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MUSIC LP

# Oedipus rex

PERFORMED BY STUDENTS OF  
AMHERST COLLEGE WITH  
JOHN SOMMERS AS OEDIPUS  
DIRECTED BY EDWIN BURR PETTET

COVER: SUE SOMMERS

NOTES AND TEXT OF THE PLAY  
ARE IN INSIDE POCKET

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SOPHOCLES

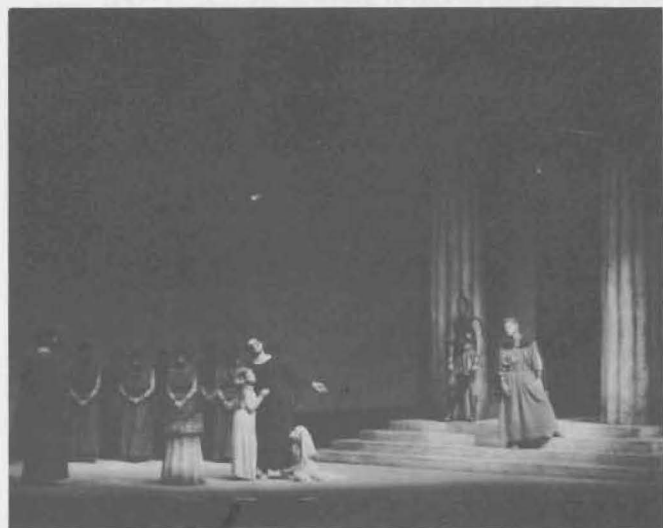
# Oedipus rex

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card No. R63-363  
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SOPHOCLES  
**Oedipus rex**

DIRECTED BY  
 EDWIN BURR PETTET  
 COSTUME DESIGNER  
 THOMAS BRENNAN  
 LIGHTING  
 UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
 MUSIC BY  
 FREDERICK J. KARLIN



Oedipus, His Children,  
 Creon and Chorus



Messenger from Corinth, Oedipus,  
 Jocasta and Chorus



Tiresias, Oedipus  
 and Chorus



Oedipus and Jocasta

PERFORMED BY STUDENTS OF  
 AMHERST COLLEGE WITH  
 JOHN SOMMERS AS OEDIPUS  
 DIRECTED BY EDWIN BURR PETTET

PA  
 4414  
 07  
 B87  
 1960  
 MUSIC LP



DIRECTED BY  
EDWIN BURR PETTET

SETTINGS & COSTUMES  
THOMAS BRENNAN

LIGHTING & TECHNICAL DIRECTOR  
RALPH C. MCGOUN

MUSIC BY  
FREDERICK J. KARLIN

with

JOHN SOMMERS  
OEDIPUS

H. UNDERHILL \*  
HERDSMAN

ELINOR FRIEDMAN  
JOCASTA

ROGER PORTER \*  
PRIEST

GEORGE GAY \*  
CREON

L. GOLDSTEIN  
2nd MESSENGER

GEORGE CORSON \*  
TIRESIAS

BRUCE BRADLEY \*  
CHOREGUS

PETER STRAUSS  
1st MESSENGER

\* MEMBER AMHERST COLLEGE MASQUERS

Moses crossing the Red Sea is a fine adventure story. It has all the proper elements: the chase, the dangerous impasse, the near-capture and the tidal climax where the pursuers are vanquished and the pursued are victorious. But the story of Moses has traditionally been more than a story, the adventure more than a thrilling incident. The chase and the escape are only part of a larger and more significant tale, which is the epic of Jehovah's providential concern for His people Israel. When the waters close over the Egyptians, we know that now the Jews are free from the threat of bondage. We are also meant to see this act as the intervention of God on behalf of His covenanted nation.

And so too with the story of Oedipus of Thebes. It is a stark and terrible one, telling of how a man is fated to kill his father and marry his mother and, despite his most determined efforts to avoid this end, he is unwittingly led to commit both acts. The story, as Sophocles relates it, is reinforced with powerful ironies: in trying to solve a murder Oedipus learns that he is the murderer; in assuming his own innocence he is forced to recognize his guilt; in defending his security he utterly destroys his happiness.

The action of the play is so masterfully compressed that every turn of events, every conflict—indeed every speech—further compounds these basic ironies and constantly increases the tension. It is an unpleasant story but it is dramatized with such remarkable skill that we cannot but be fascinated by it.

Yet, as with Moses, the story is more than a story. There is a larger context for the hand of God is also present. Only here the god is not Jehovah but Apollo and his presence tends to confuse rather than clarify the action. The oracle of the god relates the curse to Oedipus' parents and later to Oedipus himself. The mortals struggle vainly to avert the curse and the god

seems unconcerned. What are we to make of this situation?

Apollo is a god but not, like Jehovah, the God; not the master of the universe, only one god among many. As the god of wisdom he can foresee events but he is not responsible for them. He is privileged to see the full design of Oedipus' misfortune before it actually takes place. When called upon he simply relates what he sees. He neither punishes nor victimizes Oedipus. His is completely objective.

