

Oedipus rex essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

? OEDIPUS REX AN ENGLISH VERSION BY DUDLEY FITTS AND ROBERT FITZGERALD Table of Contents: PERSONS REPRESENTED: OEDIPUS A PRIEST CREON TEIRESIAS IOCASTE MESSENGER SECOND MESSENGER CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS SHEPHERD OF LAIOS ANTIGONE, Daughter of Oedipus ISMENE, Daughter of Oedipus PROLOGUE THE SCENE. Before the palace of Oedipus, King of Thebes. A central door and two lateral doors open onto a platform which runs the length of the facade. On the platform, right and left, are altars; and three steps lead down into the “orchestra,” or chorus-ground.

At the beginning of the action these steps are crowded by suppliants who have brought branches and chaplets of olive leaves and who lie in various attitudes of despair. OEDIPUS enters. OEDIPUS: My children, generations of the living In the line of Kadmos, nursed at his ancient hearth: Why have you strewn yourselves before these altars In supplication, with your boughs and garlands? The breath of incense rises from the city With a sound of prayer and lamentation. Page 4 Children, I would not have you speak through messengers, And therefore I have come myself to hear you— I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name. To a PRIEST: You, there, since you are eldest in the company, Speak for them all, tell me what preys upon you, Whether you come in dread, or crave some blessing: Tell me, and never doubt that I will help you In every way I can; I should be heartless Were I not moved to find you suppliant here. PRIEST Great Oedipus. O powerful King of Thebes! You see how all the ages of our people Cling to your altar steps: here are boys Who can barely stand alone, and here are priests By weight of age, as I am a

priest of God, And young men chosen from those yet unmarried; As for the others. all that multitude, They wait with olive chaplets in the squares,

At the two shrines of Pallas, and where Apollo Speaks in the glowing embers.

Your own eyes Must tell you, Thebes is tossed on a murdering sea And can not lift her head from the death surge. A rust consumes the buds and fruits of the earth; The herds are sick: children die unborn, And labor is vain. The god of plague and pyre Raids like detestable lightning through the city, And all the house of Kadmos is laid waste, All emptied, and all darkened: Death alone Batters upon the misery of Thebes. Page 5

You are not one of the immortal gods, we know; Yet we have come to you to make our prayer As to the man surest in mortal ways

And wisest in the ways of God. You saved us From the Sphinx, that flinty singer, and the tribute We paid to her so long; yet you were never Better informed than we, nor could we teach you: It was some god breathed in you to set us free. Therefore, O mighty King, we turn to you: Find us our safety, find us a remedy, Whether by counsel of the gods or men. A king of wisdom tested in the past Can act in a time of troubles, and act well. Noblest of men, restore Life to your city! Think how all men call you Liberator for your triumph long ago; Ah, when your years of kingship are remembered, Let them not say We rose. ut later fell Keep the State from going down in the storm! Once, years ago, with happy augury, You brought us fortune; be the same again! No man questions your power to rule the land: But rule over men, not over a dead city! Ships are only hulls, citadels are nothing, When no life moves in the empty passageways. OEDIPUS: Poor children! You may be sure I know All that you longed for in your coming here. I know that you

are deathly sick; and yet. Sick as you are, not one is as sick as I. Each of you suffers in himself alone His anguish, not another's; but my spirit Groans for the city, for myself, for you. Page 6

I was not sleeping, you are not waking me. No, I have been in tears for a long while And in my restless thought walked many ways. In all my search, I found one helpful course, And that I have taken: I have sent Creon, Son of Menoikeus, brother of the Queen, To Delphi, Apollo's place of revelation, To learn there, if he can, What act or pledge of mine may save the city. I have counted the days, and now, this very day, I am troubled, for he has overstayed his time. What is he doing? He has been gone too long. Yet whenever he comes back, I should do ill To scant whatever duty God reveals. PRIEST: It is a timely promise.

At this instant They tell me Creon is here. OEDIPUS: O, Lord Apollo! May his news be fair as his face is radiant! PRIEST: It could not be otherwise: he is crowned with bay, The chaplet is thick with berries. OEDIPUS: We shall soon know; He is near enough to hear us now. [Enter CREON O Prince: Brother: son of Menoikeus: What answer do you bring us from the god? Page 7

CREON: A strong one. I can tell you, great afflictions Will turn out well, if they are taken well. OEDIPUS: What was the oracle? These vague words Leave me still hanging between hope and fear. CREON: Is it your pleasure to hear me with all these

Gathered around us? I am prepared to speak, But should we not go in?

