Emma Goodwin

[Name of Instructor]

[Subject]

14 July 2019

Literary Analysis Paper

Among literary experts and readers, Ancient Greek literature is well-known for its elaborate plotlines, powerful themes, and immersive settings. The tragic play *Antigone* by Sophocles is unique for its complex and layered characters, and themes that revolve around the exercise of free will and fate. The protagonist, Antigone, is forced to decide between her uncle's decree and her brother's burial, ultimately choosing to defy the decree. However, it is not just her motivations and personality that influences her decisions, instead, Sophocles makes frequent references to the mediating role of fate in influencing outcomes. Likewise in Larry and Andy Wachowski’s film *The Matrix*, the viewer finds the lead character, Neo, constantly struggling with decisions and choices, based upon his perception of reality and truth. Some elements of the film have notable similarities with *Antigone*, especially when it explores the apparent conflict between free will and fate. The essay will analyze the Wachowski brother’s film and compare it with *Antigone,* to examine how the complex lead characters of the two stories encounter the theme of free will and fate in their journey. It will also explore whether it is fate, the characters’ personal motivations, or a combination of the two that lead to their ultimate demise or success.

The play, Antigone, constantly wrestles between the two apparent concepts of fate and the free will. Antigone’s fate was to fight for the respect of the family and to live a free life, but her free will lead her to choose a life which went against the decisions of Creon. When she chooses to disobey Creon, her fate was to die. Yet, in doing so she accepts the challenges in her way and opts for going against the set norms. Towards, the end of the play, Creon chooses to let her go but fate eventually takes her over and she dies. In the same way, Creon’s fate was to give in to burying the polyconic and let Antigone live, even though his personal inclination was to do otherwise until Teresa’s Prophecy changes his mind. In the story, it is evident that Creon knows the power of fate. Considering the incidents happened in this play, it is right to argue that fate remains powerful compared to the free will.

Knox takes the notion of his critic upon the play, by the argument that “Everything you say is obscure and riddling (Knox)”. He explains this in the manner that every word has its meaning and therefore is not associated with a certain circumstance. In *Antigone*, Sophocles writes that Antigone’s life circumstances are much worse compared to that of Creon, therefore, her manner of dealing with the things is different. This is depicted in another way when Oedipus chooses to remain silent on issues of special considerations in the story. However, there are many situations in the play when the author has not cleared the intention of the character yet it appears fate generally predominates free will. The Wachowskis explore these tendencies more elaboratively and show how Neo is at a constant battle with fate and free will. Given the choice between the truth and his perceived reality, Neo takes control of his own destiny and selects the truth in the form of a red pill. However, he is then exposed to a world of oppression and deception in which each of his moves is pre-known to Oracle and the Architect. Sophocles also depicts a similar struggle in Antigone’s case who seemingly thinks herself to be in control of her decisions yet is eventually affected by fate. Even as Creon tries to save her, she is already dead before he manages to arrive just as the prophecy mentioned; nevertheless, Antigone insists to choose to follow her own path earlier proclaiming, “Yea, for thou chosed’st life, and I to die” (Sophocles 544-556). It shows that despite being aware of the consequences, she made her own choice and lead herself to her doom.

Both *The Matrix* and *Antigone* explore liberalism, compatibilism, hard and soft determinism with different characters inclining towards different views based upon their understanding of their circumstances and their place in the setting.Morpheus and Neo demonstrate their own beliefs regarding free will and fate when Neo responds to Morpheus question, “Do you believe in fate, Neo?” with “no” stating that “I don’t like the idea that I’m not in control of my life” (Wachowski and Wachowski). However, this was Neo’s preference rather than argument; his own beliefs are challenged when he confronts the Oracle. The Oracle tells him “I'd ask you to sit down, but, you're not going to anyway. And don't worry about the vase” yet Neo breaks it a second later (Wachowski and Wachowski). Although the Oracle’s comment seems to suggest that she believes in hard determinism, and thus, the vase broke as a result of fake; however, she later remarks is “Would you have broken it if I hadn’t said anything?” (Wachowski and Wachowski), which seems to indicate that the world of the matrix works on compatibilist determinism. On the other hand, Morpheus seems to incline towards fate more than free will by holding on to the belief that Neo is “The One”. We see a glimpse of the same concept in *Antigone* when even as Antigone chooses to defy Creon's decision on account of her own motivations and choices, the same choices lead her to her fate and ultimately her demise. However, the authors of the film and the text disagree upon whether a character would be fully responsible for his/her choices and actions. Another character in the play, Ismene, seems to accept fate when she suggests, “I scorn them not, but to defy the State Or break her ordinance I have no skill” but Antigone remains firm on her choice and says, “a specious pretext. I will go alone, To lap my dearest brother in the grave” (Sophocles 1091–1470). Antigone clearly feels she has the power to impact her destiny as opposed to Ismene or Creon. Creon wanted to resist but knew that fighting fate was futile, remarking, “That fights with Fate, is smitten grievously. (1095-1099)”. Here Creon seemed to incline towards soft-determinism, Antigone was more liberal in her views, while Sophocles himself seems to be lean more towards a deterministic view of fate rather than compatibilism.

