

**Scene 2 – Chorus followed by Oedipus,
Sophocles’ “Oedipus at Colonus”**

Chorus:

Show me a man who longs to live a day
beyond his time
who turns his back on a decent length of life,
I’ll show the world a man who clings to folly.
For the long, looming days lay up a thousand
things
closer to pain than pleasure, and the pleasures
disappear,
you look and know not where
when a man’s outlived his limit plunged in
age
and the good comrade comes who comes at
last to all,
not with a wedding-song, no lyre, no singers
dancing –
the doom of the Deathgod comes like
lightning
always death at the last.

Not to be born is best
when all is reckoned in, but once a man has
seen the light
the next best thing, by far, is to go back
back where he came from, quickly as he can.
For once his youth slips by, light on the wing
lightheaded ... what mortal blows can he
escape
what griefs won’t stalk his days?
Envy and enemies, rage and battles,
bloodshed
and last of all despised old age overtakes him,
stripped of power, companions, stripped of
love –
the worst this life of pain can offer,
old age our mate at last.

This is the grief we face – I am not alone –
like some great headland fronting the north
hit by the winter breakers beating down
from every quarter – so we suffer,
terrible blows crashing over him
head to foot, over and over down from every
quarter-
now from the west, the dying sun
now from the first light rising

now from the blazing beams of noon
now from the north engulfed in endless night.

Oedipus:

Dear friend, only the gods can never age,
the gods can never die. All else in the world
almighty Time obliterates, crushes all
to nothing. The earth’s strength wastes away,
the strength of a man’s body wastes and dies –
faith dies, and bad faith comes to life,
and the same wind of friendship cannot blow
forever,
holding steady and strong between two
friends,
much less between two countries.
For some of us soon, for others later,
joy turns to hate and back again to love.
And even if all is summer sunshine now
between ourselves and others,
infinite Time, sweeping through its rounds
gives birth to infinite nights and days...
and a day will come when the treaties of an
hour,
the pacts firmed with a handclasp will snap –
at the slightest word a spear will hurl them to
the winds –
some far-off day when my dead body,
slumbering, buried
cold in death, will drain that hot blood down,
if the gods are still gods
and still speak clear and true.