

Tragic fate of greek heroes essays example

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A story is written when a prediction is made. A character's journey is laid out as they're being guided towards their fate by the invisible hands of the Gods. Fate is as important today as it was thousands of years ago and this was the reason the Greeks incorporated the concept of fate in their stories and plays. While fate can decide a person's well-being or destruction, the Greeks almost always depicted fate in a tragic sense. By depicting their heroes as prone to tragedy and fate, the ancient Greeks who conceived these fables might have been looking to reassure the audiences that even great and valorous heroes were not immune from the wrath of the Gods and fate. Therefore, one can understand that Fate is any action or event occurring as a result of supernatural influences. In the lives of all people, fate plays an overbearing role that most people do not easily realize. This essay will examine the concept of fate as seen in two great works, namely Oedipus Rex and The Odyssey.

Fate in Oedipus Rex

The main character in Oedipus, time and again, displays his recognition of the manner in which the Gods have reduced him to a despicable fate. However, the most important lines that show Sophocles recognizing the concept of fate in this story, " It said Laius was fated to be killed by a child of ours, one born to him and me." (Sophocles Line 857-858) In this case, Laius is the father of Oedipus who is also a King and receives the above line from an oracle. Therefore, at the very beginning of the story, fate dictates that a tragedy in the form of a father's death at the hands of his son should occur. Even Oedipus, time and again, recounts the manner in which fate has treated him stating, " It was my fate to defile my mother's bed." (Sophocles

Line 951) In the play, the chorus too sings repeatedly to save Oedipus from the fates but to no avail since fate always as her way. In fact, Oedipus also states “ If there is some suffering more serious than all the rest, then it too belongs in the fate of Oedipus.” (Sophocles Line 1610-1612) Therefore, one understands that fate had at one time, a degree of purity, but that it ultimately, and despite his most arduous efforts, brings irresistible and unspeakable suffering. (Scheepers 139) This is especially shown by Sophocles in the case of Oedipus. While some people feel that Oedipus’ hubris enables this tragedy to hit him, it is indeed fate and the divine working of the Gods that led to his tragic and miserable downfall. (Scheepers 142)

The lines above clearly highlight the manner in which the Gods and fate together shaped Oedipus’s life for the atrocious deeds that he performed, albeit unwittingly. Marjorie Barstow considers that while fate did play a role, Oedipus might have modified his behavior to fit the predictions of the Oracle or that quite possibly acting in an irrational manner on the basis of irrational predictions does lead to disastrous results. (p. 4) This viewpoint is an important one since it helps one understand that even though fate is beyond a character's control and determines a character's destiny, a character has full autonomy over his/her own action. In the case of Oedipus, a choice that he makes decides and seals his fate. In numerous places in the epic, the king highlights his guilt for having killed his own father and having been in an immoral and unholy relationship with his own mother. But despite the guilt, the situation has been lost for Oedipus. Towards the very end of the tragic saga as well, fate only has more pain and sorrow for Oedipus since he is rendered blind and exiled. Even the chorus concludes the play with the lines <https://assignbuster.com/tragic-fate-of-greek-heroes-essays-example/>

“ we cannot call a mortal being happy before he’s passed beyond life free from pain.” (Line 1813-1814) This conclusion strengthens the argument in favor of fate since both destiny and fate can affect a person so long as he is alive and not once he is dead. Thus, one sees the overwhelming hand of fate in this tragic tale.

Fate in Odyssey

The Odyssey is a classic example of a Greek tragedy wherein the Gods decide the fate of the human characters in the story. However, the story displays the concept of free will in conjunction with fate. In The Odyssey, the responsibility of one’s life is one's own; instead of leaving events and happenings on fate, the characters have a considerable control upon their own way of life. While the Gods do control many aspects of the story’s direction, it is the people in the end who decide where they end up through the choices they exercise. For instance, the Gods hold Odysseus captive for eight years and when they mutually decide to free him they inform his captor Kalypso. However, the choice of whether he wanted to leave or not lay with Odysseus since Kalypso states, “ You would stay here, and guard this house, and be immortal.” (Homer 267) However, Odysseus left the place, primarily due to the fact that it was fate that offered him the choice. But even when he left the place in a boat the Gods aided by Poseidon send Odysseus’ boat to a distant land where he is free from the influence of the Gods for some time. (Homer 270) Poseidon acts in this manner as retaliation because Odysseus had blinded Cyclops in the eye. This instance, shows the manner in which fate is controlled and manipulated by the Greek Gods in the story. The Gods are almost human-like in their act of revenge and anger

against erring humans. Even when Odysseus decides to go his own way he is still influenced by the actions of the various Gods and fate. Therefore, in a way, Poseidon blocks Odysseus' path to his home and takes him to another place.

