

Ananalysis Of Oedipus: A Tragic Hero

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Abstract: *Oedipus the King is the play which was composed by a renowned Greek creator, Sophocles in 420 BC. This play is additionally notable with Oedipus Tyrannos or Oedipus the Rex. As a matter of fact the play Oedipus is a set of three of Oedipus which was written in three plays: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. These three plays depict about Oedipus story starting from his arrangement as the ruler of Thebes in the wake of noting the puzzles of the Sphinx until the fall of Oedipus and later the misfortunes of his kids suffer. Oedipus the King is the play which was composed by a renowned Greek creator, Sophocles in 420 BC. This play is additionally notable with Oedipus Tyrannos or Oedipus the Rex. In reality the play Oedipus is a set of three of Oedipus which was written in three plays: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. These three plays portray about Oedipus story starting from his arrangement as the ruler of Thebes subsequent to noting the enigmas of the Sphinx until the fall of Oedipus and later the misfortunes of his youngsters endure.*

Keyword; *Tragic, classic, Sophocles, Aristotle, character*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Oedipus Rex also known as Oedipus The King is a classic play by Sophocles and has stood the test of time and included as required reading in many educational settings. According to Britannica.com “frequent references to Sophocles in Poetics to Oedipus the King show Aristotle considered this play a masterfully constructed piece of literature, although there have been others who disagree with Aristotle in that regard.” In Sophocles’ play: “Oedipus”, the main character Oedipus is a prime example that embodies Aristotle’s characterization/definition of a “tragic hero”; where Oedipus makes errors in judgement that lead to his own self destruction.

To decide whether Oedipus truly fits the bill of “Tragic Hero” one must define what a tragic hero is. Aristotle has spent a lot of time studying Sophocles’ play “Oedipus”. “Aristotle defined a tragic hero rather strictly as a man of noble birth with heroic qualities whose fortunes change due to a tragic flaw or mistake (often emerging from the character's own heroic qualities) that ultimately brings about the tragic hero's terrible, excessive downfall”.

Oedipus does fit being a tragic hero, born to King Laius and Queen Jocasta thereby fitting the Noble Birth. Due to a message that his parents received from an Oracle that their son would kill his father and marry his mother and bear children. They chose to send their infant son away to prevent this prophecy from coming to fruition. A shepherd given the infant pierced and bound his feet to take him to the mountains to die, however fate intervened and another Shepherd to the infant boy to Corinth where King Polybus and Queen Merope who were childless adopted this infant as their own. “The Child was given the name Oedipus (“Swollen

Foot”) because of the injury to his ankles.” (Johnson, Arp, Perrine, (N.D), p.1257) Oedipus came of age in the King’s court and after allegations of not being his father’s son he chose to explore this allegation on his own. Oedipus left Corinth and saw the Oracle in Delphi who repeated the prophecy that he was to kill his father, marry his mother and have children by her. This troubled him, and he decided not to return to his family home to keep the prophecy from occurring. While traveling he came to where three roads met. An older man accompanied by his attendants ordered him to leave the road, one can envision this as a modern-day incident of who has the right of way in today’s world, followed by road rage. Oedipus kills the man and his attendants. Continuing his travels just outside of Thebes he happens upon the Sphinx; a horrible monster that was plaguing Thebes with destruction of crops and killing any man who came by that could not answer its riddle. The Sphinx asked Oedipus the same question it asked the rest; what walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night?” (Oedipus. (n.d.). thought Oedipus answered the question correctly; “man; for he crawls as an infant, walks erect as a man, and uses a staff in old age” (Johnson, Arp, Perrine ,(N.D), p.1258), The Sphinx killed itself and Oedipus continued on to Thebes where he was met by Kreon; who was the acting King after the reigning King Laius had been Murdered. Oedipus having destroyed the Sphinx was now a hero, as a reward for freeing Thebes from the Sphinx’s curse, was given the hand of the Kings Widow; Jocasta and became the ruler of Thebes. The Oracle says to remove this plague they must remove from Thebes “An old defilement we are sheltering. “(Line 100, Oedipus) they must avenge the murder of the Prior King Laius, a man who Oedipus never set eyes upon. Oedipus asks questions “Tell me: Was Laius murdered in his house in some fields, or foreign country? ““(Line 116, Oedipus) Kreon informs him he was to make a trip and never returned. It is told that there was one witness the murder of the King and he is ordered to be brought to Oedipus. Meanwhile word comes forth that his father King Polybus has died a natural death, and confusion about the prophecy comes to Oedipus he did not kill his father as the Oracle said. Oedipus’s Wife Jocasta seemed to resist having the witness brought forward and with good reason, because he reveals Oedipus’ true parentage; his Father was Laius and Mother Jocasta, the woman he is married to. Further revelations from the witness who saw the murder and escaped makes Oedipus realize that that road where he killed that man and his attendants he sadly yet unknowingly had fulfilled the prophecy years prior. Oedipus retreats to his home angry and finds his wife Jocasta only to find has hung herself. Distraught over everything Oedipus uses her brooches to gouge out his eyes and blinds himself. Oedipus born of noble blood, a hero to the inhabitants of Thebes takes accountability for his actions comes out speaks to the kingdom about what he has done, asks Kreon to take care of his young daughters and reveals the truth to his daughter that he is both their father and brother. Oedipus also begs Kreon to send him away. Kreon has pity on him wants him to stay, however agrees to Oedipus wanting to leave and live in the mountains. So here again Aristotle’s tragic hero is in play Oedipus has his downfall, Oedipus’ actions of unknowingly killing his father set upon a string of events that cost him everything.

