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HUMAN EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE PROJECTION OF THE DIVINE:  
MELANCHOLY AND TRAGEDY IN ANCIENT PERIOD

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**Human Experiences Through the Projection of the Divine:  
Melancholy and Tragedy in Ancient Period**

**İlahinin İzdüşümünde İnsan Deneyimleri:  
Antik Dönemde Melankoli ve Trajedi**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the melancholic and tragic experiences related to Ancient Greek cosmology and the depictions of these experiences in mythical heroes.

The aim of this study is to investigate the reflections of the divine, as a phenomenon of Ancient Greek cosmology, on human experiences and to analyze the melancholic and tragic experiences that arise within these domains. By employing a retrospective strategy based on Sigmund Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, the thesis explores the depictions and definitions of melancholy in the Ancient Period. It addresses the cosmological phenomenon underlying the experience of Bellerophon, considered the first melancholic figure, and differentiates between the absence and presence of the divine. Within the boundaries of these differentiated domains, melancholic and tragic experiences are explained, with a particular focus on the tragic experience of Oedipus in the tragedy of *Oedipus the King*.

**Keywords:** Melancholy, Tragic, Ancient Greek Cosmology, Bellerophon, Oedipus the King

## ÖZET

Bu tez, Antik Yunan kozmolojisiyle ilişkili olarak melankolik ve trajik deneyimin ve bu deneyim alanlarının mitik kahramanlardaki tasvirlerinin incelenmesi üzerinedir.

Çalışmanın amacı, Antik Yunan Kozmolojisinin bir olgusu olan ilahinin, insani deneyimler üzerindeki izdüşümlerini incelemek ve bu deneyim alanlarında oluşan melankolik ve trajik deneyimleri irdelemektir. Sigmund Freud'un *Mourning and Melancholia* metninden yola çıkarak bir geriye dönüş stratejisiyle melankolinin Antik Dönemdeki tasvirleri ve tanımlamaları ele alınır. İlk melankolik figür kabul edilen Bellerophon'un deneyiminin arkaplanını oluşturan kozmolojik olguya değinerek ilahinin absence'ı ile presence'ı arasında bir ayrıştırma yapar. Bu ayrışan iki alanın sınırlarında melankolik deneyim ve trajik deneyim açıklanır ve trajik deneyim ile ilişkin olarak *Oedipus the King* tragedyasındaki Oidipus'un trajik deneyimi incelenir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Melankoli, Trajik, Antik Yunan Kozmolojisi, Bellerophon, Kral Oedipus

## INTRODUCTION

Jean Starobinski (2013) states that melancholy, like many other painful conditions related to the human condition, was experienced and described long before it received its name and medical explanation. He points out that lines from Homer's *Iliad*, which he describes as being at the origin of all images and ideas, express melancholy.<sup>1</sup>

But then Bellerophon aroused the hatred  
of all the gods. Alone and lost, he wandered  
across the Alean plain, heartsick with grief,  
avoiding any human habitation.<sup>2</sup>

Bellerophon, the figure in whom we observe the ongoing and unchanging elements of the melancholic experience—namely “abandonment,” “loss,” and the “void” left behind by these—represents the first melancholic figure in history, and therefore, the first depiction of the melancholic experience. His melancholic experience occurs as a result of being abandoned by the gods. In Bellerophon, who experiences a state similar to what we now refer to as depression, the situation is related to a phenomenon involving supernatural divine powers. This phenomenon encompasses the gods, their place and roles in human existence, and their interventions in it. The relationship that the divine establishes with humans also serves as the foundation for relationships and communication among people. Therefore, when abandonment occurs, the individual loses all of these, straying from the path of others and becoming diminished in the face of life.

In his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, Sigmund Freud explains and compares the experiences of mourning and melancholia, noting that both experiences are responses to a loss. In his essay, Freud uses three key elements: “loss,” “the void

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<sup>1</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Homer. (2023), *The Iliad*, (Wilson, E. Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company, 6/200-203, 181-182.

left by the loss," and "identification with the lost object." The fact that these three elements are the main components of the melancholic experience leads us on a journey back in time to observe how this experience was expressed in earlier periods, starting with Freud. On the other hand, the term "melancholia" which has its origins in the Hippocratic Tradition, was associated with black bile in Ancient Greece. In Ancient Greek, the term "melancholia," derived from the combination of "melas, melan" ("black") and "chole" ("bile"), is described in Hippocratic texts as the prolonged experience of fear and sadness.<sup>3</sup> The state of mind experienced by individuals is attempted to be described not as a condition of psychic loss but through explanations related to the human body. One of the preliminary studies on this topic is the Humoral Theory. In this theory, the fundamental factor that causes melancholy is considered to be the imbalance or excess of bodily fluids. When discussing the history of melancholy, Jacky Bowring refers to the Humoral Theory and Hippocrates in her book titled *A Field Guide to Melancholy* with the following statement:

Early research into melancholia was often based on the humoral theory, and a humoral imbalance was considered to be the main trigger for melancholia. In order to diagnose a "melancholic" diagnosis, one sought to identify a disproportionate expression of sadness, for example, a greater than normal expression of grief or a constant state of sadness without any obvious cause. This basic view is based on the following words of Hippocrates: "If fear or sadness persists for a long time, it is melancholia."<sup>4</sup>

Hippocrates associated melancholy with a bodily anomaly by defining it with the term "black bile." Following its consideration as a temperament, a significant question is posed in *the Problemata*, which is attributed to Aristotle but is now considered to have been written by one of his followers: "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are

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<sup>3</sup> Hippocrates. (1868). *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates* (C. D. Adams, Trans.). Dover. (Original work published n.d., Section 6, No. 23, 259.

<sup>4</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 5.

melancholics, and some of them to the extent of being affected by diseases caused by black bile?”<sup>5</sup>

In his book, *Melankoli: Normal Bir Anomali*, Serol Teber (2009) highlights that the *Problemata* is the first and most comprehensive monograph on melancholy and black bile that has survived to the present day, and he examines the distinction between melancholic temperament and melancholic illness.<sup>6</sup> Melancholy is observed as a state of illness in ordinary individuals; however, those who are melancholic by nature—that is, by temperament—are not considered ill. They are different from ordinary individuals. Teber states that these individuals possess a distinctive morality (ethos) and an innate ability to be stirred by a passionate and justified force (pathos), as well as qualities of positive difference and extraordinariness. Black bile, in these individuals, stimulates their abilities. This stimulation facilitates the emergence of abilities that are normally unknown. Thus, there is a boundary between temperament and a state of illness—one that is not easily delineated and can sometimes be overcome. It is important to note that in Ancient Greece, melancholic temperament rarely appears with its extraordinary psychic dimensions.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout its historical journey, this state of mind, which at times has been subject to pathological and medical explanations, has been associated with creativity, viewed as a form of genius, and later defined in Christianity as a deadly sin *acedia*. However, it is also important to consider the cosmological aspect of Bellerophon's experience. Ultimately, the presence of gods is a dominant element in the cosmological phenomena that explain Bellerophon's melancholic experience. So, what kind of situation does the absence of gods correspond to?

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir Anomali"*. Say Publications, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 119.

This relates to a cosmology associated with human actions. In epic poetry, such as the Iliad, divine factors are seen influencing human actions. At this point, when describing human actions, the gods are identified as the agents or causes behind these actions. In Ancient Greece, answers to questions about the causes of human actions are crucial, and the presence of gods is indeed a significant factor. For this reason, the point Teber refers to in this context is significant. Variations observed in the psychic dimension and the causes of human actions will guide us through the layers. However, before that, it is important to define the divine and human realms.

The main inquiry addressed in this thesis is to understand the difference between the presence and absence of gods in human existence. What significance does the presence and absence of the divine hold in the cosmological worldview of Ancient Greece, and what is its cosmological background? How do these conditions create a realm of experience for humans?

In the first chapter, the melancholic experience and the history of melancholy in the ancient period will be examined. It will begin by discussing the three elements discussed in Freud's article *Mourning and Melancholia*, and will then explore the distinction between melancholy and mourning, tracing the reflections of melancholy throughout history. As we chart a course towards Ancient Greece, Bellerophon and occasionally other narrative heroes and figures of the period will accompany this journey. The focus will be on the earliest definitions of melancholy in Ancient Greece, with an effort to explain the definitions of the melancholic experience according to the approaches of the time. This chapter will cover the origins of the concept of "melancholy" in the Hippocratic tradition, Galen's treatment recommendations, and topics such as the four humoral theories.

Following Ancient Greece, the focus will shift to the Roman period, examining thoughts on the experience that was not yet referred to as "melancholy." At this point, the focus will shift to human dissatisfaction, examining therapeutic approaches to melancholy and concepts of mental tranquility as discussed in

Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi*. Seneca's approach to melancholy as a psychological rather than a physiological condition provides a clue to the changes in the definitions of melancholy in Ancient Greece, which were more often evaluated physiologically. In this chapter, Seneca's thoughts on the tranquility of the soul and its relation to *taedium* are discussed. Following Ancient Rome, the discussion moves to the concept of "acedia," a term that can be understood as a melancholic experience within Christianity during the Middle Ages. In *acedia*, the individual believes they have been abandoned by God, leading to a sense of indifference towards the divine and a withdrawal from God. This state also results in laziness and resignation from active participation in life.

The second chapter focuses on the cosmological structure of Ancient Greece and includes a discussion of the Ancient Greek gods and the understanding of the period. The relationships between the nature of the Greek gods and the realm of mortal humans will be explored, aiming to understand the impact of the gods on the lives of mortals. The divine interventions and their effects will be examined through the decisive role of the divine in the destinies of mortals. A distinction will be made between the presence and absence of the divine, and the experience generated by both conditions will be discussed. In this chapter, the melancholic experience associated with the abandonment by the gods—the absence of the divine—is explored through the figure of Bellerophon. The concept of *mania* within the context of the presence and scope of the gods is also examined. Both *mania* and *melancholia* are outcomes of specific cosmological conditions. The experience of *mania*, which cannot be considered separate from the place and role of the gods in this world, opens up another dimension beyond melancholy: *mania* leads us toward a tragic experience.

*Mania* is associated with a supernatural force that affects individuals. Starobinski notes that in *mania*, an individual is either encouraged or possessed by a

supernatural power.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to say that, in mania, the individual perceives the influence of a supernatural force. On the other hand, within the scope of mania, the interaction between the world of the gods and the world of humans creates an area of pre-tragic and tragic experience. The pre-tragic experience can be viewed as a realm where the divine entirely envelops the human sphere. In this context, there is unrestricted and infinite intervention by the divine into the human realm. In the tragic experience, on the other hand, an intersection occurs between the divine and human spheres. In the discussed realm of experience, the intersection between the divine and human is not infinite like the pre-tragic but still encompasses a broad area. This chapter will explore this relational framework while also considering the responses to human actions previously identified as key. The intersection set where the tragic experience occurs relates to the different meanings and responsibilities that human actions acquire.

At this point, referencing Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's (2012) work *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, which describes tragedy as "...a stage in the formation of the responsible subject"<sup>9</sup>, we can conclude that the intersection set creating the tragic experience—where the divine and human realms overlap—constitutes the domain of tragedy.

The third chapter of the thesis examines the realm of tragic experience and its connection to tragedy. After discussing the nature of tragic experience, the fundamental concepts of tragedy will be clarified, followed by an analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

Concerning the field of tragedy, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet's work is examined, highlighting their perspectives on the intervention of the gods into the human world and the intersection between these two realms in tragedy. In the context of tragedy,

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<sup>8</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalci Publishing, 15.

the significance of human action will be examined, focusing on key concepts related to tragedy, especially through Aristotle's *Poetics*. Under the extensive influence of the divine and the conditions of the period's context, what is the nature of human action? By analyzing Oedipus's experience, the goal will be to understand the tragic experience and explore how the elements of tragedy are represented within this context.

Oedipus represents the final destination of our journey that began with the melancholic experience and its initial depictions. This journey, which starts with the discussion of Bellerophon's experience and traces the reflections of melancholy in Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, and the Middle Ages, culminates in the figure of Oedipus, who struggles with the riddle of "Who is the murderer?"—a question that has no answer other than himself.

# CHAPTER 1

## FROM FREUD TO ANTIQUITY: EXPLORING THE MELANCHOLIC EXPERIENCE

### 1.1. FREUD'S DEFINITION OF MELANCHOLY: "MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA"

*Mourning and Melancholia* presents itself as an article that encompasses the history of the concept we will use as melancholia in this thesis, thereby expressing the main framework of the ideas related to melancholia. Freud (1914 -1916) can be described not only as a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist but also as a cultural historian, even though he later revised some of the ideas presented in his text, his essay *Mourning and Melancholia* constitutes a significant starting point for understanding the concept of melancholia.

In his essay, Freud compares the experiences of mourning and melancholia. These are experiences that significantly resemble each other, and both are responses to a loss. The lost object is one in which a libidinal investment has been made, meaning it is an object to which one is bound by a bond of love. This object could be a person, a person's homeland, an ideal, or a phenomenon similar to these. This object may have died or been lost, or perhaps the subject has been abandoned by this object, but in some way, the object has been lost. Freud notes that the same effects lead some people to melancholia instead of mourning.<sup>10</sup> Although mourning involves deviations in attitudes toward life, it is not considered pathological, whereas there are suspicions of a pathological inclination in melancholia. The reason mourning is not seen as pathological is the belief that the individual will eventually overcome it, and the approach that any intervention might be unnecessary or even harmful.<sup>11</sup> In both melancholia and mourning, a significant

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<sup>10</sup> Freud, S. (1914-1916). *Mourning and Melancholia*. In The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XIV): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works, 243.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 243-244.

void arises following the loss. In such cases, a person may experience deep sorrow, a loss of interest in the external world, a diminished capacity to love, a cessation of all activities, and feelings directed toward oneself, including self-reproach.<sup>12</sup> Here, the difference between the two experiences is as follows: In melancholia, disturbances in a person's self-esteem are observed, which will be discussed later. However, in mourning, even though the other characteristics are the same, no disruption is seen in the feelings directed toward oneself. Freud explains this as follows:

Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world -in so far as it does not recall him- the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological.<sup>13</sup>

The mourning process can be summarized as enabling the libido to sever its ties to a beloved object by accepting that the object is no longer present. However, breaking these bonds is often difficult, and individuals tend to remain attached to the old object even when they shift their focus to a new one. This resistance can be so strong that a person may cling to the former object through hallucinations, leading to a detachment from reality. Although reality is eventually acknowledged, this process is not immediate; it takes time and requires significant energy. The psychological presence of the lost object is extended, with the libido working intensely on each memory and expectation to dissolve these bonds. The painful nature of this process is difficult to explain in economic terms, but once mourning is complete, the ego is liberated once again.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 245.

As previously discussed, melancholia can be can also be a response to loss. Nevertheless, in melancholia, the lost object may sometimes not be a concrete death but rather the loss of a love object. Freud provides the example of being abandoned by a fiancée in this context. In some cases, the nature of the loss may not be perceived. Such situations involve the person's inability to consciously perceive what has been lost. Freud emphasizes this situation as follows:

...the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout mourning the ego's complete focus on mourning work explains inhibition and loss of interest. A similar internal process is present in melancholia; however, the cause of melancholic inhibition is often unclear, which can make it confusing. The melancholic subject exhibits a condition not present in a mourner: a significant decrease in self-esteem and a severe impoverishment of the ego. Freud's statement here provides a striking insight into the situation: "In mourning, it is the word which has become poor and empty; in melancholia, it is the ego itself."<sup>16</sup>

The melancholic individual views their ego as worthless and unsuccessful; they blame themselves, belittle themselves, and anticipate rejection. Their self-criticism extends back into their past, with the person asserting that they have never been good enough.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the person feels deprived of respect. Freud observes that although there is an attempt to find similarities with mourning, the melancholic person's loss is specifically related to their ego. He concludes that the loss in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 246.

melancholia is not just about the object but concerns the ego itself.<sup>18</sup> According to Freud's observations, in the melancholic individual, a part of the ego opposes and criticizes another part, treating it almost as an object. The idea that this critical agency can act independently of the ego and demonstrate its independence under different conditions is supported by each new observation. Freud suggests that there are valid reasons to determine that this agency is distinct from the ego. This agency is commonly referred to as the "conscience" and is considered one of the main components of the ego, along with consciousness control and reality testing. Freud indicates that there is evidence suggesting this agency can become ill on its own. In the clinical picture of melancholia, dissatisfaction with the ego due to moral reasons stands out as a prominent feature, while the patient's self-assessment often highlights fears and claims of impoverishment in this context, rather than issues such as physical illness, ugliness, or social inferiority.<sup>19</sup> Regarding the melancholic experience, Freud emphasizes that a key aspect of the clinical picture is that self-criticism and accusations directed at a beloved object are projections onto the patient's ego. He suggests that these criticisms are essentially redirected from the object of affection to the ego itself.<sup>20</sup>

There is a melancholic subject who explicitly insults themselves, degrade themselves, and, when appropriate, subject themselves to severe self-criticism with considerable fervor, showing no signs of shame. Freud, who asserts that this rebellious state of the angry subject can be explained by their transition into a melancholic condition<sup>21</sup>, articulates the situation as follows:

There is no difficulty in reconstructing this process. An object choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 247-248.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 248.

one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it onto a new one, but something different, for whose coming about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced onto another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way, an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to these aspects, another significant point is "ambivalence." Freud discusses another distinguishing factor that separates melancholia from mourning and even from narcissistic object choice and regression. The loss of a love object provides a conducive environment for the emergence of ambivalence. Freud, referring to tendencies in obsessive neurosis, notes that in individuals with these tendencies, ambivalence can lead to a pathological state of mourning, where the person may self-critically blame themselves for the loss of the loved object.

