ALSO BY CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS

Forces of Destiny
The Shadow of the Object

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BEING A CHARACTER

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Why Oedipus?

When Freud designated *Oedipus the King* as a theatrical metaphor of the crucial psychic conflict of the individual, linking the worlds of politics, literature, and psychology in one fell swoop, like Sophocles he dramatized the many factors that constitute human complexity, as he was astutely aware of the mythic, civic, psychic, and cultural elements that contribute to the living of a life.

There is a vast, intelligent, and compelling critical literature on the play and on Freud's view of the Oedipal scene in the life of the individual, which I shall not review here. Instead I shall consider the Oedipal dilemma as a complex that is independent, if that is possible, of any of its singular participants, including, of course, the child Oedipus who kills his father and sleeps with his mother. This is not to diminish the solitary significance of the Oedipal horror or its psychic place in the life of every child whose desire threatens him with terrors and whose father is essential to the survival of such fears, but I think Sophocles explores a more tragic fate than the frame of mind constituted by the Oedipal dilemma.

The Planes of Reference

Hesiod's *Theogeny* was the fundamental oral version of the Greek myths passed from one generation to the next. Curious forms of condensation, myths often derive from specific historical events, and when they do they bear some link to reality; but the persons who form the tableau of a myth exist at different times with represented events from diverse unrelated cultures yoked into one false unity, occasionally populated by fabulous creatures and fantastical events. Versions of a myth are also subject to change, in what Robert Graves terms "iconotropy": the moment when a mythographer deliberately misinterprets the visual representations of a sacred picture (the pictorial place of myth as a visual condensation) by weaving a verbal picture that changes it (21).

The legend of Oedipus was well known to Athenians. The audience knew the outcome of the hero's future, and even though differing playwrights and storytellers changed the inner details of the legend, Oedipus always slew his father and slept with his mother. As Knox points out, Sophocles used this fact to place the audience in the position of the gods who could see the full course of events and yet, by identification with Oedipus, be drawn into the inner texture of his specific dilemma: a mirroring of that oscillation we all endure in life between our complex reflective self states and the location of the simple experiencing self.

What are some of the elements that Sophocles weaves into what I term the psychic context of his play?

In the Greek middle ages, to which some of the play refers, kingship was the universal form of government. With the collapse of trade, kings could no longer afford their retinues and gradually their power was usurped by a regent, then a council, then a group of judges, to form the nine Archons of Athens which formed the structure of Greek

democracy. The kings were not abolished, however; they served a ceremonial function closely allied to the temple and the patron god of the city, an ironic affiliation as the temple took the place of the palace.

The Greeks also had in mind—in some part of their mind—the transition from the world of the warrior-king (the Achilles figures of Homer) to the world of the figure of discourse—a Pericles—who could participate in democracy. This evolution is not total or absolute. In Sparta, only a hundred miles from Athens, was another society that continued to revere the patriarchal. Shall we speak, then, of Athenians knowing of two structures: one monarchial (or dictatorial) and the other democratic?

At the same time they would have had in mind the legendary transition from a matriarchal world order to a patriarchal one. It is unclear whether there ever was a matriarchal society in Crete before the invasion by the Greeks, but even if there was, it is hard to believe that such a culture was, in fact, known by the Athenians, as surely it would have spawned a rich mythological elaboration. But the Athenians certainly did have a powerful myth of a matriarchal line, as in their mythology Gaia was the founding god of all the gods and mankind. She was a kind of primordial element who gave birth to Uranus without coupling with a male, and then coupled with Uranus to propagate the gods. Greek mythology is in large part the saga of conflict between men and women. So, if there was in fact no matrilineal culture, there was certainly a powerful myth of an originating maternal power out of which men emerged and eventually took power. This evolution, if one can put it that way, was very much in their mind, and certainly Sophocles played upon its ontological resonance in the life of each child who was born from the mother and who became subject to the father's law.

If we believe Robert Graves, however (whose work on myths is open to serious question), there *was* a matriarchal

society in Crete which was dominated by a queen who annually appointed a king. In prehistoric Greek culture this king was allegedly appointed annually (a probable representation of the seasons and of fertility), while the queen ruled until her death, passing on her power to her eldest daughter. Occasionally the king substituted for the queen and wore false breasts. At the end of his annual reign the king was "sacrificed" and there were many and varied symbolizations of his death. Commonly, he endured a symbolic execution, yielding his kingship for one day to a boy-king who "died" at the end of the day, although sometimes he remained as alternative to the king. Note how he might be killed:

> His ritual death varied greatly in circumstance; he might be torn in pieces by wild women, transfixed by a sting-ray spear, felled with an axe, pricked in the heel with a poisoned arrow, flung over a cliff . . . or killed in a prearranged chariot crash. (Graves, 18)

Perhaps audiences attending *Oedipus Rex* identified Laius's death by chariot and Oedipus's immediate reign as partly symbolic of a legendary annual ritual, practiced within a matriarchy, a mythic trace of an alleged prior social structure considered now within a democratic society which was still bearing traces of its more recent patriarchal power structure. Thus the mother, the father, and the group are part of the psychic texture of this play, layered into the action at different points of symbolic reference.

