

The tragedy of oedipus

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The tragedy of Oedipus the King by Sophocles, is a story of a man named Oedipus who becomes king, and through a series of events, ultimately meets his downfall. Through his display of hubris and hamartia throughout the play, Oedipus has risen and fallen. Oedipus' misfortune has been argued as "some error of judgement of frailty", or if he is just a tragic hero doomed with a tragic flaw. A tragic hero is "the protagonist, the hero or chief character of a tragedy, is a person of high estate, usually a king, queen, or member of the royal family, who is neither superlatively good and just not wholly vicious and depraved, but who is brought low by some error of judgment or shortcoming".

In Oedipus Rex, a play written by Sophocles, Oedipus' hubris and hamartia eventually lead him to his downfall, making him a tragic hero. The first quality of Oedipus that justifies him as a tragic hero is his hubris. Hubris is defined by the Webster-Merriam dictionary as "Exaggerated pride or confidence". Oedipus is a proud man; praised as the King of Thebes and the defeater of the Sphinx, but it is his pride, his own belief that he is a good man who is favored by the gods. As the Chorus said, "Pride breeds the tyrant violent pride, gorging, crammed to bursting with all that is overripe and rich with ruin—clawing up to the heights, headlong pride crashes down the abyss—sheer doom!" (In 963-967).

In his attempt to find the facts to prove he is favored by the gods, he only proves to himself that he suffers from a cruel fate. Oedipus' hubris also influences him to fulfill the oracle and further intensify his punishment from the Gods. Even before Oedipus came into power as the King of Thebes, he allowed his arrogance to control his judgment and reign over his actions.

Although he has enough reverence to the deities not to assume himself to be an equal with the gods, but greater than them it is clear that Oedipus perceives himself to be of a greater importance than the lesser mortals that surround him. As he said, “ One of you summon the city here before us, tell them I’ll do everything. God help us, we will see our triumph-or our fall” (In 163-165). He is conceited to think that he can shape his own destiny and the gods can punish him for this arrogance. Another quality of Oedipus that confirms the idea of him being a tragic hero is his hamartia. Hamartia is defined as a personal error in a protagonist’s personality, which brings about his tragic downfall in a tragedy. The defect in a hero’s personality is also known as their “ tragic flaw”. One of Oedipus’ tragic flaws displayed in the tragedy is his lack of self-knowledge. When he hears the story of how the king, Laius, was brutally murdered, Oedipus is eager to get to the bottom of the story and find the person who is guilty. He never wonders if it is him, even though he knows he murdered a man not very long ago. When Oedipus is confronted by Tiresias about the murder of Laius, he is shocked and appalled that someone would say such a thing about him, showing that he feels he can do no wrong. He becomes outraged and says to Tiresias, “ You, shameless- aren’t you appalled to start up such a story? You think you can get away with this?” (In 356-357) and ultimately starts to put the blame on Tiresias.

This shows that Oedipus cannot look inside himself to find the truth, and he does not want to know the truth about himself. Also Oedipus states, “ Lost in the night, endless night that nursed you! You can’t hurt me or anyone else who sees the light—you can never touch me” (In 879-880). This furthers the

fact that Oedipus was made a fatal mistake in his understanding of the information. He kills his own father and marries his mother out of ignorance. He has set a curse on the man who kills his father, not knowing that it is he who has done so, creating his own downfall. The theme of Oedipus plays a great role in proving how Oedipus is a tragic hero, doomed with a tragic flaw. The theme of "the limits of free will" is described as the power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate; the ability to act at one's own discretion. It is difficult to say how justly one can accuse Oedipus of being "blind" or foolish when he seems to have no choice about fulfilling the prophecy. As Teiresias said to Oedipus, "I have no more to say; storm as thou wilt, and give the rein to all thy pent-up rage" (ln 341-347).

Regardless of what Oedipus does or says, fate will always play itself out. Similarly as Jocasta says to Oedipus, "A prophet! Husband, listen to Me. No human being on Earth need fear what prophets say. I'll prove it. A prophet came to Laius Not God, a prophet only and told him that one day his son..." (ln 707-725).

Jocasta is trying to explain to Oedipus that the prophecy could not possibly be true and that he should not worry about such a thing. She is bringing him to the realization that fate will happen regardless of what others say or do. Oedipus seems only to desire to flee his fate, but his fate continually catches up with him. Oedipus, a man who becomes King and through a series of events, ultimately meets his downfall has been argued as "some error of judgement of frailty", or if he is a tragic hero unfortunately doomed with a tragic flaw. Through Oedipus' elements of hubris and hamartia, he eventually meets his downfall, deeming him a tragic hero.