OEDIPUS: Let them all hear it. It is for them I suffer, more than for myself.

CREON: Then I will tell you what I heard at Delphi. In plain words The god

commands us to expel from the land of Thebes An old defilement we are sheltering. It is a deathly thing, beyond cure; We must not let it feed upon us longer. OEDIPUS: What defilement? How shall we rid ourselves of it? CREON: By exile or death, blood for blood. It was Murder that brought the plague-wind on the city. OEDIPUS: Murder of whom? Surely the god has named him? Page 8 CREON:

My lord: long ago Laios was our king, Before you came to govern us.

OEDIPUS: I know; I learned of him from others; I never saw him. CREON: He was murdered; and Apollo commands us now To take revenge upon whoever killed him. OEDIPUS: Upon whom? Where are they? Where shall we find a clue To solve that crime, after so many years? CREON: Here in this land, he said. If we make enquiry, We may touch things that otherwise escape us.

OEDIPUS: Tell me: Was Laos murdered in his house, Or in the fields, or in some foreign country? CREON: He said he planned to make a pilgrimage. He did not come home again. OEDIPUS: And was there no one,

No witness, no companion, to tell what happened? CREON: They were all killed but one, and he got away So frightened that he could remember one thing only. Page 9 OEDIPUS: What was that one thing? One may be the key To everything, if we resolve to use it. CREON: He said that a band of highwaymen attacked them, Outnumbered them, and overwhelmed the King. OEDIPUS: Strange, that a highwayman should be so daring— Unless some faction here bribed him to do it. CREON: We thought of that. But after Laos' death New troubles arose and we had no avenger. OEDIPUS: What troubles could prevent your hunting down the killers? CREON:

The riddling Sphinx's song Made us deaf to all mysteries but her own.

OEDIPUS: Then once more I must bring what is dark to light. It is most fitting that Apollo shows, As you do, this compunction for the dead. You shall see how I stand by you, as I should, To avenge the city and the city's god. And not as though it were for some distant friend, But for my own sake, to be rid of evil. Whoever killed King Laios might—who knows? — Decide at any moment to kill me as well By avenging the murdered king I protect myself. Come, then, my children: leave the altar steps, Page 10 Lift up your olive boughs! One of you go

And summon the people of Kadmos to gather here. I will do all that I can; you may tell them that. [Exit a PAGE So, with the help of God, We shall be saved—or else indeed we are lost. PRIEST: Let us rise, children. It was for this we came, And now the King has promised it himself. Phoibos has sent us an oracle; may he descend Himself to save us and drive out the plague. [Exeunt OEDIPUS and CREON into the palace by the central door. The PRIEST and the SUPPLIANTS disperse R and L. After a short pause the CHORUS enters the orchestra. PARODOS CHORUS: [STROPHE I What is God singing in his profound Delphi of gold and shadow?

What oracle for Thebes, the sunwhipped city? Fear unjoins me, the roots of my heart tremble. Now I remember, O Healer, your power, and wonder: Will you send doom like a sudden cloud, or weave it Page 11 Like nightfall of the past? Speak, speak to us, issue of holy sound: Dearest to our expectancy: be tender! [ANTISTROPHE Let me pray to Athena, the immortal daughter of Zeus, And to Artemis her sister Who keeps her famous throne in the market ring, And to Apollo, bowman at the far butts of heaven— O gods, descend!

Like three streams leap against The fires of our grief, the fires of darkness;
Be swift to bring us rest!

As in the old time from the brilliant house Now our afflictions have no end.
[STROPHE 2 Now all our stricken host lies down Of air you stepped to save
us. come again! And no man fights off death with his mind; The noble
plowland bears no grain, And groaning mothers can not bear See, how our
lives like birds take wing, Like sparks that fly when a fire soars, To the shore
of the god of evening. [ANTISTROPHE 2 The plague burns on, it is pitiless,
Though pallid children laden with death Lie unwept in the stony ways. And
old gray women by every path Flock to the strand about the altars There to
strike their breasts and cry

Page 12 Worship of Phoibos in wailing prayers: Be kind, God's golden child!
[STROPHE 3 There are no swords in this attack by fire, No shields, but we are
ringed with cries. Send the besieger plunging from our homes Into the vast
sea-room of the Atlantic Or into the waves that foam eastward of Thrace- For
the day ravages what the night spares- Destroy our enemy, lord of the
thunder! Let him be riven by lightning from heaven! [ANTISTROPHE 3
Phoibos Apollo, stretch the sun's bowstring, That golden cord, until it sing for
us, Flashing arrows in heaven! Artemis, Huntress, Race with flaring lights
upon our mountains!

