



## DECONSTRUCTING THE CHARACTERS IN SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS REX*

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**ABSTRAK:** Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk mengetahui apa saja karakteristik dari karakter-karakter yang ada di dalam Drama *Oedipus Rex* karya Sophocles, serta untuk mendekonstruksi karakterisasi dari karakter yang sudah ditemukan dan memunculkan sisi lain dari karakteristik tiap-tiap karakter. Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan untuk menganalisis data pada penelitian ini. Data dianalisis dengan cara membaca dan menyeleksi data dari ujaran-ujaran yang ada pada dialog drama. Kemudian data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan teori dekonstruksi terhadap karakterisasi dari karakter-karakter dalam drama. Teori yang digunakan adalah teori dekonstruksi yang ditemukan oleh Jacques Derrida. Hasil dari analisis menunjukkan bahwa yang pertama, karakter yang diteliti adalah Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, dan Tiresias. Masing-masing karakter memiliki karakteristik antara lain, Oedipus memiliki karakteristik bijak, pemberani, dan juga merupakan sosok penolong. Jocasta memiliki karakteristik yang baik, Creon merupakan sosok yang adil, dan Tiresias adalah sosok yang bijaksana. Namun, setelah didekonstruksi, masing-masing karakteristik memiliki karakteristik yang berlawanan sehingga sisi lain tersebut dapat dimunculkan. Oedipus berkarakteristik bodoh, pengecut, dan merupakan sosok pengkhianat. Jocasta memiliki karakteristik yang buruk. Sementara itu, Creon memiliki karakteristik yang tidak adil, dan Tiresias memiliki karakteristik yang egois.

**Kata Kunci:** drama, karakter, karakterisasi, dekonstruksi

**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed at finding the characteristics of the characters in Sophocles' Drama *Oedipus Rex*, as well as to deconstruct the characterization of the characters that have been found and brought out the other side of the characteristics of each character. Descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the data in this study. The data were analyzed by reading and selecting data from the utterances in the drama dialogue. Then the data were analyzed using deconstruction theory on the characterization of the characters in the drama. The theory used was the deconstruction theory discovered by Jacques Derrida. The result of the analysis shows that firstly, the characters are Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and Tiresias. Each character has characteristics. Oedipus has the characteristics of being wise, brave, and is also a helpful figure. Jocasta is a kind character, Creon is a fair figure, and Tiresias is a wise figure. However, after being deconstructed, each characteristic has opposite characteristics so that the other side can be revealed. Oedipus is characterized as a silly, a coward, and a betrayer figure. Jocasta has bad characteristics. Meanwhile, Creon has unfair characteristics, and Tiresias has a selfish characteristic.

**Keywords:** drama, character, characterization, deconstruction



## INTRODUCTION

Humans use language as a tool to communicate with other people either directly or through other media. As stated by Gani, Doi & Liru (2021), language can be interpreted as a tool to convey something that comes to mind. Literary work is one of the media to convey ideas and how to communicate indirectly between individuals. Owa, Separ & Wanggai (2021) also says that people may learn about life through literature because literature generally comes from and human experience. Reading literary works can add our understanding of life in the world around us because conflicts or problems that are described in literary works are an inseparable part of real life.

The most attractive work of fiction from the several forms of literary work is drama. The reason why drama is so interesting to be studied because drama has its own unique characteristic from other types of literary works, namely it can describe or bring directly to the audience about the atmosphere and also experiences that resemble reality in the staging process. This idea is also supported by Iwuchukwu (2008:3) by revealed that the uniqueness of drama is that during the stage performance of a play, drama brings life experiences realistically to the audience.

Dramatic literature is the record of the attempts of playwrights to express and communicate their ideas about man's hope, dreams, ideals, feelings, thoughts and experience, and his relationship to society. Drama is the form of composition designed for performance in theater, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action, and utter the written dialogue (Abrams & Harpham, 2015:95). That means, the drama being staged is a drama that has been written in advance and is in the form of a drama script that must be read by every actor who will take a role in the drama being played. Thus, drama is divided into staged drama and drama in the form of written texts or drama script. In a drama script, the reader can interpret the text of the drama script that is read. Each person has a different perspective on a text they read. The reader can interpret for himself the meaning contained in the drama script, both textually and contextually. The author of the drama script himself has a way to interpret the drama script he makes. These new meanings or values can be explored and lifted into a meaning replacing the previous meaning, so that an uncertain order is created and has other possibilities. This can be studied using the deconstruction method. One of the most famous forms of drama is the play *Oedipus Rex*. *Oedipus Rex* is one of Sophocles' plays which is very interesting to be studied. *Oedipus Rex* is a drama that is very well known for its tragic story where Oedipus marries his own biological mother and blinds his own eyes. This drama is also a drama that underlies the development of drama up to modern times.

