

THE ECOPSYCHOLOGY OF OEDIPUS

Part One: The Theban Ecopsychological Tragedy

The seed we plant determines what will grow, including the seed of a discipline. We can graft the original plant to another, we can transplant, we can trim and shape, but we cannot change the seed itself.

But it can happen that we discover the seed is not what we thought it was.

The creation myth, or seed, of the modern discipline of psychology is profoundly and essentially ecopsychological. Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious, as we all know, was inspired by the ancient Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. As you will recall, in the Theban tragedy Oedipus discovers he has unknowingly murdered his own father and married his mother. The drama is replete with dramatic metaphors about 'blindness,' and in the final harrowing scene, Oedipus blinds himself. From these metaphors of blindness Freud developed his theory of the unconscious, a part of ourselves that drives us that we cannot see.

But Freud himself was blind and so has the discipline of psychology been blind to the ecology in its own creation myth. Not only is the Theban tragedy an ecopsychological tale, but there is another drama about what happened after Thebes, *Oedipus at Colonus*. When we bring the two dramas together into the whole life journey of Oedipus, we see that the entire life of Oedipus is about *transforming one's soul for the sake of the Earth*.

In this first article of two, I will restore the ecopsychological throughline, as we say in theatre, to the first play, the tragedy in Thebes. In the second article I will reveal the remarkable ecopsychological drama that follows, throughout making connections with our own time and fate and the discipline of Ecopsychology.

The Theban Tragedy

Plague

Oedipus Rex opens with a Chorus of Theban Citizens approaching the palace to tell their king that a terrible plague has seized the Earth circle around Thebes. "Buds turn to rust," they tell him. Stillbirths, no births, miscarriages afflict animals and humans alike. Rashes appear on human and animal skin, and the air itself is poison. Crops wither in a constant, scorching, mad heat, as if Sophocles were predicting global warming, eco-systemic estrogen mayhem, acid rain, pollution and toxic waste 2500 years ago, at the birth of the concept of the individual creator self.

The first gesture Oedipus makes is to help an old man who stumbles; this is a compassionate king. The first words he speaks are:

*My children, generations of the living. . .
I would not have you speak through messengers,
And therefore I have come myself to hear you—
I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name.**

"Oedipus" literally means "wounded feet," a telling name for the first self-made king in the Western, Humanist tradition. Though the Athenian audience would not put it this way, in the 'famous name' of Oedipus lies embedded a wounding environmental footprint. His Earthwalk imprints on the Earth not so much the literal wounds as the emotional and ecopsychological wound to his psyche of which Oedipus is not aware. He thinks he knows himself, but as the plot unfolds, he discovers that his parents are not who he thought they were and therefore he has no idea what his actual, true place in creation is. Someone who

* All quotes are from the Robert Fitzgerald & Dudley Fitts translation, *The Oedipus Cycle*, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1949/1976.

does not know his place in creation has the fatal power to 'displace creation,' to confuse its salutary creative order. A planet "unhinged," as Bill McKibben describes the 'plague' of global warming and climate chaos, is a planet of self-made kings like Oedipus who are themselves 'unhinged' from creation but do not consciously know it.

Thebes

Oedipus is renowned for his cleverness; this is the man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx, the mythical creature who is part woman, part eagle, part lion who guarded the entry to Thebes and destroyed all who could not answer her riddle: What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? After many failed, Oedipus, then a young man on his way to Thebes from another province, finally answered the riddle: Man, who crawls as an infant, walks in adulthood, and needs a cane in old age. The Sphinx was defeated and Oedipus hailed as a hero upon his entry into Thebes.

Poor guy. Little did he know what "Thebes" was. In actual, environmental terms Thebes was known as a place of pestilence and disease; it is no accident Sophocles sets the tragic drama there. In ecopsychological terms, when the Sphinx let him pass the gates Oedipus enters into the 'space' in the *anima mundi* of the hyper-independent, isolated, clever individual. "Cleverness" is the word environmental educator, David Orr, uses to describe the kind of mind we are producing in our educational system, a mind that is good at manipulating systems, including human and ecosystems, for personal gain and self-actualization, and is devoid of empathy for the systems being manipulated. It is an objectification of everything living into a resource for personal use.