O scarlet god, O golden-banded brow, O Theban Bacchos in a storm of
Maenads. [Enter OEDIPUS. C. Whirl upon Death, that all the Undying hate!
Come with blinding torches, come in joy! SCENE I OEDIPUS: Is this your
prayer? It may be answered. Come Page 13 Listen to me, act as the crisis

demands, And you shall have relief from all these evils. Until now I was a stranger to this tale, As I had been a stranger to the crime. Could I track down the murderer without a clue? But now, friends, As one who became a citizen after the murder, I make this proclamation to all Thebans: If any man knows by whose hand Laios, son of Labdakos,

Met his death, I direct that man to tell me everything, No matter what he fears for having so long withheld it. Let it stand as promised that no further trouble Will come to him. but he may leave the land in safety. Moreover: If anyone knows the murderer to be foreign, Let him not keep silent he shall have his reward from me. However, if he does conceal it; if any man Fearing for his friend or for himself disobeys this edict, Hear what I propose to do: I solemnly forbid the people of this country, Where power and throne are mine, ever to receive that man Or speak to him, no matter who he is, or let him

Join in sacrifice, lustration, or in prayer. I decree that he he driven from every house, Being, as he is, corruption itself to us, the Delphi Page 14 Voice of Zeus has pronounced this revelation. Thus I associate myself with the oracle And take the side of the murdered king. As for the criminal, I pray to God Whether it be a lurking thief, or one of a number— I pray that that man's life be consumed in evil and wretchedness. And as for me, this curse applies no less If it should turn out that the culprit is my guest here. Sharing my hearth. You have heard the penalty. I lay it on you now to attend to this

For my sake, for Apollo's, for the sick Sterile city that heaven has abandoned. Suppose the oracle had given you no command: Should this

defilement go uncleansed for ever? You should have found the murderer: your king, A noble king, had been destroyed! Now I, Having the power that he held before me, Having his bed, begetting children there Upon his wife, as he would have, had he lived— Their son would have been my children's brother. If Laios had had luck in fatherhood! (But surely ill luck rushed upon his reign)— I say I take the son's part, just as though I were his son, to press the fight for him And see it won!

I'll find the hand that brought Death to Labdakos' and Polydoros' child, Heir of Kadmos' and Agenor's line. And as for those who fail me. May the gods deny them the fruit of' the earth, Page 15 Fruit of the womb, and may they rot utterly! Let them be wretched as we are wretched, and worse! For you, for loyal Thebans, and for all Who find my actions right, I pray the favor Of justice, and of all the immortal gods. CHORAGOS: Since I am under oath, my lord, I swear I did not do the murder, I can not name The murderer. Might not the oracle That has ordained the search tell where to find him? OEDIPUS: An honest question.

But no man in the world Can make the gods do more than the gods will.

CHORAGOS: There is one last expedient- OEDIPUS: Tell me what it is.

Though it seem slight, you must not hold it back. CHORAGOS: A lord

clairvoyant to the lord Apollo, As we all know, is the skilled Teiresias. One

might learn much about this from him, Oedipus. OEDIPUS: I am not wasting

time: Creon spoke of this, and I have sent for him— Twice, in fact; it is

strange that he is not here. Page 16 CHORAGOS: The other matter—that old

report—seems useless. OEDIPUS: Tell me. I am interested in all reports.

CHORAGOS: The King was said to have been killed by highwaymen.

OEDIPUS: I know. But we have no witnesses to that. CHORAGOS: If the killer can feel a particle of dread, Your curse will bring him out of hiding! OEDIPUS: No. The man who dared that act will fear no curse. [Enter the blind seer TEIRESIAS, led by a PAGE CHORAGOS: But there is one man who may detect the criminal. This is Teiresias, this is the holy prophet In whom, alone of all men, truth was born. OEDIPUS: Teiresias. seer: student of mysteries. Of all that's taught and all that no man tells, Secrets of Heaven and secrets of the earth: Blind though you are, you know the city lies Sick with plague; and from this plague, my lord,

We find that you alone can guard or save us. Page 17 Possibly you did not hear the messengers? Apollo, when we sent to him, Sent us back word that this great pestilence Would lift, but only if we established clearly The identity of those who murdered Laios. They must be killed or exiled. Can you use Birdfight or any art of divination To purify yourself, and Thebes, and me From this contagion? We are in your hands. There is no fairer duty Than that of helping others in distress. TEIRESIAS: How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be When there's no help in truth! I knew this well, But made myself forget.

