

Linguistic Indeterminacy and the Crisis of Authority in *Oedipus Rex*

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Abstract—Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* has been a rich source for scholars, yielding various interpretations spanning centuries. This study examines the play as a case study of how interpretation and power intertwine. By placing the play within the modern crisis of interpretation, particularly interpretation as an instrument of power, this study enters into a dialogue with postmodernist critical thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. It positions the play as a tragedy of epistemic pride, in which Oedipus asserts his interpretative framework as superior to legitimize his authority. Oedipus rules not only politically but also semiotically. As ruler of Thebes, his authority transcends the usual forms to include interpretative authority. His downfall is caused by epistemic hubris—pride in his own intellectual power of interpretation. He fails to understand that the oracle does not conform to the normal communicative functions of language. The correspondence between signifiers and signifieds is undermined by the oracle’s multiple interpretations and uncertainty of meaning. Oedipus’s world is governed by linguistic indeterminacy and referential disintegration, and as such, the referentiality of language to the world is no longer reliable. Oedipus’s authority does produce the knowledge that ultimately solves the riddle of Laius’s murder. However, his tragedy lies in the realization that this knowledge counters his understanding of language, and thus, of the world around him. The knowledge produced through Oedipus’s power proves tragic. He ends up a second Teiresias, blind but not as wise.

Index Terms—indeterminacy, power dynamics, *Oedipus Rex*, signification, referentiality

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that *Oedipus Rex* has generated a huge corpus of critical material, the play remains a rich, inexhaustible source for scholars to revisit and answer some of the questions that remain open: What kind of tragedy is *Oedipus Rex*? In what tragic perspective are readers to understand it? Scholars have long debated whether *Oedipus Rex* is a tragedy of knowledge, free will, or fate. Aristotle’s *Poetics* has been influential in gearing readers towards the conclusion that knowledge is at the heart of this tragedy. Therefore, interpreting *Oedipus Rex* as a tragedy of knowledge is warranted, with reference to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. When Aristotle cites *Oedipus Rex* as the prime example of the perfect tragic action, he relies on a specific definition of tragedy that entails “anagnorisis”, i.e. recognition, which is defined in the *Poetics* as “a change from ignorance to knowledge” (1996, p. 18). Furthermore, the mechanism of the intricate plot culminating in Oedipus’s ardent, detective-like pursuit of the truth regarding the murder of Laius led many critics to read the play as a tragedy of knowledge par excellence.

E. R. Dodds attempts to interpret the play against the already existing numerous interpretations as a tragedy of human ignorance and limited knowledge in the relentless search for truth. He humorously hopes that scholars defending such readings of the play, namely, those who view the play as a tragedy of fate or free will, are dead and buried, and he adds, “If the reader feels—as he very well may—that in this paper I am flogging a dead horse, I can only reply that on the evidence I have quoted the animal is unaccountably still alive” (1966, p. 38). Dodds’ article was published in 1966, and today, nearly 60 years later, the play is still alive for readers in 2025. This study explores the possibility that *Oedipus Rex* may signify something entirely different to 21st century readers by analyzing how language, interpretation, and power intertwine in the play through postmodernist theoretical ideas drawn from Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In *Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of Oedipus Rex*, Jean-Pierre Vernant analyzes the play from a structuralist viewpoint. According to Vernant, Oedipus is not a victim of fate but of the world he lives in, where he is caught up in a maze of binary oppositions and contradictions. He emphasizes the idea that Oedipus lives in a Greek world where the social and the religious context result in ambiguity and duality. Knowledge makes Oedipus King of Thebes as he solves the riddle of the Sphinx and thereby becomes the city’s savior, yet this very knowledge leads to his downfall when he discovers the truth about his identity and what he has done — patricide and incest. Vernant points out that uncertainty permeates the drama. This is shown in the double meanings of predictions and the conversations among the characters, which sometimes have interpretations only fully understood as the story develops. The paradoxes structurally

permeate the play: Oedipus is simultaneously the son and the husband, the king and the murderer, the solver of riddles and the riddle itself. Vernant states that “the equivocation in the words of Oedipus corresponds to the ambiguous status which is conferred on him in the play and upon which the whole tragedy is constructed” (1978, p. 477). Such uncertainty reveals the tragic irony of Oedipus’s circumstances: his attempts to escape his fate unwittingly bring him face to face with it.

