I AM under the impression that I did not succeed in convincing you of the significance of perversions for our conception of sexuality. I should therefore like to clarify and add as much as I can.

It was not only perversions that necessitated an alteration of our conception of sexuality, which aroused such vehement contradiction. The study of infantile sexuality did a great deal more along that line, and its close correspondence to the perversions became decisive for us. But the origin of the expressions of infantile sexuality, unmistakable as they are in later years of childhood, seem to be lost in obscurity. Those who disregard the history of evolution and analytic coherence, will dispute the potency of the sexual factor and will infer the agency of generalized forces. Do not forget that as yet we have no generally acknowledged criterion for identifying the sexual nature of an occurrence, unless we assume that we can find it in a relation to the functions of reproduction, and this we must reject as too narrow. The biological criteria, such as the periodicities of twenty-three and twenty-eight days, suggested by W. Fliess, are by no means established; the specific chemical nature which we can possibly assume for sexual occurrences is still to be discovered. The sexual perversions of adults, on the other hand, are tangible and unambiguous. As their generally accepted nomenclature shows, they are undoubtedly sexual in character; whether we designate them as signs of degeneration, or otherwise, no one has yet had the courage to place them outside the phenomena of sex. They alone justify the assertion that sexuality and reproduction are not coincident, for it is clear that all of them disavow the goal of reproduction.

This brings me to an interesting parallel. While “conscious” and “psychic” were generally considered to be identical, we had to make an essay to widen our conception of the “psychic” to recognize as psychic something that was not conscious. Analogously, when “sexual” and “related to reproduction” (or, in shorter form, “genital”) has been generally considered identical, psychoanalysis must admit as “sexual” such things as are not “genital,” things which have nothing to do with reproduction. It is only a formal analogy, but it does not lack a deeper basis.

But if the existence of sexual perversions is such a compelling argument, why has it not long ago had its effect, and settled the question? I really am unable to say. It appears to be because the sexual perversions are subject to a peculiar ban that extends even into theory, and stands in the way of their scientific appreciation. It seems as if no one could forget that they are not only revolting, but even unnatural, dangerous; as if they had a seductive influence and that at bottom one had to stifle a secret envy of those who enjoyed them. As the count who passes judgment in the famous Tannhauser parody admits:

“And in the mount of Venus, his honor slipped his mind,
It’s odd that never happens to people of our kind.”

Truthfully speaking, the perverts are rather poor devils who atone most bitterly for the satisfaction they attain with such difficulty.

What makes the perverse activity unmistakably sexual, despite all the strangeness of its object, is that the act in perverse satisfaction most frequently is accompanied by a complete orgasm, and by an ejaculation of the genital product. Of course, this is only true in the case of adults; with children orgasms and genital excretions are hardly possible; they are replaced by rudiments which, again, are not recognized as truly sexual.

In order to complete the appreciation of sexual perversions, I have something to add. Condemned as they are, sharply as they are contrasted with the normal sexual activity, simple observation shows that rarely is normal sex-life entirely free from one or another of the perverse traits. Even the kiss can be claimed to be perverse, for it consists in the union of two erogenous mouth zones in place of the respective genitals. But no one outlaws it as perverse, it is, on the contrary, admitted in theatrical performances as a modified suggestion of the sexual act. This very kissing may easily become a complete perversion if it results in such intensity that it is immediately followed by an emission and orgasm—a thing that is not at all unusual. Further, we can learn that handling and gazing upon the object becomes an essential prerequisite to sexual pleasure; that some, in the height of sexual excitation, pinch and bite, that the greatest excitation is not always called forth in lovers by the genitals, but rather by other parts of the body, and so forth. There is no sense in considering persons with single traits of this kind abnormal, and counting them among the perverts. Rather, we recognize more and more clearly that the essential nature of perversion does not consist in overstepping the sexual aim, nor in a substitution for the genitals, not even in the variety of objects, but simply in the exclusiveness with which these deviations are carried out and by means of which the sexual act that serves reproduction is pushed aside. When the perverse activities serve to prepare or heighten the normal sexual act, they are really no longer perversions. To be sure, the chasm between normal and perverse sexuality is practically bridged by such facts. The natural result is that normal sexuality takes its origin from something existing prior to it, since certain components of this material are thrown out and others are combined in order to make them subject to a new aim—that of reproduction.