Triggering conditions for obsessive depression and melancholy often extend beyond death to encompass concepts such as contempt, neglect, or disappointment. All these factors have effects that reinforce ambivalence. On the other hand, they may also serve as preconditions for melancholia.<sup>23</sup> According to Freud, ambivalence has a confusing impact on melancholia. However, before exploring this, it is useful to consider a question Freud posed about mental processes. Freud poses the question of which aspects of the mental processes in melancholia are

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 251-252.

connected to the abandoned unconscious object-cathexes and which are linked to their replacement through identification within the ego.<sup>24</sup>

The quick and easy answer is that 'the unconscious (thing-) presentation of the object has been abandoned by the libido'. In reality, however, this presentation is made up of innumerable single impressions (or unconscious traces of them), and this withdrawal of libido is not a process that can be accomplished in a moment but must certainly, as in mourning, be one in which progress is long-drawn-out and gradual. Whether it begins simultaneously at several points or follows some sort of fixed sequence is not easy to decide; in analyses, it often becomes evident that first one and then another memory is activated, and that the laments which always sound the same and are wearisome in their monotony nevertheless take their rise each time in some different unconscious source. If the object does not possess this great significance for the ego -a significance reinforced by a thousand links- then, too, its loss will not be of a kind to cause either mourning or melancholia. This characteristic of detaching the libido bit by bit is, therefore, to be ascribed alike to mourning and melancholia; it is probably supported by the same economic situation and serves the same purposes in both.<sup>25</sup>

Freud points out that melancholy involves more than just a normal mourning process. To elaborate on the previously mentioned statement, it is noted that ambivalence influences the complexity of the relationship with the object in melancholy. Ambivalence may either be innate, as an element of the love relationship created by the ego or arise from experiences related to the threat of object loss. -In this process, the conflict between love and hate is seen as an unconscious battle: one part tries to detach the libido from the object, while the other attempts to protect it. In mourning, the efforts to detach the libido proceed normally through conscious means. In melancholia, however, this process is

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 257.

obstructed for various reasons, and there is a broader range of stimulating factors involved, beyond the actual loss of the object. Due to ambivalence, all aspects related to the triggered struggles remain withdrawn from consciousness until the characteristic result of melancholy is observed. This refers to the process wherein the libido eventually relinquishes the object, leading the ego to withdraw to its original state. After the regression of the libido, the process may become conscious. The article expresses that there is a conflict between a part of the ego and the critical agency within consciousness.

Based on Freud's statements, we can assert that with the loss of the object of libidinal investment, the libido rapidly detaches from this object—contrary to mourning—and then the ego withdraws into itself. This withdrawal is accompanied by a splitting in the ego: the part of the libido that is identified with the lost object versus the part that is not. A conflict is observed between these two parts. The part that is not identified with the loss feels anger towards and issues insults at the part that is identified. The reason for the angry and rebellious state directed at oneself in the melancholic individual is found here. The insults that the person uses towards themselves are directed at the love object with which they identified and to which they feel great anger for having lost.

An interesting aspect addressed by Freud in the article is the tendency for melancholy to evolve into mania. Freud underscores that this is not observed in every case of melancholy, noting that in some instances, manic symptoms may completely disappear or be quite mild, while in others, there is a transformation between melancholic and manic phases as described by a cyclical hypothesis.<sup>26</sup> Freud makes two fundamental observations here. In the first, both mania and melancholy grapple with similar “complexes.” However, in melancholy, the ego succumbs to these complexes, whereas in mania, the ego manages and dismisses them. The second observation relates to states of joy and triumph typically

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 253.

associated with mania. Freud, who provides details on this in his article, notes the following regarding the dynamics of the two conditions:

In mania, the ego must have got over the loss of the object (or its mourning over the loss, or perhaps the object itself), and thereupon the whole quota of anticathexis which the painful suffering of melancholia had drawn to itself from the ego and 'bound' will have become available. Moreover, the manic subject plainly demonstrates his liberation from the object which was the cause of his suffering, by seeking like a ravenously hungry man for new object-cathexes.<sup>27</sup>

The most notable aspect of mania in this study, as discussed in the article, is its tendency to evolve from melancholy. The term "mania" will reappear in the section dealing with ancient Greek cosmology. Before that, it should be noted again that the three most important elements related to melancholy in Freud's study are "loss," "the void left by the loss," and "identification with the lost object." The concept of melancholy and its definitions in ancient times, as well as its initial portrayals, will be examined in the following section.

## **1.2. MELANCHOLY IN ANCIENT GREECE: THE FIRST DESCRIPTION OF MELANCHOLY**

The experience of melancholy is one that was described before it was formally named. The earliest written sources where we encounter the initial depiction of this experience are Homer's epics. Although melancholy is not mentioned by name or as a quality in these epics, we do find figures who experience melancholy within their historical context. Psychiatrist Serol Teber (2009), in his work *Melankoli: "Normal Bir Anomali"*, comments on the epics concerning this concept:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 255.

In Homeric epics, examples of mythological melancholy/psychosis, usually seen in humans who have suffered divinely afflicted, are exhibited. This situation gives extremely important clues in understanding the God-Human relations throughout history.<sup>28</sup>

One of these individuals whom Teber describes as having been “divinely afflicted,” Bellerophon, is considered the earliest melancholic figure in history. The following three lines from Homer’s *Iliad* will provide us with both informative and guiding insights into his melancholic experience:

But then Bellerophon aroused the hatred  
of all the gods. Alone and lost, he wandered  
across the Alean plain, heartsick with grief,  
avoiding any human habitation.<sup>29</sup>

As evidenced in these lines, the subject is depicted as experiencing a profound loss, the resulting void, and within this void, as isolated and self-destructive. Bellerophon's experience reflects the melancholic elements as articulated by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholia*. Before delving into analyses related to Bellerophon’s experience of being estranged from the path and left in the emptiness of the plain, it is more appropriate to first become acquainted with his story. Author and scholar E. M. Berens (2016) recounts Bellerophon's story in *Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome* as follows:

Bellerophon was the son of Glaucus and grandson of Sisyphus. His fate changed as a result of a murder and he was accused even though he was innocent. He escaped and traveled to Tiryns, where he became the protégé of King Proetus. Proetus' wife Antea fell in love with Bellerophon, but this feeling was unrequited. Thereupon, Antea gave false information to her husband and defamed Bellerophon. Proetus first

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<sup>28</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: “Normal bir Anomali”ormal bir anomali*”. Say Publications, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Homer. (2023), *The Iliad*, (Wilson, E. Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company, 6/200-203, 181-182.

thought of killing Bellerophon, but his hospitality and kind demeanor dissuaded him. Instead, he decided to send Bellerophon to Iobates, king of Lycia. However, Iobates loved Bellerophon and refused to kill him because he did not want him to be harmed. When Iobates could not decide to kill Bellerophon, he sent him on dangerous missions. First, he asked him to kill a monster named Chimaera. Bellerophon asked for help from the gods and killed Chimaera with Pegasus, the winged horse sent by Athena. Then he sent Bellerophon to fight the Solymans tribe and defeated them. He was then sent to fight against the Amazons and again returned victorious. Finally, he set a trap to kill Bellerophon but Bellerophon killed all the attackers. When Iobates realized that Bellerophon was under the protection of the gods, he forgave him. He made Bellerophon a partner in the government and married him to his daughter. However, Bellerophon gained the displeasure of the gods and had the desire to fly. Zeus sent a fly to Pegasus to punish Bellerophon and restrain the horse. Bellerophon fell and wandered alone and sad all his life.<sup>30</sup>

The quotation from Berens allows us to provide a general description of Bellerophon, but it also raises the need to address the phrase “However, Bellerophon gained the displeasure of the gods and had the desire to fly.” It is plausible to conjecture that Bellerophon’s punishment may be concretely attributed to actions such as taming Pegasus and attempting to fly too high, which the gods might consider deserving of retribution. However, to clarify the issues related to Bellerophon within the scope of this study, it is essential to elucidate this matter. The cause of Bellerophon’s divine wrath is neither explicitly stated nor widely known. Homer does not provide details on this subject. The only fact is that Bellerophon is condemned to solitude.<sup>31</sup> Connecting this to causality would relate to assumptions. In this study, Bellerophon is not considered a figure who is attempting to escape the gods' dominion or as someone whose actions were punished due to excessive behavior in pursuit of his desire for freedom. On the

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<sup>30</sup> Berens, E. M. (2016). *Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Vol. 76). Xist Publishing, 186-187.

<sup>31</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: “Normal bir anomali”*. Say Publications, 80-81.

contrary, the main issue concerning him is that he was not abandoned by the gods; rather, it pertains to his experience of the deficiency left by this perceived abandonment.

As indicated by Homer's lines, another notable aspect of Bellerophon's condition in the void is his isolation from others. Jean Starobinski, in *L'Encre de la mélancolie*, asserts the following about Bellerophon: "Sorrow, solitude, avoidance of all contact with people, a wandering existence: There is no reason for this calamity, as Bellerophon, who is a brave and just hero, has committed no offense against the gods."<sup>32</sup> According to Starobinski, Bellerophon's misfortunes are related to his virtue. He began to face troubles after rejecting the love of a queen. Despite these continuous difficulties, Bellerophon bravely fought for a long time. His attempts to be ambushed were in vain, and he managed to gain both his lands and his wife, as well as his peace. Starobinski remarks:

And just at the moment when everything is given to him, he collapses. Did he exhaust his vital energies during the struggle? Did he turn his anger upon himself because there are no new enemies? Let's set aside this psychology, for there is nothing of the sort in Homer.<sup>33</sup>

Starobinski notes that in the Homeric world, everything—people's interactions with others and the ability of an individual to progress on the right path—occurs under divine guarantee. Otherwise, when a person is deprived of or abandoned by this grace, they are condemned to solitude, self-destructive sorrow, and aimless wandering in anxiety.<sup>34</sup> Previously observed by Teber, Homer's portrayal of Bellerophon is instructive for understanding the divine-human relationships of the era. Bellerophon's experience- his psychological state resulting from the abandonment by the divine- is intrinsically connected to Ancient Greek cosmology.

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<sup>32</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

It was noted that the initial descriptions related to melancholy referred to it as a concept "not yet labeled." Returning to this section, we will seek to identify where the concept of "melancholy" appears within Ancient Greek thought.

In Ancient Greece, the concept of "melancholy" as a term is first encountered in the Hippocratic Tradition. The word "melancholia" comes from the Ancient Greek words "melas" (black) and "khole" (a bile-like fluid). In the *Aphorisms*, Hippocrates describes the state of melancholy as a prolonged condition of fear and sadness.<sup>35</sup> In *A Field Guide to Melancholy*, Jacky Bowring includes Hippocrates' definition of black bile:

Depressed, hopeless, discouraged. In sorrow. Writing in pain. Avoid light, avoid people. Aversion to darkness... Avoidance of talking, avoiding any kind of dialogue. Appearance of the abdomen and diaphragm as if protruding... These people do not want to see anything fearful or hear any sad news... Prolongation or recurrence of the disease can be fatal.<sup>36</sup>

With the evolution of terms such as "bile," "disease," and "fatal," it becomes pertinent to explore how the concept of melancholy aligns with ideas associated with black bile. The term "melancholy" has come into use as a distinct descriptor. According to its etymology, the term signifies a condition that is related to "black" or "dark" and is associated with a bodily fluid referred to as "bile." Historically, "black bile" or "melancholia" encompasses a range of meanings. It represents not only the humor that is believed to arise from bile but also the broader effects attributed to this bodily fluid. The notion of melancholy, therefore, integrates both the physiological aspect of bile as humor<sup>37</sup> and its implications for emotional and psychological states, reflecting a complex interplay between bodily functions and mental health. In Ancient Greece, various beliefs were seen as the cause of

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<sup>35</sup> Nirven, N. (Ed. & Trans.). (2021). *Aphorisms* (Section 6.23 pg. 259). In Hippokrates Külliyyati, Pinhan Publications, 233-267.

<sup>36</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Humor refers both to bodily fluids and temperaments.

melancholia. Among these beliefs, the primary and most significant reason for melancholia was an imbalance or excess of body fluids. In these times humoralism was the foundation for an understanding of psychology, with the four humors ruling the body's characteristics.<sup>38</sup> Building on these considerations, the focus now shifts to an examination of humoral theory.

The Greek physician Hippocrates developed a theory based on the four humors. According to Hippocratic writing, there are four humors: blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile each linked to the qualities of heat, cold, moisture, and dryness.<sup>39</sup> Blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile were recognized as the four governing elements, each associated with different seasons, elements, and temperaments. Among these four humors, black bile was related to Earth, autumn, and the melancholic temperament. Starobinski, who notes that autumn is the season when black bile is most potent and dangerous, states that a coherent cosmos was constructed where the human body also reflects these fundamental fourfold divisions, and time is understood as a regular journey through four stages.<sup>40</sup> Black bile was also associated with melancholy due to its cold and dry qualities. It was believed that the excess of black bile was the cause of melancholy. In ancient medicine's understanding of melancholy, the presence of bodily humor in a natural mixture determines the healthy physical and mental state of individuals. However, the excess or imbalance of the humors could disrupt people's physical and mental health.

Sadness and fear are fundamental symptoms of melancholic illness in antiquity. However, even a small difference in the level of black bile can result in significant changes in symptomatology.<sup>41</sup> The early investigations into the nature of melancholy were predominantly grounded in humoral theory, which posited that the primary cause of melancholy was an imbalance in the body's humors. In the

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<sup>38</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Radden, J. (2000). *The Nature of Melancholy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 56.

<sup>40</sup> Starobinski, J. (2012). *L'Encre de la Mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

diagnosis of a ‘melancholic’, what was required was the identification of a *disproportionate* expression of sadness, for example in the magnitude or sustained nature of grief, or wretchedness without a normal cause. This foundational judgment is rooted in the words of Hippocrates: “If fear or sadness lasts for a long time it is melancholia”.<sup>42</sup> Hippocrates categorized the symptoms of melancholy into two primary groups: despondency and fear. In his writings, he detailed both physical and mental manifestations of melancholy, noting that these included symptoms such as loss of appetite, profound despondency, and overall bodily weakness. Additionally, many of these symptoms were observed to involve elements of fear and sadness. While Hippocrates did not provide a systematic analysis of melancholia in his works, he identified it—alongside conditions such as hemorrhoids, dysentery, and skin eruptions—as a pathological state resulting from an excess of black bile.<sup>43</sup>

It can be stated that various methods for the medical treatment of melancholy were explored in Ancient Greece and beyond. After the Hippocratic Tradition, there is a text called *Problemata Physica*, attributed to the Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle, but thought to have been written by one of his followers rather than by Aristotle himself. Within this text, a specific section is dedicated to the discussion of black bile. Unlike the Hippocratic approach, which viewed melancholy as a pathological condition resulting from an imbalance of bodily humors, the perspective presented in *Problemata* treats melancholy not as a disease but as a temperament that is an inherent aspect of human nature. The Aristotelian author<sup>44</sup> assumes that excesses of black bile result in melancholia and more severe states of mental disorder, while a lesser and more stable imbalance of humors with additional black bile produces the melancholic temperament or disposition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Radden, J. (2000). *The Nature of Melancholy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 56.

<sup>44</sup> Bowring and other scholars may refer to the thoughts in *Problemata* directly as Aristotle’s. For consistency with language and thought contexts, this work will use Aristotle.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

According to *Problemata*, an excess of black bile might result in melancholy. It was also believed that the amount of the excess and the temperature of the black bile played a crucial role in causing melancholy. Ancient Greek philosophers explored the connection between the human body and the soul, believing that the human mind and body were interconnected. As mentioned above, disturbances in the body, such as an imbalance in bodily fluids or their temperature, could lead to melancholy. Besides physical reasons, other factors such as environmental influences, psychological disturbances, and individual characteristics were also considered potential causes of melancholia.

For instance, *Problemata* suggests that melancholia was not only caused by an excess of black bile but also by its temperature, external circumstances, and personal temperament. It proposed that some individuals are more prone to melancholia due to their inherent disposition. Unlike Hippocratic theory, which associated black bile only with coldness and dryness, Aristotelian writing allows that black bile could be too hot or too cold, and that black bile must be at an average temperature. If the black bile is too cold, the resulting melancholia is one of dullness, while if it is too hot, it leads to melancholic mania. The melancholic mean, or the condition of genius, lies in between.<sup>46</sup> In the text, this condition is explained by the increase of black bile in the body, leading to the disruption of the previously mentioned four humors. Here, we encounter the use of wine as a metaphor. Dark-colored wine, similar to the color of black bile, causes different effects on a person's character in a short period. With each glass, changes in behavior and character are observed. Similarly, black bile creates a comparable effect in a melancholic individual.<sup>47</sup> A melancholic person is not confined to a single character due to the amount of black bile; they can fluctuate between different characters and may become less constrained or unrestrained. This is what makes them creative, and the reason why all those with black bile are extraordinary is not due to illness but rather

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<sup>46</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 34.

<sup>47</sup> Aristoteles, (2007). *Karasafralılık*, (Trans. Ömer Aygün) Cogito, Number: 51, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Publications, 110-112.

to their nature.<sup>48</sup> The imbalance or excess of black bile cannot be regarded as the only physical cause of melancholy; the temperature of black bile also plays a crucial role in determining an individual's melancholic temperament. If the temperature of black bile is at an average level, it may result in genius, creativity, and extraordinary circumstances. This explains why many heroes were depicted as behaving like melancholic individuals, as melancholy was also seen as the disease of heroes. In *Problemata*, black bile is present in all human beings, but its existence does not always cause illness. When the black bile is at an average temperature, melancholy is not considered a disease, and a melancholic individual is viewed not as a freak or mad, but as a genius and an extraordinary person.

