

## THE SELF-BLINDING OF OIDIPOUS IN SOPHOKLES: *OIDIPOUS TYRANNOS*

*Introduction:* Methodologically, this article seeks to apply to the problem of Oidipous' self-blinding in Sophokles' *Oidipous Tyrannos* the psycho-analytical principle of overdetermination, which Professor Dodds appears to have been the first to apply consequently and fruitfully to classical studies.<sup>1</sup> It is proposed to show that Oidipous' self-blinding was a heavily overdetermined deed.

As regards the material to be considered, this study applies rigorously 'the essential critical principle that what is not mentioned in the play does not exist'.<sup>2</sup> But the *rigorous* application of this principle requires one to treat as 'mentioned in the play' that which is *ostentatiously*—and sometimes even *explicitly*—'not' mentioned in the play.

As regards the perspective adopted here, it seeks to rectify a rather singular tendency, which consists in appealing to 'dramatische Technik'<sup>3</sup> *mainly* where the literary critic *thinks* he is confronted with something illogical or self-contradictory. I hope to show in at least one instance that such a passage, while certainly instancing Sophokles' brilliant 'dramatische Technik', is psychologically perfectly plausible—provided that one applies to it a scientific psychology and not the type of home-grown pseudo-psychology which mars so many critical discussions of ancient texts.

### THE CONCRETE PROBLEM

It is proposed to determine whether Oidipous' self-blinding is specifically and primarily linked with his incest, and, if it is, to determine the nature of the nexus between the incest and the self blinding. The focus of my enquiry is Sophokles' *Oidipous Tyrannos*, which (except perhaps for Ar. *Ran.* 1195) is the first surviving account of Oidipous' self-blinding. Whether this necessarily means that Oidipous' self-blinding was invented by Sophokles is a problem which does not concern me here.

The first authors to link Oidipous' self-blinding with his incest *only* appear to be Dion Chrysostomos (x 29 f.) and Ailianos (*NA* iii 47), both of whom deride Oidipous' self aggression and consider it an insensate or even mad action. Various modern scholars also connect the self-blinding *primarily* with the incest, though already Crusius—probably bearing in mind that punitive mutilations tend to be highly 'crime specific'—noted that self-blinding, viewed as a punishment, does not seem to fit the crime of incest too well. I note in passing that certain variants of this myth, in which Oidipous is blinded by others,<sup>4</sup> link his blinding not with his incest, but with his parricide/regicide.

Freud also appears to have felt that self-blinding, *taken at face value*, was not a very suitable punishment for incest. He therefore interpreted Oidipous' self-blinding as a *symbolic self-castration* in which, through an 'upward displacement', the eyes represent the genitals.<sup>5</sup>

I propose to show that Freud's interpretation of Oidipous' self-blinding as a symbolic self-castration could have been advanced also on purely philological grounds, on the basis

<sup>1</sup> E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1951, pp. 7, 16, 30 ff., 51 (note 10).

<sup>2</sup> E. R. Dodds, 'On Misunderstanding the *Oedipus Rex*' (in) *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (1973) 68.

<sup>3</sup> Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles*, 1917.

<sup>4</sup> Punitively or vengefully by Kreon's henchmen: sch. E. Ph. 26, or by those of Laios: E. (*Oed.*) fr. 541 N<sup>2</sup>; prophylactically by Polybos (sch. E. Ph. 26). How M. Delcourt (*Oedipe ou la Légende du Conquérant*,

1944, 215) extracted from sch. E. Ph. 26 the meaning that he was blinded by his mother is a mystery to me.

<sup>5</sup> S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Standard Ed. iv (1953), p. 398, note. Cp. S. Ferenczi, 'On Eye Symbolism', *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, 1916. A girl recently told me one of her dreams: women with long, claw-like finger nails had blinded her fiancé. In reply to my immediate and direct question, she told me that her fiancé had had potency troubles with his *previous* girl friend.

of Greek (and Roman) data *only*. However, I must first consider in detail what is said about Oidipous' self-blinding in S. *OT* only.

I begin with a minor matter. Sch. E. *Ph.* 61 asserts that Oidipous was blinded (presumably in S. *OT*) by the curse he himself had hurled at Laios'—at that time still unidentified—murderer. This view implies that even in that case he was blinded *only* because of his parricide, for, when he uttered the curse, Oidipous did *not* know that Laios' murderer was also incestuous. Moreover, his curse does not mention blinding *at all*. As to the Delphic oracle, which *did* know all along the identity and double crime of Oidipous, it spoke only of the slaying or exile of the regicide (100 f, 308 f.).

One person only—who knew both the identity and the *double* crime of Laios' slayer: the prophet Teiresias—*predicts* Oidipous' blindness, but does not so much as hint at Oidipous' blinding *himself* (415 ff., 454 ff.). What matters most is that, *at the time it is made*, Teiresias' prophecy *seems* to predict (somewhat vindictively) this particular calamity chiefly because Oidipous had taunted *him* with his blindness. From the viewpoint of 'dramatische Technik', it could even be argued that, *at that point*, the audience might interpret Teiresias' prophecy in a figurative sense only. On the other hand, one does note that, on both occasions (415 ff., 454 ff.) the reference to Oidipous' future blindness is *immediately* followed by remarks concerning his *incest*, which Teiresias is the *first* to mention.

Hence, even though Teiresias' utterances do not clearly and unambiguously mention Oidipous' *self*-blinding, nor explicitly represent his predicted blindness as a *penalty* for his incest, the passages in question are those which come closest to establishing a *basic* nexus between blindness and incest and to indicating that the blindness is a punishment or retribution. This inference is materially strengthened by the fact that Teiresias is manifestly unwilling to talk and by the consideration that the utterances of a prophet are necessarily somewhat allusive. In short, Teiresias' remarks are as clear as the dramatic situation and his status as a prophet allow—which is not very clear.

But the authority and nature of Teiresias' utterances also deserve some attention. Though he is angry and offended, his prophecy is *not* a curse; it is simply a prediction: a prophecy. It is, moreover, a prophecy which *differs materially* from what the Delphic oracle prescribes as a penalty for the killer of Laios. That oracle, as we saw, did not mention the incest at all—though it could not but know it—and made not the slightest reference to the blinding of the culprit. In fact, there is little connection between Teiresias on the one hand and Apollon and his oracle on the other hand. Teiresias' prophetic powers come either from Artemis (Callim, *Lavacr.* 121 ff.), or from Zeus (Apollod. iii 6.7)—as do those of Apollon himself (A. *Eum.* 17 f.). Teiresias is a dependent of Apollon only in the very general sense in which all properly authorized prophets are votaries or dependents of Apollon (410).

My next task is to consider in detail Oidipous' own explanations of his deed, which, as will soon become apparent, have certain perplexing features.

*Oidipous' explanations* require careful scrutiny. One must differentiate between the explanations reported by the Messenger and those uttered by Oidipous himself, on stage. One must take into account the Messenger's state of mind and even more that of Oidipous. Above all, one must carefully appraise the persuasiveness of Oidipous' explanations.

