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*Dramatic Publishing*

# OEDIPUS:

A STORY OF GOLD AND SHADOW

ADAPTED BY ANN H. BROCKETTE



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# OEDIPUS:

A STORY OF GOLD AND SHADOW

*Drama. Adapted by Ann H. Brockett. Cast: 5m., 2w. with an ensemble of up to 40 either gender.* Intrigue, pride, political power, love—the story of Oedipus holds multiple options for interpretation. *Oedipus: A Story of Gold and Shadow* focuses on hubris—the pride that drives us to overstep boundaries and take on roles that have not been allotted to us. Oedipus is often cast as a story of misplaced love. This adaptation is a story of a great man, savior of Thebes, who pays the ultimate price for trying to outsmart the gods. Oedipus fulfilled a prophecy that said he would kill his father and marry his mother and thus brought disaster on his city and family. To the very end of the drama, Oedipus is convinced that he is in charge of his fate. As Greek mythology shows, however, no human can rise to the power of the gods who rule over us. Even in defeat, deviant and majestic, Oedipus is still unable to comprehend that, before we act, we must wait for the will of the gods to be revealed to us. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: O88.*

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# **Oedipus: A Story of Gold and Shadow**

By  
ANN H. BROCKETTE



**Dramatic Publishing**  
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## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Laios, King of Thebes, having learned from the oracle of Apollo that he would be killed by his own son, thrusts a spike through the ankles of his infant son. He orders that the child be exposed on Mount Cithaeron. The child, left to die on the holy mountain, is rescued by a shepherd. The shepherd gives the baby to the childless King and Queen of Corinth: King Polybus and Queen Merope. They name the child Oedipus, which in Greek means “scarred feet.”

Raised as the Prince of Corinth, Oedipus comes to manhood expecting to be a king. In his early childhood, Oedipus is warned by the Delphic oracle of Apollo that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Fleeing Corinth in horror, Oedipus meets an old man and his servants on the road. When the old man refuses him passage, Oedipus kills the man and his entire retinue. He proceeds to Thebes, which is being ravaged by the Sphinx who poses a riddle to anyone entering or leaving the city. If the passerby cannot answer her riddle, she eats him.

Oedipus is asked the riddle: What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? When Oedipus answers the riddle correctly: “Man, who crawls as a baby, walks upright in his youth, and walks with a cane in his old age.” The Sphinx disintegrates and Oedipus has free passage into the city.

The regent, Creon, offers Oedipus the throne and the hand of Laios' widow, Jocasta, who is Creon's sister. Jocasta and Oedipus rule Thebes for fifteen years. Then, a famine devastates the city, destroying children before they are born, as well as all the crops and herds of the people. From the Delphic oracle, Oedipus learns that he must cleanse Thebes of an unavenged defilement, the murder of Laios.

Our play begins.

## History of Oedipus: A Story of Gold and Shadow

*Oedipus: an Adaptation with Music* was written in 1989 as a means to bring all members of Jesuit College Preparatory School in Dallas, Texas, together on a similar project. School administrators, faculty, students and staff contributed to the production in some way. For the first time, students and faculty performed in a play together. Teachers and students formed the chorus and played the main roles: a student was Oedipus and his biology teacher was Jocasta.

Originally presented as a musical, the play ran 90 minutes with one intermission. Three seniors wrote the original music; the school band performed it. A senior English seminar student designed the stage, costumes and posters. A freshman handled all the typing into a new school implement: the computer. The math teacher and students built the set. Staff handled all the makeup and costuming. The senior English teacher directed the play. The mime troupe, students proficient in tae kwon do, spontaneously pantomimed the murder of King Laios.

A unique feature of the play is the versatility of casting. Except for the main roles, male or female cast members can perform all others. Costuming can be minimal or elaborate, especially for Oedipus. In the original production, the cast wore monotone everyday wear with white, gold and red headdresses. Oedipus wore an elegant gold mask, black turtleneck and black pants. He donned a brilliant white, gold and red cape to emphasize his kingly position, as the play dictates.

