

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*

TIRESIAS

You blame me for being angry, but you don't see your own anger.

OEDIPUS

Who wouldn't be angry,
hearing how you despise your own city!

340

TIRESIAS

Even though I reveal nothing, things will work themselves out.

OEDIPUS

But shouldn't you tell me about these things?

TIRESIAS

Vent your anger if you must, but you won't get anything from me.

OEDIPUS

You've goaded me into telling you exactly what I think.
You took part in the crime, although you didn't kill him yourself.
If you weren't blind, you would probably have done that too.

TIRESIAS

Is that so?
Then I tell you to keep your word
and remember what you said:
don't speak to others or to me from this day on,
because YOU are the unholy affliction on this land.

350

OEDIPUS

Can you stand there and shamelessly say that
and think there will be no consequences?

TIRESIAS

Not for me. Blame the truth.

OEDIPUS

Where does this “truth” come from? Not from your craft.

TIRESIAS

From you. You forced me to speak against my will.

OEDIPUS

What was it again? I want to know exactly what you said.

TIRESIAS

Didn't you understand? Is this a test?

360

OEDIPUS

Say it again. I want to know exactly what you mean.

TIRESIAS

I say that you are the murderer you are looking for.

OEDIPUS

You won't get away with saying this rubbish twice.

TIRESIAS

Shall I go on and make you even angrier?

OEDIPUS

Go on, you can't say anything
that is more ridiculous than you already have.

TIRESIAS

I say you are blind to the filth in which you live,
in the worst relationship possible, with those who are closest to you!

OEDIPUS

Do you really think you can go on in this fashion?

TIRESIAS

If the truth counts for anything.

OEDIPUS

Yes, but not for you. You are blind in your ears,
in your mind, and in your eyes.

370

TIRESIAS

It is too bad that you condemn me
for something for which you will soon be accused.

OEDIPUS

You live in perpetual night,
so you can't harm me or anyone else who looks on the day.

TIRESIAS

I won't bring you down. Apollo will.

OEDIPUS

Is it you or Creon who is responsible for this plot.

TIRESIAS

Creon's not the problem, but you are.

OEDIPUS, *to the chorus*

Dark and dangerous is the envy provoked by wealth and power, 380
and a skill that surpasses skill!

My proof is that Creon, my trusted friend from the beginning,
has been plotting against me, secretly, out of desire for the throne, which the city gave to
me without my asking.

Now he sets on me this charlatan who weaves plots,
a beggar up to tricks, who only cares about lining his own pocket, but is blind in his craft.

To Tiresias.

If you had any talent, why didn't you help free the citizens
in their hour of need when the singing Sphinx set her riddles? 390
Not anyone could solve those riddles!
Some prophetic skill was needed,
but you could find none from your birds or gods.
No. I was the one, know-nothing Oedipus.
I stopped her by using my brains, not nonsense from birds.
And now it's me you're trying to throw out,
thinking you'll be a trusted advisor of Creon, 400
sitting on the throne that used to be mine.
You will be sorry that you came up with this plan
to "throw out the defilement."
If you weren't an old man,
I'd teach you the hard way for devising this scheme.

CHORUS

You both have spoken in anger. That's not helpful.
We have to figure out how best to do what the god asked us to do.

TIRESIAS

Although you are the ruler, we have equal power to speak.
I am not a slave to you, but I serve Apollo. 410
I also am hardly in Creon's service.
You insult my blindness, but you, who are not blind,
cannot see your own suffering, nor where you live, nor with whom. Do you know your
parents?
You can't see that you are the enemy
of both those above and below the earth.
One day, the deadly-footed, double-woven curse
that comes from your father and mother
will drive you from this land.
You see now, but soon you will be in darkness.
How the mountains and shadowy caves
will echo with your screams when, 420
after having sailed into the port of your home,
with winds at your back,
you finally learn the truth about your marriage.
But there's worse to come, which you don't even suspect,
and it will destroy you and your children.
You can blacken Creon's name and mine as much as you like!
No human being will ever be more utterly ruined,
nor more cruelly, than you.

OEDIPUS

This is intolerable! I won't hear another word!
Go to hell! Get out of here and go home, NOW!

430

TIRESIAS

I wouldn't have come if you hadn't sent for me.

OEDIPUS

If I'd known you would speak such nonsense,
I'd never have brought you here.

TIRESIAS

Nonsense? Your parents thought me wise.

OEDIPUS

My parents? Wait! Who are they?

TIRESIAS

This one day will both birth and bury you.

OEDIPUS

Your words are all smoke and riddles.

TIRESIAS

Aren't you the master of riddles?

440

OEDIPUS

You also insult my strength.

TIRESIAS

It's that strength that ruined you.

OEDIPUS

I don't care what you say, if I saved the city.

TIRESIAS

I'll leave. Boy, lead me.

OEDIPUS

Yes. Take him away. You're only a burden to me.
Your departure will be good riddance to bad rubbish.

TIRESIAS

I've said what I came to say.
I'm not afraid of you, because you can't hurt me.
But I tell you this: the murderer of Laius
that you seek and threaten is here. 450
He's thought to be a stranger,
but it will turn out that he's native-born.
He won't be happy about that. Once he could see,
but now he'll be blind; once rich, now poor.
He'll tap his way with a stick, a stranger in a strange land.
He'll be seen as both brother
and father to his children with whom he lives,
son and husband to his wife,
and murderer of his own father, 460
sowing seeds in the same wife.
That's something for you to think about
when you go back into your palace.
If you find I'm wrong,
then you can say I have no skill in seeing the future.

Exeunt TIRESIAS and OEDIPUS.