The story begins with the suppliants gathering in front of Oedipus' palace in Thebes. The suppliants ask Oedipus, as their king, to find a way to stop the plague that occurred in the city of Thebes, where many people have died and there is chaos everywhere. Oedipus grants the suppliants wish by sending Creon, his brother-in-law, to go to Apollo and find out the origin of the chaos and the plague. As the story, Oedipus become the king right after Laius death. Oedipus then decides to find the killer of Laius. This is the beginning point of the tragedy of this story. The search for Laius' killer is a disaster for Oedipus himself. He will know the truth he should not know.



Oedipus announces that he will find Laius' killer who is still in Thebes so that Thebes can be free from the terrible plague. Oedipus begins to gather people and ask them for information regarding the Laius murder case. A blind prophet named Tiresias is called before Oedipus. Tiresias who already knew the truth didn't want to speak a word. Therefore, in the past, when he was young, Oedipus ran away from his father, Polybus, king of Corinth and Merope, his mother, who was in Corinth to prevent this prophecy from happening and also from that runaway, he killed someone on the street before coming to Thebes.

Not surprisingly, many people have put up a 'hierarchy' or mindset where Oedipus is a brave hero, as seen from Sophocles' portrayal of direct dialogue. Jocasta is a woman who is wise and kind. In reading a text, in this case a literary work, the words, sentences and statements in the text have meaning for the readers. With deconstruction, words and sentences in the text can have new meanings and not only have one single meaning. The author is interested in deconstructing the *Oedipus Rex* drama script with a different point of view so that the characters in this *Oedipus Rex* drama have other sides that were not initially shown and highlighted in this drama, that can be appear and can provide a different point of view when understanding the role of each characters and their respective characteristics in this *Oedipus Rex* drama.

The first theory of deconstruction was brought by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida explains that the meaning of a text is no single or that the meaning has multiple meanings that can be developed. Everything that is written is not only centered on one meaning only, but there are other meanings that do not have a center, so that the meaning can be seen from a different point of view than it should be. Deconstruction thus offers us a radical vision of the activity of thinking. Our mental life consists not of concepts—not of solid, stable meanings—but of a fleeting, continually changing play of signifiers (Tyson, 2015:231). Therefore, all existing texts and 'hierarchical' thoughts that are certain and have been widely interpreted by people in general and are absolute in nature, it can be reversed by deconstruction, including literary texts, such as drama.

All of that is clearly reflected in the text of the drama script *Oedipus Rex* and also because of this, there is a kind of challenge to explore the character and characterization in this drama. Therefore, this study aimed at finding the characteristics of the characters in Sophocles' Drama *Oedipus Rex*, as well as to deconstruct the characterization of the characters that have been found and brought out the other side of the characteristics of each character.

## METHODS

The research design used was descriptive qualitative approach. Stated by Creswell (2009:3), research designs were plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. Also stated by Creswell (2009:4), that qualitative research was a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The researcher built a complex holistic picture, words analysis, and report detailed views of informants, and doing the research in a natural setting. In conclusion, qualitative research was the method to analyze the object using word, sentence, and also information that had been collected.



The data source in this study was *Oedipus Rex* drama script written by Sophocles in 426 B.C. And had been translated by J. E. Thomas with a total 52 pages of drama scripts. The data were taken from dialogues in the form of words, sentences, and noun phrases. In collecting data for literary work, the writer used some steps that are reading the *Oedipus Rex* drama script by understanding the drama script, taking notes some words, sentences, and noun phrases from the drama script, and identifying the words, sentences, and noun phrases that refer to the characterization of the characters and the deconstruction of the characters. After obtaining the data, the data were analyzed by classifying, discussing, and making the conclusion based on the characterization of the characters and the deconstruction of the characters.

