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The Motif of Fate in Homeric Epics and *Oedipus Tyrannus*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Dr. Lisa Raphals, Chairperson

This dissertation examines the concept of fate in Greek antiquity from a literary perspective, looking into how and why a literary text uses fate in a certain way. The main texts of this study are the two Homeric epics and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The chief method of this study is literary analysis, which includes close reading of texts, attention to semantic fields, the analysis of story plot, and the comparison of a series of texts over time and across genre. I also pay attention to the problem of formulaic composition and borrow from the methods of folklore studies.

This combination of methods helps to understand Sophocles' innovation in the

Oedipus Tyrannus and the figure of Oedipus. The Homeric epics present heroes and their fates in the context of oral composition and transmission. As songs that laud the hero's κλέος in immortal memory, Homeric epics do not problematize free will or portray conflicts between the heroes and their fates. This Homeric system of literary representation of hero and his fate, together with its social role, lost context in the fifth century Athens. When traditional beliefs were challenged and new concepts and ways of thinking arose, the old values and solutions for the hero and fate, which the Homeric epics presented, were no longer valid. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus shows his thinking on a different kind of hero and a new relation between the hero and his predicted fate. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus is a hero who outlived his good reputation and saw its dissipation. In a sense, the play demonstrates to what an extent a person is able to face the truth of one's fate, however terrible it is and whatever responsibility it incurs. Oedipus may not be a laudable hero, but his sufferings and his confrontation with fate deserves respect. It is through such a hero that Sophocles gives meaning to the life of his day.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Fate in Homer and Attic Tragedy—Semantic Representations.....	11
1. The Representation of Fate in the <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i>	11
2. Fate’s Representation in the Theban Plays.....	27
Chapter Two: the Plot Function of Fate in the <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	46
1, Fate as a Rhetorical Device in the <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	46
2, Structural Comparison with Earlier Versions of the Oedipus story.....	48
3, Fate in Structure in the <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	56
Chapter Three: the Interplay of Fate and Personality in the <i>Oedipus Tyrannus</i>	76
1. The Sphinx and the Image of Oedipus.....	78
2. Fate versus Individual Responsibility.....	88
3. Conclusions.....	106
Chapter Four: the Significance of Oedipus’ Fate in the 5 th Century Context.....	109
1. The Fulfillment of Fate.....	109
2. Changing Notions of Heroism and Fate from Homer to Sophocles.....	123
Conclusion.....	139
Bibliography.....	144

Introduction

The concept of fate is an important and intriguing one in classical Greek literary works. Most studies of fate in Greek antiquity approach the subject from the viewpoints of philosophy (especially ethics), religion or theology. For example, William Chase Greene's *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Early Greek Poetry* (1944) examines μοῖρα in major Greek works in antiquity, yet focuses on the discussion of theology and ethics.¹

My dissertation takes a different approach. I examine the idea of fate from a literary perspective. By literary perspective I include lexical usages, plot structure, characterization, the choice and arrangement of myth and legends, and so on. How and why a literary text uses fate in a certain way is important in understanding the work in its time and genre, but it has been a less discussed topic. Fate in legends and literary works may include a broad spectrum of events. The most important aspect of fate is a person's life span and the time and manner of one's death. A certain text can also focus on one specific aspect of a hero's life which is of the greatest interest in the story-telling. In this sense, fate can be one or several events in a character's life instead of the general outcome of it. In addition to the fate of a person, literary works

¹ Other important works include: W. Krause, "Die Ausdrücke für das Schicksal", *Glotta* 25 (1936), 142-52; E. G. Berry, *The History and Development of the Concept of θεῖα μοῖρα and θεῖα τύχη down to and Including Plato* (Chicago, 1940); D. Amand, *Fatalism et Liberté Dans l'Antiquité Grecque* (Louvain, 1945); U. Bianchi, *Dios Aisa* (Rome, 1953); B.C. Dietrich's *Death, Fate and the Gods* (1965); Jules Brody, "Fate" in *Oedipus Tyrannus: A Textual Approach* (1985).

also describe the fate of a city, such as Troy in the *Iliad*.

I focus on two particularly important texts. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the Homeric epics are of different genres (both in antiquity and in the present), but they share several important characteristics that suggest them for comparison. Their authors drew on the same stock of myths and legends, yet skillfully selected and arranged them by focusing on particular characters and events, and gave them special force and vitality. In comparison with the epic cycle, Homeric epics focus on fewer characters and events, use less magic, and as a result are more dramatic.² More over, in antiquity the genre distance was not so great. Aristotle distinguishes them only in variation of length, the use of meter and the accompaniment of music; otherwise he discusses the two almost indiscriminately (*Poetics* 1449b).

I begin with the Homeric poems because they are the first texts in Greek antiquity to introduce the motif of fate, and because fate is central to both works. In these poems fate and the Olympian gods, especially the will of Zeus, together drive the plot. My second text is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which takes up over half the dissertation. Although the Oedipus story and Theban legend have a long history before the fifth century BCE, Sophocles' Oedipus is highly influential and to a large extent shapes the modern impression of Oedipus' image. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* also forms the key text of discussion in such modern theories as psychoanalysis and structuralism (discussed below). Moreover, the problem of fate

² See also Griffin (1977) and Scodel in Bushnell (ed. 2005: 181) for more discussion of the dramatic aspects of Homeric epics.

and free will in this play remains an area of heated discussion. My purpose is to see how and to what an extent *Oedipus Tyrannus* inherits and innovates the idea of fate when applying it to the play.

The Problem of Fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Different scholars have approached the issue of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* differently. Some interpretations suppress or totally ignore the element of oracles and fate. Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytical interpretation of the play, believes that the play's powerful and universal appeal to the audience, ancient and modern, lies not in the contrast between destiny and human will, but in the fact that all men share the first sexual impulse to their mother and the first hatred to their father.³ C. Levi Strauss' structural reading neglects the element of fate and the intervention of Apollo, and focuses only on the story pattern and the arrangement of "mythemes".⁴ Among classicists, the discussion mostly hinges upon the interaction of fate and free will: whether the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a play in which the force of fate is so predominant that it excludes the protagonist's free will, or a play that emphasizes free will and gives full play of individual choices. Bernard Knox attaches more importance to free will, and argues that Oedipus's will is free and he is responsible.⁵ Knox's argument is in line with his studies of the "heroic temper" of Sophoclean tragedies, which gives preeminence to the characters in the play.⁶ E. R.

³ Freud, 1953. vol. 4. pp. 260-264, esp. p. 262.

⁴ Levi-Strauss, 1963. pp. 213-218.

⁵ Knox, 1957, 2nd. Ed. 1966. p. 5.

Dodds rejects both extremes either of the tragedy of guilt or the tragedy of fate—that Oedipus suffers because of his own personality or as a puppet of his destiny, suggesting that fate and free will may not be mutually exclusive.⁷ Walter Burkert agrees with Dodds and argues that the persons involved are free and Oedipus can do otherwise in many cases.⁸ Charles Segal, however, in acknowledging the free will of Oedipus, emphasizes the futility of the hero's efforts, and believes that, on one reading, the play is indeed “a tragedy of a destiny that the hero cannot evade, despite his best attempts to do so.”⁹ It seems to me that by pointing out Oedipus' “best attempts” Segal also shows his awareness of the free will, and admits that fate is not an all-determining power before which man is completely helpless. I especially applaud his understanding of the “tragedy of fate”, that

What we mean by calling *Oedipus Tyrannus* a tragedy of fate might be more accurately phrased as Sophocles' sense of the existence of powers working in the world in ways alien to and hidden from human understanding.¹⁰

And for Segal, one needs to recognize the importance of this power in the working of tragedy. There are also voices among classicists against the kind of interpretation that centers upon fate and character or free will. Federick Ahl argues that “the question posed

⁶ See Knox's other discussions on Sophoclean characters such as Antigone and Ajax in *The Heroic Temper*. My 3rd chapter will discuss about fate and character in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

⁷ Dodds, 1966, p. 37.

⁸ Burkert, 1991. p. 17.

⁹ Segal, 2001. p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.

by traditional interpreters of whether the play is a tragedy of fate or of free-will is wrong headed and irrelevant.”¹¹ For Ahl, the question of fate does not exist, because he sees the words of Apollo in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a fraud which is fabricated by Creon.

The issue of fate is obviously not the focus in the reading of the Oedipus myth as reflective of the scapegoat ritual. A human scapegoat, *pharmakos*, is expelled to purify the cities during Thargelia and also during adverse periods such as plague and famine. Based on this historical ritual, Girard went further to elaborate it into a sociological theory that attempts to be all-comprehensive, which sees the expulsion of scapegoat as necessary when a society responds to its crisis in an attempt to return to normality.¹² Girard retells the Oedipus story as one reflective of the historical scapegoat ritual,¹³ and in his account the element of divine intervention is totally absent. Jean-Pierre Vernant also sees the reflection of scapegoat ritual in the Oedipus story and suggests an anthropological reading of the play.¹⁴ Vernant understands the ambiguity in the character of Oedipus as resulting from two ends in the polar structure: the quasi-divine, superhuman one, and the scapegoat, subhuman one. According to Vernant, although neither of these two aspects is an innovation, Sophocles is quite ingenious in combining these two features into one hero who represents the model of the human condition. The

¹¹ Federick Ahl, 1991. p. 95.

¹² For earlier discussions of such rituals, see Jane E. Harrison, 1921, p 20 on the puppet kings; F. Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (Princeton 1949, repr. Garden City, NY, 1953), p. 39; and R. Parker, *Miasma* (1983), 257-280.

¹³ Girard, 1986. p. 29-30.

¹⁴ J-P Vernant, 1988, pp. 113-141. (first published 1978.)

applicability of the scapegoat theory in interpreting the *Oedipus Tyrannus* will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Methodology

The chief method of this study is literary analysis, which includes close reading of texts, attention to semantic fields, the analysis of story plot, and the comparison of a series of texts over time and across genre.

In addition, I adopt methods used in the discussion of folklores. Folklorists offer some interesting reading of the Oedipus story. Vladimir Propp, a Russian folklorist who, according to Lowell Edmunds and Alan Dundes, wrote “the first major folkloristic essay on the Oedipus story”,¹⁵ lists other folklores which involves patricide, the trial of the hero, and bride-winning, and sees the original Oedipus story in the folklore pattern of throne-winning through murder and marriage. Propp also noted the use of foreknowledge in the Oedipus story. He admits the special importance of prediction in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where “the foreknowledge is organically linked with the entire plot, while in the folklore material the prophecy is only loosely connected”.¹⁶ Propp thinks that the reason why oracles, forewarnings and prophecies are completely absent when power passes from the king to the son-in-law from another lineage is that these tales reflect a historical situation. Prophecy is also absent in the early stages of the occurrence of the patricide motif, before the establishment of patrilineal society.¹⁷ Propp’s reading of

¹⁵ Propp, in Edmunds and Dundes (eds. 1983). p. 76.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 87. Propp’s samples are mostly legends other than classical Greek ones.

the Oedipus story aims to reinforce his idea of pre-historical social stages. This argument, as I quote Edmunds, “stands or falls on the truth of the historical development he assumes”.¹⁸ However, albeit his emphasis on the history of social stages, Propp points out that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is treated as a story of fate because of the air of fatality created in the play, although in essence and in historical terms it is not.¹⁹ Lowell Edmunds also sees fate in the narrative of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and thinks that “the tale’s air of fatality derives, not from its content, but from what might be called fatality of narrative.”²⁰ Propp and Edmunds’ attention to fate from folklorists’ perspective specially calls our attention to Sophocles’ handling in a literary masterpiece. In my study, especially in Chapter 2, I pay special attention to how Sophocles shapes his narrative and works up the sense of fate.

Especially illuminating is the study of Lowell Edmunds of the role of the Sphinx in the Oedipus legend. Edmunds examines a variety of medieval and modern folklore versions of the Oedipus story. Following the method of Aarne and Thompson, Edmunds also adopts the simple method of “segmenting the narrative into motifs” which greatly facilitates comparison of different folktale versions.²¹ Edmunds’

He is also aware of exceptions like the prophecy to Oenomaus, though he sees these few exceptions as proof that “our hypothetical oracle is not a fiction, but rather given in the nature of things”.

¹⁸ Edmunds, 1985. p. 23.

¹⁹ Propp, in Edmunds and Dundes (eds., 1983). p. 111.

²⁰ Edmunds, 1985. p. 38.

²¹ Edmunds, 2006. p. 5.

method is helpful in that, instead of viewing the various elements in the Oedipus story as self-contained, he demonstrates the importance of tracing the origins of each element, sometimes even beyond the Greek context. Like stories of many Greek mythological and legendary figures, there is no fixed, authoritative text for the Oedipus story. For example, Oedipus' self-exile, on which depends the scapegoat reading of the Oedipus story, is seen in Sophocles; but there is no standard version of it as such. The self-exile is not only absent in Homer, but also not seen in Euripides. One should not equate the tragedian's literary representation with historical fact, nor view the text as something inherited from earlier versions and kept intact. I adopt the method of motif segmentation in my discussion of the function of fate in the structure and characterization of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 1 examines groups of words and phrases used to express the idea of fate in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. I first analyze the Homeric diction and phrasing concerning the idea of fate. I specially address the formulaic language used in Homeric epics, and the relationship between fate and Zeus. Next I discuss the shifting ways in which "fate" is represented in the Theban plays, especially in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The concept of τύχη, "chance", is introduced as the opposite aspect of fate. Oracular consultation, or advice from mantic figures, to a large extent takes the place of omen-reading in Homer and becomes the major means by which mortals learn the will of gods. In tragedy, oracles become an important representation of fate. I also

examine the mantic figure, Teiresias, and his role in the Theban plays in relation to the prediction of fate.

Chapter 2 discusses how fate functions as a structuring device in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I begin with a discussion of fate and its function in plot in literary works. I also talk about the role of the Delphic oracle as a later addition to the original Oedipus legend. In this chapter, I follow the method of Lowell Edmunds and break down the Oedipus story into its constituent motifs. I trace the development of each motif in literary works before or contemporary to Sophocles. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate Sophocles' inheritance and innovation in the different elements of the original Oedipus legend.

Chapter 3 discusses the interaction between fate and character. Literary works from Homer till Sophocles give different representations of Oedipus' image. I trace the change of Oedipus' image and demonstrate how the image of Oedipus hinges on the shifting role of the Sphinx, especially how the riddle-solving episode creates the myth of Oedipus' intelligence. I proceed to examine the character of Sophocles' Oedipus in comparison with that of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. The comparisons focus on the following episodes: first, Odysseus' consultation of Teiresias in the underworld and Oedipus' consultation at Delphi as well as his confrontation with Teiresias; second, Odysseus' encounter with the goatherd in book 17 of the *Odyssey* and Oedipus' encounter with Laius at the crossroad; third, Odysseus' defeat of Polyphemus and Oedipus' defeat over the Sphinx. The comparisons aim to analyze

the nature of Oedipus' intelligence, the other traits in his personality, as well as how his character interacts with destiny.

Chapter 4 examines the significance of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in a larger context of the fifth century social and historical situation. I first analyze the fulfillment of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as an inevitable force. On the one hand, Jocasta's skepticism does not constitute a serious doubt to the belief in Delphi, because Greek divination always involves the active participation of human initiation. The skepticism of messengers or interpreters of a divine prediction does not equal the skepticism of the god. On the other hand, unlike Aeschylus or Euripides, Sophocles minimizes the family context, and represents Laius as innocent. Picking up the topic of innocent victims of fate, I also discuss the description of sufferings in other extant Attic tragedies, and the possible social background of it. I then proceed to the changing values of heroism from Homeric epics to tragedies. I end the chapter with a discussion of Oedipus as a domesticated civil hero who gives significance to life in face of the inexplicable sufferings of mankind.

Chapter One: Fate in Homer and Attic Tragedy—Semantic Representations

The present chapter addresses the semantic representations concerning the idea of fate in Attic tragedies, especially in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in comparison with Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The difficulty of the chapter lies in the fact that it is an attempt to analyze the semantic terminologies used in literary works. Homer and the tragedians are poets, not theologians or philosophers. It is not their concern to keep a consistent system for the idea of fate; and they might tailor their expressions for poetic and dramatic concerns. Still, though it is not the poets' primary concern to maintain a vocabulary of fate faithfully reflective of a systematic theology, what they use to represent fate does have important significance in our understanding of the concept.

1. The Representation of Fate in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

I begin with words and phrases which denote the idea of fate in Homer. It is a topic that has been heavily discussed;²² thus my attempt is less to repeat what is

²² According to B. C. Dietrich (1965), E. Leitzke is the first to examine the words and expressions in Homer that signify fate (*Moirā und Gottheit im alten Griechischen Epos: Sprachliche Untersuchungen*. diss., Göttingen, 1930). For a summary of Leitzke's grouping, see p. 184 of Dietrich (1965). Dietrich himself discusses the Homeric expressions for fate on pp. 249-83, examining each related word separately and believes it necessary "in an examination of the Homeric words for fate to separate the two epics" (194) due to their different subject matter. Other significant discussions include: E. G. Berry, *The History and Development of the Concept of θεῖα μοῖρα and θεῖα τύχη Down to and Including Plato* (Chicago, 1940), which specially focuses

generally agreed upon than to offer some new perspectives and to raise problems less talked about. In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the concept of fate as we later understand is represented by the following groups of expressions. First, words that originally mean “a share, a portion”. While they have not totally deviated from their original meaning, they also gradually gain the meaning of “fate”. These words, together with their derivatives and related phrases, are as follows:

μοῖρα < μείρομαι

derivatives: μοιρηγενής, ἔς;²³ μοῖρα ἔστι(ν)

μόρος < μείρομαι

derivatives: ἔμμορος, ον; ἄμμορος, ον; ὠκύμορος, ον; δυσάμμορος, ον; κάμμορος, ον; μόρσιμος, ον; ὑπέρμορος, α, ον; μόρος ἔστι

αἶσα < ἰσάσθαι, ἴσος, originally used to denote a share of sacrificial meat

derivatives: αἶσιμος, ον; ἑναίσιμος, ον; ἔξαίσιος, ον; αἶσυλος, ον; ὑπὲρ αἶσαν; κατ’ αἶσαν

In Homer these group of words have never totally lost their original meaning of ‘part’ or ‘share’.²⁴ The majority of these words are used in their original sense, as share or portion. The most common usages include the division of materials, such as food or booties,²⁵ the dividing of time, such as a portion of the night (*Iliad* 10. 253), the dividing of space, such as the land (*Iliad* 16. 68), or even the division of power between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades (*Iliad*. 15. 195). αἶσα and μοῖρα are also used in

οἰθεῖα μοῖρα and θεῖα τύχη but has a longer time scope, and William Chase Greene’s *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (1944), which arranges the study of moira according to each author and work.

²³ e.g. *Iliad*. 3. 182.

²⁴ Berry, 1940. p. 1.

²⁵ Examples of food: *Iliad* 1. 468, 602; *Odyssey* 4.97, 5.40, 8. 470, 11. 534, 14. 448, 15. 140, 17 258, 335, 19. 423, etc. Examples of booties: *Iliad* 18. 327, *Odyssey* 11. 534.

the sense of “due measure”, to indicate the idea of order, regularity, and propriety.²⁶ Thus phrases like *κατὰ μοῖραν* and *κατ’ αἴσαν* indicates a speech and action that is done “duly” or “properly”,²⁷ while *ὑπὲρ μοῖραν* and *ὑπὲρ αἴσαν* has the opposite meaning of something done unfittingly, improperly or unduly. Many of their uses are formulaic; phrases like *κατὰ μοῖραν* and *κατ’ αἴσαν* are used interchangeably, probably for variation. Occasionally, variations of such phrases as “ἐν μοίρῃ” (*Iliad* 19. 186) or “ἐν αἴσῃ” (*Iliad* 9. 378), are also used. Although *μόρος* is not used in the sense of “due measure” or “share” in Homer, there is indeed the derivative of *ὑπερμóρος* to indicate something beyond fate.

It is worth noting that these words are often used in connection with death. James Duffy points out that “Moirā when used impersonally refers to death in the *Iliad*”, and that the combination *θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα* occurs frequently in both poems of Homer.²⁸ The same applies to *μόρος* and *αἴσα* as well. Examples of this kind of expressions includes “θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα”,²⁹ “φόνος καὶ μοῖρα”,³⁰ “θάνατόν τε μόρον”,³¹ “αἴσιμον ἦμαρ”,³² and so on.³³ *μοῖρα* and *αἴσα* can even denote death or doom

²⁶ See also Winnington-Ingram, 1980. p. 155.

²⁷ For *κατὰ μοῖραν*, see *Iliad* 9. 59, 15. 206; *Odyssey* 2. 251, 3. 331, 4. 266, 7. 227, and so on. For *κατ’ αἴσαν*, see *Iliad* 3. 59, 10. 445, 17. 716 and so on.

²⁸ Duffy, 1947. p. 478.

²⁹ e.g. *Iliad* 5.83, 17. 478.

³⁰ e. g. *Odyssey* 21.24.

³¹ e. g. *Odyssey* 9. 61, 11.409, 16. 421, 20. 241.

³² e. g. *Iliad* 8.72, 21.100, 22.212.

independently (*Iliad* 4. 517). Some of the expressions used in this meaning are clearly formulaic, applied with little or no variation to similar situations, as in such phrases as “πορφύρεος θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή”,³⁴ or “μοῖρ’ ὀλοή”.³⁵

But why do these words come to be connected with death, and how do they relate to the notion of fate? B. C. Dietrich believes that there is “the early popular idea of fate= death”. He examines the chthonic relation of the deities of fate to find the “elementary aspect” of moira which has been obscured by literature.³⁶ In his discussion of μοῖρα, he argues for the traces of popular belief in and after Homer, and claims that “*Moirai* might well originally have meant ‘the share of death’”.³⁷ Dietrich studies the personified goddesses of fate, the Moirai, and thinks that they were not well-established goddesses of destiny from scratch, but used to have influence only in limited aspects of life. Gradually, they extended their offices, beginning with the giving of death, until they decided the important moments within the life of men.³⁸ And by the time of Hesiod, they had secured their place as the “comprehensive” goddesses of fate in the Olympian genealogy, ascending from the chthonic goddesses

³³ For more examples, see also *Iliad* 21. 133, 22. 13, 24, 428, and so on.

³⁴ It appears in *Iliad*. 5. 83, 16. 334, 20. 477; 16. 853, 21. 110 and 24. 132, without “πορφύρεος”.

³⁵ It appears in *Odyssey* 2.100, 3.238, 24. 29, 135.

³⁶ Dietrich, 1965. p. 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

to the new system of the Heavenly deities.³⁹ The logic of Dietrich’s judgment, however, is not completely convincing, since his sources are mostly grave inscriptions, which naturally have a primary connection with death.⁴⁰ I also find this explanation hardly applicable to αἴσα and μόρος, which are not a personified deity in popular culture, but used almost indiscriminately with μοῖρα to denote death.

Thus there is no solid proof as to which comes first—whether these words acquire the meaning of fate because they have been associated with death, or the other way round. Still, it is hard to deny that death is the most important share of man’s universal fate.⁴¹ Walter Burkert, talking about *moira* and *aisa*, also points out that their meaning of “portion” proclaims “that the world is apportioned, that boundaries are drawn in space and time,” and that for man, “the most important and most painful boundary is death: this is his limited portion”.⁴² Thus it is not surprising that the most frequently used words for fate is often used in the sense of death.

Second, there is a phrase that does not literally mean fate but convey such an idea in the context of epics: the Διὸς βουλή. To understand this phrase demands a discussion about the relationship between gods and fate in Homer. In Homer fate

³⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁰ Atkins (1968: 195) also points out that most of the inscriptions are grave inscriptions: it is hardly surprising to find Moira concerned with death here—and men do not set up inscriptions to commemorate other aspects of their life in which Moira might be concerned.

⁴¹ See also Price and Kearns, 2003. p. 589.

⁴² Burkert, 1977. p. 129-130.

seems to be a power independent from the gods. At times there are things out of the control of gods: Athena, disguised as Mentor, says that not even gods can fend off death which comes to everyone alike, once “μοῖρ’ ὀλοή” fastens it upon him (3. 236-8). Death, as an important aspect of fate, seems to be out of the control of Olympian gods. At times gods and fate seem to be one power, or that gods can fully determine the course of fate. A mortal can be overcome by the doom of the gods (“μοῖρα θεῶν”, *Odyssey* 3. 269); and gods’ decision can determine or change the fate of a man or a city.⁴³ Some critics attribute the irreconcilability of the inconsistencies in this power relationship to the poetic nature of Homeric epics, and that “express statements about the relationship of fate and the gods are often actuated not by any theory of the poet but by the dramatic needs of the moment”.⁴⁴ Some other critics see the distinction as between a vague destiny and an operative god, with the gods approachable and touchable by prayers and sacrifice, and destiny inexorable and immovable.⁴⁵ Still, no immortal seriously contradict or change the course of fate. And sometime gods’ interference is said to guarantee the fulfillment of fate. Poseidon rescued Aeneas from the battlefield because it was not Aeneas’ fate to die there (*Iliad* 20. 302).⁴⁶

⁴³ e.g. about a man, *Iliad* 16. 431ff and 20. 310-2; about cities, *Iliad* 4. 37-67.

⁴⁴ Berry, 1940. p. 1

⁴⁵ See Winnington-Ingram, 1980. p. 152; Bushnell, 1988. pp. 59-60.

⁴⁶ However, this example could also be explained as a *post facto* attribution (Redfield, 1994. p. 271) of an event to the interference of gods. More discussion on this will follow in the next chapter.

Moreover, Gods might disagree with each other, take different sides in human affairs, but they submit and concede to the rule of Zeus. As the lord of all immortals (*Iliad* 4. 61), Zeus has the power to do things even when the other Olympians do not approve of them (*Iliad* 4. 29, 5. 30) and no other god has the power to contradict him (*Iliad* 4. 55-6). Among the immortals Zeus gives the mightiest token (“μέγιστον τέκμωρ”, *Iliad* 1. 525-6); once Zeus nods his consent nothing will be revocable, illusory or unfulfilled.⁴⁷ When Odysseus finally arrived at his homeland, Poseidon’s anger is less because Odysseus achieved his nostos than with the fact that he had an easy and comfortable sail, well attended by the Phaeacians (*Odyssey* 13. 131ff). Poseidon does not intend to take away the homecoming once Zeus has nodded his assent. Gods may interfere “beyond fate” (*Iliad* 20. 336) according to their likes and dislikes, but they do know and accept the fate of a character or an event; one might as well see the gods’ function as a means to add dramatic effect in the conflicts. As James Redfield points out, “Zeus of ordinary belief is a figure parallel to fate”.⁴⁸ The gods’ will as unified by the will of Zeus, the Διος βουλη, is thus a variation of the many Homeric expressions for fate.⁴⁹

Διος βουλη appears in the opening lines of the *Iliad*, laying down the whole

⁴⁷ οὐ γὰρ ἔμὸν παλινάγρετον οὐδ’ ἀπατηλὸν
οὐδ’ ἀτελεύτητον ὅ τί κεν κεφαλῆ κατανεύσω. (*Iliad* 1. 526-7)

⁴⁸ Redfield, 1994. p. 271.

