

Oedipus Rex – The Conflict, Climax and Resolution

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Sophocles' tragic drama, Oedipus Rex, presents to the reader a full range of conflicts and their resolution after a climax. Thomas Van Nortwick in *The Meaning of a Masculine Life* describes Oedipus' tragic flaw: As ruler, he is a father to Thebes and its citizens, and like a father he will take care of his "children." We see already the supreme self-confidence and ease of command in Oedipus, who can address not only other people's children as his own, but also be a father to men older than he is. But beyond even this there is, in the stretched posture of the citizens, the hint of prostration before a deity. We are "clinging to your altars," says the priest. . . . That he also exudes a godlike mastery in the eyes of his subjects only strengthens the heroic portrait. . . . (21-22). The "godlike mastery" to which Van Nortwick refers is the same mastery which Creon in his final lines designates as the cause of the tragic dimension in the life of the protagonist: "Crave not mastery in all, /For the mastery that raised thee was thy bane and wrought thy fall." Oedipus' total mastery of the investigation resultant from the Delphic oracle's declaration, yes, his forceful "railroading" of the investigation against the wishes of Jocasta, Teiresias, the messenger and the shepherd, ultimately spells the downfall of King Oedipus. Abrams says that the conflict is between the protagonist and antagonist (225). Is the antagonist within Oedipus in the form of his "godlike mastery," as Creon believed? Or is the antagonist weird/wyrd/fate, so that

the oracle demonstrated the gods' power to predestine their creatures? Frank B. Jevons in "In..... middle of papershers, 1999. Benardete, Seth. "Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus." In Sophocles: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Thomas Woodard. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966. Ehrenberg, Victor. "Sophoclean Rulers: Oedipus." In Twentieth Century Interpretations of Oedipus Rex, edited by Michael J. O'Brien. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968. Jevons, Frank B. "In Sophoclean Tragedy, Humans Create Their Own Fate." In Readings on Sophocles, edited by Don Nardo. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1997. Sophocles. Oedipus Rex. Transl. by F. Storr. no pag. http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbn/browse-mixed_new?tag=public&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&part=0&id=SopOediVanNortwick, Thomas. Oedipus: The Meaning of a Masculine Life. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

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