Greek Tragedy and its Effects

What is a Greek Tragedy? According to CollinsDictionary.com (in ancient Greek theatre) a play in which the protagonist, usually a person of importance and outstanding personal qualities, falls to disaster through the combination of a personal failing and circumstances with which he or she cannot deal. Sophocles’ Oedipus fits the definition of Greek Tragedy. Throughout the story the audience viewing the play or the reader reading the play experiences many emotions. The characters go through many wonderful pleasant emotions, although those pleasantries are very brief because, after all this is a tragedy. The characters make the audience

wonder where is this leading and the twists and turns put the audience on the edge of their seats. The Hero, their lives become tragic due to flaws within their life that leads to the climatic ending with a downfall of some sorts, death, dismemberment, banishment from society. A Greek tragedy shows the audience that life is not always perfect that everyone has flaws that can catch up to you and end up putting your life into a tailspin. The effects can help humanity learn to live a better life and keep them from making the same mistakes made by the characters within their own lives.

Tragic Flaw and Oedipus's Virtue.

Dictionary.com defines Tragic Flaw as: "the character defect that causes the downfall of the protagonist of a tragedy; hamartia." Tragic flaw is also known as hamartia and is not always an inferior quality, but it can also be a superior quality such as trusting others, which can in the end lead to tragedy. An example on a personal level of having the quality of trusting can be when allowing someone into your home and they decide to clean you out of your valuables and thereby leaves you with picking up the pieces and becoming broke from replacing what was taken. In Oedipus he keeps his virtuosity throughout he is wise for having defeated the Sphinx in solving the riddle. Which in turn during the plague and when Kreon said they must find the killer of King Laius they turned to him because he is wise and able to solve puzzles. Oedipus also shows compassion and empathy to the children who are suffering from the plague that has besieged Thebes, as evidenced in lines 63-66 "My poor children, what you desire is known and not unknown to me, for I see well that everyone is sick, and being sick, still, not one of you is sick as I am." Oedipus seems to be saying and showing his compassion and empathy towards the children by saying while they are sick, the whole situation makes him sicker than they are. The most important virtue that Oedipus has kept despite the flaws of murdering his birth father, marrying his mother and having children with her as the Oracle claimed is that of integrity. When the Delphi Oracle told Kreon that they must cast out the perpetrator of this murder of King Laius, once Oedipus realized that he was the one who did this disparaging act he himself punished himself with gouging out his eyes, going blind and asking to be cast out by his Brother-in-Law Kreon to save Thebes from the horrible plague they were living in. Despite the flaws Oedipus shows one can keep their integrity no matter what,

2. CONCLUSION.

Oedipus is not an easy read and can be confusing, but after several readings one may finally grasp the story. Oedipus started out as a discarded infant, left for dead rescued, adopted into Nobility. Grew up and upon hearing an Oracle's dire prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother showed integrity to walk away hoping to stop the prophecy from coming true. He saved a kingdom from a horrible monster, married had a family and upon learning the truth of his parentage and that he had murdered his father he again shows he is a man of good morals and followed through on the wishes of Apollo and cast the evilness, which was himself Thebes to save it from the ongoing plague. Oedipus is truly a tragic hero that has shown everything that Aristotle claims a tragic hero should be. Sophocles literary influences have stood the test of time and many other Authors have no doubt used his influence within his writing stories such as Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie where his tragic flaw is that of being afraid to grow up old and when everyone else has grown up alone. Tragic heroes such as Oedipus can be helpful to show humans how to not make tragic mistakes in their own.

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