

# ***Comparative Analysis of the Power Between Medea and Oedipus***

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**Abstract:** This paper gives a comparative analysis of the concept of power through two characters in Greek tragedy: Oedipus by Sophocles and Medea by Euripides. Both figures demonstrate a unique use of power, which inevitably leads to tragic endings. Oedipus is a noble king trapped by his own fate. He wields power in the political area but is blinded by his search for truth and self-discovery. This ultimately leads to unexpected personal and social disasters. In contrast, Medea is a strong woman who uses personal as well as her supernatural powers to impose devastating revenge on the unjust patriarchal society that betrayed her. This analysis seeks to reveal the small differences of their power, such as its origins, manifestations, and effects, within their social and narrative contexts. Through the examination of the two characters' different attitudes to power and their outcomes, this paper is a deeper understanding of the nature of power and its significant impact in Greek tragedy, highlighting the tragic flaws and social critiques lied in these books.

**Keywords:** Oedipus the King, Medea, Greek tragedy, Patriarchal Society

## **1. Introduction**

In the wide and fascinating history of Greek tragedy, the characters of Oedipus and Medea remain historically remarkable. Both characters include the complexities of human nature and the strong forces that shape destinies. As two protagonists from distinct authors and stories, Oedipus Rex and Medea, written by Sophocles and Euripides respectively, manipulate power in totally divergent ways. Oedipus, the unwitting killer of his father and the husband to his own mother, causes tragic consequences of his actions, while Medea, a woman scorned and abandoned by her husband, executes a violent revenge against the patriarchal system that indirectly leads to the death of two innocent kids. This essay seeks to explore the nuanced variations in the types of power exhibited by Oedipus and Medea, unraveling the intricacies of their characterizations and the societal frameworks that mold them. Through a comparative analysis of their respective stories, the goal is to discern the factors contributing to the disparity in their wielded power and delve into the profound implications these differences hold for understanding the essence of power within the tragic tapestry of Greek literature.

## **2. The Fascinating Plots of "Oedipus Rex" and "Medea"**

It is crucial to understand the fascinating plots of these two plays in order to form an original idea of where the protagonists' distinct power comes from. In Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, Oedipus, the king,

struggles to avoid a vicious prophecy that foresees he would kill his own father and be the spouse of his mother. As a powerful king, his relentless search for the truth demonstrates the complicated parts of power, self-discovery, and taking responsibility for what he does in comparison, Euripides' Medea, who has been ruthlessly forsaken by her husband Jason, utilizes her wisdom and magic power to acquire justice for herself. Medea's story is centered on her tough revolt against the fraud of her husband and the harsh society where men dominate the world. By digging into a brief summary of each story, their different types of power they possess and employ in their battles against fate can be easily seen.

### **3. Origins and Types of Power**

#### **3.1. Oedipus: Political Power and Societal Status**

As the plots unfold step by step, the origins of power for Oedipus the king and Medea are significantly divergent. Oedipus, the king of the city of Thebes, derives authority mainly from his political role and societal status. This is why he is able to get Tiresias' help while searching for the truth [1].

#### **3.2. Medea: Magical Power and Emotional Intelligence**

In contrast, significantly unlike Oedipus the king, the power of Medea who is a foreign woman navigating the patriarchal norms of ancient Greece, originates from her enigmatic and supernatural field. In other words, Medea is emotionally and strategically intelligent compared to Oedipus' arrogance, allowing her to manipulate both human relationships and magical elements [2].

### **4. Impact of Power on Surrounding Characters**

#### **4.1. Medea's Direct and Indirect Influence**

Medea uses her magical power and so-called wisdom to directly cause the deaths of six people. She was already an outcast when she became the wife of Jason, because she had already violently killed her father and brother for Gold Fleece in order to please and marry Jason. Now, Jason unexpectedly betrays her and decides to marry Glauce, the daughter of King Creon in the city of Corinth. She was furious when she first heard the news and then elaborately planned a flawless revenge aiming to kill Jason and Glauce as well as Creon. She strongly held that these people who either deceives her or are not loyal to her should undoubtedly pay the price. As for her two children with Jason, although Medea was initially struggling with the methods of how she would cope with them because she did not allow herself to hurt them as their mother, she decided to execute them as well, as a possible form of self-punishment. Her rage towards Jason outweighs her kindness as a mother. After she asked her servant to send the fabulous but poisonous gift, golden coronet and dress, to the palace, Creon the king and his daughter both miserably passed away as soon as they touched the cloth. Soon after that, Medea went into her children's room and finally sent them to death. She is directly responsible for the tragic fate of her brother, father, her two young sons, and Creon and his daughter [3].

