

Oedipus Rex in English and Arabic Drama: An Analogy

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The present paper deals with the Oedipal theme as was treated by Sophocles in Oedipus Rex and then imitated first in Oedipus written in collaboration by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee in English literature, and then in Arabic literature by Tawfiq Al-Hakim in his King Oedipus and Ali Ahmed Bakathir in Oedipus' Tragedy. The study investigates changes made by the three writers in the plot and main characters and in some issues and dramatic elements of the tragedy. These changes are introduced by the playwrights to make their versions acceptable to their contemporary audiences. The purposes of the three writers are considered to see how far they have succeeded in fulfilling them.

Key Words: Greek myth, Arabic drama, adaptation, social and political criticism

Most of the men of letters who treated or rather wrote on the Oedipus myth were under the impact, to varying extents, of Sophocles' masterpiece, Oedipus Rex. The present study will shed light on points of congruence and differences in Sophocles' tragedy on the one hand, and Dryden' Oedipus, Al-Hakim's King Oedipus and Bakathir's Oedipus' Tragedy on the other. The study is based on an analogical analysis because most of those who treated the Oedipal theme were influenced by Sophocles at large. This affirms the idea of Mimesis in criticism and literature as explained by Aristotle that the imitation is the imitation of imitation of archetypal ideas. No wonder that Sophocles stands under the spotlight while his imitators stand in the shade. This, however, brings us to the analogy which is carried out below.

Aspects of Congruence: (Similarities)

The main events of Oedipus Rex have been retained by Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir in their works. The plot concentrates on principal issues. Thebes is

suffering greatly. In trying to find the cause of their misery, the citizens come to King Oedipus as suppliants to urge him deliver their town. The oracle brought from Delphi is essentially the same with the four playwrights. In Oedipus Rex, Creon reveals Phoebus' order to wreak vengeance on Laius' murderer so as to put an end to the troubles of Thebes. After getting information about the crime from Creon, Oedipus promises to do his best to dispel the taint. Dymas, in Dryden's Oedipus, returns with the same oracle. Al-Hakim makes his Creon go to Delphi accompanied by the chief priest to get the oracle. In Bakathir's play, Oedipus agrees to send Creon to Delphi after being assured by Teiresias that this step will help carry out their plan against the temple. Creon returns without knowing anything and Loxias comes with him to reveal his fabricated oracle.

Sophocles introduces the story of the sphinx through Creon's account of Laius' murder. When Laius was slain, nobody arose to avenge him because the riddling

sphinx had already started to give the citizens troubles at the gates of Thebes. The Thebans' terrible condition with the sphinx continued until Oedipus was able to save the city by solving the monster's riddle. Dryden has the same story narrated by Teiresias to blame the citizens for their ingratitude when they show signs of rebellion against Oedipus. After the first choral ode in Oedipus Rex, Oedipus invokes a curse on the murderer(s) of Laius and the accomplices in the crime whoever they are. Dryden is the only dramatist who comes close to Sophocles in this incident. In his play, Oedipus' imprecation on the murderer occurs after the revelation of the Delphic oracle.

Since Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir have introduced many changes in the treatment of Teiresias' scene, it is going to be included in the part that deals with differences while stressing the aspects that have remained unchanged. The quarrel scene between Oedipus and Creon occurs after the second choral ode in Oedipus Rex. In that scene, Oedipus confronts Creon with the charge of being a traitor and an accomplice in the plot against the throne. Creon defends himself against the charge and gives logical reasons proving his honesty but they are all turned down by Oedipus. The disagreement between Oedipus and Creon takes place in Al-Hakim's King Oedipus after Creon's revelation of the Delphic oracle which names Oedipus as murderer of Laius. In defending himself, Oedipus charges both Creon and the chief priest with treason and resolves to sentence them with death or banishment.

The scene in which Jocasta tells Oedipus about the old oracle given to Laius has been handled in the same way by Dryden.

