Means To Tragic Ends Essay, Research Paper

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Does man really have free will, or does free will lie within a system of limitations

that gradually compose a web of circumstantial fate that ultimately cannot be torn apart?

The events in both Oedipus The King and Antigone controversially suggests that man

ultimately chooses his own deeds and endures fate and the responsibilities for them.

These events brought by fate are unmistakably aggravated by certain characteristics

within the characters. Oedipus, from Oedipus The King, Antigone, and Creon, both from

Antigone possess such flawed characteristics that lead to their tragic ends.

Oedipus possesses a multitude of characteristics, some of them common to other

characters, but pride is exceptionally prevalent. This characteristic, which margins with

utter arrogance, appears to be one of the dominant flaws that causes Oedipus’ tragic

downfall. This is plainly established in the beginning of the play in which he states “I

Oedipus whom all men call the great.” (p11.8). This is strengthened by the Priest’s

replies of “…Oedipus, Greatest in all men’s eyes,” (p12.40) and “Noblest of men”

(p12.46).

However, pride is not the only characteristic which contributes to Oedipus’ tragic

end. There exists his temper, which is initially presented in the argument between

Teiresias and himself. After Teiresias speaks the truth as factual, Oedipus replies “Do

you imagine you can always talk like this, and live to laugh at it hereafter?” (p26.367)

and then soon after calls Teiresias a “fool” (p29.433). His temper is also exposed when

he threatens to banish or kill Creon after Creon’s attempted reasoning.

Another contributing factor is his suspicion for others, this is evident where he

questions Teiresias “Was this your own design or Creon’s?” (p.27.377). He is falsely

rationalizing that Teiresias is secretly plotting, in coalition with Creon, to overthrow him.

Moreover, Oedipus has an unrelenting pursuit for the truth, which is demonstrated

when he finally believes that he is the murderer and that Polybus was not his father.

Nonetheless, he continues with his search with an extensive questioning of both his wife

Jocasta and the messenger.

Furthermore, Oedipus exhibits self-loathing and a desperation towards the end of

the play. After the facts have been voiced, he desperately attempts to rationalize the

evidence and states,

“You said that he spoke of highway robbers who killed Laius.

Now if he uses the same number, it was not I who killed him.

One man cannot be the same as many. But if he speaks of a

man travelling alone, then clearly the burden of the guilt inclines

towards me.” (p47.842).

At the end of the play, after all has been revealed, Oedipus expresses self-loathing as he

whimpers “Now I am godless and child of impurity, begetter in the same seed that created

my wretched self. If there is any ill worse than ill, that is the lot of Oedipus.” (p69.1360).

Although not as potent as her father Oedipus, Antigone also holds a detrimental

sense of pride. This is presented in the speech between Creon and herself, “How can

such as I, that live among such troubles, not find a profit in death?” (p178.507).

An additional contributing element to Antigone’s tragic end is her acceptance and

welcoming of death, which is evident when she states, “Life was your choice, and death

was mine.” (p183.610). Creon affirms this by declaring “In that place she shall call on

Hades, god of death, in her prayers.” (p192.844).

Furthermore, Antigone appears to display righteousness when she states “But if

Creon and his people are the wrongdoers let their suffering be no worse than the injustice

they are meting out to me.” (p196.984).

Not unlike Oedipus once was, Creon was also a proud ruler. In a confrontation

with Antigone he states, “When I am alive no woman shall rule.” (p181.579), which

suggests that his pride is adamant and unforgiving, more so than Oedipus. Creon also

exhibits stubbornness along with his pride, this is evident when he states “My enemy is

still my enemy, even in death.” (p181.575). His pride becomes even stronger when

others attempt to defy his will. His argument with his son Haemon demonstrates this

where he states, “…let it be from a man; we must not let people say that a woman beat

us.” (p187.733) and when he asks “Should the city tell me how I am to rule them?”

(p189.794).

The flawed characteristics held by both Oedipus and Antigone that lead to their

tragic ends are ironically contradictory. The probable foremost characteristic flaws of

Oedipus is his inability to see the situation he has placed himself in, and that he

intentionally ignores the hints and prophesies that everyone else knows. Antigone’s

feasibly leading characteristic flaw is her expectation of pity for the wretched situation

she was born into. In opposition with Oedipus, whereas he does not want or expect pity

from those around him partially because he does not realize his calamitous situation.

The flawed characteristics of father and daughter are similar to the sides of a coin.

On one side, Oedipus is caught in the center of a disastrous situation ignorant to the world

around him. However, on the other side of the coin, Antigone is fully aware of the

impure situation she was born into. Unlike her father, Antigone wants people to know

about her deplorable position so they can show sympathy for her. The strengths of her

father Oedipus, have become her weaknesses, and the strengths of his daughter Antigone,

are Oedipus’ weaknesses.

Creon’s flawed characteristic is undoubtedly his pride. A sense of pride as strong

as a lion, yet as fragile as a small bird, added with his stubbornness and temper, created a

man as unmovable as a mountain. This flawed characteristic prevented him from heeding

to the advice of others, primarily his son, and lead to the destruction of all that he held

close.

Ultimately, Oedipus is guilty in the end, not for killing his father and marrying his

mother, rather it is his attempt to raise himself above others, disregarding the facts and

wisdom brought to him. Antigone, a woman of nobility and idealism, is guilty of the

immature masochistic desire to martyr herself. Creon’s guilt, perhaps the most chosen, is

his inability to recognize that someone other than himself can be right. These

characteristics are fated by man, not by fate itself, and created a web of circumstantial

fate. The events brought on by these characters could have been avoided if the

characteristics were not part of their identities. Thus, it is the characteristics within the

character that determines their fate, not fate which determines their character.