
Aspects of Classical Greek Tragedy in Tsegaye Gebremedhin's *Oda Oak Oracle*

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Abstract

This paper explores some salient features of classical Greek drama reflected in modern Ethiopian drama through the analysis of *Oda Oak Oracle*, a play by Tsegaye Gebremedhin. The parallels between the two dramatic works that are remotely related in spatio-temporal setting have been studied by examining the striking similarities between Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (5th century B.C.) and Tsegaye's *Oda Oak Oracle* (1965). The temporal gap can be bridged by arguing that great literature is timeless in its appeal. Comparative textual analysis has been used as a basic method in the paper. Primary data that substantiate the central arguments of the paper have been drawn from the plays under study through close reading. Secondary data have been gathered from related literature on the subject. Theory has been drawn from the principles underpinning classical Greek tragedy. Through close reading and analysis, it has been established that the two plays demonstrate striking parallels in terms of plot construction, thematic preoccupation, character delineation and dramatic techniques.

Keywords: classical, classical Greek tragedy, mimesis, oracle

Introduction

This introduction will throw some light on the socio-cultural context of ancient Greece. Ancient Greece society was polytheistic with a belief in more than one God. In the socio-cultural context of ancient Greece religion played an important role in many occurrences and decisions in people's lives. Another force that determined the occurrences and decisions in people's lives was fate or predestination. The philosophy of predestination was based on the belief that divine will and human will are incompatible. This is to say that divine will is beyond human understanding and control. According to this view, man is engaged in an unequal struggle with fate. As will be discussed in this paper, the implication of this unequal struggle for tragic heroes like Oedipus and Shanka is that they are brutally crashed in the quest for shaping their destinies. The basic argument in this paper is to show how ancient

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Greece philosophy of predestination has maintained its hold on Tsegaye's tragic genius and imagination long after these ritualistic traditions had gone out of use in Greece.

The term classical is used specifically to designate the literature or culture of ancient Greece and Rome. In like manner, the notion of classical drama refers to the theatrical conventions of ancient Greece and Rome. In the theatrical convention of ancient Greece, tragedy was given a very prominent position. It was believed that through imitation of the reversal of fortune in the life of a tragic hero due to a certain minor tragic flaw in his character, people who watch these dramatic performances are cleansed from such flaws in their own character. This is reflected in Aristotle's definition of classical tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament" (in McKeon, p. 10).

It is generally accepted that the theatrical conventions of ancient Greece and Rome have together formed the foundations of dramatic culture of the western world as a whole. Furthermore, classical drama and Elizabethan drama of the 16th century have been exerting a profound influence on the development of world drama in general over the years. The history of the development of Ethiopian drama is no exception in this regard. This can be seen in aspects of classical Greek drama drawn from the works of Sophocles and Elizabethan drama drawn from the works of Shakespeare that often infuse the dramatic works of Tsegaye Gebremedhin. This seems to be true about many of the most important dramatic creations and adaptations, both in Amharic and in English, attributed to Tsegaye.

Tsegaye wrote four plays in English, namely *Oda Oak Oracle* (1965), *Azmari* (1965), *Tewodros* (1965), and *The Collision of Your Altars* (1971). This shows that Tsegaye was at the peak of his creative genius in the mid 1960s and early 70s. In this writer's view, the mid 1960s and early 70s can also be regarded as the golden period in the history of Ethiopian drama in English. What is more, Tsegaye's dramatic creations and adaptations show the playwright's profound insight into classical and Shakespearean drama. *Oda Oak Oracle*, which is the subject of this paper, is Tsegaye's first play in English and probably the most popular. According to some studies such as Debebe (1980) and Homa (2016), for instance, this play was staged in several European countries and the United States. Debebe has noted this in his MA thesis: "Though *Oda Oak Oracle* has not been produced so far in our home theatres, European and American

audiences have had the opportunity of seeing the production of this compact and beautiful play” (ibid. p, 124).