In Sophocles' tragedy, Jocasta tries to lessen Oedipus' anger and fear from Teiresias' prophecy by telling him about the old oracle which, as she thinks, has not come true. In return, Oedipus informs her about the oracle he was told when he was in Corinth and about the accident he had at the crossroads. Dryden has the very same scene right after Oedipus has been accused of Laius' murder in act three and thus brings his plays, like its Grecian model, to its climax. Al-Hakim has also employed the same scene without introducing great changes into it. The declaration of Oedipus' parentage is the essential role of the Corinthian and Theban shepherds and it is the same in the plays of Sophocles, Dryden and Al-Hakim.

There is a general agreement among most of the writers who attempted the Oedipal theme to make Oedipus the hero. Sophocles' Oedipus answers all the requirements of a tragic hero set by Aristotle. He is a man of great reputation and prosperity and has positive and negative traits. In the works of Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir, Oedipus shares with the Sophoclean hero some traits and differs with him in others. He is seen as the savior of Thebes who is capable of solving all her troubles. His courage and justice are stressed among his positive traits in all the three treatments. With Sophocles and Dryden, Oedipus' intelligence is proved for he managed to answer the sphinx' riddle all by himself. On the other hand, the bad traits which Oedipus displays are not unlike those of the Grecian model for he is depicted by the three dramatists as being proud, stubborn, hot-tempered and self-righteous. At the beginning of Oedipus Rex, Oedipus is shown as having respect to religion and its representatives because

he sends Creon to Delphi. Once he is accused of being the defiler of the city, he becomes skeptic, humiliates Teiresias and eventually declares that he has become most hateful to the gods. With Dryden and Al-Hakim, Oedipus has a similar attitude towards religion. Apart from Al-Hakim, Dryden and Bakathir imitate Sophocles in drawing their hero into the animal world. The stork and monster have been used in connection with Oedipus in Dryden's Oedipus while the Corinthian cat is compared to Bakathir's Oedipus. Finally Al-Hakim comes closer to Sophocles in the punishment which Oedipus inflicts upon himself. Having gouged out his eyes, Al-Hakim's Oedipus decides to banish himself.

While the character of Teiresias is drawn by the three dramatists, Dryden's portrait bears many characteristics of its Sophoclean counterpart. To find out the defiler of the city mentioned in the Delphic oracle, Teiresias' knowledge is needed in both Sophocles' and Dryden's plays. At his entrance, in both plays, Teiresias is showered with praises by Oedipus. The Sophoclean queen preserves some of her qualities while she lacks some of them in the works of Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir. In Oedipus Rex, she is seen as a wise and affectionate woman who is loved and respected by her husband and who is ready to sacrifice everything to preserve her happiness. Al-Hakim's Jocasta has the very same traits. In all the four plays Jocasta is content to leave the affairs of the state totally for Oedipus but the effect of her counsels are only stressed in Oedipus Rex. In all the four plays, Jocasta does not believe in oracles because they are often misinterpreted by the priests and thus become a source of troubles. Dryden's and

Bakathir's queens are similar in actually directing their onslaughts against priests. When Oedipus is searching the truth about his origin, Jocasta, with the four playwrights, tries hard to stop him.

Dryden and Al-Hakim agree with Sophocles in the essential roles assigned to the Corinthian messenger and the Theban shepherd. These two characters are important in the discovery of Oedipus' true origin. The Corinthian messenger has a further role which is breaking the news of Polybus' death and the Corinthians' desire to crown Oedipus. He does so in the plays of Sophocles, Dryden and Al-Hakim. Jocasta's death, in Oedipus Rex, is narrated by the second messenger who also describes Oedipus' self-blinding. Al-Hakim is the only one who imitates Sophocles in this minor character and its role.

