



SPHINX

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The satyr-play that completed Aeschylus' Oedipus tetralogy, first produced in 467 BC. The original has not survived, and nothing is known for certain about it beyond the title. Satyr plays often made fun of issues in the preceding trilogy. In this version, I have imagined a less than serious treatment of Oedipus' victory over the man-munching Sphinx.

By Andrew Wilson

For Juliet

THE OEDIPOUS TETRALOGY

IV

SPHINX

Characters

SILENUS, father of the Satyrs

CHORUS of SATYRS

OIDIPOUS, a shepherd boy

SPHINX, an attractive monster

A HERALD of the Theban court

Scene

At first, somewhere in the foothills of Mount Kithairon; later, in Thebes itself.

SPHINX

Mount Kithairon. Enter Silenus, a well-upholstered somewhat elderly Satyr. He is red-faced both because of a lifetime's excessive alcohol consumption, and because he is very angry.

SILENUS

Where are you Dionysus? What's your game?

I and my Satyrs have been loyal slaves

Of yours since time began. It seems. And now

You've forced us here to dance attendance on

Some shepherd boy, some local yokel's son!

It's cold and draughty, damp and miserable;

Kithairon's grim at any time of year:

What makes it really ten times worse is this:

There's not a vine, a smell of grape, a drop

Of wine to be had anywhere. Can I

Ask if you care seeing your devotees

Dying of thirst, our lips all rough and cracked?

We are immortals – even if we are

The lowest, least important, most ignored

Of all the sub-god grades – but still we know
What it must feel like to be facing death -
Starved of refreshment, dry as Egypt's sands.
We're dessicated, dehydrated, parched:
I need a drink! Satyrs exist so they
Can demonstrate the joy of drink to mortals,
And teach the wretched creatures how to drink!
And how by raising of the wrist, even
A fool can worship Bacchus, god of wine.

A SATYR

While you were sleeping off the stuff you slurped
Last night, the god was here. He told us this...

SILENUS

He told us what? You should have woken me.

SATYR

I tried to but you were much too far gone.

ANOTHER SATYR

And now he moans because there's nothing left!

SILENUS

It's true! What are we going to drink tonight?

OEDIPUS *entering*

Well, fatso, maybe I can help you there!

SILENUS

Who do you think you are, young man? Do I

Know you? How dare you speak to me!

OEDIPUS

You do not know me, but I know you lot.

You're Satyrs, slaves of Dionysus, son

Of Zeus, also called Bacchus, god of wine.

Like mortals, hairier, though, and bigger ears.

The horse's tails are quite distinctive too.

SILENUS

What's it to you? There is no shame attached

To being Satyrs. We have feelings too!

I'm very proud of all my horsy bits.

OEDIPUS

Then get down off your horse, old chap, and hear

The proposition that I have for you.

If you agree to go along with me, there'll be

More booze than even your enormous gut

Could hold. Not if you drank all day and night

For twenty years. Lend me your pointy ears.

A SATYR

This is the lad the god told us about!

SILENUS

What god? You should have mentioned this before!

SATYR

I did, but you were fast asleep, you sleep

Each day in daylight hours, because

Each night you drink from dusk till dawn.

SILENUS

So what? I need a drink from time to time.

With you as sons, what else is there to do?

I'm sober now – worse luck – so don't hold back.

Which fecking god and what the feck d'he say?

SATYR

Bacchus himself it was, Di-o-ny-sus!

The son of Zeus, in person, him, for real.

SILENUS

But surely it was me he came to see?

SATYR

He did, but when he saw how drunk you were

He said to let you sleep it off. I said

If he got struck by lightning he would go
On snoring just the same. The god gave me
A look as if I'd spoken out of turn.
But anyway, I said if he told us
We'd pass the message on, and so we shall!

SILENUS

Then feckin' tell me then! Or do you want
To make me torture you to get the truth?
Remember when you lied about that cake
You stole – I had you snivelling like a babe!

SATYR

I'm sorry, dad, I'll tell you right away.
I never meant to keep you in the dark!

SILENUS

Fetch me the rack. Bring out the thumbscrew, now!

SATYR

OK. What Dionysus said was only this.

SILENUS

The waterboard! The Britney Spears CDs!