Apollo is in the service of a higher power. Above both gods and men and working behind all of creation is the mysterious power of Order called Fate or Necessity. To the Greeks, this was the primal power which maintained the balance of both the physical and moral world. Murder and incest are unnatural acts because they upset the stability of the moral order. Balance must be restored; it is the law of Necessity. And so the pollution is cleansed and the offenders struck down.

Thus, it is the act, not the man, that is punished. Oedipus is destroyed, not because he is Oedipus, but because through him the natural order has been upset. The fact that he may have acted in all innocence is immaterial. The gods and forces of nature are not concerned with motivation; they are only interested in maintaining proper equilibrium.

The higher powers may be indifferent to Oedipus but we are not. The question they dismiss is the very one that absorbs. A judgement on the act alone may be enough to satisfy the needs of an abstract justice, but it will not satisfy the demands of human conscience. We must be concerned with motivation. Oedipus has committed fearful acts but to all appearances he did them unintentionally. Is it just to so shatter a man who is innocent? If he is guilty, what is his crime?

Oedipus does everything in his power to avoid the curse that has been laid upon him. He flees from Corinth so that he may escape the circumstances which could cause disaster. He miscalculates, for the danger is ahead of him and not behind him. He is blameless, in one sense, for he could not know what is ahead of him. He is also guilty for he assumes that he could know, that he has all the facts, that he can outwit the gods.

The innocent premise drawn from the guilty assumption; this is the paradox which runs through every moment of the play. And it is, Sophocles suggests, the insoluble riddle of human existence.

Circumstances force men to make decisions and act upon them. Each man will judge the facts before him, select a course and follow it. He can never know before hand if the issue will be happy or disastrous, but he must assume that he knows or he would never be able to act. Every decision is an act of pride for it postulates certainty where there is only probability. Oedipus makes reasonable decisions granting the limits of his knowledge. He leaves no margin for error and he is punished as a consequence. But the circumstances that press upon him are so urgent and the alternatives so calamitous that there is little margin for choice. He trusts his reason because it is all that he can rely upon. His tragedy points to the general human tragedy that man is not a god and yet is forced to act as if he were.

Moses is the hero of a triumphal expedition because Jehovah befriends him and protects him. Oedipus is solitary and broken and his gods are cold and impartial. Yet he too is a hero, the hero of the Lost Cause. Oedipus does not doubt the Oracle of Delphi when she relates the prophecy to him. Apollo speaks through her and he always speaks the truth.

It is precisely because Oedipus believes in the truth of the prophecy that he immediately sets out to circumvent

it. This is a contradiction in logic but it is also a heroic affirmation. In the face of certain doom Oedipus will not surrender his humanity. He gambles on himself and is willing to do contest with the gods. When the action of Sophocles' drama opens, Oedipus is confident of his victory. Every scene of the play brings the fact of his guilt closer and closer to him, but again, he will not cower before the inevitable. He is a proud man, at times arrogant and cruel, but always confident of his dignity as a man. The contest is, of course, unequal for he cannot battle the gods and win. This is the lesson he is so painfully made to understand. The best he can offer is not good enough-- that is the real agony in this tragic experience. But the glory of his impossible defiance is that he battled so bravely. Although less than the gods, he was able - for a time at least - to war with them on an equal basis. His final defeat proves his fallibility but it also shows that as a man he could do what no other creature short of the gods is able to perform. In a world so perilous and imperfect, it is the greatest possible achievement.

John Sommers

PRIEST:

Oedipus, King of my country, a blight has fallen upon the fruitful blossoms of the land, a blight upon flock and field and upon the bed of marriage - plague ravages the city. Oedipus, King, not God but foremost of living men, seeing that when you first came to this town of Thebes you freed us from that harsh singer, the riddling Sphinx, we beseech you ...

(A blight has fallen upon the ancient city of Thebes. The plague has struck ravaging the countryside; and the land like the people who inhabit it is barren and unfruitful. Suppliants, holy branches newly cut in their hands, and led by their Priest come to the palace gates the home of Oedipus, imploring that he, the foremost of living men, the god-like one who had freed them from that harsh singer, the riddling sphinx, now free them from the curse that wastes their land. Oedipus, helpless in the grip of the terror that holds them all, can only reply that he has done all he knew how to do)

OEDIPUS:

My unhappy children! I know well what course has brought you here, what sufferings you endure; yet sufferers though you be, there is not a single one whose suffering is as mine - each mourns himself, but my soul mourns the city, myself, and you. It is not therefore as if you came to arouse a sleeping man. No! Be certain that I have wept many tears and searched hither and thither for some remedy. I have already done the only thing that came into my head for all my search. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, my own wife's brother, to the Pythian House of Phoebus, to find if deed or word of mine may yet deliver this town. I am troubled, for he is a long time away ...

(And Creon comes to speak the fateful words that set in motion the dreadful mechanism of the tragedy)

OEDIPUS:

Speak before all. The sorrow I endure is less for my own life than these.