The stage set is comprised of a three-tiered platform with 4 to 6 pillars situated in the middle and around the perimeter. No stage props were used in the performance, except for a thurible used by the leader to “bless” the audience, and a briefcase carried by the messenger.

While *Oedipus* is presented here as a play, not a musical, please feel free to create your own music and insert it where indicated in the script and at moments of your choice.



# **Oedipus: A Story of Gold and Shadow**

## **CHARACTERS**

OEDIPUS  
JOCASTA  
CREON  
TEIRESIAS  
LEADER (OF THE CHORUS)  
MESSENGER (FROM CORINTH)  
SHEPHERD  
SERVANT (OF JOCASTA)  
CHORUS (12)  
PETITIONERS (14)  
MIME TROUPE (5)

## **SETTING**

In front of King Oedipus' palace.

## **SYNOPSIS OF SCENES**

### **PROLOGUE**

Dawn

The Wakening of the Petitioners

### **SCENE I**

Morning

The Accusations

### **SCENE II**

Afternoon

The Realization

### **INTERMISSION**

### **SCENE III**

Dusk

The Acceptance

### **EPILOGUE**

Night

Exile

# Oedipus: A Story of Gold and Shadow

## PROLOGUE

Dawn

The Wakening of the Petitioners

*(The stage lights are low; the house is in darkness. Music begins. Fog rises from the stage area and behind the platform upon which OEDIPUS will make his entrance. The stage lights rise slowly as the petitioners begin to awaken and to call, in muted tones, for OEDIPUS. The music increases in intensity and a spotlight rises on the center of the platform. OEDIPUS enters from backstage to the platform elevated above the people. He wears the garments of a high priest and a mask that announces his godlike stature. The mask is gold, with glitter, and elaborately executed. Music ends.)*

OEDIPUS. My children, sons and daughters of Kadmos. Why do you come before me? Why do you call to me like this? Speak to me, my children; I have come to hear you myself. Tell me, why do you come? You, you there. *(Points to the LEADER.)* Tell me what sorrows you

bear. What do you fear? Tell me, old man, and never doubt that I will help you.

LEADER. Great Oedipus, most powerful King of Thebes! Look at how your people cling to your palace steps! Look at this boy, and this priest weighted with age. Look at these young men, still unmarried. Have pity on us and help us in our sorrow. There is not a bud or fruit left in the land. The herds sicken, and the children die before they are born. Plague and death raid our city. Our people die. We know, great Oedipus, you are not a god, but you are wise in the ways of the gods. Save us, Oedipus, as you saved us from the Sphinx. Set us free. We turn to you, mighty King.

PETITIONERS. Find us safety. Find a remedy. Restore life to our city. Rule over men, not over a dead city!

OEDIPUS (*majestically, priestly, raises his hands toward the people*). My children, poor children, I know why you come to me. I have not been sleeping, my children, You are not waking me. I have sent my brother, Creon, to hear Apollo's wish, and to learn what act or pledge of mine will save our troubled city. What the gods demand, I will do.

LEADER. My king, we do need you. We have no life without you. But look! Here is Creon.

PETITIONER. I hope he brings good news.

LEADER. He has a determined look. Surely he must.

(*Enter CREON.*)

OEDIPUS. Prince, brother, good Creon! What command do you bring us from Apollo?

CREON. A stern one, my king. He says these sufferings of our people will end if we listen to his command.

OEDIPUS. What does he ask of us?

CREON. Oedipus, let us go into the palace. Do not discuss this matter here.

OEDIPUS. Let my people hear it for themselves, Creon.

CREON. This is a kingly matter, Oedipus. Come into the palace.

OEDIPUS. It is for them I suffer, even more than for myself. Speak to us here, in plain words, and tell us what the god commands.

CREON (*hesitantly*). You must expel from Thebes something we now shelter. We can protect it no longer!

