

Oedipus Rex libretto

English translation of spoken text by e. e. cummings

English translation of Latin by Deryck Cooke

PROLOGUE

Speaker

Spectators, you are about to hear a Latin version of King Oedipus. This version is an opera-oratorio; based on the tragedy by Sophocles, but preserving only a certain monumental aspect of its various scenes. And so (wishing to spare your ears and your memories) I shall recall the story as we go along.

Oedipus, unknown to himself, contends with supernatural powers: those sleepless deities who are always watching us from a world beyond death. At the moment of his birth a snare was laid for him – and you will see the snare closing.

Now our drama begins. Thebes is prostrate. After the Sphinx, a plague breaks out. The chorus implores Oedipus to save his city. Since Oedipus has vanquished the sphinx; he promises.

ACT I

Chorus

Kaedit nos pestis, Theba peste moritur.
E peste serva nos, serva, e peste qua Theba moritur.
Oedipus, adest pestis, kaedit nos pestis,
Oedipus, e peste serva nos, serva, Oedipus,
E peste libera urbem,
Urbem serva morientem.

Oedipus

Liberi, vos liberabo,
Liberabo vos a peste.
Ego clarissimus Oedipus,
Ego Oedipus vos diligo,
Ego Oedipus vos servabo.

Chorus

Serva nos adhuc, serva urbem, Oedipus,
Serva nos, clarissime Oedipus,
Quid fakiendum, Oedipus,
Ut liberemur?

Oedipus

Uxoris frater mittitur,
Oraculum consulit,
Deo mittitur Creo,

Chorus

The plague is upon us, Thebes is dying of the plague.
Save us from the plague of which Thebes is dying.
Oedipus, the plague is upon us, the plague is
destroying us,
Oedipus, save us from the plague, save us, Oedipus,
and deliver the city from the plague,
deliver our dying city.

Oedipus

Citizens, I will deliver you,
I will deliver you from the plague.
I, distinguished Oedipus,
I, Oedipus, will deliver you,
I, Oedipus, will save you.

Chorus

Save us once more, save our city, Oedipus!
Save us, far-famed Oedipus,
What is to be done, Oedipus,
That we may be delivered?

Oedipus

The Queen's brother has been sent
To consult the oracle,
Creon has been sent to the God,

Quid fakiendum consulit.
Creo ne commoretur.

Chorus

Vale, Creo! Audimus.
Vale, Creo! Kito, kito.
Audituri te salutant.
Audimus, audimus.

Speaker

Creon, the brother-in-law of Oedipus, has returned from Delphi, where he consulted the oracle. The oracle demands that Laius' murderer be punished. The assassin is hiding in Thebes; at whatever cost, he must be discovered. Oedipus boasts of his skill in dealing with the powers of darkness. He will discover and drive out the assassin.

Creon

Respondit deus:
Laium ulkiski, skelus ulkiski.
Reperire peremptorem.
Thebis peremptor latet.
Latet peremptor regis:
Reperire opus istum,
Luere Thebas a labe.
Kaedem regis ulkiski,
Regis Laii perempti,
Quem depelli deus jubet peremptorem,
Peste infikit Thebas.
Apollo dixit deus.

Oedipus

Non reperias vetus skelus.
Thebas eruam,
Thebis incolit skelestus.

Chorus

Deus dixit, tibi dixit.

Oedipus

Tibi dixit.
Mihi debet se dedere.
Opus vos istum deferre.
Thebas eruam.
Thebis pellere istum.
Vetus skelus non reperias.

Chorus

Thebis skelestus incolit.

To ask what is to be done,
May Creon not tarry long.

Chorus

Hail, Creon! We hearken.
Hail, Creon! Speak, speak!
We hearken and greet you.
We are listening.

