

## **Oedipus —Myth, Reality and the Distribution of Guilt:**

**With special consideration of *Oedipus at Colonus*<sup>1</sup>**

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The myth of Oedipus the King and the eponymous Oedipus complex has ignited our imagination with its mystifying power. As the myth has been retold and has endured through ancient times, so have its interpretations. However, the Oedipus complex is rarely included in our case formulations anymore, as if it had exhausted itself and became a cliché, more readily embraced by pop-culture than by scientific circles. Some authors have challenged its universality and central importance; others have noted a whole analysis can go without the emergence of Oedipal material, suggesting that there is deficit of Oedipus complex issues (O'Shaughnessy, 1989). Still others have gone as far as to revoke the complex from its eponymous bearer (Eisner, 1987; Steiner, 1985). If the cornerstone of psychoanalysis has become clinically insignificant, theoretically, it had become its Gordian knot to be untied from many different perspectives with far-reaching inferences.

Freud saw Sophocles' drama in a way that no one had seen it before—the significance of seeing the oracle's wish as the unconscious wish, and myth as an emanation of unconscious dynamics, established a paradigm shift in our understanding of myth in general. Even though there is no single work defining the Oedipus concept, Freud elaborated on the structure and its universality throughout his work: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1965); *The Ego and the Id* (1960); *Totem and Taboo* (1950); *The Future of an Illusion* (1927); and, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Overall, Freud struggled with some of the Oedipal concepts, modifying others, and remaining adamant about others,

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besides obvious clinical contradictions (Verhaeghe, 2009). Through all the twists and turns of its development, the core of Freud's formulations remained unchanged and the definition of that core concept is generally accepted today: the Oedipus complex is the organized body of loving and hostile wishes, which the child experiences toward his or her parent (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). It plays a central part in the structuring of the personality, and in the orientation of human desire (Laplanche & Pontalis, p.283).

Since the formulation of the Oedipus complex, many attempts have been made to reexamine, re-evaluate, and revisit the concept, as the titles of numerous articles testify (Pollock, 1986; Britton, 1994; Quinodoz, 1999; Bernstein, 2001; Zepf & Zepf, 2011). However, even in many of the revisions, the theoretical and clinical terms remain unchanged since its initial formulation, and they are largely adultocentric (Devereux, 1953), and in most cases demonstrate a masculinist (Verhaeghe, 2009) perspective. By adultocentric I mean the "adult's deep-seated need to place all responsibility for the Oedipus complex upon the child" (Devereux, 1953). The masculinist perspective is the original one, where the male child's complex is taken as a blanket term and patched over the rest of the participants in the Oedipal drama. Verhaeghe (2009) posits that Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex endorses and supports the basically masculine fantasies and anxieties (p.xvii). It still seems to me, that this "blanket term" does not stretch far enough, and when revisionists try to cover one part, another part remains uncovered. One of the goals of this present paper is to suggest coining new terms, or, alter the current ones, to encompass the totality and complexity of the complex.

Freud based his conceptualization of the Oedipus complex entirely on the drama *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles. However, *Oedipus the King* is only a snapshot, so to say, of the Oedipal family saga, a part of the whole story, and in Sophocles' case, a part of a trilogy. Sophocles was very involved with the Theban myth, as he worked and staged three separate plays on the theme over

several decades of his life, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King* and the last one, *Oedipus at Colonus*, staged posthumously by Sophocles' son (Griffith & Most, 2012).

It is not known whether Freud was familiar with the entire saga described by Sophocles and if he ever read *Oedipus at Colonus*. If he did, doing so did not influence his initial concepts. I believe that the formulation of the Oedipus complex started, so to speak, on the *wrong foot*, by taking the play *Oedipus the King*, and Oedipus's character, out of their mythical and literary context. It is the same reason that prevents us today from grasping the entire scope and complexity of the complex. I contend that the play *Oedipus at Colonus*, the third of Sophocles' trilogy, has to be taken into account when formulating the concept of the Oedipus complex. If we took a hero, after whom we named a structure, who we choose to represent a trans-historical fact of human psychology (Pederson, 2015), considered fundamental for our psychic development, we should, therefore follow his entire journey and pre-history.

A number of provocative studies (Bergmann, 1992; Pollock & Ross, 1988; Verhaeghe, 2009; Perelberg, 2015) stimulated the ideas in this paper, and are works, that outline the multi-dimensional aspect of the Oedipus complex. One of these aspects is looking at its counterpart—the incestuous and filicidal impulses of the parents generally referred to as the Laius complex (Pollock & Ross, 1988). George Devereux first introduced the term “Laius complex” into the literature, in his 1953 paper “Why Oedipus Killed Laius” (Devereux, 1953). Devereux noted that there is a “blind spot” in regard to the Laius complex, its sadistic and murderous aspects, which he believed proves that the Laius complex is even more “ego-dystonic and culturally objectionable” than the Oedipus complex (Levy, 2011). In his description, Devereux referred to the Laius complex as a “complementary” (Devereux, 1953) to the Oedipus complex. I take as a premise, the hypothesis that the Laius complex is the **obverse** and not complementary motif (Ross, 1988), but instead is an inherent part of the organization and psychic structural cluster that we have come to know as the Oedipus complex.

Therefore, by Laius complex I understand not only father/son relationship, but also the complicated and ambivalent attitudes that any person who represents parental authority may have toward a “subordinate,” (Levy, 2011), which also includes the attitude of the mother. The terminology is in need of modification here, as the term “Laius complex” would have to stand for both—mother and father attitudes toward the child, as well as the attitude of the parental couple as a unit, either, or, or both. Just as the Oedipus complex had become the accepted term for its equivalent in girls, so the Laius complex in this presentation would stand for its equivalent presentation in women/mothers. This is where theory is in need of coining new terms that would aid the therapeutic assessments and work. Furthermore, this paper explores the resistance to accepting the Laius complex. Even if the concept has been widely discussed, it has been slow in gaining theoretical significance, and even slower in clinical implementation. I suggest that such acceptance would require a paradigm shift that might be inconvenient or even psychologically impossible.

Next, this paper explores the subject of guilt as central to our understanding of Oedipus’s character and eponymous complex. The thesis that Oedipus is a bearer of primary as well as secondary, acquired guilt is put forward. I suggest that the subject of guilt with its determinants is central to the Oedipal structure and should be included in our formulations of the Oedipus complex.

In my conclusion, I will propose a new definition of the Oedipus complex, which encompasses all above-considered aspects of the structure. I will extrapolate the nature of psychic processes that propelled the original tragedy, and their consequences by looking at the exact text of Sophocles’ trilogy of dramas.

### **Oedipus the King: From Ignorance to Knowledge**

It is not coincidental that Freud became fascinated with this particular version of the Oedipus myth—the retrospective development of the plot in Sophocles’ play resembles quasi-analytic investigation. Furthermore, the investigator is the protagonist of the play, Oedipus, unwittingly

unraveling his own crime. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle (Aristotle, 1988) used Sophocles' play as exemplary for illustrating the art of Tragedy, which he considered the highest form of art. According to Aristotle (1988), the tragic effect of any play is the **reversal** of the situation and the **recognition**. Aristotle quotes the Oedipus tragedy as a masterpiece in presentation, where reversal of the situation—the action veers to its opposite, and recognition—a change from ignorance to knowledge—coincide (p.72). In the Oedipus play coming from ignorance to knowledge is not only a dramaturgical technique; it is the subject of the tragedy.

