

Psychological theories of sophocles' oedipus the king analytical essay

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



Psychology and literature are united by a common intent in searching for the universal answers. Philosophy and literature helps to understand the motives of the heroes' behavior and psychology explains how the poetry affects human emotions.

One of the greatest tragedies of Sophocles, Oedipus the King touches upon a deep psychological theme of the parents-son relations which lately was called the Oedipus complex and the theme of faith as a main key of the human's life movement.

Based a myth, the story begins before Oedipus' birth when the oracle predicted Laius the King of Thebes the death from the hands of his son in case if he marries with Jocasta. Nevertheless, Laius disobeys the prediction and after the birth of his son, fearing for his life, orders to kill the child. Oedipus was left in the mountains but didn't die. A Corinthian shepherd found the boy and cared about him.

He took the boy to the Corinthian king Polybus who gave him the name of Oedipus and cared about him like a father. Suddenly, after many years, Oedipus learns that he was adopted. Asking Oracle about the solution, he is informed about a destiny to kill him father and marry his mother. Trying to avoid the faith, Oedipus leaves his home and goes to another place. However, the destiny can't be changed.

Running away, he travels down a road. He meets a group of people included his real father Laius. Oedipus kills all of them on the road after the

arguments. Obviously, Oedipus couldn't know that one of the men he killed was his real father. Therefore, the first prediction comes true.

Oedipus comes to the City of Thebes, marries the queen and becomes a king saying that his " spirit grieves for the city, for myself and all of you" (Sophocles). Seeing his responsibility, Oedipus tries to find the king's murder. He lives happily with his wife for years and has four children.

The will of man vs. the will of the Gods as a key characteristic of the whole Greek literature is clearly described by Sophocles. In spite of a will of the protagonist to avoid the prediction, faith is more powerful issue as an instrument of the Gods. Trying to find the murder of Laius, king Oedipus needs to ask the Gods. There is no solution in ancient Greece that can be found without Gods' help.

Oedipus asks Oracle from Apollo to help his investigation. And Oracle commands them " to drive the corruption from the land, and don't harbor the murderer any longer" (Sophocles). Oedipus learns that he is that murder and his wife, in fact, is his mother. Thereby, the whole prediction has come true. Oedipus is a good ruler and honest and decent man.

However, according to the ancient Greek literature, nothing can change the faith. King Laius has to be killed by his son and this happens by chance in such random situation. Nobody can prevent this to happen, if there is a faith that Oedipus has to be a murderer of his father.

The heroes have no control over their lives. Perhaps, nowadays, an idea of the absolute faith seems quite bizarre, but for the ancient people such attitude was completely reasonable.

Segal says that " the play is a tragedy not only of destiny but also of personal identity: the search for the origins and meaning of our life, our balance between " one" and " many" selves" (4). The theme of self-injury and suicide are also connected to the family until the end. Oedipus rightly feels guilty and blinds himself. Sophocles sees only one possible conclusion based on his idea of moral and faith.

This physical change also is a symbol of the internal transformation of the protagonist which comes from the place of king to blinded and abandoned old man. This idea is similar to the biblical story of Samson. The family betrays Oedipus. However, the protagonist accepts this situation just because he is sure of the predictability of his life.

It seems that the solution can't be found and the terrible mistakes of the past will always follow Oedipus' family. Realizing an impossibility of the change of past, Oedipus can't achieve other good things, he doesn't see any perspective.

The awful crime of his past destroyed his life forever. Looking back on the life, Oedipus sees that things could be prevented. However, it is the faith and, perhaps, everything would be the same even in case of choosing the way and events.

Obviously, the psychological theory of the Oedipus complex had not been known in the ancient Greece. The psychoanalytical approach of this problem appeared only at the beginning of 20th century. However, such complicated topics and psychological motives of the heroes' behavior were quite popular among Greek.

The conception of the Oedipus complex was produced by the German psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud. He sees Oedipus as a story of the hidden sexual impulses that lead man to dangerous situations (174).

Basically, this conception is stated on the sexual attraction to the opposite sex parent and angry attitude to the parent of the same sex. Exploring the psychological stages of personal development, this theory describes a boy's feelings for his mother and jealousy and anger toward his father. A boy sees the life as a competition between him and father for possession of mother.

The Oedipus complex represents the universal unconscious sexual attraction to the child's parents (Goodrich 182). Nowadays, this conception is a key top of the psychoanalytic theory.

Although this theory is called after the tragedy of Sophocles, the main psychological motives of the heroes' behavior are the hopelessness and conscious subjection to the faith and Gods' will. If Oedipus has suffered from the complex, he wouldn't run from his family. He loves his foster father and wants to avoid the prediction. Oedipus's example is rather a story of the meaningless of life.

He lives in a tragic universe where nobody can understand his horrible suffering. Oedipus begins with pride and loses it becoming ashamed and abandoned. He can't bare his meaningless life and blinds himself. However, Oedipus is the only one who can blame him.

He did everything to prevent the tragedy and fatal end. Sophocles clearly defines his protagonist as a hero archetype which starts from the state of knowledge and sacrifices his life in order to help his family.

Sophocles doesn't give us the final answer about a future of the protagonist. The story has no moral lesson. Sophocles' tragedy Oedipus the King discovers several psychological motives of the human's behavior where the most acceptable solution is the resignation to the faith and Gods' will.

Freud, Sigmund. A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis. Trans. S. Hall. New York: Horace Liveright, 1920. Web.

Goodrich, Peter. Oedipus Lex : Psychoanalysis, History, Law. US: University of California Press, 1995. Web.

Segal, Charles. Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Web.

Sophocles. Oedipus Plays of Sophocles: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Kolonos, and Antigone. Trans. R. Bagg. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004. Web.