The audience also knew of a legend that Tiresias had once seen two snakes coupling and had intervened to kill the female. He was immediately turned into a woman and could only regain his masculinity some seven years later when he returned to kill the male serpent. Indeed, he was responsible for a small war between Hera and Zeus, who were quarreling over which sex gained the greater pleasure in intercourse. They called for Tiresias to settle the matter, as he had been

both a man and a woman. He infuriated Hera by claiming that the woman had the greater pleasure, but that is another matter. What is of immediate interest to us is Sophocles's placement of Tiresias in this play as such a crucial figure, insofar as he represents not only bisexuality but bisexuality based upon the murder of the female element (snake) which can only be undone by another murder (of the male snake). The psychic density of the Tiresias myth only adds to the play's extraordinary complexity.

From the above mythical elements one could add many other features which become part of the psychic context.

1. That the return-of-the-exile story was a well-known pretext (or subsequently revisionist act) for invasion by a foreigner.
2. That children were sometimes abandoned and left to die, having been spiked in the foot, to stop the ghost of the child from coming back to haunt the parents.
3. That outside the cities were people in settlements not taking part in city life, people who were exiled for one reason or another—for example, younger sons who could not be included in the city space and so were abandoned to the fringes.

We could dwell on these different factors and deconstruct the play in a particular way following the logic of each element's contribution to Sophocles's argument. My aim, however, is only to establish that Sophocles's play operates on many planes of reference, and I shall now consider how this tells us something about the nature of the complex Freud associated with Oedipus.

The Evocation of Dense Psychic Texture

Sophocles constructs a drama that will evoke within the audience a dense texture of inner associations so subtle and complex that as they play upon the mind they invite the acute work of the ego to process them. But the ego will inevitably fail to grasp in consciousness the full meaning of the events—not simply as this is a cognitive impossibility but because the unconscious issues presented are so disturbing that the subject represses or splits off what is knowable. The drama invites the subject's psychic response to displace conscious frames of mind, which is partly achieved by subversive presentation of a myth which all presume to know in advance, thereby lulling the witnesses into a false and premature sense of the play's meaning.

Although the myth of Oedipus's life is not a complex tale, Sophocles dramatizes the story from so many interlaced dimensions (from Oedipus's view, from the leader's perspective, from Creon's place, from Jocasta's view) that its mythic integrity is subverted by multiple points of identification with its characters, challenging what we think we know.

For example, we know Oedipus discovers that he has in fact killed his real father; or rather, we know this will be true. But when, along with him, we hear that there were several men at the crossroads, like Oedipus, we have some momentary doubt. How could it have been he if there were several attackers? Indeed when the story of the murder is first put to Oedipus, his powerful conviction to root out the truth marries with Jocasta's later admonition to stop thinking and to forget. Creon's martial actions and Tiresias's befuddling riddles also bear the sense of powerful conviction and certainty that pervades the play. But this sense is continually undermined, as we know, by the course of events, which reveal more truth to challenge that sense.

If we were to review Oedipus's first response to Creon's

story of Laius's murder, we would, like some in the audience, note how Oedipus inserts psychic truth into the discourse. Speaking of the attendant who survived the murder of Laius, Creon says:

> He said thieves attacked them—a whole band, not single-handed, cut King Laius down. (135–40)

to which Oedipus replies:

> A thief, so daring, so wild, he'd kill a king? Impossible, unless conspirators paid him off in Thebes. (140–45)

Oedipus changes the story to murder by a single thief, and no one corrects his error. He repeats this error in conversation with the leader.

> LEADER: Laius was killed, they say, by certain travelers.
> OEDIPUS: I know, but no one can find the murderer. (330–35)

Note now how the leader responds:

> LEADER: If the man has a trace of fear in him he won't stay silent long, not with your curses ringing in his ears. (335–40)

Oedipus has transferred one truth into the prior taken, or objective version, so that now his truth usurps the former narrative account without any apparent conscious recognition of this.

How many people in the audience caught this? How many in Freud's Vienna recognized this, or how many today pick it up? We shall never know. But surely some will miss it. Perhaps they are feeling the sense of impending trauma as Oedipus echoes his own initial dispossession. He does not

know that he is Theban and that he was abandoned by the king to die upon a mountain. We know this. And as he calls for the exile of the murderer and sets his people on a course of action, we know that he will re-create the original trauma to himself, now lived out in his mature years.

When he subsequently rails against Creon, who has in innocence gone to fetch Tiresias, who in the audience is not overcome with a sense—from the emotional unconscious—that Oedipus is correct to be suspicious and enraged? And if we are not, note how deftly Sophocles nudges us to recall something:

> CREON: . . . But this injury you say I've done you, what is it?
> OEDIPUS: Did you induce me, yes, or no, to send for that sanctimonious prophet?
> CREON: I did. And I'd do the same again.
> OEDIPUS: All right then, tell me, how long is it now since Laius . . .
> CREON: Laius—what did *he* do?
> OEDIPUS: Vanished, swept from sight, murdered in his tracks. (620–25)

Have we noticed that Creon breaks in on Oedipus to demand what Laius did, thereby calling attention to Laius's crimes? As Creon speaks, he unwittingly represents Laius in the heat of a moment, so when Oedipus expresses his sense that a deep injustice has been committed against him, we are reminded of his victimage. Do we recognize the expression of unconscious truth? Laius's crime? He "vanished"!

But perhaps this moment is lost upon the audience, some of whom are caught by Oedipus's suspicions that Tiresias is a "sanctimonious prophet." Caught up in thinking about something else, they do not hear Creon's question, thus failing to note its unconscious point.

