

\*Question 1\*

Dramatic irony plays a large part in the artistry of Sophocles' Oedipus, creating a special dramatic tension. For example, when Oedipus says:

And for the man that slew him [Laius]..  
I lay this curse upon him, that the wretch  
In wretchedness and misery may live. (1)

Since we, the audience, know that Oedipus is the killer, we see him setting himself up for the fall. We can also see irony in Jocasta's denial of prophecy:

...the prophetic art  
Touches our human fortunes not at all.  
..an oracle once came to Laius..  
His fate it was, that should he have a son  
By me, that son would take his father's life.  
..Apollo failed... (2)

Later, she counsels Oedipus:

Why should we fear, seeing that man is ruled  
By chance..  
No, live at random, live as best one can. (3)

Thus, we can see Oedipus and Jocasta create their own tragedies, and pull themselves further into their fates, even as they deny them.

\*Question 2\*

Light and dark seem to play an important part in Oedipus Rex. Early in the play, Oedipus is king and hero of Thebes; he is "in the spotlight," and his world is bright and well-defined. In fact, Oedipus seems to have nothing but contempt for the darkness:

OEDIPUS: ...You are blind, in eyes and ears and brain and everything.

TIRESIAS: You'll not forget those insults that you throw  
At me, when all men throw the same at you.

OEDIPUS: You live in darkness; you can do no harm  
To me, or to any man that has eyes. (4)

Later, however, as evidence of the truth mounts, Oedipus remarks:

I greatly fear that prophet was not blind... (5)

Eventually, as he begins to accept his fate, Oedipus recognizes that his bright and wonderful world has come to an end:

Ah God! Ah God! This is the truth, at last!  
O Sun, let me behold thee this once more. (6)

Finally, he recognizes that his fate is upon him, inescapable:

O cloud of darkness abominable,  
My enemy unspeakable,  
In cruel onset insuperable. (7)

Thus, Oedipus, who began the play in fame and daylight (and thus, presumably, in the good graces of Apollo), ends it in infamy and darkness; it is this contrast which makes the play so fascinating.

*\*Question 5\**

While there are those who would argue, it seems obvious that Oedipus Rex is meant to be, at least somewhat, a deterministic play. The only guilty parties here would seem to be Laius and Jocasta, who defied the warnings of the Oracle by having children in the first place. Once they had a son, the warnings of the gods inexorably took place, regardless of the best efforts of all involved. In fact, the play serves to show us the folly of ignoring the advice of oracles, seers, and holy men; whenever someone in the play ignores the Oracle, or belittles Tiresias, they bring themselves closer to their own destruction. Thus, not surprisingly, the play serves to reinforce the beliefs and traditions of the society from whence it came.

*\*Footnotes\**

(1) Types of Drama: Plays and Essays, 6th Ed.; Barnet, Berman, and Burto; HarperCollins 1993, P. 53

(2) Ibid., P. 59

(3) Ibid., p. 63

(4) Ibid., p. 54

(5) Ibid., P. 60

(6) Ibid., P. 66

(7) Ibid., P. 67