In *Freud and Oedipus*, Peter Rudnytsky examines Sigmund Freud’s engagement with *Oedipus Rex*, and he goes beyond Freud to read the play as a “quest for self-knowledge” (1987, p. 249), reflecting the interpretative tension and meaning-making in the play that make Oedipus “a representative hero of self-knowledge” (1987, p. 314). Rudnytsky furthermore identifies the dramatic action as a hermeneutic endeavor to uncover the truth of the self. The tragic end of Oedipus is not the result of a Freudian psychosexual fate, but rather an epistemological journey in search of identity.

In a similar vein, Bernard Knox’s *Oedipus at Thebes* identifies the play as a drama of knowledge and a study of intellectual pride. According to Knox, Oedipus is endowed with a fifth-century Athens spirit that is characterized by “pride in the superiority of its intellect” (1998, p. xi). Knox’s main argument is that *Oedipus Rex* is not purely a tragedy of fate but one of knowledge where Oedipus leads himself to destruction through his pursuit of knowledge. Oedipus, therefore, is not a victim of fate but of intellectual pride that blinds him to the tragic fate generated by the very truth he seeks. The play examines the paradoxical nature of knowledge with its dual nature: an instrument of enlightenment, yet one of destruction.

Similarly, Karl Harshbarger points out in his article “Who Killed Laius?” that *Oedipus Rex* is a tragedy of knowledge because “Oedipus is a man who [wants] to know too much” (1965, p. 125), and his urge to seek knowledge of the murderer of Laius is underscored by the conflicting narratives in the play. One narrative says that robbers killed Laius while another implicates Oedipus as the murderer. Harshbarger states that it is not just Oedipus who is in a state of uncertainty, but the audience as well. He invites readers even to investigate the possibility of the Chorus being the murderer. This is justified by the difficulty of attaining epistemological certainty, which is complicated in the play by misinterpretations and multiple narratives.

In his seminal work *Freud and Philosophy*, Paul Ricoeur argues that Sigmund Freud appropriated *Oedipus Rex* to produce a reductive reading of the play as a universal psychic drama of repressed desires. For Ricoeur, there are two plays: One of patricide and incest and another of self-recognition. *Oedipus Rex* is the second tragedy, and it is mainly about the unconcealment of the self, the recognition of the self that has been deeply buried in the unconscious. Ricoeur provides a second interpretation of the play pointing out:

This interpretation no longer concerns the drama of incest and parricide, a drama that has already taken place when the tragedy begins, but rather the tragedy of truth. It appears that Sophocles’s creation does not aim at reviving the Oedipus complex in the minds of the spectators; on the basis of a first drama, the drama of incest and parricide, Sophocles has created a second, the tragedy of self-consciousness, of self-recognition. (1970, p. 516)

Ricoeur advocates a hermeneutic approach to the play that allows for multiplicity of interpretations. The Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the self is only one aspect of the hermeneutic configuration of the play. In fact, the hermeneutic dimension permeates the play. The riddle of the Sphinx requires interpretation to be solved, and the oracle involves interpretation, especially when it is generally characterized by ambiguity. Interpretation is also the key word that distinguishes Oedipus, raises him to the throne, and misinterpretation leads to his downfall.

Drawing on a comparable line of Ricoeur’s approach, Havi Hannah Carel (2006) identifies the hermeneutic implications of the play. She asserts that Oedipus’s quest for knowledge is at the heart of the play, yet Oedipus’s power of interpretation is limited and flawed. Thus, the play is an investigation of the human will to arrive at certainty impeded by the limitation of human knowledge. Moreover, Carel argues that the play presents ambiguity regarding Oedipus’s knowledge. To address this ambiguity, she suggests interpreting such knowledge through a Freudian perspective, focusing on the unconscious. Consciously, Oedipus does not know that he committed patricide and incest, but unconsciously he does. This epistemic ambiguity leads to a moral ambiguity. Carel investigates the question of how much unconscious knowledge is deemed responsible for action. For Carel, “the play is constituted by a hermeneutic circle” (p. 98); therefore, the play resists single or reductive interpretations.