## ANALYSIS

In this analysis, the focus will be on describing the characteristics of the characters in the Drama *Oedipus Rex* and using the deconstruction method in order to reveal the other side of the characteristics of the characters to be studied.

### *Characteristics on Characters*

The characters used in this study are the characters of Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and Tiresias. As stated by Beard (2001:64-65) the way to describe the characteristics of a character is to explore the characterization of the character with an understanding from the reader's point of view presented by the writer to the reader. In other words, the reader can find out directly the description of the characteristics of the character depicted in a drama.

As stated by Baldick (2015:37) characterization is a representation of a person or individual figure in a dramatic work. The way of depicting a story in a literary work, one of which is the Drama *Oedipus Rex*, is done by describing a person's figure or characteristics both from the behavior of the character, dialogues that are directly expressed by the character, as well as the depiction of a character from other characters.

Thus, in this study the writer uses the theory, which is to directly describe the characteristics of each character by drawing conclusions based on the description given by Sophocles about the characters in the Drama *Oedipus Rex*.

### *Oedipus*

The characteristics of Oedipus found in this drama are wise, brave, and a helper figure.

-Wise

#### CREON:

If you wish these people nearby to hear,  
I am ready to speak, or should we go inside?

#### OEDIPUS:

Speak to everyone, for I consider their pain  
More important even than that of my own soul. (Oedipus Rex, 2004:6)

Oedipus himself feels responsible for the Thebes people who suffer from a catastrophic disease. Oedipus is more concerned with the safety of his people than himself because of his sense of responsibility as king of Thebes. Oedipus' character here is a character who really loves his own people so that what his people feel can be felt by Oedipus himself and also with his responsibility as king, Oedipus has sent Creon to Apollo as a representative to find a way out in overcoming the problems that occurred in Thebes. Because of his responsibility, Oedipus is described as a wise figure.



-Brave

**PRIEST:**

...And now, Oedipus, greatest in the eyes of all,  
...Come, o best of mortals, and save our city;... (Oedipus Rex, 2004:5)

Oedipus is described as a manly and courageous figure and is highly respected by his people and it is represented by a priest who glorifies the name of Oedipus. Therefore, the people of Thebes really expected the great and brave figure of Oedipus to be able to solve the problems that occurred in Thebes. If Oedipus was not a brave and brave figure, the Thebes people would not glorify Oedipus and would not ask Oedipus to save the Thebes people from disaster.

-Helper Figure

**CHORUS:**

...he stood and defended my land from death.  
Since that time he has been called my king  
and beyond all men  
was honored, ruling in glorious Thebes... (Oedipus Rex, 2004:43)

Oedipus is a helper for the Thebes people because with his abilities, Oedipus is able to protect the Thebes land from destruction and was appointed king of Thebes by the Thebes people. Because Oedipus is able to fight for the people of Thebes, Oedipus is a helping figure.

Jocasta

The characteristics of Jocasta found in this drama is a kind figure.

-Kind

**CHORUS:**

Lady, why do you hesitate  
to take this man inside the house?

**JOCASTA:** I would learn what has befallen. (Oedipus Rex, 2004:25)

Jocasta is a good wife figure who will always listen and always be by her husband's side, Oedipus. Without judging before knowing the truth, Jocasta first heard the answer from Oedipus, because that's why Jocasta is a good woman figure.

Creon

Creon's characteristic in this drama is a fair figure.

-Fair Figure

**CREON:** You must know mine equally well,

**OEDIPUS:** Not when they are false!

**CREON:** Do you understand nothing?

**OEDIPUS:** Yet, there must be rule. (Oedipus Rex, 2004:23)

Creon defends his opinion and upholds justice due to Oedipus's very selfish and unfair attitude towards Creon. If Creon does not maintain his reputation and agrees with Oedipus that he is guilty of being accused without clear evidence, then Creon has no fair character. But Creon still maintains the truth about his innocence.



### *Tiresias*

The characteristics of Tiresias found in this drama is a wise person.

-Wise

#### **OEDIPUS:**

O Tiresias, who grasp all things,  
both what can be learned and what is unspeakable,  
both of heaven and treading the earth,  
even if you cannot see, you still understand  
what sickness plagues our city, and we find, lord,  
you alone are our saviour and defender.

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:12)

Oedipus describes Tiresias as a great prophet, despite Tiresias' shortcomings due to his blindness. Despite his disability, Tiresias is considered capable of understanding the causes of the disaster that occurred in Thebes. With the depiction of some of these characters, it proves that Tiresias is a wise character.

