

Oedipus the king



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

and Number Due Reader's Response to a Comparison of The Poetics and Oedipus the King In his The Poetics, Aristotle claims that all of Greek tragedy follows the same pattern, and all contains the same themes. This essay, then, is simply a look at how closely Aristotle's theory fits with Sophocles' Oedipus the King.

Tragedy

If tragedy is the imitation of some serious action, then Oedipus can definitely be called tragic, for more than one such magnanimous event occurs in the play. One example is the king's blinding himself. It is tragic for obvious reasons, but is also an important action because it foretells unknown (probably evil) events to come. Parts of Oedipus are dramatic, rather than narrative. When Oedipus suspects that he has killed Laius, he doesn't tell Jocasta of his suspicions, but drags it out of her bit by bit in an unnecessary dramatic fashion. He asks: Where did it happen? What did he look like? Who was he with? Can the survivor be sent for? Then he cries, " O God, what have you planned to do to me? (42). Oedipus also has several moments that arouse pity, and fear. The most notable of which is King Laius' order to have baby Oedipus killed. Readers (as well as characters in the story) would feel sorry for the baby, but fear a king ruthless enough to kill his own son. The one element that doesn't fit with Aristotle's claim is poetic language. At least in the edition I have, the language is everyday, layperson language. There is nothing poetic about it, and little that requires in depth translation.

Catharsis

The moment in which Oedipus realizes he has killed his father is a cathartic one. He is torn between the repulsion of having had sex with his mother, the knowledge that he has murdered his biological mother, and wanting to save

face as a king, or allow his kingdom to show weakness. I doubt if anyone feels relieved by the events that took place. In the end, it was still depressing, unlike Aristotle's view of Greek tragedy.

Tragic Hero

It is true that Oedipus was neither totally good, nor totally evil. He was, obviously, a murderer, but he was actually attempting to flee because he thought it would save his father, not knowing he was the son of Laius. It is also true that Sophocles needed to put Oedipus into the position of king, so that when the true events were made known, there would be more of an impact, that if we found out some shepherd had accidentally killed King Laius. Oedipus' unfortunate circumstances allow us to feel pity for him. It wasn't his fault that he was ordered killed, and it wasn't his fault that he didn't recognize his own father

There are a few points that don't fit with Aristotle's assumptions. The first is that the events cause the reader fear because it is relevant to his or her own life. Unless the reader is a participant of The Jerry Springer Show, most of us can say we've never killed one parent and married and had children with the other. In fact, I doubt if that is something anyone spends any time worrying about. Second, I don't know how well I agree with the reversal of fortunes idea. His life was fine prior to being told he was destined to kill his father. That was his tragic flaw, but it also took away his free choice. Technically, he chose to kill the king, but not having pertinent information didn't allow him to make a different decision.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that Aristotle's summations come close to fitting Oedipus the King, but it doesn't fit in total, leaving his theory with several flaws.