

## Sopocles' Ajax: A Tragedy of Deception

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### Abstract

Greek tragedy is a tragedy of fate that brings the downfall of the central figure. Greek playwrights were masters of storytelling and tried to bring purgation of human emotions. Man is indeed responsible for his prosperity and downfall, but no one can deny the role of destiny in man's life. Sophocles was one of the greatest Greek Playwrights who produced considerable tragedies in Greek literature. Sophocles' plays were performed on the stage during the ancient time. His most horrible tragedy is *Oedipus Rex* in which Sophocles presents the cruelty of destiny that brings Oedipus's downfall. Ajax is a tragedy of the central character Ajax who is presented as a noble warrior in the play but his rivalry with Odysseus for the armour of Achilles invites his downfall. In Ajax, Athena, a Greek goddess is presented as a villain in the play. Athena blurs the vision of Ajax and makes him believe that he has killed his rival Odysseus and Greek leaders but later on, he comes to know that he has killed the innocent cattle under the influence of Athena's false vision. When Ajax comes to know about his sin, he commits suicide at the end of the play. Athena's deception brings downfall to Ajax.

**Keywords:** Greek tragedy, Sophocles, Ajax, Odysseus, Armour, Achilles, Deception

## **Introduction**

Sophocles wrote over a hundred plays for the Athenian theatre during his lifetime. Sophocles is mainly famous for his Theban plays based on the theme of the tragic fate of Oedipus. He influenced English drama greatly. Sophocles also developed his characters to a greater extent than earlier playwrights. Ajax or Aias is a tragedy of the central figure Ajax and his strengths and weaknesses, Ajax is a mythological character found in the Illiad and the Trojan war. Sophocles produced Ajax around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Ajax appears in The Illiad and other myths as a heroic figure, a rugged giant with strength, courage and the ability to think quickly beyond the normal standards of mankind. According to Lioyd Jones, “Ajax is being portrayed heroically in defiance of unjust and capricious gods.” ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax)) It seems that Ajax is merely a puppet in the hands of destiny. Despite his merit, Ajax is not honoured by the Greek leaders which makes him furious and invites his own downfall.

## **Ajax's Determination**

The play begins with a dialogue between Athena and Odysseus about Ajax's rivalry for the armour of Achilles. Athena favours Odysseus for getting the armour of Achilles. Achilles was a Greek warrior who died in the Trojan War but it would be an honour to have the armour of Achilles. Greek leaders Menelaus and Agamemnon awarded the armour of Achilles to Odysseus. Ajax has decided to take revenge on Odysseus and the leaders. Robert Bags and James Scully point out that the play is composed of two parts; the first is steeped in the world, a world of kings and heroes and the second part resembles more the democratic marked by imperfect debate of contending ideas. Lioyd Jones thinks that Ajax's murderous intentions are softened by Sophocles but the difficult aspects of his character are fully depicted.