The Fate Of King Oedipus Essay, Research Paper

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The Fate of King Oedipus

In “King Oedipus” there comes a point in the play where Oedipus

learns something that plays an important role throughout the play. He learns

from a oracle that he will eventually kill his own Father and sleep with his

own mother. As one could imagine this is a shock to Oedipus, and he does

not believe the oracle. However, he cannot control any of this from

happening because it is his fate. He is a victim of circumstances beyond his

control. Oedipus has no control on the outcome of what happens in his life

because his life had already been planned by the Greek Gods.

Throughout the whole play there are references made to many of the

ancient Greek Gods, for example, Apollo, Zeus, Dionysis, and Artemis are

discussed quite often. In ancient Greece the people believed that if anything

happened one of the god’s had a reason for it. Each god was related to one

specific thing like Poseidon being the god of the sea. They thought that if

there was a tidal wave or a hurricane it was because Poseidon was angry at

them. This is the basis for my assumption that Oedipus had no control over

his fate.

First of all, when Oedipus is just a baby his father, King Laius of

Thebes, is told in an oracle that his own son will kill him. So, with the

agreement of his wife, Jocasta, the baby’s feet are pinioned, and it’s given to a

slave who is supposed to leave it to die on Mt. Cithaeron. However, the

slave feels sorry for the baby, and gives it to a fellow shepherd from Corinth.

The shepherd from Corinth presented the baby to the childless King of

Corinth, who is Polybus, and he brings him up as his own. He gives him the

name Oedipus, which means swollen foot, because of his deformity.

This shows how the god’s had already intended for his life to be. He

had no way to control what his parents did to him after he was born. Then,

eighteen years later, he leaves Corinth for Delphi, to check on his parentage

at the oracle of Apollo. The oracle, though, gives him a horrific prediction.

Which is that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother, which are the

two most inconceivable crime in a Greek family. After hearing this he flees

Corinth and heads toward Thebes believing to of left his father behind in case

the oracle was right.

However, the god Apollo has somewhat tricked him. Since he believes

that his real father is Polybus, but he does not yet know that his father is the

King of Thebes, which is where he is going. Along the way he meets an old

man driving a wagon of slaves at a place where three roads meet, and he then

precedes to kill him.

Years pass after this incident, during which time he becomes King of

Thebes, marries Jocasta (his mother), and fathers four children by her.

Slowly, Thebes becomes engulfed by a horrific plague, which kills animals,

children, and crops. Oedipus, being the brave king he is, promises to save his

city. Since plagues are caused by pollution, and the pollution is caused by

sins the gods are the only one’s who can reveal it’s cause. Oedipus sends his

brother-in-law, Creon, to see the oracle at Delphi again, and the god’s answer

is that the plague was caused due to an unpunished murderer. That being the

murderer of Laius. He then places a terrible curse on the murderer whomever

it is, and then looks for help from Teiresias, the respected prophet. She tells

him that he is the killer, and she hints at even worse crimes. Oedipus is

enraged at what she tells him, and thinks that Teiresias and Creon have made

this up to dethrone him. Teiresias departs with threats of her life while Creon

begs his innocence. Oedipus does not believe him, and would have had him

executed if not for Jocasta.

After hearing that the argument was the result of what an oracle had

told them she reassures Oedipus by saying that what the oracles say is

nonsense. She then tells a story of how her and Laius were told by one that

their son would kill his father. She then tells him how the father was killed by

robbers at a place where three roads meet. Then Oedipus remembers that he

killed a man at a place like this and wonders if it was Laius. He realizes that

this would make him the cursed murderer who is to blame for the plague of

Thebes. Jocasta pleads with Oedipus that a witness said it was thieves, and

that it could not have been him. Oedipus wants this witness to be found so

that his fears can be laid to rest. During this time a messenger arrives to tell

Oedipus that his father, the King of Corinth, has died and that he is now the

King of Corinth as well.

Oedipus is saddened by this event, but tells the messenger that he

cannot return to Corinth while his mother is still alive. Then the messenger

tries to help himself out by telling Oedipus that she was not really his mother,

nor was Polybus his father. He then explains to them that Oedipus was given

to him by a shepherd from Thebes. Jocasta then realizes that Oedipus is truly

her son and rushes away. Meanwhile Oedipus believes that she is

embarrassed that her husband might have been an unwanted child, and

perhaps he was the son of a slave.

At last the Theban shepherd arrives, and this is ironic because turned

out to be the man who was the witness to the murder of Laius. The shepherd

is reluctant to tell Oedipus anything. Not until after a threat of torture does he

tell Oedipus that the baby was given to him by Jocasta to be killed, and that

he passed it on to the Corinthian out of pity. Oedipus now knowing the truth

rushes to find Jocasta, but alas, it was to late. She had already hanged

herself. Oedipus then takes the shoulder pins from her dress and gouges his

eyes out with them blinding himself. From this misfortune Creon becomes

King, and after allowing Oedipus to say good-bye to his daughters, orders

him into the house, to await disposal at the god’s pleasure. As Oedipus enter

the house he is continually saying that he should be left to die on Mt.

Cithaeron just as the gods intended for him to.

As one can see, the god’s played with the lives and emotions of all the

characters in the play. While doing so Oedipus could in no way control his

own fate. The god’s mislead him, and did not allow him to keep from his

destiny. Oedipus was indeed a victim. A victim of circumstances beyond his

control, and it just goes to show that it is impossible for someone to escape

their own fate.

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