

# The Oedipus Complex in the Contemporary Psychoanalysis

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## ABSTRACT

*In this article, authors have tried to answer the question: »Were is the place, and what is the meaning of the Oedipus complex in contemporary psychoanalysis?«. The review of different theoretical standpoints was given, according to meaning and place of the Oedipus complex in human development. Although it depends on the resolving of preoedipal conflicts, the conflicts of phallic phases of the psychosexual development are universal to all human being, no matter how we call them – Oedipus, Electra or Persephone Complex.*

**Key words:** Oedipus complex, preoedipal conflicts, psychoanalysis

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*»It has justly been said that the Oedipus complex is the nuclear of the neuroses, and constitutes the essential part of their content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced with the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis. With the progress of psycho-analytic studies the importance of the Oedipus complex has become more and more clearly evident; its recognition has become the shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents«*

Sigmund Freud,

Footnote added to the 1914 edition of *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905)

## Introduction

A central position in Freud's theory of the psychosexual development is occupied by the Oedipus Complex. When it is unresolved, it becomes a nucleus of the neurosis.

Aside from this, since 1899, the year when Freud presented his theory of the Oedipus Complex to the public in his work »Interpretation of Dreams« till today, the understanding of meaning of the Oedipus Complex (especially in females) has changed in psychoanalytic circles.

In 1998, Jean Arundale, at the psychoanalytic conference dedicated to the analysis of the Oedipus complex, asked the following questions: »Is the Oedipus Complex still the core complex for analysts today? Is it still regarded as a fundamental human experience? Is overcoming the Oedipus Complex still necessary for emotional maturity?«

We also think that is worthwhile to try to give answers to these questions. In this text we would like to of-

fer the viewpoints and interpretations of the Oedipus Complex which were available to us, and which have been influencing our personal standpoints. We do not have any pretensions to give a complete and general review of the critics of this »cornerstone of psychoanalysis«. These critics are numerous both inside and outside of the psychoanalytic establishment. We are starting with Freud's thought and metaphor borrowed from the theatre world, for something that he considered as a central moment in the psychological development of each individual, but also as a cornerstone of civilization from the most primitive human communities to the most progressive ones.

## Freud and Oedipus

Developing his theory of psychosexual development, Freud<sup>1</sup> believed that different elements of sexual drive

converge at the age of 5–6 in the genital organization, where the components of pregenital instincts (oral and anal) are subsumed under the genital domination. The aim of all infantile wishes at that age is the sexual intercourse with a parent of the opposite sex. The parent of the same sex becomes a dangerous rival (in 1923, Freud introduced a concept of »the negative Oedipus Complex«.)

Freud thought that a little boy is »condemned« to follow his drives and wishes, the same way as Sophocles' Oedipus was condemned to do. In his opinion this is the reason why he became involved in a strong emotional drama, which is resolved due to the castration anxiety. The boy believes that his father, a strong rival, is the one who will castrate him, unless he abandons his Oedipal wishes. He finds a solution in the process of identification with his father, constitution of the Superego structure and transferring his sexual strivings from his mother to other female figures.

Concerning the Oedipus Complex of females, Freud did not succeed in working it out in details. He started with the assumption that a little girl experiences herself as castrated, incomplete; because she does not have a penis. She puts the blame on her mother, and being revolted, she turns to her father as an object of love and sexual wishes. Therefore we can say that Oedipus Complex in girls would be a consequence of feeling castrated, and not her predictor. Freud saw the resolution of the Oedipus Complex in females in the capability to wish for a penis and that the penis envy is turned into a wish for a baby as a penis substitute.

We find it important to stress, that Freud himself, realized that the emotions towards parents are not exclusive and that there is ambivalence in girls and boys towards both of the parents. Unsuccessfulness in resolving the Oedipus Complex is, according to Freud, the main reason for neurosis.

Freud named his theory after the main character in Sophocles drama about a Theban king, Oedipus. For our better understanding of some new viewpoints on the Oedipus Complex, we find it useful to refresh our memory of the myth.

## The Oedipus Myth<sup>2</sup>

King Laius of Thebes, otherwise a violent man who raped in a homosexual act Chrysippas, son of his friend and master of the house, king Pelops, is told by Apollo's oracle at Delphi that his own son would kill him. With the permission of his wife Jocasta he pierces the legs of his newborn baby at the ankles with a golden hook, passed a chain through the holes and tied them together, and then left the baby to die on the mountain Cithairon. However a shepherd found the sacrificed baby and saved it by giving it to the childless couple of king Polybus and queen Merope of Corinth. They named him Oedipus, which in Greek means, »swollen footed« (because of his leg deformations), and brought him up as their own child. In his adolescence, Oedipus found out

that he was adopted, and upon hearing the oracle that he would kill his father and marry his mother, he ran away from Corinth. At a fork on the road to Thebes, he met Laius, who started a fight with him and was the first one to take out a weapon. Oedipus killed Laius in this fight, without knowing whom did he kill. At that time the Sphinx, monster with the body of a lion, the head of a woman and big wings, was tormenting the citizens of Thebes with a riddle. All those who did not know how to solve the riddle were killed. Oedipus solved the riddle, became a hero, the liberator of the city, and as a reward he got the throne and the king's widow Jocasta became his wife. He had four children with her; one of them is Antigone. After many years, a great plague broke out in Thebes, killing helpless people. A new oracle promised that the city would be saved, when the murderer of Laius had been found and punished. Searching for truth, Oedipus found out that he was his father's killer and that he married his own mother. Jocasta killed herself, and Oedipus pierced his own eyes becoming blind. Since that time, he roamed around, being followed by his devoted daughter Antigone, till he died on Colonus.