Although this dramatic creation holds such a prominent position in Ethiopian literature in English, the attention given to it by researchers and students of literature, both in Ethiopia and abroad, is quite limited. This is the main reason for conducting this academic research on *Oda Oak Oracle*. The researcher has not come across any study that shows how Tsegaye has created striking parallels between classical Greek drama and modern Ethiopian drama.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this play seems to be its resemblance to classical Greek tragedy, Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* in particular, in various aspects. *Oedipus the King*, just like *Oda Oak Oracle*, is usually regarded as the most popular of all Greek tragedies. The central aim of this paper is, therefore, to closely examine *Oedipus the King* and *Oda Oak Oracle* to explore some of the most striking aspects of classical Greek tragedy that Tsegaye has employed in this Ethiopian play. More specifically speaking, the paper attempts to compare some of the salient parallels between Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* and Tsegaye’s *Oda Oak Oracle*. In short, the paper attempts to answer the following questions through a comparative study of these two plays:

1. What were the most prominent aspects of classical Greek tragedy?
2. Which aspects of classical Greek tragedy are employed by Tsegaye in *Oda Oak Oracle*?
3. Why does Tsegaye juxtapose these two dramatic works that are so distant in space and time?
4. What is the significance of the subject matter of these two plays in our lives today?

Methodology

In this paper, comparative textual analysis has been used as a basic method. Primary textual data that substantiate the central arguments of the paper have been obtained from the two plays under study through close reading, selection, and evaluation. Secondary data that complement the conceptual and theoretical aspects of the paper have been gathered by reviewing critical studies on the plays. The critical framework used to analyse and interpret the textual data has been developed by examining concepts and theories related to classical Greek drama, classical Greek tragedy in particular.

Review of Related Literature

This section provides to make a critical review of studies, concepts and theories related to the subject of this paper. As stated in the introduction section, there is very limited research on Tsegaye's works in English in general and *Oda Oak Oracle* in particular. Probably the first scholarly work on *Oda Oak Oracle* was William Prouty's commentary entitled *Oracular Poetry: A Review*, published in the English edition of *Menen* magazine in 1965. In this review, Prouty considered *Oda Oak Oracle* as poetic drama. Poetic drama is a type of drama that attempts to restore ritual to drama. The notion of restore here relates to the classical conception that drama originated from ritualistic beginnings. Prouty has emphatically stated this view at the very outset of his commentary: "*Oda Oak Oracle* is an outstanding example of poetic drama" (1965: p.22). Brooks (1984:27) also supports this observation: "The history of drama attests that it evolved from ritualistic beginnings." In his review of *Oda Oak Oracle*, Prouty also dealt with the oracular aspects of what he calls "... the poetry of the play" (ibid.) He also made some insightful comments on the images and figures employed in the play which make allusion to nature.

Another scholarly work on *Oda Oak Oracle* was Debebe Siefu's MA thesis entitled *Ethiopian Literature in English* (1980). As the title indicates, Debebe's work is very comprehensive in that it touches upon works in fiction, poetry and drama written in English. In a section devoted to *Oda Oak Oracle* in his paper, Debebe presented a critical commentary on the plot structure of the play, but did not deal with other aspects of the work.

Homa Mulisa's MA thesis (2016) entitled "*The Style of Tsegaye Gabremedhin's Oda Oak Oracle: Figures of Speech in Focus*" was also another related study on *Oda Oak Oracle*. As the title of the paper clearly shows, the focus of this study was on the most prominent figures of speech employed by Tsegaye in the play such as metaphor, simile, personification and irony. Since Homa's concern was essentially with figurative language, the paper did not consider aspects of classical Greek drama reflected in the play.

It is appropriate to note in this review that there are some studies on Tsegaye's dramatic creations in Amharic. One such work was Zewdu Wondimu's MA thesis (2006) entitled *Satirical Types and Techniques in Hahu Besidist Wor(1964) and Hahu Woim Pepu (1984)*. As Zewdu stated in the introduction to his paper, however, the concern of the paper was with the use of satire in the plays: "The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of satire in the plays of Tsegaye Gebremedhin." (p. 4).

Before closing this review, it is also appropriate to examine some key concepts that are central to the discussion of aspects of classical Greek tragedy in the plays under study. One important concept related to the plays under study is the notion of oracle. The term oracle has several meanings. In ancient Greece, an oracle could mean a person such as a priest or priestess through whom a deity is believed to speak his prophecies. Likewise, in ancient Greece, oracle also referred to a person with great wisdom or someone believed to have communication with a deity. In classical Greek drama, oracle also denoted a shrine in which a deity reveals hidden knowledge or divine purpose through a priest or priestess. It is in these senses that the notion of oracle has been used in *Oda Oak Oracle*. In this play, the trunk of the Oda Oak is a cave in which the Oracle, the Oda-Man, the interpreter of the voices of the dead, abides and reveals the hidden knowledge of the dead ancestors to the Oda Oak valley tribe.

