

Oedipus is a blind man, a mom-marryin, kill your own kind, man

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To See or Not to See

The disparity between light and darkness is the oldest theme in history, from the early peoples believing "God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness." (*NIV Bible*. Genesis 1:4) Thus, light and dark became the universal symbols for good and evil. In Sophocles play *Oedipus*, this theme of light verses dark is represented in characters' blindness, light being the ability to see and darkness the inability. When Oedipus is informed by the blind prophet, Teiresias, that he himself is the murderer he seeks, he is enraged and mocks the prophet's blindness. Through a series of events, the tragic hero learns the meaning behind Teiresias' reply that, "you, with both your eyes, are blind; you can not see the wretchedness of your own life" (*Oedipus Rex*. Scene 1.198).

The play opens with Oedipus the king faced with a distressed city. Receiving word that the turmoil is due to the murderer of the prior king, Laius, going unpunished, Oedipus exclaims, "once more I must bring what is dark to light," and issues the most severe fate for the one found guilty (Prologue. 134). Here, bringing "what is dark to light," refers to revealing the hidden truth. Teiresias accuses Oedipus of being in the dark, calling the king blind to the truth. Could he see that he is condemning himself? Oedipus would not make such a careless edict.

However, the king commits himself to further investigation and summons for the family's former shepherd. As a messenger recounts the events of Oedipus' infancy, which include this same shepherd, Iocaste realizes the truth of her own blindness, that she has wed her son, and urges Oedipus, "For God's love, let us have no more questioning! Is your life nothing to you? My own pain is enough for me to bear" (Ode 2. 140-143). Pained by the horrors of her darkness being brought to light, Iocaste tries to prevent the same from happening to Oedipus, knowing they would be condemned by his edict. However, her efforts are to no avail. As the stories of the shepherd and the messenger converge with Oedipus' memories, he realizes his guilt and folly.

When the truth is finally revealed, Iocaste commits suicide. Upon sight of his dead wife and mother, Oedipus plunges her brooches into his eyes crying:

No more, no more shall you look on the misery about me, the horrors of my own doing! Too long you have known the faces of whom I never should have seen, too long been blind to those for whom I was searching! (Exodos. 45-49).

Ironically, when at last the king's eyes are opened, he shuts his eyes forever. Seeing Oedipus this way, Creon exclaims, "I can not even look at you, poor ruined one...too terrible to think of, or to see" (Exodos. 79-80). Creon averts his physical eyes because of the truth he can now see. Oedipus justifies his actions, "How could I bear to see when all my sight was horror everywhere? ... And now what is left? Images? Love? A greeting even, sweet to the senses?" (Exodos. 118-119). Of course, it was not the physical sights that pained him, but the truth behind them.

In the end, Oedipus finally understands Teiresias' prophecy. He brings the dark to light, and in doing so he finds that light does not necessarily bring about goodness, but

rather truth- "everything exposed by the light becomes visible..." (*NIV Bible*. Ephesians 5: 13) In the light one is able to distinguish good from evil, and in the light Oedipus' eyes are opened to the evils of his own life. At last he can see that he is blind.

Works Cited

1. *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

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2. Delbanco, Nicholas, and Alan Cheuse. *Oedipus. Literature : Craft and Voice*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010.