

Sophocles' oedipus as aristotle's tragic hero essay sample

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Sophocles' Oedipus is an impeccable personification of Aristotle's concept of a tragic hero. Per Aristotle's idea of a tragic hero, Oedipus possessed the qualities of a tragic hero while the story reflected the rubrics that the tragic hero need to undergo. Below is a review of Aristotle's criteria of a tragic hero with the corresponding explanation of how Oedipus met and satisfied them.

Per Aristotle's prescription, the tragic hero must be a character of noble stature and greatness. Under this heading, Oedipus occupies the highest position in society. He was the King of Thebes. He had royal blood because his father was indeed a King. When he was abandoned by his own father, he was adopted and raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth, who acted as his step parents. In practically in his lifetime, Oedipus lived a life of noble stature.

The nobility of Oedipus is also reflected in his virtuousness. After learning about the loathsome oracle, he tried to prevent it from happening by leaving his country (Corinth), preferring to live a simple life and relinquishing his interest to his father's crown. He was discreet enough to waive his power ambition for the sake of his parents. This shows his virtuousness of kindness and benevolence.

However, this also served as the hamartia or error that has tragic consequences in the play. Oedipus thought that he can circumvent the oracle or his dreadful fate that he will murder his own father and marry his own mother. In leaving Corinth towards Thebes, he thought that he can outwit the will of the gods and get away from it. In which case, there was a

presumed arrogance or sense of hubris on the part of Oedipus as his actions were meant to avoid if not challenge the will of the gods.

In the course of his quest to escape from the oracle, he was unknowingly and actually heading towards his real destiny and on the way of fulfilling the oracle. The flaw of Oedipus was his conviction that he can elude the oracle, his destiny and the will of the gods. While Oedipus was indeed noble and impressive, he was nevertheless human and thus born to make mistakes. Such imperfection and predilection of this great hero allows people to identify with him.

As to be discovered later in the story, Oedipus realized that he killed his real father, King Laius and married his real mother, Jocasta. The fulfillment of such curse is what plagued the city and Oedipus decided to exile himself. This realization is Oedipus' anagnorisis, which is the climax of the story. This involves the tragic hero unexpectedly faced by his own guilt, admitting it and embracing its consequences. (McLeish, 1999, p32) To provide a comparison to the defiant and insubordinate character of Oedipus to the will of the gods, another character in the play was provided in the personality of King Creon who manifested a contrasting attitude towards the gods. At this situation, Creon showed how humble, dutiful and submissive he was to the will of the gods. Instead of executing the instructions of Oedipus, he referred and sought approval of the gods first before carrying out the exile of the tragic hero. Thus, part of Oedipus' anagnorisis is the realization and acceptance that humans cannot escape his destiny and must always abide by the will of the gods including one's punishments.

The exile of Oedipus forms part of his peripeteia or an absolute and complete turn around of his well condition indicated externally by physical suffering and internally through disgrace. His downfall and ruin is a series of misfortunes and heartbreaks. Oedipus' cry of agony was deep. His cry to Zeus expressed disbelief and repulsion at the downfall of one whose joy and great rule in Thebes have been bared mortal in every way. And he was a disgrace to his entire kingdom because of his incestuous marriage to his own mother. Oedipus cries,

" Unbar the doors and let all Thebes Behold the slayer of his sire, his mother's- ' that shameful word my lips may not repeat. He vows to fly self-banished from the land; He also played the central role for the fulfillment of such curse which is what plagued the city....."

Oedipus blinded himself so that he can no longer see the pain and misery that he had caused. He also thought that his inability to see the truth which is the inevitability of fate and submission to will of the gods should make his undeserving of the gift of sight. Her mother, after learning of the truth, had committed suicide.

The series of tragedies that Oedipus underwent was not entirely warranted. The penalty he paid for was not commensurate to the type of crime or offense he has committed. Up until now, one can surmise that Oedipus still suffers punishment and bantering. Freud's " Oedipus Complex" was construed based on the tragic fate of Oedipus. This psychosexual disposition refers to a male child's sexual attractions or " desire to sleep" with his

mother and a sense of jealousy or desire to kill his father. (Brennan, 1989, p248) Thus, Oedipus name had been permanently associated with incest.

Finally, Aristotle's story of a tragic hero must be a source of self discovery and learning for its audience. While it stirs up fervent feelings, the tragedy of the hero does instill despair and dejection among the audience. While tragic stories incite pallid emotions like compassion and distress, the tragic fate of Oedipus was meant for people to learn from his mistakes and thus allow us to overcome unhealthy predispositions in life. The value of the story does not rest purely on its entertainment value but on its didactic or instructive functions. In the case of Oedipus, it was meant to enlighten people about the irrevocability of fate and the importance of conformity to the will of the gods, which is precisely why plays like those of Sophocles are performed during the Greeks' religious celebrations.

References

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