

A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION  
OF  
SOPHOCLES'S OEDIPUS THE KING

by

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## FOREWORD

When Thaspi stepped forth and became the first actor in 534 B. C., drama had its beginning as a technique of having actors tell a story to an audience. The Greek playwrights, including Sophocles, experimented with writing, added actors, and laid a foundation for theatre as we know it today. This play, Oedipus the King, is representative of this period of beginning and stands as one of the classics of world drama. With the presentation of the play the audience was given an insight into early theatre, the actors were given a challenge worthy of any high school student, and the director was awakened to the necessity of studying the history of drama.

The author's decision to do this play was based upon his desire to show to high school students and their parents what can be done above the level of the common, light comedies which are the most frequently produced plays in the secondary school of our country. It was the author's purpose to show an audience that theatre can be entertaining, if done well, regardless of when the script was written. Also, the author has always had a personal interest in the Greek tragedies and anticipated enjoyment in learning more about them. He knew that an extensive research would be necessary if he were to attempt such a weighty production, using high school students who would perform before an audience of people who were accustomed to lighter entertainment provided by motion pictures and television.

The author felt that the school in which he taught would have the facilities to do this play and that the people of the community would accept the play. The author believed that he could adequately cast the

people who would portray the characters created by Sophocles, and he knew that the school calendar would permit the five-week rehearsal schedule which he planned.

Finally, the author felt that the play would make a picturesque presentation, for the costumes and stage would be a distinct change from our modern plays. With all of these things influencing the author's judgment he proceeded with the plans for the production which finally became a reality May 15, 1959.

## THE PRODUCTION

## Directorial Concept and Approach

General. When the author commenced work on Oedipus the King, he knew that his first obstacle would be the attainment of a clear picture of that which he and the actors would present to the audience which would view the play. In Modern Theatre Practice can be found the approach which a director must take.

His first step is to determine as clearly as possible what approach he is going to make to the interpretation of the play; that is, what effect the playwright intended to produce and how the director is going to present the total production so as best to bring out this effect.<sup>1</sup>

The author realized that his work as a director, as a costume designer, and as a producer would come later, but his first task was to find the story of the play and the intent of Sophocles. In order to do this, it would be necessary to become familiar with the story which precedes the play. He found this information, written by Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr.

Oedipus the King, the first of the Theban saga, is perhaps the greatest of the Sophoclean tragedies. As we discover in the course of the drama, Oedipus's parents, Laius and Jocasta, had exposed him

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<sup>1</sup>Hubert Heffner, Samuel Selden, and Hulton D. Sellman, Modern Theatre Practice, p. 13.

at birth, but he had been reared by a shepherd and reared by Polybus and Merope, the king and queen of Corinth. Years later Oedipus had met Laius on a lonely road; they had not known each other and there had been a quarrel, with the younger man killing the elder. Oedipus had continued his journey to Thebes, where a monster oppressed the city. He had guessed the riddle of the Sphinx, the city had been relieved, and the grateful people had made him king. He had then married Jocasta, the widow of the late king. They had had children, the years had passed, and a plague had fallen upon Thebes. At this point the play opens.<sup>1</sup>

With this information guiding him the director of the play began to think about what he would present to his audience. He had a concept of the story, and now he must formulate a concept of the effect which he would attempt to present.

Plays have been defined in many ways; as "the stage presentation of a drama," or "a story in dialogue shown in action before an audience," or "an imitation of an action." None of these definitions sufficiently emphasize the fact that from the viewpoint of the theatre, the drama or the story written down in a manuscript or printed in a book, the lines to be spoken and the stage directions to be carried out, are not in the truest sense a play at all. They are rather the directions from which a play can be made. They become a play by being played, in the same way that a song comes into existence only as the printed words and notes are sung. This idea is the basis of the ancient maxim that "No play is a play until it is acted."

But, according to the modern conception, acting alone does not create a play; for a play is not merely an intellectual understanding of an incident gathered from the actions and the words of the actors. It is a far bigger thing. It is an impression made on the spectators by ideas, sounds, colors, movements, lines, and all the other elements that move one in the audience. It is an emotional reaction to these elements and to many others that are too subtle to be analyzed out of the total situation. In brief, a play is an effect made upon an audience.<sup>2</sup>

As the author became more sure of his concept of the play and that effect which he wished to bring to his audience, he cast the play, keeping

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<sup>1</sup>Robinson, op. cit., p. xdi.

<sup>2</sup>Milton Smith, Play Production, p. 3.



in mind the dramatic impact required by the script of the play and selecting students whom he felt would convey this impact.

When the play was cast and the author had become more familiar with the text of the play, the first rehearsal was held April 12, 1959. This gave the cast and the director a period of five weeks in which to prepare the play. The first rehearsal was held on a Sunday afternoon, with the purpose of familiarizing the cast with the script and answering questions concerning the story, the philosophy presented and pronunciation. The director felt that it was necessary that the first rehearsal be informal. Consequently, he met his cast for the first time to read the play and attempt to find relaxation and pleasure on a Sunday afternoon. He felt that a school day would not be as propitious for the purpose which was his primary objective at the first rehearsal.

Nothing is more important for success in a play production, both amateur and professional, than the conduct of rehearsals; and unfortunately this is one of the most difficult parts of the process. One can learn from a book how to organize for a performance, or how to make scenery, or the important facts about lighting. But rehearsing, like the teaching process, is a very subtle thing, depending almost entirely on the influence of one personality on another. A good director, like a good teacher of any other art or craft, must be the product of experience.

Nevertheless, there are certain suggestions that may be given; and the most important of these is the fact that the rehearsing of a play is a learning process for the actor--and for the director, too--and that, therefore, like all learning processes, it consists of a series of distinct and recognizable steps.<sup>1</sup>

The director had previously set his rehearsal schedule according to standard form, as described by Mr. Smith.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

There are, in my opinion, four distinct phases, or steps, which are discernible in any series of rehearsals, whether or not they are recognized by the persons involved. The sensible thing is to follow these steps consciously, and to make each one as sound as possible. They are:

1. Preliminary study, during which the actors should become familiar with the ideas of the play.
2. Blocking out the movement, or deciding and learning the entrances, exits, and changes of position.
3. Working out the details of characterization, or learning the roles and how to act them most effectively.
4. Working for finish, or pulling the whole play together to give unity and effectiveness of performance.<sup>1</sup>

At the first rehearsal on stage the director blocked the movement of the play for the convenience of time. It is his belief that students become tired after a period of two hours for most acting rehearsals, but for this play he felt that the students would tire more readily. Consequently, he limited his first four rehearsals to an hour. He found that the retention of the actors was much better than if he tried to keep them a longer period of time. After the actors became more familiar with the play, the director increased the rehearsal time to an hour and a half, and for the last two weeks of preparation he used a full two hours for rehearsals.

The author feels that it is advisable for any one attempting to present Greek drama in the high school to use students who are intellectually capable of understanding as well as memorizing the script of the play. It is not enough for an actor merely to memorize Greek drama. Far too

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 68.



many actors, in college as well as high school, fail to develop an understanding of the part which they are to portray. With this feeling on the part of an actor, the role will develop as a cold and inanimate repetition of words, and the audience will not be given any effect. The author felt that it was extremely important that his actors be intellectually qualified to interpret the characters in Oedipus the King, and he cast the play with this in mind.

The author knew that the three central characters, Oedipus, Creon, and Jocaste, would constitute the bulk of the acting load. Consequently, he sought two boys and a girl who could portray, with sincerity, the roles which Sophocles created over two thousand years ago. The author finally made his selection from his advanced speech class and chose three honor students who would be capable of memorizing with intellectual understanding and present the words as a message from a specific individual.

The Chorus presented another problem, for it is not an easy task to have eight high school students speak together in a language which is ancient and beyond the understanding of most of an audience. The author considered breaking the lines of the Chorus into individual speeches, in an attempt to ease the situation of direction, but he finally decided to accept the challenge of having the Chorus speak in unison, with eight voices contributing. This proved to be the greatest challenge to the author, and he felt fortunate that he had chosen eight students who could work together harmoniously.

The costumes for the play were comparatively simple and required little work in making them, for the Greek clothing consisted mostly of plain cloth, given form by the use of a belt or sash. The director

decided to use plain colors for his costumes, in an attempt to add unity without distraction of figured material. Also, the costumes were easily made, and the color scheme was easily kept, for dyeing was a simple matter in acquiring a color which would blend with the rest of the costumes. Black and white were used extensively for effect, and the director used pastel shades for everyone except Jocasta, whose rose-colored dress gave her the distinctness which the role requires, and Creon, whose majesty must never be minimized. The director desired to have Oedipus dressed in black and white, to blend with the Chorus, with whom he had so many scenes, but yet, he desired to have Oedipus dressed in regal splendor. Consequently, he used white satin for his clothing, with black accessories.

Technically, the play was easy to produce, for the stage and the costumes called for simplicity. Only the stylized acting and the uniformity of the Chorus presented major problems.

Direction. The director sought to attain uniformity of the stylized form of acting in this play, and each character was directed toward an accomplishment of this purpose. Oedipus must have a strong, forceful presentation, but yet, he must also have the pathetic quality which Sophocles created so well.

Now Oedipus, though of a hasty and impulsive temperament, with something too of proud self-assertion, cannot, broadly speaking, be said to have owed his ruin to any striking moral defect. His character was not the determining factor in his fortunes. He, if any man, was in a genuine sense the victim of circumstances. In slaying Laius he was probably in some degree morally culpable. But the act was done certainly after provocation, and possibly in self-defence. His life was a chain of errors, the most fatal of all being the marriage with his mother. All minor acts of ignorance culminated

here; and yet it was a purely unconscious offense to which no kind of blame attached.<sup>1</sup>

The director could not present Oedipus as a weakling or as a morally depraved person. He has committed a sin, but he has not done it because of his own convictions or moral beliefs. He is pathetic because he cannot prevent that which is to come. The director attempted to convey this effect to the audience. The tragic irony in the play was built by having Oedipus forceful and dominating in the beginning and slowly becoming more pathetic and lost under the burden of unfortunate circumstances. His final scene with Creon, after he has blinded himself, was accepted by the director as a tragic conclusion which the audience had seen much earlier. The two daughters, Ismene and Antigone, were used by the director to point up the pity of the tragic central character. In the production the daughters knelt, one on each side of Oedipus, and cried at the sight of the misery of their father and brother. Creon was used by the director to add to the finality of the misfortune of Oedipus. Creon stands, in all of his regal splendor, and reminds Oedipus of his defeat.

Aristotle believed that tragedy was an ideal means of presenting the emotions of pity and fear, and the director attempted this effect in his production. S. H. Butcher describes Aristotle's opinion of tragedy. "Tragedy, he would say, is a vent for the particular emotions of pity and fear."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

In recognizing the emotions of pity and fear, the director attempted to build in the character of Oedipus the fear which was conducive to creating an effect of pity in the minds of the audience. At the beginning of the play Oedipus is strong and forceful, until fear fills him when he first believes that he may be at fault concerning the plague which has obsessed his city. Without the recognition of this fear the audience will not feel pity for Oedipus as the story unfolds.