Blindness is one of the motifs that recurs in all the four plays. Oedipus' moral blindness is set in contrast with Teiresias' physical blindness to show that the first kind is more dangerous than the latter. Oedipus has been living for such a long time without seeing the crimes he has been committing. Only when the disaster befalls Thebes, Oedipus starts his investigation and eventually knows the horrible reason of their calamity. Teiresias, in all the four plays is being taunted with blindness, though in a less degree in Al-Hakim's play. His reaction to the taunt, with Sophocles, Dryden and Bakathir, is getting angry because he knows that the real blindness is not that of the eyes, but of the mind and heart. Enlightenment through suffering is one of the themes in Oedipus Rex and it could be found clearly in Bakathir's play rather than in Dryden's or Al-Hakim's plays. The hero with Sophocles and

Bakathir, suffers, and through suffering, he gains insight into himself and the surrounding circumstances. His decision to leave Thebes is the result of the realization that in his present condition, he has no place in the city. Due to Oedipus' immoral attitude towards Jocasta after the discovery of the truth, in Al-Hakim's play, one is doubtful whether the hero's suffering has led to his enlightenment or not. Oedipus' suicide at the end of Dryden's play brings us to the same conclusion.

Aspects of Differences: (Dissimilarities)

Although the four playwrights agree on the incident of the citizens' supplication to the king, they differ in the manner and time of presenting it. Oedipus Rex opens with this event and we have the suppliants headed by the priest of Zeus coming to discuss with Oedipus who has already sent Creon to get religious advice from the Paythian house of Phoebus. Dryden delays this scene till the end of the first act because Oedipus, when the play starts, is in war outside Thebes. Yet Dryden manages to be on the same track by making Creon and his faction give accounts of the devastation in Thebes. Oedipus, with Dryden, does not send Creon to Delphi, but another person called Dymas. Al-Hakim also delays the incident but for a short time. His play starts with Oedipus inside his palace to stress the importance of family in the king's life and to acquaint the Arab audience with the story through giving an ample background of its hero. Al-Hakim's Oedipus does not send anybody to Delphi, but the chief priest and the citizens tell him that they have chosen Creon, their favorite, for this mission. Bakathir starts his play inside the royal palace. Creon describes the afflicted city and Oedipus refuses to

send anyone to the temple which he thinks to be the cause of their troubles.

The difference found in the presentation of the first episode of the play shows that each of the four dramatists puts emphasis on some aspect of the play he believes to be of considerable significance. To Sophocles, the city's plight is the first thing to be discussed because through its investigation, Oedipus' origin will be revealed. Dryden's introduction of Creon and his faction before the presentation of the city's difficulty is intended to draw the attention to the role they will play in the lives of most of the characters employed in the play. Oedipus' family scene at the beginning of Al-Hakim's play draws the attention to the effect the family is going to exert on vital decisions the king will make at later stages of the play. In the discussion of the city's troubles at the beginning of Bakathir's play, Loxias is introduced with hints at the influence he could have on the city as a whole. As the story unfolds, we realize that all these hints are true.

The oracle as treated by Dryden differs only in the following phrase: "The rest let Laius tell." (Dryden & Lee: 153). By this phrase, Dryden prepares for the conjuring scene in which the rest of the information about the murder is to be taken from Laius' ghost. The other difference with Al-Hakim is that both Creon and the chief priest know from the oracle that Oedipus is the murderer of Laius. Influenced by his Greek tradition, Sophocles followed his ancestors in considering oracles as something sacred and not to be questioned. The Christian legacy is not apparent in Dryden's treatment of the oracle because he followed the footsteps of the Greeks while adding touches of sorcery and witchcraft that were popular with the

audience of the time. Although Al-Hakim claimed that he adapted the story to the Islamic thought, he failed, as in other instances, to achieve this claim in the treatment of the oracle. Only Bakathir proved to be true to his principles for he showed at an early stage of the play that the oracle is a fabrication.

