

# The Interpretation of Literary-Aesthetic Views in Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex"

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**Abstract:** This article provides a theoretical and analytical examination of the literary-aesthetic views reflected in Oedipus Rex by Sophocles. The study explores the formation of ancient Greek tragedy, its religious and mythological foundations, and its artistic and aesthetic characteristics. Particular attention is given to the analysis of tragic conflict, the characterization of the protagonist, and the aesthetic ideas expressed through the compositional structure of the work. The research focuses on key issues such as the conflict between fate and free will, the process of searching for truth, and the concept of the tragic hero. In addition, the aesthetic essence of tragedy is examined through Aristotle's theory of Catharsis. The study concludes by substantiating the significance of Oedipus Rex not only within ancient Greek dramaturgy but also in the broader context of world literature.

**Keywords:** Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, tragedy, literary-aesthetic views, tragic conflict, tragic hero, Catharsis, fate and free will, ancient Greek literature, dramaturgy, composition, mythology, search for truth, moral responsibility.

**Introduction:** Ancient Greek literature occupies an important place in the development of world literary thought and has played a special role in the formation and evolution of the literary-aesthetic thinking of other nations. The songs performed during the Greek hecatomb rituals and theatrical performances were not merely religious ceremonies or entertainment, but also served as a means of reflecting the lifestyle, beliefs, and intellectual horizons of people of that time. Literature, especially songs and stage performances, represents the most vivid expression of this phenomenon. Such performances were predominantly tragic in nature. The genre of tragedy was capable of portraying human destiny, revealing the complex and multifaceted turns of a tragic life path. "In the works of creators such as Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar, who belong to the archaic period of ancient Greek culture, one can already encounter views on literature. More precisely, these works provide an understanding of how their authors perceived literature. Naturally, these views

corresponded to their worldview. According to ancient Greek beliefs, the structure of the world was relatively simple: the gods lived on Olympus, humans lived on earth, and the world consisted of the unity of these two realms. They believed that the Olympian gods regulated life on earth; more precisely, they imagined earthly order as analogous to the order on Olympus." For this reason, the names of Greek gods were frequently mentioned in performances, and people sincerely believed in ideas about their actions, mercy, and wrath. These beliefs were also deeply embedded in everyday life and social practices.

From ancient times, events, songs, tragedies, and other creative works were preserved primarily in oral form until the emergence of writing. "In ancient times, when writing either did not exist or was not widespread, ideas, concepts, and events that needed to be transmitted from generation to generation were mainly expressed in poetic form, because verse was easier to memorize and retain than prose. Even the

earliest constitution in the world was written in poetic form by the poet, thinker, and statesman Solon (7th century BCE).” Even after the emergence of written literature, authors continued to compose tragedies and epics in verse, as poetic works were more easily memorized and widely disseminated, even among illiterate audiences.

Ancient Greek tragedy developed in close connection with religious rituals. It originated from dramatic performances held during festivals in honor of Dionysus and gradually evolved into an independent literary genre. Tragedy provided an opportunity to artistically interpret human life problems, social relations, and moral choices. In ancient Greek aesthetic thought, tragedy was regarded as an important artistic means of revealing the complexity of the human psyche and destiny. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle paid special attention to this issue. In his work *Poetics*, he defines tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious and complete, which, through arousing pity and fear, leads to the purification of emotions.” This process is called catharsis. The concept of catharsis is one of the fundamental theoretical notions explaining the aesthetic essence of tragedy.

Tragedies of that period allowed for the artistic expression of moral choices and the complex relationship between humans and divine forces. Among many dramatists, Sophocles played an exceptionally important role in the development of ancient Greek tragedy. This article aims to analyze the literary-aesthetic views reflected in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, identifying the tragic conflict, the character of the hero, and the aesthetic ideas expressed through artistic composition. “This work, the pinnacle of Sophocles’ творчество, has remained on the world stage for over 2,500 years. It is always relevant, always modern, and applicable to all systems and eras. In the history of artistic thought, no tragedy like *Oedipus Rex* has been written. This tragedy constantly reminds humanity of who it is, what responsibility it bears, and what is permissible and impermissible. It is as if Sophocles has eternally suspended this tragedy in the history of artistic thought as a warning for humanity. Humans always try to avoid tragedy, to distance themselves from it; however, without tragedy, they would not appreciate happiness.” This work is recognized not only as one of the most perfect examples of ancient Greek