Thus in psychological analysis fear is the primary emotion from which pity derives its meaning. Its basis is a self-regarding instinct; it springs from the feeling that a similar suffering may happen to ourselves. It has in it a latent and potential fear.<sup>1</sup>

The director used each strophs and antistrophs to move his Chorus about the stage and to add balance to the stage. The one platform on the stage, covered with a black cloth to accentuate the white robes of the Chorus and the white costumes of Oedipus, was used to break the levels and add to the message of the play. When Oedipus was in doubt, in fear, or in misery, he would sit upon the platform and allow others in the play to stand above him. In this way the director was able to emphasize the fear which Oedipus felt and build toward the pity which the audience feels later. When Oedipus was certain of his power, as he is at first with Creon, the director promenaded him about the stage as he exercises his power. In this way the director allows the audience to know that this great figure is not morally weak but is caught by circumstance.

The role of Teirrasias was interpreted as being fearful but not weak, and the boy who played the role was reclining at first when he knew the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

answers to the questions which Oedipus asked, but he was dominant and forceful when forced to speak. His blindness tended to give him dignity and power rather than weakness, and the director strived to bring this effect to the audience.

The role of Creon was presented as a masterful figure who is forced to subjugation at first but later attains the regal force which is rightfully his. At no point was he inferior to Oedipus. At the beginning of the play he accepts the rightful domination of Oedipus, but he does not permit himself to be dominated, for his character must be as strong as that of his brother-in-law. At one time in the play Jocasta enters to make peace between the two and ease the coercion which has arisen from their conflict of personalities. Creon is the only character in the play who continually is equal to Oedipus in strength of character, and the director sought to keep this equality at all times. Even the wife, Jocasta, never approaches the regal splendor of her husband. She was presented as an interloper between the two strong forces and as the means by which the story is told to the audience.

Aristotle defined tragedy, "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the director attempted to keep the magnitude of the action. He did this with the interpretation of Oedipus as a pathetic individual who seeks, with all sincerity, the solution of a problem which faces his people. As the rightful ruler, it is his obligation to find an answer. If Oedipus is presented

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 240.



at any time as a weak character, then the magnitude of the role would be lost, and the tragic element would be minimized. The director attempted to present Oedipus as a human being, caught in the unfortunate circumstances which he could not prevent. If he had been presented as weak or immoral, then the pity could have not been gained for him at the conclusion of the play, and the intent of Sophocles would have been lost. Sophocles, unlike most of the playwrights of his day, did not consider himself as a teacher or a religious authority. Instead, he merely tried to show what effect the circumstances of life had upon the life of man.

Certainly Sophocles (ca. 496-406 B. C.) did not consciously regard himself as a teacher or an innovator in religious matters; in his plays the gods had a conventional role and he presented as normal their more appealing aspects. The real concern of Sophocles was the human fortunes of his characters. This inevitably grew out of his background, for as a man of wealth and education, who had been born in the fashionable Athenian suburb of Colonus, he served the state in various capacities and mingled with all classes of people. In the year 443 B. C., for example, Pericles appointed him chief treasurer during a reorganization of the Athenian empire; and three years later, having meanwhile produced the *Antigone*, he was a general under Pericles in the Samian War. As a poet, Sophocles was chiefly interested in what effect life has upon a man's character and soul.<sup>1</sup>

The director attempted to present Oedipus as human, with all of the emotional reactions of any person who might be caught in his position. It was Sophocles's intent that his characters, particularly his protagonists, be typical of universal human nature. S. H. Butcher states, that "the characters of Sophocles answer to the higher dramatic requirements; they are typical of universal human nature in its deeper and abiding respects; they are ideal, but ideally human."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robinson, op. cit., pp. xi-xii.

<sup>2</sup>Butcher, op. cit., p. 371.



It was the directors interpretation that Oedipus was endowed with all of the requisites of a good kind, but he was beset by uncontrollable circumstances. He was sincerely interested in the welfare of his people, he was righteous, and he was willing to abide by that which he felt was just. However, he became enmeshed in circumstancee over which he had no control.

Oedipus was proverbial for two things--sagacity and atrocious misfortune. Greek popular wisdom had it that if a man were careful and prudent, he would avoid trouble. Of all men, Oedipus should have succeeded, but of all men he particularly did not. Oedipus remains a type of human ability condemned to destruction by an external insufficiency in life itself.<sup>1</sup>

The director further attempted to show Oedipus as being a mighty ruler, but one who possessed the tender emotions to warrant sympathy from the audience. R. C. Jebb states, "Sophocles surveyed the spectacle of life with less prepossession and with a more tender sympathy."<sup>2</sup> By presenting Oedipus as a dominant character, but possessing the qualities of a person who warranted sympathy and pity, the audience witnesses the misfortune of a man for whom they can feel sorry. It is mandatory that the audience like Oedipus as a person, or the entire purpose of Sophocles is destroyed.

The director felt fortunate that he had high school students who could intellectually comprehend the message which they were trying to present. In this way the director could fulfill the obligations which faced him without abusing courtesy and good manners during the rehearsals.

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<sup>1</sup>Cedric H. Whitman, Sophocles, pp. 122-123.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. Jebb, Classical Greek Poetry, p. 182.

The director, then, of a nonprofessional theatre organization today must be a versatile and accomplished person. His position will require of him not only knowledge and training in the arts of production and directing, but also ability in organization and management, qualities of leadership, and a forceful as well as pleasing personality. He should be an individual who commands the respect of his co-workers and inspires their confidence. The statement has been made by an eminent English critic that it is only those ignorant directors of weak personality who have to resort to shouting at and abusing the members of their casts. Certainly a director who knows thoroughly what he is doing and has the ability to impart this knowledge to others does not have to resort to such means to accomplish his purpose with intelligent people. Courtesy and good manners are just as necessary and charming in the theatre as in the drawing room.<sup>1</sup>

How well the director attained the stipulations set forth in the preceding paragraph could only be determined by the cast. It was, at least, the director's attempt to rely upon all of the training and experience which he had known in the past.

The Performance. The director does not claim that the audience comprehended the entirety of the story which unfolded before them, but it is the assumption of the director that they could follow the story. It is certainly the hope of the director that the people who witnessed the production have a better concept of that which gave theatre its beginning. At the performance the director talked to the audience before the play commenced and explained to them his purpose in presenting the play. He also explained some of the story which precedes the action of the play and gave introductory remarks which he felt would help them to understand the plot of the play.

The Oedipus complex is so common in modern psychiatry that it is a part of our every day education, and the director is certain that at least

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<sup>1</sup>Heffner, Selden, and Sellman, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

the audience has a better understanding of the term and how psychiatrists gave it its name. The director received much education from the production after expending a great deal of time in doing research in order to familiarize himself with Greek theatre, the actors gained experience in acting and an understanding of the beginning of drama, and the audience was educated, if not completely, at least partially. These were the objectives of the director, and he was pleased with the final results.

#### LIGHTING

For lighting of Oedipus the King the director used partially dimmed overhead striplights and red, blue, amber, and white footlights, with separate controls for each color. For Jocasta's prayer, beginning with the cue "Princes of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrine of the gods, with this wreathed branch in my hands, and these gifts of incense," the overhead lights were cut, the white and amber footlights were cut, and a blue spotlight was used. At the completion of her prayer the lights were brought back up, and the spotlight was cut.

At the conclusion of the Second Messenger's speech on the cue of "For lo, the bars of the gates are withdrawn, and soon thou shalt behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity," all lights were cut, and a blue floodlight and an amber floodlight were used until Creon's speech on the last page. "Crave not to be master in all things: for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life" was the cue for cutting the floodlights, and a blue spotlight was used for the Chorus's final speech. As the Chorus spoke,

Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a man most mighty; on whose fortunes what citizen did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come!

Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.

they moved to stage center, where they raised their arms and asked that each mortal learn a lesson from the tragic Oedipus. Their arms remained raised, the spotlight dimmed until there was nothing but darkness, and the curtain closed.

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<sup>1</sup>Starts down steps.

<sup>2</sup>Crosses to Oedipus.

## OEDIPUS THE KING

(SCENE:--Before the royal palace of Oedipus at Thebes. In front of the large central doors there is an altar. Suppliants--old men, youths, and young children--are seated on the steps of the altars. They are dressed in white tunics and cloaks,--their hair bound with white fillets. On the altars they have laid down olive-branches wreathed with fillets of wool. THE PRIEST OF ZEUS, a venerable man, is alone standing, facing the central doors of the palace. These are now thrown open. Oedipus enters, in the robes of a king. For a moment he gazes silently on the groups at the altars, and then speaks.)

## OEDIPUS

My children, latest-born to Cadmus who was of old, why are ye set before me thus with wreathed branches of suppliants, while the city reeks with incense, rings with prayers for health and cries of woe? I deemed it unmeet, my children, to hear these things at the mouth of others, and have come hither myself, I, Oedipus renowned of all.

Tell me, then, thou venerable man--since it is thy natural part to speak for these--in what mood are ye placed here, with what dread or what desire? Be sure that I would gladly give all aid; hard of heart were I, did I not pity such suppliants as these.

## PRIEST OF ZEUS

Nay,<sup>1</sup> Oedipus, ruler of my land, thou seest of what years we are who beset thine altars, some, bowed with age; priests, as I of Zeus,--and those, the chosen youth;<sup>2</sup> while the rest of the fold sit with wreathed branches in the market-places, and before the two shrines of Pallas, and where Ismenus gives answer by fire.

<sup>1</sup>Turns and crosses down right.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Crosses to Oedipus.

<sup>4</sup>Crosses closer to Oedipus.

<sup>5</sup>Crosses right.

<sup>6</sup>Turn and cross left.

For the city,<sup>1</sup> as thou thyself seest, is now too sorely vexed, and can no more lift her head from beneath the angry waves of death;<sup>2</sup> a blight is on her in the fruitful blossoms of the land, in the herds among the pastures, in the barren pangs of women; and withal the flaming god,<sup>3</sup> the malign plague, has swooped on us, and ravages the town; by whom the house of Cadmus is made waste.

It is not as deeming thee ranked with gods that I and these children are suppliants at thy hearth, but as deeming thee first of men, both in life's common chances, and when mortals have to do with more than man: seeing that thou camest to the town of Cadmus, and didst quit us of the tax that we rendered to the hard songstress; and this, though thou knewest nothing from us that could avail thee, nor hadst been schooled; no, by a god's aid, 'tis said and believed, didst thou uplift our life.

And now,<sup>4</sup> Oedipus, king glorious in all eyes, we beseech thee, to find for us some succour, whether by the whisper of a god thou knowest it, or haply as in the power in man; for I see that, when men have been proved in deeds past, the issues of their counsels, too, most often have effected.

On, best of mortals, again uplift our State! On, guard thy fame,-- since now this land calls thee saviour for thy former zeal; and never be it our memory of thy reign that we were first restored and afterward cast down:<sup>5</sup> nay, lift up this State in such wise that it fall no more!

#### OEDIPUS

Oh my piteous children, known, well known to me are the desires wherewith ye have come; yet, sufferers as ye are,<sup>6</sup> there is not one of you whose suffering is as mine. Your pain comes on each one of you for himself alone,

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Crosses back to original position.

<sup>3</sup>Crosses to Priest.

<sup>4</sup>Crosses to Creon.

and for no other; but my soul mourns at once for the city, and for myself, and for thee.<sup>1</sup>

Be sure that I have wept full many tears, gone many ways in wanderings of thought. And the sole remedy which, well pondering, I could find, this I have put into act.<sup>2</sup> I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, mine own wife's brother, to the Pythian house of Phoebus, to learn by what deed or word I might deliver this town. And already, when the lapse of days is reckoned, it troubles me what he doth; for he tarries strangely.<sup>3</sup> But when he comes, then shall I be no true man if I do not all that the god shows.