SATYR

He said "A young man will appear". That's him!

SILENUS

THAT'S ALL!! Why couldn't you say that before??

SATYR

I tried, but you kept interrupting me.

OIDIPOUS

I know nothing about a god, I came

To seek the help of Satyrs in a quest.

SILENUS

If you need help to steal a sheep or two,

Or perhaps a goat if that's more to your taste

We are your men. We're cunning thieves.

On moonlit nights we often go and grab

A lamb and roast it on the fire, and wash

The juicy meat down with a cask of wine.

OIDIPOUS

Well, that explains a lot of things we blame

On wolves or bears or birds of prey.

I'll not enquire too deeply now into

Our missing kids, those lambs we never found.

No, it's your fabled cunning interests me.

You Satyrs have a name for knowing stuff,

Secrets that mortals never get to learn.

You know about the supernatural world;

You're said to be in touch with nature, and

To see far more than normal men can see.

SILENUS

What are you getting at? Are we ABNORMAL?

Queer, weird, peculiar in some way? D'you think

We're funny? Freaks? Monstrosities to be

Made jokes of to amuse you mortal oiks?

SATYR

O shut up, dad, he's paying compliments!

Men often think we're stupid, lazy oafs

With hairy asses, funny ears, and thirst,

Whose only aim is constant drunkenness.

That is in fact a good description of

My lovely father, but the rest of us

Have aspirations to improve ourselves.

Develop our potential intellects...

SILENUS

I need a drink. Gods give me strength. Now. Please.

OIDIPOUS

O Satyrs, you have shown how right I was
To come to you to aid me in my task.

SATYRS

Just tell what you want us all to do.

OIDIPOUS

I am, just as you see, a shepherd boy
A herdsman's son who's spent his life with sheep,
And goats, on Mount Kithairon's rugged slopes.
I'm good at milking, making cheese, I know
What herbs the ewes prefer and where to go
And look for them if one should stray too far.
I understand the ways to keep them safe
Away from packs of prowling wolves, I've fed
An orphan lamb and I can shear a sheep
Quicker than you could down a pint of hooch.
I've helped a ram service a hundred ewes.
I know my sheep – and goats, if truth be told.
Diseases? Brucellosis, blackleg, bloat,
And Bluetongue, scours (that's diarrhoea)
Keds, ticks, lice, scabies, nasal bots, wet mange,
The Staggers, foot and mouth, and worms –

The tape worms, lung worms, brain worms, liver flukes -
And hard bag, pink eye, pizzle rot – and more –
Scrapie, that's fatal, scabby mouth – I'm not
Starting to bore you? There's much more I know...
Of sheepfolds, shepherds' crooks and collie dogs...
That's all I know! I am that hedgehog in
The proverb, who knows only one thing well.
Unlike the polymathic fox – and you,
You Satyrs with your insight into things
That mortals do not know they do not know!
That wisdom hopefully you'll share with me.

SATYR

There is no need to ask you what would be
Your subject when you go on Mastermind!

OIDIPOUS

Too right you are! But yet I “mutton” boast.
It's “ewesless” for the task I have in mind!

SATYR

Then “wool” you “fleece” say what that task entails?

OIDIPOUS

Well! Very soon I shall be king of Thebes!

SATYR

What you? A smelly shepherd with a limp?

OIDIPOUS

My limp? I'd hoped you wouldn't mention that.

ANOTHER SATYR

A dick that's limp as well, or am I wrong?

OIDIPOUS

I'd hoped you wouldn't crack that antique joke.

A SATYR *[aside]*

From underneath his cloak he took

A todger like a shepherd's crook.

OIDIPOUS

All jokes aside, I mean to be the king!

SATYR

But surely Thebes has got a king, Laios?

OIDIPOUS

The king is dead. Some robbers murdered him.

SATYR

You're telling us there is a vacancy?

OIDIPOUS

... That I intend to fill, I'll have the queen...

SATYR

You will be king and shag the queen? Dream on!

OIDIPOUS

The post of king's been advertised, and I

Have put my application in. And what

I need to do to win the throne and have

A queen to share my bed is only this.

