

## Hubris and Nemesis: the Myth of Oedipus and Identity in *Crossed: Wish You Were Here*

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**EN Abstract.** The themes of past sins have occupied our collective imagination since the dawn of humankind. The ways in which characters are faced with their nemesis have changed throughout history, but the structure of the myth permeates our culture even nowadays. In this essay, Shaky from Simon Spurrier's *Crossed: Wish You Were Here* is analysed and compared to Sophocles' Oedipus to determine if this myth still accurately represents some of our oldest fears, if its structure still serves the purpose of identifying anxieties in our culture, and if the psychoanalytic Oedipal process can help explain Shaky's search for identity.

**Keywords:** *Crossed: Wish You Were Here*; madness; myth of Oedipus; identity; fate; myth; Simon Spurrier; Sophocles

### **ES Hibris y Némesis: El mito de Edipo e identidad en *Crossed: Wish You Were Here***

**ES Resumen.** El mito del pecado ancestral ha ocupado la imaginación colectiva desde el albor de la humanidad. Las maneras en las que los personajes se enfrentan a su némesis han cambiado a lo largo de la historia, pero la estructura de este mito sigue permeando nuestra cultura. En este ensayo, Shaky de *Crossed Wish You Were Here* es comparado con el *Edipo Rey* de Sófocles para determinar cómo sigue este mito representando nuestros miedos, si su estructura sirve para identificar y procesar estas ansiedades sociales en nuestra cultura y si el proceso edípico psicoanalítico puede explicar la búsqueda de identidad de Shaky.

**Palabras clave:** *Crossed: Wish You Were Here*; locura; identidad; mito de Edipo; destino; mito; Simon Spurrier; Sófocles

**Sumario:** Hubris and Nemesis: the Myth of Oedipus and Identity in *Crossed: Wish You Were Here* 1. Introduction. 2. Oedipus and Nemesis – Shaky and Fate. 3. Oedipus and Jocasta – Shaky and the Mother. 4. Oedipus and Laius – Shaky and the Father. 5. Oedipus and Thebes – Shaky and Cava. 6. Oedipus and his exile – Shaky and his last trip. 7. Conclusions – Shaky; or, the modern Oedipus. Works Cited.

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## Hubris and Nemesis: the Myth of Oedipus and Identity in *Crossed: Wish You Were Here*

*The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving, kindness and truth... Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.* (The New American Standard Bible, Ex. 34:6)

### 1. Introduction

The sins of the Father have haunted our imagination throughout the annals of human history, as exemplified by the aforementioned passage from The Bible. A past, unearthed and long-forgotten shadow that resurfaces, unrelenting and ruthless, to exact retribution and deprive us of happiness due to an ancestral sin constitutes a recurrent motif in foundational mythology, Greek tragedies, or Elizabethan plays. During the 18th century, with the advent of Gothic romance, societal focus was turned to this primordial anxiety with renewed strength (Botting 128). Even currently, as evidenced by the proliferating patriarchal and racist (Johnson 104) establishments and organisations which are compelled by popular movements to confront and acknowledge their past transgressions, a resolute message emerges: Historical misdeeds invariably pursue us, like a bell tolling our doom. This notion directly intersects with the theme of fate: Can one avert destiny, whether the initial transgression was an act of commission or omission? Few concerns have held greater prominence throughout history and have assumed renewed significance in contemporary literature, where it can be appreciated in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) or in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). While The Bible stands as a great source of examples, the motif of ancestral sin finds its roots in the fabric of Greek tragedy, wherein divine retribution was traditionally meted out by the Erinyes upon those who, through impious deeds and broken oaths, invoked a curse upon themselves (Burkert 198). Specifically, the House of Cadmus—Oedipus' lineage—is depicted in classicist works as having drawn the wrath of the Gods in an exceedingly virulent fashion (Hard & Rose 294). Likewise, in the 20th century, psychoanalysts contended that the violation of a taboo necessarily invited subsequent retribution (Freud 71).

Similarly, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* not only delved into the realm of fate but also in the profound depths of identity. Oedipus, originally the son of Laius and Jocasta, spent the majority of his life oblivious to his true identity as the rightful heir to the Theban throne, largely due to the efforts undertaken by his parents to avert the destiny that had been foretold by the Oracle. This lack of awareness regarding his authentic identity, rendering him ignorant of his past and his impending fate, eventually precipitated its tragic finale. It allowed Oedipus to inadvertently slay his father and marry his mother (Dugdale 422-23). This narrative originally moved Freud to use the myth in his seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

where he stated, "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (296). Subsequently, he coined the term "Oedipus complex" to encapsulate this phenomenon (Nagera 64). For Freud, the resolution of the Oedipal complex stood as an indispensable phase in the lives of all infants for the realisation of identity, entailing both desire for the parent of the opposite sex and hatred directed towards the same-sex one. Failure to resolve this complex could engender neurosis—a condition characterised by psychological damage resulting from an unresolved or repressed past (Sletvold 460-62). Hence, the interconnection between a repressed and traumatic past and the imperative to resolve the Oedipal psychosexual situation serves as a bridge between traditional mythological narrative structures and modern psychoanalytical theory. It further bolsters the comparison between Simon Spurrier's Shakespeare "Shaky" and Sophocles' Oedipus.

