

Giovanni Rivera

Mrs. Utzman

World Literature

8/4/2021

The classical period (Ancient Greece)

The classical period in ancient Greece was a golden age in arts and literature that saw the rise of renowned writers like Homer of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* fame and the Virgil, a Roman poet for *Aeneid* (Puchner 391). The classical period occurred between the 4th and the 5th centuries BC in modern Greece (Kakhidze and Emzar 576). It was marked with a great belief in gods and fate that life had to offer. The Greeks believed that gods had the power to shape a person's destiny and that a person's fate could not be changed no matter the counter-interventions. *Medea* by Euripides and *Oedipus, the King* by *Sophocles* are excellent examples of the ancient Greek Classical era. They both focus on tragedy, use irony, and embrace dialogue as their writing style.

The use of short stories and poetry dominated the classical period, most of which covered social issues, for instance, love and marriage. Cultural norms bound social relationships that one had to abide by them. Killing an innocent person was considered a sin, and the killer was to face the wrath of God. They also covered the political aspects of the reign of the aristocratic kings and political warfare (Puchner 390). The fifth century saw the rise in the use of rhetoric and oratory styles in literary work writing. The study of oratory and rhetoric raised questions of morality and truth in argument. The use of tragedy was supreme during this period. It is during this time that the classicism movement blossomed (Bakogianni 467). The movement was shaped by ancient Greeks and emulated by the Romans. Writers, for instance, Sophocles and Aristotle,

ruled the literal works (Puchner 395). They used direct expression, attention to form, fewer words, and subtlety of thought to express themselves. Classicism supports the superiority of rationality and balance as opposed to emotion and impulse. Classicism asserts the significance of morals, unity, and wholeness.

Both *Medea* and *Oedipus the King* cover tragedy, which was a common theme in the Classical literal works because death was a common phenomenon in society during that period. Medea was the daughter of King Aeetes, who ruled Colchis, and a wife to hero Jason. Medea fell in love with Jason when the Argonauts arrived in Aeetes's kingdom to claim the Golden Fleece from Medea's father. After succeeding in taking the fleece and sailing away, the king pursued Medea and Jason. Medea decided to kill Absyrtus (her brother) in a bid to slow his advancing father (Bremmer 97). In another episode, Jason deserts his wife together with their two children to remarry Glauce (the daughter of King Creon of Corinth). The event prompts Medea to kill the two children as a way of avenging Jason. During the murder plan, she also poisons Jason's bride and Creon as well. This leaves Jason without children and a bride to marry. In the context of *Oedipus*, tragedy is also imminent. It trails a story of King Oedipus of Thebes killed by Laius (his son) taking up the throne and marrying Jocasta (his mother). Oedipus says, "Old man, I did not wish to kill my father" (Puchner 425).

Both literal works employ irony in some parts of their presentations. The use of dramatic irony as a stylistic device was also dominant during the classical era (Ober and Barry 237). The irony is created when the audience knows more about the situations than the leading actors. An excellent example of irony in *Medea* is when Jason emerges to take his children from his wife, Medea. Even as he narrates his intentions, the audience already understands that the two children are dead. The play *Oedipus the King* is total irony in itself. An excellent example of irony is

when Oedipus the King is looking for the person behind the death of King Laius, who was his father. He wants to punish the murder, but the audience understands that Oedipus himself killed Laius. Another irony is that Oedipus ends up marrying Jocasta without the knowledge that Jocasta was his biological father. The audience understands that Oedipus was Jocasta's son. Oedipus says, "Then I would not have come to kill my father and marry my mother infamously. Now I am godless and child of impurity, begetter in the same seed that created my wretched self" (Puchner 433).

Another element prominent in the two literal works is the use of dialogue as their writing style. The classical era was characterized by the use of dialogue by characters to express ideas and build the plot. Both *Medea* and *Oedipus the King* employ this style by using shorter poetic sentences to build their themes. An excellent example in *Medea* is a conversation between Medea laments to Nurse about her life predicaments. She says,

I'm abused, I'm abused, that's why I cry,

Boys, you are cursed; your mother is loathsome.

You might as well die along with your father...

Nurse. *No No! I don't like the sound of that*

Why blame your sons for their father's offenses? (Puchner 443).

The same style is used in the play Oedipus the King. An excellent example is when Oedipus converses with Creon about the Laius. The conversation is as follows;

Oedipus: *Who is this man whose fate the god pronounces?*

Creon: *My Lord, before you piloted the state, we had a king called Laius.* (Puchner 403).

To conclude, the classical period in ancient Greek is a golden era that occurred between the 4th and the 5th century. The period was marked with themes of death, love, and political supremacy. The literal works of that time had common traits, such as fewer words, dialogue, and direct expression—the common stylistic devices were the use of irony and symbolism. Medea and Oedipus the King are good representatives of the classical period. Both use dialogue as their presentation style. They also have several episodes of tragedy and use irony in their presentation.

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