PRIEST

Nay, in season hast thou spoken; at this moment these sign to me that Creon draws near.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

(Enter Creon) Prince, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus, what news hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON

Good news: I tell thee that even troubles hard to bear,--if haply they find the right issue,--will end in perfect peace.

OEDIPUS

But what is the oracle? So far, thy words make me neither bold nor yet afraid.

CREON

If thou wouldest hear while these are nigh, I am ready to speak; or else to go within.



<sup>1</sup>Crosses left.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Crosses to Creon.

<sup>4</sup>Crosses to in front of Chorus.

## OEDIPUS

Speak before all: the sorrow which I bear is for these more than for mine own life.

## CREON

With thy leave, I will tell what I heard from the god.<sup>1</sup> Phoebus our lord bids us plainly to drive out a defiling thing, which<sup>2</sup> (he saith) hath been harboured in this land, and not to harbour it, so that it cannot be healed.

## OEDIPUS

<sup>3</sup>By what rite shall we cleanse us? What is the manner of the misfortune.

## CREON

By banishing a man, or by bloodshed in quittance of bloodshed, since it is that blood which brings the tempest on our city.

## OEDIPUS

And who is the man whose fate he thus reveals?

## CREON

Laius, king, was lord of our land before thou was pilot of this state.

## OEDIPUS

I know it well--by hearsay, for I saw him never.

CREON<sup>4</sup>

He was slain; and the god now bids us plinly to wreak vengeance on his murderers--whosoever they be.

## OEDIPUS

And where are they upon the earth? Where shall the dim track of this old crime be found?

<sup>1</sup>Turns to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Crosses to Creon

<sup>3</sup>Crosses down left.

<sup>4</sup>Crosses to center.

CREON

In this land,<sup>1</sup>—said the god. What is sought for can be caught; only that which is not watched escapes.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

And was it in the house, or in the field, or on strange soil that Laius met this bloody end?

CREON

'Twas on a visit to Delphi, as he said, that he had left our land; and he came home no more, after he had once set forth.

OEDIPUS

And was there none to tell? Was there no comrade of his journey who saw the deed, from whom tidings might have been gained, and used?

CREON

All perished, save one who fled in fear, and could tell for certain but one thing of all that he saw.

OEDIPUS

And what was that? One thing might show the clue to many, could we get but a small beginning for hope.

CREON<sup>3</sup>

He said that robbers met and fell on them, not in one man's might, but with full many hands.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Now, then, unless there was some trafficking in bribes from here, should the robber have dared thus far?

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>4</sup>Stop.

CREON<sup>1</sup>

Such things were surmised; but, Laius once slain, amid our troubles  
no avenger aross.

## OEDIPUS

But, when royalty had fallen thus, what trouble in your path can have  
hindered a full search?

## CREON

The riddling Sphinx had made us let dark things go, and was inviting  
us to think of what lay at our doors.

## OEDIPUS

On behalf of no far-off friend, no,<sup>2</sup> but in mine own cause, shall I  
dispel this taint. For whoever was the slayer of Laius might wish to take  
vengeance on me also with a hand as fierce.

Come, haste ye, my children, rise from the altar-steps and lift these  
suppliant boughs; and let some other summon hither the folk of Cadmus,  
warned that I mean to leave nought untried; for, for our health (with the  
god's help) shall be made certain--or our ruin.

## PRIEST

My children, let us rise;<sup>3</sup> we came at first to seek what this man  
promises of himself.<sup>4</sup> And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles, come to us  
therewith, our saviour and deliverer from the pest. (Exeunt Oedipus and  
Priest. Enter Chorus of Theban Elders.)

## CHORUS (singing)

## strophe 1

O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit had thou come from  
golden Pytho unto glorious Thebes? I am on the rack, terror shakes my soul.



<sup>1</sup>Cross to up left.

<sup>2</sup>Lift hands.

<sup>3</sup>Hands down.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to semi-circle left.

<sup>5</sup>Lift hands.

<sup>6</sup>Hands down and turn.

What thing thou wilt work for me, perchance unknown before, perchance renewed with the revolving years: Tell me, thou immortal Voice, born of Golden Hope.<sup>1</sup>

antistrophe 1

First call I on thee, daughter of Zeus, divine Athena, and on thy sister, guardian of our land, Artemis, who sits on her throne of fame, above the circle of our Agora, and on Phoebus the fardarter: O shine forth on me, my three-fold help against death! If ever aforetime, in arrest of ruin hurrying on the city, ye drove a fiery pest beyond our borders, come now also!

Woe is me,<sup>2</sup> countless are the sorrows that I bear,<sup>3</sup> a plague is on all our host, and thought can find no weapon for defence. The fruits of the glorious earth grow not; and life on life mayest thou see sped like bird on nimble wing, aye, swifter than resistless fire, to the shore of the western god.<sup>4</sup>

antistrophe 2

By such deaths, past numbering, the city perishes: unpitied, her children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence, with none to mourn: and meanwhile young wives, and grey-haired mothers with them, uplift a wail at the steps of the altars, The prayer to the Healer rings clear, and blent therewith, the voice of lamentation,<sup>5</sup> for these things, golden daughter of Zeus, send us the bright face of comfort.<sup>6</sup>

strophe 2

And grant that the fierce god of death, who now with no brazen shields, yet amid ories as of battle, wraps me in the flame of his onset, may turn his back in speedy flight from our land.

## OEDIPUS

Thou prayest: and in answer to thy prayer,--thou mayest hope to find succour and relief from woes. Their words will I speak publicly, as one who has been a stranger to this report, a stranger to the deed; for I should not be far on the track, if I were tracing it alone, without a clue. But as it is,--since it was only after the time of the deed that I was numbered a Theban among Thebans,--to you, the Cadmeans all, I do thus proclaim.

Whosoever of you knows by whom Laius was slain, I bid him to declare all to me. And if he is afraid, I tell him to remove the danger of the charge from his path by denouncing himself; for he shall suffer nothing else unlovely, but only leave the land, unhurt.

But if ye keep silence--hear ye what I then shall do. I charge that no one of this land, whereof I hold the empire and the throne, give shelter or speak word unto that murderer, whosoever he be,--make him partner of his prayer or sacrifice, or serve him with the lustral rite; but that all ban him their homes, knowing that this is our defiling thing, as the oracle of the Pythian god hath newly shown me. I pray solemnly that the slayer, whoso he be, whether his hidden guilt is lonely or hath partners, evilly, as he is evil, may wear out his unblissed life. And for myself I pray that if, with my privacy, he should become an inmate of my house, I may suffer the same things which even now I called down upon others. And on you I lay it to make all these words good, for my sake, and for the sake of the god, and for our lands, thus blasted with barrenness by angry heaven.

It was not meet that ye should leave the guilt thus unpurged, when one so noble, and he your king, had perished; and now, since 'tis I who hold the powers which once he held, who possess his bed and the wife who bare

<sup>1</sup>Cross to right.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

seed to him; and since, had his hope of issue not been frustrate, o children born of one mother would have made ties betwixt him and me--but, as it was, fate swooped upon his head; by reason of these things will I uphold this cause, even as the cause of mine own sire, and will leave nought untried in seeking to find him whose land shed that blood.

LEADER<sup>1</sup>

As thou hast put me on my oath, on my oath, O King, I will speak. I am not the slayer, nor can I point to him who slew. As for the question, it was for Phoebus, who sent it, to tell us this thing--who can have wrought the deed.

OEDIPUS

Justly said, but no man on the earth can force the gods to what they will not.

LEADER<sup>2</sup>

I would fain say what seems to me next best after this.

OEDIPUS

If there is yet a third course, spare not to show it.

LEADER

I know that our lord Teiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus; from whom, O King, a searcher of these things might learn them most clearly.

OEDIPUS

Not even this have I left out of my cares. On the hint of Creon, I have twice sent a man to bring him; and this long while I marvel why he is not here.

<sup>1</sup>Cross up left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross up left center.

LEADER

Indeed the rumours are but faint and old.

OEDIPUS

What rumours are they? I look to every store.

LEADER

Certain wayfarers were said to have killed him.

OEDIPUS

I, too, have heard it, but none seems him who saw it.

LEADER<sup>1</sup>

Nay, if he knows what fear is, he will not stay when he hears thy ouses,  
so dire as they are.

OEDIPUS

When a man shrinks not from a deed, neither is he scared by a word.

LEADER

But there is one to convince him.<sup>2</sup> For here they bring at last the  
godlike prophet, in whom alone of men doth live the truth.

(Enter Teiresias, led by a boy from temple)

BOY

I brought--here is the wise Teiresias whom thou seekest.

OEDIPUS

Teiresias, whose soul grasps all things, thou feelest, though thou  
canst not see, what a plague doth haunt our State,--from which, great pro-  
phet, we find in thee our protector and only saviour. Now, Phoebus--if  
indeed thou knowest it not from the messengers--send answer to our question  
that the only riddance from this pest which could come was if we should  
learn aright the slayers of Laius, and slay them, or send them into exile

<sup>1</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Teiregias.



from our land. Do thou, then, grudge neither voice or birds nor any other way of sesh-lore that thou hast, but rescue thyself and the State, rescue me, rescue all that is defiled by the dead. For we are in thy hand; and man's noblest task is to help others by his best means and powers.

TEIRESIAS

Alas, how dreadful to have wisdom where it profits not the wise! Aye, I knew this well, but let it slip out of mind; else would I never have come here.

OEDIPUS

What now? How sad thou hast come in!

TEIRESIAS

Let me go home; most easily wilt thou bear thine own burden to the end; and I mine, if thou wilt consent.

OEDIPUS

Thy words are strange when thou withholdest this response.

TEIRESIAS

May, I see that thou, on thy part, openest not thy lips in season;<sup>1</sup> therefore I speak not, that neither may I have thy mishap.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

For the love of the gods, turn not away, if thou hast knowledge: all we suppliants implore thee on our knees.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, for we are all without knowledge; but never will I reveal my griefs-- that I say not thine.

OEDIPUS

How sayest thou? Thou knewest the secret, and wilt not tell it, but art minded to betray us and to destroy the State?

<sup>1</sup>Cross right.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Teiresias.

## TEIRESIAS

I will pain neither myself nor thee. Why vainly ask these things?  
Thou wilt not learn them from me.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

What, basest of the base, wilt thou never speak out? Can nothing touch  
thee? Wilt thou never make an end?

TEIRESIAS<sup>2</sup>

I will speak no further; rage, then, if thou wilt, with the fiercest  
wrath thy heart doth know.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

Aye, verily, I will not spare--so wroth am I--to speak all my thought.  
Know that thou seemest to me e'en to have helped in plotting the deed, and  
to have done it, short of slaying with thy hands. Hadst thou eyesight, I  
would have said that the doing, also, of this thing was thine alone.

## TEIRESIAS

In sooth? I charge thee that thou abide by the decree of thine own  
mouth, and from this day speak neither to these nor to me: thou art the  
accursed defiler of this land.

## OEDIPUS

So brazen with thy blustering taunt? And wherein dost thou trust to  
escape thy due?

## TEIRESIAS

I have escaped: in my mouth is my strength.

## OEDIPUS

Who taught thee this? It was not, at least, thine art.

<sup>1</sup>Cross down center.

<sup>2</sup>Turns back.

TEIRESIAS

Thou: for thou didst spur me into speech against my will.

OEDIPUS

What speech? Speak again that I may learn it better.

TEIRESIAS

Didst thou not take my sense before? Or art thou tempting me to talk?

OEDIPUS

No, I took it not so that I can call it known. Speak again.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou art the slayer of the man whose slayer thou seekest.

