



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' ìpnou] pain that cannot forget [mnhsipÆm̄vn p̄onow], falls drop by drop [stāzei] upon the heart [prÚ kard̄aw], 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 [daim̄onvn d° pou xāriw b̄aiow].

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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