Ecopsychologists may hear in Orr's Cleverness an echo of Paul Shepard's concept of "Autism" as a condition of absolute incapacity to feel, sense, connect, know our ecological reality. In the cognitive psychology of Simon Baron-Cohen, Autism is placed on a scale at the opposite end of Empathy. Autism, in Baron-Cohen's schema, is identical with Orr's cleverness, a mind that can manipulate systems, often in astonishing and mysterious ways (as in the *idiot savant* character played by Dustin Hoffman in the movie *Rain Man*). Autism, clever as it is, cannot *experience* relationship.

At the other end, Empathy, we find individuals who can feel and know others, including the otherness of nature. Feminist cognitive theory has proposed two ways of knowing, 'separate knowing' and 'connected knowing.' Separate knowing is replete with war metaphors and proceeds through argument and conquest ("defend your position in this paper," "master your information"), whereas connected knowing develops understanding by trying to understand the knower, their lifeworld, why they believe what they do, and then engage in a dialogue (not an argument) to seek mutual understanding. Connected knowing depends on Empathy; separate knowing, on Cleverness.

Gathering these together, what we might call the cognitive ecopsychological profile that 'gets us into Thebes' is Separate Knowing and Autism. As Brian Swimme writes (*The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and The New Story*):

...[Even though Oedipus was made king of Thebes, he did not actually live in the kingdom of Thebes. For to live in the kingdom means to live in proper relationship with the members of the kingdom. But Oedipus was in proper relationship with no one....We too regard ourselves as living on Earth. But we do not live on Earth in the sense of living as members of Earth's Community. (47)

Thebes is the site, in psyche, where we are "in proper relationship with no one" because relationship eludes us. It is the psychical place where one is ignorant of the delimiting laws of "the

kingdom,” the entire interconnected creaturely web of creation. The answer given to the riddle of our Creatureliness that opens the cognitive gates to Thebes is that we are a species that is utterly unlike others. I join many environmentally concerned educators when I say that traditional Western education prepares students ‘to enter Thebes.’

Curiosity

Having listened to the bad news from the Chorus, the blind seer, Tiresias, tells Oedipus that this plague that has seized the Earth circle around Thebes is the result of the unsolved murder of the former king, Laius. Oedipus commits to discover the source of this terrible plague. He does not, please note, demand more evidence, hand out special tax cuts to his plague-making cronies, or say, “I’m on vacation. I have a life.”

In *The Love of Nature and the End of the World*, Shierry Weber-Nicholsen uses psychoanalytic theory (the ill-named ‘object relations’ theory) to explore the causes of our environmental tragedy. She speaks to the power of “curiosity” to snap us out of our “spellbound” “psychic numbness” and grief over the loss of the Earth along similar lines to Joanna Macy’s work on compassion for the Earth’s suffering, feeling its pain. They are describing ecopsychological Autistic therapy, the labor of restoring the severed links and closed doors of Empathy. One of the horrors of current Western education is that the domination of Separate Knowing severs and shuts down Empathy till it withers, perhaps beyond recovery until something happens in-mid life to shatter what standard education has sealed.

In Oedipus’s commitment to undertake an investigation, it is curiosity about the plague and the murder that allows him to overcome whatever fear and resistance he may feel upon hearing the news of the plague.

One of the problems we face in helping individuals and communities develop a “green self” and come into mutual, intimate and salutary relations with the Earth is that the bad news of plague is delivered *in toto* and overwhelms us all. When Bill McKibben writes eloquently of the need for our environmental situation to “register in our imaginations,” in psyche, he is speaking to the challenge of finding language and stories that allow our reality to penetrate psyche without the psyche shutting down in fear.

