

THE RAGE, HEALING AND DAEMONIC
DEATH OF OEDIPUS:
A SELF-IN-RELATION THEORY

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Western psychoanalytic theory has at its center an analysis of the passions of Oedipus, his lust for his mother and his murderous rivalry with his father. But it offers no discussion of his healing. I propose first to return to Freud's source, *Oedipus the King*, by the 5th century Greek playwright, Sophocles, and offer a new perspective on the King's ills. This will be a Self-in-Relation view of him drawn from Kohut's Self Psychology and from Object Relations Theory. Then I will examine *Oedipus at Colonus*, written about a weathered Oedipus on the last day of his life, by a 90 year-old Sophocles. It is only through the revised understanding of what ailed Oedipus that the steps in his healing can be discerned.

a
*Self-in-Relation
view of
Oedipus*

Oedipus' healing and completion as a human being precedes his transmutation into divinity—he becomes a hero-daemon or mediating spirit between humans and gods who casts a protective shield over Athens. Androgyny plays its role in his human completion and post-human evolution: he merges at the last with the chthonic goddesses, the Furies, by dissolving into the elements of their sacred grove. A return to the archaic is involved as well, since the Furies are charged with the enforcement of primal blood taboos. Early in his life Oedipus had suffered *involuntary* destruction of his human personality and *involuntary* immersion in the archaic, through living first in taboo relation to father and mother, and then discovering these relations. Late in life, by contrast, he moves *voluntarily* beyond personality and before it (transcending, while returning to the archaic) when he makes his way to the grove of the Furies,

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where he dissolves in apotheosis. This place, which, as Sophocles sees it, is a place both in the cosmos and the psyche, is the chink through which Oedipus enters the transcendent.

OEDIPUS THE KING:
THE SELF AS A HOUSE OF CARDS

Freud focuses on the lust of Oedipus toward his mother and his murderous hostility toward his father. He dismisses the King's protestations of unknowing as a poetic rendering of the fact that the adult has relegated to the Unconscious these childhood passions. The present investigation, by contrast, takes it that the news Oedipus receives, about his tragic relation to mother and father, is genuine news. And it focuses instead on the self and its vicissitudes: as it forms, and then coheres through change or fails to cohere-under the impact of news which shatters the sense of self, in its own right, in relation to other, and to the cosmos.

*news
which
shatters
the
sense of
self*

Also in focus are the King's struggles with boundaries. He finds himself at one moment before the Sphinx, who swallows young men whole, and at the next in an exile unmatched for suffering. Tried and tried again are his capacities for knowing himself; grasping himself as a whole being; grasping that whole with compassion; and setting boundaries that see him neither swallowed up nor spit out. The isolation which he discovers, and from which, in his healing, he returns, is one in which he is universally shunned and, worse yet, self-shunning. But the self-shunning had begun *early* and *is* only intensified by the revelation of his contaminated actions. To heal, in the etymological root sense of finding his own "wholeness," and finding wholeness in relation to family, society, and cosmos, is a course set with horrors for him as it has been for few others. Perhaps this helps account for the stark power of his solution.

Oedipus the King opens with *citizens* and priest appearing before Oedipus as suppliants. Yes, he assures them, he will heal Thebes of this plague that is making the women sterile and decimating the city; he has already asked the oracle to discover what pollutes the town. The oracle soon answers that the murderer of the former king lives: this is the pollution. Oedipus promises to ferret the man out, sparing neither him nor any citizen who offers him the least refuge. There is no conceivable mitigation: exile for all concerned. And this is pronounced by "I Oedipus whom all men call the Great" (*Oedipus the King*, 1.8).

The suppliants are appealing to the Oedipus who had

miraculously healed the town once before. At that time the Sphinx, a creature with the body of a lion and head of a woman, crouched outside the city walls and posed this riddle: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night?" Every valiant young Theban who tried to answer failed and was devoured. The town had shut tight its seven gates and was starving from within. Then Oedipus arrived, having run away from Corinth. He was the one young man able to withstand the Sphinx (who might be dubbed the "Lion Mother"); he did not lose himself to her appetite for merger, or else to what appeared to be her appetite but was in some unacknowledged way his own. In this victory, he seemed a hero, both of mysterious knowledge and of self-composure.

Oedipus replied to the Sphinx that a human being crawls on all fours as an infant, stands a brief moment upright, then resorts to a cane. He seemed at this point to be the expert on what it means to be human-caught in the transient flow. But his behavior many years later, as he pursues the killer of Laius, shows him to be an expert only in theory. Limits are what he can least tolerate, and any sense of himself as caught in the transient flow, subject to changes, to loss of potency, to the psychological death of failure or to biological death, comes late and hard to him. We can instead look at this encounter with the Sphinx as more of an unwitting bid for knowledge than a full realizing of it: he seems to have been "chosen," for better and for worse, to *become* an expert. Initially, however, as the brilliant young healer who has foiled the Sphinx, he is awarded both the throne, since the king has recently been killed on the road, and the queen, who cements his accession.

"chosen"
for
better
or
worse

Years later, as Oedipus attempts to heal Thebes from a second round of misery, the plague, he discovers a mid-life answer to the riddle much deeper and much more personal. What is this human creature that changes shape in a changing context? Oedipus uncovers, with horror reaching violent proportions, his own story.

The encounters the King has with the Sphinx and the plague raise questions that follow him through his collapse and healing. What is an individual, and in what intimate, social, cosmic context does he or she exist? There is first of all the need to form and maintain boundaries. Oedipus is the one young man *not* terrified by the mature feminine, or so it seems. As De Beauvoir said, a man will usually fear the mature woman, who reminds him of his birth and therefore of his death (De Beauvoir, 1952). Oedipus, by contrast, replies to the Sphinx with great self-composure, "We live in the transient flow, we change our shape from strong to helpless, we are born, grow

old, die." He discovers, however, that he has not, as he thought he had, fended off the "swallowing up."

His life has in fact been swallowed into his relationship with his mother, and into the accompanying helplessness and death-of-individuation. The outcome is a terrible exile-from the human community and even from himself: for when he finally discovers that he is the murderer of King Laius, his father, and that Jocasta, his queen, is also his mother, he plucks out his eyes and says that he would, *if* he could, stop his hearing also.

he He plucks out his eyes with the brooches from his mother's self-
wishes slaughtered body. Without eyes, without ears, Oedipus would
to be an empty fortress, like Thebes under siege by the Sphinx.
be Then, he says, no hurt could reach him. He wishes simply to be
empty empty, even, or especially, of himself.

A first step in his healing occurs when his daughter Antigone (a virgin and less threatening as such) joins him on the road, takes the arm of the now blind Oedipus, and guides him for the next twenty years as he wanders through Greece, begging, dogged by his reputation. He is no longer the strutting blustering King who holds the "devouring" feminine energy at bay, and who, in doing so, also holds at bay his own receptive intelligence. He no longer believes he can, knowing neither the man nor the circumstances, declare that the murderer is in every way unforgiveable and that nothing will stop Oedipus the Great from finding and punishing him (all who care for Oedipus *do* try to stop him). And he is no longer the self-sufficient player, who moves people like pawns on a chessboard; but has instead begun to realize in practice what he knew in theory-a person is more often helpless than not. The denial of his actual relation, with its need and vulnerability, to the feminine and ultimately the cosmos, is over.

