

THE PLAY AND THE FILM

A play very often proceeds by a process of "unravelling."

In effect, the play is often set in one place, frequently a single setting nowadays, and during the period in which two, three or more acts, with a limited number of scenes in each act, characters make entrances and exits to engage in scenes involving much talk and a rather restricted amount of physical action. The term "action" in a play is apt to be less a physical activity than confrontations between characters where conflicts of personalities and verbal exchanges develop the story. The progress of the narrative is apt to be in revelations - disclosures which may be rooted in events that really belong to the past, or that describe crises taking place elsewhere. What happens in front of us, "onstage and now", is the drama of reactions to events, or comments upon events, or descriptions and revelations about events elsewhere or in the past. Hence "unravelling".

By contrast, a film (and frequently a novel) deals with the "knitting up" of sequential incidents in which complex situations are piece-meal built up. Thus it can be said that the structure of the story is designed in almost the opposite fashion: a "weaving" of the ball of string into an increasingly complex tension of dramatic knots.

To illustrate this, you may examine two synopses attached. Both tell the same story: the Oedipus myth.

In the first synopsis, there is the bald outline of the plot structure of the play that has sometimes been offered as the example of the "first real play", Sophocles' 'Oedipus Rex'. This is the bare synopsis of the dramatic action only, stripped of all its poetry. Even when pared down like this, as nothing but a plot, it is worth studying for pure mechanical structure. It is indeed a series of disclosures: the tension builds (it's also been suggested that it is the first "whodunnit" ever written), but it builds as onstage characters discuss things that have happened at another time or in another place. "Dramatic" action onstage proceeds by the *reactions* of the onstage listeners to successive disclosures that represent a process in which pieces of a jigsaw are assembled, culminating in the final crisis where Oedipus is faced with the completed and inescapable evidence of the dreadful web of events which has been prepared for him by the vengeful Gods who have designed his ruin.

The second synopsis is of a modern film by Pier Angelo Pasolini. Pasolini has taken the liberty of using not the Sophocles play but the same source from which Sophocles worked: the original myth. It's the same story, an utterly different structure to its telling.

What was *described* by Sophocles' characters is acted out by the figures in Pasolini's movie. Thus, after the preliminary scene, which is the modern frame for the ancient tale, the film first presents Oedipus, the central figure, as an infant. It tells of how, condemned to death by exposure (a traditional form of getting rid of unwanted children in very archaic times) the infant Oedipus came to be adopted by another couple, how he learned that he might be an adopted child, fled from his adoptive parents because of what he believed was a curse and then - through coincidence so strange as to be surely the work of malevolent supernatural forces - came to kill his own father and then marry his real mother. The whole Oedipus myth is acted out and only the last events, the "third act" of the film story, follow the pattern of the stage play.

This, oddly enough, is all too frequently what a modern screenwriter finds that he must do with a contemporary subject that begins as a theater-project and then is adapted for the cinema. First the writer has to absorb all the action which may be implicit in the play, taking place long before the rise of the curtain, or taking place offstage. Beginning perhaps at some time in the past and with incidents never shown in the theatrical version, the film starts with incident: one incident leads to another in the forward movement - rather than in sequential disclosures of the past.

THE PLAY AND THE FILM (cont'd.)

Typically, it is towards the main climaxes of the film story that we reach the point at which the events of the play take place. The whole of the play becomes just the final sequences of the film: what is the structure of the stage version becomes just the final crisis and resolution of the film story.

Compare the synopses and you will see. . .

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Dramatic Construction

OEDIPUS THE KING The Sophocles Play

A Step Outline:

- 1) The CHORUS, the PRIEST and a number of citizens of Thebes, including children, wait outside the palace. KING OEDIPUS appears, announcing himself; "I, Oedipus whom all men call great. . ." The PRIEST explains that they have come to him to beg his intercession with the Gods. Oedipus may be able to persuade the Gods to release the city from the plague that has come upon them all. Oedipus helped them before; he destroyed the monstrous Sphinx that terrorized Thebes: he must have had the help of the Gods to do that. OEDIPUS announces that he has already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to consult the oracle on their behalf. Creon should be returning now.
- 2) CREON enters, bringing good news from the Delphic oracle. The God commands that Thebes drive out the pollution in the city. They must banish from the city the murderer whose crime has angered the Gods. The city must identify and punish the criminal who killed Laius, King of Thebes before Oedipus arrived.

Questioned by Oedipus, CREON tells how Laius left the city on a journey to the oracle. He went with a small escort of whom only one man returned to tell how the King had been murdered by a band of robbers. Creon would have done more to find the culprits but was distracted by the troubles brought on them by the evil Sphinx.

OEDIPUS swears that he will find and punish the guilty man. He wonders if there were not accomplices within the city who conspired in the assassination of his predecessor. He also comments that it is in his own interest to find those who killed Laius, since Laius was married to the woman who now is Oedipus' wife, Jocasta. The children of Laius and Jocasta have been adopted by Oedipus to be raised with the two more daughters which Jocasta has borne to Oedipus.

The characters exit, leaving the Chorus, who comment:

- 3) STROPHE and ANTISTROPHE predict tragedy: doom will come to the city. There is impiety and the Gods are revengeful.
- 4) Re-entering, OEDIPUS repeats his oath. The CHORUS advises him that he should consult the old blind soothsayer, Teiresias. OEDIPUS explains that, on the advice of Creon, he has already summoned Teiresias.
- 5) Led by a boy, the old blind man appears - unwillingly, and only because of the King's command. OEDIPUS reports the pronouncement of the oracle and asks Teiresias' comment. TEIRESIAS grows apprehensive, unwilling to answer questions. OEDIPUS becomes violently angry, threatens the old man, and provokes him into counter accusations that Oedipus is the man at whom the God's anger is directed. Furious, OEDIPUS finally accuses him of conspiracy in the murder of Laius. Perhaps Creon and the old man are in league against Oedipus. TEIRESIAS retaliates with more dire prophecies: Oedipus is ignorant of the identity of his own parents, is living under a curse, will be driven out when he has 'learned the secret of his marriage. . .'. TEIRESIAS promises that 'this day will show your birth and will destroy you.' Before leaving, TEIRESIAS prophesizes that OEDIPUS will be proved 'father and brother both to his own children; to her that gave him birth, a son and husband both. . .'

TEIRESIAS and OEDIPUS exit in opposite directions.

- 7) CHORUS, reciting the Strophe and Antistrophe, comment: they wonder who is the man so hounded by the Gods, pursued by malignant prophecies, they are filled with forebodings.

OEDIPUS THE KING (cont'd.)

- 8) CREON enters, questions the CHORUS. He has heard that Oedipus accuses him of treachery. Has Oedipus gone out of his mind?

OEDIPUS enters and denounces CREON to his face for plotting to depose him and seize the throne of Thebes. He further suggests that CREON advised Oedipus to call for Teiresias only because Creon and Teiresias are in a conspiracy, planning to blame Oedipus for the death of Laius.

Their dialogue establishes that OEDIPUS has married Creon[s sister, Laius' widow, and that Creon is rated as equal of Oedipus and Jocasta, the King and Queen.

CREON denies the treasonable plot, promises that within the space of the day, truth will come out that proves his innocence.

The CHORUS, siding with CREON, appeals to OEDIPUS to believe his brother-in-law. But OEDIPUS insists that he must meet the conspiracy with equally violent measures.

JOCASTA enters. She scolds them both for quarreling when there are more important problems. CREON appeals to her, reporting OEDIPUS' calumnies. JOCASTA begs OEDIPUS to trust CREON. The CHORUS also begs clemency for CREON, assuring him of CREON's loyalty.

Unconvinced and still in a temper, OEDIPUS orders CREON to leave.

Alone with the CHORUS and JOCASTA, OEDIPUS tells them that he is still sure that Creon and Teiresias have conspired in their accusations that he is the murderer of Laius.

In order to calm OEDIPUS, JOCASTA recounts an old prophesy that the oracle made to Laius, declaring that Laius would die at the hands of his own son. In fact, however, Laius was killed by a band of robbers who ambushed him at a place where three roads meet. Also, the son that was actually born to Jocasta and Laius was put to death, carried out to be left to die of exposure on the hillside.

OEDIPUS, listening, grows more apprehensive. He questions JOCASTA about the place where Laius is said to have been ambushed, the junction of the three roads. When did they hear of Laius' death? It was, says JOCASTA, just before OEDIPUS arrived in Thebes.

OEDIPUS is increasingly troubled. He asks for details of Laius' appearance, and the number of servants that were with him. There were, says JOCASTA, five servants only, one of them the herald who fled and brought back the news of the murder by the group of bandits. The herald begged to be allowed to leave and return to his work as a shepherd and JOCASTA let him go.

OEDIPUS, without revealing all his fears to his wife, sends men to bring the shepherd to him for questioning.