⁴⁹ The phrase could also be used in a more specified context. When Ares and other gods are refrained from participating in the battle of mortals, they are “ἦστο Διὸς βουλῆσιν ἐελέμενος”, held fast by command of Zeus (*Iliad*. 13. 524). This is a usage not in the sense of fate.

framework of the epic and the events as predetermined. It is used twice in the *Odyssey*, one in Odysseus' false story to Eumaios (14. 328-331), the other in his lie to Penelope (19. 297):

τὸν δ' ἔς Δωδώνην φάτο βήμεναι, ὄφρα θεοῖο
ἐκ δρυὸς ὑψικόμοιο Διὸς βουλήν ἐπακούσαι,
ὄππως νοστήσει Ἰθάκης ἔς πίονα δήμον
(ὄππως νοστήσειε φίλην ἔς πατρίδα γαῖαν in Book 19)
ἤδη δὴν ἀπεών, ἢ ἀμφαδὸν ἦε κρυφιδόν.
But he said Odysseus had gone to Dodona, to listen
to the will of Zeus, out of the holy deep-leaved oak tree,
for how he could come back to the rich countryside of Ithaka,
in secret or openly, having been by now long absent. (trans. Lattimore)

The two passages are almost identical except for the variation of one line, and the contexts involved are similar. Odysseus, telling false information about himself, reports a story of Odysseus going to Dodona “to listen to the will of Zeus” for information about his homecoming. The subject matter under concern here, the homecoming, does not equal Odysseus' fate, though it constitutes an important part of it. But the way the epic describes this practice suggests that other aspects of fate could also be consulted by seeking the Διὸς βουλή in this manner.

Third, there are images and metaphors which represent the workings of fate. Three images are used in Homer: the jar of Zeus, Zeus' golden scales, and the spinning of fate. Zeus' jars occur only once, when Achilles speaks to Priam about how gods distribute sorrows to mortals in book 24 of the *Iliad*:

δοιοὶ γάρ τε πίθοι κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὔδει
δώρων οἷα δίδωσι κακῶν, ἕτερος δὲ ἑάων:
ᾧ μὲν κ' ἀμμίξας δῶη Ζεὺς τερπικέρανος,
ἄλλοτε μὲν τε κακῶ ὅ γε κύρεται, ἄλλοτε δ' ἐσθλῶ:
There are two urns that stand on the door-sill of Zeus. They are unlike

for the gifts they bestow: an urn of evils, and urn of blessings.

If Zeus who delights in thunder mingles these and bestows them
on man, he shifts, and moves now in evil, again in good fortune.
(527-30, trans. Lattimore)

The arbitrariness of fate is greatly emphasized by these jars from which Zeus gives good or evil. Again, despite the much debated question as to whether Zeus is the ultimate dispenser of fate, or merely the executioner, Zeus is closely related to the working of fate. In other places of both epics, the word *πίθος* is extensively used as the wine jar, a daily, common utensil; only the jars of Zeus can distribute good and evil, and constitute an image of fate.

And this is not the only case Homer adopts images from daily life to describe the intangible notion of fate. The same is true with the golden scales of Zeus. The word *τάλαντον* refers to a definite amount of gold, and this meaning is applied to various situations in both epics.⁵⁰ *Τάλαντον* can also mean balance, and in plural form it means a pair of scales or a balance.⁵¹ The use in *Iliad* 12. 433, a metaphor describing a widow's careful balancing of the wool, suggests that it is also a common, daily image. Again, its connotation of fate requires the connection with Zeus; it is only when it refers to the scales of Zeus—which is also always described as golden (“*χρυσεία*”), that this homely image becomes the looming image of fate. Though

⁵⁰ Cuncliffe (1977: 372) gives examples of these usages in *Iliad* 9. 122-264, 14. 507, 23. 269, 614, 24. 232; *Odyssey* 4. 129, 526, 8. 393, 9. 202, 24. 274.

⁵¹ LSJ, 1940 (9th Edition). p. 1753. For examples, see *Iliad* 9. 122, 264, 18. 507, 23. 269, 24. 232; *Odyssey* 4. 129, 8. 393, 9. 202, 24. 274. In post Homer writers, the *τάλαντον* was both a commercial weight (differing in different systems), and also the sum of money represented by the corresponding weight of gold or silver.

absent from the *Odyssey*, it occurs four times in the *Iliad*,⁵² one of which figuratively in the perception of Hector (16. 658). The familiarity of the image enhances the vividness of the situation and brings images to the audience' mind. Dietrich thinks that it also helps "introduce the idea of balancing a decision, important in the structure of the poem".⁵³ In addition, the golden scales are also viewed as a "poetic device". They raise the tension at a critical moment in the narrative by appearing to create a momentary doubt, while in fact the outcome of an event firmly remains in the control of Zeus.⁵⁴ Thus the golden scales of Zeus, together with Zeus' jars, well work out the randomness of fate as executed by Zeus:

ἀτὰρ θεὸς ἄλλοτε ἄλλω
 Ζεὺς ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε διδοί: δύναται γὰρ ἅπαντα
 Yet divine Zeus sometimes
 gives out good, or sometimes evil; he can do anything. (*Odyssey* 4. 236-7)

Furthermore, the image of spinning is also used to describe the working of fate.

Despite the later personification of fate as three female spinners, in Homer there is no such connection between spinning and the personification of fate. According to Dietrich, there did not exist in popular belief a fully developed concept of a divine figure as a spinner of general fate which the Homeric poets might have taken over.⁵⁵ Spinning in Homer is not associated with any one god, nor does it particularly require a female agent. The one who does the spinning could be Zeus (*Odyssey* 4. 207-8), or it

⁵² See *Iliad* 8. 69= 22. 209, 16. 658, 19. 223.

⁵³ Dietrich, 1965. p. 295.

⁵⁴ Price and Kearns, 2003. p. 589.

⁵⁵ Dietrich, 1962. p. 93.

could also be the gods in general, weaving misery for men:

ὥς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι
ζῶειν ἀχθυμένοις; αὐτοὶ δέ τ' ἀκηδέες εἰσί.
Such is the way the gods spun life for unfortunate mortals,
that we live in unhappiness, but the gods themselves have no sorrows.
(*Iliad*. 24. 525-6. trans. Richmond Lattimore)
ἀλλὰ θεοὶ δυόωσι πολυπλάγκτους ἀνθρώπους,
ὄππότε καὶ βασιλεῦσιν ἐπικλώσονται ὄϊζύν.
Yet it is true; the homeless men are those whom the gods hold
in despite, when they spin misery even for princes.
(*Odyssey*. 20. 195-6. trans. Richmond Lattimore)

And in Book 7 of the *Odyssey*, the “heavy spinners” together spin destiny at birth (“οἱ αἴσα ... κλῶθές τε βαρεῖται”, 197-8). Considering the vast amount of vocabulary of the craftsmanship in Homer, spinning as an everyday, familiar image among the ancient Greeks might have been applied to the concept of fate first as a convenient metaphor, and then gradually became a fixed image.

It is interesting to note that there are a lot of concrete ideas and images from daily life in representing fate, or the workings of fate, either a portion, or a jar, a loom and the scales. Interestingly, these images are not commonly used in Attic tragedy. Perhaps this is because epic allows more room for the imagination of the audience but do not need those images to be actually performed out. Still, tragedies could as well refer to these images in dialogue without actually putting them on stage. Considering the fact that moira is not yet personified into a concrete deity in Homer, it is possible that these quotidian images are used as various attempts to supply concretized images for an abstract concept.

Fourth, in Homer some words for fate reflect its negative aspects, especially

death. κηρ is the goddess of death, hence also means ruin and fate. Its usage is often connected with death and the underworld, as in “θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν”,⁵⁶ and “κηρὶ δαμειὶ Ἄϊδόσδε βεβήκει”.⁵⁷ οἴτος possibly comes from the verb “to come”,⁵⁸ thus to mean what comes to or befalls one. Πότμος, with the stem πετ-, refers to what is “appointed or falls to one”,⁵⁹ thus used to mean the lot that falls to one. Its derivatives include πανάποτμος and ἄποτμος. For πότμος, we might as well say that death is the most important and most painful thing that falls to one. I have discussed the connection of fate and death in the first group’s discussion. Words in the fourth group are used almost exclusively in the sense of death and doom. More loosely, τέλος, a word of boundary or limit, is often used in the sense of death, thus considered in connection with fate.⁶⁰

The etymological source demonstrates some important Homeric concepts of fate. These begin with the inevitability of fate, as suggested by μοῖρα and αἴσα: everyone has a share of fortune, a portion coming to all humans. Next is the super-human nature of this power of fate: it is something imposed upon mortals from an outward force, a power which falls on us all, to which mortals are merely the passive object, as

⁵⁶ “death and black doom”; see *Odyssey* 2. 283, 3. 242, 15. 275, and 24. 127.

⁵⁷ “by doom has gone to the house of Hades” see *Odyssey* 3. 410 and 6. 11.

⁵⁸ For a fuller discussion of the word, see Dietrich (1965: 338).

⁵⁹ Price and Kearns, 2003. p. 589.

⁶⁰ Examples include: *Iliad* 3. 309, 5. 553, 9. 411, 416, 11, 451, 13, 602, 16. 502, 22. 361 and *Odyssey* 5. 326, 17. 476, 24. 124.

suggested by πότμος and the phrases and images connected with Zeus.

Two aspects are worth noting in Homeric expressions for fate:

First, Homeric expressions for fate have clear features of oral composition, and could be formulaic. However, I believe it incorrect to over emphasize the mechanic aspect of formulae or to argue that all formulae are perfunctory. Nor is the application of formulaic phrases solely concerned with meter but with no regard for character or occasion. Formulaic language about fate also fits the identity of each character. For example, in Book 7 of the *Odyssey*, Alkinoos tells his fellow Phaeacians that

Odysseus should be safe on his way home with their convoy, but:

. . . ἔνθα δ' ἔπειτα
πείσεται, ἄσσα οἱ αἴσα κατὰ κλῶθές τε βαρεῖαι
γιγνομένῳ νήσαντο λίνῳ, ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ.
... but there in the future
he shall endure all that his destiny and the heavy Spinners
spun for him with the thread at his birth, when his mother bore him. (196-8)

This speech is very similar in structure and vocabulary to a speech of Hera to Poseidon and Athena in the *Iliad* 20, saying that Achilles should be kept from harm from the Trojans on that day, though

. . . ὕστερον αὖτε τὰ πείσεται ἄσσά οἱ αἴσα
γιγνομένῳ ἐπένησε λίνῳ ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ.
... Afterwards he shall suffer such things as Destiny
wove with the strand of his birth that day he was born to his mother. (127-8)

The identical structure of the two passages shows a similar tone: the full control of the present situation and certain knowledge of something to happen. As many have noticed, the Phaeacians are close to the gods; and this is the only case in the two Homeric epics that mortals speak in the same formula as the gods do. The way in

which Alkinoos talks betrays the divine aspect of the Phaeacians.

There are also formulae applied only to Hector and Patrocles. The phrase used of Patrocles' death in 16.855-8 are the identical to the terms used to describe Achilles' slaying of Hector in 22. 361-4:⁶¹

ὣς ἄρα μιν εἰπόντα τέλος θανάτοιο κάλυψε:
ψυχὴ δ' ἔκ ῥεθέων παμμένη Ἄϊδος δὲ βεβήκει
ὄν πότμον γοόωσα λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἦβην.
τὸν καὶ τεθνηῶτα προσηύδα φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ (in 16. 858)
(τὸν καὶ τεθνηῶτα προσηύδα δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς in 22. 364)
He spoke, and as he spoke the end of death closed in upon him,
and the soul fluttering free of his limbs went down into Hades' house
mourning her destiny, leaving youth and manhood behind her.
Now though he was a dead man glorious Hector spoke to him: (in 16. 858)
Now though he was a dead man brilliant Achilles spoke to him: (in 22. 364)
(trans. Lattimore)

Many warriors die in battlefield in the *Iliad*, but only the deaths of Patrocles and Hector are described with such words. Their fall in battle, one triggering the other, foreshadows and leads up to the death of Achilles which is not explicitly depicted but has been looming large throughout the epic. These formulae are used not only to project the special significance of Patrocles' and Hector's death, but also to hint at the fate of Achilles, the main hero of the book.

On the other hand, formulaic language about fate is indeed many times used in its general sense. Mortals do talk a lot about their own or other people's fates, but with few exceptions their language is normally unspecific. They talk about fate with a tentative tone, giving perfunctory laments or making vague comments both about

⁶¹ The phrase “νῦν αὖ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κιχάνει” describing Patrocles and Hector at *Iliad* 17. 478, 672 and 22. 436 is another example, though less obvious.

themselves and about others.⁶² In the *Odyssey*, especially, many people talk about Odysseus in a general, speculative way, using such words and phrases as “ill-fated” or “evil destiny”;⁶³ yet they do not really know about his fate.

However, this kind of vague and unspecific language about fate does not occur in the language of those who have true knowledge of fate. The immortals talk about fate in a more specific, assertive way. Thetis laments to her son that his lifetime is short but not long: “νύ τοι αἴσα μίνυθ’ ἀπερ οὔ τι μάλα δήν” (*Iliad* 1. 416); Apollo warns Patroclus of his fate (?). Gods’ language in talking about fate is detailed, definite and clear—either of a man or of a family or of a city. This puts them higher than the mortals whose knowledge is just as confined as their life span. As Bernard Knox rightly comments, “real knowledge is what distinguishes god from man.”⁶⁴

Such knowledge of fate may not be confined to gods, and is also held by beings who are favored or inspired by the divine. So Hera put a voice to Achilles’ horse, Xanthus, who even predicts Achilles’ death with accuracy, as “μόρσιμόν ἔστι θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνέρι” (19. 417ff). Moreover, the narrator also talks about fate in an assertive, unambiguous way, making comments on specific situations. In many cases, the narrator clearly indicates the outcome of a future event or the destiny of a certain character. The narrator, or the poet, has full knowledge of fate in the context of the

⁶² e.g. *Iliad* 5. 209, 6. 487, 9. 245, 19, 315, 22. 60, etc.

⁶³ e.g. *Odyssey* 1. 166, 2. 351, 7. 270, 11. 216, 20. 194, 24. 290, 24. 311, etc.

⁶⁴ Knox, 1979. p. 107.

epics. Thus in attributing a certain event to the gods, the poet commonly names the particular deity concerned, while the a particular character speaking at the time usually gives the name θεός, θεοί, Zeus, or δαίμων to the deity which he felt responsible for a certain welcome or unpleasant occurrence in his life and plans.⁶⁵ The narrator, with full knowledge of characters' fate, use less formulaic language than the average mortal character.

Second, it is important to note that in Homer not all predictions are about fate, nor do they always reveal the gods' true intentions. Homeric characters receive omens about the future through signs (often the flying of birds), through sounds (usually thunder), through dreams, or even from gods directly who appear to mortals themselves either in disguise or directly. These signs, sounds, dreams and divine epiphanies could be no more than instructions for the immediate action, a revelation of some hidden or unknown fact, or a token of luck.⁶⁶ It may apply only to the immediate future but does not have long term validity.⁶⁷ These temporary omens may reflect part of Zeus' grand plan; they could be false and sent to mislead mortals, as Zeus' dream to Agamemnon in Book 2 of the *Iliad* (786ff).

Apart from a few exceptions, most such omens come at their own accord; the

⁶⁵ Jorgensen's original study is on *Hermes* xxxix (1904), 357ff. E. Heden, in his *Homerische Gotterstud*, also made distinction between the poet's narrative and direct speech of the characters in Homer. qtd. Dietrich (1965) 181.

⁶⁶ See also Nock, 1942. p. 477.

⁶⁷ See Bushnell (1988: 11) for a discussion of the "problematic temporality" of Homeric omens.

gods send them without being asked. However, in Homer people also learn about their fate through another means, by deliberate questioning. This is the visiting of a person or a special place that has prophetic powers. In the *Odyssey* 11. 90-151, Odysseus went into Hades, “to consult with the soul of Teiresias the Theban” (“ψυχῆ χρησομένουσ Θεβαίου Τειρεσίασ”, *Odyssey* 10. 492). Menelaus also made efforts to catch Proteus and consulted him about his homecoming (4. 384-569). In Odysseus’ false story to the swineherd and Penelope, he described the hero’s journey to Dodona to inquire about his return from the oak tree of Zeus. In all three examples above, the journey to a special location is required for the inquiry, and the information is conveyed through a special medium, either a person or an object. These features remind us of the practices in the consultation of an oracle, a topic which will be subsequently elaborated.

2. Fate’s Representation in the Theban Plays

I now turn to the semantic representation of fate in Attic tragedies. On the one hand, words such as αἶσα, μοῖρα, μέρος, and their derivatives, are extensively used. The notion of an allotted share or portion still exists, though it is not as extensively applied to all spheres of life as in Homer.⁶⁸ It is several times applied to the share of burial. In *Ajax* 1327, Teucer would not leave Ajax’s corpse “ἄμοιρον”, and in this

⁶⁸ For examples, see Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 947, *Libation Bearers* 238, *Eumenides* 352 “ἄπόμοιρος”, 476, *Prometheus Bound* 631; Sophocles *Ajax* 927; Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1491, *Phoenician Women* 610, and so on.

context, to leave a dead body without its share is to leave it unburied.⁶⁹

These words are still often used in connection with death, either together with words about death, in a derivative, or to describe death and doom by themselves.⁷⁰ Aeschylus' Prometheus claims he should not fear since death is not his fate: “ὦ θανεῖν οὐ μόνον” (*Prometheus Bound* 933). In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, “αλεξιμορος” (164) is used to describe deities who are “warding off death”. Oedipus curses Laius' murderer to easily wear out his “κακὸν... ἄμορον... βίον” (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 248), and a life without filling out its share is a doomed one. Tecmessa talks about μοῖρα as a force bringing the death of her parents: “καὶ μητέρ' ἄλλη μοῖρα τὸν φύσαντά τε/καθεῖλεν Ἄιδου θανασίμους οἰκήτορας” (*Ajax* 516). And in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, μοῖρα is used together with Hades, the fate of Hades (“Ἄιδος ... μοῖρα(α)”, 1221).

κατὰ μοῖραν and κατ'αἴσαν are no longer used in the sense of due measure to describe the propriety in speech.⁷¹ There is one case of κατὰ μοῖραν used to indicate the allotted order (*Rhesus* 545=564). Formulaic usages involving words and phrases of fate, though frequent in Homer, are rare in tragedy, although there are some cases, especially in the lamentation of fate (*Seven against Thebes* 975-986).

In Attic tragedy μοῖρα needs to be distinguished from the word τύχη, which is not

⁶⁹ See also Euripides *Suppliants* 309, Sophocles *Antigone* 1071.

⁷⁰ For examples, see Aeschylus *Persae* 917, *Agamemnon* 1266, 1314, 1365, 1462; Euripides *Medea* 987, 1281; *Hecuba* 196, and so on.

⁷¹ In tragedy the propriety of speech is often expressed through the word δίκη: e.g., Eumenides 787-8: διὰ δίκας πᾶν ἔπος /ἔλακον.

seen in Homer but frequently used in tragedy. τύχη is from τυγχάνειν, “to hit the mark, attain something”. It could mean the act of a god; it is also “regarded as an agent or cause beyond human control”.⁷² The word could either be fate or providence, or the impersonal force of chance. It could also independently indicate the either end of fortune, the mischance and destruction or luck and good fortune.⁷³ For this reason, its derivatives often have prefixes indicating good or bad fortune, as in εὐτυχία, δυστυχία, δυστυχεῖν, εὐτυχεῖν and others; and it is also combined with adjectives to indicate the quality of one’s fate or fortune (e. g. *Women of Trachis* 327). This suggests that the word has, or used to have, a neutral sense which could turn into both directions. Berry also argues that the meaning of pure chance is an independent development among the pre-Socratic philosophers, and in many cases, τύχη means fortune in the neutral meaning, either good or bad depending on its combination with adjectives. According to Berry, the word was, in the earlier usages, more connected with the result of an action than with chance in causality.⁷⁴ The sense of result instead of active causality is still seen in Attic tragedy; for example, in cases of *Ajax* 1028, or *Philoctetes* 1418, the word is used to indicate accomplished facts.

In Aeschylus, the differentiation between μοῖρα and τύχη is not obvious (e.g.

⁷² LSJ, 1940 (9th Edition). p. 1839. For example, Sophocles *Philoctetes* 1326; Euripides *Medea* 671.

⁷³ For examples of destruction, see *Oedipus at Colonus* 1404, *Electra* 48. For examples of good fortune, see *Oedipus at Colonus* 1506, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 52, *Philoctetes* 1418, 1069, OT 80, 1036, 773, 680, *Ajax* 1028, *Antigone* 1158, 387.

⁷⁴ Berry, 1940. pp. 8-9.

Sept. 505-6). In Sophocles, as noted by Berry, there is a distinction between the τύχη alone and θεία τύχη, and an almost complete disappearance of θεία μοῖρα but the increasing evidence of a θεία τύχη.⁷⁵ We see it in *Philoctetes* 1326, when Neoptolemus explains the source of Philoctetes' sickness.⁷⁶ Combined with θεία, the phrase represents the divinely planned order of the world as explicitly distinct from random luck. Τύχη in Sophocles, on the other hand, is used to indicate pure chance or accident. Jocasta talks about this chance as opposite to any predicable knowledge (*Oedipus Tyrannus* 977), and Oedipus proclaims himself as the child of fortune, “παῖδα τῆς Τύχης” (1080). When used as chance, it stands in opposition to fate which represents the fixed order of the world. In Euripides, examples show that μοῖρα and τύχη seem to be less distinguished. In *Suppliants* 608-9, the chorus wishes fate to bring low the one victorious in his luck. In this case, τύχη is the random luck while μοῖρα represents a higher order. Yet in *Ion* 153, μοῖρα in the phrase “ἀγαθῆ μοίρα” may well be substituted by τύχη to mean fortune or luck.

In tragedy, in addition to the singular μοῖρα which indicates fate and acts as an agent, the plural Moirai have become personified deities as the goddesses of fate.⁷⁷

They are not yet the Moirai as mentioned by Plato, who spins and sings the past, the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁶ “σὺ γὰρ νοσεῖς τόδ’ ἄλγος ἐκ θείας τύχης”: “You are sick and the pain of the sickness is of God’s sending” (trans. David Grene).

⁷⁷ e. g. Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 516, 895; *Libation Bearers* 306; *Eumenides* 724; Sophocles *Antigone* 987, Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris* 207 (where Fates attend at the child’s birth); *Bacchae* 99.

present and the future (*Republic* 617c). Fates in tragedy are not necessarily connected with spinning, and the weaving image can be used to describe the singular $\mu\omicron\tilde{\iota}\rho\alpha$ (*Eumenides* 335). In the process of this personification, Hesiod seems to have an important role, who according to Berry has a tendency “to create personalized figures and deifications of the old” and who subordinates Moirai to the all powerful Zeus as his daughters and agents.⁷⁸ Indeed, in tragedy, although there are personified goddesses of fate, it is hard to say that fate is a power independent of the will of the gods. This point becomes clear by comparison with Homer. As we have demonstrated above, fate remains a power outside and independent of the gods although Homeric gods have divine knowledge about fate and even have control and substantial influence on it. In Homer it is nowhere directly stated that fate or destiny stands above the gods;⁷⁹ nor is fate subsidiary to the Olympians. Fate in Homer is often described to make something happen independently.⁸⁰

However, the relationship between gods and mortals changed in post-Homer literary works. As Berry argues, from the time of Homer on, the powers which control human destiny have been attributed in an increasing degree to the gods, and $\tau\acute{o}\chi\eta$ and $\mu\omicron\tilde{\iota}\rho\alpha$, once to a great extent independent in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, now show a

⁷⁸ Berry, 1940. p. 7.

⁷⁹ Duffy, 1947. p. 478.

⁸⁰ For example, in *Iliad* 24. 209 ff, Hecuba laments the destiny that fate spun for Hector at his birth.

tendency to be placed in subjection to the Olympians.⁸¹ Things ordained by Fate are also given by the gods (*Eumenides* 392-3). The changing relationship between fate and the Olympian gods has been reflected in the double lineage of the Moirai in Hesiod as either the daughters of Nyx (*Theogony* 214), or the daughters of Zeus (*Theogony* 900): the daughters of Night, deities of natural elements, are synthesized into the Olympian system and are subjugated to its highest representative Zeus.

In tragedy, on the other hand, there are still traces of this shift. Aeschylus, the earliest of the three tragedians, did once mention Zeus' subjectivity to the Fates in

Prometheus Bound:

Χορός: τίς οὔν ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν οἰακοστρόφος;
 Προμηθεύς: Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες
 Χορός: τοῦτων ἄρα Ζεὺς ἐστὶν ἀσθενέστερος;
 Προμηθεύς: οὔκουν ἄν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην.
 Chorus: Who then is the steersman of necessity?
 Prometheus: The three-formed Fates and the remembering Furies.
 Chorus: And is Zeus, then, weaker than these?
 Prometheus: Yes, for he too cannot escape what is fated.
 (515-20, trans. David Grene)

It is a rare example. Among the extant tragedies, this is the only place where Zeus submits to the power of fate. Other than this one, fate seems to have merged into the will of gods, and what is fated to happen equals what is planned by the gods, especially Zeus and Apollo. As the chorus chants at the end of *Eumenides*:

Ζεὺς <ὅ> πανόπτας
 οὔτω Μοῖρά τε συγκατέβα.
 Zeus the all seeing
 met with Destiny to confirm it. (1045-6, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

⁸¹ Berry, 1940. p. 14.

Literally, Zeus the lord of immortals walks together with Μοῖρα. The will of the Olympians, represented by Zeus, converges with the power of fate. In Euripides' *Electra*, μοῖρα and Zeus together decree doom (1248). μοῖρα is also described as working together with Apollo (Euripides *Electra* 1301-2). Bushnell, when comparing the *Iliad* and the *Antigone*, sharply points out their difference in depiction of fate and the power of the gods. The *Iliad* depicts a world in which the gods are inconsistent and placable, while the μοῖρα of mortals is forever fixed. In *Antigone*, however, the gods and fate are fused together into one implacable force.⁸² The comment, though focused on specific works, also reveals a difference between Homer and Attic tragedy in general.

While the gods' will and fate become one and the same power in tragedy, the ways gods communicate to mortals are also different. In Homer gods are actively engaged in human affairs. They care about the welfare of their descendents; they take sides with their gain or loss involved; they care about mortals' affairs just as they care about their own honor and pride. It is true that in Homer the immortals keep certain distance from common mortals. It is occasionally hinted that the immortals do not use human speech just as animals cannot.⁸³ A deity is specially marked out when adopting human speech. Ino is said to have once been using human speech, “πρὶν μὲν ἔην βροτῶς ἀυδήεσσα”, but now she holds degree of a goddess (*Odyssey* 5. 334).

⁸² Bushnell, 1988. pp. 59-60.

⁸³ In the *Iliad* 19. 404, Achille's horse Xanthus speaks only because Hera put human voice in him.