In the following paragraphs from Philip Slater's book, *The Glory of Hera*, Slater describes the psychological dilemma of the Greek male of the classical period. Although Slater is quoting contemporary sources to construct his theory, he derives his view of the "oral-narcissistic dilemma" mostly from characters in the tragedies. (He offers appropriate caveats [Slater, 1968, preface] as to generalizing about "the Greeks," too lengthy for inclusion here.)

Guntrip, in his analysis of Fairbairn's theories of schizoid reactions, derives this fear of maternal engulfment from the love-hunger of the child. The child's need is so intense that he feels he will devour the object and lose it forever, or that his hunger will be

reciprocated and he be gobbled up in turn-an outcome the possibility of which is made more vivid by his own wish to merge and fuse and be incorporated by another. He has fantasies of being a vacuum cleaner, or "one big mouth," and to counteract all these threats to his own or another's bodily integrity he tries to keep aloof and detached [Guntrip, 1952, pp. 86ft].

To this conflict between the desire to merge and the desire to be free and separate, I have applied the rather cumbersome title, "oral-narcissistic dilemma." It originates in a failure to negotiate successfully the transition from the infantile state of total narcissism and total dependence to one involving an awareness of the separate existence of others. As this awareness grows, one's sense of narcissistic integrity and one's dependency needs are simultaneously violated. The child who is comfortable in a strong but non-intrusive and relatively unconditional parental love can effect a new equilibrium, with a less inclusive definition of personal boundaries and a greater independence. Without these advantages both the need for dependence and the need for autonomy become too desperate, and the contradiction too absolute. Total fusion and stratospheric isolation become equally essential and equally terrifying (Slater, 1968, p. 88).

We watch Oedipus go from the pseudo-composure of warding off the Sphinx, with an answer which subsequent experience will force him to grasp at a deeper and deeper level, to engulfment in the mother, to a lengthy reliance on the virgin daughter (Slater notes that the Greeks turned all their *friendly* goddesses into virgins, such as Artemis, Athena, etc., reducing the threat). At the end Oedipus freely joins with the sexually mature, and therefore more threatening Furies (Sophocles portrays their grove as fertile, a deliberate change he rings on the Furies as carriers of sterility). This merging, I will argue, is not a Freudian regression into infantile dependence on the mother, and into, as Freud calls it disdainfully, that "oceanic feeling," but rather the outcome of Oedipus' growth and healing.

*merging
is the
outcome*

Let us return, however, to our investigation of what ails the King, examining the quality of the suffering which is both brought down upon him and arises from within.

Midway in his course of searching out the killer, Oedipus has discovered enough fragments about himself, and o/himself, to say the following

But I account myself a child of Fortune,
beneficent Fortune, and I shall not be
dishonoured. She's the mother from whom I spring;
the months, my brothers, marked me, now as small,

and now again as mighty. Such is my breeding,
and I shall never prove so false to it,
as not to find the secret of my birth.

He believes Jocasta has run inside the palace because, now that a messenger has told Oedipus he was not the true prince of Corinth but an adopted child, she thinks him low-born. Jocasta has concluded, however, having hoped against hope, that her husband, Oedipus, father to her present four children, is the son of her first marriage, the child handed away at birth. She runs into the palace to hang herself.

But Oedipus is gathering news of himself more slowly. He only knows that his father and mother were not Corinthians. He perceives instead the many relatively innocent permutations of himself to this point. He had been an infant abandoned on Mt. Citbaeron, found there and brought by a herdsman to the King and Queen of Corinth. He is then their son, but is slandered by a drunk at dinner who calls him a bastard; his parents falsely reassure him that he is natural, not adopted. He is rankled, however, by the notion he might not be as he imagined himself and becomes a pilgrim to the oracle. The oracle turns him into the vagabond on the road, running from the Corinthian father and mother he endangers. And then, when an old fellow attempts to bash him off the road, Oedipus becomes a killer. He still does not know this was his father. But he does know that he has gone from orphan to prince to vagabond to killer to king.

*recovering
himself
in
pieces*

Oedipus is recovering himself in pieces-i-vnowas small,! and now again as mighty." But earlier in the play there is a foreshadowing of the violence that will meet him when he meets himself entire. This comes in the exchange between the King and the Prophet Teiresias, who has been summoned to supply information about the killer of Laius so that Oedipus may find him, root him out, heal the town of plague. Teiresias refuses to speak, both for the King's sake and his own. Oedipus, who believes neither in the integrity of the Prophet nor in the brooking of his own will, fires off a reckless barrage of insults at "this juggling, trick devising quack, j this wily beggar who has only eyes! for his own gains, but blindness in his skill" (ll. 387-89). But it is as if his rage at the Prophet triggers the mousetrap of his destiny, because it triggers the prophet's words (to paraphrase): 'you with your temper and your raging, you call me a blind, helpless old man, a wily beggar in cahoots with Creon to subvert your throne-blind, helpless, a beggar, these are things everyone will soon call you. You are the man who not only killed Laius but live at this moment in foulest shame with those you love.'

The quality of Oedipus' rage is best illuminated by viewing it not through a Freudian lens, in terms of the drive-conflict psychology of desire and murderous rivalry, but through the lens of Self Psychology. Heinz Kohut might see the self-in-pieces dilemma of Oedipus much as I have explicated it to this point. To explore these vicissitudes of the self, I rely-s-not on direct remarks about Oedipus by Kohut, since these are few (Kohut, 1985, p.37)—but on Kohutian theory, which has so greatly enriched both psychoanalysis and psychotherapeutic practice.

The quality of the rage Oedipus unleashes at Teiresias attests to a self mutilated in the forming. Oedipus had been abandoned at birth, by his mother's instructions, on the stony breast of Mt. Cithaeron. The healthy infant, by contrast, has a mother who reflects to the child a knowledge of who it is, and how it fits together at each new stage (e.g. as it lets go of her hand to walk away), who mirrors affectionately the whole of the child, not selecting one piece, expurgating others. The infant thrives on this parental attention and transmutes it, in a kind of psychological photosynthesis, into the structures of the self. The light pours in from the parent's eye: the new creature feels itself all-important and omnipotent, as is an infant's due. With this quality attention as a base, the self can gradually abandon its native grandiosity and meet a chastening reality, which transforms grandiose notions into saner ambitions, and delusions of omnipotence into a confident willingness to try. Without such attention, the infant's grand notions of itself take refuge in an inner fortress, inaccessible both to nourishment and to realistic discouragement and modification.

Although Oedipus purportedly had the Corinthian royal couple as parents, they are insubstantial in the play. (And in the care of the Corinthian couple, he still lacked mirroring of who he *really* was.) So it is appropriate to do as Freud did, and theorize about the Oedipus who discovers himself as son of Laius and Jocasta. Clearly, the child lacked the mirroring that a "selfobject," as Kohut calls the mother or anyone continuing these mirroring and soothing functions later on (such as a wife), supplies in plenty. This is the kind of attention which nourishes a self-knowing and a self-advocacy that is unconditional and sustained, rather than self-aggrandizing and easily punctured. The strut and bluster of the King smacks instead of archaic (unmodified) grandiosity. His ranting against Teiresias has a quality easily recognized by therapists who have worked with people wounded in the way of Oedipus: it is narcissistic rage.