Seeing her husband's distress, JOCASTA persuades him to tell her the reason for his concern. OEDIPUS tells her that he was brought up as the son of Polybus and Merope, King and Queen of Corinth, a city far from Thebes. As a child, OEDIPUS never doubted that he was the son of Polybus - until an incident at a banquet when a drunken guest taunted Oedipus with being illegitimate. The insult rankled to the extent that Oedipus, without telling Polybus or Merope, decided to consult an oracle. On doing so, Oedipus was told nothing of his own birth; but he was promised a more appalling future; the oracle warning him that he would be the murderer of his father and would commit incest with his own mother. Aghast at the prospect of killing Polybus and committing incest with Merope, Oedipus did not return to Corinth but took off in order to escape the dreadful fate ordained for him. His wanderings brought him towards Thebes. But before he reached the town, he had an encounter with a group of people, an old man in a chariot with some armed servants. As the chariot approached

OEDIPUS THE KING (cont'd.)

him, driving him off the road, Oedipus was incensed at the arrogance of their behaviour. In a sudden quarrel, he was attacked and, in defending himself, killed four of the servants and also the old man. Only one servant escaped. OEDIPUS has begun to sense that he was 'born evil' and the Gods are malignant.

Sharing her husband's terror, JOCASTA asks why OEDIPUS should wish to interrogate the shepherd. OEDIPUS explains that the witness spoke of robbers in the plural; if this is true then it is not Oedipus who is the murderer, there is still some hope.

JOCASTA supports him with the reminder that there was the prophesy that Laius would die at the hand of his own son. OEDIPUS and JOCASTA exit, leaving the CHORUS'.

- 9) The CHORUS comments again: STROPHE warns that any man who has the arrogance to believe that his worldly achievements are all his own must court the enmity of the Gods. ANTISTROPHE adds that the oracular prophesies about Laius were some time ago, people have forgotten them; the Gods are no longer feared and that may be why they are angry.
- 10) JOCASTA re-enters. She is bringing flowers, offerings to lay on the altars of the Gods - to beg their pity and release the city from the curse. Oedipus is so much under stress, so full of fears of conspiracy that he will not listen to her; she pleads with the Gods on his behalf.

She is interrupted by the arrival of a MESSENGER; he comes from Corinth and says he is the bearer of good news, though perhaps some pain as well.

Polybus has died. The people of Corinth are about to appoint Oedipus as his successor.

JOCASTA, excited by the message, sends quickly for Oedipus. To her it is further proof that the terrible prophesies cannot be true; was it not prophesied that Oedipus would kill his father Polybus? And now Polybus had died a natural death!

OEDIPUS enters and is told the news. He questions the MESSENGER, asking whether Polybus was killed by treachery and is reassured by the MESSENGER that Polybus died of nothing but old age.

OEDIPUS' relief is enormous as he agrees with JOCASTA that this new event proves the falsity of the oracles. The oracles were wrong; Oedipus is innocent. OEDIPUS can think of only one person he still fears, Merope; the oracle also predicted that Oedipus would commit incest with her. For this reason he will refuse the invitation to return to Corinth.

The MESSENGER interjects. He pleads with OEDIPUS to reconsider and offers some further information known only to himself. Oedipus need no longer fear Corinth and the prophesy - because Polybus and Merope were not really his parents!

OEDIPUS is incredulous, stricken with new terror. How can that be? In his anxiety, he is brutal in his interrogation of the MESSENGER who, piecemeal, discloses the real events which led to Oedipus coming to Corinth. The Messenger himself presented the infant Oedipus to the childless Merope and Polybus. They adopted him as their own son, never disclosing to Oedipus or the people of Corinth that the child was not theirs. In growing horror, OEDIPUS bullies the MESSENGER into revealing that the baby was actually found on the open hillside. Another shepherd had brought him there - to be abandoned and to die. The infant's feet had been pierced at the heels and bound, to prevent him crawling. The MESSENGER also reports that the shepherd who brought the baby out to be abandoned was a servant of Laius. As she hears this, JOCASTA breaks down, begging her husband not to ask further questions. She rushes offstage while OEDIPUS demands again that this shepherd described by the MESSENGER be found and brought before him.

OEDIPUS THE KING (cont'd.)

- 11) OEDIPUS and the CHORUS remain. The CHORUS begs him to explain Jocasta's distress. OEDIPUS declares that it may be the news that Oedipus is not of royal birth.
- 12) STROPHE and ANTISTROPHE comment: soon the truth of it all must come to light. Whose child was it that was left on the hillside to die? Who is Oedipus?
- 13) Oedipus' servants bring to him a very old man, the HERDSMAN. OEDIPUS confronts him with the MESSENGER. The old man's memory is failing. The MESSENGER challenges him to recognize that Oedipus is the infant that survived only because the Messenger and the Herdsman took pity on it. The old HERDSMAN grows frightened. Under threat of torture, he confesses; the infant was given him, with orders to abandon it and leave it to die by Jocasta! She should be asked whose child it was. Appalled, OEDIPUS demands why any mother should give away her own child, knowing it would be left to die. Because, says the HERDSMAN, of the prophesy that the child, if allowed to grow to manhood, would kill its own father.

Confronted finally by this evidence, OEDIPUS cries out in agony and rushes off-stage.

- 14) The chorus, STROPHE and ANTISTROPHE remain. They join in lamenting the fate of Oedipus - the hero who destroyed the evil Sphinx by answering her fatal riddle, who then became the hero of Thebes, King and consort of the Queen and most honoured ruler. Now he is its most miserable citizen.
- 15) A SECOND MESSENGER enters to report that Jocasta has committed suicide, hanging herself. And Oedipus, on discovering the corpse of his wife, has stabbed out his own eyes with brooches torn from her dress. Blinded, he has called on the citizens of Thebes to cast him out, banishing him for his crimes.

OEDIPUS re-enters. The CHORUS interrogates him. OEDIPUS explains that the Gods have punished him; but the hand that has struck him is his own - so that he might not have to see things that are unbearable to look on. He recounts his crimes, demanding why he was not left to die as the infant abandoned on the hillside. Better to have died than live to commit such monstrosities and suffer for them such pain.

- 16) CREON re-enters. OEDIPUS invites CREON to banish him, so that CREON may rule in Thebes that is cleansed of its impurity and acceptable to the Gods again. OEDIPUS assures CREON that his two sons are strong, fit to look after themselves, but pleads that CREON look after his two daughters, Antigone and Ismene.

The two little girls enter, weeping. They run to their blinded father, embracing him. CREON orders the girls to go inside the house, but OEDIPUS begs that they are allowed to remain with him. CREON advises him that he must no longer try to act as the master, for the things of which he was the master no longer follow him.

- 17) CREON, OEDIPUS and the children exit, leaving the CHORUS which comments: 'Count no man happy until he is dead.'

OEDIPUS THE KING (cont'd.)

Here are the opening speeches in a modern translation of the poetry of the ancient Greek original. Remember that the actors wore exaggeratedly large masks and high platform shoes to increase the appearance of heroic scale. The speeches, one guesses, were delivered in declamatory style, performed in an open air amphitheater, which demanded a great deal of vocal projection in the rhetorical manner.

SCENE 1

In front of the palace of Oedipus at Thebes. Near the altar stands the Priest with a crowd of children. Oedipus emerges from the central door of the palace.

OEDIPUS

Children, why do you sit there? The town is heavy with sounds and smells of groans and hymns and incense; I did not think it fit that I should hear of this from messengers but came myself.

(He turns to the Priest.)

You're old and they are young; come, speak for them. What do you fear or want?

PRIEST

Oedipus . . . A blight is on the fruitful plants of the earth, a blight is on the cattle in the fields, a blight is on our women that no children are born to them. . . We have not come as suppliants because we thought of you as of a God, but rather judging you the first of men. . . You came and by your coming saved our city, freed us from tribute which we paid of old to the Sphinx. . . It was God that aided you, men say. . . Now Oedipus, we all entreat you, find us some strength for rescue.

OEDIPUS

You have not roused me like a man from sleep. I have given many tears to this, gone many ways wandering in thought. I thought I found only one remedy.

I sent Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Apollo, to this Pythian temple, that he might learn there by what act I could save this city. I count the days he is gone far longer than he needed for the journey. But when he comes, then, may I prove a villain, if I shall not do all the God commands.

PRIEST

Your servants here signal that Creon is this moment coming.

CREON enters.

OEDIPUS

Lord Creon, my good brother, what is the word you bring us from the God?

CREON

A good word. If you will hear my news before these others I am ready to speak, or else to go within.

OEDIPUS THE KING (cont'd.)

OEDIPUS

Speak it to all.

CREON

The God in plain words commanded us to drive out a pollution from our land, pollution grown ingrained within the land; drive it out, said the God, not cherish it, till it's past cure.

OEDIPUS

What is the rite of purification? How shall it be done?

CREON

By banishing a man, since it is murder guilt.

OEDIPUS

Who is this man?

CREON

My Lord, before you piloted the state we had a king called Laius. The God commanded clearly: let some one punish with force this dead man's murderers.

OEDIPUS

Where are they? Where would a trace of this old crime be found?

CREON

The clue is in this land; that which is sought is found; the unheeded thing escapes: so said the God.

OEDIPUS

Was it at home, or in the country that death came upon him, or in another country travelling?

CREON

He went upon an embassy, but never returned when he set out from home.

OEDIPUS

Was there no fellow traveller who knew what happened?

