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The Tragic Hero Revisited: A Comparative Study of *Hamlet and Oedipus Rex*

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Abstract

This research undertakes a comparative analysis of two iconic tragic heroes in Western literature—Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*—to revisit and critically examine the classical concept of the tragic hero as defined by Aristotle. Drawing upon the Aristotelian framework of hamartia (tragic flaw), peripeteia (reversal of fortune), anagnorisis (recognition), and catharsis (emotional cleansing), the study investigates how both protagonists embody and transcend traditional tragic paradigms. While Oedipus is portrayed as a decisive, noble king whose downfall results from an unintentional act rooted in fate, Hamlet emerges as a deeply introspective, hesitant prince whose tragedy is shaped by inner conflict and moral ambiguity. The study explores how cultural and philosophical contexts—the Greek belief in fate versus the Renaissance emphasis on individual agency—shape the trajectory and psychological depth of each character. Through close textual analysis, the paper highlights key similarities such as their royal status, moral complexity, and ultimate downfall, while also emphasizing their differences in dealing with knowledge, action, and responsibility. In doing so, the research not only redefines the tragic hero in a cross-cultural and historical context but also underscores the enduring relevance of these archetypal figures in exploring human suffering, ethical dilemmas, and existential questions. This comparative study reveals how the tragic hero has evolved from a symbol of fate-driven downfall to a vessel of psychological and philosophical exploration, enriching modern interpretations of tragedy.

Keywords: Tragic Hero, Hamlet, Oedipus Rex, Fate, Aristotle

1. Introduction

The tragic hero has been the central figure in the Western literary imagination and has concealed the splendor, as well as the vulnerability of the human condition. Since the Athenian stage of the fifth century BCE to the Elizabethan theatre of the sixteenth century, the tragic hero has been used by dramatists to offer answers to questions regarding fate, morality, knowledge and human limitation. Two of the greatest works in this type of archetype are Oedipus Rex by Sophocles and Hamlet by William Shakespeare. These two plays may be separated in time by over 2000 years, but both

plays still form the basis of canon of world literature, not only due to their dramatic art, but also to their deep exploration of philosophical and cultural presuppositions of their epoch (Bradley, 2009; Knox, 1957). Both heroes Oedipus, the highborn and massively ambitious king of Thebes, and Hamlet, the philosophical prince of Denmark, demonstrate this old paradox of human greatness and weakness, though in their own manner that speaks of the moral universes of Greek antiquity and Renaissance Europe.

The classical basis of the tragic hero is offered by Poetics of Aristotle. His hamartia (tragic flaw), peripedeia (reversal of fortune), anagnorisis (recognition) and catharsis (emotional purification) are still very important tools in examining how tragedy generates dramatic unity and moral wisdom (Aristotle, trans. Heath, 1995; Halliwell, 1998). The case of Oedipus, who unwillingly kills his father and marries his mother, is one of the best examples of the Aristotelian model of the noble character's demise caused by both personal imperfection and the inescapable power of fate (Segal, 2001). Hamlet, in his turn, is a dramatically different reenvisioning of the tragic hero: his demise does not occur due to his hastyness and lack of knowledge but rather due to his over-awareness, indecisiveness, and the weight of moral responsibility in a world faced with numerous uncertainties (Bradley, 2009; Kastan, 1999). Comparing these two characters, it is possible to follow the development of the tragedy as the story of the divine destiny or the mental analysis of the human will and the psychological complexity.

This paper conducts a comparative review on Oedipus and Hamlet to refer back to the classical definition of the tragic hero in regard to the change in history and culture. It contends that both heroes fit the Aristotelian paradigm in general, but diverge when it comes to the way in which they pursue the tragic experience: Oedipus as the classic victim of fate and Hamlet as the victim of conscience and doubt in the age of modernity. Compared to the fatalism of Greek, the humanism of Renaissance highlights how widely Tragedy acculturates itself to philosophical atmosphere of the time (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990; Greenblatt, 2004). Also, the analysis discloses that the tragic hero transforms in Oedipus Rex and in Hamlet where collective destiny is depicted to become the subject of individual subjectivity and existential conflict.

Such a comparison has importance not merely in the history of literature, but also in

the further relevance of tragic heroes to the modern audience. Oedipus and Hamlet serve to remind us that humans will always suffer, moral conflict always exists, and that we will always seek meaning, regardless of time or culture. Through a reinterpretation of these archetypal figures, this study aims to reveal the timeless value of tragedy in both its classical and Renaissance manifestations to explain the intricacies of human life.