*Vv. 1272 ff.:* Oidipous' statements are selectively reported by a Messenger so upset that he does not even explain what Oidipous meant to do with the sword he had clamoured for (1255). At 1271 he specifies that he mentions only (approximate) samples of Oidipous' statements. At 1289 he explicitly expurgates one of Oidipous' self reproaches. He reports that Oidipous called himself a father-slayer, but stops short of repeating *in full* the self-designation: mother-(*defiler*).<sup>6</sup> The fact that, at this point, Oidipous is raving further

<sup>6</sup> I am not squeamish in so completing the utterance. 'Coitizer' will not do as a counter-part of 'slayer', for whereas coitus is often good and beautiful,

a (private) killing is always bad. Hence, in this passage, the real counter-part of 'slayer' is 'defiler'.

obscures the meaning of his selectively reported utterances.<sup>7</sup> There are, moreover, considerable differences of nuance between the five translations I consulted,<sup>8</sup> and I, too, was unable to extract an unambiguous meaning from the Greek text. The Editor kindly referred the matter to Mr R. W. B. Burton, who writes: 'I am sure about the imperative nuance: the clauses introduced by *δοῦν'εκα* (= *ὡς* or *ὅτι* in indirect statement) denote what he said to his eyes, "You shall not . . .", future indicatives of command in direct speech, exactly as in the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not . . .". Also, I think 1272 is a comprehensive enough phrase to cover more than the incest. The allusive masculine plurals in 1273-4 are also ambiguous, as in the parallel type of passage 1184-5, where they refer to both Laios and Iokaste.' The Editor also relayed to me Mr Burton's verbal conclusion that this passage contains one of Sophokles' many 'deliberate ambiguities'—a view with which I fully concur.

What, then, can be held to have been *explicitly* said? Oidipous accuses his eyes of crimes of commission and omission, which call for punishment—and I hasten to stress that *only* this one of Oidipous' remarks represents the self-blinding as a *punishment*. I note in passing that the sentence construction does not suggest that the visual crime of commission (presumably the sight of Iokaste's nakedness) was worse than the visual sin of omission, nor vice versa. The sin of omission is, needless to say, Oidipous' failure to recognise Laios and/or Iokaste.<sup>9</sup>

Summing up, this passage refers *explicitly* only to visual crimes. Only the self-designation: 'mother-defiler', partly suppressed by the Messenger, seems to imply that the self-blinding punishes *also* the incest . . . precisely because the text itself draws our attention to the partial omission of this label.<sup>10</sup> The ambiguousness of the utterance certainly permits this inference. That much, and nothing more, can be extracted from this passage.

*Vv. 1328 ff.* will be discussed later on, for they seem to concern instrumental, rather than operant, motivation. They shed less light upon the causes of Oidipous' self-blinding than upon his state of mind.

*Vv. 1334 ff.*: One cannot but be struck by the extent to which, after 1333, the tenor of Oidipous' explanations changes: his blindness is now represented as the *lesser* of two evils: almost as a benefit. And it could hardly be argued that the 'benefits' he derives from his self-blinding correspond simply to the relief a good man experiences when he makes atonement for some misdeed. This stricture does not imply that the self-blinding is not, in many respects, a punishment, but only that its main benefit is *not* the appeasement of 'pangs of conscience'.

*Vv. 1334 f. and 1375 ff.* state that certain sights, which would rejoice more fortunate—and more average—men, are unbearable for Oidipous (cp. 791 ff.). It is not simply a matter of his not deserving to see pleasant sights; it is that these sights cause him unbearable distress. This reasoning has some affinities with that found in *A. Ag.* 416-19, as I understand those verses.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Oidipous wishes he could eliminate all external stimuli, partly by a further

<sup>7</sup> The vagueness of the Messenger's report is realistic: it is nearly impossible to repeat accurately a frenzied person's ravings.

<sup>8</sup> Jebb, Mazon, Ph. Vellacott (*Sophocles and Oedipus*, 1971; prose and verse), M. Delcourt (*Oedipe ou la Légende du Conquérant*, 1944, 215).

<sup>9</sup> The man able to discern the changes time brings about in the appearance of a person (riddle of the Sphinx) and able to unravel obscure statements, when it suits him (440), did not recognise Laios and/or Iokaste. Though a man exposed shortly after being born, *could not*, many years later, recognise his parents, there is tragic irony in the *expert* Oidipous'

inability to do so. Similarly, though young Lieutenant Bonaparte *could not* have foreseen the middle-aged Emperor Napoleon's exile, *we* perceive the tragic irony of the last entry in one of Lieutenant Bonaparte's notebooks: 'Sainte Hélène, petite île.' Nothing more is meant.

<sup>10</sup> The ostentatiously omitted element is sometimes the crucial one. A dream about three fishes, named Mark, Matthew and Luke, turned out to concern a man named John.

<sup>11</sup> G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy*, 1973 (in press), chap. 3. Even the Aischylean *κολοκκοί* are replicated by the Sophoklean *ἀγάλαθ' ἱερά*.

sensory self-mutilation (1386 ff.) and partly by a retreat into the solitudes of Kithairon, where, as an infant, he was meant to perish (1451 ff.). But these sensory deprivations, too, are described by him in a manner which suggests that they represent, at the lowest estimate, the *lesser* of two evils.

Vv. 1371 ff. mention another advantage of his now lacking eyes: Oidipous will not have to look at his parents in Hades. This odd bit of eschatology is barely commented on by Jebb, who notes only that, in Hom. *Od.* xii 266, Teiresias is said to be blind also in Hades and that, in the *Nekyia* (xi 91), *εγνω* need not imply that the shade of Teiresias can see. But Jebb misses a crucial point: *no other* dweller in Hades bears the marks of old wounds. In fact, though in late tales Achilles died of a heel-wound, he is (formulaically) 'fleetfooted' even in Hades (Hom. *Od.* xi 471, 538). Equivalents of Oidipous' expectation of continued blindness after death are hard to find: perhaps the cleft crest of the snake which represents Agamemnon (Jebb) (Stesichor. *fr.* 42 P.); A. *Eum.* 103 (but only if Hermann's emendation is accepted); V. *Aen.* vi 445 and, as an outside possibility, the shade of a person whose corpse was subjected to *μασχαλισμός*—i.e., to a practice on which precisely Sophokles is one of our main authorities.<sup>12</sup>

Nothing in this passage seeks to minimise the ghastliness of Oidipous' self-aggression. In vv. 1368 ff., the Choros asserts that it would have been better had Oidipous died, but he retorts that even death by strangulation<sup>13</sup> could not adequately atone for his double crime.

I must now turn to vv. 1327 ff., which, as noted, shed light mainly on Oidipous' state of mind, rather than upon the motives of his deed. The Choros asks what supernatural being urged Oidipous on and he replies: 'Apollon' (cp. 376 f.)—but hastens to add that his own hands carried out the self-blinding. But the question arises at once whether the 'evil things' that happened to Oidipous are *all* of his misfortunes and crimes or *chiefly* his *present* state, i.e., his blindness, and his general accursedness *at this point*. Once again, no clearcut answer is possible. All one can be sure of is that, at this point, the misfortune uppermost in Oidipous' mind is his self-blinding.

The time has now come to examine the sufficiency and persuasiveness of Oidipous' explanations of his deed.

