

Analysis of oedipus the king



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In the play, the country of Thebes is stricken by a great plague, and king Oedipus, being a noble leader, is determined to find the solution of ending the scourge. A determined Oedipus goes on a quest of determining the truth behind his parentage and the old prophecy. After a thorough investigation, he traces the trail of the prophecy, and it falls onto him. Thomas De Quincey argues that the Oedipus was guilty right from the moment he solved the riddle of the sphinx. De Quincey places Oedipus as the scape goat of his actions. However, other scholars such as Dodds, Gould, Kitano and Sommerstein provide sufficient evidence that refute with the claims of scholars such as De Quincey. Therefore, in this narrative, the paper will refute to the claims of de Quincey that places Oedipus as responsible and provides sufficient evidence from the other scholars that Oedipus actions are misunderstood, and he should not be held culpable. Although scholars have argued that actions that precede Oedipus should be justified, I argue that the Oedipus guilt has been misunderstood. Oedipus was a mere victim of a prophecy foretold by the god. Thus, the actions that preceded his life cannot be justified, and the sins of his parents should not be carried forward.

Dodds argues that there is a misunderstanding in the narrative of Oedipus and his action should not be taken as poetic justice for his sins (Dodds 17). Majority of the people take the actions of Oedipus as justifiable seeing as how he treats other characters such as Creon and argue that it is legitimate for the gods to extend the curse on him. Dodds also claims that Oedipus is a flaw in accordance to the Aristotle view. The action in the play has been brought out to indicate that he deserves the horrors due to his pride and the treatment toward Creon and the Oracle (Dodds 17). However, in

understanding of Oedipus as the villain of the narrative, it is essential to understand the role that the author had fashioned for him.

Determining whether Oedipus is a right person creates a double entendre since his character is portrayed as neither sinister or too noble (Dodds 17). For instance, as the story unfolds, he comes off as the hero having saved the city from the Sphinx. However, his attitude at the crossroads paints him with a different picture. Nonetheless, being on the Aristotelian view, it is possible to derive that the rhetoric employed in the narrative is used to bring out the ignorance in Oedipus based on the occurrence of the events (Dodds 18). Despite the theme of ignorance, one cannot forget that some of the actions happened independently, thus justifying them would create a bias. The narrative of Oedipus draws parallels with that of Thyestes which features a man eating the flesh of his child without his knowledge.

Notably, creating the contrast enables one to identify the point of view about Aristotle regarding the justification of the narrative (Dodds 18). In the story, Oedipus acts are natural pollution considering the incestuous nature and killing his father. Had Oedipus committed the acts with prior knowledge, it would depict him as a person without conscious and deservedly of any injustice. The great misunderstanding comes in from the fact that most people do not understand the traditional narrative where the hero had a tragic flaw (Dodds 20). The fatal flaw allowed the audience to develop pity for the character.

On the other hand, the author has posited that Oedipus could not have avoided his fate. For instance, during the prophecy, the Oracle did not

provide conditions under which the events would occur (Dodds 22). Instead, the oracle provides straight answers in that, Oedipus would kill his father and betroth his mother. Oedipus tries his best to avoid the action, but it comes out that fate had already determined the path which Oedipus would follow. Consequently, the majority of the people may perceive the actions of Oedipus drawn by the gods to make him a puppet of his fate (Dodds 27). However, one must keep mind that no one forced Oedipus to find out the truth.

In most occasions, the messengers and Jocasta pleaded with him not to continue with the investigations (Dodds 24). However, it is his passion and desire to see that Thebes was lead of the plague that led him to seek for justice. Although he got the news, he did not anticipate one cannot flaw him for the nature of finding the truth (Dodds 24). As a result, it would be hypocritical to justify Oedipus guilt because he is a leader who acted for the greater good on the nation he was leading.

According to Sommerstein, the Athenian law fund people who had committed sins such a sleeping with their kin or homicide to be detrimental sins (Sommerstein 105). Additionally, killing a person on the spot such as the fight that ensued between Oedipus and Laius is culpable. In other words, Oedipus had committed all these forms of his evil which warrants people to think that he deserved the hereditary curse that followed him (Sommerstein 105). However, in the case of Oedipus, his crimes would have been punishable had it been established that he tried to kill his father with the firm knowledge, but the act that he did not comprehend his relationship with

Laius indicates that Athenian law would not have found him culpable as he is obliged to strike back when provoked.

Additionally, depending on the nature of the incidence, Oedipus was traveling alone in the darkness thus giving him the entitlement of self-defense (Gould 32). According to Gould, it is justifiable that Oedipus chose to gouge his eyes upon realizing the offenses he had committed. The actions of gouging his eyes could justify his actions (Gould 35). However; one has to sympathize with the nature of the occurrence and that Oedipus was oblivious of the events.