*Problemata* can be considered the first and most comprehensive masterpiece on melancholy and can also be regarded as the first to explore the connection between melancholy and genius. *Problemata* begins with the question: "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are melancholics, and some of them to the extent of being affected by diseases caused by black bile?"<sup>49</sup> The conclusion we can draw from this is that melancholy is a state of mind associated with highly prominent individuals in the arts, poetry, politics, and philosophy. It is also linked to genius and creativity in its current role. According to researcher Marke Ahonen (2019), people who behave outside the norm are bombarded by mental images and vivid dreams, as they are prone to violent moods. They also possess abilities such as prophecy. According to the discussion in *Problemata*, the tendency of black bile to be either too hot or too cold affects both the body and the character (ethos) of those who are naturally moody. However, the ability of melancholics to display extraordinary abilities depends on the black bile remaining moderately warm. Only then can they be mentally agile, alert, and sensitive, which can lead them to become great poets or illustrious statesmen.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Ahonen, M. (2019). *Ancient Philosophers on Mental Illness*. *History of Psychiatry*, 30(1), 3-18, 6-7.

*Problemata* mentions mythological figures such as Heracles, Aias, and Bellerophon when dealing with this subject. It states that Heracles's nature is prone to melancholy, Aias is completely insane, and Bellerophon is a hermit. *Problemata* equates these mythological characters with philosophers such as Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato<sup>51</sup>, suggesting that they had similar melancholic tendencies.<sup>52</sup> In Ancient Greece, philosophers were among those attributed with melancholy. This includes Socrates, who was considered "atopos" (out of place) and thus melancholic, as well as Democritus, who is said to have laughed at the state of the world and humanity, and Heraclitus, who wept over the same problems. As mentioned in *Problemata*, mythological heroes are also associated with melancholy. Starobinski, referencing Hippocrates' comments on the relationship between epilepsy and melancholy, notes that the term "melancholy" refers to a fluid that may not be pathogenic, but he emphasizes that its imbalanced state points to a mental disturbance related to "intelligence." However, as he also points out, this condition, as seen in *Problemata*, can lead to mental superiority because it brings with it qualities of heroism, philosophical insight, and poetic ability.

Melancholics often become epileptic, and epileptics become melancholic; which of these conditions is more pronounced depends on the direction of the disease: if it affects the body, it is epilepsy; if it affects the intellect, it is melancholy.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to these, we will turn our attention a bit more to physiological conditions associated with melancholic personality and symptoms.

One of the mythological heroes mentioned as melancholic in *Problemata* is Heracles (Hercules). Heracles is one of the most tragic heroes in mythology, an

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<sup>51</sup> Plato is also known as "Eflatun".

<sup>52</sup> Radden, J. (2000). *The Nature of Melancholy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 56.

<sup>53</sup> Hippocrate, *Épidémies*, VIII, 31, dans Hippocrate, *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, op. cit., vol. V, 355 (as cited in Starobinski, 2012, 27).

invincible national hero against nature, symbolizing strength and endurance. Everything he does is for the benefit of humanity; he eliminates the evils inflicted upon man by nature. However, despite his extraordinary strength, Heracles is fated to suffer a painful destiny, and this tragedy begins from his birth. As the son of Zeus, his divine and earthly origins lead him to experience contradictions and spiritual turmoil throughout his life. He did not choose to be a hero and does not enjoy the god-given strength; rather, he makes mistakes unintentionally due to his inability to control it, faints due to his lack of balance, and is driven to madness. This condition also becomes the fate of his children. He is continually subjected to the hatred and schemes of the goddess Hera, which never leave him throughout his life. Heracles spends his life struggling with this unstable state of mind and Hera's hatred and wrath. He dies by burning as a result of a dreadful mistake. Two notable points in Heracles' situation are his lack of choice in having divine strength, which leads to dissatisfaction with what it brings, and Hera's refusal to grant him peace. Being born of a divine father and a mortal mother is one of the primary reasons for his contradictions and dilemmas.<sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup> Besides his fate and the state of being “self-consuming” and “deficient,” another indication of Heracles' affliction caused by black bile is his symptoms. One of these symptoms is the injuries he inflicts on his children before he experiences a state of madness and disappears.<sup>56</sup>

In the Homeric epics frequently referenced, there are physical conditions associated with melancholic personalities and symptoms of melancholy. Teber notes that the concepts of “the middle part of the body,” “darkening,” and “anger” are used to describe the state of melancholy, emphasizing that these terms are not limited to the spirit or mind, nor the body alone. The middle part of the body covers the chest and upper abdomen, symbolizing the unity of the soul and body. Darkening refers to the internal darkening of the body due to anger, and when the feeling of anger is not expressed outwardly, it leads to swelling and darkening in the middle part of the

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<sup>54</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: “Normal bir Anomali” ormal bir anomali*. Say Publications, 123-125.

<sup>55</sup> Erhat, A. (1972). *Mitoloji sözlüğü* (Vol. 12). Remzi Publications, 138.

<sup>56</sup> Radden, J. (2000). *The Nature of Melancholy*, 56.

body. On the other hand, when anger is not expressed, behavioral disorders or physical discomforts can arise. This situation explains the physical manifestations of spiritually rooted melancholy. According to Teber, melancholy arises more from events than from organ disorders.<sup>57</sup> Teber provides the following example from the *Iliad*:

Let strife and contention perish from among gods and men,  
and anger, that drives even a wise man to do things  
that he must afterward repent of.  
Sweet it is at first to yield to anger,  
sweeter than dropping honey,  
but then it grows to be as smoke  
that fills a man's breast.<sup>58</sup>

As seen in these lines describing Achilles' situation, anger enters a person like smoke, gathers in the middle of the body—specifically the chest—and envelops the chest like smoke.<sup>59</sup>

Starobinski, when introducing the melancholic experience, notes that Homer is the first person to speak about the power of a remedy, as mentioned at the beginning of the study. Referring to line 219 of Book IV of the *Odyssey*, he discusses a potion belonging to Helen that alleviates remorse and tears, inspiring the acceptance of the unpredictable decisions of the gods. His conclusion is:

If Homer presents us with a mythological image of melancholy caused by a human's fall from favor before the gods, he also provides an example of a pharmaceutical relief for grief that does not require divine intervention...

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<sup>57</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir Anomali"*. Say Publications, 89-91.

<sup>58</sup> Homer. (1998). *The Iliad* (S. Butler, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published ca. 8th century B.C.E.).

<sup>59</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir Anomali"ormal bir anomali"*. Say Publications, 90.

The source of Bellerophon's grief is found in the Council of the Gods; however, the remedy is hidden in Helen's wardrobe.<sup>60</sup>

Hippocratic writings mention symptoms such as depression, hallucinations, and manic states, which are somatic symptoms. These are also attributed to a fluid-based origin as explained in the humoral theory. These conditions, related to imbalances in bodily fluids, are physical symptoms. Exercise and diet are important for treatment.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Galen's methods of treatment during this period are also significant. Galen conducted studies on the condition of black bile. His ideas relate to the notion that black bile reaching the brain disturbs it and that accumulated black bile in the brain increases anxiety, sadness, and suicidal thoughts while leading to delirium. Galen discusses a form of vaporization and suggests phlebotomy as a means of draining the bile accumulated in the blood, in addition to dietary changes as a treatment recommendation.<sup>62</sup>

So far, this section of the study has discussed the thoughts on bodily fluids and the physiological and psychological effects that arise according to their quantities. In addition to epilepsy, sadness, and lesions, states of mania also appear in relation to these fluids in the texts. It is useful to consider this as a form of madness. This is important to emphasize because, although melancholy is considered an unusual and pathological state, it is not regarded as mania. In Ancient Greek mythology, mania is thought of in a cosmological context and is associated with the divine. In the context of the melancholic experience illustrated by the example of Bellerophon, melancholy is described as being the result of abandonment by the gods. Similarly, mania is also considered a divine phenomenon. Although this concept will be discussed further in subsequent sections, it can be stated that the condition known as mania involves a divine force that enters individuals and compels them to perform actions they would not normally undertake. Sometimes, this force directs

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<sup>60</sup> Starobinski, J. (2012). *L'Encre de la Mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 27-28.

<sup>62</sup> Kelif, Z. (2021), *Resimde Melankolik Bedenler*, Master Thesis, Hacettepe University, 19.

people in particular ways and punishes them as needed. The divine power referred to in the context of mania is related to the concept that later became known in Western languages as "demon," which is represented by the Greek term "daimon."

Discussions regarding conditions such as depression, manic-depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder, along with their associated symptoms, have been ongoing since the Ancient Period. As observed in the section on Freud, Freud also addressed the relationship between "melancholia" and "mania" in his work "*Mourning and Melancholia*," and he occasionally expressed the idea that melancholic individuals might be inclined towards mania.<sup>63</sup> However, mania and melancholia are consequences of cosmological conditions within Ancient Greek cosmology. Particularly in literary works from Ancient Greece and in the tragedies we will discuss later, these conditions are considered more as cosmological states rather than pathological conditions. In summary, it would not be incorrect to consider Ancient Greece as the tradition where the concepts related to these disorders were first introduced.

While melancholia continues to be associated with creativity and genius, it also remains a condition that is worked on and treated. After providing a general overview of the concept in the context of Ancient Greece, the next section will focus on Ancient Rome.

### **1.3. MELANCHOLY IN ANCIENT ROME: SENECA'S PEACE OF MIND**

In the context of Ancient Rome, it is noteworthy that the term "melancholia" was not used. Instead, the focus will be on Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi*, a work by the Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman. This text is a correspondence between Seneca and Serenus, where Serenus poses questions and objections, expresses his

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<sup>63</sup> Freud, S. (1914-1916). *Mourning and Melancholia*. In The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XIV): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works, 253.

complaints, and seeks Seneca's assistance. This correspondence essentially functions as a form of therapeutic practice. It presents a scenario where a young citizen consults a philosopher regarding his troubles. Additionally, this exchange serves as a spiritual exercise, allowing one of the parties to alleviate their concerns related to their own psychic life.

Serenus' complaints in this correspondence generally relate to a state of imbalance and oscillation between extremes. Serenus recognizes that virtues strengthen over time and, like habits, initially start weak. He acknowledges that while habits can be easily altered, they become stronger over time and are challenging to eliminate. In his effort to acquire virtues and rid himself of vices, Serenus finds that sometimes vices become more entrenched and difficult to remove. The situation Serenus describes indicates that he is afflicted by several vices. Consequently, he seeks Seneca's assistance and remedy for this condition, which he refers to as a "malady."<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, in the face of the Stoic philosophical principles of simple and natural living and avoidance of ostentation, Serenus sometimes finds himself caught in a dilemma, admiring magnificent ceremonies and grand houses. He also reports difficulty in participating in public life and fulfilling his civic duties. According to Stoic principles, he decides to undertake his public duties solely for the benefit of humanity. However, as he faces challenges and doubts, he questions the value of his civic responsibilities. Even when he wishes to return to his previous state, he again falls into a state of indecision. Stating that he is constantly going back and forth between different thoughts, Serenus tries to explain his mental state to Seneca as follows:

Not to speak longer of individual instances, in all things this weakness of a good mind clings to me: and I fear that I may gradually become unfaithful to it, or, what is still more alarming, that I may always hang like one who

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<sup>64</sup> Seneca, L. A. (1900). *On Tranquility of Mind: De Tranquillitate Animi* (W. B. Langsdorf, Trans.; M. S. Russo, Rev. & Ed.), 1.

is about to fall, and that there may perhaps be greater weakness in me than I myself perceive<sup>65</sup>

...

I know that the agitations of my mind are not dangerous and that they bring nothing stormy with them: to express to you by a fitting simile that of which I complain, I am not troubled by a tempest, but by seasickness. Free me, then, from this evil, whatever it may be, and help one who is suffering in sight of land.<sup>66</sup>

Serenus expresses his search for a remedy for what he refers to as a "malady" in the following words: "I ask, therefore, in case you have any remedy by which you can put a stop to this vacillation of my mind, that you consider me worthy to owe my tranquility to you."<sup>67</sup>

Seneca begins his response by stating that individuals suffering from the situations Serenus describes are not illnesses.<sup>68</sup> Indecisiveness, disgust, and constant changes in goals, combined with a tendency to feel more satisfaction with things they have abandoned, are common states for individuals experiencing this condition. Some of them occasionally alter their living conditions, while others avoid change due to their laziness. Factors such as an inability to control the mind, living with unfulfilled desires, and remaining in uncertainty lead to a frustrated mind and an undeveloped life. All of these and other conditions have only one effect: "-to be dissatisfied with themselves."<sup>69</sup> Seneca explains that the state Serenus desires is the "tranquility of mind," which means maintaining mental balance and experiencing continuous peace without undergoing either excessive enthusiasm or depression. For this to be achieved, the mind must be at peace with itself, and the individual must be content with themselves; only then can tranquility be possible.<sup>70</sup> A person who is

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<sup>65</sup> Seneca, L. A. (1900). *On Tranquility of Mind: De Tranquillitate Animi* (W. B. Langsdorf, Trans.; M. S. Russo, Rev. & Ed.), 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

dissatisfied with themselves and unable to maintain mental balance may become restless if left idle; they might even find it intolerable to stay at home, alone, or even with the walls around them. When alone, their mind will direct its focus solely on itself.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the progression of this pessimistic state, Seneca states:

Hence that weariness and dissatisfaction with one's self (Hinc illud est taedium et displicentia sui), the restlessness of a soul which nowhere finds peace, and the sad and unwilling endurance of leisure. In any case, when one is ashamed to confess the cause of one's trouble, and when modesty keeps the trouble concealed, the passions enclosed in a narrow space without an outlet strangle one another. Hence sadness and melancholy and a thousand fluctuations of a vacillating mind, which is held in suspense by unfulfilled hopes, dejection, and sorrow (inde maeror marcorque et mille fluctus mentis incertae, quam spes inchoatae suspensam habent, deploratae tristem). Hence that condition of those who loathe their leisure and complain that they have nothing to do, and the bitterest jealousy at the success of others. For an unhappy idleness nourishes envy, and they wish all men to be ruined because they themselves have not been able to succeed.<sup>72</sup>

To sum up, the absence of tranquility of mind and the lack of actions that restore balance represents a struggle in the quagmire of personal dissatisfaction. Starobinski also suggests that Serenus's presentation of "taedium vitae," or "boredom," to Seneca indicates a state of depression rather than melancholy.<sup>73</sup> In this context, we will attempt to draw an inference about individuals who experience dissatisfaction with themselves, mental fluctuations, and thus lack balance. *Taedium sui*, which refers to dissatisfaction with oneself, transforms into *taedium vitae*, or dissatisfaction with life and complaints about it. This is closely related to *absentia sui*, meaning the experience of being incomplete or deficient in oneself. At this

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Starobinski, J. (2012). *L'Encre de la Mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 46.

point, it is important to highlight the similarity of this definition with Freud's characterization of the melancholic subject. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud describes the melancholic individual as someone who knows what or whom they have lost but does not know what it is that they have lost. What they have lost is themselves.<sup>74</sup> The concept of *absentia sui* encountered in Seneca is closely related to this definition. As seen in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, the state of feeling deficient or incomplete in oneself leads to dissatisfaction with oneself, and this path ultimately leads to dissatisfaction with life. This condition can even evolve into a form of anger or even hatred toward life.

Another significant aspect addressed in Seneca's *De Tranquillitate Animi* is his approach to the condition described by Serenus. As previously noted, Seneca refrains from categorizing this state as a disease. Instead, he provides a detailed description of the condition and offers practical solutions. Unlike Galen, whose remedies involve physiological interventions such as dietary adjustments or phlebotomy, Seneca approaches the condition primarily from a psychological perspective. His recommended remedies focus on nurturing the mind and enhancing mental well-being through activities such as outdoor walks, travel, environmental changes, and occasional moderate wine consumption. Central to Seneca's approach is the idea that the most crucial aspect of addressing the condition is the fortification of the mind. By engaging in these activities, individuals can promote mental resilience and emotional stability, which Seneca views as essential for overcoming the described state and achieving tranquility.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, we can say that the recommended exercises are a form of ascetic practice.

In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Pierre Hadot explains the connections between *askesis* and spirituality, addressing the relationship of these practices with the soul

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<sup>74</sup> Freud, S. (1914-1916). *Mourning and Melancholia*. In The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XIV): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works, 245.

<sup>75</sup> Seneca, L. A. (1900). *On Tranquility of Mind: De Tranquillitate Animi* (W. B. Langsdorf, Trans.; M. S. Russo, Rev. & Ed.), 27.

and their transformative effects on it. Hadot emphasizes that for Ancient Greek philosophers, *askesis* represented spiritual exercises.<sup>76</sup> *Askesis* in Ancient Greek means "exercise" or "training."<sup>77</sup> In Ancient Greece, the concept of *askesis* was intricately linked to practices centered on personal self-care and self-improvement. Within Greek culture, the act of attending to oneself was perceived as fundamentally connected to the pursuit of self-knowledge and the understanding of deeper truths. This connection is vividly illustrated in many of Plato's writings, where the phrase "gnothi seauton" ("know thyself") is prominently featured, famously inscribed at the entrance of the Temple of Apollo. This phrase, which can be regarded as a guiding principle or motto, underscores the importance of self-knowledge as a core element of ascetic practice. For Plato, achieving self-knowledge was not merely an intellectual exercise but a crucial ascetic endeavor. He posited that an individual must first gain a profound understanding of their nature before being able to effectively compare and contrast themselves with others. This process of self-examination and introspection was seen as essential for personal growth and moral development.<sup>78</sup> In this period, *askesis* was not limited to physical strength alone but also aimed at achieving mental clarity. During the Hellenistic-Roman period, ascetic practices were shaped around concerns of selfhood rather than just self-knowledge. In this era, selfhood became the central element of a telic relationship, both for the one who is concerned and the one being concerned. Selfhood concerns enable an individual aiming for virtue to reach existential truth and have increasingly come to be understood as an exercise or training.<sup>79</sup>

In Ancient Greece, *askesis*, or ascetic practice, extended beyond merely cultivating physical strength to encompass the pursuit of mental clarity and self-understanding.

