
The City Walls of Thebes in Oedipus the King, a Play by Sophocles

In Oedipus The King, Sophocles tells the tale of a man from a foreign land that champions his way to the throne of the city Thebes. As the play progresses, the audience learns that this foreign man, Oedipus, is in actuality, a native Theban. Oedipus, as the king, is faced with the task of ridding Thebes of the vicious plague that is spreading and finding the individual responsible for it. The story is reflective of Greek politics and society as well as how these are intertwined with religion and the gods. The play explores the importance of being a member of society and the contrast between life within the city walls and outside of them. All throughout Oedipus The King, the audience sees how being a member of society comes along protection and unity while living outside of the city walls

Straight away, the notions of civilization and the wild and the divergence of these constructs are addressed at Oedipus's birth. After Jocasta and Laius learn of their baby's cursed future, they have the Shepard take the infant out of the city into foreign territory. As Thebes is a society that heavily relies on the guidance the gods and Oracles, Jocasta and Laius do not doubt that the fate that the Oracles have predicted for their son is true; they willingly give up their baby in order to save the city as well as themselves. Living within the city walls is of utmost importance. The territories outside of the city walls are where outcasts, criminals, and unwanted infants are sent away to. Civilization represents safety and protection from the gods while the wild represents a godless land without laws or security.

In Oedipus the King, Thebes is characterized as a land looked over by the gods. The people trust their king with their lives because it is believed that those in power are closer to the gods and spirits. People call on Oedipus to save the city when misfortune hits them not only because he is the king, but also because they feel that he has a direct connection with god. When the plague strikes the city, the Priest proclaims to Oedipus, "We taught you nothing, no skill, no extra knowledge, you still triumphed. A God was with you, so they say, and we believe it - you lifted up our lives." Priest tells Oedipus that he knows that he is able to reach such amazing feats without any person's help because he has a god with him. This interaction further displays the city's reliance on religion and the perceived correlation between powerful, upper class people and godliness. The city has the gods on their side while the land on the outskirts of the city walls are desolate and lacking in faith.

Throughout the play, being exiled from society is presented as being the ultimate punishment, comparable to death. It is believed by all the characters in the story that the major conflicts in

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the story can be resolved by ridding the city of the person responsible for it. Laius's murderer must be found or else the plague will continue to wreak havoc on the city. When speaking about the king's murder, Creon states, "Drive corruption from the land, don't harbor it any longer, past all cure don't nurse it in your soil - root it out!". Creon urges Oedipus to realize that corrupt individuals cannot be cured in the city; the only way for order to be restored is for the murderer to be driven off their land. Oedipus agrees with Creon saying, "Banish the man, or pay back blood with blood. Murder sets the plague-storm on the city." Oedipus reaffirms the idea that exile is the same level of punishment as death.

Within the city walls, unity is an important aspect of life. Being a traitor is one of the worst titles that could be bestowed upon a person. When Oedipus accuses Creon of plotting against him to steal his throne, Creon adamantly denies it. Creon states, "No, there's nothing worse: branded a traitor in the city, a traitor to all of you and my good friends." While within the city unity and allegiance to your king is vital, outside city walls is a place of isolation and separateness. Those living outside the city have been taken out of their communities and away from everyone they know. There is no government to protect them or community to be a part of. It is a place for outcasts and lone wolves while the city is a place for conformity and unity.

At the end of the play, Oedipus comes to terms with the fact that he is indeed Laius's murderer. Knowing that the city is a territory watched over by the gods and that the plague can only be cured by getting rid of the person who caused it, Oedipus insists that Creon exiles him. Oedipus pleads to Creon, "As for me, never condemn the city of my father's house my body, not while I'm alive, no, let me live on the mountains." He does not deserve to share the land with the body of his biological father, when he is alive or dead.

Throughout Oedipus The King the importance of living within the city walls of Thebes is explored. The audience is shown the contrast between belonging to a community and living in the territories outside of the city. The city represents protection, godliness, and unity. On the other hand, the land outside the city walls represents an isolated, ungodly, and unprotected state. The main conflicts in the story are surrounded around the prospect of ridding the city of people who are against the king.

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