

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Child of the Dark Sun

by Justin Fleming

EXTRACT

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*COMPANY*

*Laius*  
*Jocasta*  
*Teiresias*  
*Polybus*  
*Meropé*  
*Oedipus*  
*Antigone, a young girl.*

*The company, perhaps masked, may play the rôles of Chorus, Priestess, Physician Athené, etc.*

*The action takes place in Thebes and Corinth, some time before the birth of Christ.*

*CHILD of the DARK SUN had its first presentation at New Dramatists, New York City, on Friday, September 22, 2000, directed by Susan Fenichell, with the following company:*

*Laius .....Matthew Maguire*  
*Jocasta ... Heather Gillespie*  
*Teiresias...Thomas Barbour*  
*Polybus.....Bill Camp*  
*Meropé..... Joanna P Adler*  
*Oedipus.....Charles Parnell*  
*Antigone..... Olivia Oguma*

*For this presentation, the Chorus was performed by Julia Prud'homme, incidental parts by Maria Striar, and stage directions by Kate Umstatter. Stage Manager was Tim Acito.*

## *Act One*

*A Greek flute. A sunrise.*

*A sense of a great plain, and at a distance, of Mount Kithairon, which rises out of the red earth.*

*One of the company is THE PRIESTESS, who can be seen, seated on her tripod at the Pythian Shrine, Delphi.*

*In different spaces, the company begin, severally, as CHORUS.*

CHORUS: In her temple of rock, she sits, consulting the oracle.

*Gentle notes of the flute drift over.*

CHORUS: At her seat of augury, with its westward aspect, the Priestess chews the whispering leaves.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* Life, child, send, people, many, many, mountain, life, stolen, send, abandon...

CHORUS: Within her deep cleft of stone, she awaits inspired ecstasy.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* Cast, destiny, their, from, mountain, child, send, life, people, many...

CHORUS: And from the ancient sanctuary, she seduces meaning.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* Dark, lost, life, many people, abandon, send, child, send send, abandon...What...destiny...

CHORUS: Bringing the unseen close to Man.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* Another...One, what, back? One if, back, What....destiny, back?

CHORUS: Opening a secret from its dark shell.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* If If If If? Send. Abandon. Child. Back?

CHORUS: At once riddling and revealing.

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* People...if one...back?

CHORUS: She listens for the heaven-sent voice, the critical rumour...

PRIESTESS: *(whispers)* Back, if, if, dark... back.

CHORUS: ...Or a rushing murmur from the Sepulchre of the Moon.

PRIESTESS: (*ecstatic*) Life, child, send, people, many, many, mountain, life, stolen, send, abandon...Cast, destiny, their, from, mountain, child, send, life, people, many... Another...One, what, back? One into, if, back, What....destiny. If If If If? Send. Abandon. Child. Came People...if one...Back, if, if, dark. Back!

CHORUS: ...Or the rustle of a grove, the eddy of a stream, the odour of a burnt offering. A secret. A secret as pitiless as the burning sun. But whence will it come and in what guise?

PRIESTESS: Life, child, send, people, many, many, mountain, life, stolen, send, abandon...Cast, destiny, their, from, witness, mountain, without, child, send, life, people, many... Another...One, into, what, back? One if, back, What....destiny. If If If If? Send. Abandon. Child. Came. People...if one...Back, if, if, dark...!

*She climaxes. The flute stops.*

CHORUS: To us, an intoxicated spasm. To her, a habit of mind.

PRIESTESS: Came back.

CHORUS: To us, a base convulsion, to her, a euphoric frenzy.

PRIESTESS: Stolen. Send. Abandon. Child. Back....

CHORUS: Then, finally, in her oracular temple....

PRIESTESS: (*A long sigh*)

CHORUS: Silence.

*A moment. Flute resumes.*

CHORUS: For interpretation, we seek the prophet. And we await a flight of birds...

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*Sound of a flight of birds.*

*The forest outside Thebes. A later time.*

*The blind prophet, TEIRESIAS with LAIUS. Teiresias touches the entrails of an opened bird.*

LAIUS: I had a dream.

TEIRESIAS: The mind's energy may yield a terrible power.

LAIUS: Yes...

TEIRESIAS: Tell me, then.

*Distant sound of PRIESTESS overlapping.*

PRIESTESS & LAIUS: (*muttering like an echo*) Life, child, send, people, many, many, mountain, life, stolen, send, abandon...