CREON

They were all killed save one. He fled in terror and he could tell us nothing in clear terms of what he knew, nothing, but one thing only. This man said that the robbers they encountered were many. It was no man's single power.

OEDIPUS

How could a robber dare a deed like this were he not helped with money from the city, money and treachery?

OEDIPUS THE KING - Film Version

Step Outline of Pasolini's Film:

1) **Modern Period**

A middle class house in a provincial Italian city - during the 1930's. A montage scene of the birth of a baby, its first experience of life, the sunshine.

Another idyllic scene; young women in white flowing dresses playing in a meadow beside the river. The scene as through the eyes of the infant, the softness of the girls as he is passed from the arms of one to another. The grass, the sky, the clouds and the warm sunshine.

A WOMAN brings the baby to feed at her breast. We see for the first time the face of the mother, radiant and soft - 'queenly' and comforting (the first view of Sylvano Mangano.)

More images of earliest childhood memory. The YOUNG MOTHER and her husband, a YOUNG OFFICER in splendid military uniform. The father stands looking down on his baby son as he lies in the perambulator. The father is pensive and we hear his private thoughts; "Here he is, the child who is gradually going to take your place in the world. . .the first thing he will do is to rob you of your wife. . .through love of his mother, this fellow will murder his father. And there is nothing that you can do about it. Nothing at all."

Another scene, the CHILD is a toddler now. The mother tucks it up in bed as the father prepares to take her to a reception; she is in evening dress, he in dress uniform.

Later, the CHILD wakes, hearing the music from across the courtyard. Climbing out of bed, the CHILD finds its way across to the balcony from which it can look across to windows and the ballroom.

Hanging onto the bars of the balcony, the CHILD catches sight of its father dancing with the mother. Crying and jealous, the little CHILD watches. . .

DISSOLVE TO THE PERIOD OF THE MYTH

2) **Desert Mountain Hillside**

An INFANT, its heels pierced and tied with a thong, is slung, head downward, from a staff which the HERDSMAN carries over his shoulder, a helpless little animal ready to be slaughtered.

On the slope of the barren hillside, the HERDSMAN stops. Putting down the child, he draws his knife, about to cut its throat. The infant looks at him. For a long time the HERDSMAN pauses, unable to do what has to be done. A snake slithers among the rocks. Hawks circle in the sky. The HERDSMAN stands up and walks away.

Two SHEPHERDS, an older man and his assistant. They play the primitive music of the reed pipes while their sheep graze. The wail of a crying child interrupts. The OLDER SHEPHERD picks up the abandoned infant, studying the mutilated feet; 'Poor little Swollen Feet. . .'

3) Outside Corinth

A primitive, ancient place of red mud walls. KING POLYBUS - chieftan of the tribe - squats under the canopy that provides shade for the bartering and other transactions over which he presides. The OLD SHEPHERD arrives with the foundling, presenting it to POLYBUS. It was found, he says, abandoned on the side of Mount Cithaeron.

POLYBUS is a great fat, sanguine peasant. Delighted, he announces that he will accept the child as his own, will make it one day their king. Laughing, he demands that they all pay homage to it. The infant promptly piddles on him.

POLYBUS mounts his horse to ride off and present the infant to his wife, the 'Queen' who is busy with her women, washing clothes in the river. 'Today we've been granted a child,' MEROPE is angry at her husband's clumsy handling of the crying infant; she takes it from him, nurses it until it stops its squalling. Her companions come to study it; 'My little Swollen Feet, little Oedipus, my son, my son. . .'

4) A Playing Field Outside Corinth

The child is now an adolescent YOUTH, playing with companions of his own age, practicing throwing the javelin. The boys are watched by giggling girls. Young OEDIPUS is the rival of another YOUTH as they compete in throwing a stone discus.

OEDIPUS is the strongest, throwing the discus farthest and jubilant as he demonstrates that he is the winner. He is showing off to the girls. The RIVAL, angry, starts a fight and again OEDIPUS is the winner as they wrestle in the dust. Defeated and humiliated, the other boy shouts at him, calling him names: "Foundling! Adopted son of your father and mother!"

5) Polybus, Merope and Oedipus

They are at dinner. The young OEDIPUS is withdrawn, infinitely sad. When MEROPE pleads to know what is the matter with him, he refuses to answer. POLYBUS is angry at his son's bad manners, scolding the spoiled youth. OEDIPUS sulks. For a while, the family eat in silence. Then OEDIPUS tells his parents that he has had a terrible dream. He wants to go to the Delphic Oracle and ask the meaning of the dream. He wants to go alone, without servants, without escort, not as a rich prince but as an individual. He will leave immediately.

6) At dawn, OEDIPUS takes leave of POLYBUS and MEROPE. POLYBUS gives him money. MEROPE weeps, unable to control herself, foreseeing some disaster.

7) Scenes of OEDIPUS' journey through desert.

8) The Delphic Sanctuary

The 'Oracle' is a WITCH DOCTOR, surrounded by the crowd of cripples, the blind, the paralyzed and afflicted, telling fortunes and dispensing cures. As OEDIPUS confronts her, she senses his fear and reacts with a hysterical rage; 'Take care! In your future it is written that you will kill your father and make love to your mother. . . Do not contaminate these people by your presence!.'

OEDIPUS is frozen with terror - perhaps sensing guilt. He is unable to move until pushed out of the way to make room for the next supplicant.

9) Delphi

Leaving the sanctuary, OEDIPUS passes through the crowds of pilgrims as if unaware of them.

He comes to the milestone that indicates the road back to Corinth. In fear and pain he stares at it before he turns and stumbles off in the other direction.

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

10) The Desert

OEDIPUS begins his aimless journey, through barren hostile desert. Then through greener land. The sun is fierce and he is exhausted, hopeless. Title: 'Where are you going, my youth? Where are you going, my life?'

Snow capped mountains in the distance. A milestone; Thebes.

YOUNG OEDIPUS approaches a group of musicians, playing drums and wind instruments - a wedding. The smiling bridegroom, the bride are wearing garlands of flowers.

Another milestone pointing the direction to Thebes. A vista of ruins. The wind is blowing. Men clothed in black in a wild, gesticulating dance. One of them, old toothless and bald, points in the direction of the ruins.

Approaching the ruins, OEDIPUS enters them, moving under an archway. Abruptly he confronts a young girl - standing in the ruins, more or less naked, watching him. He reacts, afraid of her, guilt-stricken.

A third milestone marked Thebes. OEDIPUS tramps the road, hot and angry.

11) The Road to Thebes

The road is very narrow and dusty. As OEDIPUS trudges on, a cart appears, a two wheeled vehicle drawn by a pair of horses, driven at some speed by an armed attendant of the older man with a beard who stands in it; other attendants, also armed, run alongside and one man runs in front, the herald. As it comes at him, OEDIPUS halts in its path, staring at the old man.

They stare at each other, the arrogant old man in the cart (Oedipus' father) and OEDIPUS. Profound, irrational hatred. (Echo of the scene of the young officer and the baby in the perambulator). The OLD MAN shouts at the stranger to move aside, "Get out of the way, scum!" OEDIPUS shakes his head. The horses leap up and down; one soldier tries to hold them, but the driver flicks the reins to urge them on. OEDIPUS shakes his head again. The SOLDIER in the lead draws his sword to advance on OEDIPUS. OEDIPUS drops his belongings, stoops to pick up a heavy stone and hurl it at the SOLDIER with the sword. The SOLDIER falls. His companions charge at OEDIPUS who turns and bolts. They pursue him. Followed by three of them, OEDIPUS outdistances all but one of them. Out of breath, he has to turn and fight, managing to kill the man before the others come close enough. Again OEDIPUS runs, pursued but turning once more to confront his enemy, killing again. One after another, he kills those who have followed him before returning to slaughter the soldier that he wounded with the stone. In the cart, the DRIVER is terrified and leaps down to run for his life while the old man waits with drawn sword. In bloodlust, OEDIPUS throws himself on the only one left, the grey-haired man in the cart, swinging his sword like an executioner's axe, murdering him at a stroke. The crazed horses kick and take off at a gallop, but the cart collapses and the beasts are trapped, injured.

As if coming out of a dream, OEDIPUS stares at the five men he has killed. The other is nowhere to be seen.

He is behind a bush, shivering in terror, silent.

12) Thebes

A crowd of people moving, on foot, a few on horseback, some with carts. Refugees - from what?

In the distance, deserted countryside. OEDIPUS, meeting them, singles out one of them, a small girl. What is happening? What has happened? The small girl doesn't know, but points out an old man, who sits against a ruined wall, playing the flute; TEIRESIAS, the prophet, attended by a YOUTH.

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

OEDIPUS accosts the aged figure. He is blind.

OEDIPUS listens to the flute. We hear Oedipus' thoughts; 'He sings, but not about himself. . . somebody has burdened him the duty of singing. . . he sings for others, he is singing for me, he is singing about me. . . '

The YOUTH comes to tug at OEDIPUS' sleeve, telling him he must leave. As they walk away together, the YOUTH explains, pointing towards the cliffs above; "There! Up there is the cause of the misery in our city. . . Just think. It came from the bottom of an abyss, no one knows where. . . It does nothing but sit there, day in, day out. All it asks is questions. But whoever is unable to reply, must die. . . No one has the courage to throw it back into its abyss. Even though he who does it is to become the husband of Jocasta. . . the Queen of Thebes. . . "

OEDIPUS advances towards the cliffs.