CREON:

Then, with your leave, I speak. Our Lord Phoebus bids us drive out a defiling thing that has been cherished in this land.

OEDIPUS:

By what purification?

CREON:

King Laius was our King before you came to to pilot us.

OEDIPUS:

I know - but not of my own knowledge, for I never met the man.

CREON:

He was killed; and the God now bids us revenge it on his murderers, whoever they be.

OEDIPUS:

Where shall we come upon their track after all these years? Did he meet his death in house or field, at home or in some foreign land?

(With the key to the fearful riddle now in his hand and with firm reliance upon the logical power and the gift of insight that had brought him fame and into the kingship of Thebes, Oedipus embarks with confidence upon the investigation into the murder of Laius. His first move is to call for representatives from the Elders of Thebes that he may inform them officially of the guilt under which the city is suffering and in their presence to lay upon the unknown murderer the sentence that later is to have such ironic meaning for him)

CHORUS:

What message comes to famous Thebes from the Golden House?

What message of disaster from that sweet-throated Zeus?

What monstrous thing our fathers saw do the seasons bring?

Or what that no man ever saw, what new monstrous thing?

Trembling in every limb I raise my loud importunate cry,

And in a sacred terror wait the Delian God's reply. We call against the pallid face of this God-hated God

The springing heel of Artemis in the hunting sandal shod,

The tousel-headed Maenads, blown torch and drunken sound,

The stately Lycian king himself with golden fillet crowned,

And in his hands the golden bow and the stretched golden string,

And Bacchus' wine-ensanguined face that all the Maenads sing.

OEDIPUS:

You are praying, and it well may be that your prayer will be answered; that if you hear my words and do my bidding you may find a way out of all your trouble. This is my proclamation, children of Cadmus. Whoever among you knows by what man Laius, son of Labdacus, was killed, must tell all he knows. If he fear for himself and being guilty denounce himself, he shall suffer no worse thing than banishment. If on the other hand there be one that knows that a foreigner did the deed, let him speak, and I shall give him a reward and my thanks. If any man keep silent from fear or to screen a friend, listen to what I will do to that man. No one in this land shall speak to him, nor offer sacrifice beside him; but he shall be driven from their homes as if he himself had done the deed. And in this I am the ally of the Pythian God and of the murdered man, and I pray that the murderer's life may, should he be so hidden and screened, drop from him and perish away, whoever he may be, whether he did the deed with others or by himself alone. And

if there be any man who do not obey me in it, I pray that the Gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb; but let him be wasted by this plague, or by one more dreadful still. But may all be blessed who hear my words and do my will!

CHORUS:

We do not know the murderer, and it were indeed more fitting that Phoebus, who laid the task upon us, should name the man.

OEDIPUS:

No man can make the gods speak against their will.

CHORUS:

Then I will say what seems the next best thing.

OEDIPUS:

If there is a third course, show it.

CHORUS:

I know that our lord Tiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus, and through him we may unravel all.

OEDIPUS:

So I was advised by Creon, and twice already have I sent to bring him.

CHORUS:

If we lack his help we have nothing but vague and ancient rumors.

OEDIPUS:

What rumors?

CHORUS:

Certain wayfarers were said to have killed the King.

OEDIPUS:

I know, I know.

Then seeing that come it must, you had best speak out.

TIRESIAS:

I will speak no further. Rage if you have a mind to; bring out all the fierceness that is in your heart.

(But when Tiresias comes to the palace gate he will not speak; for knowing as he does, through the wisdom given him as a seer that Oedipus is the murderer that he seeks, he refuses to give tongue either to the lie he assumes Oedipus expects of him or to the truth that will ruin them both. Furious at what he takes to be Tiresias' duplicity, Oedipus lashes out and with the intemperate words born of hasty conclusions, goads the blind seer to utter the accusation)

OEDIPUS:

That will I. I will not spare to speak my thoughts. Listen to what I have to say. It seems to me that you have helped to plot the deed; and, short of doing it with your own hands, have done the deed yourself. Had you eyesight I would declare that you alone had done it.

TIRESIAS:

So that is what you say? I charge you to obey the decree that you yourself have made, and from this day out to speak neither to these nor to me. You are the defiler of this land.

OEDIPUS:

So brazen is your impudence? How do you hope to escape punishment?

TIRESIAS:

I have escaped; my strength is in my truth.

OEDIPUS:

Who taught you this? You never got it by your art.

TIRESIAS:

Would you that I say more that you may be still angrier?

OEDIPUS:

Say what you will. I shall not let it move me.

TIRESIAS:

I say that you are living with your next of kin in unimagined shame.

OEDIPUS:

Do you think you can say such things and never smart for it.

TIRESIAS:

Yes, if there be strength in truth.

OEDIPUS:

There is; yes - for everyone but you. But not for you that are maimed in ear and in eye and in wit.

TIRESIAS:

You are but a poor wretch flinging taunts that in a little while everyone shall fling at you.