There is some creature, monster, beast, I'm not

Entirely sure exactly what it is,

But what I've heard is, if someone can kill

The beast, he'll be made king of Thebes, and have

The lovely Epicaste as his queen

To share his bed, not once, but every night!

Well that's for me, I made my mind up, that's

My way to fame and fortune, how to get

Away from bloody sheep and shepherding!

The best bit, though, is this: the scary beast

Will be defeated by a man with brains,

Not brawn. I don't have brawn, as you observed.

The monster asks a riddle, which it makes

Its victims answer. If they can't, it eats them raw.

That would be nasty, I admit, but if
I know the answer and I give it straight,
I'm home and dry! I'm king! The queen
Is all undressed and waiting for my... personal attention.
So, Satyrs, how about it? You have heard
In your immortal lives all riddles that exist!
So teach me what you know and help me train
My intellect to cope with any cunning trick
Or pun or verbal craftiness, And I
Will make the Satyrs stewards, cellarmen,
In charge of all the vintage wine there is
In old king Laios' palace vaults. It's yours!
So tell me, do we have a deal or not?

*The Chorus begin a dance of celebration, in anticipation
of a coming glut of alcohol.*

CHORUS

Guys, A life of luxury
We're anticipating!

More wine than we ever dreamed!
Let's start celebrating!

Maybe we should wait a while
Till we've checked his story
If he's shooting us a line
We could end up sorry.

He's for real I know for sure
Not even Miss Bo-Peep
Could reel off all those facts he did -
He surely knows his sheep.

That's because he's shagging them
A new one every day.
A man who loves his sheep so much
Could lead young men astray.

We don't even know his name,
I fear we're being dim;
A shepherd who would be a king?

Why go out on a limb?

And what about this ghastly beast

He says prefers to eat men raw.

Suppose it makes of him a feast

What would our effort then be for?

All our hard work would go to waste

If he can't get to be made king.

Of wine we wouldn't get a taste

If he gets swallowed by the Thing.

Before we finalise the deal

We need to get the ground rules clear

He might just end up as a meal

An outcome we'd be right to fear.

It seems he wants to pick our brains

I don't know why he thinks we're bright!

Thinking too much give me pains

Guess we'll have to put him right!

OIDIPOUS

So will you teach me all the stuff you know?

SATYR

We're only half convinced. Tell us your name.

OIDIPOUS

My name is Oidipous, my ancestors

Have all been shepherds herding sheep,

On Mount Kithairon every bloody day.

It's boring, yes, but that's what shepherds do.

We drive them down when winter comes

And back up in the summer, every year.

SATYR

What makes you think you could become a king?

OIDIPOUS

A king is nothing but a different sort

Of shepherd, can't you see? He leads his flock

To cover from the stormy winter winds,

And fights off animals that wish them harm

Just as a king protects his folk from foes:

He shelters them inside the city walls,

And when his people are attacked, he leads
His army forth to kill the enemy.

He makes sure every sheep and lamb receives
An equal share of care, and curbs the rams'
Aggressiveness. Responsibility

He shows to keep them fed, so they won't stray.
If every shepherd were a king, or kings
Were Shepherds – how much better life would be!

SATYR

You fuck your sheep too, just like kings fuck us!
We're sold! How lucky will be Thebes's peeps
When you are king, and Thebans are your sheeps.

OIDIPOUS

Then let's begin. Teach me the riddles that
You Satyrs know. Start with some easy ones
Then test my skill with harder stuff as I -
Let's hope – improve, until I can reply
With confidence to any riddle which
The ravening man-muncher can toss at me!

SATYR

OK, Here goes. Try out your brain on this:

My mother's red and gold, but I am black.

Wingless, I fly, to heaven, but not back.

The pupils when they see me shed a tear.

As soon as I am born, I disappear.

OIDIPOUS

Well let me say I haven't got a clue!

My brain is aching! I'm already lunch!

ANOTHER SATYR

A riddle's really just a kind of joke.

The answer – isn't it obvious? – is: smoke!

OIDIPOUS

O man, that is so clever! Cunning puns

And double meanings. Educating me

Will be a long and arduous task, methinks.

Please, test my brain again. I won't give up.

ANOTHER SATYR

Two sisters, one

Is mother to the other -

Her sister's sister

And her mother's mother.