2. Research Problem

Although Aristotle's Poetics is often invoked, the scholarly literature has not completely charted the operation of the classical formula of the tragic hero (hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, catharsis) when its application in the Renaissance shifted due to the Renaissance preoccupation with individual agency and conscience. The research question is as follows: how do both Oedipus Rex and Hamlet adhere to the Aristotelian tragic form, as well as how they do not, how their cultural-philosophical backgrounds (fatalism in Greek culture, humanism in Renaissance Europe) generate different tragic effects and moral outcomes?

3. Research Objectives

- To analyze how the Aristotelian concepts of hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catharsis are represented in Oedipus Rex and Hamlet.
- To compare how fate and personal agency shape the downfall of Oedipus and Hamlet.
- To explore how cultural and philosophical contexts (Greek fatalism vs. Renaissance humanism) influence the construction of the tragic hero.

4. Methodology

This study is qualitative-comparative research using literature as its method. It relies mostly on the close-reading of the main texts-Oedipus Rex by Sophocles and Hamlet by Shakespeare-with some specific emphasis put on the main moments, which exemplify the Aristotelian ideas of hamartia, peripedeia, and anagnorisis. I use Poetics, a classical model created by Aristotle, to inform the analysis and the related literature on the development of tragedy, psychological richness, and philosophic significance in literature.

The paper places the two plays in their historical and cultural context to draw a point where the role of building the dramatic hero differs. The interpretative support and

critical views are provided with the help of secondary sources such as works of literary critics and theorists. Although the comparison of the two canonical tragedies is reduced to thematic and textual analysis, the results are projected to shed light on how the tragic hero has changed over the ages, thus, providing a perspective on the long-term relevance of the tragedy as a literary genre.

5. Aristotle's Concept of the Tragic Hero

In order to establish the tragic aspects of both Oedipus and Hamlet, it is imperative to first refer back to the original theory of tragedy as expressed by Aristotle in his Poetics. The earliest extant literary criticism, Poetics was written in the fourth century BCE and has influenced Western practitioners and audiences in the understanding of tragic plots (Else, 1967; Halliwell, 1998). To Aristotle, tragedy is not just a tragedy of woe but a well-woven art that aims at eliciting strong feelings and ethical consideration. The vision is centered on the tragic hero as an admirable and imperfect figure whose downfall brings forth the mixed feelings of pity and fear, which lead to catharsis (Golden, 1968).

Aristotle describes tragedy to be the imitation or enactment of an action that is serious, complete, and of some scale, in dramatic form as opposed to narrative and orchestrated in such a manner that it incites pity and fear and therefore attains the purgation, or catharsis, of these emotions (Aristotle, trans. Heath, 1995). The key to this process is the tragic hero who is used to enable the audience to identify and experience estrangement at the same time. The tragic hero is neither a villain, who must be fallen due to wickedness, nor a saint, who may be wrongfully punished, but instead he stands somewhere in between: he is noble but flawed, strong but weak. Such paradox makes his fall both inevitable and very moving (Abrams and Harpham, 2014).

The model of Aristotle has four concepts that are particularly important, namely, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, and catharsis. Hamartia, also called tragic flaw, does not always mean a moral shortcoming, and is rather a mistake of judgment or character that triggers the fall of the hero. In the case of Oedipus, it could be seen as his indiscretion, egoism, or insatiable pursuit of the truth (Knox, 1957; Segal, 2001); with Hamlet, it is seen in his indecisiveness and overthinking (Bradley, 2009). Peripetia, or reversal of fortune, is seen when the actions of the hero, which are

usually aimed at preventing an accident, cause it directly. This comes out clearly in Oedipus Rex when the news of the messenger, intended to comfort Oedipus, ends up convicting Oedipus unknowingly (Sophocles, trans. Fagles, 1994). The accidental killing of Polonius in Hamlet is a triggering event that leads to the unfortunate sequence of events that determine the fate of the prince (Shakespeare, 1997).

Intimately connected to peripeteia is anagnorisis, the recognition or discovery scene in which the tragic hero realizes all that is happening to him. To Aristotle, this awareness increases the emotional effect of the turnaround as it enables the audience to perceive the situation of the hero in its barest simplicity (Lucas, 1968). The anagnorisis of Oedipus is violent and extrinsic: he does it by the irrefutable facts that he has completed the very prophecy he attempted to avoid (Segal, 2001). The acknowledgment of Hamlet is more personal and philosophical, which is summarized as his understanding of mortality and the unexplainable will of fate- there is a divinity that cuts our ends, rough-hew them how we will (Shakespeare, 1997, 5.2.10-11).

Lastly is the climax of tragedy, catharsis, which is the purgation of pity and fear in the audience. The reader sympathizes with the hero since he is not entirely at fault in his predicament, but is afraid of what might happen to him due to his weaknesses which are humanity in general (Golden, 1968; Halliwell, 1998). Tragedy offers us not despair, but insight, through catharsis, as the audience is driven to face the reality of suffering and human limitations. It is this emotional and intellectual cleansing that is what gives tragedy its lasting appeal across cultures and time.

