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A Kinship of Grief: Oedipus in the Theban Plays and Middle Earth

Abstract

The works of J.R.R Tolkien have proven very nearly to be the harbinger of the tradition of epic fantasy within the domain of popular fiction in the twentieth century. So much so, that various quarters have freely and overtly uttered a distinct acknowledgement that the stories of Middle Earth, which are the fictional renditions of his imaginary plane with its races, histories, languages including their dialects, politics and mythopoeic chronicles, marked the shift of its genre towards a new era.

*This paper seeks to examine, analyse and discern the occurrences, patterns and tropes apart from motifs and inherent notions latent in Tolkien's works, chiefly in *The Children of Hurin*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. It places his world in fundamental juxtaposition with the Hellenic, and as an exemplary study of the tragic and the unfortunate, pits Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, even going on to include portions from the rest of the Theban plays in its consideration, against the story of Turin Turambar, the protagonist of *The Children of Hurin*, doomed unwittingly and inadvertently to his banal fate.*

The History of Middle Earth is also used in order to bolster the location of ideas and points pertinent to the world in the course of the study, so that the respective mythical traditions may be weighed in accordance to the primary onus of the paper. In this manner, it will be possible to delineate how the respective worlds and their essential premises machinate the trajectory of the concerned protagonists and comprise their mould.

“I will not say do not weep, for not all tears are an evil”. (Tolkien, *Lord* 1029). So saying, Gandalf parts along with Frodo, the protagonist of *The Lord of the Rings*, evoking a cup full of grief in spite of victory. Similar happenings may be observed in other works by Tolkien. Yet, *The Lord of the Rings* has often been recognised as the author’s greatest and most important accomplishment in literary and critical circles. The hardships of Frodo and Sam, the two chief characters in the story have been recounted both on stage and in film. But this has certainly brought about a lack of attention devoted to Tolkien’s lesser-known and relatively unsung works which may also contain protagonists who come to just as tragic a pass, if not one that is more so.

Critical commentary is mostly directed towards praising his famous epic trilogy. W.H Auden wrote – “No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me more joy than *The Fellowship of the Ring*” (“Hobbit” n. pag). Even John Mark Eberhart and Matthew Schofield remarked – “After half a century, *The Lord of the Rings* towers over fantasy fiction — and now the films loom,” (“Review” n. pag). It is not surprising that there has been a paucity of study on a work such as *The Children of Hurin*.

However, we may note that part of the problem certainly stems from how the text originated. Christopher Tolkien notes in his introduction to *The Children of Hurin* – “It has seemed to me for a long time that there was a good case for presenting my father’s long version of the legend of the Children of Húrin as an independent work, [. . .] despite the unfinished state in which he left some parts of it. I have thought that if the story of the fate of Túrin and Niënor [. . .] could be presented in this way, a window might be opened onto a scene and a story set in an unknown Middle-earth” (Tolkien, *Children*, 4). Thus, having been brought together from incomplete tracts, including “The Tale of Turambar and the Foaloke”

(Tolkien, *Lost Tales* 92), which are recounted by Christopher Tolkien in *The History of Middle Earth* and *The Unfinished Tales*, it was earlier, therefore, not examined in a critical manner. To that, of course, was added the enormous acclaim of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, which eclipsed such merits which *The Children of Hurin* may possess.

This paper has as its aim a comparison between *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles and the *The Children of Hurin*, critically considering various aspects of the latter text and its protagonist, Turin Turambar, and comparing him to Oedipus in the play. The exploration of such an idea is instigated by what Tolkien wrote in one of his letters –“There are other stories almost equally full in treatment and equally independent and yet linked to the general history. There is the *Children of Húrin*, the tragic tale of Túrin Turambar and his sister Níniel – of which Turin is the hero: a figure that might be [. . .] derived from elements in Sigurd the Volsung, Oedipus, and the Finnish Kullervo”(Tolkien, *Letters* “Waldman” 127). This paper sets out to investigate such a claim, and shed light upon the points of contact between the respective texts. Such a reading of the text may help enhance the multiplicity of possible readings. It may initiate other potential views about the novel, thus furthering the critical worth of *The Children of Hurin* in the field of Tolkien Studies.