A multitude of analyses of the Sophocles play have already been done. However, in my analysis I would like to keep strictly to the text of the play. The text is the only concrete narrative we have of the myth, via which we received the story. It is comparable to the script we make of a dream or a therapy session. Further, the text of the myth should be studied in its entirety, and in its original cultural mytho-poetic context, which acts as a para-textual understanding of the myth's message.

The play begins with Oedipus in his full glory as a revered king, who with courage, and determination nearing impudence, starts on a quest to find the slayer of the old king, in order to rid the city from the plague. Along the way, the riddle of his birth is solved. According to the ample literature and general understanding, the true theme of Oedipus' tragedy is revelation of the truth. However, a few authors contend to the contrary (Steiner, 1985; Devereux, 1953) that the play *Oedipus the King* is about a cover up of the truth. The play is not the drama of discovering what happened—the murder and the incest—the audience already knew the story. It is the drama of the discovery itself. The tragic effect comes not from the deed that has been done; it comes from the ironic twist of the unwitting discovery of one's own crime.

The foreknowing is echoed in the background of the play through the refrains of the chorus, the remarks of the characters, and by the protagonist himself. In the very beginning, Oedipus speaks to the priest about the plague that ravages the city:

But I have known the story before you told it  
only too well. I know you are sick,  
yet there is not one of you, sick though you are,  
that is as sick as myself (Sophocles, 2013, pp. lines 55-63).

The author gives us ample evidence in the text that nearly all the characters acted in knowledge of the events, whether conscious or unconscious, about which they decided to be silent, ignore or consciously conceal.

Tiresias—the blind seer, knew the truth. His character is seen by many as Oedipus’s alter- ego, a projection of his unconscious knowledge (Rascovsky & Rascovsky, 1964). Tiresias’s stubborn refusal to speak, when summoned by Oedipus to deliver his knowledge, is perceived as the painful denial of psychic reality, the tense dialog between them—as a compromise formation between repression and knowledge coming to the surface. Tiresias does not reveal the entire truth—he tells that Oedipus killed Laius, but only through obscure implications does he reveal that Laius was Oedipus’s father and Jocasta, his mother.

Next, Oedipus summons Creon, accusing him of being a traitor and his foe. Here the unconscious knowledge is projected outward in a paranoid defense. The dialogue between them is terse in short verses, resembling contemporary interrogation. Oedipus questions Creon about Laius and his murder: “You never made a search for the killer?” to which Creon replies defensively: “I don’t know; and when I know nothing, I usually hold my tongue” (p.98).

According to Steiner (1953), Creon shows no surprise when told of Tiresias’s accusations to Oedipus. Steiner contends that Creon, just as the other participants in the drama, was involved in a cover-up of the truth about the king’s murder, but had his own reasons to keep silent.

The next to appear on stage is Jocasta, who attempts to calm the squabbling between her husband and her brother Creon. Many authors assert that Jocasta knew all along the whole truth about her new young husband. The resemblance to Laius, the pierced feet, Oedipus’s age that matches the age

her son would have been at this time, his arrival in Thebes right after Laius's murder. Sophocles embedded enough information in the play to show the implausibility of Jocasta's ignorance (Bross, 1984). Bross insists that had Sophocles wanted to portray Jocasta as an unwitting mother-wife, as seen by Freud, he certainly had the artistic means to do so, as his many female characters are drawn with penetrating observation (1984, p. 329), but he did not choose to portray her that way.

In this first dialogue between Jocasta and Oedipus she reveals:

...as for the son—before three days were out  
after his birth King Laius pierced his ankles  
and by the hands of others cast him forth  
upon a pathless hillside... (Sophocles, 2013, p.105, lines 715-720)

At this, Oedipus becomes deeply disturbed; the scene of their dialogue is wrought with palpable tension. Oedipus is inquiring of Laius--what he was like as a man, without knowing that Laius is his father, but with the confirmed apprehension that he had murdered the king. Jocasta, while trying to console Oedipus, is supplying all the information of his own mutilation, exposure and abandonment by his father. She tells Oedipus that the king was "in his form-not unlike you"

(Sophocles, 2013, p. 107). She goes on to persuade Oedipus that it cannot be true that he is the killer of Laius because of Apollo's prediction that:

...by his son from me he would be killed. And yet  
that poor creature surely did not kill him—  
for he himself died first (Sophocles 2013, p.111, line 855).

If Jocasta knew that she was talking to her son, a very gruesome character of a mother emerges from the play. Even if she did not know that Oedipus was her son, in these chilling words of her infant's death no regret, no sentiment, no feeling of loss transpires.

As the action revolves hastily toward the reversal, Jocasta keeps trying to divert Oedipus from his zealous quest for the truth. Upon learning of the death of Oedipus's adoptive father, Polybus, she takes that as prove not to trust the prophecies, as his father is dead and Oedipus did not kill him:

“still in your father’s death there’s light and comfort?” (Sophocles, 2013, p.117, line 989). Polybus, who with his wife adapted and raised Oedipus, was a kind father to him. Jocasta’s words sound callous, even if the fact of his (adaptive) father’s death seems to absolve (mistakenly) Oedipus of at least one part of the prophecy.

Jocasta continues to desperately implore Oedipus to stall his search: “Don’t give it heed;”, “I beg you, do not hunt this out-I beg you”, “O be persuaded by me, I entreat you, do not do this.” ” O Oedipus, god help you! God keep you from the knowledge of who you are!” (Sophocles, 2013, pp.122-123, lines 1060-1070). The final piece of the puzzle leading to the recognition is not, as yet, delivered, but while Oedipus is grappling for hope, Jocasta already knows that she is going to her death.

Freud contended that the main force driving the Oedipus tragedy, and accordingly, the kernel of the Oedipus complex, was lust for his mother, the coveted libidinal object. However, there is no evidence in the text of Oedipus’s affectionate feelings toward his wife/mother. By looking closely at the text, it is hard to be convinced that Oedipus was in love or had any passion for her. The only evidence of lust found in the play is when Jocasta is trying to console Oedipus: “Now let us go indoors. I will do nothing except what pleases you...” (Sophocles, 2013, p.112, line 860). On the few occasions when Oedipus is talking about or to his wife, he mentions her noble origin, her rich family, or he displays a benign condescension toward her reasoning. She seemed not to be an aim for Oedipus; never mind the aim that Freud surmised. Instead, she was what came as a prize for saving Thebes from the Sphinx, according to the ancient tradition of giving the widowed wife to the new conqueror (Steiner, 10985). Many authors have suggested that the Sphinx was an emanation of Jocasta (Kanzer, 1988; Eisner, 1987), the dreaded female, guarding the doors to the feminine (the city) and to knowledge (of carnal pleasures) and destroying young people who tried to get to it. The Sphinx is the keeper of the knowledge, just as Jocasta is in her attempts to cover the truth and

mislead Oedipus. Jocasta kills herself upon Oedipus's finding out the truth about his origin just as the Sphinx does upon Oedipus finding the answer to her riddle. Again supporting the idea of truth, and finding it through cover-up, denial or repression, was the driving force. Another view, is that the Sphinx with its four legs is the incorporated and corporeal image of the primal parental couple, in a coital embrace<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, Jocasta feels akin to her late husband, evident in her final words before her suicide—raging into her marriage chamber, groaning and cursing, she summons up not anybody else's name but her late husband, “crying upon Laius long dead...” (Sophocles, 2013, p.131, line 1245).