Sophocles, in his renowned play *Oedipus Rex* (429 BC), adeptly weaved the themes of the sins of the Father, fate, and identity, thus creating what Aristotle described in his *Poetics* as the epitome of the genre—a work where the sins of the Father inevitably trap the protagonist, irrespective of their futile endeavours to evade their nemesis. The present essay attempts to establish how literature continues to reflect this enduring motif of fate and inevitability, perpetuating it as a myth-like narrative that resonates as one of the fundamental apprehensions within our collective imaginary. As such, it stands as one of the foremost motifs within the realm of Gothic literature (Botting 132.). Moreover, this essay employs the tools of narratology and myth criticism to delineate structural parallels between the actions of Shaky in Simon Spurrier's *Crossed: Wish You Were Here* (2012) and the character of Oedipus in Sophocles' work. This comparative analysis aims to illuminate Shaky's Oedipal process of individuation using Lacan's theory of psychosexual development, and also comparative narratology to justify it as a contemporary reimagining of the timeless Oedipal myth and a legitimate heir to the Gothic tradition.

*Crossed: Wish You Were Here*, a graphic novel penned by Simon Spurrier and based on Garth Ennis' original *Crossed* (2008), offers a compelling portrayal of Shaky, a character who perfectly exemplifies how age-old anxieties undergo transformation and resurgence in the modern era, thus reaffirming the enduring mythical essence that lies at their core. Shaky, whose name is derived from Shakespeare, is a former writer who recounts his narrative through a blend of contemporary narration and flashbacks. This aspect remains significant as the story unfolds predominantly through Shaky's recollections, which are influenced by imperfect memories. This inability to accurately depict history parallels a traditional Romantic infatuation with the past, where the subjective interpretation of personal accounts becomes paramount (Gordon 2). This makes Shaky a somewhat unreliable narrator and the work itself a true heir to the Gothic tradition. Early Gothic authors often embraced historic ambiguity within their narratives, fostering an atmosphere of enigmatic and unknown pasts resurfacing to threaten the present. In fact, the

genre has been recognised for its capacity to exploit “the blurred relationship between literature and history in order to question the extent to which we can know and understand the past” (Dent 15). Moreover, it draws upon the “characteristic Enlightenment scepticism about the truth of historical accounts” (Stevens 33).

As documented in his diary, Shaky’s journey leads him to the Isle of Cava, among the Orkney Islands, where he finds solace amidst a community of survivors following the initial days of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the graphic novel swiftly moves on to depicting how Shaky’s present actions erode his identity, and how his past transgressions compromise—and ultimately kill—most of those he now leads, losing everything he had fought for. The readers bear witness to his profound transformation—from being hailed as a saviour to being viewed as the harbinger of the plague that ravages his people—and, eventually, becoming a scapegoat. This duality, whereby a character can be both the catalyst for their people’s affliction and their potential deliverer, is analysed and described in Rene Girard’s 1974 essay, “The Plague in Literature and Myth”:

The difference between the founding process of myth and the scapegoat processes we may know of and understand is that the first, being the more powerful, literally goes full circle from unanimous hatred to unanimous worship. The juxtaposition of the one and the other is intelligible. If the polarization of the crisis upon a single victim really effects a cure, this victim’s guilt is confirmed, but his role as a savior is no less evident. That is why Oedipus and behind him the more remote but parallel figure of the god Apollo appear both as bringers of the plague and as benefactors. (*The Plague* 844)

Indeed, much like the analysis by Girard in his previous works and perhaps unwittingly predicting future ones, Shaky assumes a dual role—both the cause for his people’s downfall and their sole beacon of hope for salvation. Throughout the comic, Shaky contemplates ending his own life or undertakes perilous actions that verge on self-destruction, each time driven by a desire to establish order and evade repressive sanctions of mechanical solidarity (Durkheim 70). However, it is only during his final act that he truly sacrifices himself for the sake of his people, rather than being solely motivated by selfish considerations. His initial suicide attempt stems from an overwhelming inability to adapt to the post-apocalyptic world, wherein Shaky perceives few, if any, reasons to live. The second sacrifice manifests in his manipulation of the lottery system, ensuring that he is “randomly” selected to embark on an exploratory mission into the unknown, an endeavour undertaken to occupy his mind and prevent introspection into his past sins. Lastly, he sacrifices himself to divert the attention of Aoileann’s trusted circle of *Crossed*, thereby safeguarding the lives of those he has come to regard as his chosen family in Cava. It is this final act that marks the culmination of the mythical cycle and establishes a parallel between

Shaky and Oedipus. However, to comprehend these connections between both characters, it is necessary to explore the origins of their respective journeys and the underlying elements that bind them together.