To adequately study these parallels we may examine various incidents in the life of Oedipus as well as events leading up to it. For instance, at the founding of Thebes, the founder of the city, Cadmus, proves equal to the might of the Dragon which threatens to destroy it- “The place called Thebes [. . .] was first founded by Cadmus, [. . .] Misfortune befell him even before his city was established, for all the trusty companions who should have been his first citizens were devoured by a fierce dragon which inhabited a neighbouring glen. But Cadmus was a match for the dragon and at one stroke laid him dead” (Watling 23). In Turin’s case, he too is able to challenge a Dragon equally gallantly and kill him with a

single deadly blow— “Then Turambar drew the Black Sword of Beleg and stabbed [. . .] Then Glaurung, feeling his death-pang, gave forth a scream” (Tolkien, *Children* 126). Therefore, though the feat of Turin may bear resemblance to *Sigurd the Volsung*, where also there is the slaying of a dragon, the feature of the Dragon ravaging cities is nearer to *Oedipus Rex*, where we also have the Sphinx whom Oedipus must defeat in a battle of wits to become the king of Thebes. Turin is similarly challenged by the conundrum of Glaurung the Dragon —“Glaurung spoke again, taunting Túrin. 'Evil have been all your ways, son of Húrin,' said he. 'Thankless fosterling, outlaw, slayer of your friend [. . .] and deserter of your kin [. . .] And Túrin being under the spell of Glaurung hearkened to his words” (Tolkien, *Children* 92). Thus, Turin’s confusion about the puzzle which he has to face is both material and moral, though the question of the Sphinx directed at Oedipus was metaphorical and symbolic. His solution of the riddle “destroyed the Sphinx’s power” (Watling 23). Turin is able to partially see through Glaurung’s trick—“But Túrin drawing back his sword stabbed at his eyes” (Tolkien, *Children* 92), and therefore break his spell. Yet, nevertheless, he is forced out of concern for his kin to depart from the place. Oedipus, similarly, does not understand that the riddle of the Sphinx about the three stages of a man’s life also epitomises what will become of him after his tragedy leaves him blind, forcing him to walk with a stick or his daughter’s assistance. Turin’s horrified departure from the place, believing the Dragon’s words, and fearing for his mother and sister, may be likened to Oedipus having to leave Corinth— “but by chance he came to hear, from the mouth of Apollo’s ministers, the terrible prediction concerning him. Again, as his parents had done, he sought to give lie to the Oracle. He fled from Corinth” (Watling 24). Both are driven from where they should have remained by flawed hopes, because Turin was instructed by a wise elf named Gwindor to rescue the maiden who alone could save him from his dire fate —“ Haste you to Nargothrond, and save Finduilas. And this

last I say to you: she alone stands between you and your doom. If you fail her, it shall not fail to find you” (Tolkien, *Children* 90). But Turin fails to do so, and his error of judgement is brought about by the intervention of Glaurung, thus going towards his terrible fate instead of away from it.

Both their childhoods revolve around being separated from their family, albeit in somewhat different ways. Turin never gets to see his father, who left for battle but was captured by the enemy and tortured by the prime antagonist of the story, Morgoth, who is an evil god who drifted away from and opposed the other gods, who are called Valar, during the creation of the world-

“He said to his mother: 'When will my father come back [. . .] ? Why does he not come?’” (Tolkien, *Children* 33).

This is soon followed by having to be separated from his mother in childhood itself-

'Why my mother is sending me away,' said Túrin, and tears filled his eyes. [. . .]

‘Well, well, it cannot be helped: we must say farewell. Now will you not take my knife as a parting gift?’