Gooder writes that in the play Antigone, the contrast between fate and the free will is more metamorphic. He argues that not in the literature, such definite contrast wok. He pillars his opinion on very limited choice, the author of the play has provided to the characters (Gooder). He writes that Antigone and Creon are both living a different life. They are provided with many different circumstances in the character. Creon being great in power and respect opts for the way other characters do. Similarly, Antigone does the same. He writes that the play apparently draws a contrast between two aspects, but in doing so it comes to the same point. He writes that the end achievement of the characters in the play is the same. Neither of the characters has remained dependent on the conditions, rather have opted to leave the final decision on the forces of nature. Similarly, the matrix tells that fate is non- negotiable and every action appears to be preprogrammed. However, when Morpheus offers to Neo that he could walk towards the rabbit hole or choose to live in the wonderland, by opting for the red or the blue pill, he is offering him the option to choose between fate and the free will. A bird's eye view suggests that nothing in life can be left to the circumstances. It is always beforehand that one needs to decide about the way of life. These characters of the movie show that they are forced to live in some forced kind of circumstances. By presenting some literary examples, the filmmaker suggests that it is the life which offers everyone the right choices. These choices at the very first hand tell that the circumstances are always moving toward a definite end. In this procession of the life event, there are some characters which offer to have a look into things which are right and wrong. It is in this very time when fate works. One who takes too long in choosing between the right and wrong is left with nothing in hand. Frauenfelder writes that it is the culture which develops the circumstances with time. He argues that since the culture is not the same throughout the world (Frauenfelder). Therefore, it is right to argue that fate can act differently in many cultures. Bushnell also argues the same in other writings. For examples, he writes in another book that tragedies are not always abrupt, it takes time to become mature and finally, there comes a time when no option, other than disruption remains with them (Bushnell). For Bushnell, fate is the only product which makes one believe that anything is possible. Bassham’s opinion is relevant to the movie as according to him, it is unjustified to think that fate and free will have never interacted with anyone in life. He focuses on the efforts of the people which is important in deciding the end of life and that the sooner one opts for one thing between the fate and the free will, the sooner he is able to achieve the purpose of his life like Neo.

To conclude, both *The Matrix* and *Antigone* appear to acknowledge the existence of free will. However, the Wachowskis seem to incline towards the view that everyone possesses agency and because of that, one is responsible for his/her actions. Out choices remain, even if the results of those choices are predetermined. This is demonstrated by the choice given to Neo in opting for the red or blue pill, each signifying two determined results but ultimately occurring as a result of choice. The viewer sees the two Neos reflecting in the sunglasses indicating the existence of two possible paths which Neo has the agency to pick. The Oracle merely guides visitors by indicating how both fate and free will combine to form their choices and agency. A similar conflict can be seen in *Antigone,* where she attempts to forge her own destiny and rescue her sister. Sophocles demonstrates through his main character that free will as a concept does exist. However, Creon and Ismene feel it is futile to fight fate despite their personal inclinations. This suggests that although, it was Antigone’s fate to die but it was ultimately her exercise of free will that led to her death. It can be concluded that both literary pieces indicate the existence of fate and free will working together to alter the course of events, however, Sophocles tends to take a more soft-deterministic view while the Wachowskis present a more compatibilist view of the theme.

Works Cited

Bassham, Gregory. *The Prophecy-Driven Life: Fate and Freedom at Hogwarts*. na, 2004.

Bushnell, Rebecca Weld. *Prophesying Tragedy: Sign and Voice in Sophocles’ Theban Plays*. Cornell University Press, 1988.

Frauenfelder, David. “Popular Culture and Classical Mythology.” *The Classical World*, 2005, pp. 210–213.

Gooder, Jean. “'Fixt Fate’and’Free Will’in" Phèdre" and" Macbeth".” *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1999, pp. 214–231.

Knox, Bernard MW. “Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannos 446: Exit Oedipus?” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1980, pp. 321–332.

Sophocles, and Paul Woodruff. *Antigone*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2001. Print.

Wachowski, Andy, Larry Wachowski, Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, and Carrie-Anne Moss. *The Matrix*. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1999.