

The Tragic Hero Presented in Sophocles' Oedipus the King Differs from Marlow's Protagonist Dr.Faustus In Increasing The Sense Of Catharsis

Khawater Fahad A. Alshalan

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts, King Saud University

Abstract: This study aims to investigate one of the major theories in drama, know as Catharsis. The audiences feel a combination of pity and fear towards Aristotle's tragic hero. Catharsis mainly depends on free will and the role of choice. The character's decisions build up in a person while watching the tragic hero in Sophocles' Oedipus the King more than the protagonist in Marlow's Dr.Faustus. The reason behind that is Dr.Faustus should not be considered Aristotle's tragic hero because the hero is neither a good man nor have the ability to admit his own fault. However, reaching catharsis can assist the audience make better decisions in life. Although, these characters do not raise the sense catharsis themselves, but their actions give a kind of purging and releasing. The audiences will be able to handle similar situation in their lives because they would be influenced by these didactic plays.

Keywords: Catharsis, free will, Dr.Faustus, Oedipus the King, drama, pity and fear.

I. Introduction

Human beings from all around the world face different fortunes. However, there are some shared consequences among people in general that lead to tragedy. Aristotle's tragic heroes who fall from a high place to a low place of misery evoke audience's emotions, such as pity and fear. This sense of catharsis towards the fall of a tragic hero in Sophocles' *Oedipus the king* differs from a regular man who makes a decision and starts fall gradually; this can be shown as an example in Marlow's *Dr.Faustus*. They were both presented on stage in two different periods of time; the Classical and the Renaissance periods and give the audience a moral lesson by showing them how bad decisions lead to falling. This paper will show how a tragic hero presented in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* differs from Marlow's protagonist *Dr.Faustus* in rising Catharsis and how will it serve as therapy to the audience.

II. Catharsis

The theory of Catharsis that is strongly related to the role of choice is very beneficial to the person who is watching. Art, according to Aristotle is valuable when it comes to teaching morality. It is widely known that there's no such thing as a perfect theory in drama, but Aristotle's definition of Catharsis might be considered as a major ethical theory that no one can deny. It is an "activity of the soul that accords with rational principle" (Forrest 1458). Catharsis has to do mainly with virtue and choice of the protagonist (Jones 2015). Pity and fear are the emotions that are being triggered while watching the play. However, only some situations lead to Catharsis, such as having a good character suffers from his or her poor decision (Jones 2015). This kind of character is described as Aristotle's tragic hero. In *Oedipus the King*, the audience gets to experience the choices of a tragic hero, Oedipus, which basically leads him to a miserable life. This has raised the feeling of pity and fear among the audience. There are some signs in the play that show how good and loyal King Oedipus is to his citizens. For example, when Oedipus addresses his people by calling them "my children", shows how much he cares about his them. He's a king who is responsible of solving the issue that is going around, which is the plague and he assured them that he is still concerned and cannot sleep while they are struggling. These signs of goodness make the audience feel that they're somehow attached to the character. One of *Oedipus's* decisions is when he takes his wife's pin to poke his own eyes when he found out the truth. This particular action increased the sense of catharsis for the fact that they see their true loving king; the hero is suddenly falling apart. Whereas *Dr.Faustus*, besides his knowledge, does not seem as good as *Oedipus*. This is one of the reasons that the audience felt sorry for *Oedipus* more that *Dr.Faustus*. Although, the main purpose of both plays is letting the audience see the how poor choices lead to horrible consequences. As a result, they will avoid those choices due to these didactic plays (Jones 2015).

III. Free will

The concept of free will is mostly considered as a philosophy rather than a theory. Human freedom and responsibility are balanced by force or ignorance (Cary 2007). In decision-making, rational and irrational elements are combined together as a result of the character's weakness of will. It is considered as a limitation in balancing the rational and the irrational elements. For instance, when someone thinks he knows the right thing to do but turns into a complete failure against him because of this person's liability or tendency to suffer from a particular condition and holds a particular attitude towards something. This means that that the character made a false decision of what is supposed to be good. The protagonist, *Dr. Faustus*, had a free will but soon was a victim of his own desires. He was an expert in every field of knowledge so he wants more power. As he chooses to go with dark magic, thinking of it as a good decision, he gets to be controlled. He suffers from his own free will to the point that he could not even move his hands to ask God for forgiveness. Even though he had the choice of free will, yet, the sense of catharsis was not increased among the audience compared to what happened to *Oedipus*. This goes back to the concept of a tragic hero. *Dr. Faustus* does not consider as one of Aristotle's tragic heroes because of the lack of being a great man, he was not from a high social class. The first impression to get from *Dr. Faustus* that he's not as good as *Oedipus* because of the use of magic, it makes the audience watch from a distance but what humanizes the protagonist evoked the audience's emotions. There are many factors that are used to humanize *Dr. Faustus*: at first, there are signs telling him to step back from magic but he did not listen: There's a sense of reflection, when he starts thinking, good and bad angles appear to advise him. After signing the contract for the first time, he starts to regret what he got himself into and calls out for holy creatures. His mind develops psychologically to the point that he wants to go back to the right path and to the way he was. There is a sense of catharsis towards *Dr. Faustus* but not as much as *Oedipus* because he does not have the same characteristics of a tragic hero.