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<sup>76</sup> Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (A. I. Davidson, Ed. & M. Chase, Trans.). Blackwell Publishing, 128.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> Özgen, M. K., & Bilgin, B. (2022). *Ascetic practices in the context of self-concern in Hellenistic-Roman culture and the early Christian period*. *Temaşa: Journal of the Department of Philosophy at Erciyes University*, (17), 171-191, 173.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

During the Hellenistic-Roman period, these ascetic practices evolved to focus not just on the attainment of self-knowledge but also on the broader concept of selfhood. In this era, selfhood emerged as a central element in the telic relationship, defining the interactions between both the individual engaged in the practice and the object of their concern. This shift in focus meant that selfhood became a primary concern for those striving for virtue, facilitating their journey toward existential truth. As a result, askesis increasingly came to be understood as a rigorous exercise or training regimen aimed at achieving both personal and philosophical enlightenment.

Seneca's recommendations to Serenus concerning the practice of selfhood are designed to prevent an individual from remaining isolated from oneself, or more precisely, with one's mind. By engaging in these recommended practices, the condition that is the source of dissatisfaction begins to be addressed and resolved. This approach facilitates a transformative process directed towards oneself, enabling a form of self-liberation from feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction. Through these engagements, individuals are guided away from internal isolation and towards a more integrated and harmonious state of being, ultimately leading to a greater sense of personal fulfillment and inner peace.

#### **1.4. MELANCHOLY IN THE MIDDLE AGES: ACEDIA**

As earlier stated, askesis is a practice involving transformative activities aimed at alleviating the dissatisfaction one feels about oneself. Askesis is particularly useful in explaining the manifestation of melancholy in Christianity. Just as in other periods, in the Middle Ages, Christianity also presents experiences of melancholy that can be readily associated with its descriptions.<sup>80</sup> Teber describes the concept of melancholy in the Middle Ages as follows:

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<sup>80</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal Bir Anomali"*. Say Publications, 141-143.

During the Middle Ages, when the social influence of the Church was strong, the perception of melancholy underwent significant changes. Although Aristotle regarded melancholy as a natural temperament and considered melancholic individuals to be geniuses, in the Middle Ages melancholy was seen as a mortal sin. According to Christian theologians, melancholy was not defined as a personal temperament or lifestyle; instead, it was perceived as denial, a defiance of the divine order, and thus a divine punishment.<sup>81</sup>

In early Christian times, acedia was categorized among the seven deadly sins, specifically identified as the sin of Sadness. In this context, acedia was interpreted as a profound state of apathy and lack of joy, which were seen as manifestations of a refusal to embrace the goodness of spirituality and to appreciate the divine presence of God. This interpretation framed acedia as a significant moral and spiritual failing, reflecting a deep-seated unwillingness to engage with or respond to the positive aspects of spiritual life. It was perceived as a sin against God, characterized by a failure to love and honor Him as expected within the Christian faith. This conceptualization underscored the belief that acedia represented not merely a personal or psychological issue but a serious transgression against one's religious obligations and spiritual well-being.<sup>82</sup> For this reason, melancholics were seen as threats and people who needed a cure. It can be said that the primary reason behind melancholics being perceived as a threat in the Middle Ages was that they were believed to threaten the church's power and the social forms that were structured by the church. About the relationship between melancholic individuals and the church's dominance, in his book *Melancholy: A Normal Anomaly*, Serol Teber (2022) states: "The conduct of individuals, even those not associated with any political group, who exhibit signs of sadness and isolation from everyday life, is commonly perceived as a rebellion and a longing for an alternative societal

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>82</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 93.

framework. This melancholic attitude is considered a poignant social criticism, subtly challenging the existing order.”<sup>83</sup>

Bowring (2008), on the other hand, touches upon certain aspects regarding the depictions of melancholic individuals during this period. In antiquity, melancholic personalities were often regarded as creative and extraordinary individuals, distinguished by their depth of thought and emotional sensitivity. However, this perception underwent a significant transformation during the Middle Ages. In the artistic and literary works of this period, melancholic figures were frequently depicted in a more negative light, characterized as lazy and unintelligent. This shift in portrayal reflects a broader change in the understanding of melancholy. A key term to consider in this context is "acedia," which was closely associated with melancholy during the medieval period. Initially, "acedia" was used to describe a range of conditions including laziness, spiritual apathy, and melancholia. Over time, its application expanded to encompass not only those who exhibited physical and emotional lethargy but also individuals who failed to fulfill their religious duties. Thus, acedia came to denote a broader spectrum of spiritual and moral failings, intertwining with the medieval conceptualization of melancholy as a form of moral and religious deficiency.<sup>84</sup>

In this epoch, the pervasive use of dark and somber imagery in church texts, the characterization of melancholy as a sinful state of mind, and the portrayal of melancholic figures with introverted and sorrowful expressions in the works of painters and writers all played a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing the perception of melancholy. These artistic and literary representations served to embed melancholy within the broader cultural and religious framework of the time. Moreover, the view of melancholy as a spiritual weakness rather than a medical condition led to the treatment of melancholy in medieval society being supported by religious rituals and prayers. Thus, melancholy was perceived not only as an

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<sup>83</sup> Teber, S. (2022). *Melankoli Normal Bir Anomali*. Okuyan Us, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Bowring, J. (2008). *A Field Guide to Melancholy*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books, 91.

individual affliction but also as a sin that needed to be addressed from a spiritual perspective. After providing some information on the theological perspectives of the time, we will attempt to explain acedia.

The condition referred to as acedia is notably observed in Christian monks, who, in their pursuit of spiritual purity, would often retreat to the deserts of Egypt. This retreat was intended as a means to avoid and cleanse themselves of worldly desires and the demonic forces that might tempt them into sin. The harsh and isolated desert environment was seen as a way to distance themselves from the distractions and temptations of daily life, allowing them to focus more intently on their spiritual practices and religious devotion. This practice is closely related to the concept of askesis previously discussed. With the advent of Christianity, asceticism evolved to encompass not only exercises aimed at distancing oneself from bodily desires and abstaining from worldly temptations but also practices involving a deliberate withdrawal from the world and a renunciation of the self, all following divine will. Christianity encourages individuals to act with the purpose of rebuilding their severed connection with God during their earthly exile. The most effective way to achieve this goal is through asceticism, which involves constant exercises and purification rituals.<sup>85</sup> Christian monks would retreat to the desert, bringing with them their Bibles, and would engage in a variety of manual labor activities and Bible readings as part of their spiritual discipline. Despite this rigorous routine, their period of seclusion was not free from challenges. They were subjected to numerous trials imposed by malevolent divine forces. Particularly during the midday hours, when the sun was at its zenith and the heat was most intense, these monks would experience visitations by these demonic entities in various forms. This phenomenon, known as "demon de midi," reflects the particular trials faced by monks during this time. These demonic manifestations bear a resemblance to the demons described in ancient Greek cosmology, particularly in the context of the

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<sup>85</sup> Özgen, M. K., & Bilgin, B. (2022). *Ascetic practices in the context of self-concern in Hellenistic-Roman culture and the early Christian period*. *Temaşa: Journal of the Department of Philosophy at Erciyes University*, (17), 171-191, 183.

distinction between mania and melancholia.<sup>86</sup> The demons of acedia incite monks to commit various sins, preying on their vulnerabilities. If the monk is unable to muster sufficient strength and willpower to resist these malevolent visitations, he begins to experience profound suffering and despair. This anguish leads him to believe that he has been abandoned by God. In his deepening suffering and sense of betrayal, the monk may then abandon or reject the very God whom he perceives as having forsaken him. This cycle of spiritual distress and abandonment exacerbates his suffering, creating isolation and despair.

In general terms, the condition described in acedia involves the individual's belief that they have been abandoned by the divine, leading them to also forsake the deity. This is followed by a profound sense of apathy towards both themselves and the divine, accompanied by a state of inertia. During the medieval period, melancholy frequently became associated with a sense of lethargy and a withdrawal from active engagement in life. This association reflects a broader understanding of melancholy as not merely a feeling of sadness but as a pervasive disengagement from life's activities and responsibilities.

In his book *L'Encre de la Mélancolie*, Jean Starobinski (2012) states the definition of acedia and the characteristics of individuals who were seen to suffer from acedia:

First and foremost, what is acedia exactly? Acedia is a bodily heaviness, a slowing down, a complete despair regarding salvation. Some describe it as a sorrow that renders the person speechless, just like the loss of a spiritual voice, the "silencing of the soul" in its entirety. Acedia destroys our ability to speak and worship. Inner existence becomes mute, closes itself off, and rejects communication with the outside world. Dialogues established with others and with God vanish at their very source. Acedia does not allow its victim to open their mouth. The person has seemingly swallowed their tongue; the ability to speak has been taken away. However, if the person

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<sup>86</sup> In ancient Greek cosmology, a divine force that enters individuals and compels them to perform actions they would not normally undertake.

accepts this and if their soul also submits to it, and if they succumb to this heaviness that may originate from physical sources utilizing their own volition, then, at that moment, it transforms into a deadly sin.<sup>87</sup>

As emphasized in the passage, the monk experiences a profound sorrow that renders him mute, followed by a state of complete isolation. This condition of being cut off and abandoned by a deity closely mirrors the situation encountered by Bellerophon. Both the monk and Bellerophon find themselves forsaken by the gods, left within a void that gradually transforms into a profound silence, akin to the stillness of the soul. Starobinski characterizes Bellerophon's experience as one of profound emptiness and withdrawal from all things. He suggests that Bellerophon appears to exist in an endless desert, distanced from both divine beings and humans<sup>88</sup>, reflecting a similar sense of desolation experienced by the monk in acedia.

The section on acedia and its relation to the melancholic experiences and approaches of the ancient period has now been concluded. In the subsequent section, the cosmology of ancient Greece will be examined concerning Bellerophon's melancholic experience, the divine presence responsible for creating the state of melancholia in Bellerophon will be discussed, and the potential encounters in the absence of this deity will be explored.

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<sup>87</sup> Starobinski, J. (2012). *L'Encre de la Mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 60.

<sup>88</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *Homère*. In *Les maîtres antiques*. In *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

## CHAPTER 2

### ANCIENT GREEK COSMOLOGY: THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN

Ancient Greek cosmology forms the primary foundation of this study. To convey something about humans in an area governed by the divine, it is essential to first discuss this domain briefly. In this cosmology, the worlds of gods and humans are intertwined. Precisely for this reason, most of the occurrences within life concern both gods and humans. Thus, the two realms are so interwoven that, in Ancient Greek culture, there is no separate world that is non-religious and non-divine as opposed to the divine and religious.<sup>89</sup> After addressing the extent of this intertwined realm, it is necessary to turn to elements related to the gods.

In the divine understanding of Ancient Greece, a polytheistic structure presents itself. These gods are intrinsic to human life and can occasionally intervene in human affairs, and even experience conflicts among themselves due to their interactions with humans and related actions. Moreover, one of their most distinctive features is their ability to assume various forms. They are depicted as zoomorphic at times and anthropomorphic at others. On the other hand, these gods are immortal.

When examining the gods of the period, although there is mention of a death phenomenon for Dionysus, he is born a second time from Zeus's thigh. Philologist Azra Erhat notes that some mythographers interpret Dionysus's name as meaning "twice-born," but this interpretation lacks support within the context of the Greek language. He also points out that there is another goddess with a motif of second birth: Athena. Athena is born a second time from Zeus's head, while Dionysus is born a second time from Zeus's thigh.<sup>90</sup> Their births are more directed towards their immortality than their mortality. Greek gods and goddesses embody all the values

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<sup>89</sup> Pironti, G. (2017). *The gods and goddesses of the Greeks*. In U. Eco (Ed.), *Ancient Greece*. Alfa Publishing, 553.

<sup>90</sup> Erhat, A. (1972). *Mitoloji sözlüğü* (Vol. 12). Remzi Publications, 93-94.

that constitute the price of existence in this world, such as aesthetics, power, perpetual youth, and the continuous brightness of life. The gods are far removed from the concept of death, which determines the priorities of human existence. They are *athanatoi*, meaning immortal; humans, on the other hand, are *brotoi*, destined to mortality, sickness, aging, and ultimately death.<sup>91</sup> Vernant emphasizes that the fact that humans are *brothoi* does not mean they should be considered insignificant, and he discusses the hero cults. There are hero cults that also serve as a form of worship for the gods. In these cults, heroes are associated with both citizenship and the land, and they are honored.<sup>92</sup>

Ancient Greek gods are depicted as anthropomorphic beings exhibiting human-like qualities and emotions; however, they are also endowed with extraordinary beauty, power, and immortality. This anthropomorphic representation allowed the Greek people to establish a more personal and comprehensible relationship with the gods. By displaying human emotions such as jealousy, anger, love, and revenge, the gods enabled humans to identify with them and better understand their behaviors. Zeus's infidelities, Aphrodite's romantic complexities, and Poseidon's anger reveal the human traits and emotional complexities of the gods. Alongside their human-like aspects, the gods are described as possessing superior intelligence and power, acting with a sense of justice, and having the authority to punish and create disasters when necessary.<sup>93</sup> Beren's views on this matter are as follows:

Daily recurring phenomena, which for us we know to be the result of certain well-established natural laws, were for the early Greeks the subject of serious speculation and frequent anxiety. For example, when they heard the terrible thunder, accompanied by bright flashes of lightning, black clouds, and torrents of torrential rain, they believed that the great god of the sky was enraged and trembled at his wrath. If the calm and peaceful

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<sup>91</sup> Vernant, J.-P. (2016). *Eski Yunan'da mit ve din* (M. Erşen, Trans.). Alfa Publishing, 46.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Berens, E. M. (2016). *Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Vol. 76). Xist Publishing, 1-3.

sea suddenly stirred and the cresting waves crashed over the rocks, bringing death, the god of the sea was thought to be enraged. If the sky glowed with the colors of the coming day, it was thought that the goddess of dawn was pulling aside the veil of darkness with her pink fingers, pulling the night aside to allow her brother, the sun god, to enter his bright career. This very imaginative and highly poetic nation, personifying all the forces of nature, seen in all Greek mythology, characterized by enchanting beauty and fairy-tale ideas, a divinity. The most important of this divinity may be more than mere creations of an active and poetic imagination. They were probably human beings who so distinguished themselves in life by their superiority over mortals that they were posthumously deified by the communities in which they lived among mortals, and poets touched with their magic wands the details of lives which in more prosaic times would have been recorded only as well-known.<sup>94</sup>

For the Ancient Greeks, the way of understanding and depicting the gods enables the theogonic structure of this cosmology. This structure also constitutes one of the sources for the traditions of poetry and literature. People learned even the judgments of the gods not from sacred texts but from mythological works expressed in poetic form and later transcribed into writing.<sup>95</sup>

Homer's works provide an important source for understanding Ancient Greek cosmology. In his epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the gods are depicted both physically in human form and with human-like psychology. In these epics, the gods play significant roles in both warfare and the fates of individual characters. In the *Iliad*, the gods are actively involved in the Trojan War. While Zeus attempts to control the course of the war, gods such as Hera and Athena support various sides. Hera manipulates Zeus, while Athena aids the warriors. These gods intensely experience human emotions such as jealousy, anger, love, and revenge, which lead

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>95</sup> Lloyd-Jones, H. (2001). *Ancient Greek religion*. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 145(4), 456-464.

to conflicts. For example, Hera's opposition to Zeus's decisions and Athena's assistance to Achilles reflect the gods' human-like weaknesses and disputes.

In the *Odyssey*, the gods play a decisive role in Odysseus's journey. Athena guides and protects Odysseus, while Poseidon, enraged with Odysseus, creates various obstacles to hinder his return home. The gods intervene directly in Odysseus's fate using human-like emotions and logic. Athena's sympathy for Odysseus and Poseidon's hatred reflects the gods' human emotions. Additionally, the relationships among the gods—such as friendships, enmities, alliances, and rivalries—display a dynamic reminiscent of human interactions. In this context, the actions and relationships of the gods, as well as the emotional and ethical challenges they face, make them more understandable and relatable; these anthropomorphic portrayals play a crucial role in comprehending the nature of the gods and their interactions with humans.

As highlighted by Thales's assertion that the universe is connected with the gods, Ancient Greek belief encompasses a phenomenon where the gods are integral to the universe. The realm referred to as the human world also includes the gods, who possess the power and right to intervene directly in this world. For the Greeks, their ability to intervene was not merely a belief but a reality.<sup>96</sup> In such an atmosphere, the gods have another aspect for the Ancient Greeks. In their daily lives, the Greeks would turn to the gods for influence and sometimes assistance or mercy. They sought to ensure that the gods were on their side by honoring them in situations involving productivity, prosperity, health, and protection from dangers.<sup>97</sup>

In the first chapter, while discussing the mythical hero Bellerophon, who is associated with the experience of melancholy, it was stated that his condition is related to a cosmological phenomenon. Following the explanation of cosmology,

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<sup>96</sup> Carastro, M. (2017). *Kült alanı*. In U. Eco (Ed.), *Antik Yunan* (1st ed.). (L. Tonguç Basmacı, Trans.). Alfa Publishing, 592.

<sup>97</sup> Mikalson, J. D. (2010). *Ancient Greek Religion* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell, 21.

we will turn to the primary element that constitutes his experience: the absence of the gods.

## 2.1. THE ABSENCE OF THE DIVINE: THE MELANCHOLY'S REALM

The word “absence” is composed of the Latin words “esse” meaning “being” and “ab” meaning “distance” meaning “away”. Theology, philosophy, literature, and art theory have dealt with this inquiry in the context of the synesthetic conceptual field (death, disappearance, lack, emptiness, and silence).<sup>98</sup>

Absence refers to the lack or non-existence of something. In the ancient Greek context, this is usually understood as the absence of gods or divine powers. The absence of the gods creates a deep void in the life and spiritual world of the individual. This emptiness refers to a situation in which man is deprived of the guidance and protection of the gods. In this period, the person who is turned away by the gods corresponds to the turning away of other people as well, so the person is left alone. This situation leads to an existential crisis and causes the individual to question his place and meaning. The person is now abandoned by everyone and everything. The story of Bellerophon best exemplifies this situation.