OEDIPUS:

Night, endless night has covered you up so that you can neither hurt me nor any man that looks upon the sun.

TIRESIAS:

Your doom is not to fall by me. Apollo is enough; it is his business to work out your doom.

OEDIPUS:

Did Creon put you to this or you yourself?

TIRESIAS:

Creon is not your enemy; you are your own enemy.

OEDIPUS:

Power, ability, position, you bear all burdens yourself, and yet what envy you create! Great must that envy be if envy of my power in this town - a power put into my hands unsought - has made trusty Creon, my old friend Creon, secretly long to take that power from me; if he has suborned this scheming juggler, this quack and trickster, this man



with eyes for his gains and blindness in his art. Come, come, where did you prove yourself a seer? Why did you say nothing to set the townsmen free when the riddling Sphinx was here? Yet that riddle was not for the first-comer to read; it needed the skill of a seer. And none such had you! No, I came; I silenced her, I the ignorant Oedipus, it was I that found the answer in my mother-wit, untaught by any birds. And it is I that you would throw from my power, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. But you and the plotter of all this shall mourn despite your zeal to purge the land. Were you not an old man, you had already learnt how bold you are and learnt it to your cost.

TIRESIAS:

King though you are, the right to answer when attacked belongs to both alike. I am not subject to you, but to Loxias; and I shall never be Creon's subject. And I tell you, since you have taunted me with blindness, that though you have your sight, you cannot see in what misery you stand, nor where you are living, nor with whom, unknowing what you do - for you do not know the stock you come of - you have been your own kin's enemy be they living or be they dead. And one day a mother's curse and father's curse alike shall drive you from this land with darkness upon those eyes. Therefore, heap your scorn on Creon and on my message if you have a mind to; for no one of living men shall be crushed as you shall be crushed.

OEDIPUS:

Begone! Away, away! Get you from these doors!

TIRESIAS:

I had never come but that you sent for me.

OEDIPUS:

I did not know that you were mad.

TIRESIAS:

I may seem mad to you, but your parents thought me sane.

OEDIPUS:

My parents! Stop! Who was my father?

TIRESIAS:

This day shall you know your birth; and it will ruin you.

OEDIPUS:

What dark words you always speak!

TIRESIAS:

But are you not most skillful in the unravelling of dark words?

OEDIPUS:

You mock me for that which made me great?

TIRESIAS:

It was that fortune that undid you.

OEDIPUS:

What do I care? For I delivered this town.

TIRESIAS:

Then I will go: boy, lead me out of this.

OEDIPUS:

Yes, lead him away. You take vexation with you.

CHORUS:

The Delphian rock has spoken out, now must a wicked mind,  
Planner of things I dare not speak and of this bloody wrack,  
Pray for feet that are as fast as the four hoofs of the wind:  
Cloudy Parnassus and the Fates thunder at his back.  
That sacred crossing-place of lines upon Parnassus' head,  
Lines that have run through North and South, and run through West and East,  
That navel of the world bids all men search the mountain woods,  
The solitary cavern, till they have found that infamous beast.

CREON:

Fellow-citizens, having heard that King Oedipus accuses me of dreadful things, I come in my indignation. Does he think that he has suffered wrong from me in these present troubles, or anything that could lead to wrong, whether in word or deed? How can I live under blame like that? What life would be worth living if by you here, and by my nearest friends, called a traitor through the town?

CHORUS:

He said it in anger, and not from his heart out.

CREON:

He said it was I put up the seer to speak those falsehoods.

CHORUS:

Such things were said.

(Now with what he considers a palace revolution on his hands and for the moment all thought of Laius and the curse upon Thebes forgotten, Oedipus returns to deliver his condemnation of Creon, angrily refusing to heed his brother-in-law's explanation)

OEDIPUS:

You are plausible, but waste words now that I know you.

CREON:

Hear what I have to say. I can explain it all ...

OEDIPUS:

One thing you will not explain away - that you are my enemy.

CREON:

You are a fool to imagine that senseless stubbornness sits well upon you.

OEDIPUS:

And you to imagine that you can wrong a kinsman and never suffer for it.

CREON:

That is justly said, I grant you; but what is this wrong that you complain of?

OEDIPUS:

Did you advise, or not, that I should send for that notorious prophet?

CREON:

And I am of the same mind still.

OEDIPUS:

How long has it been, since Laius ...

CREON:

What, what about him?

OEDIPUS:

Since Laius was killed by an unknown hand?

CREON:

That was many years ago.

OEDIPUS:

Was this prophet in his trade at that time?

CREON:

Yes; skilled as now and in equal honor.

OEDIPUS:

Did he ever speak of me?

CREON

Never certainly when I was within earshot.

OEDIPUS:

And did you investigate the murder?

CREON:

We did inquire but learnt nothing.

OEDIPUS:

And why did he not speak out at that time?

CREON:

I do not know. When I know nothing I say nothing.

OEDIPUS:

This much at least you know and can say out.

CREON:

What is that? If I know it I will say it.