OIDIPOUS

This family tree is too complex for me!

How could a parent be a child as well? *[beat]*

ANOTHER SATYR

Can't work it out? The night is mother to

The day, and day is sister to the night!

OIDIPOUS

I feel already that I'm being devoured!

O man! Next, please. Give me an easier one

ANOTHER SATYR

Here's number three. Good luck to you this time!

I do not have a tongue, and yet I talk:

Like Aeolus, I have a big supply of air.

I'm hairy sometimes, sometimes not, and if

You stick your weapon in me, I don't care!

ANOTHER SATYR

Silenus, our pot-bellied drunken dad?

SATYR

No, it's an arse-hole, stupid, like the one

Through which you talk. Incessantly.

OIDIPOUS

O man, that's funny. But not helping me

To find out what the monster's question is.

YET ANOTHER SATYR

Here's a good one. Three girls were arguing:

"What is the strongest thing you'd ever find?"

"It's iron", says the first young girl. "You're wrong,"

The second contradicts. "A blacksmith is

Much stronger. Iron, he can bend and twist."

"You've neither of you got a clue!"

Says number three. "You know the strongest thing?

A dick. Just shove that up the bugger's arse,

And then you'll see the blacksmith bend and twist!"

OIDIPOUS

Thanks. Satyrs, you've been so much help.

I feel my education is complete. I'm off

To Thebes to try my luck. O man, I'll need

Assistance from a god, or for a fact

Oidipous will end up a monster's snack.

SILENUS rises dramatically from his couch of stupor, suddenly serious. The Satyrs stop their foolery, and pay awed attention, as does Oidipous.

SILENUS

Here is one final riddle 'ere you go.

You must solve this whether you will or no.

A girl who flies, and crawls, and walks alone,

A snarling beast who treads on paws she does not own,

Her upper half, no doubt, attracts one's interest:

She's eagle's wings, but flaunts a woman's breast -

Her voice a ghastly roar, no gentle purr.

But lower down she is a lioness, with fur,

Behind she drags a writhing snake-like tail -

Attempts at full description can't but fail:

She's bird, she's hungry beast, she's part reptile,

Who threatens death beneath a young girl's smile.

Stunned silence

ALL THE SATYRS *give a horrified shout/scream*

The Sphinx! O lordy!! Not the **Sphinx!!! The bitch!!!**

The President of shitty days! Bad luck! [fragment 236]

OIDIPOUS

Well, thanks for that old man, now I am scared.

My confidence, such as it was, has disappeared.

SATYRS

Just hearing you describe her makes us want
To run away and hide. Young Oidipous
You can't go through with it. Go back while you
Still can, and mind your sheep. I'm sure they must
Be missing you by now. You are a shepherd.
Never a king! That was a crazy dream.

I know in your imagination you
Were sitting on a throne, and next to you
The lovely queen was making eyes at you
Dressed in her finest Coan silks which you
Could see her, in your mind, seductively
Removing in your bedroom bower of bliss ...
But get real, shepherd boy! That fantasy,
That dream - Not in a thousand years could it
In any way, by any chance, come true.

OIDIPOUS

No, what you say inflames my passion more!
You must not doubt how serious I am!
Now my ambition has been stirred to life,

Nothing can stop me using all I've got
To make my dreams come true, achieve
What I set out to, make my parents proud! [beat]

SATYR

Young man, I fear you are about to make
The worst mistake than any man has made.
Don't go to Thebes, I plead with you, don't go!
Even suppose you do defeat this beast,
Remember who you are – it does not suit
A shepherd to forget his place. You look
Just like a peasant and you smell just like
A peasant, common folk, and common folk
Should know their limits, not aspire to be
What they are not. A wise man said some words,
Which you may find inscribed in Phoebus' shrine:
This: *Gnothi sauton*, "Know Thyself!" Do not
Presume to interfere with how the gods
Intend that all mankind should live their lives.
The rich are born to win, the poor to lose.

