

Oedipus Rex, written by Sophocles is a Greek tragedy built on the basis of a riddle given by the maleficent Sphinx, who in Egypt is considered the protector of the three pyramids, however, the perspective given to us by the narrator in this drama allows us to view that it is really a “disease” which plagues, torments and confines the citizens of Thebes. Despite that fact, the Sphinx can represent all that is rational about man, as in the tragedy she chooses to challenge man’s thought and intellect by imposing a riddle in which only those who possess the qualities and abilities could solve such as Oedipus, though arrogant and self-confident, he is the only one of those who tried and---died able to unravel the “mystery” the riddle, or so it may seem.

“What is it that walks on 4 feet and 2 feet and 3 feet and has only one voice, when it walks on most feet it is the weakest?” Oedipus responded confidently with the answer, Man and like the old saying the answer to any great riddle is just as important as the person who answers it. This statement can obviously help to focus on the fact that the riddle of the Sphinx is really a metaphor of Oedipus and of life in general.

A hero is born with the defeat of the Sphinx, the city is cleansed of the evil and prosperity is restored. However, for Oedipus who gained the title of king, life is far from perfect, despite his heroic deed. With that being said, it is ironic that he fails to see an important aspect of the riddle and thus because of this “blindness” he ultimately throws himself at inevitability. Correspondingly, the theme of blindness heavily relates to his misperception of the riddle. Though as a tragic hero, Oedipus is a man who sees but one side of the situation. Thus, it is befitting for Sophocles to utilize such a theme and situate it with the Sphinx as an underlying, key element in the play. This blindness can be furthered emphasized when Oedipus begins to boast that he is superior to the supremacists, the Gods, simply because he has solved the riddle using his self-learned intelligence while those who tried, failed. His flaw, is not knowing that God gave him the position and ultimately it is He who can crush it. Godlike in power, a god in him, more like a god than any man alive. These phrases are considered a mockery of the Gods and is evidently a path to his downfall; all this pride simply due to the result of his early success with the Sphinx. Nonetheless, by elevating himself over the general Man and equalizing

to God, he threatens his own position and that of the Gods. Thus, it is not surprising that his blindness to see the correct path in which nature paved for him lead to his defeat.

Sophocles perhaps intended to use Oedipus as an image of the rest of man from the beginning to the end. Also to illustrate that he has been used to set an example in which the life that God gave him can be destroyed at any moment.

The Sphinx not only represents his downfall but again it is a symbol of the stages of life. With reference to the riddle, we can see that as a baby we do indeed walk on 4 feet, similarly as a mature adult we grow erect and we walk on two feet, and lastly as we age, with we are able to walk with the aid of a staff. Furthermore, if interpreted with the play, the 4 represents the ignorant man, the 2 the intellectual man, and the 3 the spiritual man, all of which can be related to the theme of blindness.

First, and most importantly it can be noticed that Oedipus either suffers as result of blindness or blindness from others, each coming in a different form, which correlates ideally with the general view of life. First, Oedipus, as a baby suffers from the blindness of his parents King Laius and Queen Jocasta, believing that they could fight for their freedom from Gods will. This will supposedly from Apollo stated that Laius' son, Oedipus, would one day kill him and marry the future widow, Jocasta and rule over Thebes. This prophecy unfortunately drove them to the extent that they simply left Oedipus to die at the slopes of Mt. Kithairon only to risk an attempt at avoiding predestined fate. In this first situation, the blindness, which they suffer, is in the mind and rather a intellectual blindness, as evidently they both know about the prophecy, but even after their horrendous actions, which by the way fails and now Laius and Jocasta believes that their son, Oedipus is dead up in the mountain. Moreover, even Jocasta has no idea that she has married her son. Nevertheless, as the story progressed pieces of information started to come together to a point where even she refused to accept what had really happened. Frankly, her way of dealing with this epiphany is to kill herself. With that, it can be seen that Laius and Jocasta's blindness is more or less a representation of the general Man and their characteristics, as perhaps this is what Sophocles intended to use

them for, as it really brings up a question, can one truly escape their destiny? In this case by doing so it led to their downfall. From this, we can arrive to understand that perhaps the riddle is actually a metaphor of life, but at the same time, the weakness of Man.

The second instance of this intellectual blindness and the second stage of life comes solely from the faults of Oedipus himself, who brutally mocks the prophet Tiresias of knowing nothing close to the truth because Oedipus believes that he is blind in all aspects of mind, eyes and ears. The blindness, which Oedipus suffered, made him unable to accept and comprehend that Tiresias, although a blind prophet, can "see" the truth about his king, and yet Oedipus, with his perfect physical sight, cannot see this truth of himself, for he is still ignorant of it. In fact he is so blind that he becomes furious and angry with anyone who is foolish enough to suggest such an idea concerning his destiny. Correspondingly Tiresias plays an important role and is used significantly by Sophocles to shadow the weaknesses of Man by simply showing that although he is physically blind and he has the vision into the future, Man, being represented by Oedipus shows the lack of respect for wise. This is furthered, when he presents the truth to him. In his reaction, Oedipus "attacks" verbally his blindness and tells him that the only reason he is not blaming him is simply because he is blind. Actually, Tiresias uses his blindness to prophesize that Oedipus would leave Thebes blind, poor, and shamed. This statement obviously aggravated Oedipus even more. From this he begins to turn away from the idea of a prophet and seeing into the future. Ironically Tiresias' physical blindness led ultimately to Oedipus' physical blindness. Again, this situation shows that despite Oedipus' intellectual ability, he is ignorant and flawed. For he believes that his words are the truth and those from others are corrupt.

The last instance was the turning of the tide, as toward the end of the play, it is shown how Oedipus learns the true nature of things. His past is revealed to him and he learns that the oracle is actually correct despite his bitter previous attacks. Now Oedipus has completed a full circle: he can see all too clearly what the truth is, but he desperately does not want to accept his fate. So, in response, Oedipus commits an act that is devastating, physically but it is a sense of enlightenment spiritually as he blinds himself

so that he may not see anymore. Unfortunately, this does not help his problem. Sophocles wanted to show that because he didn't want to accept the situation the way he "saw" it, he decided instead not to see it at all. In addition to this Oedipus becomes physically blind and this is undoubtedly a representation of the last stage of life. Being physically blind he begins to see the errors of his path and ultimately the truth. As the staff is naturally considered the universal symbol of wisdom.

With that being said, all three stages of life consists of different forms of blindness, from the indirect to direct and naturally Sophocles had used it with relativity to the Sphinx and her riddle. In Oedipus' case he is "blinded" from the truth. The answer to the riddle or solution to problem may have been obvious. Yet, from his point of view he could not "see" the answer, the real answer. Yet, perhaps not being able to see it, in the beginning is human weakness and is a part of life, which consists of a series of changes in which Oedipus experienced.