

Oedipus rex character analysis

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Oedipus, in Sophocles' play Oedipus Rex, is by definition, a tragic hero. King Laios of Thebes was given a prophecy from the oracle that he would be murdered by his son's hand, and that his son would marry his wife, Queen Iocaste. When Oedipus was born, King Laios had him taken to Mt. Cithaeron to die, however, the servant who was instructed to take him to the mountain felt pity for the baby and turned him over to a shepherd from Corinth.

Once in Corinth, he was raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope, and the prophecy slowly became a reality. Oedipus grew up, believing that he was indeed the son of Polybus and Merope, when a drunken man informed him that he was not his father's son.

In search of the truth, he went to the shrine at Delphi, where he was told of the same prophecy his birth parents already knew, and fled to Thebes, believing the prophecy pertained to King Polybus and Queen Merope.

In going to Thebes, he finds that King Laios was murdered in the same area that he had recently murdered a man in. He tells Iocaste of this event, exclaiming that he had "killed him. [He] killed them all." (Scene II, ll. 288-289) His curiosity gets the best of him, and he orders – as the new king of Thebes – that the people find out who murdered Laios, and that they report it to him immediately.

When a messenger brings the shepherd to the palace, he is told that he was Laios' son. Oedipus realizes that he has killed his own father, saying, "Ah God! It was true! All the prophecies!" (Scene IV, ll. 68-70) Iocaste is horrified by this, and flees to her room, where she is later found "hanging, her body swaying from the cruel cord she had noosed about her neck." (Exodus, ll. 38-

39) Oedipus finds her lifeless body, and breaks down, completely hysterical, “[striking] his eyes - not once, but many times.” (Exodus, l. 52)

His entire lifespan is completely full of tragedy. His nobility, his curiosity, his bad choices, the realization of a foretold prophecy coming to life, the death of Iocaste, and the blinding by his own hand, all contribute to the theory of him being a tragic hero. He was born the son of a king, and lived his life king of both Corinth and Thebes - responsible for the people of his land. His curiosity is his biggest flaw, because he can't leave well enough alone, and goes to great lengths to find out the truth.

His choice to kill the man on the road instead of just letting the confrontation go decided his fate. Realizing that he's murdered Laios even though he'd tried so hard to prevent the prophecy from becoming a reality was unbearable. Finding Iocaste dead in her room by her own hand was his suffering. Finally, gouging out his own eyes in a hysterical attempt to punish himself was a punishment far beyond the crimes he had committed. These factors alone do not define a tragic hero, but when brought together the way they do in Sophocles' play, they make Oedipus a tragic hero.