Circe and Calypso are specially tagged as goddesses who talk in human speech.⁸⁴ In Homer the gods do not dine with mortals; even with the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes, who are close to gods, it is in time past (“αἰεὶ γὰρ τὸ πάρος”) that the immortals used to show themselves with no concealment and sit down to feast (7. 199-206). Still, Homeric gods do reveal themselves to those they favor. Achilles and Odysseus, as heroes of the two Homeric epics, are mortals who enjoy such privilege. In Book 16, Athena’s presence is seen only by Odysseus but not even by Telemachus, since the gods do not show themselves to everyone, “οὐ γὰρ πῶ πάντεσσι θεοὶ φαίνονται ἔναργεῖς” (161). In Book 20, when Athena shows up under the disguise of Mentor, the suitors were deceived, but Odysseus does recognize the goddess.

In Attic tragedy, however, gods become even more distant. Less involved in human affairs, they look down on mortals with cool detachment, untouched by their sufferings. Among the extant Attic tragedies, gods tend more and more to be far off from the human world. Bushnell notices that “the Olympian gods appear less frequently in Attic tragedy, and speak differently from the Homeric gods”.⁸⁵ The “participatory gods”⁸⁶ in early tragedy, as those in *Eumenides* who walk the stage as the chorus and main characters, are reminiscent of Homeric gods in the way they meddle with human affairs, yet are not seen in later tragedies. In Sophocles gods

⁸⁴ *Odyssey* 10. 136, 11. 8, 12. 150, 449.

⁸⁵ Bushnell, 1988. p. 12.

⁸⁶ Griffin, 1999. p. 12.

already became less personal than Homeric gods.⁸⁷ The intimate manner in which immortals talk with human heroes in Homer is not to be seen. For example, in descriptions of gods and the Trojan war heroes, Athena in the *Odyssey* reprovably praises Odysseus' cunning (13. 291-3), claims that she cannot abandon him (330) and even compares his mortal intelligence with her divine wit (296-9). However, in *Ajax*, Athena the goddess appears on a high platform, out of sight "ἄποπτος" (15) for Odysseus. Indeed, Odysseus at first welcomes the goddess, whose voice is the dearest to him of all gods ("φιλτάτης ἔμοι θεῶν", 14), but the goddess' treatment of Ajax leaves him lamenting the shared yoke of ruin ("ἄτη συγκατέζευκται κακῆ", 123) both for Ajax and equally for every mortal. Here, Athena's appearance is to reinforce the unbridgeable barrier between men and gods. It is true that in Homer gods would also punish those who made threats against the Olympian gods. For example, Apollo killed the son of Iphimedeia and Poseidon, half divine as they are (*Odyssey* 12. 305-320). Yet in Ajax's case, he constitutes no real threat to the divine as the twins of Otos and Ephialtes do. Athena only suggests the reason for punishment as pride in word and action (127-8). She insists that Odysseus see Ajax's madness so as to publish it to all Greeks as a warning: "δείξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τήνδε περιφανῆ νόσον/ ὡς πᾶσιν Ἀργείοισιν εἰσιδῶν θροῆς" (66-7). Athena's warning in *Ajax* serves as a good example of the emphasized distinction and distance between gods and men. In Euripides, we mostly

⁸⁷ Bushnell, 1988. p. 13.

see the “framing gods”⁸⁸ as the Athena in *Helen* who descends from high up to settle the conflicts at the end of the play, or as the Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* who appears only in the beginning, laying out her divine intention to the audience, while keeping the characters involved in the dark.

The change of human-god relationship is revealed also in the use of certain words. The epithet “god-like” is applied to many Homeric heroes, and for metrical variation a group of words and phrases are employed: “ἰσόθεος” (*Iliad* 7. 136, *Odyssey* 1.324), “ἀντίθεον” (*Iliad* 8. 275, 13. 791) “ἐπιείκελος ἀθανάτοισιν” (*Iliad* 1. 265, 4. 394), θεοείκελος (*Iliad* 19. 155) and θεῖος (*Iliad* 16. 798). It is applied extensively to various men, highlighting any hero of importance at the moment. However, such words are either absent in extant tragedy, as in the case of ἐπιείκελος ἀθανάτοισιν and θεοείκελος, or used to describe a matter (*Trachiniae* 1162), an object (*Philoctetes* 140), or the divine (Euripides *Orestes* 420) instead of mortals. There are exceptions. Jocasta, having committed suicide, is described as “θεῖον Ἰοκάστης” (*Persae* 1235); the chorus use ἰσόθεος to describe Darius and Xerxes, dead or completely defeated; and the word is also used to describe Antigone who has gone to her fate like a god, “τοῖς ἰσοθέοις σύγκληρα λαχεῖν” (*Antigone* 837), at a point when she was led away and determined to die. In the above exceptions, mortals are describe as “godlike” only in death, or in Xerxes’ situation, the word gains a sarcastic effect compared to his total defeat. One mortal who is positively described as god-like

⁸⁸ Griffin, 1999. p. 12.

seems to be Teiresias, the godlike mantis, “τὸν θεῖον ἤδη μάντιν” (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 298). As will be discussed later, this is a fitting exception, since Teiresias has become the symbolized figure representing divine will. Apart from these exceptions, no living mortal is granted such epithets as the heroes in Homer enjoy. To Oedipus the chief priest in supplication cautiously clarifies that they do not judge him equal to gods, “Θεοῖσι μὲν νυν οὐκ ἰσοῦμένον” (31) but only exalt him as the first among men “ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον” (33) and best of mortals “βροτῶν ἄριστ’(ε)” (46). Thus when the dying Heracles recalls the prophecy from his father Zeus, “ἔμοι γὰρ ἦν πρόφαντον ἕκ πατρὸς πάλαι/ τῶν ἐμπνεόντων μηδενὸς θανεῖν ὕπο” (*Trachiniae* 1159-60) he is recounting a rare example in Attic tragedies of the way gods communicate their knowledge to men. After all, Heracles is half-divine, and in another play by the same author he shows up as *deus ex machine* (*Philoctetes* 1408ff). Gods in Attic tragedies are not only more impersonal, they are harsher and more distant, less approachable to men; mortals are compared to gods in a much more cautious manner.

In many cases, especially in the Theban plays which will be the focus of this study, the will of gods are more often stated through oracles. Oracles, in a sense, represent the mortals’ attempt to communicate with immortals. Jean-Pierre Vernant’s discussion about a fifth century Greek attitude, though focused on speech and sound, is telling about the function of oracles between men and gods:

The Greeks valorized oral divination; rather than techniques of interpreting signs or aleatory procedures like the throw of the dice, considered by them to be minor forms, they preferred what Crahay calls the oracular dialogue, in which the

deity's word replies directly to the questions of the consultant.⁸⁹

Bird signs, thunder sounds, and dream omens all require the professional skill of interpretation. Except for a few exceptions, such omens come at their accord, at the will of gods instead of humans. The oracular dialogue is different in these two aspects. Men actively pose questions to gods through oracles, to which they get answers which address these questions. In this sense, oracles both offer a more direct way of communication between gods and men and betray gods' actual distance from mortals. Since gods seldom reveal themselves to men and less often explain their intentions to mortals, there is the need to consciously seek their advice.

Now I proceed to discuss the specific god concerning fate in Attic tragedy. As is discussed above, in Homer a lot of the words and phrases of fate are in connection with Zeus. Compared with his predominant power on fate in Homeric poems, Zeus is portrayed with "greater stature and remoteness" in tragedies.⁹⁰ Yet Zeus is still referred to as the source of sufferings on the stage (*Trachiniae* 1278); mortals pray to him (*Agamemnon* 973ff) as the one causing all and all effecting (*Agamemnon* 1486). However, Zeus is never portrayed on stage, nor does Zeus directly relate with human affairs. The daily images in the Homeric epics, which became representations of fate when connected with Zeus, are not seen in Attic tragedies. Zeus' primary connection with the expressions of fate in Homeric epics is replaced by Apollo's primary connection with fate in the Attic tragedies.

⁸⁹ Vernant, in Zeitlin (ed., 1991). p. 311.

⁹⁰ Roberts, 1984. p. 86.

This is in close connection with the worship of Apollo. Apollo, a main god among the twelve Olympians, enjoys a large number of sanctuaries throughout the Hellenic world, at Delphi, Delos, Didyma, Clarus, Daphni and so on. Of the many sanctuaries of Apollo, the oracle at Delphi receives the most attention and delineation in Attic tragedies. Despite the large number of oracles in Greece, the oracle in Delphi gets predominant importance, and is repeatedly referred to in Attic tragedies. There are indeed a few references to other oracles. The oracle of Zeus at Dodona is referred to several times,⁹¹ and in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the chorus mentions the temple at Abai (900) and the oracle of Zeus at Olympia (901). Considering the large number of oracles extant in Greece, the oracle of Delphi does receive a disproportioned prominence in Attic tragedies. The reason why Delphi gains such a predominantly important place in tragedy is not clear,⁹² yet the rising influence of Delphi is explicitly reflected in Attic tragedies. There is debate about what questions people asked and whether Delphi “declined” after the Peloponnesian Wars, but there is no debate of its importance as a pan-Hellenic site.

Although the literary representation of Delphic oracles in Attic tragedy differs

⁹¹ Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 669, 831; Sophocles *Trachiniae* 1168; Euripides *Andromache* 886.

⁹² Parker argues about the issue of objectivity, and thinks that the most influential shrine lay outside the territory of the great classical city-states not because these had no use for it, but because the most convincing prophecy comes from afar. (in Cartledge and Harvey (eds., 1985). p. 300)

from the historical practice,⁹³ I think it is necessary to further discuss a little more about the worship of Apollo at Delphi. Apollo is believed to have multiple origins and to have arrived at Delphi from somewhere else, and very likely a place outside Greece.⁹⁴ Functions of Apollo's sanctuaries include a larger variety than modern people might imagine, and there was always no distinct line between religious and civic ones. The sanctuary of Apollo Aleos, north of South-Italian Croton, is said to have marked the northern frontier of the city and so also marked sovereignty, as well as to have been one of the main centers of regular public contact.⁹⁵ The Lykeion in Athenian suburbs was a cult-place for Apollo Lykeios, a gymnasium for athletes and an exercise area for troops.⁹⁶

The oracle at Delphi had its role in inter-state gatherings and institutions;⁹⁷ it also

⁹³ This will be elaborated later in this chapter and in the 2nd chapter.

⁹⁴ Plutarch records the practices at Septerion, one of three festivals at Delphi. The escorting of the boy and the journeying away and then back to Delphi was then, in Plutarch's days, interpreted in correlation with the dragon-slaying myth; thus the boy in the festival represents Apollo, and the journey to and back from the Vale of Tempe represents the god's wandering and purification. Some other scholars, arguing that Apollo originates from somewhere in the north, see the rituals as a reflection of the god's original arrival from the "Hyperboreans"—beyond the north winds, though in the actual ritual the procession went no further than Tempe, that is, Thessaly (Guthrie 80). Apollo's many sanctuaries in Asia Minor constitute a strong proof for an origin outside Greece. The festival of the Hyakinthia at Amyklai in Lakonia worships Apollo as an agriculture god (Guthrie 86), while the ancient epithet "Lykios"—the wolf god—implies an origin as the shepherd god (Guthrie 82). He was also worshipped as a protector on the sea; according to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the god "first came to Delphi in the shape of a dolphin, carrying Cretan priests on his back", a legend which echoes Apollo's epithet as "the Dolphinian".

⁹⁵ See Bremmer (1994: 29); Polignac in Alcock (ed., 1994). p. 16.

⁹⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood, in Marinatos and Hagg (eds., 1993). p. 13.

⁹⁷ Morgan, in Marinatos and Hagg (eds., 1993). p. 18.

had influence on colonization.⁹⁸ However, the most famous function of Delphi was to give oracles, a function which survives the change of deities.⁹⁹ Priesthoods of a certain god were always held by the gender corresponding to that of the deity,¹⁰⁰ yet the priest of Apollo at Delphi, the Pythia, was always a woman. This might have some connection with the name of Delphi, for the word “δελφός” meaning the “womb”, which might indicate an archaic veneration of an Earth Goddess. It might be more appropriate to have a priestess in the “womb” of worship. Furthermore, Simon Price suggests an association of female priesthood with the way oracles were delivered. According to Plato, there are two kinds of prophecy, one is “through observation of birds and by other signs” (*Phaedrus* 244c); and the other is sent “through madness” (*Phaedrus* 244a), in fits of frenzy.¹⁰¹ The divine possession of the Pythia by Apollo befits the common conception of the female gender as less rational and more easily susceptible to frenzy.

It is exactly the prophetic function of Apollo and Delphi that receives the most attention and delineation in Attic tragedy. Although Delphi as the oracle of Apollo

⁹⁸ Guthrie, 1968. p. 188.

⁹⁹ Apollo was not the first to deliver oracles at Delphi. Some legends say that Gaia was the first (e.g. see Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 4ff; Euripides *Ion*); others hold that it was a sibyl named Herophile, who received her predictions from Gaia. Then the oracle was succeeded by Themis, the goddess who later gave her seat to Apollo. It is also said that between Themis and Apollo Phoebe, the Titaness, took post for a period of time.

¹⁰⁰ Price, 1999. p. 68.

¹⁰¹ *Bacchae* 298ff also mentions the connection between madness and mantic powers.

may be ultimately giving the will of Zeus,¹⁰² fate in Attic tragedies has an immediate connection with Delphic oracles and Apollo. Oracular consultation only has less than a handful of marginal examples in Homer. According to Demodokos' song, Agamemnon consulted Apollo at Pytho at the beginning of the war (*Odyssey* 8.75-82), but it is for this reason that critics tend to consider this episode as a later addition and "cannot have been composed before the eighth century",¹⁰³ since it is very unlikely that "Bronze Age Pytho had any such institution, or even a cult of Apollo".¹⁰⁴ Apart from this example, although there are practices which resemble oracular consultation, there is no explicit mention of oracles or their visitation.

However, oracles and oracular consultations are prevalent in tragedies. Bushnell describes prophecy as "the language of fate" in early histories and plays;¹⁰⁵ and oracles, especially the Delphic oracle, are the major means of prophesying. It is true that a distinction should be made between the literary representation of oracles and the historical one. Joseph Fontenrose's study on Delphic oracles shed much insight on this issue. He discussed the characteristics of historical oracles and legendary ones. In contrast to those historical oracles which are most likely to be authentic, Delphic oracles in Attic tragedies are mostly about domestic and profane matters instead of

¹⁰² Specially, for Zeus' role in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, see Segal (1995) chapter 8.

¹⁰³ Fontenrose, 1978. p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Bushnell, 1988. p. x

religious or public affairs, and their mode of representation is more likely to be ambiguous, even evasive in meaning, and not to be immediately understood by the person concerned.¹⁰⁶ Delphic oracles in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as in other Attic tragedies, are very much different from evidence we have now about the actual ones in antiquity. The fact that tragedians use them so often in their works, yet shape them as something different from reality, suggests that they have an important poetic function. We might cautiously draw the conclusion that oracles in tragedies, though based on common practice, are less a faithful reflection of reality than a symbolic dramatic device. Oracle in Attic tragedies, especially in the Theban plays, constitutes a major literary representation of fate.

Lastly, in the Theban plays in particular, the mantic figure Teiresias has a special role in the prophecy and representation of fate. Teiresias seems to be one of the few named professional manteis in extant Attic tragedies. There are several references to other seers and diviners, but they are more often nameless and mentioned in general terms.¹⁰⁷ Figures like Cassandra and Prometheus also foresee future events, yet they are not professional manteis, but exceptionally endowed with the skill of prophecy by the divine, or a deity himself. Teiresia alone is described as a mortal who has divine knowledge. In tragedy he seems to have become a symbol of prophecy, and every

¹⁰⁶ Fontenrose, 1978. pp. 26-7 and 21-4.

¹⁰⁷ *Philoctetes* 1338 mentions a ἄριστόμαντις named Helenus, who predicted the fall of Troy. In addition, there are other nameless seers and diviners, like the ὄνειρόμαντις in *Libation Bearers* 33 and the προφήτης in *Agamemnon* 409.

Theban play has his role. The old mantis appears on stage over an amazingly large extent of time. He is already an old man in the early days of Thebes, when Cadmus, the founder of the city is still alive (Euripides *Bacchae*). He also advises Eteocles, descendent of Cadmus five generations down (Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes*). The portrayal of Teiresias as participating in Theban affairs over such an unusually long span of time makes him almost a symbolic figure.

Teiresias in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* seems to be especially different in his source of knowledge. In *Antigone* Teiresias is described to practice his skill just as other diviners, following the bird omens (*Antigone* 1000). In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, although the angry Oedipus thinks that the old mantis gets knowledge either from birds or gods (“ἄπ’ οἰωνῶν” or “ἔκ θεῶν”, 395-6), the chorus describes him as a godlike mantis (“θεῖος μάντις”, 298), in whom truth is naturally inborn (“τᾶλθές ἐμπέφυκεν ἀνθρώπων μόνῳ”, 299). Thus unlike other diviners who only find explanation from outward signs, Teiresias is naturally endowed with divine knowledge.¹⁰⁸ The inborn knowledge is superior to that gained from outward signs and sources. Thus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the image of Teiresias is even more symbolized as the representing the inexplicable power of fate. In addition, while Teiresias’ physical blindness forms a contrast to his divine insight, his blindness may

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, John Dillery (in Johnston and Struck, eds., 2005) points out that the term *mantis* is seen, though rarely, to be applied to gods. See the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* 533-38 and Plato *Lg.* 686a, and so on. And the very term Pythia is referred to, *promantis* (Herodotus *Histories* 6. 66. 2-3, 7. 141.2), implies that Apollo was thought of as the mantis there. See Dillery (2005: 169).

also be the embodiment of the stark aspect of fate. Talking about the convergence of the power of fate and that of Zeus, Winnington-Ingram argues that Moira, as well as the Moirai as the daughters of Night, are used to stand for the primitive, the rigid, the intractable, the violent, the blind and the dark aspect of divine operation; and that Moira joined force with Zeus the all-seeing (*Eumenides* 1046).¹⁰⁹ The power of fate is rigid, intractable, and fixed, before which all mortals are reduced to equals regardless of their worldly rank, age, appearance or what else. The blind Teiresias seems to embody this characteristic of fate.

¹⁰⁹ Winnington-Ingram, 1980. p. 158.

Chapter Two: the Plot Function of Fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Having discussed the semantic representations of fate, I now move to the plot function of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The focus of this chapter is internal, examining only the text of the play. And my discussion centers on fate as a rhetorical device which helps structure the plot of the play.

1, Fate as a Rhetorical Device in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Fate is used as a structuring device in a range of literary works other than tragedy, and various scholars have discussed the function of fate in the composition of a text. In Homeric epics, just as the characters frequently attribute events they cannot explain to Zeus *post facto*, in the first few lines of the *Iliad*, the poet is attributing his plan of the whole plot to Zeus *pre facto*. The grand plan revealed in the beginning of the *Iliad* is, in a sense, also the grand plan of the text. P. Engelbert Eberhard argues that fate in the Homeric poems was the means by which the poet made his poem progress within the limits of a preconceived plan; and when the action of the poem clashed with the will of gods, fate is the excuse to ensure that the plot advanced according to the poet's plan.¹¹⁰

James Redfield sees fate as plot in the sense that there is "a fateful quality" in the "aesthetic unity of a well-made story", which joins separate actions together and gives

¹¹⁰ Eberhard, *Das Schicksal als poetische Idee bei Hommer*. Paderborn 1923. qtd from Dietrich, 1965. p. 183. According to Dietrich, Eberhard was the first to propose such a theory.

them implicit meaning.¹¹¹ The perspective of fate gives significance to the individual incidents that seems irrelevant and insignificant when viewed separately. In history settings, fate and the telling of fate may also function importantly in the historian's composition. Julia Kindt talks about how Herodotus uses oracles to establish the authority of his history writing as a new genre, and "the authoritative voice of oracles, seers, and omens in many ways corresponds to the authoritative voice of the historian in his roles as the researcher and narrator."¹¹²

While fate is a fact in human life, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* fate is also used as a literary device. Attic tragedians, who composed and competed as individuals, could use the mythic past while reshaping it to a certain extent. As Alan Sommerstein points out, one way to avoid or evade the limitation of an existing framework and existing personages is to create a story that reached an existing destination by an entirely novel route.¹¹³ In arranging the diverse details and incidents, fate could be a literary means to thread the parts into a coherent, meaningful whole. Sophocles, in composing his tragedies, may have chosen from and manipulated previous traditions, or even invented new ones. In this process, he may have used fate as an active literary device to shape his narrative and create the intended artistic effect. Richmond Lattimore also discusses the way a poet makes his plot with stories whose general outline is fixed yet details may vary.

¹¹¹ Redfield, 1994. p. 134.

¹¹² Kindt, 2006. p. 35.

¹¹³ Sommerstein, "Tragedy and Myth." Ed. Bushnell, 2005. 163-180. p. 165. Also see M. I. Finley, 1980. p. 10-11 for discussion on the dramatists creativity and originality.

He uses the Oedipus story as an example to examine what stories poets had at their disposal and what the legend required, permitted, or forbade.¹¹⁴ I argue that fate functions as a literary device in structure and characterization, and the tragic sense of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is, to a great extent, the result of Sophocles' poetic handling.¹¹⁵

In this and the next chapter, I adopt Edmunds' method to address the issue of fate in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. By analyzing the origins and developments of each element in the play, I aim at a better understanding of Sophocles' inventions and emphases on the issue of fate. This method will supplement the interpretation based primarily on close reading and gives insights through the context of Sophocles' writing.

2, Structural Comparison with Earlier Versions of the Oedipus story

My first step is to compare Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* with other versions of the Oedipus story. I limit my comparisons to other versions of myths, tales and poetic works earlier or roughly contemporary to Sophocles.¹¹⁶ Using the same legendary figures, these works exhibit differences drastic or subtle.

¹¹⁴ Lattimore, 1964. p. 3.

¹¹⁵ This is not to repeat the third category of "misunderstanding" rejected by Dodds (1966), that Sophocles was a pure artist and the gods are simply part of the machinery of the plot. What Dodds rejects is the notion that fate functions merely as literary machinery. My discussion of fate's literary function in this chapter will be followed up by a discussion of the historical and social contexts behind it in Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ Folklorists like Vladimir Propp and Lowell Edmunds (Edmunds and Dundes, 1984) offer a wider range of examples in discussing the Oedipus legend, which are crucial in determining folklore types but may not all apply to the discussion of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Homer

I begin with the *Iliad*, which contains only a brief mentioning of Oedipus

ὄς ποτε Θήβας δ' ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο
ἔς τάφον...

who came once to Thebes and the tomb of Oedipus after
his downfall, ... (23. 679-80. trans. Richmond Lattimore)

Instead of being forever expelled from Thebes, Oedipus was buried in Thebes. The word δουπέω deserves some attention. It means “sound heavy or dead” and in Homer it refers to the heavy thud of a corpse as opposed to the clashing of the armor.¹¹⁷ The distinction between the sound of a dead body and that of armor suggests battlefield. Moreover, according to Chantraine, *Iliad* 4. 504 is an example of δουπέω which “dit du fracas de la chute d’un guerrier en armes”. In another context, *Iliad* 13. 426, the word is “de la formule décrivant la mort d’un héros au combat”.¹¹⁸ Although Cunliffe thinks that the word in 23. 679 means only “to die”,¹¹⁹ the use of this word in the other contexts in the *Iliad*, with the strong connection of warriors and armory, brings the indication of Oedipus’ death in battle. This indication, though weak, is noteworthy.

The *Odyssey* offers a concise account of Oedipus’ life:

μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλήν Ἐπικάστην,
ἧ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν αἰδρεΐησι νόοιο
γημαμένη ᾧ υἱί: ὁ δ' ὄν πατέρ' ἔξεναρίζας
γῆμεν: ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοᾶς διὰ βουλᾶς:
ἧ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἶδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,

¹¹⁷ LSJ, 1940. Ninth Edition. p. 447.

¹¹⁸ Chantraine, 1968, p. 295.

¹¹⁹ Cunliffe, 1977. p. 99.

ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
 ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη: τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
 πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.
 I saw the beautiful Epikaste, Oedipus' mother,
 who in the ignorance of her mind had done a monstrous
 thing when she married her own son. He killed his father
 and married her, but the gods soon made it all known to mortals.
 But he, for all his sorrows, in beloved Thebes continued
 to be lord over the Kadmeians, all through the bitter designing
 of the gods; while she went down to Hades of the gates, the strong one,
 knotting a nose and hanging sheer from the high ceiling,
 in the constraint of her sorrow, but left to him who survived her
 all the sorrows that are brought to pass by a mother's furies.
 (11. 271-80, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

This account, with no self-blinding or self-exile, is drastically different from the modern common conception of the Oedipus story. It is first important to note that there is again the semantic hint of battlefield. The word “ἐξεναρῖζω”, which Cunliffe thinks to mean “killing in general” in *Odyssey* 11. 273,¹²⁰ is more often used in Homer (especially in the *Iliad*) as to “strip or spoil a foe slain in fight”.¹²¹ In *Iliad* 6. 30 it describes a killing with spear in the battlefield. Thus echoing the use of “δουπέω” in the *Iliad*, the image of Oedipus as a warrior is again suggested. Second, Homer does not mention any children from the incestuous union. This has been explained by the fact that Homer's “epic grandeur tends to shun such ugly details”.¹²² Still, the immediacy that gods make the incest known starkly contrasts to the rendering in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and it seems that the temporal adverb “ἄφαρ” eliminates the possibility of any issue from a marriage so

¹²⁰ Cunliffe, 1977. p. 136.

¹²¹ LSJ, 590. Examples include: *Iliad* 6. 20, 6. 417, 7. 146, 7. 151, 11. 246, 11. 368, 13. 619, 17. 37, 22, 376; *Odyssey* 22. 264.

¹²² Charles Segal, 2001. p. 25.

short-lived.¹²³ It seems that Homer's Oedipus story, instead of omitting the children of this marriage, allows no possibility of producing children. Third, the intervention of gods is explicit, though Apollo is not specified and there are no prophecies mentioned. The revelation of Oedipus' dreadful deeds has different results from the version in Sophocles. Although Homer does mention Epicaste's furies (280), and there is the indication that Oedipus is partly responsible for Epicaste's death, the Erinyes here do not pursue Oedipus for revenge as they do to Orestes in the *Eumenides*. Oedipus is sorrowed by Epicaste's suicide, and his ἄλγεα, "woes", are repeated in lines 275 and 279.¹²⁴ However, these sorrows do not weigh on Oedipus so that they in any way affect his reign. The fact that Oedipus continues to rule Thebes demonstrates that he is not struck down in spirit, nor is he considered an outcast by the Theban people.

The Oedipodeia

No more than two fragments survive from the *Oedipodeia*. The first fragment concerns Sphinx's activity before Oedipus' arrival at Thebes. The second fragment,

¹²³ There have been disputes among scholars as to the meaning of the word ἄφρα (see Baldry 25, Robert 108 and II 37 (n. 91), Hofer 728. 56, Legras 56, etc.). Some gave the word not its literal meaning of "immediately, soon, straightway (εὐθεῶς), but the meaning of ἐξαίφνης, "suddenly". Still others stick to the literary meaning. Kirchihoff 57 contends that all heroines in the Nekyia catalogue who had children have their children explicitly mentioned. Deubner 37 points out that this does not always apply. De Kock believes that Oedipus has no children, or at least has no time for four of them from this marriage (p. 12). I also take the literal meaning of ἄφρα and thinks that in the *Odyssey* version Oedipus does not have all four children by Epicaste. Further discussion follows in the discussion of the epic cycles.