Nonetheless, the structure of Aristotle cannot be applied in studies of subsequent drama forms, especially the Renaissance stage, without being limited. Unlike the Greek tragedy, which tends to preempt the inevitability of fate and the will of the Gods, the Renaissance tragedy tended to focus more on personal choice, moral accountability, and psychological depth (Neill, 1997). Hamlet is hesitant, morally doubtful, and intellectually enriching, e.g., and cannot be easily classified under the Aristotelian label. His hamartia is not one misjudgment but existential crisis, which postpones action to an ineffective time (Bradley, 2009; Kirsch, 1981). In the same vein, the Elizabethan theatre tendency to focus on soliloquy and interiority makes the focus by Aristotle on external action as the vehicle of tragedy problematic (Kastan, 1999).

However, the model proposed by Aristotle is not dispensable as a point of reference. It gives the prism according to which one can observe continuity and progression of the tragic hero. Oedipus fits the Aristotelian model just about perfectly, and is a classical example of the tragic hero, but Hamlet is both an example and a departure at the same time, leading to a more postmodern interpretation of tragedy as a psychological experiment and an existential crisis.

By so doing, the theory of Aristotle is not only defining the tragic hero, it is also used as a scale according to which the formation of other tragic characters can be evaluated. It is in both Oedipus Rex and Hamlet that the tragic form is seen to be resilient, yet it is also seen that the tragic can be adapted to various eras and culture, and philosophical and psychological interests (Greenblatt, 2004; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990).

6. IOedipus Rex: The Classical Tragic Hero

The Oedipus Rex by Sophocles (c. 429 BCE) has been long considered the canonical specimen of Greek tragedy, and to many scholars the best example of the application of the theory of Aristotle. Written almost one hundred years earlier than Aristotle wrote Poetics, the play, however, appears to pre-empt the principles of the philosopher, especially the creation of the tragic hero. Oedipus is noble, bright, and ruthless but he also has the deadly vice of arrogance and unthoughtful decision-making. The path of his life of the hero of Thebes to the blind beggar shows the unstoppable correlation of greatness and weakness which creates the tragic experience (Knox, 1957; Segal, 2001).

Oedipus is portrayed as someone of unprecedented heights at the beginning. He has figured out the Sphinx paradox, freed the town of Thebes, and has been crowned king in gratitude of his wisdom and braveness (Sophocles, trans. Fagles, 1994). Aristotle (trans. Heath, 1995) stipulates that the tragic hero should be superior to the ordinary men, a man whose downfall will be felt meaningful to the society. Oedipus obviously satisfies this requirement: as a king his destiny is tied to that of the city itself. The tragedy of the king turns into that of the polis and stresses the civic aspect of classical tragedy (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990).

But it is within the very strengths of Oedipus as well that resides the germs of his ruin. His insatiable quest of truth and justice which are virtues in themselves turn out to be

devastating when it is turned against him. The exact substance of the hamartia of Oedipus has been a matter of argument. According to Knox (1957), he points out his hot-tempered behavior, and overconfidence particularly his argument with Tiresias, and his fight with Creon. Segal (2001) however focuses on his passion to learn- the rejection to leave a question unanswered even in a case where ignorance would have been his savior. Whatever is read between the lines, Oedipus shows that hamartia is not vice but an error or overdoing good, in the subtle sense of Aristotle.

The turning point, or peripetia, of the drama comes in when the messenger of Corinth comes to Oedipus to tell him that Polybus, whom he thinks was his father, is dead of natural causes. This apparently good news, however, is presented in an ironic manner to show that Oedipus is not the son of Polybus thus triggering off the unveiling of his actual parenthood. The twist is shocking and crushing, as it turns out that what was seemingly a relief to be free of fear turns out to be a verification of guilt (Sophocles, trans. Fagles, 1994). Aristotle (trans. Heath, 1995) outlines peripeteia as the reversal of intention to the same with a twist and in the case of Oedipus, the same pursuit that is meant to keep him safe out of an oracle turns out to be the one that brings it to pass.

The identification, or anagnorisis, comes quickly. Desperate calls by Jocasta to Oedipus to forget his investigation, and her follow-up suicide, hint at the fact that Oedipus is the only person resistant to then take on the truth until overwhelming evidence compels him to face it. And his understanding--O god--was all, And all burst into light! (Sophocles, trans. Fagles, 1994, p. 172)--is the turning point of the play. Oedipus, as opposed to Hamlet, whose identification is revealed over time and in a philosophical way, is violently revealed to him, an identity that deprives him of name, family and of kingship in a single movement (Segal, 2001).