Before we make use of our knowledge of perversions to concentrate anew and with clearer perspective on the study of infantile sexuality, I must call your attention to an important difference between the two. Perverse sexuality is as a rule extraordinarily centralized, its whole action is directed toward one, usually an isolated, goal. A partial instinct has the upper hand. It is either the only one that can be demonstrated or it has subjected the others to its purposes. In this respect there is no difference between normal and perverse sexuality other than that the ruling partial instincts, and with them the sexual goals, are different. In the one case as well as in the other there is, so to say, a well organized tyranny, excepting that here one family and there another has appropriated all the power to itself. Infantile sexuality, on the other hand, is on the whole devoid of such centralization and organization, its individual component impulses are of equal power, and each independently goes in search of the acquisition of pleasurable excitement. The lack as well as the presence of centralization fit in well with the fact that both the perverse and the normal sexuality originated from the infantile. There are also cases of perverse sexuality that have much more similarity with the infantile, where, independently of one another, numerous partial instincts have forced their way, insisted on their aims, or rather perpetuated
them. In these cases it is more correct to speak of infantilism of sexual life than of perversions.

Thus prepared we can consider a question which we certainly shall not be spared. People will say to us: “Why are you so set on including within sexuality those manifestations of childhood, out of which the sexual later develops, but which, according to your own admission, are of uncertain origin? Why are you not satisfied rather with the physiological description, and simply say that even in the suckling one may notice activities, such as sucking objects or holding back excrements, which show us that he strives towards an organic pleasure? In that way you would have avoided the estranging conception of sexual life in the tiniest child.” I have nothing to say against organic pleasure; I know that the most extreme excitement of the sexual union is only an organic pleasure derived from the activity of the genitals. But can you tell me when this organic pleasure, originally not differentiated, acquires the sexual character that it undoubtedly does possess in the later phases of development? Do you know more about the “organic pleasure” than about sexuality? You will answer, the sexual character is acquired when the genitals begin to play their role; sexual means genital. You will even reject the contrary evidence of the perversions by confronting me with the statement that in most perversions it is a matter of achieving the genital orgasm, although by other means than a union of the genitals. You would really command a much better position if you did not regard as characteristic of the sexual that untenable relation to reproduction seen in the perversions, if you replaced it by activity of the genitals. Then we no longer differ very widely; the genital organs merely replace other organs. What do you make of the numerous practices which show you that the genitals may be represented by other organs in the attainment of gratification, as is the case in the normal kiss, or the perverse practices of “fast life,” or the symptoms of hysteria? In these neuroses it is quite usual for stimulations, sensations and innervations, even the process of erection, which is localized in the genitals, to be transferred to other distant parts of the body, so that you have nothing to which you can hold as characteristics of the sexual. You will have to decide to follow my example and expand the designation “sexual” to include the strivings of early childhood toward organic pleasure.

Now, for my justification, I should like you to give me the time for two more considerations. As you know, we call the doubtful and indefinable pleasure activities of earliest childhood sexual because our analysis of the symptoms leads us to them by way of material that is undeniably sexual. We admit that it need not for that reason in itself be sexual. But take an analogous case. Suppose there were no way to observe the development of two dicotyledonous plants from their seeds—the apple tree and the bean. In both cases, however, imagine it possible to follow their evolution from the fully developed plant backwards to the first seedling with two leaf-divisions. The two little leaves are indistinguishable, in both cases they look exactly alike. Shall I conclude from this that they really are the same and that the specific differences between an apple tree and bean plant do not appear until later in the history of the plant? Or is it biologically more correct to believe that this difference is already present in the seedling, although the two little leaves show no differences? We do the same thing when we term as sexual the pleasure derived from the activities of the suckling. Whether each and every organic enjoyment may be called sexual, or if besides the sexual there is another that does not deserve this name, is a matter I cannot discuss here. I know too little about organic pleasure and its conditions, and will not be at all surprised if the retrogressive character of the analysis leads us back finally to a generalized factor.

