

Oedipus Essay

Oedipus Essay (Fate) Sophocles "Oedipus the King" is a tragic play which discusses the tragic discovery of Oedipus that he has killed his father and married his mother. The story of Oedipus was well known to the Athenians. Oedipus is the embodiment of the perfect Athenian. He is self-confident, intelligent, and strong-willed. Ironically these are the very traits which bring about his tragic discovery. Oedipus gained the rule of Thebes by answering the riddle of the Sphinx. Sophocles used the riddle of the Sphinx as a metaphor for the 3 phases of Oedipus' life and to further characterized him as a tragic man. The Sphinx posed the following riddle to all who came to obtain the rule of Thebes: "What is it that walks on 4 feet and 2 feet and 3 feet and has only one voice, when it walks on most feet it is the weakest?" Oedipus correctly answered "Man" and became the king of Thebes. This riddle is a metaphor for the life of Oedipus. As a child man crawls on his hands and knees this is the four feet to which the Sphinx refers. Also man is at his weakest as a small child. He depends solely on others for his nourishment and well-being. Oedipus was the child of Jocasta and King Laius who was taken to the mountain by a shepherd to be killed so the omen of the god Apollo that Laius' son would kill him and lay with Jocasta would not come true. Oedipus was the weakest of his life at this point. If it had not been for the shepherd sparing his life and giving him to Polybus to raise as his own Oedipus would have died. Man walks on 2 feet when he has matured. This is a metaphor for Oedipus when he reaches adulthood and leaves Corinth to escape the oracle. Oedipus meets up with a band of travelers and in a rage kills them.

Inadvertently Oedipus has killed his own father. Oedipus then answers the riddle of the Sphinx and becomes king of Thebes. By becoming king of Thebes he marries Jocasta the Queen of Thebes and his own mother. Many years later after bearing children with Jocasta a plague kills many of the inhabitants of Thebes. Oedipus is told by the gods to find the killer of Laius. He is very diligent in the inquiry and finally comes to the horrible truth that he himself is the murderer. Jocasta kills herself at the horrible realization that she has layed with her son and Oedipus puts out his eyes at finally

seeing the truth. This fulfills the final part of the Sphinx's riddle for Oedipus will have to walk with a cane for the rest of his life because of his blindness, this will give him the 3 feet which man walks with at the end of his years. Oedipus used his intellect and diligence to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. Many of the most intelligent young men of Thebes has been killed attempting to answer the riddle but Oedipus proved his intelligence superior to theirs. Oedipus uses the same intelligence and perseverance to find the killer of Laius. He does not give up his search even when

Jocasta warns him to stop and let the matter rest. He calls the shepherd and interrogates him till he discovers the horrifying truth that he is the killer.

Oedipus' intelligence was ultimately his flaw. Also, if Oedipus had not had been as courageous he would have never ventured to answer the riddle of the Sphinx. Thus even though he had killed his father he would have never become king of Thebes and laid with his mother. In addition, if Oedipus had had the courage but not the intelligence the Sphinx would have killed him for answering the riddle incorrectly. Sophocles used this to characterized Oedipus as a tragic man for he came about his tragic discovery not because of an evil act or an evil trait but because of the person he was. Oedipus' traits which gave him riches and power ultimately led to his tragic ending. Also, the god Apollo did not predestine that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother by the oracle, he only stated what he knew was inevitable because of who Oedipus was. The Sphinx's

riddle was used by Sophocles to characterize Oedipus as a tragic man and as a parallel to his life. The riddle describes the 3 stages which Oedipus went through in his life. Also in answering the riddle Oedipus inevitable brought about his own tragic ending by a horrible discovery. . Oedipus does not unselfishly seek out the truth even though he knows it will be painful for him, rather, he has no idea what the outcome of his search will be, denies the truth at every turn, and threatens those who speak it. Many people may paint Oedipus as a great man, pointing out that he pursues the truth at whatever personal cost and has the strength to accept and endure it when found. They admire that Oedipus was willing to bring himself down in his lust to find his true identity. However, the driving force of Oedipus' fact-finding mission is an attempt to end the disease that plagues his city. He doesn't realize the personal consequences his hunt will have for him, and his loyalty to the truth is based on his ignorance of it. In fact, if we examine his "quest for identity", it becomes apparent that the sequence of events are quite coincidental. First, he summons Tiresias to name the killer, who Oedipus does not at the time believe to be himself. Secon! The tragic hero Oedipus emerges as anything but a social person. He may begin that way, motivated by a genuine desire to help the people, but what emerges throughout is different. It becomes plain to see that Oedipus is actually, deep down where it really counts, far more concerned with his own sense of self and demands for justice on his terms, than in compromising his desires like any other true leader would. This tragedy reminds us that even the bravest, those known throughout the world for their knowledge, are doomed if they set themselves up against the mystery of life itself, and if they try to force life to answer them, they are going to self-destruct.

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