The members of the Choros certainly concur with some of Oidipous' objective appraisals of his *plight* (1336), but are, despite his explanations, bewildered by his *deed* (1327 f.). Vv. 1367 f. do not suggest that his explanations satisfy them. At 1300 (*μανία*) they think that he was mad when he blinded himself. Their question regarding the intervention of some supernatural power also shows that they view the self-blinding as an act of madness . . . and Oidipous' *own* reference to Apollon's role can be held to mean that, at least at that point, he, too, views his deed as 'ego alien': as unnatural, exogenous and indeed mad. But, the rest of the time, he refuses to let the Choros criticise his deed (1369 ff.) and continues to offer explanations.

But how persuasive are these explanations? It was just shown that they do not really satisfy the Choros. In S. *OC* 765, the older and somewhat more resigned Oidipous seems to treat his self-blinding as an act of madness. In E. *Phoin.* both Eteokles (763 f.) and Oidipous himself (1612) speak of a mad deed. Dion Chrysostomos (x 29 f.) reports a sarcastic comment about the madness of this deed; Ailianos (*NA* iii 47) expresses the same opinion.

In short, even in terms of the Choros' reactions in S. *OT*, Oidipous' explanations are neither sufficient nor very convincing.

I hold that Sophokles *did not mean* to make Oidipous' explanations satisfactory; it is

<sup>12</sup> S. *El.* 445; (*Troilos*) *fr.* 566 N<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> There is an ambiguity: execution by strangulation (Jebb, Vellacott), or suicide by hanging (Mazon,

Delcourt). Oidipous does try to hang himself in E. *Phoin.* 330 f., after bungling a suicide by the sword.

both excellent 'dramatische Technik' and sound psychology that he did *not* devise more convincing explanations to put in the mouth of Oidipous. It is good drama and good psychology to make Oidipous *try—and fail*—to explain his irrational act rationally, for nearly everyone who performs a sudden, impulsive deed, tries to rationalise it *in retrospect*. I would like to clarify matters further, by means of an analogy, but *without* imputing to Sophokles a familiarity with the theory and technique of hypnosis, even though hypnosis and allied phenomena have been reported from many ancient and primitive groups.<sup>14</sup> If a hypnotised subject is ordered to perform, *after* he emerges from the hypnotic state, some unusual action, he will execute the order . . . and will then try to rationalise his odd action, whose real cause (the post-hypnotic suggestion) he ignores. Oidipous' attempts to explain his frenzied act are of the same *kind*. Their insufficiency, implausibility and far-fetched nature brilliantly highlight that the Choros is right in calling his self-blinding a deed of madness. Also, whatever one may think of Knox's view that, soon after appearing again on stage, Oidipous is, once more, his old self,<sup>15</sup> Oidipous *is* wrestling with the irrational and incomprehensible *whenever* he tries to rationalise his deed. The one tenable interpretation he offers—his reference to Apollon's intervention—is precisely the one which constitutes an implicit admission of the irrationality of his self aggression.

Since all this is excellent 'dramatische Technik', as well as sound psychology, one cannot but regret that the 'dramatische Technik' argument should so often be used to justify what the literary critic *considers* to be self-contradictory or unreasonable, though it is, in most instances, quite logical in terms of depth psychology.

Summing up, since Oidipous' explanations of his deed satisfied neither the Choros nor certain ancient authors, we must admit that his self-blinding was an act of madness. And it suffices to mention in passing that Oidipous' madness—either on this or on some subsequent occasion—is referred to also by a number of other ancient texts.<sup>16</sup> But, the moment his act is viewed as a consequence of his (transitory) madness, his self-blinding *cannot* be taken *only at face value*: it *must* be viewed also as a *symbolic* act. Precisely because, in some other sources, Oidipous is (more or less legally) blinded for parricide (or regicide), his self-blinding in *S. OT* *must* have a different meaning: it must be a symbolic self-castration, for the crime of incest. For it is an *essential* characteristic of the psychotic that he does not break off *all* contacts with the materials of his culture: he simply de-culturalises them and treats them in an idiosyncratic manner. A cultural item has for him not the meaning it has in daily life, but the meaning it has for the small child or else in dream or in the more irrational segments of culture itself.<sup>17</sup>

My next objective must therefore be to show that arguments over the appropriateness of (self-)blinding for the crime of incest are otiose even in strictly philological and culture historical terms. The simple fact is that, in Greek (and also Roman) tradition, blinding was a common penalty for sexual misconduct. Once this point is established, it will become possible to explain also why self-blinding can—and does, in fact—symbolise self-castration, for the crime of incest.

#### BLINDING FOR SEXUAL CRIMES

Before I present the relevant data, I must briefly consider their bearing upon the problem of Oidipous' self-blinding in *S. OT*. In that play, as noted, the self-blinding is *not* represented as a traditional form of punishment and—for obvious aesthetic reasons—Sophokles does not refer in it to other tales of blinding for sexual misconduct. But that does not imply that he was unaware of the many traditions in which blinding is a penalty

<sup>14</sup> O. Stoll, *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie*, 1904.

<sup>15</sup> B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes*, 1957, chap. 5 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> C. Robert, *Oidipus*, 1916, i 177 f., 263, 438.

<sup>17</sup> G. Devereux, *Essais d'Ethnopsychiatrie Générale*, 1970, chap. 2.

for sexual sins. He mentions the blinding of Phineus' 'incestuous' sons in his *Antigone* (970 ff.). In short, Sophokles was aware of what I hope to show to have been a culturally patterned sequence: sexual trespass—blinding.

Most of the data I cite are also listed by Esser<sup>18</sup>—who failed, however, to see that these many isolated items constitute a recurrent pattern.

So as not to overburden my text with countless references, I cite sources only for the less well-known tales.

(1) Incest with the mother: Oidipous, Zeus (Clem. Alex, *protr.* ii 15.2; Arnob. *adv. nat.* v 20 f.), Aigyptios<sup>19</sup> and, almost certainly, also the very cleverly expurgated Thamyris (Thamyras) myth.<sup>20</sup>

(2) *Incest with the stepmother*: The sons of Phineus; Orion.<sup>21</sup>

(3) *Incest with the father's concubine*: Phoinix; I will discuss this myth briefly further on.

(4) *Incest with the stepdaughter*: A woman puts out both of her daughter's eyes but only one of her husband's eyes.<sup>22</sup>

(5) *Adulteress blinded by a stork*: Ael. *NA* viii 20.

(6) *Adulterer blinded by legal judgment*: Val. Max. viii 20; cp. Luc. *Apol.* 4; Quint. *Inst.* iv 7.9.

(7) *Lecher blinded by bees*: Plu. *Quaest. Nat.* 36.

(8) *Nymph blinds unfaithful lover*: Daphnis: Stesich. *fr.* 102 P., etc.; Rhoikos: Pi. *fr.* 252 Sn.; Charon Lampsac. ap. sch. A.R. ii 477; *FGrH* ii A 20 Jacoby; *EM* 75.26.

(9) *Woman blinds unfaithful lover*: Ov. *Am.* i 7.64 ff. (by gouging); Prop. iii 8.7 (by burning).