To conclude this discussion, it would be wrong to crucify Oedipus for his actions. Although the majority of the actions that had been prophesied came true, one could argue that the ambiguity of the situation did not provide justice for Oedipus. Additionally, the forecast did not have conditions hence one would be obliged to conclude that Oedipus was culpable. However, taking into account the nature of the events and the constant attempts of Oedipus to avoid moving the prophesied direction one could conclude that he was a victim of circumstance. Oedipus did not deserve the heredity curse that occurred to him due to the negligence of his biological parents. Instead, the reader should justify the actions of Oedipus based on his love to see that Thebes was free from the plague that had stricken them.

Oedipus should not be guilty of his actions, but instead, his parents should be the ones to bear the brunt of injustice (Gould 36). When Laius was the king, he took in Jocasta as one of his wives. However, the oracle warned him against bearing a child because the child would eventually end up killing him

and taking Jocasta as one of his wives. The narrative indicates that Laius had been sufficiently warned by the gods (Gould 38). Therefore, going against them would ultimately lead to a curse befalling them. Additionally, the prophecy indicates that both prophesy had sufficient information regarding the outcomes and actions contradicting the forecast can be deciphered as ignorance.

Nonetheless, in one night, a drunken Laius sleeps with the wife and ends up having a son. The fact that they conceived a child together indicated that they had already gone against the prophecy and the outcomes would be evident (Kitano 120). However, they give the child to be exposed to the wilderness. However, out of pity, one shepherd gives the child to a childless loyal couple. Therefore, the conception of the prophecy can be rightfully blamed on the recklessness of Laius for not taking heed of the warning given to him. Oedipus can be referred to as collateral damage for the mistakes committed by his parents (Kitano 120). Additionally, in as much people find Oedipus guilty and justify his action, it is wrong that he had to be punished by the gods.

Aside from the biological parents, the adoptive parent of Oedipus should also be held liable for the actions instead of Oedipus (Kitano 121). For instance, the adoptive parents led Oedipus to believe that he was their biological child. Notably, had the parents been right about the origins of Oedipus, he would have probably avoided some of the actions. However, despite the efforts, the gods had already predetermined the fate of Oedipus, thus making him a pawn to the grand scheme. Notably, when Oedipus learned of the prophecy, he abandoned his adoptive parents to avoid the outcomes that would follow.

The actions indicate that Oedipus was a self-conscious person who was determined to prevent the occurrence of the prophecy, which would see him kill his father and betroth his mother (Kitano 120). However, had the adoptive parents provided Oedipus with sufficient knowledge of his origins they would have prevented the outcomes. As a result, the narrative indicates that Oedipus had not acted out of ignorance about the prophecy but acted with diligence to avoid the curse (Kitano 122). In reality, whichever direction that he chose to follow, the gods had already cast their fate on Oedipus as there was no stopping the events that had been planned.

According to Kitano the murder of the crossroad was ambiguous for Oedipus to figure out that he was going to kill Laius (Kitano 122). Jocasta revealed to Oedipus that the killing of Laius had been told and it occurred at the crossroads after a fight with the bandits. Upon probing the situation, Oedipus realizes that he had a hand in the murder. However, a closer look indicates that there is no manner in which Oedipus could have determined that he was going to kill his biological father. During the ordeal, he had fled from his parents to avoid the fulfilling the prophecy but unintentionally ended up killing his father.

The act was intentional, thus compounding the fact that there is no way in which Oedipus could have predetermined the actions that would proceed (Kitano 122). However, the events create a dilemma because killing a person irrespective of the actions cannot be justified. The nature of the murder implies that Oedipus tragedy could have been defending Laius at the crossroads. Additionally, the situation brings about poetic justice because Oedipus was being reciprocated punishment for killing an innocent man at <https://assignbuster.com/analysis-of-oedipus-the-king/>

the crossroads (Kitano 122). Notably, before the murder had occurred, several scholars argue that Oedipus had been responsible for starting the fight.

Irrespective of the person starting the fight, it is clear that the path leading to the battle of the two oblivious characters unfolds the plot of the narrative (Kitano 122). Nonetheless, the confession by Oedipus indicate that he had been provoked and acted out of anger, but the situation should not have prompted to act by killing (Kitano 123). A step back at the scene indicates that both Laius and Oedipus were liable for the events. However, no justification would have allowed Oedipus to realize that he was killing his father.

Additionally, the actions and reaction of Oedipus at the crossroads brings about the principle of exceeding, which requires that retaliation should be followed due to the suffering caused (Kitano 124). The law posits that regardless of the intentions, his actions had to be followed by actions. As a result, the principle helps in justifying that Oedipus or Laius cannot be held accountable for the murder at the crossroads. Instead, their actions were driven by instincts of self-defense (Kitano 124). Furthermore, the fact both characters ascribed to the same philosophy, of reciprocity, it goes to show that Oedipus cannot be held liable for the guild and the flaw in the character.

Works Cited

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