

Freud's interpretation of sophicles' oedipus tyrannus is ridiculous

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" Freud's interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus is ridiculous. "

Discuss This essay will discuss the interpretation of Oedipus Tyrannus by Freud and whether his interpretation holds any weight in using it to aid his own theory, the Oedipus complex, or whether it was a ridiculous reading of the play itself. Freud's theory will be explored first, before moving on to look at the interpretation itself. This will give a strong sense of how the Oedipus complex comes about in a young child and help in the discussion as to whether Oedipus may have been fulfilling this unconscious desire.

The discussion will also touch upon Freud's belief that it is his own theory that explains the reason for the play's long-lasting success. Sigmund Freud is the father of a branch of psychology that he named psychoanalysis, as well as having a tremendous influence in how modern psychology has developed since the turn of the 20th Century. Freud was born on May 6th 1856. The first reference to Freud having used Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus to help strengthen his theory of the Oedipus complex, which is explained below, and also the first mention of the Oedipus complex altogether comes in 1900 in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

However, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* the theory is clearly only just beginning to be devised by Freud as it is not until 1910 that the term ' Oedipus complex' is first used. To be able to understand Freud's interpretation of Oedipus Tyrannus it is vital to grasp what the Oedipus complex actually refers to. Before discussing the Oedipus complex it is important to discuss the earlier psychosexual development of a child, which

leads into the development of the Oedipus complex. The first two stages, or the 'pregenital' stages, begin very early in life.

The first is the oral stage, unsurprisingly, as infants first derive sexual pleasure primarily through the mouth; such as tasting, sucking, and making sounds. This stage is followed by the anal stage, in which the infant has discovered the anus. This stage is focused on the control of the self and gives the infant the first opportunity to gain a sense of independence and achievement through learning to control the bowel and bladder. With the next stage, the phallic stage, the Oedipus complex starts to become apparent. It is during this time that the child discovers the difference between a boy and girl, the boy begins to see the father as a rival for his mother's affections, but also develops a fear of the father becoming a rival for the mother's affections. Alongside these developments the child finds the genital area as an erogenous zone. The 'castration complex' can develop throughout this period and it is important to think of the male and female child as, 'with penis' or 'castrated', relatively.

Freud believed that the male child saw the female child as a castrated boy and thus the result of, what seemed to be common in the turn of the century, the threat of parents telling young boys to stop playing with their genitals or they will be cut off. The young boy now believes that the father becomes a real threat to the affections for his mother. Between the age of four and five, Freud believed that the young child develops sexual feelings for his mother, and alongside this wants to have complete possession of her and thus hostile feelings develop towards the father.

However, the possibility of castration that the young boy has understood to be seen in the naked girl, poses a horrific possibility to the boy. With the loss of his penis at stake, as in the young boy's mind this is the form of retaliation the father will take to any hostile action from the child, the boy focuses his attention towards other feminine sources for sexual satisfaction. This is the Oedipus complex laid out as unimpeded development of the young boy and variations to this development through childhood is how Freud can explain 'abnormal' sexual behavior.

For the young girl the Oedipus complex follows a different path once the difference between boy and girl has been realised. The lack of a penis is seen, through the young girl's eyes, as the fault of her mother, because of this the girl moves away from the need to possess the mother and begins to long for the father in a similarly sexual manner and the wish for him to impregnate her. It is the resulting child that Freud imagines can 'cure' the girl of her 'penis envy' seeing the baby as a replacement for the missing organ.

For Freud however the female never really surpasses this stage of penis envy. With Freud's interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus it is the male side of the Oedipus complex that is discussed. It is obvious that Oedipus indeed performs the actions that one would attribute to the desires of the Oedipus complex being fulfilled: The murder of his father and the sexual union with his mother. Freud's interpretation, however, seems to conveniently ignore certain aspects of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, which upon inspection provide obstacles for Freud's theory to navigate.

In the development of his theory on the Oedipus complex, Freud undertook a great deal of self analysis and as such it is questionable as to how generalised his thoughts can be used to understand the human development. Freud had seen the play Oedipus Tyrannus and; " saw himself in a very concrete sense as Oedipus. " With this in mind Freud's interpretation of Oedipus Tyrannus is not lessened in itself, but this does have bearings on his interpretation as proof of the Oedipus complex. Tragedy, as in all art forms, is open to interpretation no matter what the original artist intended as the meaning.

