



## artspicks

### THE DARKER FACE OF THE EARTH



by Mark Cofta  
Feb. 7, 2008

The classics are most revered when they remain pertinent, as poet Rita Dove shows with her verse adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus, The Darker Face of the Earth*. Dove — winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for *Thomas and Beulah* and the first African-American named the United States' Poet Laureate, in 1993 — found inspiration on a trip to Jerusalem. Pondering similarities between the classical sense of destiny and contemporary attitudes toward history and heroes, she found a modern analogy, circumstances with a social structure as rigid and powerful as the Greek universe in *Oedipus'* tragic story: the futility faced by slaves in the American antebellum South.

In *The Darker Face of the Earth*, racial parentage shapes destiny as much as Sophocles' dire portents foretold that *Oedipus* would kill his father and marry his mother. Temple Theater's area première, directed by Charles Dumas with a large cast trained in African dance and music, explores forbidden interracial love on a South Carolina plantation circa 1840.

Given our nation's continued discussions about race, *The Darker Face of the Earth* should feel as contemporary as, well, *Oedipus* — still not out of date after 2,400 years.

Through Feb. 16, \$20, Temple University, Randall Theatre, 13th and Norris streets, 800-298-4200, [temple.edu/theater](http://temple.edu/theater).