

Oedipus, Odysseus and the Return of Memory

The association between Oedipus and Odysseus begins with Homer and Hesiod. According to Hesiod, Oedipus and Odysseus belong to the same elitist rank of demi-god heroes. They seem to share the same mysterious fate that aligns them together at the islands of the blessed. The *Odyssey* takes a different direction, however, as it confronts Odysseus with Oedipus' miserable story of which he learns from Epicaste's testimony. The monstrosity of the story leaves the impression that Oedipus' example should offer Odysseus some important caveat.

The connection between the two mythical heroes turns into an intriguing case of intertextuality once their relationship is investigated through the fascinating links that the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* maintains with the episode of the foot washing of the *Odyssey*, Book 19. I argue that the Homeric Odysseus provided Sophocles with an inspiring model for imitation: A middle-aged man carries on his body a childhood scar of which he has been oblivious for many years. After many years of absence, a homecoming brings with it a return of memory: the traumatic scarification begins to surface.

In my talk I wish to analyze the significance of Oedipus' childhood memories in shaping the tragic plot of *Oedipus Rex* as a tragedy of recollection. In order to do so, I wish to concentrate on the mnemonic function of the scar in the Homeric epic and Sophocles' tragedy. The talk will discuss the scar, *sema*, which as Gregory Nagy (1990) shows is etymologically connected to a thought, *noos*, and to a homecoming, *nostos*. Oedipus' and Odysseus' scars bring home something that has collapsed into forgetfulness. I will discuss the scar as a junction of forgetting and remembering and show how Odysseus' memory and Oedipus' forgetfulness are intertwined.

Bibliography

Nagy, Gregory (1990). *Greek Mythology and Poetics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.