Creon

The God has replied:
Avenge Laius, avenge the crime.
Seek out the murderer.
The murderer hides in Thebes.
The murderer of the King is in hiding:
He must be discovered,
To purge Thebes of its stain.
Avenge the murder of the King,
The slain King Laius,
The God decrees: expel the murderer,
Who brought the plague upon Thebes.
The God Apollo has spoken.

Oedipus

You cannot solve this ancient crime.
I will turn Thebes upside down,
The criminal dwells in Thebes.

Chorus

God has spoken, he has spoken to you.

Oedipus

God has spoken to you.
He is obliged to give himself up to me.
You must deliver him to me.
I will turn Thebes upside down,
To drive that man from Thebes.
You cannot solve this ancient crime.

Chorus

The criminal dwells in Thebes.

Oedipus

Deus dixit.
 Sphynga solvi carmen solvi,
 Ego divinabo, iterum divinabo,
 Clarissimus Oedipus,
 Thebas iterum servabo,
 Ego, Oedipus carmen divinabo.

Chorus

Solve, solve, solve!

Oedipus

Pollikeor divinabo.

Chorus

Solve, Oedipus, solve!

Oedipus

Clarissimus Oedipus, likeor divinabo.

Speaker

Oedipus questions that fountain of truth: Tiresias, the seer. Tiresias will not answer. He already realises that Oedipus is a plaything of the heartless gods. This silence angers Oedipus, who accuses Creon of desiring the throne for himself, and Tiresias of being his accomplice. Revolted by the injustice of this attitude, Tiresias decides – the fountain speaks. This is the oracle: the assassin of the King is a King.

Chorus

Delie, exspectamus,
 Minerva filia Jovis,
 Diana in trono insidens.
 Et tu, Phaebe insignis iaculator,
 Succurrite nobis.
 Ut praekeps ales ruit malum
 Et premitur funere funus
 Et corporibus corpora inhumata.
 Expelle, expelle everte in mare
 Atrokem istum Martem
 Qui nos urit inermis
 Dementer ululans.
 Et tu, Bakke,
 Cum taeda advola nobis
 Urens infamem inter deos deum.

Oedipus

God has spoken.
 I solved the riddle of the Sphinx,
 I will solve, I will solve this once again,
 Illustrious Oedipus,
 Again I will save Thebes,
 I, Oedipus, will solve the riddle.

Chorus

Solve it, solve it, solve it!

Oedipus

I promise that I will solve it.

Chorus

Solve it, Oedipus, solve it!

Oedipus

I, most brilliant Oedipus, promise that I will solve it.

Chorus

God of Delos, we are waiting,
 Minerva, daughter of Jupiter,
 Diana enthroned.
 And you, Phoebus Apollo, distinguished archer,
 Hasten to our aid.
 For winged evil swiftly rushes down
 And death is followed by death
 And corpses lie, unburied, upon each other.
 Drive out, overturn into the sea
 That cruel Mars
 Who consumes us, we who are unarmed,
 Shrieking madly.
 And you, Bacchus,
 Fly to us with torches,
 Burning up this God, who is notorious among all
 Gods.

Salve, Tiresia, homo clare, vates!
Dic nobis quod monet deus,
Dic kito, sacrorum docte,
Dic, dic!

Tiresias

Dikere non possum,
Dikere non liket,
Dikere nefastum,
Oedipus, non possum.
Dikere ne cogas!
Cave ne dicam!
Clarissime Oedipus,
Takere fas, Oedipus.

Oedipus

Takiturnitas t'acusat:
Tu peremptor.

Tiresias

Miserande, dico,
Quod me acusas, dico.
Dicam quod dixit deus:
Nullum dictum kelabo.
Inter vos peremptor est,
Apud vos peremptor est,
Cum vobis, vobiscum est.
Regis est rex peremptor.
Rex kekidit Laium,
Rex kekidit regem,
Deus regem acusat;
Peremptor rex!
Opus Thebis pelli regem.
Rex skelestus urbem foedat,
Rex, rex peremptor regis est.