*he
lacked
mirroring
of who
he
really
was*

Such a rage has a desperation or frailty behind it. Its intent is to

annihilate, because one feels annihilated by the person judged to have caused this anger. One feels about to "fly apart" from pain or frustration, and the rage is in proportion to a sense of humiliation couched inside it, since one has suddenly been made aware of a desperate need for help.

Teiresias is definitely not helping: he is not offering support as a good selfobject should. There is another character-not Oedipus-whom Kohut uses for the exploration of narcissistic rage: this is Ahab, who has been cannibalized by Moby Dick, his leg bitten off, and will cannibalize the white whale in return. Ahab ignores the fact that his real enemy is a less concrete one-destiny, the cosmos. Instead there *is*, as Kohut says, a relentless avenging spirit here, with full intent to annihilate; because Ahab takes his whole self to be at stake.

*functions
performed
by
the self
for
the self*

When a healthy self is formed, it receives a sustained mirroring and soothing such that these functions can be internalized and eventually be performed by the self for the self: supplementary attention can then be secured from others. Without such internal mirroring, and the self-knowing and self-loving it supports, the manner of securing attention from others becomes imperious rather than flexible, for what is needed is not just a supplementary connection but a lifeline. A person who is "narcissistically wounded" in this way, sets a tyrannical standard for selfobject performance. If the player opposite fails to function as "mirror-mirror-on-the-wall," ready with attentive and unconditional applause, a cold or hot rage ensues and the defective selfobject is coolly dropped through a trapdoor or attacked with an intent to dismantle. It is in this spirit that Oedipus lights into Teiresias,

Also, when early deficits are such that no true self solidifies at the core, false selves form instead. The false selves flatter and manipulate distant or untrusted parents and, eventually, cope with a treacherous social and political world. False selves always do in fact form, but in this case they come to dominate. The person has become an assemblage with no true self at the center. Living without this core or nuclear self, the narcissistically wounded person may pretend to live in a fortress, and as a fortress, but the fortress, like Thebes besieged by the Sphinx, starves from within. And so it is with the rage-prone Oedipus. He had attempted to preserve in a walled-off sanctuary a view of himself as grand and all-powerful in a good cause, but soon discovered himself, not as a fortified personality, but a collapsing house of cards.

We have yet to examine the other side of the coin to narcissistic rage: which is the shame and the desire for self-display which

floods Oedipus when he discovers who he is. Rage, shame and exhibitionism: these are a standard trilogy in the Kohutian examination of the narcissistically wounded, that is, of those who are injured in functions of self-knowing and self-loving. One inflates with self-advocating rage, one deflates with self-abandoning shame, one floods with the impulses of self-display which reach for a loving mirror, someone to mirror and sustain a person whole. The puncturing which occurs in the inflation/ deflation cycle, and the flooding of self-display energy all overtake Oedipus, tragically enough, when he can no longer strut as the once and future Savior, but can show to the world only the gouged and tortured face of an incestuous parricide. Creon comments (11.1422-28):

. . . Oedipus, I've come
not so that I might laugh at you nor taunt you
with evil of the past. But if you still
are without shame before the face of men,
reverence at least the flame that gives all life,
our Lord the Sun, and do not show unveiled
to him pollution such that neither land
nor holy rain nor light of day can welcome.

Oedipus' public keening, in which he stood before the Theban populace with gouged eyes, had in fact been full of inner shame, which Creon fails to acknowledge. But the brother-in-law, though shallow or worse in his concern, at such a moment, with matters of style, notes rightly that Oedipus has made a display of himself. Shame, self-display, and rage: the rage which Oedipus had previously turned against Teiresias, is now turned, in the self-blinding, against himself.

*rage
turned
against
himself*

To examine the particular qualities of his suffering, a suffering both so acute and generic that theorists and therapists mine it over and over again for meaning, we will need not just Kohut but also Freud. A combined understanding will be brought to bear on the King's public lament after he has discovered first his own crimes, then the self-slaughtered body of his mother, and has blinded himself with her brooches. Here is Kohut's version of a major difference between his focus and Freud's:

The psychological understanding of man as seen within the conceptual framework of the drive-conflict [Freudian] approach of psychoanalysis is related to that traditional outlook on human problems which is evoked by such terms as guilt and restitution, sin and redemption, crime and punishment, and the like. I will, despite the great variety of phenomena that are involved, characterize this whole outlook on human psychology by saying that it focuses on *guilty man*.

But there is another dimension of human existence which must be taken into account. It is the fateful matter of whether one's nuclear self is able to express its basic patterns within the span of a lifetime. We are dealing here with psychic functions that are not regulated by the pleasure/reality principle but which are subject to forces "beyond the pleasure principle." I will once more disregard the great variety of phenomena that are here involved and characterize this second outlook on human psychology by saying that it focuses on *tragic man* (Kohut, 1985, p. 36).

The conceptualizations of mental-apparatus [Freudian] psychology are adequate in explaining structural neurosis and guilt-depression—in short, the psychic disturbances and conflicts of Guilty Man. The psychology of the self is needed to explain the pathology of the fragmented self (from schizophrenia to narcissistic personality disorder) and of the depleted self (empty depression, i.e., the world of unmirrored ambitions, the world devoid of ideals)—in short, the psychic disturbances of Tragic Man (Kohut, 1977, p. 243).

Kohut elaborates on the themes of the Tragic Man and also woman, naming specific forms of vulnerability or security in the self-love realm (Kohut, 1985, p. 182). These are:

The ups and downs in our self-esteem; . . . our lesser and greater need for praise, for merger into idealized figures, and for other forms of narcissistic sustenance; and . . . the greater or lesser cohesion of our self during periods of transition, whether in the transition to latency, in early or late adolescence, in maturity, or in old age.

*the
quality
of
Oedipus'
suffering*

Let us, then, examine the quality of Oedipus' suffering. Both Kohut and Freud are relevant. But it is the damage to the self that is primary. It is the lack of self-knowing and self-sustaining that makes Oedipus as painfully vulnerable as he is to the Freudian guilt and self-reproach. It is only late in life that Oedipus comes to say, "I did not intend to do what I did. I am not guilty." At the moment of revelation, he is instead torn with anguish. The insistent question is one of how implicated he is in this guilt. Is this polluter wholly and solely to **blame**—as Oedipus assumed the killer of Laius would be—and should he be ejected from society, denied refuge even by himself?

To the question of his guilt, a Freudian theme, I bring a Kohutian understanding of the King's vulnerability. For Oedipus there is no loving mirror, either outside or inside him, and only a core emptiness to mirror or be mirrored, unless he should choose suddenly to place in that gap the jigsaw face, now fully assembled, of an incestuous and parricidal monster. The face of the King in his public lament, with its gouged sockets, is in fact a paradoxical making visible (for the idea of

making visible, cf. Kott, 1970) of both the Empty and the Monstrous.

The deficit of self, of self-knowing and self-loving, will make Oedipus painfully vulnerable to the monstrous version of himself which appears in the cosmic mirror. Divinity, as Kohut has said, can act as a selfobject. In this case, divinity mirrors a person which Oedipus is not, but which, by way of a destiny he never chose, he too nearly resembles. The fated events *do* have a foothold in the King's passions; for this reason, he can be persuaded of his guilt, the guilt which Freud examines. Oedipus had been met by an old man at a crossroads, who attempted to knock him out of the way. The son like the father must have responded with temper, because he killed not just Laius, the old man, but the whole party (except for one escapee who later testified). Oedipus can and does rage.