The complete revelation of Oedipus's origin comes by the herdsman—the mutilation by his father from which he got his name Oedipus—*swollen foot*; his exposure on the mountain site; his mother's collaboration. The tragic scene that follows is so heart-wrenching that the ancient author gave its narration to a messenger and did not work the scene onto the stage—so intense is the terror of the protagonist's experience. Frantic Oedipus is roaring through the castle, shouting and begging: “Give me a sword, I say, to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb, this field of double sowing, whence I sprung...” (Sophocles, 2013, p.132, lines 1255-1260). With chilling bellowing and fearful groans, he finds Jocasta hanged, undoes her brooches and stabs his eyes with the brooches “again and again” (p.132). In his affected state, the question arises, had she not been already dead, was Oedipus going to kill his mother with the sword, just as he had his father? Much has been said and more than I can quote here, about the symbolism of Oedipus's self-blinding act. Before I continue on that theme, I would like to look at the character that propelled the tragedy behind the scene—Laius.

It is interesting to note that all the participants in the play, though they are not outlined in detail, emerge under the masterful pen of the author as complete and finished characters. Laius's image,

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<sup>1</sup>In many ancient Greek drawings, the Sphinx's face is consistently masculine. It is a rather hermaphroditic image, even though grammatically it is referred to as “she.” The Sphinx is one of many hermaphroditic monsters, populating Greek myths. The symbolism of the Sphinx has fascinated researchers and much can be said in that direction, however, it is not the theme of this work.

however, is only implied in the back story, wherein the only description of Laius is the one Jocasta gave of him to Oedipus. Sophocles does not give any ethical or moral evaluation of Laius's character at any point of the drama. Many researchers of the Oedipus myth have wondered why Freud did not see Laius's part in initiating the tragedy. It might be reasonable to suppose that Laius, not being an actual participating character in the drama, gave Freud the grounds for this omission. This is an example of taking the play out of its mythological context, which was well known to the ancient audience. Sophocles did not find it necessary to start the tragedy with its actual beginning—the curse upon Laius. However, the author embedded many references to Laius's crime throughout the text including the title of the play. In the text, we can follow a thread of cues that the author gives the audience, which masterfully put the action of the play in context, without having to tell the entire story. This thread consists of metaphors containing the word “feet” and “on foot” that abound in the text.

There are many subtle reminders of Oedipus's origin and the origin of this tragedy—an infanticide gone wrong. These verbal references found throughout the text involved the use of “foot” and “feet”, such as in Tiresias's foreboding: “A deadly *footed*, double-striking curse, from mother and father both, shall drive you forth...” (Sophocles, 2013, p. 91, lines 415-420). For the ancient audience they were linguistic cues, as Oedipus literally meant “*swollen foot*” in Old Greek.<sup>3</sup> For the Greeks the question of who Oedipus was and his story was apparent from the start by the name of the play itself Oedipous Tyrannous--Swellfoot the Tyrant. They knew why he was called Swellfoot, in consequence of his mutilation, abandonment and exposure. These internal verbal references have lost their direct significance today for the modern audience, therefore my suggestion in the beginning of this analysis that we have started on the ‘*wrong foot*,’ in our understanding of the “Swellfoot” character dynamics and the psychic processes propelling the drama.

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<sup>3</sup>From Ancient Greek Oidipous—from oid, edema, (oidao, “to swell”)+(pous, (genitive podos) “foot”) from PIE root ped- “foot”—Oidipodos or Oidipodis. (Oedipus. Origine and history of Oedipus., n.d.)

The tragedy does not start with the killing of Laius, or even with Laius's mutilation of his infant son. Both Oedipus and Laius were descendants of the unfortunate line of King Cadmus, who started a family saga, which included such atrocities as infanticide, filicide, incest, cannibalism, castration, fratricide, and suicide. Laius, like Oedipus was abandoned and abused as a child. His own father died when he was an infant, and he wandered in exile. By all accounts in different versions of the legend, Laius had a violent and impulsive character. He became known as the father of pederasty—he abducted and raped Chrysippus, the son of Pelops, a neighboring king who had given Laius an asylum. By the few remarks about him in the play, we see that Laius was prone to hubris, violence and impulsivity. He attempted to kill his son twice—as an infant and as an adult at the crossroad, where he found his own death. When Oedipus recalls the story to Jocasta, he does not seem to feel any regret for the old man, and likewise, Laius's death does not provoke compassion in the audience. However, by the ancient Greek laws, when someone was dead someone had to answer for it (Eisner, 1987, p. 14).

The Greek gods might appear erratic in their demands regarding who is to be punished and who is to be absolved and for what. As Bergmann (1992) pointed out, "...Greeks never succeeded in creating loving gods..." (p. 52). However, there is a consistency of motifs, belonging to the realm of the Oedipus tragedy—*patricide and filicide* populate the primordial myths since the beginning of time.

The Greek primordial myth, that traces the ancestral and psychic genealogy of Oedipus to Uranus, the first god, reflects the motifs of filicide and patricide. Uranus appears to be the only one who was not deposed or in some other way brutalized by a father—he did not have one. He was the ultimate primal Oedipal child—born to a single mother, Gaia, Earth, without the aid of a father, then, this comes as no surprise, becoming her husband. He was also the first primal father who was overthrown by his son Cronus. Cronus rescued his siblings, and castrated his primal dad, in turn

devouring his infant children one by one. Zeus was saved by the wit of his mother, and later rescued his own siblings—all-future Olympus celebrities, out of their father's gut and castrated his father as well.

Infanticide, in the form of sacrificing children to the deities, is a well-researched anthropological fact. In mythical reconstruction, we find it in many different manifestations--prehistoric tales, folk tales, legends and myths of different origin. Martin Bergmann's (1992) brilliant research "*Into the Shadow of Moloch*" is a great contribution to the psychoanalytic interpretation of that fact and its implications for the Oedipal theory.

Patricide, however, seems to appear more as a motif in literary works, fiction and modern myths, rather than being supported by concrete anthropological evidence. It appears that the unconscious wish to kill one's father may have been a compensatory mechanism, triggered by the reality of the infanticide and filicide in primitive societies (Rascovsky & Rascovsky, 1964; Ross, 1982; Perelberg, 2015). This is not to enumerate the crimes of humanity against children or to establish the primacy of filicide over that of patricide. I believe that the question of which comes first is an elliptical one, not unlike the question about the chicken and the egg. However, since the myth of Oedipus is built around these motifs, my goal is to identify the universal psychic structures ingrained in the myth, which allows for the identification with the character throughout centuries.

In accordance with the subject of the play-- knowing and finding the truth, there is an escalation of what was known, and, what could not have been known to the main character. Oedipus knew that he had killed a man; he might have surmised that this man was the king and that he married his wife; he might even had discerned that he killed his father and married his mother, in completion of the prophecy. However, the piece of information that he could not possibly have known, is that he was left to die by his father and mother. Upon discovering this, terror gripped him. In his search for the

truth of his life and character, Oedipus finds out two things—*that he had committed a crime and that he was a victim of a crime*. This final stark discovery is what Oedipus was not able to bear.