The last element of the tragic sequence, as formulated by Aristotle, catharsis is attained through the response of the audience to the tragedy of Oedipus. The image of the once-powerful king blinding himself and pleading to be sent away to exile stirs both sympathy to his unwarranted unlucky fate as well as the fear of acknowledging the human helplessness to forces that cannot be controlled (Golden, 1968). The disgrace that befell Oedipus is not only his but also symbolic of the delicate distinction between man-reason and God-deed as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990)

note. The viewer, therefore, is forced to face the contradiction to the greatness of humans: the same traits that render Oedipus a great person trigger his downfall.

Oedipus culturally symbolizes the Greek school of thought whereby destiny and the gods eventually dictate the fate of human beings. Even though he is smart and strong willed, he is unable to avoid the prophecy given to him prior to birth. It is this aspect of fatalism that has made some scholars interpret him not as a person in free will but as a loser of divine will (Lucas, 1968). But to make Oedipus a victim is to ignore his agency: to seek the truth, in the face of advice, is an act of both daring and duty. This paradox is stressed by Knox (1957) who thinks that it is not his avoidance of suffering but his direct facing of it that makes Oedipus great and gives him a tragic nobility.

This is why the moral of Oedipus Rex goes beyond the necessity of fate. It also theatrically expresses the boundaries of human knowledge, as well as the risks of being too full of oneself to challenge the divine order. According to Segal (2001), the story of Oedipus depicts tragic heroism of knowledge sought to its very end. Oedipus is deprived of everything, his throne, his family, his eyes, by the end of the play but he has been spared some dignity which makes his plight rise to ancestral value.

On the whole, Oedipus can be said to be the Aristotelian tragic hero in its most straightforward form. His hamartia puts him into the downward spiral, his peripetia and anagnorisis seal his doom, and his catharsis keeps the play memorable to people. Meanwhile, his tragedy is indicative of cultural presuppositions of classical Athens: the powerlessness of the human will, the dominance of destiny, and the ethical burden of responsibility. Oedipus can be considered the classical model of the tragic hero, who could be compared to Hamlet to measure the reinterpretations of the tragic hero later.

7. Hamlet: The Renaissance Tragic Hero

The Hamlet of William Shakespeare (c. 1600) is an immensely important reinterpretation of the tragic hero in the intellectual and cultural context of the Renaissance era in Europe. Compared to Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, which focuses on fate and Godly will, Hamlet frames the tragedy in the details of human psyche, dilemma and corruption in government. Shakespeare modifies the Aristotelian model, but also transcends and offers a protagonist whose failure arises not out of one flaw,

but out of a complex combination of doubt, indecision, and philosophical self-examination (Bradley, 1904/2009; Bloom, 1998).

Hamlet is a person similar to Oedipus, who satisfies Aristotle by being a noble character whose destiny has collective meaning. Being the Prince of Denmark, he has to decide not only his own fate, but also fate of the state itself. However, Shakespeare changes the theme of civil to personal levels: the corruption of the political world of Denmark is reflected in the inner turmoil of Hamlet. According to Greenblatt, the Hamlet play brings into reality the Renaissance anxiety about the untrustworthy nature of identity and the impossibility of finding truth in a world dominated by pretense (Greenblatt 2004). What remains is to have a tragic hero whose nobility rests not merely in his intellectual richness but in his role as a king.

In the center of the tragedy of Hamlet is hamartia, but in a much more ambiguous sense than in the case of Oedipus. The classical critics like A. C Bradley (1904/2009) pin down his fatal flaw as procrastination or failure to take decisive action against Claudius, even though he is aware of his murder of his father. Some other researchers, such as Jones, (1954) propose that Hamlet is frozen by the psychological clash that includes his repressed Oedipal drives. According to more recent scholarship, he is too intellectual and skeptic, as a result of which he doubts the morality and certainty of revenge (Greenblatt, 2004). In contrast to Oedipus, whose weakness is rashness, Hamlet makes mistakes in procrastination, and it shows that Renaissance humanism reorganized the tragic hero as a divided person instead of a person ruined by mere accident.

In Hamlet, the peripateia or reversal is developed not as abruptly as it is in Oedipus Rex. A turning point takes the place as Hamlet unintentionally kills Polonius in the chamber of Gertrude. This unwitnessed but deadly act changes his position of contemplative delay to active outcome and triggers off the madness of Ophelia, the revenge of Laertes and a final plan of Claudius against him (Shakespeare, trans. Bevington, 2014). Peripetia is described by Aristotle (trans. Heath, 1995) as an act whereby the good fortune changes to a misfortune. In the case of Hamlet, reversal is self-inflicted but unplanned, which serves as an example of how the indecisiveness of Hamlet guarantees him the very chaos that he tries to keep at bay.