Oedipus

Invidia fortunam odit.
Creavistis me regem.
Servavi vos carminibus
Et creavistis me regem.
Solvendum carmen, cui erat?
Tibi, homo clare, vates;
A me solutum est
Et creavistis me regem.
Invidia fortunam odit.
Nunc, vult quidam munus meum,

Hail, Tiresias, renowned man, prophet!
Tell us what God demands,
Speak quickly, you who is learned of holy things,
Speak, speak!

Tiresias

I cannot speak,
I am not allowed to speak,
To speak is a sin,
Oedipus, I cannot speak.
Do not force me to speak!
Beware, lest I speak!
Illustrious Oedipus,
Allow me to be silent, Oedipus.

Oedipus

Your silence accuses you:
You are the murderer.

Tiresias

Deplorable man, I speak,
Since you accuse me, I speak.
I speak what God has said:
I will conceal no word.
The murderer is among you,
The murderer is near you,
He is with you, he is one of you.
The King's murderer is a King,
A King killed Laius,
A King killed the King,
The God accuses a King;
The murderer is a King!
You must drive this King from Thebes.
A wicked King pollutes the city,
The King's murderer is a King.

Oedipus

Envy hates fortune,
You made me King.
I saved you by answering the riddles
And you made me King.
Who should the riddle have been solved by?
By you, celebrated man, prophet;
But it was solved by me
And you made me King.
Envy hates fortune.
Now, there is one who desires my office,

Creo vult munus regis.
Stipendiarius es, Tiresias!
Hoc fakinus ego solvo!
Creo vult rex fieri.
Quis liberavit vos carminibus?
Amiki, ego Oedipus clarus, ego.
Invidia fortunam odit.
Volunt regem perire,
Vestrum regem perire,
Clarum Oedipodem, vestrum regem.

Chorus

Gloria, gloria, gloria!
Laudibus regina Jocasta
In pestilentibus Thebis.
Gloria, gloria, gloria!
In pestilentibus Thebis
Laudibus regina nostra.
Gloria, gloria, gloria!
Laudibus Oedipodis uxor.
Gloria, gloria, gloria!

ACT II

Speaker

The dispute of the princes attracts Jocasta. You will hear her calm them, shame them for raising their voices in a stricken city. She proves that oracles lie. For example, an oracle predicted that King Laius would perish by the hand of a son of hers; whereas Laius was murdered by thieves, at the crossing of three roads from Daulis and Delphi. Three roads ... crossroads – mark well those words.

They horrify Oedipus. He remembers how, arriving from Corinth before encountering the Sphinx, he killed an old man where three roads meet. If Laius of Thebes were that man – what then? Oedipus cannot return to Corinth, having been threatened by the oracle with a double crime: killing his father and marrying his mother. He is afraid.

Jocasta

Nonn' erubescite, reges,
Clamare ululare in aegra urbe
Domestikis altercationibus?
Clamare vestros domestikos clamores,
Coram omnibus domestikos clamores,
In aegra urbe, reges, nonn' erubescite?
Ne probentur oracula
Quae semper mentiantur.
Oracula, mentita sunt oracula.
Cui rex interficiendus est?
Nato meo.

Creon desires the office of Kingship.
You are his accomplice, Tiresias!
I will unravel this evil plot!
Creon desires to be king.
Who saved you from the riddle?
Friends, it was I, illustrious Oedipus.
Envy abhors fortune.
They desire that the King should die,
They desire that your King should die,
Great Oedipus, your King!

Chorus

Glory, glory, glory!
All praise to Queen Jocasta
In plague-stricken Thebes.
Glory, glory, glory!
In plague-stricken Thebes,
Give praise to our Queen.
Glory, glory, glory!
All praise to Oedipus's wife.
Glory, glory, glory!

Jocasta

Are you not ashamed, princes,
To raise your voices, in a stricken city,
Howling in domestic strife?
To air your domestic grievances,
Your personal quarrels, before all,
In a stricken city, princes, are you not ashamed?
Nothing is proved by oracles,
Which always lie.
The oracles, they have lied.
By whom was the King to be slain?
By my son.