This part of the Oedipus's discovery—the parental crimes toward him, has not been emphasized by Freud and has not been psychoanalytically explored. Freud (1900) established that blinding symbolizes castration, and blindness stands for Oedipus not wanting to see the truth of his own crime. That view still holds grounds, accepted nearly *sine qua non*. But, this also begs the question of why not see blinding as just what it is—blinding, based on the analogy of “eye of the body” and “eye of the mind” (Fergusson, 1988). It appears that Oedipus knows exactly what he is doing, while he is doing it, even though he is in a deranged state as is persuasively stated in the play:

... You will never see the crime  
I have committed or *had done upon me!* (Sophocles, 2013, p.132, lines 1270-1275), [emphasis mine].

The theme of sight and blindness, light and darkness, runs through the play with other important imagery—*blind* is Tiresias, the *seer* (Fergusson, 1988). Many researchers of the myth alluded to the blindness as “turning a blind eye” (Steiner, 1985), “blindness of the seeing eye” (Britton, 1994), “requesting to close the eyes” to the truth discovered by Oedipus and parallel to that, the Oedipus complex. Physical blindness, which they took to be synonymous with ignorance, is in fact a recurring mythological trope of the opposite—having insight. Blindfolded Justice, blindfolded or one-eyed prophets, represent turning one's eyes inward and being *enlightened* of the truth, not blind to it. By the act of blinding himself, Oedipus could be seen as achieving the insight of the seer, merging with the knowing part that has been repressed and expelled prior to that act. This idea is implied in the dialogue between Oedipus and the chorus, the latent thought would be: “I had eyes and did not see; now I'm blind and I see”.

For Oedipus, the blinding seems to be a conscious, nearly ceremonial act of defiance, but not denial, an act of acceptance, but not submission. I contend that the act of Oedipus's self- blinding

does not stand for castration and for turning a blind eye; but for the opposite: it shows acceptance, insight and possessing of the situation. Oedipus certainly does not appear impotent after his self-blinding and does not drop his regal stature, when he gives his final commands as a matter of course, ordering rites for Jocasta and how to deal with his children, and his exile.

*Oedipus the King* closes with his request to see his two young daughters. The scene of their meeting is the most lyrical and tender humane expression in the entire play—the warm fatherly feelings of a loving dad toward his daughters are palpable in the text. He calls them “my two darlings,” he wants to touch them, to sob with them, and he beseeches Creon to take care of them as a father (Sophocles, 2013, p.139, lines 1450-1475). He mourns their pitiful fate and future, and in despair asks Creon to not take them away from him. Antigone will follow her father to Colonus, where he will find his resting place.

By looking at the concrete text of the play *Oedipus the King*, certain themes emerge that can be reconsidered and evaluated psychoanalytically—the supposed affection of Oedipus to his mother/wife; the image of Jocasta as knowing and cruel female; the act of blinding as an act of enlightenment, not closing one’s eyes to the truth; further —as an act of defiance, not of defeat and punishment; infanticide as a main motif and propeller the tragedy, alongside parricide and incest. These themes are further developed in *Oedipus at Colonus*.

### **Oedipus at Colonus –The Drama of Character**

Following his exile from Thebes, Sophocles described the rest of Oedipus’s life in his final tragedy *Oedipus at Colonus*. The plays *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* correspond directly to each other contextually and thematically and the characters complete their development in the last play. As mentioned earlier, we should see the protagonist’s character through to his end and

derive our inferences accordingly and not come to premature conclusions as Freud may have done by not taking the full trilogy into account.

A few authors have written on *Oedipus at Colonus*. Kanzer (1950) sees this final play as integral part of the drama, where the relationship between father and son finds a successful resolution (p.89). He finds reconciliatory notes in Oedipus's attitude toward Theseus, the ruler of the land where Oedipus seeks refuge, and an attempt to reconcile with a father substitute. Fromm (1957) insists that the theme, uniting the three tragedies is the conflict between father and son, to the exclusion of the problem of incest (p.123). Eisner (1987) emphasizes the dramaturgical success of Sophocles' "swan song to the hero," who has finally come to a place that will become the only secure home he has ever had (p.57). Moreover, the place of his death will become a sacred place, which will give protection and prosperity to the people who inhabit it. There is a reversal of the situation for Oedipus—from being an outcast, expelled from his city, he is now wooed by other cities, all of which want him to die in their vicinities, so they can benefit from the power and protection that his resting place is said to provide.

In the beginning of *Oedipus in Colonus*, we see old Oedipus limping, with mutilated eyes, supported and nursed by his daughter Antigone in his exile in the vicinities of Athens. With less action and more philosophical discourse, the entire play revolves around Oedipus's contemplation of what had happened to him and his preparations for his passing. Despite being blind and in pitiful condition, Oedipus does not appear to have lost strength of character and to be a passive sufferer. He knows where he wants to be, he knows what he wants, and he demands protection by Theseus.

As mentioned earlier, it is not known whether Freud ever read or was familiar with this play. However, had Freud read *Oedipus at Colonus*, he would certainly have acknowledged Oedipal presentations that were "*positive*" manifestations of the Oedipus complex, more clearly defined in

*this play than in Oedipus the King*. Here Oedipus has grown into a “proper” Oedipal father to Antigone--he insisted that his daughter comes with him and takes care of him, which she properly did. In his attitude toward his daughter, he is very, if subtly demanding of care and duty. The claim that he has turned into a helpless infant (Kanzer, 1988) is not supported in the text; rather he is a demanding, if feeble father, not unlike some real characters, which we can find in Freud’s case formulations (consider Anna O. and Dora). Antigone, for her part, has replaced Oedipus’s mother/wife, becomes her own mother, and is an “Oedipal victor” so to speak (Bergman, 1992, p.277), perpetuating her father’s fate. Antigone’s image is truly more suitable counterpart of the positive Oedipus complex in girls, than is Electra. Antigone forfeited her youth to serve her father, and later her womanhood to bury her brother, events described in the play *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2013). After Oedipus’s death, Antigone opposes Creon, her uncle and a father-substitute, to give a proper burial to her brother Polyneices, with that, expressing her own rebellion toward her father, which she was not able to do while he was alive, and for which she was punished with death. Oedipus’s tender feelings for his two daughters are countered by his vehement anger toward his sons--Oedipus is a “Laius father” to them, properly perpetuating the pattern of the family saga and his own father’s attitude toward himself. He curses his two sons, venting intense anger and hatred toward them for not standing behind him upon his expulsion from Thebes. He condemns them to utter destruction, which finds them after Oedipus’s death, when they battle with each other for their father’s throne (also described in the play *Antigone*). Oedipus’s implacable behavior strikes a discordant note (Bergmann, 1992), canceling the otherwise reconciliatory refrain of the last days of Oedipus, which casts doubt to the claim that he reached enlightenment or reconciliation in Colonus:

Now go! For I abominate and disown you,  
Wretched scum! Go with the malediction  
I have pronounced for you... (Sophocles, 2013, p.207, lines 1380-1385).

Oedipus is implacable to the words of Antigone, who is hopelessly trying to dissuade her father of his wrath toward his sons:

Reflect, not on the present, but on the past:  
Think of your mother's and your father's fate  
And what you suffered through them! If you do  
I think you will see how terrible an end  
terrible wrath may have. (Sophocles, 2013, p.201, lines 1190-1200),

We can see all the characters promptly falling into the classic positive Oedipal categories. The developments of Oedipus's character, and the psychological determinants of his sense of guilt make this subject a central theme of the play. If the theme at *Oedipus the King* was **coming to knowledge**, the theme of *Oedipus at Colonus* is **coming to terms with the sense of guilt**:

"I suffered those deeds more than I acted them,  
as I might show if it were fitting here to tell my father's and my mother's story...  
...I had been wronged, I retaliated; even had I known what I was doing, was that evil?  
Then, knowing nothing I went on. But those who wronged me, knew, and ruined me"  
(Sophocles, 2013, p.158, lines 256-275).