OEDIPUS:

That if he had not consulted you he would never have said that it was I who killed Laius.

(Proud and sure of himself, Oedipus turns a deaf ear to the reasoning logic of Creon. Yet Creon speaks on, showing here the balance and judgment that are one day to forsake him when he becomes king in Oedipus' place)

CREON:

No wise mind is treacherous. I am no contriver of plots, and if another took to them he would not come to me for

help. And in proof of this go to the Pythian Oracle, and ask if I have truly told what the gods said; and after that, if you find that I have plotted with the Soothsayer, take me and kill me; not by the sentence of the mouth only - but of two mouths, yours and my own. But do not condemn me in a corner, upon some fancy and without proof. What right have you to declare a good man bad or a bad good? It is as bad a thing for a man to cast off a true friend as it is for a man to cast away his own life - but you will learn these things with certainty when the time comes; for time alone shows a just man; though a day can show a knave.

CHORUS:

King! He has spoken well, he gives himself time to think; a headlong talker does not know what he is saying.

OEDIPUS:

The plotter is at his work, and I must counterplot headlong, or he shall get his ends and I miss mine.

CREON:

What will you do then? Drive me from the land?

OEDIPUS:

Not so; I do not desire your banishment - but your death.

CREON:

You are not sane.

OEDIPUS:

I am sane at least in my own interest.

CREON:

You should be in mine also.

OEDIPUS:

No, for you are false.

CREON:

But if you understand nothing:

OEDIPUS:

Yet I must rule.

CREON:

Not if you rule badly.

OEDIPUS:

Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON:

Thebes is for me also, not for you alone.

CHORUS:

Cease, princes: I see Jocasta coming out of the house; she comes just in time to quench the quarrel.

JOCASTA:

Unhappy men! Why have you made this crazy uproar? Are you not ashamed to quarrel about your own affairs when the whole country is in trouble? Go back into the palace, Oedipus, and you, Creon, to your own house. Stop making all this noise about some petty thing.



CREON:

Your husband is about to kill me - or to drive me from the land of my fathers.

OEDIPUS:

Yes: for I have convicted him of treachery against me.

CREON:

Now may I perish accursed if I am guilty of such a thing!

JOCASTA:

For God's love believe it, Oedipus. First, for the sake of his oath, and then for my sake, and for the sake of these people here ...

(Creon leaves, saved from death by the pleas of Jocasta and the leader of the Theban Elders, but banished forever from the land of his fathers)

JOCASTA:

Listen to me, and learn to your comfort that nothing born of woman can know what is to come. I will give you proof of that. An oracle came to Laius once, I will not say from Phoebus, but from his ministers, that he was doomed to die by the hand of his own child sprung from him and me. When his child was but three days old, Laius bound its feet together and had it thrown by sure hands upon a trackless mountain; and when Laius was murdered at the place where three highways meet, it was or so at least the rumor says, by foreign robbers. So Apollo did not bring it to pass that the child should kill its father, nor did Laius die in the dreadful way he feared by his child's hand. Yet that was how the message of the seers mapped out the future. Pay no attention to such things. What the God would show he will need no help to show it, but bring it to light himself ...

(So it is from Jocasta his wife that Oedipus first hears of events sorrowful and foreboding that slowly lead him to suspect that accidentally and unknowingly he had been the instrument that killed the former king. Here is his reply as he matches to Jocasta's story the pieces of evidence his own life has provided)

OEDIPUS:

My father was Polybus of Corinth, my mother the Dorian Merope, and I was held the foremost man in all that town until a thing happened - a thing to startle a man, though not to make him angry as it made me. We were sitting at the table, and a man who had drunk too much cried out that I was not my father's son - and I, though angry, restrained my anger for that day; but the next day went to my father and my mother and questioned them. They were indignant at the taunt and that comforted me - and yet the man's words rankled, for they had spread a rumor through the town. Without consulting my father or my mother I went to Delphi, but Phoebus told me nothing of the things for which I came, but much of other things - things of sorrow and of terror: that I should live in incest with my mother, and beget a brood that men would shudder to look upon; that I should be my father's murderer. Hearing those words I fled out of Corinth, and from that day have but known where it lies when I have found its direction by the stars. I sought where I might escape those infamous things - the doom that was laid upon me. I came in my flight to that very spot where you tell me this king perished. Now, lady, I will tell you the truth. When I had come close up to those three roads, I came upon a herald, and a man like him you have described, seated in a carriage. The man who held the reins and the old man himself would not give the room, but thought to force me from the path, and I struck the driver in my anger. The old man, seeing what I had done, waited till I was passing him and then struck me upon the head. I paid him back in

full, for I knocked him out of the carriage with a blow of my stick. He rolled on his back, and after that I killed them all. If this stranger were indeed Laius, is there a more miserable man in the world than the man before you? Is there a man more hated of Heaven? No stranger, no citizen, may receive him into his house, not a soul may speak to him, and no mouth but my own mouth has laid this curse upon me. Am I not wretched? May I be swept from this world before I have endured this doom!