#### **4.2. Oedipus's Unintended Consequences**

Oedipus committed violent crimes as well. He uses his power as a king and a son to constantly try to achieve self-discovery. While Oedipus the King does not actively execute planned homicide with his own hands as Medea did, his actions significantly contribute to tragic outcomes of other characters. The only one he kills by himself is his biological father, Laius. Nonetheless, he was not able to realize that it was he that killed his own father. Before Oedipus grew up to be the new king of Thebes, he was abandoned by his biological parents, because an old, malicious prophecy predicted that Oedipus

would finally kill his own father and marry his mother. His parents wanted to try to avoid the horrific fate of their family. His father Laius and her mother Jocasta ordered a shepherd to pierce the ankle of the baby, and tie them together; they also left him exposed on a mountainside to die. However, a shepherd sympathized with the infant and gave him to another shepherd from Corinth, and then he was adopted by Polybus, the king of Corinth, and his wife. In consequence, Oedipus was raised by Polybus in his childhood. As an adult, Oedipus was aware of this prophecy too. He left his father in Corinth and traveled to the city of Thebes. He encountered a group of travelers on the way, including unknowingly, King Laius, at a crossroads. After an intense argument with them, he angrily kills all of them, including Laius, while not realizing he was his real and biological father. It is reasonable to conclude that his action was not premeditated, and it fulfills the prophecy in a surprising way. At the same time, Oedipus indirectly created more grievous impacts to other characters in the book. First, he is undoubtedly responsible for the suicide of Jocasta, who is his biological mother as well as his current spouse. She committed suicide as soon as she discovers the truth, that he had already slain his father, from those two honest shepherds. Additionally, she already married him, which is the second part of the oracle. Her action of ending her own life is because she is "so ashamed that, even in her moment of truth with Oedipus, she cannot be totally truthful" even in front of his real son Oedipus. Another potential cause is that she is in fear that the hilarious oracle is already in effect, that his son had already murdered his father and she had already married his son. Second, the plague that destroys citizens' life in the city of Corinth might result from Oedipus' restless pursuit of his authentic and original identity, which can be summarized as his strong defiance of God's wills. Consequently, the devastating disease people were suffering can be viewed as a punishment to Oedipus' brave spirits and behaviors regarding his disrespect to his fate controlled by God. While the death of King Laius is an immediate consequence of Oedipus's actions, these two additional points also highlight the tragic outcomes that are due to Oedipus's pursuit of truth [4].

## **5. Abuse of Power and Its Consequences**

### **5.1. Medea's Vengeful Acts**

The abuse of power is another emphasis in both tragedies. The different methods of abusing their power Medea and Oedipus own are designated meticulously by both Euripides and Sophocles. Medea's revenge against Jason for his betrayal is a clear demonstration of the extremes to which power, particularly in the form of cunning and magic, can be employed. Her excessive acts, including the murder of her own children, illustrate the devastating consequences that take place when power is unleashed with unrestrained fury [5].

### **5.2. Oedipus's Relentless Search for Truth**

Similarly, Oedipus, in his long path of uncovering the truth and his strong determination to unravel the mystery surrounding his identity, unconsciously becomes a catalyst of his own demise. His intellectual power, coupled with political authority, makes him unaware of the possible tragic outcomes. For example, he did not consider enough results that can probably make his mother Jocasta insane and hard to accept. Therefore, the tragic ending seems unavoidable [6].

## **6. Influence of Patriarchal Society**

### **6.1. Medea: Challenging Patriarchal Norms**

Both Medea and Oedipus are confined within the everlasting sophisticated patriarchal power that is a dominant characteristic in ancient Greek society. Medea, although possessing powerful and

mysterious magical abilities and intelligence, was tightly limited by a patriarchal society in which men, such as her husband Jason, dictate the roles and expectations of women. It is reasonable to say that her initial personality as Jason's wife and her subsequent transformation into an outsider in Jason's family after his betrayal clearly demonstrates the vulnerability of women in Greek society at that time that always inherently favors male authority. Furthermore, the patriarchal norms contribute a lot of oppression to Medea herself as a wife, which finally leads to her revenge and helps her transform to an absolute feminist. It can possibly be inferred that there might be a delicate design by the author Euripides regarding the tragic ending of the book. He might have been suggesting that there will never be a satisfactory and fortunate life for women if they restlessly dedicate themselves to resisting the deep-rooted patriarchal power in that society [7].