Another instance of free will lies in the conversation between Athena and Odysseus. Athena states " Yes, try the suitors. You may collect a few more loaves, and learn who are the decent lads, and who are vicious- although not one can be excused from death!" (Homer 423) This line clearly highlights the fate of the prospective grooms that were brought on solely by the gods. In this case, their fate arose from the choices that these grooms had made. This is an apt instance of the manner in which a choice made out of free will can sometimes bring about a tragic fate. In most of these tales, including the Odyssey, the Gods and the element of fate introduces a level of chaos and conflict in the story, but the end always depicts the result that the particular hero deserves. (Smith)

In case of the Odyssey, fate is an instrument in the hand of the Gods who use it willingly to either reward or punish humans who worship or abhor them. The story does illustrate that humans have free will, yet it also highlights the fact that humans are mere pawns in the game that fate plays.

Comparison between Oedipus and the Odyssey

Since both the tales display a strong tendency to identify with the concept of fate, it is natural that a comparison of the two from the viewpoint of fate helps the essay identify the ways in which fate works. While the characters in both the tales are influenced heavily by the concept of fate, one observes that Oedipus is affected in a much more tragic manner than his counterparts

in the Odyssey. In case of Oedipus, his 'dusdaimon' or bad fate inherently acts against the king since his deeds are undoubtedly immoral and arguably wicked. (Scheepers 139) Compared to the Odyssey, the element of fate is much more visible and distinct in the story. If one refers to the translation of the play, one constantly understands that most of the characters, including Oedipus and even the Chorus constantly bring the role of fate to the forefront. In this case, however, the Oracle plays a crucial role in the unfolding of the events at the very beginning of the revelation to Laius (Oedipus' father) as well as towards the very end of the story when the Oracle calls for the banishment of Oedipus for having polluted the land. (Line 100) In short, the Gods speak through the Oracle in ordaining the fate throughout the story.

On the other hand, the Odyssey displays instances of fate in a much more implicit manner through the acts of various Gods against humans. In a sense, the characters in the Odyssey seem to struggle with the concepts of free will and fate. The roles of the Gods are much more active in the case of characters in the Odyssey and hence, to some extent, the author assumes that his audience would be able to relate to the concepts in an indirect manner. However, the most important difference is that fate dictates the fact that tragedy is engraved within the very happenings of the story of Oedipus while in case of Odyssey fate dictates that it is best described as a tale of adventure and bravery.

However, the most important point of difference that fate outlines of both the plots are the endings. While Odysseus undergoes various adventures and fights different battles, he is rewarded in the end when he reaches back to Ithaca to his family and friends. One can imagine that he spends his life in <https://assignbuster.com/tragic-fate-of-greek-heroes-essays-example/>

peace and solitude with his family thereafter. However, for the despicable acts that he performed, fate has 'banishment' in store for Oedipus as well as the various perils that accompany exile. One, therefore, sees the manner in which the supernatural concept of fate treats two very different characters and rewards or punishes them based on their acts.

In conclusion, fate is a very strong element in both these sagas. The authors, however, have shaped the element of fate very differently in both the cases. A meritorious Odysseus faces turbulent adventures through his life, but is rewarded in the end, but a person like Oedipus is punished through the end by the very element of divinity that dictates the happenings of fate amongst people. Although, the stories display elements of free will and choice, the element of fate tends to override these elements as visible in the banishment of Oedipus, for instance. In that case, he has absolutely no choice and decides to exercise this choice.

Therefore, in both these stories, fate improves the quality of life in one case (Odysseus) while leading to the deterioration in another (Oedipus).

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