Age rex peremptus est.
Laius in trivio mortuus.
Ne probentur oracula
Quae semper mentiantur.
Laius in trivio mortuus.

Chorus

Trivium, trivium ...

Jocasta

Cave oracula!

Chorus

... trivium, trivium! ...

Oedipus

Pavesco subito, Jocasta,
Pavesco maxime.
Jocasta, audi:
Locuta es de trivio?
Ego senem kekidi,
Cum Corintho exkederem,
Kekidi in trivio, Jocasta, senem.

Jocasta

Oracula mentiuntur,
Semper oracula mentiuntur.
Oedipus, cave oracula
Quae mentiantur.
Oracula mentiuntur,
Semper oracula mentiuntur.
Oedipus, cave oracula.
Domum kito redeamus.
Cave oracula ...

Oedipus

Pavesco, maxime pavesco,
Pavesco subito, Jocasta,
Pavor magnus, Jocasta,
In me inest.
Subito pavesco, uxor Jocasta.
Nam in trivio kekidi, senem kekidi;
Pavor magnus, Jocasta,
In me inest subito.
Volo consulere ...

Well, the King was murdered.
Laius died at the crossroads.
The oracles are not to be trusted,
The oracles, who always lie.
Laius died at the crossroads.

Chorus

The crossroads, the crossroads ...

Jocasta

Beware the oracles!

Chorus

... the crossroads, the crossroads ...

Oedipus

Suddenly I am afraid, Jocasta,
I am greatly afraid.
Jocasta, listen:
Did you speak of the crossroads?
I killed an old man,
When I was coming from Corinth,
I killed an old man at the crossroads, Jocasta.

Jocasta

The oracles lie,
The oracles always lie.
Oedipus, beware the oracles,
For they lie.
The oracles lie,
The oracles always lie.
Oedipus, beware the oracles.
Let us return home swiftly.
Beware the oracles ...

Oedipus

I am afraid, I am greatly afraid,
I am suddenly afraid, Jocasta,
A great fear, Jocasta,
Is within me.
I am suddenly afraid, Jocasta, my wife.
For I killed an old man, I killed him at the crossroads;
A great fear, Jocasta,
Is suddenly within me.
I wish to speak ...

Jocasta

Non est consulendum.
 Oedipus, domum kito redeamus;
 Cave oracula quae semper mentiantur,
 Cave oracula.

Oedipus

Consulendum est, Jocasta,
 Volo videre pastorem.
 Skeleris super est spectator,
 Jocasta, consulendum, Jocasta,
 Volo consulere.
 Skiam!

Speaker

The witness of the murder steps from the shadows. A messenger, announcing that King Polybus of Corinth is dead, reveals to Oedipus that he is only an adopted son of the King. Jocasta understands. She tries to draw Oedipus back – in vain. She flees. Oedipus supposes that she is ashamed of being the wife of an upstart. O, this lofty, all-discerning Oedipus! He is in the snare. He alone does not know it. And then the truth strikes him. He falls. He falls headlong.

Chorus

Adest omniskius pastor
 Et nuntius horribilis.

Messenger and Chorus

Mortuus est Polybus.
 Senex mortuus Polybus.

Messenger

Polybus non genitor Oedipodis;
 A me keperat Polybus,
 Ego attuleram regi.

Chorus

Verus non fuerat pater Oedipodis.

Messenger

Falsus pater,
 Pater per me!

Chorus

Falsus pater,
 Pater per te!

Jocasta

There is no truth there.
 Oedipus, let us return home swiftly;
 Beware the oracles, which always lie,
 Beware the oracles.

Oedipus

I wish to speak, Jocasta,
 I wish to see the shepherd.
 The witness of the crime still lives,
 Jocasta, I wish to speak to him, Jocasta.
 I wish to consult with him.
 I must know!

