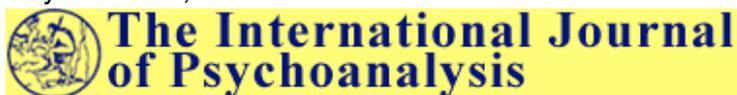


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Why Oedipus Killed Laius—A Note on the Complementary Oedipus Complex in Greek Drama

George Devereux, Ph.D. 

It is striking to note that psycho-analytic theory pays exceedingly little attention to certain complexes which, in a very genuine sense, complement the Oedipus complex. In particular, even though occasionally reference is made (13) to the tender and even to the erotic components of what may be called the Laius complex and the Jocasta complex, the sadistic (and homosexual) components of these complexes are, generally speaking, ignored by psycho-analytic writers.² Indeed, there exist certain Greek traditions regarding Laius which suggest that the complementary Oedipus complex, even in its homosexual and sadistic phases, was close enough to the threshold of consciousness to receive at least a mythological expression. Yet even Rank (20), who specifically discusses these traditions, fails to stress that they provide us with a highly specific and 'historical', rather than only with a general and 'paleopsychological', explanation of Laius' behaviour towards the infant Oedipus.

It must be assumed that this continued scotomization of the complementary Oedipus complex is rooted in the adult's deep-seated need to place all responsibility for the Oedipus complex upon the child, and to ignore, whenever possible, certain parental attitudes which actually stimulate the infant's oedipal tendencies. This deliberate scotoma is probably rooted in the authoritarian atmosphere characteristic of nineteenth-century family life. This interpretation is supported by the history of Freud's thoughts on the subject of the etiology of hysteria. At first, Freud accepted as genuine the seduction stories narrated by his patients. When he discovered that these tales merely expressed certain fantasies and wishes, he made the necessary revisions in his theory of the etiology of the neuroses. Unfortunately, from that time onward he also began to ignore fairly consistently the very genuinely seductive behaviour of parents,³ perhaps because the concept of the Laius and Jocasta complexes was even more egodystonic and culturally objectionable than was the theory of the Oedipus complex, which, in a sense, merely confirmed the nineteenth-century adult's low opinion of children in general.⁴ In certain later writers the scotomization of the Laius and Jocasta complexes appears to have led to the need to develop an elaborate, and not over-convincing, theory of a phylogenetically determined infantile fantasy-life. This theory predicates that, regardless of how loving and humane the father may be, the infant will none the less view him primarily as a monster, because of instinctually determined and phylogenetically anchored fantasies of its own.

The trend away from the recognition of the seductive behaviour of adults, which was bolstered up not only by Freud's genius and prestige, but also by social pressure and by the analyst's own need to scotomize this anxiety-arousing idea, was too strong to be reversed even by the findings of Ferenczi (13) and of certain of his students, who stressed that, presumably by means of the 'dialogue of the unconscious', children recognize the true instinctual roots of the tenderness which adults display towards them (23).

Actually, it is a matter of common experience that in sexual relations between adults and children—which are far less uncommon than

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1 From Winter Veterans Administration Hospital, Topeka, Kansas.

2 Off hand, the writer can think only of one author who devoted considerable attention to the Jocasta complex, and that author was not a psycho-analyst but an anthropologist (19).

3 This development led to a shift toward greater conservativeness in matters pertaining to the ethics of sexual acts, and also to the theory of the death-instinct, or primary self-aggression, which psycho-analytically well-informed theologians have sometimes compared to the doctrine of original sin.

4 This outlook—represented e.g. by such attitudes as 'spare the rod and spoil the child', or 'children should be seen and not heard'—had as its complement the conception of the 'angelic' nature of children. Similar institutionalizations of ambivalence towards children also occur in primitive society (5).

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one would like to believe—it is usually the adult who takes the initiative. Only in rare instances are the children the actual seducers (8).

The great popularity of Sophocles' Oedipus trilogy also tends to support this interpretation. It must be assumed that many members of the Greek audience found the play of absorbing interest precisely because they successfully—though perhaps unconsciously—identified themselves with the problems of certain major characters.⁵ Alice Balint's analysis of the irrational and primitive aspects of the mother-child relationship (1) also lends plausibility to our inference that the women in Sophocles' audience must have had at least an unconscious empathy with Jocasta's problems. By extension, the male audience must likewise have felt a certain carefully repressed kinship with Laius, who, as we propose to show, was not a mere puppet of Fate, but a psychologically consistent and plausible person, whose character-structure provides us with the true explanation of his destiny.