¹²⁴ Edmunds specially notices the word ἀλγεα, and thinks that the word "clearly signals the theme that would continue to shape it were it expanded to the length of an epic." See Edmunds, 2006. pp. 14-15.

preserved in Pausanias 9.5.10, talks about Oedipus' marriage to Euryganeia¹²⁵ and his offspring by her. Pausanias considered Euryganeia as a different woman from Oedipus' mother; nor does he believe that Oedipus has any children by his mother, quoting *Odyssey* 11. 271 as his proof:

πῶς οὖν ἐποίησαν ἀνάπυστα ἄφαρ, εἰ δὴ τέσσαρες [γενεαί] ἐκ τῆς
Ἐπικάστης ἐγένοντο παῖδες τῷ Οἰδίποδι;
How could they "have made it known forthwith," if Epicaste had borne
four children to Oedipus?¹²⁶ (trans. W.H.S. Jones)

Pausanias' interpretation both explains the existence of Oedipus' children, and avoids the awkwardness of incestuous offspring. Pausanias' reading has received two kinds of criticism. Some scholars argue that Euryganeia is just another name for Oedipus' wife and mother in the *Oedipodeia*, just as it is Epicaste in the *Odyssey* and Jocasta in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹²⁷ Still others, like de Kock, agree with Pausanias and argue for the second marriage of Oedipus after the death of his mother.¹²⁸ The issue of a second marriage could be important. If Oedipus could enter into a second marriage, the revelation of his patricide and incest in *Oedipodeia* should not have a destructive effect on his life. Oedipus probably remained on the throne as the case in the *Odyssey*, and his self-blinding and self-exile, which became now the well-known version of the Oedipus

¹²⁵ Euryganeia is said to be the daughter of Hyperphas and wife of Oedipus according to Apollodorus 1. 1. 14 and Pausanias 9. 5. 11.

¹²⁶ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 9.5.11.

¹²⁷ Such scholars include Robert, Rzach, Daly and Davies.

¹²⁸ De Kock, 1961. pp. 15-6.

story, is probably lacking in this epic.¹²⁹

Pindar

Pindar's version emphasizes both fate and Delphic prophecy, though there are no details:

οὕτω δὲ Μοῖρ', ἃ τε πατρώιον
τῶνδ' ἔχει τὸν εὐφρονα πότμον, θεόρτω σὺν ὄλβῳ
ἐπί τι καὶ πῆμ' ἄγει παλιντράπελον ἄλλῳ χρόνῳ:
ἐξ οὐπερ ἔκτεινε Λαῖον μὀριμος υἱὸς
συναντόμενος, ἐν δὲ Πυθῶνι χρησθὲν
παλαίφατον τέλεσσεν.
ἰδοῖσα δ' ὄξει' Ἐριννύς
ἔπεφνέ οἱ σὺν ἀλλαλοφονίᾳ γένος ἀρήιον: (Olymp. 2. 35-42)
and so it is that Fate, which controls the benevolent destiny
that this family has enjoyed, can bring some suffering
even into their heaven-sent prosperity,
which in time when Laius' son met his father
and, as had been foretold, killed him,
so fulfilling the oracle delivered long before at Pytho.
The sharp-eyed Erinys saw this act,
and slew his warlike sons, who died at each other's hands. (trans Anthony
Verity)

In this version are the many elements repeatedly used by the tragedians who wrote about the Oedipus story: the element of fate, the Delphic oracle, and son slaughtering the father, and the mutual slaughter of last generation of the family. It is perhaps for this reason that de Kock comments that in Pindar there is an almost full-fledged Oedipus of the tragedy.¹³⁰ Oedipus' story is attributed to both the predominance of fate and the family destiny. Oedipus is described as “μὀριμος”, and since there are no details, and there is no room for Oedipus' character, Pindar's narration gives the sense that he is

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

purely the victim of fate. Pytho is explicitly mentioned, thus Delphic oracle has become a key element in Pindar. Moreover, in Pindar's version, the Erinys executed the mutual destruction of Oedipus' sons on account of Oedipus' killing of Laius. It seems to suggest that the sons' death are incurred not by the family curse as in the *Seven Against Thebes*, nor by Oedipus' curse as in *Oedipus Colonus* or *Phoenician Women*, but as the retribution of Oedipus' patricide.

Aeschylus

There are only summaries of Aeschylus' lost *Oedipus*, and only the last one of the trilogy survives. In *Seven Against Thebes* 742-56 we read:

παλαιγενῆ γὰρ λέγω
 παρβασίαν ὠκύποινον:
 αἰῶνα δ' ἔς τρίτον μένει:
 Ἀπόλλωνος εὔτε Λάιος
 βία, τρὶς εἰπόντος ἔν
 μεσομφάλοις Πυθικοῖς
 χρηστηρίοις θνάσκοντα γέν-
 νας ἄτερ σώζειν πόλιν,
 κρατηθεῖς δ' ἔκ φίλων ἀβουλιᾶν
 ἐγείνατο μὲν μόρον αὐτῷ,
 πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν,
 ὅστε ματρὸς ἀγνὰν
 σπείρας ἄρουραν, ἴν' ἐτράφη,
 ῥίζαν αἱματόεσσαν
 ἔτλα

Old is the tale of sin I tell/ but swift in retribution: / to the third generation it abides. / Thrice in Pythian prophecies/ given at Navel-of-Earth/ Apollo had directed/ King Laius all issueless to die/ and save his city so...

but/ he was mastered by loving folly/ and begot for himself a doom,/ father-murdering Oedipus, / who sowed his mother's sacred womb, / whence he had sprung himself, / with bloody root, to his heartbreak. (trans. David Grene)

Aeschylus' version offers many more details. The Delphic oracle is clearly an element in the story. The inherited family curse is emphasized, since Laius' guilt is

carried on to the third generation. More importantly, the triple warning by Apollo came with a choice, that Laius could save or destroy the city by this choice. Pindar did not mention any possible free will of Oedipus or Laius except for the fact that the oracle about the patricide was realized. Neither was there any choice for Laius mentioned in Sophocles. However, in Aeschylus' version, Laius could have saved his city by restraining his desires. Thus Aeschylus emphasized the guilt of Laius, who is responsible for the “παρβασίαν ὠκῦπτοινον” which passes down over three generations.

Euripides

Euripides enjoys the dramatist's freedom in supplying details in the Oedipus story which his predecessors omit.¹³¹ In Euripides' version, Laius, as in Aeschylus, neglects Apollo's forewarning in his drunken pleasure (*Phoenician Women*, 18-22). Jocasta, however, did not commit suicide, and with Oedipus they remained in the palace for many years. Euripides' version shows that the self-exile is not an established, authoritative motif in the fifth-century Athens.

From the comparisons we learn that: first, many details and plot arrangements in Sophocles have no existing evidence for his borrowing from any predecessors. Second, there is no authoritative version on the many details of the Oedipus story, such as how and to what extent divine intervention is realized, when, where and in what manner Oedipus encountered the Sphinx, or how Oedipus took the realization of his horrible deeds. It is thus important to examine how Sophocles chose from different versions and

¹³¹ For a fuller list of these details, see Charles Segal, 2001. p. 31.

even invented new details.

3, Fate in Structure in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

I now discuss the important function of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* by analyzing the different elements in the story. I trace the origins of these respective elements in an attempt to demonstrate Sophocles' special handling of each. I start with the explicit elements of fate, then proceed to elements less directly connected with fate.

Oracular Consultations and Prophecies

As we have discussed in the first chapter, fate in fifth century Attic tragedies, especially in the Theban plays, is very often represented through oracles and other kinds of predictions. Oracles and prophecies have a key function especially in the structure of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. As Charles Segal says, "Although the oracles are important both in Aeschylus and in the lyric poet Pindar, Aeschylus' contemporary, Sophocles is the first to make them a leitmotif of the plot."¹³² The play is framed by two Delphic oracles: the one in the beginning sets off the whole search for Laius' murder, the other suggested in the end seems to be part of the attempt to appease the intense emotions aroused towards the end of the play. If one reconstructs the Oedipus story in its chronological sequence, it is obvious that all major steps in the life of Oedipus are somewhat driven by predictions. In the actual sequence of events, Apollo's oracle to Laius spurred him to rid himself of Oedipus who, unbeknown to Laius, was taken to Corinth. Another oracular utterance

¹³² Segal, 2001. p. 27.

spurred Oedipus to leave his foster parents when, shocked by what he heard at Delphi, he traveled to Thebes, in reality his native city. Moreover, Oedipus set out to search for Laius' murderer at the direction of a new Delphic response, which led to the fatal discovery of terrible truth. Thus, structurally speaking, oracles are integral to Sophocles' play, and create the coherence of the whole plot. None of Sophocles' predecessors known to us today used oracles and predictions to structure the plotline in this way.

Moreover, what is unique in the Oedipus story is that the narrative is not set up in the sequence of its actual events. The story line does not start with a prediction, proceed with the process of its realization, and end with its fulfillment. Contrary to most Attic tragedies which culminate with the perpetration of the most violent acts—for example, Agamemnon's death at his wife's hand right after Cassandra's terrible prediction, Orestes' killing his mother, Medea's murdering her own children—the *Oedipus Tyrannus* starts at a point when what the oracle predicted about the dreadful facts of Oedipus' life are already a *fait accompli*. As P. H. Vellacot comments, there is no other extant Greek tragedy which contains a comparable proportion of lines devoted to circumstantial narrative of past events.¹³³ The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is thus a play in the perfect tense, and the key events are already realized and cannot be undone. Of all existing and extant Attic tragedies treating a heroic or divine myth,¹³⁴ this temporal structure is unique. In other tragedies, prophecies point

¹³³ Vellacot, 1971, p. 107.

¹³⁴ The only exception might be Aeschylus' *Persians* which deals with an event of the tragedian's own life. Here, Xerxes' defeat has been realized before the play opens, and

to the near or remote future, to something to be realized within the play. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, on the other hand, two of the three major oracles concern a past event, an irretrievable fact for characters in the play. This unique arrangement greatly adds to the sense of helplessness of mortal man before the power of fate.

Delphi

Among the oracles mentioned in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Delphi is not the only one. Naming a list of oracles, the chorus mentioned the oracle of Apollo in Abae and the oracle of Zeus at Olympia (899-900) in addition to Delphi. Yet it is the oracle at Delphi that enjoys the preeminent role in this play. Consultation at Delphi takes place in the beginning of the play, and is again suggested by Creon towards the end. It is also the oracle of Delphi that Oedipus consults about his birth and where he received information about his terrible fate. However, despite the special emphasis received in this play, Delphi is not integral but a later addition to the original Oedipus legend. It is only after the Oedipus story took shape and circulated in several versions that the Delphic element entered.

The Delphic oracles described in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* are different in form from those that are more likely to be authentic oracular utterances. Joseph Fontenrose points out that the historical and the legendary responses differ in the modes of expressions, the topics, the question formulae and the occasions of their consultation.¹³⁵ Among the

during the play the cause of that catastrophic defeat is revealed.

¹³⁵ Fontenrose, 1978. 13-44.

occasions of consultation he mentioned, plague and famine are more often the occasions for legendary oracles, but rarely the occasions for historical ones. The consultation in the beginning of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is obviously occasioned by a plague. For the modes of oracular responses, typical oracles in reality usually chose between a limited number of options instead of giving specific directions or statements for future events. Statistics shows that clear future statements among legendary responses greatly outnumber those in historical ones. The oracles in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* are obviously not chosen from a few options; instead, they states specifically about Oedipus' future or gives clear directions for a certain situation. Thus there is little doubt that the Delphic oracles in Oedipus story are typical fictional ones.

However, the problem of authenticity could be viewed differently from the perspective of oral transmission. Lisa Maurizio examines Delphic oracles in respect to oral performance. Maurizio believes that the audience of oracles are indeed the true performers or composers of oracles insofar as they confer authority on an oracle-performer by accepting the oracle, or even rewording it.¹³⁶ She concludes that

... the oracles attributed to Delphi were considered authentic by their tellers. Thus all the oracles attributed to Delphi are canonized by the tradition as authentic and thereafter become part of the appropriating force of the tradition.¹³⁷

Predictions attributed to Delphi in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* may have existed in the early development of the story, before the Delphic element entered. But in the long

¹³⁶ Lisa Maurizio, 1997. p. 315.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 322.

process of a story's oral transmission, Delphic oracle was possibly adopted to frame a narrative or to enforce authority. Fontenrose called our attention to phenomenon of the attribution of oracles to Delphi:

Numerous were the legends and folktales that floated about Greek lands in the eighth century B. C. when the Delphic Oracle was probably established; and in many of them prophecies and other revelations of divine purpose were favorite motives. It was likely then that as Delphi's fame increased, and especially after Delphi had surpassed other Oracles in prestige, some storytellers would say that Apollo at Delphi had made the revelation in question. So some versions of a tale acquired a Delphic response; others did not.¹³⁸

The process of attribution and manipulation of legendary oracles continued in texts such as the *Oedipus Tyrannus* which are not orally composed. Of the two oracles Sophocles used to predict Oedipus' fate, the oracle to Laius might serve as a good example of the process of this attribution. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* mentioned Apollo as the source of the prediction to Laius, and despite the strong suggestion by the other Delphic oracles in the play, did not explicitly describe it as from Delphi. Nor did Euripides specify the warning to Laius as from Delphi except for mentioning Apollo as the speaker (*Phoenician Women* 15-17). From the textual evidence we have, Pindar and Aeschylus first attributed it to Delphi, though the prophesying to Laius in the Oedipus story might have been part of the original legend, since otherwise it would be hard to explain the parents' motive to kill the baby. The prophecy spoken to Laius, then, probably belongs to the original Oedipus story predicted by some agent other than the Delphic oracle.

The oracle to Oedipus, however, is probably not a feature of the original legend.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Fontenrose, 1978. p. 93-4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

There is no explicit oracle in any other existing versions of the Oedipus story.¹⁴⁰ We have no evidence that Sophocles took it from some earlier version, and it is quite possible that he invented the episode.¹⁴¹ In comparison with other Oedipus stories in the folklore tradition, the oracular response given to Oedipus is unusual. Propp points out that normally in other folklore only the parents know of the prophecy; the child does not. By making Oedipus himself aware of his future patricide and incest, and spurring him to vain efforts to escape fate, “Sophocles gives the whole story tragic meaning”. Accident of fate makes tragedy.¹⁴² Propp’s samples include folklores from all peoples of Europe, as well as Zulu legends from African, and Mongol legends from Asia. Decades later Fontenrose, a Hellenist, uses the evidence of modern Greek tales to point out that in the folklore tradition, “it was the Moirai who appeared on the day when the child was born or a few days later and predicted his destiny to the parents.”¹⁴³ Thus Oedipus consulting Delphi about his own fate would be, if not unique, still an innovative episode in a Greek context. In employing Delphi as the literary device of prediction, Sophocles chose, or no less likely, invented an episode which greatly adds to the artistic effect of the tragedy.

Teiresias

¹⁴⁰ Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* does mention an implicit one, that Oedipus went to Phoebus’ house to learn about his parents (34ff).

¹⁴¹ See also Edmunds (2006: 47): “Sophocles is the earliest source for, and perhaps the originator for, such an oracle.”

¹⁴² Propp, in Edmunds and Dundes (eds., 1983). p. 82.

¹⁴³ Edmunds, 1983. p. 97.

Though it is not certain to what an extent it functioned in the plot, the element of prophecy is probably ingrained in the original legend. The absence of prediction in Homer's brief account of the Oedipus story does not eliminate such a possibility in the original tale. Fontenrose thinks that the early legend already contained prophecies and oracles, which are either anonymous, from dreams, or ascribed to a mantic figure like Teiresias.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Teiresias is probably an older element than Delphi in the Oedipus story. On the one hand, the reputation of Teiresias as a Theban mantis was well-established, at least by the time of Homer (*Odyssey* 10). On the other, the story demands a prophesying agent to give prediction to Laius about his future son. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, the two key predictions to Laius and to Oedipus are not made by Teiresias. Edmunds compares Teiresias' role in Hyginus' version with his role in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* 200-462, and finds that in Sophocles' version "Teiresias is ineffectual".¹⁴⁵ For Edmunds, the reason why Teiresias appears at all is that he "had such importance in Theban legend that he was bound to appear somewhere in the legend of Oedipus".¹⁴⁶ For me, Teiresias' appearance in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* without an important prophesying role suggests that he was the vehicle of prophecy in the original story, but his roles as such are greatly taken over and overshadowed by the later Delphic element. If prophecy has an integral place in the original story, Teiresias probably was the

¹⁴⁴ Fontenrose, 1978. p. 95.

¹⁴⁵ Edmunds, 1985. p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

vehicle of it, either immediately as the tale took shape, or at some point of its circulation, before the element of Delphi entered. Since there is probably no prophesying to Oedipus himself and Teiresias' prediction should be the only time that Oedipus' fate is predicted, it is likely to be in a more straightforward way compared with the riddling manner in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Since the *Oedipus Tyrannus* has the Delphic oracle doing most of the prophesying, Teiresias needs to be assigned some new function other than repeating what is pronounced at Delphi, if he is to be preserved in the play as an older element. Sophocles solves the need in a marvelous way, taking advantage of the special characteristics of a mantis. It should be noted that oracle and mantis are two distinct types of prophesy. Manteis are independent and came into conflict with kings in both legend and history.¹⁴⁷ In Sophocles, Teiresias made his appearance on stage only once, for a breath of less than 150 lines, which is much less than Creon. Yet the old mantis holds an important role in the plot. On the one hand, it is during the encounter with Teiresias that the eager search set off by Oedipus takes a fatal turn: the hunt for the murderer turns into the hunt for the origin of his birth. Teiresias' angry words "you do not know who you are" may bring back to memory the original question which drove Oedipus to Delphi.¹⁴⁸ It is also in an

¹⁴⁷ Paul Roth discusses the speech in the *Bacchae* between Pentheus and Tereisias, and shows how it in form and etymology resembles the actual sophist argument. The article also discusses several real figure sophist-diviners such as Euthyphro, to show that there is actually no unbridgeable gap between these two roles. See Roth, 1984.

¹⁴⁸ Justina Gregory argues that "Oedipus never forgot the original question which drove him to Delphi; that it was not heedlessness, but the assumption that all danger was limited to Corinth that led him unwittingly to fulfill the Delphic prophecy." See

attempt to appease the king who is angered by the unhappy encounter with Teiresias that Jocasta brings up the oracle to Laius, which is in turn followed up by a recount of what Oedipus received at Delphi. Structurally speaking, the encounter with Teiresias is the dividing line in the play. After it, Oedipus is no longer the over-confident, all-competent king of the prologue. It dissolves his self-composure as the one in control of the situation and results in some subsequent events that completely turned Oedipus from the hunter to the hunted.

On the other hand, it is during the encounter with Teiresias that divine will gains a touch of enigma. Teiresias' conflict with Oedipus is essentially different from other representations of encounters between the mantis and the king. In both the confrontation of Agamemnon and Calchas in the *Iliad*, and the encounter of Creon and Teiresias in the *Antigone*, the conflict arises from the mantis' eagerness to guide the king and the king's stubborn refusal to listen. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, the conflict arises not from a failed persuasion, but from Teiresias' unwillingness to reveal. In contrast to the oracles to Laius and Oedipus, which take the form of simple, clear statement, Teiresias refuses to explain Apollo's will to Oedipus. He speaks in language that is enigmatic to the characters in the play, though clear to the audience. This aspect explains Segal's claim that Sophocles brings the mysterious power of the oracles onstage in the person of Teiresias.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the Sphinx episode is recounted (391ff). During this encounter, the Sphinx's obscure origins and fatal riddles add to the mysterious atmosphere of the

Gregory, 1995. p. 146.

¹⁴⁹ Segal, 2001. p. 26.

play. Thus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Teiresias further enigmatizes the oracle received in the beginning of the play, and helps to hold up the ἀναγνωρίσις till later. Teiresias also has an important function in characterization, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The plague

The source of the plague is never clarified by Sophocles. Apollo might be the first possible agent. In a similar situation at the beginning of the *Iliad*, Homer specifies Apollo as the cause of the plague, in answer to the eager prayers of his priest. Audiences familiar with the Homeric tradition would naturally wonder whether Apollo is also the source of plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In addition to the strong inter-textual implication from the *Iliad*, there is, as Deborah Roberts points out, a tension between the god's traditional aspects and what has actually happened under his auspices.¹⁵⁰ It is not unusual that gods inflict afflictions that are contradictory to the qualities that they are worshipped for. Apollo, as the god of healing and medicine, also brings the plague. So it is no surprise that the chorus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* pray to him for to release from the plague (162). It seems that here Apollo is the god who both heals and inflicts. The god excluded from the chorus' prayer is Ares; what is more, the chorus calls for the retreat of "raging Ares" (190-196). In this way, there is an indirect connection between the plague and Ares. Knox thinks it unusual that the Theban chorus should blame Ares. He compares this with the Theban women chorus who begged for help from Ares in the *Seven against Thebes*

¹⁵⁰ Roberts, 1984. p. 85.

(104-7, 135-6), and says that this connection of the plague with Ares has no precedent.¹⁵¹

However, the historical situation of Athens, with a war going on, may suggest this connection. On this basis, one has reason to argue that Sophocles possibly meant Ares to be responsible for the plague.

Whether sent by Apollo or Ares, within the Oedipus story it is accepted that the plague is god-sent. Segal argues that Sophocles' audience would naturally assume that the plague was sent by the gods, which is confirmed by Apollo's command that Creon reports from Delphi in the first scene.¹⁵² Moreover, the *Odyssey* explicitly stated that it is the gods who made Oedipus' crimes known. This inter-textual implication may also make people inclined to believe that the plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which triggers the series of actions that reveals Oedipus' patricide and incest, is of a supernatural source, purposely designed by the gods. Still, the plague, viewed outside the story, is probably an invention by Sophocles.¹⁵³ The plague is not a usual motif in the folklore tales of the Oedipus story. We have no evidence for something similar in the previous Oedipus myth from which Sophocles can borrow. Edmunds thinks there is an implied plague in the *Odyssey* even if it does not explicitly mention a plague in Thebes, on account that comparison with the *Iliad* thematically suggests that a plague could already be implicit in the 'woes' which he mentions.¹⁵⁴ This inference seems to me a little far-fetched, and,

¹⁵¹ Knox, 1956. p. 138.

¹⁵² Segal, 2001. p. 58.

¹⁵³ See also Robert, *Oidipus* (1916) 1: 292; Knox, 1956; and Segal, 2001. p. 27.

¹⁵⁴ Edmunds, 2006. p. 15.

even if there is one, it should be more similar to the plague in the *Iliad* (1. 47ff) than to what we see in Sophocles. Indeed, as Knox notices, while Sophocles' plague has marks of traditional threefold blight which is typical to plague literature, none of the passages about the traditional blight is depicted together with a disease which attacks the whole population.¹⁵⁵ It seems that Sophocles added the plague to the blight and gives this plague some new features.¹⁵⁶

Why is Sophocles inventing a plague in the beginning of the play? It seems to me that there are three possible reasons. Each of them might alone account for this new invention, but it is more likely that Sophocles had more than one in mind. First, the plague could be used for inter-textual reference. Audiences with knowledge of Homer would easily be reminded of the plague in the beginning of the *Iliad*. The allusion should arouse an immediate sense of familiarity among the audience. The second possible reason could be a historical one. This is advocated by Knox, who understands the raging Ares which the chorus tries to expel as in connection with war, not merely with fire. Knox's interpretation of the plague fits into his larger scheme of the allegorizing of Athens into the character of Oedipus. Although I agree with E. R. Dodds that "allegory of that sort is alien to Greek tragedy",¹⁵⁷ and take Knox's interpretation as a little stretched, I believe that Sophocles could very well have the actual plague of Athens in mind while

¹⁵⁵ Knox, 1956. p. 135.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1 36.

¹⁵⁷ Dodds, 1966. p. 47.

composing the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Moreover, the actual description of Thebes seems to suggest an ongoing war in addition to the plague. Those supplicating Oedipus at the beginning of the play are either old men or youth (18-9), and around altars are wives and old women (182). Jacqueline Duchemin noticed the parallel in Thucydides about the situation for Athens when there is the war on the outside and the plague inside.¹⁵⁸ Sophocles' description of the plague and its possible connection with Ares may well be based on this historical situation in Athens. The third possible reason may be that it is an invention convenient for the arrangement of the plot. Sophocles might have been touched by the contemporary plague, or he might be consciously invoking the audience's familiar memory of Homer. But at the same time he needs an event to trigger the revelation of Oedipus. As previously mentioned, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* differs from most other tragedies in that it does not culminate with the fulfillment of a prophecy, but begins at a point when that prediction has already been realized. After unwittingly fulfilling the oracles, Oedipus ruled Thebes as king for many years, and apparently in peace and esteem. The sudden outbreak of a plague, and the oracular response prompted by it, offer the chance for the *peripetia* of his dreadful deeds which are hitherto unknown.

The plague in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is often interpreted in connection with pollution and punishment.¹⁵⁹ Segal thinks that the plague attaches a strong feeling of horror and pollution to Oedipus' deeds.¹⁶⁰ The scapegoat theory advocated by Girard and accepted

¹⁵⁸ Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*. II. 54. Also see Duchemin, 1949. p. 112.

¹⁵⁹ See Parker, 1983.

by J-P Vernant all emphasized the connection between the plague and Oedipus' self-exile. In their reading, the expulsion of the culprit addresses the problem of the plague and alleviates the pestilence. However, one needs to use caution in connecting the plague and self-expulsion in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* with the historical scapegoat rituals. Burkert thinks that the scapegoat theory does not explain the entire play as a whole.¹⁶¹ Segal points out that even on the level of ritual action, Oedipus' expulsion as a *pharmakos* is "ambiguous and problematical", because in Sophocles' ending it is not clear whether Oedipus was exiled; he remains suspended between expulsion and enclosure.¹⁶² As discussed above, the plague might probably be Sophocles' invention, and in many other versions of the Oedipus story—for example, in Homer and Euripides—there are neither the plague nor the exile of Oedipus to end the plague. The plague, as it seems, provides an opportunity for the god to set forth the search for Laius' murderer; it may not be the divine punishment for the patricide. More recently R. D. Griffith also argues against the connection of plague and Apollo's command to expel the murderer. Griffith calls our attention to the pattern of the other two oracles in the same play. Just as Oedipus himself complains, "μὲν ὁ Φοῖβος ὧν μὲν ἰκόμην ἄτιμον ἐξέπεμψεν" (l. 788-9), the oracular response does not address his original question. Nor does Apollo directly answer Laius' inquiry in predicting the future child's patricide.¹⁶³ If the third

¹⁶⁰ Segal, 2001. p. 27.

¹⁶¹ Burkert, 1991. pp. 20-21.

¹⁶² Segal, 1981. p. 208.

