Analysis Of The Oedipus Trilogy Essay, Research Paper

Novel Analysis of The Oedipus Trilogy

Oedipus Rex, or Oedipus Tyrannus as it is in Latin, could be what we call today a Freudian work of literature. The Oedipus Trilogy was originally written by Sophocles and is meant to be told in a story-telling fashion. But this Grecian tragedy was revised and translated into English by Paul Roche and put into a novel form.

The Oedipus Trilogy is a novel that deals with destiny and fate. The reader is shown a series of events plotted out from which Oedipus cannot escape. When we begin to read this story, we must remember that Greek society was based around myths and legends. They, much like today?s society, had the need to explain everything. Their myths were a way of explaining such things. They had a series of gods and muses and fates to explain why things happened the way it happened. They believed in a force greater than their own controlling their every move. Sophocles took their beliefs and used the Oedipus Trilogy to explore the irony of how the Fates work more closely.

The Oedipus plays are separated into three main plays: Oedipus Rex (The King), Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone. The story starts in Oedipus Rex, and the city of Thebes in which he is ruler is in plague. The city calls upon the ruler Oedipus to find a way to stop the plague. At this point in time, it is 15 years after the prophecy given to him by the Oracle of Delphi of his father dying and him marrying his mother. When he hears of this he promises never to return so he may outsmart the fates. He eventually ends up in Thebes through his travels and gets into an argument with an old man. He ends up killing the old man in a brawl. Little does he know that this old man is King Laius, his father. He goes to Thebes where a Sphynx is harassing it?s people for an answer to it?s riddle. Oedipus solves the riddle and the Sphynx throws itself from its perch upon a rock outside the city. Its people make Oedipus the new King. Now he is faced with another challenge, to find the killer and banish him from the city to rid them of the plague.

We are faced with an interesting plot indeed. When Oedipus pledges to find the murderers, he puts himself in the ironic position of having to hunt himself down. The story shows Oedipus following his own tracks until he finds the shepherd who gave the infant Oedipus to the king of Corinth, from King Laius. Once the story becomes clear, Jocasta, his wife, kills herself in a bloody rage and Oedipus stabs his eyes out. Oedipus has Creon, brother to Jocasta, tend to his last affairs and assume kingship of Thebes. When we go to Oedipus at Colonus, the whole story then goes to the eminent defeat of Thebes by whomever holds Oedipus?s tomb. Oedipus promises the knowledge of his tomb only to the kings of Athens. The story of Antigone is of how Oedipus? daughter defies the will of Creon and gives Polynices.

When a person is faced with the possibility of committing an unfavorable deed, a person will take whatever steps necessary to prevent them from committing the act. It is a basic human instinct to prevent ones self from committing the act. And the basic overall theme of the Oedipus trilogy is defiance. We see the attempt to defy throughout the whole trilogy. Oedipus tries to defy the Fates by avoiding his destiny. Creon tries to avoid the will of the Fates by getting Oedipus to come back to Thebes so he can save it from being taken. And Antigone defies the will of Creon by burying Polynices against his will. What they all learned by the end of their stories was that they could not escape their chosen fate. All throughout the story we see attempts to defy the will of others. Oedipus staying in the sanctuary is one example. His resistance to go back to Thebes is another. It all points back to defiance of fate.

The entire trilogy is done from a third person omniscient point of view. This gives it the flexibility to move easily between the three different stories without having to explain each setting in length. Each character in Oedipus? line all seems to have one thing in common, their stubbornness. Creon seems to be a man of distinction and honor in the story. Tiresias, as the seer, symbolizes knowledge and reason. Jocasta acts as the mediator between Oedipus and the rest of the world. The two daughters are quiet and obedient to only their family and to what makes sense. The sons are the symbol of the everlasting conflict in the line of Oedipus.

Of course the setting takes a major role in the play. It takes place in ancient Greece, naturally, where tragedies and stories of misfortune are known to happen. And as such there are many symbols used throughout the trilogy. The chorus is one of the main symbols continually used in the story, singing their strophies and antistrophies. Their importance is to show what the people of the time would feel about what was happening. They are sort of a mild version of critics in the story. Tiresias, the seer, is another great symbol in the story. Though he is blind, he is proved in the story to have seen things more clearly than the stubborn Oedipus would have. The irony of it is that Oedipus himself later became that seer in the story of Colonus, with Antigone as his own hand-girl. The plays of Oedipus also use a great range of picturesque speech to make a point. We see it in the very first lines of Oedipus the king when Oedipus asks his beloved people, ?what is the meaning of this thronging round my feet- this holding out of olive branches wreathed in woe?? (Roche 23). By this sentence Sophocles is showing that his people are crying at his feet for an answer to their sickness. Little did Oedipus know that he had his own much larger problem on his hands.

The plays of Oedipus have long been some of the most enlightening and teaching of stories. This story sparked the study of much psychological debate and theories pertaining to the love of ones mother and ones own sanity. It was used in Ancient Greece to tell of the twisted ways that Fate worked and how you can do something you may not want to out of pure ignorance. This story is a truly remarkable one for those who would read it for pleasure, and yet it is a plague of its own for many a student. And it is still used today so that we may study how an ancient culture thought. Much of Greco-Roman myths are centered on the subject of Fate. Homers epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey are two such examples. We can see that their societies were greatly concerned with Fate, as much of their writing reflects that. Every society has its own needs and concerns, and literature is always the best way to reflect them.

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