One thing more. You have on the whole gained very little for what you are so anxious to
maintain, the sexual purity of the child, even when you can convince me that the activities of the suckling had better not be called sexual. For from the third year on, there is no longer any doubt concerning the presence of a sexual life in the child. At this time the genitals already begin to become active; there is perhaps regularly a period of infantile masturbation, in other words, a gratification by means of the genitals. The psychic and social expressions of the sexual life are no longer absent; choice of an object, affectionate preference for certain persons, indeed, a leaning toward one of the two sexes, jealousy—all these have been established independently by unprejudiced observation, prior to the advent of psychoanalysis, and confirmed by every careful observer. You will say that you had no doubt as to the early awakening of affection, you will take issue only with its sexual nature. Children between the ages of three and eight have already learned to hide these things, but if you look sharply you can always gather sufficient evidence of the "sexual" purpose of this affection. What escapes you will be amply supplied by investigation. The sexual goals of this period of life are most intimately connected with the contemporaneous sexual theories, of which I have given you some examples. The perverse nature of some of these goals is the result of the constitutional immaturity of the child, who has not yet discovered the goal of the act of copulation.

From about the sixth or the eighth year on a pause in, and reversion of, sexual development is noticeable, which in the cases that reach the highest cultural standard deserves the name of a latent period. The latent period may also fail to appear and there need not be an interruption of sexual activity and sexual interests at any period. Most of the experiences and impulses prior to the latent period then fall victim to the infantile amnesia, the forgetting we have already discussed, which cloaks our earliest childhood and makes us strangers to it. In every psychoanalysis we are confronted with the task of leading this forgotten period of life back into memory; one cannot resist the supposition that the beginning of sexual life it contains furnishes the motive for this forgetting, namely, that this forgetting is a result of suppression.

The sexual life of the child shows from the third year that it has much in common with that of the adult; it is distinguished from the latter, as we already know, by the lack of stable organization under the primacy of the genitals, by the unavoidable traits of perversion, and, naturally, by the far lesser intensity of the whole impulse. Theoretically the most interesting phases of the sexual development or, as we would rather say, the libido-development, so far as theory is concerned, lie back of this period. This development is so rapidly gone through that perhaps it would never have been possible for direct observation to grasp its fleeting pictures. Psychoanalytic investigation of the neuroses has for the first time made it possible to discover more remote phases of the libido-development. These are, to be sure, nothing but constructions, but if you wish to carry on psychoanalysis in a practical way you will find that they are necessary and valuable constructions. You will soon understand why pathology may disclose conditions which we would have overlooked in the normal object.

We can now declare what form the sexual life of the child takes before the primacy of the genitals is established. This primacy is prepared in the first infantile epoch prior to the latent period, and is continuously organized from puberty on. There is in this early period a sort of loose organization, which we shall call pre-genital. In the foreground of this phase, however, the partial instincts of the genitals are not prominent, rather the sadistic and anal. The contrast between masculine and feminine plays no part as yet, its place is taken by the contrast between active and passive, which we may designate as the forerunner of sexual polarity, with which it is later fused. That which appears masculine to us in the activity of this phase, observed from the
standpoint of the later genital stage, is the expression of an instinct to mastery, which may border on cruelty. Impulses with passive goals attach themselves to the erogenous zone of the rectal opening. Most important at this time, curiosity and the instinct to watch are powerful. The genital really takes part in the sexual life only in its role as excretory organ for the bladder. Objects are not lacking to the partial impulses of this period, but they do not necessarily combine into a single object. The sadistico-anal organization is the step antecedent to the phase of genital primacy. A more penetrating study furnishes proof how much of this is retained for the later and final form, and in what ways its partial instincts are forced into line under the new genital organization. Back of the sadistico-anal phase of libido-development, we get a view of an earlier, even more primitive phase of organization, in which the erogenous mouth-zone plays the chief role. You may surmise that the sexual activity of sucking belongs to it, and may wonder at the intuition of the ancient Egyptians, whose art characterized the child, as well as the god Horus, with the finger in his mouth. Abraham only recently published material concerning the traces which this primitive oral phase has left upon the sexual life of later years.