Oedipus claims that he is not a sinner, that there are "extenuations" as he did not know the man, who tried to kill him first. When Creon comes and wants to take Oedipus back to Thebes for the Thebans want to have the healing powers of his grave, Oedipus defends himself passionately, with nearly contemporary sounding sarcastic verse:

"Just answer me one thing:  
if someone tried to kill you here and now,  
you righteous gentleman, what would you do,  
inquire first if the stranger was your father?"  
(Sophocles, 2013, p.193, lines 990-995)

Besides his realization that he suffers not only of his own faults, in Oedipus's internal struggles there is no single word against his father, Laius, and even less is said about his mother. In his defense, Oedipus even summons his father on his site: "My father's soul, were it on earth, I know would bear me out." (Sophocles, 2013, p.193, lines 995-1000).

Some authors see Oedipus's behavior in *Oedipus at Colonus* as inconsistent—he has punished himself for the crimes he had committed unknowingly; yet, he is adamant in insisting that he is not guilty. I believe that the preconception that Oedipus punished himself for the unconscious murderous and incestuous wishes and the corresponding guilt has limited our understanding of the Oedipal dynamics; just as the preconception of his self-blinding standing for symbolic castration and submission, has limited our view of that symbolic act. As we know Freud's explanation of why Oedipus feels guilty, although he committed the crimes unknowingly, is because of his unconscious wish to murder his father and marry his mother. Because these wishes are present in the unconscious, the feeling of guilt will occur even when murder and incest have not taken place. Freud struggled with the idea of "tragic guilt" in the ancient drama. For its explanation, it is even possible that Freud went as far as to invent the myth of the murder of the primal father, in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where he insists that actual murder did occur (Freud, 1913). It is rather puzzling to see how Freud went against his own finding--that the mere desire to do the deeds suffices to arouse primal guilt.

The ideas described in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913) are an important contribution to psychoanalytic thinking, as they display the primal phantasy for the murder of the father, just as the myth of Oedipus displays the unconscious wishes for that murder. Still, this does not answer the question what are the determinants of the Oedipal sense of guilt. What is significant in *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* is not why Oedipus feels guilty, but, it is that the protagonist **feels guilt at all**. Oedipus's claims of clear consciousness tainted with the existential doubt are a new element in myth, as well as in artistic presentation. One might say that the pre-Oedipal stage in the Greek mythology is the Theogony- the myth of the creation, where patricide and filicide had no bearings on the consciousness. In the pre-Oedipal myth, gods punished the sons who overthrew their fathers. Pre-Oedipal murderers do not feel guilt, their observing agency is transferred to the gods,

who punish or acquit them. The doer of the crime just bares the consequences of his punishment. The development of the play represents a transformation— the hero takes the fate into his own hands, by discovering his own crimes and the crimes done to him. The ending marks a turning point—the hero is implementing his own punishment. The role of the gods has been in a way abdicated, the punishment coming from some impersonal outside source, is being internalized. *Oedipus at Colonus*, is not a drama of fate, as is *Oedipus the King*—it is a drama of character. With the presentation of the protagonist’s internal struggle and the experience of guilt as a central subject, Sophocles brings the hero into modern times, close to our western sensibilities.

### **Why does Oedipus feel guilty?**

A stalemate, such as the kind that has occurred in understanding the Oedipus complex, is often a sign of a wrong premise. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus discovered two sets of crimes—the ones he did and the ones done to him. If one can think of economics of the sense of guilt, it could be surmised that where there is a crime there should be guilt. The two crimes—his and his parents’ crimes, are the sources that can reasonably give rise to guilt feelings.

Let us consider the first source of guilt—the murder and incest Oedipus committed. There is a peculiar insensitivity to the fact that in *Oedipus the King* there was a murder and someone was killed, regardless if that was a father or if the father had brought it upon himself. Murder has occurred, whether in an actual act or in a corresponding unconscious act. If the murdered man were a criminal, does that justify his murder, and absolve the murderer? On another hand, the murdered person’s death does not exculpate him from his own crimes. Not knowing the identity of the murdered person is also inconsequential in regards to experience of guilt or punishment. In the unconscious, murder is a murder is a murder; and thus, as the Greek gods punished it indiscriminately, so it is punished in the unconscious—there is murder and for that a price must be

paid. The same is true in the contemporary jurisdiction and therefore, the blindfold on the image of Justice. By that analogy, Oedipus's self-blinding could be taken as a sign that he remained impartial to the fact he had just found out, that the murdered person was guilty himself and had abused and tried to kill him as an infant. The unconscious and equivalent punishment for murder is murder, yet Oedipus does not kill himself. Blinding, however, does not redeem murder. He lived on, even though he claimed: "...I have done things deserving worse punishment than hanging" (*Oedipus the King*, Sophocles, 2013, p.136, line 1370-1375). The monolog of *Oedipus the King* is in direct correspondence to his monolog in *Oedipus at Colonus*:

...The truth is that at first  
my mind was a boiling caldron; nothing so sweet  
as death, death by stoning, could have been given me;  
yet no one there would grant me that desire.  
it was only later, when my madness cooled,  
and I began to think my rage excessive ,  
my punishment to great for what I had done..."  
(*Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles, 2013, p.166, lines 435-440)

Should we take the fact of the parental abuse described in the myth only as a projection of infantile fantasy? If we take the myth of Oedipus as analytic allegory for the Oedipus complex, should we think of the entire chronicle "merely as a four-year-old-psycho fiction" (Ross, 1982), wherein Oedipus's deeds are an allegory of his unconscious wish and his parents' deeds are Oedipus's unconscious projection onto them? Does the infantile phantasy eliminate the parental unconscious? I believe that seeing the myth only as infantile projection and infantile unconscious phantasy is unsubstantiated psychoanalytically. If we see the parental crimes as his projection, then again, why would Oedipus feel guilty for being left to die? If we see them as an allegory of the parental unconscious wishes, into which he was fated, something for which he could not have taken responsibility, then taking up the guilt has a different origin. In this way, the act of blinding is

transformed into a redeeming act. In order not to substantiate the crimes of his parents, he takes up the guilt of their unredeemed crimes upon himself.

What is the significance of this psychic act? Why is this elaborate unconscious work done?

In a way, it could be said that Oedipus was already dead before his journey began. After finding out the truth of his mutilation, binding and abandonment, Oedipus had to come to terms with that fact—he was fated to die by his parents and he is living a borrowed life. How would his psyche reconcile this deadened self? The issue at stake here is not expressed in terms of the ambivalence between love and hate for the parents; the issue is between life and death—actual and psychic. Rather than facing the unconscious dread of complete annihilation, which such realization would bring, he accepts the burden of the guilt of his parents. He is guilty for being alive, but he is blind in order to redeem his parents. **This secondary, or I would like to call it--acquired guilt, has a different origin and operates by different set of psychic mechanisms, then the primal guilt.**

In her book, *Murdered Father Dead Father*, Perelberg (2015) conceptualizes the law of abolition of the dead father, based on the phantasy of the murdered father. If the law of the dead father is abolished, one is left with no structuring law, be that internal or external. Perelberg gives an example of the abolition of that law in the concentration camps, by citing an author, who described that experience: “The reality of the camps appears to burst the bounds of imagination, the precinct of conceivability...if something is labeled incomprehensible, one can avoid having to perceive its horror in all its detail” (2015, p. 163).