The experience of being caught up in one's own particular train of thought is a feature of all human mental life, but one that especially fascinated Sophocles as he played upon the unconscious capacities of his audience by bringing them into the web of the play's complexity, displacing coherence with the fecund violence of emotional turbulence and wild associations.

We—or, I suggest, Sophocles—could argue that at any one moment in time the truth lies right before us. Certainly more than one critic has commented on Oedipus's extraordinary failure to see the truth before he set himself to suffer it. Why didn't he realize that, having killed the wealthy man at this crossroads, he had in fact killed a king? Why didn't he ask questions upon his arrival? Many more points along this track could be raised, but we know that human denial and the power of the wish are sufficient to blind.

And if Sophocles intends to set us an example of the extremes of mental process by putting Oedipus before our eyes, as certainly he does—when we learn that we should allow time to pass before moving to action and that we should listen to others—he does so only to signify a feature of our own personality: that we are a human complex.

Indeed, Sophocles lets us know—if we see it (and many have not)—the true riddle posed by the Sphinx, or perhaps I should say, the other riddle. We all know the manifest riddle and Oedipus solves it, to apparently rid the world of a scourge. But the Sphinx poses a hidden riddle, which Sophocles puts before his audience. In the streets of Athens, after the play was over, did one Athenian turn to his companion and ask, "Yes, but what was the true riddle?" I rather suspect so. Even as I think that, not having the text before them, they may have quarreled over what exactly was said.

What was the true riddle? Oedipus asks Creon why, after Laius was killed, the people of Thebes failed to investigate the crime and pursue the culprit. Creon replies:

> The singing, riddling Sphinx. She . . . persuaded us to let the mystery go and concentrate on what lay at our feet.[1] (145–50)

Familiar? It should be. How like Jocasta, who urges Oedipus to forget: "From this day on, I wouldn't look right or left" (950). So the Sphinx who holds the city in its frightful female clutches is echoed by the near-wicked queen who urges denial. Look not to the left or right. But what if Oedipus looked below him, for example, at his feet, which name him? What if he did what the Sphinx said and concentrated on his feet? Perhaps by thinking of his affliction he would have connected it to the nature of child abandonment, as such children frequently had their feet punctured to prevent their ghosts from haunting the murderers. But what if Creon and his consort had in fact listened to this comment, which appears to evade the truth but which becomes the new riddle, that if recognized and solved would have prevented the horrors to come? For upon hearing of the stranger's name—Oedipus (swollen foot)—a particularly thoughtful Greek might have said, "Ah! This is the foot that lies at our feet: the swollen foot of your name." Focusing on Oedipus, then, as the clue to Laius's murder would have resulted in his arrest and prevented his marriage to Jocasta.

But perhaps this secret riddle has gone unnoticed by some. Certainly on my first readings of the play I "missed it," and, as with Oedipus, it is arguable that, having missed it, I was unaware of Creon's and Jocasta's complicity—among others, including Tiresias—in failing (refusing?) to stop the course of actions. Is this true? Am I right to see things this way? Or is it misguided? Is there something about my interpretation which is incorrect? Am I at the mercy of my own limitations, whatever they may be?

1. Fagle's translation is a literal rendering of the Greek text, thus remaining faithful to Sophocles's play on "feet," which renders the Sphinx's statement a new riddle.

Yet is that not part of the true riddle posed by the Sphinx? When Oedipus killed Laius, the people aimed to deliver themselves from this beast by answering her "old riddle," but now new events had usurped it and she added to it with a new one which no one saw (except perhaps Tiresias). The underlying realities that cause anguish change. They change, as Freud saw, because of the dynamic nature of internal mental life, where wishes, needs, defenses, and reparations change our feelings about ourself, others, and events. To have answered the secret riddle was not a matter of figuring it out. Had the Sphinx said, "I have a new riddle: the murderer of Laius will lie at your feet," some clever Greek would have thought, "Oedipus! Swollen foot," and the murderer would have been found. But the point I believe that Sophocles makes, and the reason Freud is drawn to this text, is that solving particular mental contents (i.e., riddles) requires an understanding of the psychic reality generating the changes of mental content, as any mind is always reformulating its contents, and to prevent the plague of rash action one must not become too set in one's ways.

So to heed this Sophoclean admonition I shall now set my chapter on a new, somewhat different course, which I shall weave into the question "Why Oedipus?" In what respects, then, does my argument bear on the Oedipal child's dilemma?

The Child's Discovery

Just as Athenian culture "knew" it had once, at least in legend, derived from a maternal deity, so too does each child. The infant lives within the complex laws and unconscious principles of being and relating that are primarily conveyed by the mother, even when she communicates the father's views, her culture, the social order, and above all her language: the symbolic.

The dawn of the Freudian Oedipal era in the child's life is between the ages of four and six, a time when contributions from many previously latent sources now impinge upon the child who must consider them. Prior to this, he or she was being protected and held by maternal provision of care so that disturbing mental contents were always seemingly processed by the mother's many acts of containment as she often functioned as an auxiliary to the infant's self.

During the infant phase of the subject's life, in what we might term the matrilinear order, psychic structure is being laid down as the infant builds inner models of the world—of himself and his objects—that find reliable statuses as continuous points of inner view. By virtue of early infantile defenses, different psychic structures can be established around various types of object set up around differing experiences of the mother, father, and parental couple.

