MANGALAYATAN
UNIVERSITY
Learn Today to Lead Tomorrow

BRITISH DRAMA

MAO-6103

Edited By
Dr Rashmi Saxena

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION
MANGALAYATAN
UNIVERSITY

PREFACE

In this course, we shall deal with various aspects of DRAMA

- Sophocles: Oedipus the King.
- Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus.
- William Shakespeare: Hamlet.
- Henrik Ibsen : Doll's House.

SYLLABUS

Drama (MA-Eng.-104)

Course Content

Unit-I	Sophocles: Oedipus the King.
Unit-II	Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus.
Unit-III	William Shakespeare: Hamlet.
Unit-IV	Henrik Ibsen : Doll's House.

CONTENTS

1. **OEDIPUS THE KING-SOPHOCLES** 1–31
   - Learning goals
   - Introduction
   - About the author
   - Oedipus the king—plot
   - Action of the play
   - Relationship with mythical tradition
   - Dramatic Personal
   - Major Characters—An intensive study.
   - Important themes, motifs and symbols
   - Summary and analysis
   - Review questions
   - Suggested Readings
2. **DOCTOR FAUSTUS-CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE** 32–69
   - Learning goals
   - Introduction
   - About the author
   - Plot of doctor Faustus
   - Dramatis Personal
   - Major characters—An intensive study
   - Important themes, motifs and symbols
   - Summary and analysis
   - Important quotations
   - Review questions
   - Suggested Readings
3. **HAMLET–WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE** 70–135
   - Learning goals
   - Introduction
   - About the author
   - The Enigmatic Shakespeare
   - Hamlet—plot
   - Dramatis Personable
   - Major characters—an intensive study
   - Important themes, motifs and symbols
   - Summary and Analysis
   - Important Questions
   - Review Questions
   - Suggested Readings
4. **A DOLL'S HOUSE-HENRIK IBSEN** 136–180
   - Learning goals
   - Introduction
   - About the author
   - Synopsis of the play
   - Doll's house – plot
   - Important characters
   - Analysis of major characters
   - Important themes, motifs and symbols
   - Summary and analysis
   - Important quotations
   - Summary
   - Key words
   - Check your progress
   - Answers to check your progress
   - Review questions
   - Suggested reading

1

OEDIPUS THE KING-SOPHOCLES

STRUCTURE

- Learning goals
- Introduction
- About the author
- Oedipus the king—plot
- Action of the play
- Relationship with mythical tradition
- Dramatic Personal
- Major Characters—An intensive study.
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
- Summary and analysis
- Review questions
- Suggested Readings

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to :

- Know about the Greek tragedy, "Sophocles".
- Have a broad understanding of his works.
- Narrate the story of the play, "Oedipus the King"
- Understand and discus the themes that occur in 'Oedipus the king'.

INTRODUCTION

Oedipus the King is an Athenian tragedy by Sophocles that was first performed c. 429 BC. It was the second of Sophocles' three Threban plays to be produced, but it comes first in the internal chronology, followed by Oedipus at Colonus and then Antigone. Over the centuries, it has come to be regarded by many as the Greek tragedy par excellence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sophocles was the second of the three ancient Greek tragedians whose work has survived. His first plays were written later than those of Aeschylus and earlier than those of Euripides. According to Suda, a 10th century encyclopedia, Sophocles wrote 123 plays during the course of his life, but only seven have survived in a

complete form: Ajax, Antigone, Trachinian Women, Oedipus the King, Electra, Philoctetes and Oedipus at Colonus. For almost 50 years, Sophocles was the most-feted playwright in the dramatic competitions of the city-state of Athens that took place during the religious festivals of the Lenaea and the Dionysia. Sophocles competed in around 30 competitions; he won perhaps 24 and was never judged lower than second place; in comparison, Aeschylus won 14 competitions and was defeated by Sophocles at times, while Euripides won only 4 competitions. Sophocles' fame and many works earned him a crater on the surface of Mercury named after him.

The most famous of Sophocles' tragedies are those concerning Oedipus and Antigone: these are often known as the Theban plays, although each play was actually a part of different tetralogy, the other members of which are now lost. Sophocles influenced the development of the drama, most importantly by adding a third actor and thereby reducing the importance of the chorus in the presentation of the plot. He also developed his characters to a greater extent than earlier playwrights such as Aeschylus.

Life

Sophocles, the son of Sophilos, was a wealthy member of the rural tribe, small community of Colonus Hippius in Attica, which would later become a setting for one of his plays, and he was probably born there. His birth took place a few years before the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC: the exact year is unclear, although 497/6 is perhaps most likely. Sophocles' first artistic triumph was in 468 BC, when he took first prize in the Dionysia theatre competition over the reigning master of Athenian drama, Aeschylus. According to Plutarch the victory came under unusual circumstances. Instead of following the custom of choosing judges by lot, the archon asked Cimon and the other strategic present to decide the champior of the contest. Plutarch further contends that Aeschylus soon left for Sicily following this loss to Sophocles. Although Plutarch says that this was Sophocles' first production, it is now thought that this is an embellishment of the truth and that his first production was most likely in 470 BC. Triptolemus was probably one of the plays that Sophocles presented at this festival.

Sophocles became a man of importance in the public halls of Athens as well as in the theatres. At the age of 16, he was chosen to lead the eulogy, a choral chant to a god, celebrating the decisive Greek sea victory over the Persians at the Battle of Salamis. The rather insufficient information about Sophocles' civic life implies he was a well-liked man who participated in activities in society and showed remarkable artistic ability. He was also elected as one often strategic, high executive officials that commanded the armed forces, as a junior colleague of Pericles. Sophocles was born extremely wealthy and was highly educated throughout his entire life. Early in his career, the politician Cimon might have been

one of his patrons, although if he was there was no ill will borne by Pericles, Cimon's rival, when Cimon was ostracized in 461 BC In 443/2 he served as one of the Hellenotamiai, or treasurers of Athena, helping to manage the finances of the city during the political ascendancy of Pericles. According to the Vita Sophoclis he served as a general in the Athenian campaign against Sainos, which had revolted in 441 BC; he was supposed to have been elected to his post as the result of his production of Antigone.

In 420 he welcomed and set up an altar for the image of Asclepius at his house, when the deity was introduced to Athens. For this he was given the posthumous epithet Dexion by the Athenians. He was also elected, in 413 BC, to be one of the commissioners crafting a response to the catastrophic destruction of the Athenian expeditionary force in Sicily during the Peloponnesian War.

Sophocles died at the age of ninety or ninety-one in the winter of 406/5 BC, having seen within his lifetime both the Greek triumph in the Persian Wars and the terrible bloodletting of the Peloponnesian War. As with many famous men in classical antiquity, Sophocles' death inspired a number of apocryphal stories about the cause. Perhaps the most famous is the suggestion that he died from the strain of trying to recite a long sentence from his Antigone without pausing to take a breath. Another account suggests he choked while eating grapes at the Anthesteria festival in Athens. A third account holds that he died of happiness after winning his final victory at the City Dionysia. A few months later, the comic poet wrote this eulogy in his play titled The Muses: "Blessed is Sophocles, who had a long life, was a man both happy and talented, and the writer of many good tragedies; and he ended his life well without suffering any misfortune." This is somewhat ironic, for according to some accounts his sons tried to have him declared incompetent near the end of his life; he is said to have refuted their charge in court by reading from his as yet unproduced Oedipus at Colonus. One of his sons, lophon, and a grandson, also called Sophocles, both followed in his footsteps to become playwrights.

Works and Legacy

Among Sophocles' earliest innovations was the addition of a third actor, which further reduced the role of the chorus and created greater opportunity for character development and discord between characters. Aeschylus, who dominated Athenian play righting during Sophocles' career, followed suit and adopted the third character into his own work towards the end of his life. Aristotle credits Sophocles with the introduction of skiagophia, or scenery painting. It was not until after the death of the old master Aeschylus in 456 BC that Sophocles became the prominent playwright in Athens.

Thereafter, Sophocles emerged victorious in dramatic competitions at 18 Dionysia and 6 Lenaia festivals. In addition to innovations in dramatic structure, Sophocles' work is also known for its deeper development of characters than earlier

playwrights. His reputation was such that foreign rulers invited him to attend their courts, although unlike Aeschylus who died in Sicily, or Euripides who spent time in Macedon, Sophocles never accepted any of these invitations. Aristotle used Sophocles' Oedipus the King in his Poetics (c. 335 BC) as an example of the highest achievement in tragedy, which suggests the high esteem in which his work was held by later Greeks.

Only two of the seven surviving plays can be dated securely: Philoctetes (409 BC) and Oedipus at Colonus (401 BC, staged after Sophocles' death by his grandson). Of the others, Electra shows stylistic similarities to these two plays, which suggests that it was probably written in the latter part of his career. Ajax, Antigone and The Trachiniae are generally thought to be among his early works, again based on stylistic elements, with Oedipus the King coming in Sophocles' middle period. Most of Sophocles' plays show an undercurrent of early fatalism and the beginnings of Socratic logic as a mainstay for the long tradition of Greek tragedy.

The Theban Plays

The Theban plays consist of three plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King (also called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus Rex), and Oedipus at Colonus. All three plays concern the fate of Thebes during and after the reign of King Oedipus. They have often been published under a single cover. Sophocles, however, wrote the three plays for separate festival competitions, many years later. Not only are the Theban plays a true trilogy (three plays presented as a continuous narrative) but they are not even an intentional series and contain some inconsistencies among them. He also wrote other plays having to do with Thebes, such as The Progeny, of which only fragments have survived.

Subjects

Each of the plays relates to the tale of the mythological Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother without knowledge that they were his parents. His family is luck to be doomed for three generations.

In Oedipus the King, Oedipus is the protagonist. Oedipus infanticide is planned by his parents, Laius and Jocasta, to avert him fulfilling a prophecy; in truth, the servant entrusted with the infanticide passes the infant on through a series of intermediaries to a childless couple, who adopt him not knowing his history. Oedipus eventually learns of the Delphic Oracle's prophecy of him, that he would kill his father and marry his mother ; Oedipus attempts to flee his fate without harming his parents (at this point, he does not know that he is adopted). Oedipus meets a man at a crossroads accompanied by servants; Oedipus and the man fought, and Oedipus killed the man. (This man was his father, Laius, not that anyone apart from the gods knew this at the time). He becomes the ruler of Thebes after solving

the riddle of the sphinx and in the process, marries the widowed Queen, his mother Jocasta. Thus the stage is set for horror. When the truth comes out, following another true but confusing prophecy from Delphi, Jocasta commits suicide, Oedipus blinds himself and leaves Thebes, and the children are left to sort out the consequences themselves (which provides the grounds for the later parts of the cycle of plays).

The banished Oedipus and his daughters Antigone and Ismene arrive at the town of Colonus where they encounter Theseus, King of Athens. Oedipus dies and contrariety begins between his sons Polyneices and Eteocles.

In Antigone the protagonist is Oedipus' daughter. Antigone is faced with the choice of allowing her brother Polyneices' body to remain unburied, outside the city walls, exposed to the ravages of wild animals, or to bury him and face death. The king of the land, Creon, has forbidden the burial of Polyneices for he was a traitor to the city. Antigone decides to bury his body and face the consequences of her actions. Creon sentences her to death. Eventually, Creon is convinced to free Antigone from her punishment, but his decision comes too late and Antigone commits suicide. Her suicide triggers the suicide of two others close to King Creon: his son, Haemon, who was to wed Antigone, and his wife who commits suicide after losing her only surviving son.

Consonance and Inconsistencies

The plays were written across thirty-six years of Sophocles' career and were not composed in chronological order, but instead were written in the order Antigone, Oedipus the King, and Oedipus at Colonus. Nor were they composed as a trilogy -a group of plays to be performed together, but are the remaining parts of three different groups of plays. As a result, there are some inconsistencies: notably, Creon is the undisputed king at the end of Oedipus the King and, in consultation with Apollo, single-handedly makes the decision to excommunicable Oedipus from Thebes. Creon is also instructed to look after Oedipus' daughters Antigone and Ismene at the end of Oedipus the King. By collate, in the other plays there is some struggle with Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polynices with regard to the succession. In Oedipus at Colonus, Sophocles attempts to work these inconsistencies into a tenacious whole: Ismene explains, that, in light of their flawed family genealogy, her brothers were at first willing to cede the throne to Creon. Nevertheless, they eventually decided to take charge of the monarchy, with each brother disputing the other's right to succeed. In addition to being in a clearly more powerful position in Oedipus at Colonus, Eteocles and Polynices are also blameworthy: they condemn their father to exile, which is one of his bitterest charges against them.

Other Plays

Other than the three Theban plays, there are four surviving plays by Sophocles: Ajax, The Trachiniae, Electra, and Philoctetes, the last of which won first prize.

Ajax focuses on the proud hero of the Trojan War, Telamonian Ajax, who is driven to treachery and eventually suicide. Ajax becomes gravely upset when Achilles' armor is presented to Odysseus instead of himself. Despite their enmity toward him, Odysseus persuades the kings Menelaus and Agamemnon to grant Ajax a proper burial.

The Trachiniae (named for the Trachinian women who make up the chorus) dramatizes Deianeira's accidentally killing Heracles after he had completed his famous twelve labours. Tricked into thinking it is a love charm, Deianeira applies poison to an article of Heracles' clothing; this poisoned robe causes Heracles to die an tormenting death. Upon learning the truth, Deianeira commits suicide.