Perelberg’s (2015) notion highlights the taking on the acquired guilt. The reality of what has been done to Oedipus is incomprehensible. Taking up the guilt of his parents is a balancing act, with the purpose to fend off the abject horror of his annihilation. It is better for the psyche to bear the burden of an acquired guilt, then to handle the annihilation anxiety. It is psychically impossible to perceive the abject horror of our own annihilation, especially when inflicted by one’s parents. **Ultimately, it**

**is more acceptable to the psyche that one is their own source of one's misfortune, then to be non-existent--a state, not only unacceptable but also impossible to experience.** This explains a phantasy that we often come about--that the parents who inflict abuse, real or perceived, are not our real parents, or the fantasy of being adopted. In Oedipus's drama the adoption is also a motif, only here his adoptive parents are the good parents to Oedipus, the ones who saved him. The adoption motif rings through ancient and modern myths of heroes being raised apart from their real families, adopted by animals or other parents, being saved from their fathers' or father based figure's destructive wrath. The myths of heroes left to die or otherwise abandoned and being raised as feral children are numerous and not exclusive to Greek origin. Zeus was raised by a goat, Atalanta was raised by a she-bear, and Romulus and Remus— were nursed by she-wolf, Moses—was sent on the river and adopted by an Egyptian princess. Freud (1931) gives a good account of this motif in *Moses and Monotheism*. The motif persists down to modern day prose and fairy tales, where it is not only the father, who is the destructive force, but also step-mothers, or mother-substitutes (consider Snow White, Cinderella, Rapunzel). Oedipus has been taken away from the family situation, being raised by the more benign father and mother substitutes. Just as in other ancient tales, Jocasta, the mother, saved her infant from his father's wrath. She was a collaborator in the crime; nevertheless, she did not leave her infant to die, but handed him to the shepherd.

It has been conjectured that Oedipus is a father-based drama and the Oedipus complex, a father complex (Kanzer, 1988; Fromm, 1988; Verhaeghe, 2009). Interestingly, Freud himself first used the term *Father Complex*, before he formulated it in Oedipal terms. The term *Father Complex* is still vaguely defined, as Freud later wrote that it is the heir of the Oedipus complex, but did not determine its definitive origins and development (Freud, 1923). Freud granted a mythical stature to the father, and a special status to the father-son relationship--his Oedipal theory talks about the son almost exclusively and hardly ever about the daughter and the other participants in the Oedipal

romance. The father-son relationship is seen as a matrix of a relationship between parent and child by Freud, as well as by later neo-Freudians. Lacan's concept of the Name-of-the-Father as the ultimate parental metaphor is particularly instructive in that matter (Dor, 1998). Lacan, as well as Freud, see the father as the provider of law and the authority, which is the stabilizing factor, the third, who protects from the mother's primal seduction. Freud situated the incestual desire in the child, while Lacan saw the danger in the mother's desire for the child and her seduction (Verhaeghe, 2009). Paul Verhaeghe (2009) posits that for both, Freud and Lacan, the paternal function is primal and the father is needed to protect from the dangers coming from the mother's or from the child's unconscious wishes (p. 32). When father authority fails, when his image is de-crowned, due to him behaving contrary to what he professed and to what he should stand for, the child will invent a father or a father substitute- uncles, teachers, tutors--who does not fail. Verhaeghe (2009) used a very fitting term for that process—an unfailing father will be **installed**, where one is absent, and **re-installed** when one has failed (2009, pp. 30-31). I would add that another way of inventing the unfailing authority of the father is **relieving him of his faults, by taking the guilt upon oneself, in this way, keeping the father's image pure.**

In *Oedipus at Colonus* we find this “upgrading of the father figure” (Verhaeghe, 2009, p. 32) materialized in the image of Theseus—a virtuous noble character, of whom Oedipus demands protection and offers him his own—by consecrating the land of Theseus with his sacred death, Oedipus is going to give eternal protection to the father substitute. The re-installment of a father figure is needed for Oedipus's psychic survival, and the taking up the guilt is part of that process.

In his study “*The Repression and the Return of Bad Objects*,” Fairbairn (1986) describes his experience with delinquent children who came from homes where violence reigned supreme (p. 108). He found a consistent peculiar attitude in the children-- they would rather be bad themselves than admit the badness of their parents. By becoming bad, the children were really taking upon

themselves the burden of badness, which resides in their objects (Fairbairn, 1986, p. 108). This process of purging their objects of their badness rewards them with a sense of security of being in an environment of good objects: “Other security is purchased at a price of inner security...” (Fairbairn, 1986, p. 108). Fairbairn refers to this as “the defense of guilt”. He also distinguishes between “unconditional” badness and “conditional” badness (1986, p. 109). To exemplify his statement Fairbairn resorted to religious terms: “Framed in such terms the answer would be that it is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the Devil” (Fairbairn, 1986, p. 110).

In other words, it is better to be bad in a good universe than to be good in a bad universe. By being bad in a good universe, there is always a hope of redemption. In a bad universe, badness is unconditional; there would be no structure and no law to go by, the only prospect being death, destruction and chaos. This universal category is represented in Oedipus—taking up the guilt of his parents is a defense against annihilation anxiety, which would have taken hold of him, had he not done this self-preserving act. It is a survival mechanism, which allowed him to live on, and the mutilated eyes are a benign substitute for the death, that was supposed to have happened. By his living on, he denounces his parents’ crimes, exculpating them and keeping their image pure. Had he died he would have accomplished their wishes, forfeiting any possible redemption for them and for himself.

While Oedipus might have found absolution for his parents in that balancing act of atonement, by accepting the guilt for the badness within him another imbalance is created—he is not able to contain it and instead he passes it on to the next generation. This is described in his attitude toward his sons, his curse upon them and their imminent death. He takes up the guilt of his parents, but does not see his own repetitious behavior as a parent. In a way, his suffering is pre-emptive for what he would do to his sons, without acknowledging his own guilt in that matter. This brings another nuance to the

Oedipus complex —the distinction of Oedipus’s role as a child to his parents and his role as a father to his children. Breathtakingly, the absolution of the parents is more important for the psychic survival, than even the physical continuation of one’s species. In this way the guilt is distributed from parent to child in a continuous manner—as a child he takes up the guilt of his parents, the parental image is absolved; as a parent, Oedipus repeats the pattern toward his children, with that trusting the guilt upon his sons. This balancing act of guilt distribution is perhaps the ultimate act of redemption—to keep the image of the parent pure at all cost is the ultimate survival mechanism.

As the image of father becomes the blue print for creator, representing law and structure, he is needed to be perfect, as not to personify the hostile universe himself. The guilt taken off the father’s image and acquired by the child serves a self-preserving function to ward off annihilation anxiety. If this defense starts to fail, abject fear sets in.

