

The Sinister Encounter with the Truth

Yannis Grammatopoulos

In *The Freudian Thing*, Lacan has Truth address Freud's disciples as "bloodhounds that Sophocles preferred to put on the scent of the hermetic traces of Apollo's thief than on Oedipus' bleeding heels, certain as he was of finding the moment of truth with him at the sinister meeting at Colonus."¹

This is not the only instance where Lacan invokes *Oedipus at Colonus*. In *Seminar II*, contemporary to *The Freudian Thing*, he asserts: "If the tragedy *Oedipus Rex* is an exemplary work, analysts should also be acquainted with this beyond of the drama realised in the tragedy of *Oedipus at Colonus*."² Indeed, while Freud never mentions this play, Lacan returns to it frequently. The choral lament "not to have been born" (μη φῶναι) recurs throughout the seminars and the *Écrits*, establishing the play as a significant lesson for psychoanalysts.

In effect, in *Oedipus Rex*, the hero – once the saviour of the city and now its absolute monarch – is the active seeker of truth. Conversely, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, he has become the miasma resulting from the discovery of the truth. He is depicted as a wandering, blind old man, destitute and embittered – "nothing more than the scum of the earth, the refuse, the residue, a thing empty of any plausible appearance"³; "an object that has no name at all."⁴

In *Seminar VII*, Lacan comments that all the Sophoclean heroes live in "special solitude"⁵ [...] "always isolated, they are always beyond established limits, always in an exposed position and, as a result, separated in one way or another from the structure".⁶ Furthermore, "they are at a limit that is not accounted for by their solitude relative to others".⁷

What exactly, then, is this "moment of truth" of which Lacan wrote in 1955? What was Sophocles certain of finding at Colonus — his own birthplace and, consequently, the very site where the injunction "not to have been born" was originally violated?

¹ Lacan, J., "The Freudian Thing, or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis", *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, p. 342.

² Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. J. Forrester, New York/London: Norton, 1988, p. 210.

³ *Ibid*, p. 232.

⁴ Laurent, É., "The Oedipus Complex", eds, R. Feldstein, B. Fink & M. Jaanus, *Reading Seminars I & II Lacan's Return to Freud*, SUNY Press, 1996, p. 71.

⁵ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 333.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 335.

Based on Lacan's approach to truth during the first period of his teaching, to which this text belongs, we could say that the moment of truth for Oedipus – stripped of “any plausible appearance” by his self-inflicted blindness – is the encounter with the horror of castration. As Jacques-Alain Miller has put it, within the framework of Lacan's early teaching, horror is the index of what Freud termed castration and what Lacan characterizes as truth.⁸ If *Oedipus Rex* dramatizes the pursuit of truth, *Oedipus at Colonus* unveils the tragic stakes that lie beyond its discovery.

⁸ Miller, J.-A., *Comment finissent les analyses, Paradoxes de la passe*, Navarin, 2022, p. 87.