



Freudian Mythologies: Greek Tragedy and Modern Identities

Rachel Bowlby

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More than a hundred years ago, Freud made a new mythology by revising an old one: Oedipus, in Sophocles' tragedy the legendary perpetrator of shocking crimes, was an Everyman whose story of incest and parricide represented the fulfillment of universal and long forgotten childhood wishes. The Oedipus complex - child, mother, father - suited the nuclear families of the mid-twentieth century. But a century after the arrival of the psychoanalytic Oedipus, it might seem that modern lives are very much changed. Typical family formations and norms of sexual attachment are changing, while the conditions of sexual difference, both biologically and socially, have undergone far-reaching modifications. Today, it is possible to choose and live subjective stories that the first psychoanalytic patients could only dream of. Different troubles and enjoyments are speakable and unspeakable; different selves are rejected, discovered, or sought. Many kinds of hitherto unrepresented or unrepresentable identity have entered into the ordinary surrounding stories through which children and adults find their bearings in the world, while others have become obsolete. Biographical narratives that would previously have seemed unthinkable or incredible-'a likely story!'-have acquired the straightforward plausibility of a likely story. This book takes two Freudian routes to think about some of the present entanglements of identity. First, it follows Freud in returning to Greek tragedies - Oedipus and others - which may now appear strikingly different in the light of today's issues of family and sexuality. And second, it re-examines Freud's own theories from these newer perspectives, drawing out different strands of his stories of how children develop and how people change (or don't). Both kinds of mythology, the classical and the theoretical, may now, in their difference, illuminate some of the forming stories of our contemporary world of serial fa

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