The only difference between Sophocles and Dryden in the treatment of the sphinx story is that in the latter's play, Oedipus never boasts about his victory over the sphinx whereas in the former's, he does in the quarrel scene between him and Teiresias. Al-Hakim and Bakathir handle the story in a different way. In Al-Hakim's play, the sphinx is merely a lion which Oedipus killed and threw into the sea. But because there is an intrigue between Teiresias and Oedipus, the lion is made into a monster with a woman's face and the wings of an eagle. Because Teiresias does not want Creon to ascend the throne after Laius' death, he has invented this story and taught Oedipus the answer of the riddle. Bakathir has also made a similar change. The sphinx is not a real monster but a dummy in which one of the priests is hidden to strike fear into the citizens and kill them when they fail to answer his riddle. Like Al-Hakim's play, the intention of this plan is to enable Oedipus to get the Theban throne and queen. Bakathir goes a step further than Al-Hakim when he presents the monster actually on stage. Unfortunately, the sphinx story as treated by Bakathir is the least successful of the four because it is less dramatic and far from being acceptable.

The only difference between Sophocles and Dryden in relation to Oedipus' imprecation is that Dryden's play, Jocasta prays that the effect of Oedipus' invocation

be brought to him, her and everybody. The rest of the play shows that her prayers have been answered. Both Al-Hakim and Bakathir differ from Sophocles and Dryden in this respect. Al-Hakim does not use the invocation because when his Oedipus receives the Delphic oracle, he takes it for granted that Teiresias is the murderer and never thinks that he himself could be the assassin. Similarly, Bakathir does not use the invocation because Oedipus knows from the beginning that he has killed Laius. The invocation is, then, a merit in Oedipus' character with Sophocles and Dryden since their hero is seen to be more sincere in his search for the murderer.

In Sophocles' tragedy, Teiresias has been called to help in finding the murderer. On being asked to tell what he knows about the crime, Teiresias refuses to speak. His refusal enrages Oedipus and they start abusing each other ending the scene with the dreadful prophecy about Oedipus' downfall. Dryden introduces some changes in this aspect of the Grecian tragedy. Teiresias first comes without being summoned and offers the citizens various reasons for the Theban calamity. When the Delphic oracle is revealed, Teiresias is called. He gives descriptions of the murderer without naming him. Only at the groves when he conjures the ghosts, Teiresias is able to know the murderer in particular and after being taunted by Oedipus, he confronts him with the truth and tells him the same prophecy his Grecian counterpart has disclosed to Oedipus. Because Al-Hakim's Teiresias is the villain of the play, certain changes have been introduced to suit his role. In the same manner of Sophocles, he is called to help in solving the problem of the city. On

his attempt to shake of his responsibility for the affairs, Oedipus threatens to reveal his secrets to the citizens. In the trial scene, he is summoned again, but this time, to attend only without helping in anything. Al-Hakim differs from Sophocles in that he does not use the prophecy concerning Oedipus' downfall. Like Teiresias' first appearance in Dryden's Oedipus, Bakathir's Teiresias comes all by himself to help Oedipus carry out his intention to confiscate the treasures of the temple and bring back Oedipus to true faith. Different from Sophocles' Teiresias, he does not withhold information. On the contrary, he tells Oedipus everything about Loxias' intrigues. Like Al-Hakim, Bakathir eliminates the prophecy about Oedipus' end and goes a step further than Al-Hakim in adjusting all the oracles of the Grecian tragedy with the Islamic beliefs.

In Dryden's Oedipus, the quarrel scene between Oedipus and Creon does not occur. Creon is actually involved in various intrigues to get rid of Oedipus who is thought to be a stranger to the Theban throne. Despite all these crimes, Oedipus is still deceived and believes Creon to be a true friend. Like Dryden, Bakathir does not use this scene, but his reason is different from that of Dryden. Oedipus never suspects Creon because he knows that he is not involved in the plot made by Loxias. Sophocles' use of the scene helps increase the tension of the play which is almost absent in Bakathir's play and is less in Al-Hakim's play, while it is supplied by other elements in Dryden's.