This very resistance to interpretation is the key to understanding *Oedipus Rex*. This resistance to interpretation is a condition of possibility that makes understanding possible. According to Georg-Hans Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (2004, pp. 271-281). The text has its own alterity, and it does not yield itself easily to the reader when it is deep; the deeper the text, the more resistant to interpretation it becomes. This is a sign that the text is still alive, inviting us to interpret it. The play is undoubtedly a dynamic text that invites ongoing interpretations from readers across different historical, and cultural contexts. To understand *Oedipus Rex*, readers ought to engage with the text through the Gadamerian concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons), where “every interpretation has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs” (2004, p. 398). When readers enter a dialogic conversation with the text, it becomes possible for a new postmodernist interpretation. As Dodds and others approached the play from their horizons, readers today can approach it as well from their postmodernist, historical and cultural horizon.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper employs qualitative, critical methodology to examine Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* with reliance on Derrida's theory of linguistic indeterminacy and Foucault's concept of the correlation between knowledge and power. The aim is to explore how Sophocles's play uses the instability of meaning and the politics of interpretation in the tragic design of the play. Furthermore, this paper investigates how signification is deferred and destabilized as a site of struggle and authority practice rather than being a transparent vehicle of meaning.

The methodology in this paper has at its core the concept of *différance*, which unsettles the idea that language can deliver clear, fixed meanings. This study draws on Derrida's concept of *différance* to show that *Oedipus Rex* is a play that represents a crisis of reference in the world of the protagonist, destabilizing his identity and his relationship to those around him. The key scenes of the play—Oedipus's understanding of the oracle, his encounter with Teiresias, and his final self-recognition—are analyzed through their uncovering of how Oedipus's linguistic world is governed by indeterminacy and ambiguity that resist closure. The other contributing element to the methodology in this paper is Foucault's theory of discourse and the correlation between knowledge and power. For Oedipus, language and interpretation serve as a mechanism of wielding power. Meaning-making is a privilege to those who have power, and once Oedipus realizes that his interpretation is flawed, his power collapses. Foucault's ideas on discourse and power inform a reading of the play as a text that presents interpretation not as a neutral outcome of linguistic processes, but as an integral force at play within the structure of power dynamics.

By integrating Foucault's critique of interpretive regimes with Derrida's theory of language, this methodology allows for a re-reading of *Oedipus Rex* not as a tragedy of fate or character, but as a tragedy of discursive power where meaning is contested, destabilized, dismantled, and constructed. Truth in the play is inseparable from the power that has the claim to construct meaning and interpret both language and reality.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From a new postmodernist perspective that focuses on language and the hermeneutic dimension, *Oedipus Rex* can be read as a tragedy of a man whose epistemic pride in the power of interpretation and solving riddles blinds him to the nature of the Derridean world he lives in. Lost in a labyrinthine world of linguistic indeterminacy, Oedipus fails to comprehend the linguistic nature of the oracle and its referential relevancy to his identity and the world around him. His search throughout the play is not just for the murderer of Laius, but for interpretation on both the linguistic and the existential levels.

Adhering to the Aristotelian formula, the fall of the tragic hero in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* is typically viewed as a result of hubris, i.e. pride. The general tendency among critics is to take "pride" from the moral point of view. The flaw of the tragic hero need not be moral. It is the task of the critic, therefore, to identify hubris outside the moral sphere and answer the following question: What kind of pride does the tragic hero have? To locate hubris in *Oedipus Rex* outside the moral sphere requires understanding of the Greek world in which Oedipus lives, and which the play itself reflects. It is a world where a regicide has resulted in plaguing the city of Thebes, and men sought the consultation of the god Apollo for cure. The oracle, which is the reply of Apollo, requires a certain aptitude for decoding. Oedipus has already gained the reputation of one skilled in solving riddles. He is the one to solve the riddle of the Sphinx and thus save Thebes. The Chorus describes him more than once as the one "who solved the famous riddle" and the one who "answered the Sphinx's riddling demands" (2009, p. 63). The riddle of the Sphinx poses the following question: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon and three legs in the evening?" (2009, p. xxvii). Unless taken metaphorically, the riddle remains unsolved. The answer requires a certain aptitude to avoid the literal meaning and opt for the metaphorical one. Understanding the meaning of the riddle is a priori to solving it. Interpreting the riddle is the hard part; solving the riddle afterwards is easy. What is truly difficult is interpreting the language of the riddle on the metaphorical level. Once one realizes that the words in the riddle are used metaphorically, the riddle is immediately solved. The words "morning", "afternoon", and "evening" respectively mean early childhood, youth, and old age. The word "three" does not refer to literally three legs but two legs and a cane usually used by old. The processing of information in this manner to solve the riddle is specifically related to the hermeneutic aspect of Oedipus's intellectual power.