It appears that in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the murder of the father and father’s redemption via the son, have been addressed, giving the grounds to think of the play as a father-based drama, while there is no direct talk in the text about the mother, the incest and the guilt, associated with it. However, this is achieved indirectly, in the end of the play, in the mysterious grove where Oedipus goes to find his death. Only a few authors have elaborated on the symbolism of this act, most interpretations being anthropological, rather than psychoanalytic (Bergmann, 1992; Eisner, 1987). Bergmann (1992) compares Oedipus’s miraculous death, with ancient motifs of self-sacrifice and martyrdom (p.267-280). The super-natural death is, in a way, a sanctification, which puts Oedipus’ image on par with other legendary heroes of the more recent tradition—saints and martyrs. I believe that had Freud read the last Theban play, he would have come to the same conclusion. In his short study *Dostoyevsky and Parricide*, Freud (1928) clearly identifies in Dostoyevsky’s work this type of hero, the criminal, seen as “...a Redeemer who has taken on himself the guilt, which must else have been born by others” (p. 455). In Oedipus’s case, the unwitting redeemer carries on the unconscious

wishes of everyman, which in the first play incites the identification with the hero's acts, and in the second play—the identification with the hero's redemption for his unjust sufferings.

Sophocles gives a detailed description of the purification rituals, which Oedipus performs on himself in preparation for his death in the groove of the Furies. The roles are reversed—form a blind limping old man, Oedipus now guides his daughters to the place, as if led by an inner light:

...let me alone discover  
the holy and funereal ground where I  
must take this fated earth to be my shroud. (Sophocles, 2013, p.214, lines 1540-1545)

The act of Oedipus's passing has been seen as a symbolic reunion with the primal mother, or returning to the womb (Bergmann, 1992). Eisner (1987) posits that far from wanting to sleep with the mother the adult male wants to insert his whole self back into the warmth of the nourishing and protective womb (p. 55). However, if we do not stray from the text of the play we would find that Oedipus does not return to the earth. The text is unequivocal:

But some attendant from the train of heaven  
came for him; or else the underworld  
opened in love the unlit door of earth. (Sophocles, 2013, p.218, lines 1660-1665)

And further:

...but something invisible and strange caught him **up—or down—**  
into a space unseen. Sophocles, 2013, p.219, lines 1680-1685).  
[emphasis mine].

These are the words of the onlookers describing Oedipus's ascending at the groove. The scene is dense with symbolism on many levels. His disappearance is comparable to rising from the grave of a semi-divine or divine hero, who undergoes transformation. His mutilation, exile, suffering and implied resurrection achieve the characteristics of martyrdom. Even though the tragedy takes place in a multi-deity ancient world, with this act Oedipus can be seen as a precursor to monotheism. As pertaining to the issue of guilt and atonement, if we accept going down to earth as an act of symbolic

reunion with the mother (womb, earth), and raising up (to the sky, heaven) as an act of redemption, Oedipus's death represents the ultimate atonement and redemption act. It is a mysterious reconciliation with the mother, the ultimate symbiosis with the original libidinal object. The raising up is an act of absolution for that union and expiation for both, mother and child. The down/up opposition is an attunement of the feminine/ masculine dichotomy within himself, between the internalized parental images. It is also a symbolic attunement between the land (feminine) and the ruler of the land (masculine). Oedipus's mysterious death described as a disappearance between heaven and earth is the ultimate balancing act, exculpating him from his crimes, reuniting him with his parents, rehabilitating, and preserving their images pure, reconciling all of the "complexes" and turning him into a redemptive hero.

### **Discussion: The Oedipus Complex--The "Father of Complexes"**

Current controversies around the Oedipus complex include whether it is indeed universal, of central importance, and should it still be regarded as the "nucleus" of development (O'Shaughnessy, 1989).

In this paper's analysis of the ancient tragedy I selected certain themes which have been overlooked—themes that I consider essential for drawing conclusions of the psychic processes, revolving the drama and determining the Oedipus complex. The overlooking, which some authors pointed out as "blind spot" (Steiner, 1985) "scotomization" (Devereux, 1953), or creative misreading of the myth (Verhaeghe, 2009; Eisner, 1987), including by Freud himself, brought about a generally held long-term misconception of the different aspects of the Oedipus complex, which could be the reason of its stalemated condition in psychoanalytic discourse. I suggested that this is due to the fact that the myth of Oedipus has not been read in its entirety and the development of Oedipus's character over the course of Sophocles' trilogy has not been taken into account. By returning to the

myth as presented by Sophocles trilogy of the Theban family saga, by seeing *Oedipus at Colonus* as an organic part of the original myth and development of the characters, and examining the concrete text of the plays, I have identified certain dynamics that have not been evaluated psychoanalytically previously.

The themes that I identified through detailed analysis of the text are as follows:

-- It was not the libidinal impulses, which propelled the drama—there is no testimony in the text of the affectionate feelings between Oedipus and his mother. The stake for Oedipus was not between love and hate toward his parents, but between life and death, physical and psychological.

--The characters of Laius and Jocasta emulate the unconscious parental libidinal and aggressive wishes toward the child, just as Oedipus's character emulates the unconscious infantile wishes toward the parents.

--The motifs of filicide and patricide are laid down as the basis of the ancient drama —the tragedy does not start with the killing of Laius, it is a family saga, going down to Oedipus's genealogy. The mythic topos of infanticide and filicide is well-attested. It perpetuates throughout the Theogony (the succession myth of gods and heroes) into more recent religious tales. Besides being a mythical trope, it is a confirmed anthropological fact, researched by anthropologists (Frazer, 2012) and psychoanalytically interpreted (Bergmann, 1992).

--Oedipus's self-blinding does not stand for symbolic castration. Opposite to the popular view that Oedipus blinded himself to his crimes, I suggest that blindness stands for achieving insight after lifting denial and cover-up. It is an act of defiance to what has been set for Oedipus. Instead of being a victim of circumstances beyond his control, far from becoming impotent, Oedipus masters the situation. Blindness is also a benign substitute for killing himself. Oedipus was fated to die and with his blindness, he opposed that act. Blindness is a ceremonial act and symbolic acceptance of his parents' guilt, absolving them and keeping their images pure. The acceptance of the acquired guilt is

a survival defense mechanism to ward-off annihilation anxiety produced by the inconceivable state of non-being.

--*Oedipus at Colonus* is an integral part of the myth where the drama of fate decisively turns into a drama of character—the function of the gods, personifying the unconscious human desire is abdicated from them and the conflict is internalized. With the experience of guilt Oedipus becomes a modern hero, close to our western sensitivity and perhaps one of the reasons we identify with him so readily. In addition, in *Oedipus at Colonus* the Oedipal motifs are further developed—first in Oedipus as a father to his daughters and to his sons, then, in his daughter's characters and in his sons' behavior, and finally in Oedipus's attitude toward a father substitute—installing an honorable and unfailing father figure—Theseus.

-- Oedipus's super-natural death at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, his disappearance between heaven and earth is an apotheosis of redemption of the parental images, reconciliation with them, transcendence of the “complexes,” as well as attunement of the feminine/masculine dichotomies and familial conflicts and repetitions within himself.

--The genealogy of the Oedipal sense of guilt was explored in light of these new findings. The sense of guilt is seen as an inherent Oedipal development. I suggest that besides guilt associated with unconscious murderous and incestuous wishes toward the parents, there is also acquired guilt from the parents, in an act of exculpating the parents/creator, and keeping their images pure at all cost. This act is a mechanism of psychic and physical survival, and constitutes a defense against annihilation anxiety.