IV. Sense of pity and fear

One must consider that fact that the characters themselves do not raise the sense of pity and fear, but the actions of those particular characters do (Forrest 1997). For example, the protagonist in *Oedipus the King* has some internal flaws such as pride and having a high temper but that would not make the audience reach the sense of Catharsis. Even though the sin of pride is known as an internal flaw. As a proof of that, Oedipus keeps saying "I, Oedipus" over and over again and it shows his ego while speaking to the citizens (Sophocles 49). He also asked them if they ever saw the murders of the previous king among them by saying "I command you all to drive him from your doors" (Sophocles 56), he didn't even consider that he himself might be the murderer. Oedipus's high temper personality is also considered as an internal flaw, he starts to threaten Teiresias by saying "you will not affront me twice and go unpunished" (Sophocles 60), he then lost his temper when he heard from Teiresias that he is the murderer of the previous king. Moreover, he blamed Creon that he planned this to get the crown. Furthermore, he warned the Theban Shepard by cutting his tongue if he doesn't speak the truth. All these weaknesses of the protagonist should appear in a tragic hero but it do not tend to raise pity and fear within the audience. However, what happened to them as consequences do. At the end of Sophocles' play, *Oedipus* starts hugging his daughters and gets worried about their social status after discovering the truth. This sympathetic moment between father and daughters highly increased the sense of catharsis.

Also, there's no sign of recognition in *Dr. Faustus* where a tragic hero must face. He does not admit that what all happened to him is his own fault. In addition, he has a strong free will because he signs the contract twice. Whereas *Oedipus*, he is able to recognize his fault and to admit it in front of the audience. Oedipus is clearly responsible for his own downfall and this goes for the reason in wanting more knowledge about his identity. He starts to force everyone around him to say the truth regarding his birth everyone was not willing to answer. As *Oedipus* comes close to the answer while putting certain pieces together to get the full image, he says, "I can't stop now. Not with all my birth clues in my hands"(59). His desire of continuing to search leads to his fall from a high place to a low place of misery. The free will only of a tragic hero makes the audience reach the sense of catharsis.

Aristotle defined the word *catharsis*, that it heals a person. This means when people experience these emotional states, the release comes after watching a tragedy. According to VandenBos, Catharsis is "the discharge of affects connected to traumatic events that had previously been repressed by bringing these events back into consciousness and re-experiencing them" (153). From a medical interpretation, Jacob Bernays explains that people watching the tragic drama experience a release of held back emotions. Unhealthy emotions, including pity and fear, gather within the audience and make them feel uncomfortable (Highland 2005). And it might be dangerous if they are not released using a certain strategy carefully. Catharsis might include purging and releasing that is described as a kind of therapy. Halliwell explains, "Through exposure to others' greater sufferings, our susceptibility to pity and fear in our own lives is lessened. Tragedy helps us to become injured to misfortune and so better able to tolerate it." (Halliwell 351) As an advantage of catharsis, the audience is

influenced by what they saw and felt during these events that help them handle the situations when they face similar issues in their lives (Highland 2005).

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, Catharsis is considered as a major theory in drama. It is defined as a mixture of pity and fear within the audience towards Aristotle's tragic hero. Catharsis strongly relies on the role of choice and free will. It builds up in an individual while watching the play as a result of character's decisions. The audiences tend to reach the sense of catharsis towards the tragic hero in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* more than the protagonist in Marlow's *Dr. Faustus* because Dr. Faustus did not fulfill all the characteristics of a tragic hero; being good and a great man, and having the ability to admit his own fault. Reaching Catharsis help the audience make better decisions in life. Although, characters themselves do not increase the sense catharsis, such as having internal flaws, but the actions of those particular characters do purge and release as a kind of therapy. The audiences get to be influenced by these didactic plays and will be able to tolerate similar situation if they face them.

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