

The Tragedy of Fate in Oedipus the King

Yuzhu Zhang^{1,a,*}

¹Humanities Department, College of Arts and Science, Hubei Normal University, Jinshan Street,
Huangshi, Hubei Province, China
a. 16011010232@stu.suse.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: Among the tragedies of ancient Greece, Oedipus Rex is a work well worth exploring in depth. The study of the problem of fate and tragedy in work has been a topic of interest so far. This article focuses on the tragic destiny of Oedipus, manifested in two different forms: the "oracle" and the "eye". The oracle drives the development of the story, leading Oedipus towards a predetermined end and suggesting his ultimate fate, while the eye leads people to experience the world of light and darkness, perceive the deafening impact of fate, and grasp the essence of things with the 'eyes of the heart'. In the end, Oedipus' struggle with destiny is a failure, and he goes round and round in an unavoidable course of destiny that has already been ordained. Although the tragedy is predetermined and fate is dominated by an irresistible mysterious force, the freedom and will of the human being are not to be ignored, and human dignity is as important as fate. This sublime understanding of the tragedy of destiny renews the ancient Greeks' inherent perception of the fixed nature of fate and deepens the connotation of ancient Greek tragedy and the sublimation of its spirit.

Keywords: Tragic Fate, Oedipus the King, Oracle, Eyes

1. Introduction

In this essay, the origins of Oedipus' tragic fate and the forces behind it are discussed. The occurrence of his tragedy is invoked in two different forms. On the one hand, there is the oracle, and on the other hand, there is the eye. These two aspects are analyzed and studied separately, drawing on references to the ancient Greek perception of the oracle and the common intention-eye in literature, to conclude that the oracle leads the course of Oedipus's actions, while the eye is a necessary element in his path to a step-by-step recognition of the truth of his fate. Guided by both forms, he fulfils his preordained destiny, behind which the subjective consciousness of man cannot be ignored. The essay's analysis leads to deeper comprehension and awareness of the tragedy of fate in ancient Greek.

The tragedy of fate is an important concept in ancient Greek literature. In ancient Greek literature, the tragedy of fate is the root cause of the tragedies of the protagonists. The word "tragedy" was used in the original Greek language to denote the "song of the sheepman", a ritual for the worship of the god of wine, which was known as the "Ode to the God of Wine". The word tragedy is deeply rooted in the ancient Greek belief in the adoration of Dionysus, the god of wine, who was enshrined in a 50-person chorus dressed as a goat-man to sing about his earthly sufferings during the annual festival. By 569 BC, the ceremony had spread from the countryside to the cities, gradually becoming a national festival, and the heroes celebrated expanded from Dionysus to other ancient Greek heroes. The

philosopher Russell described 'the 'ode to the gods of wine' of the ancient Greeks as 'an escape from the burdens and cares of civilization into the beauty of the unearthly world and the freedom of the breeze and the stars and the moon', an act that transcended society and life [1]. That act gave the ancient Greeks extreme catharsis of their emotions, leading to their spiritual evolution and sublimation, which gave rise to the tragedies that belonged to them.

Oedipus the King was called a " Perfect Tragedy" by Aristotle [2]. The tragedy of Oedipus, the King's fate, can be highly summarized as the futureless struggle of man against the gods. The main character, Oedipus, unwittingly learns of his destiny from an oracle and struggles desperately to resist it, only to fulfil the destiny he has been given one by one by misfortune.

Oedipus is a brave, resolute, bold and kind-hearted young man who solves the riddle of the enchantress, a monarch who saves the people of Thebes from suffering and is beloved by the people of the city, but even such a brilliant character can hardly escape his god-given fate and needs to suffer the tragic consequences it brings. The author Sophocles' intention in arranging the plot in this way stems from the ancient Greek people's view of fate - that man's destiny is governed by an irresistible mysterious force and that the oracle is precisely the manifestation of this mysterious force in front of the people.