Chorus

The all-knowing shepherd arrives
 And the messenger of bad tidings.

Messenger and Chorus

Polybus is dead.
 The aged Polybus is dead.

Messenger

Polybus was not the father of Oedipus;
 Polybus adopted him through me,
 I took him to the King.

Chorus

He was not the true father of Oedipus.

Messenger

His adoptive father,
 A father by my doing!

Chorus

His adoptive father,
 A father by your doing!

Messenger

Reppereram in monte puerum Oedipoda,
Derelictum in monte parvulum Oedipoda
Foratum pedes, vulneratum pedes.
Attuleram pastori puerum Oedipoda.

Chorus

Reskiturus sum monstrum,
Monstrum reskiskam.
Deo claro Oedipus natus est,
Deo et nympha montium
In quibus repertus est.
Reskiturus sum monstrum,
Monstrum reskiskam.

Shepherd

Oportebat takere, nunquam loqui.
Sane repperit parvulum Oedipoda.
A patre, a matre in monte derelictum,
Pedes laqueis foratum.
Utinam ne dikes,
Hoc semper kelandum
Inventum esse in monte
derelictum, parvulum, parvum Oedipoda.
Oportebat takere, nunquam loqui.

Oedipus

Nonne monstrum reskituri,
Quis Oedipus?
Genus Oedipodis skiam.
Pudet Jocastam, fugit.
Pudet Oedipi exulis,
Pudet Oedipodis generis.
Skiam Oedipodis genus,
Genus meum skiam,
Nonne monstrum reskituri,
Genus Oedipodis skiam, genus exulis mei.
Ego exul exulto.

Shepherd and Messenger

In monte reppertus est,
A matre derelictus;
A matre derelictum

Messenger

I found the child Oedipus in the mountains,
Abandoned in the mountains, the little Oedipus,
His feet pierced, his feet wounded.
I took the child Oedipus to the shepherd.

Chorus

We are about to learn of a marvel,
We are to learn of a misfortune.
Oedipus was born of a great God,
Of a God and a nymph of the mountain,
On which he was found.
We are about to learn of a marvel,
We are to learn of a misfortune.

Shepherd

I ought to have remained silent, I should never have
spoken.
Indeed, he found the child Oedipus.
Deserted in the mountains by his father and
mother,
His feet pierced by chains.
If only you had not spoken,
This always ought to have remained hidden
That the abandoned child,
Little Oedipus, was found on the mountain.
I ought to have remained silent, I should never have
spoken.

Oedipus

Surely these are not ominous tidings,
Concerning Oedipus?
I will discover Oedipus's lineage.
Jocasta is ashamed, and she flees.
She is ashamed of the exiled Oedipus,
She is ashamed of Oedipus's lineage.
I shall discover the heritage of Oedipus,
I shall find out my heritage,
Surely these are not ominous tidings,
I shall discover the heritage of Oedipus, the origin of
my exile.
I, an exile, exult.

Shepherd and Messenger

He was found in the mountains,
Abandoned by his mother;
Abandoned by his mother,

In montibus reperimus.
Laio Jocastaque natus!

Chorus

Natus Laio et Jocasta!

Shepherd and Messenger

Peremptor Laii parentis!

Shepherd, Messenger and Chorus

Coniux Jocastae parentis!

Shepherd and Messenger

Utinam ne dikeret,
Oportebat takere,
Nunquam dikere istud:

Shepherd, Messenger and Chorus

A Jocasta derelictum
In monte reppertus est.

Oedipus

Natus sum quo nefastum est,
Concubui cui nefastum est,
Kekidi quem nefastum est.
Lux facta est

Speaker

And now you will hear that famous monologue “The divine Jocasta is dead”, a monologue in which Creon, her brother, describes Jocasta’s doom. He can scarcely open his mouth. The chorus takes Creon’s part and helps him to tell how the queen has hanged herself, and how Oedipus has pierced his eyeballs with her golden pin.