¹⁶³ Both Griffith and Fontenrose assume that Laius' question was "what should I do

oracle confirms to this pattern, that Apollo's instruction to expel the murderer of Laius does not address the question about the plague, there will be no implied causal link between the expulsion of the polluted individual and the end of the plague.¹⁶⁴

In addition, I argue that the plague is not sent as a punishment of the patricide on account of the delay of the plague. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the plague, probably a new element, came many years after Oedipus unwittingly fulfilled the oracles. If the gods intend to make known the fulfillment of Oedipus' fate and punish his patricide, why should they wait so many years? The silence of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as to the delay, in my view, suggests traces of the tale's many versions and the tragedian's innovation. In such variations as the *Odyssey*, the exposure came almost immediately, yet Oedipus continues to rule. Unpleasant as they are, the patricide and the incest do not disqualify his reign. Oedipus as the king of Thebes is thus an established tradition. However, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* requires the king be dethroned immediately after the exposure. It is in such an attempt to reconcile the need of an immediate exile and the tradition of Oedipus as Theban king that the story ends in a long delay of the search for Laius' murderer and of the final revelation.

The Sphinx

Before the plague there is another national affliction, the Sphinx, which, far from raising the demand to avenge Laius' murder, has the opposite effect of preventing any

to have children?" (hypoth. 2, Aeschylus *Sept*, p. 110) See also Fontenrose (1978: 96ff and L17 in the catalogue) for more discussion on this oracle.

¹⁶⁴ Griffith, 1993. p. 110.

investigation and even leads up to the fatal marriage between mother and son.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the source of the Sphinx is undefined, and the question seems to have perplexed a number of writers and commentators from the classical age.¹⁶⁵ Some folklorists, who see the Oedipus legend as originated from the folktale of the hero who wins a bride by slaying a monster, views the Sphinx as one variation of the monsters in the trial of these heroes. It may be applied to the other versions of the Oedipus story. But, in Sophocles' version, the Sphinx has a more crucial role in plot. As Lowell Edmunds shrewdly points out, since the arrangement of the patricide at Delphi should postdate the importance of Delphi as an oracular center in Greece, there ought to be an earlier form of patricide.¹⁶⁶ In the earlier form, the mother-son marriage probably takes place not long after Laius' death near Thebes. With this changed locale of the patricide, the plot needs an episode to join the killing with the marriage, and to bind Oedipus, who killed Laius near Delphi, with Thebes. It is under such circumstances that Sophocles arranged Oedipus' encounter with the Sphinx outside Thebes, after killing Laius but before his marriage to Jocasta. In arranging the time and locale of the Sphinx episode, Sophocles probably made these innovations.

Furthermore, that the Sphinx element is a later addition to the Oedipus story is also suggested by the fact that Teiresias has no role in the expulsion of the monster. Oedipus' accusation of the old mantis, that Teiresias did not help when the city is threatened by the

¹⁶⁵ Various sources of the Sphinx are suggested by different ancient authors; for a list of these, see Edmunds and Dundes (eds., 1984). p. 155.

¹⁶⁶ Edmunds and Dundes, eds, 1983. p. 158-9.

monster (391-2) is never explained in the play. Why Teiresias did not use his oracular power to help in the Sphinx crisis? Apparently, Teiresias' refusal to give a direct answer seems to bring out the contrast between the human knowledge of Oedipus and the divine knowledge of the old mantis. Another glance at the origins of each element in the story could shed more light on the issue. Teiresias is probably a figure who exists in the original form of the tale, or at least before the Delphi and the Sphinx elements were added. The episode that the Sphinx inflicted the Theban people is probably added to give a preeminent position to Oedipus and to make possible his marriage with the queen of Thebes. It is no wonder that there is no encounter or dealing between the old mantis and the new monster.

The Sphinx constitutes, among others, another coincidence which leads Oedipus to his prophesized destiny. The temporal triumph incited in this event forms a great contrast to the eventual downfall, and the mortal knowledge in solving the riddles contrasts weakly with the divine knowledge. By the end of the play, one has good reason to think the apparently incidental appearance of the Sphinx is a link in the grand plan of Oedipus' fate. Just as Teiresias' oracles are riddling (439), the Sphinx is chanting oracles ("χρησιμωδόν" 1200), and her riddles requires the prophetic powers to interpret ("μαντείας ἔδει" 1200).¹⁶⁷ The image of Sphinx, connected with riddling oracles and demanding prophesy, is strongly suggestive of the power of fate. Though Sophocles never made this connection explicit, the time and location of the Sphinx's appearance,

¹⁶⁷ See also Segal, 1981. p. 238. Segal also mentions the tradition that the Sphinx is not a beast but a propounder of oracles (Euripides *Phoenician Women* 1760).

and its crucial role in the fulfillment of Oedipus' fate all add to the atmosphere of destiny. More functions of Sphinx in characterization will be discussed in the next chapter.

The Messenger

If the Sphinx is an element which helps bring out the fulfillment of Oedipus' fate, the messenger from Corinth, like the plague in the beginning of the play, is what helps to expose this fulfillment. And it is a crucial link. This character, as it seems, embodies the greatest coincidence in the play. He comes at an opportune time, when Oedipus begins to suspect himself as the murderer of Laius and the dire facts of old oracles are recalled. The unexpected arrival of the messenger brings a temporary triumph to Jocasta's theory about the unreliability of the oracles, or of any mortal's prophetic skill (708ff). Yet it is not long before this short-lived triumph vaporizes. As the plot unfolds, the messenger turns out to be the same person who received the infant Oedipus from the Theban shepherd. His presence thus conveniently proves the loathed identity of Oedipus, and also the horrible fact of the oracles.

Contrary to Teiresias or the shepherd of Laius, who are summoned by Oedipus, the messenger comes on his own accord. The timely arrival of a character so crucial to the identification of Oedipus reminds us of a similar situation—the surprise arrival of Aegeus to the distressed Medea in Euripides' *Medea*. Aegeus' appearance conveniently solves the problem of a safe shelter both for Medea the character and for the development of the plot. Yet this plot does not seem very natural and probable, but more of an artificial

arrangement by the tragedian. Indeed, in the *Poetics* Aristotle seems to suggest “the improbability in the appearance of Aegeus in *Medea*” (1461b) as an example of the bad plot when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of its episodes (1451b). The opportune arrival of the messenger in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* has aroused similar discussions. Drew Griffith believes that the fortuitous arrival of the Corinthian stranger should be seen either as a flaw in the composition of the play, an improbability, or as another intervention of Apollo.¹⁶⁸ How should one take these coincidences? Some modern scholars argue against the view that they are flaws in the plot. For David Kovacs, the chance appearance of Aegeus precisely at the time of need “are not the result of Euripides’ carelessness or of a desire for effects at any price but intelligible parts of a coherent theological design”.¹⁶⁹ Kovacs argues that Zeus works in mysterious ways, and the apparent implausible coincidence is the proof of divine intention. Kovacs’s understanding of the Aegeus episode is insightful for our reading of the Corinthian messenger. His timely arrival, together with some other coincidences in the play which together brings the revelation, could be viewed as divine intervention within the play. Such an arrangement by the tragedian is just another example of the fatality of the narrative.

Indeed, both the fulfillment and the publication of Oedipus’ fate are brought out through a sequence of coincidences. Within the play, the convergence of so many

¹⁶⁸ Griffith, 1993. pp. 111-112.

¹⁶⁹ Kovacs, 1993. p. 45.

incidents is viewed as a confirmation of the power of fate. Teiresias in prediction and Oedipus in retrospect both see what happened as the working of Apollo (376-77, 1329-30). Though the original Oedipus story contains prophecies and predictions, it is Sophocles who supplies these detailed chance events which brings out the sense of fate. Thus structurally speaking, Sophocles' creation gives greater weight to the working of fate.

Chapter Three: the Interplay of Fate and Personality in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*

In the previous chapter we examined the function of fate through Sophocles' innovation in the structure of the Oedipus story. Taking the basic forms of the original tale, Sophocles adds in new elements as well as recreates the old elements, thus winds out a story more loaded with the sense of fate than earlier versions. Laius received an oracle that he would be killed by his own son, so he got rid of the baby (711-714). Yet the child survived and, when grown up, he also received the prediction about his fate that he would kill his father and marry his mother (790-793). Despite his attempts to avoid this fate, the oracle was fulfilled without his knowledge. The plot raises complex questions on the relation of a person's fate and his free will. By free will, I mean the ability a person has to make choices, and the possibility that his choices and actions have effects on the future. Does Oedipus have alternatives in most of his actions? To what extent is Oedipus' personality responsible for his actions? The present chapter intends to address these issues.

Characterization has been claimed as one of the distinctive traits of Sophoclean tragedies.¹⁷⁰ It is for this reason that many critics emphasize this aspect in the play

¹⁷⁰ In our discussion of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, I do not intend words like "characterization", "personality" or "character" to mean what they normally do in the modern sense. Modern literature in general lays more emphasis on characterization, and explores the character's subjectivity and inner complexity. Greek tragedy does not treat characters in this way. Aristotle says in the *Poetics* that it is only for the sake of action that Greek tragedy includes characters (1450a). M. I. Finley thinks that "In a fundamental sense, the personality of Oedipus or Antigone or Lysistrata did not matter, did not even exist. The problems, the morality, the actions mattered, and they

over fate. Bernard Knox points out that Sophocles prevents the impression that his tragic hero is a puppet of fate through the greatness of the hero and the dramatic independence of his action.¹⁷¹ E. R. Dodds believes that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a play “about human greatness” in which Oedipus is great “in virtue of his human strength”.¹⁷² Lowell Edmunds thinks the notion that fate is the meaning of the myth and of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is arguably reductive and trivializing, since “Apollo is not the agent but the prophet of Oedipus’ downfall.”¹⁷³ These discussions rightly point out the importance of Oedipus’ character and his decisions. But they fail to address the fact that, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Oedipus, despite his strength and excellence, in the end proves to be powerless before the working of fate. The will of the divine is ultimately triumphant, despite all the earlier incidents which appear to prove the failure of its realization. As Oedipus cries out in the end (1329-1330):

Ἀπόλλων τάδ’ ἦν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι,
 ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ’ ἐμὰ πάθηα.
 It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo
 who fulfilled my evil, these my evil sufferings. (trans. Ruby Blondell)

How much does the character’s personality have influence on the course of his

alone.” (Finley, 1980. p. 6.) Charles Segal points out that “character” in the modern sense is not to be expected from Greek tragedy. Moreover, “the individuality of the Sophoclean hero appears not in small personal details but, as in Homer, in a few large essential gestures.” (Segal, 1981. p. 8.) I think there is still room for a discussion of Sophoclean characterization, while keeping in mind how characterization in Attic tragedy is different from that in modern works.

¹⁷¹ Knox, 1966. p. 50.

¹⁷² Dodds, 1966. p. 48.

¹⁷³ Edmunds, 2006. p. 49.

fate? And how does the intangible, uncontrollable force of fate strike the fatal blow despite the human strength? In my discussion in this chapter, I try to approach the problem of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* through the interaction between fate and character.

1. The Sphinx and the Image of Oedipus

The different versions of the Oedipus legend compared in the last chapter show that extant literary representations vary in the description of the protagonist. They all adhere to a consistent account of the main events of Oedipus' life—his killing of his own father Laius and his marriage to his mother Jocasta. But these literary representations present, or imply, different images of Oedipus. Among these different versions, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* describes Oedipus as someone who saved the city and won the throne through solving the riddle of the Sphinx. Sophocles' version exerts an abiding influence on our modern perception of Oedipus as an intelligent person. Commenting on Sophocles' version of Oedipus, Knox sees “the working of a great intelligence” in Oedipus.¹⁷⁴ Dodds praises Sophocles' Oedipus as the “symbol of human intelligence which cannot rest until it has solved all the riddles”.¹⁷⁵ Charles Segal thinks that in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* “Oedipus sums up all that man can attain by

¹⁷⁴ Knox, 1966, 2nd Edition. p. 18.

¹⁷⁵ Dodds, p. 48.

mind alone.”¹⁷⁶ Claims for Oedipus’ intelligence based on Sophocles’ version date back to the nineteenth century. Hegel views Oedipus as the symbol of Greek consciousness.¹⁷⁷ Hegel does not specify the textual source of the “Greek legend” that he discusses. But in his discussion, Oedipus is primarily the solver of the Sphinx’s riddle, and he quotes the Sphinx’s riddle in full. In doing so Hegel probably had in mind Sophocles’ Oedipus, or a version similar to Sophocles’. Nietzsche comments on Sophocles’ Oedipus story, and thinks the riddle of the Sphinx, the patricide and the incestuous marriage form a mysterious triad of fated deeds. Nietzsche believes that Oedipus’ wisdom is a kind that turns against the wise man.¹⁷⁸

While not all reading of the Oedipus story emphasizes the motif of riddle-solving,¹⁷⁹ discussions of Oedipus as an intelligent individual always refer to the Sphinx and the riddle-solving motif. In the previous chapter we discussed the riddle-solving as a secondary addition to the Oedipus legend, nor was the Sphinx in the original Oedipus story. The Sphinx had been predominantly a decorative figure in Greek art and literature, and was not connected with riddles. Relief decoration on a series of Middle Minoan pots features the wingless Sphinx, which suggests influence from Egypt. The Sphinx in the Mycenaean times was already a winged creature and a

¹⁷⁶ Segal, 1981. p. 207.

¹⁷⁷ Hegel (1st ed. 1837), trans. 1956. pp. 220-221.

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche (first published 1872), trans. 1999. p. 48.

¹⁷⁹ For example, in Sigmund Freud’s psychological analysis and Levi-Strauss’ structural reading, the Sphinx and the riddle-solving have minor importance.

hybrid with a human female head. It appeared on wall paintings,¹⁸⁰ as well as coffins as a death angel and as a guardian of the house and the tomb.¹⁸¹ The name of the Sphinx, etymologically speaking, may be connected with the word σφίγγω, a verb which means to bind or hold fast.¹⁸² Literary sources suggest that the name may come from a monster of Theban legend. According to *Theogony* 326, the woman-dragon monster Echidna bore two children to her own son Orthos: the deadly Phix and the Nemean lion. The Phix is believed to have later changed into the Sphinx, the strangler.¹⁸³ It is only in Hesiod that the Sphinx became connected with the Theban royal house. Hesiod calls it ὀλόη, death to the Cadmeans.¹⁸⁴ It should be noted that in the *Theogony* the (S)phinx is listed along with other monsters slaughtered by various heroes. Heracles and Iolaus destroyed the Hydra of Lerna (313-317); Pegasus and Bellerophon slew Chimaera (319-325); and Heracles also killed the Nemean lion (327-332). These heroes are all famous for their military power and do not necessarily have a claim to superior mental power, and killing monsters is part of their heroic

¹⁸⁰ For the wingless Sphinx, see Immerwahr, 1990. p. 35 and 37. For Sphinx in the Mycenaean times, see pp. 137-138, and for images on wall paintings, see p. 133.

¹⁸¹ Vermeule, 1979. For Sphinx's connection with the *ker* of death, see p. 69; for her image as a muscular and erotic winged lover of death, see p. 171 ff.

¹⁸² See Chantraine, 1968. p. 1077.

¹⁸³ De Kock, 1961. p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ “Καδμείοισιν ὀλεθρον”. *Theogony* 326. De Kock thinks that the name of Phix is connected with Φικιον or Φικειον ορος close by Thebes. For him, Hesiod's figure of the Sphinx as connected with Thebes was to become the prototype of all later Sphinx figures in Greece. See de Kock, 1961, p. 10.

ordeal. At this stage, the (S)phinx was not yet connected with riddle solving as it was in the fifth century tragedies. In Sophocles, the Sphinx was both winged (“περόεσσ’(α)”, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 508) and sewing riddles (“ῥαψωδός”, 391; “ἀίνιγμ’(α)”, 393). Euripides also described it as a winged maiden (“παρθένιον πτερόν”, *Phoenician Women* 806) with hoofed claws (“τετραβάμων χαλαῖς”, 808) and unmusical songs (“ἄμουσοτάταισι ... ᾠδαῖς”, 807).

This raises several questions: when the Sphinx first entered the Oedipus story, was she from the beginning a poser of riddles as in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*? If not, what was her earlier image? Is Oedipus always described as having defeated the Sphinx through his mental power, as Sophocles’ Oedipus himself asserts? Furthermore, are there any words or epithets associated with intelligence or wisdom that have been constantly applied to Oedipus by ancient authors? These questions are very important in comparing Sophocles’ characterization of Oedipus with other variants.

The earliest extant accounts attest only to the physical prowess of Oedipus without explicitly or implicitly praising his mental excellence. In Homer there is no Sphinx; Homer’s vocabulary for Oedipus suggests the military traits of the hero. In the last chapter I discussed the semantic connotations of two verbs, “δοῦπέω” in *Iliad* 23. 679 and “ἔξεναρῖζω” in *Odyssey* 11. 273. These two verbs may imply a warlike image of Oedipus as a warrior. The fragment of *Oedipodeia* mentions the Sphinx, though we are not sure if there is the riddling. However, the fact that Oedipus is the

protagonist of this epic would typically guarantee a depiction of his physical strength. Superior intelligence is not a prerequisite for epic heroes, though they should always be capable warriors. For example, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, the hero of μῆτις, is above all a warrior. It is more likely that Oedipus defeated the Sphinx the same way that Theseus defeated the Minotaur and Heracles the centaur. Even if the riddle-solving and the element of intelligence are involved, Oedipus' prowess would be a prerequisite to qualify him as the protagonist of this epic.

Euripides mentions that after killing Laius Oedipus took his chariot and gave it to Polybus (*Phoenissae* 44-5).¹⁸⁵ Killing an opponent in battle and taking the spoil is the typical practice for combat among warriors. In this sense, Euripides' brief account of Oedipus also suggests a martial image. Apollodorus reports that Oedipus, when grown up, excelled in strength (“διαφέρων τῶν ἡλίκων ῥώμῃ”, *Library* 3.5.7). Except for this, he gives no other description of Oedipus' personality. He relates the riddle-solving episode in a brief, matter-of-fact manner: “Οἰδίπους δὲ ἀκούσας ἔλυσεν” (“Having heard this, Oedipus solved the riddle”, *Library* 3.5.8), and there is no emphasis on his mental excellence. Thus although Apollodorus includes the element of riddle-solving, he did not emphasize Oedipus' intelligence, at least not more than his bodily strength.

Another testimony concerns Oedipus' confrontation with the Sphinx as a martial figure. Korinna, the Boeotian woman lyric poet, mentions that Oedipus killed not only

¹⁸⁵ See also Peisander Schol. Eur. *Phoenician Women*. 1760.

the Sphinx but also the Teumessian fox:

ἀνελεῖν δὲ αὐτὸν οὐ μόνον τὴν Σφίγγα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν Τευμησίαν ἀλώπεκα,
ὡς Κόριννα.

According to Korinna, he killed not only the Sphinx but also the Teumessian fox.¹⁸⁶

Korinna's poems have as chief subject matter her local myth and legends. The Sphinx mentioned along with the fox is probably one variant of the monsters killed by powerful men. This may in a sense confirm my earlier judgment about the role of the Sphinx in the *Oidipodeia*. In both cases, the Sphinx seems to pose as a physical, but not mental, challenge to attest Oedipus' martial ability.

The element of intelligence first appeared in Pindar. Pindar uses the word “wisdom”, σοφία, to describe Oedipus: “Learn now the wisdom of Oedipus” (“γνῶθι νῦν τὰν Οἰδιπόδα σοφίαν”, *Pyth.* 4.263).¹⁸⁷ Pindar mentions Oedipus before his appeal to Arcesilas to recall Damophilus. R.W.B. Burton, commenting on this sentence, thinks that this σοφία is “the special skill in solving riddles for which Oedipus was famous”.¹⁸⁸ Anthony Verity also thinks that Oedipus is mentioned because he is wise enough to solve the Sphinx' riddle.¹⁸⁹ However, neither in here nor in the more extent account of Oedipus in *Olympian 2* did Pindar explicitly mention the riddle or the Sphinx.

¹⁸⁶ 672 *PMG*= Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 26. See Page, ed., 1962, p. 340. For the dates of Korinna, see Snyder, 1989. p. 41-44. This translation is mine.

¹⁸⁷ Trans. Anthony Verity.

¹⁸⁸ Burton, 1962. p. 168-9.

¹⁸⁹ Pindar, trans. Verity, 2007. p. 161, note on line 263.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the mental superiority is an important part of Oedipus' personality, and Sophocles explicitly connects it with the riddle-solving. The priest, in supplication of Oedipus, calls him "the first of men" ("ἄνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον", 33), "most powerful of all" ("κράτιστον πάντων", 40), and "best of mortals" ("βροτῶν ἄριστ'", 46). The priest gives his proof for this judgment of their king: Oedipus' past achievement in prevailing over the Sphinx. The episode is only briefly referred to by the chief priest:

ὄς γ' ἐξέλυσας ἄστυ Καδμεΐον μολῶν
 σκληρᾶς ἄοιδοῦ δασμὸν ὃν παρείχομεν.
 For you
 came to the town of Kadmos and released it from
 the tribute we were paying the harsh singer (35-6, trans. Ruby Blondell).

The chorus also confirmed this: Oedipus is clever, "σοφός", in the eyes of the people by defeating the Sphinx:

φανερὰ γὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῷ
 πτερόεσσι ἦλθε κόρα
 ποτέ, καὶ σοφὸς ὤφθη
 βασάνῳ θ' ἄδύπολις.
 For this much was clearly revealed:
 the winged maiden came at him,
 and he was seen openly as clever,
 and sweet for the city by that touchstone. (507-510, trans. Ruby Blondell)

Sophocles does not directly allude to the contents of the Sphinx's riddle, nor does the audience receive any more than some retrospective recounting of it. However, the Sphinx is described as giving riddles. The riddle-solving is essential to the characterization of Oedipus. It secures the foundation for our present image of Oedipus as a man superior and famous for his mind. Oedipus himself claims to have saved the city by his "γνώμη" (398):

γνώμη κυρήσας οὐδ' ἀπ' οἰωνῶν μαθῶν.

succeeding by the power of thought, not taught by birds. (trans. Blondell).

In contrast to the list of heroes in the *Theogony* such as Heracles, Iolaus, Pegasus and Bellerophon (313ff) who fight savage beasts or wild monsters with sword, arrow or spear, Sophocles' Oedipus is relying on his mental ability and defeats the Sphinx in an unwarlike manner. The martial image of Oedipus from earlier literatures diminished, giving place to a perfectly civil king who boasts the power of his mind. Although it is not clear exactly when riddle-solving became connected with the Sphinx motif,¹⁹⁰ in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the riddling Sphinx seems to have become an established image. The achievements of Oedipus, and furthermore the presentation of his image, hinge on this episode: the confrontation with the riddling Sphinx. As notes Edmunds,

... in the history of the legend, the intelligence of the hero reacted upon the motif of riddle-solving and caused this motif to assume greater and greater importance, as the character-trait of intelligence came to be felt as the source of Oedipus' achievement.¹⁹¹

Thus the myth of Oedipus' intelligence seems to build on the riddling of the Sphinx. Is the development of the Sphinx motif parallel to the evolution of Oedipus'

¹⁹⁰ It seems to be an unsolved problem among critics. Lowell Edmunds says that "although it is relatively unclear why the Sphinx herself enters the legend, it is not clear why the motif of monster-slaying is thus over-determined by the addition of riddle-solving" (Edmunds, 1984. p. 159). In another book he suggests that the appropriateness for Oedipus to become a riddle-solver lies in that this constitutes a display of the mental superiority that the hero of this type of folklore often displays as a child (Edmunds, 1985. p. 34). But there is no strongly claimed answer to the problem.

¹⁹¹ Edmunds and Dundes, 1983. p. 167.

image? Does the intelligent Oedipus replace an earlier martial one? For some scholars like E. L. de Kock, the evolution of the Sphinx's image is parallel to that of Oedipus. According to him, the Sphinx probably enters the Oedipus saga first as a creature of brute force and only later becomes the poser of riddles.¹⁹² He finds proof in the appearance of the Sphinx: a monster with the body of a lion is a figure of strength and force but less suggestive of such intellectual prowess as riddles. For de Kock, the transformation of the Sphinx particularly contributed to the change of Oedipus. De Kock's method is mainly to trace descriptions about Oedipus in such works as the Homer epics, the *Nekyia*, the epic cycle, the *Oidipodeia*, the *Thebaid* and Pindar's poetry. Arguing that the riddle-solving episode was added later as Oedipus' image shifted from a warrior to a civil king, de Kock draws the conclusion that the Sphinx, as a secondary addition, made Oedipus a wise man.¹⁹³ In doing so, de Kock seems to suggest a linear development of the Oedipus image over time.

Lowell Edmunds is more cautious in reviewing the chronological sequence of the Sphinx materials and is reluctant to accept such a convenient development of the character of Oedipus. Edmunds receives De Kock's idea as the "diachronic" method, a kind of thinking which presupposes that the history of the legend culminates in fifth century tragedy (especially in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*) and that the tradition of an Oedipus in the *Odyssey* exists earlier to the one in Sophocles. Edmunds takes the

¹⁹² de Kock, 1961. pp. 10 and 11.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

diachronic view with a pinch of salt, and advocates a synchronic reading, which simply identifies variants as background to a comparative analysis of the analogues of the Oedipus legend.¹⁹⁴ For him, the monster-slaying Oedipus and the riddle-solving Oedipus are two distinct motifs, and different authors may employ one or the other. The monster-slaying motif does not necessarily precede the riddle-solving one. In other words, Edmunds thinks that the Oedipus legend did not “develop” into the form in which we find it in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* through time. Although the tragedy postdates Homer by several hundred years, there may be motifs in it which represent variants of the legend earlier than Homer.¹⁹⁵

Edmunds’ diachronic method is especially necessary since his study on the Oedipus legend has a larger scope both in time, in region, and in motif. Still, I think that among the limited texts I compare, the diachronic view and the synchronic one may not be mutually exclusive. Although there is the martial image of Oedipus, which we find in the epics, also exists long after the tragic era (as attested in Apollodorus and Korinna), we do not have records in earlier literary works of any riddle-solving, civic image of Oedipus as seen in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. While one should be cautious not to take for granted a linear development of the various motifs in the Oedipus legend within a limited number of texts, some motifs may be determined as later than others with confidence. From what evidence we have, one may cautiously

¹⁹⁴ Edmunds, 1985. p. 34.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

draw the conclusion that there was, through time, a development from the epic, martial image of Oedipus to the more intelligent, civic one as in Sophocles, and the riddling of the Sphinx is a motif added to the Oedipus story during this development. These changes may not be all linear; the earlier martial image may continue to exist side by side with the new one, perhaps with diminishing influence, but was preserved in works later than the fifth century, as seen in Apollodorus and Korinna. Still, Oedipus' killing of the Sphinx, which used to be a variation of the motif of heroes killing savage beasts, was later used as the marker of intelligence for a hero in the civil context.¹⁹⁶

2. Fate versus Individual Responsibility

The following chapter will discuss why Sophocles might choose to present such an image of Oedipus in his day, and the possible contemporary influence on this portrayal. In the present chapter, I focus on the character's personality. If Sophocles' Oedipus has the reputation to be endowed with a superior mental force, what kind of ability is it? To what extent does it contribute to the realization of his fate?