OEDIPUS

Now thou shalt rue that thou twice said words so dire.

TEIRESIAS

Wouldst thou have me say more, that thou mayest be more wroth?

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

What thou wilt; it will be said in vain.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou hast been living in unguessed shame with thy nearest kin, and seest not to what woe thou hast come.

OEDIPUS

Dost thou indeed think that thou shalt always speak thus without smarting?

TEIRESIAS

Yes, if there is any strength in truth.<sup>2</sup>

OEDIPUS

Nay, there is--for all save thee; for thee that strength is not, since thou art maimed in ear, and in wit, and in eye.

<sup>1</sup>Cross in a few steps.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>3</sup>Cross in a few steps.

<sup>4</sup>Turn.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Teiresias.

<sup>6</sup>Turn.

## TEIRESIAS

Aye,<sup>1</sup> and thou art a poor wretch to utter taunts which every man here will soon hurl at thee.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Night, endless night hath thee in her keeping, so that thou canst never hurt me, or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS<sup>3</sup>

No, thy doom is not to fall by me: Apollo is enough, whose care it is to work that out.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Are these Creon's devices, or thine?

## TEIRESIAS

May, Creon is no plague to thee; thou art thine own.

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

Come now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher was here who wove dark song, didst thou say nothing that could free this folk? Yes the riddle, at least, was not for the first comer to read; there was need of a seer's skill; and none such thou wast found to have either by held of birds, or as known from any god; no, I came, I Oedipus, the ignorant, and made her mute, when I had seized the answer by my wit, untaught of birds. And it is I whom thou art trying to oust, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne.<sup>6</sup> Me thinks thou and the plotter of these things will rue your zeal to purge the land. Nay, didst thou not seem to be an old man, thou shouldst have learned to thy cost how bold thou art.



<sup>1</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>2</sup>Cross left.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Teiresias.

## LEADER

To our thinking, both this man's words and thine, Oedipus, have been said in anger. Not for such words is our need, but to seek how we shall best discharge the mandates of the god.

TEIRESIAS<sup>1</sup>

King, though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord. Not to thee do I live servant, but to Loxias; and so I shall not stand enrolled under Cræon for my patron. And I tell thee--since thou hast taunted me even with blindness--that thou hast sight, yet seest not in what misery thou art, nor where thou dwellest, nor with whom. Dost thou know of what stock thou art? And thou hast been an unwitting foe to thy own kin, in the shades, and on the earth above; and the double lash of thy mother's and thy father's curse shall one day drive thee from this land in dreadful haste, with darkness then on the eyes that now see true.<sup>2</sup>

And what place shall not be harbour to thy shriek, what of all Cithæron shall not ring with it soon, when thou hast learnt the meaning of the nuptials in which, within that house, thou didst find a fatal haven?<sup>3</sup> And a throng of other ill thou guessest not. No one among men shall ever be crushed more miserably than thou.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Are these taunts to be indeed borne from him? Back--away--! Avaunt thee from these doors!

## TEIRESIAS

I had never come, not I, hadst thou not called me.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to center and face down stage.

## OEDIPUS

I knew not that thou wast about to speak folly, or it had been long ere I had sent for thee to my house.

## TEIRESIAS

Such am I,--as thou thinkest, a fool; but for the parents who begat thee, sane.

## OEDIPUS

What Parents? Stay...and who of men is my sire?

## TEIRESIAS

The man of whom thou hast this long while been in quest, uttering threats, and proclaiming, a search into the murder of Laius--that man is here. A blind man, he who now hath sight, a beggar, who now is rich, he shall make his way to a strange land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he shall be found at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; heir to his father's bed, shedder of his father's blood. So go thou in and think on that; and if thou find that I have been at fault, say thenceforth that I have no wit in prophecy.

(Teiresias is led out by the boy. Oedipus enters the palace.)

## CHORUS

strophe 1<sup>1</sup>

Who is he of whom the divine voice from the Delphian rook hath spoken, as having wrought with red hands horrors that no tongue can tell?

It is time that he ply in flight a foot stronger than the feet of storm-swift steeds: for the son of Zeus is springing on him, all armed with fiery lightnings, and with him come the dread, unerring Fates.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to semi-circle down right.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Turn upstage.

antistrophe 1<sup>1</sup>

Yea, the message hath flashed forth to make all search for the unknown man. Into the wild wood's covert, among caves and rocks he is roaming, fierce as a bull, wretched and forlorn on his joyless path, still seeking to put from him the doom spoken at Earth's central shrine.

strophe 2<sup>2</sup>

How I speak, I know not; I am fluttered with forebodings; neither in the present have I clear vision, nor of the future. Never in past days, nor in these, have I heard how the house of Labdaous or the son of Polybus had, any grief that I could bring as proof in assailing the public fame of Oedipus, and weeping to avenge the line of Labdaous for the undiscovered murder.

antistrophe 2<sup>3</sup>

Nay, Zeus indeed and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test; though man may surpass man in lore. Yes, until I see the word made good, never will I assent when men blame Oedipus. Before all eyes, the winged maiden came against him of old, and he was seen to be wise; he bore the test, in welcome service to our State: never, therefore, by the verdict of my heart shall he be adjudged guilty of crime.

(Enter Creon)

## CREON

Fellow-citizens, having learned that Oedipus the king lays dire charge against me, I am here, indignant. If, in the present troubled, he thinks that he has suffered from me, by word or deed, aught that tends to harm, in truth I crave not my full term of years, when I must bear such blame

<sup>1</sup>Cross left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Oedipus.



as this. The wrong of this rumour touches me not in one point alone, but has the largest scope, if I am to be called a traitor in the city, a traitor too by thee and by my friends.

LEADER

Nay, but this taunt came under stress, perchance, of anger, rather than from the purpose of the heart.

CREON

And the saying was uttered, that my counsels won the seer to utter his falsehoods?

LEADER

Such things were said--I know not with what meaning.

CREON<sup>1</sup>

And was this charge laid against me with steady eyes and steady mind?

LEADER

I know not; I see not what my masters do: but here comes our lord forth from the house.

(Enter Oedipus)

OEDIPUS

Sirrah, how camest thou here? Hast thou a front so bold that thou hast come to my house, who art the proved assassin of its master--the palpable robber of my crown? Come, tell me, in the name of the gods, was it cowardice or folly that thou sawest in me, that thou didst plot to do this thing?

CREON

Mark me now<sup>2</sup>--in answer to thy words, hear a fair reply, and then judge for thyself on knowledge.

OEDIPUS

If thou deemest that thou canst wrong a kinsman and escape the penalty,  
thou art not sane.

CREON

Justly said, I grant thee: but tell me what is the wrong that thou  
hast suffered from me.

OEDIPUS

Didst thou advise, or didst thou not, that I should send for that  
reverend seer?

CREON

And now I am still of the same mind.

OEDIPUS

How long is it, then, since Laius--.

CREON

Since Laius...? I take not thy drift...

OEDIPUS

---was swept from men's sight by a deadly violence?

CREON

The count of years would run far into the past.

OEDIPUS

Was this seer, then, of the craft in those days?

CREON

Yea, skilled as now, and in equal honour.

OEDIPUS

Made he, then, the mention of me at that time?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Turns away from Creon.

CREON

Never, certainly, when I was within hearing?

OEDIPUS

But held ye not a search touching the murder?

CREON

Dus search we held, of course--and learned nothing.

OEDIPUS

And how was it that this sage did not tell his story then?

CREON

I know not;<sup>1</sup> where I lack light, 'tis my wont to be silent.

OEDIPUS

Thus much, at least, thou knowest, and couldst declare with light enough.

CREON<sup>2</sup>

What is that? If I know it, I will not deny.

OEDIPUS

That, if he had not conferred with thee, he would never have named my slaying of Laius.

CREON

If so he speaks, thou best knowest; but I claim to learn from thee as much as thou hast now from me.

OEDIPUS

Learn thy fill:<sup>3</sup> I shall never be found guilty of the blood.

CREON

Say, then--thou hast married my sister?

<sup>1</sup>Turns in to Creon.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>3</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>4</sup>Turn.

<sup>5</sup>Cross left.

<sup>6</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

OEDIPUS

The question allows not of denial.

CREON

And thou rulest the land as she doth, with like sway?

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

She obtains from me all her desire.

CREON

And rank not I as a third peer of you twain?

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'tis just therein that thou art seen a false friend.

CREON

Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thine own heart as I with mine.<sup>2</sup>

And first weight this--whether thou thinkest that any one would choose to rule amid terrors rather than in unruffled peace,--granting that he is to have the same powers.<sup>3</sup> Now I, for one, have no yearning in my nature to be a king rather than to do kingly deeds, no, nor hath any man who knows how to keep a sober mind.<sup>4</sup> For now I win all boons from thee without fear; but, were I ruler myself, I should be doing much e'en against mine own pleasure.

Now, then,<sup>5</sup> could royalty be sweeter for me to have than painless rule and influence? Now, all wish me joy; now, every man has a greeting for me; now, those who have a suit to thee crave speech with me, since therein is all their hope of success. Then why should I resign these things, and take those? And,<sup>6</sup> in proof of this, first go to Pytho, and ask if I brought thee true word of the oracle; then next, if thou find that I have planned aught in concert with the soothsayer, take and slay me.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Leader.



## LEADER

Well hath he spoken, O king, for one who giveth heed not to fall: the quick in counsel are not sure.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

When the stealthy plotter is moving on me in quick sort, I, too, must be quick with my counterplot. If I await him in repose, his ends will have been gained, and mine missed.

## CREON

What wouldst thou, then? Cast me out of the land?

## OEDIPUS

Not so: I desire thy death--not thy banishment--that thou mayest show forth what manner of this is envy.

## CREON

Thou speakest as resolved not to yield or to believe?

## OEDIPUS

No; for thou persuadest me not that thou art worthy of belief?

## CREON

No, for I find thee not sane.

## OEDIPUS

Sane, at least, in mine own interest.

## CREON

May, thou shouldst be so in mine also.

## OEDIPUS

May, thou art false.

## CREON

But if thou understandest nought?

<sup>1</sup>Cross left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Creon.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Jocasta.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Jocasta.

OEDIPUS

Yet must I rule.

CREON

Not if thou rule ill.

OEDIPUS

Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON<sup>1</sup>

Thebes is for me also--not for thee alone.

(Jocasta enters from the palace.)

LEADER

Cease, princes; and in good time for you I see Jocasta coming yonder from the house, with whose help ye should compose your present feud.

JOCASTA

Misguided men, why have ye raised such foolish strife of tongues? Are ye not ashamed,<sup>2</sup> while the land is thus sick, to stir up troubles of your own? Come,<sup>3</sup> go thou into the house,--and thou, Creon, to thy home,--and forbear to make much of a petty grief.

CREON

Kinswoman,<sup>4</sup> Oedipus thy lord claims to do dread things unto me, even one or other of two ills,--to thrust me from the land of my fathers, or to slay me again.

OEDIPUS

Yea,<sup>5</sup> for I have caught him, lady, working evil, by ill arts, against my person.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Chorus.

## CREON

Now may I see no good, but perish accursed, if I have done aught to thee that wherewith thou chargest me?

## JOCASTA

O, for the gods' love, believe it, Oedipus--first, for the awful sake of this oath unto the gods,--then for my sake and for theirs who stand before thee!

(The following lines between the Chorus and Oedipus and between the Chorus, Jocasta, and Oedipus are chanted responsively.)

