Oedipus Rex-Sophocles Essay, Research Paper

JOCASTA

My lords look amazed to see your queen with wreaths and gifts of incense in her hands. I had a mind to visit the high shrines, for Oedipus is nervous, alarmed with various terrors. He will not use his past experience, like a man of sense, to judge the present need, but lends his ear to any croaker that argues. Since then my counsels don?t have an advantage, I turn to thee, our help when we are in trouble, Apollo, Lord Lycean, and to you my prayers and pleas I bring. Ease us, lord, and cleanse us from this curse! For now we all are intimidated. Who see their helmsman confused in the storm.

]

MESSENGER: My masters, tell me where the palace of Oedipus is; or better, where’s the king.

CHORUS

Here is the palace and he lives within it; this is his queen the mother of his children.

MESSENGER: All happiness attend her and the house. Her marriage-bed and husband are both blessed.

JOCASTA: My greetings to you, stranger; whose reasonable words deserve a like response. But tell me why have you come–what do you need or what news do you have?

MESSENGER: It is good for your husband and the royal house.

JOCASTA: What is it? Whose messenger are you?

MESSENGER: The Isthmian commons have resolved to make your husband king?at least that is what I heard.

JOCASTA: What! Isn?t aged Polybus still king?

MESSENGER: No, regretfully; he’s dead and in his grave.

JOCASTA: What! The sire of Oedipus is dead?

MESSENGER: If I don?t speak the truth I may die.

JOCASTA: Quick, maiden, Tell this news to my lord. The god-sent oracles, where are they now? This is the man whom Oedipus long turned away from, in dread to prove his murderer; and now he dies in nature’s course, not by Oedipus? doings.

OEDIPUS: My wife, my queen, Jocasta, why have you called me from my palace.

JOCASTA: Listen to this man, and explain what happened to the oracles.

OEDIPUS: Who is this man, and what is his news for me?

JOCASTA: He comes from Corinth and his message is this: your father Polybus has passed away.

OEDIPUS: What? Tell me in your own words.

MESSENGER: There is no other way of saying this, the king is dead.

OEDIPUS: By old age, or by sickness?

MESSENGER: One touch will send an old man to his rest.

OEDIPUS: It was sickness then?

MESSENGER: Yes, and his age.

OEDIPUS:Ah! why should one regard the Pythian hearth or birds that scream in the air? Did they not point at me saying I killed my father? but he’s dead and in his grave, and here I am who never touched a sword; unless the longing for his absent son killed him and so I slew him in a sense. But, as they stand, the oracles are dead–dust, ashes, nothing, dead as Polybus.

JOCASTA: Did I not predict this long ago?

OEDIPUS: You did: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA: Don?t ever think of these things again.

OEDIPUS: Can I not fear my mother’s marriage bed.

JOCASTA: Why should a mortal man, with no assured foreknowledge, be afraid? It is best if one lives a careless life through. Don?t fear this marriage with your mother. How often does the chance that a man weds his mother! No reasonable man is troubled by this.

OEDIPUS: I should have had full confidence, is not my mother alive; since she lives I still have to worry.

JOCASTA: And yet thy sire’s death lights out darkness much.

OEDIPUS

Much, but my fear is touching her who lives.

MESSENGER

Who may this woman be whom thus you fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope, stranger, wife of Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what of her can cause you any fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven-sent oracle of dread import.

MESSENGER

A mystery, or may a stranger hear it?

OEDIPUS

Aye, ’tis no secret. Loxias once foretold

That I should mate with mine own mother, and shed

With my own hands the blood of my own sire.

Hence Corinth was for many a year to me

A home distant; and I trove abroad,

But missed the sweetest sight, my parents’ face.

MESSENGER

Was this the fear that exiled thee from home?

OEDIPUS

Yea, and the dread of slaying my own sire.

MESSENGER

Why, since I came to give thee pleasure, King,

Have I not rid thee of this second fear?

OEDIPUS

Well, thou shalt have due guerdon for thy pains.

MESSENGER

Well, I confess what chiefly made me come

Was hope to profit by thy coming home.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will ne’er go near my parents more.

