Sight and Blindness

Sophocles’ classic tragedy, Oedipus the King, entails a suffering city’s corrupt conditions, a doomed civilization’s heavy dependence on a revival and the incestuous relations intertwining the royal family. Thebes’ former ruler, King Laius, endures a horrific slaughter- revealing an empty throne and mourning widow. Due to this devastating tragedy, Thebes was in dire need of a ruler. Soon after the first portion of the play, the plot jurastically evolves into a much deeper mystery murder and selfish suicide. Sophocles captivates the reader by ironically exposing a realm – foreign to me – of gender roles, status, and political aspects.

Jocasta is one - in a minor population - who does not possess the customary set of characteristics that the majority of ladies commonly did in mythical times. Rather than carrying herself with a reserved approach, she speaks her mind and expresses her outlook on issues. Furthermore, Jocasta signifies dual roles - alien to most playwrights. Concluding her monologue directed to Oedipus:

*And for this marriage with your mother –*

*have no fear. Many a men before you,*

*in his dreams, has shared his mother’s bed.*

*Take such things for shadows, nothing at all-*

*Live, Oedipus,*

*as if there is no tomorrow! (1073-1078)*

As I begin to analyze this excerpt, I notice a maternal essence incorporated within. This passage thoroughly depicts to the reader her dual role as both mother, as well as wife to Oedipus. Within the closing lines, “live, Oedipus, as if there is no tomorrow!” (1076-1077), the reader is introduced to her motherly instinct: inspirational and supportive. Toward the leading line, she reassures Oedipus of his common fantasy, “ have no fear. Man and men before you, in his dreams, has shared his mother’s bed.” (1074-1075) revealing her role as spouse and lover. Her acts as mother *and* lover make gender-role quite vital in this playwright.

Oedipus perpetually intrigues the reader by possessing a great level of class and status. Oedipus conquered ­ the votes of the Theban population, and is later found guilty of the royal ruler’s – also genetically bound father’s - vulgarly baffling bloodshed. Although this passage lacks length, the logical and satiric aspect that I dissected *between the lines,* is vital in comprehension. One of the essential themes depicted throughout the piece – status - is very powerfully illustrated:

*“You pray to the gods? Let me grant your prayers.*

*Come, listen to me-do what the plague demands:*

*you’ll find relief and lift your head from the depths” (245-247)*

In this excerpt, the reader inherits a sense of arrogance portrayed by the character. As Oedipus conceitedly recites, “let me grant your prayers” (245), the reader comes to an abrupt realization of his indecent attempt to *play* the role of god. Within the other lines, “come, listen to me-do what the plague demands: you’ll find relief and lift your head from the depths” (246-247) is an implied sense of cockiness from Oedipus.

Creon is a fascinating personality in terms of status. He quickly becomes associated with Oedipus’ level of extensive status. Creon continues to maintain a secretive and reserved attitude throughout Oedipus’ accusations. Although he is distant from the Thebans, he plays a crucial role. One – of the many – powerful passages depicting class and status:

*“Creon, the soul of trust, my loyal friend from the start*

*steals against me… so hungry to overthrow me*

*he sets this wizard on me, the scheming quack,*

*this fortune-teller peddling lies, eyes peeled*

*for his own profit – seer blind in craft!” (437-442)*

Creon quickly becomes involved in Oedipus’ case of conceitedness when he is accused of being disloyal, “my loyal friend from the start steals against me” (438). Oedipus is confident that Creon wishes to overthrow the throne and become the new ruler. Once the reader analyzes this passage, he or she understands that Creon has no intentions of claiming the throne as his own, rather continue possessing a royal title and be responsible for nothing. Oedipus becomes enraged in saying, “he sets this wizard on me, this scheming quack” (440) as he refers to Tiresias – a bling prophet This passage accurately reveals Oedipus’ true lack of confidence in status, as well as his attempt to conceal his lack of self-assurance. Creon was not in existence in this portion of the play, making self-defense quite difficult.

Sophocles concludes his piece with such a level of mastery and intensity. Oedipus reaches an epiphany: that his life is dreadfully corrupt. He gouges his eyeballs out of socket, making him now physically and mentally sightless. Jocasta brutally kills herself as a result of her recent realization of Oedipus’ history. Composing all of these horrifying incidences was simply gender role, as well as status/class – amongst the essential theme: sight and blindness.