## CHORUS

strophe 1

Consent, reflect, hearken, O my king, I pray thee!

## OEDIPUS

What grace, then, wouldst thou have me grant thee?

## CHORUS

Respect him who aforetime was not foolish, and who now is strong in his oath.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

Now dost thou know what thou cravest?

## CHORUS

Yea.

## OEDIPUS

Declare, then, what thou meanest.

## CHORUS

That thou shouldst never use an unproved rumour to cast a dishonouring charge on the friend who has bound himself with a curse.

<sup>1</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross toward center.

<sup>3</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Chorus.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

Then be very sure that, when thou seekest this, for me thou art seeking destruction, or exile from this land.

## CHORUS

strophe 2<sup>2</sup>

No, by him who stands in the front of all the heavenly host, no, by the Sun! Unblest, unfriended, may I die by the uttermost doom, if I have that thought! But my unhappy soul is worn by the withering of the land, and again by the thought that our old sorrows should be crowned by sorrows springing from you twain.

## OEDIPUS

Then let him go,<sup>3</sup> though I am surely doomed to death, or shall be thrust dishonoured from the land. Thy lips, not his, move my compassion by their plaint; but he, where'er he be shall be hated.

CREON<sup>4</sup>

Sullen in yielding art thou seen, even as vehement in the excesses of thy wrath; but such natures are justly sorest for themselves to bear.

## OEDIPUS

Thou wilt not leave me in peace, and get thee gone?

## CREON

I will go my way; I have found thee undiscerning, but in the sight of these I am just.

(Exit Creon)

## CHORUS

## antistrophe 1

Lady, why dost thou delay to take yon man into the house?

JOCASTA<sup>5</sup>

I will do so, when I have learned what hath chanced.



<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

## CHORUS

Blind suspicion, bred of talk, arose; and, on the other part, injustice wounds.

## JOCASTA

It was on both sides?

## CHORUS

Aye.

## JOCASTA

And what was the story?

## CHORUS

Enough, methinks, enough--when our land is already vexed--that the matter should rest where it ceased.

## OEDIPUS

Seest thou to what thou hast come, for all thy honest purpose, in seeking to slack and blunt my zeal?

## CHORUS

antistrophe 2

King, I have said it not once alone--be sure that I should have been shown a madman, bankrupt in sane counsel, if I put thee away--thee, who gavest a true course to my beloved country when distraught by troubles--thee, who now also art like to prove our prospering guide.

## JOCASTA

In the name of the gods, tell me also,<sup>1</sup> O King, on what account thou hast conceived this steadfast wrath.

## OEDIPUS

That will I: for I honour thee, lady, above yonder men;--the cause is Creon, and the plots that he hath laid against me.

<sup>1</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Cross up center.

JOCASTA

Speak on--if thou canst tell clearly how the feud began.

OEDIPUS

He says that I stand guilty of the blood of Laius.

JOCASTA

As on his own knowledge? Or on hearsay from another?

OEDIPUS

Nay, he hath made a rascal seer his mouthpieces; as for himself, he keeps his lips wholly pure.

JOCASTA

Then absolve thyself of the things whereof thou speakest; hearken to me, and learn for thy comfort that nought of mortal birth is a sharer in the science of the seer. I will give thee pithy proof of that.<sup>1</sup> An oracle came to Laius once--I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers--that the doom should overtake him to die by the hand of his child, who should spring from him and me.<sup>2</sup> Now Laius,--as, at least the rumour saith,--was murdered one day by foreign robbers at a place where three highways meet. And the child's birth was not three days past, when Laius pinned its ankles together, and had it thrown, by others' hands, on a trackless mountain.

So, in that case, Apollo brought it not to pass that the babe should become the slayer of his sire, or that Laius should die by his child's hand. Thus did the messages of seer-craft map out the future.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

What restlessness of soul, lady, what tumult of the mind hath just come upon me since I heard thee speak!

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Turn and face left.

JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

What anxiety hath startled thee, that thou sayest this?

OEDIPUS

Methought I heard this from thee,--that Laius was slain where three highways meet.

JOCASTA

Yea, that was the story; nor hath it ceased yet.

OEDIPUS

And where is the place where this befell?

JOCASTA

The land is called Phocis;<sup>2</sup> and branching roads lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulia.

OEDIPUS

And what is the time that hath passed since these things were?

JOCASTA

The news was published to the town shortly before thou wast first seen in power over this land.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, what hast thou decreed to do unto me?

JOCASTA

And wherefore, Oedipus, doth this thing weight upon thy soul?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not yet; but say what was the stature of Laius, and how ripe his manhood.

JOCASTA

He was tall,--the silver just lightly strewn among his hair; and his form was not greatly unlike thine.

OEDIPUS

Unhappy that I am! Methinks I have been laying myself even now under a dread ouse, and knew it not.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou? I tremble when I look on thee, my king.

OEDIPUS

Dread misgivings have I that the seer can see. But thou wilt show better if thou wilt tell me one thing more.

JOCASTA

Indeed I will answer all thou askest, when I hear it.

OEDIPUS

Went he in small force, or with many armed followers, like a chieftain?

JOCASTA

Five they were in all,--a herald one of them; and there was one carriage, which bore Laius.

OEDIPUS

Alas! 'Tis now clear indeed; who was he who gave you these tidings lady?

JOCASTA

A servant--the sole survivor who came home.

OEDIPUS

Is he haply at hand in the house now?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Joesta.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down left.



## JOCASTA

No, truly; as soon as he came thence, and found thee reigning in the stead of Laius, he supplicated me, with hand laid on mine, that I would send him to the fields, to the pastures of the flocks, that he might be far from the sight of this town. And I sent him; he was worthy, for a slave, to win e'en a larger boon than that.

## OEDIPUS

Would, then, that he could return to us without delay!

## JOCASTA

It is easy: but wherefore dost thou enjoin this?

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

I fear, lady, that mine own lips have been unguarded: and therefore am I fain to behold him.

## JOCASTA

May, he shall come. But I too, methinks, have a claim to learn what lies heavy on thy heart, my king.

## OEDIPUS

Yea, and it shall not be kept from thee,<sup>2</sup> now that my forebodings have advanced so far. Who, indeed, is more to me than thou. My father was Polybus of Corinth,—my mother, the Dorian Merope: and I was held the first of all the folk in that town, until a chance befell me. At a banquet, a man full of wine cast it at me that I was not the true son of my sire. And I restrained myself for that day as best I might; but on the next day I went to my mother and father, and questioned them; and they were wroth for the taunt with him who had let that word fly. So on their part I had comfort; yet was this thing ever rankling in my heart; for it still crept

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>3</sup>Turn to Jocasta.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Jocasta.

<sup>5</sup>To Jocasta.

<sup>6</sup>Turn and cross down right.

abroad with strong rumour. And,<sup>1</sup> unknown to mother or father, I went to Delphi; and Phoebus sent me forth disappointed of that knowledge for which I came, but in response set forth other things, even that I was fated to defile my mother's bed; and that I should show unto men a brood which they could not endure to behold; and that I should be the slayer of the sire who begat me.

And I, when I had listened to this,<sup>2</sup> turned to flight from the land of Corinth to some spot where I should never see fulfillment of the infamies foretold in mine evil doom. And on my way I came to the regions in which thou sayest that this prince perished. When in my journey I was near to those three roads, there met me a herald,<sup>3</sup> and a man seated in a carriage drawn by colts, as thou hast described; and he who was in front, and the old man himself, were for thrusting me rudely from the path. Then,<sup>4</sup> in anger, I struck him who pushed me aside--the driver; and the old man, seeing it, watched the moment when I was passing, and from the carriage brought his goad with two teeth down full upon my head. Yet was he paid with interest; by one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled right out of the carriage, on his back; and I slew every man of them.<sup>5</sup>

But if this stranger had any tie of kinship with Laius, who is now more wretched than the man before thee? And this--this curse--was laid on me by no mouth but mine own! Say, am I vile?<sup>6</sup> Oh, am I not utterly unclean?--seeing that I must be banished, and in banishment see not mine own people, nor set foot in mine own land, or else be joined in wedlock to my mother, and slay my sire, even Polybus, who begat and reared me.

Then would not he speak aright of Oedipus, who judged these things sent by some cruel power above man? Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that

<sup>1</sup>Cross up to Oedipus.

I should see that day! No may I be swept from among men, ere I behold myself visited with the brand of such a doom.

LEADER

To us, indeed, these things, O king, are draught with fear; yet have hope, until at last thou hast gained full knowledge from him who saw the deed.

OEDIPUS

Hope, in truth, rests with me thus far alone; I can await the man summoned from the pastures.

JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

And when he has appeared--what wouldst thou have of him?

OEDIPUS

I will tell thee. If his story be found to tally with thine, I, at least, shall stand clear of disaster.

JOCASTA

And what of special note didst thou hear from me?

OEDIPUS

Thou wast saying that he spoke of Laius as slain by robbers. If, then, he still speaks, as before, of several, I was not the slayer: a solitary man could not be held the same with that band. But if he names one only wayfarer, then beyond doubt this guilt leans to me.

JOCASTA

May, be assured that thus, at least, the tale was first told; he cannot revoke that, for the city heard it, not I alone. But even if he should diverge somewhat from his former story, never, king, can he show that the murder of Laius, at least, is truly square to prophecy; of whom Loxias plainly said that he must die by the hand of my child. How be it that poor innocent never slew him, but perished first itself.

<sup>1</sup>Cross up left.

<sup>2</sup>Stop.

<sup>3</sup>Turn and cross right.

## OEDIPUS

Thou judgest well. But nevertheless send some one to fetch the peasant,  
and neglect not this matter.

## JOCASTA

I will send without delay. But let us come into the house: nothing  
will I do save at thy good pleasure.

(Oedipus and Jocasta go into the palace.)

## CHORUS

strophe 1<sup>1</sup>

(singing) If any man walks haughtily in deed or word,<sup>2</sup> with no fear  
of justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him  
for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep  
him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities. Where  
such things are, what mortal shall boast any more that he can ward the  
arrows of the gods from his life?<sup>3</sup>

antistrophe 2

No more will I go reverently to earth's central and inviolate shrine  
if these oracles fit not the issue, so that all men shall point at them  
with the finger. Nay, king,--if thou art rightly called,--Zeus all-ruling,  
may it not escape thee and thine everdeathless power! The old prophecies  
concerning Laius are fading: already men are setting them at naught, and  
nowhere is Apollo glorified with honours; the worship of the gods is  
perishing.

(Jocasta comes forth, bearing a branch, wreathed with festoons of wool,  
which, as a suppliant, she is about to lay on the altar of the household  
god, Lycean Apollo, in front of the palace.)

<sup>1</sup>Cross to up left.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Messenger.



JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

Princes of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the gods, with this wroathed branch in my hands, and these gifts of incense. For Oedipus excites his soul overmuch with all manner of alarms. Since, then, by counsel I can do no good, to thee, Lycean Apollo, for thou art nearest, I have come, a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, that thou mayest find us some riddance from uncleanness. For now we are all afraid, seeing him affrighted, even as they who see fear in the helmsman of their ship.

(While Jocasta is offering her prayers to the god, a Messenger, evidently a stranger, enters and addresses the Chorus.)

MESSENGER<sup>2</sup>

Might I learn from you, strangers, where is the house of the king Oedipus? Or, better still, tell me where he himself is--if ye know.

## LEADER

This is his dwelling, and he himself, stranger, is within; and this lady is the mother of his children.

