



Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant
Professor in English, Narajole Raj College

Oedipus : The King

SOPHOCLES

ENGLISH(CC) SEM-IV;PAPER C8T; *OEDIPUS: THE
KING*



Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant Professor in English,
Narajole Raj College

Plot Structure of the play

ENGLISH(CC) SEM-IV;PAPER C8T; OEDIPUS: THE
KING



Plot Structure of play

- ◆ Greek plays have conditional and fairly rigid architectonics of the plot, as noted in Aristotle's *Poetics*(chapter-12). Aristotle referred to 'the constituents of tragedy', 'the separate sections into which the work is divided', namely: prologue, episode, exode, and choral song, the last being subdivided into parode and stasiman. Sophocles's *King Oedipus* maintains the pattern. But before going into the analysis of the plot construction, we mention two precise turning points in *King Oedipus*. The action of the play is not simple, but complex, i.e. the change of fortune is accompanied by both reversal (peripeteia) and discovery or recognition (anagnorisis). In the play the process of reversal starts with the arrival of the Corinthian shepherd and the discovery takes place when Oedipus finishes questioning the Theban shepherd. With the discovery the fourth episode is over and following the fourth Stasimon we are inexorably led to the exode, in which we hear of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus's self-blinding.



Sophocles most probably for the first time in drama uses flashback technique for unveiling the dark deeds that happened in the past. Flashback is employed in the prologue when Creon narrates how the Thebans came to know of Laius's death. We also hear of Sphinx that had made the Thebans 'let dark things go' and invited them to tackle the immediate problem i.e. how to get rid of the riddling creature.



Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant Professor in English, Narajole Raj College

5

Plot Structure

- ◆ The most important flashback occurs in the second episode when Jocasta tells Oedipus of the oracle happened to Laius foretelling the doom that he is damned to die by the hand of his child. This does not trouble Oedipus so much as what she says afterwards: Laius was murdered at a place where three highways met. Apparently Oedipus totally misses words which followed, that Laius had pinned the newborn child's anklets together and had it thrown by other hands on a trackless mountain. Oedipus then embarks on a long flashback. He tells of his early youth at Corinth, how a drunken reveler had told him that he was not true son of his father, how restless he became on hearing that and visited Delphi to know his true identity. But the oracle disappointed him and finally unexpected circumstances forced him to kill an old man and his entourage. The whole of Oedipus's life is encapsulated in this speech. The life story of Oedipus right from his birth down to his self-blinding is revealed part by parts.



Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant
Professor in English, Narajole Raj College

6

Plot Structure

- ◆ Another technique that is employed by Sophocles is the courtroom atmosphere in the play. There is the predominance of the interrogative sentences in the play. The prologue opens with Oedipus asking the suppliants to tell him what has made them come to him: “My children, latest-born to Cadmus who was of old, why are ye set before me thus with wreathed branches of supplicance, while the city reeks with incense, rings with prayer for health and cries of woe?” The rest of the play proceeds through a series of questions followed by answers: Oedipus interrogates Creon, his interview with Tiresias turns into a two-way interrogation: the blind prophet even demands his right as a citizen to defend his own case.



Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant
Professor in English, Narajole Raj College

7

Plot Structure

- ◆ The same kind of examination and cross-examination is repeated when Oedipus confronts Creon and continues until the Chorus and Jocasta are forced to intervene. The last and the most decisive interrogation takes place in the fourth episode when the Theban shepherd appears before Oedipus. Without any preliminaries Oedipus sets out to ascertain the identity of the Theban shepherd, with the Corinthian shepherd helping him. Once the identity is established Oedipus starts examining him. Short, pointed questions follow question till the painful truth is revealed bit by bit. With the examination of the last witness every mystery is cleared. All that lay so long hidden now comes to light. Oedipus has his recognition (anagnorsis).

ENGLISH(CC) SEM-IV;PAPER C8T; OEDIPUS: THE
KING

Conclusion

- ◆ Aristotle upholds King Oedipus as a model tragedy. Sophocles succeeds in making the Oedipus legend synonymous with tragedy. This is solely due to his masterly handling of the plot: the conscious reversal of the chronological order of events mixing flashbacks with flash-forward (i.e. the prophecies) and proceeding through a series of interrogations. He alternates narration (for example, Oedipus telling his story to Jocasta) with dialogue, all the while the Chorus oscillating between hope and despair. Yet the plot emerges “as a unified whole”, as Aristotle prefers: “its various incident must be so arranged that if anyone of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted”. In spite of the back-and-forth movement, the plot of King Oedipus is tight-knit, and proceeds with remorseless logic to its catastrophic finale.





Designed and Circulated by Milan Mondal, Assistant
Professor in English, Narajole Raj College

9

Thank you

PREPARED BY MILAN MONDAL
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN ENGLISH
NARAJOLE RAJ COLLEGE

ENGLISH(CC) SEM-IV;PAPER C8T; OEDIPUS: THE
KING