To answer these questions one easily goes back to the issues which have been long discussed among critics about the responsibility of the character—are the outcomes due to the characters' actions, or resulted from fate? The issue could go

¹⁹⁶ Segal, 1981. p. 232: "the solving of the riddle of the Sphinx ... like Heracles' defeat of monsters, is a basic civilizing act, a defense of the city against threatening, half-bestial monsters from the "raw" world outside."

back to the discussion of Homeric characters and whether their actions and choices influence the outcome of their fates. Homeric gods—the main agents of fate in Homer—are not solely responsible for the action of Homeric characters; on the contrary, there is individual responsibility in each action. In various situations, such as Achilles' deliberation as to whether he should kill Agamemnon (*Iliad* 1. 188-222), removing the divine intervention may not seriously change the human decision.¹⁹⁷

In Attic tragedy, especially the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, fate is unknown to mortals, but it may be revealed through oracles or omens such as dreams. E. G. Berry believes that while the powers which control human destiny have been attributed in an increasing degree to the gods, there is also an increasing growth in the feeling of human responsibility for at least a part of man's destiny, first of all through the development of the concepts εἰδώς and προμαθεία, later in the development of ἄρετή.¹⁹⁸ G. M. Kirkwood believes that the fulfillment of most Sophoclean oracles requires both the force of human character and divine will.¹⁹⁹ W. C. Greene thinks that although in

¹⁹⁷ See also Lloyd-Jones (1983: 24 and 10) on Achilles' anger: "the divinely motivated act can also be fully motivated in human terms; the part played by the god can always be subtracted without making nonsense of the action."

¹⁹⁸ Berry, 1940. p. 14. Critics like John A. Moore, J. C. Opstelten, and Cedric Whitman also use the term ἄρετή, yet they rejected the notion of the tragic hero's responsibility altogether and find the basis of Sophoclean tragedy in the conflict between heroic ἄρετή and the world of gods or man; the sufferings springs not from faults of the hero but from the incompatibility of his excellence with the world about him; the fault lies in other men, or in the gods, or in the "irrational evil" of circumstances. See John A. Moore, *Sophocles and Arete*, 1938; Opstelten, *Sophocles and Greek Pessimism*, 1952; Whitman, *Sophocles, A Study in Heroic Humanism*, 1951.

¹⁹⁹ Kirkwood, 1958. p. 73. Also see p. 74 on his analysis of the *Ajax*, in which

Greek tragedy the action more or less proceeds with causes intelligible to mortals and beyond the control of human characters, any sweeping statement asserting Greek tragedy to be fatalistic is fallacious.²⁰⁰ R. Drew Griffith thinks that the predestination does not exonerate Oedipus from his responsibility in his actions, since predestination does not constitute a compulsion, and Oedipus could have fulfilled his fate in total innocence—that is, Laius could have died at Oedipus’ hands in other ways instead of the direct, fierce confrontation.²⁰¹ In a more recent study, Lowell Edmunds also acknowledges the function of individual choice. Oedipus plunges into an investigation that carries him far beyond the political responsibility entailed in the oracles instruction concerning the plague, as Edmunds argues, and Oedipus is “the kind of person who might have committed these crimes even if they had not been fated”.²⁰²

Both fate and character contribute to the evolution of events, and they work together to bring about the action of the play. It is hard to imagine how a Greek tragedy would totally neglect the force of fate, nor is it likely that any literary work of such quality should present characters as mere puppets of its destiny. The strong contribution of the character to the realization of an action does not necessarily diminish, but may reinforce the importance of fate; on the other hand, what is ordained as fate might point to the same direction of what the characters might

“Calchas’ announcement does not in the least make Ajax’s suicide inevitable”.

²⁰⁰ Greene, 1963. p. 91.

²⁰¹ Griffith, 1996. p. 53-54.

²⁰² Edmunds, 2006. p. 49.

naturally do. The key to understand fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as it seems to me, lies in the interaction between a strong character and the unexplainable force of the necessity.²⁰³ To better illustrate this interaction in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, I compare the issue of fate and character of Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* with that of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*.

1, Oedipus and Odysseus: the Necessity of a Comparison

In discussing the characterization in Sophocles, it is helpful to ask whether Sophocles is influenced by Homer. Sophocles has the claim to be “the most Homeric” of Attic poets. This judgment goes back to Aristotle who thinks Sophocles is akin to Homer in portraying good men.²⁰⁴ Aristotle's argument calls attention to the comparison between the characterization in Homer and in Sophocles. A. C. Pearson thinks Sophocles wins this claim chiefly in respect of his diction, but also acknowledges that Sophocles is considered a follower of Homer not only in the structure of plot but also in the delineation of character and in the artistic expression of his thought.²⁰⁵ The claim is also reiterated by contemporary critics like E. R. Dodds and John Herington,²⁰⁶ both agree that like Homer Sophocles has more

²⁰³ Also see Charles Segal, 1981. p. 8: “Tragic character in Sophocles exists in the tension between the isolation imposed by heroic individuality and the larger design which that destiny fulfills.”

²⁰⁴ “ὁ αὐτὸς ἄν εἴη μιμητῆς Ὀμήρῳ Σοφοκλῆς, μιμοῦνται γὰρ ἄμφω σπουδαίους.” Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a 26.

²⁰⁵ Pearson, 1917. For Sophocles' diction, see p. xxiv. For Sophocles' characterization, see p. xxiii.

²⁰⁶ Dodds, 1951. p. 43; Herington, 1985. p. 137.

emphasis on character and is good at taking old story patterns and remolding them, shaping anew traditional characters.

The comparisons between the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Odyssey*, or between Oedipus and Odysseus, are not unprecedented, yet nor are they conventional. Previous comparisons tend to focus on issues other than characterization or the problem of fate and character. Propp compares the two heroes in the context of social and historical development. He thinks that the story of Odysseus shows a transition from matriarchal society to a patriarchal one, and that the marriage with Circe is of the older order while that with Penelope is monogamous of the new order.²⁰⁷ Comparing Homer with Sophocles, Propp finds that the old and new orders co-exist in the *Odyssey*, but in the Oedipus story the new order has triumphed.²⁰⁸ F. Ahl gives a comparison of the two figures by relating Oedipus' lament to the chorus in 1329-31 with the cries of the blinded Polyphemus in *Odyssey* 9. 403-12. Ahl sees a verbal parallel or the echoing of the two passages, though it is a little far-fetched for me. For Ahl, on hearing Oedipus, Sophocles means his audience to think of Odysseus, whose legend with Telegonus constitutes an interesting variant of the Oedipal tale of killing one's father and marrying one's mother.²⁰⁹ Charles Segal compares the Oedipus' story with that of Odysseus mainly from the perspective of narrative, that

²⁰⁷ Propp, in Edmunds and Dundes (eds., 1983). p. 99 and 100.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ahl, 1991. p. 229.

The continuity of life-movement in the *Odyssey* corresponds to the clarity and forward movement of narrative in the epic form, in contrast to the halting, unpredictable, blocked movements of narrative in tragedy.²¹⁰

The hero's movement in the *Odyssey* is forward, though it uses retrospective narrative; however, for Oedipus, the past is always returning to the wrong place.

My reasons for a comparison of the two are more related to the issue of fate and the characterization of each hero. First, both literary works concern the prediction of a hero's fate and how that hero reacts to this prediction and brings out his fate. It is true that Odysseus consults only about his homecoming and not explicitly about fate.

However, in the *Odyssey*, the νόστος, Odysseus' homecoming, is the central question during his consultation of Teiresias, the main aspect of Odysseus' fate, as well as the epic theme. Odysseus' homecoming has been sanctioned by the gods in the beginning of the *Odyssey*:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ ἔτος ἦλθε περιπλομένων ἐνιαυτῶν,
τῷ οἱ ἔπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἴκόνδε νέεσθαι
εἰς Ἰθάκην, ...

But when in the circling of the years that very year came
in which the gods had *spun* for him his time of homecoming
to Ithaca, ... (1. 16-18, trans. Richmond Lattimore, emphasis added)

The root in ἔπεκλώσαντο is the common word used in Homeric spinning image, which is closely connected with fate, as is discussed in chapter 1. Moreover, Odysseus' homecoming also brings out the fulfillment of prophecies about other people's fates.²¹¹ Thus in the context of the *Odyssey*, the most important aspect of the

²¹⁰ Segal, 2001. p. 62.

²¹¹ Polyphemus was told by Telemos that he would lose sight at the hand of Odysseus (9. 507-512). Circe was forewarned by Argeiphontes that Odysseus would come to her on his way back home (10. 330-332). The Phaeacians had the old prophecy that one day Poseidon would be angry because of their convoy without hurt to all men (13.

hero's fate is his homecoming.

Both Oedipus and Odysseus received predictions about their fates, not at birth but in the middle of their lives. The reasons and manners in which they consult an oracle or the seer, the contents of each prophecy, as well as the reception of these prophecies by each character, are worthy of comparison. Moreover, in the realization of their fate, both Oedipus and Odysseus confronted similar situations. Comparisons will focus on the different reactions of each hero to similar situations, and how their actions affect their fates.

Second, despite the difference in genre and length of the work, both the *Odyssey* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus* describe their protagonists in situations different and wider than the battlefield. Each situation requires the protagonist to respond in ways other than direct combat and sheer force. For example, in the encounter with Polyphemus, Odysseus first described themselves as the followers of Agamemnon and sackers of Troy. But the Cyclops only dismissed it “in pitiless spirit” (“νηλέι θυμῶ”, 9. 272; trans. R. Lattimore) and ignored his supplication. Odysseus had to give up the sword and think of other ways to escape (9. 299-306). As Segal rightly points out, this episode shows that what is suitable for straightforward battle is inappropriate in a strange world of fabulous monsters.²¹² In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, both the present problem in the city—the plague, and the past disaster—the Sphinx, require solutions

172). These seem to me less likely to be just simple formulae because they are each given under specific contexts and with ample details.

²¹² Segal, 1994. p. 89.

other than simple force.

While both heroes display superior mental ability, their respective mental powers are not necessarily of the same kind. The mental excellence of Odysseus, clearly labeled as μῆτις in the epic, has been more fully studied in recent decades. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant defines μῆτις in their *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, as

a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing; it implies a complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behavior which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years.²¹³

Thus μῆτις involves a practical skill, an ability to manipulate all the resources in a transient, shifting or urgent situation, in order to achieve an end which might not be explicit at the moment. The word is never seen as to label the mental power of Oedipus, the nature of which will be the focus of our comparison.

2, The consultation

The *Odyssey* elaborates on the process of the consultation and the formalities that Odysseus observed. Odysseus did not hesitate to take the trouble of going down to the underworld although this trip was not welcomed by his companions (10. 566-570). The necessary rituals were first instructed by Circe (10. 516-540) then actually performed by Odysseus himself (11. 23-41). It is obvious that Odysseus, in order to properly consult the old mantis, strictly followed the proper procedures. The consultation in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is only briefly recounted by Oedipus himself. Of

²¹³ Detienne and J-P Vernant, 1978. p. 3.

course, the limited space of tragedy does not allow for repetitious detail. Still it should be noted that, while Odysseus made his consultation at the command of a goddess, Oedipus' trip to the oracle was totally his own decision. He went there "secretly" ("λάθρᾳ", 787) from Polybus and Merope. Compared with Odysseus' trip which is well sanctioned by the gods and well prepared, Oedipus made his consultation in haste, and the question he raised was not honored by Apollo (788-9).

Although the account about Oedipus' consultation of Apollo is brief, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* does devote more than a hundred lines to his encounter with Teiresias. As we discussed in the last chapter, the introduction of Delphi has replaced Teiresias in the oracular function. Preserved from the original Oedipus tale, Teiresias is not the major oracular figure to predict Oedipus' fate. His appearance in the play, in my opinion, contributes more to the characterization of Oedipus. Oedipus' encounter with Teiresias is filled with strong emotions. The inquiry, originated by the public cause of the plague, soon turns to the direction of personal concerns. Suspecting treachery, Oedipus not only attacks Teiresias verbally (334-6, 370-1), but also threatens him with bodily harm (403-4). Oedipus' attitude towards Teiresias, together with his earlier attempt to evade Apollo's prophecy by fleeing Corinth (753-8), and his later doubt as to the reliability of oracles (964-972), shows that Oedipus is easily swayed by strong emotions. Moreover, his very piety is put to stake. On the contrary, during the consultation in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus showed a high degree of respect to Teiresias and strong self-discipline of emotions. Unlike Oedipus who summons the

old mantis, Odysseus made a special and uncomfortable journey to meet the ghost of Teiresias. Nor did he allow personal emotions to overweigh his original intention to the underworld. Seeing the ghost of his mother, and touched as he was, Odysseus did not allow her, let alone any other ghost, to draw near the blood until he first questioned Teiresias.

The content of the oracular utterance is also worth comparing. Although Zeus gives his consent to Odysseus' homecoming in the beginning of the epic, the prediction about his νόστος is nevertheless a heavily conditional one. Teiresias filled his language with conditions: "if... you might... you may" (*Odyssey* 11. 105). Circe's instruction about Odysseus' future journey in 12. 56-8 also gives him choices:

ἔνθα τοι οὐκέτ' ἔπειτα διηνεκέως ἀγορεύσω,
ὀπποτέρη δὴ τοι ὁδὸς ἔσσεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς
θυμῷ βουλευέειν: ἔρέω δέ τοι ἀμφοτέρωθεν.
... for that time I will no longer tell you in detail which way
of the two your course must lie, but you yourself must consider
this in your own mind. I will tell you the two ways of it. (trans. Lattimore)

Both indicate that Odysseus' homecoming depends greatly on his own actions and choices despite the consent of Zeus, and that his actions may change the course of his fate. The prediction about Odysseus' homecoming contrasts drastically with the prophecy that Oedipus received. Oedipus recounts Apollo's prediction as:

... λέγων,
ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρεΐη με μιχθῆναι, γένος δ'
ἄτλητον ἀνθρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὄρᾱν,
φονεὺς δ' ἔσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός.
I must have intercourse with my own mother, show
to human eyes a race unbearable to see,
and kill the father of my birth. (790-3, trans. Lattimore, emphasis added)

The italicized verbs “χρείη” and “ἔσοίμην” are in the optative form, which grammatically replaces the indicative in indirect statement of secondary sequence. The grammatical structure has a factual, realistic tone, which indicates that the outcome of Oedipus’ fate little depends on his own choices and actions. Still, Oedipus did not passively wait for the realization of his fate. Just as Odysseus made decisions at every situation he was confronted with during his journey, Oedipus actively contributed to each crucial step in the realization of his predicted fate. His personality, resulting in his behaviors, contributed crucially to this realization.

3, Laius and the goatherd

What is Oedipus’ character apart from strong emotions and disputed piety? Has he totally retreated from the warrior image of the older versions of the story? The audience of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* could hardly be unaware of the episode in which Oedipus most clearly demonstrated his physical strength. Single-handedly, in a disadvantageous position, Oedipus killed Laius and all but one of his followers. Oedipus exhibited such extraordinary force that, the Thebans easily believed the survivor’s report that the king was killed by a group of robbers.

I am less concerned with Oedipus’ demonstration of force than with his decision to resort to force. Many critics have talked about the fatal conflict between Laius and Oedipus on the crossroads. Oedipus might be excused by the fact that Laius was the first to provoke an unarmed traveler and to use force. The blame may also be on Oedipus. R. Drew Griffith thinks that Oedipus should give the right of way to Laius,

and that his killing of Laius is the killing of a stranger, which indicates extreme barbarity fit for the Cyclopes.²¹⁴

Justina Gregory lists the possible reasons for one to give way to another as the mode of locomotion, age and rank. She considers that of status as decisive in this case. Gregory points out that

By asserting the right of way either party could claim dominance of the public space, and the posture and gestures deployed by each conveyed unambiguous messages about relative social position.²¹⁵

In this context, to yield the right of way was to be marked as an inferior.²¹⁶

Gregory admits that there was nothing demeaning in giving way to royalty; yet Oedipus did not recognize Laius as royal, since Laius was not accompanied by the sizeable retinue appropriate to a ruling man (“ἄνῆρ ἀρχηγέτης” 751). Gregory also compares Oedipus’ confrontation with Laius and Odysseus’ encounter with Melanthius, the goatherd, upon his return in Ithaca (17. 233-8). Oedipus, ignorant of the identity of the man in the carriage, could not bear the insult from an older person. In Odysseus’ case, he is in full knowledge of both his own and Melanthius’ identity, which makes the insult from his social inferior seem more unbearable. Still, Odysseus controlled himself and refrained from violent retaliation. Thus, facing undeserved insult and bodily attack, Oedipus lets his anger get the upper hand, despite the unclear

²¹⁴ Griffith, 1999. p. 48-9. Here, Griffith compares Oedipus’ killing of Laius to Polyphemus’ killing of Odysseus’ crew in book 9 of the *Odyssey*. I doubt the validity of this comparison, because there seems to be no guest-host relationship between Oedipus and Laius.

²¹⁵ Gregory, 1995. p. 144.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

identity of his opponent.

Odysseus' excellent self-control may be attributed to his full knowledge of the situation and the sense of security that comes with it. Odysseus' disguises are "deliberately contrived and willingly assumed".²¹⁷ He has total control over his identity. His disguise back in Ithaca was specially encouraged and supported by Athena. On the contrary, Oedipus is not a man secure with his own knowledge. Gregory suggests that Oedipus never forgot the original question that drove him to Delphi.²¹⁸ Oedipus never really knew his true identity until the very end of the play. While Odysseus actively fabricates stories and make up different identities for himself, the various identities with which Oedipus appears before people—the stranger, the son of Polybus and Merope, the tyrant king of Thebes, Oedipus only accepts them as the situation requires. This may partly explain the irascibility of Oedipus both in this scene and in his encounter with Teiresias.

It is also worth noting that Odysseus deliberates between two choices:

ὁ δὲ μερμήριξεν Ὀδυσσεύς
ἢ ἔμεταίξας ῥοπάλω ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλοιτο,
ἢ πρὸς γῆν ἐλάσειε κάρη ἀμφοῦδις ἀείρας,
ἀλλ' ἐπετόλμησε, φρεσὶ δ' ἔσχετο:

... he pondered within him
whether to go for him with his cudgel, and take the life from him,
or pick him up like a jug and beak his head on the ground. Yet
still he stood it, and kept it all inside him.
(trans. Richmond Lattimore, 17. 235-8)

In the *Odyssey* this kind of deliberation occurs frequently. For example, in the

²¹⁷ Murnaghan, 1987. p. 25.

²¹⁸ Gregory, 1995. p. 46.

homecoming scene, in his own palace, Odysseus deliberated about how to fight the other beggar (18. 90-92). In Polyphemus' cave, when threatened with death, Odysseus took counsel with himself (9. 299), dispelled his first impulse to kill the Cyclops, and resolved to yield to the present situation (9. 300-305). This kind of deliberation, of weighing different results when confronted with the present situation, of adapting oneself to the needs of the moment, are typical traits of μῆτις but not found in Sophocles' Oedipus. In contrast to the pliable, ever changing Odysseus, Oedipus sticks to his strong character and is rarely changed through all kinds of situation, even after the final revelation. He also easily resorts to force, and very often with no good reason to do so. Right after he received the oracle, and even though he could have chosen to bear the insult, Oedipus killed an old man who was of the same age as his father. He raged at Teiresias whom he had invited to give counsel: "did you not seem to me too old, you'd learn by suffering what kind of thoughts yours are".²¹⁹ He threatened the old shepherd with torture (1152, 1154, 1166). It is thus concluded that Oedipus is fully capable of and prone to use force. He is more likely to act on impulse than on reason, and his intelligence is not ruled by rational thinking or self control. Oedipus lacks the endurance and pliability of Odysseus. He might be smart, but is far from being wise. In this sense, although the chorus describes Oedipus as clever with words like "σοφός" (484, 508) and "σοφία" (502), Sophocles quite correctly refrains from ever describing him as σώφρων, a word which indicates the wisdom of

²¹⁹ "εἰ δὲ μὴ ἴδοικαι γέρον/ εἶναι, παθὼν ἔγνωσ ἄν οἶά περ φρονεῖς", 402-3.

prudence, moderation and self-control.

4, The Sphinx and the Cyclops

In both Oedipus' dealing with the Sphinx and Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus divine interference is apparently absent. In the Cyclops' episode, Odysseus saves himself from a desperate pitfall through his own resources. The μῆτις of Odysseus is practical and productive; its application leads to successive and fruitful results. However, Odysseus does not see his μῆτις in any way exclusive to divine help. In Polyphemus' cave, the first action of Odysseus and his men when seeing the Cyclope's cruelty was to hold up hands to Zeus (“ἀνεσχέθομεν Διὶ χεῖρας”, 9. 294). Pondering their way out, Odysseus thought of

εἴ πως τισαίμην, δοίη δέ μοι εὖχος Ἀθήνη.

how I might punish him, how Athene might give me that glory.
(9. 317; trans. Richmond Lattimore)

The above expressions are epic formulae. Athena is said to give glory elsewhere once in Homer, to young Nestor,²²⁰ and holding hands up to Zeus is seen in various other situations of supplication.²²¹ These formulaic phrases contribute to the characterization of Odysseus. His close relationship to Athena, the goddess endowed with μῆτις, is also demonstrated through non-formulaic expressions. When Athena stopped visiting him after the sack of Troy, he wondered, as he later said, “with my heart torn inside its coverings”.²²² For Odysseus, divine help is something eagerly

²²⁰ “δῶκεν δέ μοι εὖχος Ἀθήνη.” See *Iliad* 7. 154.

²²¹ See *Iliad* 5. 174, 6. 257, 19. 254 and 24. 301.

²²² “ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ φρεσὶν ἦσιν ἔχων δεδαῖγμένον ἦτορ”, *Odyssey* 13. 320.

sought for and greatly welcomed. Endowed with this unusual μῆτις, Odysseus never prides himself over the divine. He accepts whatever is given by the divine:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ λυγρὰ θεοὶ μάκαρες τελέσωσι,
καὶ τὰ φέρει ἀεκαζόμενος τετληότι θυμῷ:
τοῖος γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
οἷον ἐπ' ἥμαρ ἄγησι πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε.
But when the blessed gods bring sad days upon him,
against his will he must suffer it with enduring spirit.
for the mind in men upon earth goes according to the fortunes
the Father of Gods and Men, day by day, bestows upon them.
(18. 134-7; trans. Richmond Lattimore)

In the *Odyssey* Odysseus is also described as offering sacrifice beyond all other men (1. 65-7). Thus although Odysseus actively uses his μῆτις in dealing with each situation he meets, he never overvalues his own ability. Nor does he try to avoid or to avert what is directed by the divine.

While the Cyclops episode greatly demonstrates Odysseus' μῆτις, the confrontation with the Sphinx is the very foundation on which Oedipus' claimed intelligence is based. Within the civil context of a city state in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, there is the new emphasis not in sword but in the excellence in mind, different from all traditional heroes in the epic tradition, Oedipus wins the throne not by killing but through riddle-solving. But what is the nature of the power of γνώμη (398) that enables Oedipus to triumph in the dealing with the Sphinx? How does Sophocles depict this new characteristic added to the hero?

The first point to notice is that, the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, instead of explicitly acclaiming Oedipus' intelligence, repeatedly put into question his intelligence and the soundness of his mind. Jocasta blames that he acts not like a man of sound mind,

“οὐδ’ ὅποι’ ἀνήρ ἔννοϋς” (915-6). Despite the claim to be best at finding out riddles (440), he was unable to figure out the truth of himself till the very last. The logic deduction to interpret through signs and evidence, which Oedipus stuck to throughout the play, was at no avail. Thus his human intelligence is very restricted and does not perceive or understand the divine will. He can solve the mortal, mundane riddle, but does not interpret divine oracles. On top of his over-confidence in his mental power, Oedipus actively uses his human knowledge, his γνώμη, to block, contradict or evade divine will. Secondly, except for the riddle-solving, which is a later addition, there is no other account in the play through which Oedipus and the others could make any claim for his superior intelligence.²²³ It is only the riddle solving, a later addition to the Oedipus tale, that serves as a basis for Oedipus’ fame as intelligent.

More important is the relationship between Oedipus’ riddle-solving intelligence and divine interference. The priest mentions the dealing of the Sphinx as distinctly a feat of Oedipus, yet he very explicitly differentiates his respect for Oedipus from his piety to the gods (31). He clearly defines Oedipus’ excellence in the sphere of men,²²⁴ and attributes Oedipus’ victory over the Sphinx to the aid of heaven:

ἀλλὰ προσθήκη θεοῦ
λέγει νομίζει θ’ ἡμῖν ὀρθῶσαι βίον:
it was through the aid of god that you set our lives straight again—so people
think and say (38-9, trans. Ruby Blondell)

To the priest, the superiority of Oedipus’ human ability is not adequate to achieve

²²³ See also Richmond Lattimore, 1964. p. 61; Edmunds, 1983. p. 160-1.

²²⁴ “ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρῶτον” (33) and “βροτῶν ἄριστ’” (46).

the victory; he cannot succeed without the help of the divine. Oedipus, however, takes pride in his own mental power over the mantis' skill when referring to the same event:

γνώμη κυρήσας οὐδ' ἄπ', οἰωνῶν μαθῶν

succeeding by the power of thought—not taught by birds
(398; trans. Blondell)

By denying the skills of reading the birds, Oedipus is denying the preeminence of the mantic arts, and especially, the ability of the old mantis in front of him. Oedipus was not explicitly denying the help of gods by distrusting Teiresias; but at the same time he shows no intention to acknowledge any god's role in his triumph. For him, he is the sole savior of the city. It has been noticed that the confrontation of Oedipus and Teresias demonstrates an opposition in language between the human and the divine, the secular and the sacred.²²⁵ It also shows the opposition between human knowledge and divine knowledge. Teiresias does not deny his claim of a single-handed victory; however, the old mantis takes his ability in doing this with contempt (440-441) and considers it as ultimately destructive (442).

The tension aroused by the different opinions in viewing Oedipus' defeat of Sphinx is pressing. Oedipus thinks it is the tour-de-force of his own mental power, independent of the divine, that he alone solved the riddle of Sphinx and enjoys the reputation of solving riddles and unchallenged wisdom. However, it is hard to fully eliminate the existence of some intangible yet persistent power behind the Sphinx

²²⁵ Gould in Bloom (ed., 1990). p. 213.

episode. The monster has a mysterious source. The timely occasion on which she besieged Thebes leads to Oedipus' marriage with Jocasta and bonds him with Thebes. And in the end, this encounter, triumphal to Oedipus at the time, turned out very possibly to be a fatal link of a grander design, as Teiresias has warned, that self-same fortune which won him kingship and reputation has destroyed him too (“αὐτὴ γέ μέντοις ἢ τύχῃ διώλεσεν 442). Sophocles kept silent on the source of the Sphinx in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and never made it explicit whether Oedipus' triumphed over the monster through his own ability or, as the priest said, through the aid of god. Still, the final revelation compels the audience to look back and reexamine Oedipus' claim of single-handed victory—along with his many other assertive claims. The Sphinx episode may very well be one link of the grand plan of Oedipus' fate and this would ultimately puts to doubt Oedipus' claim to intelligence and his human knowledge.

3. Conclusions

The above discussion demonstrates that Oedipus represents a new kind of hero in the civil context, different from the traditional warrior image in the epics.

Consequently, his mental superiority or, intelligence, is also in the civil setting.