As to sexual guilt and forbidden desire, Jocasta attempts to reassure him (11.977-84):

As to your mother's marriage bed,--don't fear it.
Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles,
many a man has lain with his own mother.
But he to whom such things are nothing bears
his life most easily.

Her attempt to dissuade Oedipus from holding himself responsible instead implies that there *is* inner desire, for "many men dream." There is rage. There is desire. Oedipus does resemble the monster in the mirror, whose rage was *against* the father and whose desire was *for* the mother.

To present more of the "how" of the King's anguish, and some of the why, let me introduce a concept of my own: *circus mirroring*. As an old man Oedipus can assert that the oracle forced his deeds on him without his conscious choice. That is, if he had known it was his father he was killing, he wouldn't have done it, etc. But at this terrible mid-life moment, divinity catches some actual portion of him to mirror back, but does it with a circus-mirror distortion. As Kohut says, divinity too can be a selfobject, a reflector. We may take ourselves to be a favorite son or daughter of the universe (is God and the lottery on our side today?); or we may wake up to find ourselves a despised step-child and, worse, feel that we deserve no better. Divinity here has reflected Oedipus as an incestuous parricide. Even though the distortions are flagrant, it is because similar passions *are* inside him, and caught by the mirror, and because there is no staunch self-knowing to oppose these distortions, that Oedipus succumbs to the Divine Parody.

*circus
mirroring*

Let us look at his final public lament, the one for which Creon reproaches him, when he has plucked out his eyes (11.1370-90):

What I have done here was best done-don't tell me
otherwise, do not give me further counsel.

I do not know with what eyes I could look
upon my father when I die and go
under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother-
those two to whom I have done things deserving
worse punishment than hanging. Would the sight
of children, bred as mine are, gladden me?
No, not these eyes, never. And my city,
its towers and sacred places of the Gods,
of these I robbed my miserable self
when I commanded all to drive *him* out,
the criminal since proved by God impure
and of the race of Laius,
To this guilt I bore witness against myself-
with what eyes shall I look upon my people?
No. If there were a means to choke the fountain
of hearing I would not have stayed my hand
from locking up my miserable carease,
seeing and hearing nothing; it is sweet
to keep our thoughts out of the range of hurt.

Cithaeron, why did you receive me? why
having received me did you not kill me straight?
And so I had not shown to men my birth.

*attention-
seeking
and
attention
giving
poles*

To apply Kohut here I will have to add a further description of the nuclear self and its development. Not only is there a grandiose or attention-seeking pole of the self, there is also an attention-giving pole that idealizes and admires. Often the father is the one idealized-and the primitive or archaic form of this idealizing will be the desire to merge with the "omnipotent parent imago." The matured form will be to admire and grow toward some person or set of values, and incorporate these into the personality. So the person is pulled to grow by the model person or values, as a plant is pulled by the sun. He or she is *pushed*, in the grandiose or attention-seeking pole, by ambitions, but *pulled*, in the idealizing or attention-giving pole, by ideals.

However, here at his nadir, Oedipus has no use for eyes at all. There is nothing beautiful or pure for them to admire. He also wishes to escape being looked *upon*, what is odd, is the way he *removes* his eyes so as to avoid being looked *upon* ("And so I had not shown to men my birth.") But this proposition, illogical in the ordinary world, has a paradoxical logic

characteristic of the psyche. At this nadir, then, both the attention-giving and the attention-seeking pole of the self are in collapse. Nothing to admire, and no loving eye to mirror him anywhere. Especially not his own. This approach to the self-blinding of Oedipus is a substantial improvement upon Freud's, who takes it to be a symbolic form of self-castration (Freud, 1949, p.92, fn. 11). Instead the action is construed literally: Oedipus destroys his eyes so as to destroy his sight; when he takes out his eyes, he takes out his *eyes*.

It will not do, however, to view Oedipus *wholly* apart from the miseries of guilt and self-punishment (themes of Freudian *Guilty Man*) and *solely* in terms of the fragmented and empty self, with ideals and self-love in ruins (Kohutian *Tragic Man*). He clearly feels guilty and self-punishing, perhaps even self-castrating. At the very least, the gesture he makes is huge, with room enough for both a punishing fury *and* a collapsing world and self. His is a nightmare gesture, richly overdetermined. The point is that at bottom there is a deficit of self-knowing and self-loving: and it is this which makes Oedipus most vulnerable.

Finally, when we view Oedipus in these last moments of his revelation, we see a man about to be cut off, in exile from the human race and from himself. According to Kohut, this is what people fear most, and they organize their personality to defend against such a "cutting off" even more than they fear and organize against castration. What Kohut calls *disintegration anxiety* is, he maintains, more central to the organizing of the personality than castration anxiety. One fears dis-integration from the human race, "the human experience" as he characterizes it; one also fears dis-integration within, a falling into fragments. A prime expression of this disintegration would be madness, and Kohut rightly instructs us to keep track of the fear of madness, since it plays a major role in therapies as they deepen. Another form in which one fears dis-integration is through being cut-off by the selfobject and from the selfobject (e.g. the parent, or the lover/spouse who sustains the self in the parent's stead), and as a consequence cut off from the race. One patient of Kohut's, at the nub of therapy, as he was about to step into being-in-his-own-right, was shaken by a nightmare in which he watched his mother irrevocably turn her back on him. (Cf. the inverse, in which the selfobject is destroyed rather than the child. On the brink of a major separation, patients also fear such an outcome: e.g. because Oedipus can answer her riddle, the Sphinx's Mother dashes herself against the rocks, or, in another version, explodes [remarked in conversation by Dr. Margaret Warner]).

*defending
against
"cutting
off"*

The story of Oedipus in his youth and midlife, is the story of the

self in dis-integration. which is to say, in exile: the self is horribly lost to itself, to the family, to the human community, to the cosmic setting. The self, despite attempting to root itself in a special grandness-s-I am uniquely necessary. savior of the city or the race-discovers itself as outcast; almost, but not quite throwaway ("... Yet I know *this* much: no sickness and no other thing will kill me.; I would not have been saved from death if not for some strange evil fate" [11.1455-59]).

*the
more
encompassing
context*

We have reviewed an understanding of Oedipus as Freud's *Guilty Man*: guilt and self-punishment surely play their role in his suffering. And we have modified our understanding with a new perspective on how the *sense* of guilt occludes actual guilt or innocence: the crimes do have a foothold in the passions of Oedipus, but these passions are caught and reflected in a circus-mirror universe. and he mistakes the monstrous distortion for himself. It is, however, not the *guilty* man or woman but the *tragic* one who provides us with the more encompassing context. It is the Self Psychology of Kohut that best permits us to grasp, in the context of self, family, society, and cosmos, the courageous and unrelenting struggle of Oedipus both to realize, and to hold in one piece, who he is.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS:
THE SELF AND THE FERTILE VOID

At the end of *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus has completed a frighteningly thorough assemblage of the true pieces of his personality; and yet he is shattered. The revelation he suffered, especially at such a pace and in such a form. shattered his personality as a hurled stone shatters glass (c.f., Ulman & Brothers, 1988). And when this happens, the glass shatters along its flaws.

