The Chorus And Oedipus The King W/Quotes Essay, Research Paper

THE CHORUS and OEDIPUS the KING Oedipus the King, by Sophocles, is one of the more renowned Greek tragedies in existence. It’s fast pace and surprising close are why the tragedy is so popular, yet it is not very long and only has 6 main characters; 4 main family members, a priest of Zeus, and the chorus. In Oedipus the chorus is the character that represents the community of Thebes, the city of Oedipus’ ruling. Neither of the other works of literature we studied, The Odyssey (Homer) nor Gilgamesh placed such an emphasis on the people the kings ruled. Yet, Sophocles gives them a character with many lines to express the thoughts of the community, offer advice, and foreshadow the impeding doom. Simply enough, these seem like the tasks of any chorus, however, this chorus has one characteristic that sets it apart. This chorus plays the part of Oedipus’ conscience at times, taunting him and tormenting him, they may drive him to gouging out his eyes in the end. The actual play of Oedipus has the chorus as a group of dancers, who, in tight organized clusters, dance and chant around the main characters. The chorus gives Oedipus a great sense of belonging and throughout he is eager to please his people. There was a plague that struck the city suddenly. The people of Thebes turned immediately to their leader to save the city from death and destruction. Oedipus responds valiantly to their distresses and vows to end the plague no matter the consequences. “Oh my children, the new blood of ancient Thebes, why are you here? Huddling at my altar, praying before me, your branches wound in wool. Our city reeks with the smoke of burning incense, ring with cries for the Healer and wailing for the dead. I thought it wrong, my children, to hear the truth from others, messengers. Here I am myself- you all know me, the world knows my fame: I am Oedipus,”(Sophocles pg. 590 line 1-8) It is evident that Oedipus cares for his people and is eager to find out why the city is in turmoil. He goes on to help up a Priest and begs him to proclaim the reason for the misery.”Our city- look around you, see with your own eye- our ship pitches wildly, cannot lift her head from the depths. The red waves of death Thebes is dying. A blight on the fresh crops and the rich pastures, cattle sicken and die, and the women die in labor, children stillborn, and the plague “(Sophocles pg. 591 lines 27-32).The chorus pleads for his help to the lift the curse of the gods. Oedipus pities them, and valiantly agrees to help lift the plague as a good ruler would. Later Oedipus hears from Creon, Oedipus’ wife Jocasta’s brother, that the plague is caused by the murder of King Laius. Only when the murderer is killed or exiled will the plague be lifted. Oedipus vows to find the murderer for the sake of his people and his own safety. Oedipus often finds himself accepting advice. Usually that advice would come from the chorus. The chorus loves their king and offers good advice in the time of crisis. They help him keep a level head nearly throughout, and advise him against doing anything too brash. The chorus defends their kingdom and those in it. They even defended Creon when Oedipus accused him of plotting to stab him in the back. The chorus calmed Oedipus and saved the relationship between he and Creon. “Oedipus: Precisely. I caught him in the act, Jocasta, plotting, about to stab me in the back. Creon: Never – curse me, let me die and be damned if I’ve done you any wrong you charge me with Chorus: Believe it, be sensible give way, my king, I beg you! Respect him – he’s been no fool in the past and now he’s strong with the oath he swears to god The man’s your friend, your kin, he’s under oath – don’t cast him out, disgraced branded with guilt on the strength of hearsay only,”(Sophocles pg. 608, lines 725-733). Oedipus agrees then to let Creon go, even if he is going to ruin him, he did it for his people. Oedipus still does not admit to liking him, he actually says he still hates him which proves just how strongly he views his people when taking their advice to let one so hated be free. The chorus is constantly watching, silently or chanting and dancing. They watch all that happens but they don’t feel as though they know the future because they don’t proclaim it, but they do hint to what it may be. The chorus is constantly suggesting that maybe Oedipus is the killer, they chant around him wondering who actually committed the murder and let their minds run wild, then they question Oedipus about his patronage.

“Who- who is the man that voice of god denounces resounding out the rocky gorge of Delphi? The horror too dark to tell, whose ruthless bloody hands have done the work? His time has come to fly to outrace the stallions of the storm his feet a streak of speed,” (Sophocles pg. 603 lines 527-534).They chant this as they dance around Oedipus. It instills doubt and expels hints and questions of the innocence of everyone, including Oedipus.”Oedipus- son, dear child, who bore you? Who of the nymphs who seem to live forever mated with Pan, the mountain-striding Father? Who was your mother? Who, some bride of Apollo the god who loves the pastures spreading toward the sun? Or was it Hermes, king of the lightening ridges? Or Dionysus, lord of frenzy, lord of the barren peaks – did he seize you in his hands, dearest of all his lucky finds? Found by the nymphs, their warm eyes dancing, gift to the lord who loves them dancing out his joy,”(Soph. Pg. 620 lines205-213)!The entire passage here gives the general direction to which the play then follows, the puzzle of figuring out who the father and mother of Oedipus is. The chorus does not know the outcome of the tragedy but they believe they know in which general direction the story line will take, and they foreshadow the coming confusion. Oedipus eventually finds that his wife is actually his mother and that Oedipus had killed his own father, not knowing it was he. The chorus’ final task in the tragedy of Oedipus is to relate the thoughts of his conscience. They echo the exact thoughts that Oedipus would be thinking at that moment. They chant and dance around him almost in a kind of tormenting fashion, it seems as though they want him to face his fears and his dismal thoughts, confess. They seem to place guilty thoughts in Oedipus’ head that eat away at his conscience and may have driven him to gouging out his eyes in the end. They sing of his blazing beginning and his ensuing downfall, they sing of rage and sorrow as if those were the words of Oedipus himself. ” does there exist, is there a man on earth who seizes more joy than just a dream, a vision? And the vision no sooner dawns than dies blazing into oblivion,” (Soph. Pg. 622, lines 1315-1318).”But now to hear your story – is there a man more agonized? More wed to pain and frenzy? Not a man on earth, the joy of your life ground down to nothing son and father both, son and father came to rest in the same bridal chamber. How, how could the furrows your father plowed bear you, your agony, harrowing on in silence O so long? Now I weep like a man who wails the dead and the dirge comes pouring forth with all my heart I tell you the truth, you gave me life my breath leapt up in you and now you bring down night upon my eyes,”(Soph. Pg. 623, lines 1333-35, 1338-42, 1347-51). The words spilling off of the page, nearly belonging to the wrong mouth, the thoughts of Oedipus chanted by the chorus in unison, continuously dancing in unison, they do this for a purpose. They represent his conscience, the center for his guilt and self-loathing. They proclaim his sorrows. Sophocles meant for his chorus’ character to personify the thoughts of Oedipus, they personify his guilt in their songs and in their dance moves, their Strophe.In the final pages of Oedipus the King we see the chorus change from revering their leader to becoming the herald for his guilt. Throughout the tragedy the chorus plays key roles which parallel the King’s. They represent the community, and in doing so proclaim the goodness and ability of their king. They offer advice to the King in his time of confusion, and in doing so keep their community from turning against one another. Finally the chorus acts as Oedipus’ conscience, they proclaim his sorrows as if the sorrows were their own, weep and wail for their king and in doing so feed into the guilt of Oedipus himself. In the end Oedipus gouges out his eyes with the broaches from Jocasta’s dress, his guilt for what he had done, although unknowingly, was much too strong to see forever. The chorus, however, continues to dance.