## 2. Oedipus and Nemesis – Shaky and Fate

In *Crossed: Wish You Were Here*, Spurrier masterfully employs the theme of inescapable destiny, echoing the narrative technique employed by Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex*. While Sophocles depicted, Laius’ futile attempts to elude Nemesis by abandoning Oedipus and Oedipus’ own attempts to avoid fate by leaving Corinth, Spurrier’s protagonist, Shaky, fervently attempts to distance himself from his haunting past. He seeks to suppress the memories of his transgressions, only to find that they persistently haunt him. As Shaky reflects, “Everything has consequences... Everything buried works its way to the light. Every sin has a penalty” (2:23). This parallel between the works highlights the timeless notion that the repercussions of our actions are inescapable, regardless of our efforts to suppress or distance ourselves from them. Both Oedipus and Shaky fight with the consequences of their past deeds, ultimately discovering that the weight of their actions cannot be evaded when the forces of fate and divine justice destroy the illusion of escape.

While Oedipus manages to forge a new life in Thebes, temporarily escaping the haunting spectre of his past, Shaky exists in a perpetual nightmare, fully aware of the horrifying reality that surrounds him. He recognises that his survival thus far has been a product of sheer luck and understands that it is mere chance that has ultimately determined his fate. This realisation makes him suffer long before he encounters his eventual reckoning. As he expresses it, “Why bother? Can we actually fight it? It’s all bloody chance keeping us alive and we resent that luck when the buggers pass by” (1:2). Shaky’s profound awareness of his own passivity in his existence, forever haunted by his past and anticipating his inevitable fate, becomes a recurring motif in the comic. Initially possessing a semblance of inner peace, Shaky soon realises that he must confront and escape his past, akin to Oedipus. Challenged by the reappearance of individuals he believed to be dead—details that unfold through subsequent flashbacks—he becomes acutely aware of the need to take action in order to stave off the encroaching madness that threatens his sanity: “You ignore the unknowns, you remind yourself they’re invisible, unchangeable, and as long as you don’t think about them they can’t hurt you. Like ghosts. Like the past.” (1:5). Shaky adopts a strategy of ignorance, attempting to dismiss the unknown, to convince himself they are invisible and unchangeable, and to delude himself into believing that by not dwelling on them, they cannot harm him. He likens them to ghosts, remnants of the past. However, by the end of the first volume, Shaky experiences a moment of revelation that precipitates his downfall. He realises that he can never truly find safety or escape; the sins of his past are inescapable and will inevitably catch up with him.<sup>1</sup> This profound epiphany serves as a harbinger of his doom, driving

<sup>1</sup> Shaky’s sin are adequately explained in their respective chapters, but to clarify the narratological similarities between both works, Shaky is trying to escape the past where he had raped Aoileann, the symbolic Mother, and attempts to murder both Father Moses

him toward an inexorable confrontation with the consequences of his actions.

Listen, the past is my enemy, that's the truth. That's why I did what I did. There's nothing to do with my bastard brain except remember, remember, remember. Every. Nasty. Thing. I ever did. And oh, the echoes of old sin. Daydreamers never last. So I'll go find myself a nightmare. (1:22)

Shaky's moment of chilling enlightenment, which sets him on a tumultuous path of internal struggle and uncertain outcomes, occurs while he stands guard on the watchtower and spots Aoileann—his symbolical Mother—in a small boat off the Cava flow. Aoileann, in the story, represents both his past sins and his potential agent for redemption or retribution.

### 3. Oedipus and Jocasta – Shaky and the Mother

It has been established, as will be further explored in the concluding part of this essay, that Shaky's ultimate act of self-sacrifice is driven by his determination to deliver his people from the Crossed, whose attention he inadvertently draws upon them, just like Oedipus endeavours to save his people from the plague. This retribution is likewise triggered by symbolically incestuous elements. In Shaky's case, however, the narrative incorporates dual maternal figures—Tabitha and Aoileann—although it is primarily the latter who emerges as a distinct symbol representing the archetypal Mother.