TEIRESIAS: (*Over the opened bird*) Many people send, abandon their child upon the mountain...

PRIESTESS & LAIUS:: Cast, destiny, their, from, witness, mountain, without, child, send, life, people, many... Another...One, into, what, back? One if, back, What....destiny. If If If If? Send. Abandon. Child. People...if one...Back, if, if, dark. Back!

TEIRESIAS: ...Cast like a stolen life into another destiny. What if....

PRIESTESS & LAIUS: Another...One, into, what, back? One if, back, What....destiny. If If If If? Send. Abandon. Child. People...if one...Back, if, if, dark. Back!

TEIRESIAS: Many people send, abandon their child upon the mountain, cast like a stolen life into another, dark destiny. What if...

CHORUS: What if?

TEIRESIAS: What if one...

CHORUS: What if one...

TEIRESIAS: What if one child came back.

CHORUS: What if one... came back?

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*The flute. Thebes. A later time.*

*OEDIPUS, with his young daughter, ANTIGONE. He is playing a game with her of Blind Man's Bluff, and he is blindfolded with a scarf. He also has a cane owing to his crippled ankle, and hobbles, a flaw for which he more than compensates with his manual, and general, dexterity.*

OEDIPUS: You're very good at this. Very good.

*She laughs. He tries to find her.*

ANTIGONE: Over here!

*She silently runs a distance, attempting to deceive him.*

OEDIPUS: I think...not!

*He tries to predict her position.*

OEDIPUS: You'll exhaust your poor father, Antigone.

ANTIGONE: Over here, Papa! No, over here!

OEDIPUS: Then again I suppose that's the whole idea.

*He gropes for her, catches her, they fall in a heap. He removes the scarf.*

OEDIPUS: All right. You win. Give your Papa a kiss.

*She does. He lifts her in the air and lowers her with great flair. She laughs.*

ANTIGONE: I love you, Papa.

OEDIPUS: So you should. And as proof that I love you too, I'm going to help you with your (*sing-song*) homework.

ANTIGONE: Ohhhhh.

OEDIPUS: Come on: look, out there.

*They rest on elbows looking to Mount Kithairon. Oedipus picks up her lesson and browses.*

ANTIGONE: Mount Kithairon....

OEDIPUS: "In the age when divination came from the flickering of an eternal fire..."

ANTIGONE: Let me say it.

OEDIPUS: Well go on.

ANTIGONE: "A luminous meteor fell from the temple...." (*she falters*)

OEDIPUS: Come on, you know it...

ANTIGONE: "A luminous meteor fell from the temple of Venus into her sacred lake beneath."

OEDIPUS: Very good. And?

ANTIGONE: "Over time, it cooled into a giant mono..."

OEDIPUS: A giant mono?

*She laughs*

ANTIGONE: "A giant monolith, perhaps the largest in the world."

*She stops, pleased.*

OEDIPUS: I'm sorry to be the harbinger of bad news, but I'm afraid there's more.

ANTIGONE: I know.

OEDIPUS: Good.

ANTIGONE: Stop interrupting.

OEDIPUS: Pretend I'm not here.

ANTIGONE: "Oval in shape, it rises three hundred and thirty five metres above the desert plain."

OEDIPUS: Does it?

ANTIGONE: "It is three point six kilometres long by two kilometres wide."

OEDIPUS: Says who?

ANTIGONE: Shhh. "Its lower slopes have become....have become...."

OEDIPUS: *(imitates a flute)*

ANTIGONE: "Have become *fluted*...."

OEDIPUS: Yes!

ANTIGONE: "....by the erosion of weaker rock layers, whilst its top...."

OEDIPUS: Oh, let' see.....Twenty.

ANTIGONE: Twenty? O, yes. "...is *scored* with gullies and basins that produce giant...."

OEDIPUS: Meoow.

ANTIGONE: Cats? Oh! "Cataracts! Giant cataracts after infrequent rainstorms."

OEDIPUS: You're a genius. Go on.

ANTIGONE: "Some of the shallow caves in the rock are sacred."

OEDIPUS: "Being composed of...."

ANTIGONE: "Composed of ...arkosic sandstone, the rock changes colour with the attitude...."

OEDIPUS: "Altitude"

ANTIGONE: Same thing.

