

CHAPRA GOVERNMENT
COLLEGE

Established - 2013

NAME - DEBA HALDER

REG NO - 036129

COURSE CODE - ENG-H-CC-T-2

SESSION - 2022-2023



● Introduction

Oedipus Rex, (Latin: "Oedipus the King") Greek Oidipous Tyrannos, play by Sophocles, performed sometime between 430 and 426 BCE, that marks the summit of classical Greek drama's formal achievement, known for its tight construction, mounting tension, and perfect use of the dramatic devices of recognition and discovery. It examines the story of Oedipus, who in attempting to flee from his fate, rushes headlong to meet it.

● Historical Background

Oedipus, in Greek mythology, the king of Thebes who unwittingly ~~killed his father and a psychological and~~ married his mother. Homer related that Oedipus's wife and mother hanged herself when the truth of their relationship became known, though Oedipus apparently continued to rule at Thebes until his death.

● Theme

Oedipus Rex, is an Athenian tragedy where Sophocles gives the story of Oedipus, a king of Thebes who has a hereditary

curse and who consequently has to suffer the terrible consequences of fate. At a time when Thebes is experiencing fires, plagues and other forms of decimation, King Oedipus decides to act in order to restore prosperity and life to Thebes, his kingdom. However, through his quest, he discovers that his identity is contrary to what he thought. He discovers that he is his own father's killer and that he has married his mother with whom she has had four children. On discovering this, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile while Creon, Jocasta's brother and therefore his uncle, succeeds him as King of Thebes.

Apparently, in this play, Sophocles has used irony to show the way Oedipus struggles battling with fate and free will.

Fate

From the play, it is evident that Oedipus has no control over his life - some divine power seems to control his destiny. From the very start, Oedipus was fated to fulfill Apollo's hereditary prophecy of killing his father and marrying his mother. Despite King Laius' attempts of killing Oedipus in order to prevent this shameful prophecy from being fulfilled,

Fate impels the Corinthian messenger to save him. The prophecy of the gods must come true and no human being, not even the kings, can prevent it from occurring. This same power controls Oedipus once more when he leaves Corinth, his childhood home, after hearing that he would kill his father and marry his mother. On his way, fate leads him to turn to the road where he meets and kills Laius, his biological father.

Finally, Oedipus fulfils the last part of the prophecy by marrying his mother. Fate causes him to free the people from the pestilence that the presence of the riddling Sphinx had brought on them by giving the correct the answer to the riddle and thereby receiving the honor coincidentally his real mother. This is a clear indication of the fact that Oedipus has no power over the outcome of his life. Were it not for the intervention of fate, there would have been small chances of marrying Jocasta because there are numerous places where he could have gone, with numerous women who he would have married. Further, fate leads Oedipus to wanting to find out Laius' murderer following the plague that has befallen.

Thebes, pronouncing a curse upon the murderer not knowing that he is the murderer that he seeks. Oedipus' senses of dignity disappears on discovering that he is a murderer and that he had committed incest.

In the play, it is described that what Oedipus faces in his life is about either fate or free will. Oedipus has to face the prophecy which is the God's will on Oedipus can stand far away from the prophecy.

Facing the prophecy that says that Oedipus will kill his father and sleep with his mother, he set out from his fostered father, Polybus, and went to his own father, Laius, whom he killed later then he marries Jocasta, Laius' wife or his own mother. When Oedipus left his parents because of the prophecy, it was his will to stay away from the prophecy. But his will even drag him into his real fate.

Apparently, Sophocles wants to show that humans cannot defeat what God will. No matter the deeds that humans have done, he has to admit the God's power toward men. Humans cannot defeat Gods' will. As also Oedipus says to curse himself about the God's will. He blames Apollo for the prophecy but he does not blame himself for what he did to his eyes to gouge them.

Irony

Sophocles uses dramatic irony to present the downfall of Oedipus. At the beginning of the story, Oedipus is portrayed as "self-confident, intelligent and strong willed". By the end, it is within these traits that he finds his demise.

One of the most significant instances of irony in this tragedy is when Tiresias hints to Oedipus what he has done; that he has slain his own father and married his own mother (lines 157-60):

To his children he will discover that he is both brother and father.

To the woman who gave birth to him he is son and husband and to his father, both a sharer of his bed and his murderer.

Go into your place then, King Oedipus and think about these things and if you find me a liar then you can truly say I know nothing of prophecies.

The audience knows the truth and what would be the fate of Oedipus. Oedipus, on the other hand, chooses to deny the reality that has confronted him. He ignores the words of Tiresias and continues on his journey to find the supposed killer. His search for a murderer is yet another instance of irony. Oedipus, determined to find the one responsible for King Laius' death, announces to his

people (lines 247-53):

I hereby call down curses on this killer... that horribly, as he is horrible, he may drag out his wretched unblessed days.

This too I pray: Though he be of my house,

if I learn of it, and let him still remain, may I receive the curse I have laid on others.

This is ironic as Oedipus is, as he discovers, the slayer of Laius, and the curse he wishes upon the killer, he has actually wished upon himself.