OIDIPOUS

What utter bollocks, even if it came

From god! Men make their own luck in
This world, and I intend to finish what
I started out to do. Thank you for trying.
I see that Oidipous is on his own.
But my offer to you still stands, when I
Am king of Thebes and rule the Cadmeans,
There shall be wine for you, and everyone!
So wish me luck, as I depart. Today
I shall find out that I was born to be
A king. I shall fulfil my destiny! *[beat]*

SATYRS

Then may the gods protect you, guide
Your limping steps, and keep your brain
Alert to deal with all the monster's tricks.
We will go with you, valiant Oidipous,
Though at a distance. We won't get too close.

Oidipous limps off

CHORUS

Are you a brave man, Oidipous

Or just a fool?
To put your head into the noose?
You seem so cool.

You are our hero, Oidipous
You realised
Our riddles were no use!
You weren't surprised.

We're right behind you, Oidipoes,
Yes sir, indeed!
But glad we are not in your shoes
As you proceed.

If you are king, great Oidipuse
And wear the crown
We trust you won't find an excuse
To let us down.

You are a fine chap, Oidipooze
That's what we think

You promised we'd get all the booze
That we can drink.

The scene changes to Thebes. Enter the Sphinx.

SPHINX

Where are the people? Where are all the men?
I'm hungry. I've been forced to wait too long
For today's meal of human flesh. When I
Say human, I mean fresh young male.
If there was no alternative, I'd make
Myself devour inferior meat, a man
Of middle-age, or, god forbid, a tough
And gristly pensioner. But as for women
Whether young girls, or newly-weds, housewives,
Or ancient crones – I cannot stand the taste.
Too sweet, too cloying on the lips, too mushy,
Nowhere enough to exercise my jaws.
No feminist! I love all men: although
No philanthrope! Philanthropophagous!
But you're a girl yourself I hear you cry!

You don't look like a monster who can eat
A young man raw in half the time it takes
To shell a mound of peas. I do look like
A rather lovely maiden on the cusp
Of womanhood. I'm pleased I do.
But that is far from my identity.
You'd know me better if I said my name.
I'm Sphinx. A monstrous blend of beasts
A composite hell-cat, in human form.
For now. You ought to hear my pedigree:
My father, Orthos, is a vicious dog,
A hound who has two heads, who can
Contemporaneously bark and bite.
His brother you all know as Kerberos,
My uncle, guardian of the Underworld,
And he of course has one more head – that's three.
My lovely mother is Khimaira, she
Has three heads too, each one breathes fire, one is
A lion's, one a goat's, the third a snake's!
My parents mated, doggy style of course,
And she gave birth to me, the Sphinx. And did

You know I have a brother I adore?
A scary lion – famous carnivore!
He haunts Nemea, and he'll never die,
Because his hide is super-tough and can't
Be pierced by any weapon known to man.
So I, the Sphinx am bits of everything.
I'm girl, I'm lioness, I'm eagle, snake:
Whichever one I choose to be! I change
My shape to suit my current mood,
Or what is better for the task in hand.
Or, I combine the different bits in one:
That is my favourite outfit, actually.
Just now I'm an attractive girl – I need
To lure a man down some dark alleyway,
Where he shall soon find me transformed into
A lioness, to tear the tasty meat
Straight off his bones, bones I shall then
Take pleasure crunching up with brutal jaws.
Had you been wondering how this little girl -
Such pretty lips! - could eat men raw? Well now
You know! And when I'm done, I spread my wings

And simply fly away! No leftovers!
What of the famous riddle of the Sphinx?
I ought to mention that while you are here.
The riddle's really an excuse, a sneaky way
To make men think that they can conquer me.
It's simply a formality: I sing it out to them
(I've got a most attractive singing voice –
When I'm a girl. When I'm a lioness I roar.
Though I can bark if I prefer, or hiss)
They get it wrong – they always do, and then
Le diner est servi. If someone ever did
Reply to me, it's said I'd disappear!
Queen Hera who sent me to Thebes (I don't
Know why, but not my place to ask a god)
Said this could happen – but so far so good.
I'd say the riddle is impossible
For any mortal brain to figure out.

I hear **the sound of footsteps**. Time for lunch! [fragment 237]

I'll watch him carefully, make sure I get
Him cornered so he can't escape. There aren't
So many on the streets these days. Young men

Are scared to walk alone for fear of me.
It's good they're frightened, but it means
I have to make quite sure no victim gets away.

