

Banha University - Faculty of Arts
English Department
First Year Students

Introduction to Criticism
Lecture 7

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2019-2020

Analysing Sophocles' Play

Oedipus the King

Sophocles 496 B.C.-406 B.C.

- Sophocles (495 BC-405 BC) was a famous and successful Athenian writer of tragedies in his own lifetime. Of his 120 plays, only 7 have survived. Oedipus the King, also called Oedipus Tyrannos or Oedipus Rex, written around 420 BC, has long been regarded not only as his finest play but also as the purest and most powerful expression of Greek tragic drama.

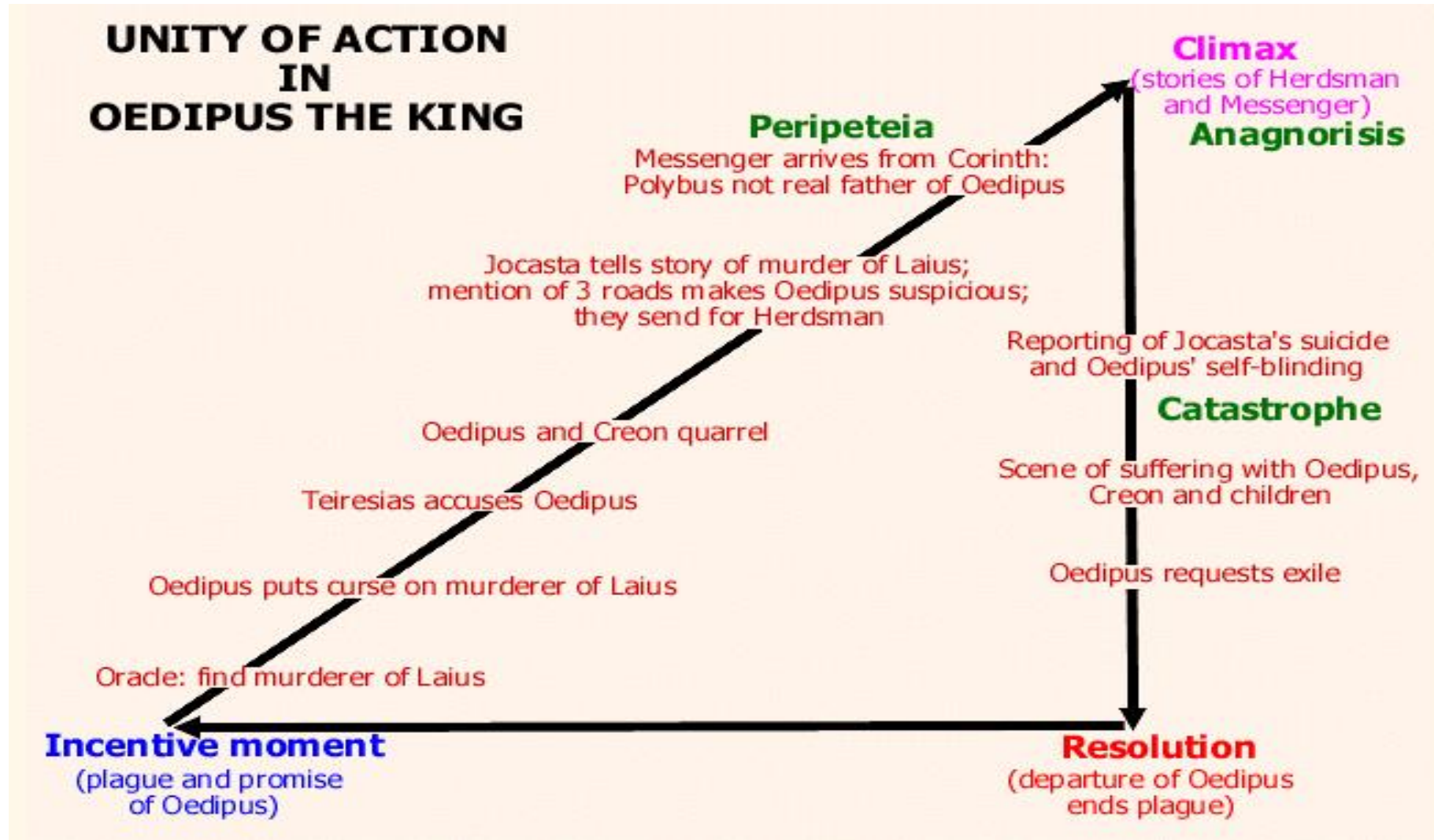
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (430-28? BC)

- A plague has stricken Thebes. The citizens gather outside the palace of their king, Oedipus, asking him to take action. Oedipus replies that he already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle at Delphi to learn how to help the city. Creon returns with a message from the oracle: the plague will end when the murderer of Laius, former king of Thebes, is caught and expelled; the murderer is within the city. Oedipus questions Creon about the murder of Laius, who was killed by thieves on his way to consult an oracle. Only one of his fellow travelers escaped alive. Oedipus promises to solve the mystery of Laius's death, vowing to curse and drive out the murderer.

The setting

The setting of the *Oedipus the King* as in the case of most Greek tragedies, does not require a change of scene. Throughout the play with at least one door represents the facade of the **royal palace of Thebes**.

Plot



Dramatic irony

- ***•Dramatic irony plays an important part in Oedipus the King.***
- ***•Its story revolves around two different attempts to change the course of fate: Jocasta and Laius's killing of Oedipus at birth and Oedipus's flight from Corinth later on.***
- ***•In both cases, an oracle's prophecy comes true regardless of the characters' actions.***

Themes

- Blindness vs. sight
- Self-knowledge
- Pride
- Truth
- Responsibility
- Fate/destiny vs. choice