THE CHARACTER OF LAIUS

Laius' early life is vaguely reminiscent of that of Oedipus. King Labdakos of

Thebes died when Laius was but a year old. A nobleman named Lykos (Wolf) usurped the throne, and grievously wronged his niece Antiope. Later on Antiope's sons conquered Thebes, slew Lykos, and banished Laius, who only regained his throne after the death of Antiope's sons. At the time of his restoration to the throne Laius was already burdened with a curse, which he had brought on himself through an act of homosexual rape. It was this curse which eventually culminated in the Oedipus tragedy (22).

Numerous Greek sources and fragments⁶ reveal that Laius was deemed to have been the inventor of pederasty. In his early manhood, long before he married Jocasta and fathered Oedipus, Laius fell violently in love with Chrysippus, son of King Pelops. Instead of courting and winning the handsome youth, in a manner which the latter-day Greeks would have deemed proper, he chose to kidnap him during the sacred Nemean games, without seeking to obtain the consent of King Pelops, which, Licht intimates, would probably have been forthcoming. The enraged Pelops therefore laid upon Laius the curse that his own son should slay him and then marry his own mother. According to a later version it is the Delphic oracle which informs Laius of Zeus' decision that Laius' son would kill him in retribution for the rape of Chrysippus. This curse seems to suggest that the Greek mind linked Oedipus with Chrysippus—an inference which is further substantiated by still another version of this myth, according to which Hera was so greatly angered by the rape of Chrysippus that she sent the Sphinx to ravage Thebes, in order to punish the Thebans for having tolerated Laius' homosexual escapade (20). The *Oidipodeia* is even more specific in conjoining the fates of Chrysippus and of Oedipus. According to this epic, Oedipus was exposed as a propitiatory sacrifice, in order to appease Hera's wrath over the Chrysippus incident (20). In other words, Hera caused Laius to lose not only his youthful bedfellow Chrysippus, but also his son Oedipus.⁷

In this context it cannot be stressed strongly enough that after the imposition of the curse, and especially after the birth of Oedipus, almost nothing further is heard of Chrysippus, until the moment of the fatal encounter between Laius and Oedipus. At that point several sources once more bring Chrysippus into the plot, it being alleged that Laius and Oedipus fought each other because they were rivals for the love of Chrysippus. Yet, significantly, Chrysippus himself was not present during this combat, while, according to some sources, Jocasta did witness the death of Laius. Be that as it may, various versions of this myth clearly represent this combat as a homosexually motivated encounter. After this episode Chrysippus once

⁵ Licht records that a rather cynical and hedonistic defence of incest—in terms of the thesis that whatever gives pleasure is good—occurring in one of Euripides' plays was hooted by the audience so violently that the line had to be changed to an admission that whatever is dishonourable *is* dishonourable, regardless of how pleasant it may be. Of course, in this instance, the incest enacted on the stage was that of a brother and a sister, which was both psychologically and economically unacceptable to parents in the audience (17).

⁶ According to Licht, these sources include: the epic 'Oidipodeia', Praxilla, a fragmentary play by Euripides, a fragmentary play by Aeschylus, and some other fragments (17).

⁷ Hera's anger over this incident is, in itself, a problem of some magnitude, which can only be partially understood in terms of her position as the custodian of family life and in terms of her own experiences with Zeus' various heterosexual and homosexual loves. Her choice of the Sphinx—whom Rank (20) views as a phallic woman—as the special instrument of her further retribution is equally perplexing. Unfortunately, lack of space prevents us from discussing this matter in detail, and forces us to content ourselves with pointing out the existence of this interesting mythological problem.

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more disappears, for all practical purposes, from the rest of the Oedipus myth. The overall impression created by these various accounts is that, psychologically at least, Chrysippus is, in a sense, the representative of Oedipus' own passive homosexual characteristics, which were brought into being, or were at least aroused, by Laius' aggressive and homosexual impulses towards his son.

Regardless of whether this curse was uttered by Pelops in person, or by the Delphic oracle, it made a considerable impression upon even so impulsive a man as Laius. According to sources cited by Rank, Laius (self-castratively) refrained from cohabiting with Jocasta for several years, in order to avoid the risk of procreating a son.⁸ However, on a certain occasion, when Laius was either drunk, or else unable to resist Jocasta's seductiveness, he succumbed to temptation and knowingly procreated a son, even though he well knew what calamities the birth of an heir would entail for him. Thus, after a period of self-restraint, Laius' self-destructive impulsiveness once more got out of hand, only to be followed by another futile (self-castrative) attempt to ward off the consequences of his second hasty sexual act by exposing the infant Oedipus.