Oedipus saved Thebes through this kind of capacity to understand the meaning of the Sphinx's riddle; the answer followed without much difficulty. Similarly, the murder of Laius posits another riddle to Oedipus that requires solving to purge the city of the plague, and who is better than the already acclaimed master of interpretation who has been able to decode the Sphinx's riddle? The search for the murderer of Laius is the turning point in the play, where Oedipus reveals his pride in his interpretative power. In his counter-attack on Teiresias, Oedipus reveals his pride in his power of reasoning over men and gods together:

The riddle should not have waited for a stranger
to solve it. There was need of a prophet—
but neither from birds nor gods did you learn
the answer. *It was I, Oedipus,*

the ignorant, who stopped her, who triumphed

through my own intelligence, not the help of gods or birds. (Sophocles, 2009, pp. 393-398) [emphasis added]

The aptitude for decoding in the Greek world was part of solving riddles and interpreting oracles. To think of the oracle as an utterance that belongs to a system of signification subject to man's power of interpretation at will is to miss the Greek concept of the oracle. For them, the oracle is an utterance that belongs to a system of signification, subject to Time's power of revealing its interpretation, and any attempt to override that power has tragic consequences. It is not without a price, therefore, that men pay for the attempt to trespass the boundaries of Time. Confident in his interpretative power, Oedipus misinterprets the Delphic oracle. This misinterpretation plays a decisive role in bringing about his downfall as a tragic hero. Accordingly, the tragedy of Oedipus ought to be read as a tragedy of epistemic pride resulting in misinterpretation with tragic consequences.

The riddle of the Sphinx is central to the action prior to the play and serves as the reason behind Oedipus's rise to power. The oracle, on the other hand, is the center of the action proper. It is the dynamic enunciation that propels the tragedy towards its fulfillment of the Aristotelian requisite of anagnorisis, the change from ignorance to knowledge. Oedipus succeeds in understanding the riddle and does solve it, yet he is incapable of understanding the oracle and, therefore, is incapable of interpreting it. It is this misinterpretation of the oracle that brings his downfall.

How is it that Oedipus, famed for solving riddles, misconstrues the meaning of the oracle? This question could be answered if the reader approaches the oracle from a perspective that is different from the riddle. The riddle of the Sphinx is purely linguistic, and its referents are in language itself. Therefore, its interpretation involves reading it metaphorically. The oracle, on the other hand, is a linguistic pronouncement similar to the riddle as such but linked to referents in the world, not in language. The pronouncement of the oracle states that Oedipus is to kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus takes these words literally, and rightly so, since there is no room for metaphorical interpretation with such words as "father" and "mother". His misunderstanding of the meanings of the words lies in misidentifying their referents in the world. Oedipus's main tragic flaw is that of misreading the oracle, because, as one critic rightly puts it, "Meaning is not a property of words: it is a consequence of relations that always include human beings... Everything depends on what relations are established, and in what way" (Searle, 1977, p. 317).

Misinterpretation occurs when Oedipus confuses linguistic utterances with their referents. Such confusion is unavoidable when the utterance has a multiplicity of referents, something that makes the utterance ambiguous. Linguistically speaking, the oracle is not ambiguous; Oedipus is to kill his father and marry his mother. As long as the oracle refers to a linguistic meaning, the oracle cannot afford more than one interpretation. The ambiguity of the oracle lies elsewhere. It is only when the oracle is connected to the world in which Oedipus lives that it becomes referentially ambiguous; a world where a signifier has more than one signified. The word "father" refers simultaneously to King Laius, the biological father, and Polybus, the adoptive father. Similarly, the word "mother" refers simultaneously to Queen Jocasta, the biological mother, and Queen Merope, the adoptive mother.