Anagnorisis or recognition takes a thoroughly Renaissance shape as well. In the case

of Oedipus, recognition is an external revelation which is imposed on him by the fact itself. In the case of Hamlet, it manifests itself within, and eventually leads to him embracing mortality and providence. This acknowledgment is summed up in the graveyard scene when Hamlet stands in front of the skull of Yorick and bears the thought of how all people die: Alas, poor Yorick! Known to me, Horatio" (Shakespeare, trans. Bevington, 2014, 5.1.190). Before the duel with Laertes he makes his last wise and accepts it, saying, "There is special providence in the fall of sparrow" (5.2.233-234), which heralds the change of paralysing uncertainty to serene preparedness. This is seen as the reconciliation of human will to divine order by Hamlet by critics like Kerrigan (1996), an understanding that enables Hamlet to accept his position in the tragic sequence.

The action in which Hamlet is destroyed brings about catharsis unlike that of Oedipus. Although pity and fear are in the center stage, the audience is presented with intellectual stimulations and moral confusion. The agony of Hamlet is not only the result of a predestined prophecy but of the decisions under the uncertainty. Spectator is forced to think about the confusion of conscience, justice, and mortality that is not only achieved through emotion, but also through reflection on human life (Bloom, 1998; Eagleton, 2003). This reflective aspect renders Hamlet a classic Renaissance tragedy since it is filled with cynicism and irony and philosophical insight.

As far as culture is concerned, Hamlet is an example of the Renaissance transformation of communal to individual interests. Oedipus on the other hand dramatises the impossibility of escape in the world of gods, whereas Hamlet is the humanist fight of independence, scepticism, and identity. The fears of their own generation, as evidenced by the Reformation and the emergence of the humanist mind, were the doubts about the certainty of divine justice, the degradation of the political system, and the impermanence of individual identity, and these preoccupations would have been familiar to Renaissance readers in Hamlet (Greenblatt, 2004). In this way, Hamlet is not only a tragic hero, but also a culture symbol of Renaissance subjectivity. Researchers tend to focus on the relative delicacy of Hamlet downfall. In contrast to Oedipus, who cuts off his sight in a melodramatic scene of agony, Hamlet is killed in a duel where he is poisoned and his last deed is to name Fortinbras as a successor. This low-key resolution supports the Renaissance insistence on the limitation of

humans instead of the punishment of deities cosmetically. The heroism of Hamlet is not in defeat of fate but in the honor of surviving in it. As Bradley (1904/2009) notes, the tragedy of Hamlet is squandered potential: a brilliant and sensitive man ruined by the very traits, which make him noble.

Generally, Hamlet is an adaptation of the Aristotelian model of tragedies to become a psychological and philosophical study of human conflict. His indecision is his hamartia, his unintentional action his peripeteia, his acceptance of mortality his anagnorisis and his reflection on conscience and existence by the audience is his catharsis. He is culturally the spirit of Renaissance: skeptic, self-reflective and very human. In case Oedipus is the classical tragic hero who is determined by the fate, Hamlet is the one who is the modern tragic hero who is determined by the thought. In combination they show the historic flexibility of the tragic form in different cultures and eras.

8. Comparative Analysis of Oedipus and Hamlet

The enduring significance of the Sophocles Oedipus Rex and Shakespeare Hamlet is as much a measure of brilliance as it is of probation and the manner in which it highlights the universality and flexibility of the tragic hero. Together they read, and encourage a comparative reading of the operation of the Aristotelian model of tragedy in its cultural and historical contexts. Oedipus and Hamlet both fit the requirements of an Aristotelian tragic hero: they are noble characters whose own shortcomings and external destinies combine to bring about recognition, reversal and catharsis. However, their travels take very different paths--Oedipus is a representative of the classic Greek preoccupation with destiny and community, and Hamlet with the Renaissance fears of agency and personal choice, existential confusion and mental division.

8.1. Nobility and Moral Status

Both Oedipus and Hamlet also meet the criteria given by Aristotle that the tragic hero must be placed in a position of high rank, so that their fates are felt by more than personal misery (Lucas, 1968). Oedipus king of Thebes is a wise and decisive ruler and Hamlet is heir to the throne, the Prince of Denmark. Their positions as royalties make their downfalls not just personal tragedies, but also a danger to stability in their respective states. According to Knox (1957), the demise of Oedipus brings about instability in Thebes, causing plague and desperation, which is the same way the

reluctance of Hamlet extends the corruption of Denmark under Claudius. The kind of nobility that each has is however different. The nobility of Oedipus is civic and heroic, which lies in decisive action, the nobility of Hamlet is intellectual and moral, which is characterized by a hyper sensitivity to ethical dilemma.

