

'You are the curse, the corruption of the land!'. With these words, Tiresias, a blind prophet in 'Oedipus The King' set the actions in play that would turn king to beggar within the day. Prophecy and foreshadowing is an important part of playwriting, and adds an element of suspense that is not possible any other way. Whether it be the witches of MacBeth, the ramblings of Tiresias in Oedipus: The King, and Antigone, or whether it is the unrealized foreshadowing by Figaro in 'The Marriage of Figaro', foreshadowing gives the reader or the audience something to puzzle themselves over, until the play or novel is actually over. It would not be a stretch of the imagination to say that some of the greatest plays ever written would be impotent if their elements of foreshadowing was removed.

Foreshadowing is defined, in Webster's dictionary, as 'to give a hint or suggestion of beforehand'. In drama, foreshadowing is generally used for several purposes, including the creation of tension, creation of atmosphere, and adds an element of credibility to a character. All of these are important elements of a play. However it is not hard to imagine a play in which more than half of the elements of a plot, namely exposition, discovery, point of attack, complication and crisis all be caused by an act of foreshadowing or prophecy. Indeed, "Oedipus the King", which was considered the greatest play in history by Aristotle, was one such play.

"Oedipus the King" was the story of the King of Thebes, Oedipus, and his dark past history which no one, including himself to a point, was aware of, one that involved abandonment, patricide and incest. Thebes was beset by a plague, and a delegation was sent to Apollo, the Greek God of healing, where they received instructions to find the murderer of the previous king of Thebes, King Laius. This form of foreshadowing was necessary for the storyline to have a starting place, and acts not only as foreshadowing, but also as discovery, because it gave new information that moved the plot forwards. A problem with this is the fact that it requires an act of God, something that Aristotle frowned upon in his definitive text 'Poetics'. In the case of 'Oedipus the King', Sophocles managed to get around the problem by having the consultation happen off-stage, but in a good drama, this 'form' of foresight is generally frowned upon. As such, it should be avoided, unless where completely necessary, as in Oedipus.

Another type of foreshadowing showcased in 'Oedipus the King' was intended as a point of attack, and it was when the blind prophet Tiresias directly blamed King Oedipus for plague sent by Apollo. This form of 'foreshadowing' differs from the first one, which was intended only to give a starting point for the storyline. The blame which is leveled against Oedipus was totally unexpected, and it left the audience in complete suspense throughout the play, as they tried to figure out how Oedipus was involved in the plot to kill Laius. This helped build the suspense, and was what really started 'the ball rolling' so to speak, in an effort to find out what the past of Oedipus actually was. This plot device grabbed the audience's attention, and adds complication, which is necessary in any play.

The third, and most highly ironic, foreshadowing happened when Oedipus, in a fit of anger, said to Tiresias, "You've lost your power, stone-blind, stone-deaf - senses, eyes blind as stone!". By the end of the story, Oedipus was almost exactly that. By day's end, Oedipus no longer possessed the sense of sight, and had lost his kingdom to his brother-in-law. A complete reversal of circumstances, which saw him, in the play 'Oedipus at Colonus', enter the city the same way that Tiresias entered Oedipus' court on that day, blind as a bat, with a helper without whom he would be useless.

'The Marriage of Figaro' has one obvious prophetic scene, where Figaro says "Look to the day's work, Master Figaro! First bring forward the hour of your wedding to make sure of the ceremony taking place, head off Marceline who's so deucedly fond of you, pocket the money and the presents, thwart His Lordship's little game, give Master Bazile good thrashing, ..." This scene of foresight was not the same as the two previously cited examples. It is used twofold, first, and most obviously, it is used as comic relief, but second, and more importantly, it is

used to show the almost impossible odds that Figaro overcome at the out right beginning of the story. Without the foreshadowing, the audience would be in the dark as to Figaro's plans, and an major irony of the story would be missing. That irony is that all of Figaro's carefully thought-out plans failed him when it was important, but despite it all, he still managed to come out carrying out all the plans which he carefully laid out at the start. For instance, Figaro tried to stop Marceline from marrying him. Despite his best arguments, he was given the choice of paying several hundred gold pieces or be married off to Marceline without a choice. His entire plan of stretching the law to his aims failed. However, an act of pure chance saved him from the unwanted marriage when Marceline recognized Figaro to be her son. This all goes to say that while the plans of Figaro may have failed him, his 'vision' of the day, so to speak, was still correct.

Another scene in 'The Marriage of Figaro' which may be considered foretelling the future was when Bartholo said "...what mortal, abandoned of gods and women, could... it be?" when he was talking to Marceline about finding a man to marry her. The statement is dripping with foresight. Bartholo had little love for Figaro, and his discovery that Figaro was his son was not a comfortable realization. As such, he might have been considered 'abandoned of gods', as he was given a harsh 'punishment' by 'God', and was not helped nor given any escape routes. He was forced to admit parenthood someone he loathed. This line was highly ironic, because later on, Bartholo married Marceline, after he was 'abandoned by god' so to speak by finding out that Figaro was his son.

If one was to take a look at the scenes of foreshadowing in both plays, there are obviously some different, as the above examples show, mainly due to the fact that 'Oedipus the King' was a tragedy, and 'The Marriage of Figaro' was a comedy. However, there was one similarity that was found throughout, mainly that foreshadowing led to the major events of the story, which caused major changes in the lives of characters, such as the gouging of Oedipus' eyes, the marriage of Bartholo to Marceline, so as to allow Figaro go get married, etc... This suggests that foreshadowing is generally used only when a major impact is about to be made, so foreshadowing is a sign of something important yet to come.

In conclusion, dramatic foreshadowing is one of the most important parts of both plays. Oedipus could not have even started if it was not for the first prophecy given by Apollo, and 'The Marriage of Figaro' would have lost one of its most sweetest ironies. Most importantly, it gives a taste of things to come, which in a good play, should be enough to keep an audience listening.