In handling the scene in which Jocasta tells Oedipus of the oracle given to Laius, and he informs her about the prophecy which he got in Corinth, Al-Hakim differs with Sophocles in that it occurs while the trial

of Creon and the chief priest is taking place. Bakathir differs from the other three dramatists in this respect. With Bakathir, all the oracles and prophecies are nothing but intrigues planned by Loxias who has used every possible means to achieve them. Oedipus knows that he has killed Laius. So does Jocasta who believes that the murder is a punishment to Laius for killing his own child just to avert a reckless prophecy. Bakathir's Oedipus and Jocasta tell each others about the old oracles, but when Teiresias comes, we know their truth.

The scene in which Jocasta offers prayers and gifts of incense to the god, in Oedipus Rex, has no counterpart in the works of Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir. Sophocles presents this scene to heighten the tension of the tragedy and give some sort of resolution. Jocasta is praying so that the troubles of Thebes and of Oedipus in particular may come to an end. The sudden arrival of the Corinthian messenger gives her the feeling that her prayers have been answered. The coming events will show that she is mistaken. In Oedipus Rex, "peripety" is achieved through the news of Polybus' death, while "discovery" is attained by the declaration of Oedipus' parentage. Although Al-Hakim agrees with Sophocles and Dryden in the role of the Corinthian and Theban shepherds, he departs from them in other respects. Al-Hakim's Oedipus knows from the beginning of the play that he is not the son of Polybus and Merope. The news of Polybus' death broken by the Corinthian messenger does not give the same relief it does in Oedipus Rex in which Oedipus believes that he is the son of the Corinthian monarchs. Another difference is that Al-Hakim makes the Corinthian

messenger arrive after the Theban shepherd's declaration that Laius was killed by one person and not by a band of robbers. Such a declaration is important at this stage of the play because Oedipus is more concerned with Laius' murder than with the idea whether or not he killed his father. Bakathir's play takes another direction. Both the Corinthian messenger and the Theban shepherd are employed to confirm Loxias' crimes.

In Oedipus Rex, the dreadful punishment Oedipus and Jocasta inflict upon themselves is narrated by the second messenger. Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus gouges out his eyes so that they no longer behold the horrors he has been suffering and working. Each of the three dramatists introduced a certain change in this part of the Sophoclean tragedy. After knowing the horrible truth, Oedipus, in Dryden's play, tries to kill himself with his sword but he is detained by his friends who confine him into his room in the palace. There, he gouges out his eyes without anything happens to Jocasta in the meanwhile. This act is not reported by a second messenger from the royal house, but by Haemon who has been watching at Oedipus' door. The rest of the play shows Oedipus attempting to kill himself until he manages to do so in the very end by flinging himself from the window of the tower. Jocasta's end is different also. Before stabbing herself, she hangs her daughters and slays her sons. The influence of revenge tragedy, with its quest for vengeance, violence, the ghost of a murdered kinsman, scenes of real insanity (Drabble: 822), is apparent in the construction of Dryden's play.

Al-Hakim's Jocasta meets the same end of her Grecian counterpart but after

complaining to Oedipus, in a long scene, about her inability to live with him. Oedipus also blinds himself but for a different reason. After Jocasta's death, he decides to mourn her by gouging his eyes. Bakathir's Jocasta has also hanged herself. But before her death, she is presented in a scene in which she apologizes to Teiresias and bids Oedipus a farewell. Oedipus, on the other hand, does not blind himself but resolves to leave the city for good and he does so. Bakathir's Islamic stand is clear in choosing the end of his hero and heroine. Agreeing with Sophocles on Jocasta's suicide, Bakathir justifies that suicide, which is forbidden among his Muslim audience, by making it the action of an insane person. Oedipus neither gouges out his eyes nor commits suicide but chooses exile through which he could repent his sins.

Having put his children into the care of Creon, Sophocles' Oedipus concludes the tragedy by pleading with Creon to send him into exile. Dryden does not follow Sophocles in this respect since his play ends with the death of nearly all the main characters. Al-Hakim employs Sophocles' conclusion for his play and even goes a step further in borrowing from Oedipus at Colonus the idea that Antigone accompanies her father into his exile. Bakathir fails in his imitation of Al-Hakim in this regard. While Al-Hakim's Antigone accompanies her blind father to see for him, Bakathir's use of this incident is not logical because his Oedipus does not blind himself.