Imagine that the Chorus and Tiresias, in this opening scene, revealed to Oedipus that he is the murderer and source of plague. Imagine statistical charts appearing on stage with arrows all pointing to Oedipus as the guilty cause. Imagine rage, protest, fury and accusation being hurled at him. The response of Oedipus to this onslaught of information and accusation would be to check out, slip into psychic numbing and denial, and curse them back.

All of us respond negatively when someone tells us who we “really” are and we have not been given the opportunity to discover for ourselves. The discipline of patience is well known to the therapist, able to see what the client cannot but knowing that they must find it for themselves and cannot be told directly and all at once or they will withdraw and shut down.

As I look with my dramatist’s eyes upon this moment in the drama, and imagine I am directing the blind seer, Tiresias, the director-actor dialogue would be about how Tiresias knows already but he cannot let on too much or Oedipus will do what we see current U.S. leadership doing, at its best denial and at its worst full scale ecological Autism. As the first “Earth prophet” in the West, Tiresias could tell Oedipus abundant, insightful truths about why there is plague in his kingdom. Without going into details, Tiresias’s powers as a prophet are the direct result of his seeing into the heart of the dynamics of creation; he could tell Oedipus everything.

But it is Oedipus who must investigate for it is Oedipus who must change, and the journey to discovering his authentic place in creation needs to be his.

How can we translate this scene into our current reality effectively to achieve the desired result of ending plague, given that the ‘cat’s out of the bag,’ as it were? A few possibilities come to mind. One is for Ecopsychologists and environmental activists to work together on language, ‘framing,’ metaphors, strategies. This is also a task of changing political discourse so that the spiritual-scientific revolution is incorporated into straightforward political action, a project that has, happily, begun at the inaugural conference of the Network of Spiritual Progressives in Berkeley this past summer, with another scheduled for this spring in Washington (www.tikkun.org).

Another is for educators to cease – and I mean this – cease presenting the bold, terrifying facts about our environment to students. Education about our environmental situation needs to be crafted with care of the soul in mind, curriculum designed and pedagogy generated that maximizes Empathy and Curiosity and minimizes the chances of withdrawal, denial, shut down and psychic numbing.

Finally, we need to follow the cue of Tiresias, who conducts Oedipus’s investigation into the plague toward Oedipus discovering how and why he entered Thebes in the first place. This translates into current reality as finding ways to inspire curiosity about why the West acts as we do toward the Earth, and help clients, students, and leaders explore those aspects of our individual and collective psyche that take us into Thebes. The great drama educator, Dorothy Heathcote, defined drama as “a man in a mess.” We need to help us understand how we got into this environmental mess as much as help us find our way out. This is not to say we are not doing this, only to support this aspect of the work.

Therapeutic, educational and artistic use of the entire Oedipal story can help us here, for we can begin our therapeutic, educational and artistic explorations of the seminal tragedy of the West and the creation myth of psychology with the knowledge that we do not end up in Thebes. There is hope in that fact. To get out and onto the next stage of the journey, we need to understand how we got into Thebes in the first place, all the “killings we made,” the deals, the ecocidal actions, the *unintentional* murders of ecosystems and species that lead us on the fast track to Thebes *so that we can get out*. And we can do this secure in our knowledge that the *whole* story of the ancestor of modern psychology did precisely that: he got out, moved on, and changed from bringer of plague to healer of it.

Root Errors

The Theban plot unfolds, scene after scene revealing another chapter in the authentic plot of Oedipus’s childhood. He discovers he has been wrong about who his ancestors are; his parents are not his actual parents. Now he is a riddle to himself. Uncertainty and conflict prevail as Oedipus struggles to uncover his authentic roots while, at the same time, being terrified of what he might find out – that he is the child with the fate predicted by the Delphic oracle. In these scenes of reconstructing his childhood, as we all know, Freud found his inspiration for psychoanalysis.