Aoileann makes her first chronological appearance—she had appeared by the end of the first volume, although in the present—in the second volume, shortly after Shaky joins the Gamekeeper's group of survivors, and is first presented as a nun who works in a hospice, where she is known as Mother Teresa, a name that further cements her symbolic role. Throughout the comic, Aoileann embodies control, restraint, and a nurturing nature. She chooses to stay back with the Father, a reverend initially introduced as Moses White but thenceforth simply called “the Father” who resides in an attic alongside children; here Aoileann will fulfil her role as “a mother figure” (4:5). Upon her infection, Aoileann swiftly becomes a Mother figure as well among the Crossed, attaining a position of responsibility and control. She even manages to enforce discipline, leading the Crossed to carve an X on their faces as a sign of deference, mirroring the scarred X on Aoileann's face, engraved by the Gamekeeper. This symbolism of a caring Mother extends beyond her role with the elderly, the children she stays with, the Father she cares for, Ashoke, and Shaky, encompassing the Crossed as well, who are like her children. Tabitha's perspective aligns with this, viewing the Crossed as “toddlers throwing tantrums due to their inability to articulate what they want” (2:5).

Tabitha, a caring and compassionate former art teacher, possesses qualities that inherently evoke a maternal nature due to her role in guiding, educating, and caring for younger pupils. Moreover, she serves as Shaky's love interest on Cava Island. According to Lacan's theory of psychosexual development,

Tabitha could have functioned as a substitute for Shaky's maternal figure, Aoileann, if not for his blatant lie when she asks him whether he still has feelings for her: “H-how could I? She's dead” (2:20), which marks how Shaky simply tries to suppress his position in relation to Aoileann. Despite Shaky's love and obsession on Aoileann, he and Tabitha engage in a regular sexual relationship, eventually resulting in Tabitha becoming pregnant, firmly establishing her as a Mother figure. Nevertheless, due to Shaky's actions, Tabitha's child is doomed and is ultimately murdered, aligning with the theme of an ancestral biblical or mythical curse.

However, if there is a significant aspect that distinguishes Tabitha from being strictly perceived as Shaky's maternal figure within the context of the Oedipal myth is the absence of a need for him to compete with a Father figure to gain her attention. This sets Tabitha apart from Aoileann, who, on the other hand, becomes an object of desire for Shaky's two paternal figures: the Gamekeeper and “the Father” Reverend Moses White.

### 4. Oedipus and Laius – Shaky and the Father

Shaky's character is shaped by two prominent traits: cowardice and sneakiness, which contribute to his admiration for individuals who possess decisiveness and innate leadership abilities. His awareness of his own cowardly nature is established in the first volume, as he openly admits:

‘I learnt two things about myself, the first day. One was, after 30 years of speculating... of imagining myself in bad shit, convincing myself I'd react with calmness and bravery no matter what... that I am in fact a coward of the first fucking order. (1:2)

Within the comic, Shaky harbors admiration and, to some extent, jealousy towards several male characters. However, only two individuals can be regarded as potential Father figures due to their shared interest in Aoileann, who serves as Shaky's Mother figure. This distinction holds significance, as the essay aims to explore the parallels and disparities between Shaky and Sophocles' Oedipus, but also considering the concept of mimetic desire, crucial in the creation of a scapegoat, as Girard posits:

The spirit of worship must combine with the spirit of hatred. To reveal the secret of this ambivalence, we need not turn to someone like Freud. There is no secret at all. To imitate the desires of someone else is to turn this someone else into a rival as well as a model. From the convergence of two or more desires on the same object, conflict must necessarily arise. (*The Plague* 836-837)

While Shaky may hold admiration for other male characters in the comic, such as Des or Jasper, due to their traditionally perceived as masculine qualities like resourcefulness, bravery, or straightforwardness, it is essential to consider additional factors in order to establish them as true Father figures for Shaky. Apart from possessing these aforementioned traits,

which are characteristic of many individuals in the story, certain criteria must be met to successfully construct them as Shaky's Father figure. In line with the psychoanalytic tradition and for the purpose of drawing comparisons with the Oedipal myth, a crucial element is that the Father figure should be perceived as an adversary who competes for the Mother's attention, whether it is in terms of love or sexuality. Only two characters meet these requirements: the Gamekeeper and the Father.