With our revised sense of the flaws and the process of shattering, we can better discern the steps in the healing of Oedipus. *A major aspect of the healing is his harnessing the energy of the grandiose or attention-seeking pole. There is a maturing of its fantasies and a taming of its tumults. Oedipus gives new scope instead to the idealizing or attention-giving pole* (cf. Hanly, 1984, for parallels). The question and the emphasis change from "Am [great? Am I omnipotent?" to "How do I attune to what *is*?" In the opening of the first play Oedipus asserts he will be wholly sufficient to the challenge of healing the plague and declares himself to be "1 Oedipus whom all men call the Great." But the implicit challenge, which the gods accept, is the desire to know his measure of greatness. In the second play, Oedipus at the opening says, "What place is

this?" (1.3). There is now less emphasis on being attended to, more emphasis on attending. It is as if certain issues of self-image have been calmed or resolved so that Oedipus can gather an enhanced awareness of the world around him, and of portions of his internal world previously expurgated by his tyrant imago of self.

Progress *in* this first step is reflected in the changed meaning and look of Oedipus' face as we see him twenty years after the day of revelation. The gouged eyes which, on that day, were inlets to emptiness are now the organs of second sight. As the play unfolds it becomes clear that Oedipus has become like someone he never chose to admire but who nevertheless became a magnetic north pole to the King's evolution: Teiresias. Oedipus' idealizing or attentive pole had discovered in Teiresias someone with the actual knowledge to which the King was only pretending. Oedipus as King had pretended to be a lynchpin between gods and citizens, but the Prophet, not the King, could hear what the gods were saying and had the knowledge for healing the Theban plague. So in the standoff in which Oedipus accuses Teiresias of being a corrupt helpless old man, Oedipus, all unaware, is confronting what he will come to admire and evolve toward: the man with eyes that channel messages from divinity. The empty sockets no longer embody just the emptiness of defect and bereavement (although Theseus notes the still tortured cast of the face); they are now receptive channels as well.

*confronting
what
he
will
come to
admire*

After the opening scene which alerts us to his change in orientation, he begins to evince his new powers of clairvoyance. In the course of this last day of his life he will "swell" in power (Greene, 1967) toward his death in apotheosis: for he dies as a hero-daemon, a demi-god rather than as a normal human being. Part of this "swelling" toward divinity will be the increasing immediacy with which he grasps and utters divine purposes. At first he simply recognizes the Furies' sacred grove, when the citizens warn him apprehensively that he has set foot in that forbidden place. He knows from the oracle, as no one else yet does, that this grove, dangerously offlimits to everyone else, is intent on receiving him; it will host him in death. But this knowledge has an indirect quality, since he obtained it from the oracle.

Later in the play he translates apocalyptic thunder, from which others take cover in holy terror, as the signal for him to begin his last rituals. "Sounds are the things I see," he has told the citizens. And when the old man says the thunder marks his final hour, Theseus acknowledges Oedipus with, "I believe you. I have seen you prophesy many things, none falsely" (ll. 1516-

17). This exchange between Oedipus and divinity, then, is a more direct one than the earlier communication from the oracle.

The most direct exchange comes, however, when Oedipus has completed the ritual ablutions. Lingered as he takes leave of his last substantial tie to life, his daughters, he hears the gods summon him to make his passage and make it now. It is all happening in the instant: "Oedipus! Oedipus! what are we waiting for? You delay too long!" (11.1627-29).

In short, Oedipus has become like the prophet Teiresias, which has entailed change in the attention-giving pole of the personality, that assimilates what it admires. The essence of the clairaudient activity in the new Oedipus, as it had been in Teiresias, is the alert bestowing of attention culminating in complete Presence. We can call this activity *attunement*. And at its furthest reaches, this attunement is so complete that there is no attention left over for sustaining self-consciousness and therefore for sustaining the distinction between self and object. This stage would correspond to Meister Eckardt's "poverty" which is a poverty so complete that the self can neither possess the self nor seek god. For, attending to any of these, one is still not poor enough. Likewise, Zen *sunyata* or emptiness applies. In such a state there is Nobody to bestow attention with Nothing to bestow attention upon. Perhaps we can call this kind of awareness, without subject or object, Absolute Awareness.

*the
last
day
in
Oedipus'
life*

A more detailed overview of this last day in Oedipus' life will provide a basis for further remarks on the steps in his healing. We have yet to examine the harnessing energy of the attention-seeking grandiose pole of the self, which has in part been accomplished when the day begins and is more fully accomplished as it wears on. This harnessing is instrumental in the shift from Oedipus' exaggerated and exacerbated concentration on self-image to his final sheer attentiveness. We will also examine further his assimilation toward the Eumenides /Furies (the Eumenides are the gentle, fertile face of the avenging Furies), and his ultimate attunement. Teiresias is the masculine magnet for the changes in Oedipus, but the Furies draw him on and draw him in with the power, both more frightening and enhancing, of the Mature Feminine.

Before reaching this final moment of attunement, he undergoes what we may view as the completion of his human personality. He ties up loose threads in relation to the old city-state which once held and defined him and the family which holds him to

this day. He then prepares for a life of a qualitatively different kind from the human incarnation, as he sets up an adopted family (Theseus, King of Athens), a newly adopted homeland (Colonus/ Athens, which also contains the grove of the Furies), and assigns to both his legacy: a protective blessing for Theseus and Athens. He then takes on a new incarnation as a semi-divinity when he disappears in the grove, and so becomes a creature of a qualitatively different kind from the human called Oedipus.

Finally, there is implied a life for him qualitatively different from the other two, in which he is neither the human Oedipus nor the hero-daemon of the same name. This is the life mysteriously radiant in the empty spot into which he disappears. It is the poverty so poor it contains all riches, the Fertile Void.

*mysteriously
radiant
in the
empty
spot*

At this point, a brief plot summary may be helpful. *Oedipus at Colonus* opens with Oedipus asking, "What place is this?" The local citizens inform him that he has arrived at the Furies' grove in Colonus, on the outskirts of Athens. It is this grove, according to the oracle, that will contain Oedipus in death. Furthermore, whatever place possessed him in death would stand invulnerable in war against its enemy. At first he seems to be the only one to know about this, but we discover, when his daughter Ismene arrives, that news of the oracle and his changed status, from living curse to potential blessing in death, has travelled as far as Thebes. She warns her father that his brother-in-law Creon and his son Polyneices will visit and attempt to secure his body, each to bless his own side in the Theban civil war, now taking place between Oedipus' sons.

Oedipus has a violently bitter grudge against both Creon and his sons. He has been wandering the road as a blind beggar these last twenty years, exiled by Thebes, not immediately after the day of revelation, at which time he longed for exile or death, but a few years down the road from that, when, according to him, he had begun to find some comfort at home. As the plot unfolds, we hear, in his confrontations with Creon and then, climactically, with his son Polyneices, his bitter accusations: not that they exiled him but that they did so with such cruel *timing*. They refrained to do so when he desperately wanted it, but did it only when it renewed an anguish that had just subsided; afterwards, they abandoned him to his misery on the road. Only the daughters had cared for him: Antigone by constant attendance, guiding him throughout Greece; and Ismene by such courageous forays as she makes on this last day, finding him to bring tidings.