Oedipus' claimed intelligence, as a later elaboration to the more traditional image of the warrior hero, is in nature different from the μῆτις exemplified in Odysseus, which is characterized by its flexibility and many turns. Although Oedipus is characterized by a persistent desire to know the truth, this desire is different from Odysseus'

curiosity for the world unknown. Oedipus' desire to know is more of an intellectual one, based on logical deduction and rational thinking. It is devoid of the social experience as seen in Odysseus. Furthermore, the μῆτις has been saving Odysseus from troubles, its value and usefulness affirmed even by the divine; the value and usefulness of Oedipus' mental power is ultimately put at stake.

The personality of both characters contributes significantly to the realization of their respective fates. Odysseus' curiosity to know the world leads him into more wanderings during his journey home,²²⁶ while his “πολύτροπος” μῆτις saves him from dangerous situations. In Oedipus' case, although he could have fulfilled the oracle about his fate in a more innocent, unwitting way, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents Oedipus as playing an active role in each crucial step of his life. It might well be said that, to a certain extent, the predicted fate fits each character's personality.

The relationship between the hero's character and his predicted fate is more complicated in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* than in the Homeric poems. Although the realization of each fate befits what would be the natural outcome of their character,

²²⁶ Odysseus' biggest trouble, the curse of Poseidon, originated from his insistence to visit Polyphemus' cave and to know his way of life (book 9). The Sirens enchants him by a song promising everything that happens on earth (12. 184-191). Odysseus' own intention to wonder and to see the world is also interestingly betrayed in Odysseus' various false stories that he invented when he gets back home. It is interesting to note that the actions in his false stories are similar to his own, which involves battle, sailing, and wanderings; the heroes of his stories also share the personality of himself (14. 199ff, 260; 19. 271ff; 19. 296, his journey to Dodona is also similar to his journey to the underworld for prophecy). As Odysseus said in one of his false stories:

καί κεν πάλαι ἐνθάδ' Ὀδυσσεὺς
ἦην: ἀλλ' ἄρα οἱ τό γε κέρδιον εἶσατο θυμῷ,
χρήματ' ἀγυρτάζειν πολλήν ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἰόντι. (19. 282-4)

each work seems to imply different attitudes towards this free play of character. The setting of the *Odyssey* makes the predicted fate of Odysseus a conditioned one, which encourages his own free actions and decisions. Similarly, in the *Iliad*, Achilles is given the choice between longevity and glory. Moreover, the prediction of fate in Homer gives more details. Achilles knows when and how his fate is to be fulfilled, and Odysseus receives instructions about specific events in his νόστος. Oedipus has none of these privileges. In the context of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the prediction about fate is absolute, and does not depend on Oedipus' choices and actions. Neither the oracular responses Oedipus get nor the dialogue with a mantic figure gives helpful directions for Oedipus' future actions; moreover, Oedipus is horrified, confused, or misled by them. The direct intervention of the gods in Homer becomes the murky, restrained divine intention which demands the mortals' special effort to understand. In this sense, Oedipus' situation is closer to that of everyman. The interaction between such a personality and the power of fate is crucial to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The attempted, yet failed efforts on the part of the protagonist to communicate with the divine hints at the existence of a grand, divine plan which may not be easily discernible but demands fear and respect. The forceful struggles to evade the predicted fate unwittingly bring out its realization, and it is just through this that the power of fate is conveyed in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Chapter Four: the Significance of Oedipus' Fate in the 5th Century Context

The previous chapters analyze the rhetorical function of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in structure and characterization. In the present chapter, I examine the significances of Sophocles' representation of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* by drawing upon works by Sophocles' immediate predecessors and contemporaries in the 5th century Greece and by putting the problem of fate and its reception in the historical context.

1. The Fulfillment of Fate

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents a narrative of the fulfillment of fate. The play focuses our attention on the problem of fate in several ways. First, the play begins at a point where a series of predetermined and predicted events have already come to pass. Second, several characters express doubts about oracles of Apollo. Oedipus questions Teiresias' prophetic art, and Jocasta raises doubts about the truthfulness of Apollo's oracles (720-722).

On a purely literary level, we can view the fulfillment of fate as a narrative mechanism adopted by the tragedy. The interactions of Oedipus, Teiresias and Jocasta become part of the tragic irony. The doubts raised by Oedipus and Jocasta are just the words of men and women doomed to disaster.²²⁷ The bolder their claim, the greater

²²⁷ See Nock, 1942. p. 474-5.

the artistic effect when their doom is realized.

The theme of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* also has important ramifications for fifth-century Athens. Philosophers, historians and tragedians questioned traditional religious belief in a variety of ways. Especially in the second half of the fifth century, the validity of oracles was no longer taken for granted, and was an object of active debate.²²⁸ When Jocasta dismisses the oracle to Laius, the chorus begs Zeus to fulfill the oracle to Oedipus in order to preserve the religious status of *all* oracles (899-910). In this dramatic scene, the entire belief system hinges on the fulfillment of the oracle to Oedipus, and the vindication of Apollo's prediction in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* constitutes a reaffirmation of traditional belief. More specifically, the important role of Apollo in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* calls attention to the oracle at Delphi.

I argue that the *Oedipus Tyrannus* does not display serious disbelief in oracles or the gods, nor does it ridicule skeptics through their fated downfall. Despite Oedipus' strong character, stubbornness and rashness, he is not an impious person. Nor is Jocasta. I begin with Jocasta's skepticism about Apollo's oracles, then proceed to the oracle to Laius, to demonstrate how the *Oedipus Tyrannus* presents fate's innocent victims.

Jocasta's Doubts: Human Factors in the Prediction of Fate

The major skepticism about oracles in the play occurs when Jocasta doubts the validity of Apollo's oracle to Laius, and tries to persuade Oedipus not to heed the one

²²⁸ See Knox, 1966. pp. 43-44.

he received (708ff). It should be noted that Jocasta made a careful distinction between the prophetic god, the prophetic art and the mortal practitioners. She starts by dismissing mortal practitioners: “there’s no mortal creature sharing in prophetic skill” (“ἔστι σοι / βρότειον οὐδὲν μαντικῆς ἔχον τέχνης”, 708-9, trans. Blondell). In her account of the oracles to Laius, Jocasta uses caution and propriety not to blame a god directly:

χρησιμὸς γὰρ ἦλθε Λαίῳ ποτ’, οὐκ ἐρῶ
 Φοίβου γ’ ἄπ’ αὐτοῦ, τῶν δ’ ὑπηρετῶν ἄπο,
 An oracle once came to Laius—I won’t say
 from Phoibos, but from Phoibos’ servants— (711-12, trans. Blondell)

Jocasta’s distrust of Apollo’s servants does not equal any distrust for the god. To understand this, it is necessary to examine the ways by which the divine communicates to mortals in Attic tragedy. I categorize them into direct and indirect ways of communication.²²⁹ The direct way is epiphany, the gods’ physical appearance on stage. In the *Eumenides*, the Furies, Apollo and Athena are characters on stage who directly express their opinion about Orestes’ matricide. In the *Philoctetes*, Heracles reveals himself to Philoctetes and persuades him in person. In epiphanies, gods’ intentions are communicated directly to the mortals, and there is no problem with its interpretation. When Jocasta says that “if a god seeks what he needs, he’ll easily uncover it himself” (“ὧν γὰρ ἄν θεὸς / χρεῖαν ἐρευνᾷ, ῥαδίως αὐτὸς φανεῖ.”, 724-5), she might well have this in mind.

What Jocasta (and for that matter, Oedipus) has doubts about is the indirect way

²²⁹ See also Parker’s categorization in Griffin (ed., 1999) pp. 11-15.

of communication between the divine and mortals. By indirect I mean that the divine message is sent through a verbal, vocal or signal medium, and in reading and understanding it, there is the problem of interpretation. These indirect ways include omens, such as the flying of birds, the occurrence of a thunder, or a dream; it also includes what is most concerned in the passage of Jocasta's doubts: the oracular utterance.

Signs and omens are natural phenomena, and are loaded with meanings only through human interpretation. Not all natural phenomena bear divine messages; so before interpretation one must also determine which ones are the true signs. Once one believes he receives an omen, he may need a professional to interpret the meaning. In historical situations, different omens require different professionals.²³⁰ Literary works present how a mantic figure interprets signs and omens. In the *Iliad* Odysseus recounts the portent they received in the beginning of the war, which Calchas interpreted (2. 303-330). Occasionally, literary characters may interpret omens themselves, taking the role of a professional at the moment. When a bird omen appeared upon Telemachus' departure for Ithaca, Helen claimed that she would prophesy (*Odyssey* 15. 172) and offered an interpretation. In the *Libation Bearers*, once Orestes learnt about Clytemnestra's dream, he read it as an omen for his success

²³⁰ See Nock (1942: 475) for a summary of how different omens are interpreted by different professionals: "On a sign or a portent you might consult an oracle, an *exegetes* (or local representative of Delphi and specialist in sacred lore), or a *mantis* (soothsayer): on dreams, an *exegetes* or a *mantis*, and occasionally an oracle: on victims or birds, a *mantis*."

in revenging his father (540-1).

Now I proceed to oracles which constitute the central concern of Jocasta's doubts. Historical evidence shows problems in the delivery, the transmission and interpretation of the oracular message. The Pythia at Delphi, and other "gods' servants" at Delphi and in other oracles spoke for the gods, but they are themselves human beings and are susceptible to fear, pressure, and others.²³¹ In the case when the enquirer was not physically present at Delphi but sent one or more envoys, procedures are taken to ensure the security of the oracular responses, or even the questions.²³²

Tragedy reflects the concern for the reliability of oracular messages. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, when Creon, who had been sent as an envoy to consult Delphi, was charged of conspiracy with Teiresias, he asked Oedipus to test him by going back to Delphi and inquiring about the faithfulness of his report (603-4).

Interpreting oracles also poses dramatic problems. As has been discussed in previous chapters, historical oracular responses often chose from a limited number of options, or gave a simple affirmation or denial. Attic tragedy portrays legendary and fictional oracles which are often ambiguous in meaning. "Puzzling riddles of Phoebus lured me on" (Euripides, *Suppliants*, 138), exclaims Adrastus. Robert Parker discusses how riddling oracles provided a kind of resistance to the understanding, and also

²³¹ See also Nock, 1942. p. 474. Fontenrose (1978: 211) also points out that the Pythia's emotions affected her utterances. Fontenrose also mentioned bribery, which has only several known cases.

²³² Fontenrose, 1978. p. 217.

points out that the interpretive process shifts the responsibility from the one who utters the oracles to those who receive them.²³³ When Apollo responded to delicate enquiries with riddles, he was forcing the client to construct his own response through interpretation.²³⁴ Apollo told Adrastus to marry his daughters to a boar and a lion (*Phoenissae* 411); and when he saw Polynices and Tydeus coming to his palace as exiles, he interpreted that the oracle meant these young men. In doing so Adrastus takes great liberty in the understanding and execution of Apollo's teaching. Even when oracles or predictions do give simple, direct statements, they may still be unhelpful in the actual human situation, and mortals need to choose their own course of action. The oracle about the plague in the beginning of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (95-98) involves no riddling; yet it requires no less human judgment and efforts to carry it out.

Given the important role of Teiresias in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is necessary to look into the mantis profession. Oracles and manteis are two distinct modes of divination. A mantis interprets divine will through omens and sacrifice,²³⁵ thus has a different source of authority from oracles. The profession especially involves

²³³ See Parker, 1985, p. 301. Parker is aware of the contra-argument about the ambiguity of Delphic oracles. Fontenrose argues that the reputation of ambiguity is wholly modern, and that Herodotus never says ambiguity was a Delphic characteristic. See Fontenrose, 1978, p. 236. Even if Fontenrose is right about the historical situation, it could still be valid that in literary representations oracles are quite often portrayed as hard to understand.

²³⁴ Parker illustrates this point through the "wooden wall" oracle in Herodotus (*Histories* 7. 140-44).

²³⁵ Dillery, 2005, p. 169.

choosing from multiple meanings, which demands the use of human reason.²³⁶ The mantis is very often a military figure that accompanies the troop and consults kingly figures, as Calchas in the *Iliad*. As an independent practitioner of divination, a mantis has an individual relationship with his clients.²³⁷ Tragedy represents the tension between a mantis and his clients. Manteis are constantly portrayed as the objects of rebuke by kingly figures, and their opposition to the authority of kings is a recurring feature of manteis in myth.²³⁸ Agamemnon rebukes Calchas in book 1 of the *Iliad*; and Sophocles' Jocasta indignantly says that no mortal shares the prophetic art. Teiresias is depicted to have conflicts both with Creon in *Antigone* and with Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and Teiresias in the *Phoenissae* feels the danger of speaking the truth (891, 956). Sophocles' Teiresias is described to be a little removed from the historical situation; he is not a military figure in any of the Theban plays, and he seems to be endowed with an intuitive knowledge (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, 299). Nevertheless, his confrontation with Oedipus reflects the individual relationship and possible tensions between a historical mantis and his client.

Thus in the context of most Attic tragedies, human reaction to the signs and oracles is of great significance either in the interpretation or in the execution of them. Jocasta's apparent skepticism of oracles in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* should also be

²³⁶ See Nock, 1942. p. 475 for the discussion of the art of Mantike.

²³⁷ For a detailed discussion, see Flower (2008) and Raphals (forthcoming) 99-108.

²³⁸ Dillery, 2005. p. 172.

understood in this context. Sophocles' Jocasta does revere the gods; right after her attempts to persuade Oedipus of the unreliability of words of prophecy (723), she proceeds to sacrifice at Apollo's altar (911-923). And although Jocasta openly questions the "reverent prophecies" from the god (953) after learning about Polybus' death, Oedipus' lament which follows up seems to suggest that what people learns from oracles or signs are through the medium of interpreters (964-7). This mixed feeling towards gods and prophetic signs and oracles is quite in accord with what Parker describes as the historical situation of oracles. Clients may show open incredibility or even contempt to certain diviners or a particular form of divination, and the fact that clients attribute failures to the incompetence or fraud of mortals "supports rather than subverts belief". As Parker concludes, "the society that abuses diviners is the society that consults them."²³⁹ Parker's argument is that individual diviners were considered fallible, but the divinity was not. The above discussion shows that Jocasta's words and actions in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* do not constitute a serious challenge to the belief in Delphi, or to divine prediction of fate in general.

Laius' Inevitable Fate and Fate's Innocent Sufferers

Nor is there a clear reason for the fulfillment of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Sophocles does not reveal the ultimate machinery behind all the coincidences which bring out Oedipus' fate. The source of the plague and its timing is left unexplained. The mystic origin of the Sphinx is never clarified. The encounter between Laius and

²³⁹ Parker, 1985. p. 302.

Oedipus, the timely arrival of the messenger, and the fact that the witness of Laius' death is conveniently the same person who was charged with the exposure of the baby years ago, are all left without any account of divine participation, or its absence. The divine powers, their acts and motives, are hidden both from both the audience and the characters.²⁴⁰

One of these crucial events most heatedly debated is how Laius receives the prophecy about his fate. Within the play, Sophocles never clarifies why Laius (or Oedipus, for that matter) was allotted such a fate. Jocasta mentions that “an oracle once came to Laius” (711); like the one Oedipus received at Delphi in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the oracle came as a statement of predetermined fact, not in the form of warning or advice. Moreover, no reason is suggested for the allotment of such a fate to Laius.

By contrast, however, the other two tragedians spell out more of the background to the doom of the Theban house in their treatment of the Oedipus story. In Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, his only extant surviving play dealing with the Oedipus legend, Laius was given a choice in the oracle about his fate. The chorus specified that Apollo warned Laius three times (746), but Laius did not take heed of the premonition to save his city (748-9). Laius' action was first described as the result of thoughtlessness (“ἔκ φίλων ἀβουλιᾶν”, 750), then lamented as ill counsel (παλαιᾶς Λαΐου δυσβουλίας, 802), and further as lacking in trust (“βουλαὶ δ' ἄπιστοι Λαΐου”, 842). It is

²⁴⁰ Gould, 1990. p. 209.

consequently clear that the disaster of the household results from Laius' failure to make the right choice; Laius is to blame for a disaster spanning three generations. Oedipus' curse on his sons is indeed the immediate cause for the present bloodshed in the *Seven Against Thebes*, a curse which invoked the Furies to utterly destroy the whole race (1060-2). Both the chorus and Eteocles repeatedly lament Oedipus' curse, as well as the Furies and the doom the curse brings.²⁴¹ However, Oedipus does not receive the ultimate blame. Nowhere in the play does the chorus blame him for being responsible for the family disaster; on the contrary, the chorus describes Oedipus as a man who wins admiration from gods and man (772-5), and states that Oedipus blinded himself and cursed his sons in the grip of pain and distracted in heart (“ἔπ' ἄλγει δυσφορῶν/ μαινομένῳ κραδίῳ” 780-1).

In Euripides, too, the doom of the family over three generations is the result of Laius' negligence of Apollo's warning. In the beginning of *Phoenissae*, Jocasta recounts that Laius went to Delphi to beg for a male heir, but was warned not to have children (13-20). Laius begot Oedipus in lust and drunkenness (“ἠδονῆ δούς ἔς τε βακχείαν πεσῶν”, 21). Besides Laius' lack of respect for the oracle, the added detail of lust and drunkenness shows him as a man lacking in self-control. On the other hand, Oedipus is described as cursing his sons only when he was not himself, struck ill by misfortune (“πρὸς δὲ τῆς τύχης νοσῶν”, 66). It seems that Oedipus did not curse his sons intentionally, and according to Jocasta he regrets this act and mourns

²⁴¹ See also *Seven against Thebes* 709, 724ff, 833, 840-1, 886-7, and 898-9.

his curse after Polynices left Thebes (326-335). Later in the play, Teiresias also sees Laius as the source of disaster, because he made a child against heaven's will (867).

Do all three tragedians depict Laius' guilt as passing through the generations and evoking due punishments? To Aeschylus and Euripides Laius' guilt is quite obvious. Since he has a choice, Laius' disregard for Apollo's oracle constitutes a clear offense. In Aeschylus, Laius committed the fatal act despite multiple warnings. In Euripides, moreover, Jocasta specifies that Laius went to Delphi himself specially seeking for advice. Parker notes that in historical situations there is no record of disobedience to a specifically solicited oracular response.²⁴² By contrast, Laius' disobedience to an oracle that he himself sought, even though in Euripides' fictional context, is phenomenal.

Lloyd-Jones raises a further question about the divine motivation for giving Laius such an oracle, and argues that the legend of Chrysippus is the ultimate reason for Laius' punishment. The story, recorded in Apollodorus 3. 5. 5, tells how Laius' abduction of Chrysippus incurred the curse of the boy's father, Pelops. The legend, with due variations on details, probably formed the plot of Euripides' lost play *Chrysippus*; and is believed to have been used by Aeschylus in his lost play *Laius*.²⁴³ Still, even if Aeschylus and Euripides included this episode, I do not think that Laius' rape of Chrysippus is the guilt that incurred the fates of Laius' descendants. There

²⁴² Parker, in Cartledge and Harvey (eds., 1985). p. 298.

²⁴³ See Welcker, *Die Aschyleische Trilogie*. p. 359; *Der Epische Cyclus*. I 94; II 316; Hermann on Aeschylus, *Septem*. p. 813; and Lloyd-Jones, 1971. pp. 120-1.

would have been no inevitable punishment if Laius had followed Apollo's advice. One might as well argue that to die without issue is itself a punishment for Laius; yet in that case the doom over three generations would be absent. In my opinion, it is the failure to heed Apollo's warning that induces the punishment in Aeschylus' and Euripides' Theban plays. What befalls the cursed family is a righteous punishment for the neglect of divine advice.

In this sense, human response to the oracle has great significance in reading the play. It is thus crucial that Sophocles mutes the element of Laius' offence and leaves out Laius' choice. Given no choice at all, Sophocles' Laius is not guilty as in Aeschylus or Euripides. Lloyd-Jones raises an objection against Laius' innocence, that even in Sophocles, Laius was warned beforehand. Lloyd-Jones gives two reasons: first, Jocasta omits details in her account of Laius' oracle, and probably leaves out Apollo's warning, which was irrelevant at that moment; second, Oedipus' lament in 1184-5 "I who am sprung from those who should not have begotten me" can only be explained if Laius had been warned but chose to have a child.²⁴⁴ On the first point, I believe that the omission on Jocasta's part does not justify free speculation for the readers of the play. On the second point, since Jocasta's account is the first chance for Oedipus to learn about Laius' oracle and Jocasta omits (according to Lloyd-Jones), Oedipus has no opportunity to learn about Apollo's warning, if there indeed was one. Thus line 1184 for me serves more as a rhetorical lamentation than as evidence for

²⁴⁴ Lloyd-Jones, 1971. pp. 119-121.

hidden details.

I argue that within the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Sophocles intends Laius to appear innocent. I agree with Lloyd-Jones that Sophocles and his audience must have been familiar with the tradition of Laius' neglect of the oracle. However, unlike Lloyd-Jones I think Sophocles does alter the form of the oracle somewhat.²⁴⁵ Sophocles does not deny this tradition in his play, nor does he emphasize it. There is no solid proof that Sophocles intends his audience to be reminded of this tradition, or to understand the play in this context. Sophocles' special treatment of the oracle to Laius seems more significant if we take into consideration the oracle to Oedipus in the same play, which also involves the inevitability of fate and which, as discussed in chapter 2, was possibly an innovation by Sophocles.

Thus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Sophocles especially presents the innocent victims of fate, that fate comes inevitably to someone who did not necessarily do wrong. The tragic irony is all the greater because Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* learnt about the fulfillment of his fate specifically because he attached great importance to the oracle about Laius' murder, and spared no efforts to carry it out. The depiction of innocent suffering also appears in other tragedies. The *Oedipus Colonus*, the final one of Sophocles' Theban plays, gives special emphasis to Oedipus' innocence and his sufferings. Described as fate's innocent victim, Oedipus finally found resolution of his life, and died as one no less blessed than he was polluted. Sometimes sufferings come

²⁴⁵ See also Dodds, 1966, p. 41. For the contrary argument, see Lloyd-Jones, 1971. p. 119.

to a character regardless of his choice, as in Aeschylus' Orestes who is caught in a fatal dilemma by Apollo's oracle to kill Clytemnestra (*Libation Bearers* 269ff). He would be punished either through disobedience of Apollo, if he avoids the matricide, or by his mother's Furies if he obeys it. In a like spirit, Aeschylus made Eteocles comment on the general situation of human suffering regardless of a person's piety or justice. A pious man ("εὐσεβῆς ἄνθρωπος") may die when in company with the god-detested persons (*Seven against Thebes* 602-4), and a just man may receive the same ills as his fellow citizens who are inhospitable to strangers and forgetful of the gods' commands (605-6).

The depiction of sufferings is not unique to Attic tragedy. The Homeric epics also give voice to human πάθος. Zeus claims that of all things that breathe and move upon the earth, there is nothing more wretched than man (*Iliad* 17. 446-7). Although they also show us Andromache's tears, Priam's pains and Penelope's hardship, Homeric epics center on a small group of warrior-heroes, or, the aristocracy.

Suffering in the Attic tragedy is given in a larger context; tragedians display the tears, pains, and struggles of groups of people that receive less depiction in Homeric epics. For example, using the Trojan War material, Euripides depicts women and their fate after the fall of their city (*Trojan Women*). Various plays choose women, foreigners, or slaves as the chorus who passionately voice their pains. The cruelty of war is described from the perspective of common soldiers (*Agamemnon* 433-57, 559-67) and better shows the pain and misery of common people. Tragedians may

have depicted these human sufferings for the dramatic effect and not out of genuine interest. Still, to a certain extent the weaker gender and the minor characters are given more voice and attention in tragedy, as compared to epic which focuses on the few male heroes.

I draw a brief conclusion from the above discussion about the fulfillment of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. First, the emphasis on the reaffirmation of oracular predictions, especially oracles at Delphi, may reflect the historical situation of a crisis of belief and the need to reinforce tradition. Still, there is no serious challenge, doubt or irony in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* against the authority of Apollo and his oracles, or against the Olympian gods in general. Second, the predicted fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* comes to realization as an inevitable force, regardless of the characters' actions. I hesitate to agree with Dodds' affirmation that Sophocles does not believe his gods are in any way just; still I do not think that justice of divine will is Sophocles' main concern. Instead, by focusing on human efforts and sufferings in dealing with fate, Sophocles calls our attention to fifth century values in confrontation with one's fate.

2. Changing Notions of Heroism and Fate from Homer to Sophocles

Now I proceed to examine the changing values behind the attitudes to fate reflected in extant Attic tragedies, in hope to better understand the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Towards the end of Euripides' *Electra*, Castor says:

Φοῖβός τε, Φοῖβος — ἀλλ' ἄναξ γάρ ἐστ' ἐμός,
 σιγῶ: σοφὸς δ' ὧν οὐκ ἔχρησέ σοι σοφά.
 αἰνεῖν δ' ἀνάγκη ταῦτα: τάντεῦθεν δὲ χρῆ
 πράσσειν ἃ Μοῖρα Ζεὺς τ' ἔκρανε σοῦ πέρι.
 As for Phoebus, Phoebus—yet he is my lord,
 silence. He knows the truth but his oracles were lies.
 Compulsion is on us to accept this scene, on you
 to go complete the doom which fate and Zeus decreed.
 (1244-8, trans. Emily Townsend Vermeule)

This is a typical message in extant tragedies, advocating the acceptance of whatever fate has in store for men. Wise Apollo may give unwise prophecies, but it is a god's advice for men to accept whatever it is. Similar attitude appears also in Homer (*Odyssey* 18. 134-7). Yet it would be unfair to think that Homeric poems and Attic tragedies are upholding a complete pessimism. While representing sufferings as coming to mortals with no good reason and indiscriminately to even innocent people, the Homeric corpus and Attic tragedy also bring out the heroes who receive their fate and sufferings with courage and who wins dignity and respect in this process. I now examine how the heroic values are represented in Homer and Attic tragedy in confrontation with fate, and the difference and change in them.

Homeric Heroes

In book 2 of the *Iliad*, the disguised Iris describes warriors on the battle field as very much like tree leaves and the sands of the sea-shore (“λίην γὰρ φύλλοισιν ἔοικότεσ ἢ ψαμάθοισιν”, 2. 800). Leaves and grains of sand are numerous, one indistinguishable from another. In another context, Hippolochos comments on human generations:

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεὴ τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν.
 φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
 τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη:
 ὡς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει.
 As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.
 The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber
 burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning.
 So one generation of men will grow while another dies.
 (*Iliad* 6. 146-9, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

The human generations will continue, but each person must face his inevitable death. Homeric epics also present a poor view of afterlife, and the ghost of Achilles once said that he would rather live as a common farmer than be a king of the dead (*Odyssey* 11. 489-91). The above passages describe a general situation that each Homeric man needs to confront. When individual life is like a tree leaf, how can a hero find distinction and immortality?

