

The them the fear  
that "it could happen



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The events in *Oedipus the King*, written by Sophocles, show an underlying relationship of man's free will existing within the cosmic order or fate which the Greeks believed guided the universe in a harmonious purpose. Man was free to choose and was ultimately held responsible for his own actions. Both the concept of fate and free will played an integral part in Oedipus' destruction. Although he was a victim of fate, he was not controlled by it.

Oedipus was destined from birth to someday marry his mother and to murder his father. This prophecy, as warned by the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was unconditional and inevitably would come to pass, no matter what he may have done to avoid it. His past actions were determined by fate, but what he did in Thebes, he did so of his own will. From the beginning of this tragedy, Oedipus took many actions leading to his own downfall. Oedipus could have waited for the plague to end, but out of compassion for his suffering people, he had Creon go to Delphi. When he learned of Apollo's word, he could have calmly investigated the murder of the former King Laius, but in his hastiness, he passionately curses the murderer, and in so, unknowingly curses himself. " Upon the murderer I invoke this curse- whether he is one man and all unknown, or one of many- may he wear out his life in misery or doom! If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth, I pray that I myself may feel my curse.

" (pg. 438; lines 266-271) In order for Sophocles' Greek audience to relate to the tragic figure, he had to have some type of flaws or an error of ways. This brought the character down to a human level, invoking in them the fear that " it could happen to them." And Oedipus certainly is not one without flaws.

His pride, ignorance, insolence and disbelief in the gods, and unrelenting quest for the truth ultimately contributed to his destruction.

When Oedipus was told (after threatening Teiresias), that he was responsible for the murder of Laius, he became enraged and calls the old oracle a liar. He ran away from his home, Corinth, in hopes of outsmarting the gods divine will. Like his father, Oedipus also sought ways to escape the horrible destiny told by the oracle of Apollo. The chorus warns us of man's need to have reverence for the gods, and the dangers of too much pride. " If a man walks with haughtiness of hand or word and gives no heed to Justice and the shrines of Gods despises- may an evil doom smite him for his ill-starred pride of heart!- if he reaps gains without justice and will not hold from impiety and his fingers itch for untouchable things. When such things are done, what man shall contrive to shield his soul from the shafts of the God?" (pg. 452; 975-984) Oedipus' unyielding desire to uncover the truth about Laius' murder and the mystery surrounding his own birth, led him to the tragic realization of his horrific deeds.

Teiresias, Jocasta and the herdsman tried to stop him from pursuing the truth. Take for example a part of the last conversation between Jocasta and Oedipus. After realizing that the prophecy had come true, Jocasta begs him to just let the mystery go unsolved for once.

" I beg you- do not hunt this out- I beg you, if you have any care for your own life. What I am suffering is enough." (pg.

461; 1158-1161) Oedipus replies, " I will not be persuaded to let chance of finding out the whole thing clearly." (pg. 461; 1166-1167) He is unable to

stop his quest for the truth, even under his wife's pleading. For it is in his own vain that he must solve the final riddle, the riddle of his own life.

Upon discovery of the truth of his birth from the herdsman, Oedipus cries, " I who first saw the light bred of a match accursed, and accursed in my living with them, cursed in my killing." (pg. 465; 1300-1303) Oedipus knew that his fate had indeed come to pass and feels cursed by