Even though the facts are that Creon and his sons had followed the oracle's instructions in carrying out the cruel decrees against Oedipus, the callous self-furthering they show on this day indicates that Oedipus' rage at them is somewhat-if not precisely-appropriate. They repeat their injury of him in a new variation on this day: they who exiled him now invite him home but have no plan to grant him actual refuge in Thebes. When he asks Antigone about their plans, wavering as if he might consider relenting, she answers that they may seduce him with promises but plan to bury him *outside* the city, just near enough to gain benefit from the new oracle, not near enough to risk pollution.

*a
chance
to
tie up
the
loose
ends*

Oedipus, then, on this last day receives visits from his other daughter, Ismene, and from his brother-in-law Creon. Creon makes Jocasta and Laius present to Oedipus by taunting the old beggar with his crimes. There is also a visit from the son Polyneices, who conjures the other son, Eteocles, in complaints of their conflict over the rulership of Thebes. Oedipus, then, has a chance to tie up all the loose ends of his life and sort out the human relations.

He, first of all, exonerates himself. He can now declare with apparent lucidity, although clearly he has agonized over this for years, that he would have abhorred to sleep with Jocasta, had he known she was his mother, or to kill Laius-s-though killing in self-defense is reasonable-had he known this was his father. The issue, he declares, is settled, although *it is* not for most people he confronts. And perhaps the festering inside him is betrayed by the bitter vehemence with which he meets Creon's jibes on the subject of his crimes, and by the almost pathological attacks on Polyneices for abandoning him. Yet in both cases his violent rebuttals are forms of self-defense; he has finally become his own advocate-as he was not on the day of his self-punishment. He lashes out in protest at filial abandonment (although this had been a faint echo of parental abandonment and, before that, through the oracle, abandonment by the gods-both of which must have cut deeper). Still, in the lashing out, there is a step in healing: Oedipus, having declared himself not guilty, and deserving of better treatment, no longer abandons Oedipus.

Beyond the reckoning with himself, there is the distributing of curses and blessings. He rewards and blesses the daughters. He curses Creon to a family life *as* blighted as his own, and curses his sons to die by each other's hands in battle. He decisively turns his back on Thebes, since its dust would in any case not be mingled with his own. He takes Colonus/ Athens as his new homeland, so that his body, by being buried there, will one day

award victory in war to Athens over Thebes. This sorting out belongs to the human phase of his leaving. What characterizes the *human* approach to life in the world of this play is that one can make sense of suffering and of the baffling sequences of life by punishing enemies and rewarding friends. It is true that as he pronounces the curses he begins to "swell" toward the daemon he is to become—he is evolving from a relatively broken old man, remarkable only for his access to divine knowledge, toward a voice filled with potency for good or evil. Nevertheless, the explicit rewarding and punishing may be assigned to the human phase, along with the "adopting" of Theseus and Athens, since in this way Oedipus both acknowledges his death and bequeaths his legacy. But this adopting-new family to guard the secret of his transformation, new city to enjoy his protective shield—is also a bridge to the daemon he becomes.

The accomplishment in this human phase is characterized by Jack Engler's charting of development that moves through personal completion into transpersonal transcendence: "you have to be somebody before you can be nobody" (Engler, 1986, p.24). Oedipus is completing the Somebody he was. However, that the human personality, in its translation to divinity, could be mortified rather than fulfilled is a lurking possibility throughout the play (Greene, 1967, p.115):

*completing
the
somebody
he
was*

Oedipus is finally in a position to gratify his hatred of Creon and his own sons but only when he is already almost "nothing" as he says himself.

OEDIPUS: When I am no longer anything, am I a man?
ISMENI: Yes, for now the gods raise you up, then they destroyed you.
OEDIPUS: It is a poor thing to raise up the old man that fell when young.

[Oedipus at Colonus, n. 393-95]

He has to struggle to prevent his grave from becoming an advantage to his foes, so completely will the personality of his ghost-spirit cease to have connections with his present self.

Oedipus does succeed in preventing Creon from snatching his body to Thebes, but had he failed, he would have realized himself as daemon at the expense of the human being.

The distinction between human and daemon also appears when Oedipus swells with a vigor and autonomy that make him hardly recognizable—because in fact, he is becoming a new creature. For the first time in decades, he leaves Antigone's arm and walks alone, followed only by his daughters and Theseus, to the spot in the grove which he knows, though blind and a

complete stranger to the place, to be designated for his death. He then strips naked and does ritual ablutions. Finally he takes leave of his daughters, his old family, because only his newly "adopted" son, Theseus, may witness his death. This painful leave-taking is punctuated by actual and audible prodding from divinity: "Oedipus! Oedipus! why are we waiting? You delay too long!"

from
Somebody
to
Nobody

It remains for us to examine what Oedipus becomes when he leaves behind the completed Somebody to become Nobody. Of course he had flirted with being Nobody, in the worst sense of the word, all his life; he had suffered the terrible rollercoaster of inflation and deflation to which his fate had exposed him and his insides disposed him. And it is not wholly accurate to say that he evolves from Somebody to Nobody-in-the-best-sense-i- because he does enter a new identity, that of Oedipus the daemon. But the mystery goes even deeper than the attainment of a semi-divine status that is still nameable. The daemon assimilates to the grove and the grove is divinity-which is itself a kind of being, or more accurately, a way of being that emanates in the world of Process yet escapes that world's confinements. Oedipus, in the course of his evolution, escapes confinement in linear time and comes to live, in certain moments at least, as a prophet with access to the Simultaneity of pattern. He does so while approaching a translation that brings him beyond pattern and process, to the Source of these, which emanates in them. Such ways of being can be hinted at but not materialized on the stage.

During the early phases in *Colanus*, Oedipus is freed to shift to the attentive rather than attention-seeking pole through the compassionate presence of Antigone, who now remains at his side. She is a loving eye to mirror him as whole and beautiful (11.198-201): "You must keep step with me; gently now. I Lean your old body on my arm. It is I who love you ... " Since the ordinary challenges of self-love had been beyond him-s-and in fact the challenges *he* suffered were extraordinary-what has been realized and made visible is his need for an abiding selfobject,

Oedipus does, however, evolve into a gentler presence, adjusting to the local customs of each place and no longer imagining he can bend the world, in all things, to his will (although a King, if anybody, might entertain this delusion). He is a gentler presence also in relation to himself, as his own advocate, declaring himself innocent. It is by releasing Antigone's arm, however, to lead the way solo into the grove, that he launches on the final phase in his transformation from human to daemon.

It is worth noting that, after twenty years walking the roads on Antigone's arm, there is now no false self-sufficiency to Oedipus. As he says of his own begging, with a certain black humor (ll. 5-8): "Though he ask little and receive still less, it is sufficient: Suffering and time, / Vast time, have been instructors in contentment! which Kingliness teaches too." He both accepts what he can beg and confesses his need.