OIDIPOUS

So this is Thebes! Much smaller than I thought.
It didn't take me long to stroll around
The walls. It's all so new to me! I found
Myself counting the gates, to make quite sure
That there were seven. Zethos built the walls
Did all the work, while brother Amphion
Sat there and strummed his lyre. Brothers it seems
Don't always work together as they should. *[beat]*
I stopped to drink from Dirke's spring, and thought
About the terrible revenge those sons,
Antiope's, once took on their step-mum
For all the horror she had put them through,
Tied to a bull's tail, dragged across the rocks.
What fearful agony, until the gods
Felt pity and transformed her to this spring!
It seems that gods can cure a mortal's pain,
But only if she's suffered torments first.

I wandered too by Hismenus's banks,
They call it river, though I'd say a brook.
I found the royal palace, much less grand
Than I'd imagined. Hoped I'd glimpse the queen,
My future wife, but no such luck. I made
A mental survey of the building where
My future life will be, if all goes well,
Planning improvements I intend to make...

He spots the Sphinx disguised as an attractive young girl

Phoowar! That girl is not the queen, but she's
More beautiful than anything I've seen,
Given my lack of opportunities
Up on Kithairon's slope. She's coming close!
She's seen me. Help! My knees are giving way.
I don't know how one's meant to talk to girls!
A life with sheep has left me unprepared.
With ewes a chat-up line is not required.

SPHINX

Good day, young man! Might I converse with you?

OIDIPOUS

Madam, er miss, of course you might. I'm pleased...

SPHINX

To meet me! Well of course you are. Come here.

OIDIPOUS

Where are you taking me, not that I mind!

SPHINX

To somewhere quiet so we can be alone.

OIDIPOUS

I never been alone with any girl!

SPHINX

Give me your hand. I'll teach you what to do.

OIDIPOUS

This is exciting! Though I'm just a little scared.

SPHINX

I won't bite you! No need to be afraid.

OIDIPOUS

I'm in your hands. Just tell me what to do.

SPHINX

Before I show you what comes next, you must...

OIDIPOUS

Do what? I'll do whatever you demand.

SPHINX

Just answer me one simple question.

OIDIPOUS

My name? It's Oidipous – due to my limp...

SPHINX

Don't worry, I've a cure for that! My question...

OIDIPOUS

What is that smell? I am a shepherd. Sheep!

SPHINX [aside]

A lamb come to the slaughter. That's so cool!

OIDIPOUS [aside]

I've just remembered what you say to girls!

SPHINX

Sit yourself down and listen carefully.

OIDIPOUS

There is a question **I** should have asked **you**.

I'm such a bumpkin! Er... Will - you – dine - with - me?

SPHINX

I'd love to have a meal with you. [aside] Of you.

You've made me hungry! Here's your question. [*Sings*]

There's a thing on earth that has
Two feet four feet sometimes three -
Doubled tripled quadrupled.
But it's only got one name.
Of all that creep or fly or swim
There's one creature that can be
Biped, triped, quadruped.
When it's more legs, - this is obscure -
It moves much slower than with fewer.
What am I?

OIDIPOUS

That is a riddle, not a question!
You've made a fool of me. I know
Now who you are! You are the dreaded Sphinx
That eats men raw! No, no, I don't believe it!
Your pretty face, your smiling lips, your teeth
So sparkling, just how could a girl like you
Consume a human body, whole, uncooked?

SPHINX

Just watch me, buster! But it's over quick.
They don't feel pain - for very long. A bite

Aimed at the neck can sometimes lead to death
In minutes rather than in hours. Depends.
So what's the answer? Get it over with!

OIDIPOUS

O man. My head's confused. O how I wish
I'd concentrated when the Satyrs tried
To tutor me. O man, o man o man!
I'm such a fool. How could I think I could
Outwit the Sphinx, professional riddler!
O man, I won't be king of Thebes. I won't
Be marrying the queen. I'll have no family
To carry on my name. It's over. Man! O man!
I wish I'd never left my lovely sheep.
Truly a peasant's life is best, a life
Of modest toil and honest drudgery.
To be devoured! I rather be poor Dirke
Strapped to the lashing tail of that mad bull.
And raw! To feel those pearly white teeth rip
My tender flesh from off my bones. O man!
Please god, just change me to a river now!
I'd gladly be a spring to give a drink

To horses, mules or rabid dogs. Or let
Me end the way that Cadmus did. I'll be
A snake, if that's what you prefer for me
I'll slither off and not be seen again!
Give me hole to live in, in the reeds
Along the gurgling stream of Hismenos.