Another concept related to the central thought of *Oda Oak Oracle* and *Oedipus the King* is predestination. In Christian theology, predestination denotes the divine fore-ordinating of all that will happen. In religious terms, predestination is the belief that everything that happens has already been determined by God. In other words, it is the belief that people have no control over events. The significance of these concepts in the development of the plays will be further elaborated in the discussion later in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

The aim of this section is to examine some theories of classical Greek drama that can help to explore the prominent aspects of this dramatic convention that are reflected in Tsegaye's *Oda Oak Oracle*. The primary intention is to find out the extent to which *Oda Oak Oracle* imitates or is modeled on classical Greek tragedy, particularly on Sophocles' famous play called *Oedipus the King*. Classical mimetic theories maintained that drama is a make-believe art based on imitative action. Mimesis is a Greek word for artistic imitation. The central idea of mimesis is that art imitates reality.

There were two major theories of mimesis in classical Greek drama. One of these was that of Plato (375 B.C). Plato maintained that literary writers imitate nature or reality. However, according to Plato, artistic imitation involves a step away from reality or truth, producing an imperfect copy of a given reality. In this idealist view, literary imitation, therefore, is inferior or lower than the reality or truth that it produces. This appears to be the reason for the banishment of the poet from Plato's ideal republic on ethical and

epistemological grounds (in Guth, 1981.) Since the intention of this paper is to show how Tsegaye's *Oda Oak Oracle* closely imitates the reality in the life experiences of the people of Oda Oak Valley, Plato's theory of mimesis does not provide an appropriate framework for the analysis of aspects of classical Greek drama in the work.

The other theory of imitation or mimesis was that of Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C). Aristotle laid down the principles of his mimetic theory in the *Poetics*, which is regarded as one of the most influential works of literary criticism in western civilization. According to Aristotle's theory of mimesis, drama is the most mimetic art and that imitation is a basic human instinct. For Aristotle, imitation is natural to mankind. According to Aristotle's counter argument, literature imitates life in the form of great and low actions. In this view, great actions refer to tragedy and low actions refer to comedy.

The aim of Aristotle's mimetic theory of literature is to determine to what extent a work of literature connects to the real world. In other words, mimetic criticism attempts to determine how a work of literature relates to or represents the real world. Hence, Aristotle's view of imitation differs from that of Plato. For Aristotle, the aim of literary imitation is not to produce a copy or a mirror image of reality, but a mediation of reality through catharsis. In great tragedy, Aristotle argues, the playwright imitates not people's characters, but their actions. This notion of mimesis is encapsulated in his definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude," in McKeon, *ibid*. Hence, in this paper, Aristotle's theory of mimesis has been used to study the parallels between *Oda Oak Oracle* and *Oedipus the king* and to show how Tsegaye's *Oda Oak Oracle* reflects the realities in the life experiences of the people of Oda Oak Valley. It is in the light of this understanding that the principles used in the analysis of the textual data from the plays have been drawn from classical mimetic theories.

Moreover, in order to explicate the prophetic parallels between the two plays, the study has also employed the theory of predestination or fatalism. The theory of predestination or fatalism as promulgated by the French theologian John Calvin (1536), held the view that mankind is living in a world in which powerful forces are at work. According to this theory, these forces are often beyond our understanding and control. In other words, this theory addressed what came to be called "the paradox of free will" whereby the omniscience of

God seems incompatible with human free will. In other words, life is an unequal struggle between man and fate.

Hence, tragic heroes like Oedipus in *Oedipus the King* and Shanka in *Oda Oak Oracle* may demonstrate tremendous energy and determination to shape their own destinies. In other words, as will be demonstrated in the discussion later, in this struggle, man is not a passive sacrifice to his destiny, but takes an active part. However, the gods have arranged it in such a way that every step mankind takes in the hope of avoiding his/her fate brings him/her nearer to it. The theory of predestination has thus been used to show how fate has been used in the two plays to shape the lives of both tragic heroes, Oedipus and Shanka.