(10) *Rapist blinded by the woman*: Bryas: Paus. ii 20.2; Roman soldier: App. *BC* i 109 (cp. Appul. *Met.* viii 13, blinded husband killer).

(11) *Rapist blinded by a male avenger*: Orion (by Oinopion, for rape in *some* versions); the Kentaur Gryneus by the Lapith Exidius (with a staghorn): Ov. *Met.* xii 266 f.

(12) *The procuress Dipsas* by the tempted girl's lover: Ov. *Am.* i 8.112.

(13) *A molester by the woman*: The hetaira Thais threatens Thraso: Ter. *Eun.* 740; her maid Pytheas threatens the *eunuch* Dorus: *ibid.* 648. I will briefly return to this example.

(14) *Seduced daughter blinded by father*: Amphissa (Metope) is blinded by Echetos, who multiply mutilates and also castrates her lover Aichmodikos (A.R. iv 1093; sch. Hom. *Od.* xviii 85; Eustath *ad Hom. Od.* 1839.1; Suid. s.v. Φῆτρος); Hypermnestra (for refusing to kill Lynkeus): Ov. *Her.* xiv 10 f.

(15) *Self-blinding (or, perhaps, facial disfigurement) from prudishness*: Spurrinna: Val. Max. iv 5 (externi 1).

(16) *Chivalrous homoerotic love*: Amizokes ransoms Daidamis with his eyesight; freed, Daidamis blinds himself from love and gratitude: Luc. *Tox.* 40.

(17) *Excessive kissing of a friend's eyes*: Cic. *Fam.* xvi 27.

(18) *For refusal to yield one's wife to the King*: Onnes (D.S. ii 6.9 f.).

(19) *Voyeurs*: Teiresias (*infra*); Semele may have been momentarily blinded by Zeus appearing to her as lightning;<sup>23</sup> the imaginary voyeur and purveyor of divine scandals, Stesichoros, probably had *two* attacks of hysterical blindness;<sup>24</sup> Erymanthos (Ptol. *Heph.* 1). Pentheus, the would-be voyeur, had temporary visual troubles (E. *Ba.* 918 ff.).

<sup>18</sup> A. Esser, *Das Antlitz der Blindheit in der Antike* (2nd. edn.), 1961, 36 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Boios ap. Ant. Lib. 5; perhaps also: Ov. *Met.* vii 386 f., and Hyg. *fab.* 253.

<sup>20</sup> In versions in which Thamyris is the son of a Muse, the prize he competes for is *not* a sexual one; where it *is* sexual, his mother is *not* a Muse.

<sup>21</sup> Sch. Nic. *Ther.* 15 is so interpreted in C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks*, 1951, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Philostr. *V. Apoll.* i 10. I note that in many cultures the stepdaughter fairly often becomes her mother's co-wife, cp. A. L. Kroeber, 'Stepdaughter Marriage', *The Nature of Culture*, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> Temporary blinding by lightning: X. *An.* vii 4, etc.

<sup>24</sup> G. Devereux, 'Stesichoros' Palinodes: Two Further Testimonia and Some Comments', *RhM* (in press).

In the preceding list I did not distinguish between deeds and threats, for in Greek tragic diction an evil plan is fairly often spoken of as a deed (*infra*). It is conceded that many of my examples post-date the S. *OT*—but this does not mean that they do not reflect an ancient cultural pattern.

What really matters is that, given the quantity and variety of data linking blinding with sexual misconduct, it is otiose to discuss the ‘appropriateness’ of Oidipous’ self-blinding *in the abstract*. The real objective is to discern *why* blinding was deemed to be so appropriate a penalty for sexual trespass as to be quite frequently inflicted, even by legal process (examples given under item 6).

#### EYE—LOVE—SEX

(1) *The role of the eyes in love* is too well known to require detailed discussion.<sup>25</sup>

(2) *Eye = phallos*: Zeus’ ‘eye’ in A. *PV* 654.<sup>26</sup> Charikleia dreams that she loses one of her eyes. On awakening she thinks it means that she will lose her lover Theagenes and wishes that she could actually lose an eye instead of losing her lover (Hld. ii 16). The symbolism is fairly evident here, for both clinical experience and anthropological data show that the woman is held to be the ‘possessor’ of her mate’s penis.<sup>27</sup>

(3) *The epicene eye*: Like the nose,<sup>28</sup> the eye, too, can symbolise either the male or the female genitals.<sup>29</sup> This finding fits the psychological distinction commonly made between ‘active’ looking and ‘passive-receptive’ seeing or ‘noticing’.<sup>30</sup> The eye, like glory, is described in some sources almost as ray-emitting (Aurel. Vict. 1; Luc. *Demosth.* 17) and, in Epikouros, as a receptive organ.<sup>31</sup> This may explain, in part, the four cases in which *women* are blinded for sexual misconduct, though I add that three of the four cases have some ambiguous aspects.<sup>32</sup>

At any rate, it is noteworthy that the sexually misbehaving woman’s genitalia are *never* mutilated *in any way*. Yet, the Greeks knew of the existence of ‘female eunuchs’ in Lydia,<sup>33</sup> and Ailianos (*NA* iv 55) reported the searing of the vulva of the Bactrian she-camel, which parallels the castration of the Bactrian male camel. Strabon (xvi 2.28, xvi 4.9) knew the custom of female ‘circumcision’ (excision). Equally remarkable is the fact that no Greek woman—not even a psychotic and almost certainly incestuous<sup>34</sup> mythical woman like Io—seems to have been blinded or to have blinded herself, for modern psychotic women do occasionally blind themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Two other links between the eyes and phalloi may also be mentioned:

(1) *Phalloi with eyes are represented by many monuments*.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Cp. A. *Ag.* 418 f. and Thomson *ad. loc.* G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy*, 1973 (in press), chap. 3, ad A. *Ag.* 418; Esser, *op. cit.*, p. 90; L. Malten, *Die Sprache des menschlichen Antlitzes im frühen Griechentum*, 1961, etc.

<sup>26</sup> G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy*, 1973, chap. 2.

<sup>27</sup> J. W. M. Whiting, *Becoming a Kwoma*, 1941, 49: a boy should not masturbate, for his penis belongs to his future wife. An American woman analysand claimed she ‘owned’ her lover’s penis.

<sup>28</sup> L. Saul, ‘Feminine Significance of the Nose’, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* xvii (1948), 51–57.

<sup>29</sup> G. Devereux, ‘A Note on the Feminine Significance of the Eyes’, *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis* vi (1956) 21–24.

<sup>30</sup> G. Devereux (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and the Occult*, 1953 (=1970), 406 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Ep. *Ep.* 1, p. 10 U., *Nat.* ii 1, al.; Cic. *Fam.* xv 16.1, etc.

<sup>32</sup> Item 4: the husband is also partly blinded. Item 12: the procuress acts on behalf of a man. Item 14: Amphissa’s lover is castrated; Hypermnestra, being a Danaid, had performed masculine feats: she had helped build a temple, construct and row a ship, etc.

<sup>33</sup> Xanth. *FHG* i 39.19; Hsch. *Mil.* *FHG* iv 171.47.

