Oedipus The King Analysis Essay, Research Paper

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 athenian?s. Oedipus is the embodiement

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 Sphinx. Sophocles

used the riddle of the sphinx as a metaphor for the 3 phases of Oedipus? life

and to futher 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 shepard 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 has not been for

the shepard spairing 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 dilligent in the

inquiriy 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 perseverence 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 shepard 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 coarageous he would have 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 Spinx 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.