We could pose a question, why did Jocasta's words in Sophocles' drama »Many man had been dreaming about having intercourse with their mothers; the one who doesn't care about it, easier stands life?« make such an impact on Freud?

Does this have any connection with his personal family history? He was a first-born son in his family; his mother Amalia was 20 years old at that time, and his father Jacob was 41. Freud has always been very attached to his mother, and he was her favorite child, »the golden child«. We are familiar with a quote from a letter Freud wrote to Flies in 1897: »I have found in my own case too, the falling in love with the mother and the jealousy of the father, and now I regard it as a universal event of the childhood«.

How much Freud has identified with Oedipus, the decipherer of the Sphinx riddle, we can see from conformations in his own life.

There are some statements that, after turning 40, after »The Dream Interpretation« had been published, his father's death and birth of his daughter Anna, his fifth child, Freud stopped with his active sexual life, what could be interpreted as an equivalent of making oneself blind or castrating oneself. Anna Freud has undoubtedly played a role of his Antigone, and his death in exile in England is a parallel to the Oedipus death on Colonus.

It is obvious that in each of us these elements of myth, film and event are echoing and are recognized by our unconscious.

We could also ask why Freud put an emphasis on the Oedipus dilemmas, neglecting the analysis of characters of both the biological and the adoptive parents. In her analysis, Han Groen-Prakken<sup>3</sup> put much more emphasis on the analysis of parents. Or we can follow

Jung's path and his analysis of civilization and comparative religion, putting more emphasis on »mitrays cults« of matriarchate, as opposed to Freud who analyzed patriarchy. This was a crucial moment in the split of the relation father (Freud) to son (Jung) in the time when Freud was writing »Totem and Taboo«. Son has chosen the mother. We could say that he anticipated the road of development of psychoanalysis towards the mother as a central figure, the road that was lead by women psychoanalysts.

### Jung and the First Splittings

In his analysis of the Oedipus Complex and Oedipus myth, Jung dedicated full attention to the character of Sphinx, which he assumed as a representative of the maternal image of avenging, dangerous mother. Analyzing Sphinx, Jung stressed she was a daughter of two feminine components: Echidna serpent and Gea; so she is thoroughly feminine. On the other hand, she is the opposite of Jocasta – while Sphinx is anthropomorphous, sterile, the destroyer of young men, a monster, a female vampire and a virgin, Jocasta is a woman, a wife, a mother and a grandmother, a beauty and a mistress.

At this moment we find it appropriate to remember the riddle of Sphinx:« Which creature of earth walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three at night and is weaker the more legs it has?«

The answer is »A man«, and only Oedipus answered correctly. And who better could discover the solution to a riddle, which is based on, the locomotion, than the man whose greatest suffering was connected with the locomotion, who was crippled his whole life, handicapped in his locomotion.

In the Jung's interpretation of the myth, the stress was put on the fact that Oedipus got the widow's hand in marriage only after he conquered Sphinx. Although he conquered one, he fell in the claws of the other. In our opinion, Sphinx could today be seen as a phantasm of the preoedipal, a greedy mother, who must die, from whom a child should be separated in order to be able to enter into a fantasized triangular love relationship with the Oedipal mother. So, considering from this point of view, we consider Jung as a forerunner of the present day explanation of the Oedipus Complex.

Anyway, Jung was the one who suggested as a supplement expression: the Electra Complex, as a symmetric position in girls, but at that time his suggestion was rejected. Now, 80 years later, it is being considered again.<sup>4</sup> Jung was the first one stressing that little girl's position does not differ solely due to the phallic organization and the cathexis of the libido on the phallus, but also due to her previous attachment to her mother.

For a girl, the Oedipus Complex represents the reorientation from the mother to the father as an object of love, but now she has to behave towards the mother, the one she depended on and has symbiotically bounds, as her rival.

Therefore, Jung has stressed the problem of the symbiotic bounds towards the mother. Freud's breaking up with Adler and later also O. Rank was, as in the case of Jung, was based on the central position Oedipus and sexual etiology of neurosis. Through Abraham who was not a dissident, and who revised the theory of psychosexual development particularly stressing the early, pregenital phases, we came to his analyst M. Klein.