'No!' said Túrin. 'I am going to the Elves, to the King of Doriath, my mother says. There I may get other things like it. But I shall not be able to send you any gifts, Labadal. I shall be far away and all alone' (Tolkien, *Children* 38).

For Oedipus, too young when he was handed over by his mother, Jocasta, to a shepherd, it is a shock which he can't come to terms with when, towards the end of the play, he learns the truth of how he was given away. Not only does he find that hard to believe, but also that a mother should be capable of separating herself from her child in any way, for whatever reason. He is, even then yet to know that he himself is the child in question. Therefore, his sympathy towards the child having to lose or be away from its mother is heartfelt, and he

undergoes a concern towards which he feels profoundly connected, though trying still to remain in denial about the possibility of the prophecies which he heard about himself even in his youth back at Corinth –

OEDIPUS What! she, she gave it thee?

HERDSMAN 'Tis so, my king.

OEDIPUS With what intent?

HERDSMAN To make away with it.

OEDIPUS What, she its mother.

HERDSMAN Fearing a dread weird.

OEDIPUS What weird?

HERDSMAN 'Twas told that he should slay his sire.

OEDIPUS What didst thou give it then to this old man?

HERDSMAN Through pity, master, for the babe. I thought

He'd take it to the country whence he came;

But he preserved it for the worst of woes.

For if thou art in sooth what this man saith,

God pity thee! thou wast to misery born” (Sophocles, 31)

For both the mothers, there was no alternative but to part with their respective sons, despite the dissimilarity in the reasons involved. But considering the tragedy that came upon both the protagonists as a result, it completely bears out the herdsman’s exclamation of sympathy and also the affirmation for Turin’s sorrows that must come as a result of such a tormented childhood away from his mother – “This was the first of the sorrows of Túrin” (Tolkien, *Children*, 34).

But for both the princes, this separation leads them to end up in Royal houses in other distant, kingdoms. They are kept sumptuously and reared as children belonging there. Oedipus finds shelter in the court of King Polybus of Corinth and his queen. Throughout his upbringing he is blissfully unaware of his origins and the truth is hidden from him until he overhears the words of the Oracle of Apollo. Turin, on the other hand, is unaware ever since he leaves home to take refuge in the Kingdom of Thingol of the birth of the sister, Nienor, and of all the proceedings which happen. Therefore, her life is entirely separate from his until they meet as accorded by fate. He is brought up as foster-kin of “the Elvish king Thingol, who took Túrin to be his fosterson” (Tolkien, *Children*, 7). Oedipus, on the other hand, does not know the life of his past and is entirely separated from it by a wall of ignorance. Turin finds his past life, the life that he could have had but lost, when he meets his sister unknowingly. Similarly Oedipus finds upon his return to Thebes the life of his past which is utterly unfamiliar to him. He marries his mother, Jocasta and relates in a fresh, twisted way to that life just as Turin marries his sister setting up the selfsame premise of incest. Oedipus grows to manhood before setting out again from his foster home in Corinth. Turin displays a precocious pattern of development, being ahead of several of his peers- “And Túrin grew in stature until he became tall among Men and surpassed that of the Elves of Doriath, and his strength and hardihood were renowned in the realm of Thingol” (Tolkien, *Children* 40). He left the Kingdom of Doriath even though there were attempts to summon him back and recall him to his rightful place within the Kingdom. Oedipus receives a similar acknowledgement when the messenger proclaims that he is enthroned in Corinth on account of the death of Polybus-

MESSENGER The Isthmian commons have resolved to make

Thy husband king--so 'twas reported there.

JOCASTA What! is not aged Polybus still king?

MESSENGER No, verily; he's dead and in his grave. (Sophocles, 22)

But Oedipus, for whom this news comes as a matter of dread rather than mirth, is already too close to finding out the truth and succumbing to the discovery that he was not sired but only raised as a son by Polybus and Merope.

