

The Tragic Hero of Thebes

Alexander D. Monagan

Cathedral HighSchool

World Literature

Mrs. Graning

September 6, 2024

The Tragic Hero of Thebes

The play “Oedipus” was written and directed by Sophocles. That is well known as a tragedy. In the play the protagonist, Oedipus, who is a well renowned hero has a very vital tragic flaw which ultimately leads to his downfall. “The Tragedy of Oedipus” informs us before the play starts that a prophet in Oedipus' old village tells Oedipus that he will someday kill his father and be married to his mother and his son. Oedipus flees his old village and returns to this village called Thebes. Along the way the previous King of Thebes Laius and Oedipus meet at a crossroad. During the meeting neither one of them knew the idea that they are father and son, and Laius strikes him with his horse's whip. Oedipus gets scared and kills his dad Laius and his guards. After Oedipus arrives in Thebes, he helps interpret a prophecy and saves Thebes and becomes a hero. Shortly after a plague gets struck upon the village of Thebes and the people are coming to Oedipus for help. Sophocles likes to use a lot of irony in his stories and plays that he writes. In the play “Oedipus” there is a lot of dramatic irony where the audience knows what he has done but Oedipus does not know. Oedipus has a lot of great characteristics and good personal traits but these traits can also be very bad in certain situations and sadly in his case it costs him the throne and shame not only upon the village but upon himself as well. Oedipus embodies a true tragic hero due to his hubris and noble character which ultimately turns out to be his fatal flaw.

In the play “Oedipus the King” ,Sophocles makes Oedipus the classic tragic hero. The key characteristics that Oedipus has that makes him a tragic hero is his noble, ambitious and hubris. Oedipus is willing to do anything to uphold his honor and make sure that the people under his reign will be safe and protected. In the story ,Oedipus was making it very clear he would get to the bottom of who murdered the previous king Laius. Oedipus states “What I must do or promise to do to save the city of Thebes from this plague”(Oedipus 11). This is an example of Oedipus's noble and hubris characteristics in the play. “But I suffer for you, for my city, and for myself”(Oedipus 11). Another example of Oedipus' nobleness

and hubris character. Oedipus is willing to do whatever it takes to bring peace and safety to the people of Thebes. Sadly he has no idea and is blind to the fact that he caused the plague .

Oedipus' most tragic flaw is how his determination to know the truth at times can cause him to be blind to certain realities and act off of impulse decisions. Tiresias who is the prophet for the god Apollo tells Oedipus what is causing this deadly plague, the deadly virus to spread and who is causing the plague.(Oedipus 19-20). The prophet tells Oedipus that he is the one that caused the plague to happen because he killed the previous king of Thebes and is sleeping with his mother. Instead of listening to Tiresias he goes off on him and then frames him and his brother-in-law Creon for trying to turn against him and frame him for the cause of the plague. Oedipus throughout the play still believes that he did not commit the crime of killing the previous king and is excessively trying to find out who is behind the murder. “Perhaps the seer who has no eyes can see the truth. But tell me all you know”(Oedipus 35) This is another example of Oedipus being overbearing about finding out the truth. He kept asking her this question over and over until she finally had enough and told him everything he knew about her previous husband Laius.

Oedipus second biggest tragic flaw his hubris mindset can cause him to be blind and ignorant in certain situations.(Oedipus 20-24)Oedipus tries to have Creon and Tiresias ordered to be banished or killed because he believed that they set him up and tried to frame him for a murder that he believed he did not commit. Instead of jumping to conclusions, he should have tried and assessed the situation and seen how he murdered the king instead of blaming it on himself. Oedipus hubris caused him to be ignorant whenever he believed he could outsmart a prophecy which said he would kill his father and marry his mother. “You will kill your father and end up falling in love with your mother who gave birth to you (Oracle of Delphi). Despite his efforts to escape the prophecy given to him, he ends up fulfilling his prophecy without him even knowing. His hubris and arrogance blinded him which led him to make more impulse decisions and even though he had the right intentions, it just made him look worse.

Oedipus was a tragic hero like many others who suffered from fate. No matter what Oedipus tried to do to prevent his prophecy from coming true sadly nothing worked out for him and his prophecy still

came true.(Oracle of Delphi) you will be married to your wife who is your mom and murder your father. Oedipus did his best to stop them by fleeing but fate ultimately caught up to him. While trying to figure out the truth without accepting that he did, Oedipus learns and figures out his worst fear is coming true. (Jocasta 40-42) Jocasta tells Oedipus about how he was born and the Oedipus realizes that the same thing happened to him which causes both of them to believe that Oedipus is Jocasta's son. Oedipus fights the reality but soon comes to the realization that the prophecy might be true. "To seek no further" (Jocasta 58) once she figures out the prophecy is true. Oedipus then realizes fully that the fate the Oracle of Delphi has come true.

In conclusion, Oedipus is a very well known tragic hero. He tries his best to escape the prophecy but sadly that did not happen and his prophecy came true anyway. Sophocles uses a lot of dramatic irony to show Oedipus's tragic flaws throughout the play. Oedipus's tragic flaws and downfall shows how greeks believe that you cannot escape the fate and prophecy of the gods. Oedipus' whole life has been dictated by this prophecy that was given to him. He attempts to try and outsmart the prophet and escape it and have control over his destiny. But in the end he ends up fulfilling his destiny that the Oracle of Delphi had laid out for him. "Sophocles does a great job of using dramatic irony and other literary devices in the play. Oedipus as a tragic character is heroic because of his struggle, pitiable because of his weakness before the forces of his destiny, and his tragedy arouses fear in us, because he is in the same predicament and difficult situation like us, though he was a great man otherwise. The irony of his fate is that fate has done what it wanted to before he started actually believing in it" (M.Ali). Even though he commits some sin, he wins over our sympathy, because he is a victim of fate, circumstances and surroundings. His committing sin is not willful. For this reason whenever he knows about his sin, he curses upon himself, and becomes blind of the sight of his eyes by which seeing his father, he has killed him, and has seen such parts of the body of his mother that should not be seen, and now he does not want to see the good things of the world. Therefore, though he commits sin unwillingly, mentally he is a pure man who is only a prey in the hands of destiny"(M.Ali). Oedipus' tragic fall will remind us to not be hubris or be to blind to listen to people whenever we ask people for help.

Works Cited

Oedipus the Hero in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex./What makes Oedipus a Hero?Oedipus the Hero in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex.

<https://www.operaphila.org/community/dress-rehearsal-program/oedipus-rex-plus-lilacs/what-makes-a-hero/>

M Ali Notes/ Oedipus as a Tragic Hero.

May 01, 2014

https://malinotes.blogspot.com/2014/05/oedipus-as-tragic-hero.html#google_vignette

Sophocles Oedipus the King | Book | By Nicholas Rudall | Drama