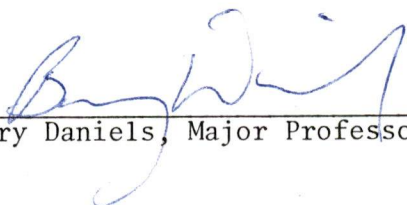
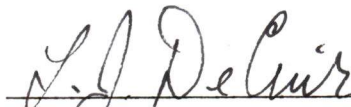
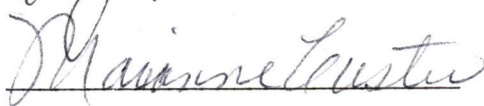


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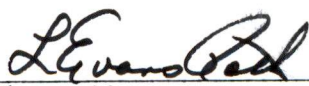
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Donald K. Skelton entitled "Costuming Period Plays: Designing a Modern Production of the Greek Tragedy, Oedipus Rex." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Speech and Theatre.

  
Barry Daniels, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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COSTUMING PERIOD PLAYS: DESIGNING A MODERN PRODUCTION  
OF THE GREEK TRAGEDY, OEDIPUS REX

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Donald K. Skelton

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1390060

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## ABSTRACT

This study represents an examination of the state of the art of costuming the period play for the modern theatre, along with a discussion of the process of designing the costumes for a modern staging of Oedipus Rex. The production was an attempt to take the classic tragedy beyond the limitations of the "museum piece," making it speak to the modern audience on more familiar terms. The idea behind the production was that a combination of ancient and modern elements would break down some of the barriers separating today's audience from the essential spirit of the Greek theatre. The thesis presents a discussion of the function of the theatrical costume, examines modern theories of costuming period plays, and evaluates the costumes for Oedipus Rex in light of these criteria.

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No writer can fully recapture the life of Athens of the fifth century before Christ, any more than a production of Oedipus Rex can repeat the performance at the Festival of Dionysus. Though much of the outward physical production has been lost—the music the movement and sound of the chorus, the nature of the voices—the more important loss, that which can never be repeated, is the spirit of an age, lived but once in time.

Allan Lewis

## INTRODUCTION

The great importance of the costume in the visual expression of a play is undeniable. According to Josephine D. Paterek, the theatrical costume "speaks to the audience with words of silence."<sup>1</sup> All too often people fail to realize the important function the costume can, and should serve in the presentation of a play. It seems appropriate at this point to examine some of the ways the costume communicates with the audience in an attempt to outline the function of the costume in modern theatrical practice.

In what is probably the most comprehensive text on the subject of the theatrical costume, Stage Costume Design, Douglas A. Russell discusses the many things the well designed costume may reveal about characters and the play. The costume can aid in the communication of the play's period. It can help identify the locale of the play. The costume can establish the time of day and distinguish social classes. Age or occupation can be expressed through the skillful use of costume. And finally, the costume can establish the relative importance of various characters, and support character relationships.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Josephine D. Paterek, Costuming for the Theatre. (New York: Crown, 1959), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas A. Russell, Stage Costume Design: Theory, Technique, and Style (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 9-10.

Beyond this expression of information about the play's characters, however, is the ability of costume design to "express intangible ideas that can strengthen the visual mood, style, and theme of the play."<sup>3</sup> This communication takes place on two levels: "the aesthetic or formal level, as pure art; and the associative or symbolic level, where it suggests by stimulating an audience's visual experience and sense of association."<sup>4</sup> It can be said without question that few designers are able to make such effective use of the costume, but it is imperative that every serious designer become aware of these capabilities and work toward their maximum utilization.

Another highly respected writer on the subject of theatrical costume is Theodore Komisarjevsky. In his The Costume of the Theatre there is a considerable space devoted to a discussion of the function of the costume on the modern stage. He states that it is "impossible to act a part in a costume that exists independently merely as a dressmaker's creation, and is not 'born' out of the understanding of the part and felt by the actor as the necessary form for the 'skin' of the character."<sup>5</sup> He goes on to present three requirements of stage costume. The first of these requirements is that the costume "should be the expression of this understanding and outlook (that of the producing director), and its purpose should be to make the imagination of the spectators work in the desired direction."<sup>6</sup> The next requirement of the costume "is to assist the actor

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Theodore Komisarjevsky, The Costume of the Theatre (London: Bles, 1931), p. 167.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

in his interpretation of the part and accentuate the expressiveness of his movements to reflect the rhythm of his creative mind."<sup>7</sup> The final requirement of the costume is "to place the actor into necessary prominence, and to make him in plastic and tonal harmony with his scenic environment, without ever being absorbed by it."<sup>8</sup> These three requirements, though simple, represent a great challenge to the designer: a challenge that is ever present, ever elusive, and yet one that must be met with every new production.

In an attempt to evaluate the relative success or failure of the costume designs for any play, the ideas set forth by Russell and Komisarjevsky concerning the function of costume may be used as a sort of yardstick. In the latter part of this study, these criteria will be applied in an analysis of my designs for Oedipus Rex.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 169-70.

## CHAPTER I

### COSTUMING PERIOD PLAYS: SOME MODERN CONCEPTS

#### Introduction

The theatre-going public, except for those familiar with avant-garde productions, has come to expect period plays to be costumed with at least a partial reflection of historical accuracy. Few modern productions, however, are costumed according to a strict adherence to absolute historical detail. Often the designer will select the essential characteristics of the dress of a certain period and combine them to create costumes that are more theatrically appropriate and more comfortable than authentic period dress would be. This concept is perhaps the most prevalent in today's theatre. This approach, modified historical accuracy, selective realism, or whatever one chooses to call it, is not the only valid and acceptable solution to the problem of costuming period plays. Although there are probably more plays designed from this standpoint, numerous productions of period plays are staged every year using modern dress or a combination of styles which may be best referred to as eclecticism. Whatever costume style is chosen must be chosen for its ability to contribute most effectively to the overall scheme of production. The first chapter of this study will examine these three major costume design concepts—historical accuracy, modern dress, and eclecticism—and present discussions of significant modern productions illustrating each of the ideas.

### Historical Accuracy

Historical accuracy as it applies to stage costuming is a term that almost defies definition. Whereas the term was originally applied to designs that represented archeologically-detailed realism, it is today more loosely applied to a whole range of costumes that are based on historic dress, though often highly modified. On the modern stage a costume is often referred to as being historically accurate when, in essence, it exhibits only the use of certain historic silhouettes or details. If a costume is recognizably a product of a specific point in time, even if it is clearly abstracted, it is likely to fall under the general heading of historical accuracy.

Another form of historical accuracy in stage costuming is accuracy to the theatrical style of the period in which the play was written. Although this method of designing period plays is not as widely used as some others, it is frequently seen in the costumes for the plays of Shakespeare. His plays, no matter what the time and place of their subject, are often costumed in the style of Elizabethan England. The application of this concept of costume design gives modern audiences an insight into the theatrical traditions of the past.

For the purposes of this study the general heading of historical accuracy will be divided into three sub-categories. The first of these is historical accuracy in its most strict sense: archeological realism. Second is the concept of employing the theatrical style of the time in which the play was written. Finally there is the modified approach to historic costuming: selective or stylized realism. Each of these areas

offers a distinct option to the modern designer, and each deserves to be weighed carefully as the costumer, along with the entire production staff, makes a decision regarding the mounting of the "realistic" play.

The Rise of Historical Accuracy. The trend toward historical accuracy in costuming for the theatre became evident early in the eighteenth century. In England," as early as 1721, Aaron Hill was urging costumes more nearly like the period the character was portraying. . ."<sup>9</sup> In 1773, Charles Macklin "played Macbeth in 'the old Scottish garb' even though his Lady appeared in the costume of contemporary fashion."<sup>10</sup> Other English actors of this period experimented with historical costume as well, but because there was no uniformity the effect must have been quite chaotic.

Germany and France also saw the beginnings of costume reform during the eighteenth century. Johann Christoph Gottsched in 1741 convinced Carolina Neuber to present his Cato in Greek costume. The German audience was not yet ready for such a drastic departure from the standard costume practice of the time, and "he was made as ridiculous in the eyes of the audience as she desired he should be."<sup>11</sup> It was not until 1773 that a production with historically accurate costumes was successfully performed on the German stage. But even that production, Goethe's Goetz von Berlichingen, "seems to have been the exception rather than the rule."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Vera Mowry Roberts, On Stage: A History of Theatre, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 252.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

The French stage was also subject to mild costume reform during the eighteenth century. The changes in France came primarily due to the efforts of Voltaire, Diderot, the actresses Mlle. Clairon and Mme. Favart, and the actors Lekain and Talma.<sup>13</sup> But in France, as in Germany and England, advances in costume reform would not meet with popular acceptance until the nineteenth century.

In dealing with the changes in costume practices in the nineteenth century, three of the most important names are J. R. Planché, Charles Kean, and the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. "The first attempt at historical accuracy for every character in the production was evidently that of J. R. Planché for Charles Kemble's production of King John late in 1824."<sup>14</sup> Not only did Planché design costumes, he also "undertook extensive research which resulted in his History of Costume (1834), long the standard English work in this field."<sup>15</sup> The trend toward antiquarianism "reached its zenith in the early 1850's with the Shakespearean revivals of Charles Kean, for which teams of art historians and archeologists would spend months of preparation gathering the background material for a production."<sup>16</sup> The extremes to which Kean went often made him the target of both critics and public opinion. "Only a membership in the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>15</sup>Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn, 1974), p. 443.

<sup>16</sup>Russell, Stage Costume Design, p. 364.

Royal Society of Antiquarians soothed him and made him feel that at least in archeological circles his theatrical efforts had been appreciated."<sup>17</sup> One of the problems that plagued Kean and others interested in furthering the development of historical accuracy in costume, was the persistence of most nineteenth century actresses to wear contemporary crinolines and hair styles with otherwise authentic costumes. The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen overcame this difficulty. In addition to his strict use of authentic materials, he insured accuracy by his "refusal to permit actors to tamper with their costumes."<sup>18</sup> Because of his absolute authority over every aspect of production, he was able to achieve a unity that made the most effective and desirable use of historical realism in costuming. The culmination of one trend, however, is always followed by the beginnings of another, and before long the movement toward the "new stagecraft" would push historical accuracy aside as the vogue in theatrical practice.

Archeological realism. There is a surprisingly small amount of literature devoted to the discussion of historical accuracy as it may be applied to the creation of costumes for the modern stage. The concensus among twentieth century theorists seems to be that absolute period authenticity in costume design is a goal that should not be attempted and one that cannot be realized. A short look at a few of these theorists will confirm this and will provide a glimpse of the state of the historically accurate costume in today's theatre.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> Brockett, p. 421.

The idea that the stage costume should be an accurate recreation of the dress of the time of a play's setting is one that finds few advocates in today's theatrical establishment. In fact, most costume theorists devote a good deal of time and space arguing against the idea. Theodore Komisarjevsky writes that "the naturalistic and genuine historical costume, since it is never expressive of the manner in which any artistic play is written or of the individual understanding of a play by any producer-artist, is quite senseless on the stage."<sup>19</sup> Any costume that is taken directly "from a museum to the stage means nothing, and merely belongs to the category of 'technical assistants.'"<sup>20</sup> He goes on to state that the actor who wears such a costume cannot look like anything other than "a museum piece or a waxwork from Madame Tussaud's."<sup>21</sup> This outlook is typical of those who write about today's stage costume design.

James Laver and Josephine Paterek are two of the authors of theatrical costume texts whose opinions are in accordance with Komisarjevsky's. Although Laver is primarily a historian rather than a theorist, his feelings may be seen in certain evaluative statements. For example, he writes that L. Gischia, a mid-twentieth century designer, "excels in the task of period evocation" with his ability to "suggest the essential flavour of an epoch without ever falling into the pedantry of mere 'historical reconstruction.'"<sup>22</sup> Paterek, on the other hand, approaches

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<sup>19</sup> Komisarjevsky, p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James Laver, Costume in the Theatre (London: Harrap, 1964), p. 198.

costuming from a practical standpoint rather than a theoretical one. She does mention, however, that the costumer "need not be a slave to history."<sup>23</sup> She later comments that "the inexperienced costumer tends to rely completely on authenticity because it is safe and because pictorial evidence is at hand to prove the costume is right."<sup>24</sup>

Douglas A. Russell, who, as already noted, is the author of the most comprehensive text on the subject of costume design theory, expresses the same attitude as Komisarjevsky and so many others. He too believes that archeologically correct costumes have no place on the stages of our theatres.