I can surmise that these details about sexual organization have burdened your mind more than they have informed you. Perhaps I have again gone into detail too much. But be patient; what you have heard will become more valuable through the uses to which it is later put. Keep well in mind the impression that sexual life, as we call it, the function of the libido, does not make its appearance as a completed whole, nor does it develop in its own image, but goes through a series of successive phases which are not similar to each other. In fact, it is a developmental sequence, like that from the grub to the butterfly. The turning point of the development is the subordination of all sexual partial-instincts to the primacy of the genitals, and thereby the subjection of sexuality to the function of reproduction. Originally it is a diffused sexual life, one which consists of independent activities of single partial instincts which strive towards organic gratification. This anarchy is modified by approaches to pre-genital organization, first of all the sadistico-anal phase, prior to this the oral phase, which is perhaps the most primitive. Added to this there are the various processes, as yet not well known, which carry over one organization level to the later and more advanced phase. The significance, for the understanding of the neuroses, of the long evolutionary path of the libido which carries it over so many grades we shall discuss on another occasion.

Today we shall look at another angle of the development, namely the relation of the partial instinct to the object. We shall make a hurried survey of this development in order to spend more time upon a relatively later product. Some of the components of the sex instincts have had an object from the very beginning and hold fast to it; such are the instinct to mastery (sadism), curiosity, and the impulse to watch. Other impulses which are more clearly attached to specific erogenous zones of the body have this object only in the beginning, as long as they adhere to the functions which are not sexual; they release this object when they free themselves from these non-sexual functions. The first object of the oral component of the sexual impulse is the mother’s breast, which satisfies the hunger of the infant. By the act of sucking, the erotic component which is also satisfied by the sucking becoming independent, it gives up the foreign object and replaces it by some part of its own body. The oral impulse becomes auto-erotic, just as the anal and other erogenous impulses are from the very beginning. Further development, to express it most briefly, has two goals—first, to give up auto-eroticism, and, again, to substitute for the object of one’s own body a foreign object; second, to unify the different objects into a single impulse, replace them by a single object. To be sure, that can happen only if this single object is itself complete, a body similar to one’s own. Nor can it be consummated without leaving behind
as useless a large number of the auto-erotic instinctive impulses.

The processes of finding the object are rather involved, and have as yet had no comprehensive exposition. For our purpose, let us emphasize the fact that when the process has come to a temporary cessation in the childhood years, before the latent period, the object it has found is seen to be practically identical with the first object derived from its relation to the object of the oral pleasure impulse. It is, if not the mother’s breast, the mother herself. We call the mother the first object of love. For we speak of love when we emphasize the psychic side of sex-impulses, and disregard or for a moment wish to forget the fundamental physical or “sensual” demands of the instincts. At the time when the mother becomes the object of love, the psychic work of suppression which withdraws the knowledge of a part of his sexual goal from his consciousness has already begun in the child. The selection of the mother as the object of love involves everything we understand by the Oedipus complex which has come to have such great significance in the psychoanalytic explanation of neuroses, and which has had no small part in arousing opposition to psychoanalysis.

Here is a little experience which took place during the present war: A brave young disciple of psychoanalysis is a doctor at the German front somewhere in Poland, and attracts the attention of his colleagues by the fact that he occasionally exercises an unexpected influence in the case of a patient. Upon being questioned he admits that he works by means of psychoanalysis and is finally induced to impart his knowledge to his colleagues. Every evening the physicians of the corps, colleagues and superiors, gather in order to listen to the inmost secrets of analysis. For a while this goes on nicely, but after he has told his audience of the Oedipus-complex, a superior rises and says he does not believe it, that it is shameful for the lecturer to tell such things to them, brave men who are fighting for their fatherland, and who are the fathers of families, and he forbade the continuation of the lectures. This was the end.

Now you will be impatient to discover what this frightful Oedipus-complex consists of. The name tells you. You all know the Greek myth of King Oedipus, who is destined by the fates to kill his father, and take his mother to wife, who does everything to escape the oracle and then does penance by blinding himself when he discovers that he has, unknowingly, committed these two sins. I trust many of you have yourselves experienced the profound effect of the tragedy in which Sophocles handles this material. The work of the Attic poet presents the manner in which the deed of Oedipus, long since accomplished, is finally brought to light by an artistically prolonged investigation, continuously fed with new evidence; thus far it has a certain similarity to the process of psychoanalysis. In the course of the dialogue it happens that the infatuated mother-wife, Jocasta, opposes the continuation of the investigation. She recalls that many men have dreamed that they have cohabited with their mothers, but one should lay little stress on dreams. We do not lay little stress on dreams, least of all typical dreams such as occur to many men, and we do not doubt that this dream mentioned by Jocasta is intimately connected with the strange and frightful content of the myth.

