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October 9, 2003

World Lit. 1A

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The Effects of Pride and Power

Power and pride can be seen as a companionship of ideas, such as spaghetti and meatballs. When you have one there is most likely the other there with it. Wherever there is a base of power or source of power, that base or source come with a feeling of pride with the power package. The pride of having that power, the pride of accomplishing things that in return earned that power. Pride in return for power can help gain power or too much pride can lead to the diminishing of power and blindness of power in truth. All of these relationships between power and pride listed before can be seen in the tragic play by Sophocles, "Oedipus Rex", through the characters Oedipus and Kreon. Sophocles exemplifies how Oedipus and Kreon both had power and pride that influenced their actions and clarified their values. Also how the power and pride of Oedipus lead him to doom and the power and pride of Kreon led him to more power and pride.

The title of the play Oedipus Rex, which is originally in Greek means Oedipus the King refers to the fact that Oedipus, the main character of the play, is a king of high stature and much authority. In the beginning of the play Oedipus is seen to have the most power over any other character in the play, he is the King of Thebes and whatever he says or does the people of Thebes must subject to him, "no man questions your power to rule the land" (line 56), says a priest. Oedipus attained this power by his acts in relieving the city of Thebes from a horrible monster, the sphinx, by solving her riddle, and there by

saving the city from the hideous monster that was terrorizing them. This power of the throne for Oedipus consisted of “wealth, power, craft of statesmanship! / Kingly position, everywhere admired”(line 367-8), as stated by Oedipus. With this a king also holds many responsibilities of the city and its people.

One of these responsibilities that Oedipus has, that is shown in this play is, the responsibility of Oedipus to save the people. And he thought that he had the power to take on anything, since before he saved the people of Thebes from the Sphinx, he now is required to save them from the plague and is obligated to because he is the king, “tell me, and never doubt that I will help you / In every way I can” (13-14). The people also believe that he has the power, almost like a god, to save them from the plague, “you are not one of the immortal gods, we know...surest in mortal ways and wisest in the ways of God”(35-38). And all of this talk about saving the city brought pressure onto Oedipus, the king who was to save them. Pressure from the fact that he had to save the city from this or he would lose face and authority.

Pressure from the responsibility of saving the people affected the acts where Oedipus took advantage of his power. The pressure brought on by the society, pressuring him not fail, and the sense in Oedipus that his power was not strong enough to defeat the plague gave him the idea to show in public his authority. And he did this clearly when arguing with Kreon, after the blind soothsayer Teiresias had said his prediction and accused Kreon of treason, Oedipus took advantage of his power and made threats to anyone or thing that was going to interfere with him losing his power/authority on the throne. For example, he threatened Teiresias, “you have spat infamy, you’ll pay for it!”(348), he also threatens Kreon, “it is your death I want”(591), and he tells the

shepherd, “You are a dead man if I have to ask you again”(1101), he can make these threats with out question because he is the king, and he is a king in fear of his position being taken away from him by recent accusations of him being the murderer of the late king Laius. Oedipus has the power to convince the people of Thebes that whatever he is doing is for the benefit of the city and has total control over the city in the sense of what goes on all because of his high authority and stature.

Yet, all of this power that Oedipus holds in the beginning slowly fades away towards the end of the play. One of the main reasons he loses his power is because of its companion pride and also another reason why Oedipus loses his power is because he lacks one power, the power of truth, which others like Teiresias have, “there is power in truth”(354). Oedipus does not know the truth so he forever seeks it, and when he finds out, the truth the result is of him being exiled.

Kreon is another character in the play that is what would be called second in command in Thebes. Kreon is the brother of the queen. His powers pertain to those like the king but not to full potential as the king. Kreon is highly respected in Thebes because he is the brother of the king. Also it seems that he is well liked by society, most likely from past gratitude that he had shown, this is proved when Kreon and Oedipus are in a quarrel Choragos stands up for Kreon, reminding the king the Kreon has been a loyal friend to the king. Though in comparing the power of the king in the beginning of the play and the power of Kreon in the beginning of the play Oedipus has the upper hand. Kreon is still subject to Oedipus’s rule. Though it is true that Kreon has similar powers but does not have the same responsibilities and does not wish to have it any other way,

“power with all the king’s anxieties, to that same power and the grace of sleep? Certainly not I.”(552-54).