Electra Corresponds roughly to the plot of Aeschylus' Libation Bearers. It details how Electra and Orestes' avenge their father Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Philoctetes retells the story of Philoctetes, an archer who had been forlorn on Lemnos by the rest of the Greek armada while on the way to Troy. After learning that they cannot win the Trojan War without Philoctetes' bow, the Greeks send Odysseus and Neoptolemus to retrieve him; due to the Greeks' earlier treason, however, Philcctetes refuses to rejoin the army. It is only Heracles' intimately machina appearance that persuades Philoctetes to go to Troy.

OEDIPUS THE KING

Plot

The myth of Oedipus takes place before the opening scene of the play. In his youth, Laius was a guest of King Pelops of Elis, and became the tutor of Chrysippus, youngest of the king's sons, in chariot racing. He then breached the sacred laws of comradeship by seizure and raping Chrysippus, who according to some versions killed himself in shame. This cast a doom over him and his descendants.

The protagonist of the tragedy is the son of King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes. After Laius learns from an oracle that "he is doomed to perish by the hand of his own son", he tightly binds the feet of the infant Oedipus together with a pin and orders Jocasta to kill the infant. Hesitant to do so, she orders a servant to commit the act for her. Instead, the servant takes baby Oedipus to a mountain top to die from exposure. A shepherd rescues the infant and names him Oedipus. The shepherd carries the baby with him to Corinth, where Oedipus is taken in and raised in the court of the childless King Polybus of Corinth as if he were his own.

As a young man in Corinth, Oedipus hears a rumour that he is not the biological son of Polybus and his wife Merope. When Oedipus questions the King and Queen, they deny it, but, still suspicious, he asks the Delphic Oracle who his

parents really are. The Oracle seems to ignore this question, telling him instead that he is destined to "Mate with his own mother, and shed/With his own hands the blood of his own procreator". Desperate to avoid his foretold fate, Oedipus leaves Corinth in the belief that Polybus and Merope are indeed his true parents and that, once away from them, he will never harm them.

On the road to Thebes, he meets Laius, his true father. Unaware of each other's identities, they quarrel over whose chariot has right-of-way. King Laius moves to strike the disdainful youth with his sceptre, but Oedipus throws him down from the chariot and kills him, thus fulfilling part of the oracle's apocalypse. He kills all but one of the other men. Shortly after, he solves the riddle of the Sphinx, which has baffled many a diviner: "What is the creature that four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?"

To this Oedipus replies, "Man", who crawls on all fours as an infant, walks upright later, and needs a walking stick in old age, and the wacky enigma throws herself off the Cliffside. Oedipus's reward for freeing the kingdom of Thebes from her curse is the kingship and the hand of Queen Dowager Jocasta, his biological mother. The apocalypse is thus fulfilled, although none of the main characters know it.

ACTION OF THE PLAY

A priest and the chorus of Thebans arrive at the palace to call upon their King, Oedipus, to aid them with the contagion. Oedipus had sent his brother-in-law Creon to ask help of the oracle at Delphi, and he returns at that moment. Creon says the contagion is the result of religious pollution, caused because the murderer of their former King, Laius, had never been caught. Oedipus vows to find the murderer and curses him for the contagion that he has caused.

Oedipus summons the blind prophet Tiresias for help. When Tiresias arrives he claims to know the answers to Oedipus's questions, but refuses to speak, instead telling Oedipus to relinquish his search. Oedipus is enraged by Tiresias's refusal, and says the prophet must be deceitful in the murder. Infuriate, Tiresias tells the king that Oedipus himself is the murderer. Oedipus cannot see how this could be, and concludes that the prophet must have been paid off by Creon in an attempt to undermine him. The two argue fervently and eventually Tiresias leaves, mumbling darkly that when the murderer is discovered he shall be a native citizen of Thebes; brother and father to his own children; and son and husband to his own mother.

Creon arrives to face Oedipus's asseverations. The King demands that Creon be executed, however the chorus convince him to let Creon live. Oedipus's wife Jocasta enters, and attempts to comfort Oedipus, telling him he should take no notice of prophets. Many years ago she and Laius received an answer which never

came true. It was said that Laius would be killed by his own son, but, as all Thebes knows, Laius was killed by bandits at a crossroads on the way to Delphi.

The mention of this crossroads causes Oedipus to pause and ask for more details. He asks Jocasta what Laius looked like, and suddenly becomes worried that Tiresias's asseverations were true. Oedipus then sends for the one surviving witness of the attack to be brought to the palace from the fields where he now works as a shepherd. Jocasta, confused, asks Oedipus what is the matter, and he tells her.

Many years ago, at a fete in Corinth, a man drunkenly cites Oedipus of not being his father's son. Bothered by the comment Oedipus went to Delphi and asked the answer about his parentage. Instead of answers he was given a apocalypse that he would one day murder his father and sleep with his mother. Upon hearing this he resolved to quit Corinth and never return. While travelling he came to the very crossroads where Laius was killed, and encountered a carriage which attempted to drive him off the road. An argument ensued and Oedipus killed the travellers, including a man who matches Jocasta's description of Laius.

Oedipus has hope, however, because the story is that Laius was murdered by several robbers. If the shepherd confirms that Laius was attacked by many men, then Oedipus is in the clear.

A man arrives from Corinth with the message that Oedipus's father has died. Oedipus, to the surprise of the messenger, is made elated by this news, for it proves one half of the apocalypse false, for now he can never kill his father. However he still fears that he may somehow commit oedipal love with his mother. The messenger, eager to ease Oedipus's mind, tells him not to worry, because Merope the Queen of Corinth was not in fact his real mother.

It emerges that this messenger was formerly a shepherd on Mount Cithaeron, and that he was given a baby, which the childless Polybus then adopted. The baby, he says, was given to him by another shepherd from the Laius household, who had been told to get purge of the child. Oedipus asks the chorus if anyone knows who this man was, or where he might be now. They respond that he is the same shepherd who was witness to the murder of Laius, and whom Oedipus had already sent for. Jocasta, who has by now realized the truth, forlornly begs Oedipus to stop asking questions, but he refuses and Jocasta runs into the palace.

When the shepherd arrives Oedipus questions him, but he begs to be allowed to leave without answering further. Oedipus presses him however, finally threatening him with torture or capital or death penalty. It emerges that the child he gave away was Laius's own son, and that Jocasta had given the baby to the shepherd to secretly be manifested upon the mountainside. This was done in fear of the apocalypse that Jocasta said had never come true: that the child would kill its father.

Everything is at last revealed, and Oedipus curses himself and fate before leaving the stage. The chorus bewails how even a great man can be demolished by fate, and following this, a servant exits the palace to speak of what has happened inside. When Jocasta enters the house, she runs to the palace bedroom and hangs herself there. Shortly afterward, Oedipus enters in a wrath, calling on his servants to bring him a sword so that he might kill himself. He then rages through the house, until he comes upon Jocasta's body. Giving a cry, Oedipus takes her down and removes the long gold pins that held her dress together, before spree them into his own eyes in despair.

A blind Oedipus now exits the palace and begs to be exiled as soon as possible. Creon enters, saying that Oedipus shall be taken into the house until oracles can be consulted regarding what is best to be done. Oedipus's two daughters (and half-sisters), Antigone and Ismene, are sent out, and Oedipus bewail that they should be born to such a cursed family. He asks Creon to watch over them and Creon agrees, before sending Oedipus back into the palace.

On an empty stage the chorus repeats the common Greek maxim, that no man should be considered fortunate until he is dead.

RELATIONSHIP WITH MYTHIC TRADITION

The two cities of Troy and Thebes were the major focus of Greek epic poetry. The events surrounding the Trojan War were journal in the Epic Cycle, of which much remains, and those about Thebes in the Theban Cycle, which have been lost. The Theban Cycle recounted the sequence of tragedies that emerge the house of Laius, of which the story of Oedipus is a part.

Homer's Odyssey contains the earliest account of the Oedipus parable when Odysseus encounters Jocasta, named Epicaste, in the underworld. Homer briefly summarises the story of Oedipus, including the oedipal love parricide and Jocasta's subsequent suicide. However in the Homeric version Oedipus remains King of Thebes after the divulgence and neither blinds himself, nor is sent into exile. In particular, it is said that the gods made the matter known, whilst in Oedipus the King Oedipus very much discovers the truth himself.

In 467 BC, Sophocles's fellow tragedian Aeschylus won first prize at the City Dionysia with a trilogy about the House of Laius, comprising Laius, Oedipus and Seven against Thebes (the only play which survives). Since he did not write connected trilogies as Aeschylus did, Oedipus the King focuses on the ceremonial character while hinting at the larger myth athwart, which was already known to the audience in Athens at the time.

DRAMATIC PERSONAL

Oedipus

Oedipus is the protagonist of the play, "Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus". Oedipus becomes the king of Thebes before the action of Oedipus the King begins. He is eminent for his intelligence and his ability to solve riddles—he saved the city of Thebes and was made its king by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, the supernatural being that had held the city captive. Yet Oedipus is stubbornly blind to the truth about himself. His name's literal meaning ("swollen foot") is the clue to his identity—he was taken from the house of Laius as a baby and left in the mountains with his feet prance together. On his way to Thebes, he killed his biological father, not knowing who he was, and proceeded to marry Jocasta, his biological mother.

Jocasta

Jocasta is Oedipus's wife and mother, and Creon's sister. Jocasta appears only in the final scenes of Oedipus the King. In her first words, she attempts to make peace between Oedipus and Creon, entreating with Oedipus not to expatriate Creon. She is comforting her husband and calmly tries to hankering him to flotsam Tiresias's terrifying prophecies as false. Jocasta solves the riddle of Oedipus's identity before Oedipus does, and she expresses her love for her son and husband in her desire to protect him from this knowledge.

Antigone

Antigone is the child of Oedipus and Jocasta, and therefore, she is both Oedipus's daughter and his sister. Antigone appears briefly at the end of Oedipus the King, when she says goodbye to her father as Creon prepares to expatriate Oedipus. She appears at greater length in Oedipus at Colonus,. leading and caring for her old, blind father in his exile. But Antigone comes into her own in Antigone. As that play's protagonist, she demonstrates a courage and lucidity of sight unparalleled by any other character in the three Theban plays. The other characters—Oedipus, Creon, Polynices—are circumspect to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, Antigone is blatant in her assuredness onviction that she has done right.

Creon

Creon is Oedipus's brother-in-law, Creon appears more than any other character in the three plays combined. In him more than anyone else we see the continuous rise and fall of one man's power. Early in Oedipus the King, Creon avouch to have no inclination for kingship. Yet, when he has the opportunity to clutch power at the end of that play, Creon seems quite eager. We learn that Oedipus at Colonus is willing to fight with his nephews for this power, and in

Antigone Creon rules Thebes with a tenacious blindness that is similar to Oedipus's rule. But Creon never has our sympathy in the way Oedipus does, because he is bossy and legislative, intent on avouch his own authority.

Polynices

Polynices is son of Oedipus. Polynices appears only very briefly in Oedipus at Colonus. He arrives at Colonus seeking his father's blessing in his battle with his brother, Eteocles, to capture the power of Thebes. Polynices tries to point out the similarity between his own situation and that of Oedipus, but his words seem urbane rather than complaint, a fact that Oedipus points out.

Tiresias

Tiresias is the blind sibyl of Thebes, appears in both Oedipus the King and Antigone. In Oedipus the King, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he is the murderer he hunts, and Oedipus does not believe him. In Antigone, Tiresias tells Creon that Creon himself is bringing catastrophe upon Thebes, and Creon does not believe him. Yet, both Oedipus and Creon claim to trust Tiresias deeply. The literal blindness of the soothsayer points to the metaphorical blindness of those who refuse to believe the truth about themselves when they hear it spoken.

Haemon

Haemon is Creon's son, who appears only in Antigone. Haemon is engaged to marry Antigone. Stimulated by his love for her, he argues with Creon about the concluding decision to punish her.

Ismene

Ismene is Oedipus's another daughter. Ismene appears at the end of Oedipus the King and to a limited extent in Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone. Ismene's minor part underscores her sister's grandeur and courage. Ismene fears helping Antigone bury Polynices but offer to die beside Antigone when Creon sentences her to die. Antigone, however, refuses to allow her sister to be immolated for something she did not have the courage to stand up for.

Theseus

Theseus is the king of Athens in Oedipus at Colonus. He is a eminent and powerful warrior, Theseus takes commiseration on Oedipus and defends him against Creon. Theseus is the only one who knows the spot at which Oedipus descended to the underworld-a secret he promises Oedipus he will hold forever.

Chorus

Chorus is sometimes comically lumpish or capricious or fickle, sometimes stance, sometimes hokey, and the Chorus reacts to the events arena. The Chorus's reactions can be lessons in how the audience should elucidate what it is seeing, or how it should not elucidate what it is seeing.

MAJOR CHARACTERS—AN INTENSIVE STUDY

Oedipus

Oedipus is a man of abrupt action and great discernment. At the opening of Oedipus the King, we see that these qualities make him an excellent ruler who anticipates his subjects' needs. When the citizens of Thebes beg him to do something about the influx, for example, Oedipus is one step ahead of them—he has already sent Creon to the answer at Delphi for advice. But later, we see that Oedipus's habit of acting swiftly has a dangerous side. When he tells the story of killing the sash of travellers who attempted to impel him off the three-way crossroads, Oedipus shows travelers that he has the capacity to behave impetuously.