Repeatedly, one sees productions in which all the costume designer's research is still on the stage on opening night; one sees an illustration of a period, a pageant of dress from past times, an unrolling of historical facts that are fascinating in themselves but stand in the way of the audience's concentration on the mood of the play.<sup>25</sup>

For Russell, the need to be true to the expression of the characters and the play itself is "far more important than historical accuracy and an abundance of historical detail."<sup>26</sup>

The lack of a need for, and the undesirability of such strictly historical costumes notwithstanding, Russell contends that modern costumes can never recreate the dress of years gone by. "The designer should put aside the idea that he can recreate the past in his costume designs.

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<sup>23</sup> Paterek, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Russell, Stage Costume Design, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

No matter how honestly he tries, he is doomed to failure."<sup>27</sup> The reason for this inevitable failure is simple: a costume designer "cannot escape his own time and place; he cannot escape himself."<sup>28</sup> Despite all his efforts to be objective, all his research, and all his desire to present the past as it was, "what he finally presents to the public is a personal interpretation, colored by training, personality, and the culture in which he lives."<sup>29</sup> In addition to this, the mere fact that the twentieth century designer works with modern fabrics, modern cutting techniques, and the sewing machine "always results in period costumes having a modern look, that is, a relationship to modern styles."<sup>30</sup> The basic problem lies in the fact that "there are still many people who confuse art with archaeology, who allow the nineteenth century belief in the scientific approach to interfere with their intuitive response to an artistic experience."<sup>31</sup>

In searching for a modern production done in the style of archaeological realism, one discovers quickly that such productions have been rarely staged in the twentieth century. There are, however, certain productions that approach the problem of costuming from an almost archaeological standpoint. These productions are characterized by an abundance of accurate historical detail in costume, but applied with reason and a consideration of script and character analysis. One such production was that of The Miser designed by Kurt Wilhelm for the Charles Street Playhouse.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The date chosen for the play's setting was 1668. "The Miser, Harpagon, would be at least 15 years behind the times, while his son, Cleante, would be the height of haute couture. The clothes would also be 'clothes' and not 'costumes' and a feeling of age would be apparent everywhere."<sup>32</sup> The costumes would be constructed of old fabrics—blankets, curtains, etc.—or of fabrics that could be "distressed." Attention to detail was of the utmost importance, including the use of authentic fastenings for the costumes. "Bits of ribbon, trim, buttons and missing buttons, or the threads left by missing buttons" were all of great concern.<sup>33</sup> The overall effect was to have everyone look like a character who "existed as a living being in Paris in 1668."<sup>34</sup>

Accuracy to Theatrical Style. The concept of accuracy to theatrical style is perhaps the ultimate form of historical accuracy. According to this theory, the period play is produced with the goal of recreating the theatrical style of the period in which it was written. The plays of Shakespeare, for instance, would be produced as they were in Shakespeare's time, using an Elizabethan playhouse type of stage and conventionalized adaptations of Elizabethan dress. Plays from the Restoration period and those of the eighteenth century are also among those most frequently staged in this manner. This style of production requires the recreation of the typical setting, lighting effects, and acting style, as well as

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<sup>32</sup> Kurt Wilhelm, "Stocky Bourgeoisie in The Miser," rpt. in The Theatre Craft Book of Costume, ed. E. Ray Smith (Emmaus, Penn: Theatre Crafts Books, 1973), p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

the use of costumes that are representative of those in use at the time of the play's origin.

Douglas Russell discusses the production of Sheridan's School for Scandal from this standpoint:

Since the scenic methods used in the eighteenth century can be used to capture a certain period charm that is also inherent in the play, it is possible to use wings and shutters to depict the various locations needed and allow the audience to observe the shifts from one scene to the next. . . .With this concept of production, the acting will be removed from the level of realism to one of artificiality and a mannered style. The costumes will support the decorative and pictorial needs of the play rather than being tied primarily to the psychological demands of characterization.<sup>35</sup>

Russell obviously considers the use of this style of production a viable alternative for the staging of certain plays. The use of this production style works best, of course, when, as Russell mentions, the scenery, acting style, and costumes work together, as they must in any style production.

Chief among the advocates of reality to theatrical style in the production of Shakespeare's plays was William Poel, founder of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Poel, who was active in Shakespearean productions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, believed "that Shakespeare and his fellow-Elizabethans could not adequately be contained within the limits of the proscenium stage; that they were harmed by realistic scenery; and that the rhythm of these plays was destroyed by the intervals that these accessories imposed."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Russell, Stage Costume Design, pp. 352-53.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (London: Heinemann, 1954), p. 43.

Additionally, Poel was convinced that just as Shakespeare "had seen the world through Elizabethan eyes, so we must recover that vision if we wished to do him justice."<sup>37</sup> Not only did Poel work to revive the staging techniques of the Elizabethans, but also, and perhaps more importantly, he strove for the reinstatement of a text that was "as close as possible to the original representation."<sup>38</sup>

Among those who were highly influenced by the work of Poel and the Elizabethan Stage Society was Lucy Barton, as she mentions in her article "Why Not Costume Shakespeare According to Shakespeare?" In this article, Barton calls for the costuming of Shakespeare's plays not always in Elizabethan dress, but as they would have been costumed in his time.

"According to Shakespeare" means much more than paying attention to the specific references in the text to the clothes of his characters, though costume words are frequent throughout the plays. It means following the directive of the entire text—the words and their connotation in their own time. As Shakespeare's poetry and prose clothed his thought in terms of Renaissance England, so did the garments available to his time and place clothe the people he created. When the plays were first produced the actors could have dressed only in the kinds of garments known to the managers, the actors, and their audiences. Separate the visual aspect of these characters from what is said by them, to them, and about them and you risk disturbing the flow and unity of the play.<sup>39</sup>

Barton continues by writing that the popular concept of Elizabethan clothing—"highly stylized garments, stiff, apparently uncomfortable, and definitely inhibiting"—cannot "speak for the whole range of Shakespeare's characters, which include not only the court but all sorts and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Lucy Barton, "Why Not Costume Shakespeare According to Shakespeare?" Educational Theatre Journal, 19 (1967), 349.

conditions of men, and not just the English, but foreigners, the ancients, even legendary and elfin folk."<sup>40</sup> The costumer of today, "through pictures and the writings of the Elizabethans," is able to determine the manner in which these plays were dressed.<sup>41</sup> Barton does not deny the validity of other concepts for the presentation of the works of Shakespeare, but she does emphasize her firm belief that the most effective productions are those staged according to the theatrical style of the time of their writing.

One of Poel's productions of Shakespeare is perhaps the best example available for illustrating accuracy to theatrical style. Produced on an approximation of an Elizabethan stage in December of 1912, Troilus and Cressida was presented with the Greeks "dressed as Elizabethan soldiers, smoking the tobacco which Raleigh had just introduced from Virginia."<sup>42</sup> The Trojans were dressed in Elizabethan masque costumes.<sup>43</sup> Although there is no mention of pseudo-Greek additions to otherwise Elizabethan costumes, that probably would have been the case in Shakespeare's time. It should be noted that costume details are often absent from discussions of Poel's productions. Lucy Barton insists that Poel's productions were characterized by a "harmonizing of words and dress" through the proper use of Shakespearean style costumes.<sup>44</sup> It is possible, however, that Poel was not as consistent as he should have been in the application of his

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Speaight, p. 196.

<sup>44</sup> Barton, p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Shakespearean Revival standards. Whatever the case may be, Poel's work represents the spirit, if not the letter, of the basics of the concept of accuracy to theatrical style.

Modified historical accuracy. The most widely applied variation of historical accuracy in costume design is that of selective or stylized realism. "Selective realism is the most usual form of realism in which costumes resemble clothes which were actually worn but were specifically selected for theatrical effect and for their contribution toward the delineation of character."<sup>45</sup> The use of stylized realism takes the costume design into a more theatrical realm, "with more careful attention paid to line," the result being "a simpler but still recognizable silhouette."<sup>46</sup> Although Paterek defines selective realism and stylized realism separately, they will be, for the purposes of this study, combined into a single category and referred to as modified historical accuracy. This move is justified due to the fact that the two are so closely related, and because other sources do not make as specific a delineation as does Paterek.

Komisarjevsky comments that "realistic stage costumes should, by their shape and colour, only suggest to the spectator a certain period and also the 'milieu' in which the action of the play develops."<sup>47</sup> He continues by stating that "even in a realistic production every modern or historical dress should be transformed by the conception of the producing

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<sup>45</sup> Paterek, pp. 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Komisarjevsky, p. 170.

director into an expressive stage costume serving the purposes of the acting and production without destroying the required realism of the play."<sup>48</sup> In other words, when the production concept calls for realistic costumes, they should be as nearly accurate as possible without limiting their effectiveness as legitimate reflections of that concept and the characters for whom they are intended.

Russell agrees with Komisarjevsky on this, writing that the theatrical costume "can be as close to reality or as far from it as the director, the designer, and the playwright wish, as long as they do not attempt the impossible: the recreation of a period on stage."<sup>49</sup> He notes that in a substantial number of productions one finds "costumes that give the audience the illusion of period reality, but. . . are actually limited in line, texture, and color, . . . and create a world of the play and of the production before they create a world of the past."<sup>50</sup> He points out that in today's theatrical climate a play's costumes may be "almost completely abstracted from visual reality without the audience feeling that this interferes with their appreciation of the character's psychological reality, while a half-century ago the audience would have been distracted by such designs."<sup>51</sup> The designer's urge to create historical costumes must therefore be tempered by the realization that a certain amount of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Russell, Stage Costume Design, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

stylization or abstraction is preferable to, and more expressive than, costumes that vainly attempt to place historical fact on the stage.

William D. Roberts, in an article in "Theatre Crafts" magazine discusses his approach to designing a staging of Love for Love in modified historically accurate costumes. After discarding the original idea of updating the production all the way to the "swinging London" of 1967, the concept was modified to include somewhat historic costumes combined with such modern touches as Bach sonatas rearranged for a jazz combo.<sup>52</sup> Roberts decided to keep the silhouette of the seventeenth century, but strove to use color in such a way as to create a contemporary effect.<sup>53</sup>

I used no patterned fabrics, and stuck to intense, flat areas of color; acid greens, hot pinks, oranges. It was a palette one often sees in modern graphic design, and in a lot of women's clothes today. Also, the kind of juxtapositioning of primaries—greens, purples, reds—one associates with art nouveau, another style I feel quite appropriate for Love for Love both in terms of its own kind of over-lush decadence and also its current revival.

Mostly I chose chemical colors as opposed to vegetable colors, that is, colors usually associated with chemical dyes instead of vegetable dyes. They're more intense, "fakier," less natural looking. For fabrics, since I was using no pattern detail and hard, bright colors, I chose velvets, velveteens, taffetas; fabrics which are made commercially in the colors I wanted, and have the flat intensity of hue I wanted.<sup>54</sup>

Through the use of color, Roberts gave a new feeling to the play, removing it from that standard "period play" look. He instead was able

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<sup>52</sup>William D. Roberts, "The Contemporaneity of Love for Love," rpt. in The Theatre Crafts Book of Costume, ed. C. Ray Smith (Emmaus, Penn.: Theatre Crafts Books, 1973), pp. 117-119.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

to give it "a rather glossy, brash, contemporary look. . . in keeping with Congreve's glossy, brash, highly sophisticated treatment of his contemporaries."<sup>55</sup>

### Modern Dress

The use of modern dress as an alternate method for the costuming of period plays is a practice that is not terribly uncommon on the twentieth century stage. This approach has been shown to be a valid one when employed as an integral part of an overall production concept. The idea is not one that is new to the theatre. The plays of Shakespeare were in his time performed in contemporary dress, or conventionalized variations thereof, no matter what the period in which the action occurs. The eighteenth century stage also saw most plays costumed in only slightly modified versions of everyday clothing. "Garrick played Macbeth in knee breeches, a scarlet and gold coat, and a tie wig. Hamlet was played in the same contemporary dress, but all in black."<sup>56</sup> Actresses of the period were particularly careful to appear onstage in the most fashionable and beautiful costumes possible. Although this was the period that saw the beginnings of the move towards historic costuming, audiences were accustomed to and accepted characters from ages past in contemporary dress. Herein lies the major obstacle to twentieth century productions of period plays in period clothing. Without the elimination of this barrier the modern dress period play is doomed to be less than completely successful.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>56</sup> Roberts, On Stage, p. 250.