<sup>34</sup> For the incestuousness of Io, cp. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy*, chap. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Esser, *op. cit.*, 67, n. 193. K. A. Menninger, *Man Against Himself*, 1938, 214 ff., 273 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Phallos-shaped chariot (Museum of Mykenai); phallos-headed cock (kyathos, Berlin 2095); phallos on an Attic krater (by the ‘Pan painter’, Berlin 3206); baubon (olisbos) on an Attic amphora (by the ‘Flying Angel painter’, Paris, Petit Palais 307);

(2) *The notoriously lecherous Satyroi* are often represented with *bulging eyes*. Now, *exophthalmos* occurs fairly often in Basedow's disease, in which strong sexual cravings are quite common. Whether or not the *exophthalmos* of the *Satyroi* is a mere coincidence is anyone's guess.

The considerations just cited show that the punishing of the eyes because of sexual misconduct fits Greek (and Roman) cultural thought models, as well as basic human psychological tendencies and common symbols. But the case for the equivalence of blinding and castration can be made even stronger by showing that the two punishments appear to be mutually exclusive.

*The mutual exclusiveness of blinding and castration* is easy to demonstrate. The only quasi-exception known to me is Pythias' threat to blind the *eunuch* Dorus (*Ter. Eun.* 648). The most ancient, though by no means the most striking, example is the multiple mutilation and complete castration of the unblinded Melanthios.<sup>37</sup> I must also point out here a fact which, I think, has gone unnoticed. There is much talk in the *Odyssey* of what Echetos does *to men*—but *the only 'other' Greek* who performs a comparable deed is: Odysseus, a contemporary of Echetos, whose mainland kingdom was not very distant from Odysseus' island kingdom. Could this mean that this type of mutilation was a culture-pattern of that area? Or does it mean that Odysseus' palace, of which no trace could be found in Ithake, should be looked for in Epeiros, because Echetos and Odysseus were the same person? Archaeology may furnish the answer to this vexing question, which has preoccupied me for some years past.

Equally curious is the tradition concerning Semiramis. As noted, King Ninos threatened to *blind* her first husband, Onnes, if he did not give her to the King (*D.S.* ii 6. 9). After Semiramis became the sole ruler, she is said to have originated the practice of castration (*Amm. Marc.* xiv 6. 17).

The mutual exclusiveness of the two punishments can lead to a variety of mythical arrangements:

(1) In the Echetos myth, Aichmodikos is castrated but *not* blinded; Amphissa is blinded but her genitalia are *not* mutilated.

(2) In the case of incest with the stepdaughter, the man is blinded unilaterally and the girl bi-laterally—and it is known that odd numbers tend to symbolise the male and even numbers the female: *Plu. Quaest. Rom.* 2 hints at this, in a somewhat confused way.

(3) The two punishments occur in two separate variants of the Phoinix myth, which is linked with the Oidipous myth in *Ov. Ib.* 261.

(a) In *Hom. Il.* ix 453 ff. Phoinix is unmanned, in an unspecified way, by the Erinyes, whom his father's curse invoked. Now, *A. Eun.* 186 f. tells us that the Erinyes preside (*inter alia*) over blindings, castrations and impalements—a point to which I will return subsequently. There is, at any rate, little doubt that they feminised him. It suffices to compare *Hom. Il.* ix 485 ff. (and the derivative passage: *Q.S.* iii 470 ff.) with the speech of Orestes' nurse (*A. Choe.* 479 ff., cp. *E. Phoin.* 1433), to realise that, at the start, Phoinix was more a nurse than a paidagogos or mentor. Also, despite his epithet 'knight' (*Hom.*

and on an Attic cup (by the 'Nikosthenes painter', *British Museum E.* 815). In all these instances the phallos is *detached* from the body: it is the phantasmatic (autonomous) phallos encountered in psycho-analytical clinical practice. Why phalloi should have eyes is not easy to understand. It may be due to a misplaced 'realism', inspired by the fact that snakes (and cocks) have eyes. I also note that one sometimes finds on the dorsum of the glans penis two small, pigmented spots, which do look a little

like 'eyes.' But the real explanation remains to be discovered.

<sup>37</sup> *Hom. Od.* xxii 474 ff. This pattern seems fundamental, for the illiterate Peruvian rubber-gatherers, who brutalized in an absolutely identical way a Witoto Indian, whose genitals they, too, fed to dogs and whose wife they raped before his (unblinded) eyes, had hardly read the *Odyssey*. W. E. Hardenburg, *The Putumayo: The Devil's Paradise*, 1912 (*Cp.* also *Mart.* ii 83.)



*Il.* ix 432) he does *not* fight: *Str.* ix 5.5 (contra: *Pi. fr.* 183 Snell<sup>3</sup> and possibly *Hom. Il.* xvi 196).<sup>38</sup>

(b) In many more versions, he is not unmanned but blinded.<sup>39</sup>

A brief comment is in order. It would have been very easy for an ancient mythographer to devise a version in which Phoinix is, quite logically and legitimately, *first* unmanned and *then* blinded. That version could have run somewhat as follows:

(α) Phoinix' incest is punished by unmanning.

(β) The unmanned Phoinix plots revenge: he plans to kill his father, exactly as in the *Iliad*.

(γ) In tragic diction an evil plan is often spoken of as a performed action: *S. Aj.* 1126; *S. OC* 1008; *E. Ion* 1497 ff.; *E. IT* 60, etc.

(δ) He is therefore blinded, both punitively and prophylactically (cp. sch. *E. Phoin.* 26), for though a eunuch can, at times, punish his castrator without being destroyed in the process,<sup>40</sup> even the blind Samson could not take revenge except by suicidal means (cp. *S. OT* 348, 374 f.).

This extremely plausible variant was, however, *not* invented, even by a late complication- and-horror loving mythographer, presumably because castration and blinding are equivalent.

While I am on the subject of authors loving complications and the piling up of horrors, a word may be said about the fate of Hippolytus in Seneca's *Phaedra*. Though his chariot accident is fully described both by Euripides and by Seneca, there is *no* mention of an injury to his eyes, even though that would have been natural enough in the case of a charioteer dragged by his runaway team over rocky ground. But in *Sen. Phaedr.* 1098 f., and in *no other text known to me*, a tree-stump impales him *inguinally*, obviously feminising him.<sup>41</sup>

Summing up, in the Phoinix myth the unmanning and the blinding, inflicted for the selfsame deed, appear separately in two variants of the myth: we may speak here of 'simultaneous' alternatives.<sup>42</sup>

(4) 'Succedaneous' alternative punishments, for the same *type* of repeated sin, are exemplified by the very complex myth of Teiresias, which I can discuss only in the most summary manner. In particular, I can mention only cursorily its oedipal aspects.<sup>43</sup>

(a) Teiresias is blinded either for an accidental act of voyeurism (*Callim. Lavacr.* 75 ff.), or for an utterance which Hera appears to *treat* as though it were a kind of (retrospective) voyeurism and scandal-mongering (*Apollod.* iii 6.7), resembling that of Stesichoros. In each of these alternative versions Teiresias is compensated for his loss of sight, by being given second sight.