Laius appears to have retained throughout life a propensity for unconsidered violence. This is clearly shown by his wanton aggression against the wayfarer Oedipus, which caused the latter to slay him.

This, however, is not the whole story. Indeed, there exist several versions of this incident, the best known being the story that Oedipus and Laius quarrelled over the right to *pass first* over a certain *narrow road*. This incident appears to be a somewhat bowdlerized and symbolic version of certain far more explicit accounts of Laius' death. Rank quotes a series of sources, according to which Oedipus and Laius did not quarrel over even so symbolic a trifle as the right to pass first over a narrow road. Indeed, Praxilla affirms that not only Laius, but Oedipus himself was also in love with Chrysippus, and the scholium to Euripides' *Phoenissae*, 66, is even more explicit, in that it states outright that Oedipus killed Laius in a quarrel over Chrysippus.

In apparent contradiction to this homosexual motive, various sources quoted by Rank allege that the combat took place in the presence of Jocasta. For

example, Nikolaos Damaskenos stated that incest between Oedipus and his mother occurred immediately after the combat, while still another source stresses that Oedipus *knowingly* raped his mother. Furthermore, the *Oidipodeia* specifies that, after killing Laius, Oedipus deprived him both of his sword (castration) and of his belt. The latter deed suggests the feminization of Laius, since, in ancient Greece, the undoing of a woman's belt was a preliminary to intercourse. If this inference is correct, Oedipus did more than kill his father and marry his mother, in token of his heterosexual maturity. He also turned the tables on his homosexual father, by castrating (sword) and feminizing him (belt), as he himself had once been castrated and feminized (pierced ankles) by Laius. If this be so, then cohabitation with Jocasta was not only cohabitation with the mother as a woman, but also with the mother as the representative of the now feminized homosexual paternal ogre.

This latter inference gives added meaning to Gruppe's opinion (16), cited by Rank, that Oedipus originally bested the Sphinx—who, according to Rank, is a phallic mother—in physical combat.⁹ If Rank's inference is correct, then Oedipus' triumph over the phallic mother—whose phallus, needless to say, was derived from the father—represents both a heterosexual and a homosexual victory and gesture of triumph. Since this latter meaning of incest with the phallic mother—i.e. the combination of heterosexual relations with the mother and of symbolic active homosexual relations with the father—is a relatively novel inference, it is offered here only as a tentative conclusion, and as a problem which may well deserve further study.¹⁰

The important point in all these considerations is the fact that our sources emphasize primarily

⁸ Some aspects of the problem of chastity in marriage were discussed in another essay (9) in connection with certain ancient Indian traditions regarding two kings, each of whom killed a father-figure at the very moment when the latter was engaging in marital relations.

⁹ If the Sphinx was killed in a physical combat, then its death was, in a sense, similar to the death which Laius brought upon himself. If the Sphinx killed itself after Oedipus guessed its riddle, the suicide of the Sphinx approximates to that of Jocasta. These seemingly divergent versions of the same plot-element therefore actually converge and further support the thesis that Jocasta, when 'raped' by Oedipus, represented both herself and the castrated and feminized Laius.

¹⁰ A Hungarian military joke specifically describes an incident in which adultery with the wife is at the same time represented as anal cohabitation with the woman's husband, thus further substantiating well-known theories of paranoid jealousy.

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the homosexual element in the causation of Laius' death, and only bring in the

incest with Jocasta more or less as an afterthought, e.g. as the link which couples the tragedy of Laius with the latter fate of Oedipus Rex. Thus, it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that cohabitation with Jocasta should be viewed primarily as a homosexual and only epiphenomenally as a heterosexual act, Oedipus' true love-hate object being the now feminized homosexual ogre Laius.

In this context it is important to remember that Greek mythology, which, after all, is our real authority in regard to the problem of Oedipus, did not derive Oedipus' hostility to Laius from heterosexual, but from homosexual sources. Indeed, Oedipus is not even described as having been particularly fond of his foster-mother, Queen Merope, while all accounts of his early life emphasize his devotion to his saviour and foster-father, King Polybus, who apparently represented the 'good father' in Oedipus' unconscious. What we do find in Greek accounts is an explanation of Oedipus' aggression against Laius in terms of Laius' character-structure: his propensity for homosexual rape, and for unconsidered, injudicious violence and overbearingness ('hybris').¹¹ Indeed, Laius is presented to us as a pederastic ogre—as a homosexual rapist, rather than as a seducer—even before Oedipus was born. Licht also adds that when Laius married Jocasta he was deprived both of his real love-object Chrysippus, and of the hope of an heir (17). After the birth of Oedipus, Laius made himself guilty first of attempted infanticide, and, later on, of an attempt to kill his adult son in the course of a quarrel which the overbearing old man had wantonly started with the peaceful wayfarer Oedipus.