It is surprising that Sophocles’ tragedy does not call forth much greater indignation and opposition on the part of the audience, a reaction similar to, and far more justified, than the reaction to our simple military physician. For it is a fundamentally immoral play, it dispenses with the moral responsibility of men, it portrays godlike powers as instigators of guilt, and shows the helplessness of the moral impulses of men which contend against sin. One might easily suppose that the burden of the myth purposed accusation against the gods and Fate, and in the hands of the critical Euripides, always at odds with the gods, it would probably have become
such an accusation. But there is no trace of this in the work of the believer Sophocles. A pious sophistry which asserts that the highest morality is to bow to the will of the gods, even if they command a crime, helps him over the difficulty. I do not think that this moral constitutes the power of the drama, but so far as the effect goes, that is unimportant; the listener does not react to it, but to the secret meaning and content of the myth. He reacts as though through self-analysis he had recognized in himself the Oedipus-complex, and had unmasked the will of the gods, as well as the oracle, as sublime disguises of his own unconscionness. It is as though he remembered the wish to remove his father, and in his place to take his mother to wife, and must be horrified at his own desires. He also understands the voice of the poet as if it were telling him: “You revolt in vain against your responsibility, and proclaim in vain the efforts you have made to resist these criminal purposes. In spite of these efforts, you are guilty, for you have not been able to destroy the criminal purposes, they will persist unconsciously in you.” And in that there is psychological truth. Even if man has relegated his evil impulses to the unconscious, and would tell himself that he is no longer answerable for them, he will still be compelled to experience this responsibility as a feeling of guilt which he cannot trace to its source.

20

It is not to be doubted for a moment that one may recognize in the Oedipus-complex one of the most important sources for the consciousness of guilt with which neurotics are so often harassed. But furthermore, in a study of the origins of religion and morality of mankind which I published in 1913, under the title of Totem and Taboo, the idea was brought home to me that perhaps mankind as a whole has, at the beginning of its history, come by its consciousness of guilt, the final source of religion and morality, through the Oedipus-complex. I should like to say more on this subject, but perhaps I had better not. It is difficult to turn away from this subject now that I have begun speaking of it, but we must return to individual psychology.

21

What does direct observation of the child at the time of the selection of its object, before the latent period, show us concerning the Oedipus-complex? One may easily see that the man would like to have the mother all to himself, that he finds the presence of his father disturbing, he becomes irritated when the latter permits himself to show tenderness towards the mother, and expresses his satisfaction when the father is away or on a journey. Frequently he expresses his feelings directly in words, promises the mother he will marry her. One may think this is very little in comparison with the deeds of Oedipus, but it is actually enough, for it is essentially the same thing. The observation is frequently clouded by the circumstance that the same child at the same time, on other occasions, gives evidence of great tenderness towards its father; it is only that such contradictory, or rather, ambivalent emotional attitudes as would lead to a conflict in the case of an adult readily take their place side by side in a child, just as later on they permanently exist in the unconscious. You might wish to interpose that the behavior of the child springs from egoistic motives and does not justify the setting up of an erotic complex. The mother provides for all the necessities of the child, and it is therefore to the child’s advantage that she troubles herself for no one else. This, too, is correct, but it will soon be clear that in this, as in similar situations, the egoistic interest offers only the opportunity upon which the erotic impulse seizes. If the little one shows the most undisguised sexual curiosity about his mother, if he wants to sleep with her at night, insists upon being present while she is dressing, or attempts to caress her, as the mother can so often ascertain and laughingly relates, it is undoubtedly due to the erotic nature of the attachment to his mother. We must not forget that the mother shows the same care for her little daughter without achieving the same effect, and that the father often vies with her in caring for the boy without being able to win the same importance in his eyes as the mother. In short, it is clear that the factor of sex-preference cannot be eliminated from the
situation by any kind of criticism. From the standpoint of egoistic interest it would merely be
terrible of the little fellow not to tolerate two persons in his services rather than only one.