MESSENGER<sup>3</sup>

Then may she be ever happy in a happy home, since she is his heavenblest queen.

JOCASTA<sup>4</sup>

Happiness to thee also, stranger! But say what thou hast come to seek or to tell.

## MESSENGER

Good tidings, lady, for thy house and for thy husband.

<sup>1</sup>Cross in to Messenger.

<sup>2</sup>Cross in to Messenger.

<sup>3</sup>Turn to handmaid.

<sup>4</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Jocasta.

JOCASTA

What are they? And from whom hast thou come?

MESSENGER

From Corinth: and at the message which I will speak anon thou wilt rejoice--doubtless; yet haply grieve.

JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

And what is it? How hath it thus a double potency?

MESSENGER

The people will make him king of the Isthmian land, as 'twas said there.

JOCASTA

How then? Is the aged Polybus no more in power?

MESSENGER

No verily: for death holds him in the tomb.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou?<sup>2</sup> Is Polybus dead, old man?

MESSENGER

If I speak not the truth, I am content to die.

JOCASTA<sup>3</sup>

O, handmaid, away with all speed, and tell this to thy master!<sup>4</sup> O ye oracles of the gods, where stand ye now! This is the man whom Oedipus long feared and shunned, lest he should slay him; and now this man hath died in the course of destiny, not by his hand.

(Oedipus enters from the palace.)

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

Jocasta, dearest wife, why hast thou summoned me forth from these doors?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross up right center.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Messenger.

<sup>4</sup>Turn and cross arms.

<sup>5</sup>Cross down left.

JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

Hear this man, and judge, as thou listenest, to what the awful oracles of the gods have come.

OEDIPUS

And he--who may he be, and what news hath he for me?

JOCASTA<sup>2</sup>

He is from Corinth, to tell that thy father Polybus lives no longer, but hath perished.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

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

MESSENGER

If I must first make these tidings plain, know indeed that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS

By treachery, or by visit of disease?

MESSENGER

A light thing in the scale brings the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Ah, he died, it seems, of sickness?

MESSENGER

Yea, and of the long years that he had told.

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas! Why, indeed, my wife, one look to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads, on whose showing I was doomed to slay my sire? But he is dead, and hid already beneath the earth; and here am I, who have not put hand to spear.<sup>5</sup>--Unless, perchance,

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to center.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to center.

<sup>5</sup>Turn.

he was killed by longing for me? Thus, indeed, I should be the cause of his death.<sup>1</sup> But the oracles as they stand, at least, Polybus hath swept with him to his rest in Hades: they are worth nought.

JOCASTA<sup>2</sup>

May, did I not so foretell to thee long since?

OEDIPUS

Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA

Now no more lay aught of those things to heart.

OEDIPUS

But surely I must needs fear my mother's bed?

JOCASTA

May, what should mortal fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who hath clear foresight of nothing?<sup>3</sup> 'Tis best to live at random, as one may. But fear not thou touching wedlock with thy mother. Many men ere now have so fared in dreams also: but he to whom these things are as nought hears his life most easily.

OEDIPUS

All these bold words of thine would have been well, were not my mother living;<sup>4</sup> but as it is, since she lives, I must needs fear--though thou sayest well.

JOCASTA

How be it thy father's death is a great sign to osher us.

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

Great, I know; but my fear is of her who lives.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

<sup>4</sup>Cross to Oedipus.



MESSENGER<sup>1</sup>

And who is the woman about whom ye fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope, old man, the consort of Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what is it in her that moves your fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven-sent oracle of dread import, stranger.

MESSENGER

Lawful, or unlawful, for another to know?

OEDIPUS

Lawful, surely. Loxias once said that I was doomed to espouse mine own mother, and to shed with mine own hands my father's blood.<sup>2</sup> Wherefore my home in Corinth was long kept by me afar; with happy event, indeed,--yet still 'tis sweet to see the face of parents.

MESSENGER<sup>3</sup>

Was it indeed for fear of this that thou wast an exile from that city.

OEDIPUS

And because I wished not, old man, to be the elayer of my sire.

MESSENGER

Then why have I not freed thee, king, from this fear,<sup>4</sup> seeing that I came with friendly purpose?

OEDIPUS

Indeed thou shouldst have guerdon due from me.

<sup>1</sup>Put hand on Oedipus's shoulder.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to center.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

<sup>4</sup>Cross a few steps right.

<sup>5</sup>Cross more right.

## MESSENGER

Indeed 'twas chiefly for this that I came--that, on thy return home,  
I might reap some good.

## OEDIPUS

Nay, I will never go near my parents.

MESSENGER<sup>1</sup>

Ah, my son, 'tis plain enough that thou knowest not what thou doest.

## OEDIPUS

How, old man? For the gods' love, tell me.

## MESSENGER

If for these reasons thou shrinkest from going home.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Aye, I dread lest Phoebus prove himself true for me.

## MESSENGER

Thou dreadest to be stained with guilt through thy parents?

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

Even so, old man--this it is that ever affrights me.

## MESSENGER

Dost thou know, then, that thy fears are wholly vain?

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

How so, if I was born of those parents?

## MESSENGER

Because Polybus was nothing to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

What sayest thou? Was Polybus not my sire?

<sup>1</sup>Turn and cross to center.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

MESSENGER

No more than he who speaks to thee.

OEDIPUS

And how can my sire be level with him who is as nought to me?

MESSENGER

Nay, he begat thee not.

OEDIPUS

Nay, wherefore, then, called me his son?

MESSENGER

Know that he had received thee as a gift from my hands of yore.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

And yet he loved me so dearly, who came from another's hand?

MESSENGER

Yea, his former childlessness won him thereto.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

And thou--hadst thou bought me or found me by chance, when thou gavest me to him?

MESSENGER

Found thee in Cithaeron's winding glens.

OEDIPUS

And wherefore wast thou roaming in those regions?

MESSENGER

I was there in charge of mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS

What, thou wast a shepherd--a vagrant hireling?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Messenger.

<sup>3</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>4</sup>Turn.

<sup>5</sup>Cross in a few steps.

MESSENGER<sup>1</sup>

But thy preserver, my son, in that hour.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

And what pain was mine when thou didst take me in thine arms?

MESSENGER

The ankles of thy foot might witness.

OEDIPUS

Ah me, why dost thou speak of that old trouble?

MESSENGER

I freed thee when thou hadst thine ankles pinned together.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

Aye, 'twas a dread brand of shame that I took from my cradle.

MESSENGER

Such, that from that fortune thou wast called by the name which still is thine.

OEDIPUS

Oh, for the gods' love--was the deed my mother's or father's?<sup>4</sup> Speak!

MESSENGER

I know not; he who gave thee to me knows better of that than I.

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

What, thou hadst me from another? Thou didst not light on me thyself.

MESSENGER

No: another shepherd gave thee up to me.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Art thou in cause to tell clearly?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Messenger.

<sup>2</sup>Turn and cross to Jocasta.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>4</sup>Cross down left.



## MESSENGER

I think he was called one of the household of Laius.

## OEDIPUS

The king who ruled this country long ago?

## MESSENGER

The same: 'twas in his service that the man was a herd.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

Is he still alive, that I might see him?

## MESSENGER

Nay, ye folk of the country should know best.

## OEDIPUS

Is there any of you here present that knows the herd of whom he speaks-- that hath seen him in the pastures or the town? Answer! The hour hath come that these things should be finally revealed.

## LEADER

Methinks he speaks of no other than the peasant whom thou was already fain to see; but our lady Jocasta might best tell that.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Lady, wottest thou of him whom we lately summoned? Is it of him that this man speaks?

JOCASTA<sup>3</sup>

Why ask of whom he spoke? Regard it not...waste not a thought on what he said...!twere idle.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

It must not be that, with such clues in my grasp, I should fail to bring my birth to light.

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Turn back.

<sup>3</sup>Turn to Oedipus.

<sup>4</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>6</sup>Turn.

<sup>7</sup>Cross down left.

JOCASTA<sup>1</sup>

For the gods' sake, if thou hast any care for thine own life, forbear this search! My anguish is enough.<sup>2</sup>

OEDIPUS

Be of good courage; though I be found the son of a servile mother, thou wilt not be proved base-born.

JOCASTA

Yet hear me, I implore thee:<sup>3</sup> do not thus.

OEDIPUS

I must not hear of not discovering the whole truth.

JOCASTA

Yet I wish thee well--I counsel thee for the best.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Those best counsels, then, vex my patience.

JOCASTA

Ill-fated one!<sup>5</sup> Mayst thou never come to know who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go, some one, fetch me the herdsman hither,<sup>6</sup>--and leave yon woman to glory in her princely stock.

JOCASTA

Alas, alas, miserable!--that word alone can I say unto thee, and no other word henceforth for ever.

(She rushes into the palace.)

LEADER<sup>7</sup>

Why hath the lady gone, Oedipus, in a transport of wild grief? I misdoubt, a storm of sorrow will break forth from this silence.

<sup>1</sup>Cross in front of Chorus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

Break forth what will! Be my race never so lowly, I must crave to learn it. Yon woman, perchance thinks shame of my base source. But I, who hold myself sone of Fortune that gives good, will not be dishonored. She is the mother from whom I spring; and the months, my kinsmen, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great.<sup>2</sup> Such being my lineage, never more can I prove false to it, or spare to search out the secret of my birth.

## CHORUS

(singing) If I am a seer or wise of heart, O Cithaeron, thou shalt not fail to know at tomorrow's full moon that Oedipus honours thee as native to him, as his nurse, and his mother, and that thou art celebrated in our dance and song, because thou art well-pleasing to our prince. O Phoebus to whom we cry, may these things find favour in thy sight!

## antistrophe

Who was it, my son, whom of the race whose years are many that bore thee in wedlock with Pan, the mountain-roaming father? Or was it a bride of Loxias that bore thee? For dear to him are all the upland pastures. Or perchance 'twas Cyllene's lord, or the Bacchants' god, dweller on the hill-tops, that received thee, a new-born joy, from one of the Nymphs of Helicon, with whom he most doth sport.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

Elders, if 'tis for me to guess, who have never met with him, I think I see the herdsman of whom we have long been in quest; for in his venerable age he tallies with yon stranger's years, and withal I know those who bring him, methinks, as servants of mine own. But perchance thou mayest have the advantage of me in knowledge, if thou hast seen the herdsman before.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Messenger.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Herdsman.

## LEADER

Aye, I know him, to be sure; he was in the service of Laius--trusty as any man, in his shepherd's place.

(The herdsman is brought in.)

## OEDIPUS

I ask thee first,<sup>1</sup> Corinthian stranger, is this he whom thou meanest?

## MESSENGER

This man whom thou beholdest.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Oh thou, old man--I would have thee look this way, and answer all that I ask thee. Thou wast once in the service of Laius?

## HERDSMAN

I was--a slave not bought, but reared in this house.

## OEDIPUS

Employed in what labour, or what way of life?

## HERDSMAN

For the best part of my life I tended flocks.

## OEDIPUS

And what the regions that thou didst chiefly haunt?

## HERDSMAN

Sometimes it was Cithaeron, sometimes the neighboring ground.

## OEDIPUS

Then wottest thou of having noted yon man in these parts?

## HERDSMAN

Doing what? What man does thou mean?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Messenger.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Herdsman.

<sup>3</sup>Cross up right a few steps.

<sup>4</sup>Cross down left.

<sup>5</sup>Cross down.

<sup>6</sup>Turn.



OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

This man here--or of having ever met him before?

## HERDSMAN

Not so that I could speak at once from memory.

