

Benjamin Goldenstein

English 11 SL

Mrs. Capur

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2. Discuss a scene in which a particular mood or atmosphere contributes significantly to the total effect of Oedipus.

### Mystery Catch-22

In Sophocles' *Oedipus The King*, King Oedipus of Thebes is confronted and strangely obsessed with the mystery of who killed Laios, the former king of Thebes, for a great plague has overtaken the city of Thebes because due to this murder. During his quest for the truth, he begins to discover that the answer to his query is also the answer to another disturbing mystery about himself, who am I? The work as a whole seems to be a study of the nature of the mystery and how its discovery brings out the true identity of Oedipus. The clues involved in Oedipus' puzzle surface a dark truth about his past and the fate that he simply cannot shake the fact that he is the murderer and is indeed controlled by the Gods, not as powerful as them.

When Kreon returns from Delphi, he tells Oedipus that he must, "avenge the murderers of King Laios. (l.131)" In a desperate situation to save his city, Oedipus focuses on Laios' murder, consequently beginning the play with the mystery of, "Who killed king Laios?" To help him in his quest, Oedipus calls for the blind prophet Teiresias to use his powers and identify the murderer. After receiving a ruthless interrogation and many threats from Oedipus, the prophet reveals that Oedipus is in fact the true slayer, "I say you, you are the killer you're searching for. (l.492)" Though calling Teiresias' news

as foolish deceit, Oedipus later learns that the murder of King Laios had been foretold to be at the hands of his lost son, which he exiled and sentenced to death when his son was still a baby. Knowing that the same prophecy was told to him by Apollo, Oedipus now knows that he is implicated in the murder, and searches to find the underlying mystery of who he is, which holds the key to the solution of the original mystery.

The mystery of who killed Laios quickly becomes dependent on the mystery of who Oedipus really is and the events of his infancy and upbringing. Oedipus' past is mainly described by an abnormal will to escape his fate at all costs, leading him to flee Corinth. Oedipus is extremely paranoid about his foreseen path, and fears its coming. Jocasta, who is dually his wife and mother, wanting to help her husband, tells Oedipus about the prophecy of her son killing his father and marrying her, and since the king was supposedly killed by marauders, "Apollo didn't make that child his father's killer. Laios wasn't murdered by his son. (1.945)" Once Oedipus gains this knowledge, the quest for his identity begins to revolve around the question: Is Oedipus doomed to his foreseen fate, or are the God's not as powerful and controlling as believed? With his wife desperately hammering the idea that the Gods are wrong into Oedipus mind to hide him from the truth she knows, he begins to question their true power and his own power, comparing the two, he assumes an ignorant attitude. He believes that he is almost equal to the Gods, and is not subject to prophecies. Short after, however, the mystery is canceled out, because when Oedipus learns about the presumed false prophecy, he also learns that Laios was to suffer the same fate that Oedipus was prophesized to give his father many years ago at the shrine at Delphi. As all of the pieces come together, the solution to all of the mysteries explored by Oedipus is Oedipus himself: he is Laios's son and killer.

As a whole, the work is a portrait of the nature of Oedipus' mystery, and how the investigation of the murder is also an investigation of his true identity, leading to the discovery that no man can escape his fate. During the exploration of Laios' murder, Oedipus learns his real identity piece by piece, and is ultimately destroyed by this very discovery. The mysteries and investigations are what make up the entire play. The plot is the search for the murderer, from start to finish.