Then comes the epilogue: The King is caught. He would show himself to all: as a filthy beast, an incestuous monster, a father-killer, a fool. His people drive him (gently, very gently) away. Farewell, farewell, poor Oedipus! Farewell, Oedipus – we loved you.

Creon

Divum Jocastae caput mortuum!

Chorus

Mulier in vestibulo
Comas lakerare.
Claustris occludere fores,
Occludere exclamare.
Et Oedipus irrumpere
Et pulsare, ululare.

We found him in the mountains.
He is the son of Laius and Jocasta!

Chorus

He is the son of Laius and Jocasta!

Shepherd and Messenger

The murderer of his father Laius!

Shepherd, Messenger and Chorus

The husband of his mother Jocasta!

Shepherd and Messenger

If only you had not spoken,
It would have been better to remain silent,
Never to have spoken this

Shepherd, Messenger and Chorus

Abandoned by Jocasta,
He was found on the mountains.

Oedipus

Sinful was my begetting,
Sinful was my marriage,
Sinful was my shedding of blood.
All is made clear!

Creon

The divine Jocasta is dead!

Chorus

The woman was in her chamber
Tearing out her hair.
She closed the door with bolts,
Lamenting in seclusion.
And Oedipus burst in,
Banging on the doors, howling.

Creon

Divum Jocastae caput mortuum!

Chorus

Et ubi evellit claustra,
 Suspensam mulierem omnes conspexerunt.
 Et Oedipus praekeps ruens
 Illam exsolvebat, illam collocabat;
 Illam exsolvere, illam collocare.
 Et aurea fibula, et avulsa fibula
 Oculos effodire;
 Ater sanguis rigare.

Creon

Divum Jocastae caput mortuum!

Chorus

Sanguis ater rigabat prosiliebat;
 Et Oedipus exclamare
 Et sese detestare.
 Omnibus se ostendere.
 Beluam vult ostendere.
 Aspikite fores pandere,
 Aspikite spectaculum
 Omnium atrokissimum.

Creon

Divum Jocastae caput mortuum!

Chorus

Ekke! Regem Oedipoda,
 Foedissimum monstrum monstrat,
 Foedissimam beluam.
 Ellum, regem okkeaetum!
 Rex parrikida, miser Oedipus,
 Miser rex Oedipus carminum coniator.
 Adest! Ellum! Regem Oedipoda!
 Vale, Oedipus, Te amabam, te miseror.
 Miser Oedipus, oculos tuos deploro.
 Vale, vale Oedipus,
 Miser Oedipus noster,
 Te amabam, Oedipus.
 Tibi valedico, Oedipus,
 Tibi valedico.

Creon

The divine Jocasta is dead!

Chorus

When he tore open the doors,
 They all saw the Queen hanging there.
 And Oedipus ran to her,
 Loosened the cord, and laid her down;
 He untied her to lay her down.
 And snatching a golden pin,
 He scratched out his eyes;
 The dark blood flowed.

Creon

The divine Jocasta is dead!

Chorus

The dark blood flowed forth;
 And Oedipus cried out
 And cursed himself.
 He showed himself to all.
 He wanted to show the horror.
 Behold, the gates are opening,
 Behold a sight,
 Of all sights the most terrible.

Creon

The divine Jocasta is dead!

Chorus

Behold! Oedipus the King,
 Shows himself the foulest of monsters,
 The most loathsome beast.
 Behold! The blinded King!
 Wretched Oedipus, the King who slayed his father,
 Wretched King Oedipus, the solver of the riddle.
 He is here! Look! King Oedipus!
 Farewell, Oedipus, we loved you, we pity you.
 Unfortunate Oedipus, we lament for your eyes.
 Farewell, farewell, Oedipus,
 Our poor Oedipus,
 We loved you, Oedipus.
 We bid you farewell, Oedipus,
 We bid you farewell.