## MESSENGER

And no wonder, master.<sup>2</sup> But I will bring clear recollection to his ignorance. I am sure that he well wots of the time when he was abode in the region of Cithaeron,--he with two flocks, I, his comrade, with one,--three full half-years, from spring to Arcturus; and then for the winter I used to drive my flock to mine own fold, and he took his to the fold of Laius. Did aught of this happen as I tell, or did it not?

HERDSMAN<sup>3</sup>

Thou speakest the truth--though 'tis long ago.

## MESSENGER

Come, tell me now--wottest thou of having given me a boy in those days, to be reared as mine own foster-son?

## HERDSMAN

What now? Why dost thou ask the question?

## MESSENGER

Yonder man, my friend, is he who then was young.

HERDSMAN<sup>4</sup>

Plague seize thee--be silent once for all!

OEDIPUS<sup>5</sup>

Ha! Chide him not, old man--thy words need chiding more than his.

HERDSMAN<sup>6</sup>

And wherein, most noble master, do I offend?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

OEDIPUS

In not telling of the boy concerning whom he asks.

HERDSMAN<sup>1</sup>

He speaks without knowledge--he is busy to no purpose.

OEDIPUS

Thou wilt not speak with a good grace, but thou shalt on pain.

HERDSMAN

Nay, for the gods' love, misuse not an old man!

OEDIPUS

Ho, some one--pinion him this instant!

HERDSMAN

Alas, wherefore? What more wouldst thou learn?

OEDIPUS

Didst thou give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN

I did,--and would I had perished that day!

OEDIPUS

Well, thou wilt come to that, unless thou tell the honest truth.

HERDSMAN

Nay, much more am I lost, if I speak.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

The fellow is bent, methinks, on more delays.

HERDSMAN

No, no! I said before that I gave it to him.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

Whence hadst thou got it? In thine own house, or from another?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Herdsman.

<sup>4</sup>Cross left couple of steps.

<sup>5</sup>Turn.

HERDSMAN

Mine own it was not--I had received it from a man.

OEDIPUS

From whom of the citizens here? From what home?

HERDSMAN<sup>1</sup>

Forebear, for the gods' love, master, forbear to ask more!

OEDIPUS

Thou art lost if I have to question thee again.

HERDSMAN<sup>2</sup>

It was a child, then, of the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS<sup>3</sup>

A slave? Or one born of his own race?

HERDSMAN<sup>4</sup>

Ah me--I am on the dreaded brink of speech.

OEDIPUS

And I of hearing; yet must I hear.

HERDSMAN<sup>5</sup>

Thou must know, then, that 'twas said to his own child, but the lady within could best say how these things are.

OEDIPUS

How? She gave it to thee?

HERDSMAN

Yea, O king.

OEDIPUS

For what end?

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to center.

<sup>3</sup>Messenger and Herdsman exit left.

<sup>4</sup>Cross left.

HERDSMAN

That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS

Her own child, the wretch?

HERDSMAN

Aye, from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS

What were they?

HERDSMAN

The tale ran that he must slay his sire.

OEDIPUS

Why, then, didst thou give him up to this old man?

HERDSMAN

Through pity, master, as deeming that he would bear him away to another land, whence he himself came; but he saved him for the direst woe.<sup>1</sup> For if thou art what this man saith, know that thou wast born to misery.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Oh, oh! All brought to pass--all true! Thou light, may I now look at last on thee--I who have been found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood!

(He rushes into the palace.)<sup>3</sup>

CHORUS

strophe 1<sup>4</sup>

(singing) Alas, ye generations of man, how mere a shadow do I count your life! Where, where is the mortal who wins more of happiness than just the seeming, and, after the semblance, a falling away? Thine is a fate that warns me,--thine, thine, unhappy Oedipus--to call no earthly creature blest.

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Second Messenger.



## antistrophe 1

Oedipus, thou hast been called our king, and hast been honored supremely,  
bearing sway in great Thebes.

## strophe 2

But now whose story is more grievous in men's ears? Who is a more  
wretched captive to fierce plagues and troubles, with all his life reversed?  
Alas, renowned Oedipus! The same bounteous place of rest sufflood thee,  
as child and as sire also, that thou shouldst make thereon thy nuptial couch.

## antistrophe 2

Time the all-seeing hath found thee out in thy despite: he judgeth  
the monstrous marriage wherein begetter and begotten have long been one.  
Alas, thou child of Laius, would, would that I had never seen thee! I  
will wail as one who pours a dirge from his lips; sooth to speak, 'twas  
thou that gavest me new life, and through thee darkness hath fallen upon  
mine eyes.

(Enter Second Messenger from the palace.)

## SECOND MESSENGER

Ye who are ever most honoured in this land, what deeds shall ye hear,  
what deed behold, what burden of sorrow shall be yours, if, true to your  
race, ye still care for the house of Labdaous! For I seen that not Ister  
nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many are the ills that it shrouds,  
or will soon bring to light,--ills wrought not unwittingly, but of purpose.  
And those griefs smart most which are seen to be of our own choice.

LEADER<sup>1</sup>

Indeed those which we knew before fall not short of claiming more  
lamentation: besides them, what dost thou announce?

## SECOND MESSENGER

This is the shortest tale to tell and to hear: our royal lady Jocasta is dead.

## LEADER

Alas, hapless one! From what cause?

## SECOND MESSENGER

By her own hand. When, frantic, she had passed within the vestibule, she rushed straight towards her nuptial couch, clutching her hair with the fingers of both hands. Once within the chamber, she dashed the doors together at her back; then called on the name of Laius, long since a corpse, mindful of that son, begotten long ago, by whom the sire was slain, leaving the mother to breed accursed offspring with his own. And she bewailed the wedlock wherein, wretched, she had borne a two-fold brood, husband by husband, children by her child. And how thereafter she perished, is more than I know. For with a shriek Oedipus burst in and suffered us not to watch her woe unto the end; on him, as he rushed around, our eyes were set. To and fro he went, asking us to give him a sword, asking where he should find the wife who was no wife, but a mother whose womb had borne alike himself and his children. And, in his frenzy, a power above man was his guide; for 'twas none of us mortals who were nigh. And with a dread shriek, as though some one beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, and from their sockets forced the bending bolts, and rushed into the room. There beheld we the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. But he, when he saw her, with a dread, deep cry of misery, loosed the halter whereby she hung. And when the hapless woman was stretched upon the ground, then was the sequel dread to see. For he tore from her raiment the golden

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Chorus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross down right.

<sup>3</sup>Exit.

brooches wherewith she was decked, and lifted them, and smote full on his own eye-balls, uttering words like these: 'No more shall ye behold such horrors as I was suffering and working! Long enough have ye looked on those whom ye ought never to have seen, failed in knowledge of those whom I yearned to know--henceforth ye shall be dark! To such dire refrain, not once alone but oft struck he his eyes with lifted hand; and at each blow the ensanguined eyeballs bedewed his board, nor sent forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail. From the deeds of twain such ills have broken forth, not on one alone, but with mingled woe for man and wife. The old Happiness of their ancestral fortune was aforetime happiness indeed; but today--lamentation, ruin, death, shame, all earthly ills that can be named--all, all are theirs.

LEADER

And hath the sufferer now any respite from pain?

SECOND MESSENGER<sup>1</sup>

He cries for some one to unbar the gates and show to all the Cadmeans his father's slayer, his mother's slayer, as purposing to cast himself out of the land, and abide no more, to make the house accursed under his own curse. How be it he lacks strength, and one to guide his steps; for the anguish is more than man may bear. And he will show this to thee also; for lo, the bars of the gates are withdrawn,<sup>2</sup> and soon thou shalt behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity.<sup>3</sup>

(The central door of the palace is now opened. Oedipus comes forth, leaning on attendants; the bloody stains are still upon his face. The following lines between Oedipus and the Chorus are chanted responsively.)

<sup>1</sup>Cross left to Chorus.

## CHORUS

O dread fate for men to see, O most dreadful of all that have met mine eyes! Alas, alas, thou hapless one! May, I cannot e'en look on thee, though there is much that I would fain ask, fain learn.

## OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Alas, alas, wretched that I am! Whither, whither am I borne in my misery? How is my voice swept abroad on the wings of air? Oh my Fate, how far hast thou sprung?

## CHORUS

To a dread place, dire in men's ears, dire in their sight.

## OEDIPUS

strophe 1

O thou horror of darkness that enfolded me! Ay me, and once again, ay me! How is my soul pierced by the stab of these goads, and withal by the memory of sorrows!

## CHORUS

Yea, amid woes so many a two fold pain may well be thine to mourn and to bear.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

antistrophe 1

Ah, friend, thou still art steadfast in thy tendance of me,--thou still hast patience to care for the blind man! Ah me! Thy presence is not hid from me--no, dark though I am, yet I know thy voice full well.

## CHORUS

Man of dread deeds, how couldst thou in such wise quence thy vision? What more than human power urged thee?

<sup>1</sup>Turn and cross left.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to Chorus.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

strophe 2

Apollo, friends, Apollo was he that brought these my woes to pass,  
 these my sore, sore woes: but the hand that struck the eyes was none save  
 mine, wretched that I am! Why was I to see, when sight could show me nothing  
 sweet?

CHORUS

These things were even as thou sayest,

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Say, friends, what can I more behold, what can I love, what greeting  
 can touch mine ear with joy?<sup>3</sup> Waste, lead me from the land, friends, lead  
 me hence, the utterly lost, the thrice accursed, yea, the mortal most  
 abhorred of heaven!

CHORUS

Wretched alike for thy fortune and for thy sense thereof, would that  
 I had never so much as known thee!

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 2

Perish the man, whoso'er he was, that freed me in the pastures from the  
 cruel shackle on my feet, and saved me from death, and gave me back to life,—  
 a thankless deed! Had I died then, to my friends and to thine own soul I  
 had not been so sore a grief.

CHORUS

I also would have had it thus.

OEDIPUS

So had I not come to shed my father's blood, nor been called among  
 men the spouse of her from whom I sprang.



<sup>1</sup>Cross right.

<sup>2</sup>Turn.

<sup>3</sup>Turn and cross a few steps right.

## CHORUS

I know not how I can say that thou hast counselled well: for thou were better dead than living and blind.

## OEDIPUS

Show me not at large that these things are not best done thus:<sup>1</sup> give me counsel no more. For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes I could e'en have looked on my father, when I came to the place of the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against both I have sinned such sins as strangling could not punish.<sup>2</sup> But deem ye that the sight of children born as mine were born, was lovely for me to look upon? No, no, not lovely to mine eyes for ever.<sup>3</sup> I have doomed myself to know these no more, by mine own command that all should thrust away the impious one, and of the race of Laius!

After hearing such a stain upon me, as I to look with steady eyes on this folk? No, verily: no, were there yet a way to choke the fount of hearing, I had not spared to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, that so I should have known nor sight nor sound. Alas, Cithaeron, why hadst thou a shelter for me? When I was given to thee, why didst thou not slay me straightway, that so I might never have revealed my source to men? Ah, Polybus,--ah, Corinth, and thou that wast called the ancient house of my fathers, how seeming-fair was I your nurseling, and what ills were festering beneath! For now I am found evil, and of evil birth.

Hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where ye shall never behold me more!

(Enter Creon)

<sup>1</sup>Cross to Oedipus.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Creon.

<sup>3</sup>Turn.

<sup>4</sup>Cross down right.

## LEADER

Nay, here is Creon, in meet season for thy requests, crave they act or counsel; for he alone is left to guard the land in thy stead.