I should not have come. OEDIPUS: What is troubling you? Why are your eyes so cold? TEIRESIAS: Let me go home. Bear your own fate, and I'll Bear mine. It is better so: trust what I say. OEDIPUS: What you say is ungracious and unhelpful To your native country. Do not refuse to speak. TEIRESIAS: When it comes to speech, your own is neither temperate Nor opportune. I wish to be more prudent. OEDIPUS: In God's name, we all beg you— Page 18 TEIRESIAS: You are all ignorant. No; I will never tell you what I know. Now it is my

misery: then, it would be yours. OEDIPUS: What! You do know something, and will not tell us?

You would betray us all and wreck the State? TEIRESIAS: I do not intend to torture myself, or you. Why persist in asking? You will not persuade me.

OEDIPUS: What a wicked old man you are! You'd try a stone's Patience! Out with it! Have you. no feeling at all TEIRESIAS: You call me unfeeling. If you

could only see The nature of your own feelings... OEDIPUS: Why, Who would not feel as I do? Who could endure Your arrogance toward the city?

TEIRESIAS: What does it matter! Whether I speak or not, it is bound to come.

OEDIPUS: Then, if " it" is bound to come, you are bound to tell me. Page 19

TEIRESIAS: No, I will not go on.

Rage as you please. OEDIPUS: Rage? Why not! And I'll tell you what I think:

You planned it, you had it done, you all but Killed him with your own hands: if you had eyes, I'd say the crime was yours, and yours alone. TEIRESIAS: So? I

charge you, then, Abide by the proclamation you have made: From this day forth Never speak again to these men or to me; You yourself are the

pollution of this country. OEDIPUS: You dare say that! Can you possibly think you have Some way of going free, after such insolence? TEIRESIAS: I have

gone free. It is the truth sustains me. OEDIPUS: Who taught you shamelessness? It was not your craft.

TEIRESIAS: You did. You made me speak. I did not want to. OEDIPUS: Speak

what? Let me hear it again more clearly. Page 20 TEIRESIAS: Was it not clear before? Are you tempting met? OEDIPUS: I did not understand it. Say it

again. TEIRESIAS: I say that you are the murderer whom you seek. OEDIPUS:

Now twice you have spat out infamy. You'll pay for it! TEIRESIAS: Would you care for more? Do you wish to be really angry? OEDIPUS: Say what you will, whatever you say is worthless. TEIRESIAS: I say you live in hideous shame with those most dear to you. You can not see the evil. OEDIPUS: It seems you can go on mouthing like this for ever.

TEIRESIAS: I can, if there is power in truth. OEDIPUS: There is: But not for you, not for you, You sightless, witless, senseless, mad old man! TEIRESIAS: You are the madman. There is no one here who will not curse you soon, as you curse me. Page 21 OEDIPUS: You child of endless night! You can not hurt me Or any other man who sees the sun. TEIRESIAS: True: it is not from me your fate will come. That lies within Apollo's competence, As it is his concern. OEDIPUS: Tell me: Are you speaking for Creon, or for yourself? TEIRESIAS: Creon is no threat. You weave your own doom. OEDIPUS: Wealth, power, craft of statesmanship!

Kingly position, everywhere admired! What savage envy is stored up against these. It Creon, whom I trusted, Creon my friend, For this great office which the city once put in my hands unsought—if for this power Creon desires in secret to destroy me! He has bought this decrepit fortune-teller, this collector of dirty pennies, this prophet fraud— Why, he is no more clairvoyant than I am! Tell us. Has your mystic mummery ever approached the truth? When that hellcat the Sphinx was performing here, What help were you to these people? Her magic was not for the first man who came along: Page 22 It demanded a real exorcist.