While Oidipous has been feeling sorry for himself, he has not noticed that the Sphinx has vanished. A group of Satyrs approaches sheepishly.

Well here I am. I have no inkling how
To solve your fiendish riddle. Eat me now.
Unwashed, unseasoned, all untenderized.
I hope I choke you. Give you stomach cramp.
Gastritis, ulcers, diarrhoea, the runs.
But she's not here. She's vanished, disappeared.
I know you're there. Let's not play games!
She's toying with me like a vicious cat
Who mucks around with some poor little mouse,
Then bites its head off and crunches the brains.
Don't keep me waiting here! Your dinner's served!

SATYR

She's gone. She's dead. She is no more.

She is deceased, she's dust, she's handed in

Her dinner pail. She's kicked the bucket. Dead.

A sphinx no more. An ex-sphinx, extinct sphinx.

OIDIPOUS

She's left the meal that was laid out for her!

I failed the cross-examination,

I had no clue to what the answer was!

I had prepared myself to face the worst.

I was expecting her to eat me raw!

SATYR

You didn't get it wrong, you fool, she heard

You give the answer loud and clear not once

But several times. You didn't realise

Of course, you muppet, but I had it all

worked out. A satyr's brilliance! Never mind.

No need to thank me, not yet anyway.

The answer, idiot, is Man. And you

Kept shouting "Man o man o man o man."

The Sphinx, according to the rules laid down

By Hera, had to take the answer that
Was given first. It's just like Mastermind.
When she heard "man" she knew the game was up.
She'd lost. The riddle had been answered and
She had to die. I watched her go. She seemed
To melt, dissolve to nothingness, just like
An effigy which shrivels swiftly in
The fire and vanishes - no flames, no smoke.

Well, stranger! Benefactor of mankind! [fragment 235]

A crown for you, a garland, as of old
The Titan had to wear for what he did...

OIDIPOUS

The best of punishments, Prometheus said,
An easy way to make his peace with Zeus:
Here's hoping Hera won't make such a fuss!
My feat was not as glorious as his
In stealing fire to save the human race,
But comes damned close. No shit! I did it!
I think Prometheus' liver must have felt
The same as me, the time it realised
The vulture would be pecking it no more!

Or else the lucky fifth one of that crew
Odysseus led, when Cyclops lost his eye -
And could not have him for his evening meal.
Hurrah! This humble lad of shepherd stock
Has solved the riddle of the Sphinx, a thing
Which no one else could do, as none
Could match this clod's, this Lumpkin's native wit.
O man! Some instinct made me blurt it out:
It wasn't brains but something deeper still.
I have a skill that nature's given me
An intuition to spew out the truth
When all the rest are groping in the dark.
Something had told me I was born to be
The king of Thebes! Some hidden power guided
My faltering steps towards my destiny.
I thought it odd that Laios had no son
Who might have claimed the throne. It seems *[beat]*
This royal post had been reserved for me!

SATYR

Congratulations, Oidipous, you'll be
Made king, and take the queen to bed!

She's somewhat older than yourself, as you'd
Expect. She's of an age to be your mother
It's said. But royal birth and beauty are
What count, when getting one a wife.

OIDIPOUS

Thanks, loyal friend, thanks all you Satyrs too.
Already I begin to feel as if
The town of Thebes is where I'm meant to be!
Somehow this city starts to feel like home.

CHORUS

This was the plan of Dionysos from
The start, I do believe, our own, our local
Dithyrhambos, born first time in Thebes
When Hera had his mother killed, and born
Again from Zeus's thigh. The gods then all
Along intended to reward us for
Our loyal service. Dionysus had
A plan to quench our thirst for years to come!
Truly the gods are wise and care for us,
Though for a while they sometimes make
Us suffer, when the drink runs out. So now

Ask Dionysus to inspire our dance
And help us celebrate this victory.

