

Oedipus: a tragic hero

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



Oedipus: A Tragic Hero Aristotle's tragic hero is one of the most recognizable types of heroes among literature. A tragic hero combines five major points all of which have to do with the hero's stature in society, his faults, how these faults effect him, the punishment his faults gets him, and how he reacts to this punishment. Aristotle explained that the story of Oedipus the King, written by Sophocles, is a perfect example of a tragic hero. In the play, Oedipus is given a prophecy in which he is told that he will kill his father then marry his mother.

As in many Greek plays, Oedipus tries to run from his prophecy and ends up fulfilling exactly what it is foretold. Through the play we see that Oedipus posses many of the characteristics of a tragic hero such as: he is of noble stature, his downfall was his own fault, and that his punishment was not wholly deserved. The first trait that Oedipus possesses that makes him a tragic hero is that he is a man of noble stature. Within the first lines of the play, Oedipus immediately supports this in saying, " Here I am myself-/you know me, the world knows my fame:/I am Oedipus" (7-8).

This quote shows that Oedipus is so confident in people knowing who he is that he is willing to put this out there, though he is not being overly confident. This quote is later given reason to when we hear from other characters such as the Priest when he explains things that Oedipus has done such as, " You freed us from the Sphinx, you came to Thebes/and cut us loose from the bloody tribute we had paid/that harsh, brutal singer" (44-46). The Priest depicts when Oedipus defeated the Sphinx, which is the task that gains him the position of king of Thebes.

The next characteristic that Oedipus possesses that makes him a tragic hero is that his downfall is of his own doing. The act that ultimately contributes to Oedipus' downfall is that of when he kills his father and he explains to Jocasta that he killed everyone, " I killed them all-every mother's son! " (898). Since he is talking about his father's caravan it shows that he, indeed killed his father even though he was unaware that it was his father at the time.

That is only the beginning of his downfall though as he earlier told the Chorus that anyone harboring the murderer would be cursed, even if it was himself, "...if by any chance/he proves to be an intimate of our house...may the curse I just called down strike me! " (284-287). This shows just how serious that Oedipus was about punishing this person and even though he doesn't understand that it is himself, and takes awhile for him to realize, that he was responsible for what happened to him. The final discussed characteristic that Oedipus possesses is that his punishment was not wholly deserved.

There are three main punishments that Oedipus has to go through because of his crime. Those punishments are his exile from Thebes, the suicide of Jocasta, and the loss of his sight. However, the punishment that pushes everything over the edge is when Oedipus strikes out his own eyes. When he appears to the Chorus he comes out and speaks of how horrid he feels for everything in saying, " The blackest things/a man can do, I have done them all! " (1541-1542). During this very scene the Chorus speaks, not to Oedipus directly, but to each other and they literally shrink away from him.

It is obvious that they don't believe he deserves this through their words, " O the terror--/the suffering, for all the world to see/the worst terror that ever met my eyes,/what madness swept over you? " (1432-1435). The Chorus continues to speak of how Oedipus cursed himself by the gods and that this is his punishment, but cannot understand what god would force such a punishment on any man. Works Cited Mifflin, Houghton. Language of Literature World Literature. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005. Print.