13) The Sphinx

The SPHINX is a strange figure wearing a large mask which covers the whole of the top half of its body. It sits on a barren hillside.

They confront each other. The SPHINX asks: "There is an enigma in your life. What is it?" OEDIPUS draws his sword as he replies; "I don't know. I don't want to know. I don't want to see you - I don't want to hear you. . . " He circles the creature, lunging at it. The SPHINX: "It's useless, it's useless. The abyss you are pushing me into is within yourself!"

The YOUTH watches the struggle on the top of the cliff. Presently he sees OEDIPUS returning. Jubilant, he leaps up to run with the news; OEDIPUS arrives among the crowd celebrating their release from the evil influence. He is brought to meet the figure who is carried towards him in a strange procession that follows her carriage - a sort of ornamental wheelbarrow of ancient barbaric design. She is heavily veiled. As OEDIPUS stares at her in wonder, JOCASTA slowly raises the veil to look at him very directly. . . (It is our second view of Sylvano Mangano, an echo of the opening scene of the infant with his mother).

The YOUTH is explaining that whoever kills the Sphinx is supposed to marry the Queen. . . Oedipus will be King now.

CREON, who wears a crown, watches OEDIPUS and JOCASTA. As the Queen's litter is turned to carry her back towards Thebes, CREON follows. Transfixed, OEDIPUS stares after her.

The crowd claim OEDIPUS as their saviour. . .

14) Thebes

The interior of the royal palace. The bridal chamber and the marriage bed - waiting. Moonlight from the window and the sound of evening, crickets and frogs.

15) The Town

Celebrations in the city. Torches, crowds, musicians. Dancers waving ceremonial branches of greenery.

16) The Bridal Chambers

While the noises of crowd and music continue outside, OEDIPUS and JOCASTA prepare to retire, consummating the marriage. From the image of the naked back of Oedipus to. . .

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

17) The Plague and the Town

... a body blistered with the infection of the plague and left to rot in the sun. Other bodies, victims of the disease. Birds of prey circling in the sky.

Bodies in the street are robbed by scavengers, themselves diseased. Bodies fouling the town's well.

Funeral processions. A crowd, led by the elders of the city approaching the palace of the King.

18) The Entrance to the Palace

OEDIPUS as King now in ceremonial robes. He meets the demonstrators in public audience, commands the PRIEST to speak.

The PRIEST calls on OEDIPUS to intercede for them with the Gods, reminding him that it was surely only with the help of the Gods that he rid them of the Sphinx.

OEDIPUS assures them of his concern, tells them he has already sent his brother-in-law Creon to consult the oracle. He should be returning now.

They wait. OEDIPUS is more anxious than any of them.

19) Later

They have been waiting an hour, a day, several days. The sound of funeral chants continue. The crowd sweats in the heat of the sun.

The BOY MESSENGER comes running with the news that Creon has been seen. Creon seems to be bringing good news.

As he appears, OEDIPUS orders him to speak his news before the crowd. CREON reports: the oracle insists that they must drive from the city a murderer. . . the Gods want the man punished with exile or death. The man who murdered Laius, whoever he is. . .

How is he to be found, asks OEDIPUS. The Gods, says CREON, have said the man is in the city now. Questioned, CREON tells OEDIPUS that King Laius left Thebes accompanied by a small guard of whom only one survived to bring back the news that the King had been attacked by bandits, a number of robbers. CREON and the elders of the city would have done more to find the culprit but were distracted by the troubles brought upon them by the Sphinx.

OEDIPUS announces that he will take upon himself the task of avenging the death of Laius; he will start by questioning the surviving servant. And when he identifies the guilty individual the city will be cleansed. Anyone with information will be rewarded; anyone who assists the escape of the guilty will be punished. Oedipus will avenge Laius 'as if he was my own father. . .'

20) Teiresias

The old blind prophet appears, answering a summons from OEDIPUS, but pleading that he be allowed to go again. The knowledge that he has is of no value to himself or to the King.

Interrogating TEIRESIAS, OEDIPUS loses his temper and threatens the blind prophet. TEIRESIAS retaliates with equal anger, warning Oedipus that he is 'not aware of the character you carry within yourself.'

OEDIPUS accuses TEIRESIAS of some complicity in the death of Laius; why else would he be so secretive?

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

TEIRESIAS, pushed too far, tells OEDIPUS that he himself will be accused of the crimes of which he accuses Teiresias. He prophesies calamity that will fall upon Oedipus. He challenges the King: 'Do you know who gave birth to you? Do you know that your forbears, those dead and those still on this earth are cursing you?'

While OEDIPUS demands to know what the blind man means, TEIRESIAS orders the boy who is his guide to lead him away. Before departing, TEIRESIAS spells out the full horror of what will be disclosed; 'The man you are seeking. . . stands here. . . a foreigner, as is generally believed. . . in fact. . . from Thebes. But this discovery will give him no joy, because it will bring with it blindness and impoverishment, and he will go off to distant lands, a foreigner once more, tapping the ground with a stick. It will be discovered that he is at once brother and father of his children. That he is at once son and husband of his mother. That he is united with the woman who was married to his father, and that he alone is the murderer of his father. . . '

OEDIPUS' reaction is strange; (Each new revelation - no matter how terrible, how horrifying - has its own mysterious joyful vitality); OEDIPUS, perversely, smiles.

21) Inside the Palace

But later, alone, OEDIPUS feels a terror at the sense of the truth in the terrible prophesy.

Alone, he walks through the rooms of the palace. There is a sound of a girl's voice singing - a childlike sound, from the women's quarters. OEDIPUS follows it and comes to the place where he can watch JOCASTA among her womenfolk, spinning as the girl sings to her.

OEDIPUS watches for a while. JOCASTA is very desirable. Abruptly, he enters and, as the girl's song stops, takes JOCASTA from the room.

22) The Bedroom

OEDIPUS is brutal in his love-making. In his attempts to remove her clothing, he jabs his hand on the pin of the brooch she wears. . .

23) The Atrium of the Palace

CREON pleads his innocence to the elders; the accusations that Oedipus has now brought upon him are utterly untrue.

OEDIPUS appears and challenges CREON, insisting that CREON suggested that Oedipus consult Teiresias because Teiresias and Creon are in league to remove Oedipus and seize the throne. A savage quarrel develops, with CREON protesting that he was satisfied to be nothing but third in rank after his sister and her husband, the King; OEDIPUS insisting that he means to have Creon put to death.

The noise of their altercation reaches JOCASTA. She comes to intervene, calmly - almost too calmly. She rebukes them both. She leads OEDIPUS away. The elders follow, begging OEDIPUS to be generous to Creon. In the presence of JOCASTA, OEDIPUS is bewildered, docile. He agrees to pardon her brother, though reluctantly. And when CREON again demands why OEDIPUS is bitter, OEDIPUS screams to be left alone. . .

24) The Palace Gardens

OEDIPUS and JOCASTA alone, dependant on each other, desolate. The sound of a deathchant from outside the garden. She asks him why he and Creon were quarrelling and he tells her that her brother seems to be accusing him of the murder of Laius.

JOCASTA is gentle, reassuring. No one should heed prophecies. As illustration, she tells of the prophecy made to Laius - he was not told that he would die as he did, at the hand of robbers. The prophecy was that he would be killed by his own son. And, because he was so terrified of this prediction, when Jocasta bore him a boy child, Laius actually took it from her, gave it to a servant to bind the infants feet and carry it out to leave it on a barren hillside where it died.

Instead of reassuring OEDIPUS, her story appalls him further. He questions her on Laius' death. When did he die? Where? What did he look like? And, as she tells him that the servant returned with the news of Laius' death at the hands of robbers just before Oedipus came to Thebes, OEDIPUS grows more and more terrified. He allows JOCASTA to take him in her arms. . .

25) **The Bedroom**

OEDIPUS and JOCASTA in bed. As they embrace like lovers, OEDIPUS recounts to her his own story, the youth who accused him of being an adopted child, his journey to the oracle, the prediction that he would kill his own father and marry his own mother. . .

Both now are trying to shut out the truth, the unbearable truth.

26) **The Atrium**

JOCASTA appears, accompanied by her women. She is on her way to offer prayers to the Gods - for the plight of the city - for Oedipus whose suffering has made him desperate and ready to act irrationally - for them all.

She is interrupted as soldiers bring to her a very old man, a MESSENGER come from Corinth, bringing news that should bring some joy and also some pain. Old Polybus is dead. And now the people of Corinth have sent him to invite Oedipus to return to Corinth to rule in his father's place.

27) **Later**

OEDIPUS now dressed to receive the OLD MESSENGER. OEDIPUS asks to know how Polybus died. Was he assassinated? The old man reports that Oedipus' father died a natural death.

