

Oedipus the king



**ASSIGN
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Oedipus Rex posits the existential dilemma of unalterable destiny to which human life is inextricably linked. True to Shakespeare's observation, "as flies are to wanton boys, so are we to the gods, they kill us for sport" in his King Lear, the life experiences of Oedipus reveals how the powers of destiny had played a cruel game with his life. Predestined to commit the horrible sin of killing his father and wedding his mother, Oedipus is a doomed man despite his many attempts to escape from his fate. The Oracle of Delphi had made clear that his life was designed in the most unfortunate manner from the moment he took birth.

King Laius and Jocasta of Thebes tried to avoid the dreadful prophecy's fulfillment by ordering to kill Oedipus soon after his birth, but their servant saves the child and he grows up as the foster son on Polybus of Corinth and his wife Merope. Without having any clue on his real identity, Oedipus comes across the dreadful prophecy regarding himself and tries to run away from his fate, thinking that Polybus and Merope were his real parents. In fact, he runs into his fate as he kills Laius on his way, solves the riddles of the sphinx that had a curse on Thebes and becomes its King. He has to marry the widowed the Jocasta and in turn have children in her. The truth is hidden from him until Thebes is accursed once again and he conducts an investigation to find out the cause for it.

Once the truth is revealed to Oedipus, he is a shattered man, realizing his frailty as a mere human being out of control with slightest element of his destiny. His painful cry reveals his state of mind prior to his self-inflicted punishment:

O light, let me look at you one final time,
a man who stands revealed as cursed by birth,

cursed by my own family, and cursed
by murder where I should not kill. (1419 -1422)

Upon the news of Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus blinds himself with her brooches. He does not try to escape from his destiny any more. He decides to suffer for his the sins he had committed unknowingly. This is a sign of complete submission to destiny, much in the fashion of the Shakespearean King Lear. IN his suffering, he laments:

Aaaiiii, aaaiii . . . Alas! Alas!

How miserable I am . . . such wretchedness . . .

Where do I go? How can the wings of air
sweep up my voice? Oh my destiny,
how far you have sprung now! (1558-1562)

The life of Oedipus exposes the innate weakness of human heart on the face of an all-consuming destiny. The play has strong psychoanalytic undertones with regard to the incestuous libidinal urges from which human beings have to run away, under the socio-cultural pressures. On a boarder level, the notion that human life is essentially predetermined and there are limitations to which anyone can alter his life contributes the basic motives of the play.

The protagonist and the people associated with him feared the worst even as they tried to avoid the horror that was predicted to come at all costs.

Oedipus had been living in perpetual terror until the moment he confronts his real identity. And this self-realization causes only a new phase of terror in his life, with the repentance and suffering that he inflicts upon himself.

Altogether, his life was just a plaything in the hands of God, despite his genuine attempts to avoid the horrible sin that he was predestined to commit.