Your birds— What good were they? or the gods, for the matter of that? But I came by, Oedipus, the simple man, who knows nothing— And this is the man you think you can destroy, I thought it out for myself, no birds helped me! That you may be close to Creon when he's king! Well, you and your friend Creon, it seems to me, Will suffer most. If you were not an old man, You would have paid already for your plot. CHORAGOS: We can not see that his words or yours Have been spoken except in anger, Oedipus, And of anger we have no need. How can God's will Be accomplished best? That is what most concerns us. TEIRESIAS:

You are a king. But where argument's concerned I am your man, as much a king as you. I am not your servant, but Apollo's. I have no need of Creon to speak for me. Listen to me. You mock my blindness, do you? But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind: You can not see the wretchedness of your life, Nor in whose house you live no, nor with whom. Who are your father and mother? Can you tell me? You do not even know the blind wrongs That you have done them, on earth and in the world below. Page 23 But the double lash of your parents' curse will whip you Out of this land some day, with only night Upon your precious eyes

Your cries then—where will they not be heard? What fastness of Kithairon will not echo them? And that bridal-descant of yours—you'll know it then, The song they sang when you came here to Thebes And found your misguided berthing. All this, and more, that you can not guess at now, Will bring you to yourself among your children. Be angry, then. Curse Croon. Curse my words. I tell you. no man that walks upon the earth Shall be rooted out more horribly than you. OEDIPUS: Am I to bear this from him? —Damnation Take you! Out

of this place! Out of my sight! TEIRESIAS: I would not have come at all if you had not asked me.

OEDIPUS: Could I have told that you'd talk nonsense, that You'd come here to make a fool of yourself. and of me? TEIRESIAS: A fool? Your parents thought me sane enough. OEDIPUS: My parents again! —Wait: who were my parents? Page 24 TEIRESIAS: This day will give you a father, and break your heart. OEDIPUS: Your infantile riddles! Your damned abracadabra!

TEIRESIAS: You were a great man once at solving riddles. OEDIPUS: Mock me with that if you like; You will find it true. TEIRESIAS: It was true enough. It brought about your ruin. OEDIPUS: But if it saved this town? TEIRESIAS: [To the PAGE: Boy, give me your hand. OEDIPUS:

Yes, boy: lead him away. —While you are here We can do nothing. Go; leave us in peace. TEIRESIAS: I will go when I have said what I have to say. How can you hurt me? And I tell you again: The man you have been looking for all this time, The damned man, the murderer of Laos, That man is in Thebes. To your mind he is foreign- born, But it will soon be shown that he is a Theban, A revelation that will fail to please. Page 25 A blind man, Who has his eyes now; a penniless man, who is rich now; And he will go tapping the strange earth with his staff To the children with whom he lives now he will be Brother and father—the very same; to her

Who bore him, son and husband—the very same Who came to his father's bed, wet with his father's blood. Enough. Go think that over. If later you find error in what I have said, You may say that I have no skill in prophecy. [Exit TEIRESIAS, led by his PAGE. OEDIPUS goes into the palace. ODE I CHORUS:

The Delphic stone of prophecies [STROPHE I Remembers ancient regicide
And a still bloody hand. That killer's hour of flight has come. He must be
stronger than riderless Coursers of untiring wind, For the son of Zeus armed
with his father's thunder Leaps in lightning after him;

And the Furies follow him, the sad Furies. Holy Parnassos' peak of snow
[ANTISTROPHE I Flashes and blinds that secret man, Page 26 That all shall
hunt him down: Though he may roam the forest shade like a bull gone wild
from pasture To rage through gluons of stone. Doom conies down on him;
flight will not avail him; For the world's heart calls him desolate, And the
immortal Furies follow, for ever follow. But now a wilder thing is heard
[STROPHE 2 From the old man skilled at hearing Pate in the wingbeat of a
bird. Bewildered as a blown bird, my soul hovers and can not find

Foothold in this debate, or any reason or rest of mind. But no man ever
brought—none can bring Proof of strife between Thebes' royal house,
Labdakos' line, and the son of Polybos; And never until now has any man
brought word Of Laios' dark death staining Oedipus the King. Divine Zeus
and Apollo hold [ANTISTROPHE 2 Perfect intelligence alone of all tales ever
told; And well though this diviner works, he works in his own night; No man
can judge that rough unknown or trust in second sight, For wisdom changes
hands among the wise. Shall I believe my great lord criminal At a raging
word that a blind old man let fall?

I saw him, when the carrion woman faced him of old, Prove his heroic mind!
These evil words are lies. Page 27 SCENE II CREON: Men of Thebes: I am told
that heavy accusations Have been brought against me by King Oedipus. I am

not the kind of man to hear this tamely. If in these present difficulties He holds me accountable for any harm to him Through anything I have said or done—why, then, I do not value life in this dishonor. It is not as though this rumor touched upon Some private indiscretion. The matter is grave. The fact is that I am being called disloyal To the State, to my fellow citizens, to my friends. CHORAGOS:

He may have spoken in anger, not from his mind. CREON: But did you not hear him say I was the one Who seduced the old prophet into lying?