At the beginning of Oedipus the King, Oedipus is hugely confident, and with good reason. He has saved Thebes from the curse of the Sphinx and become king virtually overnight. He proclaims his name proudly as though it were itself a assuage charm: "Here I am myself—you all know me, the world knows my fame: / I am Oedipus" (7-9). By the end of this tragedy, however, Oedipus's name will have become a curse, so much so that, in Oedipus at Colonus, the Leader of the Chorus is petrified even to hear it and cries: "You, you're that man?" (238).

Oedipus's celerity and confidence continue to the very end of Oedipus the King. We see him probe Creon, call for Tiresias, threaten to expatriate Tiresias and Creon, call for the servant who escaped the attack on Laius, call for the shepherd who brought him to Corinth, rush into the palace to skewer out his own eyes, and then demand to be exiled. He is constantly in motion, seemingly trying to keep pace with his fate, even as it goes well beyond his reach. In Oedipus at Colonus, however, Oedipus seems to have begun to accept that much of his life is out of his control. He spends most of his time sitting rather than acting. Most mournful are lines 825-960, where Oedipus fumbles blindly and helplessly as Creon takes his children from him. In order to get them back, Oedipus must reckon wholly on Theseus.

Once he has given his trust to Theseus, Oedipus seems ready to find peace. At Colonus, he has at last hammered out a bond with someone, found a kind of home after many years of exile. The single most significant action in Oedipus at Colonus is Oedipus's deliberate move offstage to die. The final scene of the play has the

haste and drive of the beginning of Oedipus the King, but this haste, for Oedipus at least, is toward peace rather than horror.

Antigone

Antigone is very much her father's daughter, and she begins her play with the same swift conclusiveness with which Oedipus began his. Within the first fifty lines, she is planning to defy Creon's order and bury Polynices. Unlike her father, however, Antigone bewitchs a remarkable ability to remember the past. Whereas Oedipus flouts Tiresias, the prophet who has helped him so many times, and whereas he seems almost to have forgotten his encounter with Laius at the three-way crossroads, Antigone begins her play by talking about the many griefs that her father handed down to his children. Because of her drastic awareness of her own history, Antigone is much more dangerous than Oedipus, especially to Creon. Aware of the kind of fate her family has been allacated, Antigone feels she has nothing to lose. The thought of death at Creon's hands but it terrifies Ismene but it does not even faze Antigone, who looks forward to the kudos of dying for her brother. Yet even in her expression of this noble sentiment, we see the way in which Antigone continues to be jinxed by the travesty that has destroyed her family. Speaking about being killed for burying Polynices, she says that she will lie with the one she loves, loved by him, and it is difficult not to hear at least the hint of sexual connotation, as though the mélange whim of the Oedipus family always tend toward the incestuous.

Antigone draws attention to the difference between divine law and human law. More than any other character in the three plays, she casts serious doubt on Creon's authority. When she points out that his edicts cannot override the will of the gods or the unshakable traditions of men, she places Creon's edict against Polynices' burial in a perspective that makes it seem shameful and ridiculous. Creon sees her words as merely a passionate, wild outburst, but he will ultimately be swayed by the words of Tiresias, which echo those of Antigone. It is important to note, however, that Antigone's motivation for burying Polynices is more complicated than simply reverence for the dead or for tradition. She says that she would never have taken upon herself the responsibility of defying the edict for the sake of a husband or children, for husbands and children can be replaced; brothers, once the parents are dead, cannot. In Antigone we see a woman so in need of familial connection that she is desperate to maintain the connections she has even in death.

Creon

Creon spends more time onstage in these three plays than any other character except the Chorus. His presence is so constant and his words are so pivotal to many parts of the plays that he cannot be dismissed as simply the legislative fool he sometimes seems to be. Rather, he represents the very real power of human law and of the human need for an orderly, mooned society. When we first see Creon in

Oedipus the King, Creon is shown to be separate from the citizens of Thebes. He tells Oedipus that he has brought news from the answer and suggests that Oedipus hear it inside. Creon has the secretive, businesslike air of a politician, which stands in sharp contrast to Oedipus, who tells him to speak out in front of everybody. While Oedipus insists on hearing Creon's news in public and builds his power as a political leader by upholding a rhetoric of openness, Creon is a master of administration. While Oedipus is aim on saying what he means and on hearing the truth—even when Jocasta begs and petition with him not to—Creon is happy to dissemble and eludes.

At lines 651-690, Creon argues that he has no desire to usurp Oedipus as king, because he, Jocasta, and Oedipus rule the kingdom with equal power—Oedipus is merely the king in name. This argument may seem assuring, partly because at this moment in the play we are disposed to be sympathetic toward Creon, since Oedipus has just ordered Creon's expatriation. In response to Oedipus's hotheaded foolishness, Creon sounds like the voice of reason. Only in the final scene of Oedipus the King, when Creon's short lines expose his eagerness to exile Oedipus and separate him from his children, do we see that the title of king is what Creon desires above all.

Creon is at his most dissimulate in Oedipus at Colonus, where he once again needs something from Oedipus. His honey-tongued speeches to Oedipus and Theseus are made all the more ugly by his cowardly attempt to kidnap Antigone and Ismene. In Antigone, we at last see Creon comfortable in the place of power. Eteocles and Polynices, like their father, are dead, and Creon holds the same unquestioned preponderance that Oedipus once held. Of course, once Creon achieves the cohesion and power that he foraged and Oedipus possessed, he begins to replication Oedipus's mistakes. Creon reprobate Tiresias, for example (1144-1180), obviously echoing Oedipus's denunciation in Oedipus the King (366-507). And, of course, repentant penitent waitings in the final lines of Antigone echo those of Oedipus at the end of Oedipus the King. What can perhaps most be said most in favour of Creon is that in his final lines he also begins to sound like Antigone, waiting for whatever new catastrophe fate will bring him. He cries out that he is "nothing," "no one," but it is his suffering that makes him seem human in the end.

The Chorus

The Chorus reacts to events as they happen, generally in a foreseeable, though not consistent, way. It generally expresses a longing for calm and stability. For example, in Oedipus the King, it asks Oedipus not to expatriate Creon (725-733); fearing a curse, it attempts to send Oedipus out of Colonus in Oedipus at Colonus (242-251); and it questions the sagacity of Antigone's actions in Antigone (909-962). In moments like these, the Chorus seeks to maintain the status quo, which is

generally seen to be the wrong thing. The Chorus is not quaking so much as nervous and smug—above all, it hopes to prevent disruption.

The Chorus is given the last word in each of the three Theban plays, and perhaps the best way of understanding the different ways in which the Chorus can work is to look at each of these three speeches briefly. At the end of Oedipus the King, the Chorus conflates the people of "Thebes" with the audience in the theater. The message of the play, delivered directly to that audience, is one of complete despair: "count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last" (1684). Because the Chorus, and not one of the individual characters, delivers this message, that the play ends by giving the audience a false sense of closure. That is, the Chorus makes it sound like Oedipus is dead, and their final line suggests there might be some relief. But the audience must immediately realize, of course, that Oedipus is not dead. He cruise, blind and miserable, somewhere outside of Thebes. The audience, like Oedipus, does not know what the future holds in store. The play's ability to universalize, to make the audience feel incriminated in the emotions of the Chorus as well as those of the protagonist, is what makes it a particularly harrowing tragedy, an archetypal story in Western culture.

The Chorus at the end of Oedipus at Colonus seems genuinely to express the thought that there is nothing left to say, because everything rests in the hands of the gods. As with Oedipus's death, the Chorus expresses no great struggle here, only a willing resignation that makes the play seem hopeful—if equivocally so—rather than despairing. Oedipus's wandering has, it seems, done some good. The final chorus of Antigone, on the other hand, seems on the surface much more hopeful than either of the other two but is actually much more ominous and ambivalent. Antigone ends with a hope for knowledge—specifically the knowledge that comes out of suffering. This ending is quite different from the endings of the other two plays, from a mere banality about death or the fact that fate lies outside human control. The audience can agree with and believe in a statement like "Wisdom is by far the greatest part of joy," and perhaps feel that Creon has learned from his suffering, like Antigone seemingly did at the beginning of the play.

While the Chorus may believe that people learn through suffering, Sophocles may have felt differently. Antigone represents the last events in a series begun by Oedipus the King, but it was written before either of the other two Oedipus plays. And in the two subsequent plays, we see very little evidence in Antigone that suffering teaches anyone anything except how to sustain it.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas traversed in a literary work.

Fate and Free Will

Fate is a theme that often occurs in Greek writing, tragedies in particular! The idea that attempting to avoid an oracle is the very thing which brings it about is a common notion in many Greek myths, and similarities to Oedipus can for example be seen in the parable of the birth of Perseus.

Two oracles in particular dominate the plot of Oedipus the King. In lines 711 to 714, Jocasta relates the apocalypse that was told to Laius before the birth of Oedipus. Namely :

(The oracle) told him that it was his fate that he should die a victim at the hands of his own son, a son to be born of Laius and me. The oracle told to Laius tells only of the parricide; the oedipal love is missing. Prompted by Jocasta's recollection, Oedipus reveals the apocalypse which caused him to leave Corinth (791-93): that I was fated to lie with my mother, and show to daylight an jinxed breed which men would not endure, and I was doomed to be murderer of the father that engender me.

The implication of Laius's oracle is dubious. A prominent school of thought argues that the presentation of Laius's answer in this play differs from that found in (e.g.) Aeschylus's Oedipus trilogy produced in 467 BC. Helaine Smith argues:

Sophocles had the option of making the oracle to Laius conditional (if Laius has a son, that son will kill him) or unconditional (Laius will have a son who will kill him). Both Aeschylus and Euripides write plays in which the answer is conditional; Sophocles... chooses to make Laius's oracle unconditional and thus removes culpability for his sins from Oedipus, for he could not have done other than what he did, no matter what action he took.

This exposition has a long thoroughbred and several anthusiast. It finds support in Jocasta's repetition of the answer at lines 854-55: "Loxias declared that the king should be killed by/ his own son." In the Greek, Jocasta uses the verb chrenai: "to be fated, necessary." This monotony of the answer seems to suggest that it was unconditional and inexorable. Other scholars have nonetheless argued that Sophocles follows tradition in making Laius's answer conditional, and thus avoidable. They point to Jocasta's initial disclosure of the answer at lines 711-14. In the Greek, the answer cautions: hos auton hexoi moira pros paidos thanein/ hostis genoit emou the kakeinou para. The two verbs in agate indicate what is called a "future more vivid" condition: if a child is born to Laius, his fate to be killed by that child will overtake him.

Whatever may be the meaning of Laius's answer, the one delivered to Oedipus is clearly unconditional. Given our modern conception of fate and fatalism, readers of the play have a tendency to view Oedipus as a mere puppet controlled by greater forces, a man crushed by the gods and fate for no good reason. This, however, is

not an entirely accurate reading. While it is a mythological truism that oracles exist to be fulfilled, oracles do not cause the events that lead up to the outcome. In his landmark essay "On Misunderstanding the Oedipus Rex", E.R. Dodds draws a comparison with Jesus's prophecy at the Last Supper that Peter would deny him three times. Jesus knows that Peter will do this, but readers would in no way suggest that Peter was a puppet of fate being forced to deny Christ. Free will and predestination are by no means mutually exclusive, and such is the case with Oedipus.

The oracle delivered to Oedipus what is often called a "self-fulfilling apocalypse", in that the apocalypse itself sets in motion events that conclude with its own fulfillment. This, however, is not to say that Oedipus is a victim of fate and has no free will. The answer inspires a series of specific choices, freely made by Oedipus, which lead him to kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus chooses not to return to Corinth after hearing the oracle, just as he chooses to head toward Thebes, to kill Laius, to marry and to take Jocasta specifically as his bride; in response to the plague at Thebes, he chooses to send Creon to the Answer for advice and then to follow that advice, initiating the investigation into Laius's murder. None of these choices is predetermined.

Another characteristic of answers in parable is that they are almost always misunderstood by those who hear them; hence OedipUs's misunderstanding the significance of the Delphic Answer. He visits Delphi to find out who his real parents are and assumes that the Answer refuses to answer that question, offering instead an unrelated apocalypse which forecasts parricide and Oedipal love. Oedipus's assumption is incorrect: the Oracle does answer his question. Stated less concisely, the answer to his question reads thus :

Polybus and Merope are not your parents. You will one day kill a man who will turn out to be your real father. The woman you will eventually marry is your real mother.

State Control

The exploration of this theme in Oedipus the King is paralleled by the examination of the strife between the individual and the state in Antigone. The dilemma that Oedipus faces here is similar to that of the dictatorial Creon: each man has, as king, made a decision that his subjects question or disobey; each king also perverts both his own role as a sovereign and the role of the agiolator. When informed by the blind prophet Tiresias that religious forces are against him, each king claims that the priest has been fraudulent. It is here, however, that their similarities come to an end: while Creon, seeing the devastation he has imposed, tries to amend his mistakes, Oedipus refuses to listen to anyone.