2. The Power of the Oracle

The ancient Greeks had a tradition of asking the oracles, whether in matters of religion, war or fertility, to predict the will of the gods through rituals and prophets [3]. In Oedipus the King, the tragic fate of Oedipus is manifested in turn through three oracles, the fulfilment of which drives the story. As the story progresses, the first oracle appears when the old king Laius receives it. Laius goes to the Egyptian temple of Apollo to seek a son and learns from the oracle - that his son Oedipus will grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. So, the newborn baby was abandoned in the wilderness. However, Oedipus did not die; he was rescued by kindly shepherds and adopted by King and Lady Corinthos. The second is that Oedipus unwittingly receives an oracle. When he grows up, he is accused by a drunken minister at a banquet of being an "impostor's son", and, doubtful, he goes to the palace temple to ask about his identity and learns from the oracle that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. He is forced to leave home and flee, vowing never to return to the city, to escape the tragic fate he has been given, but he accidentally kills an older man at a fork in the road, Laius, his birth father. In the story that follows, he defeats the Sphinx, solves the riddle of the Sphinx, and becomes king of Thebes to marry the former queen, his birth mother, Jocasta. Oedipus completed his destiny without knowing it, and the oracle was answered. The last oracle is Oedipus' search for the murderer of the former king. As Oedipus committed the great sin of killing his father and marrying his mother, a plague spread through his region of Thebes. The plague would only stop if he accepted the oracle's instructions and found the culprit, which is the only way. When he finally discovers that the murderer is himself, he is blinded with a golden pin and abdicates from the throne and goes into exile.

In the novel, Laius and Oedipus are terrified and rebellious when they learn that the oracle is to "kill their father and marry their mother". The Laius abandon their baby, Oedipus leaves his birth parents, and they both struggle against the oracle to avoid its devastating consequences, but when the truth comes out and fate reveals itself, they realize in a trance that they are still in the orbit of fate and cannot escape it. On the whole, Oedipus' struggle against his fate comes to naught.

The tragedy of ancient Greece demonstrates that the oracle cannot be disobeyed, nor is it inevitable. The oracle, as a materialization of destiny, is above all forces. Its existence governs people's lives and emotions, and as Russell says, "It is not the Olympic gods, but the "fate", "necessity", "destiny", and "certainty" that are to be found in connection with the true religious feeling", the ancient Greeks were devout and full of faith in the oracles, and they generally believed that they were led by them and that

their power was supreme [1]. Likewise, the oracle was a major influence in the ancient Greek system of government. Hegel says that "the oracle is intimately connected with that democratic form of government which is unique to Greece" [4]. In this connection, the temple of Delphi is the best representative. By the sixth century B.C. Delphi had become the most important divine depository in the Greek lands, and not only did the Greeks have access to divine instructions and oracles for everything, but city-states all over Greece made regular offerings to the Delphian temples, and by the end of the fifth century B.C. twenty-seven "vaults" had been built to house the offerings [1]. The ancient Greeks were devout and full of faith in the oracles, and they generally believed that they were led by them and that their power was supreme. Likewise, the oracle was a major influence in the ancient Greek system of government. Hegel says that "the oracle is intimately connected with that democratic form of government which is unique to Greece" [4]. In this connection, the temple of Delphi is the best representative. Legend has it that LYKURGOS, the Spartan legislator, learned his laws from the oracle of Delphi. In the sixth century B.C. Delphi had become the most important divine trust in the Greek lands, and not only did the Greeks have to obtain divine instructions and oracles for everything, but city-states all over Greece made regular offerings to the Delphian temples, and by the end of the fifth century B.C. twenty-seven "vaults" had been built to house the offerings. The Delphian temples glittered in Greece and assumed an important prophetic role.

3. Expression of Core Imagery: The Eye

Sophocles uses an essential image - the eye - in his description of Oedipus' fate. Here the eyes highlight the fundamental contradiction between man and his fate. "He who has eyes cannot see his own calamity; he who has no eyes can see the fate of others." In the opening scene of the story, the prophet Tiresias says, "You have eyes, but you cannot see your own destruction" "You are the prisoner you have been trying to find", revealing that Oedipus himself is the murderer, yet Oedipus is unwilling to listen and "You live in the night, a darkness that never sees the light," he says in a rage, cursing him for being "blind, deaf and ignorant"[5].

The prophet Tiresias, though a blind man, could see Oedipus' fate clearly, while Oedipus, despite having bright eyes and the courage and wisdom to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, still could not see his own fate. His mockery of the blind prophet Tiresias is a reflection of his own blindness in the darkness.