For both the protagonists, we see a point of success that they reach in the course of their story. For a brief span of time, they both manage to establish stable Kingdoms bringing peace and prosperity in which the adversities of the past seem to abate. For Oedipus, it comes about as – “he was received joyfully into Thebes as her king and heir to the house and fortune; a happy man, a wise and resourceful man, and (save for one sharp encounter on his journey from Corinth to Thebes) a man of peace” (Watling 24). Such a reckoning of his governing abilities and wisdom is seen to prevail that citizens beseech him to stop the plague of Thebes-

Art thou not he who coming to the town
 Of Cadmus freed us from the tax we paid
 To the fell songstress? Nor hadst thou received
 Prompting from us or been by others schooled;
 No, by a god inspired (so all men deem,
 And testify) didst thou renew our life.
 And now, O Oedipus, our peerless king,
 All we thy votaries beseech thee, find
 Some succor, whether by a voice from heaven
 Whispered, or haply known by human wit.
 [. . .]

Our country's savior thou art justly hailed (Sophocles 2).

Túrin, on the other hand, has a span of time during which he is quite feared as a leader by his chief antagonist, the evil god Morgoth, and rises to prominence, lessening the sufferings of many people and bringing hope by fortifying his domain –

In that year far and wide in Beleriand the whisper went [. . .] saying that the Bow and Helm that had fallen [. . .] had arisen again beyond hope. Then many, both Elves and Men, who went leaderless, dispossessed but undaunted, remnants of battle and defeat and lands laid waste, took heart again, and came [. . .] guarded camps and forts were established round about: in the forest eastward, or in the highlands, or in the southward fens. (Tolkien, *Children* 74).

As a result, his arch foe Morgoth grows to fear him- “Report of the Dragon-helm in the land west of Sirion came swiftly to the ear of Morgoth [. . .] he began to fear that Túrin would grow to [. . .] power” (Tolkien, *Children* 71). This, however, is temporary on account of the fate that has been ordained for them and which they, knowingly or in ignorance, seek to defy and to escape.

To bring about the respective tragedies of both the tragic protagonists, fate plays its inevitable part. Oedipus, having finally settled down as the sovereign of the city of Thebes seemed to have a comfortable future ahead of him. And, having acted bravely all along in trying to flee the tragedy which destiny had in store for him, it would apparently appear that he had, at last made it through – “there passed some fifteen years of seeming prosperity. But beneath the deceptive surface are hideous depth of shame and infamy lay concealed. The god’s could no longer brook in silence the affront of Oedipus’ unwitting sins. Pestilence and famine brought Thebes once more to the verge of utter extinction” (Watling 24).

For Turin, his fate has been woven many ages ago in the strife-ridden past of his world, named Beleriand, of what Tolkien calls the Elder Days. Before the race of Men, of which the house of Hurin was one of the foremost in terms of lineage, the Elves were the primary race inhabiting the world apart from the gods, who are known as Valar. However, owing to strife and disagreement between them, they moved away from the abode of the gods and came to the mainland of Beleriand. It was then ordained by the Valar that the Elves, who left the company of the gods in order to struggle against the power of the evil god Morgoth, would prove futile in the endeavour, to which they swore an oath –“The wrath of the Valar lieth from the West unto the uttermost East, and upon all that will follow them it shall be laid also. Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue. To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever [. . .] and slain ye shall be: by weapon and by torment and by grief [. . .] and [. . .] shall grow weary of the world as with a great burden, and shall wane, and become as shadows of regret” (Tolkien, *Silmarillion* 94). It is similar to the woeful futility epitomised by Strife, as described by Hesiod- “And loathsome Strife bore painful Toil and Forgetfulness and Hunger and tearful Pains, and Combats and Battles and Murders and Slaughters, and Strifes and Lies and Tales and Disputes [. . .] and Oath, who indeed brings most woe upon human beings on the earth” (Hesiod 52).