In the good enough Oedipus Complex—so to speak—the infant has already slept with the mother and enjoyed the fruits of this triumph. This good position emerges from the intimacy of mother and infant who have killed the father, by temporarily holding off the outside world that he represents, and this killing off is a permissible pleasure, which the father supports as the not good enough mother. Then the father enters the scene as a new figure in his own right, but through the infant's, or now, I should say, child's body. It is the genital drive which puts the father and the child in a new place. A new psychic structure is being laid on, generated by libidinal development. It is at this stage in the boy's life that the mother is imaginatively specified as a different object of desire and the father is now seen as a different rival to the child's claim.

Anxiety about castration testifies to the specificity of this eros, as the zone determining the excitement is localized as a threat. But is it the fear of castration that drives the boy toward the increased identification with the father which eventually resolves his Oedipal dilemma? If this were so, if

an anxiety became the source of an aim for identification, such an identification would itself be a psychopathy. One need only compare this to Klein's depressive position theory, for example, when the infant's realization of its harming the object of love inaugurates a new perspective in object relations. Fear of castration as the motive of identification would be a seriously retrograde act.

It is my view that the child resolves the Oedipal dilemma by a discovery that emerges out of his anxieties and desires. He or she has a claim upon the mother: no child is in any doubt about that. Smell of the mother is still inside the Oedipal child. But each child also realizes in quite a profound way that the father preceded the child's relation to the mother, and it is recognition of such precedents—on the part of both girl and boy—that is an identification: a correct identification of one's place, of one's position in time, that informs the child of the mother's prior desire.

The child may oppose this recognition and murderous fantasies may increase as he strives to deny the fact of lineage, something we know that Oedipus did by sleeping with his mother, to give symbolic birth to himself as well as to make his sons and daughters into brothers and sisters.

The child in the Oedipal dilemma discovers the patrilineal line along with the Name of the Father that breaks the illusions emerging from the infant's place in the matrilineal order. But it is the child's emergent genital primacy that drives him to this discovery, that in an odd paradoxical sense breaks the matrilineal mold as the erotic mother—now his or her object—displaces the infant from the child's place. So it is not the father whose frightful presence displaces the child in the first place, but the child's own erotic desire for the mother which creates in him a new object and a new self, as a new psychic structure arises out of this libidinal position.

It is at this age that the child philosopher emerges, asking about ontology, the origin of the universe, and the reason

for death's existence. The child poses these questions because he is developing a sense of perspective that naturally derives from his continuous oscillation between being two children: the new child who sees the mother as erotic and the old child who is her infant. However, during this transitional period, in the course of "answering" questions about the origins of their body's genital urges, they discover with what sex they are identified, therefore with what parent they are identified, and they realize their lineage. As they are in conflict with themselves between the two child states, the father will be defined largely according to the child's inner state of private conflict. In the course of discovering his desire the child recognizes the desires of the mother and the father and becomes fascinated by the father's specificity—his difference.

My aim now is to come to the core of this chapter: I wish to discuss why and how the Oedipal dilemma (Freud favored this phrase) is displaced by the Oedipus Complex, or how the child's anguish in the triangle is resolved to the point of a form of liberation from it—a liberation from dilemma into complexity.

Psychic Complexity

As the child endures the Oedipal dilemma he recurrently splits in two: as child back to infant, returning to child. In the course of these movements he creates, destroys, and recreates new sets of internal objects: the parents of infancy, the new parents of genital representation. We could say that the child is discovering the nature of internal representations, that fathers and mothers change within one according to internal self states. This is not so much a fully conscious recognition, except insofar as the child becomes interested in the nature of epistemology, which indicates preconscious recognition of the problems linked to knowing.

As Oedipus tells the Leader at Colonus that he is "born of the royal blood of Thebes," the Leader cries in horror: "You, you're *that* man—?" (235–40). All in Colonus know that man, who lives as a vividly disturbing internal object. But Oedipus stands before them as the actual other from whom all internal objects derive: "Your name, old stranger, echoes through the world" (330–35).

When Oedipus meets Theseus at his second crossroads ("And now, seeing you at this crossroads, beyond all doubt I know you in the flesh"), he meets a new father who recognizes the difference between an internal object and its actual otherness (620–25). Theseus promises to give Oedipus time to speak, telling him "I want to know," and this father who can delay his impulses, give himself time, and think about reality is the new father of the Oedipal child who though driven by desires is not so rash, so harsh, or so omnipotent: not, that is, so infantile (645–50). ". . . once a man regains his self-control, all threats are gone . . . Rest assured, no matter if I'm away, I know my name will shield you well" (750–55). If there is a father the absolute opposite of a Laius, it is present now in the person of Theseus.

Theseus is, however, simply a different paternal object. If Sophoclean tragedy tells us only one thing, it is that relations always change, nothing can be taken for granted; in other words, we are to be complex, indeed to live within the complex. The dream, for example, exemplifies to the child just how his objects change, leaving him bewildered by the shifting prophecies contained in these seemingly oracular moments. If the Western theatergoer finds it difficult to tolerate the Sophoclean hero's dispensation to the differing oracles, one perhaps only needs reminding that each night we dream we see and hear a strange other view of our life and our destiny.