OEDIPUS turns to JOCASTA with the comment; so much for the prophecies. Polybus' death cannot be blamed on Oedipus. But the other part of it, the thought of incest with his mother is still a nightmare. While the elders watch, shocked, JOCASTA takes her husband's hand and comforts him with the assurance that the dream of making love to his own mother is not uncommon - why should it terrify him so?

The OLD MESSENGER intervenes. There is another reason why Oedipus need have no such terror. Polybus was not his true father. Oedipus reacts violently, challenging the old man. Under interrogation, the OLD MESSENGER tells the story of his encounter with another herdsman who had been ordered to take a small baby out and leave it to die on the mountain, how they took pity on the infant and brought it to Corinth.

OEDIPUS seems in a state of exultation as he insists on the search for the other herdsman. Who was he? Who ordered the exposure of the infant? Hearing the OLD MESSENGER say that he was a servant of the household of the King of Thebes, Laius, OEDIPUS demands that he be discovered and brought before him.

In desperation, JOCASTA begs her husband to stop. She leaves him with his counselors who cannot understand her reaction. What is the matter with her? OEDIPUS is reckless. He doesn't care. What does it matter if Jocasta worries that he is not of royal birth? The time has come when he must find out the whole truth, everything, however bitter the truth may be.

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

28) The Square in Front of the Palace

A public hearing over which OEDIPUS presides. The MESSENGER from Corinth is brought to confront the old HERDSMAN who originally took the child out to abandon it on Mount Cithaeron. They are questioned by OEDIPUS; the MESSENGER identifies the HERDSMAN, but the HERDSMAN is unwilling to admit that he recalls the circumstances. Convinced that he is lying, OEDIPUS threatens him with torture and the old HERDSMAN pleads that OEDIPUS question his wife, Jocasta. Jocasta herself gave him the infant. . . to see that it was killed. . . why? . . . because she was afraid of evil prophesies. . . the child was destined to kill its parents if it lived. . . the herdsman let his friend save it out of pity.

OEDIPUS: "Now it all fits together. . . it was willed, but not imposed, by destiny."
OEDIPUS follows JOCASTA into the palace.

29) The Gardens

JOCASTA with her women. They run to and fro, laughing and playing. JOCASTA escapes from them, hides. She collapses on the ground, out of breath. Off screen a voice, chanting. . .

30) The Palace

OEDIPUS with his soldiers. They return to the Palace, he looks up towards the window of the bedchamber. Wearing his armour, he walks through the palace to the bedchamber. As he enters he sees. . .

JOCASTA has hanged herself. The body swings from an overhead beam.

The soldiers in the palace hear the great cry of Oedipus. The cry seems to echo over the rooftops of Thebes.

OEDIPUS, wild-eyed, clutches at the hanging corpse of his wife-mother. He fingers the robe, rips loose the brooch and stabs the pin first into one eye and then the other, blood streaming through his fingers.

Mutilated, he staggers from the bedchamber, stumbling sightless through the corridors of the palace. Two of his men wrap a cloak around him as he staggers ahead, disappearing into shadow.

31) The Square

The whole town, people, soldiers and the elders, wait outside the house of tragedy. OEDIPUS emerges, alone. Their pity for him is mixed with horror and revulsion.

An ELDER asks him why he has done what he has done. 'Like this, I won't have to look any more at the evil. . . that I have suffered and committed. . . We must never mention the impure things of life. . . never talk of them, never refer to them, we must keep absolute silence. Hide me away! Cast me out of this land! Throw me somewhere inaccessible, where I will never be seen again.'

CREON comes, answering the elders who say that Creon must make the decisions now. He has nothing but pity now for Oedipus. He instructs the citizens to take Oedipus back into the palace where his children alone can suffer the spectacle of his degradation. But OEDIPUS refuses; better that, out of the same compassion, he is sent from the city, " . . . to wander in the same desolate mountains where my mother and father consigned me as a new-born child, and let me die there, as they wished me to. . ."

A YOUTH steps out of the crowd. In his hand, a flute - like the one that Teiresias played. The YOUTH leads the blinded man away, through the crowd, out of Thebes. OEDIPUS is become a blind beggar, an outcast. . . and (like Teiresias) a prophet-poet. He begins to play on the reed, the same melody heard from Teiresias. . .

'Swollen Feet! Swollen Feet!'

OEDIPUS THE KING (CONT'D.)

32) Modern Period

Another city. Now in modern times. Middle-class shoppers crowding the pavements on a sunny, lazy day.

Through the scene move the figures of OEDIPUS and the YOUTH, beggars among the students who are carrying their books, pretty girls, housewives and children. A few of the children, momentarily frightened of the blind beggar, run away but shout at him, 'Swollen Feet! Swollen Feet!'

33) Other Locations - Modern Period

OEDIPUS and his guide move through other contemporary scenes. Railway shunting yards. Factory buildings. The thin song of the flute is contrasted against the noises of the contemporary world, the traffic, the noises of the factory.

Another location; the barracks that were seen in the opening episodes. The window of the room in which the modern Oedipus was born. The square where his mother wheeled the pram.

Then the meadow by the river. The blind man asks the youth, 'Angelo, where are we?' 'We are in a place with big trees, with the mist rising, in a meadow covered with green.'

Tears on OEDIPUS' cheeks, "O light which I could no longer see, which before was in some way mine, now you return to me for the last time. I have come back. Life ends where it begins."

STEP OUTLINE

OEDIPUS REX
(FILM VERSION)

Susan Barnet
Destiny Itano

OEDIPUS - King of Thebes. He has genuine concern for the welfare of his townspeople who honor him as a great and wise king. He is arrogant and has a quick temper. He is proud of his accomplishments, and jealously guards his position which indicates that secretly, he may well doubt his right to it.

JOCASTA - Queen of Thebes. She lives primarily for the happiness and well being of the king. Her loyalty to the throne remains, even though the person may change. She is a religious woman, and believes in the destiny that is laid out by the gods, though not necessarily their mortal interpreters.

TEIRESIAS - A blind prophet. He has the ability to foresee the future, but the inclination not to tell it. He can see the pain the future often brings, and would rather not be the messenger of ill tidings. He is a human being, however, and can be provoked.

CREON - Jocasta's brother. He enjoys the status of royalty with none of the responsibility. He is highly regarded as a man of reason and loyalty by the townspeople, and rightly so.

STEP OUTLINE

- 1) The townsfolk of Thebes gather in front of the palace of Oedipus, the king. They hail him as great (actually, it is Oedipus himself who says "Whom men shall areas ...") and ask him to help them out of the plague that has taken the city as he helped them before, when the Sphinx was tormenting them.
- 2) Oedipus comes out and tells the crowd that he knows of the plague, and that he has already sent Creon, his brother-in-law to the Oracle at Delphi to find out what can be done.
- 3) Creon arrives with the news that the way to cure the plague is to bring to justice whoever killed the old king, Laius - king before Oedipus, who had been killed by a band of robbers while traveling. Oedipus pledged to do everything in his power to find the murderer.
- 4) The people of Thebes pray to the gods to relieve them of their sufferings from this horrible plague.
- 5) Oedipus asks the townsfolk to help him find the killer, and to carry out a curse of banishment, to include himself as well if the guilty one is found to be living in his home.

Oedipus says that he is searching for the murderer of Laius as though his own father had been murdered because Laius was a king, and because he, Oedipus, now fills Laius' position as king and husband.

- 6) The townsfolk say that they haven't any knowledge of the murderer, but suggest that Oedipus consult Teiresias - the Seer. Oedipus, on Creon's advice, has already sent for Teiresias.
- 7) Teiresias arrives. Oedipus asks Teiresias who Laius' murderer is, but Teiresias refuses to tell him. Oedipus accuses Teiresias of involvement in the murder and taunts him about his blindness. Teiresias, angered by the attack, tells him that he, Oedipus, is the "pollution"; he is his own problem and doesn't even know it; he will fulfill his fate.

Oedipus claims that Teiresias' accusations are a plot by Creon to get the throne and that Teiresias is no Seer. Teiresias denies having plotted against Oedipus and tells him that in not knowing who his parents are, he is cursed by them. In learning the secret of his marriage, Oedipus will be blinded and banish. Oedipus orders Teiresias to leave. Teiresias says that the murderer is there, that he is seemingly a foreigner, but is actually a native. On discovering this, he will be blinded, impoverished, and banished. He will be found to be brother to his children, sleeping with his mother, and murderer of his father. Teiresias leaves.
- 8) The townspeople speak of the manhunt that's begun to find Laius' murderer. Whoever is responsible had better watch out.
- 9) Creon arrives. Having heard about Oedipus' accusations of treason against him, he comes to defend himself. Oedipus

confronts Creon saying that since Teiresias didn't point him out at the time of the murder, he must have gotten the idea from Creon. Creon denies this and tells Oedipus to check with the Oracle and backup his argument with proof. Oedipus doesn't believe him and, though the townspeople caution him not to act rashly, he wants to kill Creon. Jocasta enters and tells them both not to quarrel when such misery surrounds them. Upon the townspeople's cry that he show mercy toward Creon, Oedipus backs down, but points out that he, Oedipus, is now implicated in the death of Laius. Creon leaves.