8.2. Hamartia: Rushiness vs. Delays

Aristotle (trans. Heath, 1995) outlines hamartia, or tragic flaw, as the main feature of tragedy. In Oedipus, this weakness is in his impetuosity and overconfidence. He is unable to moderate and ignores caution in his insatiable quest of the killer of Laius, a trait that Segal (2001) perceives as a heroic and disastrous aspect. In comparison, the fault of Hamlet is indecisiveness, a lack of ability to turn intent into action (Bradley, 1904/2009). Where Oedipus is too hasty, Hamlet is too tardy. Their hamartias are therefore opposites in a mirror, which is indicative of the differences in culture: Greek tragedy idealized action and its risks whereas Renaissance tragedy idealized thought and its disabling effects (Eagleton, 2003).

8.3. Peripetia: Turn of Fortune

In both plays, there are dramatic turnaround events, but they are expressed through contrasting ways. The peripateia of Oedipus comes suddenly when the discovery of his own guilt makes him the suspect in the death of Laius. The truth-seeker is the victim, and he falls like the savior of Thebes into the curse of Thebes (Sophocles, trans. Fagles, 1994). The inversion experienced by Hamlet is more subtle: after his accidental but final act of killing Polonius, Hamlet turns into a meditative prince and an entangled in a net of revenge and political intrigue (Shakespeare, 2014). Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990) note that Greek tragedy was more inclined towards external reversals due to the fate, whereas Renaissance tragedy was able to involve reversals as a result of a psychological or moral choice.

8.4. Anagnorisis: Formation of Recognition and Self-Knowledge

Oedipus Rex is wretchedly outward recognition. Oedipus is unable to avoid the reality that is shown in prophecy, witness testimony and through the realization of Jocasta. His own knowledge of himself is violent, abrupt and devastating. According to Segal (2001), the anagnorisis of Oedipus dramatizes the boundaries of the human knowledge in a universe dominated by divine order. Hamlet, however, without any rush attains recognition. It is by considering the skull of Yorick and his acceptance of

providence towards the end of act 5 that Hamlet understands that death is inescapable and that divine will cannot be challenged (Kerrigan, 1996). His anagnorisis is philosophical and internal, a re-negotiation with mortality as opposed to identity. This contrast highlights the difference in cultures: to the Greeks, recognition was to find out his tragic destiny; to the Renaissance, recognition was to learn existential truth.

8.5. Catharsis: Emotional/Intellectual

Both the plays have catharsis but in various registers. Oedipus Rex is both a tragedy that inspires pity and fear due to the spectacle of a man who was innocent and ruined by the powers that he could not control. The audience is carried away by the unchangeability of the fate and the anguish of acknowledgement (Aristotle, trans. Heath, 1995). Hamlet on the other hand is a combination of emotional catharsis and intellectual catharsis. The viewers empathize with the pain Hamlet was going through yet they also ponder on the issue of right and wrong, justice and death. As Bloom (1998) suggests, Hamlet will also appeal to the spectators and can appeal to them on a philosophical level to face their concerns about identity and death. In such a way, Oedipus is the classical cathartic model, whereas Hamlet stretches it towards the psychological and philosophic one.

8.6. Fate versus Free Will

The most notable contrast perhaps is the way fate and agency determine the demise of each of the heroes. The tragedy of Oedipus is predestined by prophecy: all his attempts to escape it fail and he becomes the fulfiller of his oracle. His failure is the example of the Greek belief in the powerlessness of human will over the law of gods and the inevitability of its results (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1990). Hamlet, on the other hand, takes agency, despite being inhibited by indecisiveness. His downfall comes as a result of his decisions, the timing of revenge, killing Polonius, dueling Laertes and his trying to balance free will and providence (Greenblatt, 2004). This change of fate to agency can demonstrate a more widespread cultural change involving the group religious order of Greece, as well as the Renaissance humanism, with its focus on the individuality and personal responsibility.

8.7. Action and Inaction

Their relation to action is another contradiction. Oedipus is an action-oriented person who takes chances and risks his life to seek the truth and justice. Reflection paralyzes

Hamlet though. According to Kirsch (1981), Hamlet is focused on moral and metaphysical dilemmas, which do not allow him to take any action, which leads to the tragedy of delay. Oedipus makes the mistake of being too quick (acting), Hamlet too sluggish (waiting). This polarity, indicates that tragedy might be just as much the result of surplus of action as of surplus contemplation.