Oedipus accepts his tragic fate in life and realizes the truth, choosing to be blinded. He believes that his eyes "see those who should not see and do not know those who want to know", that he had grown eyes in vain, that he sees but does not know, and that he uses his physical pain to inform himself that he was blind before he lost his sight. The specific punishment brought to Oedipus by fate is blindness, the blindness of the eyes. However, more pain comes from within, deep in the infinite darkness, experiencing spiritual suffering, which fulfils the novel's classic ending: "Do not say that a mortal is happy until he has crossed the line of life until he has been relieved of his pain" [5].

In *The Republic*, Plato refers to the eyes where he writes of a man in a cave who is released from his chains and forced to get up and walk around, looking up and around at the fire. "In fact, the man in the cave is in pain as he makes these movements and has vain shadows appearing before his eyes; he cannot see those physical objects whose shadows he could originally see" [6]. When someone tells him that what he used to see is all a shadow and that now he sees something more real, something closer to the real, the caveman immediately turns and runs away, still running towards those shadows he can see, which he does not consider to be images, but "real" which are indeed more clearly and precisely defined than the physical objects to which others refer. At the same time, Oedipus is still living in his own darkness, just like the man in the cave described in *The Republic*, unwilling to accept the light, willing only to see the shadows of the darkness he sees, and when the time comes for the real light to appear. At the same time, Oedipus is still living in his own darkness, just like the

man in the cave described in the Republic, unwilling to accept the light, willing only to see the shadows of the darkness he sees. When the time comes for the real light to appear, his eyes will be blinded by the light, as Oedipus is; in a roundabout way, Oedipus is blinded by the truth of his fate.

Darkness and brightness have always been opposing images. The tragic figure is in the darkness, clear-eyed but unable to see his hanging fate; when disaster falls upon him and he is blinded, he is able to see clearly the essence, and in order to gain the light of the inner being, he must lose the outer light; this is the dialectic between darkness and brightness; the substance of darkness is brightness, and the inner brightness is darkness.

Cupid in archery is blind; the statue of the goddess at the entrance to the Western courtroom, with the eyes of the goddess similarly blindfolded, including the blind prophet Tiresias mentioned in Oedipus the King, and more, all convey to us the idea that "the eye cannot see the essence of things, only the heart can be perceived in all things"[7]. Cupid must be blinded, the goddess of justice must be invisible, and the significant things in the world need to be felt with the heart. The blindness of the eyes makes it possible to stop being distracted by the chaos of the world, to stop being confused by the surface of things, to perceive things with the "eyes of the heart", and thus grasp the essence of things truly. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, in his philosophical declaration 'Know Yourself', believed that human beings are no longer individuals with a sensual existence but the embodiment of a rational one. This view is reflected in his confrontation with his own mortality. "The time has come for each of us to go our own way: I will die and you will live, and which of these two ways is better, no one knows but God"[8]. He believed that his death was his own choice, not an escape from his fate and that the choice to die was one he made by relying on what the mind felt, "relying solely on the contemplation of the mind to study pure objects, by which to pursue truth, and to sever as far as possible the connection of the mind with the eye, the ear and the rest of the body, the very existence of such things as the eye and the ear preventing the mind from acquiring truth, from the formation of clear thought"[9]. The tragedy of fate lies in the fact that clear and bright eyes are often confused by appearances and that the only way to recognize reality completely is to lose both eyes. Unable to see the future, one can only guide the way forward with one's heart.