CHORAGOS: The thing was said; I do not know how seriously. CREON: But you were watching him! Were his eyes steady? Did he look like a man in his right mind? CHORAGOS: I do not know. I can not judge the behavior of great men. But here is the King himself. Page 28 Enter OEDIPUS OEDIPUS: So you dared come back. Why? How brazen of you to come to my house, You murderer! Do you think I do not know That you plotted to kill me, plotted to steal my throne? Tell me, in God's name: am I coward, a fool,

That you should dream you could accomplish this? A fool who could not see your slippery game? A coward, not to fight back when I saw it? You are the fool, Creon, are you not? Hoping Without support or friends to get a throne? Thrones may be won or bought: you could do neither. CREON: Now listen to me. You have talked: let me talk, too. You can not judge unless you know the facts. OEDIPUS: You speak well: there is one fact; but I find it hard To learn from the deadliest enemy I have. CREON: That above all I must dispute with you. OEDIPUS: That above all I will not hear you deny. CREON: If you think there is anything good in being stubborn

Against all reason, then I say you are wrong. Page 29 OEDIPUS: If you think a man can sin against his own kind And not be punished for it, I say you are mad. CREON: I agree. But tell me: what have I done to you? OEDIPUS: You advised me to send for that wizard, did you not? CREON: I did. I should do it again. OEDIPUS: Very well. Now tell me: How long has it been since Laios– CREON: What of Laios? OEDIPUS: Since he vanished in that onset by the road? CREON: It was long ago, a long time. OEDIPUS: And this prophet, Was he practicing here then? CREON: He was; and with honor, as now. OEDIPUS: Did he speak of me at that time?

CREON: He never did; At least, not when I was present. Page 30 OEDIPUS: But ... the enquiry? I suppose you held one? CREON: We did, but we learned nothing. OEDIPUS: Why did the prophet not speak against me then? CREON: I do not know; and I am the kind of man Who holds his tongue when he has no facts to go on. OEDIPUS: There's one fact that you know, and you could tell it. CREON: What fact is that? If I know it, you shall have it. OEDIPUS: If he were not involved with you, he could not say That it was I who murdered Laios. CREON: If he says that, you are the one that knows it! — But now it is my turn to question you.

OEDIPUS: Put your questions. I am no murderer. CREON: First, then: You married my sister? OEDIPUS: I married your sister. Page 31 CREON: And you rule the kingdom equally with her? OEDIPUS: Everything that she wants she has from me. CREON: And I am the third, equal to both of you? OEDIPUS: That is why I call you a bad friend. CREON: No. Reason it out, as I have done. Think of this first: Would any sane man prefer Power, with all a king's anxieties, To that same power and the grace of sleep? Certainly not I. I have

never longed for the king's power—only his rights. Would any wise man differ from me in this?

As matters stand, I have my way in everything With your consent, and no responsibilities. If I were king, I should be a slave to policy. How could I desire a scepter more Than what is now mine—untroubled influence: No, I have not gone mad; I need no honors, Except those with the perquisites I have now. I am welcome everywhere; every man salutes me, And those who want your favor seek my ear, Since I know how to manage what they ask. Should I exchange this ease for that anxiety? Besides, no sober mind is treasonable. I hate anarchy And never would deal with any man who likes it.

Page 32 Test what I have said.

Go to the priestess At Delphi, ask if I quoted her correctly. And as for this other thing: if I am found Guilty of treason with Teiresias, Then sentence me to death! You have my word It is a sentence I should cast my vote for— But not without evidence! You do wrong When you take good men for had, bad men for good. A true friend thrown aside—why, life itself Is not more precious! In time you will know this well: For time, and time alone, will show the just man, Though scoundrels are discovered in a day. CHORAGOS: This is well said, and a prudent man would ponder it. Judgments too quickly formed are dangerous.

OEDIPUS: But is he not quick in his duplicity? And shall I not be quick to parry him? Would you have me stand still, hold my peace, and let This man win everything, through my inaction? CREON: And you want—what is it, then? To banish me? OEDIPUS: No, not exile. It is your death I want, So that all the

world may see what treason means. Page 33 CREON: You will persist, then? You will not believe me? OEDIPUS: How can I believe you? CREON: Then you are a fool. OEDIPUS: To save myself? CREON: In justice, think of me. OEDIPUS: You are evil incarnate. CREON: But suppose that you are wrong? OEDIPUS: Still I must rule.