8.8. Knowledge and Ignorance

In the two tragedies, knowledge is the main theme albeit in differing purposes. Oedipus becomes a thirsty fount of knowledge and finds out that knowledge kills him. His tragedy depicts the Greek paranoia regarding the threats of human chauvinism and over-knowledge (Segal, 2001). Hamlet, on the contrary, already has the knowledge,--the ghost tells him what Claudius has done,--but he is skeptical as to its validity. The tragedy of his interpretation is that he does not discern whether knowledge is reliable or something to do and act on (Bradley, 1904/2009). Oedipus therefore is hurt since he knows too much and Hamlet hurt since he is unable to make the decision on what to do with what he knows.

8.9. Responsibility and Guilt

The two heroes are struggling with responsibility, but in other words. Oedipus takes complete responsibility of acts that he did without knowing. His one-eyedness and exile are a sign of his devotion to justice, which he had to sacrifice at his own expense (Knox, 1957). Hamlet, on the other hand, is in conflict with split responsibility to the ghost of his father, his mother, Ophelia, and Denmark. His hesitation is an indication of his inability to reconcile between conflicting loyalties and duty to do right (Greenblatt, 2004). Oedipus is an example of tragic greatness, who accepts guilt without hesitation; Hamlet is an example of tragic greatness, who does not know guilt because of inability to decide between two conflicting obligations.

8.10. The Tragic Hero

Collectively, Oedipus and Hamlet reflect the development of the tragic hero in other cultures. Oedipus is the classic example of the classical hero who was ruined by the fate but is elevated by the way he took responsibility. Hamlet is the paradigm of the contemporary hero, characterized by the depth of the soul, existential doubt, and the lack of morality. The structure proposed by Aristotle can fit both of them but it is strained by Hamlet whose tragedy is equally about thought as it is about action

(Eagleton, 2003). Such development shows the ways that tragedy responds to cultural fears: in Greece, the fear of fate and divine order; in renaissance Europe, the fear of uncertainty, corruption, and mortality.

8.11. Enduring Relevance

Lastly, the two characters survive since they are dramatizing the universals of human pain. Oedipus is a metaphor of the helplessness of man in the presence of forces that cannot be controlled whereas Hamlet is a metaphor of the suffering of man in the presence of the indecision of choice. The variety of human tragedy, between external necessity and inner struggle, is shown in the diversity of their differences. The fact that they are both royal, morally serious, and ultimately downfall just validates the agelessness of Aristotle adopting him as the world falling to ruin with a mixture of the vise and the situation (Aristotle, trans. Heath, 1995).

9. The Relevance and Modern Interpretation, which has to Last

Oedipus Rex and Hamlet remain relevant through the ages, cultures and intellectual traditions, because of the ability to speak across centuries. The two works transcend their contemporary historical settings to explore universal inquiries of every human suffering, accountability, and quest of significance. Contemporary readings have repeatedly returned to such plays and in them they have discovered archetypal exempla of the tragic hero that are open to new philosophical, psychological, and cultural contexts.

9.1. Psychological Interpretations

Psychoanalysis contributes one of the most powerful readings in modern understanding. An example of Freudian analysis is the so-called Oedipus complex, in which Freud (1920/1955) interpreted the story of Oedipus as a manifestation of his repressed desire to the mother and conflict with the father. Through this psychoanalytic usurping, Oedipus became not a figure of destiny, but rather a representative of the unconscious struggle, and found his path into the modern psychology. Hamlet was also the focus of Freudian analysis. Jones (1954) claimed that Oedipal guilt of Hamlet is the cause of his indecisiveness and his problem is not merely moral but psychological. Although these interpretations have been criticized as oversimplifying, they highlight the fact that the two characters have become instruments of delving into the inner psyche of human beings.

9.2. Existential and Philosophical Resonance

In addition to psychoanalysis, the two tragedies find echo in the philosophy of existentialism. To philosophers such as Sartre and Camus, tragedy is a representation of the absurdity of life: the conflict that exists between human aspiration to meaning and a silent universe. Hamlet, who asks his well-known question, To be, or not to be (Shakespeare, 2014, 3.1.56) is a predictor of existentialist crises of life and death and being true to oneself (Eagleton, 2003). Oedipus is full of the existential paradoxes too. According to Camus (1991), Oedipus does not become great because he evades his destiny but embraces it and lives to the fullest with the awareness of his state of absurdity. In this way, the two heroes are relevant in a philosophical context that is worried about freedom, meaning and suffering.