He is further freed to attend to the world around him by the fact that his internal tumult has been calmed (although it erupts again when he confronts his son and Creon). The opening scene of *Oedipus at Colonus* finds Oedipus before the statue of the great horse-tamer, Colonus, who is the patron saint of this spot. Oedipus, who once denied his passions, and then was thrown by them, now rides them; the horseman sits astride the horse. This interpretation of the setting and its meaning is likely enough, since Sophocles, according to Socrates, when asked whether he was too old for passion, replied, "Hush, man! I'm so glad to be rid of that beast!" The horse-and-horseman is the natural metaphor chosen by figures from Plato (chariot and charioteer) to Freud for the person and his passions. And Kohut comments on the Freudian horse-and-horseman image, noting that by the time the person has mastered the horse, not only is the person older but so is the horse.

*the
person
and
his
passions*

The final taming of the attention-seeking pole, with its ongoing hunger and tumult, occurs as Oedipus performs his last acts. Earlier, Oedipus hides in some bushes so as not to be known for who he is, which might cause immediate expulsion from the town. But it is in the last ritual and leave-taking that we see Oedipus deliberately choose secrecy. He is the man with an exhibitionism that made his desire for his mother and rage against his father public knowledge. But now, obedient to the new oracle, he makes what is usually most public—the funeral and the marking of a spot which family may visit—into something secret. The spot's potency for blessing Athens hinges on the secrecy which Theseus vows to keep, passing knowledge of the spot and the manner of Oedipus' dying down to only one cherished son in each generation. In short, this chosen secrecy is the last, most powerful indication of the harnessing of the energy of the grandiose or attention-seeking pole. In the matter of attention as well as passion, the man sits astride the horse.

These are the shifts in Oedipus which free him for greater attentiveness, and, ultimately, for attunement. This is an attunement, however, which enables Oedipus to shed the human opacity of life and death in a body, and to leave behind no corpse. It does strain the understanding. It is quite extraordinary that the playwright has ventured to portray on

stage such an evolution toward and into the greater-than-human. (He makes a similar attempt in another play, *Philoctetes*, which he writes almost at the same time as *Colonus*.) We will look at the character of the Feminine, into which Oedipus merges at death, and his evolved relation to it. After that we will examine the other qualities of this grove of the Furies, its relation to time, space, and to moral and psychological categories as humans normally conceive of them. In short, we look at the qualities of the place, since this is the place he becomes.

*the
man
who
encounters
femininity
on
every
level*

Oedipus, in his evolution toward the Feminine, has moved from staving off the devouring energy of the Sphinx to discovering he has in fact been swallowed in his relationship with his mother. At his nadir there is failure and psychological death for him. But twenty years later he links arms with the Virgin Feminine, Antigone, and frankly admits his need ("For Oedipus," he says, "is not the strength he was" [LIIO]). Yet the Virgin Feminine is less frightening to approach than the Mature Feminine. And Oedipus is finally the man who encounters femininity on every level and can join with it, to the enhancement of both his own and the goddesses' powers: for they will have in him a mediator with humans, and he, through them, gains divinity.

Kohut sees rejoining the Feminine, to which he gives a spiritual cast, as a late and high stage in a narcissistic development—that is, in the developmental line of the self-loving and self-sustaining functions. (Kohut fails to say whether this applies to *both* men and women, or he is simply using the [male] universal.) He argues this against Freud's objection, included below, that spiritual states are regressive returns to an "oceanic feeling" the infant enjoyed with the mother (Kohut, 1985, p.119):

Just as the child's *primary empathy* with the mother is the precursor of the adult's ability to be empathic, so his *primary identity* with her must be considered as the precursor of an expansion of the self, late in life, when the finiteness of individual existence is acknowledged. The original psychological universe, i.e., the primordial experience of the mother, h; "remembered" by many people in the form of the occasionally occurring vague reverberations which are known by the term "oceanic feeling." The achievement-as the certainty of eventual death is fully realized--of a shift of the narcissistic cathexes, from the self to a concept of participation in a supraindividual and timeless existence, must also be regarded as genetically predetermined by the child's primary identity with the mother. In contrast to the oceanic feeling, however which is experienced passively (and usually fleetingly), genuine shift of cathexes toward a *cosmic narcissism* [italics added]

is the enduring, creative result of the steadfast activities of an autonomous ego, and only very few are able to attain it

Oedipus' shift in cathexes is toward the cosmos and toward the Feminine in the cosmos: in fact, he actually merges with it, but the merger is not, as Freud would have it, regressive. First, he anticipates his death in the setting up of a new heir, in arranging for the legacy of his blessing and also for the legacy of his curse (the latter may seem a moment of contracted rather than expanded consciousness, but in the world of the play this is as natural, or as predictably aberrant, as earth-cracking thunderbolts that alternate with sun). Second, his expansion toward greater power and autonomy is visible throughout the course of the last day, culminating in Oedipus' walk alone into the grove. Finally, he does not go to either an all-bad mother, such as the Sphinx, nor an ali-good mother such as Jocasta before the worst is known. Instead, he goes to the good/bad mothers, the Eumenides/Furies, and brings the good/bad, blessing and cursing self. This is the achievement of maturity.

*the
good/bad,
blessing
and
cursing
self*

The goddesses of the grove had previously been known as the Furies. We see them in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* with snakes for hair, blood dripping from their fangs, upholding the taboos that protect the child's relation to the mother, and bringing madness on Orestes for having killed his mother. But in his trial by jury, Orestes as the avenger of his father's death is vindicated, and the relation of child to father declared to override that of child to mother by a new generation of patriarchal gods. The Furies are persuaded to accept their defeat in this trial with good grace. But they lose the autonomy of their archaic provenance: the blood rights of the mother are now subordinated. Still, the Furies agree to refrain from a vengeful blighting of Athens; they will accept the name of Eumenides or Benign Ones, and the gift of a grove outside Athens where they will reside as Protectresses, resorting to vengeance only when Law fails. By this means, Athens has replaced the hegemony of archaic blood rights, and seemingly tamed these energies to reside at the foundation of the city, under the rule of patriarchal legalism and rationalism.

Oedipus, by contrast, had championed such legalism and rationalism and it exploded in his face. Forced into exile from "the City of Man," after twenty years with the wind blowing through his thinning hair and ravaged personality, he arrives at the Furies' grove. Here he will rejoin the Archaic, with its terrible face (the Furies have been persecuting him on the road for causing his mother's suicide) and its benign one, since these mother goddesses are the fertile grove, the welcoming bosom, that offers him his only permanent home. It is likewise the

bad/good Oedipus that joins the bad/good mother: having shown his avenging face to his son and Thebes, he turns around to bless his daughters and Athens in taking leave. He too is the Avenger/Protector. This is clearly, then, not an early developmental stage, when the infant splits good mother from bad, good self from bad, but a late and even awesome integration.

It may further be noted that in joining them he joins, as Kohut calls it, "a supraindividual and timeless existence....(He in any case is no longer confined to his identity as the human being Oedipus.) By reaching and joining with the Archaic in himself (his life has certainly been a journey to the bottom of the soul) and the Archaic in the cosmos, he finds in that very same place the Transcendent. (Cf. Chenin, 1986, pp. 1180-82, For Jung the Archaic and Transcendent are to be found in the same place, often with the Anima, for the male, as guide.)