In the second volume, the Gamekeeper enters the narrative by saving Shaky's life, throwing him a gun symbolising the Lacanian *phallus*, a catalyst for Shaky's psychosexual development, as noted by Hook (2006). However, Shaky's developmental process remains incomplete due to his inability to give up his desire for his Mother figure. The Gamekeeper's decision to provide Shaky with the means to defend himself, rather than directly helping him, establishes him as a stern and demanding Father figure, while also fulfilling a providing role. This dynamic fuels Shaky's jealousy towards the Gamekeeper, as he embodies qualities that Shaky perceives himself lacking in—ruthlessness, resourcefulness, proficiency in hunting, fishing, tracking, and navigating past the Crossed. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Gamekeeper is the first leader Shaky encounters on his journey. The Gamekeeper possesses the very skills that Shaky keenly feels he lacks, highlighting the disparity between them. Shaky recognises this deficiency within himself, as Shaky expresses it: the survivors "have no ruthlessness, no leadership, no careful fucking planning. No angels. All we have is luck" (2:2). This adds another layer to Shaky's internal conflict as he finds himself thrust into a leadership role without feeling adequately prepared. However, what sets the Gamekeeper apart and solidifies him as the Father figure Shaky must confront is his intimate relationship with Aoileann. This convergence of desires—as expounded by Girard (*Generative Scapegoating* 122), conflict occurs when two desires converge on the same Object—intensifies the tension between Shaky and the Gamekeeper, emphasising the symbolic nature of the latter.

The Gamekeeper assumes a paternal role by providing for the survivors, but his actions take a dark turn as he begins to rape one of the women in the group, shortly after Shaky joins them, and later kills her husband. Despite being cast out from the group, he secretly continues to support them by leaving supplies and traps. However, he resurfaces to attack Ashoke, a teenager who had previously saved the Gamekeeper's life and who is now left with an intellectual disability due to the assault. The Gamekeeper also rapes Aoileann, who looks after Ashoke. Shaky intervenes by shooting the Gamekeeper from behind and restraining him to a tree, allowing the Crossed to ultimately dispose of him. Nevertheless, Shaky's psychosexual development remains incomplete as he fails to directly confront and kill his symbolic Father figure.

Reverend Moses White, known as the Father, also embodies a Father figure in a more symbolic manner compared to the Gamekeeper's paternal role, which derives from his strength, resolute nature, and actions. The Father, after surviving the outbreak, starts living in an attic caring for children, which bolsters his

symbolic role and presents him initially as an innocent character. However, his attraction to Aoileann is evident when he is discovered stealing her underwear. Shaky becomes envious of the Father's potential connection with Aoileann, especially when she seems to give him more attention. During Aoileann's first seizure, the Father calmly cares for her and keeps her immobilised to prevent her from suffering any damage, offering whiskey upon her recovery, which unsettles Shaky. After the Father tells Aoileann that a small glass of whiskey could hardly be considered a sin, Shaky reflects, "Envy's a funny thing, diary. Comes to you at the strangest of times. [...] I'd made the same argument a billion times, diary. She always laughed it off" (4:7). After the Father leaves them alone one day, Shaky and Aoileann finally engage in a sexual encounter. However, Aoileann suffers another seizure—something that does not stop Shaky—and they are interrupted by the Father, who tries to intervene but is struck by Shaky and rendered unconscious. Believing the Father to be dead, Shaky continues to rape Aoileann. Eventually, the noise attracts some Crossed who kill the children playing downstairs. Shaky confronts and kills the adult Crossed, only to discover that three children have escaped upstairs, thus infecting Aoileann and the Father, whom Shaky had failed to kill. In a disturbing scene, the Father is observed repeatedly violating Aoileann with the amputated leg of the Gamekeeper, symbolising a further descent into depravity and his complete sway over Aoileann's—Shaky's symbolic Mother—attention.

In addition to the Gamekeeper and the Father, two other paternal figures emerge in the comic. One such figure is Des, characterised by his muscular physique, proactive nature, and assertive masculinity. Des embodies qualities that Shaky lacks, displaying fearlessness and a willingness to engage in violence, qualities that elicit jealousy in Shaky: "Envy's a funny thing, diary. Comes to you at the strangest of times [...] Proactive. Simple. I looked at Des and I wished I was him" (4:7). When Shaky embarks on a risky mission to confront Aoileann, Des volunteers to accompany him, evoking Shaky's envy and admiration. Through an inadvertent act, Des receives Aoileann's attention when he licks an envelope previously sealed by her with her contagious saliva and addressed to Shaky. Des eventually succumbs to the infection and transforms into a Crossed, but prior to his demise, he implores Shaky to convey his love to his daughter, being thus represented with fatherly traits for the first time within the narrative.