9.3. Political, Cultural Reading

The political and cultural aspects of these tragedies have been also highlighted by the modern critics. In Oedipus Rex, the downfall of the king dramatizes the vulnerability of political power and the threat of uncontrollable political power (Knox, 1957). Modern interpretation has tended to emphasize how the play resonates in contemporary times of corruption, crisis in leadership, and collective misery during the plague or a disaster- how this resonates in the COVID-19 pandemic (Goldhill, 2020). On the same note, Hamlet has also been interpreted as an attack on politics, despotism, and espionage and the court of Claudius was used as a parable of corrupt states (Neill, 1997). The paralysis of people trapped in the oppressive political regimes is reflected in the suspicions and hesitations of Hamlet, in this opinion.

9.4. Feminist and Gendered Views

One more significant aspect of contemporary interpretation is feminist criticism. Both tragedies relegate feminine voices, Jocasta in Oedipus Rex and Ophelia in Hamlet, whose plight draws attention to the gender aspects of tragedy. Feminist critics believe that not only women suffer individually but also women are systematically silenced by society as demonstrated by Jocasta and Ophelia (Showalter, 1985). These readings extend the tragic structure beyond the male protagonist, and indicate that the real price of the tragedy is usually paid by women and the dismissed.

9.5. Performance and Adaptation

Their flexibility to performance is also the reason why Oedipus Rex and Hamlet

remain alive. Both pieces have been reinterpreted by directors and playwrights around the world in order to capture the current issues. As an example, recent performances of Hamlet have tended to focus on surveillance and political corruption and the play has been placed in an authoritarian setting (Greenblatt, 2004). Postcolonial versions of Oedipus Rex have been used to comment on the issue of imperialism, cultural domination and how the fate of Oedipus can be seen as a collective resistance against the wider forces (Hardwick, 2003). Such adaptations have shown how tragic archetypes were flexible in responding to the changing human issues.

9.6. General Archetypes of Tragedy

What makes Oedipus and Hamlet still relevant to this day is that they are archetypal characters who represent common human values. Oedipus has dramatized the frailty of mankind in front of forces it cannot control, and Hamlet has dramatized the agony of decision and existential skepticism. They are read by Jungian critics as universal signs of the human condition: Oedipus as the destroyer of knowledge, Hamlet as the destroyer of indecision (Jung, 1959/1990). What makes them so attractive over the ages is their ability to take in a variety of interpretive schemata, mythic, psychological, existential, political, without becoming exhausted in their meaning.

9.7. Tragedy and Modern Humanity

Lastly, tragedy is essential in modernity, an issue raised in both plays. Tragedy continues to exist because it dramatizes contradictions that cannot be resolved: freedom and necessity, knowledge and ignorance, action and inaction as claimed by Eagleton (2003). Oedipus and Hamlet demonstrate that tragedy is not tied to a particular time or even particular worldview, but still it remains one of the frameworks of understanding ethical dilemmas and existential issues. Today, in the world that is in a constant state of uncertainty, suffering, and moral ambiguity, these tragic heroes are still a reflection of human weakness and strength.

10. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Oedipus Rex by Sophocles and Hamlet by Shakespeare show the stability in the character of the tragic hero in the course of time, culture, and philosophy. Both Oedipus and Hamlet adhere to the classical structure of a tragedy, as they are presented as highly prominent, morally ambiguous, and tragic heroes, which is why their downfall stirs empathy and terror in the spectator, leading

to their catharsis (Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Butcher, 2015). But their respective tracks indicate the changing nature of tragedy itself: it is no longer a story of a struggle against fate but rather one whose subject matter is individual human soul-searching and existential insecurity.

Oedipus is the tragic hero of the Greek antiquity. His failure is not due to an intentional vice but rather it is lack of knowledge of the truth which, in his case, turns him into a king and then an exile. His narrative supports the Greek way of seeing the world in its inexorable fate and in the constraints of human action (Dodds, 1966). Hamlet, though, is an all-too-Renaissance tragic consciousness: he wavers, doubts, and reasons, the source of his hamartia is not his lack of knowledge but his inability to make a decision due to his overthinking. His downfall is not a matter of fatality but rather a matter of responsibility to morality just as the Renaissance was based on the notion of agency of the individual and the indefiniteness of human will (Bloom, 1998). In spite of these differences, both heroes find themselves at the same point of realization of human limitation. Oedipus does not reject the responsibility in the face of divine determinism and Hamlet takes action when he comes to terms with mortality. Even their travels approve the universal use of tragedy in the dramatization of the instability of the grandeur of human beings and the necessity of affliction.

Therefore, the tragic hero is a literary and philosophical icon since it cuts across historical limits. In returning to Oedipus and Hamlet we find not only how Aristotle has been carrying on his vision but also how the flexibility of tragedy has been keeping up with the various anxieties of human life. These characters help us to remember that tragedy, the fruit of destiny or the fruit of conscience, has a perennial solution to the problems of being a human.

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