Glassberg explains that "Oedipus has clearly missed the mark. He is unaware that he is the one polluting agent he seeks to punish. He has inadequate knowledge..."

Sight and blindness

Literal and metaphorical references to eyesight appear throughout Oedipus Rex. Clear vision serves as a metaphor for insight and knowledge, yet the clear-eyed Oedipus is blind to the truth about his origins and inadvertent crimes. The prophet Tiresias, on the other hand, although literally blind, "sees" the truth and relays what is revealed to him. Only after Oedipus gouges

out his own eyes, physically blinding himself, does he gain prophetic ability, as exhibited in Oedipus at Colonus. It is deliberately ironic that the "seer" can "see" better than Oedipus, despite being blind. Tiresias, in anger, expresses such:

Since you have chosen to insult my blindness—
you have your eyesight, and you do not see
how miserable you are, or where you live,
or who it is who shares your household.
Do you know the family you come from?
Without your knowledge you've become
the enemy of your own kindred

Tyranny

Oedipus switches back and forth calling Laius a tyrant and a king throughout the duration of the play. This is done as a way to make Laius his equal in terms of ruling. Laius was a legitimate claim to rule. Oedipus's claims of calling Laius a tyrant hint at his own insecurities of being a tyrant.

The tyranny brought down the way it was, what

"troubles" could keep you from looking into it?

For even if a god weren't forcing this on you
you shouldn't leave it festering so, and
this

the case of a noble man, your
murdered King.

● Presentation of Oedipus the King

In the play Oedipus Rex, Sophocles adheres to the five-part structure of the Greek Tragedy. The five-part structure comprises the Prologue, the Parados, the Episode, the Stasimon, and the Exodos.

Prologue

The play opens with a prologue which is the first entrance of one or more actors in the play. These actors provide "exposition" on the play for the audience, and they set the play in motion.

In Oedipus Rex, a priest appeals to Oedipus, King of Thebes, on behalf of the Theban people who are suffering from a drought and plague. Creon returns from the Oracle at Delphi to report that Apollo commands that in order for the drought and plague to be lifted, Thebans must atone for their former King, Laius. Oedipus vows to do so.

Parados

Following the prologue, the Chorus enters, dancing and singing the parados - a choral ode. The Chorus in Oedipus Rex describes how the drought and plague are affecting the people of Thebes and prays to Apollo, Athena, and Artemis to help them find the murderer and end their suffering.

Episode

An episode is what we know as a "scene". In the Greek tragedies of the 5th century, the number of episodes varied from play to play. In the 4th century, tragedies usually had five episodes, from which the five-act play structure of the plays of Shakespeare and other playwrights evolved. Oedipus Rex was written in about 429 B.C., and has six episodes. The episodes in Oedipus Rex contribute to the "exposition" of the play, as well as the "rising action", composed of the complications and conflict in the play, and the "climax" of the play.

Stasimon

After each episode, the actors leave the stage, and the Chorus returns and sings and dances another choral ode called a stasimon. The stasimon usually comments on the preceding episode, and sometimes expands on the story and provides further information for the audience, as is the case in *Oedipus Rex*. The play then alternates between episodes and stasimon until the final scene.

Exodus

The exodus is the final scene of the play consisting of the "resolution" or "denouement" of the play, in which all of the issues of the play are resolved. In *Oedipus Rex*, Creon becomes King, restoring order to Thebes, and Oedipus is exiled.

The actors leave the stage, the Chorus sings one last choral ode imparting to the audience the lesson of the play, and the Chorus leaves the stage for the final.

The last lines of the Chorus

in Oedipus Rex are very interesting. The chorus points out the moral of the play, as expected.

CHORUS: Look ye, countrymen and Thebans, this is Oedipus the great, He who knew the sphinx's riddle and was mightiest in our state.

Who of all our townsmen gazed not on his fame with envious eyes?

Now, in what a sea of troubles sunk and overwhelmed he lies!

The chorus provides some further guidance for the audience, and at the same time, in the last two lines of the play, gives a hint of a sequel to Oedipus Rex.

CHORUS: Therefore wait to see life's ending ere thou count one mortal blest;

Wait till free from pain and sorrow he has gained his final rest.

● Analyzing Oedipus Rex, Othello and Duchess of Malfi

The play Oedipus the King is replete with oracles and mysteries surrounding the life of people and determining the fate of every character in the play. Human beings are portrayed as mere victims in the hands of fate and its play, tragedy happens when the characters deviate

or violate the path of kinship. Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother and all this happens despite his attempts to not fall under the hands of fate. He moves away from his mother ~~and all this happens despite his attempts to not~~ place fearing that he might fulfil the prophecy. But the playwright has shown that man cannot escape from ~~this place~~ fearing that the clutches of fate and that he has to undergo the ordeal whatever his position in the society is.