- 10) The townsfolk beg Jocasta to stop Oedipus from pursuing his argument against Creon. Jocasta asks what happened. Oedipus tells her that Creon plotted against him through Teiresias.

To comfort him, Jocasta tells him that Seers aren't always accurate. She gives as an example, the fact that a Seer once predicated that Laius would be killed by his own son, but the son was left to die on a mountain as an infant, and Laius was actually killed by a band of robbers at a crossroads. Therefore, the Seer's prophecy did not come true.

- 11) On hearing that Laius was killed "where three roads meet", Oedipus becomes distressed. He asks specific details about where and when Laius was killed, expressing fear that he's cursed himself, and that perhaps Teiresias can see. He asks if anyone saw the incident. Jocasta tells him about the servant who survived the attack, and how when he came back and saw Oedipus king, he asked to be sent to the fields. She asks why he wants to know.

Oedipus tells his story. He lives with his mother and father in Corinth. It was prophesied that he would sleep with his mother and kill his father, so he left in order to avoid it. In his travels, he encountered an old man, who looked like the man Jocasta has described, and his company at a crossroads, all of whom he killed.

Oedipus says that if this man was Laius, then he's cursed himself, but as the townspeople suggest, he won't believe for sure until the herdsman in question comes and clears up whether it was a band of robbers that killed Laius, or a single man. This will prove one way or the other if it was Oedipus.

Jocasta reminds Oedipus that the herdsman's original story to the town had been one of a band of robbers. She also says that either way, the Seer's prophecy was not true because Laius wasn't killed by their son.

- 12) The townspeople say that they follow the laws of the gods, and if someone is insolent to those laws, they'll be crushed. But, they ask, if a person who doesn't heed the gods and their prophecies is rewarded in life, what is the point of following the gods?

Jocasta comes to pray, saying that everyone's fate lies in the hands of the gods.

- 13) A messenger from Corinth arrives and tells Oedipus and Jocasta that Oedipus' father, Polybus, has died of old age. Oedipus and Jocasta take this as proof that prophecies don't always come true.

Oedipus, however, is still worried that he may sleep with his mother, describing the old prophecy again.

- 14) To relieve Oedipus' fears, the messenger reveals that Polybus was not Oedipus' real father, and Marope not his real mother. He goes on to explain how Oedipus was given to him by another herdsman who had found him in the mountains as an infant. Oedipus asks who this is, and is told that it is the same one he's just sent for.

Jocasta begs Oedipus not to pursue these inquiries. Oedipus, thinking Jocasta is only worried that she may have married below her class, sends for the herdsman anyway. Jocasta goes into the house, greatly distressed.

- 15) Oedipus thinks himself fortunate to have come so far, and the townsfolk muse on his origins.

- 16) The herdsman arrives, and the messenger from Corinth identifies him as the one who gave him the baby Oedipus on the mountain. The herdsman curses the messenger from Corinth and says he's lying. He does not want to speak of the matter.

Oedipus uses force to make the herdsman tell where he got the child. The herdsman confesses that he got the child from Jocasta, and that it was the child of Jocasta and Laius. They had feared it because of a prophecy that it would kill his father.

Oedipus realizes that he is accursed. He goes into the house moaning.

17) The townsfolk say what a sorrowful state Oedipus has gone to, and from such a good one. He seemed to have it all, but what horrors time have revealed. Now they wish he had never come.

18) A messenger comes out from the house and tells the townspeople that Jocasta has killed herself, and that Oedipus has put his eyes out.

Oedipus comes out. He says he wishes he had never lived. The townspeople ask him why he didn't kill himself; he answers that he couldn't have faced his parents in the underworld. He begs to be banished or killed.

The townspeople say he should have been left to die as a baby and are repulsed to look at him. Creon enters and tells Oedipus to go inside to spare everyone else having to see him.

19) Oedipus asks for his daughters and Creon has them brought out. Oedipus asks Creon to take care of his daughters. Creon agrees, and again tells Oedipus to go inside.

Oedipus asks again to be banished, to meet his fate. Creon tells him to go. When Oedipus cries out not to take his daughters from him, Creon says that Oedipus is no longer master; he couldn't hold on to it. Oedipus leaves.

20) The townspeople say that everyone thought Oedipus to be so lucky, and now look. No one's got it made until they're dead.

Dramatic Construction

NOTES ON SOPHOCLES AND PASOLINI

The great classic play of the fifth century B.C. and the movie made by the Italian director in the late 1960's are naturally somewhat dissimilar.

In defense of Pasolini, of course, it could be pointed out that Sophocles didn't invent the plot of his play: it was a story that all of his audience already knew by heart, the Oedipus myth. So Pasolini has a right to work from the 'public domain' of the great universal unconscious of the human race. Pasolini, who was incidentally politically left, brings to the subject a strong influence of Freud. Whether or not Pasolini's parents were a young provincial officer and his wife, I don't know: it doesn't matter. But the 'frame' of the modern opening and ending is effective in underlining the 'universality' of the myth. The tale of Oedipus is relevant to each man of today because of its Theme.

First Question:

Study **construction**.

This will require that you work closely from the full text of Sophocles (available in the Library) and the published version of the script of the Pasolini film (also in the Library).

The most obvious contrast centers on the problems of 'exposition', and the 'backstory', the 'unravelling' construction of the theatrical approach as against the forward progression of a film narrative.

Second Question: (not unrelated to the first)

Study the dramatic structure of play and movie. Wherein lies the difference?

The film covers a great deal that the play does not - or does not show 'onstage'. But it also eliminates a vast amount. What's the principle?

Third Question:

Study the function of the Chorus in the play.

This might profitably be examined in the context of the history of the development of the theatrical form. You are advised to read and study the books of Allardyce Nicoll on that subject.

Sophocles is given credit for inventing 'the third character onstage'. This could be said to be the real beginning of *all* drama - dramatic *action* as distinct from the narration of dramatic stories and myths.

To what extent does the Chorus, the Strophe and Antistrophe, represent a vestigial remain of the pre-Sophoclean theater?

And how, in cinema, does the function of the 'chorus' survive? To what extent is 'the voice of the author' possible or legitimate in cinematic forms?

Fourth Question:

Study the use of dialogue, the words, the rhetoric. Compare the play and the film-script. In what way are the words different? Does the difference illustrate any basic difference in the nature of Theater and Cinema? How would you analyse such a difference?

NOTES ON SOPHOCLES AND PASOLINI (cont'd.)

Fifth Question, then:

What is the theme of Sophocles play? Where, meaning in what lines of the play, is it most clearly stated?

What is the theme of the film - and in what way is there a change of emphasis, if any? Identify the lines of the script where the theme is most clearly expressed.

Sixth Question:

Examine treatment of character.

The treatment of character in the old play and the modern film is very different - even in scenes that are, on the surface, similar in situation.

To what extent is it the modern version 'psychological' in approach to motivations, conscious and unconscious. To what extent is this influence of the medium of film as distinct from theater?

OEDIPUS REX - THE EXPOSITION

To examine the pure plot structure of Sophocles play, simply cut out everything from the text except the passages of exposition. The story unfolds as a sequence of revelations, characters reporting on events that have happened in the past or offstage.

Of course, Sophocles could assume that his audience was familiar with the story of the myth. Plays of that period were a poetic recitation of what the Greeks believed was their history. For example, in the scene with old Teiresias, the exchange between the blind prophet and the King, Teiresias actually spells out to Oedipus the mystery and prophesies in detail how the story must end. Surprise was not the point of this kind of drama. Since the general events that were presented were common knowledge to the audience, the tension (the 'uncertainty' which is mingled with the 'anticipation') is not what will happen, but how. We, like Teiresias, know all too well the explanations: we are held in suspense only by the irony involved in anticipation of how and when Oedipus will come to the inevitable conclusion.

Old Teiresias does, of course, use the highly colored language of the soothsayer who can foretell the future and -- to some extent, at least -- this may be said to excuse Oedipus' failure to put the pieces of the jigsaw. Perhaps a more important factor, however, is that Oedipus cannot afford to accept the appalling truth.

The steps of exposition are.

ONE

The Priest, addressing Oedipus:

"You came and by your coming saved our city,
freed us from the tribute we paid of old
to the Sphinx, cruel singer..."

This is an elliptical reference to the story of how Oedipus, by answering the famous riddle of the half-woman, half-lion monster to whom the Thebans sacrificed young girls and boys, drove the creature to destroy herself. As a reward for saving Thebes from the Sphinx, Oedipus has been acclaimed as King and has married the recently widowed Jocasta.

The King also establishes this recent history: Oedipus reports that he has sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to consult the Delphic oracle: Creon was to ask the oracle why a plague has descended on the city since Oedipus became King. Are the Gods angry at the citizens of Thebes? If so, how can the city regain favor? Creon (all too promptly) appears to answer:

"Milord, before you piloted the State,
we had a King called Laius..."

Now:

"The God commanded clearly: let someone
punish this dead man's murderers..."

"He went, he said himself, upon an embassy
but never returned when he set out from home ..."

Asked of what happened to Laius escort, Creon says:

"They were all killed save one. He fled
in terror and could tell us nothing,
but one thing only..."