### Melanie Klein<sup>5</sup> and the »Early Oedipus«

She thinks that the Oedipus Complex is »on the stage« from the first year of life, that it comes out from the depressive position and reaches its culmination in the phallic phase of psychosexual development. She differentiates the »Oedipal situation« from the »Oedipal Complex«. According to Melanie Klein, both a girl and a boy start with the Oedipal Complex in its direct and inverse form. Using the relation towards the breast as a starting point of view, she thinks that if a boy can identify the breast as a good object, then later, he transfers a part of these libidinal strivings to the father's penis, which also becomes a good, creative organ. This becomes the basis of his inverse Oedipal Complex and makes his first homosexual position, but, at the same time, is one of the prerequisites for the boy's capacity to develop positive Oedipal strivings, because he believes in the goodness of father's and his own penis. The trust in a good father will later help him to confront the rivalry with father in a form of competition rather than the destructive rivalry.

In the same way, boy's sadistic fantasies can be transferred to father's penis, which, under the influence of the destructive projected strivings might sting, bite, poison or hurt. Oral, urethral and anal fantasies in which boy with his teeth, urine and defecation attacks mother's body can be projected into a fear of the mother's genitals in the form of »vagina dentate« or »cloak«. If on the other side, the breast reactivates libidinal fantasies about the internal contents, urine and defecation will get characteristics of good contents. The same principle is valid for the primary scene, which could be experienced as an attack and hurting or as giving a gift in the form of a baby. From the unconscious recognition of the creative and reparative function of the penis, boy can get a feeling of pride, and these feelings would corroborate his separation and individuation and help him to overcome the Oedipal Complex.

In Melanie Klein's<sup>6</sup> theory the early stages of the Oedipal Complex in girls are very alike to these stages in boys' development; they are also oscillating between the heterosexual and homosexual position, and between the aggressive and libidinal strivings. Further on, she stresses the importance of the primary family triangulation, which enables the child to form two separate connections with each parent, and confronts him with a third line in the triangle: the connection between the parents from which the child is excluded. If a child can tolerate the relation between the parents, it will derive from it a

prototype or a model for a third kind of a relationship with object – model in which the child is a witness and not an active participant.

In 1952, Lampl de Groot also stressed that the Oedipus Complex is developing in the condition of early attachment to the mother, which determines relations during the Oedipal period and later on. Disturbances in the preoedipal relations thus influence further development and cause abnormal forms and weaknesses in the Oedipal constellation.

### **Margaret Mahler and the Separation – Individuation**

One of the most important strikes to the centrality of the Oedipus Complex as the main crossroad on the developmental trail of individual has come out of the field of investigation, which was not dealing with this concept. Namely, it came from the researches done by M. Mahler and her collaborators, who brought the concept of the separation-individuation. We would like to draw the attention to the term individuation, which is so important, though in some different meaning, for the Jung's school.

In this article we would not like to work out in detail this developmental concept, so well known and important in the contemporary psychoanalysis. We would just like to mention it in the context of the evaluation of the centrality of the Oedipus complex today.

In short, the theoretical concept of the process of separation-individuation which lasts from the second half of the first year till the beginning of the third year of life (just some time before entering in the Oedipus), restores the rapprochement subphase as a critical point. It is also the crossroads towards the mental health through the peaceful Oedipal period, or towards the borderline pathology, which could have its own hysterical elements, as consequences of unsolved and by the »basic fault« impeded Oedipal phase.

The Blanks<sup>7</sup> (in 1986) also warn the Oedipal position is not based only on the erogenous zone, but also on the psychological development, related to the amount of autonomous functioning, process of separation-individuation and identity formation. That is the reason why the destiny of Oedipal situation is still written, for both girls and boys, in the dyadic relationship with mother.

In girls, the process is complicated by their need to transfer love from mother to father, and at the same time to eliminate the object of which she was symbiotically dependent. A girl could not stand these impulses, if she had not finished the developmental process of separation-individuation.

### **Georges Devereux and the Laius Complex**

Both Freud and M. Klein have looked upon the Oedipus Complex as something inborn, (Urcomplex), and predisposed by genes. In 1953, Ethno-psychoana-

lyst G. Devereux asked a question, re-analyzing the Oedipus myth, on how big is the father's role – Laius, in the sequence of events. As we have mentioned previously, and which had not been said to the audience of the Sophocles' play, Laius was damned because of his impudence in his youth. In this impudence, he grabbed and raped Chrysippas, a beloved son of Laius' protector, king Pelops. The problem was not in the homosexual act; homosexuality was rather common in that time, but in his impudence (hubris) which governed him to neglect the opinion of his mentor. Laius did not ask king Pelops for his approval to have sex with Chrysippas, though he could get this approval. Due to this negligence, Pelops damned him by a curse in which his own son would kill him. That was the beginning of Oedipus's destiny, and the reason for being rejected as a baby. Here, we can remember a verse from holy Bible: »Sins of fathers will fall down on sons«.

The goddess Hera, the protectress of home and family, decided to punish Laius for his sin. She decided on a double punishment. She sent Sphinx to destroy Thebes, by killing young Theban males that did not know to solve her riddle. In this way, Laius' punishment had a broader, social meaning. His personal punishment was the damnation that his own son would kill him.

