

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Jocasta Complexity

by Deborah Mulhall

EXTRACT

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The Jocasta Complexity

Characters(actors: 1F / 2M)

Jocasta / Jos

Oedipus / Rex

(the characters below are to be played by the same actor)

Teiresias

Creon

Messenger

Chris

Setting

Act 1:

Supposedly the palace at Thebes ... set perhaps should resemble a giant womb.

Act 2:

Same set, slightly modified to represent the headquarters of Regina Cosmetics

Background

Parts of this dramatization use sections from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Several translations were used and dialogue was then manipulated to form it into contemporary English.

*First performed at the Workshop Theatre, Wollongong June 2005
with Kim Griffin as Jocasta/ Jos, Sam Burns as Oedipus / Rex and Lajos
Hamers as Creon/Teiresias/Messenger/Chris.*

The Jocasta Complexity

(Jocasta emerges, raging She is dressed simply, with little make-up. The appearance of a 15 or 16 year old girl. Adjustments to costume and make-up indicate a passage of time)

JOCASTA:

That bastard! I swear to God, do you hear me Apollo? I swear that man shall never touch me again. Laius will never ever fuck me again. I am going to kill the bastard. I'll kill the bastard *(Collapses, crying)* Oh my baby, my precious baby. *(wailing)*. Ahh sweet Artemis, protector of women, what am I going to do? *(rocking and moaning)*. My little darling, my baby boy. *(sobbing)*. It feels ... it feels like this huge hole inside of me. As though I'll never be complete again. Why did he do it? What sort of an idiot believes in prophecies? What sort of a fucking deluded moron believes in the vomit of some drug infected mind. *(gradually her sobs subside and she becomes grimly determined as an idea comes to her)* I'll fix him. He killed my child – I'll make sure he never fathers another one. *(calling)* Teiresias! Teiresias!

TEIRESIAS *(entering)*

Madam Jocasta?

JOCASTA:

Help me Teiresias.

TEIRESIAS

Help you?

JOCASTA

Help me with the pain.

TEIRESIAS

You are grieving over the inevitable.

JOCASTA:

This atrocity was inevitable? Inevitable? Unnatural. It's unnatural ... it goes beyond anything. And you think it is ...

TEIRESIAS:

I do not think anything.

JOCASTA

In that way you are like other men then.

TEIRESIAS

I meant I only have a little wisdom.

JOCASTA:

A little is enough. You will know why I called for you.

TEIRESIAS:

The king has sent the baby prince to die.

JOCASTA:

Any other man would be put to death for such a crime. I would kill him myself but that would be ... too kind. Too easy. And anyway – the people would say I was guilty of Laius' death, as if it were greater crime than his killing his own son. And I would be punished. He won't be. No, he won't be though, because he is the king. A bad king who abuses his people and overtaxes them but still the king. It is so wrong. So wrong. No. No. I have something else in mind. But I need your help.

TEIRESIAS:

I see where you are going.

JOCASTA:

Do you? Then hear me Teiresias. I may not be able to kill Laius without the force of the law coming down on me, but I can certainly have you killed with impunity. After all, I am Queen. Unless you help me.

TEIRESIAS:

Don't do this.

JOCASTA

I have to.

TEIRESIAS

Spare yourself and me.

JOCASTA:

Laius has killed our son. Because he fears his own death, he has killed my son.

TEIRESIAS:

Most people fear death.

JOCASTA:

Why?

TEIRSIAS

Because they fear the loss of control.

JOCASTA:

Doesn't Laius understand our immortality lies in our children? Out of my womb springs the future and he has just murdered it. *(Pause)* He can listen to all the prophecies he likes, but he will never be inside my well of prophecy again. Or any other woman's. You will tell him that in one of your 'visions' you saw that Thebes will suffer a great disaster if he should dip his cock into the chalice of any woman – or the arse-end of any boy, ever again.

TEIRESIAS:

Madam, let me go. And let it go. It will be easier for you to bear your sorrow with time.

JOCASTA

You think so? You really believe that a mother gets over the loss of a child? That the pain is ever less?

TEIRESIAS (*uncertainly*)

I think maybe it becomes easier to mask. That is all.

JOCASTA

This is ... not right in so many ways. Children are not meant to die before their parents. It isn't ... natural. And killing your own child isn't natural. It isn't part of the cycle. You will tell him, Teiresias, do you understand? He must be punished for this crime against nature. This ... infanticide.