CREON<sup>1</sup>

I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach thee with any bygone fault. (To the attendants) But ye, if ye respect the children of men no more, reserve at least the all-nurturing flame of our lord the Sun,-- spare to show thus nakedly a pollution such as this,--one which neither earth can welcome, nor the holy rain, nor the light. Nay, take him into the house as quickly as ye may; for it best accords with piety that kinsfolk alone should see and hear a kinsman's woes.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

For the gods' love, grant me a boon: for thy good I will speak, not for mine own.

CREON<sup>3</sup>

And what wish art thou so fain to have of me?

## OEDIPUS

Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me more.

## CREON

This would I have done, be thou sure, but that I craved first to learn all my duty from the god.

OEDIPUS<sup>4</sup>

Nay, his behest hath been set forth in full,--to let me perish, the parricide, the unholy one, that I am.

<sup>1</sup>Turn.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to Green.

<sup>3</sup>Cross to center.

<sup>4</sup>Turn.

<sup>5</sup>Cross to Green.

CREON

Such was the purpose; yet, seeing to what a pass we have come.

OEDIPUS<sup>1</sup>

Will ye, then, seek a response on behalf of such a wretch as I am?

CREON

Aye, for thou thyself wilt now surely put faith in the god.

OEDIPUS<sup>2</sup>

Yea; and on thee lay I this charge,—give to her who is within such burial as thou thyself wouldst. But for me—never let this city of my sire be condemned to have me dwelling therein, while I live;<sup>3</sup> no, suffer me to abide on the hills, which my mother and sire, while they lived, set for my appointed tomb,—that so I may die by their decree who sought to slay me. Now be it of thus much am I sure,—that neither sickness nor aught else can destroy me; for never had I been snatched from death, but in reserve for some strange doom.

May, let my fate go whither it will: but as touching my children,<sup>4</sup>—I pray thee, Creon, take no care on thee for my sons; they are men, so that, be they where they may, they can never lack the means to live. But my two girls, poor hapless ones,—who never knew my table spread apart, or lacked their father's presence, but ever in all things shared my daily bread,—I pray thee, care for them; and—if thou canst—suffer me to touch them with my hands, and to indulge my grief.<sup>5</sup> Grant it, prince, grant it, thou noble heart! Ah, could I but once touch them with my hands, I should think that they were with me, even as when I had sight.

(Creon's attendants lead in the children Antigone and Ismene.)

<sup>1</sup>Cross up center.

<sup>2</sup>Cross to behind Oedipus.

Ah?<sup>1</sup> O ye gods, can it be my loved ones that I hear sobbing,--can Creon have taken pity on me and sent me my children--my darlings? Am I right?

CREON

Yea, 'tis of my contriving, for I knew thy joy in them of old,--the joy that now is thine.

OEDIPUS

Then blessed be thou. My children, where are ye? Come hither,--hither to the hands of him whose mother was your own. For you also do I weep-- behold you I cannot--when I think of the bitter life in days to come which men will make you live. When ye are now come to years ripe for marriage, who shall he be, who shall be the man that will hazard taking unto him such reproaches as must be baneful alike to my offspring and to yours? Your sire slew his sire, he had seed of her who bare him, and begat you at the sources of his own being! Such are the taunts that will be cast at you; and who then will wed? The man lives not, no, it cannot be, my children, yet ye must wither in barren maidenhood.

To you, my children, I would have given much counsel, were your minds mature; but not I would have this to be your prayer--that ye live where occasion suffers, and that the life which is your portion may be happier than your sire's.

CREON<sup>2</sup>

Thy grief hath had large scope enough: nay, pass into the house.

OEDIPUS

I must obey, though 'tis in no wise sweet.

CREON

Yea: for it is in season that all things are good.



OEDIPUS

Knowest thou, then, on what conditions I will go?

CREON

Thou shalt name them; so shall I know them when I hear.

OEDIPUS

See that thou send me to dwell beyond this land.

CREON

Thou askest me for what the god must give.

OEDIPUS

Nay, to the gods I have become most hateful.

CREON

Then shalt thou have thy wish anon.

OEDIPUS

So thou consentest?

CREON

'Tis not my wont to speak idly what I do not mean.

OEDIPUS

Then 'tis time to lead me hence.

CREON

Come, then,--but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS

Nay, take not these from me!

CREON

Crave not to be master in all things: for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life.

<sup>1</sup>Raise hands.

## CHORUS

(singing) Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a man most mighty. On whose fortunes what citizen did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come!<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.

THE END

## PROPERTY LIST

## For the Chorus:

Suppliant branches

## For Jocasta:

A suppliant branch

A box of incense

## For Teiresias:

A cane

## For Antigone and Ismene:

Scarves for their sobbing

Clothes for wiping blood from Oedipus

## SUMMARY

The true value of such a thesis lies in the educational experience offered to the director as he accepted the necessity of doing research into the field of the Greek tragedy. It was necessary to understand the philosophy of the time and of the author in order to direct the cast toward a presentation of the message which is revealed in the script. The director knew that the acting required for a Greek tragedy would vary greatly from the modern conception of interpretation, but he was not certain by what means he would attain the stylized form of acting. After extensive research into the field, the director feels that his general conception of Greek drama has been widened, and he hopes that his knowledge of the diversity of theatre has been broadened.

The director feels that Greek tragedy can be presented successfully in high schools, but it is mandatory that any teacher who attempts it must have a background in Greek theatre before attempting such a production. Such a play as Oedipus the King cannot be handled in the conventional form with which a director would approach one of the conventional comedies which are popular in the secondary schools of today. A complete understanding of this influential period in the history of theatre must be attained before any teacher should venture forth into an attempt to present a classic production to an audience which has become accustomed to light entertainment.

## Appendix



Oedipus and Jocasta



Chorus

Oedipus

Messenger

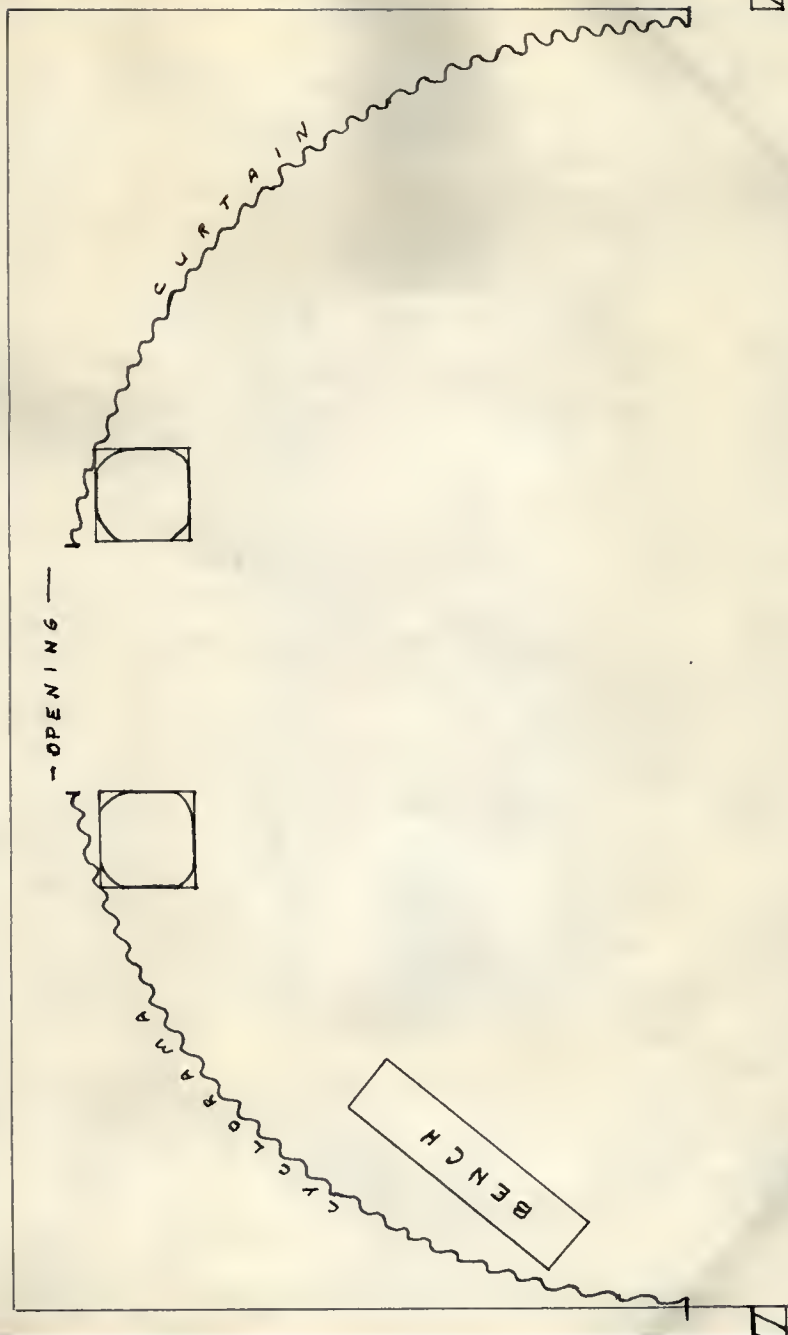
Herdsman



Stage set for Oedipus the King

presented May 15, 1959

Harlan High School, Harlan, Iowa



Costume Sketch of Jocasta



Costume Sketch of Oedipus



Costume Sketch of Teiresias





Costume Sketch of Chorus Members



Costume Sketch of Priest of Zeus



Costume Sketch of Creon



Costume Sketch of Second Messenger





Costume Sketch of Messenger



Costume Sketch of Antigone



Costume Sketch of Lamene



A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION  
OF  
SOPHOCLES'S OEDIPUS THE KING

by

MONTY BRUCE PITNER

---

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Speech  
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

1959

A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION  
OF SOPHOCLES'S OEDIPUS THE KING

When it was decided that the candidate should produce one of the classica of world theatre as his thesis, he selected Oedipus the King by Sophocles. The choice was made because of the candidate's personal interest in Greek tragedy, and he felt that this was representative of the period and the style of play presented at that time. It was his objective to become more familiar with the influential Greek period by studying the theatre of that period and presenting a production of a specific representation of that time.

The author used the University of Denver library and the University of Southern California library for research during his travels in the summer of 1958. Upon return to his home in Harlan, Iowa, where the production would be presented, he used the Creighton University library for further reference. With a familiar background behind him, the author cast the play in March of 1959. The author spent six weeks with his cast in preparation for the play, and he designed costumes for the seventeen members of the cast. He designed a simple stage setting, including one platform, an archway, and Ionic pillars. When the costumes were completed, the stage was set, and the actors were rehearsed; the play was presented May 15, 1959, before an audience of local citizens.

As a result of the work involved in presenting the play, the author felt that he had attained a much better understanding of Greek theatre and the influence that it has played on theatre of today. The use of the Chorus in drama proved to be an interesting challenge both to the director and the actors. The Chorus was an integral part of theatre during the



Greek period, and the choral reading was a pleasant innovation which the modern audience enjoyed.

The classic style of acting, which is necessary for the presentation of Oedipus the King, was accepted by the actors as a challenge and by the audience as a different interpretation from the acting which they see so frequently in modern motion pictures and on television. The director of the play discovered that the stylized form of acting presented him with an opportunity of gaining experience in a rewarding venture in direction.

After the play had been presented, the author felt that he had been offered a rich experience in theatre and that he had given both the actors and the audience a better conception of what theatre in high schools can be.