In Homer's world, which is stated to have an important place in understanding the structure of the period, everything—such as communication between individuals and the proper course of one's path—must always be guaranteed by the gods. When the gods fail to provide this assurance—such as in the case of Bellerophon, who experiences profound loneliness, emptiness, and deficiency due to their abandonment—humans are condemned to sorrow, a consuming sadness, and aimless wandering in anxiety and concern.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Leder, D. (1990). *The Absent Body*. University of Chicago Press, 22.

<sup>99</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *Homère*. In *Les maîtres antiques*. In *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

Teber points out that another figure experiencing melancholy in Homer is Ajax.<sup>100</sup> In the *Problemata*, this hero, mentioned in connection with black bile<sup>101</sup>, is the son of Telamon, King of Salamis. He is the most valiant warrior of the Trojan War after Achilles. Aias possesses a beauty that dazzles those who see him. The name of Aias, who appears as the most virtuous hero in the *Iliad*, has been the subject of many legends. After the Trojan War ended with Achilles' death, it was expected that his weapons would be awarded to Aias, the next most valiant warrior. However, the gods deceive him, and the weapons are given to Odysseus. Unable to accept this decision and deeply distressed, Aias experiences profound pain and severe nervous breakdowns. The goddess Athena misleads him, blinds his perception, and in his delirium, Aias attacks a herd of cattle, mistaking them for the Achaean army. Upon realizing his actions, unable to endure the shame before his enemies, he commits suicide by throwing himself upon his sword.<sup>102 103</sup> Erhat describes Aias's anguished condition as "a schizophrenia or paranoia crisis by today's standards."<sup>104</sup> Teber, referencing Sophocles' *Ajax*, makes the following observations:

According to Sophocles, if a person thinks in dimensions that surpass human limits, the gods will bring disasters upon them. Ajax did just that and thought and spoke in ways that exceeded the bounds of humanity.<sup>105</sup>

An example of this is Ajax's belief that even a worthless person could achieve victory with the help of the gods, whereas he, without such assistance, was confident of achieving victory.<sup>106</sup> While advancing in his self-admiration, Ajax incurs the wrath of the goddess Athena. According to Teber's interpretation of Sophocles, Ajax's delusion leads him to believe that he has lost all value in the world and that all his relationships with both humans and gods have been severed.

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<sup>100</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir anomali"*. Say Publications, 88.

<sup>101</sup> Radden, J. (2000). *The Nature of Melancholy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 56.

<sup>102</sup> Erhat, A. (1972). *Mitoloji sözlüğü* (Vol. 12). Remzi Publications, 18.

<sup>103</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir anomali"*. Say Publications, 88-89.

<sup>104</sup> Erhat, A. (1972). *Mitoloji sözlüğü* (Vol. 12). Remzi Publications, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Teber, S. (2009). *Melankoli: "Normal bir anomali"*. Say Publications, 88.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

Consequently, Ajax experiences a profound sense of emptiness, which disrupts his emotional and logical order. As a result, he descends into delirium, and his suicide becomes inevitable.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, Teber notes that as Athena confuses Ajax's mind, an ironic smile appears on his face as he senses his impending fatal destiny. This fatal, ironic "Ajax smile" is described as a part of the melancholic personality up to the present day. The relevant lines from Homer's *Iliad* are as follows:

That's how he stepped forward,  
Giant-built Aias, stronghold of the Achaeans.  
A smile on your terrible face.<sup>108</sup>

In this context, starting from Freud and considering approaches from the ancient period, there are notable common elements in the state of melancholy, such as loss, the void left by loss, and Freud's concept of "identification with the lost object," Seneca's "absentia sui," and the concept of "acedia" as "apathy," with Ajax's experience.<sup>109</sup> However, the absence of the gods and its consequences are demonstrated by the fact that even the highly accomplished Bellerophon had no power to oppose them due to the gods' mysterious wrath.<sup>110</sup> Starobinski notes that a person who is abandoned by the gods, thus drifting away from the path of humanity and being cast out of all meaning, is deprived of all the resources and courage needed to remain among their peers.<sup>111</sup> In this regard, Aias's state of madness—certainly associated with divine intervention—appears to highlight a different aspect.

The only way for Bellerophon to free himself from his melancholy is to wait for the gods to return to him or to find a way to ensure their return. It is essential that the grace, which he has been deprived of by the gods, be restored for him to return to

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>108</sup> Homer. (2023), *The Iliad*, (Wilson, E. Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company, 6/200-203, 196.

<sup>109</sup> It should be noted that Ajax is being considered here not as a tragic hero but as a mythic hero.

<sup>110</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *Homère*. In *Les maîtres antiques. In L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 24.

the path of humanity.<sup>112</sup> Ajax, apart from a certain form of intellectual blindness, does not experience any other deficiency or indifference in a practical sense. On the contrary, we find in him anger, fury, and violence. It is as if the fire ignited by Athena's wrath has led Ajax to perform actions that he would not normally undertake. If we approach this with Freud's idea that melancholics tend to mania<sup>113</sup>, it is possible to consider that Ajax's melancholic experience might exhibit such a tendency. Yet, when viewed within the context of ancient Greek cosmology, this situation represents a key distinction from psychological or internal conflict states and may be considered different from what could be categorized as a pathological condition. Starobinski's differentiation regarding Bellerophon will be quite useful in understanding this issue.

As per Starobinski, Bellerophon's condition is neither madness nor mania. In madness and mania, a person is either driven by or under the influence of a supernatural force whose presence he experiences. In Bellerophon, the situation is about absence.<sup>114</sup> From this perspective, Starobinski's discourse opens a new door. Even though Aias' melancholic temperament is evident, his actions prompt us to reflect on mania. This, in turn, shifts the focus from the absence of a divine realm to the presence of the divine, guiding the path toward a point where the divine and human trajectories begin to bifurcate.

## **2.2. THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE: THE TRAGIC'S REALM**

The word 'presence' is of Latin origin and derived from the word 'praesentia'. 'Praesentia' is derived from the word 'praesens' (present, ready) and consists of the words 'prae-' (before, beforehand) and 'esse' (to be). Therefore, 'presence' has the meanings of being present, being ready, and being. In line with the current usage of

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>113</sup> Freud, S. (1914-1916). *Mourning and Melancholia*. In The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XIV): On the history of the psycho-analytic movement, papers on metapsychology and other works, 253.

<sup>114</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). *Homère*. In Les maîtres antiques. In *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

the word, 'presence' is often used to refer to someone's physical presence or sense of presence.

When discussing Ancient Greek cosmology, Thales' statement about the universe being filled with gods was mentioned. Reflecting on Thales' assertion that "all things are full of daimones"<sup>115</sup> can be beneficial. Starobinski's description of mania as involving "a divine power perceived as present"<sup>116</sup> and the references to the divine presence in Ancient Greek cosmology underscore the necessity to closely examine the concept of "daimon."

In Chapter XIII of *Plato's The Symposium*, specifically in the section titled The Nature of Eros, a discourse on Eros takes place between Socrates and Diotima. In this discourse, it is stated that Eros is neither beautiful nor good, nor is it ugly or bad; rather, it occupies a position between these opposites. Additionally, Eros is described as neither immortal, meaning a god, nor mortal; it exists in between as a daemon. Thus, Eros, as a daemon, functions as an intermediary between gods and humans, positioning itself in the space between them.<sup>117</sup> In relation to the section of Plato's *Şölen* found in *The Symposium of Plato*, Erhat has added the following footnote regarding the daimon:

In Homer's epics, daimon is a divine command embodied in human form. Later, the concept of daimon becomes more abstract. According to Hesiod, daimons are the souls of individuals who have achieved immortality by living virtuously in this world. These semi-divine beings facilitate the exchange between humans and gods. Thales of Miletus also views the universe as being filled with such daimons. Heraclitus believes that daimons watch over humans, and Pythagoras holds a similar belief. In the Greek world, a daimon considered a beneficial and helpful entity, became

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<sup>115</sup> Aetius. (n.d.). *Placita* (Thales, 1.7.11).

<sup>116</sup> Starobinski, J. (2013). Homère. In *Les maîtres antiques*. In *L'Encre de la mélancolie*. Éditions du Seuil, 24.

<sup>117</sup> Plato. (1909). *The Symposium of Plato* (R. G. Bury, Ed.). Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 16-17.

a symbol of evil with the advent of Christianity, where 'daimon' came to be associated with the devil.<sup>118</sup>

When discussing acedia, its relation to daimons in Ancient Greece was mentioned. The malevolent demonic forces associated with acedia will be further elucidated by Erhat's footnote. After noting this, the discussion will continue to explore this phenomenon within the context of Ancient Greece.

In epic poetry and sagas, when describing human actions, the gods are often indicated as the subject or agent of these actions. Thus, within the description of a hero's deeds, there is always mention of a deity either directly involved in the action or playing a significant role in its execution. This is an important expression in explaining the presence of the divine realm. For example, in the Iliad, the cause of the plague at the beginning of the story is explained as Agamemnon taking a local priest's daughter as his concubine as war spoils, leading to the gods' anger and their subsequent punishment of the people. Returning to Thales' statement with this information, it gains a clearer meaning.

Unlike the linear historical perspective of today, it is noted that Ancient Greece had a cyclical understanding of history. Due to the absence of beliefs in an afterlife, the Greeks' approach was that everything that happens is always within this world.<sup>119</sup> Thus, it can be said that the material world was valuable to the people of Ancient Greece. The gods inherent in this world often engage in deceptions, and people also act against them. The fact that everything happens in this world inevitably affects their view of life and understanding of existence.

Refocusing on the topic of human action, a notable difference is observed in the ways Ancient Greeks conceptualized and rationalized human actions. Concepts related to one's inner world, such as desires, motivations, and intentions, find little

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<sup>118</sup> Eflatun. (1958). *Şölen* (A. Erhat & S. Eyüboğlu, Trans.). Remzi Publishing, 140-141.

<sup>119</sup> Friedell, E. (2004). *Antik Yunan'ın kültür tarihi* (N. Aça, Trans.). Dost Publishing, 76.

place in these methods. The concept of interiority is not a part of this atmosphere. Therefore, in situations that we associate with interiority today, more tangible terms are used. For example, in the Iliad, when describing their actions, people refer to the gods, which is related to the notion of responsibility. Heroes believe that their actions are influenced or driven by a deity.

On the other hand, another important statement related to the topic is Heraclitus's 'ethos anthropoi daimon.'<sup>120</sup> The term "ethos" (character) and "anthropoi" (human) together describe a situation where a person's character aligns with a daimon. This perspective suggests that the ancient Greeks provided an explanation for the reasons behind human actions within their cosmology. Daimons, who serve as intermediaries between gods and humans, are relevant in this context, and daemons sent by the gods are seen as a decisive factor in human actions. In Ancient Greece, daimon is not always associated with evil; one of the prime examples is Aristotle's concept of "eudaimonia," used to express the notion of the best life.

Up to this point, information has been provided regarding daemons, mania, and the presence of the gods. Previously, explanations were given about the divine and human realms created by the absence of the divine and their interactions. Now, we will closely examine the interaction between the realm formed by the presence of the divine and the human realm.

While the absence of the divine reveals the realm of the melancholic experience, the presence of the divine constitutes a realm associated with mania. In this state of existence, we first encounter a universe of gods that completely encompasses the human world. Here, the human realm is akin to a subset of the divine. The realm of the gods has an unlimited and infinite scope of intervention in the human world. This is the realm of the pretragic experience. It is useful to recall the characteristics

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<sup>120</sup> In Stobaeus, Anthology IV, 40.23, B119: "Ἡράκλειτος ἔφη ὡς ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων" "Heraclitus claims a man's character [ethos] is his fate." - Heraclitus to his ἦθος ἀνθρώπου (ethos anthropo, "the ethos/character of a man")

of the gods of Ancient Greece as we introduce them. These gods can lie to each other, engage in struggles, and use humans in their conflicts. They possess an inherent quality of uncertainty both among themselves and concerning humans. This situation causes people living within these limitless realms of intervention to exist in a state of constant uncertainty.

In the pretragic realm, the human domain, which initially exists as a subset of the divine realm, undergoes changes in its positioning over time. The human realm begins to differentiate slightly from the divine set, and their interactions emerge as the intersection of two distinct sets. This forms the realm of the tragic experience. To understand this area, it is necessary to examine the concept of the tragic. İonna Kuçuradi defines the tragic as follows:

The tragic is not a mere emotion; it resides not in our feelings of fear and pity, but in the things themselves; it emerges from the structure of the world. However, an event can only be tragic if it bears the tragic element through a human. The tragic is primarily a sign of events, characters, and similar things.<sup>121</sup>

As a concept, the tragic is considered by Max Scheler as a fundamental element of the universe itself. For a situation or a work of art to be considered tragic, it must have received its share of this tragic element present in the universe and must necessarily include this element within it. For Scheler, the universe represents the world endowed with values rather than the physical and chemical world. The tragic is related to a person who cannot be conceived independently of the values of the world in which they live.<sup>122</sup> In her article *On the Experience of the Tragic*, scholar Krystyna Wilkoszewska discusses the experience of the tragic as follows:

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<sup>121</sup> Kuçuradi, I. (2009). *Sanata felsefeyle bakmak*. Turkey Philosophy Foundation Publications, 8.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 1- 4.

The contradiction of being that reveals itself in experience may, due to the subject's mental activity, be manifested on the plane of consciousness as the tragic, a paradox, the absurd, the comic, catastrophism, etc. We are therefore justified to ask about the conditions necessary for the experience of contradiction underlying the world to become a tragic one. The answer to this question is rather complex. It seems that the condition necessary for the contradiction of phenomena given in experience to become the ferment of structuring, by the subject, of a tragic construction — is an attitude of commitment on the part of the recipient. The tragic will be reached by someone who, while experiencing the paradoxicality of existence, is himself entangled in this paradox, whom this paradox or conflict concerns directly. In short — tragicity is only given to the tragic hero.<sup>123</sup>

As an example of a tragic hero, Wilkoszewska (1986) refers to Icarus in Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Fall of Icarus*, dated around 1560. To understand this example, it is useful to briefly recount the mythological story depicted in the painting. Icarus, along with his father Daedalus, makes wings by attaching feathers with wax to escape their exile and imprisonment. Daedalus advises Icarus not to fly too high or too low, but to remain in the middle. However, overwhelmed by the thrill of flying, Icarus disregards his father's warning, rises too high, and falls into the sea when the wax in his wings melts due to the sun. In the account of the Roman poet Ovid, there is a sense of astonishment expressed as those who see Icarus and his father flying mistake them for gods.<sup>124</sup> In contrast, Bruegel's painting depicts indifference to the falling Icarus. Wilkoszewska remarks on this situation by stating, "None of those present, except the tragic flier, participate in his accident or share his tragedy."<sup>125</sup> Icarus's fall, driven by his disregard for his father's warnings and his eagerness to rise further, might be seen as analogous to being mistaken for gods by people, as Ovid suggests. However, while these interpretations remain speculative, the undeniable fact is his fall. On the other hand, when trying to identify

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<sup>123</sup> Wilkoszewska, K. (1986). *On the Experience of the Tragic*. Philosophica, 29.

<sup>124</sup> Ovidius. (1994). *Dönüşümler* (İ. Z. Eyüboğlu, Trans.). Payel Publishing, 189-190.

<sup>125</sup> Wilkoszewska, K. (1986). *On the Experience of the Tragic*. Philosophica, 29.

a culprit along with these interpretations, things become complicated. Is the fault in Icarus's excessive pride, or in the divine justice that might view his actions as excessive? Or is the fault with his father, who taught him to fly? Scheler indicates that there is a fault in a tragic event, but not a guilty party. If there is a clear answer to the question of who the guilty party is, it suggests a deficiency in the essence of the tragic.<sup>126</sup>

As Wilkoszewska discusses the tragic, conflict is significant aspect in the consideration of the tragic by many thinkers. For example, Scheler defines the tragic with the following statements: "The tragic is primarily a 'conflict' that prevails among bearers of high positive values."<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Scheler addresses the tragic and the subject that embodies the tragic. According to him, in a conflict of high and positive values, the full meaning and depth of the tragic become evident when there is a single event, object, or person involved, where the bearers of values are not distinct from each other. The situation is such that a power, behavior, or action realizes one high and positive value while simultaneously destroying another high and positive value. This realization and simultaneous destruction of two different things are carried by a single individual.<sup>128</sup> For the tragic subject involved in a tragic event, Avner Ziss suggests that it is related to conflicts that reflect the clash of irreconcilable opposing forces, grounded in justifiable and relevant historical and social conflicts. Additionally, Ziss states that the intrinsic structure of tragic conflict is naturally a historical category.<sup>129</sup>

In this context, the nature of the tragic and the emergence of the tragic state through conflict has been explored. Based on Ancient Greek cosmology, the experience area formed by the interaction of the divine's presence and its interaction with the human domain has been examined, with an attempt to distinguish between pretragic and

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<sup>126</sup> Max Scheler, *Zun Phanomen des Tragischen*, 257 (as cited in Kuçuradi, 2009, 20).

<sup>127</sup> Max Scheler, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*, Vol. 1, 244, Leipzig, 1923 (as cited in Kuçuradi, 2009, 7).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Ziss, A. (2011). *Estetik* (Y. Şahan, Trans). Hayalbaz Publishing, 178.

tragic within this experience area. The historical expression of the conflict indicated in the realm of the tragic forms the foundation for the other part of the study.