OEDIPUS. What? What have we been sheltering? And how should we rid ourselves of it?

CREON. By exile—or death—for murder, Apollo says, brought this plague to our city.

OEDIPUS. Murder! Whose murder? By whom? Surely the god has named them?

CREON. Laios' murder! Laios, our king before you came to us. Apollo demands we take revenge on his murderer.

OEDIPUS. Who? Who are they? How shall we find them after so many years?

CREON. He is here, in Thebes. Apollo tells us to hunt him down and drive him out into the open.

OEDIPUS. Tell me about Laios. Was he murdered here, or in some foreign country?

CREON. Not in our land. He took a pilgrimage—but he never came back.

OEDIPUS. Was there no witness? No fellow traveler to tell what happened?

CREON. All who traveled with him were killed—except for one—but he was so frightened when he returned to the city... He only told us one thing.

OEDIPUS. What? Tell us. Perhaps it is the key to solve this mystery.

CREON. He said a band of robbers attacked the king and his men. They killed the king.

OEDIPUS (*musings*). A highwayman? How could he be so daring? Unless he was bribed...

CREON. We thought of that, but we never pursued it. Just after Laios' death, the Sphinx tormented Thebes, and we had to resolve that new trouble.

OEDIPUS. And denied the rights of a dead king?

CREON. The Sphinx's song made us deaf to all mysteries but her own, Oedipus. And we had no avenger to lead us. We were tormented by her riddling song!

OEDIPUS (*turning to the people, secure in his role as savior of Thebes*). Once again, my children, I must bring what is dark to light. I stand before you now to avenge the murder of your dead king and to save the city.

OEDIPUS. You must call our fellow Thebans to come before me and I will do all I can to save our ravaged land. I will save you, my children. I know why you come to me. I have not been sleeping, my children. You are not waking me.

*(OEDIPUS exits from the platform to the back stage. CREON exits and the petitioners disperse. The LEADER remains, as he is to be the spokesperson for the CHORUS.)*

*The lights darken and a spotlight focuses on a priest weighted with age who enters, stage L, with a thurible and incenses the audience.*

*The CHORUS, dressed in black, enters down the house aisles, left and right, in measured, ritualistic step to percussion. The odes are written so that they can be recited a capella or with musical accompaniment. Also, the odes can be divided so that individuals, groups, or the CHORUS as a whole can recite them.)*

CHORUS.

What does the god sing?  
What does the god of gold and shadow call to us?  
What doom does he send like a sudden storm?  
Like a stream leaping in flood?  
What does the god sing?  
The god of gold and shadow?  
Fear unjoins me,  
My heart trembles,  
And I fear our afflictions have no end.  
No man can fight death.  
No man can attack the fire alone.  
Old men cry,  
Women on every path call to Apollo  
And pray for him to be kind.  
Destroy our destroyer.  
Drive him plunging from every home.  
Day ravages what night has spared.  
And the scarlet god draws tight the bowstring of  
revenge.

*(The CHORUS forms a semicircle around the stage area in front of the audience joined by the LEADER. During the last stanzas of the ode, the CHORUS speaks directly to the audience. During the next scene, the CHORUS slowly forms into groups, and react, as individual characters, to the argument between OEDIPUS and TEIRESIAS. When OEDIPUS calls to them, they turn from the audience to face him.)*

## SCENE I

Morning

The Accusations

*(OEDIPUS enters to platform. He is very regal. His kingly mask is especially highlighted in this speech.)*

OEDIPUS. My countrymen, to all Thebans I make this proclamation: If any man knows how your king, Laios, met his death, I direct that man to tell me everything. Have no fear. No harm will come to him. I will let him leave our land in safety. Or, if anyone knows the murderer to be a foreigner, let him tell me. He shall be rewarded. However, if any man conceals what he knows, if he hides the truth from me—then I tell you, my people, what I will do: I, King Oedipus, rightful King of Thebes, forbid the people of this country to ever receive that man or speak to him—no matter who he is—or let him join in sacrifice, or in ritual. I, King Oedipus, decree that he be driven from every house, and may his life be consumed in wretchedness. Thus, I take the side of your murdered king. You have heard the penalty. Attend to



this—for my sake, and for Apollo. Remember, I take the son's part, though I were the son, to press the fight for Laios and see it won!

