

Oedipus

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Oedipus: The Tragic Hero

Tragic heroes in literature are protagonists that are otherwise perfect except for a tragic flaw that eventually brings them down in the end. Tragic heroes populate plays throughout literature. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Othello is the tragic hero; in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman is a tragic hero; and in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is a tragic hero. Oedipus is the tragic hero who has an error of judgment and has flaws that combined with fate, bring about tragedy to him and others.

Oedipus Rex by Sophocles is an ancient Greek drama that is about moral responsibility and nature of innocence and guilt. Oedipus, the protagonist, is a young Sheppard in Corinth, who finds his destiny by trying to flee from it. Oedipus receives an oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He flees from Corinth to Thebes and on the way, Oedipus kills his father Laius, without knowing his true identity. Oedipus makes it to Thebes where he meets Iocaste, the queen of Thebes, and falls in love. Oedipus solves the riddle of Sphinx and is promised the kingdom and the queen, Iocaste. They have four children together and then a priest declares he followed his destiny he was trying to run away from. Iocaste hangs herself with guilt and embarrassment and Oedipus blinds himself and runs from his kingdom of Thebes.

Oedipus has numerous lacks of good judgment in *Oedipus Rex*. He makes a statement to his kingdom that they all will get revenge on the killer of their former king. "Whoever killed King Laius might-who knows? - Decide at any moment to kill me as well. By avenging the murdered king I protect myself" (*Oedipus*. Prologue. 141-143). Oedipus tries to kill whoever

attacked and killed Laius. This tragic decision expresses irony because Oedipus is the true killer of Laius. Oedipus does not know that Laius was his father and the King of Thebes is a part of the tragic flaw. Oedipus kills his father and that leads him to summon guards to find the killer. Once they realize the killer is Oedipus, it leads to great tragedy. Oedipus also jumps to conclusion about Teiresias and Creon working together to overthrow him as king. "What savage envy is stored up against these, if Creon, whom I trusted, Creon my friend, for this great office which the city once put my hands unsought- if for this power Creon desires in secret to destroy me!" (Scene One. 166-170) Oedipus tells Teiresias that Creon and Teiresias are both jealous and makes himself believe his people are trying to rule against him. This also leads to his tragic downfall.

Oedipus's lack

of good judgment puts him in danger with not only his life, but the life of others. The oracle Oedipus receives warns him that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He runs from the city of Corinth for the country of Thebes. He remained oblivious about his destiny and Teiresias later tries to expose Oedipus of his true destiny: "But the double lash of your parents; curse will whip you out of this land some day, with only night upon your precious eyes." (Scene 1. 201-205). If he were to stay in Corinth, this tragedy would not exist. He runs away from the prophecy without staying calm about the situation. Iocaste realizes she marries her son and hangs herself with guilt. When Oedipus realizes the truth, he blinds himself and is driven away from Thebes. "Oedipus, noblest of all the line of Kadmos, have condemned myself to enjoy these things no more, by my own malediction expelling that man whom the gods declared to be a defilement in the house of Laius" (Exodos. 151-155). Oedipus punishes himself for the pain he causes himself and others.

Sophocles' theme for the play *Oedipus Rex* is to not have excessive pride. In the prologue of the play you see the first impression of Oedipus by him calling the crowd "my children" and "I have come myself to hear you"; "O mighty King, we turn to you. Find us our safety, find us our remedy, whether by counsel of the gods or men." (Prologue. 43-45) The Priest of *Oedipus Rex* bows down to Oedipus because he is king. Citizens of Thebes do not realize he is the killer of Liaus and married his mother. Oedipus takes his pride to an excessive amount and he does not admit his wrong doing until later in the tragedy. "I think that I myself may be accurst by my own ignorant edict." (Scene 2. 217-218) Oedipus throws his pride away and realizes that what he did was wrong and apart of his tragic downfall.

Oedipus makes a lot of wrong decisions that is harmful to himself and others. His decisions, along with this fate, such as summoning to find Liaus' killer and fleeing from the city of Corinth to run from his destiny, made him a tragic hero. Oedipus having too much pride with his kingship of Thebes also leads him to being a hero of his own tragedy. The prophecy was true about Oedipus and once he realizes, he blinds himself and chooses to be exiled from Thebes. Creon takes over the kingdom and Oedipus is never to be spoken of again.