Despite the general public's aversion to period plays in modern dress, they are not infrequently costumed in this manner in experimental or avant-garde productions. The reason for the relatively common use of modern dress for productions of period plays today "is exactly the same as it has always been—to involve the audience in the immediacy of the statement being made in the performance."<sup>57</sup> Lucy Barton, in discussing costuming for Shakespeare's plays, writes that "since basically all Shakespearean costumes must have been, for their time, 'modern dress,' it is not strange that during the two centuries following the first productions modern dress was the accepted costuming."<sup>58</sup> These two centuries, she notes, were also a time when Shakespeare's texts were freely altered. She argues that if Shakespeare is presented today in modern dress without an accompanying alteration of the script there will almost always be certain incongruities between what the audience sees and what it hears.<sup>59</sup> For an example she points to As You Like It. "How," she asks, "shall a 'modern dress' Rosalind 'suit' herself" when she is disguised as a man? "There is nothing in a masculine wardrobe today that girls have not already appropriated—even to stretch pants and pea jackets. The plot falls to pieces."<sup>60</sup>

Russell sees things in a slightly different light. He concedes that "certain plays are so tied to specific dress styles and cultural *morés*" that they may not work as well if costumed in any other period.<sup>61</sup> On the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 498.

<sup>58</sup> Barton, 349.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 350.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Russell, Stage Costume Design, p. 237.

other hand, "for those plays that have a human or philosophical universality, one can often achieve new and exciting visual effects by a shift of period or a move to abstraction—if the designs are closely related to the structure of the play."<sup>62</sup> In costuming a production of Hamlet, for instance, he argues that the period chosen is "unimportant compared to the choice of the line, texture, and color in the costumes."<sup>63</sup>

Although neither Russell nor Komisarjevsky deal directly with the subject of the use of modern dress in period plays, their attitudes towards the function of costume in general are applicable. If the contemporary costumes chosen for a period play fulfill the requirements outlined by Russell, Komisarjevsky, Paterek and others, then they can be said to be appropriate and effective. If modern dress is applied haphazardly, without thoughtful consideration, or outside the realm of the scheme of production as a whole, then the play will most assuredly suffer.

Since so many of the plays of Shakespeare exhibit the universality that Russell mentions, it is not surprising that they are so frequently costumed in modern clothing. In discussing representative modern dress productions of period plays, it seems only natural to look at a few of the modern dress productions of Shakespeare. The first production to be discussed is that of Julius Caesar by Orson Welles and John Houseman. The second is the 1963 modern dress Hamlet at the Guthrie Theatre.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. p. 311.

Orson Welles' production of Julius Caesar is one of the most controversial productions of Shakespeare's Roman tragedy in recent times. Produced at the Mercury Theatre in 1937, Welles transformed Shakespeare's play into "a dazzling piece of propaganda, with the political equation so skillfully drawn that the spectator could not help but be partisan."<sup>64</sup> Through the careful adaptation of the text of the play and the use of contemporary military garb, Welles played upon the current political situation to create an emotional anti-fascist statement. "Audiences knew that they were supposedly seeing a play that took place in ancient Rome. However, their emotional reaction was quite something else again."<sup>65</sup>

Caesar's costume was "the type of uniform affected by a Hitler or a Mussolini," although neither his uniform nor any of the others had any insignia whatsoever.<sup>66</sup> "The street dress worn by the crowds was dominated by military garb, Sam Browne belts, epaulettes, and boots."<sup>67</sup> Other costumes were equally evocative of the present military and political crisis:

Casca, Decius Brutus, Legarius, and Trebonius—all the petty conspirators—were portrayed as modern day racketeers with turned-up collars, black hats pulled low around their ears, and that gun-in-the-pocket look about them. As emissaries of the state, both Publius and Mark Antony wore soldier's tunics, while Brutus, on the other hand, wore a formal mufti, <sup>68</sup> not unlike the kind that might be worn at an afternoon wedding.

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<sup>64</sup>Richard France, The Theatre of Orson Welles (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 107.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

The visual impact of the contemporary dress was undeniably important in the communication of the production's immediate political statement.

We move now from 1937 to 1963, and from Julius Caesar to Hamlet. In his book A New Theatre, Tyrone Guthrie devotes several pages to a discussion of the logic behind the choice of contemporary European court dress for the production of Hamlet that opened the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota. One of the primary reasons for the use of modern dress was "to clarify a complicated story."<sup>69</sup> Admittedly, the use of contemporary clothing strips the play of some of its romance, but Guthrie felt it his "duty to try to protect Shakespeare, and to try to protect all of us, from our passionate addiction to Romance and to Stereotype."<sup>70</sup>

We figured that if the characters looked recognizable, like the sort of people with whom we are familiar and whom we can place in the context of our own experiences, it would be easier to accept them as real people, not just as remote beings from another era. We believed that by so doing we need not necessarily make the stage look drab and ordinary. The fact that the play is set in a royal court permitted us to dress the men either in formal clothes or handsome, colourful full-dress uniforms, and to deck the women out with long gloves, plenty of jewelry and dignified, long dresses. Some of our critics objected that the full-dress uniforms were nineteenth-century and did not "go" with the modern civilian suits. In this they were mistaken. In all European courts, military full dress has hardly changed in the last hundred years, and is seen in the same rooms and at the same functions as completely modern civilian clothes.<sup>71</sup>

Another reason Guthrie chose to use modern dress for this production was that he felt "it would better suit an American cast, less at home with 'period' plays than British actors who get more opportunities to appear

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<sup>69</sup>Tyrone Guthrie, A New Theatre (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 98.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-03.

in them,"<sup>72</sup> In essence, both Guthrie and Welles used modern dress for just the reason that Roberts gave—that is to "involve the audience in the immediacy of the statement being made in the performance."<sup>73</sup>

### Eclecticism

The category eclecticism will, for the purposes of this study, serve as an umbrella-group for those productions of period plays that employ various unique concepts or production styles that may not properly be situated under the previously detailed headings. Numerous "off-beat" productions of Shakespeare's plays, for example, may be termed eclectic. One such production that comes to mind is the staging of A Midsummer Night's Dream at Freed-Hardeman College a few years ago in which the setting was moved to the nineteenth century American West. That production, though not one that will go down in the annals of theatre history because of its unusual presentation, is exemplary of a certain genre of eclectic theatrical fare. The paragraphs that follow will attempt to make some order of the chaos that often surrounds the productions that are here called eclectic.

The eclectic approach to staging the period play may take any of a number of forms. In making the choice to treat the play as an eclectic experiment, the director throws out all the old conventionalized attitudes toward the play. His new vision of the play may or may not be completely valid in everyone's opinion, but if the idea is born out of the essence of the script, even if it is highly abstracted, it should

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, On Stage, p. 498.

have at least a chance of success. Just as in any other style production, the visual components of the eclectic production must be created to contribute to the director's concept. If this means having the visual elements in total disunity, then so be it, if the new-found thematic essence of the play is most properly expressed through a chaotic presentation. Douglas A. Russell writes that "even in the wildest deviation from what the play seems to be on the printed page, the designer cannot stop analyzing the basic compositional method of the script, even though he must, of course, see the scheme through the eyes of his director."<sup>74</sup>

Because this particular category is characteristically unconventional, there is little in the way of academic theory that may be reported. It is difficult to propose a theory of eclecticism because each new production proceeds out of its own individual theory. The logical way to approach the eclectic style is then simply through an examination of various eclectic productions. There are scores of unusual presentations of period plays that are essentially eclectic in concept. Due to the great scope of the category any number of examples would be insufficient to fully illustrate the infinite variety of eclectic productions. A brief look at two representative selections will provide a brief sampling of the eclectic style.

The Stanford Repertory Theatre's production of Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus is one example of a play staged in an eclectic manner. The director, Eric Vos, wanted costumes that "would be nothing that could

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<sup>74</sup>Russell, Stage Costume Design, p. 238.

be labeled Greek; nothing, in fact, specifically human. Vos wanted the actors to suggest not human beings, but representatives of the forces of the Universe that men worshipped at the dawn of history,"<sup>75</sup> The designer, Douglas A. Russell, took his inspiration for the costumes from the colors and textures of rocks and ocean.<sup>76</sup> The resulting costumes were massive, highly textured, mysterious and symbolic.

Another example of eclecticism in theatrical production is Peter Brook's A Midsummer Night's Dream, a production that Clive Barnes called "the most genuinely and deeply original production of Shakespeare in decades."<sup>77</sup> Brook, in an interview in Plays and Players talked about the production:

The Dream is a play about magic, spirits, fairies. Today we don't believe in any one of those things and yet, perhaps, we do. The fairy imagery which the Victorian and even Post Victorian tradition has given us in relation to the Dream has to be rejected—it has died on us. . . .

We have dropped all pretence of making magic by bluff, through stage tricks. The first step must be moving from darkness to daylight. We have to start in the open—in fact we begin in a white set and white light. . . . We present all the elements with which we are going to work in the open.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Douglas A. Russell, "Primeval Crystals for Prometheus Bound," rpt. in The Theatre Crafts Book of Costume, ed. C. Ray Smith (Emmaus, Penn.: Theatre Crafts Books, 1973), p. 200.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>77</sup> Clive Barnes, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," New York Times, 21 Jan. 1971, rpt. in New York Times Theatre Reviews (New York: New York Times, 1973), XI, 10.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Ansorge, "Director in Interview: Peter Brook Talks to Peter Ansorge," Plays and Players, Oct. 1970, p. 18.

The production employed "the techniques of the circus," the actors swinging from the trapeze and walking on stilts.<sup>79</sup> "Circus tricks, Indian chants, flamenco guitar, children's streamers, paper plates, mock and mocked Mendelssohn, all are thrown into some eclectic broth."<sup>80</sup> Although the show was dress in costumes of modern inspiration, it does not fall into the category of modern dress productions. The term eclectic applies in that the costume designs exhibited a combination of abstracted contemporary style (for the human characters) and an ephemoral, purely theatrical style (for the fairies). The combination of Brook's unique concept and the startling visual impression of the production's setting and costumes must certainly have been a factor in reviewer Peter Roberts' dubbing the performance "electrifying."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>J. C. Trewin, Peter Brook: A Biography (London: Macdonald, 1971), pp. 184-85.

<sup>80</sup>Barnes.

<sup>81</sup>Peter Roberts, "Stratford: A Midsummer Night's Dream," Plays and Players, Oct. 1970, p. 42.

## CHAPTER II

### DESIGNING OEDIPUS REX

#### Introduction

Upon being asked to design costumes for a play, a costumer embarks upon a long, and often unsteady, voyage. The task of designing costumes that fulfill the requirements of the director's concept of the play, satisfy the individual tastes of the performers and aid their character development, and can be constructed, rented, or purchased within the limitations of a budget, is a job that frequently seems unrelentingly difficult. These problems, and many more, are just what the costume designer faces with every new project. The trauma, the pain, and the long hours, however, somehow seem bearable when the work is done and these costumes are brought to life on the stage.

When Fred Branch, director of Oedipus, first approached me with the idea of designing costumes for the production, I felt all the apprehensions that every student designer feels. I worried that classes and work would leave too little time to devote to the project. I was concerned about the fact that the budget allotted for the production was too small to allow even the slightest bit of extravagance. And, of course, I worried that my designs might not be satisfactory to the director and cast. But these feelings of apprehension were far outweighed by my desire to be involved with the production and see my designs on the stage. My decision to accept the challenge of designing the costumes for Oedipus Rex was the beginning of a long, complicated process, but one that was ultimately

very exciting and rewarding. Our production of Oedipus Rex was performed on May 18, 19, and 20, 1978, in the Carousel Theatre at the University of Tennessee. The following is an account of the development of the costume designs for the production, a discussion of the production itself, and finally an evaluation of the relative success of the costumes in view of the requirements of the theatrical costume as outlined in the first chapter of this study.

### Production Concepts

The production concepts that provided the basic outline for the development of the staging of Oedipus Rex seem most appropriately presented in the director's own words. The following paragraphs are taken from the introduction to his thesis:

My first inclination was to direct Oedipus as near to an actual Greek fifth century production as I could. I thought that if we were to see a production as it would have been done in the fifth century we might come closer to feeling, or to understanding, the Greek theatrical experience. This idea quickly changed because I felt that in doing a "classical" production I would not necessarily capture the spirit of the Greek theatre. I might be putting another museum piece on stage instead of a vital theatrical experience for everyone involved. I was also not unaware that the Greek theatrical form contains elements which would no longer sustain our interest such as the more formal statuesque acting style and the sung dialogue. What is more, the Greek theatrical form contains the elements of music and dance, both of which we lack sufficient knowledge of to be able to reproduce them with any correct accuracy. With these ideas in mind, a different approach to the material would be needed to make the production a vital experience.