However, in developing a critical framework for this paper, it is important to reconsider one of the research questions posed earlier in this paper: Why does Tsegaye juxtapose these two dramatic works that are so distant in space and time? This question should be addressed in view of Tsegaye's own paper entitled "*Africa as the Origin of the Early Greek Theatre Culture*" presented at the International Congress of Africanists in Addis Ababa in 1973. According to this paper, Tsegaye seems to juxtapose these two plays to dispute the conventionally maintained stance that the origin of drama is Greece. In other words, the playwright is disputing that Ethiopians, or Africans in general, are not engaged in imitation or modeling of their art on European art, but to demonstrate that Ethiopians also had a similar theatre culture probably prior to the Greek one. In his paper, Tsegaye hotly disputed the hegemonic "super culture" discourse that attributes the origin of theatre culture to ancient Greece. He writes: "theatre culture was performed by Africans for at least over 2000 years before Thespis or Aeschylus, the fathers of Greek drama, ever lived to put pen to paper" (ibid. p.439). Hence according to Tsegaye, Africans had a theatre culture in the same ritual function, mythological themes, and structures like that of the later Dionysian Greek drama of the 5th century B.C., but performed much earlier in 2000 B.C. His arguments in this regard are supported by archaeological, historical, and chronological evidences.

Plot Summary of *Oedipus the King*

The story in this play begins as Laius, king of Thebes, and Jocasta, his wife, learn about an oracle of Appolo at Delphi which predicted that a son will be born to them that will kill his father and marry his own mother. When Jocasta gave birth to a son, Laius ordered their servant to take the baby to the

mountain and leave it there to perish so as to avoid the fulfillment of the prophecy. The abandoned baby was found by a shepherd from Corinth. The shepherd picked up the baby out of sympathy and took him to the court of king Polybus of Corinth. King Polybus and his queen, Merope, who were childless took Oedipus and raised him as their own son. Again the oracle sounded a frightening warning that Oedipus was fated to kill his father and marry his own mother. To escape this fate, Oedipus left his foster parents. On a lonely mountain road, he became involved in a violent quarrel over a right of way of a chariot that carried his real father accompanied by a group of men. During the quarrel, Oedipus drew his sword and killed king Laius and his men, save one who brought the sad news to Thebes. In the course of his journey afterwards, Oedipus reached Thebes. He found Thebes being terrorized by a monster called the Sphinx. The Sphinx propounded a riddle: "What is that which first goes on four feet, then on two, then at last on three, yet is weakest when it uses most feet?" The Sphinx could only be exorcised by a man who could solve the deadly riddle. Oedipus joined this competition and solved the riddle correctly. At his answer, the Sphinx hurled herself off the rock on which she crouched and was killed. The city, in gratitude to its savior, offered the crown to Oedipus, and he became king of Thebes, marrying Jocasta, the widow of the late king Laius. Oedipus has reigned in prosperity for many years when the play opens with a scene where people come to beg him to save the city once more from a plague which has overwhelmed it.

Plot Summary of *Oda Oak Oracle*

Oda Oak Oracle presents a traditional story about the power of ancestral spirits on the life of the people of Oda Oak Valley. More specifically speaking, the play is based on, to use Tsegaye's words, a "story about a couple's tempting dilemma of whether to conceive a child or not, since the oracle of the Oda Oak prophesized that their first born son should be sacrificed for the satisfaction of the spirit of the dead ancestors."

The major character, Shanka, the strong son of the tribe, had a bride, Ukutee, chosen for him by the Oda Oak Oracle. The oracle told the couple through its interpreter, the Oda-man, that their first son shall be sacrificed for the satisfaction of the spirit of the dead ancestors. But Shanka shirks sleeping with his bride, lest she will conceive a doomed child. Despairingly, Shanka requests his friend Goaa, the inhibited by the strangers' ways, to approach the oracle on his behalf and ask for a remission of its words. Meanwhile, Ukutee who is offended by her betrothed's negligence tempts Goaa to sleep with her and

conceives a child. After nine months, she comes to the oracle with Goaa to repent. When the Oda-Man comes out of his abode he attributes the pestilential atmosphere in the valley to a breach of the word of the oracle and pronounces curses upon them. He also calls the undelivered child unbefitting to the sacrifice of the spirit of the ancestors. Considering that it was Shanka who first defied the word of the oracle by refusing to marry Ukutee, the Oda-Man orders Shanka to engage in a deadly combat with Goaa. The two friends fight and Goaa falls dead. Then Ukutee is ordered to flog Shanka as he shoulders the dead body of Goaa out of the valley to the land of the strangers. However, Ukutee hesitates to flog Shanka and faints. A little later, she dies after giving birth to a female child. In the meantime, Oda Oak Valley was in a pestilential condition because of Shanka's defiance of the prophecy and the valley tribe were angry because of this. At the end of the play, the newly born baby and Shanka were given to the angry people of the valley who clamour for blood sacrifice to soothe the wrath of the ancestral spirits.