(b) Teiresias loses his manhood (becomes a woman) after harming or killing a copulating female snake: *Apollod.* iii 6.7 and Frazer *ad loc.* This is clearly the acting out of an oedipal phantasy, for the child often visualises his enlaced parents, and especially his father, as beasts: *A. Dict.* 781: 'neither beast nor father'; mention, at 810 ff., of the 'primal scene'

<sup>38</sup> This passage seems suspect to me for, instead of leading *all* of his Dolopians, he leads only *some* of *Achilleus'* Myrmidons. On the version in which Phoinix is unmanned, cp. G. Devereux, 'A Counter-oedipal Episode in Homer's *Iliad*', *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Association for Psychoanalysis* iv (1955) 90-97.

<sup>39</sup> *E. ap. Ar. Ach.* 421 (= *TGF* p. 621); sch. *Hom. Il.* ix 448; *Apollod.* iii 13.8; *AP* iii 3; sch. *Pl. Lg.* 931b; *Tzetz. Lyc.* 421; *Ov. A.A.* 337; *Ov. Ib.* 261 f., *Prop.* ii 1.60.

<sup>40</sup> *Hermotimos*: *Hdt.* viii 106; in a Norse myth (*Draumr Thorsteins Sithuhallsonar*) the slave Gilli.

<sup>41</sup> This detail may have strayed into Seneca from

some Dionysiac tragedy, which, I think, is *E. Ba.*—and, specifically, from the lacuna after 1300. Cp. G. Devereux, 'The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides' *Bacchae*', *JHS* xc (1970) 35-48.

<sup>42</sup> Other examples of 'reciprocally symbolic' (simultaneous) alternatives are easy to find. The Mohave Indians have two aetiological explanations of the 'hikwir' (amphisbaina) disease: the patient is attacked by *aquatic* two-headed snakes (hikwir) or else the illness is caused *in women* by *coitus* while *bathing*. G. Devereux, *Mohave Ethnopsychiatry* (2nd edn.), 1969, 117 ff.

<sup>43</sup> G. Róheim, 'Teiresias and Other Seers', *Psychoanalytic Review* xxxiii (1948) 277-291.

(parental coitus).<sup>44</sup> Later on, on seeing copulating snakes a second time, he harms or kills the male and regains his virility. Since, in some versions, the situation is attenuated, in that he only sees them, but does not kill (or wound) one of the snakes, his loss of manhood is manifestly related to his voyeurism.

Summing up, Teiresias is punished for 'successive' acts of voyeurism, once with a loss of his manhood and once with the loss of his eyesight. These event-variants belong to the same narrative, but intervene at different times. Such 'sucedaneous variants' can be found also in other myths, sometimes with an additional clue, which shows that what is represented as two distinct events is *actually* the same event.<sup>45</sup>

(5) Anchises, who cohabited with Aphrodite, is paralysed (= 'impotent') in one version.<sup>46</sup> There is, however, also another version, in which Anchises is blind, instead of being paralysed (Serv. ad V. *Aen.* i 617, ii 687). He is never both blind and paralysed.

(6) In Byzantium, deposed emperors, as well as potential or would be usurpers, were either blinded or else forced to become celibate monks (or were, in some cases, castrated) . . . but apparently never both.<sup>47</sup>

(7) Origenes only emasculated himself 'for the sake of Heaven' (Matth. xix 12), as did the Galloi, but did not *also* blind himself in compliance with Matth. v 28 (cp. Mark ix 47).

*Castration*—i.e., the reciprocal of blinding—is hardly ever mentioned in Greek traditions concerning *men*. One of Helene's less well known abductors, Peritanos, appears to have been castrated.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, castration is mentioned in connection with *gods* guilty of sexual misdeeds, etc.<sup>49</sup> The case of Zeus is especially interesting. After raping his mother, Deo, he pretends to have penitently castrated himself, though what he threw into Deo's lap were the excised genitals of a ram—i.e., of one of Zeus' animal equivalents.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the castration of adulterers was common in Rome: Hor. *Sat.* i 2.44 f.; Val. Max. vi 1.13. Martialis (ii 83) even ridicules a husband who only disfigured the adulterer, but did not castrate him as well.

*Aggression against the adulterer's anus* (symbolising his feminisation) was merely a semi-grotesque farce in Greece (Ar. *Nub.* 1083, *Pl.* 168; X. *Mem.* ii 1.5; perhaps Catull. 15.19). In Rome it was a brutish anal rape: Hor. *Sat.* i 2.44 f.; Val Max. vi 1.13.

*Killing the adulterer* occurred both in myth (Paris, Deiphobos) and in reality (Lys. *de caed. Eratosth.* 24), though it does not seem to have been common in Greece. In Rome it was, predictably, common.

*The triad: blinding, castration, 'impalement'* (Pl. *Gorgias* 473c, *Rep.* 361e–362a) is of interest, for the Erinyes preside over all such cruelties: A. *Eum.* 186—this may have a bearing on Oidipous' 'woes' in Hom. *Od.* xi 280, which probably bowdlerises a harsher tradition. As punishments for adultery, the three were mutually exclusive in Greece.

<sup>44</sup> In ancient India the slaying of a copulating animal by a hunter was clearly felt to be an oedipal murder, for the penalty was either impotency or perpetual sexual abstinence, cp. G. Devereux, 'The Oedipal Situation and its Consequences in the Epics of Ancient India', *Samikṣā, Journal of the Indian Psycho-Analytical Society* v (1951) 5–13, with epitomes of sources.

<sup>45</sup> Consider the symbolic equation: girl = phallus (O. Fenichel, 'The Symbolic Equation: Girl = Phallus', *The Collected Papers of O. Fenichel* ii, 1954). In one episode El-Kronos kills his son and *decapitates* his daughter. In 'another' episode he sacrifices his son and *circumcises* himself. The two episodes are variants of the same situation (Phil. Bybl. *FHG* iii 568.18; iii 569.24).

<sup>46</sup> V. *Aen.* ii 647 ff.; Hyg. *fab.* 94, cp. for the dangers of love affairs with goddesses, Hom. *h. Ven.* 187 ff. (Anchises); Hom. *Od.* x 281 ff. (Odysseus), etc.

<sup>47</sup> Not being a Byzantinist, I could not verify this impression by consulting the sources. I did, however, question an expert on Byzantine church history, who thought that my impression was correct.

<sup>48</sup> Ptol. *Heph.* 147a 14, 149a 24.

<sup>49</sup> Ouranos, Kronos, Attis, etc., cp. G. Devereux, 'La Naissance d'Aphrodite' (in) J. Pouillon and P. Maranda (eds.), *Echanges et Communications (Mélanges Lévi-Strauss)*, 1970 (vol. ii).

<sup>50</sup> Cp. the substitution of a ram's testicles for those of Indras, who is threatened with castration: A. B. Cook, *Zeus* i (1914) 395, n. 2.

The data cited show that it is otiose to question the appropriateness of Oidipous' self-blinding for the crime of incest.

Though the matter of the appropriateness of blinding for punishing a sexual crime has just been settled, a good many other facets of the problem deserve at least brief scrutiny. As was shown, both the utterances of the Delphic oracle and various other passages speak only of death or exile for the parricide. Now, it is possible to show that both blinding (taken at face value) and castration (be it symbolic or real) are the equivalents of death.