### *Characters Deconstruction*

In deconstructing a text dialog, there are several methods that can be used. In this study, the writer uses the binary opposition described by Derrida in revealing the other side of the characteristics of each character that has been described in previous findings to answer the problem to know the way of the deconstruction perspective reveal the other side of the characters in *Oedipus Rex* drama. Binary Opposition is a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning (Powel, 2007:25). Therefore, to be able to reveal or bring out the other side of the characteristics of each character, namely the characters of Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and Tiresias, the writer deconstructs these characteristics using binary opposition.

The first step in deconstructing is to find the opposition of the characteristics that have been found, then put forward the opposite of these characteristics so as to reveal new meanings or things that are often marginalized, ignored or hidden in general.

Thus, Derrida's deconstruction theory method can be reformulated, that is as the first step in the method in deconstructing the characters in the *Oedipus Rex* drama by reveal the opposition of the characteristics of each character that has been found.

The characters and characteristics found are as follows:

|                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Oedipus</b>  | : Wise, Brave, Helper Figure |
| <b>Jocasta</b>  | : Kind                       |
| <b>Creon</b>    | : Fair Figure                |
| <b>Tiresias</b> | : Wise                       |

By using the theory of deconstruction, the opposition of characteristics that are often ignored or marginalized and have other sides so those they can be found are as follows:

|          |                                   |                                  |
|----------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Oedipus  | : Wise >< Silly; Brave >< Coward; | Helper Figure >< Betrayal Figure |
| Jocasta  | : Kind >< Bad                     |                                  |
| Creon    | : Fair Figure >< Unfair Figure    |                                  |
| Tiresias | : Wise >< Selfish                 |                                  |



### *Oedipus*

In previous analysis, the character of Oedipus has several characteristics, including wise, brave characteristic, and helper figure. However, in studying the drama of Oedipus Rex using Derrida's theory of deconstruction, it is found that the opposite or oppositional characteristics of these characteristics are found.

-Wise >< Silly

#### **OEDIPUS:**

...a herald and a man riding there  
in a chariot, like the man you described,  
encountered me. Both the one in front  
and the old man himself drove me from the road  
with force. In my anger I struck the driver,  
turning me off the road, and the old man,  
when he saw, watched me as I passed the chariot  
and struck me on the head with the two-pronged goad.  
But he more than paid for it and soon was struck  
by the scepter from this very land, lying  
on his back, at once thrown out of the car.  
I killed them all. But if that stranger  
had some connection with Laius,  
who would be more wretched than this man you see?... (Oedipus Rex, 2004:29)

Oedipus recounts that he killed someone on his way out of anger. The act of killing by Oedipus is a very cruel act. Without thinking and without using common sense and not making the right decisions, Oedipus kills other people out of anger. This cruel act without common sense is a strong fact that Oedipus is a silly figure. Oedipus' stupid actions also resulted in a disaster that would befall Thebes because the person Oedipus killed was the former king of Thebes, Laius. Thus, there are several proofs that Oedipus, who was previously a character with wise characteristics, also has silly characteristics due to his actions and decision-making without a long thought on the effects that arise due to his unwise actions and stupid characteristic.

-Brave >< Coward

#### **OEDIPUS:**

...Nor the city nor citadel, nor the holy  
Shrines of the gods, from which I, the worst of men,  
removed myself, myself decreeing  
that all expel the impious one, revealed  
unholy by the gods and, now, of Laius' race.  
Exposing such defilement as this,  
did I intend to see them with my own eyes?  
Not at all. Rather if I could somehow block  
my hearing from the ears, I would not hold back  
from sully shutting off this wretched frame of mine,  
so that I'd be blind and hear nothing, for to live



outside comprehension of these woes would be sweet.

Oh, Cithaeron! Why did you accept me? Why did you not kill me at once, so that I would never reveal to men my origins?...

...O marriage, marriage, you brought me forth, and afterwards again you harvested that same seed and revealed father-brothers. Children of kin blood, bride who were wives and mothers, and all else counted the most shameful acts by men...

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:48)

Oedipus says himself that he really do not dare to look again with his eyes because of the mistakes and crimes he had committed. Oedipus stabbed himself in the eye because of his fear of the truth. Oedipus is afraid of the mistakes and karma he will face. A figure who blames himself and does not dare to face reality is a picture that has a coward characteristic.

