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What Oracles (do Not) Say: A Hermeneutics of Oracles and Prophecies

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This study explores the way(s) oracles and prophecies were misunderstood in classical Greek literature to cause deadly outcomes for the persons involved.

When ancient Greeks faced dilemmas in their lives, or had mystifying dreams, they turned to "Oracles" to consult gods for solutions to their problems. However, these oracular words, delivered to them via Hermes, the crafty, messenger god, or priests and priestesses, ironically, turned out, most often, to be "fatally" and ambiguously misleading, to the degree that they almost always caused catastrophes due to human beings limited (in) sight. Since they just took the literal meaning of the divine message, overlooking the rhetoricity of its possible double meanings that an unexpected reading of the text of the message would eventually reveal.

One famous example in this respect is Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" where the oracular words are taken at face value to be misunderstood by the tragic hero who rushes towards sinning while willing to flee from it, thus awaiting his catastrophic fate.

Keywords: *oracles, prophecies, classical Greek literature*

