



## Credits:

Bobby Kennedy's quote, in this clip, is from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. He likely read it in a book (*The Greek Way*, by Edith Hamilton) which his sister-in-law, Jackie Kennedy, gave him to help cope with the shocking death of his brother, Jack.

RFK, speaking extemporaneously, misquoted Aeschylus. (Note his pause - at 3:18 into the clip - just before the misquoting occurs.) It seems as though he was pondering whether it was OK to substantially misquote a famous Greek poet (and, in the process, change the meaning of the point). The impact of that misquote, however - changing "despite" to "despair" - has given the poem (and its sentiments) new meaning and greater popularity.

#### Let's compare the two versions.

### **Bobby's quote:**

In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own **despair**, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

### Edith Hamilton's actual 1930 translation (see page 156) of Agamemnon:

And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own **despite**, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.

# For further study, note Hamilton's translation, with Greek phrases included:

And even in our sleep [d' ény' Ïpnou] pain that cannot forget [mnhsipÆmvn pÒnow], falls drop by drop [stãzei] upon the heart [prÚ kard€aw], and in our own despite [s°lma semnÚn ≤m°nvn], against our will [ka< par' êkontaw], comes wisdom to us [Σlye svfrone>n] by the awful grace of God [daimÒnvn d° pou xãriw b€aiow].

Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1930), page 156.

Credit for comparing the differences in Hamilton's translation and RFK's speech:

"In Our Own Despair": Robert Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Aeschylus' Agamemnon. Delivered at the Classical Association of Canada, Annual Meeting, May 12, 2002, by Christopher S. Morrissey, Department of Humanities, Simon Fraser University.

Video online, courtesy Manny 535's Channel at YouTube.

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