LEADER. My lord. My king. We cannot name the murderer. Perhaps...the Oracle that ordained this search can tell us who he is.

OEDIPUS. No man can make the gods do more than the gods will. Apollo has told us all he wishes us to know.

LEADER. There is one among us who may help us.

OEDIPUS. Who is it?

LEADER. You know, Great King, of Teiresias, Prophet for Apollo. We might learn much about this from him.

OEDIPUS. Yes, I agree. I have sent for him—twice, in fact. Why does he keep me waiting?

LEADER. There is another matter...an old report...that Laios was said to have been killed by robbers.

OEDIPUS. Yes, I know about the crime. But we have no witnesses.

LEADER. Well, now your curse will bring these men out of hiding.

OEDIPUS. I doubt it. The man who dares to kill a king fears no curse.

LEADER. Here is the man who will help us find the criminal. Here is Teiresias, our prophet who, alone of men, knows all truth.

*(TEIRESIAS enters from the audience, moving down the house aisle.)*

OEDIPUS. Teiresias, seer of all secrets of Heaven and Earth! Blind though you are, tell us how to save ourselves from this plague that ravages our state. Apollo has

told us that the plague will be lifted if we identify the man who murdered Laios. He must be killed or exiled. Can you use your arts, your powers, to save Thebes from this evil? We are in your hands, Teiresias. You must help us now in our distress.

TEIRESIAS (*aside*). How dreadful it is to know the truth—when there's no help in the truth. I know this well. I should never have come.

OEDIPUS. What is wrong, Teiresias? What is troubling you?

TEIRESIAS. Let me go home. Bear your fate, and I'll bear mine. Let me go! It is much better that way.

OEDIPUS. What you ask will destroy the State! Do not refuse to speak.

TEIRESIAS. Your command is not wise. I wish to be more prudent.

OEDIPUS. We beg you, Teiresias, tell us what you know.

TEIRESIAS. You are ignorant, all of you. No. I will never tell you what I know. The truth is my misery now; if I told you, it would be yours.

OEDIPUS. What! You do know something—and will not tell us! You would betray us and destroy the State!

TEIRESIAS. Don't ask this; I will not be persuaded.

OEDIPUS. Your silence will ruin us! Have you no feelings for your country?

TEIRESIAS. You say I have no feelings? If only you could see the nature of your own.

OEDIPUS. What are you talking about? Who would not feel as I do now? What king could endure such arrogance when the State is threatened?

TEIRESIAS (*turns away from OEDIPUS, as if to himself*).

What does it matter? Whether I speak or not, it is bound to happen.

OEDIPUS (*has followed TEIRESIAS and strains to hear what he is saying*). It? What is bound to happen?

TEIRESIAS (*resolved*). No. I will not go on. Rage at me all you like.

OEDIPUS. How can I not be furious with you! I'll tell you what I think. You planned Laios' death; you had him killed! I say the crime is yours.

TEIRESIAS. Mine! (*He moves towards OEDIPUS threateningly.*) Well, then, I charge you: Live by your own decree: From this day forth never speak to any of these people. Do not share in any of their rituals. I say to you— You, Oedipus, are the pollution of this State!

OEDIPUS. You dare say this to me! Do you think you will ever go free after such insolence?

TEIRESIAS. I am free. The truth frees me.

OEDIPUS. What is the truth? Let me hear you say it more plainly.

TEIRESIAS. I say that you are the murderer you seek.

OEDIPUS. Infamy! Treachery! You will pay for this!

