**Oedipus the King: The Tragic Hero's Journey from Nobility to Despair**

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English IV

Mrs. Graning

September 13, 2024

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The main character in Sophocles' "Oedipus the King" is the epitome of the tragic hero as described by Aristotle, who exhibits a combination of nobility, personal flaws, and self destruction. Oedipus' noble birth shapes his character, making him intelligent and driven by a strong sense of duty, which helps him earn the respected role of leader in Thebes. However, it is these very flaws—his pride, impulsiveness, and relentless search for the truth—that eventually bring about his tragic downfall (Jacobs, 2021). This essay will discuss Oedipus as a tragic hero, focusing on his noble character, his tragic flaw, and the key events in his story.

The opening stages of the play introduce Oedipus as a great king, truly loved by his people due to his decisive actions and intellect. He has resolved the Sphinx's riddle and, in doing so, saved Thebes from its sadness, “the pain we inflict upon ourselves hurt most of all”. In return, his people look up to him as a hero. Being of the aristocracy - of King Laius and Queen Jocasta, he is one of the noble kind. In fact, Oedipus exemplifies the characteristics that make an ideal ruler: he is compassionate, proactive, and concerned about the welfare of his people. He shows this when he is addressing the citizens of Thebes, where he says, "my children," showing his paternal concern and responsibilities he has for them (Castelli, 2022). His commitment to finding the truth about what ails Thebes with its plague shows his persistence and sense of justice, because he wants to eliminate the cause of his city's misery. It’s “dreadful the knowledge of the truth can be when there’s no help in truth”.

Regardless of these traits in his character, Oedipus is not totally free from flaws. His tragic flaw is due to his excessive pride and stubbornness. It is arrogance that makes Oedipus think that he can outsmart fate and the prophecies given to him by the Oracle. Learning that he is fated to kill his father and marry his mother, rather than returning home in an effort to avoid this prophecy, he flees Corinth. This puts him on a course of action that will fulfill the very same prophecy. This choice proves him to be reckless and the tragic luck in his life. His goal of running away from fate leads him towards finishing it. Furthermore, he has a very short temper and develops decisions of impulsive nature which resulted in his loss. In rage, he kills a person at a certain junction who, later is discovered, was his father King Laius (ZHU, 2020). This is a pride-driven violent incident and a sense of superiority that sets the ball rolling for his tragic disintegration.

As the play goes on, Oedipus's relentless pursuit of truth becomes both his strength and weakness. Yet, “the truth is what I cherish and that’s my strength,” and Oedipus thrives off of just that. In search of further enlightenment, he consults Teiresias, the blind prophet, who reluctantly discloses the horrific truth about Oedipus's parentage and his perpetration of Laius's murder. With pride, Oedipus has Teiresias dismissed and further accuses him of conspiracy, which once again proves that he refuses to accept his fate. This inability or unwillingness to listen to others from experience is another indication of his tragic flaw. Noble of intention, but self-destructive in the determination to discover the truth follows through, but, “those who jump to conclusions may go wrong”. It is in this process of self-discovery that he shockingly realizes that not only has he killed his father, but indeed he has married his mother, Jocasta (Raphael, 2021). Indeed, this has shattered his identity and plunged him into such great suffering. The tragedy of Oedipus is not confined to personal misfortunes that fall upon him, but extends to a universal consequence of his story. His fall invokes pity and fear, two essential elements of Aristotelian tragedy. The audience witnesses the collapse of a mighty king due to his own failure. In our culture, “how terrible it is to know, where no good comes to knowing”. It is a lesson that teaches the dangers of pride and human fallibility for their esteemed intelligence. What heightens the depth of Oedipus's suffering is that he now knows what he has done; out of desperation, he blinds himself, “to see the truth when the truth is only pain to him who sees”! The symbol of not being able to confront the truth he has unraveled (Castelli, 2021). This punishment of himself shows how much in agony he is and how irreversible the outcomes of his decisions are.

Moreover, the tragic fate of Oedipus gives a reason for profound questions of fate, free will, and human existence. It is told that though Oedipus does have choices in his life, yet he is confined to those prophecies that were to outline his life. This struggle between fate and free will is one of the principal tropes of Greek tragedy and invites the audience to consider the degree to which individuals may be able to control their lives (Seneca, 2022). Oedipus's story stands as a sad reminder of the delicacy of human life and how it is at the mercy of life's impulse.

In conclusion, Oedipus is the quintessential tragic hero, as he reflects the very character and flaws that define him. His high birth and noble attributes are overshadowed by his tragic flaws. He is brought to total ruin, thereby affecting feelings of both fear and pity. By way of Oedipus, Sophocles ponders serious issues concerning one's fate, free will, and the human condition that have continued to linger well through an audience. We can say that the tragedy of Oedipus will always remind us of the difficult moments in our life, coupled with the consequences of the choices we make. This cements his place within the opening of this classic tragedy that, “no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.

Sophocles crafts a powerful narrative around the figure of Oedipus, whose noble birth, tragic flaw, and inevitable downfall make him a classic tragic hero. His fate is sealed by his own actions, which are driven by his desire to challenge fate and assert his independence. Despite his good intentions, Oedipus cannot escape the tragic consequences of his pride. His story not only aligns with Aristotle’s definition of a tragic hero but also serves as a timeless reflection on the limitations of human power in the face of destiny.

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