Homeric heroes seek distinction and immortality through the pursuit of κλέος. Before I start the discussion of Homeric heroes, it is necessary to first clarify the concept of hero and κλέος. The word hero, “ἥρωες”, has many connotations. In Hesiod, “ἥρωες” specially refers to the 4th and 5th generation of races (*Works and Days* 106-201), which includes all the men who fought in the Theban and Trojan wars. In the plural, “ἥρωες” refers to the class of powerful dead who are the objects of hero cults and who are considered intermediate between gods and mortals.²⁴⁶ Direct reference to hero cult is lacking in Homer, Hesiod and the epic cycles,²⁴⁷ and hero

²⁴⁶ For studies on hero cults, see Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and the Idea of Immortality* (1921); A. Brelich, *Gli Eroi Greci* (1958); Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica* (1989).

²⁴⁷ See Bravo in Albersmeier (ed., 2009), p. 16. West explains this lack from

cult is not the focus of this present study. I discuss “ἥρωζ” and the heroic values in the context of literary works. In both Homeric epics, the term is entirely secular in meaning and bears no trace of the religious meaning in the context of hero cult.²⁴⁸ In Homeric epics, the word ἥρωζ is, above all, a synonym for warrior. Prowess is the essential attribute for an epic hero, and ἥρωζ is most often used in the context of battle.²⁴⁹ On the other hand, ἥρωζ is also an indicator of birth and social status. In the *Iliad* there are situations when the word is used outside a battle-field or military context. It could also be used as a direct address to a member of the aristocracy.²⁵⁰ “ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τόδε εἰπὲ διοτρεφεὲς Εὐρύπυλ’ ἥρωζ”, says Patrocles (11. 819). In this usage, “ἥρωζ” indicates that the speaker and the addressee are of equal social status. In the context of a phrase which is twice applied to Agamemnon, “ἥρωζ Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων” (*Iliad* 1. 102, 7. 322), the word has less emphasis on his identity as a warrior than on his unchallenged social status among the heroes in the entire epic. In the *Odyssey* whose the context is more outside the battlefield, the word is often applied to the lords speaking in the assembly, whether in Ithaca or among the

geography. For West, the hero cult is alien to Ionia, the land where the epics originated, and the indirect references in the poems result from the infiltration of the mainland concept of heros into the poetic tradition as it circulated there (West 1978: 370-373). Nagy explains it from the nature of the genre of epic poetry. According to Nagy, Homeric epic strives to be pan-Hellenic in appeal, but hero cult is by nature a localized phenomenon (Nagy 1979: 114-117).

²⁴⁸ See Bravo in Albersmeier (ed., 2009), p 14.

²⁴⁹ The term “ἥρωζ” is used to describe a fighter in the battlefield at *Iliad*: 2. 708, 2. 844, 3. 377, 5. 327, 6. 35, 8. 268, 10. 154, 13. 575, and 21. 163.

²⁵⁰ See 10. 416, 11. 819 and 838, 13. 788, etc.

Phaecians who are unwarlike.²⁵¹ It is also often used of kings, which is similar to the above mentioned phrase for Agamemnon in the *Iliad*.²⁵² There are also instances when “ἥρωες” is used as a general term of respect, meaning something like “noble”. For example, *Odyssey* 8. 483 uses “ἥρωες” to refer to the bard Demodokos; in 18. 423, it is used to refer to the herald and attendant Moulis. Finley also points out that in the *Odyssey* “ἥρωες” is not only a class term for the whole aristocracy, but at times it even seems to embrace all the free men (*Odyssey* 1. 272).²⁵³

To become a hero in the Greek context is to continue to exist beyond death.²⁵⁴ The hero’s immortality is closely connected with κλέος. Charles Segal rightly points out the two aspects of κλέος. On the one hand, as Nagy suggested, κλέος is “the formal word which the Singer himself (aoidos) used to designate the songs that he sang in praise of gods and men, or, by extension, the songs that people learned to sing from him”.²⁵⁵ On the other, κλέος is also the objectification of the hero’s personal survival in epic song, the imperishable fame that lives among the people and keeps alive the hero’s name.²⁵⁶ Homer epics reflect the two aspects of this word. Κλέος

²⁵¹ *Odyssey* 2. 15, 2, 157, 4. 617, 7. 155; 11. 342.

²⁵² *Odyssey* 7. 303, 14. 317, 15. 117

²⁵³ See Finley (1954: 20).

²⁵⁴ Pache in Albersmeier (ed., 2009), p. 89.

²⁵⁵ Nagy 1974, p. 248; qtd. Segal, 1994, p. 88.

²⁵⁶ Segal, 1994. p. 88.

could be a mere rumor or news,²⁵⁷ but it is also frequently used to mean good report, “κλέος ἔσθλόν” (e.g. *Iliad* 5. 3), and thus glory or honor.²⁵⁸ In the following discussion, κλέος is mostly used in the second sense, the immortal fame and glory that lives on after the hero’s death.

Κλέος is usually connected with physical prowess. Achilles thinks that he must win glory in the battlefield before he dies as fate decreed:

ὣς καὶ ἔγών, εἰ δὴ μοι ὁμοίη μοῖρα τέτυκται,
κείσομ’ ἔπει κε θάνω: νῦν δὲ κλέος ἔσθλόν Ἄροίμην,
So I likewise, if such is the fate which has been wrought for me,
shall lie still, when I am dead. Now I must win excellent glory...
(*Iliad* 18. 120-1, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

Alkinoos says that there is no greater glory than what a man achieves by speed of his feet or strength of his hands.²⁵⁹ This demonstration of physical excellence can be in battlefield, in games, or in any other context. Athena in the *Odyssey* says that Orestes won κλέος by revenging his father (1. 298-300) at home. But valor is not the only way to win κλέος. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is a hero who achieved distinction not primarily with his physical strength but with his crafty mind, as he introduces himself:²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ *Iliad* 11. 21; *Odyssey* 1. 283, 2. 217, 13. 415, 16. 461, 23. 137.

²⁵⁸ Sometimes the word τιμή is also used to mean honor, distinction or renown. For examples, see *Iliad* 1. 352, 16. 84, and so on.

²⁵⁹ *Odyssey* 8. 147: “οὐ μὲν γὰρ μείζον κλέος ἀνέρος, ὄφρα κεν ἦσιν,
ἦ ὅ τι ποσσὶν τε ῥέξιη καὶ χερσὶν ἐῖσιν.”

²⁶⁰ For more discussions on the κλέος won by μῆτις, see Nagy (1979) and Detienne and Vernant (1978).

εἴμι' Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης, ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισιν
ἀνθρώποισι μέλω, καί μεν κλέος οὐρανὸν ἵκει
I am Odysseus son of Laertes, known before all men
for the study of crafty designs, and my fame goes up to the heavens.
(9. 19-20, trans Richmond Lattimore)

In this sense, the *Odyssey* presents a broader spectrum of heroism than the *Iliad*.

It further extends the applicability of κλέος to women. Penelope is said to have won great fame (“μέγα μὲν κλέος”, *Odyssey* 2. 125) through her clever tricks on the suitors, and through her virtue (24. 196). Κλέος stands at the opposite side of cowardice and avoidance of responsibility. Agamemnon as the general encourages his men to fight, because the one who runs away wins no glory (“φευγόντων δ’ οὔτ’ ἄρ κλέος ὄρνυται”, *Iliad* 5. 532).

In most cases κλέος is closely connected with γέρας, a prize or material gain won in battle, in a game or some other situations. In different contexts, such material acquisitions are also described by various words like δῶρα (e.g. *Iliad* 16. 86), ἔναρα (e.g. *Iliad* 17. 231) and others. The γέρας could be a piece of armor, a good horse, a woman or some other treasure. A γέρας could be won through combat, which is a proof of one’s valor and brings κλέος. For example, Sthenelos, seeing Pandaros and Aeneas coming, advises Diomedes to give way to these strong enemies; but Diomedes tries to persuade his companion to fight so that they can take the enemy’s good horses as booty and win glory (“εἰ τούτω κε λάβοιμεν, ἀροίμεθά κε κλέος ἔσθλόν”, *Iliad* 5. 273). When Hector stirs up his allies to fight, he makes a promise to the one who drags back Patrocles’ body:

ἥμισυ τῷ ἑνάρων ἀποδάσσομαι, ἥμισυ δ' αὐτὸς
ἔξω ἐγώ· τὸ δέ οἱ κλέος ἔσσεται ὅσσον ἐμοί περ.
I will give him half the spoils for his portion, and keep half
for myself, and his glory shall be as great as mine is.
(*Iliad* 17. 231-2, trans. Richmond Lattimore)

In this context, the splitting of the spoil is in proportion with the sharing of reputation; the material prize incorporates the intangible fame. In the *Odyssey* where the action is mostly not on the battlefield, the central problem for the hero is to regain his kingdom, his property and his wife Penelope. It is only through the repossession of his γέρας that Odysseus' νόστος is fully achieved and his κλέος secured.

While γέρας gives a hero distinction in the present life, the song about a hero's κλέος guarantees the memory of future generations, and through a song the hero gets immortality. The κλέος of a hero is a favorite theme of singers (*Odyssey* 3. 204), and Homeric heroes are well aware of the function of a song. In consequence, they yearn to be the subject of songs, or just the words, of future generations, through which they live in the memory of posterity. Hector, in challenging the Greeks, says that whoever he killed will be buried in a mound, and men in the future will see it:

ἄνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
ὃν ποτ' ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ.
ὥς ποτέ τις ἔρειε: τὸ δ' ἐμὸν κλέος οὐ ποτ' ὀλεῖται.
“This is the mound of a man who died long ago in battle,
who was one of the bravest, and glorious Hector killed him.”
So will he speak some day, and my glory will not be forgotten.
(*Iliad* 7. 89-91, trans. Lattimore)

While Helen is aware that they shall become characters of song for people in the future (*Iliad* 6. 358), in the *Odyssey* (8. 72ff), Odysseus is already listening to a song about himself and other Trojan War heroes during his lifetime. The depiction of the

heroes' desire for immortality through songs befits the genre which was orally composed and circulated and which preserved memory.

Homeric κλέος focuses on the individual instead of the community. When Achilles asks Thetis to beg Zeus to help the Trojans and hold back the Greeks (*Iliad* 1. 408-9), he has no concern for the possible loss for the Greeks, but is only obsessed with the goal of making Agamemnon show him due honor. It should be noted that the Homeric epics already question and challenge the unlimited pursuit of fame and heroic glory in combat. The *Iliad* presents the expense of Achilles' as well as Hector's κλέος: the bloodshed of one's own people, the loss of a friend, the destruction of one's city, and the pain of one's own family.²⁶¹ It also presents Hector, a hero who, besides being a fighter is also a son, a husband, and a father, and who is defeated in the battlefield, yet no less honorable. The final reconciliation between Achilles and Priam also gives the book the humanity and sophistication that save it from the simple advocacy of heroic honor.²⁶² The *Odyssey*, moreover, depicts a different kind of hero who, unlike Agamemnon and Achilles, combines νόστος and κλέος, and who wins honor and reputation not primarily through physical force.

The epic cycles presents further challenges to the stark observance of this heroic value. In the *Thebias*, Amphiaraus foresees his death in war and chooses to avoid the battlefield. Odysseus tries to avoid going to Troy by pretending madness, and Thetis

²⁶¹ For examples: *Iliad* 11. 762-4, 16. 29ff, 18. 97ff, and so on.

²⁶² See also Else, 1965, pp. 43-44.

disguises Achilles as a girl so that he can be kept away from battlefield and his predicted death. These episodes are strikingly unfit for the heroic values that see fame, honor and avoidance of shame higher than one's own life and the suffering of one's own people. The epic cycles were composed chronologically between Homeric epics and Attic tragedy. What, then, are the heroic values depicted in tragedy? Is the limit of heroism further challenged or broadened? There might not be a clear diachronic development, but surely Attic tragedies presents us with different kinds of heroes.

Heroes in Tragedy

I first call to attention Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes* and the values exemplified in it. The play demonstrates how a mortal, when he learns his destiny for sure, may exhibit the attitude of placid, heroic acceptance of whatever decreed by fate.²⁶³ It is first shown in a minor character, through the indirect description of Amphitratus. As a mantis who knows his own death as the result of this attack (587-8), Amphitratus accepts what is destined because he looks for "a fate not dishonorable" ("οὐκ ἄτιμον ἔλπίζω μόρον", 589). Unlike the other fighters attacking Thebes who are described by the messenger to be boasting their might to the extent of hybris (469), Amphitratus sees exactly the end of his present action yet finds peace in the honor he would gain. This almost Homeric tone of a hero is quickly picked up in the character of Eteocles. Eteocles is shown to be concerned with the other end of

²⁶³ In *Prometheus Bound* Prometheus, a deity, has a similar attitude. He knows all before and all that shall be (100-1), and he bears the destiny that fate gives him (104) and admits that craft is far weaker than necessity (513).

honor, shame. “If a man suffers ill, let it be without shame” (“εἴπερ κακὸν φέροι τις, αἰσχύνῃς ὄτερ/ ἔστω” 683-4). When the chorus reminds him of Oedipus’ curse and advises him to avoid Polynices, Eteocles points out that it is the god that drives the matter on (687) and that no one can shun the ills given by gods (719).

Aeschylus’ *Amphitratrus* and Eteocles remind us of the Homeric heroes. Eteocles is specially modeled on Hector. Facing Andromache’s pleading tears, Hector claims that he would feel deep shame (“μᾶλ’ αἰνῶς /αἰδέομαι”, *Iliad* 6. 441-2) if he were to shrink from fighting, and that what he would do was to win great glory (“μέγα κλέος”, 6. 446) both for his father and for himself. When beseeched by his parents not to fight Achilles, Hector would not go back inside Troy for fear of shame (*Iliad* 22. 99-110, especially, 105). Eteocles’ persistence to fight Polynices despite the chorus’ beseeching, as well as his desperate avoidance of any possible shame, are reminiscent of the Hector who is keen on his fame and stubborn to take advice. The characters of Eteocles and *Amphitratrus* combine to bring out the heroic value well demonstrated in the Homeric epics.

Compared with the Homeric heroes, Eteocles in the *Seven against Thebes* is in a quite different social context. In the *Iliad* the needs and feelings of common people are less voiced. In one episode a commoner, Thersites, challenges the decision and authority of kings (2. 212ff). Thersites was ruthlessly reproached by those superior in social status, and laughed at by his equals; in an epic primarily concerned with aristocratic heroes little attention and recognition are given to the voice and power of

common people. By the time when Attic tragedies were staged, however, the demos, the Athenian common people, were no longer a passive bystander, and their voices and opinions mattered. While in the *Iliad* the opinion of Agamemnon alone can rule out what is favored by the rest of the Greeks (1. 22-5), in Aeschylus *Suppliant Women*, the king claims that he would never act alone apart from the people (“οὐκ ἄνευ δήμου τάδε / πράξαμι’ ἄν, οὐδέ περ κρατῶν”, 398-9). The rule of one man is criticized; in the *Antigone* Haemon warns Creon: “No city is property of a single man” (“πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ἥτις ἀνδρός ἑσθ’ ἑνός”, 737, trans. Elizabeth Wyckoff).

In a new social background, Aeschylus’ Eteocles is different from Homeric heroes in that the honor he is looking for is also the honor of the community. In choosing to die for his city, Eteocles wins individual glory just because he promotes public good. Finley is very shrewd to point out that the notion of social obligation is fundamentally “non-heroic”,²⁶⁴ and in his context, by “non-heroic” Finley means not the Homeric heroism. With the social obligations claiming the primary importance, it is not the individual hero, but the community in general, the polis, that claims the glory. The fifth century Athens was especially aware of and proud of her political uniqueness, and the emphasis on public good is well demonstrated in Pericles’ funeral oration. Pericles points out that in Athens each individual should have a concern for the public, and the man who takes no part in public affairs are considered “not

²⁶⁴ Finley, 1954. p. 125.

apolitical but useless”.²⁶⁵ Physical excellence finds meaning in the service of the city not for individual purposes; and valor in battles against enemies could cover up a man’s other imperfections (2.42.3). Individual fame comes only when one gives himself to the public cause:

κοινή γὰρ τὰ σώματα διδόντες ἰδίᾳ τὸν ἀγήρων ἔπαινον ἐλάμβανον καὶ τὸν τάφον ἐπισημώτατον.

For in giving their lives in common cause, they individually gained imperishable praise and the most distinctive tomb. (*The Peloponnesian War*, 2.43.2, trans. Steven Lattimore)

Pericles’ speech also shows an awareness of and a hope for the memory of future generations, but he declares that the city will be admired by posterity not through any poet’s song, but through demonstration of power:

μετὰ μεγάλων δὲ σημείων καὶ οὐ δὴ τοι ἀμάρτυρόν γε τὴν δύναμιν παρασχόμενοι τοῖς τε νῦν καὶ τοῖς ἔπειτα θαυμασθησόμεθα, καὶ οὐδὲν προσδεόμενοι οὔτε Ὀμήρου ἐπαινέτου οὔτε ὅστις ἔπεισι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα τέρψει, τῶν δ’ ἔργων τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἢ ἀλήθεια βλάψει.

Through great proofs, and by exhibiting power in no way unwitnessed, we will be admired by this and future generations, thus requiring no Homer to sing our praises nor any other whose verse will charm for the moment and whose claims the factual truth will destroy. (*The Peloponnesian War*, 2.41.4, trans. Steven Lattimore)

In the *Odyssey* Menelaus also piled a tomb for Agamemnon so that his κλέος will not die (4. 584). But Pericles meant a tomb not in the literal sense but one that transcends the literal meaning, just as the glory and memory he looked for transcend the individual κλέος of a traditional hero. Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* was composed more than three decades before Pericles’ funeral speech, but the speech is helpful in understanding the spirit during the tragedians’ composition. It is in this

²⁶⁵ “τόν τε μηδὲν τῶνδε μετέχοντα οὐκ ἀπράγμονα, ἀλλ’ ἀχρεῖον νομίζομεν”, Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 2.40.2, trans. Steven Lattimore.

context that Aeschylus made his invention in the lost play *Achilles* that the Myrmidons rebelled against Achilles for his refusal to fight. What the rebelling Myrmidons charged Achilles for, the duty of a warrior to his people, is less emphasized in the *Iliad*.

Sophocles' Oedipus: Exemplar of All Mankind

The honor of a community would require a set of skills and virtues different from those required of individual warriors. As Finley puts it, the community could grow only by taming the hero and blunting the free exercise of his prowess, and a domesticated hero was a contradiction in terms.²⁶⁶ The evolution of the image of Oedipus, as I discussed in Chapter 3, embodies this kind of domestication of the traditional hero. Sophocles' Oedipus is already a hero away from the battlefield but specially endowed with superior mental power. In a sense, Oedipus' stubbornness to pursue the matter of his birth constitutes a civic version of the stubborn Hector or Eteocles who would not listen to advice; but while Hector and Eteocles are persistent on battle, Oedipus is keen on evidence and truth (1058-9), new pursuits in a different community. "You can't persuade me not to clearly learn the truth." (1065) The tenacious persistence echoes Hector's insistence to avoid shame and to win honor, but their goals are of different nature. More importantly, this civic hero is not aiming at personal honor. He saved the city by solving the riddles before, and in the play he started as a responsible ruler who is anxious to solve the city's problems.

²⁶⁶ Finley, 1954. p. 125.

In this civil context citizens are expected to take responsibility for their actions. One of Plato's objections to Homer and some tragic poets is that mortals blame gods when they should blame themselves (*Republic* 379d-380c). Plato did not distinguish between Homeric epics and tragedies in their representation of characters, or for that matter among different tragedians; but there were indeed new developments in the fifth century as different from the Homeric context. Vernant argues that tragedy "marks a new stage in the development of the inner man and of the responsible agent".²⁶⁷ Segal also reads tragedies in light of the Periclean Athens and fifth century enlightenment, and thinks that Greek tragedy, especially Sophoclean tragedy, is a kind of dialogue between the older and newer ways of looking at the world.²⁶⁸

Sophocles' *Oedipus* is an exemplar of this responsible agent. The play does not end with the revelation of the horrible facts of his fate, or the passive despair of a crushed hero. Instead, the play goes on for more than three hundred lines after *Oedipus* learnt the truth. When *Oedipus* exits the stage in line 1185, the chorus laments him as the exemplar ("παράδειγμα", 1193) of all mortals, and count human lives equal to nothingness (1188). Yet *Oedipus'* subsequent actions in the remaining part of the play seem to suggest that human life is not intrinsically meaningless, and that there could be greatness and dignity even in what he had suffered. When *Oedipus* returned to stage as a blind man, the chorus asks:

ὦ δεινὰ δράσας, πῶς ἔτλης τοιαῦτα σᾶς

²⁶⁷ Vernant, 1990. p. 23.

²⁶⁸ Segal, 2001. p. 11.

ὄψεις μαρᾶναι; τίς σ' ἐπῆρε δαιμόνων;

You who have done these awful deeds, how could you bear
to quench your vision thus? What god incited you? (1327-8, trans. Blondell)

Oedipus' answer clearly distinguishes his own action from what is achieved by gods. It was Apollo who fulfilled his sufferings (1329-1330), but it was with his own hands that he inflicted his blindness (1331-2). Oedipus' self-blinding shows that he chooses to take the responsibility of his past deeds and endure their consequences, even though the gods incited them. In this sense, Oedipus is the exemplar of all mankind not in the sense that he demonstrates the total meaninglessness of human life, but in that he gives meaning to a new heroism. As Blondell comments, his decision to live on instead of choosing death exemplifies a different heroic pattern from that of Achilles, who chooses glory over a long life, or Ajax, who chooses suicide over disgrace.²⁶⁹ This, I believe, is the central message of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the significance of Oedipus' confrontation with his fate.

²⁶⁹ Blondell, 2002. p. 128.

Conclusion

This dissertation has studied the semantic representations of fate in Homer and in Attic tragedy, the literary use of fate in plot and characterization in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and the context of Sophocles' composition in the fifth century Athens. The central concern of this study is how and why a certain literary text represents a hero and his fate.

The Homeric epics present heroes and their fates in the context of oral composition and transmission. Formulaic language is an important feature of oral composition. The formulae in Homer, not confined to expressions of fate, have multiple effects. In addition to the metrical function and its role in oral composition, these formulae also help to bring out a world that is secure and stable. The repeated occurrence of formulae like the "wine-dark sea", the "rosy-fingered dawn" and warriors eating and drinking "to one's heart's content", gives the sense of familiarity and reliability, and constantly reaffirms a society that is steady and unchanging.²⁷⁰

While formulaic language is a distinctive feature in form, memory is the essential concern in an oral civilization.²⁷¹ The Homeric epics, in singing the great deeds of past heroes, exemplify this concern for memory. Homeric heroes live in the songs about their κλέος which promise to go on from generation to generation; this is the

²⁷⁰ Segal, 1981. p. 10.

²⁷¹ Detienne, 1999. p. 42.

reason why Homeric heroes find life worth living , but are still able to accept the oncoming death with a placid calmness.

As songs that laud the hero's κλέος in immortal memory, Homeric epics do not problematize free will or portray conflicts between the heroes and their fates. In the *Iliad*, Achilles, the best of Greek warriors, was fated to die in Troy *if he chose to fight the war*. In other words, his death on the field of Troy is not predetermined. It is his own decision to fight that determines the time of his death, but this decision also accomplishes his immortal κλέος. Achilles is never forced to confront a situation like the one Odysseus meets in Polyphemus' cave, where the Cyclope's strength overshadows any human valor and no mortal hero can stand as the greatest fighter. Here, Odysseus' victory against Polyphemus can only be accomplished by μῆτις; Achilles by contrast is a hero of βίη.²⁷² In the *Odyssey*, πολύτροπος Odysseus who is curious about the world and most famous for his μῆτις is fated to have a delayed νόστος after many wanderings, and to deal with complicated situations even at home. His ability to handle different situations is best demonstrated through such a fate. In both cases, the hero's fate brings out the best of his ability and helps realize his κλέος.

This Homeric system of literary representation of hero and his fate, together with its social role, lost context in the fifth century Athens which exhibited ruptures,

²⁷² For a discussion of βίη (might) and μῆτις (artifice) as key themes in Homeric epics, see Nagy, 1979. According to Nagy, there is a conflict, even in the *Iliad*, over whether the Trojan War should be won by μῆτις or βίη. Βίη appears to win the day, but that apparent victory is rewritten, or rather retold, in the *Odyssey* in the song of Demodokos.

changes and innovations in every aspect of society. When traditional beliefs were challenged and new concepts and ways of thinking arose, the old values and solutions for the hero and fate, which the Homeric epics presented, were no longer valid. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus shows his thinking on a different kind of hero and a new relation between the hero and his predicted fate.

As I have argued in Chapter 2 and 3, Sophocles reconstructed a well-known myth in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In the earlier forms of the Oedipus legend, the element of fate is not preeminent, nor does fate function crucially in plot or characterization. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, however, exhibits a treatment which greatly emphasizes the motif of fate. On the one hand one's predetermined fate is inevitable. The structure of the play emphasizes this point, because the play begins at a point when Oedipus' fate has already been fulfilled. As a result, the majority of the play is devoted not its realization, but to past events, which Oedipus is in no position to change. On the other hand, Sophocles' Oedipus knew about his fate and tried in vain to prevent its fulfillment. Sophocles' innovation in his version of the Oedipus story underscores an awareness of fate and fated events.

The fulfillment of Oedipus' fate does not in any sense bring him κλέος; on the contrary, it destroys the honor and reputation he had already achieved. Hector and Achilles met their deaths in anticipation of κλέος to follow after death; Odysseus witnessed his own fame during his lifetime. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus is a hero who outlived his good reputation and saw its dissipation. But interestingly, the

terrible truth of Oedipus' fate and its realization does not make him despicable or a pure object of pity. As discussed in Chapter 4, at the end of the play, the audience would have no less respect for Oedipus than for any Homeric heroes, even though this is a man who has committed the most horrible things in human society. In a sense, the play demonstrates to what an extent a person is able to face the truth of one's fate, however terrible it is and whatever responsibility it incurs.

Thus the issue of fate in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* demonstrates Sophocles' thinking about his contemporary men and their powers. The fifth century sees the birth of a new confidence in human power, as expressed by the "ode to man" in *Antigone* (332-72). However, 5th century warfare and slaughter also call for reflections upon the limits of human power, and its ability to cause both benefits and harm. Oedipus embodies both the good and bad aspects of humanity. He can solve problems without resorting to any help divine or human; the defeat of the Sphinx is independent of any divine help but purely a *tour de force* of his mental power. At the same time, Oedipus does not have proper control of his own abilities. He resolved the conflict with Laius at the crossroad in the fiercest way possible, which caused irretrievable results.

Most important of all, the fate that Oedipus suffered partly results from his own personality, yet it is a fate that he does not deserve. As I have argued in Chapter 4, Sophocles' Oedipus exemplifies the extent to which a hero bears his fate with courage and dignity when confronted with the unexplainable power of fate. Oedipus may not be a laudable hero, but his sufferings and his confrontation with fate deserves respect.

It is through such a hero that Sophocles gives meaning to the life of his day.

To sum up, in this dissertation I have used a combination of methods that are not typically used together, including philology, close reading, structural analysis, formulaic composition and the study of folklore. This combination of methods helps us understand Sophocles' innovation and invention in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the figure of Oedipus. In these innovations, Sophocles' literary use of fate plays an essential role. In a sense, the literary study of fate contributes to the recognition of Sophocles' genius which past studies on fate that focus on ethics or religion may have brought out incompletely.

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