4. Submission to the Tragedy of Fate

In Oedipus the King, Oedipus succeeds in solving the riddle of the Sphinx by relying on his wisdom. The riddle was not only unsolvable by passers-by but also by Apollo's diviners. Only Oedipus was able to solve it, but in so doing, he also disproved the prophets and divine help, meaning that human wisdom triumphed over the oracles. He was elected king by the people of Thebes, and he himself accepted the throne as a matter of course, valuing his wisdom and talents more and more. Throughout the successive reigns of the Theban cities, each king has been a devout believer in the gods and goddesses, often asking for a divine decree in matters and being swayed to a greater or lesser extent by oracles or prophets. Oedipus, however, who had defeated the Sphinx, grew puffed up, and during his reign, he neither sought the gods nor asked for divination but relied on his own wisdom and ruled with reason. Under his powerful rule, the city of Thebes flourished as never before, and the people loved him as a man of 'great wisdom and great service to the city state'. Oedipus' attitude towards the prophet also grew arrogant, and his questioning of him became more prominent. He called the blind prophet Tiresias a moralist and a spellbinder and questioned him, "Hey! Tell me, when did you ever prove that you were a prophet? When that dog (the Sphinx) was here, why did you not speak up and save the people?" [5] It is no coincidence that Oedipus' birth mother, Ilkaste, was also sceptical of prophets. Originally a god-fearing woman, Ilkaste sacrificed her children but still failed to save her husband because of the oracle, so she no longer looks left or right because of it. In her conversation with Oedipus, she reveals, consciously or unconsciously, an atheistic viewpoint, denying the words of the prophet and believing that the outcome is nothing more than that. "You do not need to listen to

words that by chance control things in our future; why should we fear when we cannot see clearly?" [5]

In ancient Greece, however, the meaning of the gods was inviolable. The song team in Oedipus the King had an exalted status. They were made up of elders of great power, believing in the gods and that it was the help of the gods that made them powerful. To a certain extent, their words represent the entire Theban people, and if anyone does not honor the idol and is unwilling to respect the god, "Your god does not honor the idol, and is very arrogant in word and deed; may bad luck catch him" [5]. Oedipus ruled by the power of wisdom and intelligence, but it was these powers that made him despise fate; can a man resist the will of the gods? The author Sophocles tells us that the answer is in the negative, just as his King Oedipus is caught in the crossfire and goes round and round in circles but returns to the track that was ordained by fate in advance. Therefore, never despise or blaspheme god. In a time when fate prevails, human beings cannot usurp the gods. Behind Oedipus's blindness and abdication to exile is, in fact, a resignation to fate and, thus, a restoration of divine power. To live in misery while longing for happiness was the fate that was assigned to Oedipus.

5. Behind the Tragedy

In the perception of the ancient Greeks, tragedy was the embodiment of a sublime intellectual will. Tragedy often brought people a deafening, heart-stopping and powerful force. In the face of the final tragic end, in the face of the final failure, the ancient Greeks faced it with a transcendent attitude, inspiring in it the courage to aspire to a better and more ideal life, to appreciate the extraordinary nature of man. Tragedy destroys life, and the loss of life gives a deafening sense of powerlessness, while life continues to resist the tragedy of life's destiny, thus embodying transcendence and grandeur, showing the supreme majesty of humankind, restoring the dignity controlled by the tragedy of fate, and releasing the desire to live that is inhibited by the tragedy of reality. The tragedy appreciated by the ancient Greeks was "an aesthetic reference to the tragic life of humankind, an affirmation of the existing suffering of life and a reanalysis of it with the rational eye of transcendence, a transcendent life of aesthetic reason born out of the rational analysis. Emphasis is placed on replacing the repressed human ecology with an aesthetic one" [10]. While a repressive human ecology cannot escape from all the miseries of life, an aesthetic human ecology can stand in opposition to it, bringing a positive and optimistic attitude to escape from the tragedies of life. Just like Oedipus in the novel, his fate is already a closed thing with a predetermined outcome, and no matter which direction he goes, it will all lead to the same result - killing his father and marrying his mother, and tragedy is inevitable. In his struggle against fate, Oedipus brings us the spirit of never giving in, the spirit of man's relentless and tenacious resistance to the gods, and his struggle to break free from the bonds of fate. It can be said that Oedipus is a flesh-and-blood individual, full of wisdom and creativity, with the courage to rise up and save himself, a human being in the true sense of the word, to whom the author Sophocles lavishes his sympathy, making him the object of tragic praise. This object of praise sublimates the ancient Greek perception of the tragic hero, and sympathy is not merely a lament for the fates of the world but "a sympathy for their good qualities that have suffered, a sympathy for the tragic figure as the embodiment of ethical power" [11].

6. Conclusion

Oedipus is the tragic man in ancient Greek literature. The tragic fate of Oedipus shows that even though life is a tragedy, one must live it with great vigour and not lose its magnificence. Through the compassion of Oedipus comes a deeper understanding of his own destiny, in which the quest for truth and the search for the meaning of life is at the heart of a strong will to "know yourself".

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