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## **SKELETON ESSAY: DRAMATIC IRONY IN OEDIPUS**

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher claimed that a good tragic play must arouse pity from the audience, adding that the best way to accomplish this was through the usage of dramatic irony. In the play, **Oedipus the King** by the Greek playwright Sophocles, we are able to witness the presence of dramatic irony as it helps develop meaning in the text. Dramatic irony is delivered in a way that allows the audience to be exposed deeper into the play. Within this setting, we notice that the outcome of the story is revealed to the audience, whereas the hero is blindly stumbling into the hole filled with fate and misery. In Oedipus the King, dramatic irony is used effectively to demonstrate and emphasize a character's disloyalty, ignorance, and blindness.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Argument:**

- In Oedipus the King, dramatic irony is incorporated into the text to emphasize Oedipus's and Jocasta's disloyalty towards the Gods.
- To demonstrate their unfaithfulness, Oedipus and Jocasta continually reject the prophecies that the oracles deliver.
- Ironic because in an attempt to comfort Oedipus, Jocasta tells him that the prophecies from the Gods are powerless, yet at the beginning of the next scene, we notice her praying sincerely to the Gods that she had just mocked.
- **"A fig for divination! After this I would not cross the road for any of it" - pg. 49**
- **"My lords, I am minded to visit the holy temples, bringing in my hands these tokens for supplication... To thee, bright shining Apollo, who art nearest to my doors, is my first prayer, save us from the curse from this uncleanness, save!" - pg. 50**
- Emphasizes to the audience that one second, Jocasta denies the Gods, the other second, she is praising and asking for their assistance. Exhibits her deep disloyalty.

- Oedipus rejoices over Polybus's death as a sign that the prophecies of the God's are absurd.
- However, ironically, he will not return to Corinth for fear that the God's prophecy concerning Merope can still come true.
- **Messenger: And She? How does her life endanger yours?**  
**Oedipus: We have an oracle, sir, of deadly tenor**  
**Messenger: Is it one that may rightly be uttered to a stranger?**  
**Oedipus: It is. Loxias said I was foredoomed to make my mother my wife, and kill my father, with my own hands shedding is blood. This the reason of my long estrangement from Corinth. And I have fared well, though nothing call fill the place of absent parents. - Pg. 52 - 53**
- Ironically, Oedipus's rejection of the prophecies leads to his downfall, he relentlessly pursues truth instead of trusting the Gods.
- Evidently, these two examples of dramatic irony clearly stress Oedipus and Jocasta's disloyalty towards the Gods.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Argument:

- Dramatic irony is applied in King Oedipus to display and emphasize Oedipus's ignorance and foolishness.
- Oedipus is extremely intelligent (he was the only person capable of solving the Sphinx's riddle); yet it is also what makes him tragic; his problem solving and persistent mind leads him on as he works through the mystery of his birth
- **Jocasta: Doomed man! O never live to learn the truth!**  
**Oedipus: Go, someone; fetch the shepherd. Leave the lady to enjoy her pride of birth**
- Furthermore, after Oedipus solved the Sphinx's riddle, his price was the marriage to Jocasta.
- Thus, Oedipus's intelligence, a trait that brings Oedipus to the high throne, is what also causes him to commit a heinous sin, and later, causes him to reveal the whole story.
- One would think a man of great intelligence such as Oedipus would be very careful about whom he marries or kills when a disturbing prophecy is thrown at him.
- Ironically, Oedipus cannot use his intelligence to control the way he conducts himself. Consequently, he kills someone old enough to be his father, and marries someone old enough to be his mother.
- Lastly, Oedipus demands the death of the man who killed Laios. Oedipus assumes that, as a king and citizen of Laios, he is ruled out as a suspect of Laios's assassin. Even when Teiresias accuses him, and all evidence points to him, he is still in denial that he is guilty. Ironically, the man Oedipus is looking for is himself - the murderer and plague starter.
- **Oedipus: If any one of you knows whose hand it was  
That killed Laius, the son of Labdacus  
Let him declare it fully, now, to me.**
- Dramatic Irony in the play successfully solidifies Oedipus's character as someone who is arrogant and overconfident.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Argument:

- Dramatic irony is used in order to highlight Oedipus's blindness amidst his preposterous situation.
- The behavior of Oedipus is ironic because he is unable to grasp the reality of the truth although it is being unraveled right before his eyes.
- Oedipus calls for Teiresias, a blind man who cannot see physically but understands the truth of what is happening.
- Ironic because a blind old man can see clearly what is happening whereas, Oedipus, a young person with good eyes is oblivious.
- **"You are pleased to mock my blindness. Have you eyes, and do not see your own damnation? Eyes, And cannot see what company you keep? Pg. 37**
- The more Oedipus mocks Teiresias's blindness the more ironic he sounds to the audience
- **"No, not for you, shameless, brainless, sightless, senseless sot!" Pg. 36**
- Adds to the insult with the fact that Teiresias already foreshadows Oedipus's upcoming banishment and blindness: **"Your mother's and father's curse, shall sweep you out of this land. Those now clear-seeing eyes shall then be darkened" pg. 37**
- Irony continues when Oedipus blinds himself at the end of the play. Dramatic irony is present here since Oedipus realizes the truth although he has become blind. Oedipus has switched roles with Teiresias, becoming a man who sees the truth and loses his sense of sight.
- Another example of dramatic irony was when Oedipus accuses Creon of conspiracy **"Did you suppose I wanted eyes to see? The pot preparing, wits to counter it?" pg. 40**
- Ironically, Oedipus in fact lacks the capacity to understand what is happening, and the more he tries to solve the mystery, the more blind he becomes.
- In conclusion, Sophocles does an excellent job of incorporating dramatic irony to show that Oedipus, is indeed, totally blind to the truth.

In the play **Oedipus the King**, a character's blindness, ignorance, and disloyalty are accentuated through the usage of dramatic irony. There is no doubt that dramatic irony acts as an important purpose in the play. It is capable of making an audience feel excited and engaged. Nevertheless, dramatic irony is essential in great tragedies, and surely, its incredible effects are found in Oedipus. How ironic - a play consisting of a sin so appalling, evil, and horrific can turn out to be one of the most distinguished masterpiece of Greek drama!