Be that as it may, Laius' character, as depicted by Greek mythology and tragedy alike, is not an attractive one, and corresponds rather closely to what clinical psycho-analysis found to be the small boy's conception of his father. Indeed, unlike many other tragic figures of Greek drama, Laius is not presented to us as a good man caught in the toils of fate, and having 'An Appointment in Samarra' with death, but as a violator of good manners, which the Greeks deemed more important than good morals. In brief—and despite Oedipus' possible rivalry with Laius for the love of Chrysippus—Laius' death was not caused primarily by Oedipus' own incestuous impulses, but by Laius' character, which included both 'hybris' and a tendency towards homosexual and other violence.

Despite the rivalry over Chrysippus, it is not asserted that Oedipus himself was not partially motivated also by the violent impulses connected with the normal Oedipus complex. We simply suggest that, according to Greek data, Oedipus' murderous and incestuous wishes were neither purely heterosexual nor truly spontaneous ones, but were induced by the behaviour of his father Laius. In fact, it may even be tentatively suggested that Oedipus' partly heterosexual attraction to Jocasta was to a certain extent motivated by his desire both to escape and to gratify indirectly his own sado-masochistic and homosexual wishes which had been stimulated by his father's behaviour. At the same time, Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta may also represent an unconscious attempt at restitution, since he took Laius' place at Jocasta's side, ¹² and provided further heirs for the kingdom of Thebes.¹³ Conversely, it may be permissible to suggest, at least tentatively, that

aggressively homosexual paternal attitudes towards the child may represent—in part at least—a defence against murderous impulses elicited by the sight of the nursing infant, whose very existence interferes with the formerly close relationship between husband and wife. **14**

Our central thesis—that Oedipus' own impulses were stimulated by the behaviour of his father—appears at least plausible in the light of the preceding considerations. However, in order to render this thesis even more convincing, and worthy of being taken into account in actual clinical work, it is necessary to examine rather closely the real, albeit unconscious, causes of King Pelops' extreme wrath, and the motives which impelled him to utter *precisely* and *specifically* the rather unusual curse that Laius' son should kill his father and wed his mother.

11 Only rarely—and then primarily in those versions which attribute Laius' death to a quarrel over the right of way—is there any mention of Oedipus' own proneness to violence, which, it is specified, *is similar to that of Laius*. In other words, even where impulsiveness is attributed also to Oedipus, this character-trait of the son is derived from, or correlated with, the father's character structure.

12 In certain primitive societies the murderer is adopted as a replacement for the murdered kinsman **(6)**.

13 The providing of heirs is analyzed elsewhere **(9)**.

14 In many primitive societies cohabitation is prohibited during the long period of lactation. This situation, as it pertains e.g. to the Sioux Indians, has been discussed elsewhere **(11)**.

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PELOPS, OEDIPUS, AND ELECTRA

According to Licht, Pelops' wrath over the abduction of Chrysippus should be understood as follows: 'The father (Pelops) is not driven to the curse because Laius loved a boy and was intimate with him, consequently not by the "unnatural nature" of his passion ... but simply and solely because Laius steals the boy, and abducts him against his father's wish: it is not the perverted direction of the impulse that makes Laius guilty, but the violence employed by him. ... Laius becomes a curse-laden man in consequence of an offence against conventional form; he thought he might be allowed to abduct the boy, when he could have sued for the beautiful prize freely and openly' **(17)**. In other words, Laius is guilty of a breach of manners, rather than of morals, in a context—paedophilia—in which the Greeks manifested that 'poetic chivalrousness' which the knights of the feudal period manifested towards women. Laius' behaviour towards Chrysippus is, thus, an unusually clear-cut expression of 'hybris'—excess and overbearingness—which, in Greek tragedy, is the cause of man's ultimate

downfall.

These considerations refer, however, only to the conscious causes of Pelops' reaction to the rape of Chrysippus. On a deeper level the psychological problem of Pelops' wrath has an even more significant connection with the fate of Laius and of Oedipus.