Just as Homer serves as a guiding reference when examining melancholy as a phenomenon and concept, the tragic experience area, concerning melancholy, points to the concept of tragedy as an encompassing narrative. This involves considering the cosmology of the divine realm and its impact on human lives, including the phenomena of change it entails. The mutual relationship between the divine and the human, the intervention of gods in the human world, and the intersection between these two realms naturally give rise to a tragic space filled with uncertainties, conflicts, and tensions, and this has been discussed as the causation of human actions. In the first volume of "Myth and Tragedy," a collaborative work by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, it is stated that the intersection point of these concepts is the domain of tragedy.<sup>130</sup> In line with this, the next section will be focused on tragedies about the tragic experience.

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<sup>130</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**FROM THE REALM OF THE TRAGIC TO TRAGEDY:**  
**ANALYZING OEDIPUS' TRAGIC EXPERIENCE**

**3.1. THE TRAGIC IN TRAGEDY: THE NARRATIVE OF TRANSITION IN THE CONVERGENCE ZONE**

The intersection of divine and human relationships in the tragic experience realm is related not only to cosmology but also to historical and human life transformations. This realm inherently encompasses the tragic. Just as we encounter descriptions of the heroes' experiences of melancholy in Homer's narratives, we also find portrayals of tragic experiences in literary accounts. In this context, it is pertinent to underscore the importance of human actions, examine the tragic, and focus on a genre that both originates from and reflects the transformations within Ancient Greek society. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet contend that tragedy, with its specific conventions and distinctive attributes, unveils previously unexplored facets of human experience through its unique narrative structure. They argue that tragedy represents a significant stage in the development of the inner self and the concept of personal responsibility.<sup>131</sup>

Theatre historian Sevda Şener observes that the term “tragedy,” which originates from the Ancient Greek word “tragoedia,” is composed of the Ancient Greek terms “tragos” and “oidia.” The word “tragos” translates to “male goat,” while “oidia” means “song” or “melody.”<sup>132</sup> Classical philologist Erman Gören explains that the term “tragoedia” is frequently interpreted as “the song of the goats.” He suggests that this interpretation may be connected to the activities of the satyr figures during the Dionysian festivals, where tragedy first emerged.<sup>133</sup> This study will concentrate

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<sup>131</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 15.

<sup>132</sup> Şener, S. (2007). *Yaşamın kırılma noktasında dram sanatı*. Dost Publishing, 85.

<sup>133</sup> Gören, E. (2014). *Klasik Yunan tragedyasında adlandırmanın 'trajik' işlevi*. *Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences*, 17, 239.

on tragedy rather than the origins of theatre. However, despite the numerous theories concerning the origins of theatre, it can be broadly asserted that the prevailing view links tragedy with Dionysus.

As previously discussed in the earlier section, the tragic is an inherent element of the universe. Kuçuradi argues that tragedy represents an intertwining of art and life, with no distinction between the two.<sup>134</sup> For a situation to be deemed tragic, it must derive its essence from the inherent tragic element present in the universe. The tragic pertains to something that cannot be understood independently of the values of the world in which it exists.<sup>135</sup> Scheler contends that the tragic, initially characterized by conflict among high positive values, exposes significant and profound societal conflicts.<sup>136</sup> Thus, the tragic reveals societal upheavals and revolutionary shifts in societal values, manifested through destructive contradictions. Moreover, the significance of these conflicts appearing on stage, alongside elements related to societal contexts, is correspondingly noteworthy.<sup>137</sup> This situation, which might seem like a given condition, can be identified as the domain of tragic experience within the context of tragedies, associated with the historical category of conflicts arising from the internal dynamics of Ancient Greek society. Ziss asserts that, despite varying circumstances, there are general laws of the tragic that manifest their effects in specific forms across different eras.<sup>138</sup> Vernant and Vidal-Naquet also examine the tragic moment within the context of social experience. According to them, the tragic moment represents a brief interval within a social experience where the intensity of the conflict between legal and political ideas on one side and myths and traditional hero narratives on the other becomes palpable. This period is characterized by a narrow space that both allows and incites the ongoing confrontation of opposing forces, during which value

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<sup>134</sup> Kuçuradi, I. (2009). *Sanata felsefeyle bakmak*. Turkey Philosophy Foundation Publications, 35.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 1- 4.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>137</sup> Ziss, A. (2011). *Estetik* (Y. Şahan, Trans). Hayalbaz Publishing, 176-177

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 178-179.

conflicts are experienced intensely and painfully.<sup>139</sup> Following this, the focus will shift to how these aspects are reflected in tragedy.

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet argue that tragedy emerges during a historical threshold period spanning nearly a century, culminating in a context rich with significance and expression. This period, which they delineate, is termed the "moment of tragedy." Tragedy, as a literary form, appeared in Greece towards the end of the 6th century, succeeding epic and lyric poetry, and serves as a distinct example of human experience linked to specific social and psychological conditions.<sup>140</sup> In In 5th century Athens<sup>141</sup>, the rise of city-states known as *poleis* brought about significant changes in thought systems. Alongside political institutions, ideas, and behavioral norms, a new understanding of the justice system emerged. Elements of the old order—including its organization, beliefs, and deities—were now challenged by new values. This shift created a domain in which the contrasts between the new and the old were confronted, reflecting the broader societal change.<sup>142</sup>

In ancient Greek thought, law was grounded in actual authority and coercion while simultaneously invoking sacred powers and divine justice.<sup>143</sup> Although law has been distinct from religious tradition and morality for some time, clear boundaries of authority remain undefined. This leads to ambiguity, shifts in terminology, fluctuations, and contradictions, reflecting an unsettled state.<sup>144</sup> Vernant suggests that Divine Dike<sup>145</sup> itself can appear ambiguous and unclear, noting that it encompasses an element of irrationality and raw power from the human

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<sup>139</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 19

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 23-24

<sup>141</sup> Vernant and Vidal-Naquet indicate that using the term "Attic Tragedy" is more accurate since tragedy originated and developed in Athens. However, for consistency, this study will use the term "tragedy".

<sup>142</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 15

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 19

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>145</sup> Dike: In Greek, the term has multiple meanings; its primary abstract concepts are justice, righteousness, and fairness. The word Dike is used both for the court where justice is administered and for the judgment given (as cited in Erhat A. (2022), 90)

perspective.<sup>146</sup> In tragedy, a form of Dike is depicted as conflicting with another form of Dike—an unsettled law that shifts and turns into its opposite. Vernant emphasizes that tragedy is far more complex than a legal debate, arguing that it engages with the individual who, immersed in this conflict, is compelled to make decisive choices. This individual must navigate an unstable and ambiguous world of values, where nothing holds a singular meaning.<sup>147</sup> Vernant argues that tragedy maintains a critical distance from the heroic myths it draws upon and places in different contexts. It examines these myths by contrasting heroic values and ancient religious symbols with new ways of thinking that have influenced the supremacy of law within the city-state framework. Additionally, while heroic legends are associated with royal dynasties and noble figures, these values represent elements that must be condemned or rejected within the city-state context. They signify an entity that must strive to establish itself, even as it is shaped by and deeply connected to the very values it challenges.<sup>148</sup>

Earlier, it was noted that the moment of tragedy is considered within the context of social experience. Additionally, there is an approach that examines the tragic as a form of consciousness. Vernant addresses a period when the human and divine realms, though seemingly inseparable, also diverge to the extent of opposing each other.<sup>149</sup> In this context, he refers to the presence of a tragic consciousness and states:

The tragic consciousness of responsibility appears when the human and divine levels are sufficiently distinct for them to be opposed while still appearing to be inseparable. The tragic sense of responsibility emerges when human action becomes the object of reflection and debate while still not being regarded as sufficiently autonomous to be fully self-sufficient. The particular domain of tragedy lies in this border zone where human

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<sup>146</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 18.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 20.

actions hinge on divine powers and where their true meaning, unsuspected by even those who initiated them and take responsibility for them, is only revealed when it becomes part of an order that is beyond man and escapes him.<sup>150</sup>

According to Vernant, tragic consciousness emerged and developed in tandem with tragedy.<sup>151</sup> It would be incorrect to view tragedy merely as a reflection of life and reality. Unlike other literary forms and narratives that represent life and beliefs, tragedy engages with reality as a subject of debate, presenting it as a problematic issue by fragmenting and depicting it as divided against itself.<sup>152</sup> Mythological stories, heroes, and legends from the city-state's past continue to be portrayed on stage in tragedy. When a tragic character is elevated to the realm of extraordinary beings believed in by the city-state through performance and masks, this character is linguistically aligned with the ordinary person. This alignment renders the tragic figure a contemporary of the audience within their legendary, mythical journey. Vernant emphasizes that each hero embodies tensions between the past and the present, as well as between the mythical world and the world of the city-state. Heroes are sometimes transported to a mythic past, appearing as figures from an ancient era endowed with divine powers and embodying the excesses of old kings; at other times, they emerge among the citizens of Athens as contemporary figures who live, think, and speak in accordance with the city-state.<sup>153</sup>

To summarize, the moment of tragedy arises from the tension between changes in legal and political thought and the conflicts involving myths and heroes from the past. According to theater scholar and researcher Eylem Ejder, beneath all tragedies lies a substantial past, which is not merely the personal history of any tragic hero

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

but a narrative embedded in the collective memory of the Greeks.<sup>154</sup> Therefore, viewing a tragedy solely as a text from its first to its last word, and examining a tragic hero only through their personal story and character traits, would be inadequate and incomplete.

### 3.2. THE TRAGEDY OF THE MYTHIC HERO: OEDIPUS THE KING

In Ancient Greece, mythological narratives were well-known; the heroes and their tales were familiar to audiences. The reason why listeners or spectators continued to engage with these stories, despite knowing them from beginning to end, may lie in their enduring relevance and the way they are still discussed today. Bernard Knox, in the section dedicated to the prologue of *Oedipus the King* in *The Three Theban Plays*, notes that the story of Oedipus was already a well-known myth for the audience. However, he also highlights Sophocles' narrative style, which he suggests rejuvenates this ancient story:

His use of well-known material in a different way made the play innovative. He chose to concentrate attention not on the actions of Oedipus, which had made his name a byword—his violation of the two most formidable taboos observed by almost every human society—but on the moment of his discovery of the truth. And Sophocles engineered this discovery not by divine agency (as Homer did) and not by chance, but through the persistent, courageous action of Oedipus himself. The hero of the play is thus his own destroyer; he is the detective who tracks down and identifies the criminal—who turns out to be himself.<sup>155</sup>

In this context, *Oedipus the King*, which portrays a hero in search of himself, is a tragedy of fate. Its tragic impact stems from the conflict between the futile efforts

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<sup>154</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 13.

<sup>155</sup> Knox, B. (1984). *Introduction to Oedipus the King*. In *Sophocles, The three Theban plays* (R. Fagles, Trans.). Penguin Books. 129-155, 129.

of humans and the all-powerful will of the gods. Furthermore, the significance of Ancient Greek tragedy lies not just in the conflict between fate—i.e., the divine—and humans, but in the unique way this conflict is presented.<sup>156</sup> The lesson that the audience derives from this tragedy is that humans must submit to the divine will in the face of the gods' superior power and acknowledge their own helplessness. Regardless of their efforts, humans are powerless against the divine.<sup>157 158</sup>

Knox notes that *Oedipus the King* is cited by Aristotle as an example in discussions of dramatic writing.<sup>159</sup> Before delving into the analysis of *Oedipus the King*, a tragedy, it is essential to address the concept of tragedy as defined by Aristotle in *Poetics*, the earliest surviving source on this dramatic form, and to examine its elements.

Tragedy, as a dramatic genre, encompasses a set of unique formal and stylistic elements. The earliest surviving source on both these elements and tragedy itself is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Vernant emphasizes that by the time Aristotle began developing his theory of tragedy, the essential vitality of tragedy had already faded.<sup>160</sup> Ejder also notes that Aristotle's structural description of tragedy does not reference Athens, the city-states, or the Dionysian festivals and rituals associated with the birth of tragedy. According to her, as noted by ancient Greek scholars and also mentioned by Vernant, this omission can be attributed to Aristotle's detachment from the city-states of Athens and the decline of tragedy's prominence during his time.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, Aristotle's status as a primary source on this subject underscores that tragedy remains a reflection of a specific example of human

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<sup>156</sup> Freud, S. (1911). *The interpretation of dreams* (A. A. Brill, Trans.). Macmillan. (Original work published 1900), 85.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>158</sup> Knox, B. (1984). *Introduction to Oedipus the King*. In *Sophocles, The three Theban plays* (R. Fagles, Trans.,). Penguin Books. 129-155, 129.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>160</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 23.

<sup>161</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 18.

experience shaped by particular social and psychological conditions.<sup>162</sup> Aristotle defines tragedy in *Poetics* as follows:

Tragedy is an imitation of a noble action that is complete and unfolds over a certain period. (...) This imitation is enacted not through narrative but by the characters within the action; it aims to evoke the catharsis of emotions such as pity and fear. Tragedy imitates not individuals but actions, life, happiness, or ruin. Happiness or ruin lies within the action itself; it is not a final state to be achieved but an aspect of the action.<sup>163</sup>

In his article titled *Klasik Yunan Tragedyasında Ad(landırman)ın "Trajik" İşlevi*, Göran addresses certain debates related to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, particularly focusing on issues with the concept of mimesis, which is specified as "actions" (praksis), and the understanding of catharsis, which is said to occur "through pity and fear." According to Göran, the crucial point about mimesis is that it is not related to "my moral character developed over the years" but rather to "my experience of the action in a specific situation." Thus, Aristotle emphasizes that the essence of mimesis lies in the unique action performed at a particular place and time.<sup>164</sup> Ejder also states that the action is considered "noble" not because of the nobility of the actors, such as kings or queens, but because the chosen action itself embodies "seriousness." She argues that this seriousness constitutes a "dignified movement" and is crucial to both the function and the subject matter of tragedy.<sup>165</sup> In *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses how the imitation of both noble and ordinary people by dramatists can result in these characters appearing either better or worse than they are in reality. The difference in character is determined by their virtue or vice. According to Aristotle, this distinction is also evident in Homer, who is said to

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<sup>162</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 24.

<sup>163</sup> Aristoteles. (2012). *Poetika* (H. E. Tunalı. Trans). Can Publishing, 29-30.

<sup>164</sup> Göran, E. (2014). *Klasik Yunan tragedyasında adlandırmanın 'trajik' işlevi*. *Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences*, 17, 242.

<sup>165</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 14.

elevate the characters he portrays. While both Homer and Sophocles imitate noble individuals, Sophocles additionally focuses on those engaged in action and performing deeds. Aristotle notes that Sophocles' works might be termed "dramas" because they depict people in the midst of action.<sup>166</sup> Ejder highlights Aristotle's distinction between diegetic (narrative) and mimetic (imitative) forms in this context:

According to Aristotle, the foundation of the art of drama is derived from the word drama, which comes from dran. The term dran relates to the process of doing or acting. Thus, mimetic is different from diegetic. Diegetic is associated with narrative, that is, epic or epos. The fundamental difference between epic and tragedy lies in rhythm and time. According to Aristotle, in epic poetry, sections can be added or removed because it lacks the structural unity present in tragedy. In contrast, it is not possible to add or remove sections in tragedy. Therefore, Aristotle differentiates between epic and tragedy, as well as between diegetic (narrative) and mimetic (imitative) from the very beginning.<sup>167</sup>

Aristotle's explanation for why humans engage in mimetic activity is connected to rhythm. Rhythm is derived from the Greek word *thumos*, which translates to heart, spirit, or soul in various languages. For Aristotle, *thumos* is the condition that drives human mimetic activity. In Aristotle's definition of tragedy, the concept associated with the purpose of mimetic action is catharsis.<sup>168</sup>

Ejder describes catharsis, referred to as purification, as a process where tragedy, through its tragic effect, cleanses the soul of emotions such as fear and pity.<sup>169</sup> This state of purification is experienced by the audience and can be connected to the

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<sup>166</sup> Aristoteles. (2012). *Poetika* (H. E. Tunali. Trans). Can Publishing, 21-22.

<sup>167</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 14-15.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 15.

lesson they derive from watching the tragedy. Indeed, Gören also states that the feelings of pity and fear evoked through mimetic action resonate with the audience, thereby engaging and harmonizing with them.<sup>170</sup> After discussing imitation and catharsis, it is necessary to revisit the concept of action, which Aristotle frequently emphasizes both in his definition of tragedy and in *Poetics*.

Aristotle emphasizes that tragedy imitates actions rather than people, with both happiness and ruin contained within the action. Therefore, the goal of tragedy is an action rather than a state. According to him, a tragedy can exist without character but cannot exist without action. On the other hand, the principle that defines the choice of character and represents the essence of tragedy is the plot. In Aristotle's view, thoughts represent the ability to articulate the appropriate words for a situation; they either demonstrate the existence of something or relate to an established belief.<sup>171</sup> In *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi*, Şener addresses the unity of action in relation to the plot. According to Şener, unity of action refers to the initiation and completion of events according to the principles of probability and necessity.<sup>172</sup> The inclusion of well-known mythological stories in tragedy, which occupy a place in collective memory, is reasonable because they align with reason and common sense by addressing events that have not yet occurred. However, strict adherence to these stories is not mandatory; it is possible to create a fictional narrative, as Sophocles did. Nevertheless, Aristotle notes that to ensure the credibility of the "probable," tragedians rely on familiar names and figures.<sup>173</sup> In addition to these aspects, there are key elements in the structure of the plot. One such element, *peripeteia*, refers to moments that reverse the direction of the plot based on probability or necessity. Another key element is *anagnorisis*, which signifies the transition from ignorance to knowledge or recognition.<sup>174</sup> An event that reverses the course of the plot and leads to recognition evokes feelings of fear or

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<sup>170</sup> Gören, E. (2014). *Klasik Yunan Tragedyasında Adlandırmanın 'Trajik' İşlevi*. Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences, 17, 244.