This led to a more generalized production concept which was loosely based on modern theatre practice and Greek fifth century theatre practice. The production would be a combination of both period styles. The production would be directed in the realistic style of the twentieth century theatre with the largest influence on the play coming from the fifth century theatre practice.

Since there was to be such a mixture of styles the production was allowed to develop as it went along from day to day. Everyone involved could borrow or discard ideas from the two periods without having to worry about adhering slavishly to a set period. I hoped that this practice would generate an exciting mix of styles which would carry over into the performance.

The designers were given a certain amount of freedom to explore contemporary and Greek design. They were encouraged to combine design from the twentieth century and the fifth century theatre. Everyone was in constant communication which aided the development of the individual designs into a cohesive production.

The religious aspect of the fifth century Greek theatre was stressed in all the areas of this production. Religion in the Greek theatre played an important role. Not only were the plays concerned with the gods, the gods' relationship to man, and man's relationship to man, but theatre as a whole was a religious function. The gods were believed to be present during the performances. Men connected with the theatre in any capacity were under the protection of the state because of the theatre's important religious nature. I wanted this religious aspect to be very evident in the performance. The religious aspect was part of the connection between the audience and the stage. Religion was one of the elements that made their theatre so exciting.<sup>82</sup>

For too many years, too many people have thought ancient Greek tragedy stiff and boring; this production was one small effort to show that the theatre of ancient Greece could be just as vital, just as moving, and just as significant to the audience of today as it was to those who witnessed it in the fifth century B.C.

Oedipus was to be performed in the Carousel Theatre on a full circle arena stage. The watchword for the visual creation of the play was simplicity. The designs for the setting, lights, and costumes were to be clear and to the point. The stage itself was to be painted with a simple design that would exhibit a Greek flavor. On opposite sides of the stage

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<sup>82</sup>Fred Branch, "Oedipus Rex: Staging a Production of a Greek Fifth Century B.C. Play in the Twentieth Century," Thesis Tennessee 1978, pp.3-5.

would be wide aisles that would serve as the entrances to the stage area, one side representing the entrance to the palace, the other representing the temple. A small altar would be present in the aisle serving as the temple.

The lighting, too, was to be simple, and yet the director wanted it to work subtly to underscore the foreboding elements of the play. The ritual dances that were added to the production were particularly intended to be seen in a mysterious, shadow-shrouded atmosphere. Realizing the ultimate importance of effective lighting for this production, with its simple scenic elements and complex psychological elements, the director put great emphasis on this visual aspect of the show.

The director's original concept of costumes for the production was to allow the actors to wear something of their own clothing. The logic behind this choice was that the contemporary clothing would assist the audience in dealing with the psychological problems of the play on their own terms. At this point in time, I had not yet expressed a definite interest in designing for the show, although both Fred and I had discussed the matter. As time passed, and as Fred began to make more plans concerning the production, we discussed my designing for the production at some length. At the time I was in search of a thesis topic, and designing costumes for Oedipus was a project that looked promising from that standpoint. After several conversations concerning the designs, both Fred and I concurred that coordinating personal wardrobes for the play would be neither challenging for a designer, nor suitable material upon which to base a thesis. We made the decision that a blend of modern and Greek

elements in costume would be most effectively achieved through the use of clothing with a modern, yet not common, look. Garments with a Greek accent could then be added for the principal actors, and those chorus members who assumed small roles, such as messenger and herdsman. An integral part of Fred's concept was to make the adding of the Grecian robes a ritual. Oedipus, Jocasta, and the chorus members who acted the other roles would be dressed in their respective Greek costumes before entering the circle of the stage. Fred felt that this ceremonial dressing of the actors would "give the theatre a holy connotation by making an entrance into it important."<sup>83</sup> Another of the major decisions to be reached was whether or not to use masks. The problem was not resolved in one discussion, however, for Fred had reasons for both wanting and not wanting to use masks for this production. At one point he had come to the tentative conclusion that half-masks would be worn. Later in the process of preparing the play for presentation, even the half-mask was abandoned. The primary consideration behind the elimination of masks being that our actors, all of them students, would not be able to master the art of acting while masked. Having reached an agreement on the general scheme of things, I began the search for the specifics that would successfully complete our general concept.

#### Script and Character Analysis

The first step for the costume designer, after having developed an understanding of the director's overall production concept, is to begin to study the script, taking special care to note costume references.

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

This study will, of course, take more than one reading. The designer must be sure that he is thoroughly familiar with the script before any of the actual designing takes place.

The general tone of Oedipus Rex is one of impending doom. In addition to this, however, is the feeling of royal splendor which surrounds the court of Oedipus and Jocasta. Despite the fact that the play is actually set in ancient Thebes, long before the time of the play's writing, the visual image that immediately comes to the mind of the average reader is of Athens in the fifth century B. C., not some ancient primitive culture.

One of the most obvious features of the script is, of course, the presence of the chorus. For the purposes of this production, the chorus was to act sometimes as a unit, but more often as individuals. Many of the chorus' speeches were given to individual chorus members, and chorus members also took the smaller roles in the play. In fact, only the roles of Oedipus and Jocasta were portrayed by actors who were not a part of the chorus. The chorus was to be presented in a much less formal manner than was practiced in ancient Greek theatre. This informal presentation was to be the primary factor determining the design of costumes for the chorus.

The script of Oedipus Rex yields no specific references to costumes. One of the few references to any kind of adornment is the mention of the brooches that held Jocasta's robe, the same brooches that Oedipus used

to blind himself.<sup>84</sup> It is then, primarily up to the costumer to deal intuitively with the dressing of the characters, evaluating what they say, what is said about them, and what they do. This evaluation, along with consultations with the director concerning his costume preferences, must form the basis for the designs.

The following is my general analysis of each of the characters:

Oedipus, King of Thebes. The character Oedipus is perhaps one of the most thoroughly analyzed in the entire history of the theatre. Countless numbers of studies concern themselves with the task of searching for the essence of this man, Oedipus. He is first and foremost the King of Thebes, the man who saved the city from the wrath of the Sphinx. He is a man of great strength, but he is also the victim of a raging spirit and an often uncontrolled temper. During the course of the play, after his confrontations with Teiresias and Creon, his temper takes control and he speeds the chain of events that will ultimately be his downfall. Oedipus is, however, a good man and a good ruler. His people are trusting in his ability to rule Thebes to their best advantage, calling upon him in the opening of the play to save them from the blight that has besieged the city. "Noblest of men, go, and raise up our city, go—and give heed. For now this land of ours calls you its savior since you saved it once."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Sophocles, Oedipus the King, trans. David Grene, in An Anthology of Greek Drama, 1st ser., ed. Charles Alexander Robinson, Jr. (New York: Hold, 1949), p. 93.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

It must not be forgotten that Oedipus's life, his rise to power, and his demise were all fated by the gods. Despite all human efforts, Oedipus lived to fulfill the prediction that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus, powerful though he was, was unable to avoid the course that his life was fated to follow.

In his thesis, the director expressed numerous specifics regarding his conception of the character of Oedipus. He sees Oedipus as being "firm but fair," and a ruler who "loves his people and would do nothing to hurt them."<sup>86</sup> He sees Oedipus as thirty years of age, confident, and very much a "man's man."<sup>87</sup> Fred sees Oedipus as a good father, and a trusting husband. The relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta, in the director's view, is more than one of husband and wife, or king and queen—theirs is a relationship based very deeply in love and passion. Fred blocked the scenes between Oedipus and Jocasta in such a way as to allow them as much physical contact as possible, since he felt that seeing them together in such a manner would enhance the tragedy of their relationship.<sup>88</sup> One final comment is that Fred pictured Oedipus as "an exact, methodical man," and "it is this exactness, this desire for truth, which drives him on until he is destroyed."<sup>89</sup>

Jocasta, Queen of Thebes, wife of Oedipus; widow of Laius, the late King. Jocasta is, above all things, the wife of the King of Thebes. She is a beautiful and sensual woman, and a woman of great strength.

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<sup>86</sup>Branch, p. 62.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

Oedipus has great confidence in Jocasta, as is evidenced by the fact that he has "given her an equal share in the government."<sup>90</sup> She is very much a loving wife to Oedipus, wanting only the best in life for him. As we first meet Jocasta, she is very concerned about Oedipus, "troubled by his anxiety over the state and their developing situation."<sup>91</sup> As the play progresses, and as the truth of Laius' death and resulting events begins to surface, Jocasta is unable to endure the pain. The oracles are proven true after all, and she takes her own life rather than face the shame of her guilt. She like Oedipus, is a pawn in the hands of fate, a puppet in the hands of the gods.

Creon, brother of Jocasta. Creon is a very wise and honest man, and although he is a powerful man, he does not use his power thoughtlessly. He has great faith in Oedipus and trusts his King's ability to rule. Until that point in time when Oedipus accuses Creon of treasonous plottings against his crown, Creon has been a trusted advisor and an equal, like Jocasta, in the government. Creon is no traitor, indeed, he has no desire to be King. "How," Creon asks Oedipus, "should despotic rule seem sweeter to me than painless power and an assured authority?"<sup>92</sup> Although Creon is a calm and level-headed man, he is both insulted and angered by Oedipus' blind accusations. But he is not one possessive of a vengeful spirit, and after the calamitous events ending in Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness, Creon exhibits great control and compassion.

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<sup>90</sup>Sophocles, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup>Branch, p. 65.

<sup>92</sup>Sophocles, p. 72.

He is shown to be a man of great pity and love, a man richly blessed by the gods with the ability to be King.

Teiresias, a blind prophet. Teiresias is a mystic, a blind prophet who is held in high regard by the people of the city. Teiresias' encounter with Oedipus is a fiery one, for he speaks the truth in no uncertain terms, and Oedipus does not like what he hears. Although Teiresias has no reason to lie to Oedipus, he is accused of so doing and is charged with conspiring with Creon. He is blind, and yet he is able to see that which Oedipus cannot.

Priest of Zeus. The Priest of Zeus was played by a woman in this production, and was thus played as a Priestess. The Priestess, being a spiritual leader and representative of the gods, is in importance "almost the equal of Oedipus and Jocasta."<sup>93</sup> The Priestess is noble, upright, and "not afraid to take an active part in the affairs of state."<sup>94</sup> Throughout the play she maintained her character, joining the chorus as their leader.

A Messenger, from Corinth. This messenger is the man who, many years before the time of the play, took Oedipus from a herdsman and gave him to Polybus and Merope, the rulers of Corinth. He is in Thebes to tell Oedipus the news of Polybus' death and to ask his return to Corinth. He is saddened to be the bearer of bad news but happy to be the one chosen to bring Oedipus back to become the ruler of Corinth. The worst news from

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<sup>93</sup>Branch, p. 66.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

the messenger is, however, that information he gives about Oedipus not being the natural son of Polybus. Upon hearing the messenger's story of how he came to take a child from one of Laius' servants, Oedipus begins to fit together the pieces of the puzzle that destroys him.

A Herdsman, formerly in the service of Laius. The herdsman is the servant who was sent into the wilderness with the infant Oedipus with instructions to leave him for dead. Being a man of compassion, and not being able to see how a helpless baby could bring harm to the King of Thebes, the herdsman gives the child to another herdsman rather than leaving him to die. When he is brought before Oedipus in the action of the play, we find a man who is frightened to speak because he knows the truth of the situation and probably sees himself as the cause. He speaks, though with great reluctance, and brings Oedipus' world crashing down as he does.

Second Messenger. The second messenger is one of the servants in the palace of the King and Queen of Thebes. His primary function in the play is the transmission of the news of how Jocasta takes her life and of how Oedipus blinds himself. Obviously, a servant in Oedipus' house would be very close to both him and Jocasta, and his speech telling of the tragic event reflects his terror. He describes, in painful detail, the final events fulfilling the preordained downfall of Oedipus, King of Thebes.

## Research

One of the most important facets of designing the costumes for period plays is research into the dress of the period. In the case of designing for Oedipus, since we were working toward a partially Greek design, it was necessary to research Greek dress, both civil attire and theatrical costume. The information uncovered in this research was used primarily as a visual starting point for the designs. No costume was lifted intact from any single historical source, but rather the various sources served collectively as an inspiration for the designs. The section that follows will briefly survey this research and outline the basics of Greek civil and theatrical costume from the fifth century B.C.