CHORUS:

These things, O king, fill us with terror; yet hope till you speak with him that saw the deed, and have learnt all ...

(It is into this atmosphere of growing terror and foreboding that the stranger from Corinth makes his appearance. A shepherd once, he comes now in eagerness to Thebes to bring the news that, joyful at first to the ears of both King and Queen, sets in motion the final great irony of the play)

OEDIPUS:

Jocasta, dearest wife, why have you called me from the house?

JOCASTA:

Listen to this man, and judge to what the oracles have come.

OEDIPUS:

And he - who may he be? And what news has he?

JOCASTA:

He has come from Corinth to tell you that your father, Polybus is dead ...

OEDIPUS:

How, stranger? Let me have it from your own mouth.

MESSENGER:

If I am to tell the story, the first thing is that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS:

By some sickness or by treachery?

MESSENGER:

A little thing can bring the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS:

Ah! He died, it seems, from sickness?

MESSENGER:

Yes; and of old age.

OEDIPUS:

Alas! Alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to that Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads? For they would have it that I was doomed to kill my father. And now he is dead - hid already beneath the earth. And here am I - who had no part in it, unless indeed he died from longing for me. If that were so, I may have caused his death; but Polybus has carried the oracles with him into Hades - the oracles as men have understood them - and they are worth nothing.

JOCASTA:

Did I not tell you so, long since?

OEDIPUS:

You did, but fear misled me.

JOCASTA:

Put this trouble from you.

OEDIPUS:

Those bold words would sound better, were not my mother living.

JOCASTA:

Yet your father's death is a sign that all is well.

OEDIPUS:

I know that: but I fear because of her who lives.

MESSENGER:

Who is this woman who makes you afraid?

OEDIPUS:

Merope, old man, the wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER:

What is there in her to make you afraid?

OEDIPUS:

A dreadful oracle sent from Heaven, stranger.

MESSENGER:

Is it a secret, or can you speak it out?

OEDIPUS:

Loxias said that I was doomed to marry my own mother, and to shed my father's blood. For that reason I fled from my house in Corinth; and I did right, though there is great comfort in familiar faces.

MESSENGER:

Was it indeed for that reason that you went into exile?

OEDIPUS:

I did not wish, old man, to shed my father's blood.

MESSENGER:

King, have I not freed you from that fear?

OEDIPUS:

You shall be fittingly rewarded.

MESSENGER:

Indeed, to tell the truth, it was for that I came; to bring you home and be the better for it -

OEDIPUS:

No! I will never go to my parents' home.

MESSENGER:

Ah, my son, it is plain enough, you do not know what you do.

OEDIPUS:

How, old man? For God's love, tell me.

MESSENGER:

If for these reasons you shrink from going home.

OEDIPUS:

I am afraid lest Phoebus has spoken true.

MESSENGER:

You are afraid of being made guilty through Merope?

OEDIPUS:

That is my constant fear.

MESSENGER:

A vain fear.

OEDIPUS:

How so, if I was born of that father and mother?

MESSENGER:

Because they were nothing to you in blood.

OEDIPUS:

What do you say? Was Polybus not my father?

MESSENGER:

No more nor less than myself.

OEDIPUS:

How can my father be no more to me than you who are nothing to me?

MESSENGER:

He did not beget you any more than I.

OEDIPUS:

No? Then why did he call me his son?

MESSENGER:

He took you as a gift from these hands of mine.

OEDIPUS:

How could he love so dearly what came from another's hands?

MESSENGER:

He had been childless.

OEDIPUS:

If I am not your son, where did you get me?

MESSENGER:

In a wooded valley of Cithaeron.



OEDIPUS:

What brought you wandering there?

MESSENGER:

I was in charge of mountain sheep.

OEDIPUS:

A shepherd - a wandering, hired man.

MESSENGER:

A hired man who came just in time.

OEDIPUS:

Just in time - had it come to that?

MESSENGER:

Have not the cords left their marks upon your ankles?

OEDIPUS:

Yes, that is an old trouble.

MESSENGER:

I took your feet out of the spangle.

OEDIPUS:

I have had those marks from the cradle.

MESSENGER:

They have given you the name you bear.

OEDIPUS:

Tell me, for God's sake, was that deed my mother's or my father's?

MESSENGER:

I do not know - he who gave you to me knows more of that than I.

OEDIPUS:

What? You had me from another? You did not chance on me yourself?

MESSENGER:

No. Another shepherd gave you to me.

OEDIPUS:

Who was he? Can you tell me who he was?

MESSENGER:

I think that he was said to be of Laius' household.

OEDIPUS:

The king who ruled this country long ago?

MESSENGER:

The same - the man was herdsman in his service.

OEDIPUS:

Is he alive, that I might speak with him?

MESSENGER:

You people of this country should know that.

OEDIPUS:

Is there anyone here present who knows the herd he speaks of? Any one who has been him in the town pastures? The hour has come when all must be made clear.