More even than Oedipus himself, Pelops was familiar with the potential cruelty of fathers and father-figures. Pelops was the son of the evil King Tantalus, who, from sheer overbearingness, wished to test the omniscience of the Immortals whom he presumed to invite to his palace as his guests. He therefore had young Pelops slain and served to the Immortals as the *pièce de résistance* of the feast he gave in their honour. Fortunately the Gods discovered the deed, but not before Demeter, still distressed by Persephone's loss, had absentmindedly eaten the dismembered Pelops' shoulder. At the request of the Immortals, either Rhea or else Clotho, one of the Fates, cast Pelops' remains into a cauldron, from which he reemerged alive, but with an ivory shoulder. The cannibalistic impulses of Tantalus are further underscored by the fact that his eternal punishment in Hades consisted in being 'tantalized' by food and drink, and in his being in constant fear of death. Despite these evil deeds, Greek legends stress that Pelops honoured his deceased cannibalistic father devoutly.

If we take into account only the best-known version of the Feast of Tantalus, it is hard to understand why Pelops should display such filial piety towards his brutally egotistical and cannibalistic father. Indeed, such devotion would be understandable only if, by some twist in his unconscious fantasy-life, Pelops managed to construe this cannibalistic act as a token of love. This startling inference is strikingly confirmed by Pindar's First Olympian Ode, which Bunker (3) interprets *primarily* as a bowdlerized version of the original cannibalistic feast. According to Pindar, the Feast of Tantalus never took place at all. He assures us, instead, that the story of that feast was hollow gossip, and that, in reality, Poseidon had abducted Pelops, with whom he was in love, and had taken him to the abode of the Immortals, just as Zeus brought Ganymede to Olympus. On the basis of the contrast between the original myth of the Feast of Tantalus and Pindar's version of Pelops' disappearance, Bunker concludes that the Feast of Tantalus is a disguised description of initiation ceremonies.

However, Pindar's version is not *simply* a bowdlerization of a cannibalistic myth which originated in ruder days. Rather does it enunciate the self-same theme as the original myth, but in a language and by means of symbols which pertain to a *different stage* of psychosexual development. Specifically, the fate of Pelops which, in the earlier version, is told in the language of the oral stage, and represents the anxiety-laden and yet pleasurable fantasy-experience of being devoured, appears in Pindar's version as an experience pertaining to the second phase of the Oedipus complex, and is presented to us as erotized submission to a divine homosexual father figure, Poseidon.

When seen in this light, Pelops' filial piety toward his ogre-like father Tantalus no longer appears to us as a paradox, but only as the one-sided—and highly erotized—expression of the positive component of Pelops' ambivalence towards

his father, whose idealized representative is Pelops' homosexual divine lover Poseidon.

Yet Pelops could not have accepted without ambivalence his passive rôle either in the Feast of Tantalus, or in his abduction by Poseidon, which so startlingly duplicates the abduction of his son Chrysippus by Laius. We must examine therefore also the manner in which Pelops expressed the hostile component of his ambivalence toward Tantalus. This was accomplished by means of a displacement of his hostility from

¹⁵ In this connection too Pelops' fate is similar to that of a personage in the Oedipus myth. Just as Laius had to protect his life against his son Oedipus, so Oenomaus stood in danger of death from his daughter's suitor Pelops.

¹⁶ According to another version Pelops' victory was due to the direct intervention of Pelops' erstwhile lover Poseidon who, at the crucial moment, caused the wheel of Oenomaus' chariot to become detached (24).

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its initial object Tantalus to Pelops' murderous father-in-law, King Oenomaus, ruler of Elis. Oenomaus had a daughter, Hippodamia, of whom it was prophesied that she would be married on the day her suitor slew her father.¹⁵ Being cognizant of this prophecy, Oenomaus tried to fend off his daughter's suitors, by proposing to them a chariot race. If the suitors lost, the king was at liberty to slay them, and, until Pelops arrived to sue for Hippodamia's hand, the king had always succeeded in his designs. However, Pelops asked Oenomaus' coachman Myrtilus, son of Hermes, to replace the lynch-pin of his master's chariot with a waxen one. To pay for this treachery, he promised that Myrtilus would be permitted to share Hippodamia's favours (22).¹⁶ The king pursued Pelops and Hippodamia, and almost won the race, when his sabotaged chariot disintegrated and he was killed. Then, in order not to have to pay Myrtilus the promised bribe, Pelops drowned his accomplice.