On the other side, king Pelops has his own trauma; with his father Tantalus, known by the expression »the torture of Tantalus«. To ingratiate himself with the gods, Tantalus sacrificed his own son Pelops; he roasted him and offered him as a meal. Seeing what he had done, gods brought Pelops back to life and punished Tantalus by permanent torture. He was condemned to eternal thirst and hunger and though he was trying to eat and drink, but never could fulfill his hunger and thirst. Therefore, this direct sequence of transgenerational aggression, hate and sacrifice on the father-son relation, finally lead to the story of Oedipus. We can notice that Tantalus' aggression towards Pelops was cannibalistic and related to the oral aggression; the one of Laius on Chrysippas was homosexual and thus anal, while in Oedipus conflict with Laius, the winner was rewarded by the »Oedipal reward« – a sexual intercourse with his mother.

Following all these facts, Devereux asked himself, if it would not be more appropriate to speak about the Laius Complex, whose consequence was Oedipus' tragedy. By doing this, he questioned the Oedipal positions as something inborn, almost biologically determined, and opens the field of transgenerational transmission of trauma and the resulting psychopathology.

### **Heinz Kohut<sup>8</sup> – Oedipus and Odysseus**

As we can see, most of the important, »new psychoanalytic schools« started by redefining the Oedipus Complex, and thus questioning its centrality in the human psychology.

Kohut, the inventor of self-psychology, in his latest article starts from the thesis that Oedipus Complex is

not a universal phenomenon, as is the case with the Oedipal developmental stage.

In his development, each child has minor or major conflicts related to this developmental stage, but this also depends on the parents and their psychological health, which, in Kohut's opinion, can be seen in the capacities for empathy, so that the child can pass this stage safely and without traumas, or would not be fixed in this stage and develop a neurosis. If parents are not »good« enough or healthy, the transgenerational sequence of pathology continues. Though, by Kohut's opinion, the psychoanalysts more often see the psychopathology than health, this does not mean that psychopathology is the core of the human existence. Looking from this point of view, the Oedipus Complex is more an artifact than essence.

Kohut contrasts the »Human of guilt« to the »Human of tragedy«, where the central conflict lies in the fact that through the relation with others, he cannot actually realize all the potentials of his own self.

Further on, Kohut thinks that under the Freud's suggestive interpretation of myth, the psychoanalysts did not recognize that Oedipus was rejected, unloved child. If a parent loves his child, he/she is pleased with the child's development, which is from the narcissistic position, the extension of parent's own self. The power of myth is as big as the Freud's authority and Kohut thinks that we confront the »Oedipus by Freud« by suggestively placing another myth in the juxtaposition. For him it is the Homer's Odysseus, a »first modern human«, someone with whom we can easier identify, than with Sophocles' tragic Oedipus.

When Greeks went off to the Trojan War, the war leaders Agamemnon, Menelaus and Palamedes asked all the kings to join them. Young Odysseus, the leader of Ithaca, recently married and had a baby son, did not want to go to war, so he decided to pretend to have gone mad. He harnessed both a donkey and an ox, sowing the field with salt, wearing a strange hat on his head pretending not to recognize the war leaders. Palamedes suspected he was cheating so he threw young Telemachus on the ground in front of the plough of Odysseus. Odysseus did not want to hurt his son, so he made a semicircle with his plough, thus confessing he was cheating. Kohut takes this act as a metaphor of a normal, healthy relationship between the father and the son, and named it »the semicircle of mental health«. Odysseus refused to sacrifice his son, and this differs him from many human and god figures in the myths. With Kohut the Oedipus Complex exists, but only as the psychopathology.

### **Thomas Ogden<sup>9</sup> – an Attempt of Synthesis Freud-Klein**

Among the recent theoretical attempts of redefining the role of Oedipus Complex, we find Ogden as one of the most interesting. He offers us a complete new theory on the origins and the meaning of the Oedipus Complex,

which is based on the synthesis of different psychoanalytic schools – both the ones which dealt mostly with the pregenital and the ones of the genital development.

He based his own theory on the concepts of splitting, schiso-paranoid and depressive position and early triangulation, and introduces also the concept of a transitional mother, which is based on Winnicott's model of a transitional object. Both boys and girls have a transitional relationship with their mothers. This is a transitional period between the symbiosis, which includes partial objects, and a triangular relationship, which includes the perception of the other as a subject, a person completely separate from the child.

Ogden stresses that, on first site, boy does not change the object of love, but in fact the preoedipal mother, the mother from symbiosis, and the oedipal mother are not the same. The transitional period allows boy to restore the dialectical tension between the relationships with the preoedipal and the Oedipal mother.

The preoedipal mother is experienced as omnipotent, just partially separated from the child, and Ogden named her a »subjective object«; boy has to fight to create some distance between her and himself (so as to separate from her), and to create the love affection with a completely separated oedipal mother, a »seductive« mother. In the separation process, the primary scene is of great help to the boy, in which the existence of »the third one« enables the perception and the acceptance of separated objects instead of self-objects.

As far as her role is concerned, the mother in this process is the one who, through the identification with her oedipal father, through her »male part« which she projects to her son, brings a phallic father in the oedipal relationship with her son, and enables the boy to get his own phallus (feeling of power and maleness). The real, biological father is a secondary bearer of phallus with which boy can identify.

