

**A PARTICLE  
OF DREAD**

**(OEDIPUS VARIATIONS)**

**BY SAM SHEPARD**



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

## A PARTICLE OF DREAD (OEDIPUS VARIATIONS)

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*For —  
Field Day, Stephen Rea  
Derry Project, Ireland  
Nancy Meckler, Director*

*Gratitude to —  
Santa Fe Institute*

The United States premiere of A PARTICLE OF DREAD was produced by Signature Theatre (James Houghton, Founding Artistic Director; Erika Mallin, Executive Director) in New York City, on November 23, 2015. It was directed by Nancy Meckler, the scenic designer was Frank Conway, the costume designer was Lorna Marie Mugan, the lighting designer was Michael Chybowski, the sound designer was Jill BC Du Boff, the original music was by Neil Martin, and the production stage manager was Amanda Michaels. The cast was as follows:

OEDIPUS/OTTO ..... Stephen Rea  
JOCASTA/JOCELYN ..... Brid Brennan  
ANTIGONE/ANNALEE ..... Judith Roddy  
UNCLE DEL/TRAVELER/  
TIRESIAS/MANIAC OF THE OUTSKIRTS ..... Lloyd Hutchison  
LAIUS/LAWRENCE/LANGOS ..... Aidan Redmond  
OFFICER HARRINGTON ..... Jason Kolotouros  
RANDOLPH ..... Matthew Rauch

## **CHARACTERS**

OEDIPUS/OTTO

JOCASTA/JOCELYN

ANTIGONE/ANNALEE

UNCLE DEL/TRAVELER/TIRESIAS

LAIUS/LAWRENCE/LANGOS

OFFICER HARRINGTON

FORENSIC INVESTIGATOR RJ RANDOLPH

MANIAC OF THE OUTSKIRTS

ORACLE

# A PARTICLE OF DREAD (OEDIPUS VARIATIONS)

## Scene 1

*No pre-show music or anything to indicate what's up ahead other than empty stage. White light up on Oedipus, center stage in black striped "bib" overalls, short-sleeved white T-shirt, black janitor shoes — His left foot much larger than his right. He walks with an exaggerated limp. Oedipus is mopping blood up from the stage floor. The blood is dripping down from his eyebrows but Oedipus pays no attention to its origins, he just keeps mopping up the constant flow of blood as he speaks.*

OEDIPUS. This — this was the place, wasn't it? Roads — Trees — Right here. Isn't this the place where you held me down? Your foot on my back. My chest in the mud. Here — wasn't it? Someone — Someone held me while you hammered a steel spike right through my ankle. Yes — That was it! A spike! Flash of light. Your powerful arm. Every inch of blood. Every vein. My ankle remembers. *(Pause.)* Or no — Was this the place you dropped me off? Could've been. Draped in mystery and confusion. The secret let out. Maybe that was it. Full of fear as you were. Trembling — Running — Hauling me across your back. Flapping like an extra skin. You think I'd forget? Your breath, panting like a bull calf born. Day and night. Leaves and wind. Left for dead. Hanging from an olive tree. A baby human. Left for dead. *(Oedipus exits. Lights shift.)*

## Scene 2

*Downstage center sits Uncle Del on a stool — a large, muscular man in a white butcher's apron splattered with blood, rubber boots, long-sleeved plaid shirt open over white T-shirt, sleeves rolled up. He's digging his hands into a large metal bucket in front of him, coming up with bleeding animal skins, dripping blood and streaming water. He wrings them out while listening to Lawrence pacing left and right, downstage of Del, in a dark three-piece suit and overcoat, dabbing his sweaty face with a white handkerchief.*

LAWRENCE. (*Pacing left and right.*) I don't know what it is — Lay awake through the night, staring at beams — counting — configurations — (*Wipes his brow with handkerchief.*) — patterns on the ceiling — seeing things in the dark —

UNCLE DEL. (*Wringing out skin.*) What kind of things?

LAWRENCE. (*Continues pacing.*) I don't know — faces, maybe — beings — bats — Why is it, ordinary people — any old body in the world — two people who don't even want kids — who just want to — you know — have fun — Why is it those people get pregnant like rabbits and abandon their offspring in dumpsters while we — us — mature, honest citizens of the community who actually want to have a child, end up —

UNCLE DEL. Have you tried it doggy-style? (*Lawrence stops in his tracks as Uncle Del crosses upstage with a dripping skin and hangs it to dry on a clothesline.*)

LAWRENCE. (*After pause.*) Yes — actually. We have. We've experimented with several different positions —

UNCLE DEL. (*Hanging up skin.*) To no avail?

LAWRENCE. (*Starts pacing again.*) Exactly. (*Del pulls on clothesline, which is on a pulley. Other skins appear from offstage. Del turns and crosses downstage to stool again. He sits on stool; picks up glass full of bull's blood and drinks.*)

UNCLE DEL. Her mounting you, backwards?

LAWRENCE. (*Stops.*) Excuse me?

UNCLE DEL. Her — you know — astride you — with her ass to your head. You know — you on your back.