Oedipus can be seen in two plains—first, in his particular Oedipal situation, where early abuse and exposure occurred; and in the allegorical plane—as the emanation of universal psychic processes. Not every parent is as abusive and maltreating as Oedipus's parents were. Nevertheless, every parent has projections onto the child. Primal unconscious infantile phantasies and projections

onto the parent do not preclude parental projections onto the child. Besides, we see the unconscious phantasy of abandoning abusive parents, much too often coincides with the unconscious parental wishes, and regrettably, parental deeds, as is the case of the fictional character Laius (Ross, 1988). Through Laius and Jocasta, the unconscious parental wishes are emulated, as through Oedipus--the unconscious infantile wishes. Both, the parental abuse, as well as the retribution of the child in later life can be as real as any prototype character of an ancient or a modern story.

The classic psychoanalytic interpretation of the myth ignored the fact of the parental maltreatment and accepted Oedipus's guilt unquestionably. The discovery of the desire to kill the father is one of the scandals of psychoanalysis, together with the discovery of infantile sexuality (Perelberg, 2015). However, it seems that more is at stake by admitting the fact of infanticide and filicide and other forms of child abuse and maltreatment, as well as attributing such unconscious wishes to the parental images. The parental unconscious wishes and phantasies, their projection onto the child have not been evaluated as determinants of the Oedipus complex. The attempts to include these motifs in mainstream psychoanalysis has not met acceptance (Ross, private communication, 2016). Is it, perhaps, more psychologically acceptable to deflect the responsibility onto the child, who does not have the means to protest or protect itself, than to attribute it to the adults, who supposedly have developed a stable ego and should be able to bring those wishes and phantasies to a conscious awareness? In this deflection of responsibility, it is not an infantile omnipotence, but an **adult's omnipotence** that transpires.

In the analysis of Oedipus's myth, we saw that it was psychologically more feasible to exonerate one's parents and to take their guilt upon oneself. This creates a mechanism of continuous guilt distribution throughout generations. Children exonerate their parents. Parents do not see their guilt toward their children, and take up the guilt of their own parents. In both cases, the parent is excused – first by the child, and later in his parental role, he self-excuses himself. In this way, everyone

suffers for the guilt not of one's own, but for the guilt that someone else should have experienced—clearly exemplified in *Oedipus at Colonus*. This type of guilt, besides being unconscious, and a secondary guilt, has been identified as a **borrowed** sense of guilt (Fernando, 2000), a **defensive** guilt (Fairbairn, 1986), a **mature reparative** guilt or **induced** guilt (Carveth, 2010). Carveth (2010) in his attempt to systematize different types of guilt talks about justified and unjustified, existential and induced guilt (p. 117-118). The defensive guilt, described by Fairbairn (1943), who was one of the first to elaborate on what he called “the moral defense against bad objects,” refers to the same, the implication being that it is better to be bad in good universe than to be good in a bad universe. With that defense, the child bargains with the circumstances, preserves the good internal objects, exonerating the external objects, in this way warding off annihilation anxiety. It is the same process, found to operate in the Oedipus drama, as described above, in his self-blinding, self-imposed suffering and finally redemptive death. I believe all these types of guilt can be derived from, or coincide with, the acquired sense of guilt as it arises from the Oedipus complex.

Accepting the obverse of the Oedipus complex—the parental trigger, does not mean that we should take away the intra-psychic origin of it. It could be argued that the sense of guilt can be derived without involving the parental figure. But we have to ask ourselves to what extent the early unconscious phantasies projected onto our parents are influencing the development of Oedipal dynamics and to what extent the actual parental attitude and any external circumstances have bearings on this development. The child arrives in a pre-structured universe and willing or not, has to abide to its rules. It arrives in an already built constellation of mother, father, or their substitutes, where the roles have been set. The child arrives in a triadic relationship, formed before its arrival—mother and father have already had their unconscious, as well as conscious projections onto the coming child. The newcomer immediately faces two conscious and unconscious realities, their conscious and unconscious relationship, and the image of them as a couple with all real and

phantasized dimensions. The adults have to accept the newcomer into their lives and situate themselves in relation to him/her, making physical and emotional space within themselves and among each other. In this situation, it is easy to project what the adults already have layered genetically and empirically onto the new arrival. This defines the adultocentric point of view—an attempt to contribute the entire development of the Oedipal structure to the child’s unconscious fantasies, projections and wishes.

I believe that the Oedipus complex is born in the interplay of the child’s unconscious fantasy with the adult’s unconscious fantasy. We will never be able to proportion how much of either infantile or parental projections and wishes are more influential for the development and establishing of the Oedipus complex, but we can acknowledge the fact that it is formed in interaction between three different unconscious.

Freud aptly conceptualized the Oedipus complex as a family romance. The trouble is that what we mostly see in the psychoanalytic interpretation of this romance is the male child’s projections onto the other members of the family. This masculinist perspective has influenced psychoanalytic discourse of the Oedipus complex since its initial formulation until recent times and it has obscured a more thorough analysis. In his late writings, Freud elaborated on the girl’s Oedipus complex, but he did not have the means to encompass the entire scope of dynamics, characterizing the development of the complex in girls.

Another point I put forth in the beginning is the discontinuation of the discussion of the development of the Oedipus complex—how children, boys or girls, with Oedipus complex become adults with Oedipus complex. We saw that continuity clearly in the characters of *Oedipus at Colonus* and most prominently in Oedipus himself. In our work with clients, we try to reconstruct, if we reconstruct at all, the clients’ Oedipal triangle with their parents, and rarely do we apply the Oedipal constellation to how they carried their roles as parents to their own children. We must remember that

the Oedipal situation is tripartite (Verhaeghe, 2009), and we are always a part of one—be that as infants and children, be that as parents and spouses. Even if children are not present yet, Oedipal dynamics should be considered in the decision to have or not to have children, as well as to have or not have a partner. The tripartite structure is always present whether there is an actual third or not—it is the phantom image from the original constellation. As each of us is a participant in such constellation, the Oedipal situation is eminent in our roles not only as children to our parents, but as parents to our children, as well as in our relationship with authority figures.

The analysis of the two tragedies and above observations brought up more aspects to the surface, with implications, reaching farther than originally thought. I see the Oedipus complex as ongoing development throughout lifetime, and a constant psychic structure, which undergoes transformation, but it does not get resolved. In this regard, what is called a resolution of the Oedipus complex I see as transformation from pre-Oedipal, to Oedipal proper, to post-Oedipal development in adolescents and adults.

In the light of these premises, I suggest that the Oedipus complex is universal and Oedipus does represent Everyman. Everyman—with our libidinal and aggressive wishes toward our parents; Everyman—with our libidinal and aggressive wishes toward our children; Everyman—taking up acquired guilt from our parents; and Everyman—not acknowledging our own guilt toward our children. The complex revolves throughout all stages of development. The parental involvement in the Oedipus complex along with the consequent distribution of guilt is an inherent part of this psychic structure. It represents a joint survival mechanism, which is perhaps, evolutionally determined.

Being aware of these dynamics, acknowledging their existence will help us identifying them, define them theoretically and apply them clinically. Acceptance of unrecognized dynamics into mainstream psychoanalytic evaluation and with that, re-evaluating the terms or coining new once in

regards to Oedipal terminology would be a valuable contribution to the clinical field and to understanding the Oedipus complex in our clients and in us.

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