In *E. Ph.* 331 ff., Oidipous tries to kill himself twice, and his self-blinding is called: 'murder of the eyes' (61). Hyginus (*fab.* 242) goes one step further: 'Oedipus Laii filius propter Iocasten matrem ipse se occidit ablatus oculi.' Here self-blinding, equated with suicide, is specifically linked with the incest. It suffices to add that a real blinding can have a fatal outcome.<sup>51</sup>

Castration can also represent death, and this in many ways: Domestic animals sometimes succumb to gelding; according to Anderson, this explains why the Greeks did not risk gelding their horses, which were in limited supply.<sup>52</sup> The Mohave Indians now geld their livestock, but believe that castration would kill a human being.<sup>53</sup> Though the Chinese knew that some totally castrated men (deprived both of the penis and of the testes) survived to serve as Court eunuchs,<sup>54</sup> there existed in parts of China an 'imaginary' illness, in which there allegedly occurred a *lethal* retraction of the penis into the abdomen.<sup>55</sup>

The (clinically commonplace) *fantasied* equating of castration with death is substantiated by the tradition that the corpse of Kaineus (ex-Kainis) was found to be that of a woman (*Serv. V. Aen.* vi 448). Servius then adds that Platon or Aristoteles speaks of a change of sex in metempsychosis. This statement has been questioned, though Servius probably simply generalised what Platon said of the reincarnation of Atalante as a man and of Epeios as a woman (*Pl. Rep.* 619 b-c, cp. also *Pl. Lg.* 872e).

In Greece, where the only *effective* kind of survival was posthumous fame and/or male descendance, castration, which deprived a man of offspring, was certainly felt to be a kind of murder. And, since it was shown that Oidipous' self-blinding was symbolic self-castration, it is of some interest to note that, in *E. Ph.* 1612 ff., Oidipous links his destruction of his *eyes* with his destruction of his *sons*, by means of a curse. This linking of the two is the more persuasive as, in Greek, the son is said to be the eye of the house.<sup>56</sup>

In short, one can, without undue subtlety, establish a close connection between death, blinding and castration.

At this point we have come a full circle. Having shown that blinding is, in fact, a fitting punishment for sexual trespasses, in that it represents a symbolic (self-)castration, we have found that both blinding *taken at face value* and real as well as symbolic self-castration also stand for death . . . i.e., for *one* of the alternative punishments which the Delphic oracle wished to inflict upon the one who, at that time, was known *to men* only as Laios' slayer, and was not yet identified as Oidipous, the husband of his own mother.

Before tackling this difficult and perplexing situation frontally, I note that, in so far as Oidipous' self-blinding is *also* (symbolic) suicide (cp. *Hyg. fab.* 242) and in so far as, at the

<sup>51</sup> The case of Nikodemos: Aesch. in *Tim.* 172; Athen. xiii 63, etc. Cp. Esser, *op. cit.*, pp. 53 and 58, who cites also Dem. xxi 107; Schol. Dem. xxi 104; Deinarch. i 30.

<sup>52</sup> J. K. Anderson, *Ancient Greek Horsemanship*, 1961, 38.

<sup>53</sup> G. Devereux, 'Mohave Zoophilia', *Samikṣā*, 7, of the *Indian Psycho-Analytical Society* ii (1948) 227-245.

<sup>54</sup> D. F. Spencer, 'The Cultural Aspects of Eunuchism', *Ciba Symposia* viii (1946) 406-420. For Sporus, cp. Suet. *Nero* 28.

<sup>55</sup> Extensive discussion and bibliography in: G. Devereux 'La Naissance d' Aphrodite' (in) J. Pouillon and P. Maranda (eds.) *Echanges et Communications (Mélanges Lévi-Strauss)*, 1970 (vol. ii). Actually, though all those who discuss this Chinese illness call it imaginary, every good textbook of urology mentions the traumatic luxation of the penis, in which the organ does 'retract' and disappear inside the body.

<sup>56</sup> E. R. Dodds, ad *E. Ba.* 1308, in his edition of that play.

end of the play, Oidipous is exiled, he suffers *two* punishments, even though the Delphic oracle only demanded that the culprit be *either* slain *or* exiled (100 f., etc.), and this even though, unlike men, the oracle knew that Oidipous was both a parricide and the husband of his own mother.<sup>57</sup>

To my mind, this double penalty becomes comprehensible only if one assumes that Oidipous' two crimes—parricide and incest—are two, more or less inseparable, *components* of a highly patterned and almost certainly ritual crime. Though Frazer's theories are—quite unwarrantably—no longer 'fashionable', a great many mythical Greek data are incomprehensible unless one assumes that the proper way of acceding to the throne was to kill the King in a ritual contest and to marry the Queen. Frazer's own objection, that such matrilineal practices are not recorded for any Indo-European culture is irrelevant, for the practice may well have been pre-Greek and therefore (perhaps) not Indo-European: one thinks at once also of such aliens as Kadmos and Pelops. It is, moreover, just the kind of practice a *not overwhelmingly powerful* Greek conqueror group would have had to accept, in order to legitimise itself in the eyes of the still strong conquered. What is particularly striking is that, despite S. *OT* 579 f., Frazer's list of relevant cases signally omits that of Oidipous. Yet this case is of special interest, in that a patrilineally legitimate heir accedes to the throne in the matrilineal manner: he slays the King (Father) and marries the Queen (Mother). The myth thus blends two distinct systems of royal succession and probably came into being at a time when patrilineal succession began to replace the old matrilineal accession procedure. Tales of Kings who cohabit with their daughters or even compete with their daughters' suitors as though they, too, were suitors (Oinomaos), may also have come into being during that transitional period.<sup>58</sup>

Now, the view that the Oidipous myth is a tale of patrilineal succession, temporarily disguised as one of matrilineal succession, can be substantiated by means of a somewhat different set of data: several Greek traditions *misrepresent* a succession by ultimogeniture as succession by primogeniture. Having discussed the material elsewhere,<sup>59</sup> I can cite one brief example only. Though Herakles was conceived before Eurystheus, Hera interfered with the process of gestation and caused Eurystheus to be born first.<sup>60</sup>

In short, the hypothesis that a case of lawful patrilineal succession was *disguised* as a case of matrilineal succession by test or by quasi-conquest is implicitly reinforced by the finding that, in some cases, ultimogeniture is misrepresented as primogeniture, in myth quite as much as in *Realpolitik*.

The basic finding is that, in such a system, the killing of the King is a necessary preliminary for the marrying of the widowed Queen, as, in ordinary life, the killing of a man is at times a preliminary to cohabiting with his wife.

This finding leads us to the fantasied sequence which underlies the 'Oedipus complex'. Parricide makes the incest possible . . . *in fantasy*. The two crimes are inseparable, and therefore the manner in which each of these crimes is punished has symbolic affinities with the manner in which the other one is punished: death, blinding and castration all symbolise each other.