The Power of Unwritten Law

After defeating Polynices and taking the throne of Thebes, Creon commands that Polynices be left to blight unburied, his flesh eaten by dogs and birds, creating an "indecency" for everyone to see (Antigone, 231). Creon thinks that he is justified in his treatment of Polynices because the concluding was a traitor, an enemy of the state, and the security of the state makes all of human life-including family life and religion. Therefore, to Creon's way of thinking, the good of the state comes before all other duties and values. However, the subsequent events of the play demonstrate that some duties are more fundamental than the state and its laws. The duty to bury the dead is part of what it means to be human, not part of what it means to be a citizen. That is why Polynices' rotting body is an "indecency" rather than a crime. Moral duties—such as the duties owed to the dead-make up the body of unwritten law and tradition, the law to which Antigone appeals.

The Willingness to Ignore the Truth

When Oedipus and Jocasta begin to get close to the truth about Laius's murder, in Oedipus the King, Oedipus fastens onto a detail in the hope of vindicating himself. Jocasta says that she was told Laius was killed by "strangers," whereas Oedipus knows that he acted alone when he killed a man in similar circumstances. This is an extraordinary moment because it calls into question the entire truth-seeking process Oedipus believes himself to be undertaking. Both Oedipus and Jocasta act as though the servant's story, once spoken, is inarguable history. Neither can face the possibility of what it would mean if the servant were wrong. This is perhaps why Jocasta feels she can tell Oedipus of the prophecy that her son would kill his father, and Oedipus can tell her about the similar prophecy given him by an answer (867-875), and neither feels compelled to remark on the coincidence; or why Oedipus can hear the story of Jocasta binding her child's ankles (780-781) and not think of his own swollen feet. While the information in these speeches is largely intended to make the audience painfully aware of the tragic humour, it also emphasizes just how desperately Oedipus and Jocasta do not want to speak the obvious truth: they look at the circumstances and details of everyday life and pretend not to see them.

The Limits of Free Will

Apocalypse is a central part of Oedipus the King. The play begins with Creon's return from the answer at Delphi, where he has learned that the influx will be lifted if Thebes banishes the man who killed Laias. Tiredas prophesies is the capture of one who is both father and brother to his own children. Oedipus tells Jocasta of a apocalypse he heard as a youth, that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother, and Jocasta tells Oedipus of a similar apocalypse given to Laius, that her son would grow up to kill his father. Oedipus and Jocasta debate the extent to which prophecies should be trusted at all, and when all of the prophecies come true,

it appears that one of Sophocles' aims is to justify the powers of the gods and prophets, which had recently come under attack rp. fifth-century B.C. Athens.

Sophocles' audience would, of course, Lave known the story of Oedipus, which only increases the sense of complete inexorable about how the play would end. It is difficult to say how justly one can acciwe Oedipus of being "blind" or foolish when he seems to have no choice about fulfilling the apocalypse: he is sent away from Thebes as a baby and by a remarkable coincidence saved and raised as a prince in Corinth. Hearing that he is fated to kill his father, ho flooa Corinth uiid, by a still more remarkable coincidence, ends up back in Thebes, now king and husband in his actual father's place. Oedipus seems only to desire to flee his fate, but his fate continually catches up with him. Many people have tried to squabble that Oedipus brings about his disaster because of a "tragic flaw," but nobody has managed to create a consensus about what Oedipus's blemish actually is. Perhaps his story is meant to show that error and disaster can happen to anyone, that human beings are relatively powerless before fate or the gods, and that a cautious humility is the best attitude toward life.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Suicide

Almost every character who dies in the three Theban plays does so at his or her own hand (or own will, as is the case in Oedipus at Colonus). Jocasta hangs herself in Oedipus the King and Antigone hangs herself in Antigone. Eurydice and Haemon incision themselves at the end of Antigone. Oedipus wreaks horrible violence on himself at the end of his first play, and willingly goes to his own mysterious death at the end. Polynices and Eteocles die in battle with one another, and it could be argued that Polynices' death at least is premeditative in that he has heard his father's curse and knows that his cause is ill-fated oedipablave. Incest motivates or indirectly brings about all of the deaths in these plays.

Sight and Blindness

References to eyesight and vision, both literal and metaphorical, are very frequent in all three of the Theban plays. Quite often, the image of clear vision is used as a metaphor for knowledge and discernment. In fact, this metaphor is so much a part of the Greek way of thinking that it is almost not a metaphor at all, just as in modern English: to say "I see the truth" or "I see the way things are" is a perfectly ordinary use of language. However, the references to eyesight and insight in these plays form a meaningful pattern in combination with the references to literal and metaphorical blindness. Oedipus is eminent for his clear-sightedness and

quick comprehension, but he discovers that he has been blind to the truth for many years, and then he blinds himself so as not to have to look on his own children/ siblings. Creon is prone to a similar blindness to the truth in Antigone. Though blind, the aging Oedipus finally acquires a limited prophetic vision. Tiresias is blind, yet he sees farther than others. Overall, the plays seem to say that human beings can demonstrate remarkable powers of intellectual penetration and insight, and that they have a great capacity for knowledge, but that even the smartest human being is liable to error, that the human capability for knowledge is ultimately quite limited and unreliable.

Graves and Tombs

The plots of Antigone and Oedipus at Colonus both revolve around burials, and beliefs about burial are important in Oedipus the King as well. Polynices is kept above ground after his death, repudiated a grave, and his rotting body chafes the gods, his relatives, and ancient traditions. Antigone is sepulchered alive, to the horror of everyone who watches. At the end of Oedipus the King, Oedipus cannot remain in Thebes or be buried within its territory, because his very person is polluted and derogatory to the sight of gods and men. Nevertheless, his choice, in Oedipus at Colonus, to be buried at Colonus confers a great and mystical gift on all of Athens, promising that nation victory over future attackers. In Ancient Greece, quisling/renegade and people who murder their own relatives could not be buried within their city's territory, but their relatives still had an obligation to bury them. As one of the basic, inevitable duties that people owe their relatives, burials represent the obligations that come from kindred, as well as the conflicts that can arise between one's duty to family and to the city-state.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Oedipus's Swollen Foot

Oedipus gets his name, as the Corinthian messenger tells us in Oedipus the King, from the fact that he was left in the mountains with his ankles pinned together. Jocasta explains that Laius abandoned him in this state on a barren mountain shortly after he was born. The injury leaves Oedipus with a evocative scar for the rest of his life. Oedipus's injury symbolizes the way in which fate has marked him and set him apart. It also symbolizes the way his movements have been cramped and stilled since birth, by Apollo's prophecy to Laius.

The Three-way Crossroads

In Oedipus the King, Jocasta says that Laius was slaughtered at a place where three roads meet. This crossroads is referred to a number of times during the play,

and it symbolizes the crucial moment, long before the events of the play, when Oedipus began to fulfil the dreadful prophecy that he would murder his father and marry his mother. A crossroads is a place where a choice has to be made, so crossroads usually symbolize moments where decisions will have important consequences but where different choices are still possible. In Oedipus the King, the crossroads is part of the distant past, dimly remembered, and Oedipus was not aware at the time that he was making a fateful decision. In this play, the crossroads symbolizes fate and the awesome power of prophecy, rather than freedom and choice.

Antigone's Entombment

Creon condemns Antigone to a horrifying fate as she is being walled alive inside a tomb. He intends to leave her with just enough food so that neither he nor the citizens of Thebes will have her blood on their hands when she finally dies. Her imprisonment in a tomb symbolizes the fact that her loyalties and feelings lie with the dead-her brothers and her father-rather than with the living, such as Haemon or Ismene. But her imprisonment is also a symbol of Creon's lack of judgment and his affronts to the gods. Tiresias points out that Creon commits a horrible sin by lodging a living human being inside a grave, as he keeps a rotting body in daylight. Creon's actions against Antigone and against Polynices' body show him attempting to invert the order of nature, defying the gods by asserting his own control over their territories.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Oedipus the King, lines 1-337

Summary

Oedipus steps out of the royal palace of Thebes and is greeted by a procession of priests, who are in turn surrounded by the barren and sorrowful citizens of Thebes. The citizens carry branches swathed in wool, which they offer to the gods as gifts. Thebes has been struck by a influx, the citizens are dying, and no one knows how to put an end to it. Oedipus asks a priest why the citizens have gathered around the palace. The priest responds that the city is dying and asks the king to save Thebes. Oedipus replies that he sees and understands the terrible fate of Thebes, and that no one is more sorrowful than he. He has sent Creon, his brother-in-law and fellow ruler, to the Delphic answer to find out how to stop the influx. Just then, Creon arrives, and Oedipus asks what the oracle has said. Creon asks Oedipus if he wants to hear the news in private, but Oedipus insists that all the citizens hear. Creon then tells that he has learned from the god Apollo, who spoke through the answer: the murderer of Laius, who ruled Thebes before Oedipus, is in Thebes. He must be driven out in order for the influx to end.

Creon goes on to tell the story of Laius's murder. On their way to consult an answer, Laius and all but one of his fellow travellers were killed by thieves. Oedipus asks why the Thebans made no attempt to find the murderers, and Creon reminds him that Thebes was then more concerned with the curse of the Enigma. Hearing this, Oedipus resolves to solve the mystery of Laius's murder.

The Chorus enters, calling on the gods Apollo, Athena, and Artemis to save Thebes. Apparently, it has not heard Creon's news about Laius's murderer. It bemoans the state of Thebes, and finally beseeches Dionysus, whose mother was a Theban. Oedipus returns and tells the Chorus that he will end the influx himself. He asks if anyone knows who killed Laius, promising that the informant will be rewarded and the murderer will receive no discordance punishment than exile. No one responds, and Oedipus frenziedly curses Laius's murderer and anyone who is protecting him. Oedipus curses himself, proclaiming that should he discover the murderer to be a member of his own family; that person should be struck by the same exile and harsh treatment that he has just wished on the murderer. Oedipus castigates the citizens of Thebes for letting the murderer go unknown so long. The Leader of the Chorus suggests that Oedipus call for Tiresias, a great prophet, and Oedipus responds that he has already done so.

Analysis

Oedipus is notable for his compassion, his sense of justice, his swiftness of thought and action, and his candor. At this early stage in the play, Oedipus represents all that an Athenian audience-or indeed any audience-could desire in a citizen or a leader. In his first speech, which he delivers to an old priest whose suffering he seeks to attenuate, he continually voices his concern for the health and well-being of his people. He insists upon allowing all his people to hear what the answer has said, despite Creon's suggestion that Oedipus hear the news in private. When Creon retells the story of Laius's murder, Oedipus is shocked and confounded that the investigation of the murder of a king was so briskly dropped (145-147). Oedipus quickly devises plans to deal with both his people's suffering and Laius's unsolved murder, and he has even antedated the Chorus's suggestions that he send someone to the oracle and call forth Tiresias. Finally, Oedipus is emphatic in his promises of appalling punishment for Laius's murderer, even if the murderer turns out to be someone close to Oedipus himself.

Sophocles' audience knew the ancient story of Oedipus well, and would therefore interpret the greatness Oedipus emanates in the first scene as a tragic prelude of his fall. Sophocles seizes every opportunity to escapade this dramatic irony. Oedipus frequently implies to sight and blindness, creating many moments of dramatic irony, since the audience knows that it is Oedipus's metaphorical blindness to the relationship between his past and his present situation that brings about his ruin. For example, when the old priest tells Oedipus that the people of

Thebes are dying of the influx, Oedipus says that he could not fail to see this (68-72). Oedipus eagerly attempts to uncover the truth, acting decisively and scrupulously refusing to shield himself from the truth. Although we are able to see him as a mere puppet of fate, at some points, the sarcasm is so magnified that it seems almost as if Oedipus brings disaster upon himself willingly. One such examples of this irony is when Oedipus proclaims proudly-but, for the audience, painfully-that he possesses the bed of the former king, and that marriage might have even created "blood-bonds" between him and Laius had Laius not been murdered (294-300).

Although the Chorus's first balled (168-244) piously calls to the gods to save Thebes from the plague, the answer they get to their prayer arrives in human form. Immediately following the ode, Oedipus enters and says that he will answer the Chorus's prayers. For a moment, Oedipus takes upon himself the role of a god-a role the Chorus has been both reluctant and eager to allow him (see 39-43). Oedipus is so competent in the affairs of men that he comes close to dismissing the gods, although he does not actually blaspheme, as Creon does in Antigone. At this early moment, we see Oedipus's dangerous pride, which explains his willful blindness and, to a certain extent, justifies his downfall.

Oedipus the King, Lines 338-706

Summary

A boy leads in the blind prophet Tiresias. Oedipus begs him to reveal who Laius's murderer is, but Tiresias answers only that he knows the truth but wishes he did not. Puzzled at first, then angry, Oedipus insists that Tiresias tell Thebes what he knows evoked by the anger and insults of Oedipus, Tiresias begins to hint at his knowledge. Finally, when Oedipus furiously accuses Tiresias of the murder, Tiresias tells Oedipus that Oedipus himself is the curse. Oedipus dares Tiresias to say it again, and so Tiresias calls Oedipus the murderer. The king criticizes Tiresias's powers wildly and insults his blindness, but Tiresias only responds that the insults will eventually be turned on Oedipus by all of Thebes. Driven into a fury by the indictment, Oedipus proceeds to concoct a story that Creon and Tiresias are conspiring to overthrow him.