OEDIPUS: Is it?

ANTIGONE: "... Of the sun, and at sunset, Mount Kithairon turns a fiery orange lit by the dying rays."

*A moment*

OEDIPUS: Mmm. Well. Nine out of ten.

ANTIGONE: Nine?

OEDIPUS: Don't worry. Nobody ever manages ten.

ANTIGONE: Why not?

OEDIPUS: I don't know. Some sort of unwritten rule.

ANTIGONE: How can a rule be unwritten.

OEDIPUS: Ah, yes, well that's a mystery and the best mysteries, like the best rules, are, well, unwritten.

*He kisses her. JOCASTA appears. She smiles at the sight of Oedipus and Antigone.*

JOCASTA: Oedipus, you'll soil her elbows and yours too.

OEDIPUS: Ah, well, we may have soiled elbows but we also have nine out of ten.

JOCASTA: And if you must play Blind Man's Bluff with my scarf, you might like to do it indoors.

OEDIPUS: Your scarf? So it is.

ANTIGONE: Is that the scarf you wore when you proposed to Mama?

OEDIPUS: Proposed? I never did anything as pro-active as propose. I was *given*.

ANTIGONE: Given?

OEDIPUS: Given to your beautiful mother. The day we met each other.

*He kisses Jocasta.*

JOCASTA: She knows the story.

ANTIGONE: Do it, Papa!

*OEDIPUS dons the scarf over his eyes.*

OEDIPUS: When I say "met," I should say "surprised." The day we surprised each other.

*Antigone laughs.*

OEDIPUS: "Do you, Oedipus, Solver of the Riddle of the Sphinx, agree to be given to the fair Jocasta, in marriage, though you are so young and handsome and she is, if beautiful, some years your elder...."

JOCASTA: I don't recall that bit.

OEDIPUS: "To share her bed and join with her in such childbirth as heaven shall allow...."

ANTIGONE: That's me.

OEDIPUS: That's you.

ANTIGONE: "To become...."

OEDIPUS: "To become...."

ANTIGONE: "Protector of Thebes...."

OEDIPUS: Listen, I thought I was telling this story.

ANTIGONE: Go.

OEDIPUS: "To become Protector of Thebes, Guardian of all its usages...."

JOCASTA: "And to respect the sacred laws of these, your people".

OEDIPUS: I do I do.

*He removes the scarf and is looking into Jocasta's eyes. A moment of wonder.*

OEDIPUS: I do.

JOCASTA: Dinner.

OEDIPUS: Dinner already? Well well.

JOCASTA: Antigone, clean up, darling.

*Antigone goes. Oedipus looks out to Mount Kithairon*

OEDIPUS: Jocasta - that child knows more about Mount Kithairon than I do, and I spent time there.

JOCASTA: We should worship at the cradle, not the grave. The young know everything.

OEDIPUS: Worrying, isn't it?

JOCASTA: Only if you let it be.

*They kiss, fully. The rock has begun to reflect a sunset.*

JOCASTA: You look so beautiful tonight.

OEDIPUS: So do you.

*Another kiss.*

OEDIPUS: Antigone calls this light fiery orange.

JOCASTA: I'd say red.

OEDIPUS: So would I.

*Another kiss. The COMPANY assembles for dinner.*

OEDIPUS: My wife will pray.

JOCASTA: Let us, over this banquet, remember our dreams of departed friends, and open our hearts like a chasm to the sunlit soul of our land, be thankful for these blessings, and hope to wake like woodland flowers in tomorrow's shafts of gold.

*A moment. Then they eat. The food is too hot.*

OEDIPUS: *(sudden temper)* Do the cooks want to scald us!!!

JOCASTA: Just let it cool.

OEDIPUS: And some prayer! Why must you leave the gods out of everything! Do you want to bring ruin to us?!

JOCASTA: *(soothes)* We love you, Oedipus. We love you, darling.

*She strokes his hair. Silence. The mood passes and he cools. He kisses Jocasta quickly, and winks at Antigone. The Company eases.*

OEDIPUS: *(cheerily)* Is this boiled lamb or tortoise?

JOCASTA: Both, I think.

OEDIPUS: Both? But not cooked in copper?

CHORUS: Not tonight, Sir.

OEDIPUS: What then?

CHORUS: Clay, Sir.