LAWRENCE. (*Pacing again.*) Oh — Yes — Of course —

UNCLE DEL. Standing?

LAWRENCE. What?

UNCLE DEL. Both of you standing up. Vertical penetration.

LAWRENCE. Yes.

UNCLE DEL. Squatting?

LAWRENCE. Yes!

UNCLE DEL. Sitting?

LAWRENCE. (*Pacing.*) Yes!

UNCLE DEL. Underwater?

LAWRENCE. Yes!

UNCLE DEL. Mud?

LAWRENCE. (*Stops.*) What?

UNCLE DEL. In the mud?

LAWRENCE. Like pigs or something?

UNCLE DEL. Rutting, we used to call it. In the old days. Back in the good old days.

LAWRENCE. I don't know — (*Begins pacing again.*) I don't want to hear about this. (*Del pulls out a set of three knuckle bones and rolls them on the floor in front of his stool. He drinks and reads the bones. Makes notes in a ledger he pulls out from under stool.*)

UNCLE DEL. (*Rolling bones.*) You don't remember or — ?

LAWRENCE. (*Pacing.*) I don't remember — no — yes — that's right. I don't remember.

UNCLE DEL. Seems like that would be something you wouldn't forget.

LAWRENCE. What?

UNCLE DEL. (*Making notes.*) Rutting in the mud. (*Rolling bones.*) Maybe you should drink some Memory Juice. (*Offers his glass to Lawrence, who refuses.*)

LAWRENCE. (*Stops.*) Look — What're you doing?

UNCLE DEL. What? Oh — This? Rolling the Bones.

LAWRENCE. Rolling the Bones.

UNCLE DEL. Yes — Futures — Seeing ahead. Prescience. Same with the intestines — on the line — (*Motions toward clothesline with dripping skins.*) They all tell a tale. Dreams. (*Toasts with glass.*) It's all written out somewhere. (*Lawrence moves upstage toward clothesline — stops in front of dripping skins, examines them.*)



LAWRENCE. These are somebody's intestines?  
UNCLE DEL. (*Rolling bones.*) Somebody's sacrifice. They paid the price.  
LAWRENCE. (*Touching a skin.*) Sacrificed?  
UNCLE DEL. That's right. I believe they took the head off that one I just hung up.  
LAWRENCE. What'd he do?  
UNCLE DEL. Lied about his origins.  
LAWRENCE. Origins. Is that all?  
UNCLE DEL. That's enough.  
LAWRENCE. (*Moves down toward Del.*) So — do you have any advice for me?  
UNCLE DEL. (*Continuing to throw bones.*) I do as a matter of fact.  
LAWRENCE. Good.  
UNCLE DEL. This — seeming misfortune of yours — this childlessness —  
LAWRENCE. Yes?  
UNCLE DEL. It could turn out to be a blessing in disguise.  
LAWRENCE. How do you mean?  
UNCLE DEL. I have seen the horrible event projected. I have seen it painted in the bones.  
LAWRENCE. What horrible event?  
UNCLE DEL. Murder. I have seen the murder. There is no mistake.  
LAWRENCE. Whose murder?  
UNCLE DEL. Yours. (*Lawrence immediately turns his back to Del and drops to his knees, buries his face in his hands. Del makes no reaction to this — keeps throwing bones.*) Any child born to you and your lovely queen, Jocasta, will turn out to be your killer and the husband of his mother.  
LAWRENCE. (*Still on knees.*) No!!  
UNCLE DEL. The bones never lie.  
LAWRENCE. I don't want to hear about this.  
UNCLE DEL. You're better off barren. Barren or dead. (*Del leaves bones onstage, picks up his stool, and exits. Lights shift down. Lawrence picks up bones, stares at them in his palm, stands and moves up left. He is interrupted by Oedipus, entering from up center.*)

# A PARTICLE OF DREAD

## (OEDIPUS VARIATIONS)

by Sam Shepard

6M, 2W

As a young man, Oedipus is told by a seer that he will grow up to kill his own father and marry his mother. He flees from home to avoid this terrible fate, but there is no escape — the dreadful prophecy finally catches up with him. Celebrated playwright Sam Shepard reimagines this Ancient Greek tale as a modern thriller. A murder is committed. Who is the victim? Who is responsible? What are the consequences for generations to come? There are many versions of the crime in this intriguing tale. People are hiding from the truth, even when it stares them in the face.

*"Mythic and mysterious!"*

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*"A noir thriller with touches of Grand Guignol gore and a sprinkling of surreal humor."*

—**New York Post**

*"Fans of the playwright should find this an intriguing addition to the Shepard canon — he cleverly weaves the threads of classic Greek tragedy through his own gritty sensibilities. The result is a non-linear work combining humor and poetry to remind us that the sins of the father and son are destined to repeat."*

—**NY1**

*"[Shepard] pulls the Oedipus legend up by its roots, fits it with earthy new poetry, straddles it between comedy and tragedy, and splinters characters and time frames to construct an eternal dilemma."*

—**The Irish Times**

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**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

ISBN: 978-0-8222-3331-2