The leader of the Chorus asks Oedipus to calm down, but Tiresias only gibes Oedipus further, saying that the king does not even know who his parents are. This statement both antagonize and man oeuvre Oedipus, who asks for the truth of his parentage. Tiresias answers only in riddles, saying that the murderer of Laius will turn out to be both brother and father to his children, both son and husband to his mother. The characters exit and the Chorus takes the stage, confused and unsure whom to believe. They resolve that they will not believe any of these indictments against Oedipus unless they are shown proof.

Creon enters, soon followed by Oedipus. Oedipus cites Creon of trying to overthrow him, since it was he who recommended that Tiresias come. Creon asks Oedipus to be rational, but Oedipus says that he wants Creon murdered. Both Creon and the leader of the Chorus try to get Oedipus to understand that he's assembling fantasies, but Oedipus is adamant in his conclusions and his fury.

Analysis

As in Antigone, the entrance of Tiresias signals a pivotal turning point in the plot. But in Oedipus the King, Tiresias also serves an additional role-his blindness augments the dramatic irony that governs the play. Tiresias is blind but can see the truth; Oedipus has his sight but cannot. Oedipus claims that he longs to know the truth; Tiresias says that seeing the truth only brings one pain. In addition to this unspoken irony, the conversation between Tiresias and Oedipus is filled with references to sight and eyes. As Oedipus grows angrier, he gibes Tiresias for his blindness, confusing physical sight and insight, or knowledge. Tiresias matches Oedipus insult for insult, mocking Oedipus for his eyesight and for the brilliance that once allowed him to solve the riddle of the Enigma-neither quality is now helping Oedipus to see the truth.

In this section, the characteristic swiftness of Oedipus's thought, words, and action begins to work against him. When Tiresias arrives at line 340, Oedipus praises him as an all-powerful seer who has shielded Thebes from many a influx. Only forty lines later, he refers to Tiresias as "froth," and soon after that accuses him of treason. Oedipus sizes up a situation, makes a judgment, and acts-all in an instant. While this confident expedience was meritorious in the first section, it is inflated to a point of near absurdity. Oedipus asks Tiresias and Creon a great many questions-questions are his typical mode of address and frequently a sign of his quick and intelligent mind-but they are merely oratorical, for they accuse and presume rather than seek answers. Though Tiresias has laid the truth out plainly before Oedipus, the only way Oedipus can elucidate the prophet's words is as an attack, and his quest for information only seeks to confirm what he already believes.

The Chorus seems terrified and helpless in this section, and its speech at lines 526-572 is fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. Though, like Oedipus, the Chorus cannot believe the truth of what Tiresias has said, the Chorus does not believe itself to be untouchable as Oedipus does, consisting as it does of the plague-stricken, innocent citizens of Thebes. The Chorus's speech is full of images of caves, darkness, lightning, and wings, which suggest darkness, the unknown, and most significantly, terror striking from the skies. The Chorus's supplications to the benevolent gods of lines 168-244 are long past. The gods are still present in this speech, but they are no longer of any help, because they know truths that they will not reveal. Thebes is menaced rather than protected by the heavens.

Oedipus the King, lines 707–1007

Summary

Oedipus's wife, Jocasta, enters and convinces Oedipus that he should neither kill nor exile Creon, though the reluctant king remains convinced that Creon is guilty. Creon leaves, and the Chorus reassures Oedipus that it will always be loyal to him. Oedipus explains to Jocasta how Tiresias condemned him, and Jocasta responds that all prophets are false. As proof, she offers the fact that the Delphic oracle told Laius that he would be murdered by his son, while actually his son was cast out of Thebes as a baby and Laius was murdered by a band of thieves. Her narrative of his murder, however, sounds familiar to Oedipus, and he asks to hear more.

Jocasta tells him that Laius was killed at a three-way crossroads, just before Oedipus arrived in Thebes. Oedipus, stunned, tells his wife that he may be the one who murdered Laius. He tells Jocasta that, long ago, when he was the prince of Corinth, he heard at a banquet that he was not really the son of the king and queen, and so went to the oracle of Delphi, which did not answer him but did tell him he would murder his father and sleep with his mother. Hearing this, Oedipus fled from home, never to return. It was then, on the journey that would take him to Thebes, that Oedipus was confronted and harassed by a group of travellers, whom he killed in self-defense, at the very crossroads where Laius was killed.

Hoping that he will not be identified as Laius's murderer, Oedipus sends for the shepherd who was the only man to survive the attack. Oedipus and Jocasta leave the stage, and the Chorus enters, announcing that the world is ruled by destiny and denouncing prideful men who would defy the gods. At the same time, the Chorus worries that if all the prophecies and oracles are wrong-if a proud man can in fact, triumph-then the gods may not rule the world after all. Jocasta enters from the palace to offer a branch wrapped in wool to Apollo.

Analysis

Whatever sympathy we might have lost for Oedipus amid his ranting in the second section, we regain at least partially in the third. After Jocasta intercedes in the fight between Oedipus and Creon, Oedipus calms down and recalls that there is a riddle before him that he, as the ruler of Thebes, has a responsibility to solve. Consequently, his incessant questions become more purposeful than they were in his conversations with Tiresias and Creon. We see that Oedipus logically and earnestly pursues the truth when he does not have a preconceived idea of what the truth is. When Oedipus seizes upon the detail of the three-way crossroads (805-822), he proves that he was not merely grandstanding in the first scene of the play when he expressed his desire to be forthright with his citizens and to subject himself to the same laws he imposes upon others. In his speech at lines 848-923,

Oedipus shows that he truly believes he killed Laius and is willing to accept not only the responsibility but the punishment for the act. The speech is heartbreaking because we know that Oedipus has arrived at only half the truth.

In this section, Jocasta is both careless and maternal. She tells Oedipus that prophecies do not come true, and she uses the fact that an oracle incorrectly prophesied that Laius would be killed by his own son as evidence. Jocasta's mistake is similar to Oedipus's in the previous section: she confuses conclusions and evidence. As Oedipus assumed that Tiresias's unpleasant claims could only be treason, so Jocasta assumes that because one prophecy has apparently not come to pass, prophecies can only be lies. While Oedipus's hasty and imperfect logic in the second section has much to do with his pride, Jocasta's in this section seem attached to an unwitting desire to soothe and mother Oedipus. When Jocasta is not answering Oedipus's questions, she is calming him down, asking him to go into the palace, telling him that he has nothing to worry about-no need to ask more questions for the rest of his life. Jocasta's casual attitude upsets the Chorus, which continues to be loyal to Oedipus throughout this section (see 761-767). The Chorus's ode at lines 954-997 serves as a reminder that neither Oedipus, Jocasta, nor the sympathetic audience should feel calm, because oracles speak to a purpose and are inspired by the gods who control the destiny of men. Throughout the play, the Chorus has been miserable, desperate for the plague to end and for stability to be restored to the city. Nevertheless, the Chorus holds staunchly to the belief that the prophesies of Tiresias will come true. For if they do not, there is no order on earth or in the heavens.

Oedipus the King, lines 1008 - 1310

And as for this marriage with your mother— have no fear. Many a man before you, in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed. Take such things for shadows, nothing at all— Live, Oedipus, as if there's no tomorrow!

Summary

A messenger enters, looking for Oedipus. He tells Jocasta that he has come from Corinth to tell Oedipus that his father, Polybus, is dead, and that Corinth wants Oedipus to come and rule there. Jocasta rejoices, convinced that since Polybus is dead from natural causes, the apocalypse that Oedipus will murder his father is false. Oedipus arrives, hears the messenger's news, and rejoices with Jocasta; king and queen concur that prophecies are worthless and the world is ruled by chance. However, Oedipus still fears the part of the prophecy that said he would sleep with his mother. The messenger says he can rid himself of that worry, because Polybus and his wife, Merope, are not really Oedipus's natural parents.

The messenger explains that he used to be a shepherd years ago. One day, he found a baby on Mount Cithaeron, near Thebes. The baby had its ankles pinned

together, and the former shepherd set them free. That baby was Oedipus, who still walks with a limp because of the injury to his ankles so long ago. When Oedipus inquires who left him in the woods on the mountain, the messenger replies that another shepherd, Laius's servant, gave him baby Oedipus. At this, Jocasta turns sharply, seeming to sense some horrible revelation on the horizon.

Oedipus wants to find this shepherd, so he can find out who his natural parents are. Jocasta begs him to abandon his search immediately, but Oedipus is insistent. After screaming and pleading some more to no avail, Jocasta finally flees back into the palace. Oedipus dismisses her concerns as snobbish fears that he may be born of poor parents, and Oedipus and the Chorus rejoice at the possibility that they may soon know who his parents truly are.

The other shepherd, who turns out to be the same shepherd who witnessed Laius's murder, comes onto the stage. The messenger identifies him as the man who gave him the young Oedipus. Oedipus interrogates the new arrival, asking who gave him the baby, but the shepherd refuses to talk. Finally, after Oedipus threatens him with torture, the shepherd answers that the baby came from the house of Laius. Questioned further, he answers that it was Laius's child, and that Jocasta gave it to him to destroy because of a prophecy that the child would kill his parents. But instead, the shepherd gave him to the other shepherd, so that he might be raised as a prince in Corinth. Realizing who he is and who his parents are, Oedipus screams that he sees the truth, and flees back into the palace. The shepherd and the messenger slowly exit the stage.

Analysis

Sophocles makes the scene in which Oedipus and Jocasta learn that Polybus is dead. Oedipus digests the news of Polybus's death without showing the slightest sign of grief. The moment becomes, in fact, an occasion for near ascendancy, as Oedipus believes his doubts about prophecies have been confirmed. He is now convinced that prophecies are useless. He even says, "Polybus/packs [all the prophecies] off to sleep with him in hell!" (1062-1063). Oedipus's strange elation reveals the extent to which he has withdrawn into himself after obtaining the knowledge that he killed his father. He and Jocasta elation in the smallest and most eccentric details in order to diminish some of the guilt Oedipus feels (for another example, see Oedipus and Jocasta's discussion at lines 938-951).

Oedipus's own perseverance, however, means that he will not allow his understanding to remain incomplete. When he learns that there is still a piece of the puzzle left unsolved—the identity of the man from whom the messenger received the baby Oedipus—Oedipus seems indubitably driven to ask questions until the whole truth is out. Thus, he gradually bereaves himself of dubious details that could alleviate his guilt. Jocasta, of course, solves the riddle before Oedipus-she realizes she is his mother while he is still imagining himself to be the child of slaves.

Oedipus must realize that something is amiss when Jocasta leaves the stage, screaming, but his speech at lines 1183-1194 is strangely joyful. Chance, he says in this speech, is his mother, and the waxing and waning moon his brothers. Overwhelmed by an onslaught of new information, Oedipus re-envisions his earthly relationships as celestial ones as he announces his intent to uncover his true identity. It seems that he is unable to face directly the reality of his origins-reconceiving his identity allows him to feel a sense of control over it, but it also keeps that identity ambiguous. He basically identifies himself as someone who must search for his identity. Oedipus, who is famous for his skill at solving riddles, thus makes his own life into a riddle.

The messenger and shepherd are both similar to and different from the messenger characters who enter at the end of Greek tragedies to announce the terrible events that have occurred offstage (as will happen at the end of Oedipus the King [lines 1365-1422]). Like the typical final-scene messenger, these characters bear important news that is largely concerned with events that have not happened onstage. But unlike the typical final-scene messenger, these characters bear news not only to the audience but also to the man whom the news directly affects.

Because Oedipus receives news of his own tragedy, his substantial actions near the play's conclusion become an aggrandize model of how the audience is expected to react to the words of the messenger characters, who narrate the catastrophes in the final scenes of Greek plays. Throughout the play, Oedipus has been concerned with precise words—of the oracle (102), of Jocasta when she mentions the three-way crossroads (805), of the messenger who escaped death in Laius's traveling party (932-937). After learning the truth of his origins, however, Oedipus travelling gives words physical consequence. He transforms the messenger's statement into a tangible, life-changing, physical horror, in a manner that shows the audience what its reaction should be.

Oedipus the King, Lines 1311–1684

Summary

The Chorus enters and cries that even Oedipus, greatest of men, was brought low by destiny, for he unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother. The messenger enters again to tell the Chorus what has happened in the palace. Jocasta is dead, by suicide. She locked herself in her bedroom, crying for Laius and weeping for her grotesque fate. Oedipus came to the door in a fury, asking for a sword and cursing Jocasta. He finally hurled himself at the bedroom door and burst through it, where he saw Jocasta hanging from a lariat. Seeing this, Oedipus sobbed and enclasp Jocasta. He then took the gold pins that held her robes and, with them, stabbed out his eyes. He kept lacerating the pins down his eyes, crying that he could not bear to see the world now that he had learned the truth.

Just as the messenger finishes the story, Oedipus emerges from the palace. With blood streaming from his blind eyes, he effluvium and rants at his fate, and at the infinite darkness that embraces him. He claims that though Apollo ordained his destiny, it was he alone who pierced his own eyes. He asks that he be banished from Thebes. The Chorus shrinks away from Oedipus as he curses his birth, his marriage, his life, and in turn all births, marriages, and lives.

Creon enters, and the Chorus expresses hope that he can restore order. Creon forgives Oedipus for his past accusations of treason and asks that Oedipus be sent inside so that the public display of shame might stop. Creon agrees to exile Oedipus from the city, but tells him that he will only do so if every detail is approved by the gods. Oedipus embraces the hope of exile, since he believes that, for some reason, the gods want to keep him alive. He says that his two sons are men and can take care of themselves, but asks that Creon take care of his girls, whom he would like to see one final time.