In addition to the Gamekeeper, the Father, and Des, another significant Father figure in the comic is Jasper, the survivalist. Jasper embodies the qualities that Shaky desires for himself: bravery, capability, and ruthlessness. Upon his arrival at Cava, he assumes leadership and foolishly guides the survivors in their fight against the Crossed, taking power from Shaky's hands. Jasper also becomes a sexual rival to Shaky, asserting his dominance by threatening to castrate him—"You shut the fuck up [...] or I'll cut yer [*sic*] fuckin' todger off" (2:19)—an act traditionally tied to psychosexual development, and boasting about his sexual conquests with the women in Cava (2:19).

You lissen good. This is my spot now. I got bigger balls'n any man 'ere – even the wog

chav – an’ they love me for it. I’m fucking Elisa twice nightly. Little Roshan sucked me joint just today. You? You’re nothin’. You stay out of my sanctuary. [sic]

However, when Aoileann first sails near Cava Island, Shaky kills Jasper as an act of revenge for the mistreatment he endured. It is worth noting that Shaky’s killings are limited to the Father figures who were unaware of his attachment to his Mother figure or did not express desire towards her. This prevents Shaky from fully completing his psychosexual process and hinders the comparison to the Oedipal myth. Only in the final issue of the comic does Shaky finally kill the Gamekeeper, engage in sexual activity with Aoileann, and subsequently sacrifice himself to save his people at Cava Island. This marks the culmination of his transformation into an Oedipal figure and brings closure to the narrative.

### 5. Oedipus and Thebes – Shaky and Cava

The similarities between Oedipus’ and Shaky’s actions, which comprehend attacking and abandoning his Father figures for the Crossed to kill them, have been established. These characters represent the qualities and values that Shaky associates with masculinity and fatherhood, and some of them also share his desire for Aoileann, making them symbolic representations of the Father figure. In a break with the parallelism to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, where the curse is sealed due to Oedipus’ hubris, it is Shaky’s cowardice and sneakiness that ultimately condemn them all, although Shaky also exhibits hubris by disrespecting sacred things when talking to Aoileann, showing irreverence and disbelief in the existence of her god: “You know what I wanted to say, diary? Your god’s dead, love. And his mum too.” (3:15). Despite their flaws, both Oedipus and Shaky attempt to protect those who are important to them. They both try to escape their fates, albeit unknowingly fulfilling them in the process. Oedipus flees Corinth to avoid killing his father and marrying his mother, while Shaky flees London and ends up encountering the Gamekeeper, his first Father figure, whom he eventually abandons, tied to a tree for the Crossed to finish his life. He then encounters the Father, his second Father figure, and similarly abandons him after raping Aoileann, the Mother figure. Consequently, Shaky brings the curse upon his people at Sanctuary in Cava Island. The curse takes the form of the constant threat of Aoileann’s Crossed army, always looming on the horizon and reminding the survivors of their impending doom. Like Oedipus, Shaky—albeit reluctantly—becomes a leader to the people at Cava and comes to consider it his home, despite the tragic fate that awaits all of them.

As the sins and consequences of Shaky’s actions become apparent, he comes to be barely tolerated—and ultimately exiled—by the people at Cava Island, similar to how Oedipus is exiled when his transgressions are revealed. The first reaction against him occurs when Jasper exposes Shaky’s notes to Aoileann during the expedition, which inadvertently attracts the attention of the Crossed to their location, cursing the survivors as well. Initially, the survivors merely cast Shaky out of town and lose trust in him, as he records in his diary: “We’ve had a

predictable continuation of the universal distrust and dislike towards yours truly. Something’s still out there. Something connected to me” (3:1). Nevertheless, they soon start realising the extent of the harm he has brought upon them, as Jackson expresses in behalf of the survivors at Sanctuary: “Cunt. Saint. Well-meanin’ or evil bawbag. I’ve no idea what you are, laddie. But bad shite happens t’folks around ye. Yer poison, lad.” [sic] (3:10). This description of his duality links back to Girard’s explanation of how heroes of the Classical age often could be both the catalyst for and the deliverers of their people from the curse (*The Plague* 844). This shift in attitude reflects the growing awareness of Shaky’s actions and their disastrous consequences for the community. The parallels with Oedipus highlight the tragic nature of Shaky’s existence and the impact he has on those around him.

Indeed, there is a fundamental difference between Shaky and Oedipus in terms of their awareness and response to their respective curses. Oedipus is born into a cursed lineage and, driven by his hubris, unknowingly fulfills the prophecy, only to later take responsibility for the suffering of the Theban people and exile himself from the city. In contrast, Shaky is fully aware of the danger he poses to the people of Cava Island due to his presence and the consequences of his actions. When Jackson is first introduced holds a certain admiration for him, who can survive alone outside the safety of Cava’s perimeter—while also believing he must be insane to do so—but he eventually realises that it is not insanity but rather the qualities Shaky lacks that enable such individuals to thrive (1:13):

What sort of man does it take to survive alone? [...] He’s got to be tough as nails, definitely. Resourceful, capable, violent – all that shit, no doubt. But if you want my opinion [...] he’s got to be fully and conspicuously mental.