Oedipus' portrait undergoes a change in the plays of Al-Hakim and Bakathir. While Dryden's Oedipus abhors lying which is thought to be unfit for royal figures, Al-Hakim's Oedipus is a professional liar who

not only deceives his citizens but also his wife and children and plots with Teiresias to get the Theban crown. The legendary grandeur attached to Sophocles' hero and somewhat Dryden's hero is no longer found with the heroes in Al-Hakim's and Bakathir's plays. The reason for that in Al-Hakim's play is the hero's lies and deception, while in Bakathir's play, it is due to the way the author portrays his hero. Oedipus' attitude towards religion, in Bakathir's play is not the same as in the other three plays. At the beginning, Oedipus is an atheist who does not believe in the temple and its priests. Teiresias comes to expose the deception of the temple's priests and bring Oedipus back to true faith.

The tragic flaw of the hero in Oedipus Rex is said to be excessive pride which leads to Oedipus' downfall. Each of the three playwrights attributes a certain flaw to his hero, but actually we see that they are not greatly different. The flaw in Dryden's Oedipus is his genius and restless soul which lead him to unravel the mystery of his life and thus be himself lost once it is revealed. On a more philosophical scale, love of investigation is the flaw in Al-Hakim's Oedipus and it also precipitates his catastrophe. Courage, in Bakathir's play, leads the hero to defy Loxias and thus cause his downfall. The punishment which Oedipus inflicts upon himself takes a further dimension in Al-Hakim's King Oedipus because the hero carries out his decision of banishment which is only fulfilled in Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. Dryden and Bakathir choose different ends for their heroes. Oedipus, in Dryden's play, chooses suicide after blinding himself, while Bakathir's Oedipus only goes into

exile accompanied by his daughter Antigone.

No one of the three playwrights imitates Sophocles in the lyrical function assigned to the chorus in Oedipus Rex where no song "is merely an interlude which could be transferred to another place or another play", and all the songs Sophocles employs perform a specific function for they "put the audience into a certain frame of mind after one scene and before the next" (Webster: 126). Thus, it is only in Sophocles' tragedy that the chorus plays as an actor and as a singer while in the other three plays, it is employed as one of the characters. Sophocles' use of the chorus is the best for the following reasons. The chorus participation in the action as a character is significant and to a great extent systematic. Nearly each striking scene of the major characters is introduced by a conversation of the chorus with these characters. Seen as the objective self of the playwright, the chorus helps the audience get the right message and interprets the moral and religious wisdom of the play. While commenting on events and other characters, the chorus proves itself to be free and wise in its comments. In the plays of Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir, the chorus is depicted as a foolish group of Thebans who are easily deceived and have no opinion of their own. The chorus' relation and sincerity to Oedipus are stronger in Sophocles' tragedy because it refuses to denounce him as guilty until the truth is revealed. Even after that, the chorus remains sympathetic. In both Dryden's and Bakathir's plays, the citizens turn on Oedipus when they know the truth for a while but later they sympathize with him.

The idea of fate and free will is one of the main motifs that has interested all the four playwrights. Differences found in the treatment of this idea is attributed to differences in the cultural background of each dramatist. Sophocles' presentation of the idea of fate does not suggest that his characters are driven by external forces to do things which they do not want to do. They have a will of their own and are responsible for their actions. This is quite clear in Oedipus' remark after gouging out his eyes: "Apollo, friends, Apollo was he that brought these my woes to pass, these my sore, sore woes: but the hand that stuck the eyes was none save mine Sophocles: 111)". Dryden, on the other hand, depicts his characters as puppets who have no responsibility over their actions because they are predestined to do them. "T is fate alone that makes us wretched (Dryden and Lee: 227) " is Jocasta's excuse for the crimes committed by Oedipus and herself. Both Al-Hakim and Bakathir look at the idea of fate from an Islamic perspective. According to the teaching of Islam, there is no clash between fate and the fact that man enjoys a considerable amount of freedom that makes him responsible for his deeds. The disaster, in the plays of Al-Hakim and Bakathir, is the result of an intrigue planned for specific reasons. But in each case, Oedipus is responsible for what has happened.