CHORUS:

I think he is the very herd you sent for but now; Jocasta can tell you better than I.

JOCASTA:

Why ask about that man? Why think about him? Why waste a thought on what this man has said? What he has said is of no account.

OEDIPUS:

What, with a clue like that in my hands and fail to find out my birth?

JOCASTA:

For God's sake, if you set any value upon your life, give up this search - my misery is enough.

OEDIPUS:

Though I be proved the son of a slave, yes, even of three generations of slaves, you cannot be made base-born.

JOCASTA:

Yet, hear me, I implore you. Give up this search.

OEDIPUS:

I will not hear of anything but searching the whole thing out.

JOCASTA:

I am only thinking of your good - I have advised you for the best.

OEDIPUS:

Your advice makes me impatient.

JOCASTA:

May you never come to know who you are, unhappy man!

OEDIPUS:

Go, some one, bring the herdsman here - and let that woman glory in her noble blood.

JOCASTA:

Alas, alas, miserable man! Miserable! That is all that I can call you now or for ever.

CHORUS:

Out of this silence will burst a storm of sorrows.

OEDIPUS:

Let come what will. However lowly my origin I will discover it. That woman, with all a woman's pride, grows red with shame at my base birth. I think myself the child of Good Luck, and that the years

are my foster-brothers. Sometimes they have set me up, and sometimes thrown me down, but he that has Good Luck for mother can suffer no dishonor. That is my origin, nothing can change it, so why should I renounce this search into my birth?

CHORUS:

Oedipus' nurse, mountain of many a hidden glen,  
Be honored among men;  
A famous man, deep-thoughted, and his body strong;  
Be honored in dance and song.  
Who met in the hidden glen? Who let his fancy run  
Upon nymph of Helicon?  
Lord Pan or Lord Apollo or the mountain lord  
By the Bacchantes adored?

OEDIPUS:

If I, who have never met the man, may venture to say so,  
I think that the herdsman we await approaches; his  
venerable age matches with this stranger's, and I recog-  
nize as servants of mine those who bring him. But you,  
if you have seen the man before, will know the man  
better than I.

CHORUS:

Yes, I know the man who is coming; he was indeed in  
Laius' service, and is still the most trusted of the  
herdsmen.

OEDIPUS:

I ask you first, Corinthian stranger, is this the man you  
mean?

MESSENGER:

He is the very man.

OEDIPUS:

Look at me, old man! Answer my questions. Were  
you once in Laius' service?

HERDSMAN:

I was: not a bought slave, but reared up in the house.

OEDIPUS:

What was your work - your manner of life?

HERDSMAN:

For the best part of my life I have tended flocks.

OEDIPUS:

Where, mainly?

HERDSMAN:

Cithaeron or its neighborhood.

OEDIPUS:

Do you remember meeting with this man there?

HERDSMAN:

What man do you mean?

OEDIPUS:

This man. Did you ever meet him?

HERDSMAN:

I cannot recall him to mind.

MESSENGER:

Come, tell me now - do you remember giving me a boy  
to rear as my own foster-son?

HERDSMAN:

What are you saying? Why do you ask me that?

MESSENGER:

Look at that man, my friend, he is the child you gave  
me.

HERDSMAN:

A plague upon you! Cannot you hold your tongue?

OEDIPUS:

Do not blame him old man; your own words are more  
blamable.

HERDSMAN:

And how have I offended, master?

OEDIPUS:

In not telling of that boy he asks of.

HERDSMAN:

He speaks from ignorance and does not know what he is  
saying.

OEDIPUS:

Did you give this man the child he speaks of?

HERDSMAN:

I did: would I had died that day!

OEDIPUS:

Well, you may come to that unless you speak the truth.

HERDSMAN:

Much more am I lost if I speak it.

OEDIPUS:

Where did you come by it? Your own child, or another?

HERDSMAN:

It was not my own child - I had it from another?

OEDIPUS:

From any of those here? From what house?

HERDSMAN:

Do not ask any more, master; for the love of God do not  
ask.

OEDIPUS:

You are lost if I have to question you again.

HERDSMAN:

It was a child from the house of Laius.



OEDIPUS:

A slave? Or one of his own race?

HERDSMAN:

Alas! I am on the edge of dreadful words.

OEDIPUS:

And I of hearing: yet hear I must.

HERDSMAN:

It was said to have been his own child. But your lady within can tell you of these things best.

OEDIPUS:

How? It was she who gave it to you?

HERDSMAN:

Yes, King.

OEDIPUS:

To what end?

HERDSMAN:

That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS:

Her own child?

HERDSMAN:

Yes: from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS:

What prophecies?

HERDSMAN:

That he should kill his father.

OEDIPUS:

O! O! All brought to pass! All truth! Now O light, may I look my last upon you, having been found accursed in bloodshed, accursed in marriage, and in my coming into the world accursed!