MESSENGER

My son, ’tis plain, thou know’st not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS

How so, old man? For heaven’s sake tell me all.

MESSENGER

If this is why thou dreadest to return.

OEDIPUS

Yea, lest the god’s word be fulfilled in me.

MESSENGER

Lest through thy parents thou shouldst be accursed?

OEDIPUS

This and none other is my constant dread.

MESSENGER

Dost thou not know thy fears are baseless all?

OEDIPUS

How baseless, if I am their very son?

MESSENGER

Since Polybus was naught to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS

What say’st thou? was not Polybus my sire?

MESSENGER

As much thy sire as I am, and no more.

OEDIPUS

My sire no more to me than one who is naught?

MESSENGER

Since I begat thee not, no more did he.

OEDIPUS

What reason had he then to call me son?

MESSENGER

Know that he took thee from my hands, a gift.

OEDIPUS

Yet, if no child of his, he loved me well.

MESSENGER

A childless man till then, he warmed to thee.

OEDIPUS

A foundling or a purchased slave, this child?

MESSENGER

I found thee in Cithaeron’s wooded glens.

OEDIPUS

What led thee to explore those upland glades?

MESSENGER

My business was to tend the mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS

A vagrant shepherd journeying for hire?

MESSENGER

True, but thy savior in that hour, my son.

OEDIPUS

My savior? from what harm? what ailed me then?

MESSENGER

Those ankle joints are evidence enow.

OEDIPUS

Ah, why remind me of that ancient sore?

MESSENGER

I loosed the pin that riveted thy feet.

OEDIPUS

Yes, from my cradle that dread brand I bore.

MESSENGER

Whence thou deriv’st the name that still is thine.

OEDIPUS

Who did it? I adjure thee, tell me who

Say, was it father, mother?

MESSENGER

I know not.

The man from whom I had thee may know more.

OEDIPUS

What, did another find me, not thyself?

MESSENGER

Not I; another shepherd gave thee me.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Would’st thou know again the man?

MESSENGER

He passed indeed for one of Laius’ house.

OEDIPUS

The king who ruled the country long ago?

MESSENGER

The same: he was a herdsman of the king.

OEDIPUS

And is he living still for me to see him?

MESSENGER

His fellow-countrymen should best know that.

OEDIPUS

Doth any bystander among you know

The herd he speaks of, or by seeing him

Afield or in the city? answer straight!

The hour hath come to clear this business up.

CHORUS

Methinks he means none other than the hind

Whom thou anon wert fain to see; but that

Our queen Jocasta best of all could tell.

OEDIPUS

Madam, dost know the man we sent to fetch?

Is the same of whom the stranger speaks?

JOCASTA

Who is the man? What matter? Let it be.

‘Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words.

OEDIPUS

No, with such guiding clues I cannot fail

To bring to light the secret of my birth.

JOCASTA

Oh, as thou carest for thy life, give o’er

This quest. Enough the anguish \_I\_ endure.

OEDIPUS

Be of good cheer; though I be proved the son

Of a bondwoman, aye, through three descents

Triply a slave, thy honor is unsmirched.

JOCASTA

Yet humor me, I pray thee; do not this.

OEDIPUS

I cannot; I must probe this matter home.

JOCASTA

‘Tis for thy sake I advise thee for the best.

OEDIPUS

I grow impatient of this best advice.

JOCASTA

Ah mayst thou ne’er discover who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go, fetch me here the herd, and leave yon woman

To glory in her pride of ancestry.

JOCASTA

O sadness is thee, poor wretch! With that last word

I leave thee, from now on silent evermore.

CHORUS

Why, Oedipus, why stung with passionate grief

Hath the queen thus departed? Much I fear

From this dead calm will burst a storm of woes.

OEDIPUS

Let the storm burst, my fixed resolve still holds,

To learn my lineage, be it ne’er so low.

It may be she with all a woman’s pride

Thinks scorn of my base parentage. But I

Who rank myself as Fortune’s favorite child,

The giver of good gifts, shall not be shamed.

She is my mother and the changing moons

My brethren, and with them I wax and wane.

Thus sprung why should I fear to trace my birth?

Nothing can make me other than I am.

331