*the
qualities
of
the
Transcendent*

What are the qualities of the Transcendent, and of the grove from which one launches into the Transcendent? Oedipus, when he takes up residence in the grove in Colonus, on the outskirts of Athens, enters a world very different from that of Thebes, and that of the old Theban Oedipus. It is the world of the "horseman-on-the-horse," as the choral song to Athens celebrates, and "the oarsmen-on-the-sea," It is, in short, a Verb world rather than a Noun world, because here everything is recognized to be in motion. It is the internal tumultuous energy, which one must acknowledge in order to ride, and also the external sea, which demands the attentive, flexible craft of the oarsman. Throughout the play, Theseus is doing rites to Poseidon, which are repeatedly interrupted by the spontaneous demands for split-second timing which Oedipus places on Theseus; this happens each time the old man perceives, as he can do only by attunement, not by planning, the right moment for the next action. Poseidon, then, is the god of sea-changes; the interruptions are appropriate for such a god; the interruptions are called for because Oedipus can only realize his destiny as the attuned and spontaneously-in-motion horseman-on-the-horse, oarsman-on-the-sea.

In Thebes he had lived in a world of fixed self and fixed things, as if he were the only player and the world were a chessboard with pawns to move for checkmating Laius' murderer. At least he *attempted* to live in such a world, and the cosmic reply came like a lightning bolt. Now he lives in a world not of inviolable and fixed objects, of linear time, and absolute locality, but of interchanging parts, time that accordions, and relativity of locale and custom.

Parts interchange. He and Antigone are a unit: he is the inner

eye for her and she the outer eyes for him. Time accordions. It stretches in a destined pattern for twenty years but then condenses into a crucial instant of freedom, demanding from Oedipus a corresponding immediacy of attention. Oedipus discerns that only the right move at the right moment will place his death, and the blessing it carries, in Athens, where he dearly wants it, rather than Thebes. Then again, the instant of his death, if rightly executed, can be his elevator to eternity. What he lives in is no longer linear time; it is accordion time that calls for attunement to its changing motions.

As to place, Oedipus now takes Antigone's advice and adjusts to local custom. He notices that his daughters, like Egyptian women, travel the road, while his sons, like Egyptian men, stay home. Places and customs differ. There is no longer Absolute Thebes with its Absolute rules. The world of Process breaks all the old categories of Oedipus. The previously self-absorbed and self-contained rationalist has given way to the newly attuned man who can navigate a pulsating world.

Evil too has changed its nature. This is the key to Oedipus' ability to release himself from blame. Evil is no longer absolute evil: it is instead that which is *inappropriate*. He names his sons' evil as one of bad timing: they exiled him at the wrong time. His own passions toward his parents were not so much bad in the absolute sense, as misplaced. He stands up for his angry self-defense at the crossroads, but regrets he did not recognize his father as the victim. There is no longer Time but Timing, and no longer Place but Placing.

Oedipus has evolved into attunement with a world of *Process*, and has done so to such an extent that he merges with it, dissolves into the elements. There is, however, a residue of mystery after the merging. Where a corpse should be, there is a void, and the witnessing messenger stares in disbelief. He did not see whether Oedipus was swept into the sky or down into the earth, yet the void is resonant with mystery and meaning. The following passage brings us to a world of nature, inner and outer, strange beyond even the strangeness of the Process world we have explored (11.1068-71):

*attunement
with
a world
of
Process*

These are the riders of Athens, conquered never;
They honor her whose glory all men know,
And honor the god of the sea, who loves forever
The feminine earth that bore him long ago.

In this passage (cf. also 11.688-92), there is both new psychological content and new metaphysical content. There is a natural layer of the psyche in which the ongoing communion

*the
exoneration
of
Oedipus
prevails*

between mother (the earth) and son (the sea), a communion neither sexual nor asexual. It prevails and prevails in innocence. This relationship is simply the most powerful and the most natural, and it prevails. There is no implication that such a truth could ever be lived out in society without the disastrous consequences which Oedipus suffered; nor that it should be. Still, as Oedipus places one foot out of the human condition, and the other in divinity, this new perspective on the human condition appears. The innocence in this ongoing mother-son communion does not naively precede the world of human experience: it clearly subsumes that world, and in some sense prevails over it, as the exoneration of Oedipus prevails. And this psychological shift in perspective can be better grasped in tandem with the metaphysical one.

Oedipus has shifted from living in the deluded world of fixed identities to living in the world of Process. But the sea ("the son of Time" l. 712), which is the world of Process, rests in tandem with the earth, the unmoving mother. And so there is a world of stillness, which generates the world of Process, and yet does not participate in the motion. Perhaps this is the beyond to which Oedipus goes. He becomes a daemon still participating in the world of history; but there seems to be a merger more complete than one leaving him with such historical limits. Does the emptiness of the spot of his disappearance resonate with the mystery of the earth mother unmoving, receiving her son perpetually, in perpetual innocence?

Here is another version, from the choral song to Athens, of that enchantingly still world, without stain (ll. 672-81):

In the god's untrodden vale
Where leaves and berries throng,
And wine-dark ivy climbs the bough,
The sweet, sojourning nightingale
Murmurs all day long.

No sun nor wind may enter there
Nor the winter's rain;
But ever through the shadow goes
Dionysus reveler,
Immortal Maenads in his train.

In this vale, weather makes no motion; and the nightingale continues through the day. There is a stillness and a timelessness. The one noticeable movement is of the wine-god Dionysius,

Dionysius is usually dismembered and then re-membered to regenerate the earth in spring. The Maenads are attendant

women who are known to reach ecstatic frenzies in which they tear and eat flesh raw; sometimes a mother, like Agave, will in her madness mistakenly tear the flesh of her own son, Pentheus, who in this way serves as a stand-in for the dismembered god. But here in the grove-as with the sea-Son in the earth-Mother's arms-s-the mother/son relation is restored to innocence. Dionysus and Maenads are safely ensconced in the timeless, enchanted world of the vale: no violence, no taint.

At the furthest reaches of Oedipus' evolution, he arrives at a place, both psychic and cosmic, which subsumes the world of motion, yet is beyond it. This place is innocent and stainless, beyond the world of motion and its declines. The vehicle for his arriving there is *attunement*. And attunement is the term by which I stretch Kohut's concept of the idealizing pole: Oedipus, I maintain, does more than grow toward or grow like what he admires. At the furthest reaches he attunes, and attunes so completely that he *becomes* what he regards. He enters absolute Awareness, or the fertile Void, which makes no distinction between subject and object. Intrinsic to this acquired ability of attunement has been his increased openness to the Feminine (Teiresias himself had the peculiarity of living for seven years as a man, seven years as a woman), such that the masculine and feminine, the assertive and receptive, re-balance inside him. And it is Oedipus the Son, re-balanced and attuned, redeemed and redeeming, who returns at the last to the Mother.

*he
becomes
what
he
regards*

NOTES

¹Cf. Sagan (1979), who rejects the notion that he beals.

²Fitzgerald's translation is interpretive. Literally, Poseidon is, by the Homeric epithet Sophocles is using, "earth-supporting," which is to say, he is the cosmogenic waters under Rhea, his mother. He is also "beloved" of her in the literal translation rather than "loving." Still, as the water below, and presumably above her as well, he is in an ongoing embrace with her. When this passage is viewed in conjunction with II. 688-92 and II. 1068-71 (where Fitz.gerald reads "broad-breasted" as "maternal"), I concur with Fitzgerald's inferences. My appreciation to Prof. Robert Vacca for the literal readings-the interpretations are not his, but mine and Fitzgerald's.

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