When language is used to refer beyond itself and extends signification to objects in the world, misinterpretation is unavoidable when the words do not match reality. For Laius, the meaning of the word "father" in the oracle signifies Laius himself, but the meaning of the same word for Oedipus signifies Polybus. Similarly, the word "mother" for Laius refers to Jocasta, whereas for Oedipus, it refers to Merope. The meaning of the word "father" and "mother" lose their stability as signifiers when they doubly refer to Laius and Polybus and to Jocasta and Merope. Oedipus lives in a confused world of double referentiality, or as Marianne Novy calls it, "double parenthood" (2005, p. 38). Oedipus's attempt to control his fate by disallowing the oracle to come to its fulfillment fails because he misinterprets the referents of the words "father" and "mother". Richard O. Allen states that "[c]ontrary to the humanist argument that tragedy relates directly to normal social reality, the tragic experience actually embodies a radical distortion of reality" (1971, p. 400). This is exactly what happens in *Oedipus Rex*: the world of Oedipus is referentially distorted.

The best scene that sheds light more than any other on the distorted reality in *Oedipus Rex* is where Oedipus summons Teiresias to interpret the oracle and tell him the name of the murderer who killed king Laius. Oedipus uses the word "murderer" to curse the man who killed Laius; he cannot see that he himself is the referent of this word. It is Teiresias who recognizes the flaw in Oedipus's interpretation of referents. Teiresias remarks to Oedipus, "... your words fall wide of the mark and miss their aim. I don't want mine to do the same" (Sophocles, 2009, pp. 324-325). Later in the same encounter, Teiresias bluntly sets the referent right for Oedipus, "you yourself are the murderer you seek" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 362). It is at this point that we see Oedipus suffer a shock to his world of signification. Oedipus is confronted by Teiresias with the idea that his words do not mean what they think they mean. His hermeneutic pride makes him incapable of adjusting his linguistic world so that the words match their intended referents. His hermeneutic pride is revealed in his reply to Teiresias's words. He cannot accept Teiresias's interpretation since it proves Oedipus's mismatch of the word "murderer" and its referent. This is why he rejects Teiresias's reading of the events, declaring, "Spew out whatever you like—it will mean nothing to me" (Sophocles, 2009, p. 365). Oedipus insists on imposing his own understanding over any competing interpretation that might undermine his authority. The world of Oedipus is clearly one where signifiers and their signifieds are not in their natural order. Linguistically, the world of Oedipus is indeed out of joint.

Teiresias further taunts Oedipus for not being able to capture the meaning of his shameful deed of marrying his own mother, a deed that could not have been conceived except for Oedipus's inability to locate the true referent of the word "mother" in the oracle:

Every cave and shelter in Cithaeron will echo
with your cries, when you realize

the full meaning of the marriage

you thought would be your safe harbor. (Sophocles, 2009, pp. 420-423)

Oedipus's confidence in his power of interpretation enables him to solve the Sphinx's riddle, but the murder of Laius is a hard mystery to unravel. Using language to interpret language is not always the path to interpretation. The duplicity of signifieds in Oedipus's world leads him to miss the hermeneutic mark. The Chorus addresses the audience at the end of the play to look at the transformation of Oedipus who solved the famous riddles; a transformation resulting from the same interpretative talent. Teiresias's words prove prophetic when he earlier tells Oedipus earlier that the latter would be destroyed by the very talent of which he is most proud. His defiant reply to Oedipus makes it clear that the blind man can see clearly the tragic path which is paved by Oedipus's very talent of solving riddles:

Teiresias: This day bears your birth and destruction.

Oedipus: Riddling again!

Teiresias: You are good at riddles.

Oedipus: You mock my talent.

Teiresias: The same talent has destroyed you. (Sophocles, 2009, pp. 438-441)

The tragic flaw of Oedipus is not limited to confusing signifiers and signifieds, nor to pride in his interpretative talent; it is also associated with exercising interpretation as a tool of power. As Michel Foucault argues in *Knowledge/Power*, "It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (1988, p. 52). Power and knowledge are inseparable; they are intertwined. Knowledge produces power, and power in its turn produces knowledge. Foucault links the tyranny of Oedipus to the form of knowledge he wields — one grounded in inquiry, investigation, and testimonies in contrast to the divinatory, oracular form of knowledge. The clash of two forms of knowledge is displayed in the confrontation between Oedipus and Teiresias. The tyranny of Oedipus manifests itself through a kind of display of knowledge. Foucault rightly observes, "whenever he appears, exercising his power, it is in the form of the one who knows: I know, I have seen. In this way Oedipus manifests interdependently his knowledge and his power" (2013, p. 244).

