
STUDY ON THE REASONS OF OEDIPUS' TRAGIC FATE

Yan HUANG

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering
No. 188, University City, Lingang Economic and Technological Development Zone, Yibin City, Sichuan Province,
China

ABSTRACT

Oedipus the King is a great Greek tragedy by Sophocles. Aristotle ever took it as the sample to explain his standpoint in his famous Poetics. The readers always are touched deeply by the miserable fate of Oedipus, but who causes the happening of the terrible sins? Oedipus wants to escape from his terrible fate, but, just like a puppet of God, realizes God's plan.

Key Words: Oedipus the King, a puppet, free will, fate.

INTRODUCTION

Oedipus the King is one of the most famous plays of ancient Greek. His author Sophocles is one of the three greatest Greek tragic dramatists. This play has a perfect plot. It tells the story that the child Oedipus would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. After hearing his prophesied fate, Oedipus tried his best to avoid this thing happening. The very actions taken to fight against this fate, however, led him to fulfill the prophecy. Tragedy is an imitation of persons who are above the common level [1]. Sophocles' tragedy also follows this principle. He shows the readers a great tragic hero, who loves his people, respects his predecessor and accepts his responsibility bravely for his sins. Oedipus cannot escape from God's clutches, no matter what effort he has made. It seems that he is just a puppet of god who tries to prove his power over human beings. As in his essay "Oedipus Rex: The tragic Rhythm of Action", Francis Fergusson mentioned "In one sense Oedipus suffers forces he can neither control nor understand, the puppet of fate" [2]. In the whole play, Oedipus is always struggle to escape the realization of the prophecy, but no matter what he did, God's plan came to be true at last.

GOD'S PLAN

In order to show his omnipotence, God make his plan. He first let people know what would happen and then let it happened. The oracle was known even at the first moment of the birth of Oedipus. In this course, the poor Oedipus with the high personality become the puppet as a tool to realize God's plan. No matter what means Oedipus used to change this oracle, all prove to be in vain.

Why did God do this? William Ellis said in a lecture Reading for Writing " Oedipus stands for Greek citizens, who don't believe God's wisdom and think they have a higher intelligence than God in their unconsciousness". [3] It is something "from the highest motives"[4], the victim has no choice but to receive an absolute result. In order to thwart the prophecy, Oedipus' parents fastened his feet and told shepherd to kill him. Because of the shepherd's pity, however, Oedipus

become the son of the king of Corinth rather than died. This is the first step of God for his final purpose. What the god Apollo did next was to tell the grown Oedipus in Corinth his fate “you are fated to couple with your mother.../you will kill your father, the one who gave you life” [5]. The innocent Oedipus, in order to get rid of this terrible prophet, “abandoned Corinth, ...running, always the shame of all those oracles come true.”[5]

However, what he does seems just a way for God realizing his aim. In his trip, he come across Laius and his followers. He “killed them all” [5], which is unbelievable, since a single person can kill a group of person at the same time. To make his oracle come true, God seems give great power to Oedipus so that he can kill his father “smoothly”. Although Oedipus had ever tried to fight against his fate, under some uncontrolled force, he at last realized the first part of the oracle step by step. All things go under God’s plan

5] Creon answered “The singing, riddling Sphinx. /She... persuaded us to let the mystery go” [5]. Why so many people died in the hands of Sphinx except Oedipus and he can answer her question and save the city of Thebes, and why will Sphinx stop the people of Thebes from tracking down the killer? Either one of the two assumptions hadn’t been done, Oedipus cannot become the king of Thebes. Even if these had been done, why didn’t the seer explore the truth of the murder immediately, since he knew all? Just as Oedipus said “but the great seer never accused me then—why not?” [5]

Even though it is assumed that all this probabilities have some bases, if the Thebes haven’t suffered plague, Oedipus will finish his whole life with Jocasta happily and proudly. However, God won’t let this situation happen. He did attack the Thebes with plague. At this moment, he come back to his original aim “Drive the corruption from the land,/ don’t harbor it any longer, past all cure, /don’t nurse it in your soil—root it out!” [5]The God finally demonstrate what he wants. In the ending part of the play, Oedipus was flushed out of Thebes, in exile. All his life in all, he is controlled wholly and strictly by God, acting like a puppet.

OEDIPUS’ FREE WILL

“The events of this play shows an underlying relationship of man’s free will existing within the cosmic order or fate and that both the concepts of fate and free will

At the beginning of the tragedy, Oedipus took many actions which led to his downfall, since he could have waited for the plague to end and he could calmly investigated the murder [6]. While because of his responsibility and the great love for his people, Oedipus choose to be with his people to fight against the disasters and to do everything to end the plague. He said:

Well I know

you are sick to death, all of you,

Your pain strikes each of you alone, each

in the confines of himself, no other. But my spirit

I have wept through the nights, you must know that,

groping, laboring over many paths of thought.

After a painful search I found one cure:

I acted at once. [5]

Far more than I fear for my own life. [5]

From the words above, Oedipus can be seen as a great king who can do everything for his people, living with them, feeling what they feel, suffering what they suffer. Just because of his love and responsibility, once he get a way to solve his people's problems, he would act immediately. Thus he is so zealous to find out the murder, since this is the only way to get rid of the trouble his city confronts.

He cursed the murder so bitterly, even those who hide the murder would suffer punishment. This hatred to the murder stems from his love for his people. Besides his great love for his people, he also demonstrates sincere loyalty and respect to the former king.

Even if God had never urged you on to act ,
how could you leave the crime uncleaned so long?
you should have search. [5]

In addition to his love and loyalty, Oedipus greatness also lies in his bravery and courage to accept the responsibility for what he has done unintentionally. He had tried so hardly to avoid the terrible result, while all prove to be in vain. As F.R. Dodds said in his "On Misunder- standing the Oedipus Rex":

Oedipus is great, not in virtue of a great worldly position—for his worldly position is an illusion which will vanish like a dream—but in virtue of his inner strength: strength

Oedipus is great because he accepts the responsibility for all his acts, including those which are objectively most horrible, through subjectively innocent. [4]

Kirszner and Mandell commented that the protagonist should be like the rest of us, only possessing some weakness or flaw [4]. In Oedipus the King, Oedipus is also possessing some weakness or flaw certainly, while as concerning his final suffering, the life of Oedipus seems, even from the first day, has already been arranged by God. That is his destiny. His whole life is just a trap that God had designed to show his power over human being.\

CONCLUSION

Oedipus' free will and God's plan both bring the happening of the tragedy. But in the whole course, no matter what kind of free will Oedipus take, it comes only better to prove the oracle. Compared with the fate, the free will shows so weak strength. What's worse, this strength is just to push the happening of tragic fate. In the play, Oedipus shows more like a puppet, whose hands and feet were controlled by somebody else. And his fate inevitably was decided by his controller.

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