Hence, though we have the instance in the text of the evil god Morgoth laying a curse upon Turin’s father, Hurin’s and upon all of his family, it must be borne in mind that there is ample possibility of the protagonist, Turin, of rising superior to the curse. With Turin’s increasing power, Morgoth fears “that the curse that he had laid upon him would become void, and he would escape the doom that had been designed for him” (Tolkien, *Children* 71).

Therefore, though it is possible that Turin might, by making the right choices in his life, evade the wrathful designs of Morgoth, it is the greater fate which will keep him from escaping the tragic end which lies ahead of him. It is a mechanism of inescapability which chains him to suffering for the transgressions which he inadvertently commits. So, his foster mother Melian, who is capable of prognostications, concludes –

“Not so high is your destiny, I think, Túrin son of Morwen, though greatness is in you, and your fate is twined with that of the Elven-folk, for good or for ill. Beware of yourself, lest it be ill.' [. . .] If in days to come you remember the words of Melian, it will be for your good: fear both the heat and the cold of your heart, and strive for patience, if you can” (Tolkien, *Children* 42).

This holds true as coming from the greater fate beyond Morgoth's curse for “no might had Morgoth where Melian dwelt” (Tolkien, *Shaping* 168). Besides running away from the Kingdom of Doriath, which is projected as occurring on account of his innate sense of pride, what is really at work here is a flawed sense of judgement stemming from what Morgoth subjected his father to, as Christopher Tolkien elucidates – “For he, 'Master of the fates of Arda' as he named himself to Húrin, intends to bring about the ruin of his enemy by the force of his own gigantic will. Thus he 'designs' the future of those whom he hates, and so he says to Húrin: 'Upon all whom you love my thought shall weigh as a cloud of Doom, and it shall bring them down into darkness and despair.'”

The torment that he devised for Húrin was 'to see with Morgoth's eyes'.

My father gave a definition of what this meant: if one were forced to look into Morgoth's eye he would 'see' (or receive in his mind from Morgoth's mind) a compellingly credible picture of events, distorted by Morgoth's bottomless malice” (Tolkien, *Children* 17)

It is because of this that the curse which he tried to lay on him and his family while trying to convince Hurin that he was the master of the Fates of the world, was transmitted likewise to Turin. This resulted in a warped sense of perceiving things, for “treachery and the fear of treachery” (Tolkien, *Shaping* 67). This is what led him to kill his foremost comrade, Beleg.

As Christopher Tolkien’s explains in this context, endeavouring to unravel his father’s conception of the workings of Fate in the story, Turin, at a moment when he was filled with an overpowering desire to stand equal to the power of Morgoth, “ named himself Turambar 'Master of Fate'” (Tolkien, *Children* 21).

This compels us, to read the story of Turin as a great struggle to master fate. In this, he has to stand up against Morgoth, who has a greater control over it than he himself. But even though, towards the end, the scales of power are tilted towards the possibility of being in Turin’s favour, his doom, nevertheless, swoops down upon him in a manner which leaves him with no escape. This is because “if human decisions and efforts are involved, it is only as links in a chain of means to an end that would have come about in some other way had they been absent”(Broadie 84). The fragile glory that he achieves with the slaying of the Dragon slips away from between his fingers. And all this may be attributed to his failures of recognising people, situations and executing judgements in accordance.

Indeed, his slaying of the best friend that he ever finds in his short life happens in a moment of irrational, unreasoning conduct –

Beleg drew his sword Anglachel, and with it he cut the fetters that bound Túrin; but fate was that day more strong, for the blade [. . .] pricked Túrin's foot. Then Túrin was roused into a sudden wakefulness of rage and fear [. . .] believing that Orcs were

come again to torment him; and grappling with him in the darkness he seized Anglachel, and slew Beleg Cúthalion thinking him a foe (Tolkien, *Children* 79).