-Helper Figure >< Betrayer Figure

**TIRESIAS:**

I will leave after I have said what I came to say, not fearing your face, for you cannot destroy me. I say to you: That man, whom you have long sought, Threatening him and naming as the murderer of Laius, that man is here...

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:17)

Tiresias directly tells Oedipus that it is Oedipus who killed the former king Laius. With the former king Laius killed, Oedipus is the betrayer person that Oedipus had been looking for from the start. In other words, the person who had been wanted as the killer of the former king Laius is none other than Oedipus himself. Thus the figure of Oedipus is described as a betrayer and not a helper figure.

*Jocasta*

In previous analysis, Jocasta is described as a character who has good characteristics. Jocasta is a character with a wise and kind characteristics, both as a mother and as a wife. But in the study or analysis in the Drama *Oedipus Rex* using deconstruction, Jocasta's character has characteristics that have opposition, namely bad characteristics.

-Kind >< Bad

**SERVANT:**

It is fastest of words both to say and to learn: Our divine queen, Jocasta, is dead.

**CHORUS:**

O poor woman! By whatever cause?

**SERVANT:**

By herself! But, of what has been done the worst pain you will avoid, for you cannot see it.



Still, as much as I can remember  
of that poor woman's woes you shall learn.  
After she had gone into her bridal couch,  
Snatching at her hair with both hands...

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:44)

In the drama, The Servant announces that Jocasta has died by committing suicide. From the suicide act, it can be seen that Jocasta has bad characteristics because suicide is a bad act. Thus, Jocasta has bad characteristics.

#### *Creon*

The characteristics of Creon's on the previous character were fair characteristics or a fair figure. Creon holds fast to truth and justice that will not waver even if he is unilaterally accused and found guilty. However, based on Derrida's deconstruction, the fair characteristic has an opposition, namely unfair figure.

#### *-Fair Figure >< Unfair Figure*

**CREON:** I'll say only what I think.

**OEDIPUS:** Then lead me away.

**CREON:** Come, let go of the children.

**OEDIPUS:** Do not take them from me!

**CREON:** It is not your place to decide; the power you had has not remained with you.

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:52)

The reason why Creon is portrayed as a figure who has selfish and unfair characteristics is that Creon separates the children of Oedipus from Oedipus. This action is unfair because children have their right to continue to be with their parents as well as parents, they have the right to remain close to their children. Creon's actions clearly illustrate that Creon has the characteristics of being unfair and selfish for not respecting the rights of others.

#### *Tiresias*

The characteristics of Tiresias' character in the previous finding are wise. Tiresias is described as a great prophet and wise in making decisions in the face of a problem. However, Tiresias also has another side as opposed to his wise character that is selfish characteristics.

#### *-Wise >< Selfish*

**OEDIPUS:**

Who could hear such words and not grow angry,  
words with which you dishonor the city?

**TIRESIAS:** It will end the same, though I hide it in silence.

**OEDIPUS:** Why not, then, tell me what will come anyway?

**TIRESIAS:**

I should explain no further. At these things,  
if you wish, rage as much as your heart is able.

(*Oedipus Rex*, 2004:13)



Tiresias' character, who is selfish, does not want to tell the truth to Oedipus. Tiresias doesn't care about Oedipus, who really wants to know about the truth that Tiresias is hiding even though Oedipus has been angered by him. Tiresias thinks that he has to keep the truth hidden and only himself knows the truth.

## CONCLUSION

The characters studied in this study are the characters of Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and Tiresias. These characters have several characteristics that are Oedipus has the characteristics of wise, brave, and also a helper figure. Jocasta's character is kind, Creon's is a fair person, and Tiresias is a wise figure.

By using Derrida's deconstruction, other characteristics that contradict the characteristics of each character studied are found, including Oedipus is a silly figure, coward characteristic, and also a betrayer figure. Jocasta's character has bad characteristics, Creon's character is an unfair figure, and Tiresias is a selfish person. Therefore, each character has a different side of their own characteristics that are sometimes invisible to the eyes of the readers of *Oedipus Rex*. By deconstructing these characteristics, it can be concluded that there is another side to the characters of Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, and Tiresias in the drama *Oedipus Rex*.

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