This is a sobering discovery for the child as his infantile omnipotence would have all other minds and behaviors accord with his wishes, but now he begins to reflect on human

difference and the inability to reach the other through omnipotence, a paradoxical occasion, as knowing now how unique the other is, he comes to realize the odd fact of his own peculiarity. In addition, he quietly recognizes that the place he has been living—formerly assumed to exist in order to further his needs—bears the name "family." He is in one. And there are other families which have altogether different characters, created by interacting subjectivities that transcend the individual contribution. The family is a group which dissolves the singularly powerful prior authorities of the mother and father.

The child whose Oedipal dilemma remains the organizing conflict of his life often sustains this personality conflict, in my view, because he cannot accept the labile and chaotic authority of the group. He remains attached to the father, or in combat with the authority of the parental couple, because such parental organizations are more comforting than the identity-defying features of the group where participants will find themselves continually displaced by ideas, feelings, and processes well beyond the influence of the individual.

Sophocles plays with that loss of definition that transpires through participation in the group as he alternately makes each of the figures in the play seem reasonable, empathic, searchingly wise, blind, vicious, stupid, and murderous. Who is Creon? Jocasta? Tiresias? . . . Oedipus? There seems a different figure for each shifting place in the group dynamic.

Furthermore, Sophocles was writing for a Greek audience that was somewhere between an oligarchy and a democracy. How was it to live in a democracy where one was a member of a group free to speak one's mind? What was the group that composed the democracy? We continue to pose this question today, not simply because governments are usually somewhere between democracies and dictatorships, but because these two states echo an inner problematic in man and woman: whether to stay inside a monarchical government

or dictatorship, or whether to kill the king, revolt, and establish a group government.

There are anxieties in both directions. A monarchy can devolve into absolute rule. A leader can rule oppressively and compel the people to silence. This form of government seems a political analogue to the neurotic process, based as it is on the dominance of the ego, and its power to repress an unwanted view, when the only freedom of representation is by subtle derivative. In oppressed times allegory thrives as people read a hidden meaning beneath the manifest text presented to them.

A democracy can lead to a chaos in expression. Ideas are impossible to suppress, as no one has authority sufficient for such an action; but they can be split off and made bizarre in a deeply mad world that characterizes the psychotic process. In *Oedipus the King* the flux of mind of the chorus echoes the fickle movement of thought and feeling in the democratic process which permits any expression and invites cacophony.

Families live in what we term the household, and whether the "headship" tends toward the matriarchal or the patriarchal, above all else it is a group, an interpersonal place, arrived at from the many contributions of its members who can establish an atmosphere of place, even if their private representations of the persons there are inevitably idiomatic.

As I have suggested, this new object—the family group—echoes the divergent and coterminus internal contributions to the child's sense of his own complexity. This "spirit of . . . place" (75) that Oedipus finds at Colonus is a space sanctified by the founding father whose sense of fairness lives on in the hearts of the people. It is also a place combined with the maternal, as this sacred ground is the dwelling place of the Eumenides, who live under the mother earth.

At the point in the child's life when she or he can see the patrilineal and matrilineal lines, each becomes aware of who the father's parents are—particularly the father's father—and who the mother's mother is. This inauguration of a generational sense of personal place constitutes the emergence of a capacity to think about the links between grandparents (and their personalities) and parents (and their personalities). It is a line connected by a particularly mythic narrative as actual events, screen memories, embellishments, unconscious misreadings, and so on condense the grandparents' past—and what little history they know of their family—into the family's legend. (I shall discuss the nature of generational consciousness in the next chapter.)

However much the father's name may constitute a law, which among other things prohibits incest, it is not the father who establishes justice in the group. "Loose, ignorant talk started dark suspicions and a sense of injustice cut deeply too," the chorus tells Jocasta (775), implicitly recognizing the power of the group to usurp any single authority. "Strange response . . . unlawful," muses Oedipus upon hearing Tiresias refusing to speak the truth (368). How can criminal acts come to justice? An issue which we know strikes at the very heart of *Antigone*. In a child's conflict with the mother, or the father, or a brother, where is a just settlement to be found? In the magisterial entrance of the father, who upholds the law true to his name? But his decisions may not be just; a grievance may well continue long past his adjudication, based on the child's psychic reality, especially when a true injustice is committed by a family member. It is certainly at this age of complexity that the child realizes that his psychic claims—for justice among other things—not only compete with the equally intense psychic claims of other members of the group, but his own area of judicial consideration, his internal world, is often torn between opposing positions and, finally, his internal world is well beyond the knowing of even the most insightful and patient father. Psychic life itself puts one substantially out of the reaches of intersubjective knowing, even if it simultaneously enhances it.

This is one of the child's discoveries at this age: that one

is only a part of necessarily competing subjectivities, that one's omnipotence is radically altered by this, and invocations of the name of the mother or the father do not conjure justice. Sophocles knew this well, as did all Greeks. For the household was that space created by each family, sponsoring its only shared inner reality but also the axis of many conflicts and injustices. To some extent the *polis* evolved out of a need to resolve conflicts between households. "You have to come to a city that practices justice," Theseus tells the transgressor Creon (1040). Creon earlier tries to invoke the civic sense in claiming Oedipus: "Years ago your city gave you birth" (860–65).

