

## **From *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* to *Oedipus the King***

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### **I. Abstract**

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*The "Harry Potter" series of novels showcases the magical world of fantasy, and many of its settings also highlight the essence of Western culture. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, an important competition was held in the magical world: the Triwizard Tournament, in which the protagonist Harry was involved. The fourth book unfolded the turning point of the entire series : the resurrection of Voldemort. The settings of these important plots are inextricably linked with the story of *Oedipus the King*, the mythology of the ancient Greeks written by Sophocles.*

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### **II. Sphinx**

In Greek tradition, Sphinx has the head of a human, the haunches of a lion, and sometimes the wings of a bird. It is mythicised as treacherous and merciless. Those who cannot answer its riddle suffer a fate typical in such mythological stories, as they are killed and eaten by this ravenous monster.<sup>i</sup>

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry Potter, as one of Hogwarts' warriors, participates in the final event of the Triwizard Tournament: crossing the maze. There were many distractions in the maze, and one of them Harry met was the riddle of Sphinx. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the image of Sphinx is described like this: "It was a sphinx. It had the body of an overlarge lion; great clawed paws, and a long yellowish tail ending in a brown tuft. Its head, however, was that of a woman."<sup>iii</sup> Compared with the two eared thin necked jar from 450 to 440 BC and the skinny Sphinx in the oil paintings of the 19th century, after literary recreation, Sphinx's appearance in Harry Potter is more specific and his figure is larger. Harry recognized Sphinx at the first glance. It is worth mentioning that Harry was impressed with Sphinx only after he saw the picture of her in *The Monsters' Monster Book*, which is the textbook for the magical animal protection course selected by Hagrid.

In the story of *Oedipus the King*, Sphinx was sent by Queen Hera to avenge the scourge of Thebes on her rival Semele. Sphinx sat on the mountain outside the city and repeated a riddle - what animal walks on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet at night? This is a riddle about 'understanding oneself', with the answer being human beings who crawl in infancy, stand upright in youth, and lean on crutches in old age.

The Sphinx in the Triwizard Tournament is more like a test for the warriors. It exists as a checkpoint in the maze. In the face of the warrior Harry, Sphinx asked a riddle that Harry quickly solved. It is a spider.

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“First think of the person who lives in disguise,  
 Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.  
 Next, tell me what’s always the last thing to mend,  
 The middle of middle and end of the end?  
 And finally give me the sound often heard,  
 During the search for a hard-to-find word.  
 Now string them together, and answer me this,  
 Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?”<sup>iii</sup>

In *Oedipus the King*, anyone who can't answer the riddle will be eaten by Sphinx. Different from this evil monster, Sphinx in the Triwizard Tournament is relatively mild and moderate. She explicitly told Harry from the beginning, "Answer on your first guess-I let you pass. Answer wrongly - I attack. Remain silent – I will let you walk away from me, unscathed."<sup>iv</sup> It can be seen from this that the writer, JK Rowling only followed the characteristics of Sphinx as a riddle beast, and did not copy its prototype of evil. Correspondingly, the two Sphinxes ended up in completely different ways. After Oedipus solved the riddle, Sphinx jumped off a cliff and committed suicide; while the Sphinx of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* followed the agreement between himself and Harry, showed a kind smile, straightened his legs to one side, and let Harry pass.

In both books, Sphinx symbolizes the last link to success. After solving the riddle of Sphinx, Oedipus saved the people of Thebes. The grateful Thebes people made him king and let him marry Jocasta, the widow of the former king. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the maze is the last match of the three competitions. Sphinx was guarding the fastest path. After solving the riddle, Harry met Cedric, who was only a hundred meters away from the trophy. The two heroes decided to win this Hogwarts Trophy together.

### III. Success = Disaster

In terms of narrative structure, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Oedipus the King* have the same "success=disaster" development and ending. The success of heroic characters is an inevitable trend in most stories, and success has actually caused greater disasters and brought greater pain, making the tragic color of the story even stronger.