Shaky recognises that individuals like Jackson possess toughness, resourcefulness, capability, and a willingness to resort to violence when necessary. These virtues contrast with Shaky’s own shortcomings and highlight his limitations. In this sense, Shaky can be seen as a character similar to Oedipus, in that both are well-intentioned but constrained by external forces. While Oedipus’ fate is dictated by his curse, Shaky’s spinelessness and inability to take decisive action contribute to the perpetuation of the curse on his people. This juxtaposition serves to emphasise the tragic aspect of Shaky’s character, as he becomes a symbol of the limitations imposed by one’s own nature, despite his good intentions.

Shaky’s sins from the past are revealed similarly to how Oedipus’ transgressions are exposed by Tiresias, the blind oracle. In Shaky’s case, it is Seline, an American woman who was kidnapped by Aoileann’s Crossed, who discloses the truth. Seline’s traumatic experience renders her catatonic, but she manages to tell them: “Shaky. It’s all f... fuh... for Shaky.” (3:10). This revelation deepens the distrust towards Shaky, yet he selfishly chooses to remain with them despite the danger he poses to their safety. When an American flotilla arrives, offering an opportunity to escape, Rab sends Shaky to negotiate with them, fully aware that Shaky will opt to stay: “He

sent me because he knows a snake will fight to stay in its garden. He sent me because he knows that I know. I don't deserve anything better. And nowhere else would have me" (3:5). Shaky clings to the familiarity and security of Cava, even if it means putting his people at risk. Furthermore, Shaky resorts to sowing discord and doubt among the survivors to convince them to stay in Cava. He acknowledges his role as the source of sickness and likens himself to a snake and a plague (3:14):

Like gravity, like mould, like hate: the falsehood accumulates. [...] I'm the sickness, diary. I'm the fucking snake. I'll do anything to protect my shitty tedious doomed little garden, and the best way... the easiest way... is to infect the whole fucking place.

However, towards the end of the comic, finally chooses sacrifice over selfishness, opting to protect his people rather than clinging to his own desires. This shift marks a significant development in his character, as he transcends his previous limitations and embraces a selfless act of heroism.

## 6. Oedipus and his exile – Shaky and his last trip

The attack on the American flotilla by the Crossed serves as a turning point for Shaky's fate. Initially, the survivors find themselves forced to leave as the infected Americans launch an assault on the island. Shaky suggests falling back, "Pull back. We have to. We use the defences, other side. Let them try to come through. Whittle them down. Eden's already fucked." (4:2), but it is Rab who takes the initiative to evacuate the island: "You come down to it, times like those, and really? The only choice is who says it first. The leader or the chieftain?" (4:3). Nevertheless, when attempting to escape, the survivors are confronted by Aoileann's Crossed, symbolising the inescapable consequences tied to Shaky's past sins. Faced with the reality that staying with him perpetuates the danger, they fight their way back to the island: "Was there... Was there pride for our home, as we retook it? Maybe. Maybe a bit, but not really. Mostly it's just that we had nowhere else to go." (4:5). This awakening prompts the people of Cava to finally cast out their leader, breaking Shaky's ankles—another similarity with Oedipus, whose ankles are pierced and tethered to avert his escape—to prevent Shaky from following them while they try to escape the Crossed. It serves as a stark realisation of the peril he poses, compelling them to sever ties with him. Shaky, now fully aware of the harm he has brought upon Cava, is left to reflect on the gravity of his actions.

As presented above, by the end of the comic, Shaky seeks to redefine his self-perception: "If I'm to be judged before the end of all things, I'd like to have something to be proud of." (3:22). However, he is unable to make the choice to exile himself for the sake of his people. After leaving a message for Aoileann in the envelope that leads to Des's demise, Shaky is confronted by the Gamekeeper through a walkie-talkie. It is then revealed that Aoileann had protected and kept the Gamekeeper safe from the Crossed after Shaky raped her, though her motivations remain unknown. This conversation

serves as a catalyst for Shaky's transformation. When the Gamekeeper shares that Aoileann simply desires closure for their story, Shaky becomes acutely aware of his own passivity, cowardice, and the dire consequences he has brought upon his community. Reflecting on his actions, he admits, "Have I been proactive? Debatable. I've insinuated. I've nudged when I should have guided. I've manipulated instead of making decisions. I have wasted my story in the act of waiting." (4:22). In this moment, Shaky confronts the truth about his own shortcomings and the impact of his inaction. The gravity of his realisation propels him toward a newfound sense of urgency and moves him to reassess his role in shaping their destiny.