Therefore, Turin acts on the dire misinterpretation where his fury is roused, leading to an error of judgement. For Oedipus, the same may be cited as the visible cause-

As I drew near the triple-branching roads,
 A herald met me and a man who sat
 In a car drawn by colts--as in thy tale--
 The man in front and the old man himself
 Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path,
 Then jostled by the charioteer in wrath
 I struck him, and the old man, seeing this,
 Watched till I passed and from his car brought down
 Full on my head the double-pointed goad.
 Yet was I quits with him and more; one stroke
 Of my good staff sufficed to fling him clean
 Out of the chariot seat and laid him prone.
 And so I slew them every one (Sophocles 20).

Wrathful pride is a dominant force in the dispositions of both the protagonists, which contribute to their errors of judgement. The crimes thus committed inexorably find the perpetrators out. His metaphorical blindness affirms the lack of discernment- “ For see, I am blind! [. . .] Blind, blind, groping since childhood in a dark mist of Morgoth!” (Tolkien, *Children* 206)

Turin is akin to Oedipus as both of them are, according to Aristotle’s inference, viable as tragic characters by virtue of how they have been depicted within the conditions and

framework of their respective narratives, stretching the point as far as Tolkien's premise in the novel. And as House explains, this may be extended to their imperfections as characters, for they would not have sufficed as tragic characters or adequately answered the requirements of such a character had they not been imperfect –

(a) As Aristotle explicitly says, his misfortunes would be odious to us i.e. offend our sense of justice.

(b) By implication his whole theory requires a hero less than perfect in order to allow scope for action at all (House 98).

Turin, judging by his actions, is certainly not a perfect character, marred further by the curse laid upon his father of having to see and hence reason through the eyes and mind of Morgoth, which also casts its web upon him poisoning his judgements. House accordingly emphasises that –

“The perfect or nearly perfect man would be one whose desires were so trained and controlled, whose intellect also was so habituated to the right calculation of means and the making of the right practical inferences, that he would formulate to himself ends more immediately in his power (House 92).

But, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, we may not point merely to this single episode in Turin's life in order to deduce from it a consummate sense of his *hamartia*. His shortcoming may be explained away as- “He assumes as a matter of course that the hamartia is accompanied by moral imperfections; but it is not itself a moral imperfection, and in the purest tragic situation the suffering hero is not morally to blame” (House 102). In Aristotle's nomenclature of actions, “those done in ignorance are mistakes when the person acted on, the

act, the instrument, or the end that will be attained, is other than the agent supposed"(Aristotle, *Nicomachean* n. pag). We may gather the concept as –

“(a) misfortune ... is brought upon him not by vice and depravity

but by some error of judgment (hamartia)

(b) and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some

great error (hamartia) on his part; the man himself being either

such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that”(Aristotle 41).

It is in this vein that we may approach the “great error” that Turin commits. His “tragic *hamartia*, or missing-the-mark,” may be seen to be divided amongst several instances in the story, which “can include both blameworthy and non-blameworthy missings-of-the-mark” (Nussbaum 419). Apart from erroneously killing his friend, what he undertakes as a deed of some benevolence at the outset turns against him and ruins his establishment of the territory which he was so painstakingly able to annex, namely “Amon Rûdh”. After having accidentally killed his son, Turin’s party undertakes to atone for it by offering Mim the petty Dwarf friendship and protection.

But he fails to realise that he has unwittingly erred in his judgement, because Mim is vengeful and nurses a vehement hatred for the race of Elves. It is this which eventually leads the dwarf to betray Turin’s stronghold within the caves of the hill by divulging the information of the hideout to the enemy orcs of Morgoth-“his true purpose was to seek out the servants of Morgoth, and to lead them to Túrin's hiding-place” (Tolkien, *Children* 56). They are, as a result, able to take them utterly by surprise, and Turin only narrowly manages to escape with his life.