The basic items of civil attire in fifth century Greece were the chiton, the himation, the chlamys, and the peplos. There are two main types of chiton: the Doric and the Ionic.<sup>95</sup> The Doric chiton is a simple garment, an "unsewn piece of material, wrapped around the body and pinned on the shoulders."<sup>96</sup> The width of the material could vary from one to three yards.<sup>97</sup> "The width of the woven material formed the line from neck to hem, and the length of the material went round the body. Therefore the wider the fabric the longer the gown."<sup>98</sup> This style is the form most usually worn by "working and fighting men and sometimes by serving women."<sup>99</sup> A more decorative way to drape the chiton involved

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<sup>95</sup> Iris Brooke, Costume in Greek Classic Drama (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 18.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

folding over the top edge before pinning. When draped in this manner, the often decorated top or border of the chiton would drape "over the chest like a collar."<sup>100</sup> The chiton is usually belted (girdled) with one or more belts.<sup>101</sup>

The Ionic chiton is much fuller than the Doric (i.e., the material has the same width but is longer), and is sewn up like a vast unshaped skirt. To put it on, one of the open edges should be pinned at regular intervals leaving a slightly larger interval for the head to go through. The hands are then put through between the last pin at each end and the fold in the fabric.<sup>102</sup>

The Ionic chiton, like the Doric, "can be girdled as desired."<sup>103</sup>

The himation is "a cloak some four or five yards long and about a yard in width" that is often worn over the chiton.<sup>104</sup> It could be worn in various ways, and "was worn, as all the garments were, by both men and women."<sup>105</sup> The ends of the garment were often decorated with borders or fringe.<sup>106</sup> The styles of the himation range from the very simple to numerous complicated variations.<sup>107</sup>

The chlamys is another type of cloak commonly worn in ancient Greece. It is smaller than the himation and "is sometimes shown tied round the body under one arm and round the waist, or just buckled on one shoulder, the ends falling straight. The chlamys was used chiefly by soldiers and messengers."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 21. See also Michael and Ariane Batterberry, Mirror, Mirror: A Social History of Fashion (New York: Holt, 1977), pp.34-43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

One other type of garment in use at this time was the peplos. The peplos is a tunic that could be "worn over a chiton for warmth or decoration."<sup>109</sup> It is this garment, with its neckband and sleeves, upon which the theatrical costume is based.<sup>110</sup>

The dramatic costume "appears to be roughly square in shape, folded and joined down the front and attached to a decorative yoke; sleeves are either attached just off the shoulder or else worn on some sort of undergarment."<sup>111</sup> The resulting costume is a "well-cut tunic, covered with richly varied and bold designs, with a neckline that fits and shoulders that are slightly shaped."<sup>112</sup> Although this garment was apparently the most widely used costume of the time, other types of costumes based on the chiton or tunic were probably also used.<sup>113</sup> The costume was completed with the addition of a life-size mask and buskins.<sup>114</sup>

This examination of Greek dramatic costume is admittedly brief, hardly more than a glimpse, but since our production of Oedipus was not intended to be costumed after the Greek theatrical style, it seems unnecessary to discuss the subject at any greater length. Although the Greek theatrical costume was not a major influence in the designs for our production, I nevertheless felt it important to include a short discussion of that portion of my research.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-79.

### Designing the Costumes

The design for the costumes for the chorus was born out of my watching one of their early movement rehearsals. The director had, from the beginning, encouraged the designers to watch rehearsals from time to time. Since I was having a bit of a problem understanding exactly what Fred wanted for the chorus, I hoped that watching them move could prove to be something of an inspiration. With sketch pad and pencil in hand, I sat in on the rehearsal, carefully watching the group go through its routine. I started to sketch out ideas as they came to me, and by some stroke of luck I hit upon something that I found both appropriate and rather exciting. Later that evening I showed the sketches to Fred, accompanied by an explanation of the idea. He seemed to like the idea and encouraged me to continue along that line.

That idea, the one that eventually became the design, was to have the entire chorus, both men and women in drawstring pants and tunic-type shirts. The women's shirts would have a cowl neckline treatment, unlike the men's round cut, collarless neck, although both would have long sleeves, and be belted or have elastic at the waist.

Both Fred and I liked the idea for the same reasons. First of all, the design was contemporary, but it was not something that could be seen on the street regularly. Secondly, the design was simple, clean and uncluttered. Because of its simplicity, the chorus costume could be worn underneath a chlamys or himation (when the chorus member assumed another role) without creating a terribly incongruous effect. One other reason, and certainly not the least among them, was the fact that the costume

would allow the freedom of movement that would be necessary considering the way the chorus was being used in the production. The costumes would all be made from solid color fabrics, each one a different color to accentuate the individuality of the members. The range of colors was to be chosen from a group of subtle, somewhat muted hues of similar values that would blend well when the chorus performed as a unit. (See Figures A-1, and B-2.)\*

For Oedipus' costume, Fred had clung to the idea of having the actor wear something of his own clothing, over which would be worn a Greek drape. We agreed that Jerry could wear navy slacks and a navy turtleneck sweater and I would design the garment with which he would be draped in the ceremonial dressing before entering the stage area. I wanted him to wear the darker color so he would be set apart from the chorus, and because of the tragic nature of the role. By wearing his own clothing he would not look out of place as he sat in the audience waiting for his entrance.

For wear over the slacks and sweater I designed a richly bordered himation. Although Jerry wore the himation draped under his left arm and pinned on the right shoulder, it was originally designed to be worn differently. In my first sketch, the himation was draped starting from the left shoulder, crossing the back and dipping under the right arm, up across the chest and finally thrown back over the left shoulder. When draped in this manner the left arm was covered completely, which was, according to one source, "a mark of good breeding."<sup>115</sup> The decision to

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<sup>115</sup> Ethel Abrahams and Lady Evans, Ancient Greek Dress, ed. Marie Johnson (Chicago: Argonaut, 1964), p. 54.

\* All figures located in the Appendices.

rearrange the drape of the himation was the result of Jerry's not being able to gesture freely with his left arm totally covered. Since few people are aware that covering the left arm was a sign of good breeding, I was happy to alter the design to make the costume more comfortable.

The border design for the himation was a combination of two classic Greek motifs—the key and the wave.<sup>116</sup> Both motifs are very simple, in keeping with the overall simplicity of the costume designs. Along the edge of the fabric was a solid blue line about one inch wide, paralleled by another blue line of the same width about eight inches away. Between these two lines was the key pattern border, in red. Above the second blue line was the wave pattern border, about two inches wide and also in blue. The combination of the two motifs created a quite elegant border, giving the himation a suggestion of royalty. (See Figures A-2, B-3).

The guiding factor in the design of Jocasta's costume was the desire to express as fully as possible the beauty and sensuality of the character. For her contemporary dress I wanted a gown that would look elegant and formal. She, like Oedipus, was to sit in the audience prior to her entrance, and she too needed to look like a part of the audience, and yet be somewhat removed. The design for the full length dress incorporated long sleeves and a cowl neck, and was belted to give a blouson effect. The design was to be executed in a rich sensual burgundy.

A chiton, which would be draped in the ritual dressing ceremony, was designed to be worn over the dress. The chiton was of the Doric variety,

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<sup>116</sup>See Thomas Hope, Costumes of the Greeks and Romans (1812; rpt. New York: Dover, 1962), plates 106, 123.

with the top edge folded over, as described and illustrated in the Brooke text.<sup>117</sup> The light-colored chiton would be decorated with a border design similar to the one used on Oedipus' himation. The use of the same colors and similar design was intended to pull the two together with a royal motif. (See Figures A-3, B-4.)

Creon was to be played by one of the chorus members, Dick Reiss. The design for Creon, then, needed nothing more than a drape to be added for the character. The light color chosen for Dick's chorus pants and shirt was selected to tie him visually to the lighter shades used for Oedipus' himation and Jocasta's chiton. Dick would, upon his assumption of the role of Creon, wear a blue himation draped in the style already described as the original design for Oedipus' himation: draped so as to totally cover the left arm. The rather gray tone of medium blue intended for Creon's himation was not so distinctive and crisp as the colors used for Oedipus, but there was an intentionally weak color bond linking the two costumes. The garment was bordered with a design executed in dark blue. (See Figures A-4, B-5.)

Teiresias, like Creon, was played by one of the chorus members, Margie Ragsdale. In the usual manner of the production, Teiresias was clothed in ceremony before entering the stage area. The director had a specific request that this costume include a veil symbolic of Teiresias blindness. A long, somewhat tattered himation was the basic element of

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<sup>117</sup> Brooke, pp. 19-20. See also Hope, plate 64.

the costume. The himation was, of course, worn over the chorus costume, but was so long and full that the chorus costume was completely hidden. The veil that the director had in mind was simply a small square of sheer cloth, covering only the head. I envisioned something much more dramatic—a section of fabric long enough to fall from the head all the way to the floor on either side, and wide enough to hide the head completely. The length of the veil could be draped up over the arms to give a sleeved effect. The overall look was one of mystery, a look befitting this blind seer. (See Figures A-5, B-6.)

Lynn Weaver was the Priestess, and, as already mentioned, she maintained the character throughout the performance, acting as the leader of the chorus. To distinguish her as the Priestess, I designed a chlamys with a folded-over top edge, much like that of Jocasta's chiton. The chlamys dipped under the left arm and was pinned on the right shoulder, draping across the chest. The chlamys was rather short so as to not be cumbersome during the various choral dances. The color was off-white and the garment was edged in green to match Lynn's green chorus costume. (See Figures A-6, B-7.)

The costumes for the two messengers and the herdsman were simple chlamys.<sup>118</sup> The first messenger's chlamys was green and was draped under the left arm and attached on the right shoulder. (See Figures A-7, B-7.) For the herdsman, the chlamys was relatively larger than either of those worn by the messengers, and was draped over the left shoulder and pinned

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<sup>118</sup>See Hope, plates 71, 80.

on the right. (See Figures A-8, B-8.) The herdsman's chlamys was also to be of a highly textured fabric. David May, as the second messenger, wore a chlamys draped like the first messenger's. (See Figures A-9, B-8.)

### Executing the Designs

Once the designs are completed and accepted by the director, the next step is the purchase of fabric. A good portion of the selection of fabrics was determined by the extreme limitations brought on by the severely limited budget available for the production. For the entire production the budget allotted by the University was only two hundred and fifty dollars. Even if I had been given the entire amount, I would not have been able to be extravagant in my buying. Fortunately, however, I was allowed to use over half of the money for costumes, since the setting would require only a few gallons of paint, and the lighting designer needed only to pay for the purchase of gels for the instruments. Much to my advantage was the fact that one of the local fabric stores was in the midst of a sale when I was searching for fabrics. I was able to find much of the yardage for the chorus costumes at extremely reasonable prices. Saving money on the chorus allowed me to be a bit more selective in the fabrics for the major characters.

The fabrics for the chorus costumes were all lightweight blends of cotton and polyester. For Tim Hopper I selected a color that might best be described as sand, a color that would work well underneath the muted green chlamys that he would add when he became the herdsman. David May's costume would be constructed of a fabric that was a grayed tone of brown,

over which he would wear a chlamys of loosely knitted unbleached cotton as as the second messenger. Steve Humphrey's fabric was a color best referred to as khaki. This color, along with a medium shade green chlamys would give him a quasi-military look when he appeared as the first messenger. The fabric for Cindy Horton's costume was a very dull, muted shade of green. For Brenda Brown, the only Black in the cast, I chose a fabric that was a light burnt sienna. For Dick Reiss' chorus costume I selected a very pale, creamy shade of yellow. Although the color was far lighter than any other in the chorus, I felt the choice was justified since the lighter color would help distinguish him when he assumed the role of Creon. For Lynn Weaver, the Priestess, I used a celery color. The distinctive character of the color was warranted, I felt, since the Priestess would be maintained as a character throughout the play. The chlamys that symbolized her office was of an off-white open-weave cotton. The fabric for Sharon Marlowe was a soft brown shade with a slight tint of pink. A light shade of forrest green was the color selected for Deborah Beasley. Margie Ragsdale, who would play Teiresias, would for her chorus parts wear a toned down shade of zircon blue. The fact that she played Teiresias had no bearing on the selection of the color of her chorus costume, since the himation and veil used for Teiresias would cover her completely.

Finding fabrics that would drape nicely was the primary consideration for Oedipus and Jocasta. Although I was somewhat limited because of the tight budget, I was able to find relatively inexpensive polyester knits that would drape well and look quite elegant on stage. The color scheme

for the royal family was beige, navy blue and burgundy. The blue and burgundy were chosen for their richness, the beige for its clean, honest look.

