

Oedipus The King Essay: Why Oedipus was a Tragic Hero

Emma C. Smith

Cathedral Catholic High School

World Literature

Mrs. Graning

September 23th 2024

Oedipus The King Essay: Why Oedipus was a Tragic Hero

In the start of the play, the city of Thebes is under a mystifying plague that has become of the city. The strange plague is killing the animals, plants, and the people of Thebes. The fictional character Oedipus the ruler over Thebes, has just completed the killing of the Sphinx and saved the city from ruins. While Oedipus's people are dying from this plague, Oedipus decides to send his uncle Creon to meet with Delphi to find out about the oracle of the plague. The oracle then tells Oedipus and Creon that the person who is found and punished for killing the previous king, King Laius, would end this plague if they come forward. Oedipus then finds out that Apollo is angry and sent the plague because the murderer is supposedly polluting the city of Thebes. Oedipus knows that his parents are not his biological parents through finding out from a drunken man. His wife, Jocasta explains to him that when she married King Laius that there was a prophecy about how her and King Laius's child would eventually kill King Laius and marry Queen Jocasta. So, King Laius decided to kill his only child by stabbing swords through his ankles as a baby and leaving him on a mountain to die. A messenger then tells Oedipus that he found the baby and took him to the city of Corinth to the king and queen. Oedipus has also heard about this prophecy and tries to flee from the city of Corinth to the city of Thebes so that he wouldn't kill his father and marry his mother. On his way from fleeing the city of Corinth he encounters unknowing King Laius and kills him for trying to run him over with his chariot. Queen Jocasta then tells Oedipus how her previous husband was killed and then Oedipus finally puts the pieces together. Oedipus is so devastated that he fulfilled the prophecy by killing his father and marrying his mother that he decides to blind himself. Oedipus embodies the tragic hero because of his excessive pride, his lust for truth, and his devastation of his fate.

Multiple times throughout the play Oedipus shows his excessive pride. Oedipus claims this by thinking that he is some sort of Greek god. Oedipus says “Do you seek a blessing from the gods? Tell me. Never doubt that I will help you in every way I can” (Sophocles). This shows that Oedipus thinks that he is above everyone and thinks that he is a god. Oedipus also declares that he thinks the murderer will come after him because he is a good noble king like King Laius. Oedipus states “Whoever killed King Laius might be the death of me-who knows? It might happen even now” (Sophocles). This puts in for Oedipus showing his pride by claiming that he might be murdered because he is a king.

Most of the storyline throughout the play is Oedipus having this lust of truth of who his biological parents are by seeking and analyzing the evidence he already has. Tiresias even tries to tell Oedipus to stop trying to find answers. Tiresias says “How terrible to see the truth when the truth is only pain to him who sees” (Sophocles). This shows that Tiresias tries to warn Oedipus about the truth of his fate. Creon also tries to warn Oedipus of his lust for truth. Creon says “Look at you, sullen in yielding, brutal in your rage. You will go too far. It’s perfect justice: nature’s like yours are hardest on themselves” (Sophocles). This reveals that Oedipus was warned many times by Tiresias and Creon to not seek the truth but in the end Oedipus still yearned for finding out the truth.

Then by the end of the story Oedipus’s lust for truth actually becomes the exact opposite when he finds out the truth about his fate. Oedipus is devastated by his fate that claims to blind himself because of the will of his actions. Oedipus exclaims “What good were eyes to me? Nothing I could see could bring me joy” (Sophocles). This shows that Oedipus is very devastated about his actions and how his fate was put into place. Oedipus even goes as far to say that Creon should cast him out and put him into exile. Oedipus states “Drive me out of this land at once, far

from sight, where I can never hear a human voice” (Sophocles). This quote shows that Oedipus is very upset and acts almost too guilty for what his fate has brought him.

Sophocles’s play Oedipus the King shows that even though Oedipus was a hero of his time that he still could escape his prophecy of his fate. The play points out that Oedipus' downfall is an example of how enduring it is to struggle between fate and free will. Oedipus most definitely embodies his pride, his lust for truth and his devastation of fate.

References

Sophocles and New Translation by Nicolas Rudall (2000). Oedipus the King. Ivan R. Dee
Chicago, (2000).