I have, as you will have noticed, described only the relation of the boy to his father and mother.
As far as the little girl is concerned, the process is the same with the necessary modifications. The
affectionate devotion to the father, the desire to set aside the mother as superfluous and to
take her place, a coquetry which already works with all the arts of later womanhood, give such a
charming picture, especially in the baby girl, that we are apt to forget its seriousness, and the
grave consequences which may result from this infantile situation. Let us not fail to add that
frequently the parents themselves exert a decisive influence over the child in the wakening of the
Oedipus attitude, in that they themselves follow a sex preference when there are a number of
children. The father in the most unmistakable manner shows preference for the daughter, while
the mother is most affectionate toward the son. But even this factor cannot seriously undermine
the spontaneous character of the childish Oedipus-complex. The Oedipus-complex expands and
becomes a family-complex when other children appear. It becomes the motive force, revived by
the sense of personal injury, which causes the child to receive its brothers and sisters with
aversion and to wish to remove them without more ado. It is much more frequent for the children
to express these feelings of hatred than those arising from the parent-complex. If such a wish is
fulfilled, and death takes away the undesired increase in the family, after a short while we may
discover through analysis what an important experience this death was for the child, even though
he had not remembered it. The child forced into second place by the birth of a little brother or
sister, and for the first time practically isolated from his mother, is loath to forgive her for this;
feelings which we would call extreme bitterness in an adult are aroused in him and often become
the basis of a lasting estrangement. We have already mentioned that sexual curiosity with all its
consequences usually grows out of these experiences of the child. With the growing up of these
brothers and sisters the relation to them undergoes the most significant changes. The boy may
take his sister as the object for his love, to replace his faithless mother; situations of dangerous
rivalry, which are of vast importance for later life, arise even in the nursery among numerous
brothers who court the affection of a younger sister. A little girl finds in her older brother a
substitute for her father, who no longer acts towards her with the same affection as
in former

Such things, and many more of a similar character, are shown by the direct observation of
children and the consideration of their vivid childish recollections, which are not influenced by
the analysis. You will conclude, among other things, that the position of a child in the sequence
of his brothers and sisters is of utmost importance for the entire course of his later life, a factor
which should be considered in every biography. In the face of these explanations that are found
with so little effort, you will hardly recall without smiling the scientific explanations for the
prohibition of incest. What inventions! By living together from early childhood the sexual
attraction must have been diverted from these members of the family who are of opposite sex, or
a biological tendency against in-breeding finds its psychic equivalent in an innate dread of
incest! In this no account is taken of the fact that there would be no need of so unrelenting a
prohibition by law and morality if there were any natural reliable guards against the temptation
of incest. Just the opposite is true. The first choice of an object among human beings is regularly
an incestuous one, in the man directed toward the mother and sister, and the most stringent laws
are necessary to prevent this persisting infantile tendency from becoming active. Among the
primitive races the prohibitions against incest are much more stringent than ours, and recently
Th. Reik showed in a brilliant paper that the puberty-rites of the savages, which represent a rebirth, have the significance of loosing the incestuous bonds of the boy to his mother, and of establishing the reconciliation with the father.

Mythology teaches that incest, apparently so abhorred by men, is permitted to the gods without further thought, and you may learn from ancient history that incestuous marriage with his sister was holy prescript for the person of the ruler (among the ancient Pharaohs and the Incas of Peru). We have here a privilege denied the common herd.