CREON: But not if you rule badly. OEDIPUS: O city, city! CREON: It is my city, too! CHORAGOS: Now, my lords, be still. I see the Queen, Iocaste, coming from her palace chambers; And it is time she came, for the sake of you both. This dreadful quarrel can be resolved through her. Page 34 [Enter IOCASTE IOCASTE: Poor foolish men, what wicked din is this? With Thebes sick to death, is it not shameful That you should rake some private quarrel up? [To OEDIPUS: Come into the house. —And you, Creon, go now: Let us have no more of this tumult over nothing. CREON: Nothing? No, sister: what your husband plans for me

Is one of two great evils: exile or death. OEDIPUS: He is right. Why, woman I have caught him squarely Plotting against my life. CREON: No! Let me die Accurst if ever I have wished you harm! IOCASTE: Ah, believe it, Oedipus! In the name of the gods, respect this oath of his For my sake, for the sake of these people here! CHORAGOS: [STROPHE 1 Open your mind to her, my lord. Be ruled by her, I beg you! OEDIPUS: What would you have me do? Page 35 CHORAGOS: Respect Creon's word. He has never spoken like a fool, And now he has sworn an oath. OEDIPUS:

You know what you ask? CHORAGOS: I do. OEDIPUS: Speak on, then. CHORAGOS: A friend so sworn should not be baited so, In blind malice, and

without final proof. OEDIPUS: You are aware, I hope, that what you say Means death for me, or exile at the least. CHORAGOS: [STROPHE 2 No, I swear by Helios, first in Heaven! May I die friendless and accurst, The worst of deaths, if ever I meant that! It is the withering fields That hurt my sick heart: Must we bear all these ills, And now your bad blood as well? OEDIPUS: Then let him go. And let me die, if I must,

Or be driven by him in shame from the land of Thebes. It is your unhappiness, and not his talk, Page 36 That touches me. As for him- Wherever he goes, hatred will follow him. CREON: Ugly in yielding, as you were ugly in rage! Natures like yours chiefly torment themselves. OEDIPUS: Can you not go? Can you not leave me? CREON: I can. You do not know me; but the city knows me, And in its eyes I am just, if not in yours. [Exit CREON CHORAGOS: [ANTISTROPHE 1 Lady Iocaste, did you not ask the King to go to his chambers? IOCASTE: First tell me what has happened. CHORAGOS: There was suspicion without evidence; yet it rankled

As even false charges will. IOCASTE: On both sides? CHORAGOS: On both. IOCASTE: But what was said? Page 37 CHORAGOS: Oh let it rest, let it be done with! Have we not suffered enough? OEDIPUS: You see to what your decency has brought you, You have made difficulties where my heart saw none. CHORAGOS: [ANTISTROPHE 2 Oedipus, it is not once only I have told you- You must know I should count myself unwise To the point of madness, should I now forsake you- You, under whose hand, In the storm of another time, Our dear land sailed out free. But now stand fast at the helm! IOCASTE: In God's name, Oedipus, inform your wife as well:

Why are you so set in this hard anger? OEDIPUS: I will tell you, for none of these men deserves My confidence as you do. It is Creon's work, His treachery, his plotting against me. IOCASTE: Go on, if you can make this clear to me. OEDIPUS: He charges me with the murder of Laios. IOCASTE: Has he some knowledge? Or does he speak from hearsay? Page 38 OEDIPUS: He would not commit himself to such a charge, But he has brought in that damnable soothsayer To tell his story. IOCASTE: Set your mind at rest. If it is a question of soothsayers, I tell you That you will find no man whose craft gives knowledge Of the unknowable.

Here is my proof: An oracle was reported to Laios once (I will not say iron, Phoibos himself, but from His appointed ministers, at any rate) That his doom would be death at the hands of his own son His son, born of his flesh and of mine! Now, you remember the story: Laios was killed By marauding strangers where three highways meet; But his child had not been three days in this world Before the King had pierced the baby's ankles And left him to die on a lonely mountainside. Thus, Apollo never caused that child To kill his father, and it was not Laios' fate To die at the hands of his son, as he had feared.

This is what prophets and prophecies are worth! Have no dread of them. It is God himself Who can show us what he wills, in his own way. Page 39

OEDIPUS: How strange a shadowy memory crossed my mind, Just now while you were speaking; it chilled my heart. IOCASTE: What do you mean? What memory do you speak of? OEDIPUS: If I understand you, Laios was killed At a place where three roads meet. IOCASTE: So it was said; We have no later story. OEDIPUS: Where did it happen? IOCASTE: Phokis, it is called: at a place

where the Theban Way Divides into the roads toward Delphi and Daulia.