CHORUS:

Oedipus overcame the woman-breasted Fate;  
He seemed like a strong tower against Death  
and first among the fortunate;  
He sat upon the ancient throne of Thebes, and  
all men called him great.  
But, looking for a marriage-bed, he found the bed  
of his birth,  
Tilled the field his father had tilled, cast seed  
into the same abounding earth;  
Entered through the door that had sent him wailing  
forth.

Begetter and begot as one! How could that be hid?  
What darkness cover up that marriage-bed? Time  
watches, he is eagle-eyed,  
And all the works of man are known and every soul  
is tried.

Would you had never come to Thebes, nor to this house,  
Nor riddled with the woman-breasted Fate, beaten

off Death and succored us,  
That I had never raised this song, heartbroken Oedipus!

2nd MESSENGER:

Friends and kinsmen of this house! Jocasta, our Queen,  
is dead.

CHORUS:

Alas, miserable woman, how did she die?

2nd MESSENGER:

By her own hand. It cannot be as terrible to you as to one  
that saw it with his eyes, yet so far as words can serve,  
you shall see it. When she had come into the vestibule,  
she ran half crazed towards her marriage-bed, clutching  
at her hair with the fingers of both hands, and once within  
the chamber dashed the doors together behind her. Then  
called upon the name of Laius, long since dead, remembering  
that son who killed the father and upon the mother  
begot an accursed race. Then Oedipus with a shriek burst  
in and running here and there asked for a sword, asked  
where he would find the wife that was no wife but a mother  
who had borne his children and himself. Nobody answered  
him, we all stood dumb; but supernatural power helped  
him, for with a dreadful shriek, as though beckoned, he  
sprang at the double doors, drove them in, burst the bolts  
out of their sockets, and ran into the room. There we  
saw the woman hanging in a swinging halter, and with a  
terrible cry he loosened the halter from her neck. When  
that unhappiest woman lay stretched upon the ground, we  
saw another dreadful sight. He dragged the golden  
broaches from her dress and lifting them struck them  
upon his eyeballs, crying out, "You have looked enough  
upon those you ought never to have looked upon, failed  
long enough to know those that you should have known;  
hence-forth you shall be dark." He struck his eyes, not  
once, but many times, lifting his hands and speaking such  
or like words. The blood poured down and not with a  
few slow drops, but all at once over his beard in a dark  
shower as it were hail. The curtain is parting; you are  
going to look upon a sight which even those who shudder  
must pity.

OEDIPUS:

Woe, O God, Woe, is me! Miserable, miserable that I  
am? Where am I? Where am I going? Where am I  
cast away? Who hears my words? For all my pity I  
shudder and turn away. Come near, condescend to lay  
your hands upon a wretched man; listen, do not fear.  
My plague can touch no man but me. Hide me some-  
where out of this land for God's sake, or kill me, or  
throw me into the sea where you shall never look upon  
me more.

CHORUS:

Here Creon comes at a fit moment; you can ask of him  
what you will, help or counsel, for he is now in your  
place. He is King.

OEDIPUS:

What can I say to him? What can I claim, having been  
altogether unjust to him?

CREON:

I have not come in mockery.

OEDIPUS:

But do I hear them sobbing? Has Creon pitied me and sent  
my children, my darlings? Has he done this?

CREON:

Yes, I ordered it, for I know how greatly you have always loved them.

OEDIPUS:

Then may you be blessed, and may Heaven be kinder to you than it has been to me! My children, where are you? Come hither - hither - come to the hands of him whose mother was your mother; the hands that put out your father's eyes, eyes once as bright as your own; his who, understanding nothing, seeing nothing, became your father by her that bore him. What sorrows else? Your father killed his father, he begat you at the spring of his own being, offspring of her that bore him. That is the taunt that would be cast upon you and on the man that you should marry. That man is not alive; my children, you must wither away in barrenness. Ah, son of Menoeceus, listen. Seeing that you are the only father now left to them, for we their parents are lost, both of us lost, do not let them wander in beggary - are they not your own kindred? - do not let them sink down into my misery. No, pity them, seeing them utterly wretched in helpless childhood if you do not protect them. Show me that you promise, generous man, by touching me with your hand.

CREON:

Up - Pass into the house.

OEDIPUS:

I will obey, though upon conditions.

CREON:

Conditions?

OEDIPUS:

Banish me from this country. I know that nothing can destroy me, for I wait some incredible fate; yet cast me upon Cithaeron, chosen by my father and my mother for my tomb.

CREON:

Only the gods can say yes or no to that.

OEDIPUS:

No, for I am hateful to the gods.

CREON:

If that be so you will get your wish the quicker. They will banish that which they hate.

OEDIPUS:

Are you certain of that?

CREON:

I would not say it if I did not mean it.

OEDIPUS:

Then it is time to lead me within.

CREON:

Come, but let your children go.

OEDIPUS:

No, do not take them from me.

CREON:

Do not seek to be master; you won the mastery but could not keep it to the end.

CHORUS:

Make way for Oedipus. All people said,

"That is a fortunate man",

And now what storms are beating on his head!

Call no man fortunate that is not dead.

The dead are free from pain.