

Oedipus the king



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Oedipus the King by Sophocles is really a great tragedy. At first sight it may seem that the major theme is the predisposition of the human destiny.

Oedipus's life seems to serve as a proof of the gods' mighty and uselessness of trying to change the predisposed. Yet, in terms of Aristotle, the tragedy is often referred to as the tragedy of flaw. Sight vs. blindness is a recurring motif here, pointing to the fact that Oedipus is to be blamed for his tragedy himself. His choices and actions, features and decisions bring him to the tragic end. Oedipus the King is a tragedy of a strong personality.

Oedipus is a strong personality, indeed. He represents a kind of compassionate and careful, fair but strict leader. He is characterized by swiftness of thought and action and frankness. He possesses all the features any audience would like their leader to possess. Oedipus expresses his sincere concern of the health and well-being of his people: " Explain your mood and purport. Is it dread /Of ill that moves you or a boon ye crave?/ My zeal in your behalf ye cannot doubt/ Ruthless indeed were I and obdurate/ If such petitioners as you I spurned" (11-15). Being a thoughtful ruler and a person of action, Oedipus had sent Creon, his right hand, to the oracle even before priest came to him. As Creon returns, Oedipus insists on his reporting the oracle's answer in front of all the people: " Speak before all; the burden that I bear/ Is more for these my subjects than myself" (100-101). Learning that it is necessary to punish the murderer of Laius, staying in Thebes, Oedipus behaves as a fair, strict but kind ruler. He promises that the murderer will only be exiled from the city, his life being left to him. Oedipus promises that the same punishment will befall on people close to him.

At the same time, from the very first lines Sophocles reveals the flaw that is leading Oedipus to his tragedy. This is pride. Entering, Oedipus declares: "

am hither come, myself, I Oedipus, your world-renowned king" (7-8). At the beginning of the second scene Oedipus conveys his belief that he can replace gods. As he enters and hears the chorus's prayer to gods to save Thebes, Oedipus says: " Ye pray; tis well, but would ye hear my words/ And heed them and apply the remedy,/Ye might perchance find comfort and relief" (218-210). This pride causes Oedipus's blindness, leading him to his downfall. Obviously, it was his self-pride, which guided him earlier as he left the home of his foster parents and set off trying to deceive his awful fate. Had he decided to obey gods, he would have avoided it. Then he wouldn't have killed his father Laius and married his mother Jocasta. Having been warned by the oracles, Oedipus was put before the choice. His decisions determined his further destiny. Oedipus doesn't want to believe in predisposition, relying on chance. Jocasta expresses similar thoughts when soothing him (and herself) down, as he starts guessing the truth: " Why should a mortal man, the sport of chance, / With no assured foreknowledge, be afraid? / Best live a careless life from hand to mouth./ This wedlock with thy mother fear not thou./How oft it chances that in dreams a man/Has wed his mother! He who least regards/ Such brainsick phantasies lives most at ease" (979-985).

Oedipus's swiftness and hot temper is another trait of his, working against him. It affects his ability to reason and control his temper. Due to these features Oedipus killed his father as they argued over the wagon on the crossroads (by the way, this seems to be the symbol of the decisive choice Oedipus had to do at that moment). Losing his temper, Oedipus makes wrong judgments, without accepting the obvious. This swiftness, in combination with prideful tenacity, works against him in his conversation

with Tiresius. The oracle doesn't want to inform the truth. Oedipus gets angry and finally curses Tiresius. Oedipus is so sure in his personal greatness that he denies to believe the oracle. Further, he unfairly blames Creon for the non-existing coup. As speaking to both of them Oedipus mostly puts rhetoric questions, confirming his own vision of the situation. Everybody tries to protect Oedipus from himself. Yet, his pride and tenacity make him learn the truth as it is. It is his pride also, which makes him blind himself and leave the city. Though it characterizes him as a strong personality, it makes him poorly adoptable and leads to his wreck.