The girls, Antigone and Ismene, come forth crying. Oedipus enclasps them and says he weeps for them, since they will be ostracized from society, and no man will want to marry the offspring of an interbred marriage. He turns to Creon and asks him to promise that he will take care >f them. He reaches out to Creon, but Creon will not touch his hand. Oedipus asks his daughters to pray that they may have a better life than his. Creon then puts an end to the farewell, saying that Oedipus has wept shamefully long enough. Creon orders the guards to take Antigone and Ismene away from Oedipus, and tells Oedipus that his power has ended. Everyone exits, and the Chorus comes onstage once more. Oedipus, the greatest of j man, has fallen, they say, and so all life is miserable, and only death can bring peace.

Analysis

The speech of the Chorus, with which this section begins (1311-1350), turns the images of the plowman and ship's captain, which formerly stood for Oedipus's success and ability to manage the state, into images of his failure. And the wayin which it does so is quite extreme, focusing particularly on the sexual aspect of Oedipus's actions. Oedipus and his father have, like two ships in one port, shared the same "wide harbor," and Oedipus has plowed the same "furrows" his father plowed (1334-1339). The harbour image apparently refers to Jocasta's bedchamber, but both images also quite obviously refer to the other space Oedipus and his father have shared: Jocasta's vagina.

Images of earth and soil continue throughout the scene, most noticeably in one of Oedipus's final speeches, in which he talks to his children about what he has done (see 1621-1661). These images of earth, soil, and plowing are used to suggest the metaphor of the hefty plowman harrowing the soil of the state, but they also suggest the image of the soil drinking the blood of the family members Oedipus has killed (see in particular 1531-1537). Oedipus's crimes are presented as a kind of

infestation on the land, a plague-symbolized by the plague with which the play begins-that infects the earth on which Oedipus, his family, and his citizens stand, and in which all are buried as a result of Oedipus's violence.

After we learn of Oedipus's self-inflicted blinding, Oedipus enters, led by a boy (1432)-a clear visual echo of the Tiresias's entrance at line 337. Oedipus has become like the blind prophet whose words he scorned. Unable to see physically, he is now possessed of an insight, or an inner sight, that is all too piercing and revealing. Though the Chorus is fascinated with the amount of physical pain Oedipus must be in after performing such an act, Oedipus makes no mention of physical pain. Like Tiresias, he has left the concerns of the physical world behind to focus on the psychological torment that accompanies contemplation of the truth.

Once the mystery of Laius's murder has been solved, Creon quickly transfers the power to himself. Even in his newfound humbleness, Oedipus still clings to some trappings of leadership, the most pathetic example is his command to Creon to bury Jocasta as he sees fit. Oedipus finds it difficult to leave the role of commander, which is why he tries to preempt Creon's power by asking Creon to expatriate him. Creon, however, knows that Oedipus no longer has any real control. Creon is crustly, and just as efficient a leader as Oedipus was at the beginning of the play. Just as Oedipus anticipated the Chorus's demand for a consultation with the answer in the first scene, so Creon has anticipated Oedipus's request for banishment now: when Oedipus requests banishment, Creon says that he's already consulted "the god" about it (1574). Creon has also anticipated Oedipus's desire to see his daughters, and has them brought onstage and taken away again.

Mostly because he clashed with Creon, Oedipus becomes a tragic figure rather fran a monster in the play's final moments. Though throughout the play Oedipus has behaved willfully and proudly, he has also been earnest and forthright in all of his actions. We trust Oedipus's judgment because he always seems to mean what he says and to try to do what he believes is right. His punishment of blindness and exile seems just, therefore, because he inflicted it upon himself. Creon, on the other hand, has the outward trappings of Oedipus's candid, frank nature, but none of its substance. "I try to say what I mean; it's my habit," Creon tells Oedipus in the play's final lines, but the audience perceives this to be untrue (1671). Creon's earlier protestations that he lacked the desire for power are proved completely false by his eagerness to take Oedipus's place as king, and by the cutting ferocity with which he silences Oedipus at the end of the play. At the end of the play, one kind of pride has merely replaced another and all men, as the Chorus goes on to say, are destined to be miserable.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Theban plays consist of three plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King (also called Oedipus Tyrannus or Oedipus Rex), and Oedipus at Colonus. All three plays concern the fate of Thebes during and after the reign of King Oedipus. They have often been published under a single cover. Sophocles, however, wrote the three

plays for separate festival competitions, many years apart. Not only are the Theban plays not a true trilogy.

2. Each of the plays relates to the tale of the mythological Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother without knowledge that they were his parents. His family is fated to be doomed for three generations.

3. Oedipus's two daughters (and half-sisters), Antigone and Ismene, are sent out, and Oedipus laments that they should be born to such a cursed family. He asks Creon to watch over them and Creon agrees, before sending Oedipus back into the palace.

4. Homer's Odyssey contains the earliest account of the Oedipus myth when Odysseus encounters Jocasta, named Epicaste in the underworld. Homer briefly summarises the story of Oedipus, including the incest, patricide, and Jocasta's subsequent suicide. However in the Homeric version Oedipus remains King of Thebes after the revelation and neither blinds himself, nor is sent into exile.

5. Polynices is son of Oedipus, and thus also his brother. Polynices appears only very briefly in Oedipus at Colonus. He arrives at Colonus seeking his father's blessing in his battle with his brother, Eteocles, for power in Thebes. Polynices tries to point out the similarity between his own situation and that of Oedipus, but his words seem opportunistic rather than filial, a fact that Oedipus points out.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Write down the summary of the play, "Oedipus the King".
2. Describe the themes and motifs used in the play, "Oedipus the King".
3. Sketch the character of Oedipus in the play. "Oedipus the King".
4. Justify the title of the play, "Oedipus the King".
5. Discuss the life and literary career of Sophocles.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Sophocles the Playwright—S.M. Adams.
2. Greek Tragedy : A Literary Study—H.D.F. Kitto.
3. Oedipus at Thebes : Sophocles' Tragic Hero and His Time—Knox Bernard.
4. Oedipus Tyrannus : Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge—Charles Segal.
5. Greek Tragedy in Action—Oliver Taplin.

2

DOCTOR FAUSTUS-CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

STRUCTURE

- Learning goals
- Introduction
- About the author
- Plot of doctor Faustus
- Dramatis Personal
- Major characters—An intensive study
- Important themes, motifs and symbols
- Summary and analysis
- Important quotations
- Review questions
- Suggested Readings

LEARNING GOALS

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- Know about the English Dramatist, "Christopher Marlowe"
- Have a broad understanding of his works.
- Narrate the story of the play, "Doctor Faustus"
- Understand and discuss the themes that occur in "Dr. Jaustus."

INTRODUCTION

'The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus', commonly referred to simply as Doctor Faustus, is a play by Christopher Marlowe, based on the Faust's story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. Doctor Faustus was first published in 1604, eleven years after Marlowe's death and at least twelve years after the first performance of the play.

"No Elizabethan play outside the Shakespeare canon has raised more controversy than Doctor Faustus. There is no agreement concerning the nature of the text and the date of composition... and the

centrality of the Faust legend in the history of the Western world preclude any definitive agreement on the interpretation of the play..."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Marlowe (baptised 26 February 1564–30 May 1593) was an English dramatist, poet and translator of the Elizabethan era. As the highly acclaimed Elizabethan tragedian, next to William Shakespeare, he is known for his blank verse, his overreaching protagonists, and his mysterious death.

A warrant was issued for Marlowe's arrest on 18 May 1593. No reason for it was given, though it was thought to be connected to allegations of blasphemy—a manuscript believed to have been written by Marlowe was said to contain "vile heretical concepts." He was brought before the Privy Council for questioning on 20 May, after which he had to report to them daily. Ten days later, he was stabbed to death by Ingram Frizer. Whether the stabbing was connected to his arrest has never been resolved.

Early Life

Marlowe was born to a shoemaker in Canterbury named John Marlowe and his wife Catherine. His date of birth is not known, but he was baptised on 26 February 1564, and likely to have been born a few days before. Thus he was just two months older than his contemporary Shakespeare, who was baptised on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Marlowe attended The King's School, Canterbury (where a house is now named after him) and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge on a scholarship and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1584. In 1587 the university hesitated to award him his master's degree because of a rumour that he had converted to Roman Catholicism and intended to go to the English college at Rheims to prepare for priesthood. However, his degree was awarded on schedule when the Privy Council intervened on his behalf, commending him for his "faithful dealing" and "good service" to the Queen. The nature of Marlowe's service was not specified by the Council, but its letter to the Cambridge authorities has provoked much speculation, notably the theory that Marlowe was operating as a secret agent working for Sir Francis Walsingham's intelligence service. No direct evidence supports this theory, although the Council's letter is evidence that Marlowe had served the government in some capacity.

Literary Career

'Dido, Queen of Carthage' was Marlowe's first play. Marlowe's first play performed on stage in London was "Tamburlaine" (1587) about the conqueror Timur, who rises from shepherd to warrior. It is among the first English plays in blank verse, and, with Thomas Kyd's "The Spanish Tragedy", generally is considered the beginning of the mature phase of the Elizabethan theatre. Tamburlaine was a success, and was followed with Tamburlaine Part II. The sequence of his plays is unknown; all deal with controversial themes.

"The Jew of Malta", about a Maltese Jew's barbarous revenge against the city authorities, has a prologue delivered by a character representing Machiavelli. "Edward the Second" is an English history play about the deposition of King Edward II by his barons and the Queen, who resent the undue influence the king's favourites have in court and state affairs. The Massacre at Paris is a short and luridly written work, the only surviving text which was probably a reconstruction from memory of the original performance text, portraying the events of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, which English Protestants invoked as the blackest example of Catholic treachery. It features the silent "English Agent", whom subsequent tradition has identified with Marlowe himself and his connections to the secret service. Along with "The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus", "The Massacre at Paris" is considered his most dangerous play, as anarchist in London seized on its theme to advocate the murders of refugees from the low countries and, indeed, it warns Elizabeth I of this possibility in its last scene.

"The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus", based on the German Faustbuch, was the first dramatised version of the Faust legend of a scholar's dealing with the devil. While versions of "The Devil's Pact" can be traced back to the 4th century, Marlowe deviates outstandingly by having his hero unable to "burn his books" or lament to a merciful God in order to have his contract abolish at the end of the play. Marlowe's protagonist is instead torn apart by demons and dragged off screaming to hell. Dr Faustus is a textual problem for scholars as it was highly edited (and possibly censored) and rewritten after Marlowe's death. Two versions of the play exist: the 1604 quarto, also known as the A text, and the 1616 quarto or B text. Many scholars believe that the A text is more representative of Marlowe's original because it contains irregular character names and idiosyncratic spelling: the hallmarks of a text that used the author's handwritten manuscript, or "foul papers", as a major source.

Marlowe's plays were gigantically successful, no doubt, to the grandiose stage presence of Edward Alleyn. He was unusually tall for the time, and the haughty roles of Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas were probably written especially for him. Marlowe's plays were the foundation of the repertory of Alleyn's company, the Admiral's Men, throughout the 1590s.

Doctor Faustus-Christopher Marlowe

Marlowe also wrote "Hero and Leander" (published with a continuation by George Chapman in 1598), the popular lyric 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love', and translations of Ovid's Amores and the first book of Lucan's Pharsalia.

The two parts of Tamburlaine were published in 1590; all Marlowe's other works were published posthumously. In 1599, his translation of Ovid was banned and copies publicly burned as part of Archbishop Whitgift's crackdown on offensive material.

Spying

Marlowe is often imputed to have been a government spy. Park Honan's 2005 biography even had "Spy" in its title and the author Charles Nicholl speculates this is so, suggesting that Marlowe's recruitment took place when he was at Cambridge. Surviving college records from the period indicate Marlowe had a series of unusually lengthy absences from the university - much longer than permitted by university regulations - that began in the academic year 1584-1585. Surviving college buttery (dining room) accounts indicate he began spending extra vagrantly on food and drink during the periods he was in attendance - more than he could have bestowed on his known scholarship income.

As noted above, in 1587 the Privy Council ordered Cambridge University to award Marlowe his MA, repudiating scuttlebutt that he intended to go to the English Catholic college in Rheims, instead he had been engaged in unspecified "affaires" on "matters touching the benefit of his country". This is from a document dated 29 June 1587, from the Public Records Office-Acts of Privy Council.

It has sometimes been theorised that Marlowe was the "Morley" who was a tutor to Arbella Stuart in 1589. This possibility was first raised in a TLS letter by E. St John Brooks in 1937; in a letter to Notes and Queries, John Baker has added that only Marlowe could be Arbella's tutor, due to the absence of any other known "Morley" from the period with an MA and not otherwise occupied. If Marlowe was Arbella's tutor, and some biographers think that the "Morley" in

question may have been a brother of the musician Thomas Morley it might indicate that he was a spy, since Arbella, niece of Mary, Queen of Scots, and cousin of James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, was at the time a strong candidate for the progression to Elizabeth's throne.

In 1592, Marlowe was arrested in the town of Flushing in the Netherlands for his purported involvement in the replicating of coins, presumably related to the activities of seditious Catholics. He was sent to be dealt with by the Lord Treasurer (Burghley) but no charge or imprisonment resulted. This arrest may have disrupted another of Marlowe's spying missions: perhaps by giving the resulting coinage to the Catholic cause he was to infiltrate the followers of the active Catholic co-conspiration William Stanley and report back to Burghley.