TEIRESIAS:

My telling him will not make it so. I cannot tell what I haven't seen.

JOCASTA:

Yes it will. And you can. He believes in prophecies. Oracles. Soothsaying. Fortune telling. Call it what you will. It will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. And he will become ... unfulfilled.

TEIRESIAS:

Then what will be, will be.

JOCASTA:

But you will tell him?

TEIRESIAS:

I will tell him ... the truth. A swift and two-edged sword.

JOCASTA:

Can't you ever just have a normal conversation? Go away. Do as I say.

TEIRESIAS:

Madam (*bowing and exiting*)

Transition 1: a passage of about 18 years during her monologue

JOCASTA:

(*she moves to her dressing area and begins to dress as the queen.*)

They said of me when I became queen that I was as beautiful as the moon. The moon Goddess Artemis. But aren't all queens beautiful? No city would ever say its Queen was ugly. Whatever we princesses are, we define beauty during our time. And we learn to think that is our only contribution that is worthwhile. After all, that is all anyone ever says of us. When everyone insists that the only worthwhile thing about you is your appearance, you believe it. After a while.

I thought a baby would ruin my body. So, I did not expect to find a joy in motherhood. But the body has an intelligence of its own. And for the past eighteen years it has lived in the same space as a child-murderer.
Laius says I think too much. He, who does not think at all.

(She is now dressed in a stunning white gown. The costume is rich, the make up exotic, especially around her eyes. Her hair is still loose)

JOCASTA:

Today is the 15th day of PThargelion. If my child lived he would have been eighteen years old today. *(enter Teiresias)* Tell me Teiresias, do you think it is easier to live as a man or as a woman?

TEIRESIAS:

Both have their shortcomings. But I think life is less restrictive for a man. Men are not expected to be seductive.

JOCASTA:

Is this why Apollo fell in love with your daughter? Because she was seductive?

TEIRESIAS:

Beauty is always seductive. But Apollo has been kind, giving her the gift of seeing in exchange for the son she gave him. And now she sits in Delphi.

JOCASTA:

But perhaps it was you who gave her the gift of foresight. Or her mother.

TEIRESIAS:

Not all things come from the feminine.

JOCASTA:

I think, perhaps, all creative things do. All that is destructive comes from the male.

TEIRESIAS:

Madam, it has been eighteen years. You have to let it go.

JOCASTA

I can't.

TEIRESIAS

Many women have witnessed the death of their children.

JOCASTA

That doesn't make it right. I don't understand this drive men have to destroy. Women don't.

TEIRESIAS

Then account for the Sphinx. There she sits, outside our city with her bullish chest, her lion's tail and paws and her woman's head. She poses a riddle to every young man who crosses her path, devouring him when he fails to solve it.

JOCASTA:

Proving only that men's minds are less agile than their bodies. The Sphinx plays her part in the cycle of life, as we all do. He who dares ... often loses. Are you happy Apollo made your daughter a prophetess? It is really what you want for her? To sit around in a drug induced state vomiting up answers to peoples' questions?

TEIRESIAS:

It is an honour to be chosen.

JOCASTA

But do you think she is happy? She had her child taken from her by Apollo. Do you think she might have been happier with less honour and more love?

TEIRESIAS:

She knows the child is safe.

JOCASTA:

Does she? Let me ask you something Teiresias ... when Manto was a child, did you ever lose her in the market place for a few minutes?

TEIRESIAS:

A full hour once, when she was four.

JOCASTA:

Did worry gnaw at your stomach like sharp teeth? Did a metal band squeeze your heart as you searched for her? Did you struggle to breathe?

TEIRESIAS:

Every minute.

JOCASTA:

Then live with that every minute of your life for eighteen years without hope of reprieve, with grief for your child Teiresias, and tell me if you think Manto is still honoured with her gift.

(Teiresias bows and exits. During the following Jocasta touches up her make up as she speaks.)

Transition 2: A passage of about 2 years

JOCASTA:

I was awakened in the middle of the night by a runner who brought me news that Laius was dead. On the rocky road to Delphi. *(laughs)* Where he was going to ask the oracle – hah! Teiresias' daughter - how to get rid of the Sphinx. Murdered by a band of robbers. A fitting end. Finally, at last, that disgusting man is dead and I shall never have to look at him again. I suppose I shall have to order mourning. Though I think everyone in Thebes would be happier celebrating the event. They'll all be happy to see the end of such a creature.

(enter Creon)