*The celebration is interrupted by a fanfare. Enter a herald,
with attendants*

HERALD *[bowing low, obsequious but his distaste for the
uncouth upstart can't help showing through.]*

All greetings to your royal majesty!

King Oidipous, king of the Kadmeans,

King of the land of Thebes, and Lord

Of all Boiotians, Count of Thespiai,

Duke of Tanagra, Earl of Plataiai,

Marquess of Lake Kopais – and its eels.

Your coronation will take place quite soon.

The stewards of the royal bedchamber

Have changed the sheets. Her majesty awaits,

Perfumed and ready for...*[sniffs]* your majesty?

OIDPOUS

Well thank you very much. I'm overwhelmed.

HERALD

We bow our heads, and hold our noses too,

For that heroic man who slew the Sphinx.

OIDIPOUS

Slew? That's a slight exaggeration, but

I'll take it! Let them add an extra to

My royal list of names: King Oidipous,

The slayer of the Sphinx, the super-brain

Who solved the riddle with his genius.

[Aside] In fact it was simple Satyr who

Worked out I gave the answer by mistake.

But this will stay a secret, as he knows

If he blurts out the truth there will be no

Access to Laios' cellars and their racks

Of ancient vintages laid down in days

When Labdakos ruled Thebes, or some

Maybe that go back to that ancient time

When Dionysus first brought vines to Greece.

[To the herald] Then to the palace, lead the way for us!

HERALD

All in good time. We very much appreciate

All that you've done, but etiquette will not

Permit an unwashed stinking peasant in

The rags he's doubtless worn for weeks, or months

To step inside the palace walls, and mix
With men of rank, Theban nobility;
The ladies of the court would be aghast!
I shall escort you to the public baths.
We'll take your "garments" to be burned
Then hose you down. We'll cut your hair – the man
Who shears the royal flock is standing by.
We'll trim that shaggy beard; you'll then be dressed
In robes appropriate to your rank. And **then**
We'll see you crowned and introduce you to
The queen. Truly you are a fortunate
Young man: transformed from clod to king!

*The Herald escorts Oidipous to the bath-house.
Attendants follow with towels, clothes, perfume, shears
etc*

CHORUS *[Based on "Then one of us will be a queen" from
Gondoliers Act 1 by G & S]*

So Oidipous you'll be the king
And sit on the Theban throne
With a crown instead
Of that cap on your head

And a bodyguard of your own.
With a purple robe and loads of bling
But if I may be bold
I wonder if
You'll hide the whiff
Of that stinky old sheepfold?

O it really is a glorious thing
To be the Theban royal king!
More than an ordinary man
No ordinary man
You're a regular superman
Regular superman
Super Theban king!

He'll ride in a four-horse chariot
With queen on his right-hand side
He will not care
How much they stare
At his lovely middle-aged bride
What a beautiful silver sword he's got

And his clothes are really neat
With endless stocks
Of the fanciest socks,
And whatever he wants to eat.

O, tis...

Whenever he strolls down a Theban street
He'll hear them shout and cheer
With his haughty stare
And his nose in the air
No one will dare to jeer!
They'll always remember his mighty feat -
Not how he stinks!
How he killed the Sphinx,
And no one will know he's a cheat!

Oh, tis...

Re-enter Oidipous splendidly accoutred, with gorgeous attendants following. The palace doors open. The queen emerges, with radiant magnificence. Oldipous and his

bodyguard process into the palace as the Satyrs dance and sing:

CHORUS OF SATYRS

From a Clod to a King,
From shagging sheep to a wedding ring,
He beat the Sphinx and he won the Queen
Now he's the new king of Thebes!

From a Clod to a King
He was so scared to face the Sphinx that night
He'd no idea he'd get the riddle right -
It was an accident!
For quite a little while
He thought he might get eaten raw
But just in time
He gave the answer that she feared.

From a Clod to a King
From shagging sheep to a wedding ring
He beat the Sphinx and he won the Queen
Now he's the new king of Thebes!

For quite a little while
He thought that he might get eaten raw,
But just in time
He gave the answer that she feared.
From a Clod to a King
From shagging sheep to a wedding ring
He beat the Sphinx and he won the Queen
Now he's the new king of Thebes!

"From a Jack to a King" by Ned Miller Delta Records 1957.

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