Beyond the psychic reality of the family in the civic place, men and women contribute to the body that supersedes and coordinates the authority of the household. For the child this new place will first be encountered at school, the place where I think child observers can clearly see whether or not the young have "resolved" the Oedipal dilemma. Many will cling to an internal loving mother as they refuse intercourse with their peers, while others will reflect the conflict either by assuming the law of the father or by hiding in terror. Equally, though all children will show traces of both prior authorities, those who have achieved the Oedipus Complex have discovered perspective and know something of the nature of psychic life that makes no one a natural power. To live in the group one must be able to appreciate and live with this sense of life's complexity.

In the adolescent epoch there is a revival of the Oedipal child's discovery of the potential isolation suggested by the complexity of subjectivity. The adolescent feels the anguish of the shifting internal representations of self and other, just as he or she also lives inside a peer group that vividly announces the precarious nature of group dynamics. At a time of psychobiological growth, there is a re-emergence of transformed regressions, as the adolescent seeks deep first loves that provide sexual and emotional gratification, just as

finding some way to be liked, to become one of the group, is an effort to overcome the anxiety generated by group life. By transforming the intrinsic nature of the group into a falsely organized peer culture, adolescent groups are like gangs congregated to fight the anxieties of groups themselves! As time passes, as anxieties diminish, as the fruits of complexity are appreciated—particularly the value of diverse perspectives—the need for group bonding wanes, as does the urge for intense symbiotic puppy loves.

"Time is the great healer, you will see," Creon tells Oedipus, and for once we can agree with him (1664). It is at this point that time seems to possess something naturally curative. Resolution of the Oedipus Complex leads to this curative sense of time, enabling internal and interpersonal conflicts to heal as the subject finds that with time comes increased perspective: that which has been split off or denied—in the interests of one's narcissistic economy, for example—comes back into the picture, rendering one and one's relations more complex.

Resolution of the Oedipal Dilemma

In his theory of the primal horde, Freud imagines the earliest stage of society, one dominated by a powerful father who kept the women to himself and banished his sons. Eventually these sons form a group which operates under different laws from those of the primal father because they enjoy a kind of parity with one another, a shared deprivation that was organizing, and one eventful day the gang of brothers killed and devoured the father, which Freud saw as a form of identification. In the second stage of social evolution, according to Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, "the patriarchal horde was replaced in the first instance by the fraternal clan," but in a third era of progression the family became the unit that

returned to the fathers what had been taken by the primal horde (146).

In his theory of the clan's displacement of the father, Freud seems very close indeed to grasping that the group automatically displaces the authority of the father. And one may wonder if the totem meal that he believes stands in for the cannibalized father, theoretically to prevent further parricides, isn't more a commemorative mourning of the true end of the father: his displacement in the child's mind by a colony of new cathexes, libidinal interests, and idiomatic investments. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* I think Freud suggested a different model for the dissolution of the child's "father complex." "Each individual," he writes, "is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego ideal upon the most various models" (129). It is the force of these "identifications in many directions" that breaks up the father complex, resulting in a series of *progressive disidentifications* as the child seeks to select objects that give more precise expression to his idiom.

Thus the Oedipal child learns that it is his fate to be born into a very specific family, and more importantly, to be a subject who holds or contains in his own mind an object world, a group of percepts, introjects, and identifications that deepens his sense of his own complexity and radically problematizes the authority of his narrative voice. But if the child's discovery of the complexity of the human being radicalizes perspective and in itself usurps the patriarchal structure, it sends him to a new place, inaugurating a new order which derives from this decentering of psychic structure. What is the child's sense of himself and of life at this moment in his evolution? Knox views Sophocles's play as a model for modern drama because it presents us with "our own terror of the unknown future which we fear we cannot control—our deep fear that every step we take forward on

what we think is the road of progress may really be a step forward to a foreordained rendezvous with disaster" (133). I think this partly captures something of the Oedipal child's inner emotional reality, for the child is coming to know something, something really quite like Oedipus's discovery, that in a sense is quite tragic and certainly disturbing.

Oedipus's demand to know the cause of suffering results in discovery of his own unwitting fulfillment of a prophecy, and Sophocles permeates this play and *Oedipus at Colonus* with another peripeteia: the king gradually comes to encounter the force of his own personality and how it has also caused his undoing. As I have said, it is this discovery, the recognition that one is a psychic entity, possessed of a mind divided between interacting logics of consciousness and unconsciousness, that I think characterizes the Oedipal child's epiphany. It is not the fear of the castrating father who bars the child's erotic access to the mother; it is, as I have argued, the mind itself which holds the child in place. It is not an anxiety that stops the child from acting; it is mental consideration of the entire wish, one that inevitably involves a fear of the father, but as Freud also indicated, one that equally brings up the love of a father, identification with the father, and also a sense in the child—his own moral sense—that there's something wrong with the idea.

For this is the age, is it not, when the child comes to understand something about the oddity of possessing one's own mind? A little Odysseus, each child ventures into the world of daydreams, carried off by the mind's capacity to generate theaters for heroic action. The daydream in some respects is the first truly heroic place, where the child can objectify the self engaged in ideal action that brings acclamation and recognition by an implicit other. Oh, if the mind were so simple! How easy life would be. But this very same place also brings with it uncomfortable thoughts, disturbing emotions, and persecutory daydreams. The mind and its

spontaneous conjurings displace the heroic self's envisioning of life, compelling the child to struggle with evil ideas and feelings. What, then, does the child do with his mind?