Finally, a pivotal moment occurs when Aoileann takes the walkie-talkie from the Gamekeeper and utters the words, "Go home, my love." (4:12). This moves Shaky to return to the island and embrace his fate, only to find that his people have departed without him. In Shaky's narrative, the turning point, akin to Oedipus discovering the tragic fate of his mother and wife Jocasta, comes in the form of a confrontation with Aoileann. Engaging in another conversation with Aoileann through the walkie-talkie, Shaky selfishly questions her love for him, aware that displaying weakness in front of the Crossed would undermine her authority. Despite this, Shaky chooses to deliberately crash his boat onto an island, attracting the attention of the enemy, and implores Aoileann to send them after him: "You send them over. I'm... I'm ready. I'm ready and... and i-if you want the truth, love... This saves me. R-redeemed." (4:20). It is important to note that Shaky's fatal flaw, his cowardice and selfishness, once again places his people in jeopardy. His decision to sacrifice himself comes at the cost of sowing distrust among the Crossed towards Aoileann. Ultimately, it is Rab that leads the survivors from Cava to their escape. After this, Shaky encounters Aoileann and the Gamekeeper on a small island. He avenges the Gamekeeper by taking his life, and then, together with Aoileann, they engage in a final act of intimacy before ending their lives. This marks the closure of the Oedipal myth cycle—he has raped his Mother figure and, finally, killed his Father figure—but does not resolve Shaky's psychosexual development in fully embracing the symbolic acceptance of the-Name-of-the-Father (Lacan 67).

## 7. Conclusions – Shaky; or, the modern Oedipus

Oedipus, as René Girard suggests, embodies the archetype of the perfect scapegoat "because he is never designated as such" (*The Plague* 843). Indeed, as Girard implies:

The random victim must be perceived as a "real culprit," missing before and now identified and punished. This random victim, in other words, will never be perceived as random; the "cure" would not be operative if its beneficiaries realized the randomness of the victim's selection. (*The Plague* 842)

According to Girard, the scapegoat figure must be associated with some transgression that can be construed as the true cause of the crisis, leading

to a moment of critical mass where the community can rally together and overcome the curse: “What is true is not that there is, as a ‘real culprit,’ a man who bears alone the entire responsibility for the plague. Such a man cannot exist, of course”—Girard explains—“the oracle is really talking about a victim who is ‘right,’ in the sense that against and around that victim everyone can unite” (*The Plague* 842). It is important to note that the scapegoat is not necessarily a just target of their collective wrath, but rather a victim who becomes the focal point of unity for the community. In the case of Shaky, he shares many characteristics with the Oedipal myth. First, he attempts to bury his past sins in an effort to protect his loved ones, although this action is taken by Jocasta in Sophocles’ play. Shaky, similar to Oedipus, rebels against the Father figures in his life, represented by the Gamekeeper and reverend Moses White, and engages in an impious relationship (Jenks 35) with his Mother figure, symbolised by the rape of Aoileann.

Nonetheless, Shaky does not murder his Father figure until the end of the comic, which raises the question of whether he can fully embody the role of the performative scapegoat and save his people, due to not having transgressed against the sacred paternal figure. Girard suggests that actual blame is of little significance in the selection of a scapegoat (*The Plague* 842), as they are chosen for their ability to provide the community with an opportunity to grow stronger during times of strife. In this sense, Shaky

could fulfil that role as he becomes a unifying force for the survivors of Cava, due to their distrust and dislike towards him.

The inability of Shaky to complete the psychoanalytic Oedipal cycle raises the question of whether he can truly find his identity. Social theory suggests that depersonalisation is not a loss of self, but rather a process through which individuals redefine themselves in relation to group members (McGarty), and that a depersonalised self, or social identity, can be as fulfilling as a personalised self, to the individual (Haslam). Shaky can, at most, be seen as realising his identity through his oppositional comparison to the group, acting as a reluctant antagonist by the end of the comic, although his identity is not resolved in the psychoanalytic frame. Due to the similarities in narratological structure and mythemes, Shaky can be construed as a modern interpretation of the classical Oedipus, condemning those around him not out of hubris and transgression against the sacred, but out of his own selfishness and individuality. Both characters reflect the concerns of their respective times, and Shaky represents a contemporary Oedipal figure who unwittingly brings about harm to others due to his self-centeredness. The myth continues to resonate in our collective imagination, adapting to reflect contemporary anxieties about identity and excessive individuality, and exploring the idea that retribution is always exacted and individuals have to answer for the sins of their Fathers.

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