**Oedipus at Colonus**

**PLOT (Synopsis)**

At the close of Sophocles' earlier play, *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus discovers his dual crimes of murdering his father and marrying his mother. His mother-wife, Jocasta, hangs herself, and Oedipus, to atone for these terrible events, blinds himself with her brooch and goes into a state of self-imposed exile.

Beginning where *Oedipus the King* left off, *Oedipus At Colonus* opens with Oedipus reduced to the state of a blind man exiled from his native Thebes. He has wandered like a beggar until arriving at Colonus, a suburb of Athens. His sole attendant is his loyal younger daughter, Antigone. The inhabitants of Colonus, who form the chorus in the play, warn Oedipus that he must leave the area since everyone despises him and considers him fatally cursed. Since Oedipus has learned from an Oracle that this is the place where he will die, he refuses to go away.

Oedipus appeals to Theseus, king of Athens, for refuge. The king guarantees his protection to Oedipus and also promises him a proper burial site on the soil of his kingdom of Theseus. Because of the oracle's prophesy, the spirit of Oedipus will be a source of protection to Athens. (In ancient times, the Greeks believed that heroes were offspring of unions between Gods and mortals; so when they died, religious cults spread around their grave-sites in the hope that the soil of the dead hero would actively bless and defend the locality. Though Oedipus was only a mere mortal, he was apotheosized as a god-like hero after his death).

Oedipus' elder daughter, Ismene, joins her father and tells him of the ongoing civil war in Thebes between her two brothers Polyneices and Eteocles. They are struggling for possession of the throne their father has vacated. This news enrages Oedipus, and he rails bitterly against his sons, who have both been totally indifferent to him after his disgrace and downfall. At first, Creon, who is Oedipus' brother-in-law, had served as regent of Thebes; then it was agreed that Oedipus' two sons should rule alternately for a year each. Eteocles, who took up kingship of Thebes first, refused to vacate the throne when his year's rule was over. As a result, Polyneices is now fighting against his brother for his due right to rule Thebes.

Creon arrives from Thebes with the intention of abducting Oedipus so that the Thebans may have his body when he dies and, thus, gain blessings and protection from the dead hero in their current civil war. He even orders his guards to arrest both Antigone and Ismene as hostages to be held in Thebes so as to ensure the return of Oedipus to his native city before he dies. However, when Creon attempts
to seize Oedipus himself and carry him off to Thebes, Theseus, king of Athens, intervenes. He rescues both Oedipus and his two daughters from Creon and his henchmen.

Meanwhile, Polyneices arrives on the scene and professes his repentance for having neglected his father for so long. He asks Oedipus to support him in his struggle with Eteocles and hopes that his father will help him kill his brother. Naturally, Oedipus is aghast at the thought of helping one of his sons kill another. He turns upon Polyneices in bitter rage and places a terrible curse on both his sons, praying that they will die in the civil war by each other's hand.

At the close of the play, ominous rolls of thunder are heard as a sign from the gods warning Oedipus that death is fast approaching. He withdraws into the sacred grove. Later a messenger arrives to describe his death. He narrates how Oedipus blessed his two daughters, went quietly to an isolated spot, and, in the presence of his friend, King Theseus, he was carried away to the gods. The exact manner of Oedipus' death was not known even to the messenger and remains a mystery to all.