So, at the beginning of the Oedipal phase, mother is both an internal self-object, a representative of the father who gives phallus and also an external object – the object of boy's sexual desires. By entering the more mature oedipal relationship, boy does not feel himself any more as a part of the world of partial objects, but becomes a subject in the world of complete objects; he feels excitement in the fact that he has a phallus and through a more mature identification with his father, boy takes mother as the object of love and sexual desires.

Trying to explain the female Oedipal Complex, Ogden begins with the dyadic relationship and mother's capability to identify with her Oedipal father.

Therefore, here again Ogden stresses the transition of investment not from mother towards father, but from the relationship with the inner object (preoedipal mother) towards the relationship with outer objects – both mother and father. If the preoedipal relationship with mother were good, the child would be able to give up the omnipotent control of objects and invest into outer objects, which are out of control. Furthermore, from Og-

den's point of view, girl is not guided with shame and anger towards mother in Oedipus, but with a healthy narcissism, hope and dedication towards the new. He also opens a dilemma – what does the fear of castration mean in her fantasy and if girl really thinks about her genitals as defective or not? Girl's early relationship with her mother is a relationship with the environmental mother and with the objective mother. The environmental mother is a part of girl's self, and child feels her almost identical to herself. It seems that girl created the environmental mother in accordance with her wishes. Because all of this, Ogden names such mother as the »subjective object«. The child of 6–12 months, from this subjective object, through the transitional object (which is created by the child, but also real for the child) starts to discover and accept outer objects and the world. This very transitional space between the real and the fantasized enables the creation of symbols and imagination. While the preoedipal mother is the subjective object, the oedipal mother is the outer, separated object. According to Ogden, girl's anger towards mother comes from the fact that she (mother) is changed, she is not a subjective object any more, but became an outer object, out of control and girl's wishes. It seems that in the Oedipal phase girl falls in love with that part of mother which is not completely separated yet, the transitional mother who is identified with her Oedipal father, the »father in mother«. From mother's side it is very important that she is able to see her daughter through male eyes, and transmit her message »If I would be a male, I would fall in love with you, I would find you pretty, I would marry you«. The real father comes to stage at this moment, to confirm the message given by the transitional mother. So, only if the transitional mother sends a message to her daughter »You are pretty and seductive«, girl would have courage to try to seduce her father, and later on other male figures. Therefore, we may say that from the dyadic relationship with mother, both a boy and a girl form the Oedipal triangulation. If mother solved her Oedipal conflict, she will transgenerationally enable her children to step into the Oedipal phase and to solve their conflicts. If she did not do that, boy will not be able to experience himself as phallic strong, but also there is no prohibition of incest from the third one, the male in mother. On the other side, girl develops either hyperfemininity or a competitive relationship with males. So, the development of gender identity is the reflection of interplay between the masculine and feminine identifications. It is extremely important that in this interplay the child does not have to choose any of the parents. If it has to choose one of them, it can be neither feminine nor masculine, but develops a pseudoidentity.

### **The »Female Oedipus« – Electra and Persephone**

So Ogden brought us to the field of considering the female Oedipus Complex. Aside from Ogden's theory which was presented, the most interesting theories for

us were the theories of female analysts H. C. Halberstadt-Freud<sup>10</sup>, and N. Kulish and D. Holzman<sup>11</sup>, who substitute the Oedipus myth with myths about Persephone and Electra. Jung was the first one who had offered Electra as a model for the female phallic stage development conflicts. The main remark why this myth does not correspond to the Oedipus for men lied in the fact that Electra planned for long time to kill her mother and her mother's lover, while Oedipus killed his father without knowing whom he killed. This unconsciousness makes Oedipus a better model for neurotic people, whose wish to eliminate the parent of same sex is completely unconscious, too.

The difference in myths is obvious, nevertheless thinking about pregenital development of relations with mother, especially in girls for whom the elimination of pregenital, phallic mother is more prominent than rivalry with Oedipal mother, brought up the questioning of Electra's model once again.

Maybe the »crossroads« where the aggression and libido meet in girls and boys are not on the same symmetric places.

In her theory H. C. Halberstadt-Freud agrees with Ogden that girl in her development does not have to change the first object of love in order to become a female; the main field of conflict is the oscillation between the symbiotic illusion in her relationship with mother, and the hatred towards her. Relationship with the inner maternal imago may become the source of strength and advance the female development, but can also be the source of the pathology. She also thinks that girl turns to male object of love not instead of, but as addiction to the first object of love, mother. In a healthy development, girl does not give up her internal mother, but she gives up the fantasy of the phallic mother (preoedipal, dominant), allowing herself to recognize the differences between the parents, and to restore a heterosexual wish.

The mythical character Electra was planning for many years to kill her mother Clytemnestra, accusing her for neglecting and at the same time idealizing her distanced and cruel father Agamemnon. Because of this strong ambivalence, hatred but dependency of mother and the idealization of father, H. C. Halberstadt-Freud finds her a better model for the conflict of the phallic stage in girls than Oedipus is.

The author thinks that stressed change of love from the first object of love mother, towards father, which Freud named the Oedipus complex in women, was in fact a result of the psychopathology. It could be applied to the hysterical structures, which seems rather logical if we remember that Freud based his theory on his experiences with the neurotics. According to Halberstadt-Freud's opinion, girl is during her whole life connected with the first object of love, mother, although these connections are often ambivalent. The separation from mother is often rather partial than the total one and the ambivalence in which there are contained both love and hatred is prolonged for many years.