<sup>171</sup> Aristoteles. (2012). *Poetika* (H. E. Tunalı. Trans). Can Publishing, 30-32.

<sup>172</sup> Şener, S. (2003). *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi*. Dost Publishing, 33.

<sup>173</sup> Aristoteles. (2012). *Poetika* (H. E. Tunalı. Trans). Can Publishing, 37.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 31-41.

pity. Thus, tragedy is fundamentally an imitation of actions that elicit these emotions.<sup>175</sup> Another concept directly related to these emotions and tragic heroes is that, according to Aristotle, tragedy must imitate dreadful or pitiable events. It should depict the transition of virtuous individuals from happiness to ruin. For this to occur, the tragic hero must commit a *hamartia*, or tragic flaw, which leads to their destruction.<sup>176</sup> In his article *Trajik Hata ve Sessizlik*, academician Kerem Eksen views Aristotle's definition of *hamartia* as corresponding to an intermediate zone within the universe of tragedy. According to Eksen, *hamartia* prevents the hero's downfall from being interpreted solely within the framework of cause and effect related to crime and punishment, while also precluding it from being seen as merely accidental due to its nature as a mistake.<sup>177</sup>

Ejder notes that in Greek thought, *hamartia* refers to human actions that provoke the wrath and jealousy of the gods. This concept is sometimes associated with intellectual error, madness, or illness. Ejder also points out that *hamartia* often manifests as an act of *hybris*.<sup>178</sup> Ejder defines *hybris* as follows:

“Hybris is the result of a person's failure to recognize their own limits, engaging in actions that equate themselves with the gods. Hybris, evaluated as the tragic hero's audacity to compete with the gods, is a form of arrogance.”<sup>179</sup>

In this context, the tragic hero, who demonstrates a lack of measure against the divine, appears to be subject to a form of punishment for overstepping this boundary. As Aristotle observed, the hero's choices inevitably lead to their fall. Vernant indicates that for the tragic hero, emotions, words, and actions are intertwined with the analysis and interpretation by poets, and possess a character or

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>177</sup> Eksen, K. (2010). *Trajik Hata ve Sessizlik*. Cogito: Tragedy Special Issue, issue: 54, 2008, 145-158, 148.

<sup>178</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 18.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 18.

*ethos*. According to Vernant, these elements collectively emerge as an expression of a *daimon*.<sup>180</sup> In earlier sections of the study, Heraclitus's phrase "*ethos anthropoi daimon*" was referenced, indicating that a person's character is aligned with their *daimon*. Vernant also notes that the tragic individual exists within the space between *ethos* and *daimon*<sup>181</sup> and states the following regarding the character of the tragic hero:

For a tragedy to exist, the text must simultaneously convey the following meanings: the *daimon* referred to in a person is their character—and conversely: what is called character in a person is actually a *daimon*.<sup>182</sup>

In Ejder's (2015) exploration of tragic consciousness, several key concepts are addressed: *hamartia*, *ate*, *daimon*, and *miasma*. *Hamartia*, which refers to the tragic flaw that leads to a person's downfall, and especially *ate*, which refers to irrational behavior such as *hybris*, are found in Greek thought. *Ate* is perceived as a punishment for *hybris*, an irrational state that leads individuals to act inappropriately. The *daimon*, which encourages individuals toward *ate*, is an irrational force that drives people to behave in strange ways beyond their conscious control. *Miasma*, on the other hand, is a stain or blemish that extends from an unjust wrong through time and space, affecting not only the wrongdoer but also their loved ones. In ancient cosmology, it can also be viewed as the transmission of guilt across generations, embodied in *hamartia* and sent by the gods.<sup>183</sup>

The role of *miasma* in Oedipus's fate contributes to why *Oedipus the King* is considered a tragedy of fate. Oedipus, a descendant of Labdacus, the king of Thebes, is burdened by a generational curse. This curse manifests as *miasma*,

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<sup>180</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 34.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>183</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 21-22.

affecting his destiny. In another play from the same trilogy, *Antigone*, this curse is further illustrated through the following words:

I see this house's age-old sorrows,  
the house of Labdakos' children,  
sorrows falling on the sorrows of the dead,  
one generation bringing no relief  
to generations after it- some god  
strikes at then- on and on without an end.<sup>184</sup>

Both bearing the curse of his ancestors and being a part of this curse himself, which extends to his descendants, Oedipus's condition is intrinsically linked to miasma. This connection is noted by observers of his plight. In Sophocles' works, it is emphasized that the tragic hero's relationship with his name is central to his tragic existence. The term "Oidipous" is interpreted as "Oidi-pous," meaning "swollen foot." This name not only denotes the physical mark on Oedipus from his abandonment by his father but also serves as a clear indication of his connection to the cursed lineage of Labdacus's descendants.<sup>185</sup>

*Oedipus the King* recounts the story of Oedipus, the king of Thebes, who, by killing his father and marrying his mother, unwittingly fulfills a prophecy. This act condemns both himself and his city to suffer the consequences. The play delves into themes of fate, irony, and self-destruction, as Oedipus attempts to uncover the truth behind the murder of the former king, Laius, only to discover his own horrific identity. The tragedy culminates in the suicide of his wife/mother and Oedipus's self-inflicted blindness and subsequent exile.

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<sup>184</sup> Sophocles (2005). *Antigone* (I. Johnston, Trans.). Vancouver Island University. (Original work published ca. 441 B.C.E.), 31.

<sup>185</sup> Gören, E. (2014). Klasik Yunan tragedyasında adlandırmanın 'trajik' işlevi. *Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences*, 17, 254-255.

The gods possess complete knowledge of all that has happened and will happen, and they convey this knowledge to humans through oracles as guidance. Among the most influential sources of such advice was Apollo, the son of Zeus.<sup>186</sup> Penguin Books.) In this play, the voice of fate, as determined by the gods, is embodied in the prophecy of Apollo. The oracle at Delphi informs King Laius that he will be killed by his own son. To prevent this fate, the infant Oedipus is removed from the palace and given to a shepherd, who later delivers him to another king for adoption. Unaware of his true parentage and living in a different realm, Oedipus learns of a prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother. In an effort to avoid this prophecy, Oedipus leaves his home, family, and everyone he knows.

*Oedipus the King* opens in Thebes, in front of the palace, where the people are lamenting the disaster that has befallen them. Oedipus appears and inquires of the elderly priest about the situation. The priest describes the calamities they are enduring: their crops and livestock have died, the land no longer yields produce, women are unable to bear children, and a plague is ravaging the region. Oedipus, who previously defeated the Sphinx that threatened the city and brought prosperity to Thebes, pledges to help. He has sent his brother-in-law Creon to the Pythian temple to consult the oracles. This scene highlights Oedipus's problem-solving abilities and his approach to seeking knowledge. There is a mystery known to the audience but not yet to Oedipus: his correct answer to the Sphinx's riddle made him the king of Thebes. His quest for knowledge will ultimately lead to his decadence, a consequence of the fate determined by the gods. When Creon returns, he reports that the oracles have stated that Thebes can only be freed from the plague by finding and exiling the murderer of the former king Laius, who is still in Thebes. Oedipus, having learned of Laius's murder, vows to pursue the matter and find the killer.

OEDIPUS:

Whoever

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<sup>186</sup> Knox, B. (1984). *Introduction to Oedipus the King*. In *Sophocles, The three Theban plays* (R. Fagles, Trans.). Penguin Books, 129-155, 133.

he was that killed the king may readily  
wish to dispatch me with his murderous hand; so helping the dead  
king I  
help myself.<sup>187</sup>

When Oedipus discovers the identity of the murderer, he will be led to his own destruction. His grand declarations only intensify the impact of his fate. Oedipus's situation, where he boasts of his knowledge while remaining blind to the truth, is a consequence of the tragedy destined for him. His portrayal as someone capable of solving every problem through his knowledge heightens the severity of his fall, making the situation even more tragic. Şener, in *Yaşamın Kırılma Noktasında Dram Sanatı*, comments on Oedipus as follows:

Oedipus is noble, intelligent, responsible, strong, courageous and just. He proved his intelligence by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, his sense of responsibility by governing his country well, his courage and free will by fighting against his fate, and his strength and fairness by applying the severest punishment to himself.<sup>188</sup>

In Sophocles's tragedies, the chorus plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of the text. Although it does not directly influence the progression of events, the chorus's statements and interpretations are intricately linked to the development of the plot. In *Oedipus the King*, the chorus of Theban elders represents a voice of reason. Their words and reactions offer insights into the narrative and help to uncover the tragic elements. The chorus also clarifies Oedipus's situation and provides a perspective that foreshadows the impending disaster.

CHORUS:

What is the sweet spoken word of god from the shrine of Pytho

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<sup>187</sup> Sophocles. (2013). *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (D. Grene, M. Griffith, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Eds.; E. Wyckoff, D. Grene, M. Griffith, R. Fitzgerald, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, lines 140-144.

<sup>188</sup> Şener, S. (2003). *Dünden bugüne tiyatro düşüncesi*. Dost Publishing, 87.

rich in  
gold that has come to glorious Thebes?  
I am stretched on the rack of doubt, and terror and trembling hold  
my heart,  
O Delian Healer, and I worship full of fears for what doom you  
will bring  
to pass, new or renewed in the revolving years.<sup>189</sup>

Apollo is the god who foretells the disasters that will befall Oedipus. As can be seen from this, when explaining human actions, there is both divine intervention and a human aspect. Tragedies, as Vernant has also noted, arise precisely in the space between this conflict of the divine and the human.<sup>190</sup> The chorus's plea to Apollo indicates a grim suspicion about what is to come. However, Oedipus does not reveal these suspicions and faces his fate alone:

OEDIPUS:

...I forbid that man, whoever he be, my land,  
this land where I hold sovereignty and throne...<sup>191</sup>

...

Upon the murderer I invoke this curse—  
whether he is one man and all unknown,  
or one of many—may he wear out his life  
in misery to miserable doom!<sup>192</sup>

The oracle Teiresias is hesitant to disclose what he knows, both for his own safety and for Oedipus's. Oedipus interprets Teiresias's reluctance as a betrayal and reacts

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<sup>189</sup> Sophocles. (2013). *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (D. Grene, M. Griffith, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Eds.; E. Wyckoff, D. Grene, M. Griffith, R. Fitzgerald, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, lines 155-160.

<sup>190</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Naquet, P. V. (2012). *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, Kabalcı Publishing, 35.

<sup>191</sup> Sophocles. (2013). *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (D. Grene, M. Griffith, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Eds.; E. Wyckoff, D. Grene, M. Griffith, R. Fitzgerald, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, lines 235-236.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 245-248

with anger and insistence. Eventually, Teiresias reveals that Oedipus himself has brought corruption to the city and is the murderer.

TEIRESIAS:

...you are the land's pollution.<sup>193</sup>

...

...you are the murderer of the king whose murderer you seek.<sup>194</sup>

...

I say that, unknowing, with those you love the best you live in  
Foulest shame unconsciously  
and do not see where you are in calamity.<sup>195</sup>

Oedipus does not believe Teiresias and dismisses his words as slander. He mocks Teiresias and ridicules his prophetic abilities. At this juncture, Oedipus teeters on the edge of a tragic error. Furthermore, Teiresias warns Oedipus that he is under a double curse from his parents and will soon lose his sight. Teiresias predicts that Oedipus will go mad upon discovering the truth about his marriage.

TEIRESIAS:

You have your eyes but see not where you are  
in evil, nor where you live, nor whom you live with. Do you know  
who your parents are?

...

A deadly footed, double-striking curse,  
from father and mother both, shall drive you forth out of this land,  
with darkness on your eyes,  
that now have such straight vision.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 350.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 360.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 365-368.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 415-425.

When Oedipus's lineage is revealed, it will lead to his ruin. The murderer of the former King Laius is none other than Oedipus himself: he is both the brother and father of his children, the son and husband of the woman who bore him, the man who slept with his father's wife, and the one who killed his own father. Upon this revelation, Oedipus will be blinded and exiled. Ejder discusses Oedipus's resistance to fate by stating:

Oedipus's challenge to fate and his belief that he can escape it, his boasting about knowing the Sphinx's riddle, killing a man and his retinue at the crossroads, his contemptuous behavior towards the oracle Teiresias, his supposed knowledge of the gods, his killing of his father, and his marriage to his mother—these can be seen as examples of tragic flaw. From a Nietzschean perspective, it could even be argued that Oedipus's tragic flaw is his very existence and that the best he could do is to die as quickly as possible. Various examples can be multiplied, and each determination can constitute an example of hamartia. However, when it comes to Sophocles's Oedipus, it is more accurate to derive the tragic flaw from the events on stage. A concrete example in this regard is Oedipus's belittlement of the wisdom of the oracle Teiresias. Because Teiresias knows what is happening and what will happen, he chooses to remain silent in the face of Oedipus. Oedipus emphasizes that he is the one who knows the Sphinx's riddle. According to him, where is Teiresias, who knows everything, when the Sphinx troubled the city? It is not Teiresias who defeated the Sphinx but Oedipus himself. Other examples of hamartia are related not to the on-stage plot but to the narratives, that is, the off-stage events. Oedipus's extreme behavior in his interaction with the Teiresias is a sign of excess... This excess is the overstepping of the boundary between the divine and the human and the arrogance of competing with gods who speak more accurately than the oracles.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 22-23.

Oedipus's conversation with Teiresias creates a terrifying impact on him. These words remind him of the prophecy spoken to him in the past. He is now faced with a new riddle: Who are his real parents? When he asks Teiresias this question, the oracle mocks him. "This day will show your birth and will destroy you,"<sup>198</sup> he says, confronting him with a riddle that is difficult to solve. Vernant notes that in tragedy, the oracles are always enigmatic but never lie. They do not deceive people; rather, they provide an opportunity to make mistakes.<sup>199</sup>

The riddle left by Teiresias is pivotal for Oedipus. Having become king by solving one riddle, Oedipus will lose everything through another. These riddles, which both elevate and ultimately lead to the ruin of Oedipus, are central to his tragedy. When Teiresias asserts that Oedipus has killed his father, Laius, Oedipus accuses his loyal brother-in-law Creon of betrayal and seeks to uncover the truth. A messenger from Corinth arrives, bringing news of Polybus's death and revealing that Oedipus's true parents are different from what he believed.

The peripeteia, or reversal of fortune, occurs when the messenger from Corinth informs Oedipus that Polybus, whom he believed to be his father, has died. Fearing the prophecy that he would marry his mother, Oedipus had been avoiding Corinth. When the messenger reveals that Oedipus is not the child of Polybus and Merope, but was instead found by a shepherd and brought to King Polybus, it becomes clear that what Oedipus had been trying to avoid has already happened. Thus, the messenger's revelation has the opposite effect of what was intended. Despite Jocasta's warnings, Oedipus persists in his search for the truth. Ultimately, the former servant of Laius reveals Oedipus's true identity: he has killed his father and married his mother. Anagnorisis, or recognition, occurs when Jocasta realizes that Oedipus is her son, and Oedipus recognizes Jocasta as his mother. This recognition

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<sup>198</sup> Sophocles. (2013). *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (D. Grene, M. Griffith, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Eds.; E. Wyckoff, D. Grene, M. Griffith, R. Fitzgerald, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, lines 435.

<sup>199</sup> Vernant, J. P., & Vidal-Naquet, P. (1988). *Myth and tragedy in ancient Greece*, 105.

leads to a dramatic reversal of fate, as events will unfold very differently after this revelation.

The chorus underscores that human power and happiness are mere illusions. Even Oedipus's immense power has been undone. As the chorus sings its final song, it serves as a lament for this evident catastrophe. The messenger reports that Jocasta has committed suicide. Oedipus discovers Jocasta's hanging body and, in his anguish, gouges out his own eyes with the pins from her dress. He also sentences himself to exile from the land. When he appears on stage blind, he is asked which god or divine power has brought about his downfall.

OEDIPUS:

Apollo, my friends—these things are Apollo,  
who brought to pass these evil, evil sufferings of mine.  
But no man struck me with his hand,  
but I myself dared it.  
For why must I see,  
I for whom no sight is sweet?<sup>200</sup>

Oedipus, who had previously mocked the blind Teiresias, comes to understand that he himself is blind to the truth, leading him to blind himself. The tragedy, which begins by highlighting his power, knowledge, and authority, concludes with his tragic fall. Oedipus acknowledges that his fate was written by Apollo, but he inflicted the blindness upon himself. Ejder notes that the tragic flaw in Oedipus's actions stems both from his ethos (the hero's unique situation, or character) and from the daimon sent by the gods. As frequently emphasized, while fate written by the gods includes a lingering stain (miasma) from his ancestors, Oedipus's ethos is violated when, due to a dispute over who would pass first at a crossroads, he unknowingly kills an old man—who turns out to be his father, King Laius—and his

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<sup>200</sup> Sophocles. (2013). *Sophocles I: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (D. Grene, M. Griffith, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Eds.; E. Wyckoff, D. Grene, M. Griffith, R. Fitzgerald, G. W. Most, & R. Lattimore, Trans.). University of Chicago Press, lines 1360-1365.

companions. Even though Oedipus might be excused from the crimes of killing his father and transgressing familial law due to his ignorance, he is still held accountable for the excesses and immoderation inherent to his character.<sup>201</sup>

The figure of Oedipus, initially portrayed as a powerful and wise authority, experiences a tragic downfall by the end of the play. This transformation aligns with Aristotle's observations on tragedy:

The subject of tragedy is neither superior to other men in virtue and justice, nor is he unhappy because of his wickedness or cruelty; the subject of tragedy is a person who has a great reputation among men and lives in happiness, but who has fallen into unhappiness because of a mistake (tragic flaw/hamartia).<sup>202</sup>

On the other hand, the earlier discussion highlighted the audience's capacity to learn from tragedy. The experiences of the tragic character encompass weaknesses and flaws from which valuable lessons can be derived.<sup>203</sup> Paul Ricoeur asserts that the pleasure derived from imitation in tragedies is not merely aesthetic but also instructive. This tragic pleasure stems from the compassion elicited by the character's experiences and the situations they face. As the character meets a tragic end, the audience witnesses the repercussions of actions that have angered the gods. Building on Vernant and Vidal-Naquet's view that tragedy represents a transitional space, it is essential to assess the themes within the context of the contemporary social system of the period. Knox notes that Sophocles's choice of a story involving someone who attempted to evade and believed they had successfully thwarted prophecies reflects the significance of these themes in that era. The topic of

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<sup>201</sup> Ejder, E. (2015). *Tragedya ve Etik Yaşam: Hölderlin, Hegel ve Heidegger'in Tragedya Yorumları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Istanbul University, SBE, Theatre Criticism And Dramaturgy, Istanbul, 20.