The play Othello and Duchess of Malfi was written during the Elizabethan period and Jacobean Age respectively. During the time of Shakespeare and reigns of Queen of Elizabeth I and King James I, English ideas and sex and gender, the legal rights of women and sex and the social expectations of femininity all played a significant role in the way that theatre was performed, the stories it told ~~and who told them~~. In addition to other legal restrictions on the rights of women to behave ~~at~~ according to specific social roles. Women are expected to be subservient, quiet and homebound with their primary ambitions entirely confined to marriage, childbirth and homemaking.

In Othello, tragedy happens when Othello suspects his wife Desdemona to have an affair with his lieutenant Cassio. The Reversal of situation or Peripetia happens when he believes Iago's words and decides to kill Desdemona for having cheated him and Recognition happens after the death of Desdemona, when he comes to know about the truth from Emilia. In Othello of Malhi tragedy happens when the Dukes remarries her steward. The Reversal of situation or Peripetia occurs when her brothers come to know about her secret marriage to Antonio, her steward and Recognition happens when Ferdinand is unable to see the dead face of his sister and thereby refuses to reward Bosola for what he did thereby resulting in mass killings.

In the case of Enoch Malhi, written during the reign of James I, the pessimism of the age finds way in the construction of the play. The Age of Webster comprising the last decade of the 16th century and early decade of the 17th is an age of transition. By this time the Renaissance impulse has exhausted itself, the Elizabethan zest for life has gone and the Elizabethan exuberance and optimism has been succeeded by a mood of apprehension, disillusionment and defeat.

The pessimism that runs throughout the play and the brutal torture and murder done to the players' sweet broke to a number of political and religious causes. There was a widespread feeling of uneasily and instability, in the latter years of the reign of Elizabeth caused mainly by the memory of the crisis of the past three accessions and of the series of plots to assassinate the Queen throughout her reign. And this combined with the knowledge that there was no obvious heir to the throne after her death. The situation reached the zenith in the rebellion of Essex. Then it was generally recognized that James was the probable heir. However, his personal unpopularity added to the feeling of uneasily and danger even greater than that of the last years of Elizabeth. Similarly there were religious causes also for the mood of fear and anxiety which overtook the nation during the early years of the 17th century. The Puritans and Jesuits fought with each other. The extravagance and immorality of the Court under James I, his ignorance of the English tongue and the consequent failure to communicate with the people, his uncautious appearance and awkward manners, his theory of the Divine Right of Kings advanced as a justification of his

despotic rule and the fact that his Queen was a Catholic all contributed to his unpopularity and antagonism of the people. "The times were out of joint and pessimism and satire over the natural results of the dissatisfaction with the existing order." Thus the literature of the age too was filled with themes of decay, dissolution, disease, sickness and death.

● The relation between any two periods of a literary history is not fully investigated with the acknowledgment of the co-existence of inherited texts and contemporary texts alone because every period is distinct with the presence of at least one residual, emergent and the dominant ~~within the~~ presence of it. Tragedy is a diachronic tradition that has been written across time thus maintaining the concept of 'tragedy' and thereby the two generic markers that make ~~a~~ tragedy to be a residual element. Considering the ages in which Sophocles, Shakespeare and Webster have written the plays, it is clear that the structure of feeling and the horizon of expectation was totally different in each period. While in Sophocles' period, it was the violation of kingship that

made tragedy happen, it was the violation of Divine ought to kinship and violation of moral and gender norms that led to tragedy in Shakespeare's age. Similarly it was the innate pessimism and melancholy in Webster's period that led to tragedy.

Shakespeare and Webster use the generic markers from Aristotle's prescription of tragedy but the form changes according to the structure of Feeling of the time. Even though all these plays are in dramatic mode, tragedy is constructed based on how tragedy is perceived at the time and also based on other value systems like kinship and kinship which are either part of the dominant culture or deviant from it. Generic markers ~~work just like thematic elements as residual~~ emergent and dominant. Thus it can be said that even while the generic markers of the tragedy, namely, Anagnorisis and Peripetia, was present in all the three plays, the cause on the structure of Feeling of the period and the horizon of Expectations of the audience.

● Critical note

Most wide symbolic interpretations have been made of the Oedipus - Jocasta relationship. Sigmund Freud and his followers have called this relation with the term Oedipus-complex.

Freud interprets it with "sexual impulses towards our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence towards our fathers." Sigmund Freud interpreted the relation as a symbol of man's unconscious act of trying to go back to his mother.

The natural drive and attraction of a human male towards the body of his mother is called Oedipus-complex. The infant lives in complete satisfaction of his desires and a heavenly state when he is in his mother's lap and also in the mother's womb. So, he carries along the experience of that heavenly satisfaction in his unconscious mind, and he always wants to go back to the blissful state. When he grows up and into the world of struggle, uneasiness, pain and displeasure, he naturally desires to escape from the world of reality and go back to the same blissful state in the mother's lap.

● References

- Wikipedia - "Oedipus Rex" by Sophocles.
- A Goldmine of EUROPEAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE by Dr. AKRAM HOSSAIN.
- Literature on 'Literary Mode': Tracing Generic Markers in Oedipus Rex, Othello and Duchess of Malfi. Author: Gopika Nain V.I
- eNotes - Oedipus Rex by Sophocles