The pathology in solving the complex can go take two directions – either girl rejects mother and in her hatred turns away from her, or she stays for her whole life in close, symbiotic relationship with her. But neither of these two choices includes turning the object of love from mother to father.

About the penis envy, author thinks that it does not come from the feeling of being castrated, but it is a result of the wish for power and against the dependency. The wish to have a child is also the authentic female wish, and not just a replacement for a penis.

#### *Vignette from psychotherapy*

Female patient XZ is forty-five years old, intellectual, divorced, mother of an adolescent son. She seems much younger, and feels like that. Her whole life she »saw her reflection in the mirror of other peoples' eyes, and felt in concordance to this reflection she saw«. She tried to be good, obedient, hiding aggression and sacrificing for the sick members of her family. She split her bad parts from the good ones and usually projected to others. In a relationship, she is distrustful for a long time, but when she finally accepts someone, she »completely gives up herself in his arms«. If such a person hurts her, she is strongly traumatized, and unable to repair the trauma, she breaks the relationship forever. »This person for me is dead,« she says. The sexuality and her own body were for her the »unknown field« for her whole life, and also the source of insecurities, and the only role which gave her a sense of security was the mother's role. She started the therapy because of depressive decompensation, after breaking the emotional relationship with her lover. For a long time in the therapy she was unable to remember the things from her childhood, youth, but also from previous sessions. For more than a year and a half in the therapy she idealized her father, while projecting all bad parts to her mother. A year before she was born, her 6 months old brother died, so that at the time of her birth, her mother was probably depressed and functioned as A. Greens says a »dead mother«. That was the first depressive decompensation of her mother; she later became an alcoholic, and after her husband's death became manically depressive psychotic.

After 2 ½ years of therapy, XZ began to see her parents in a more colored way rather than a white-black technique. She remembered the circumstances, which could influence her mother to brake down, and her father also became »just a human« with a lot of qualities but also some faults. Finally she verbalized that in her youth »she reproached her father for not deciding to divorce, and taking her away to a new life«.

Though in this patient we can see some features of the Electra's Complex, the basic pathology is narcissistic, and it is probably caused by the mother's inability to reflect her daughter's authentic personality.

In the transference-counter transference relationship with the female therapist, the role of a helpless, obedient, and seductive little girl is often dominant. It

seems that therapist is still a partial, good object, and probably there is a risk of developing passive, addicted transference or of rejecting the therapy in the inability to stand the aggressive feelings in transference.

#### **Kulish and Holtzman and the Persephone (Core) Complex**

N. Kulish and D. Holtzman found the main explanation for female conflicts in the phallic period in the myth of Persephone; the myth which in their opinion, mirrors the Oedipal dilemmas of loyalty towards father and mother, fear of loosing the virginity and fear of the adult sexuality. They also stress girl's duty to compete with her mother of whom she is at the same time dependant, because mother is her first object of love. For them this myth reflects the core difference in the level of separation, with which boys and girls enter the Oedipal situation. In the analysis of their patients and in the literature, the authors have noticed that the material connected with the separation even in the triangular fantasies in females is very prominent, and it does not have the meaning of psychopathological regression.

In other words, when entering the Oedipal phase boys have mostly achieved separation from the pre-oedipal mother; the material related to the separation in the Oedipal phase in males is regressive and it stands for the escape from the Oedipal situation, or it is a sign of not good enough separation from the omnipotent mother. A complete separation in a healthy male is probably helped by little boy's male identifications. Girl is not in a symmetrical position at the moment when she enters the Oedipal triangular situation; the separation from mother is much lesser and this process of separation continues through the Oedipal phase and ends in the adolescence. The main point lies in the fact that Oedipus and Persephone do not have the same starting positions for their adventures. Therefore, the authors suggest that the »Persephone Complex« can be used as a specific complex for girls.

In our opinion, at this moment, it would be useful to retell the Persephone myth. The authors rely in their theory on the variant of the myth taken from Homer's hymns to Demeter related to the Eleusian Mysteries, the cult of fertility underlying this story.

Core (means a girl, a virgin in Greek) was the daughter of Demeter and Zeus. She was picking the flowers on the meadow with other girls, and when she picked a particularly nice flower – a daffodil, the earth opened under her feet and she was kidnapped by Hades, the king of death and the underworld. No one heard her screaming. In some versions of the story, the motive of raping is even more stressed. In the underground world she became Hades' wife and got a new name – Persephone. In the meantime, Demeter came from Olympus to earth, trying to find her daughter. Zeus also took a part in this search, and tried to persuade Hades to let Persephone go. By fraud, Hades made Persephone eat seven seeds, and by doing this she was bound with him

(in the classical mythology, eating seeds represents the sexual union). In different versions eating seeds was differently presented – from fraud, compelling and unwilling act to a conscious and willing act of Persephone. A compromise among goods yielded a deal – Persephone was spending one third of year in the underworld and two thirds on the earth with her mother. This is connected with the seasons. The Wintertime is the period, which Persephone spends with Hades and spring and summer are the seasons she spends on the earth.