Incest with his mother is one of the sins of Oedipus, patricide the other. It might also be mentioned that these are the two great sins which the first social-religious institution of mankind, totemism, abhors. Let us turn from the direct observation of the child to analytic investigation of the adult neurotic. What does analysis yield to the further knowledge of the Oedipus-complex? This is easily told. It shows the patient up in the light of the myth; it shows that each of these neurotics was himself an Oedipus or, what amounts to the same thing, became a Hamlet in the reaction to the complex. To be sure, the analytic representation of the Oedipus-complex enlarges upon and is a coarser edition of the infantile sketch. The hatred of the father, the death-wish with regard to him, are no longer timidly suggested, the affection for the mother recognizes the goal of possessing her for a wife. Dare we really accredit these horrible and extreme feelings to those tender childhood years, or does analysis deceive us by bringing in some new element? It is not difficult to discover this. Whenever an account of past events is given, be it written even by a historian, we must take into account the fact that inadvertently something has been interpolated from the present and from intervening times into the past; so that the entire picture is falsified. In the case of the neurotic it is questionable whether this interpolation is entirely unintentional or not; we shall later come to learn its motives and must justify the fact of “imagining back” into the remote past. We also easily discover that hatred of the father is fortified by numerous motives which originate in later times and circumstances, since the sexual wishes for the mother are cast in forms which are necessarily foreign to the child. But it would be a vain endeavor to explain the whole of the Oedipus-complex by “imagining back,” and as related to later times. The infantile nucleus and more or less of what has been added to it continues to exist and may be verified by the direct observation of the child.

The clinical fact which we meet with in penetrating the form of the Oedipus-complex as established by analysis, is of the greatest practical importance. We learn that at the period of puberty, when the sexual instinct first asserts its demands in full strength, the old incestuous and familiar objects are again taken up and seized anew by the libido. The infant’s choice of an object was feeble, but it nevertheless set the direction for the choice of an object in puberty. At that time very intense emotional experiences are brought into play and directed towards the Oedipus-complex, or utilized in the reaction to it. However, since their presuppositions have become unsupportable, they must in large part remain outside of consciousness. From this time on the human individual must devote himself to the great task of freeing himself from his parents, and only after he has freed himself can he cease to be a child, and become a member of the social community. The task confronting the son consists of freeing himself from his libidinous wishes towards his mother and utilizing them in the quest for a really foreign object for his love. He must also effect a reconciliation with his father, if he has stayed hostile to him, or if in the reaction to his infantile opposition he has become subject to his domination, he must now free himself from this pressure. These tasks are set for every man; it is noteworthy how seldom their solution is ideally achieved, i.e., how seldom the solution is psychologically as well
as socially correct. Neurotics, however, find no solution whatever; the son remains during his whole life subject to the authority of his father, and is not able to transfer his libido to a foreign sexual object. Barring the difference in the specific relation, the same fate may befall the daughter. In this sense the Oedipus-complex is correctly designated as the nucleus of the neurosis.

You can imagine how rapidly I am reviewing a great number of conditions which are associated with the Oedipus-complex, of practical as well as of theoretical importance. I cannot enter upon their variations or possible inversions. Of its less immediate relations I only wish to indicate the influence which the Oedipus-complex has been found to exert on literary production. In a valuable book, Otto Rank has shown that the dramatists of all times have taken their materials principally from the Oedipus- and incest-complexes, with their variations and disguises. Moreover, we will not forget to mention that the two guilty wishes of Oedipus were recognized long before the time of psychoanalysis as the true representatives of the unrestrained life of impulses. Among the writings of the encyclopedist Diderot we find a famous dialogue, The Nephew of Ramau, which no less a person than Goethe has translated into German. In this you may read the remarkable sentence: “If the little savage were left to himself he would preserve all his imbecility, he would unite the passions of a man of thirty to the unreasonableness of the child in the cradle; he would twist his father’s neck and bed with his mother.”

There is also one other thing of which I must needs speak. The mother-wife of Oedipus shall not have reminded us of the dream in vain. Do you still remember the result of our dream analysis, that the wishes out of which the dream is constructed so frequently are of a perverse, incestuous nature, or disclose an enmity toward near and beloved relatives the existence of which had never been suspected? At the time we did not trace the sources of these evil impulses. Now you may see them for yourselves. They represent the disposition made in early infancy of the libidinous energy, with the objects, long since given up in conscious life, to which it had once clung, which are now shown at night to be still present and in a certain sense capable of activity. But since all people have such perverse, incestuous and murderous dreams, and not the neurotics alone, we may conclude that even those who are normal have passed through the same evolutionary development, through the perversions and the direction of the libido toward the objects of the Oedipus-complex. This, then, is the way of normal development, upon which the neurotics merely enlarge. They show in cruder form what dream analysis exposes in the healthy dreamer as well. Accordingly here is one of the motives which led us to deal with the study of the dream before we considered the neurotic symptom.