Problem Of Sight And Blindness In Oedipus Rex

Excessive arrogance and pride can blind a person from reality, where the world and life are constantly changing. If one is continually blinding itself from the truth it can lead to emotional and physical anxiety. The truth allows people to grow and discover their true self and character. One truth's revelation leads to another until all truths are revealed and the play Oedipus Rex comes to its reasonable yet unavoidable tragic end. Sophocles uses sight and blindness throughout his play to empower the literary element of irony which in turn proves human nature. Oedipus and Jocasta both lack the sight, which represents the knowledge for the truth. Oedipus and Jocasta's reactions to prophecy, such as Oedipus left Corinth and Jocasta tried to kill her own son, were rational as they were provided with such limited information.

When Oedipus and Jocasta learn about their prophecy, they attempt to avoid their future. However, both of them struggle to escape the truth. Oedipus tells Jocasta of how he fled from Corinth, where he was raised by King and Queen, attempting to change his fate. Oedipus states, "As I wandered farther and farther on my way… And I came to this country / Where, so you say, King Laios was killed." (2.1, 272-275). This is ironic because while Oedipus attempts to flee his predetermined fate, he already fulfills the prophecy, in which he killed his own father, Lauis, in a mountain on his way to Thebes. Despite knowing his destiny and taking steps to avoid it, Oedipus is still unable to do so. Jocasta confesses to Oedipus that she and Laius killed their son so that the prophecy would not be fulfilled. Jocasta says, 'But his child had not been three days in this world… and left him to die on a lonely mountain side." (2.1, 193-195). The dramatic irony lies in the truth that her son was the one who, indeed, murder his father and that her son is whom she is addressing. People who can physically see, such as Oedipus and Jocasta, tend to avoid the realization of the truth.

As they live out their happy lives, Oedipus and Jocasta become metaphorically blind to the truth, bringing them to their doom. In his arrogance and pride, Oedipus is excessively confident, after having solved the Sphinx's riddle, and assures the people of Thebes that he will find the source of the curse upon Thebes. Oedipus says to Creon, "You are the fool, Kreon, are you not? Hoping / Without support or friends to get a throne? / Thrones may be won or bought: you could do neither." (2. 28-30). Oedipus refuses to listen and accuses his brother-in-law, Creon, of wanting the throne, and Tiresias of being in collusion with Creon. It is also ironic that in Scene 3, Oedipus can finally perceive reality and realizes that he is responsible for the plague, he literally blinds himself in self-punishment and so that he will not be able to see the children, who are also his siblings. Oedipus and Tiresias' literal blindness represents perception. The blind seer, Tiresias, is more aware of the reason why Thebes has been cursed than the king, Oedipus.

Tiresias tells Oedipus, 'You mock my blindness, do you? / But I say that you, with both your eyes: are blind / You can not see the wretchedness of your life." (1. 195-197). The irony comes from the contrast between the two characters. Tiresias, a blind seer, is able to see the truth, while Oedipus, who has a physical sight, is unable to see the evil deeds he committed. Oedipus declares, 'I were his son, to press the fight for him." (1. 49). Oedipus decides quickly to avenge the Lauis' murderer without fully knowing all the circumstances at hand. His statement represents his character and is ironic that he is the true murderer of Laius. By telling Oedipus

the unfulfilled fate of Jocasta’s son, she satisfies him that the prophecies are meaningless. Jocasta says, 'My child was doomed to kill him; and my child-- / Poor baby!-- it was my child that died first.” (2.1, 327-328). Her words represent dramatic irony because she is unable to see the identity of her husband, who is the son she abandoned many years ago to escape her fate.

Also, Jocasta states, 'O riddlers of God’s will, where are you now!' (2.2, 37). Jocasta doesn’t care about the prophecies, refusing to think ahead or take precautions. Oedipus and Jocasta’s metaphorical blindness comes from their ignorance, excessive pride, or from the influence of others that purposely hide the truth from them, and then this sends them into their depths of despair.

Oedipus and Jocasta's revelation of the truth leads them into their own downfall. Oedipus meets his tragic end when he blinds himself and in deep shame of his horrible deeds, he begs Creon to exile him from Thebes as he says, “ lead me away. / Lead me away from Thebes.” (5. 120-121). in a mad act of self-hate, Oedipus “struck at his eyes--not once, but many times; / And the blood spattered his beard, / Bursting from his ruined sockets like red hail.” (5. 51-53). He gouges out his own eyes and this shows significant dramatic irony because even though he could finally able to see the truth yet he feels overwhelmed by his new sights of the truth, he executes himself physically blind. Jocasta is purposefully blind. The more Oedipus investigates into the past, the more Jocasta begins to suspect the truth of his identity, but she still tries to live in ignorance. She then pleads Oedipus not to go further with his investigation, but he declines. When she couldn’t longer avoid the truth, she takes her own life rather than deal with it. In despair over the crimes she committed, Jocasta hangs herself: 'And there we saw her hanging, body swaying / From the cruel cord she had noosed about her neck.” (5.38-39) Jocasta couldn’t accept her new sight and instead surrendered to death.

Metaphorical blindness can be harder to deal with than literal blindness. Any human, who is physically blind, learns to deal and accept the truth, however, a person, who is metaphorically blind, is helpless until they come to realize the truth. Metaphorical blindness comes from one’s ignorance or hubris that purposely hides the truth. Oedipus and Jocasta become metaphorically blind to the evil deeds they commit. The truth is revealed and their doom is cast upon them when they seek to find true sight. Oedipus and Jocasta’s sight and blindness to the truth resulted in their destruction. Through their own obsessing nature, the greatness turns against Oedipus and Jocasta and their arrogance and impulsive decisions become great no more. The human nature of Oedipus is the reason why it is impossible for him to find out that he is the murderer that he seeks. Therefore, pride in Oedipus and Jocasta prohibits them from seeing the truth. The ability and inability of sight can be the factor that decides between an individual’s success or failure to achieve happiness.