Oedipus “You are the King’s killer!” scene (2 M )

Oedipus (E-DUH-PUSS) Iocasta (JO-COST-UH)

Creon (CREE-ON) Teiresias (TIE-REE-SEE-ASS)

(Enter Teiresias, led by a boy)

Oedipus. Teiresias, by your art you read the signs and secrets of the earth and of the sky;

Therefore you know, although you cannot see, the plague that is besetting us; from this no other man but you, my lord, can save us. Phoebus has said—you may have heard already

— In answer to our question, that this plague will never cease unless we can discover what men they were who murdered Laius, and punish them with death or banishment. Therefore give freely all that you have learned from birds or other form of divination; Save us; save me, the city, and yourself, from the pollution that his bloodshed causes. No finer task, than to give all one has in helping others; we are in your hands.

Teiresias. Ah! what a burden knowledge is, when knowledge can be of no avail! I knew this well, and yet forgot, or I should not have come.

Oedipus. Why, what is this? Why are you so despondent?

Teiresias. Let me go home! It will be best for you, and best for me, if you will let me go.

Oedipus. But to withhold your knowledge! This is wrong, Disloyal to the city of your birth.

Teiresias. I know that what you say will lead you on to ruin; therefore, lest the same befall me too...

Oedipus. No, by the gods! Say all you know, for we go down upon our knees, your suppliants.

Teiresias. Because you do not know! I never shall reveal my burden—I will not say yours.

Oedipus. You know, and will not tell us? Do you wish to ruin Thebes and to destroy us all?

Teiresias. My pain, and yours, will not be caused by me. Why these vain questions?—for I

will not speak.

Oedipus. You villain!—for you would provoke a stone to anger: you'll not speak, but show yourself so hard of heart and so inflexible?

Teiresias. You heap the blame on me; but what is yours you do not know—therefore I am the villain!

Oedipus. And who would not be angry, finding that you treat our people with such cold disdain? This crafty schemer here, this mountebank, whose purse alone has eyes, whose art is blind.—Come, prophet, show your title! When the Sphinx chanted her music here, why did not you speak out and save the city? Yet such a question was one for augury, not for mother wit. You were no prophet then; your birds, your voice from Heaven, were dumb. But I, who came by chance, I, knowing nothing, put the Sphinx to flight, thanks to my wit

—no thanks to divination! And now you try to drive me out; you hope when Creon's king to bask in Creon's favour. You'll expiate the curse? Ay, and repent it, both you and your accomplice. But that you seem old, I'd teach you what you gain by treason!

Teiresias. King though you are, I claim the privilege of equal answer. No, I have the right;

I am no slave of yours—I serve Apollo, and therefore am not listed Creon's man. Listen

—since you have taunted me with blindness! You have your sight, and yet you cannot see

Where, nor with whom, you live, nor in what horror. Your parents—do you know them? Or that you are enemy to your kin, alive or dead? And that a father's and a mother's curse

shall join to drive you headlong out of Thebes and change the light that now you see to darkness? Your cries of agony, where will they not reach? Where on Cithaeron will they not re-echo? When you have learned what meant the marriage-song which bore you to an evil haven here after so fair a voyage? And you are blind to other horrors, which shall make you one with your own children. Therefore, heap your scorn on Creon and on me, for no man living will meet a doom more terrible than yours.

Oedipus. What? Am I to suffer words like this from him? Ruin, damnation seize you! Off at once out of our sight! Go! Get you whence you came!

Teiresias. Had you not called me, I should not be here.

Oedipus. And had I known that you would talk such folly, I'd not have called you to a house of mine.

Teiresias. To you I seem a fool, but to your parents, to those who did beget you, I was wise.

Oedipus. Stop! Who were they? Who were my parents? Tell me!

Teiresias. This day will show your birth and your destruction.

Oedipus. You are too fond of dark obscurities.

Teiresias. But do you not excel in reading riddles?

Oedipus. I scorn your taunts; my skill has brought me glory.

Teiresias. And this success brought you to ruin too.

Oedipus. I am content, if so I saved this city.

Teiresias. Then I will leave you. Come, boy, take my hand.

Oedipus. Yes, let him take it. You are nothing but Vexation here. Begone, and give me peace!

Teiresias. When I have had my say. No frown of yours shall frighten me; you cannot injure me. Here is my message: that man whom you seek with threats and proclamations for the death of Laius, he is living here; he's thought to be a foreigner, but shall be found Theban by birth—and little joy will this bring him; when, with his eyesight turned toblindness, his wealth to beggary, on foreign soil with staff in hand he'll tap his way along, his children with him; and he will be known himself to be their father and their brother, The husband of the mother who gave him birth, Supplanter of his father, and his slayer.—There! Go, and think on this; and if you find that I'm deceived, say then—and not before— That I am ignorant in divination.

(Exeunt severally Oedipus, Teiresias, and boy)