<sup>202</sup> Aristotle (2006), *Poetics*, (Translated, with Introduction and Notes by Joe Sachs), St.John's Collage, Annapolis, Focus Publishing, Newburyport, MA, 45.

<sup>203</sup> Ricoeur, P. (2007). *Zaman ve Anlatı: Bir/Zaman-Olay Örgüsü-Üçlü Mimesis*. Trans.: Mehmet Rifat-Sema RİFAT, Yapı Kredi Publications, İstanbul, 77.

prophecy, a contentious issue of the time, was a focal point of many critiques. Both Laius and Jocasta, as well as Oedipus, acted under the belief that they could overcome a prophecy. This notion challenges the traditional religious framework, implying that if the gods do not know the future, they cannot possess more knowledge than humans.<sup>204</sup>

In Ancient Greek tragedy, Oedipus displays remarkable willpower in his decision-making and swift actions. Arriving in Thebes as a homeless wanderer, Oedipus proves himself and becomes king. He diligently works for the welfare of his city and its people. For example, when faced with the plague, he immediately embarks on a quest for a solution. Throughout the play, Oedipus's attitude reflects an effort to shape his own fate, transcending the prophecies and advice. His determination to act, his approach to questions and problems, and his success in solving riddles ensure that the truth comes to light despite the reluctance of Tiresias, Jocasta, and the shepherd. In his quest for self-discovery, Oedipus's actions, which inadvertently probe his past, ultimately reveal the truth and lead to his collapse.

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<sup>204</sup> Knox, B. (1984). *Introduction to Oedipus the King*. In *Sophocles, The three Theban plays* (R. Fagles, Trans.). Penguin Books, 129-155, 134.

## CONCLUSION

In examining Ancient Greek Cosmology, we encounter a universe shaped by the interactions between the divine and the human realms. This cosmological structure is intertwined, yet the scope of the divine in Ancient Greek cosmology also encompasses the boundaries of the human realm. This phenomenon creates various situations, such as the presence or absence of gods, which permeate all aspects of human life, subjectivity, and decisions. In this thesis, the projections of this cosmological phenomenon on humans have been analyzed through the interactions between both realms.

The starting point of this study is related to the term “absence”. This absence corresponds to the absence of the divine within the cosmological framework. In Ancient Greek thought and divine perspective, the loss of the gods manifests in the human realm as a form of alienation and deficiency. An individual abandoned by the gods begins to experience a diminishing connection both with the human realm and with their own self. The first figure that corresponds to this portrayal is the mythical hero Bellerophon, who appears in Homer’s *Iliad*. Bellerophon, a powerful figure, after enduring numerous arduous challenges, appears to attain a life of tranquility, marked by the possession of land, a spouse, and apparent stability. Yet, in Homer’s narrative, when the gods eventually become wrathful toward him, this mythic hero is left isolated in the Aleon plain, distanced from humanity. Bellerophon thus stands as the earliest depiction of melancholy in history.

In the first chapter of this thesis, Freud's definition of melancholia is examined. Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* is a text that addresses the notion of melancholia while also summarizing earlier discussions on the subject, including the historical development of the concept. In his article, Freud compares the experiences of mourning and melancholia. These two significantly similar experiences are responses to a loss. This loss pertains to an object of libidinal investment, meaning something that was emotionally attached to the individual, which could be a person,

a homeland, or an ideal. The object in question is lost in some manner, whether through death, separation, or a similar situation. This lost object leaves a substantial void both in mourning and in melancholia. Mourning and Melancholia represent the individual's response to how this void will be filled. Mourning can be prolonged and distressing. The subject who has experienced the loss may find it extremely difficult to redirect the libidinal investment from the lost object to another object; however, mourning is not considered a pathological experience.

Melancholy is considered a response to loss, much like mourning. However, it has distinct characteristics that set it apart from mourning. In melancholy, unlike in mourning, the process of withdrawing libidinal investment occurs relatively quickly. Rather than being redirected to another object, the libidinal investment is swiftly freed from the object and is drawn inwardly into the ego itself.

At this point, a rupture occurs within the ego, resulting in a division. One part of the ego identifies with the lost object, while the other part does not. As a result, the part of the ego that identifies with the lost object, along with the subject, loses both the ego and the self, though the subject remains unaware of this loss. Even if the individual knows what they have lost, they do not realize that the lost object is a part of themselves. In his *Mourning and Melancholia* Freud explains his observations on this matter. In melancholia, the melancholic subject encounters a situation where they are overtly insulted, demeaned, and harshly criticized, often with great fervor and without any signs of shame. The experience of melancholia involves a profound anger directed toward the lost object by the person experiencing it. Notably, this anger is not aimed at anyone or anything other than the self. This situation reflects the subject's intense anger resulting from the loss of the object. Freud explains this phenomenon as the shadow of the lost object falling upon the subject who has experienced the loss. In Freud's framework, the fundamental elements of melancholia include the loss itself, the void left by the loss, and the identification with the lost object. Following Freud's analysis, this

thesis then shifts focus to Ancient Greece, exploring the earliest depictions of melancholy and examining how it was defined during that period.

Melancholy has accompanied humans as an experience throughout history, examined from various perspectives and interpreted in different ways across different periods. The earliest works that have survived to the present day regarding the explanation and understanding of melancholy are linked to the Hippocratic Tradition. In Ancient Greece, there were various beliefs about the causes of melancholy. Among these beliefs, it was thought that the primary and significant cause of melancholy was an imbalance or excess of bodily fluids, and early investigations into melancholy were generally based on humoral theory. Imbalances in bodily humors were believed to be the main causes of melancholy. At that time, diagnosing melancholic conditions was based on Hippocrates' ideas about melancholy, such as prolonged fear or sadness. In a melancholic individual, a state of more intense sorrow or a persistent sadness without any apparent cause is described. The approach to melancholy as a temperament can be seen in the *Problemata*, attributed to Aristotle. According to this work, such a state inherent in nature can enable a person to exhibit creative qualities, and melancholy is even associated with genius. The *Problemata* notes that prominent figures in philosophy, politics, literature, or art were often afflicted by melancholy. When distinguishing between melancholic temperament and pathological condition, it is indicated that individuals with a melancholic temperament are not necessarily ill. The *Problemata* provides examples of melancholic temperament from mythic heroes and philosophers. Additionally, the works of poets such as Homer, as initially referenced with Bellerophon, serve as guiding and illuminating sources on this subject. An important detail in this context is that the treatment of melancholy as "black bile" does not correspond to its contemporary meaning. The term "melancholy" is derived from the Greek words "melas" (black) and "khole" (bile), reflecting the notion of "black bile." During this period, melancholy is discussed not only as a psychological state but also in terms of its physiological manifestations. Wounds and various ailments in the body are associated with the

state of bile, and treatment efforts are ongoing. Galen suggests remedies for melancholy, including diet and phlebotomy. These methods aim to balance the excess black bile in the body, which is believed to contribute to melancholy.

In this thesis, the approaches of Seneca to melancholy during the Roman period are discussed. Unlike the physiological perspective of Ancient Greek definitions, Seneca interprets melancholy in relation to the soul. For Seneca, the term “melancholy,” which is not used as a word, corresponds to “taedium.” In his work *De Tranquillitate Animi*, which consists of letters exchanged with Serenus, Serenus, who is in a state of distress, turns to Seneca for help. This correspondence represents an ascetic practice and a spiritual exercise. Serenus describes his condition as a state of imbalance, oscillating between two extremes, and expresses his desire to overcome it. This situation, which Seneca does not describe as a malady, relates to “taedium.” The feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself, “taedium sui,” transforms into “taedium vitae,” a dissatisfaction and complaint about life. Consequently, the concept of “absentia sui” emerges, signifying a sense of being lacking or deficient in oneself.

Seneca's approach to melancholy reveals a definition closely aligned with Freud's conceptualization. Freud's notion of the self-loss experienced by an individual parallels Seneca's expression of “absentia sui,” which denotes a sense of deficiency within oneself. The dissatisfaction experienced by a person who feels a loss or deficiency in themselves can transform into a broader dissatisfaction with life and even hatred. In his advice to Serenus, Seneca emphasizes the importance of keeping oneself occupied. Accordingly, the practice of asceticism is discussed as a means of engaging in transformative activities to escape personal dissatisfaction.

In the Middle Ages, with the rise of Christianity, monks sought to escape and purify themselves from desires and demonic forces that tempted their souls by retreating to the deserts. While in the desert, these monks experienced hardships and were

visited by demonic powers in various forms. If a monk could not remain steadfast against these malevolent forces, he might fall into profound anguish, believing that God had abandoned him in the desert. This experience, later termed *acedia* and regarded as a mortal sin, involves a figure abandoned by God, similar to Bellerophon. Furthermore, with the monk's abandonment of God, a state of indifference towards life emerges, which begins to be seen as a form of detachment from both oneself and the world.

Even in periods when the term "melancholy" was not used, there were efforts to understand and define the concept of melancholy. Over time, melancholy has undergone transformations that reflect a process of evolution in its historical context, influenced by prevailing social changes. It has been viewed both as an illness and a sin, associated at times with individual creativity, occasionally popularized in society, and at other times stigmatized. Ultimately, the melancholic individual has navigated life with a sense of loss and deficiency.

In the second chapter, the background of the melancholic experience is explored through Ancient Greek Cosmology. Various narratives exist about Bellerophon, the first figure identified with melancholy, but a clear aspect is his abandonment by the gods. Consequently, Bellerophon, having lost the gods, wanders across the plain. The context of Bellerophon's plight is framed by Ancient Greek cosmology, where the gods are the key elements facilitating communication among humans. Therefore, being abandoned by the gods implies a loss of the ability to interact with others. Ancient Greek cosmology distinguishes between two states: melancholy and mania. Mania refers to the condition in which gods enter individuals and compel them to act in ways they would not normally, whereas melancholy signifies the state of being forsaken by the gods. This distinction is a crucial aspect of the dualistic nature of Ancient Greek cosmology. Moreover, these states, representing the divine presence and absence, generate different experiences within the cosmological framework and in human lives.

The absence of the divine encompasses a sense of void and loss. In a life where the divine and the human are intertwined and not perceived as distinct, the absence of the divine leads to a sense of deficiency in the individual, similar to what is observed in Bellerophon. Conversely, the presence of the divine is linked to mania. In ancient Greece, divine entities called daimons could direct and influence individuals, causing them to perform actions they would not normally undertake.

Mania pertains to the domain of human actions, reflecting the influence of daimons, or the divine presence, on these actions. In the vast realm governed by the gods, both humans and heroes find themselves immersed in and as subjects of various tragedies. Yet, who is the actual agent? This question about human actions introduces a dual distinction within mania: pre-tragic and tragic. In a context where all actions and, indeed, every aspect of human life are intertwined with the divine or face annihilation, even a fleeting glance at the agent inevitably directs attention toward the divine. However, like all phenomena influenced by societal changes, the approach to Ancient Greek cosmology also shows signs of evolution.

With the rise of city-states known as poleis in 5th century Athens, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, in their studies, have identified the emergence of a new conception of justice. They argued that tragedy reflects a conflict between the old values associated with the divine, political, intellectual, and practical spheres and the new values that emerged in opposition to each of these spheres. This liminal area, marked as the domain of tragedy, corresponds to the changes in the positioning of the divine and human realms.

The human realm, initially viewed as a subset of the divine, is subject to the divine's boundless influence and intervention. However, as new values emerge and philosophy gains prominence, the positioning of the human realm relative to the divine realm changes. The human realm evolves from being merely a subset to becoming a domain that intersects with the divine. Although it remains engaged with the divine, it is no longer confined within its infinite intervention. The space

between these realms, marked by ongoing tensions and conflicts, constitutes the territory of tragic experience.

Just as Homer's heroes exemplify the gods' absence, tragic experiences are also represented in tragedies that address both the tragic and the tragic aspects. Moreover, tragedies, by focusing on the unchanging and widely known mythological tales and heroes of the Ancient Greek tradition, have served as suitable literary forms through which the cosmological changes of the period might be discerned. Indeed, the inner reality of humans, which changes within the interaction between the two realms in cosmology, manifests through actions in their external reality, with Oedipus the King serving as a valuable case study in this regard.

In this context, the third chapter of the thesis explores the role of tragedy within this cosmology and examines the tragic experience through the lens of Oedipus Rex, a tragedy of fate. This tragedy is analyzed both in terms of the tragic hero's personal story and as a manifestation of the cursed fate related to the Labdacus lineage. It is associated with the concept of miasma, reflecting the cursed destiny that affects this generation.

Oedipus defeats the Sphinx that has plagued the city by solving its riddle and becomes the king of the city he originally entered as a stranger. He marries the widowed queen of the slain king. However, not everything goes smoothly for him. A plague has engulfed the city, and the people turn to their king, Oedipus, for a solution. While Oedipus is perceived as a wise and powerful ruler who can remedy disasters, the prophecies of Apollo come to pass once again: The murderer of the former king roams freely in Thebes, and the only way to save the city from the plague is to find and punish the murderer. Upon learning this, Oedipus sets out to trace the clues and uncover the truth about an event that has occurred in the past but remained unresolved.

In contrast to the divine's absence in melancholy, tragedy portrays the divine as pervasive and active through its presence and powers. As Oedipus embarks on his journey of self-discovery, each new revelation brings him closer to the fulfillment of the prophecy. Despite attempts to evade it and disbelief in its validity, the prophecy delivered to Laius and Jocasta inevitably unfolds. Oedipus's search for the truth and his quest for self-knowledge become intertwined, with each clue furthering the prophecy's realization. Ultimately, these efforts will lead to Oedipus being blinded by the inescapable divine fate and the direct impact of the divine forces.

A destiny, along with prophecies reflecting this destiny, suggests the possibility of free will. In Ancient Greek cosmology, there are limitations beyond the individual, which implies that a person cannot be held entirely responsible for their actions. Ultimately, a person should be accountable for actions that are expressions of their free will, not constrained by these limitations. However, in lands where the divine decree prevails, everything is subject to their influence. The interplay between order and free will represents a central issue in this context. Within the realm addressed by tragedies, the coexistence of historical interpretations of will and divine providence is evident. While each element may not produce contradictions when examined in isolation, their convergence generates a conflict within a framework of uncertainty. This uncertainty refers to the unresolved aspects of thought, law, justice, and free will that pertain to the human sphere, distinct from the divine domain. If divine rules determine fate, intervention in the human sphere becomes unavoidable. Although individuals exercise free will within their actions, the divine order remains an overriding force. Consequently, the tragic hero navigates this contradictory and intermediate space through their actions. Despite the narrative's established framework, the character's actions convey the significance of their choices. This is precisely the effect that the tragedy aims to elicit in its audience.

In tragedy, the audience identifies with the story and the hero on stage. This identification with the hero's actions and emotions is hindered if the audience

believes the hero's actions are not free, which can prevent the intended feelings of fear and pity, as well as the connection with both the hero and the narrative. Therefore, it is crucial that the hero does not merely repeat predetermined events and that a connection is established between the hero's actions and the events that befall them. In *Oedipus the King*, the elements of this relationship are illustrated through Aristotle's components of tragedy: recognition, reversal of fortune, tragic flaw, and the miasma associated with a tainted lineage. Oedipus's actions reveal that the foretold prophecies have already been fulfilled, and this process of discovery is intricately linked to his own actions. At this point, several significant elements emerge:

If Oedipus had not existed, Laius's murderer might never have been revealed, and Laius might not have been killed. Similarly, Thebes' situation with the Sphinx might have unfolded differently, with the Sphinx's riddle potentially echoing unanswered in an infinite void. In this context, Oedipus' actions represent a driving force. This driving force relates to the effort and insistence on pulling aside the curtain that conceals the truth. While the discovery of the truth signifies the hero's downfall, it also brings the truth to light. The extensive discussion and continued interest in Oedipus to this day are a testament to Sophocles's style. In the presence of the divine, it is suggested that Apollo initiates the actions affecting Oedipus, but it is Oedipus himself who performs them. Apollo determines his fate, yet the act of blinding himself remains Oedipus's own deed.

In the introduction, it was discussed that this thesis aims to explore the difference between the presence and absence of deities in the human world, and how such a cosmological backdrop creates an experiential domain for humans. In Ancient Greek cosmology, the manifestation of the divine's influence reveals that an individual experiencing loss in melancholy is driven into a state of deficiency and solitude. This solitary state, in turn, becomes a field of discovery for the subject, revealing the nature of the tragic experience

This realm of exploration can be interpreted in various ways, often relating to themes of loss, absence, and perhaps even void, and may lead to new questions. Can the tragic fate, influenced by the divine's shadow, be seen as linked to a lack of personal agency? Does this shadow serve as a crucial element in the audience's identification with the tragedy? Could an individual's actions, as part of a painful process of discovery, closely mirror the experience of the melancholic subject? Approaching these experiences through the lenses of presence and absence within the same cosmology allows for multiple interpretations. This perspective enables exploration from various angles, sometimes looking back to past contexts and at other times examining their modern implications.

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