From an ecopsychological perspective, I see Oedipus discovering he has made an ‘ancestral error’ and rooted himself in creation from the wrong source. We might play with the many versions of ‘wrong’ or ‘erroneous’ source that contaminate the individual and collective unconscious, but they will all have in common the quality of an ‘error’ that holds in it an important ‘errand.’ We enter the psychological site of Thebes in error, but we have an errand, there, a critical ecopsychological task: to re-root ourselves in creation.

Of course, the other ‘root error’ here is the root error of psychology that missed the entire ecological plot. What professional and salutary use can the profession make by re-rooting our own disciplinary ancestral roots in the *whole* journey of Oedipus? I see great potential in the concept of mistaking half for whole that extends beyond the halfway journey of Oedipus and into related disciplines.

For prime example, the error that fuels hyper independent individualism, capitalism and separate knowing is the misunderstanding of “survival of the fittest” in Darwin. Competition between species applied only to lower organisms; when it came to mammals, in Darwin’s view survival depended upon *fitting with* others and in *making the fit* between human and creatures, individualism fitting into the web of life.

We are also at the halfway point in the billion-year cycle of the solar star that feeds us, about six billions years so far and roughly another six to go. The middle of a story is a unique psychological position. Imagine how things look to the duck in *The Ugly Duckling* in the middle of her situation, or what the situation looks like from Hansel’s point of view in the middle of his and Gretel’s story. The duck has no idea she’s really a swan, but is living in a state of anguished abandonment and false consciousness. Hansel is being fattened up by the witch and Gretel is weeping, no hope in sight. Or, extending our ecological imaginations, imagine things from the perspective of the acorn on its way to being an oak but before the oak has produced any more acorn seeds. The acorn is thinking, Hold on, this thing I am, this tree, it’s not me. Then relief and insight comes when the acorn realizes that becoming an oak is the way more acorns happen.

We are in the middle of the epic tale of our solar star, and in the middle there is a lot of distortion, confusion, and be-wilderment, ‘be-wild-ness’ as we struggle to make the shift in psyche that leads us to our destined end. This structure of becoming profoundly other in the middle of a story is an ecologically based story structure that I believe we replicate in psyche. Dubrowski’s theory of “positive disintegration” applies, here, in which he says that the brain loses structure on its way to a new structure. We must endure our ideas, worldviews, and the whole shape of our psyche becoming ‘compost’ so that we flourish, fully, in the earthly garden of life. (Composting is how I view the infamous “Death of Environmentalism” article, by the way.) We lose ourselves, becoming bewildered, on our way to the full understanding of what we were always meant to be.

Returning to the Oedipal dramas and the half for whole error of psychology, what this structure tells us is that the discipline of psychology has been for over a hundred years subject to the distortions and confusions particular to the half-way place, and that the structure of psychology must undergo a “positive disintegration” to become the Ecopsychology it *always was*, to manifest the seed of Ecopsychology from the blossoming tree – so other in form from the original ecopsychological seed – of psychology. As we all behold with not a little wonder the emergence of an entirely new cosmology for the psyche from the brilliant, eclectic disciplinary mix of Ecopsychology, we are *not* embarked on creating a new discipline, but on removing the veils of our half-way false consciousness and, at the same time, elucidating the environmental consequences of remaining in that consciousness. Put another way, we were never meant to stay in Thebes; it was always the site of the *tragic* human psyche, not the whole, awesome human soul on Earth.

Ecopsychological Incest

The final, horrific revelation that he is married to his mother and that he, Oedipus, is the murderer of former Theban king Laius, who is his father, comes when a shepherd, a man of the Earth, reveals that he rescued a babe on a rock years ago whose feet had been pierced, the same number of years Oedipus is old. The blanks in his life story finally come together into a harrowing whole. We understand with Oedipus that the perversion of his own, individual creative order is the cause of the disorder in nature’s creative order. As goes the individual human psyche, so goes the Earth.

