

Introduction

Greek Mythology is full of stories depicting their gods in wonderful and, at times, horrifying light. The Greek gods are depicted as powerful creatures who exhibit human characteristics. However, since these beings are not human but divine, they have the power to make or break the lives of mere mortals. They use these powers to their advantage and for their pleasure. The three tragedies that will be discussed in this paper cast the Greek gods in a terrible light and depict the cruel nature of these creatures.

Body Paragraph

The first tragedy under discussion is that of Oedipus Rex. Oedipus's father, Laius, has been responsible for breaking the sacred laws of hospitality in his youth. Laius was welcomed by the king of Pisa after Laius lost his throne due to internal strife. However, instead of thanking his host for his hospitality, Laius kidnaps his son, Chrysippus. Laius carries Chrysippus off to Thebes, where he rapes the boy. This horrifying act causes Laius and his descendants to be cursed by the gods.

Body Paragraph

While Laius certainly deserves to be cursed, the terrible act he committed is not the fault of his descendants. His son and his wife took no part in the rape of Chrysippus and are entirely innocent of any wrongdoing. However, it is Oedipus and Jocasta who suffer the most due to this curse. Oedipus kills Laius, and while he certainly deserves to be killed by his blood, he does not suffer in a manner befitting his crime. Oedipus, on the other hand, is left devastated. After destroying his eyes, he states, "If I still had my eyes, old man, how could I face Hades in the underworld? How could I face my parents after what I had done to them both? For such atrocious acts, suicide is too small a price to pay." (*Sophocles (c.496–c.406 BC) - Oedipus Rex:*

Translated by George Theodoridis). Jocasta also kills herself when she learns the truth. The gods are so angered by the atrocity committed by Laius that they ensure that the entire line of Laius would suffer due to his act. In this manner, the gods show that those who anger them will suffer the most horrifying of life and death.

The second tragedy under discussion is that of *Bacchae*. In this story, Dionysos, the Greek god of wine, pleasure, festivity, and madness, returns to his hometown of Thebes to take revenge upon the people and his mother's family. The people of Thebes did not believe in his mother's account of an affair with Zeus, the king of gods, and refused to accept Dionysos as divine. Hence, Dionysos comes to punish these people.

He punishes his cousin, who is ruling Thebes, by driving his mother mad. Then he tricks his cousin into a vulnerable position, and a hoard of women, including the mother, rip him to pieces. Before the execution of this plan, he states:

I'm off now to dress him up in his funeral clothes. The clothes with which he will be meeting Hades once his mother slaughters him with her bare hands. Only then will he learn that the son of Zeus, Dionysos, is a god of peace for the good folk, but he is also a fearsome god who those who don't respect him (*Euripides (c.480–c.406 BC) - Bacchae: Translated by George Theodoridis*).

The feelings of anger and hatred depicted by Dionysos are explicitly human, and so is his need for revenge. However, due to his divine powers, his revenge takes the shape of wrath. Even though the story of an affair with a god is hard to believe, Dionysos still punishes the mortals for their disobedience.

The third tragedy under discussion is that of *Medea*. Medea is the half-god and half-human granddaughter of the Sun god. When her husband Jason decides to remarry to improve

his station, she decides to take her revenge upon him by murdering his new wife and her own children by Jason. She does this solely to cause pain to Jason, and her sadness at her children's death is less than the satisfaction of seeing Jason destroyed.

This story brings out the truly horrific nature of the gods. Even though Medea is only half God, her actions are consistent with those of other gods in the tragedies mentioned above. Like Dionysos, the emotions she displays are profoundly human. She is angry at her husband's betrayal and jealous of his new wife. Any human would feel the same as Medea in her position. However, it is her actions that set her apart from humans. They truly depict the wrath of the gods. In her quest for revenge, Medea does not even spare her children. She wishes to see Jason brought down and uses any means to achieve her ends. The Nurse in the tragedy states that "Her anger will not subside until she lets it clash full and hard upon someone, anyone – an enemy, I hope, not someone we love." (*Euripides (c.480–c.406 BC) - Medea: Translated by George Theodoridis*), which is proven true by Medea's actions.

Conclusively, the Greek gods are shown as wrathful creatures in these tragedies. The emotions they display, such as anger, pride, jealousy, and frustration, are all very human. However, their behavior is far from human. They use their divine powers in a fury. The results of that rage are horrific for humans such as Oedipus, whose life is destroyed for a crime he did not even commit, and the people of Thebes who are driven to madness for not believing in the seemingly impossible, and the children of Medea who are treated as pawns in Medea's game. The Greek gods show humans that they are the ones with ultimate power and that humans do not matter much at the end of the day.

Works Cited

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