Arrest and Death

In early May 1593, several bills were posted about London threatening Episcopal fugitives from France and the Netherlands who had settled in the city. One of these, the "Dutch church libel", written in blank verse, contained implication to several of Marlowe's plays and was signed, "Tamburlaine". On 11 May the Privy Council ordered the arrest of those responsible for the defamation. The next day, Marlowe's colleague Thomas Kyd was arrested. Kyd's lodgings were searched and a fragment of a dissident stretch was found. Kyd asserted that it had belonged to Marlowe, with whom he had been writing "in one chamber" some two years earlier. At that time they had both been working for an patrician frequenter, probably Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange. Marlowe's arrest was ordered on 18 May, when the Privy Council accidently knew that he might be found staying with Thomas Walsingham, whose father was a first cousin of the late Sir Francis Walsingham, Elizabeth's principal secretary in the 1580s and a man more deeply involved in state infiltration than any other member of the Privy Council. Marlowe duly appeared before the Privy Council on 20 May and was instructed to "give his daily attendance on their Lordships, until he shall be licensed to the contrary". On Wednesday, 30 May, Marlowe was killed.

Various accounts of Marlowe's death were current over the next few years. Francis Meres says Marlowe was "skewered to death by a risqué serving-man, a rival of his in his lewd love" as punishment for his "epicurism and atheism." In 1917, in the Dictionary of National Biography, Sir Sidney Lee wrote that Marlowe was killed in a drunken fight, and this is still often stated as fact today.

The official account came to light only in 1925 when the scholar Leslie Hotson discovered the coroner's report of the inquest on Marlowe's death, held two days later on Friday, 1 June, 1593. Marlowe had spent all day in a house in Deptford, owned by the widow Eleanor Bull, and together with three men: Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley. All three had been employed by one or other of the Walsinghams: Skeres and Poley hed helped snare the confederate in the Babington plot and Frizer was a servant of Thomas Walsingham. These witnesses deponed that Frizer and Marlowe had argued over the bill now famously known as the 'Reckoning' exchanging "divers malevolent words" while Frizer was sitting at a table between the other two and Marlowe was lying behind him on a couch. Marlowe snatched Frizer's poniard and wounded him on the head. In the ensuing struggle, according to the coroner's report, Marlowe was skewed above the right eye, killing him instantly. The jury concluded that Frizer acted in self-defence, and within a month he was condoned. Marlowe was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford immediately after theinquisition, on 1 June 1593.

Marlowe's death is purported by some to be an assassination for the following reasons:

1. The three men who were in the room with him when he died were all connected both to the state secret service and to the London underworld. Frizer and Skeres also had a long record as loan sharks and con-men, as shown by court records. Bull's house also had links to the government's snoop network".

2. Their story that they were on a day's pleasure outing to Deptford is purported to be far-fetched. In fact, they spent the whole day together, deep in discussion. Also, Robert Poley was carrying urgent and confidential dispatches to the Queen, who was at her residence, Nonsuch Palace in Surrey, but instead of delivering them, he spent the day with Marlowe and the other two, and didn't in fact hand them in until well over a week later, on 8 June.

3. It seems too much of a coincidence that Marlowe's death occurred only a few days after his arrest, evidently for apostasy.

4. The manner of Marlowe's arrest is purported to suggest causes more entwine than a simple charge of apostasy would generally indicate. He was released in spite of ostensible facie evidence, and even though other asseveration about him received within a few days, as described below, unadulterated connected Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Northumberland with the apostasy. Thus, some contend it to be

probable that the investigation was meant primarily as a warning to the politicians in the "School of Night", or that it was connected with a power struggle within the Privy Council itself.

The various incidents that hint at a relationship with the Privy Council, and by the fact that his patron was Thomas Walsingham, Sir Francis's second cousin once removed, who had been actively involved in intelligence work.

For these reasons and others, Charles Nicholl, in his book "The Reckoning on Marlowe's death" argues there was more to Marlowe's death than emerged at the inquisition. There are different theories of some degree of probability. Since there are only written documents on which to base any conclusions, and since it is probable that the most pivotal information about his death was never committed to writing at all, it is unlikely that the full circumstances of Marlowe's death will ever be known.

Works

The dates of composition are approximate.

Plays

- Dido, Queen of Carthage (c.1586) (possibly co-written with Thomas Nashe)
- Tamburlaine, part 1 (c.1587)
- Tamburlaine, part 2 (c. 1587-1588)
- The Jew of Malta (c.1589)
- Doctor Faustus (c.1589, or, c.1593)
- Edward II (c. 1592)
- The Massacre at Paris (c.1593)

The play, "Lust's Dominion" was ascribed to Marlowe upon its initial publication in 1657, though scholars and critics have almost concordantly rejected the ascription.

Poetry

- Translation of Book One of Lucan's Pharsalia (date unknown)
- Translation of Ovid's Elegies (c. 1580s?)
- The Passionate Shepherd to His Love (pre-1593; because it is constantly referred to in his own plays we can conjecture an early date of mid-1580s)

Hero and Leander (c. 1593, unfinished; completed by George Chapman, 1598)

Fictional Works About Marlowe

- Leo Host's Marlowe, stage musical based on Rost's book. 1981
- Louise Welsh's Tamburlaine Must Die, about the last two weeks of Marlowe's life. 2004 (Novel)
- Anthony Burgess' A Dead Man in Deptford' fictionalised account of Marlow's death. 1993 (Novel)
- Ged Parsons' The Christopher Marlowe Mysteries written by for BBC Radio 4 (1993) (Radio comedy series)
- Michael Butt's Unauthorized History: The Killing for BBC Radio 4 investigation into Marlowe's murder. Produced by Sasha Yevtushenko. 2010 (Play)
- Peter Whelan's The School of Night about Marlowe's playwriting career after his faked death at Deptford. (Play).

PLOT OF DOCTOR-FAUSTUS

Doctor Faustus, well respected German Scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and religion-and decides that he wants to learn to practise magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by mobilizing up Mephastophilis, a devil. Despite Mephastophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in banding for twenty-four years of service from Mephastophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and uses it to press a clown named Robin into his service.

Mephastophilis returns to Faustus with word that Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer. Faustus experiences some misgivings and wonders if he should lament and save his soul; in the end, though, he agrees to the deal, signing it with his blood. As soon as he does so, the words "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly," appear branded on his arm. Faustus again has second thoughts, but Mephastophilis vouchsafe rich gifts on him and gives him a book of incantation to learn. Later, Mephastophilis answers all of his questions about the nature of the world, refusing to answer only when Faustus asks him who made the universe. This refusal prompts yet another stint of misgivings in

Faustus, but Mephastophilis and Lucifer bring in incarnation of the Seven Deadly Sins to prance about in front of Faustus, and he is galvanized enough to quiet his doubts.

Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephastophilis, Faustus begins to travel. He goes to the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and plays a series of tricks. He derange the Pope's convivial by stealing food and boxing the Pope's ears. Following this incident, he travels through the courts of Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes. Eventually, he is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V, the enemy of the Pope, who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed fourth-century B.C. Macedonian king and conqueror. Faustus entreats up an image of Alexander, and Charles is suitably impressed. As in their perpetual separation from God and his repeated reflections on the pain that comes with perdition.

Chorus

Chorus is a character that stands outside the story, providing narration and commentary. The Chorus was prevailing in Greek tragedy.

Old Man

Old man is an inexplicable figure who appears in the final scene. The old man urges Faustus to lament and to ask God for clemency. He seems to replace the good and evil angels, who, in the first scene, try to ascendancy Faustus's behaviour.

Good Angel

Good Angel is a spirit that impulses Faustus to lament for his entente with Lucifer and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents, in many ways, Faustus's compunction and divided will between good and evil.

Evil Angel

Evil Angel is a spirit that serves as the analogue to the good angel and provides Faustus with reasons not to repent for sins against God. The evil angel represents the evil half of Faustus's compunction.

Lucifer

Lucifer is the prince of devils, the ruler of hell, and Mephastophilis's master.

Wagner

Wagner is Faustus's servant. Wagner uses his master's books to learn how to convene devils and work magic.

Clown

Clown is the character, who becomes Wagner's servant. The clown's antics provide comic relief; he is a diverting character, and his preposterous behavior initially disparity with Faustus's magnificance. As the play goes on, though, Faustus's behaviour comes to resemble that of the clown.

Robin

Robin is an ostler, or innkeeper, who, like the clown, provides a comic disparity to Faustus. Robin and his friend Rafe learn some basic illusion, demonstrating that even the least scholarly can possess skill in magic. Marlowe includes Robin and Rafe to illustrate Faustus's abasement as he submits to simple trickery such as theirs.

Rafe

Rafe is an ostler, and a friend of Robin. Rafe appears as Dick (Robin's friend and a clown) in B-text editions of Doctor Faustus.

Valdes and Cornelius

Valdes and Cornelius are two friends of Faustus, both magicians, who teach him the art of black magic.

Horse-Courser

A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus, which vanishes after the horse-courser rides it into the water, leading him to ransack revenge.

The Scholars

The Scholars are Faustus's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg. Loyal to Faustus, the scholars appear at the beginning and end of the play to express consternation at the turn Faustus's studies have taken, to gape at his achievements, and then to hear his brooded divulgence of his entente with Lucifer.

The Pope

The pope is the head of the Roman Catholic Church and a powerful political figure in Europe at Faustus's day. The Pope serves as both a

source of hilarity for the play's Episcopal audience and a symbol of the religious faith that Faustus has rejected.

Emperor Charles V

Emperor Charles V is the most powerful sovereign in Europe, whose court Faustus visits.

Knight

Knight is a German nobleman at the emperor's court. The knight is dubious of Faustus's power, and Faustus makes spike burgeon from his head to teach him a lesson. The knight is further developed and known as Tybalt in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus; Tybalt ransacks revenge on Faustus and plans to murder him.

Brun

Brun is a candidate for the papality, supported by the emperor. Bruno is captured by the pope and freed by Faustus. Bruno appears only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

Duke of Vanholt

Duke of Vanholt is a German nobleman whom Faustus visits.

Martino and Frederick

Martino and Frederick are friends of Benvolio who warily join his attempt to kill Faustus. Martino and Frederick appear only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

Faustus

Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe's play. He is a antithetical character, capable of prodigious enunciation and possessing stunning ambition, yet susceptible to a strange, almost willful blindness and a willingness to waste powers that he has gained at great cost. When we first meet Faustus, he is just preparing to commence on his career as a magician, and while we already precede that things will turn out badly (the Chorus's introduction, if nothing else, prepares us), there is nonetheless a magnificence to Faustus as he scrutinizes all the gapes that his magical powers will produce. He imagines accumulating up wealth from the four corners of the globe, reshaping the map of Europe (both politically and physically), and gaining access to every snippet of knowledge about the universe. He is

an haughty, self-augmenting man, but his ambitions are so grand that we cannot help being impressed; and we even feel commiserating toward him. He represents the spirit of the revivification, with its rejection of the gothic, God-centered universe, and its embrace of human possibility. Faustus, at least early on in his accretion of magic, is the quintessence of possibility.

But Faustus also enthrals an absurdity that becomes perceptible during his bargaining sessions with Mephastophilis. Having decided that an entente with the devil is the only way to fulfil his ambitions, Faustus then blinds himself happily to what such an entente actually means. Sometimes he tells himself that hell is not so bad and that one needs only "resilience"; at other times, even while conversing with Mephastophilis, he remarks to the disbelieving demon that he does not actually believe hell exists. Meanwhile, despite his lack of concern about the prospect of immutable perdition, Faustus is also assail with doubts from the beginning, setting a pattern for the play in which he repeatedly approaches penitence only to pull back at the last moment. Why he fails to lament is unclear: sometimes it seems a matter of pride and continuing ambition, sometimes a persuasion that God will not hear his plea. Other times, it seems that Mephastophilis simply persecutor him away from bewailing.

Compacting Faustus is less difficult than it might seem, because Marlowe, after setting his protagonist up as a grandly tragic figure of sweeping visions and immense ambitions, spends the middle scenes revealing Faustus's true, petty nature. Once Faustus gains his long-desired powers, he does not know what to do with them. Marlowe suggests that this precariousness stems, in part, from the fact that desire for knowledge leads indubitably toward God, whom Faustus has renounced. But, more generally, absolute power corrupts Faustus: once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything. Instead, he traipses around Europe, playing tricks on bumpkins and performing illusion acts to impress various heads of state. He uses his incredible gifts for what is substantially trifling entertainment. The fields of possibility narrow gradually, as he visits ever more minor nobles and performs ever more unimportant magic tricks, until the Faustus of the first few scenes is entirely devoured up in amateurism. Only in the final scene is Faustus rescued from amateurism, as the knowledge of his approaching annihilation restores his earlier gift of powerful diction; and he regains his panoramic sense of vision. Now, however, the vision that he sees is of hell looming up to emerging him. Marlowe uses much of his finest poetry to describe Faustus's final hours, during which

Faustus's desire for contrition finally wins out, although too late. Still, Faustus is restored to his earlier grandeur in his closing speech, with its hurried rush from idea to idea and its despairing, revivification repudiating last line, "Til burn my books!" He becomes once again a tragic hero, a great man undone because his intent have tuped up against the law of God.