TEIRESIAS. And I say you live in hideous shame with those you love.

OEDIPUS. You are mad.

TEIRESIAS. And I say that you are blind! You cannot see what you do.

OEDIPUS (*slyly*). Tell me, Teiresias, do you speak for yourself—or for Creon?

TEIRESIAS. Creon? Creon is no threat to you. You are the cause of your own doom.

OEDIPUS. What savage envy is stored up in you? And in Creon? He knows I never sought this power. Why does he wish to destroy me? (*Ironically.*) And he has brought this (to the people) decrepit fraud to tell us the truth! (*Swinging on TEIRESIAS.*) Where were you when the Sphinx tormented the city? Were you a help to the State then? But I came, Oedipus, a mere man, who knows nothing and has no powers. I thought out the Sphinx's riddle for myself. Is this (*pointing to himself*) the man you think you can destroy?

LEADER. Oedipus! Teiresias! Your words are spoken in anger. We have no need for anger now. Apollo's will—that is all that must concern us now.

TEIRESIAS (*talking over the LEADER*). You are king—but I am not your servant. I belong to Apollo. I heed his commands! You mock my blindness, but I tell you again that you, with both your eyes, are blind. You cannot see the evil of your own life—nor in whose house you live. No! nor with whom! Who are your father and mother? Can you tell us?

OEDIPUS (*to the CHORUS*). Must I put up with this from him? Out of this place! Out of my sight! I never would have called you if I had known you would talk such foolishness.

TEIRESIAS. Your parents thought me sane enough.

OEDIPUS. My parents again! What is wrong with you? What is this talk of my parents?

TEIRESIAS. This day will give you a father and mother, and break your heart.

OEDIPUS. You and your ridiculous riddles!

TEIRESIAS. You were once a great man at solving riddles.

OEDIPUS. You know that this is true.

TEIRESIAS. It was true enough. It will bring about your ruin. Boy, give me your hand.

OEDIPUS. Yes, boy, lead him away. Go! Leave us in peace.

TEIRESIAS. I will go—when I have said what I have to say. The man you look for, the murderer of Laios... You think he is a foreigner. He is a Theban. A penniless man, who is now rich; He is a blind man, who now sees; And he will soon go tapping through this world with his staff. To the children with whom he lives now, he will be a brother and a father. To the wife with whom he lives now, he will be a son and a husband, A man who came to his father's bed, wet with his father's blood. If you find error in what I tell you, then you may say I have no skill in prophecy. Come, boy.

*(Exit TEIRESIAS, led by the boy. OEDIPUS, disgusted but determined, goes into the palace. The CHORUS, in groups, comes forward toward the audience as they recite this ode. Individuals may also say particular lines.)*

CHORUS.

*(GROUP A)*

Apollo remembers an ancient murder and a still  
bloody hand.

The killer's hour of flight has come.

*(GROUP B)*

Apollo leaps in lightening after him, and the Furies  
follow, endlessly follow.

*(GROUP C)*

All shall hunt him down, hunt him down.  
Though he roams the forests, doom will come to him;  
flight will not help him.

*(GROUP B)*

And the Furies shall follow him, endlessly follow.

*(GROUP D)*

Now we have heard a strange tale from the old man  
skilled in prophecy.

*(LEADER)*

My soul hovers on the brink of despair.  
No man, until now, has ever said Laios' death has  
stained Oedipus.

*(GROUP D)*

Apollo alone holds perfect knowledge; even Teiresias  
works in his own darkness.  
No man can know the unknown,  
And wisdom changes hands among men who are  
wise.

*(GROUP C)*

Shall we believe our great king is a criminal just at  
the raging word of a blind man?  
Teiresias' words are lies!  
Teiresias' words are lies!

*(GROUP D)*

Apollo alone holds perfect knowledge and remembers  
an ancient murder.

*(ALL)*

The killer's hour of flight has come,

*(GROUP B)*

And the Furies shall follow,  
Endlessly follow.