

OEDIPUS REX (430 B.C.)

by Sophocles (496 B.C. – 406 A.D.)

PROLOGUE

(7) Oedipus: Children, I would not have you speak through messengers, and therefore I have come to hear you – I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name.

(To a Priest) You, there, since you are the 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.

(25) Priest: Your own eyes must tell you: Thebes is tossed on 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 blood and pyre raids like detestable lightning through the city, and the house of Kadmos is laid waste, all emptied, and all darkened: Death alone battens upon the misery of Thebes.

(34) You are not one of the immortal gods, we know; yet we have come to you to make our prayer [...]

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: A god's touch, it seems, enabled you to help us.

(60) 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 [...] but my spirit groans for the city, for myself, for you.

I was not sleeping, you are not waking me.

No, I have been in tears for a long while.

(71) I have sent Kreon [...] to Delphi [...] to learn there, if he can, what act or pledge of mine may save the city.

(81) Priest: It is a timely promise. At this instant they tell me Kreon is here.

Kreon: My Lord, Laios once ruled this land, before you came to govern us.

Oedipus: I know; I learned of him from others; I never saw him.

Kreon: 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?

Kreon: Here in this land, he said. Search reveals things that escape an inattentive eye.

Oedipus: Tell me, was Laios murdered in his house, or in the fields, or in some foreign country?

[...]

Kreon: They were all killed but one, and he got away so frightened that he could remember one thing only.

(134) Oedipus: Then once more I must bring what is dark to light [...] You shall see how I stand by you, as I should, avenging this country and the god as well, 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?- lay violent hands even on me – and soon. I act for the murdered king in my own interest.

SCENE 1

(28) OEDIPUS: As for the criminal, I pray to God [...], I pray that the 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.

(48) OEDIPUS: 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!

(101) TEIRESIAS: How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be.

(104) 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.

(111) OEDIPUS: In God's name, we all beg you.

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 you 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.

(119) OEDIPUS: Out with it! Have you no feeling at all?

(123) 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.

(128) OEDIPUS: 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.

(141) OEDIPUS: [...] Let me hear it again more clearly.

TEIRESIAS: Was it not clear before? Are you tempting me?

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.

(160) Oedipus: Tell me, who made these fine discoveries? Kreon? or someone else?

Teiresias: Kreon 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, if Kreon whom I trusted, Kreon my friend [...], if for this power Kreon desires in secret to destroy me!

(174) **Oedipus:** When that hellcat the Sphinx was performing here, what help were you to these people? [...]

(179) But I came by, Oedipus, the simple man, who knows nothing – I thought it out myself, no birds helped me.

[...] If you were not an old man, you would have paid for your plot.

(187) **Choragos:** We cannot see that his words or yours have been spoken except in anger, Oedipus, and for anger we have no need. How to accomplish the god's will best: that is what most concerns us.

(195) **Teiresias:** Listen to me. You mock my blindness, do you? But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind: You cannot see the wretchedness of your life, nor in whose house you live, no, nor with whom. Who are your father and your mother? Can you tell me? You do not even know the blind wrongs that you have done them. [...]

(212) Be angry, then. Curse Kreon. Curse my words. I tell you, no man that walks upon the earth shall be rooted out more horribly than you.

(219) Oedipus: You ('ve) 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?

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.

(234) **Teiresias** (exiting): The murderer of Laios 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. A blind man, who has his eyes now; a penniless man, who is rich now; [...] To the children with who 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.