In this plot, Sophocles is dramatizing his view that the consequence of individualistic consciousness, this new idea of the human being that was the Greeks’ great work, will be tragic *if* we resist, deny, ignore our place in creation and sever the bond of human soul and the soul of the world, the anima

mundi. Individualism taken too far, out of its situated, embeddedness in creation, will result in a perversion of our own creative powers (incest). This theme should not surprise us for Sophocles was a shaman, and, like all shamans in all cultures, his task is to maintain the precious balance of human psyche/soul and nature.

In other shamanic wisdom traditions, as in the oral storytelling of the Ute and Arapaho of the American Southwest and in West Africa, it is believed that a story will “stalk” or “hunt” the soul of the individual who is acting out of balance. The land will send the story the individual needs so that he can change how he is acting, precisely as the Chorus in the opening scene approaches Oedipus with the story of the land around Thebes. Sophocles, as shaman, was working in this universal shamanic plot structure; his original genius lay in dramatizing it.

As a shaman, the plague in the Earth circle is not a dramatic metaphor for Sophocles. It is a diagnosis of the symptom. Incest – the perversion of our creative powers for self-making -- is the disease.

The great nature poet, Robinson Jeffers, wrote a narrative poem based on *Oedipus Rex* called *The Tower Beyond Tragedy*, as well as a poem about incest, *Roan Stallion*. He gives us an ecopsychological definition of “incest” that fits the Theban tragic plot. He is speaking, here, of modern civilization.

More than half its energy, and at the present civilized level nine-tenths of its energy, is devoted to self-interference, self-frustration, self-incitement, self-tickling, self-worship. The waste is enormous; we are able to commit and endure it because we are so firmly established on the planet; life is actually so easy, that it requires only a slight fraction of our common energies. The rest we discharge onto each other--in conflict and charity, love, jealousy, hatred, competition, government, vanity and cruelty, and the puerile passion the will to power--or for amusement. Certainly human relations are necessary and desirable; but not to this extent. This is a kind of collective onanism, pathetic and ridiculous, or at noblest, a tragic incest...

For Jeffers, ‘tragic incest’ is a condition of self-reflexive creating, self-making akin to narcissism. He expressed the same idea poetically in *The Tower Beyond Tragedy* this way:

*...when they look backward they see only a man standing at the beginning,
Or forward, a man at the end; or if upward, men in the shining bitter sky striding and feasting,*

...

It is all turned inward, all your desires incestuous.

In Jeffers we find, I think, the link between the human incest and the Earth plague, the disorder the shaman-playwright is simultaneously dramatizing and diagnosing: Do not become so dazzled by this new idea of the individual creator Self that you see only yourself and become blind to the divine, blind to the *anima mundi*; and use all your creative powers for the aggrandizement and pleasure of the human-apart, the self-made human, forgetting we are all the children of the sun.

But as we know, this is the tragic error we make when we enter Thebes. Once in, the only way out is to fall from our heights of self-glory *back to Earth*. What makes the drama in Thebes tragic is not that Oedipus falls, as classical Aristotelian theory has it (which, by the way, was developed hundreds of years after the Oedipal plays). What makes the Theban site in psyche tragic is that it is ‘where’ we step out of creation’s web and place the human being above it, forcing ‘creation’ to ‘create’ a plot for us in which we fall. It is when individuals begin acting without awareness of their relation to the whole that shamans send them the stories they need to learn. Sophocles, I believe, was sending a story to his community that he hoped would be a cautionary tale about this new, emerging individualistic human consciousness. *Oedipus*

Rex is a shaman's version of the precautionary principle. In essence, Sophocles was saying that, as we Greeks embrace this great work of the individual creator self, let us not forget we remain subject to the laws of creation.

The Oracle

As you will recall, the murder and incest in Thebes was predicted by Apollo's oracle at Delphi. Apollo, god of the sun and of harmony is the 'playwright' here, the one who shapes the Oedipal plot. (The music that one is taught in school Apollo represents is the cosmic harmony of the music of the spheres.) The Apollo of Delphi is not the same as the Apollo in the sky. At Delphi, the Earth is cracked and a great fissure reveals the molten core of the sun. Sparks fly, stinky sulfuric springs bubble; truth often does 'stink.'