OEDIPUS: When? IOCASTE:

We had the news not long before you came And proved the right to your succession here. OEDIPUS: Ah, what net has God been weaving for me?

IOCASTE: Oedipus! Why does this trouble you? OEDIPUS: Do not ask me yet.

Page 40 First, tell me how Laos looked, and tell me How old he was.

IOCASTE: He was tall, his hair just touched With white; his form was not unlike your own. OEDIPUS: I think that I myself may be accurst By my own ignorant edict. IOCASTE: You speak strangely. It makes me tremble to look at you, my King. OEDIPUS: I am not sure that the blind man can not see. But I should know better if you were to tell me

IOCASTE: Anything—though I dread to hear you ask it. OEDIPUS: Was the King lightly escorted, or did he ride With a large company, as a ruler should?

IOCASTE: There were five men with him in all. one was a herald, And a single chariot, which he was driving. OEDIPUS: Alas, that makes it plain enough!

But who— Who- told you how it happened? IOCASTE: A household servant, The only one to escape. Page 41 OEDIPUS: And is he still A servant of ours?

IOCASTE: No; for when he came back at last And found you enthroned in the place of the dead king, He came to me, touched my hand with his, and begged

That I would send him away to the frontier district Where only the shepherds go- As far away from the city as I could send him. I granted his prayer; for although the man was a slave, He had earned more than this favor at my hands. OEDIPUS: Can he be called back quickly? IOCASTE: Easily. But why?

OEDIPUS: I have taken too much upon myself Without enquiry; therefore I wish to consult him. IOCASTE: Then he shall come. But am I not one also To whom you might confide these fears of yours? OEDIPUS: That is your right; it will not be denied you, Now least of all; for I have reached a pitch Page 42

Of wild foreboding. Is there anyone To whom I should sooner speak? Polybos of Corinth is my father. My mother is a Dorian: Merope. I grew up chief among the men of Corinth Until a strange thing happened– Not worth my passion, it may be but strange. At a feast, a drunken man maundering in his cups Cries out that I am not my father’s son! I contained myself that night, though I felt anger And a sinking heart. The next day I visited My father and mother, and questioned them. They stormed, Calling it all the slanderous rant of a fool; And this relieved me. Yet the suspicion Remained always aching in my mind;

I knew there was talk; I could not rest; And finally, saving nothing to my parents, I went to the shrine at Delphi. The god dismissed my question without reply; He spoke of other things. Some were clear, Full of wretchedness, dreadful, unbearable: As, that I should lie with my own mother, breed Children from whom all men would turn their eyes; And that I should be my father’s murderer. I heard all this, and fled. And from that day Corinth to me was only in the stars Descending in that quarter of the sky, As I wandered farther and farther on my way To a land where I should never see the evil Page 43

Sung by the oracle. And I came to this country Where, so you say. King Labs was killed. I will tell you all that happened there, my lady. There were three

highways Coming together at a place I passed; And there a herald came towards me, and a chariot Drawn by horses, with a man such as you describe Seated in it. The groom leading the horses Forced me off the road at his lord's command; But as this charioteer lurched over towards me I struck him in my rage. The old man saw me And brought his double goad down upon my head As I came abreast. He was paid back, and more! Swinging my club in this right hand I knocked him

Out of his car, and he rolled on the ground. I killed him. I killed them all. Now if that stranger and Laios were—kin, Where is a man more miserable than P More hated by the gods? Citizen and alien alike Must never shelter me or speak to me I must be shunned by all. And I myself Pronounced this malediction upon myself! Think of it: I have touched you with these hands, These hands that killed your husband. What defilement! Am I all evil, then? It must be so, Since I must flee from Thebes, yet never again Page 44 See my own countrymen, my own country, For fear of joining my mother in marriage And killing Polybos, my father.

Ah, If I was created so, horn to this fate, Who could deny the savagery of God? O holy majesty of heavenly powers! May I never see that day! Never! Rather let me vanish from the race of men Than know the abomination destined me! CHORAGOS: We too, my lord, have felt dismay at this. But there is hope: you have yet to hear the shepherd. OEDIPUS: Indeed, I fear no other hope is left me. IOCASTE: What do you hope from him when he comes? OEDIPUS: This much: If his account of the murder tallies with yours, Then I am cleared. IOCASTE: What was it that I said Of such importance? OEDIPUS: Why, “ marauders,” you said,