"This man said that the robbers they encountered
were many and that the hands that did the murder
were many: it was no man's single power..."

*Oedipus, now swears a public oath to find and
punish those who killed Laius (it is intriguing
that, in making this promise, Oedipus often uses
the singular, referring to 'he' that killed the
King, in contradiction of the concept that is,
in plot mechanics, a deliberate 'red herring').
And he also establishes that he is now husband
to the wife of Laius, stepfather to Laius'
children, as well as, the father of two more
of Jacasta's daughters.*

"Since I am now holder of this office and
have the bed and wife that once was his,
and had his life not been unfortunate,
we would have had common children..."

* * * *

*The scene with Teiresias is not, of course, so
much an exposition of past events as 'fore-shadowing'
of the future. But it is explanation, too. To a great
degree, it 'telegraphs' the answer to the puzzle. It
spells out everything that will be later revealed -
but withholds only the details of how these extra-
ordinary and very arbitrary events have come about.*

"I say you are the murderer of the King
whose murderer you seek..."

"I say that with those you love best you
live in foulest shame unconsciously..."

"Do you know who your parents are?

Unknowing you are the enemy of kith and
kin in death, beneath this earth, and in
this life. A deadly-footed, double-striking
curse from father and mother both shall drive
you forth out of this land, with darkness
in your eyes..."

"When you shall learn the secret of your
marriage..."

"In name he is a stranger among citizens,
but soon he will be shown a citizen true
Theban, and he'll have no joy of the
discovery; blindness for sight and
beggary for riches his exchange, that I
should send him to the fields to be my
shepherd and so he might see the city as
far off as he might. So I sent him away..."

STEP FOUR

*Oedipus in turn, now tells Jocasta of the reasons for which he
left the city of Corinth in which he spent his childhood:*

"Polybus was my father, King of Corinth,
and Merope, the Dorian, my mother.

I was held the greatest of the citizens
in Corinth till a curious chance befell me..."

"There was a dinner and at it a man,
a drunken man, accused me in his drink of
being a bastard..."

Oedipus describes how this accusation so haunted him that he decided without challenging Polybus and Meropa on the question, he would go on his own to consult the oracle at Pythos. There, however, he was given no answer to the question of his birth; instead, the oracle warned him of a much more terrible future in store for him:

"...that I was fated to lie with my mother and show to the daylight an accursed breed which men could not endure, and I was doomed to be the murderer of the father who begot me..."

Assuming that this warning meant he would commit incest with Merope and kill Polybus, Oedipus was so horrified that he decided never to return to Corinth and his parent's home. He set off on the journey that finally brought him to Thebes and to Jocasta.

STEP FIVE

But he also tells Jocasta of an incident just before he encountered the Sphinx. It was, he now realizes, at the spot where Laius is said to have been killed by a 'band of robbers'.

"When I was near the branching of the crossroads, going on foot, I was encountered by a herald and a carriage with a man in it, just as you tell me. He then led the way, and the old man himself, wanted to thrust me out of the road by force..."

STEP SIX

Clinging apparently to the desperate hope that he may be exonerated by the account that Laius was murdered by 'not one man but many', Oedipus sends for the only witness. (Do we really believe that Oedipus still thinks he has not killed Jocasta's husband? Or that Jocasta believes Oedipus innocent? It doesn't matter. The horror of the coincidences and the repulsive nature of the crimes of patricide and incest, lead us to sympathy with Oedipus' desperation and Jocasta's sense of guilt.)

But while they wait, there is an unexpected turn of events: the arrival of the Messenger who brings news from Corinth: Polybus is dead -

"By treachery or sickness?" demands Oedipus.

"A small thing will put old bodies to sleep."

"So he died of sickness, it seems - poor old man."

"Yes, and of age - the long years he had measured."

Oedipus turns to Jocasta to share with her this news which he claims refute the prophesies:

"They prophesied that I should kill my father.

But he's dead, and hidden deep in the earth,
and I stand here who never laid a hand or spear
against him - "

"But, they the oracles, as they stand -
he's taken them away with him, they're
dead as he himself is, and worthless."

The Messenger, who has come with the invitation to Oedipus from the citizens of Thebes that Oedipus return to Corinth to accept the throne is disappointed when he refuses. Oedipus explains that he is still uneasy about the other half of the prophesy: that Oedipus is fated to commit incest with his mother. To dispel these fears, the Messenger discloses the fact that he has kept secret for so many years.

"...Polybus was no kin to you in blood."

(This is Aristotle's example of classic 'peripety.)

With abrupt return of his worst fears, Oedipus now learns that this very morn, the Messenger, presented to the childless couple, Polybus and Merope, an infant he had found while he was a shepherd in charge of mountain flocks on Mount Cithaeron - near Thebes.

Jocasta, as she listens to the interrogation, grows more and more desperate, aware that Oedipus is now uncovering the last link in the chain of evidence.

Oedipus: "You yourself did not find me then? You
took me from someone else?

Messenger: "Yes, from another shepherd."

DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTION

TEIRESIAS' MONOLOGUE

My name is Teiresias. I am very old and I am blind. Because I am blind I see what other men cannot see; I see the future.

The people of Thebes believe this to be miraculous. So it is. But perhaps not quite so miraculous as they think. I live now by the mumbo jumbo of prophesy. There are many stories about me, ridiculous and scandalous. *Pornographic myths. I invented some of them myself. They are more amusing than the truth and I have long since learned that men prefer poetic fantasy to dull fact.

For King Oedipus the future is not hard to foresee. The end of his story is near. He has sent for the Old Shepherd and means to question him further concerning the death of Laius. Why does Oedipus pursue this thing as if he was intent on his own ruin?

I have known the shepherd over forty years, since he was a youngster in the service of Laius. He is a kindly man, cowardly perhaps but gentle. His lies are transparent and he has committed no crime--unless you call it a crime to do as he and I both have done; to keep silence in matters where disclosure would cause pain to others.

To see the past, the present and the future all in one is as much a curse as it is a blessing. If you wish to believe that it is supernatural, a gift from Zeus, that is your privilege. Personally, I prefer another explanation. When a man is robbed of one of his senses, the others become more acute. When I could no longer see I had to learn to hear. To listen. When I could no longer watch the outward display, I learned to hear in the voices of men and women the things that were unspoken. The hidden things.

Oedipus is King of Thebes and a proud man. To the people of the city he speaks a strong voice, as he must if he is to be their ruler and their protector. Is it only I who can hear in him that other voice, the sound of his desperation and his terror?

**According to some reports, Teiresias was a transsexual. Born as a woman, he became a man. The myth is that the gods, Zeus and his wife Hera had an argument, debating whether it was a man or a woman who derived greater pleasure from the sex act. They appealed to Teiresias to arbitrate. Teiresias said it was a woman. This so exasperated Hera that she struck him blind. In compensation, Zeus gave him the gift of 'second sight.'*

Since I cannot see her now, I imagine her still as the girl I knew twenty, twenty-five years ago. But, from what they tell me, she has not changed. She is still very beautiful and might be taken for a young woman. As a girl of fifteen or sixteen, when Laius chose her for his queen, she was a great beauty. That too can be a curse. King Laius was much older than she and was jealous of the attention paid to her by other men. I have been wondering; is it possible that he was suspicious that the child born to him was not his own? Is that why it had to be killed?

At the time, of course, other reasons were given. They said it was because of a prophesy. When Laius came back from consultation with the oracle at Delphi there was secrecy, but the rumor was of a dreadful prediction. The priests, they say, had told him that if the child was male, and if it lived, it would be fated to kill its own father. The King's counsellors accepted this as a warning from the gods. I did not. I do not say this publicly because it is both sacrilege and treason, but it is my private belief that the priests know well that every questioner brings with him the answer that he wishes to be told.

They took the child from Jocasta. They gave it to the nurses and did not tell her what Laius intended.

In fairness, I should explain that, barbaric as it may seem to you, it is not an uncommon practice among our people. It has a long history. There are too many births, too many mouths to feed. So when an infant is born that is sickly, deformed or in some other way accursed and unwanted, it is taken out of the city, carried up to the high slopes of the mountain and left there. It is not killed, since that is an offense to the gods, but it is left to die. It is not uncommon, as I have said--but I have never seen it done with a child of the royal household before.

Though it was done discreetly, it is not a pleasant thing. If the child is still old enough to crawl, its feet will be bound, the ankles pierced and tied with a thong so that it cannot move and its death will come soon. I am told that, on occasion, the man to whom this task is given may, in defiance of the gods, take pity on the infant and kill it to shorten its suffering.

The man they chose was the shepherd I have spoken of. When he came back, he reported that he had done as Laius ordered and fulfilled the will of the gods. The

King's counsellors took this to mean that the infant was dead. For some reason, I was not sure. I knew the shepherd.