The fabric for Oedipus' himation was a slightly textured light beige. It was a heavy fabric in comparison to that used for Jocasta's chiton, but it draped very well into deep, distinctive folds. Upon this fabric would be applied the border design in navy and burgundy. The original intention was that this himation would be worn over the actor's own navy slacks and turtleneck sweater. That idea, a holdover from the time when the director wanted the entire cast in their own clothes, was eventually dropped when it became apparent that the look would not be consistent with the rest of the show. What was eventually made for him, then, was a costume like that of the male chorus members, but in navy blue, a color much darker than any in the chorus.

For Jocasta's gown I selected a rich burgundy color quiana. For the chiton that would be worn over the gown I purchased a rather light-weight and smoothly textured polyester knit fabric. It draped elegantly and the color, slightly darker than the fabric for Oedipus' himation, was a perfect partner for the burgundy. The chiton, like Oedipus' himation, would be bordered with a design of navy and burgundy.

The fabric selected for use as Creon's himation was a cotton and polyester blend, a fabric with a less elegant look than that used for Oedipus. Although the look was not as rich as that of the King, the color and border design were chosen with Creon's royal connections in mind. The himation would be a medium tone of a rather grayed blue shade, with a border done in navy.

For Teiresias' himation I purchased a heavy polyester fabric. Although I would have to spray the piece with dye to create additional texture, the color and weight of the fabric were agreeable. The veil would be made from a sheer cotton gauze.

Once the fabrics were bought, the next step was to make the patterns, a task that was, for this particular show, really quite simple. The pants pattern for the chorus was adapted from a pajama pattern, as was the pattern for the chorus men's shirt. For the women's shirt, a pattern was adapted from a Vogue blouse pattern. Jocasta's dress pattern was drafted from the same blouse pattern, although it required some major alterations to change the neckline. Other than those, no patterns were needed. All of the Greek style drapes were simply flat pieces of fabric that needed only to be draped to style.

Most of the sewing was done by myself or other students. Several of the seamstresses from the University costume shop were also kind enough to offer their assistance. Since all of the costumes were quite simple, there were no major problems in the construction of the designs.

Perhaps the greatest decision of the construction phase was that of determining exactly how to apply the border designs to Oedipus, Jocasta, and Creon's costumes. When the designs were formulated, it was my intention to paint the border designs on with textile paint. Upon experimentation with the paint, however, I found that it made the fabric edges somewhat stiff, and I was afraid that the added stiffness would adversely affect the way the fabric would drape. Additional searching turned up no suitable alternative, so the textile paint was used in the

lightest quantities possible, and it worked quite well after all. Jane Ryer, who works in the University's costume shop, cut the stencils for all the border designs and did all of the textile painting for the show.

### Performance

After the dress parade and dress rehearsals, there were some problems to be corrected, as there always are. Most of them were minor, but there were a couple of problems that required some serious attention. The most difficult problem involved the ceremonial dressing of the actors on stage. I had thought that the actors would be able to pick up the fabric, for Jocasta's chiton for example, and simply pin it at the shoulders and belt it at the waist. Unfortunately, I had not taken into consideration the fact that many of the actors did not see well without their glasses, which they could not wear on stage. Being unable to see, they were unable to properly drape the costumes. The solution was to attach Jocasta's chiton at the shoulders, where it would have been pinned. A similar measure had to be taken with Teiresias' himation and veil. Luckily the himations for Oedipus and Creon were simple enough, and the actors who dressed them were not so blind as to require such adjustments.

There was, however, a problem with Oedipus' himation. The weight of the fabric was such that it had a tendency to slide off the shoulder even though it was pinned to the shirt. The solution was to attach a long section of twill tape to the inside of the right shoulder seam, the side to which the himation was pinned. The twill tape was then brought around the body and tied on the left side, so as to prevent the shirt from pulling so drastically to the right. The same type of problem was

encountered with the Priestess' costume, and it was corrected in the same manner.

Since the show ran for only three days, there were no additional costume problems of any great proportion. There was a bit of a scare on opening night when Teiresias' costume could not be found. After a frantic search, the costume was found, and the first night's performance went well. The only other difficulties encountered with the costumes were due to the ceremonial dressing rituals. During one performance, Creon's dressers put his himation on inside out. On another evening they draped the himation from the wrong side. Oedipus also had a problem with his himation during one performance. The brooch that held the himation at the shoulder was not pinned securely one evening, resulting in his losing the garment on stage. The incident was embarrassing for me, and a real shock for both the audience and for Jerry Neill, who played Oedipus. Otherwise the show opened and closed uneventfully.

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION

In evaluating his designs for the costumes of any play, the designer faces a difficult assignment. Few designers are able to evaluate their own work with any degree of objectivity, and even fewer are ever fully satisfied with their work. There is almost always something that they would do differently if given the chance. I am no exception.

Overall, I thought that Oedipus Rex was an excellent production. It was a very beautiful production from a visual standpoint, and a very moving emotional experience. Although we did not have the size crowds we had hoped for, the audience reaction was, for the most part, highly favorable.

From a purely aesthetic standpoint, the director was pleased with the costumes because they were neither authentically Greek nor purely contemporary in design.<sup>119</sup> He was, however, essentially dissatisfied with both the costumes and the set because he felt that both looked too classical, resulting in the production having a "museum piece" look.<sup>120</sup> The show had moved away from the original, totally modern concept and had, in Fred's opinion, been unsuccessful in his goal of capturing the spirit of the Greek theatrical experience. "In terms of the 'ideal,' this production was a failure. In reality, however, even as a 'museum piece,' it was a success . . ."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Branch, p. 29.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

In keeping with the ideas presented in the introduction to this study, the criteria set forth by Russell and Komisarjevsky concerning the function of the theatrical costume will here be put into use in an examination of my designs for Oedipus Rex. Before presenting this evaluation it seems appropriate to first briefly restate those criteria. Among the things that Russell contends that the well designed costume can do are the following: aid in the communication of the play's period; identify the locale of the play; establish time of day and distinguish social classes; express a character's age or occupation; and establish the relative importance of various characters and support character relationships.<sup>122</sup> Beyond this, the costume may also assist in the transmission of such intangible ideas as the play's theme and style.<sup>123</sup> Komisarjevsky writes that the costume must be "'born' out of the understanding of the part and felt by the actor as the necessary form for the 'skin' of the character."<sup>124</sup> He continues by presenting three requirements of stage costume. The first is that the costume should express the concept of the director and "make the imagination of the spectators work in the desired direction."<sup>125</sup> Secondly, the costume should "assist the actor in his interpretation of the part and accentuate the expressiveness of his movements to reflect the rhythm of his creative mind."<sup>126</sup> Finally, the stage costume must

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<sup>122</sup>Russell, Stage Costume Design, pp. 9-10.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>124</sup>Komisarjevsky, p. 167.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

"place the actor into necessary prominence, and . . . make him in plastic and tonal harmony with his scenic environment, without ever being absorbed by it."<sup>127</sup> It was with these ideas in mind that the following evaluation was written.

In considering the designs in light of the criteria established by Russell and Komisarjevsky, the costumes were at least partially successful. Since the entire production veered from the director's original vision, the costumes, as a part of that production, were unsuccessful in this regard. It must be considered, however, that the costumes were designed in accordance with the final concept established for the show and fulfilled that concept in that they combined elements of Greek and contemporary styles. Because of the eclectic nature of the production, the date and locale of the action were left deliberately ambiguous. The costumes did, nevertheless, give a suggestion of period style. The costumes helped to distinguish social classes and denote the characters' occupations, to such an extent as they were able considering the production's concept. The costumes for Oedipus were designed to, and I think did, aid in the communication of the relative importance of the characters and their relationships. (See the discussion of the costumes and character analysis in Chapter II.)

In view of the requirements of costume according to Komisarjevsky, the costumes for Oedipus were somewhat successful. Since they were proper expressions of the director's final concept, they were successful.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-70.

In terms of Komisarjevsky's second requirement, I feel that the costumes were successful to a certain degree. They did, I believe, assist the actors in their roles, although there were some problem areas. For example, I was aiming for elegance and grace in designing the costumes for Oedipus and Jocasta, but I feel that both were too pristine considering the tragic nature of their situation. Their beauty was justified, but not in such a pure form. The Priestess' costume was another with which I was not fully satisfied. It did not evoke the importance that the character deserved. From Komisarjevsky's standards, the costumes were successful in that they were a part of a unified visual production, making the actor "in plastic and tonal harmony with his scenic environment without even being absorbed by it."<sup>128</sup> The setting, lights and costumes were well suited for one another, working well as a unit without giving up their individuality.

As a combination of contemporary and ancient Greek visual elements, I feel that the costumes were a successful design project. With both styles abstracted to the extent that they were, neither was overpowering. The designs were simple, elegant, unobtrusive and subtle. The modern design of the chorus costumes brought the visual image forward in time without creating an effect so strong as to shock the audience. The use of both ancient and modern elements was perhaps most effective in the sense that the combination of the two went hand in hand with the combination of the poetry of the script and the realistic style of the acting.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

If totally modern dress costumes had been used, our audience would likely have been more isolated than if we had used a more historically accurate Greek design.

Considering the time and place and the situation on the whole, the production was right on target. It gave both the actors and designers a chance to experiment with the use of seemingly opposing styles in one production, providing a new kind of challenge for everyone involved. The production was far from perfect, but it was interesting, exciting, educational, and ultimately quite rewarding.

As for the director's desire to capture something of the spirit of the Greek theatrical experience, that desire was not fulfilled. The twentieth century Western culture is too far removed from that of ancient Greece for an audience to be capable of reliving that feeling. We may come very close sometimes, but we can never truly understand or comprehend the effect that Oedipus' downfall had on the audience of the fifth century B.C. Just as a play, no matter how historically accurate its production, can never visually reproduce a period on the stage, so is it impossible to recapture "the spirit of an age, lived but once in time."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Allan Lewis, The Contemporary Theatre: The Significant Playwrights of Our Time (New York: Crown, 1962), p. 5.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

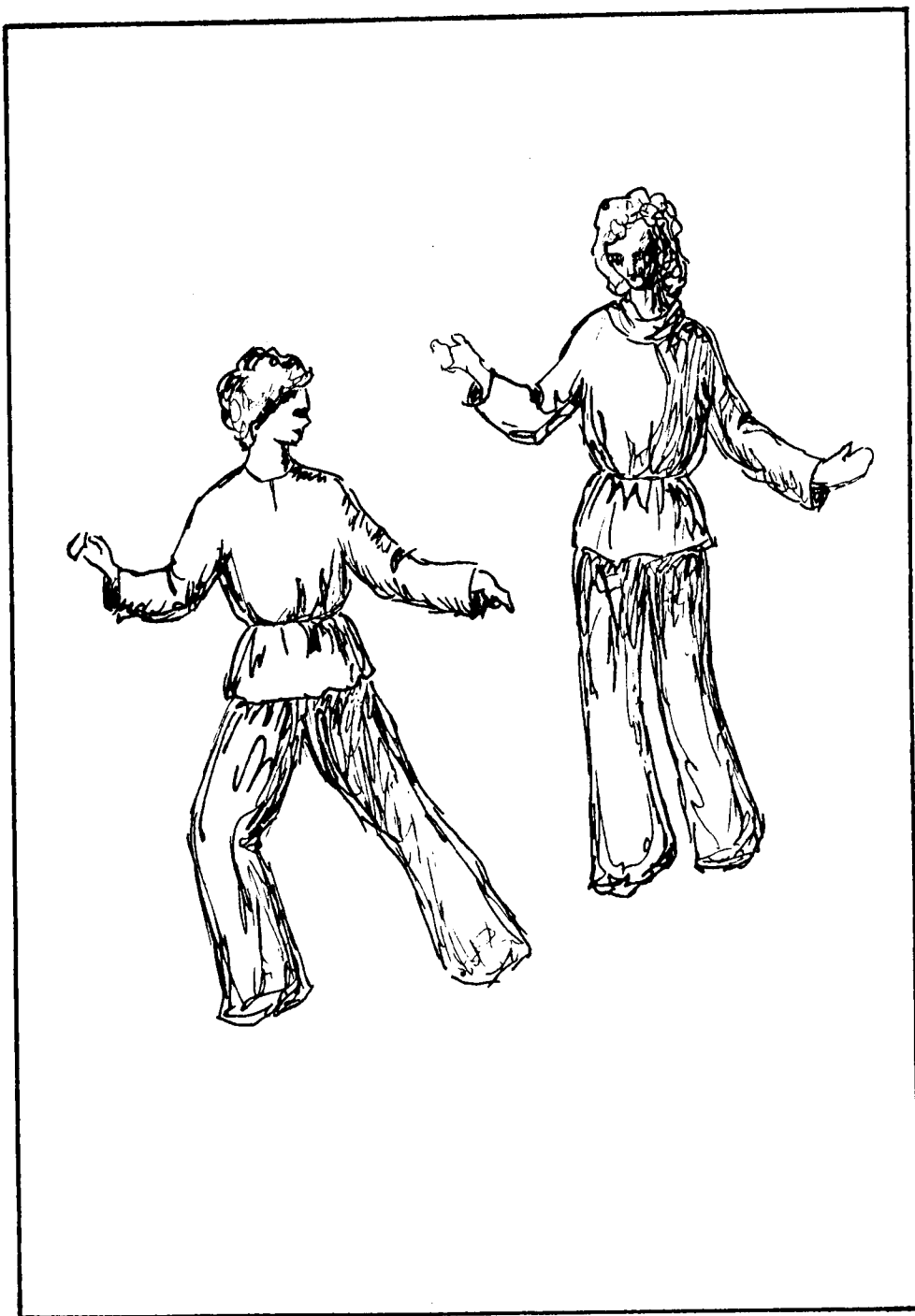


Figure A-1. Chorus Costumes.