Until the child becomes an Oedipus Complex I think mental contents have been rather more easily "understood" as slightly external events, in which the child feels magically possessed by distressing mental contents, which may then be projected into the object world and, with luck, gracefully processed by loving parents. But with the breaking up of the patriarchal structure of the family by the social group and the patriarchal psychic structure by the group of competing internal objects, the child is invited by his own development to encounter the semi-independent "itness" of his own mind. This may be most vividly studied in that painful but gradual recognition in the child that the dream he dreams is not an event external to the self that awakening or parental soothing can dispel, but an internal event, entirely sponsored by the child's mind. To my way of thinking, this is the Oedipal child's moment of truth, when he discovers that it is his own mind that creates the nightmare dramas that match poor Oedipus's fate, a discovery for each child that in some ways matches the search that Oedipus inaugurates when he aims to get to the origin of a curse that dooms his civilization. That curse is the bittersweet fate one suffers in having a mind, one that is only ever partly known and therefore forever getting one into trouble, and one that in the extreme can be rather lost (as in the losing of a mind) and one whose discovery by the child is a most arresting moment.

In this respect, then, we may rightly speak of the universality of child abuse, if by this we mean that each human subject is anguished by some of the products of his or her own mind: from the passing murderous idea that shocks the self to envy of a friend's good fortune; from the turbulent and essential pain of guilt generated by inconsiderate actions to the persecutory anxieties derived from acting out. Our

own subjectivity will abuse us all! However important it is to recognize the traumas derived from environmentally occasioned harm, such as sexual abuse, physical punishment, or severe emotional harm, it is always important to keep in mind Freud's discovery that in addition to such traumas, the mind in its own right would often be the agent of self traumatization.

But as the mind is often enough an anguishing phenomenon, so that over time a child recognizes that his own subjectivity fates him to episodic suffering, he also realizes through useful thinking that the same mind is also capable of helping him to contain and process disturbed thoughts. The mind is a problem-solving agency even if it stages the representations of self traumatizing ideas and feelings. Likewise, the group can function as a container of disturbed processes, even if its structure often invites distress.

The view that the superego is formed out of the relation to the father, and intrapsychically stands in his place, is too narrow a reading of this important psychic development. The arrival of the superego announces the presence of perspective, which is the psychically objective outcome of the Oedipal Complex, when the child discovers the multiplicity of points of view. The superego does indeed derive from identification, but by no means simply with the father, either in figure or in name, as its structure testifies to the achievement of perspective: the child can now look at himself and his objects through the many points of perspective offered by identifications.

As the child comes into the presence of his own mind, he is launched, in my view, on a most disturbing journey. This is a place where all of us live, moment to moment, in an area that I think Winnicott specified in his notion of essential aloneness, and certainly implied in his concept of the isolate that each of us is. As we develop, this mind becomes more complex, ironically enough in ratio to its sophistication. Psycho-development, then, is in part *devolutionary,* not

evolutionary: a dismantling of both pre-Oedipal and Oedipal early childhood structures. Fathers and mothers, early wishes and urges, primary needs and satisfactions, fade into a kind of mnemic opacity as we move more deeply into quite unknowable realms. Some people, and perhaps they are among our artists and philosophers, sense this psychodevolution as a fact of human life and aim to stay with it, to see if it can be accounted for or narrated, perhaps celebrated: but the risks to such adventurers are high. Most people, in my view, find consciousness of this aspect of the human condition—the complexity born of having a mind to oneself—simply too hard to bear.

Given the ordinary unbearableness of this complexity, I think that the human individual partly regresses in order to survive, but this retreat has been so essential to human life that it has become an unanalyzed convention, part of the religion of everyday life. We call this regression "marriage" or "partnership," in which the person becomes part of a mutually interdependent couple that evokes and sustains the bodies of the mother and the father, the warmth of the pre-Oedipal vision of life, before the solitary recognition of subjectivity grips the child. Ego development is thus a transformative regression: back to being in the family, this time through the vicarious rememberings generated through raising a family, absorbing oneself in cultivating a garden, and putting out of one's mind as best as one can quite what one has seen when leaving the garden in the first place. To go forward in life, we go back, back to the places of the mother and the father, where we can evoke these figures as inevitably comforting and practically as defensive alternatives to a madness always latent in groups: to the groups of social life, and more so to the group that is mental life.

As the child experiences the group's dissolution of the father complex, and as he strives to adapt to and become part of a social group, he gradually arrives at the exceptionally disquieting recognition that this cannot be done. How

can one adapt to something that refuses to identify itself? Where is the core identity of the group to which one is called upon to adapt? Although the child is raised with a fictional entity in mind created out of parental and educational visions of the civic-minded collective to which the young child should affiliate, psychoanalytic studies of the group process have taught us what we already knew as children: not only that groups are not fair but that they often operate according to psychotic principles. It can be a form of madness to live in a group. Or the group as a reliable presence is a delusion, believed in because its labile reality would be a hard lesson to preach to the young even if they know it unconsciously and suffer the anguish of its reality.

