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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 too 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 enters 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 gods 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 gods misled 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.