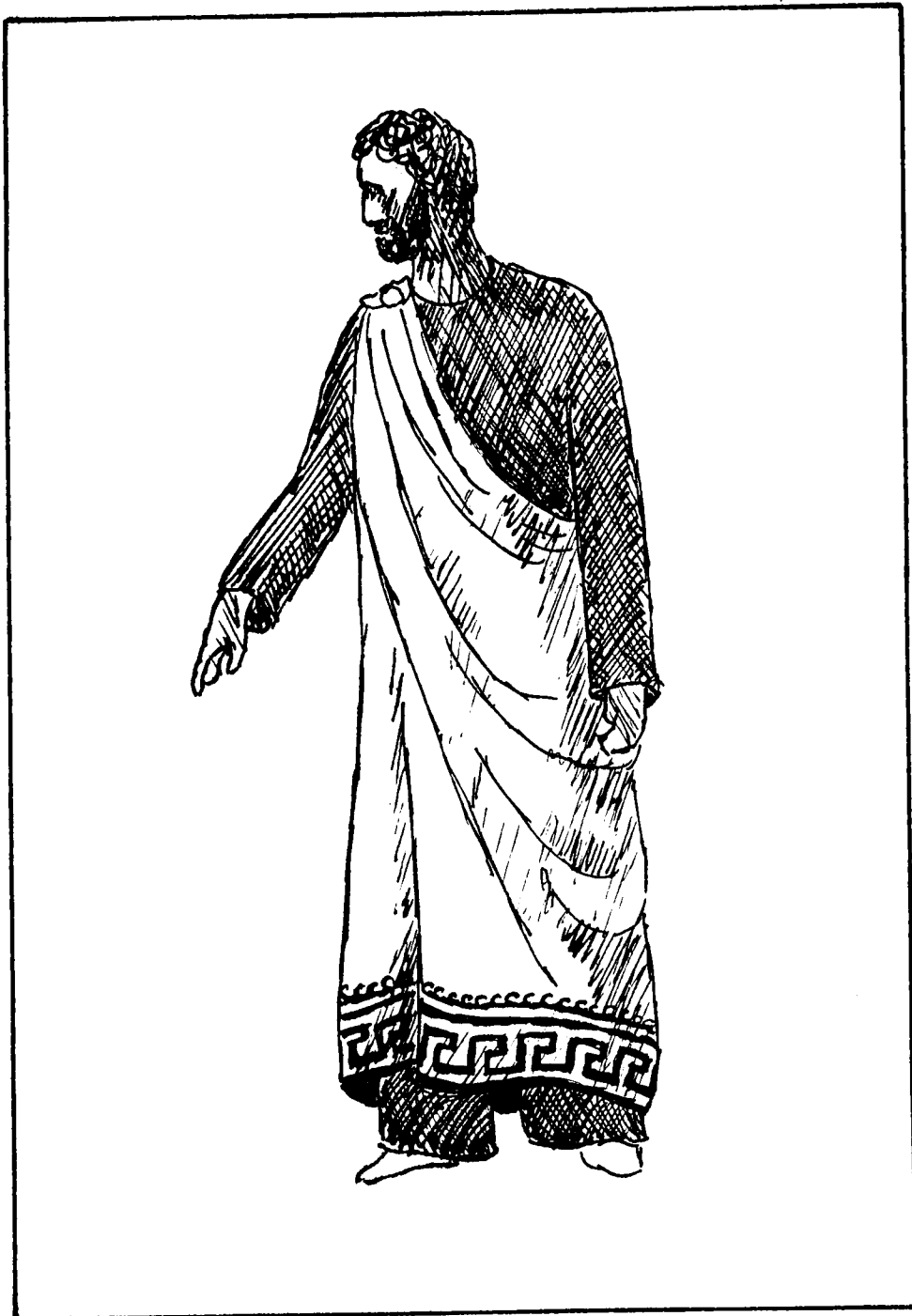


Figure A-2. Oedipus.



Figure A-3. Jocasta.

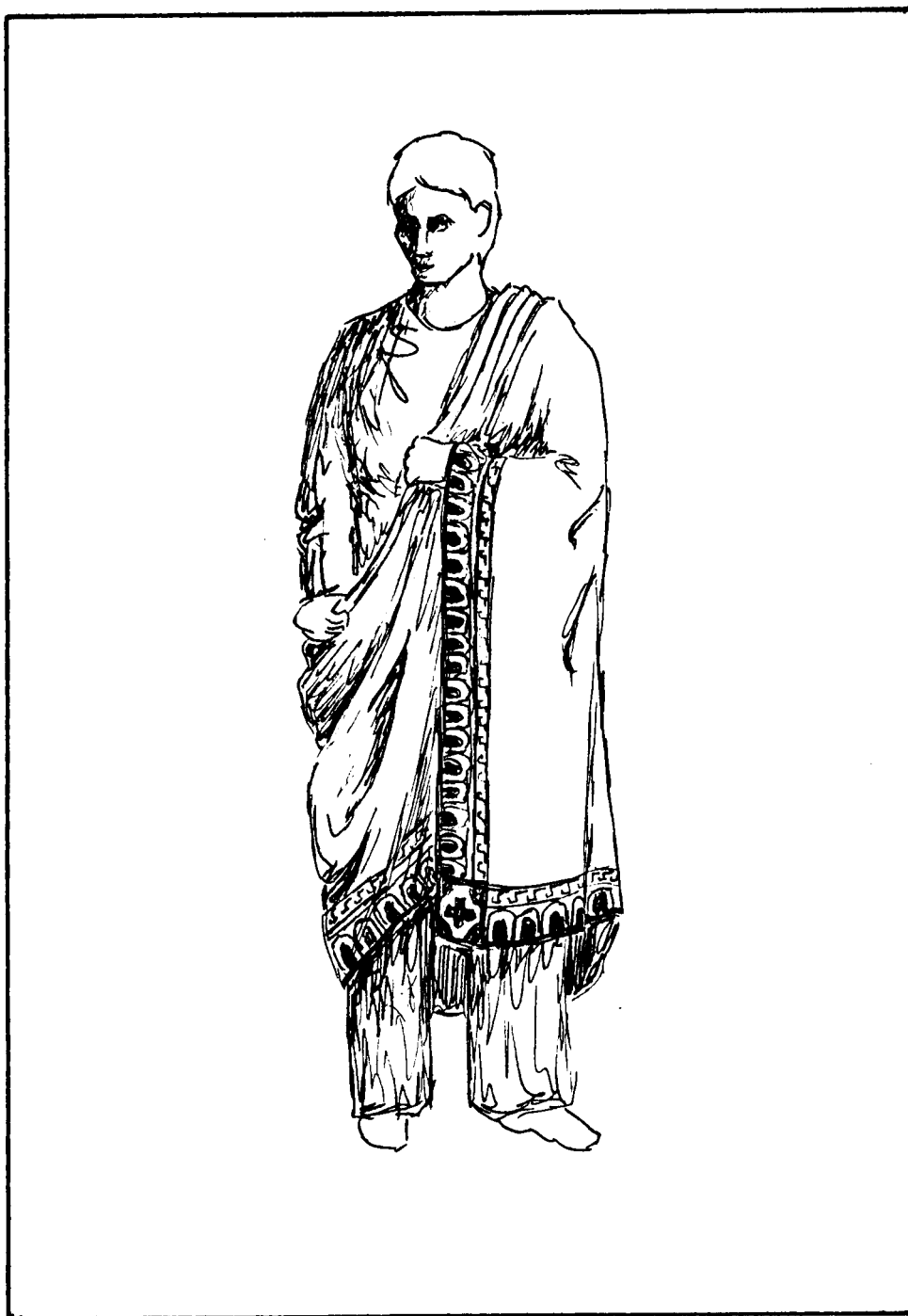


Figure A-4. Creon.



Figure A-5. Teiresias.



Figure A-6. Priestess.

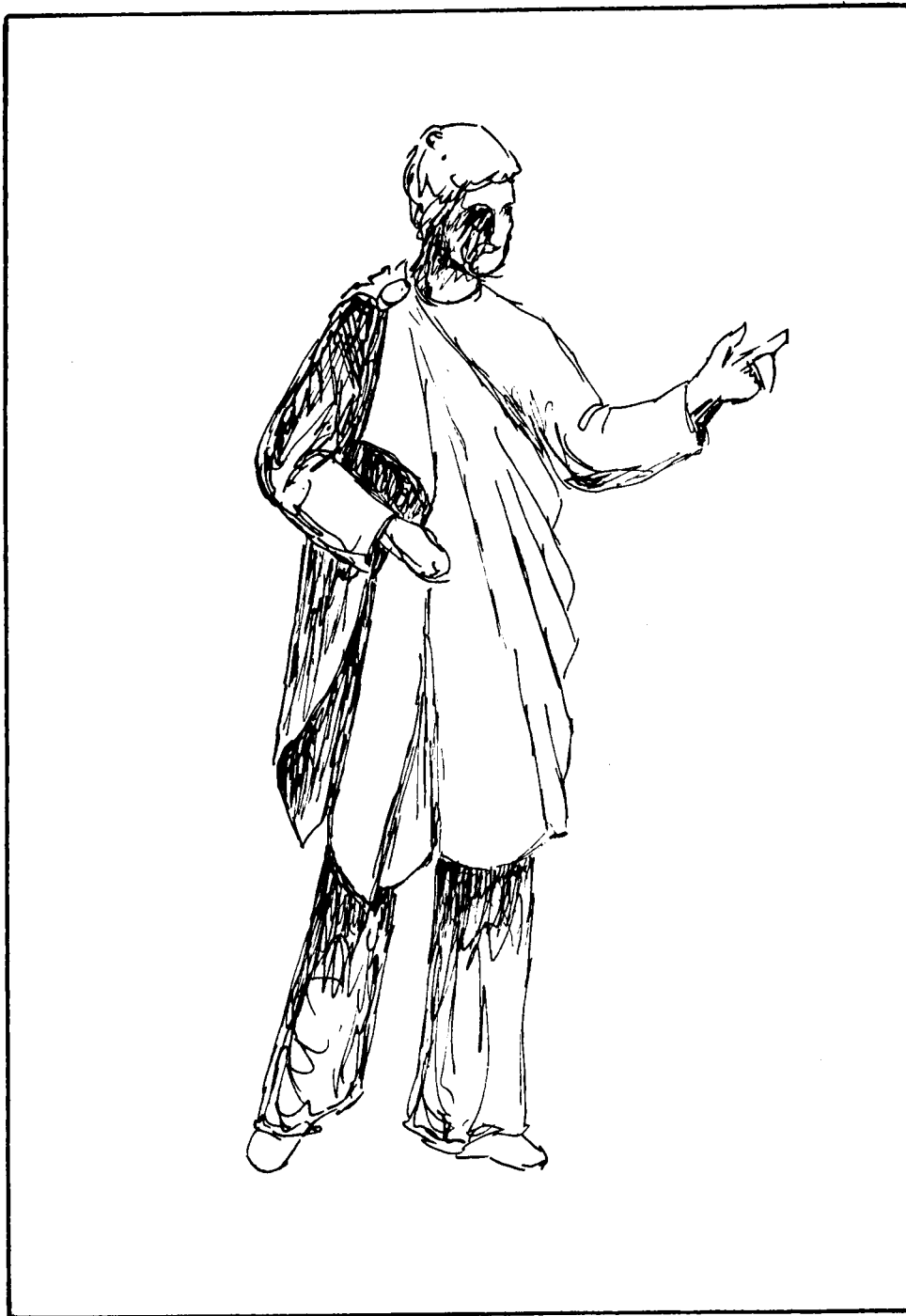


Figure A-7. First Messenger.