So, the compromise in the Oedipal (Persephone) phase shows a predominance of the symbiosis with the pre-oedipal mother over the oedipal, triangular situation. Girl functions on two parallel levels and the fixation on this phase manifests itself in patients as the oscillation typical for the hysterical structures (which was the topic that Ruprecht Schampera wrote on).

#### *Vignette from psychotherapy:*

A 30-years-old female patient XL, in the first year of her second psychotherapy retold a dream: »She was coming down the stairs in her new house... In the living room, there is her father, sitting by the table covered by a green blanket and he was playing cards with his friends. Room is half-dark, there is only one lamp on a table and it is switched on, and the light is in the level of the players' eyes. She went to the kitchen. Someone raped her on the stow, there was a vacuum cleaner there. She was surprised that her father did not help her, since he could have heard what was going on in the other room.«

The patient put her dream in her 17<sup>th</sup> year, and told that she remembered it recently. Continuing the therapy she started to read again Freud's »Interpretation of dreams«, and she tried to explain herself the meaning of diamond tears in the dream, or her father's running after her with a knife in his hand. In further associations, she connects the kitchen and the vacuum cleaner with her mother, and the staircase she connects with the sexuality and the loss of virginity. I asked her about the person who raped her – who could he be? She knew that I would surprise her with such a question, and answered with Freud's help »Freud would say father« she replied.

It seems that this situation in a dream conforms to the unconscious fantasy from the myth of Persephone and the sexualisation of the therapeutic situation, but not by »Oedipal content« but by a different sexuality, which still includes the triangular situation. A lot of other things from patient's anamnesis also lead us in this direction. At this moment, I would like to turn to the dream and stress the mother's presence represented via a kitchen and a vacuum cleaner that suggests strong and aggressive oral fantasies of sucking in and sucking out. The oral omnipotent symbiotic mother – earth, Gaia, Demeter. The father's character is doubled – the »real« father Zeus plays cards with other gods in the living room – Olympus, while the other »sexual« father Hades, the devil, raped girl Core in a kitchen, the underground

of mother earth. It must be added that the image of a »sexual father-devil« is often present in the dreams or sexual fantasies of my patient. On the transference relationship with the male therapist, and play of seduction with seeds and way to unconscious (underground, hell, Hades) I would not like to speak into further details, I would just quote the patient's expression »hellishly good«.

#### **Oedipus as a Narcissistic Patient**

When we are writing about the conflicts in the pre-oedipal communication and their implication to the Oedipus Complex, we find it interesting to mention H. Groen-Prakken's article<sup>3</sup> from 1998. The author stresses, by quoting Friedman from 1986 and Rangel from 1953, that a child, who has problems in solving the Oedipal conflict, had his developmental difficulties in the pre-oedipal periods, too. On the other side, there is no child who can solve completely the Oedipus conflict till the age of 6 or 7; its solving is a long lasting challenge, which is not present only in the relation of children towards their parents, but also in the relations of parents towards children.

Analyzing the Oedipus myth, Groen-Prakken stated her opinion that Oedipus had to act out the universal fantasy of boys, because he was traumatized in early months of his life. His mother gave him up, and was ready to sacrifice him; his parents damaged him by causing permanent physical injuries, because of which he was exposed to the mocking of other people in his toddler years. Even the relation of his adoptive parents was probably ambivalent, which can be noted in the name they gave him (swollen footed) and in the fact that they hid he was adopted by them (we should not forget that the infertility mirrored their disgrace). Out of all this, as Groen-Prakken writes, it is easy to assume that at the age of two, Oedipus had a weakened sense of self due to a faulty basic attachment, a physical deformation, the ambivalence of his parents, the humiliation and a large quantity of narcissistic rage. At age of 2 or 2 and 1/2 little Oedipus is not well equipped to enter the next developmental stage of childhood, the phallic and Oedipal stage. His character was determined by a vital need to avoid narcissistic hurts and the accompanying shame.

In her article, the author gives more importance to the shame as a result of complete rejection and feeling of worthlessness in Oedipus psychical world, than to guilt. »Children hide their eyes when they are ashamed and Oedipus took out his eyes and thus symbolically hid them. However this is not a symbolic castration; neither it is a symbolic self-punishment for murdering his father. It is a symbolic rape which reflects the sadistic sexual impulses and hatred towards the women in Oedipus. So this act may reveal a primitive guilt: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, the rapist can be punished only by rape.«

We would like to add here some other thoughts on the meaning of Oedipus' self-blindness. We agree with Groen-Prakken, it does not symbolize castration. If a



main problem were quilt, the punishment would be physical castration. However, what is the use of castrating someone who has already been castrated symbolically by his father, with angles pierced and tied at ankles, condemned to a life-long lameness? On the other side, Oedipus did not punish himself by suicide, as Jocasta did.