For Freud, Oedipus represents the fulfilment of the early sexual desires towards the mother and the aggressive behaviour towards the father. However, that Oedipus does not know that these two people are his biological parents seems to belittle Freud's use of Oedipus as an exemplum for his theory. Freud's use of Oedipus is meant to show that the Oedipus complex " transcends time and place. " That Oedipus has a lack of knowledge of his true parents doesn't seem to affect Freud in his use of Oedipus in this way. In my opinion, however, this use is severely at odds to the point that Freud attempts to make.

A child, according to the Oedipus complex, that grew up with non-biological parents should have had little to no effect upon the early stages that lead to the development of the Oedipus complex, thus little to no effect upon the complex itself. Oedipus was sent away as an infant to be killed, but instead grew up with different parents. This, therefore, gives no reason to think that

the idea that Oedipus sleeping with his biological mother and killing his biological father is the Oedipus complex realising itself within Oedipus.

The interpretation by Freud seems to have used the popularity of Oedipus Tyrannus, at the time he was developing his theory, to help in popularising and explaining the Oedipus complex. Although Freud himself seems to have believed that Oedipus was, indeed, a good example of his theory: Broken down simply his argument runs, 1. There is a universal psychological conflict (Oedipus complex), as I have discovered in my clinical experience. 2. This is confirmed by a drama which has universal effectiveness. 3.

Why this drama is universally effective can only be understood if my hypothesis is correct. This reference to why the drama is universally effective is Freud's belief that the play in itself is not that challenging a concept. According to Freud it is only if his theory is correct that the ability of Oedipus Tyrannus to have had the "universal power to move" at all. This scientific sounding argument leaves little option for Freud to be wrong, as the play has indeed enjoyed thousands of years of success.

This, however, is according to Freud. Freud's interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus seems to continually leave absolutely no room for a lack of the Oedipus complex being present. Throughout Freud seems to have missed what many people miss in Oedipus Tyrannus, Some readers of the Oedipus Rex have told me that they find its atmosphere stifling and oppressive: they miss the tragic exaltation that one gets from Antigone or the Prometheus Vincit. They miss the courage of Oedipus, he knows of his fate and yet he carries on.

His blinding represents the fumbling of humanity for the truth in the world and it is in this strength portrayed Oedipus that one can gain the tragic exaltation normally expected from a Tragedy. Freud's interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus cannot be said to be an outright ridiculous interpretation. It is clear to see, when looking at the Oedipus complex, that Oedipus fulfils the exact fantasy of the young 'Freudian' boy. The Killing of his father and having a sexual relationship with his mother, however, when the interpretation is looked at closely it is obvious to see that there are clear flaws.

The process of the development of the Oedipus complex cannot occur properly if one of the parents is absent from childhood, let alone both of them. Oedipus fulfils the fantasy of the young boy, but with the 'wrong' parents, even though they are his biological parents. The idea that the Oedipus Tyrannus portrays the idea that no matter who, where, or when we exist, the complex is inescapable even if it remains in the subconscious 'is' ridiculous. If this was the case then it would have been the king and queen of Corinth that were involved in this play, Oedipus' adoptive parents.

That Freud felt a great similarity between himself and Oedipus is not ridiculous, in and of itself, it is the belief that his own self-analytical thoughts and the actions of Oedipus are actually similar that brings the interpretation into question. Oedipus acted without knowledge of his true parents, whereas Freud knew his parents and is discussing fantasy from childhood as opposed to actual action. The idea that Freud's theory provides a reason for Oedipus

Tyrannus' success is definitely ridiculous in nature. Oedipus is the representative of the, albeit tragic, character of perseverance.

He knows his fate yet carries on to find the truth, even after he has blinded himself he does not rest until he has made it to the site where he is prophesied to come to peace. Freud's interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus has many ridiculous aspects to it, but the use to which Freud uses his interpretation does retain an aspect of credibility. Bibliography * Armstrong, R. H. Oedipus as Evidence: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/articles/psyart1999/oedipus/armstr01.htm> (1998) * Gay, P the Freud reader (Vintage 1995) * Storr, A. Freud, A very short introduction (Oxford Uni. Press 1989) * Dodds, E. R.

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