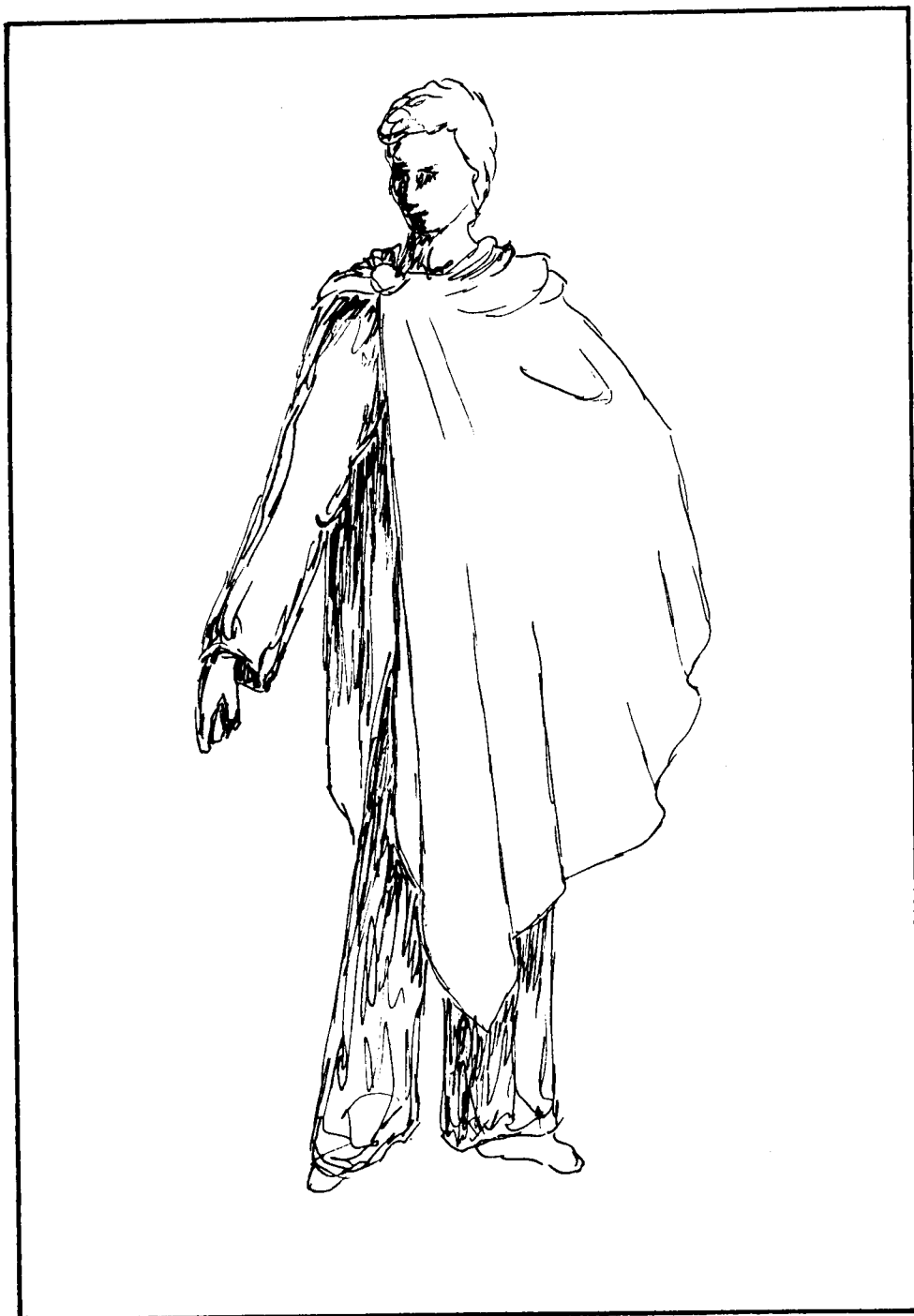


Figure A-8. Herdsman.

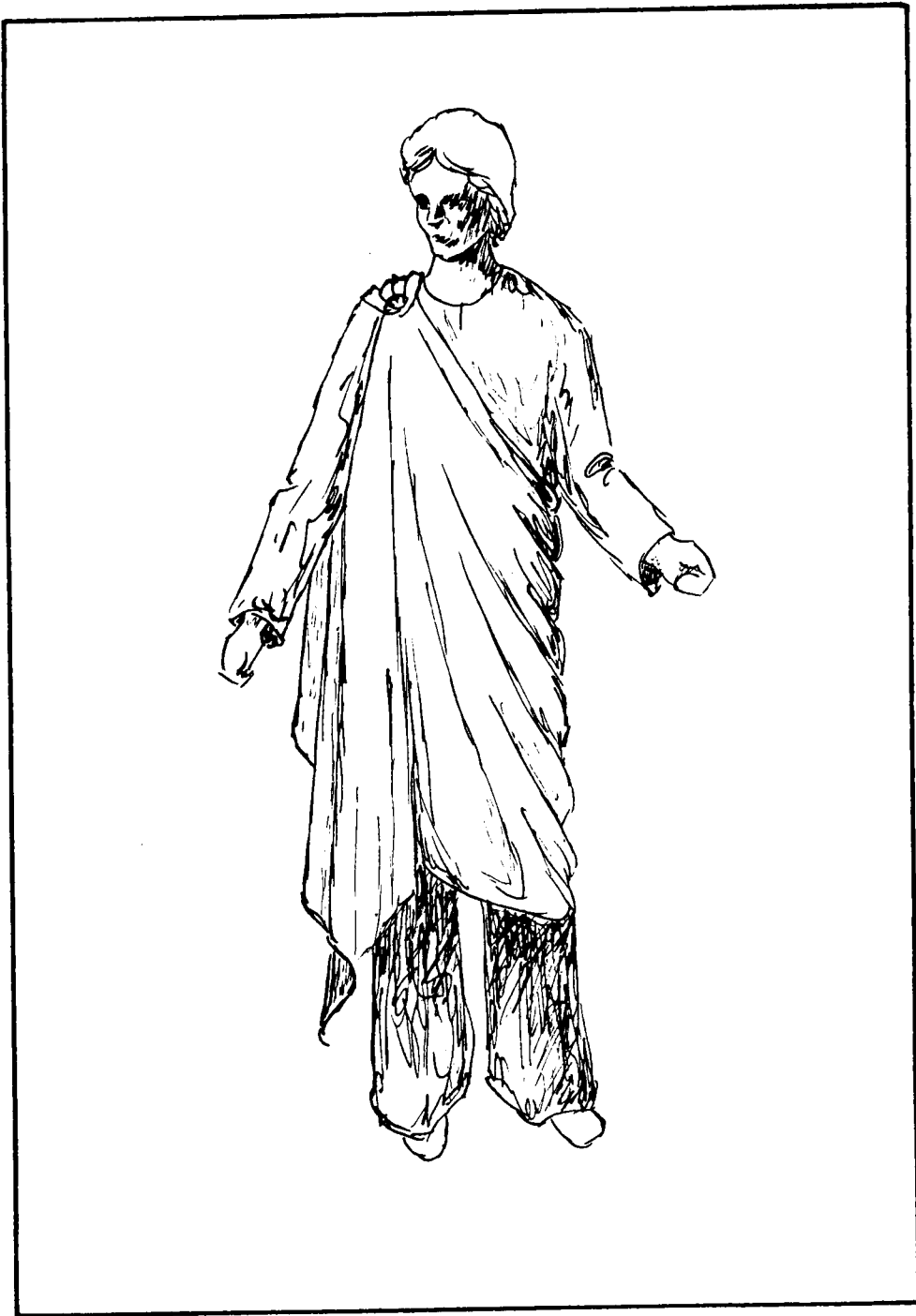


Figure A-9. Second Messenger.

## APPENDIX B



Figure B-1. The Stage.



Figure B-2. The Entire Cast.



Figure B-3. Jerry Neill as Oedipus, King of Thebes.



Figure B-4. Teresa Williams as Jocasta.

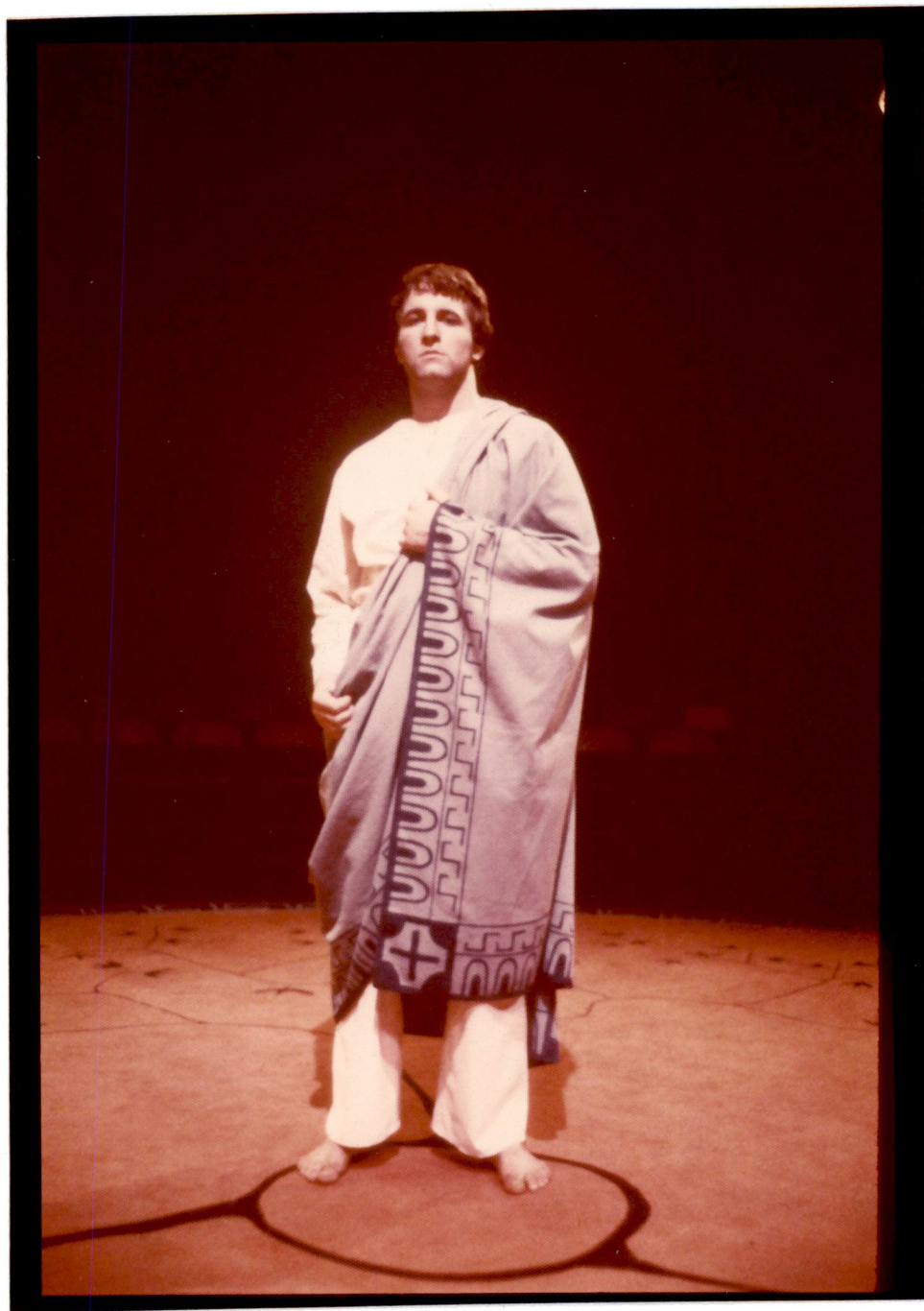


Figure B-5. Dick Reiss as Creon.



Figure B-6. Margie Ragsdale as Teiresias.



Figure B-7. Steve Humphreys as the 1st Messenger; Lynn Weaver as the Priestess.



Figure B-8. David May as the 2nd Messenger; Tim Hopper as the Herdsman.

## VITA

Donald Keith Skelton was born in Waynesboro, Tennessee, on May 3, 1954. He attended public schools in Waynesboro, New Johnsonville, and Waverly, Tennessee, graduating in 1972 from Waverly Central High School. After two years at Freed-Hardeman College, Donald transferred to Middle Tennessee State University where he completed his baccalaureate degree in Speech and Theatre. In the fall of 1976, he began study towards a Master of Arts degree at the University of Tennessee which he completed in June 1979.