When she was pregnant with Oedipus, Jocasta went to the oracle at Delphi where she was told the fate of the child in her womb: he will murder his father and marry his mother. Jocasta tries to avoid it by having her infant son's feet pierced and leaving him on a rock to die. But in the way of psyche and of archetypal drama, her action only sets in motion the necessary conditions for fulfilling Apollo's plot for the new, individual consciousness.

Putting on modern, scientific lenses for a moment, to be given a "destiny by the oracle of Apollo" is the same as having one's life determined by our solar reality, the precise energetic conditions on Earth. Ignorance of one's solar reality and the fate that the existing energetic conditions on Earth give each one of us during the mortal time of our Earthwalk gets one 'into Thebes,' into incest. What ignoring our solar reality does *not* do is get us out of our solar reality – rather, it reminds us of it by making us "fall" into "enlightenment" of our actual, authentic place in Gaia's orbit.

However, it is important to note that the oracle did not predict the plague. That is Sophocles' addition to an ancient myth on which he based his drama. The genius of Sophocles was to figure out *why* Apollo would have given such a fate to this new idea of the human as an individual: because (our shaman answers) such an individual will pervert his creative powers in ways that damage creation itself. The environmental consequences of creating one's own destiny outside of one's solar reality sprang from the shamanic imagination of Sophocles.

But Ecopsychologists would be wise, I think, to consider that there is a taboo wish in the psyche to get into Thebes, a wish for self-making apart from the delimiting laws of nature. There is, I think, great therapeutic power in accepting the tragic ecopsychological dimensions of psyche and then working compassionately and therapeutically with them.

I also believe that there is healing power in the idea that Western culture was given a fate just as Oedipus was. In Thomas Berry's "great work" schema, the tragic aspect of a great work is not fully developed, if at all. The dramatic art form of Tragedy was a product of the Greeks whose great work was the birth of the concept of the individual creator self – Oedipus. In this light, Tragedy was the fate of Humanism; the fall we are in now as we awaken, painfully and with great suffering, to our ecopsychological incestuousness was part of our Humanistic, Modern destiny all along. When we can accept that the price we paid for the birth of individualism is the birth of tragedy (apologies to Nietzsche), we can then heal ourselves of some of our debilitating rage at "the West" for being the protagonist in our current environmental situation.

The etymology of "protagonist" is made of two words, *proto* and *agon*; when brought together into protagonist, the meaning is 'he who carries the anguish, the conflict, through.' In this sense, the West is carrying the anguish of the creator self who yearns for the fullest realization of his awesome individual creative powers through to our destined, Tragic end when we realize that what makes us extraordinary as a

species can also destroy all species, including ourselves. This agon, conflict, is what makes the West the protagonist of its own fated tragedy.

A Tale of Awe

Psychologist Kirk Schneider helps us, here, with his concept of Awe. According to Schneider, Awe is authentic, depth human aliveness that is both humbling and wondrous in the face of the cosmos. Awe lives at the core of our beings, but it is not a static center; rather, it is a “fluid center.” When we flow with Awe from our fluid center, we flow with both aspects of Awe, the humbling and the wondrous, the horrific and the holy, the shattering and the luminous -- in Oedipal terms, the tragedy of Thebes and the second drama at Colonus. At times human beings are awed by the feeling of the whole cosmos within us, perfectly attuned and amazed by the wonder of being alive, at other times, the Cosmos comes along and lets us know who is really in charge of the earth-plot, here, and we experience a tragic “fall” out of our entrancement with our individual creative powers (Thebes). Then we continue on our Awe-filled journey to a place, psychical and actual, where we discover that our individual powers are, indeed, awe-some and it is possible for one soul, in one place, at one time, to reverse ecological tragedy and restore the Balance so that all the living Flourish, generations into the future (Colonus).

Awe-based Ecopsychology moves in both realms, the horrific and tragic theatre of psyche that we find in Thebes, and the salutary, flourishing theatre of psyche that we find at Colonus.