drama but also as a masterpiece of world dramaturgy, deeply interpreting issues of human destiny, fate, moral responsibility, and the search for truth. In *Oedipus Rex*, the struggle of a human being with fate, the pursuit of truth, and the tragic consequences of this pursuit are depicted. Alongside the development of events, the author’s literary-aesthetic views—such as the relationship between human beings and fate, morality and responsibility, knowledge and ignorance—are also artistically expressed.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The plot of *Oedipus Rex* is based on ancient Greek mythology. Before proceeding to analysis, it is appropriate to recall the main events of the tragedy. The play depicts a devastating plague in the city of Thebes. The citizens ask King Oedipus for help. Oedipus begins to investigate the cause of the plague. During his inquiry, a horrifying truth is revealed: he himself is the murderer of Laius, the former king of Thebes. Even more tragically, he has killed his own father and married his mother. Thus, although Oedipus tries to escape fate, he ultimately fulfills the prophecy. Through this plot, Sophocles presents the complex relationship between human destiny, free will, and divine laws in a profoundly tragic manner.

The central place in the tragedy is given to the tragic hero. Oedipus is one of the most perfect tragic figures in the history of tragedy. He is portrayed as a wise, just ruler who protects the interests of his people. However, misfortune is his destiny, and his fate demonstrates the inevitability of fate itself. One of his main qualities is his unwavering desire to know the truth. Ironically, this very trait leads to his downfall. As he seeks the truth, he ultimately uncovers his own terrible crime. Through this, Sophocles depicts the tragic contradiction between the human aspiration for knowledge and helplessness before fate.

One of the central aesthetic and philosophical problems in *Oedipus Rex* is the conflict between fate and human will. According to ancient Greek mythology, human destiny is predetermined by divine forces, and escaping it is nearly impossible. This idea is revealed through the dramatic development of events. The prophecy concerning Oedipus’ birth plays a crucial role: he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. To prevent this, his parents, Laius and Jocasta, attempt

to kill him. However, their actions cannot prevent fate. Even Oedipus himself, trying to avoid the prophecy, unknowingly fulfills it.

Sophocles thus artistically expresses the conflict between human attempts to control life and divine laws. According to the idea of the tragedy, no matter how strong a person may be, they may remain powerless before fate.

Another important aesthetic feature of the tragedy is the dramatic depiction of the search for truth. Oedipus strives to save Thebes by identifying the cause of the plague. Determined to find the culprit, he gradually uncovers that he himself is responsible. This creates tragic irony: the audience understands what Oedipus does not. As a result, strong dramatic tension arises.

Although Oedipus' pursuit of truth leads to his tragedy, it is precisely this quality that makes him a great hero. He does not avoid the truth but seeks it courageously. Through this, Sophocles presents moral responsibility and devotion to truth as supreme values. The tragedy is built upon the aesthetic principle that a tragic hero is not evil but possesses noble qualities, yet still faces catastrophe. This intensifies the aesthetic impact of the work. Oedipus Rex evokes both pity and fear in the audience. Witnessing Oedipus' suffering, the audience experiences compassion and, at the same time, fear of human vulnerability before fate. This leads to deep emotional and intellectual reflection on human life, morality, and destiny.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sophocles constructs the composition of the tragedy with great precision. The dramatic action develops step by step toward a powerful climax. Key compositional elements include:

prologue — introduction of events,

episodes — dramatic dialogues,

choral odes — aesthetic and philosophical commentary,

finale — tragic conclusion.

The chorus represents the collective voice of the people and provides philosophical evaluation of events, strengthening the dramatic effect. Analysis shows that Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is one of the most perfect examples of ancient Greek tragedy. It deeply interprets philosophical issues such as human destiny,

moral responsibility, the search for truth, and free will. The character of Oedipus stands as one of the greatest tragic heroes in literary history. His determination and moral courage reveal the aesthetic essence of the work.

Through this tragedy, Sophocles demonstrates that both the greatness and the tragedy of a human being lie within the individual. Therefore, Oedipus Rex is considered one of the most significant works not only of ancient Greek drama but also of world literature. Due to its profound philosophical content, perfect composition, and strong dramatic impact, this tragedy remains an important object of study in modern literary scholarship.

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