Oedipus the Innocent

Jonathan Quang

European Literature

Dr. Mandler

11 October 2015

Outline

Thesis: Oedipus is innocent of the crimes he committed.

I: Oedipus cannot be held accountable for patricide.

A: Oedipus did not know Laius was his biological father

B: Oedipus only killed Laius in self defense.

II: Oedipus is innocent of the crime of incest.

A: He had no knowledge of who his biological family until the day Jocasta killed herself.

B: Oedipus was too young to even have the slightest recognition of his mother's face.

III: Oedipus has no good motive for committing patricide and incest.

A: After realizing his crimes and witnessing his mother/wife committing suicide, he stabbed his own eyes out of depression.

Jury, hear me out. Oedipus is innocent. One who ordinarily commits patricide and incest is guilty. However, Oedipus has special circumstances based on his early childhood. He was given away by his biological parents, Laius and Jocasta as an infant. Only by acts of mercy did he end up remembering that he was raised by Polybus, king of Corinth, and Merope, a Dorian. My client also has no true reason to have committed patricide and incest. I swear by the gods, Oedipus is innocent.

First, Oedipus cannot be held responsible for patricide. Oedipus killed his own father in self defense without knowing that he was indeed Laius, his father. Jocasta and Oedipus were having a discussion where Jocasta was giving more details about Laius's death while Oedipus began to remember what happened. The elders of Thebes recalled Oedipus saying:

*He that led the way and the old man himself wanted to thrust me out of the road by force. I became angry... When the old man saw this he watched his moment, and as I passed he struck me from his carriage... my stick had struck him backwards from the car and he rolled out of it. And then I killed them all. If it happened there was any tie of kinship twixt this man and Laius. ("Oedipus the King" 937-948)*

Because of this, Oedipus cannot be held accountable for killing his father because he, Oedipus did not realize that he was even related to Laius. He also cannot be held accountable for killing in general because he did it in self defense in response to being pushed off the road. There is sufficient evidence that Oedipus should not be guilty of patricide.

Secondly, Oedipus cannot be guilty of incest because he lacked knowledge of who was his real biological family. He had absolutely zero knowledge of Jocasta and Laius being his parents. The testimony of the Herdsman was, "The child (young Oedipus) was called his child; but within, your wife would tell you best how all this was...Oedipus: She was so hard -- its mother?" (*Oedipus the King* 1333-1347). The Herdsman has already admitted that Oedipus had no knowledge that Jocasta was his mother. Also, please remember that Oedipus was very young when he was given away. Oedipus could not have memorized his mother's face and Oedipus has aged to a point where Jocasta can no longer see the child she once knew. The fact that they even married when they were related is a product of chance. Hence, Oedipus cannot be held responsible for incest.

The prosecution claims that Oedipus has all the motivation to deny knowing at any point between the time of his crimes up to the day he gave his throne away. My client here does not have legitimate motivation for patricide and incest. After hearing that he killed his own father, married his own mother, and that his mother/wife committed suicide, all on the same day, he stabbed his own eyes out of grief. When Oedipus was questioned on scene for why he did so, he replied "Alas for me! And yet again, alas for me! The pain of stabbing brooches pierces me! The memory of agonizing shame!" (*Oedipus the King* 1568-1570). For what reason would a criminal stab his own eyes out like this? Would a criminal feel shame and depression to this degree?

To sum up my argument, Oedipus's early life is full of unique circumstances. He had no idea who his biological family is composed of. Oedipus only killed his father out of self defense in a chance encounter and only married his mother out of chance as well. On the day when he found out that he even committed those crimes you blame Oedipus for, he was so consumed by grief that he stabbed his own eyes out. To say Oedipus is guilty of patricide and incest is an insult to the truth. Jury and judge, Oedipus, is absolutely, innocent.