Oedipus. A nickname. It means 'lame footed.' A strange name for a young man strong and vigorous, a warrior. The citizens brought him to the city as their hero and their savior. He had challenged our enemy, the monstrous Sphinx and had destroyed it. I was there among the great crowd when they brought Oedipus in triumph to the Palace. I heard the cheering. Since my sight left me, I have to depend on the boy who leads me everywhere and describes for me the scenes that others witness. As he told me of the appearance of the stranger I saw an earlier image, the young Laius. The boy is very observant, as I have trained him to be. When the name puzzled me, I asked him about the feet of the stranger and he saw what others may not have noticed, the faint mark of a very old wound. It is not so miraculous, you see: at this moment, I knew who that stranger was.

I said nothing. But I knew that there must be one other citizen who shared my knowledge.

He had remained in the service of the King's household and was promoted to be one of the King Laius' bodyguards. This same man brought us the news of Laius' death. He and three others accompanied the King when he travelled from the city and he was the only one who came back to Thebes to report the King's murder--by a band of robbers, he said.

No one doubted his story. Least of all myself. Yet there were inconsistencies. I took these to be only the result of his panic, his anxiety that the people would hold him responsible because he had failed to protect the King. But it was the old man's reaction to the arrival of Oedipus, which set me thinking. I heard of it only from others who told me that he had been to Jocasta, begging her to be allowed to leave the city and retire to the country as a simple shepherd. He did not come to see me before he left. That also gave me cause to wonder. Because they believe that I have what they call 'second sight,' men who have something to hide avoid me. So I wondered if he had seen what I had seen and knew what I knew.

There are occasional travellers from Corinth who come from Thebes and from them I have learned more of Oedipus. Polybus, his father, and Merope, his mother, were by all accounts much distressed when their son

left Corinth--left suddenly and without explanation. From one informant, however, I heard the story of the boy's reaction to the insult by a drunken dinner guest who called him a bastard.

So it is that I put together all the pieces of this man's life. One thing is still a mystery: how is it that the man himself does not know the truth? Why is it that he who has eyesight is blind while I, who have none, can see it all complete?--the beginning, the middle, and the end.

The answer is simple enough. If every man could know the future, his life would be impossible, unlivable. The ordinary man sees only the present, the word 'now' which divides the mind. The past is only partially remembered since the gift of forgetfulness eases the pain and to remember everything would drive us into madness. Above all, the future must be veiled from his sight; insecure and uncertain, since each man must believe that he is free to determine his own fate.

But this is not so. As the past makes the present, so the present makes the future, and the Infant, the Youth and the Old Man are one. Strange that Oedipus himself knows this. It was the answer he gave to the Sphinx's riddle.

I wonder why also the father fears the child, why the son must destroy the father and must forever see in all women the image of her who loved him first? If at some future time, there comes a new priest to answer these riddles, then I hope he will remember this sad and desperate man so that his name will not be forgotten, Oedipus, the lame foot.

A MONOLOGUE FOR HERA

(Who is the 'Antagonist' in 'Oedipus Rex'? I suggested that the only character within the play who might fit the bill is the old blind prophet, Teiresias. But another answer could be that it is 'the gods' for whom he is the spokesman. Here's an improvisation on the idea that Jove himself is the enemy of the unfortunate young man, condemned quite arbitrarily to commit the crimes for which he is so unreasonably punished. This is Jove's wife, Hera, speaking.)

He's up to no good. I can always tell. He's been down in the cave, listening in on those ridiculous sessions that the Oracle, that silly old gypsy holds for the poor pathetic mortals that come to her with their problems. She and my husband have been cooking up some new scheme to inflict punishment on somebody or other.

Why does Jove do it? For a God who is supposed to be looked up to by all of the rest of us here on Mount Olympus, he's really a very petty individual. I'm not talking about all his absurd infidelities, though they are enough of a humiliation. It's the indignity of his behaviour that is so hard to put up with. Dressing himself up as a bull or a swan or something to go chasing after some girl that he's taken a fancy to! He's just as bad as any of the mortals - maybe worse!

I think they've been seeing somebody from Thebes, so I guess it must be something to do with the Cadmus family and that unfortunate young man with the limp. What my husband has against him I really don't know. None of it is the poor boy's fault. The whole sad story is something that my husband cooked up years and years ago before Oedipus was even born.

The father was called Laius, as I remember. I didn't care for him much. He'd married a wife much younger than himself, a pretty little creature whom he treated rather badly. When she was pregnant, Laius came to our oracle for some reason or another, wanting to know about the future of the child. Jove must have been in a filthy mood that day - probably we'd been having a row - so, out of pure malice, no other reason, he told the Oracle to prophesy to Laius that, if it was a manchild, it would kill its own father and seduce its own mother! That sort of thing amuses my husband. He says things like that just as 'an experiment' - just to see what people will do about it. I suppose he wants to show the mortals who is the boss and keep them from getting too uppity. He's always on about that - what he calls 'hubris' in the lower classes who think they can handle things all on their own without any help from us.

One is never very sure how much the people who come to consult the Oracle really believe all the nonsense that

is handed out to them. Generally, the priestess take the precaution of using language that is vague, or ambiguous, or even just meaningless, so that if it doesn't work out nobody can be called to account. But when my husband takes it into his head to be specific, then the fat is in the fire.

Laius was thrown into a panic. He went scurrying back to Thebes and when the baby turned out to be a boy, he decided to get rid of it. We've got very strict rules about killing babies - at least male ones. The other goddesses and I are still campaigning to make them even stricter although, men being what they are, I get the feeling it will take another couple of thousand years. With the girls the way they get round it is by taking the poor little creatures out on to some desolate hillside, tying their feet together and abandonning them.

That's what they did to Jocasta's baby. It's not clear if, at the time, they told the mother that she'd had a son. They just gave the infant to some shepherd, told him to take it out on to Mount Cithaeron and dispose of it.

That was about the time that I got to know of the whole senseless and unnecessary affair. I never argue with my husband, it just makes him more stubborn. But I felt I had to do something. As it happens, I knew of another couple, some people in Corinth who had been trying to get a child. So I managed to see that, as the baby was taken out on to Cithaeron, there was another shepherd there who realised that he could get the poor little thing adopted.

I kept an eye on it. Merope and Polybus, they were the couple at Corinth, they wanted my advice whether or not to tell the boy that he was adopted. I told them not to bother. What you you don't know can't hurt you, is what I always say.

But my husband found out. He was livid. He has this thing about prophesies, he insists that when he says something is going to happen then happen it must - even if he has to go to quite lunatic lengths to make it happen. He blamed me for having spoiled the whole business and swore that, however long it took, he'd see that it turned out the way that he had said it would. And it did take quite a time. My husband, as I have said, can be extraordinarily stubborn when he gets the idea that he has been thwarted. He waited for years - until Oedipus (that's what they called him because his foot was lame because of the place where they'd cut the tendon at the ankle when he was an infant) - he waited until Oedipus was fully grown before he prompted some drunk to insult the youth, telling him that he was illegitimate. The poor boy didn't know what to believe. He didn't confront Merope, instead he came to the oracle. Which is, I suppose, what my husband wanted. The priestess didn't even answer the boy's question about his father and mother. She just repeated what Jove had told her to say - that he was under a curse and would kill his father and marry his own mother.

Oedipus was so shocked that he didn't even go back to Corinth. He ran away.

So my husband is delighted. He sat down with a map to work out how he could arrange to get Laius and the boy into a quarrel. He sat down at a map and found some cross roads at which he set up the whole silly incident, Laius with three or

four servants on his way here from Thebes, Oedipus coming the other way, all on his own. My husband engineered the whole episode, that's clear. Oedipus seems to have gone quite berserk. On his own, he slaughtered all of the servants but one, who ran away, then he killed the old man, Laius. Nasty, the whole thing.

I suppose that I have tended to take young Oedipus side because I felt he had been treated so unfairly but it has to be admitted that he has a violent streak. And everything he did, everywhere he went, my husband seemed to have laid a trap for him.. The Sphinx, for example. She was simply a monster and one was quite proud of the way that Oedipus stood up to her. That riddle -- it was smart of him to guess the answer to that, and good riddance to the creature. But my husband took immediate advantage of that too. The townsfolk of Thebes were naturally grateful to the young man and carried him back to the town to introduce him to Jocasta - so my husband had little difficulty contriving the other half of his stupid prophesy. He thought it a great joke, I dare say. Frankly, I find it hard to see why my husband had to go to all the bother. What is he trying to prove?

What's more, I don't think it's finished yet. You'd think Jove would be satisfied that he's manipulated it all so that it has worked out in the way that he promised. But, no, that's not enough. Jove has still been persecuting the town, sending them a plague and refusing to accept their sacrifices and so on. So now Oedipus has sent to ask the Oracle hear what he should do. He didn't come himself, he sent one of the family, Jocasta's brother. Typically, that also seems to have annoyed my husband so that he's sent back a message telling Oedipus that he's got to find the man who killed Laius. Jove finds that entertaining, I dare say.

As for myself, I've just washed my hands of the whole business. I tried to help. But what good did it do? My husband, Jove, he's been the source of the trouble since the beginning. He goes on about how we gods have to teach mortals to show a proper humility - and a respect for religion and that sort of thing. But any mortal with an ounce of intelligence is going to see that if the gods go on the way my husband has been doing then we don't deserve to be respected. But I suppose my husband can't see that.