The Theban Legend

Laius and Jocasta, the King and Queen of Thebes, had a son. Apollo, the oracle, had nothing but ill to foretell of the son. The son was destined one day to kill his father and to become his own mother’s husband.

Laius and Jocasta believed the son should not live. They planned to deliver the child to a servant of theirs, a shepherd, with orders to abandon it on the mountainside, it’s feet cruelly pierced with an iron pin so that it might not even crawl to safety. The shepherd had not the heart to leave the child to perish; instead he entrusted it to a fellow labourer to take him outside Thebes and raise the child as his own.

The labourer took the child to his royal master who, being childless, welcomed the child. Polybus and Merope, the King and Queen of Corinth, adopted him, and gave him the name of Oedipus (meaning swollen-foot).

Oedipus was raised as heir to the throne of Corinth, but when he grew to manhood, he again heard Apollo’s prophecies. A drunken guest at a guest accused him of being illegitimate. When he asked his parents, they did not confess that he was not their son. Oedipus consulted the oracle about his origin but Apollo ignored the question; he did reveal, however, that Oedipus was fated to kill his father and marry his mother.

He fled the city vowing never to set eyes on his mother and father again, unaware that Polybus and Merope were not his real parents. On his journey to Thebes, Oedipus met a party of travellers at a crossroad. In a dispute over the right of way, a fight breaks out and Oedipus kills them all including Laius (his true father).

On arriving at Thebes, Oedipus was confronted by the monster, the Sphinx, who had been sent as a curse on Thebes. Oedipus answers the riddle of the Sphinx and she kills herself. Thebes rewarded its savior with the throne, and is accepted into Jocasta’s house (his true mother) where he marries her, and has sons and daughters: Antigone, Ismene, Polynices, and Eteocles.

Oedipus Rex, Antigone’s father, unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. When he discovers this, he blinds himself in outrage and atonement and becomes an outcast.