But children do learn how to live in groups. Common tasks concentrate human collectivities and simplify matters wonderfully. There are festivals, manic moments, times of true accomplishment, inspiration, hope, and development; these are the occasions when it is wonderful to be in a group. But most children know that it is by transformative regression back to dyadic existence that the distresses of group life can be averted, so the finding of a close friend is a very particular aim of most children, although obviously some who will be loners find in their novels, or science projects, a reliable structure that serves the need to retreat from the madness that ego psychology terms reality. In the end, we all develop a false self (hopefully) that can assist our endurance of the madness of groups and we find passionate and narrowed interests (such as the form of work we choose or avocational interests) and most of all, we seek partners and a few close friends to be with us.

The Oedipal dilemma is replete with paradoxes and doubtless I have not helped matters by suggesting several others: in particular that the child's relatively simple psychic structures built around the dyadic and triadic relational situations are superseded by recognition of the mind's complexity. All along, of course, this mind has been developing

and objects have been created as split-off fragments of the self, and from the dyadic and triadic structures; but the Sophoclean moment, if I may put it that way, is the self's recognition that a human life outlives the known relational structures. We are amidst two quite profound unconscious orders—our own mind and that of the group—which break the symbiotic and Oedipal cohesions. In time, a false self is evolved and engages the group, and false illusions of the self's unity are generated to assuage our anxieties about our personal complexity; these illusions and illusional engagements are absolutely essential to our life, and unsuitably named false if by that we mean not true of us—they are most certainly true of us all. And yet we do retreat, from my point of view, from the anguish of having a mind and living within a social order that outstrips our early childhood structures and wears thin our illusions of unity. We retreat very subtly back to transformed dyadic affiliations, back into triangular structures when we generate our own family, forward into passionate beliefs in the veracity of a single vision of reality (whether a psychoanalytic view, a political opinion, or a theological perspective), all unconsciously soothing—even when the occasions of mental pain themselves—because the mentally objectifiable dilemma is always preferable to the complex that is beyond its mental processing.

But if mental complexity ultimately defies the passing omnipotences of false organizations of content, and if the large groups of the human race—the groups we call nations, cities, institutions, and households—prove beyond the individual's successful organizational intentions, the diversity of such complexity allows each subject, as Winnicott said, to play with reality. One's unconscious use of objects, aimed to conjugate idiom into being, allows the subject to be disseminated through the complex events that constitute lived experience. We go with the flow. It is unconscious, not

coherent, yet pleasurable. Though we cannot adapt to reality, as in some respects it does not exist, we play with it, bringing our subjectivity to the thingness of the object world and there—in an intermediate space—give reality to our life.

Why Oedipus then? Because when he picked this play to address the key problematic in human development, Freud selected a drama that represented that tension between our cohesions, whether relational (as in marital, family, or group) affiliations, or delusional (as in Oedipus's delusion of an organized persecution by Creon), and the psychic textures well beyond the possibility of mental organization, a dense complexity so intrinsic to the group process that it can only hold itself together through denials of its nature. Although Sophocles, like many Athenians, believed that it was the civic sense that could think through the madness of group life, I think he also constructed a play that defied anyone's psychic organization: a play that evoked a density of unconscious work in the audience that must have provoked an anxiety about the limits of comprehension. It is this tension between the limits of consciousness and the wayward destiny of unconsciousness, between the helpful internal objects of psychic life and the persecutory presences—which Klein brilliantly conceptualized as a constant tension between two positions, paranoid/schizoid and depressive—between the need for group life and the madness of such processes, that Sophocles brought to this play. Although *Oedipus at Colonus* would seem to celebrate the virtues of a well-governed *polis*, endowed with a spirit of place that is based on the integration of the matrilineal and the patrilineal lines, it is my view that our primary adult relations in life—marital, familial, ideological, political—are necessary regressions from the logic of human development, in which transformed simplified structures are found to comfort us against the harrowing complexity of life: be it the life of the mind or life in the strange mind of a social group. Complexity displaces the pre-Oedipal

and Oedipal structures: the child discovers his own mind and the solitude of subjectivity. Knowing this, life becomes an effort to find inner sanctuary from the logic of psychodevelopment, and when this generative asylum is established it allows the subject to play with the samples of reality that pass by him during his lifetime.

11

Generational Consciousness

Looking back on the 1914–19 war, Vera Brittain wrote in the foreword to *Testament of Youth* that she felt "a growing sense of urgency, to write something which would show what the whole world . . . has meant to the men and women of [her] generation" (11). Perhaps she felt the need to capture her generation in a literary place because the new generation—she wrote her work in 1929–33—was so different. She did not think that "the bright young people of today, with their imperturbable realism, their casual, intimate knowledge of sexual facts, their familiarity with the accumulated experiences of us their foredoomed predecessors," had endured "one-tenth of the physical and psychological shock that the Great War caused to the modern girl of 1914" (45).

Brittain had grown up in an "unparalleled age of rich materialism and tranquil comfort," of private schools tucked away in rural retreats, a protected world that contained eros in the ritual of the school dance and appealed to the adolescent ideals as partnering links to the supportive society (50). Even if Brittain, like all adolescents, fashioned her ideals in opposition to the previous generations, she and her

laughed, and I replied, "You mean, us middle-aged people?" and she nodded. "So what else is there?" I asked. "Wrinklies," she replied, and I discovered that wrinklies were true elders. "And you, what are you?" I countered. "We don't have a name," she said. "Oh yes, you do. You are a softie," which lit her up into the intergenerational dialectic, now named along with the crusties and the wrinklies.

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