Discussion: Aspects of Classical Greek Tragedy in *Oda Oak Oracle*

The aim of this section is to explore the parallels between *Oda Oak Oracle* and *Oedipus the King*. A parallel is something that is very similar to something else, but that exists or happens in a different place or at a different time. The discussion is devoted to the most prominent and striking parallels between these two works which are some 25 centuries apart, mid 20th century A. D. and 5th century B.C., when Sophocles lived and worked. The discussion will consider similarities in plot, characterization, theme, and technique in the two plays.

One striking parallel between these two tragic plays is the similarity demonstrated in their plot. The plots of both plays emerge from and revolve around oracles or prophecies. A prophecy is an inspired statement with a hidden meaning that tells what will happen in the future. For instance, *Oedipus the King* is based on a prophecy which states: "A son will be born to Oedipus and Jocasta, king and queen of the ancient Greek city of Thebes, who will kill his father and marry his own mother." In Greek mythology, Oedipus was a king of Thebes who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. In *Oedipus the King*, the prophecy was revealed through Teiresias, the prophet of Apollo. The plot begins as Oedipus seeks to defy the prophecy or the oracle. The conflict that moves the entire play forward is based on this prophecy. Similarly, *Oda Oak Oracle* is based on an oracle which has been interpreted that: "A son will be born to Shanka and Ukutee, the strong son of

the Oda Oak Valley tribe and his bride, elect of Oracle, who will be sacrificed for the satisfaction of the spirit of the dead ancestors.” The conflict that moves the play forward is based on this prophecy. In *Oda Oak Oracle*, the prophecy was revealed through the Oda-Man, the prophet or Oracle of the Oda Oak Valley, described in the play as “the all-knowing interpreter of winds.” In like manner, the plot of *Oda Oak Oracle* begins as Shanka seeks to defy the prophecy or the oracle. It should be noted in this connection, however, that the oracle in *Oedipus the King* has a greater dosage of supernatural character whereas that of *Oda Oak Oracle* is more of legendary in that it is based on the lore of the people of the Oda Oak Valley. Tsegaye has made this clear in the subtitle he gave to his play. He writes: “A legend of black peoples, told of gods and God, of hope and love, and of fears and sacrifices.”

The two plays also demonstrate thematic parallels. This can be attested in the fact that both works exhibit the theme of defiance. As noted in the foregoing section, the plots of both plays revolve around the conflicts that emerge as the protagonists seek to defy the prophecies revealed through the oracles. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus and Jocasta sent their son to perish in the wilderness in order to avoid the prophecy. “There was an oracle that came to Laius that he should die a victim at the hands of his own son. And for the son, before three days were out after his birth, king Laius pierced his ankles and had him cast upon a hillside to die. So Apollo failed to fulfil his oracle to the son.” Similarly, in *Oda Oak Oracle*, Shanka refused to know Ukutee to avoid the birth of the sacrificial child. Shanka’s defiance has been expressed by the Oda-Man in *Oda Oak Oracle* as follows:

Thus you stood aloof,
Shanka: In order that
The oracle of our by-gone
Should not be fulfilled. (P.33)

Such thematic parallels between the two plays can also be drawn in relation to the role of fate in human life which is also central to both works. This aspect of theme holds the view that life is an unequal struggle between man and fate. In this struggle, according to this view, man is not a passive sacrifice to his destiny, but takes an active part. For instance, in *Oda Oak Oracle*, one can see the passionate struggle that Shanka makes with fate. Similarly, in *Oedipus the King* one can note the passionate battle that Oedipus makes with fate. Because of this, *Oedipus the king* is often called a tragedy of fate. The classical

philosophy of fate or predestination, however, holds the view that the gods have arranged it in such a way that every step mankind takes in the hope of avoiding his/her fate brings him/her nearer to it. Hence, the thematic parallels that Tsegaye has drawn between *Oda Oak Oracle* and *Oedipus the King* can be better understood in relation to how all the attempts that the protagonists, Shanka and Oedipus, make to avert their fates bring them nearer to their destinies. In short, these tragic plays demonstrate mankind's age-old battle between fate and free will.