From the sociological point of view, this peculiar courtship episode is understandable in terms of Sir J. G. Frazer's discussion of the transmission of kingly powers in early Greek society (14). Apparently such powers were transmitted from the present king to the king's son-in-law. Hence, in permitting his daughter to marry, the king automatically created a rival for his throne, exactly as Laius provided a future king for Thebes by fathering Oedipus. In this system, in which power was transmitted from mother to daughter, although the exercise of power was delegated to the spouse—a mechanism characteristic of matriliney as distinct from matriarchy—the same effect could be achieved by marrying either the mother or the daughter. Thus, Oedipus married Jocasta, as Pelops married Hippodamia, in order to be elevated to the throne. The fact that Oedipus obtains Jocasta after mortal combat, while Pelops obtains Hippodamia by means of a

(murderous) race, is fully explained by Frazer's proof that athletic competitions for the bride were but attenuated latter-day representations of earlier mortal combats. The fact that Hippodamia rode in Pelops' chariot is reminiscent of the practice of bride theft.

From the psycho-analytic point of view, even if we disregard the obvious symbolism of the chariot-race, the sexual bribe offered to Myrtilus, and the fact that he was killed so that the bribe (*ius primae noctis?*) need not be paid, clearly suggests that—psychologically speaking—King Oenomaus and his unfaithful coachman Myrtilus are one and the same person in the eyes of Pelops, and that Oenomaus' murder was oedipally motivated. At the same time Myrtilus is perhaps also a part of Pelops himself, who, after profiting by the treachery, kills his accomplice. These deeds caused a blood-guilt which gave rise to the tragedy of Pelops' sons and also to that of Electra.¹⁷

Indeed, Tantalus seems to have been psychologically reincarnated in Pelops' vicious sons, Atreus and Thyestes. The latter seduced his brother's wife Aerope, and stole a marvellous golden ram given to Atreus by the gods, in token of sovereignty over Mycenae.¹⁸ Atreus first banished Thyestes, then feigned to be reconciled with him, and set before him *a dish made of the flesh of Thyestes' own children*. Thyestes then departed, but first placed a curse upon his brother Atreus. This curse eventually caused the tragedy of Electra, precisely as the curse of Pelops caused the tragedy of Oedipus. Indeed, Thyestes soon discovered that he could be avenged on his brother *by cohabiting with his own daughter, Pelopia*.¹⁹ The son born of this union, Aegisthus, is the killer of Agamemnon and the lover of Clytaemnestra, who is then slain by Orestes and Electra—a deed which, to psycho-analysts, is the prototypal expression of the Electra complex. These events confirm the validity of our thesis that the legend of the Pelopids is intimately connected with that of the house of Laius. It will be sufficient, however, if, in this context, we summarize only King Pelops' connections with the death of Laius.

¹⁷ A note on unconscious insight may not be out of place in this context. Professor Rose, whose style is usually of exemplary clarity, at this particular point failed to make it clear whether the blood-guilt which Pelops had to shoulder was for the death of Oenomaus or for that of Myrtilus (22). Since Professor Rose was not an analyst, his slip is of special interest, in that it reveals his unconscious insight into the identity of Oenomaus and Myrtilus. Correctly stated, the myth records that the blood-guilt fell upon Pelops as a result of the murder of Myrtilus.

¹⁸ Compare here the story that Tantalus concealed a golden dog, sacred to Zeus, which had been stolen by a thief from Zeus' shrine.

¹⁹ In one of the Bantu tribes a man setting out to hunt a dangerous beast first commits incest, so that his terribleness shall match that of the hunted beast.

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The legend of Pelops—who was both cannibalized and homosexually raped by his father, respectively by the father-figure Poseidon, and who none the less devoutly revered his father even though he slew his father-in-law, explains precisely why Pelops was so enraged by Chrysippus' abduction, and why he chose to curse Laius in so highly distinctive a manner. The chief features of Pelops' conflict may be summarized as follows:

1. Pelops behaves toward Chrysippus as a fond father should behave. In doing so he performs a highly complex action, since, on the one hand, he shows Tantalus how he *should* have treated him, and, on the other hand, shows Poseidon how he should *not* have treated him.
2. Laius' deed enraged Pelops beyond all measure, probably because Laius, in raping Chrysippus, acted out one of Pelops' own most severely repressed impulses, and at the same time reawakened Pelops' own passive homosexual conflicts.
3. The curse which Pelops laid on Laius is quite clearly rooted in Pelops' own conflicts: Oedipus is to slay his father Laius and then marry his mother Jocasta. This curse gives us the true unconscious meaning of Pelops' killing his father-in-law on the very day on which he married Hippodamia, these deeds reflecting the displacement of his oedipal homosexual hostility from Tantalus and Poseidon to Oenomaus and Myrtilus.