In "*Oedipus the King*", Apollo predicted that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus left Corinth, aiming to change his doomed fate. On the way to Thebes, he clashed with King Laius of Thebes. Oedipus killed Laius and his three attendants. He solved the mystery of Sphinx and became the hero and new king of Thebes. Oedipus had achieved great success at this time. However, it was this success that made him marry Jocasta, the widow of Laius, and gave birth to two boys and two girls. When Oedipus finally learned that he was actually the biological son of Laius and Jocasta, he realized that the prophecy had already come true. He killed his father and married his mother unintentionally, which eventually led to self stabbing in his eyes, and Jocasta hanged herself. Oedipus always loved his people and respected God. He seemed to become a hero in the end, but unintentionally caused a bigger tragedy. In essence, *Oedipus King* is a story of constant struggle against fate. However, Oedipus' tragic story shows an individual's powerlessness against the course of destiny, and his "success" was the beginning of the disaster.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry Potter and Cedric ultimately successfully passed all tests and won the Triwizard Tournament. These two brave and humble warriors decided to jointly lift the Triwizard Cup and the glory of Hogwarts. However, it was this success and this decision that caused even greater disaster. The Triumph Cup had long been replaced with a portkey, and Harry and Cedric were transported to Voldemort's father's cemetery. Cedric was killed, and Harry was forced to provide "enemy blood" for Voldemort. In the end, Voldemort was resurrected. Similarly, their success transformed into a great disaster.

Both books have a general framework of "success=disaster", but the specific design of the plot varies. In *Oedipus the King*, this kind of "success=disaster" is more of God's will and Oedipus' fate seems to be doomed. Even though he fought hard against the course of his destiny, Oedipus was powerless to escape from his own tragedy. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the entire process of the Triwizard Tournament was actually a conspiracy by Barty Crouch Jr. (disguised as Professor Moody in this book).

From Harry being selected to participate in the Triwizard Tournament, to designing to reveal the competition content and clearance secrets to him, and to replacing the final trophy with a portkey, it was all planned by Barty Crouch Jr. He swore his loyalty to Voldemort to the death. All these carefully designed arrangements were to send Harry to the Death Eaters to facilitate Voldemort's resurrection. In contrast, Harry Potter's success in the Triwizard Tournament was even more illusory. Although Harry was indeed very brave and intelligent, he was not yet old enough to participate in the Triwizard Tournament and lacked the knowledge and competition experience. Every step he took was a trap, and he finally "successfully" won the trophy, aided by Barty Crouch Jr. From the perspective of inevitability, Oedipus's "success=disaster" is the inevitable fate. After all, his story is an ancient Greek mythology, and it is reasonable to have such supernatural factors of divinity; While Harry Potter's "success=disaster" is an artificial necessity. The suffering of Oedipus was arranged by God, while the suffering of Harry Potter was arranged by Barty Crouch Jr. and Voldemort. Thus, both "success=disaster" tragedies are inevitable. For Oedipus, he knew the fate but did not believe it. At the end of the day, he found that his fate was doomed and completely unchangeable. For Harry, he fell into the trap without knowing, and finally was cheated by his enemy.

#### IV. Prophecy

In the plot development of both stories, "prophecy" is a very important part. The prophecy Oedipus learned from the oracle at the Delphi was that he was fated to murder his father and marry his mother. Although Oedipus longed to change his destiny, his tragic fate was doomed. Similarly, there are very important prophecies in Harry Potter series. The prophecy of Sybil Trelawney is like this, "*The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies*". The most important part of this prophecy is not the first two sentences that reach Voldemort's ears, but the later mention that Voldemort will choose enemies for himself, unknown forces, and that the two can only survive one of them. The prophecy came true in the books. Voldemort did indeed choose enemies for himself. Harry gained the power of love that Voldemort had never fully understood in his life. Voldemort ultimately fell under Harry's command. The causes and effects of Harry's participation in the Triwizard Tournament are also closely related to this prophecy. Barty Crouch Jr.'s goal is to transport Harry to the cemetery of TomRiddle Senior, because Voldemort's resurrection requires "the blood of the enemy" in response to this prophecy.

#### V. Conclusion

In sum, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* draws on the structure of *Oedipus the King* in the plot design, and also adds elements of Oedipus myth to some details. From the book's main plot of the Triwizard Tournament, we can more deeply understand the influence of the western culture on the construction of the story of *Harry Potter*. Oedipus's heroic image is reflected in the hero Harry Potter. Starting from the fourth book of the Harry Potter series, the tragic color of the plot gradually increases. Although we all know that justice will be ultimately done, the countless twists and turns and the deaths of important characters in this series make readers lament the suffering of war. The end of the Triwizard Tournament - the resurrection of Voldemort, and the death of Cedric-brings great spiritual tremors to readers. This is a tragedy of "success=disaster". The Oedipus style is adopted here, so that the tragic color of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* bursts out to the greatest extent, and the readers are immersed in this inverted "sadness".

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<sup>i</sup> "Dr. J's Lecture on Oedipus and the Sphinx". *People.hsc.edu*. Retrieved 2014-05-15.

<sup>ii</sup> J.K. Rowling.(2014). *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Suffolk; Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY. P529

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. P530

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. P529

<sup>v</sup> J.K. Rowling.(2014). *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Suffolk; Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY. P774