




Influence of Greek Gods in *Oedipus Rex*

Deus ex machina in English is “machinery of the gods.” That means that they believe that anything that happens to them is because of the gods. The Greek gods influenced the Greeks’ everyday lives in many ways, and they are even connected to why or how everything happens. Deus ex machina is prominent in *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles when the plague was occurring in Thebes because of Laius’ murder, when Jocasta says that prophecies are lies, and when Oedipus says that Apollo made him gouge his eyes to blindness.

For instance, deus ex machina can first be seen when Creon says that Apollo has put the plague upon Thebes for revenge on the murder of Laius, and unless they find the culprit, the plague is not going away. Creon tells Oedipus, “Then I will tell you what I heard at Delphi in plain words. The god commands us to expel from the land of Thebes an old defilement we are sheltering. It is a deathly thing, beyond cure; we must not let it feed upon us longer.” In response to Oedipus’ questions of, “What defilement?” and “How shall we rid ourselves of it?” Creon says, “By exile or death, blood for blood. It was murder that brought the plague-wind on the city.” Oedipus asks, “Murder of whom? Surely the god has named him?” Creon replies, “My lord: long ago Laius was our king, before you came to govern us...He was murdered; and Apollo commands us now to take revenge upon whoever killed him,” (Sophocles, 97-111). This part is



significant because it is when they start the search for the murderer. This is an example of dramatic irony since we know that Oedipus is the murderer, but they do not. The Greeks think that the gods, in this case Apollo, control plagues and everything else that happens to them. They say that if they do not find the murderer, then Apollo will never get rid of the plague and they will all die.

Yet another piece of evidence is when Jocasta explained how Laius died, and their baby was “killed,” she says that prophecies are lies since his son did not kill Laius. The Chorus takes this very seriously when they say, “ Zeus, if indeed you are lord of all, throned in light over night and day, mirror this in your endless mind: our masters call the oracle words on the wind, and the Delphic vision blind! Their hearts no longer know Apollo, and reverence for the gods has died away,” (lines 858-864) and loses respect for Jocasta. Jocasta explains this clearly when she says:

“Here is my proof: an oracle was reported to Laius once (I will not say from Phoebus of his own son— his son, born of his flesh and of mine! Now, you remember the story: three days in this world before the King had pierced the baby’s ankles and left him to die Laius’ fate to die at the hands of his son, as he had feared. This is what prophets and in his own way,” (669-684).

This is the part of the play where Oedipus begins to realize that he was probably the one who killed Laius. This is also an example of dramatic irony since the audience already knows that Oedipus was the one that killed Laius, his real father. Jocasta is pretty much saying that prophecies are just lies, and tells Oedipus not to believe them. This brings up strong emotions in the Chorus when they say, “Zeus, if indeed you are lord of all, throned in light over night and day, mirror this in your endless mind: Our masters call the oracle words on the wind, and the Delphic vision blind! Their hearts no longer know Apollo, and reverence for the gods has died



away,” (854-864). The Chorus does not respect Jocasta as much since she just threw away all of the peoples’ knowledge of their futures.

The final indication of *deus ex machina* is when Oedipus says that Apollo is the reason that he gouged his eyes out, but he himself committed the act. The Choragos asked Oedipus, “What god was it drove you to rake black night across your eyes?” Oedipus replies, “Apollo. Apollo. Dear children, the god was Apollo. He brought my sick; sick fate upon me. But the blinding hand was my own! How could I bear to see when all my sight was horror everywhere?” (1283-1290). The Choragos used a metaphor by comparing his blindness to “black night.” This passage is important because this is when Oedipus is explaining why he gouged his eyes out, who is to blame, and what to do next. The town is shocked, but understands why Oedipus did what he did. This also proves that the Chorus was right to be upset when they did not believe what Jocasta said when she was saying that prophecies are all lies. This is also saying that people cannot run away from their fate.

For all of these reasons, the plague in Thebes is said to be occurring for Laius’ murder, when Jocasta exclaims that prophecies are lies, and when Oedipus blames Apollo for making him gouge his eyes out, one can see that the Greeks truly believed that their futures rested in the hands of every god and goddess.