Moreover, Foucault highlights the negative effect of Oedipus's impurity on Oedipus's knowledge. Due to the impurity regarding Oedipus's patricide and incest, the tyrant-knower gradually loses grip on his knowledge. Commenting on Oedipus, Foucault writes:

He no longer knows what to do, for although he does not yet know this, his impurity has put him outside the *nomos* [law and customs]. He no longer knows the order of things and the human order ... every time a piece of news arrives, a fragment of knowledge, he recognizes (and is not mistaken) that a part of his power is being taken from him. (Foucault, 2013, p. 191)

Foucault's idea of power dynamics in *Oedipus Rex* is based on the premise that the Greek world is morally oriented. Impurity, or moral transgression, leads to social disorder and obscures knowledge. In the play, Oedipus's downfall begins with a rupture in self-knowledge which ultimately strips him of power. Oedipus's loss of power is concomitant with his gradual recognition of the loss of knowledge. When the truth about Oedipus's identity is revealed, his epistemic collapse is complete. Power shifts away from him, in full alignment with Foucault's assertion that knowledge and power are inseparable. Only those who demonstrate purity and respect for "nomos" are entitled to access knowledge. The loss of purity renders Oedipus unworthy of both knowledge and power, as he becomes tainted by patricide and incest.

However, if the moral perspective is excluded, the knowledge/power dialectic in the play can be applied whether Oedipus is guilty of impurity or not. The interpretative power Oedipus demonstrates is an exercise of knowledge, and therefore, of power. The search for the murderer of Laius is driven by a desire to uncover the truth as an Oedipal manifestation of power. Oedipus is the ruler of Thebes, and this assumed power urges him to be the one who reveals the truth about the murder of Laius, just as he was the one who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. Any other truth is rejected, even the one advanced by Teiresias. Confident in his ability to solve riddles, Oedipus demands answers to assert his authority with an excessive reliance on reason and the power of interpretation, unlike Teiresias who relies on prophetic knowledge.

V. CONCLUSION

Throughout the play, the truth regarding Oedipus's identity is constructed, controlled, and contested in the various competing narratives of Oedipus, Teiresias, Jocasta, and the shepherd. Being the king of Thebes, Oedipus assumes the role of investigator, judge, and interpreter of the murder case of king Laius. His overconfidence in interpreting signs and clues reflects his epistemic tragic flaw and his violent exercise of knowledge/power. When faced with the crisis of the plague of Thebes after the murder of Laius, he alone is to solve the mystery of the murder. Any other narrative, though true, is rejected by Oedipus. He dismisses Teiresias's accusation that he is the very murderer he seeks, and he also selectively takes pieces of Jocasta's account about the murder of Laius and ignores others that might incriminate him. His position as ruler of Thebes by virtue of his intellectual power prevents him from accepting any other narrative. Interpretation for Oedipus is a tool of power; consequently, he cannot accept any interpretation advanced by Teiresias, as it undermines his authority as ruler. This exercise of power ends when Oedipus reaches the tragic knowledge of having committed patricide and incest.

As Segal (1999) puts it, “becoming like Teiresias, Oedipus abandons control over others for knowledge of himself” (p. 241). Even before blinding himself, Oedipus acts like a blind man, groping for truth in a world of unstable systems of signification, referentiality, and meaning. It is a dangerous world, especially for someone such as Oedipus; someone who practices interpretative tyranny, asserting his own interpretation over all others only to witness the collapse of his interpretative framework at the end. Believing he can decipher the text of reality, Oedipus discovers that reality resists interpretation. The play’s design centers around the deferral of fixing the meaning Oedipus seeks to impose on events, allowing multiple meanings to overlap without closure. The tragedy of Oedipus resides in his relentless insistence on seeking closure, though a tragic one; a closure that marks his confrontation with his doppelgänger—a dark shadow of himself he finally encounters but does not wish to see.

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