Mephastophilis

The character of Mephastophilis (spelled Mephistophilis or Mephistopheles by other authors) is one of the first in a long tradition of congenial solemn literary devils, which includes figures like John Milton's Satan in Paradise Lost and Johann von Goethe's Mephistophilis in the nineteenth-century poem "Faust." Marlowe's Mephastophilis is particularly interesting because he has mixed tropes. On the one hand, from his first appearance he clearly intends to act as an agent of Faustus's damnation. Indeed, he openly admits it, telling Faustus that "when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the Scriptures and his savior Christ, / We fly in hope to get his sublime soul" (3.47-49). It is Mephastophilis who witnesses Faustus's pact with Lucifer, and it is he who, throughout the play, steps in whenever Faustus considers contribution to wheedle or threaten him into staying loyal to hell.

Yet there is an odd equivocation in Mephastophilis. He seeks to damn Faustus, but he himself is jinxed and speaks freely of the horrors of hell. In a famous passage, when Faustus remarks that the devil seems to be free of hell at a particular moment, Mephastophilis insists,

> Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
> Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
> And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
> Am not excruciated with ten thousand hells
> In being deprived of everlasting blise?
> (3.76-80)

Again, when Faustus sunnily and farcially, given that he is speaking to a demon declares that he does not believe in hell, Mephastophilis mewls and insists that hell is, indeed, real and terrible, as Faustus comes to know soon enough. Before the entente is sealed, Mephastophilis actually warns Faustus against making the deal with Lucifer. In an odd way, one can almost sense that part of

Mephastophilis does not want Faustus to make the same mistakes that he made. But, of course, Faustus does so anyway, which makes him and Mephastophilis lineage spirits. It is appropriate that these two figures dominate Marlowe's play, for they are two overly proud spirits doomed to hell.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Sin, vindication, and Imprecation

In so far as Doctor Faustus is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts clashing to the will of God. In making a entente with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly repudiates obedience to him, choosing instead to swear adherence to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be forgiven through the extenuating power of Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do, theoretically, is ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12—both of whom can be seen either as legate of God, quintessence of Faustus's compunction, or both.

Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven. In the Christian framework, this turning away from God denounces him to spend an perpetuity in hell. Only at the end of his life does Faustus desire to repent, and, in the final scene, he cries out to Christ to redeem him. But it is too late for him to repent. In creating this moment in which Faustus is still alive but incapable of being retrained, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview in order to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene. Having inhabited a Christian world for the entire play, Faustus spends his final moments in a slightly different universe, where indication is no longer possible and where certain sins cannot be forgiven.

The Conflict between Medieval and Revivification Values

Scholar R.M. Dawkins famously remarked that Doctor Faustus tells "the story of a revivification man who had to pay the gothic price for being one." While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play's central themes: the skirmish between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the centre of existence and swerved aside man and the natural world. The revivification was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new accentuation on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the gothic academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the revivification, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In the medieval model, tradition and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this sermon, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full revivification spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play's attitude toward the skirmish between medieval and revivification values is dubious. Marlowe seems confrontational toward the intent of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero straightforwardly in the medieval world, where perpetual imprecation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no devout traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus—as many readers have—a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these obtrude on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his descendant will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and amateurism that follow Faustus's pact with the devil, as he subsides from grand intent to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contradictory expounding. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though pioneering and gleaning, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

Power as a Corrupting Influence

Early in the play, before he agrees to the entente with Lucifer, Faustus is full of ideas for how to use the power that he seeks. He imagines tumbling up great wealth, but he also aspires to rotund the mysteries of the universe and to remake the map of Europe. Though they may not be entirely admirable, these plans are ambitious and inspire awe, if not sympathy. They lend a magnificence to Faustus's schemes and make his quest for personal power seem almost heroic, a sense that is reinforced by the eloquence of his early sermons.

Once Faustus actually gains the practically limitless power that he so desires, however, his horizons seem to narrow. Everything is possible to him, but his intent is somehow eroded. Instead of the grand designs that he inspects early on, he contents himself with performing illusion tricks for kings and noblemen and takes a strange delight in using his magic to play practical jokes on simple folks. It is not that power has falsified Faustus by making him evil: indeed, Faustus's behaviour after he sells his soul hardly rises to the level of true wickedness. Rather, gaining absolute power corrupts Faustus by making him mediocre and by transforming his illimitable ambition into a meaningless delight in petty celebrity.

In the Christian framework of the play, one can argue that true greatness can be achieved only with God's blessing. By cutting himself off from the creator of the universe, Faustus is précarious/perilous to amateurism. He has gained the whole world, but he does not know what to do with it.

The Divided Nature of Man

Faustus is constantly dubious about whether he should repent and lament to God or continue to follow his entente with Lucifer. His internal struggle goes on throughout the play, as part of him of wants to do good and serve God, but part of him (the dominant part, it seems) fervor after the power that Mephastophilis promises. The good angel and the evil angel, both of whom appear at Faustus's shoulder in order to Yearning him in different directions, symbolize this struggle. While these angels may be intended as an actual pair of supernatural beings, they clearly represent Faustus's divided will, which compels Faustus to commit to Mephastophilis but also to question this commitment continually.

Doctor Faustus-Christopher Marlowe

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Magic and the Supernatural Elements

The supernatural elements permeates everywhere in the story. Angels and devils flit about, magic incantation are cast, dragons pull barouche (albeit offstage), and even fools like the two hostiers, Robin and Rafe, can learn enough magic to muster demons. Still, it is worth noting that nothing terribly significant is virtuoso through magic. Faustus plays tricks on people, entreats up grapes, and explores the macrocosm on a dragon, but he does not fundamentally reshape the world. The magic power that Mephastophilis vouchsafe him is more like a toy than an asbounding, earth-shaking ability. Furthermore, the real drama of the play, despite all the supernatural tucks and pageant, takes place within Faustus's indecisive mind and soul, as he first sells his soul to Lucifer and then considers repenting. In this sense, the magic is almost incidental to the real story of Faustus's struggle with himself, which Marlowe intentional not as a fantastical battle but rather as a pragmatic portrait of a human being with a will divided between good and evil.

Practical Jokes

Once he gains his awesome powers, Faustus does not use them to do great deeds. Instead, he delights in playing tricks on people: he makes horns sprout from the knight's head and sells the horse-courser an enraptured horse. Such magical practical jokes seem to be Faustus's chief hilarity, and Marlowe uses them to illustrate Faustus's decline from a great, prideful scholar into a bored, middling magician with no higher ambition than to have a laugh at the expense of a collection of ninny.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent notional ideas or concepts.

Blood

Blood plays multiple symbolic roles in the play. When Faustus signs away his soul, he signs in blood, connotizing the permanent and supernatural nature of this entente coagulates on the page, however, symbolizing, perhaps, his own body's revolt against what he intends to

do. Meanwhile, Christ's blood, which Faustus says he sees running across the sky during his terrible last night, symbolizes the sacrifice that Jesus, according to Christian belief, made on the cross; this sacrifice opened the way for humankind to lament its sins and be saved. Faustus, of course, in his proud injudiciousness, fails to take this path to deliverance.

Faustus's Rejection of the Ancient Authorities

In scene 1, Faustus goes through a list of the major fields of human knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and doctrine-and convoke for each an ancient authority (Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and Jerome's Bible, respectively). He then flotsam all of these figures in favor of magic. This declining symbolizes Faustus's break with the gothic world, which prized authority above all else, in favor of a more modern spirit of free scrunity, in which experimentation and upheaval upstage trump the assertions of Greek philosophers and the Bible.

The Good Angel and the Evil Angel

The angels appear at Faustus's shoulder early on in the play-the good angel beseeching him to lament, and serve God, the evil angel beseeching him to follow his desires for power and serve Lucifer. The two symbolize his divided will, part of which wants to do good and part of which is sunk in sin.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Summary: Prologue

The Chorus, a single actor, enters and introduces the plot of the play. It will involve neither love nor war, he tells us, but instead will unearth the "form of Faustus' fortunes" (Prologue.8). The Chorus annals how Faustus was born to lowly parents in the small town of Rhode, how he came to the town of Wittenberg to live with his agnate, and how he was educated at Wittenberg, a famous German university. After earning the title of doctor of deity, Faustus became famous for his ability to discuss ecclesiastical matters. The Chorus adds that Faustus is "swollen with cunning" and has begun to practice sorcery, or black magic (Prologue. 20). The prelude concludes by stating that Faustus is seated in his study.

Analysis : Prelude

The Chorus's introduction to the play links Doctor Faustus to the tradition of Greek tragedy, in which a chorus traditionally comments on the action. Although we tend to think of a chorus as a group of people or singers, it can also be composed of only one character. Here, the Chorus not only gives us background information about Faustus's life and education but also peculiarly tells us that his swelling pride will lead to his downfall. The story that we are about to see is compared to the Greek parable of Icarus, a boy whose father, Daedalus, gave him wings made out of feathers and beeswax. Icarus did not deliberation his father's warning and flew too close the sun, causing his wings to melt and sending him showing to his death. Inj the same way, the Chorus tells us, Faustus will "mount above his reach" and suffer the consequences (Prelude.21).

The way that the Chorus introduces Faustus, the play's protagonist, is significant, since it reflects a commitment to revivification values. The European revivification of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a rebirth of interest in classical learning and inaugurated a new emphasis uri the individual in painting and literature. In the gothic era that preceded the revivification, the focus of scholarship was on God and doctrine; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the focus turned toward the study of humankind and the natural world, concluding in the birth of modern science in the work of men like Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton.

The Prelude locates its drama squarely in the revivification world, where humanistic values hold oscillate. Classical and gothic literature typically focuses on the lives of the great and famous—saints or kings or ancient heroes. But this play, the Chorus insists, will focus not on ancient battles between Rome and Carthage, or on the "courts of kings" or the "pomp of proud unflinding deeds" (Prologue.4—5). Instead, we are to witness the life of an ordinary man, born to humble parents. The message is clear: in the new world of the revivification, an ordinary man, like Faustus, a common-born scholar, is as important as any king or warrior, and his story is just as worthy of being told.

Summary: Scene 1

In a long serman, Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus's debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of

achieving inexplicable curative, is the most fruitful pursuit—yet he notes that he has achieved great prominence as a doctor already and that this renown has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with inconsequential matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and doctrine, seems to offer wider vistas; but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's contention that "[t]he reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are on their way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel admonish him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures instead; the evil angel uplifts him to go forward in his stalking of the black arts. After they evanesce, it is clear that Faustus is going to vigilance the evil spirit, since he rejoices at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge, and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

Valdes and Cornelius appear, and Faustus greets them, declaring that he has set aside all other forms of learning in favour of magic. They agree to teach Faustus the principles of the dark arts and describe the wondrous powers that will be his if he remains committed during his pursuit to learn magic. Cornelius tells him that "[t]he miracles that magic will perform/Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.136-137). Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are. Faustus invites them to dine with him, and they exit.

Analysis : Scene 1

The scene now shifts to Faustus's study, and Faustus's opening speech about the various fields of scholarship reflects the academic setting of the scene. In proceeding through the various intellectual disciplines and citing authorities for each, he is following the dictates of medieval scholarship, which held that learning was based on the authority of the wise rather than on experimentation and new ideas. This serman, then, marks Faustus's rejection of this gothic model, as he

Doctor Faustus-Christopher Marlowe

sets aside each of the old authorities and resolves to strike out on his own in his quest to become powerful through magic.

As is true throughout the play, however, Marlowe uses Faustus's own words to expose Faustus's blind spots. In his initial speech, for example, Faustus establishes a hierarchy of disciplines by showing which are nobler than others. He does not want merely to protect men's bodies through medicine, nor does he want to protect their property through law. He wants higher things, and so he proceeds on to religion. There, he quotes selectively from the New Testament, picking out only those passages that make Christianity appear in a negative light. He reads that M[t]he reward of sin is death," and that "[i]f we say we that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us" (1.40-43). The second of these lines comes from the first book of John, but Faustus neglects to read the very next line, which states, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Thus, through selective quoting, Faustus makes it seem as though religion promises only death and not forgiveness, and so he easily rejects religion with a fatalistic "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!" (1.48). Meanwhile, he uses religious language—as he does throughout the play-to describe the dark world of wizards that he enters. "These metaphysics of magicians /And clairvoyant books are heavenly" (1.49-50), he declares without a trace of irony. Having gone upward from medicine and law to theology, he envisions magic and wizards as the crowning discipline, even though by most standards it would be the least noble.

Faustus is not a villain, though; he is a tragic hero, a protagonist whose character blemishes lead to his downfall. Marlowe endues him with tragic grandeur in these early scenes. The logic he uses to reject religion may be flawed, but there is something imposing in the breadth of his ambition, even if he pursues it through diabolical means. In Faustus's long speech after the two angels have whispered in his ears, his rhetoric outlines the modern quest for control over nature (albeit through magic rather than through science) in glowing, inspiring language. He offers a long list of imposing goals, including the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, and political power, that he believes he will achieve once he has mastered the dark arts. While the reader or playgoer is not expected to approve of his quest, his intents are imposing, to say the least. Later, the actual uses to which he puts magical powers are disappointing and gaudy. For now, however, Faustus's reams to inspire wonder.