The Sun Moves Within

Hints of Colonus, the site in psyche and on Earth where we can manifest the Flourishing aspects of Awe, come at the end of the horrifying Theban tale. In the final moments of the play, reeling from the horror of his revelation, Oedipus contemplates suicide (off-stage). While he stands over the suicided corpse of his wife and mother, Jocasta, he wants to escape the horror of Thebes as she did. But, as he tells us in the final scene of the play, in the nadir of his life, Apollo talks to him from within. Harrowing and horrific as it has been in Thebes, his solar fate has at last been incorporated, and in the Awe-full moment of shattering, the light of Apollo shines through the cracks in Oedipus’s psyche.

Apollo tells Oedipus to remain alive on Earth. He promises Oedipus that Tragedy is not all there is of destiny for him, or, rather, Oedipus’ own shattered psyche opens up to a new plotline for his earthbound life. In a gesture as anguishing as it is fitting, Oedipus obeys the inner voice that tells him there are other ways to ‘make the Self’ and remain alive to find them, and takes the golden brooches from the robes Jocasta wears, dangling from a noose, and blinds himself. Whatever Oedipus has remained alive to see, it is not outside him but within.

From the perspective of the cosmos, the sun-that-is, the sun-I-am – my awesome, individual creative self - can now be trusted, for my ego has shattered from the realization of my eco-incestuous self-infatuation. In essence, what happens in Thebes is that our Awe at our own creative powers reveals its shadow aspect, its repulsive, horrible monstrous aspect – ecopsychological incest. The sun creates this plot for us *so that the sun can trust us*.

Oedipus remains alive, unlike Jocasta who learns, perhaps, the bitterest lesson of all, the intolerable and unbearable anguish of ‘giving birth’ to patriarchal consciousness that brings an end to the previous era when the feminine identification with mother Earth dominated. Hence, the mother in the drama kills herself; that consciousness cannot survive in the new one. But – and it is a big one – it is Jocasta’s brooches Oedipus uses to blind himself. As a result, Oedipus can no longer gaze, spellbound, upon the landscape of patriarchal accomplishment, but must forever after look inward upon his soul, his *anima*, a feminine concept in ancient Greece.

Can we see in this dramatic gesture the cure to ecopsychological incest, to take the feminine consciousness of our connection with Mother Earth and blind ourselves to the enchantments and spells of Autism, 'auto-human-apart' consciousness? Oedipus won't be looking at the false cosmology of advertising any more. No more will he be spellbound by images that proclaim bliss will be his if he only purchases an SUV. In the end, Sophocles is telling us that blindness of one kind gets us into Thebes, but blindness of another kind is what gets us out. In the disease lies the cure.

Our Oedipal Fate

What might the gift of individualism be to the Earth? What does the sun want from us after we have survived the tragedy of Thebes?

These are the questions that we are now asking ourselves, the generation that has shared Oedipus's tragic Theban fate more than any other. We, too, entered 'Thebes' bedazzled by our cleverness only to discover that we in the industrial West have 'riddled' the Earth with plague.

As to the question, why did we ever have to go to Thebes? If we did not experience Awe in our individual creative powers, none of us would believe we could accomplish the next great work, to create as nature creates. And, if we did not know the cost to our souls when we use our Awe-some creative powers for our own self-aggrandizement, only, ignorant of our solar fate and the sun's plot for the human, we could never be *entrusted* by nature with the great work of before us in the Ecozoic era.

Never forget that the Theban tragedy is a Delphic creation, a plot hatched by the divine, earthbound-sun, worked out on stage by a shaman, a healer. It is a carbon tale of crash and burn, of being burnt out, of being charred and seeing one's whole existence turn to ashes when one's ecopsychological Oedipal wish to make one's self outside of the delimiting laws of our solar fate is fulfilled.

And, as we shall see in the next article, it is also the story of rising from those ashes transformed, endowed with profoundest wisdom and reversing ecological doom at the last moment, the drama we are living on Earth, right now.

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