will I still mature on the cob?...etc.;" "Will I still sow myself?...etc."

² "It is ready / this vestment...etc.;" "It is ready! It is ready this / mortuary dress etc.;" "Look it starts again...etc.;" "And yet here I am / here in the pincers... etc."

³ "Go down low Grandpa...etc." (addressing the sun).

⁴ "Yigdal...etc."

⁵ "Move to time...etc."

⁶ "Give drink...etc."

⁷ "The sky and the earth...etc."