

Free critical thinking on oepidus rex - ancient greek play

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Oedipus the Rex is one of the most famous Athenian tragedies written by Sophocles in the 5th century BC. It is interesting to note that besides fascinating plot one may find here a reflection of historical and social backgrounds that influenced the play. One of such was an old conflict between the city of Athens and the city of Thebes.

It comes quite clear from the text of the play that all gods supported the rightfulness of punishment to which Thebes were subjected by gods. When the chorus appears in the play for the first time, it is praying to all the mighty gods for help. The chorus asks Artemis, Athena, Apollo and many other gods to save Thebes from the plague which is ravaging the city. However none of the gods reacts. Therefore the author wanted to pinpoint that Thebes were truly guilty. If the city offended only one god, than probable some of the gods to which it was turning would understand the injustice of punishment and try to help the city. However all the gods failed to be moved by the misfortune of Thebes. It is interesting that Sophocles decided to set the plot of his play exactly in Thebes, the city which was an old rivalry of the city of Athens. Therefore it may be safely supposed that the Athenian audience would approve the misfortune happening to Thebes even before knowing the story lying in the background of the play. Athenians were probably feeling grim satisfaction and pleasure hearing and seeing that gods were punishing Thebes. In fact if one thinks further on this issue the author's choice of the place where the story was set appears to be rather wise. The audience would hardly agree to watch the tragedy in which their native city was condemned to plague. On the contrary, seeing that problems were happening to the

enemy city they would watch the tragedy without negative feelings, receiving all what was happening on stage as rather a normal state of things.

The before mentioned peculiarity seems to have been rather important for the play's success, for the true reason why Thebes were punished with plague appears to be rather insufficient from the logical point of view. The city was punished for the following sin: the murderer of its previous king was not caught. However the whole tragedy lies in the fact that Oedipus, who was the murderer and therefore the sinner even though he was not conscious of that at the beginning of the play, could not escape his fate even though he tried. Therefore Oedipus was not guilty in the misfortune and did not deserve punishment. Of course from the point of view of modern reader killing anyone is a sin so Oedipus did rather wrong. However in Ancient Greece other morals were dominant and from point of view of Ancient Greeks Oedipus did right when he got involved into fight after having been offended by Laius. The fact that he was not scared by the number of people whom he assailed solely by himself characterizes him as a brave man and a good warrior.

This concept of the inevitable fate which was so characteristic for the tragedies of the Ancient Greece was quite hard for the audience's perception. Even though the audience shared the belief in fate it was hard to realize that a man is only a toy of gods and cannot do anything if he is predetermined to experience grief. Therefore the fact that the tragedy took place in the rivalry city of Thebes should have been a source of certain consolation for the souls of Athenians.