

We are not your perceptions, nor choices, nor actions. Even so, we are the experiencers of the whole, the observers of a consciousness, that can navigate, and find meaning (Pursuit of Wonder).

In the two tragedies, *Macbeth* and *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare and Sophocles grant Macbeth and Oedipus a hubristic tone in various instances of the play, and a contrasting hopeless tone in other cases climax, falling action, and denouement of the play with the means to convey the harrowing consequences of acting above deterministic phenomena, to fruition; such as death or dethronement. Shakespeare and Sophocles’s implementation of the two contrasting tones illuminate the abstraction that Macbeth and Oedipus ultimately lack control over their lives, decisions, and actions.

In Macbeth, by William Shakespeare...

If the assassination/ Could trammel up the consequence, and catch/ With his surcease success; that but this blow/ Might be the be-all and the end-all here,/ But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,/ We’d jump the life to come. But in these cases/ We still have judgment here, that we but teach/ Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/ to plague the investor” (Shakespeare, 1.7.2-10).



While ignorant to the factors which will affect his decision-making, and what is to come, Macbeth resides in the comfortable state of kingly pride as he rationalizes his design to not kill King Duncan. Soon after Macbeth’s compelling speech, elaborating upon his realization, “bloody instructions which, being taught, return/ return/ to plague the investor” he does in fact kill Duncan (Shakespeare, 1.7.2-10. This is Macbeth’s illusion of being in control, of his actions, but clearly, this in control does not last, if it was even there in the first place,

“Methought I heard a voice cry, “Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep”... Still it cried, “Sleep no more!” to all the house.“/ Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more” (Shakespeare, 2.2.35-44).

The more elements/ roles/ entities connected to one’s life, the less free-will there is. Therefore, once Macbeth committed the regicide of king Duncan, he added ‘Sisyphean-task’ of covering up one misdeed with another to his life — each misdeed was an additional element to Macbeth’s stew of troubles. Additionally, all previously arguable quantity of Macbeth’s free-will becomes dust, which causes Macbeth’s tone to turn hopeless as he experiences hallucinations of a disembodied voice cry, “Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more./ Macbeth shall sleep no more” (Shakespeare 2.2.35-44). The hallucinations are only one element, while other elements such as guilt, hallucination, hatred, anxiety, insomnia, discomfort, cause of king Duncan’s subjects’ poor state... , are all disruptive elements external to the realm of Macbeth’s ‘control’.

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,/ Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,/ To the last syllable of recorded time;/ And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!/ Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/ And then is heard no more. It is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing” (Shakespeare, 5.5.19-27).

In the denouement, Macbeth gifts the audience another soliloquy. This time however, Macbeth possesses a hopeless tone as he refers to life as a, “way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!/ Life’s but a walking shadow” (Shakespeare, 5.5.19-27). Macbeth’s hopeless, pessimistic tone in this soliloquy, is largely due to the death of Lady Macbeth, but more significantly because he realizes that the uncontrollable spiral of miseries was, in one way or another, an aftermath of his act of regicide. Although Macbeth was once the thane of Cawdor, thane of Glamis, and now king of Scotland, he is still human, and prone to ignorance; his delayed acknowledgement of his ignorance is like a shaken up bottle that has reached a crescendo, causing him to perceive life like a “poor player,/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/ an idiot, full of sound and fury” before his death (Shakespeare, 5.5.19-27) .

Essentially, the element of ‘disaster by surmise’ originates from one’s illusion of being in control. And since each individual knows so little about what anything actually is, one has never and can never know exactly what exists on the other side of what happens to them, or because of them — regardless how good or bad, luck or unlucky it may seem. In Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, a hopeless Walter possesses the same delusional sense of control as Macbeth and Oedipus. But, instead of regicide, or patricide, Walter suffers from the consequences of not knowing what exists on the other side of his seemingly promising transaction. Put simply, ‘disaster by surmise’ affects every human-being. Even so, the acknowledgement of one’s ignorance can make the difference in the disaster’s extremity.

With all this being said, I descry respite in Walter Pater’s assertion:
“we can seek great passions that give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity” — perhaps this is the silver lining to our preordained fates?

In Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles...



Oedipus: “In doing this,/ I’m acting as an ally of the god/ and of dead Laius, too. And I pray/ whoever the man is who did this crime, / one unknown person acting on his own/ or with companions,/ the worst of agonies/ will wear out his wretched life” (Sophocles, 14).

In the exposition of the play, Oedipus delivers a compelling speech to fellow Thebans regarding the pursuance to identify Laius’s murderer. In his speech, Oedipus’s aristocratic hubris seeps through to his tone while addressing his subordinates as he calls himself, “an ally of the god/ and of dead Laius, too” by punishing the murderer (Sophocles, 14). Moreover, Oedipus’ harsh tone while delivering his address exhibits his own perception of his self-importance and hierarchy.

Oedipus: “You dare say that! Can you possibly think you have/ some way of going free, after such insolence?... Who taught you shamelessness?/ It was not your craft... Speak what? Let me hear it again more clearly... Am I to bear this from him [Teiresias]?—Damnation/ Take you! Out of this place! Out of my sight!” (Sophocles 19-23).

As Teiresias, the blind prophet, sheds light on the hidden, wicked facets of Oedipus’s life, Oedipus attempts to shatter the legitimacy of the prophet’s words in efforts to shield the legitimacy of what he has believed to be true, “Can you possibly think you have/ some way of going free, after such insolence? Who taught you shamelessness?/ It was not your craft...” (Sophocles 19-23). Because the audience knows that the prophets words are true, Oedipus’s coarse response to Tiresias is dramatically ironic. Additionally, Oedipus’s hubristic tone, justified through his royal status, presents itself as he abases Tiresias with zero evidence to support his assertions, “am I to bear this from him [Teiresias]?—Damnation” (Sophocles 19-23).

Oedipus: “Ah Kithairon! why did you shelter me?/ When I was cast upon you, /why didn’t I die,/ then I should never have shown the world my execrable birth” (Sophocles, Exodus. 74).

In the Exodus, as Oedipus unravels the ruthless truths of his past, he leaves behind the hubristic tone of earlier dialogues when he surmised that someone among his subjects was the perpetrator. Instead, he adopts a hopeless tone while he begins to connect his misdeeds which led to his abrupt plunge to disaster, and how he had no control over any of i. Oedipus contemplates if he were to be left to die as a baby in Kithairon, perhaps he could have “never have shown the world my execrable birth” (Sophocles, Exodus. 74).