Another parallel between the two plays relates to characterization. The protagonists in both plays are portrayed as stubborn characters. In *Oedipus the King*, King Oedipus stubbornly rejects Jocasta's advice to stop further investigation into the case of Laius' death after she got a tragic realization that her own husband is the killer of Laius, her ex-husband. This is clearly projected in the words of Jocasta in *Oedipus the King*: "I beg you, do not hunt this out. I beg you if you have any care for your own life." Oedipus stubbornly rejects her advice as follows: "Take courage Jocasta. If my mother was a slave, I must know" (p.92).

Another striking parallel between the two plays can also be drawn from their technical aspects. One important technical aspect of classical Greek tragedy was the use of the chorus. In classical Greek tragedy, the chorus functions as actors and commentators. A review of the works of the three notable ancient Greek Tragedians, namely Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, shows that the chorus plays a significant technical role in their works. A review of some of the extant tragedies by Sophocles also shows that the chorus plays important roles not only in *Oedipus the King* but also in *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The technical similarity between *Oedipus the King* and *Oda Oak Oracle* can be drawn from the important role that the three elders of the valley tribe play as actors and commentators in the development of the play. In the play, they are presented as first elder, second elder and third elder.

Tsegaye's love for the technical aspect of Sophoclean tragedy is also manifested in the use of oracle as a central pillar of the conflict in *Oda Oak Oracle*. The technical significance of the oracle is, in fact, reflected in the title of the play. The term oracle has several meanings. In its technical sense, it relates to the prophecy or statement with a hidden meaning about the future fate of an individual. The hidden meaning of an oracle in ancient Greece is usually obtained by consulting a priest or priestess. In this sense, the Oda-Man in *Oda Oak Oracle* is similar to Teiresias in *Oedipus the King*. The prediction

of the Oracle of the Oda Oak has been noted by Tsegaye in the introduction to the play as follows: “Shanka, the strong son of the tribe, had a bride by the name of Ukutee, chosen for him by the Oracle of Oda Oak. The oracle had interpreted that their first-born son should be sacrificed for the satisfaction of the dead ancestors.” (p.1) Hence, this prediction of the Oracle of Oda Oak has a similar technical function to the prediction of the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi that King Laius would be killed by his own son.

Another parallel between these two plays relates to the voice of sorrow that pervades the entire atmosphere of the plays. According to Long (1998:127), one of the defining characteristics of classical tragedy, unlike Shakespearean and modern tragedies, is the pervading atmosphere of sorrow and fear. In other words, classical tragedies do not exhibit scenes of comic relief as in Shakespearean and modern tragic drama. Hence, *Oda Oak Oracle* parallels *Oedipus the King* in its pervading atmosphere of sorrow.

The similarity of the punishment inflicted on the protagonists for defiance of prophecy in both tragic plays can also be considered as a strikingly parallel aspect. In classical Greek tragedy, a common punishment for crime was banishment. In the resolution of *Oedipus the King*, the punishment inflicted on King Oedipus for defying the Oracle of Apollo was banishment and King Oedipus later died in exile. This is reflected in King Oedipus' final words in the play: “Where do my poor legs take me? It was Apollo that brought my ruin to completion” (p. 99). In the same vein, in the resolution of *Oda Oak Oracle*, the punishment inflicted upon Shanka for defying the oracle of the Oda Oak was banishment. This has been pronounced in the play by the third elder when Shanka asks what the spirits and the elders want of him:

“Banishment,
To the land of the strange ones.” (p. 37)

Conclusion

In this paper, attempts have been made to show the parallels between Tsegaye's *Oda Oak Oracle* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. It has been established in the course of the study that although these two tragic plays are so distant in time and place, they demonstrate several striking parallels. The temporal gap can be bridged in the sense that great literary works like *Oedipus the king* are timeless and are always with us. The distance in time and place between these works can also be bridged in relation to their thematic intertextuality. In other words, both tragic plays deal with mankind's age-old

battle between fate and free will which underlines the current significance of juxtaposing these two works that are centuries apart. In short, humanity has not won this battle to date.

As demonstrated in the preceding discussion, the parallels also relate to plot, characterization, technique and atmosphere. By drawing on these parallels, Tsegaye has demonstrated not only his tragic genius and love for Sophoclean tragedy, but also the fact that African culture in general and traditional Ethiopian culture in particular is rich in such ritualistic theatrical performances. In this connection, it should not be overlooked that by way of underlining the importance of traditional culture and the legacy of the ancestors, he is also criticizing blind imitation of these aspects of social life. Finally, it should be emphasized that the theme that underpins these two dramatic works is mankind's age-old struggle between fate and free will, a question that has not been resolved to date.

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