It is convenient at this stage to shed light on the reasons which stimulated each of the four dramatists to compose his play. The competitions held for the writers of tragedy at the annual festivals encouraged Sophocles to try winning a prize. One of his attempts was Oedipus Rex. With this aim in mind, he also sought to expose the audience with certain issues related to their

contemporary life. Dryden's admiration of Oedipus Rex motivated him to introduce it to the English audience of his time with the hope of improving their classical taste. The analogy drawn between certain aspects of the play and some living characters should not take the play away from the goal it was supposed to achieve. Being the first creative work in Arabic literature to deal with the Oedipal theme, Al-Hakim's play was composed with the aim of presenting to the theatre-goers a Greek tragedy from an Arabic point of view so as to fill the gaps the author saw in Arabic literature. Like Dryden, Al-Hakim was not sure whether or not his attempt was successful due to cultural differences. Bakathir is the only one who differs from the other three playwrights in stating clearly a contemporary political reason for writing on the Oedipal theme. The question of Palestine and the war against the Jews had preoccupied Bakathir's mind throughout his literary career. In 1928, the Arabs suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Jews who abused the Muslims and their holy places alike. The effect of the crisis was great on Bakathir and made him recall the incident of the Greek myth used in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. The strange connection between the Arabs' crisis in Palestine and the Greek myth is explained by Bakathir as follows: "The sin committed by the Arabs in Palestine and its following disgrace are as horrible as the crime Oedipus committed against his parents and the shame it caused him (Bakathir: 58). With this new outlook, Bakathir reread Sophocles' tragedy and came up with a different interpretation of the myth.

Dryden's admiration of the Grecian tragedy did not prevent him from declaring

that his collaborated version would be inferior to that of Sophocles and thus encouraged the audience not to condemn it especially if he was going to fill the play with details they liked most. Consequently, the play won the audience's admiration, but from a literary point of view, it is very unclassical. The introduction of the subplot of Adrastus and Eurydice and the great change in Creon's character, who is made the villain, took the play away from Greek tragedy to be closer to a bloody melodrama full of intrigues, murders and witchcraft. Further, Al-Hakim, with his version of the Sophoclean tragedy did not succeed in his attempt and he was bold enough to admit his failure in the preface of his play, in the same way Dryden did in English Literature. Likewise, Bakathir shares Dryden and Al-Hakim the consequences of their attempt. The account Bakathir gave for choosing the Oedipal theme is not convincing because it is hard to realize the analogy between Oedipus' tragedy and the Arabs' crisis in Palestine. Though Bakathir managed to adapt certain elements to the Muslim and Arab mentality, the play is replete with exaggerations and improbable events and devices that hamper its dramatic value.

In conclusion, the works of Dryden, Al-Hakim and Bakathir have their own merits

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and defects. None of them is qualified to compete with Sophocles' masterpiece. Besides, critics attribute this phenomenon to the religious atmosphere of Sophocles' time in which tragedies were considered a part of the religious rituals performed annually at the Dionysian festivals. Had Sophocles' tragedy been popular at his time only, the former opinion would be wholly accepted. But since Oedipus Rex is still considered one of the best tragedies ever written in world and comparative literatures and none of the attempts written in its imitation could rival with it, there must be other factors to account for its supremacy. It is known in comparative literature that when themes transfer from one literature to another, they lose some of their characteristics and assume others. This is what happened to the Oedipal theme when it transferred from the ancient Greek literature to the English Christian literature and the Arab-Muslim literature. The authors' societies, times and cultural backgrounds did affect their treatments of the ancient theme and that made them differ from Sophocles who also had his own objectives in writing the Oedipus tragedy. Each of the three dramatists of the present study had a certain purpose which he tried to achieve through his version.