CHARACTER AND FATE IN GREEK DRAMA

The analysis of Laius' character, and of the character and curse of Pelops, casts a great deal of doubt upon the validity of the traditional conception of Greek tragedy as an account of man's helplessness in the face of undeserved Fate. Laius' death at the hands of Oedipus is not the trigger-event which sets in motion the millstones of the Gods. Rather is it a rigidly determined consequence of Laius' own character-structure, just as the nature of the curse laid upon him is an unavoidable consequence of Pelops' own passive homosexual conflicts and of his repressed murderous hatred of his father Tantalus, which was displaced to, and then acted out in, the killing of Oenomaus and of Myrtilus. Thus, in a very genuine sense, we must credit the Greek poets and dramatists with more psychological acumen than we have so far done. What they called 'Fate' was merely the personification of man's character-structure, and of his need to act out those of his intra-psychic conflicts which determine the course of his life. The rôle which the Greek tragedians assigned to the character-trait 'hybris', as a determinant of man's tragic fate, at once confirms this view, and casts a vivid light upon the social psychology of Greek society, in which a character-structure involving hybris was the one least well adapted to the demands of society. At the same time the need to manifest overbearingness and excess must have been very strong indeed in a society which professed to follow the path of the 'golden mean' (which is the true meaning of the constantly misused term 'aurea mediocritas'). This subjective need to escape the bounds of the golden mean explains why the

Greek dramatists not merely condemned but also admired and pitied those whose hybris brought about their downfall.²⁰

In brief, Greek drama is not a tragedy set in motion by a fate external to man, but by man's character-structure and latent conflicts, witness the adage that whom the Gods wish to destroy they first render mad. If we replace 'the Gods' with parental figures, this adage confirms our interpretation of the characterological and conflictual sources of Greek tragic destinies. This fact was simply obscured by the Greeks' habit of personifying character-structure as 'Fate', and also by the fact that the dramatist dealt with well-known mythical personages, whose background and early history were expected to be familiar to the audience. In other words, it is very much to be doubted whether the intelligent Greek attending the representation of Sophocles' Oedipus trilogy was unaware of Laius' character and early history, and accepted the thesis that Laius' death was predetermined by Fate in the literal sense. It must be presumed that he accepted this thesis simply as a poetically appropriate allegorical reference to Laius' personality, since at that time—and until very recently—explicit

²⁰ The psychological situation obtaining in Pueblo Indian society is very much the same. These tribes profess to follow a way of life which Ruth Benedict has characterized as Apollonian (2). Yet, we do know that underneath this peaceful façade there bubbles a witch's cauldron of hate, which finds expression in constant panicky preoccupation with witchcraft (25), (11). As regards the tendency to condemn with admiration those guilty of violating the social norm, we learn that in Central Australia those guilty of incest are 'condemned with admiration' (21). The same attitude also prevails in at least one of the Moi tribes of French Indo-China (4).

²¹ The problems of the cultural and psychological formulation of the criteria of literary plausibility are discussed elsewhere (7).

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'psychologizing' was not considered to be a poetical or even a literary device. The dramatist was therefore compelled to achieve plausibility—both psychological and other—by means which the society from which his audience was recruited was culturally conditioned to accept as 'literary plausibility'.²¹ It might also be added that these considerations further justify the psychological and psycho-analytic interpretation of nominally non-psychologically formulated narratives and myths.

CONCLUDING HYPOTHESES

The following remarks, and in particular the remarks which pertain to clinical problems, are offered in a very tentative manner. They should be viewed not as conclusions in the strict sense of this term, but as attempts to indicate the location of certain problem-areas in psycho-analytic theory, which deserve to be explored further. The fact that they have been expressed in the form of simple declarative sentences should not be taken as an indication that they represent statements of

fact, or time-tested theoretical insights. We have used simple declarative statements solely because we did not wish to encumber our statements with monotonous and repetitive warnings that all our remarks are highly tentative and stand in need of a great deal of further confirmation.