This proves to be the turning point in the story. He never becomes as substantial an antagonist to Morgoth again. But his eventual fall is brought about by being unable to see beyond hidden past of his sister, Nienor. He and his men find her in the wild forest, lost and helpless, and rescue her – “Turambar cast his cloak about her and bore her away to the hunters' lodge in the woods. There they lit a fire and wrapped coverlets about her” (Tolkien, *Children* 113).

But her utter failure to recount anything from the past beyond a certain limit is a result of the spell laid upon her by the malice of the Dragon Glaurung. – “Then Glaurung laughed [. . .] he drew her eyes into his (and) a great darkness drew down on her.” Hence, “behind her lay only an empty darkness, through which came no memory of anything” (Tolkien, *Children* 109).

But in spite of that Turin is so moved to love her that he ceases to pry into the truth of her past and eventually cannot help but marry her- “Turambar restrained himself no longer, but asked her in marriage. Then Níniel was glad” (Tolkien, *Children* 116). This places him, like Oedipus, in the awful crime of incest, being unable to judge the truth of things. As a result “in that spring Níniel conceived, and she became pale and wan” (Tolkien, *Children* 119). The consequence of the unwitting crime, committed when mutual joy contributed to the depth of their ignorance of identity, is equivalent in grief, with Nienor, like Jocasta, killing herself as Glaurung reveals-“You have found your brother at last [. . .] the worst of all his deeds you shall feel in yourself” (Tolkien, *Children* 127). Turin, like “Oedipus” punishes himself, “for [. . .] he himself recognizes that he has committed acts that put him outside the pale of human society” (Dasgupta 38). He dies on his own sword-“Túrin set the hilts upon the ground, and cast himself upon the point” (Tolkien, *Children* 134). Also, Nienor’s death, in a transposition, is like Oedipus, in a ravine- “I know because I saw her leap,’ answered Brandir

[. . .] She fled from you, Túrin son of Húrin” (Tolkien, *Children* 132). Running away from Turin and from the truth, she is like Jocasta –

CHORUS Alas, poor queen! how came she by her death?

SECOND MESSENGER By her own hand. And all the horror of it (Sophocles 39)

Both of their names are sullied forever, and other lesser characters in the story are stricken with grief and dismay like the Chorus of *Oedipus Rex* –

CHORUS Woeful sight! more woeful none

These sad eyes have looked upon.

[. . .]

Who did cast on thee his spell, prowling all thy life around (Sophocles 43)

Thus, it is noteworthy how the respective stages of life of both Turin and Oedipus, considered along with the circumstances which prevail during them, may be analogous in several instances, of which some are aforementioned. Likening him in several ways to the character of Oedipus, it may be said that Turin harbours several of the factors, notwithstanding points of difference between the two protagonists, which inspire the Aristotelian notion of a tragic hero. By this suggestion, he is capable of meriting pity, since clearly, intending nothing but good, he “did not deserve the suffering,” far from a state “where we judge that the suffering is brought on by the agent's own bad choices” and whom “we (logically) do not pity” (Nussbaum 467). Tolkien clarifies his stance- “I am more impressed by the extreme importance of being on the right side, than I am disturbed by the revelation of the jungle of confused motives, private purposes, and individual actions (noble or base)” (Tolkien, *Letters* “Notes” 249). Turin’s actions bear it out, much like Oedipus’ righteous seeking of the truth.

It may be seen, therefore, how more than one element in Turin's story may be seen to be in concord with similar portions of *Oedipus Rex*. The comparative study may extend even to the respective backgrounds of the two texts. Thus, the influence of Greek Classical tragedy may be traced across genres and centuries even in the work of Tolkien, who is often viewed as one of the most important figures of fantasy literature in the twentieth century. Reading *The Children of Hurin* in this way reveals to us several connections between Tolkien's devices and framing of characters and *Oedipus Rex*, one of the foremost Greek tragedies. This has previously been largely unnoticed in the sphere of Tolkien studies, and may, therefore, hold hopes for further readings of *The Children of Hurin* leading to greater variety of insightful interpretations.

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