By the end of the play Kreon seemed to gain the upper hand over Oedipus, because Oedipus gives the rest of his powers that he yet has not lost to Kreon, such as taking care of his daughters and most likely taking over as king, “you are the only father my daughters have”(1444). Now at this point Oedipus has given up all of his power and unofficially passed them to Kreon. And Oedipus’s power is not the only thing that is gone by the end of the play, so is his pride, because pride comes with power.

Oedipus has hubris, overbearing pride or presumption. This hubris is what makes Oedipus blind to the truth at times, and slowly leads to his downfall. First, in the beginning of the play Oedipus had already gained pride from defeating the Sphinx, “I, Oedipus who bear the famous name”(9) and with this he had earned himself power and respect and the throne. The fact that he was king and proud to be king and all the powers the king had was getting to his head. His pride was unstoppable and his ego that developed in himself made him think that he was the supreme person and problem solver of all, being able to do whatever it takes to make the city happy and safe, and of course most importantly to always look good upon the subjects as not to lose his authority, Oedipus proclaims, “you shall see how I stand by you, as I should, avenging their country and the god as well”(137-138). Also his pride in being king blinded Oedipus from many truths.

The pride in Oedipus was mostly built up by the people of Thebes. The inhabitants of Thebes always went to Oedipus, because he was king, for answers to their entire problems, “O mighty power, we turn to you: Find us our safety, find us a

remedy”(43-44). So Oedipus had a large amount of pressure and burden on him to satisfy all of Thebes. The society were constantly on his back about saving the city from the plague because the people remember and depend on him, “the king has promised it”(151), to help them get through this tough time. Though pride did not always lead to power for Oedipus.

Since Oedipus had hubris, his pride led to his downfall. His infatuation with pride led to him becoming blind to the truth and to the reality of life and morals that he was soon corrupted by his pride. One example of this is when Iokaste, the queen, tells Oedipus to stop pursuing the truth and leaves and Choragus asks why she leaves at such an important time, and Oedipus says, “the Queen alone is perhaps ashamed, to think of my low origin”(1023-1024), Oedipus fails to see that his wife is trying to save him from downfall by staying away from the truth, but all that Oedipus sees is his pride in his family and no one can infringe on his pride. Also his quick decisions to threat and kill, such as the situation with Kreon and the treason accusation, Oedipus’s authority was being questioned and his pride was being questioned, and he could not let that slide by, so he threat to exile and kill, that was the only sure way in his blind mind that these obstacles in his way, to being a perfect supreme king, were to be ridden of. This proves that Oedipus’s values are his powers over the people and not really the safety of his people, what it should be. And in the end of the play Oedipus loses all his pride for himself because he had lost all of his power, “his fortunes are most changed, his state fallen to a low slave’s”(1154). Now as for Kreon it is not so much alike.

Kreon does not flaunt his pride around as much as Oedipus in this play. However he still stand up for himself and prides himself in the fact that he is a man and of high

stature and does not want his reputation to be dirtied no matter what cause, “I do not value like in this dishonor”(492). Also it is established that Kreon values the protection of the people and not just his power. He does all in his power to find out how to save the city, and does not blame anyone for his mistakes. Unlike Oedipus, Kreon in the end gained some pride in the fact that he was right in his methods of helping the city and Oedipus was wrong, he had earned the upper hand in the relationship between Oedipus and himself, he tells Oedipus to “think no longer that you re in command here”(1465) and the fact that Oedipus is now begging at Kreon, “and what is it you turn to me begging for?”(1380).

So in conclusion, in the beginning of the play Oedipus had all the power and all the pride and Kreon was second in power and less public with pride. And in the end Kreon came out on top of Oedipus, whose downfall was caused by too much power and pride. Because with power your gain pride and with more pride you become obsessed and blind to reality causing you to drop drastically, which is a characteristic in tragic plays, losing power and eventually losing pride, because there is no more power to have pride in.