This being said, the material presented in the preceding pages suggests that the following hypotheses stand in need of further study:

1. *History of Psycho-analysis.* Culturally determined scotomata may be responsible for the tendency to minimize the significance of the Laius complex and of the Jocasta complex, which complement the Oedipus complex.
2. *Metapsychology.* An analysis of the Oedipus myth does not seem to support the thesis that biological and/or phylogenetic factors are *primarily* responsible for the Oedipus complex. The notion that the child's psyche is a 'chamber of horrors' for *biological* reasons is also contradicted by Freud's thesis (15), further elaborated by the writer (11), that instincts become luxuriant and monstrous *only as a result of repression*. As suggested elsewhere (10), (12) it may be necessary to assume that the child's sensitiveness even to minimal aggression may be epiphenomenal to its sensitiveness to minimal tokens of love, since the latter appears to be one of the child's chief psychic homoeostatic mechanisms.
3. *Psychosexual Development.* The Oedipus complex appears to be a consequence of the child's sensitiveness to its parents' sexual and aggressive impulses. Homosexual conflicts may play a greater rôle in the genesis and development of the Oedipus complex than has hitherto been suspected.
4. *Clinical Implications.* It may be worth while to investigate to what extent heterosexual impulses directed to the parent of the opposite sex include and/or disguise also homosexual impulses directed to the parent of the same sex. Genitality seems to mean more than the attainment of heterosexuality pure and simple. In the case of males it also seems to require a shift from sublimated passive to sublimated active homosexuality, and, in the case of women, a shift from sublimated active to sublimated passive homosexuality. It may even be possible to assume that 'activity' and 'passivity' in the sexual sphere may be derived from homosexual rather than from heterosexual sources, since these attitudes are closely related to aggression, which belongs to the pre-genital stage of psycho-sexual development.
5. *Applied Psycho-analysis.*
 - a. *The Oedipus Myth.* The early history of Laius seems to provide us with data which are fundamental for the understanding of the entire Oedipus myth. These data appear to express the Greeks' insight into the external and realistic sources of the male child's tendency to view his father as a homosexual ogre, and of his desire to exchange rôles with the father also in this respect.

- b. *Greek Literature*. A study of the problem of Laius suggests that, especially in Greek drama, 'Fate' is actually a personification of character-structure.
- c. *Mythology*. We found that whenever there exist divergent and even seemingly contradictory versions of a given mythical episode, these variants not only do not contradict each other psychologically, but actually supplement each other, and help us obtain a deeper insight into the latent nuclear meaning of the basic theme, *motif*, or plotelement. For example, we found that the bowdlerized explanation of the causes of the quarrel between Laius and Oedipus not only

22 It is of considerable interest that Laius' character-structure, i.e. his proneness to unconsidered violence, is put in relief more strikingly in the bowdlerized than in those unexpurgated versions of this incident in which the grosser instinctual elements are more prominent. This is not surprising, since character-formation results from attempts to cope with the instincts and with unmanageable external stimulation.

23 These considerations seem to provide a theoretical basis for an interesting idea advanced by Professor Ralph Linton in a private conversation (18). He suggested that divergent versions of primitive tales may represent a kind of cultural Thematic Apperception Test, in which the basic plot—corresponding to a TAT picture—is subjectively elaborated by various tellers of tales.

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repeats in a symbolic form (narrow road) the sexual theme which is explicitly mentioned in other sources, but also helps us obtain a deeper insight into Laius' character-structure, which is of paramount importance for the understanding of the entire Oedipus myth.²² Furthermore, the various unexpurgated versions, some of which highlight the rôle of Jocasta, while others highlight that of Chrysippus, enable us in turn to discover the combined heterosexual and homosexual undercurrent in the male child's struggle against his father and in his love for his mother. As regards the legend of Pelops, the striking contrast between the traditional version of the Feast of Tantalus and Pindar's theory that Pelops was abducted by Poseidon amounts to little more than the presentation of the basic theme—erotized passivity in the face of aggression—in oral, respectively in homosexual-oedipal, terms. This suggests that a given theme has an inherent and specific latent significance, which no amount of voluntary or involuntary, or else conscious or unconscious, distortion can obliterate. In fact, such distortions only serve to highlight certain additional psychological implications of the basic theme. Thus in mythology, as in dream-work, we seem to be constantly confronted with the basic fact that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. This finding may have an important bearing not only upon the study of dreams, fantasies and

mythology, but also upon such everyday matters as false perception, the embellished and distorted rumour, deliberate lying, false evidence in courts of law, etc., all of which, though being distortions of the manifest content, probably adhere rather closely to the latent content. Finally, this inference also has a bearing upon those clinical psychological tests in which the subject is expected to repeat a story told to him, as well as upon such partially structured projective tests as the Rorschach, the TAT and probably also the Draw-a-Man Test.²³ Needless to say, these suppositions are fully compatible with classical psycho-analytic theory.

The one conclusion which we can offer with any degree of confidence is that, as long as there are human beings, the task of psycho-analytic research will never be finished.

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