## **6.2. Oedipus: A Product of Patriarchal Expectations**

Speaking of Oedipus the king, as a male protagonist, he is entrenched in the web of patriarchal power as well. Oedipus' patriarchal power is directly inherited from his stepfather, the old king of Thebes. In ancient Greek society, a king is not only simply the highest political position in the kingdom but also a symbol of divine right and societal expectations. As the new rising king of Thebes, Oedipus undoubtedly assumes a role of leadership that is responsible for the welfare of citizens and stability of Thebes. In this patriarchal structure, Oedipus stands as the image of male dominance, which means he governs his territory not only through political decree but also by acting as a symbol of strength, wisdom, and order. However, the very nature of Oedipus' power becomes tragic as his relentless pursuit of truth, fueled by the remarkable expectations placed upon him as a male leader, leads to his unwise behaviors that eventually cause his sad downfall. His patriarchal power, while handing him with absolute authority, becomes a double-edged sword. In other words, his power can be summarized as the unstable nature of the expectations imposed on men within the ancient Greek patriarchy [8].

## **7. Alternative Strategies for Medea and Oedipus**

### **7.1. Medea's Potential Pathways to Justice**

Both Oedipus Rex and Medea are great tragedies, but the protagonists' tragic outcomes might be avoided if Oedipus the King and Medea could consider strategic approaches tailored to their individual circumstances. It would be an effective method for Medea, who faced the challenges of her marriage and own family, to possibly contemplate diplomatic solutions rather than commit drastic and intense revenge that lead to the deaths of her two kids. Engaging in more negotiation with those who stand opposite to her, such as Creon the King, could produce potential opportunities of compromise for both sides; thus she will probably achieve her objectives without resorting to the extremities that lead to the tragic result of herself and her children. At the same time, seeking a network of support that might consist of people who simply sympathize with her and who could provide actual or physical assistance, or forging alliances within her "community, would not only give her emotional support but also mitigate her needs for extreme behaviors in order to the escape from the isolation of her husband Jason. By incorporating such strategies, Medea can have chances to navigate the complexities of her situation with a measured demeanor [9].

### **7.2. Oedipus's Road to Self-Discovery**

In contrast, Oedipus, who was burdened by a destiny from a prophecy in his whole life, might have avoided the tragic outcomes in his family by exploring a journey of self-discovery and investigation. His life would possibly be smoother if he could be able to deeply investigate the oracle's prophecy with meticulous attention and looking for the detailed counsel of a wise mentor, such as Tiresias,

might equip him with the knowledge and insights necessary to decrease the possibility of tragedy. Tiresias, who is an old and wise blind man, would suggest him to demonstrate humility which can prompt Oedipus to acknowledge the potential for his personal flaws, including the rashness. In fact, every action he did has led him to the final tragedy. For instance, he desired to make the prophecy useless by leaving the city of Corinth, but, unluckily, he killed his own father on his way. Through self-awareness, he had better adopt a more cautious and deliberate approach, getting rid of the destructive forces that propel him irreversibly towards his eventual tragedy [10].

## 8. Conclusion

Although these alternate approaches designed specifically for Medea and Oedipus might help them navigate their challenges with resilience and purpose; however, it is the tragic flaws or a variety of personalities for the protagonists that lead to the vivid image for the characters in the plays.

To sum up, the parallel arcs of Medea and Oedipus underscore the timeless lesson that unchecked power can lead to tragic consequences for both the users and those entangled in their influence. From the detailed analysis related to a brief and useful summary of the plots, the origins of their strengths, their diverse impacts to the remaining characters in the plays, to the methods of how they abuse their power, the horrible patriarchal structure in ancient Greek society, and a list of customized recommendations to both protagonists, it is not difficult to conclude that because of these legends and personalities these characters demonstrate, both plays could be two shining and eternal stars in the history of Greek dramas.

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