Instead of this he chooses self-blindness, condemning himself to the »clarity of the night«. He chooses a road, which was mentioned also in a Bible: »If your eyes offend you, pull them up and throw them far from you«. Being isolated from his surrounding by blindness, avoiding contacts with the external, real environment, Oedipus approaches the state similar to the psychosis. This moment is stressed by H. E. Grimaldi, Jung's follower, who takes this point of view of the myth and concludes: »It is not good to realize, it is not healthy to realize, if one realizes the entirety, it psychotises«.

#### *Vignette from psychotherapy:*

A male patient YZ, forty years old, intellectual, very well educated, came to ask for the psychotherapeutic help because of his permanent fights with the authorities; many times these fights have put his professional career in danger. He also could not establish constant emotional relationships with females.

The first year in therapy was dedicated to his relationship with his father, who was very a respected man in the society. The father was an invalid from his youth, and according to YZ opinion, too weak to be his ideal«. Duels with a stronger male were a great challenge for YZ. He did not mention females a lot; his mother was not mentioned the whole year. At the beginning of the therapy, the Oedipal themes were dominant, but as time passed, the patient's vulnerable, narcissistic structure became prominent. At the end of the second year of therapy, he started to mention his mother, and described her as a »woman without emotions, who lived her whole life in the past«. These statements were followed by a few scenes in which his mother put him to shame in front of his friends. In his dreams and in the transference, the splitting of female characters to »witches« and »fairies« is dominant. »Witches are powerful, they always have their own way, they are always dominating«, said YZ. In situations in which the libidinal feelings are dominant in transference, patient escaped in acting-outs. It is obvious that female therapist in that period was the preoedipal, omnipotent, dangerous, castrative phallic mother.

He brought a dream with the following content:« I am dreaming that I am lying in my room, on my bed. Suddenly my father enters the room and has a big knife in his hand, I am escaping, turning around and see some bloodthirsty monster instead of my father. I am hiding behind the curtain, and dream stops«. In his associations he remembered a situation from his early youth, when his mother beat him in front of his friends, because he got dirty while trying to be the best jumper over the brook.

By analyzing the manifest content of a dream, on one side it seems as a fear from the castration done by the father, but the patient's associations lead us to a phantasm of a »dangerous blood-thirsty monster«, the preoedipal mother who put his life in danger, and did not allow her son to enjoy growing up. Father's weakness, to which my patient complains, in a context of his dominant narcissistic pathology, it is obviously a weakness related to father's disability to make him free from the dangerous symbiosis with an unempathic mother.

So, the analysis of a dream also confirms a thesis that even in a patient, where at the beginning the difficulties in solving the Oedipal conflict seemed as dominant, at the basis there was a disturbed relationship with the unempathic mother, what had caused the narcissistic pathology.

### **The Oedipal Conflict and the Contemporary Psychoanalysis – Synthesis**

Now, at the end, let's try to answer the questions that have been asked at the beginning.

If the psychoanalysis in practice began with Breuer's therapy with Anna O., and Freud's patient Emmy von N., we might say that the theoretical »building« has its foundations in Freud's auto-analysis, which brought up the Oedipus complex. For Freud, it was the shibboleth (key word), and for us it is the »foundation stone«. However in the first 100 years, the psychoanalysis has gone further and deeper than Freud did. In this article we have spoken about some of those travels »on the other side of Oedipus«. Of course, surely, many of new ideas were not even mentioned.

A metaphor comes up naturally. Oedipus killed his father on the crossroad to Delphi, without knowing whom he is killing. Many ways are crossed on the crossroad... Or the other metaphor – navel, the focal point of the human body is at the same time a scar of the previous reunion with mother and a castration of child and mother's organ – placenta. The metaphor of navel is used for the crossroad of latent thought of dreams, which became the basis for the manifest dream content. Like a focal point – navel of a dream, the more recent literature contains writings about the navel of hysteria as the psychopathological organization of symptoms.

During the recent years the main focus of the psychoanalytic interest has changed from phallic, genital, drive, oedipal to pregenital, preoedipal, relational; from father as a central figure of the psychological development of child to he relationship with mother. This desexualized the psychoanalysis and Oedipus has lost his primate. But using the metaphor of navel, we might say that instead of being a fundamental stone in the historical development of psychoanalysis, it has stayed the crossroad of aggression and libido, crossroad of psychopathology and normality, chiasm of genital (hysterical) and pregenital (borderline) – in one word, the navel of the psychoanalysis.

In the end, we may conclude that in the contemporary psychoanalytic therapies, the analysis of the Oedipus Complex is of great importance. However, for sure, it is not enough if all of the preoedipal conflicts are not analyzed as well, because they lie in the basic inability to solve the Oedipus conflict. The core of the theoretical research of the contemporary analysis is the moment of analyzing the relationship with preoedipal and oedipal mother, in the development of both girls and boys. The question of femininity is still in theoretical conceptualization, because, as we have seen, Freud has sufficiently analyzed the male development (or at least the biggest

part of it), but »the Dark Continent of the female development was left by him to the others to explore more. He insisted on keeping the model of the female development as an inversion of the male development, which was also stressed by the unhappy term the »female Oedipus«. That is the reason for the present growth of new models.

Nevertheless, the conflicts of phallic phases of the psychosexual development are universal to all human being, no matter how we call them – Oedipus, Electra or Persephone Complex.

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