<sup>57</sup> Incidentally, had Oidipous been executed, he would still have been 'exiled' as well, for his corpse would probably have been thrown outside the territory of Thebes. (Pl. *Lg.* 873a). Cp., in S. *OC* 399 ff., Kreon's plan to keep and to bury Oidipous *just outside* Theban territory.

<sup>58</sup> G. Devereux, 'Sociopolitical Functions of the Oedipus Myth in Early Greece', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* xxxii (1963) 205-214. It is significant that, in some myth of royal father-daughter incest, it is the daughter who seduces her father . . . perhaps

so as to protect her rights to the throne. In most such cases the King *appears* to be a widower.

<sup>59</sup> G. Devereux, 'Quelques Traces de la Succession par Ultimogeniture en Scythie', *Inter Nord* xii (1972) 262-270.

<sup>60</sup> The other examples I cite concern Herakles' Skythian sons, the accession of Xerxes to the throne, as the firstborn of Dareios' princely sons, and the claims of Kyros the Younger. The rest of my data concern steppe nomads.

This, in turn, implies what was said at the outset: Oidipous' self-blinding is a *heavily overdetermined* act: *qua* actual blinding, it punishes the parricide—*qua* symbolic self-castration it punishes the incest. And it is precisely this overdetermination of the act which may explain why Oidipous is unable, in *S. OT*, to explain his deed clearly and in a convincing manner.

*The Act of Self-Blinding*, described in great detail (1268 ff.), may well be a Sophoklean invention: Oidipous takes both of Iokaste's brooches and jabs them into his eyes simultaneously. I believe these gory details to have a genuine significance, for Oidipous could just as well have torn his eyes from their sockets, or could have resorted to fire, or to some other means of self-blinding. I begin by citing an actual clinical case: When, after World War I, a young man returned from military service, he found that the girl he had been engaged to had married someone else. As a result, he became psychotic, committing countless acts of self-aggression especially against his fingers (which he repeatedly tried to crush in the cracks of doors) and against his toes (which he ligated with string, so as to produce a gangrene). He also attacked his ears, pinching out bits of them. But, even though attempts at self-castration are common in psychosis, he did *not* assault his genitals. Instead: 'upon several occasions he snatched *pins* from the *front* of the nurse's uniform and attempted to jab *them* into his eyes'.<sup>61</sup> (My italics.) In other words, he behaved *exactly* like Oidipous; one particularly notes the plurals in the sentence which I cite verbatim. Since this man, too, could have used *other* means of blinding himself, the *complete* parallelism between his attempts at self-blinding and Oidipous' successful self-blinding can hardly be due to chance. One must assume either that this young man had read Sophokles' drama and had tried to behave like Oidipous (which is unlikely), or that Sophokles had come across a similar case of insanity (which is by no means unlikely), or that there is some hidden nexus between a sexually motivated self-blinding urge and the use of pins or brooches torn from a woman's (Iokaste's, the Nurse's) dress . . . or all three.

Since no one can prove that Sophokles had actually known of such a case—even though, as noted, that is far from unlikely—one may explore, at least *tentatively*, the possibility of a *hidden* nexus between breast-brooches worn by the mother (or pins worn by a 'nurse') and self-aggression.

(1) The nipples (=brooches) seem at times to represent the eyes in fantasy and/or in humour.<sup>62</sup>

(2) The nipples can be fantasied as piercing, aggressive organs or weapons. At Çatal Hüyük, the breasts of a female deity contained vulture skulls, whose *beaks* were the nipples of her breasts.<sup>63</sup> Freud has shown that a childhood memory of Leonardo da Vinci equates the mother with a predatory bird.<sup>64</sup> Also, even though I am extremely sceptical of many of Melanie Klein's theories, I tend to lend credence to those of her clinical data and conclusions which indicate that the infant sometimes fantasies the maternal breast as an aggressor. I also dimly recall one of my analytic patient's fantasies: he imagined himself crucified on the body of his girl-friend, whose nipples he visualised as nails driven through his palms.

(3) In *S. Tr.* 923 ff., Deianeira removes her brooch and then stabs herself (in a somewhat perplexing way) in the flank, with a sword. As in *S. OT*, the sword and the brooch(es) are mentioned in the same passage—and in both passages there is mention also of a frenzied state. Moreover, whereas in *S. OT* we never learn what Oidipous meant to do with the sword he asked for, in *S. Tr.* the sword's *use* is described in so peculiar a manner,

<sup>61</sup> K. A. Menninger, *Man Against Himself*, 1938, 262.

<sup>62</sup> A cartoon published, I think, in *The New Yorker*, shows a young woman, with nipples pointing in different directions (as in strabismus), being told by her physician to consult an *ophthalmologist*. That humour reflects the unconscious was proven in *S.*

Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Standard Ed. viii, 1960.

<sup>63</sup> J. Mellaart, 'Deities and Shrines in Neolithic Anatolia: Çatal Hüyük', *Archaeology* xvi (1963) 29–38.

<sup>64</sup> S. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, Standard Ed. xi, 1957.

that the self-aggression must be carefully scrutinised in order to discern its real nature.<sup>65</sup>

These data are admittedly suggestive rather than conclusive. They *suggest* that there may be some (unconscious) connection between sexual problems, self-blinding and the pins or brooches (torn from a woman's breast) by means of which a self-blinding is attempted or executed. But it must also be conceded that the data I was able to cite do not *fully* elucidate the nature of that nexus. All one can say is that, in view of the clinical case paralleling the self-blinding of Oidipous, the Sophoklean description of Oidipous' gory deed must be held to be psychiatrically credible. If his story was inspired by his having heard of such a case of brutal self-blinding, then he need not have been *consciously* aware of the (probable) nexus between brooches (=nipples) and self-blinding, *in the unconscious*. If he invented this plausible incident *ex nihilo*, he must have sensed, at least unconsciously, that some such nexus existed in the realm of fantasies. Any attempt to make more definitive pronouncements on this topic would be both philologically and psychiatrically irresponsible.

#### SUMMARY

(1) Oidipous' self-blinding appears to be an act of madness, linked primarily with his incest, rather than with his parricide.

(2) Blinding for sexual trespasses is so common in tradition that its appropriateness cannot be discussed in the abstract.

(3) Greek data confirm the clinical finding that the eyes tend to symbolise the male organs, and blinding castration.

(4) This inference is further confirmed by the finding that blinding and castration are *mutually exclusive* punishments.

(5) Oidipous' total crime was a ritually patterned sequence of two crimes: the killing of the King (Father) makes incest with the Queen (Mother) possible—as it does also in infantile oedipal fantasies. In the Oidipous myth a patrilineal succession *model* is (temporarily) disguised as a matrilineal *method* of royal succession.

(6) Though the blinding of the criminal is *not* required by the Delphic oracle, and though Oidipous' final exile *does* execute the oracle's command, this does not imply that the self-blinding does not punish (in part) *also* the parricide, for it can be shown that death, castration and blinding can, and do, symbolise each other. This means that Oidipous' self-blinding is a heavily overdetermined (multiply motivated) deed of frenzy.

(7) The manner in which Oidipous blinds himself has a very exact clinical parallel which, together with other data, seems to suggest an unconscious nexus between sexual problems, self-blinding and a woman's breasts (or nipples, or brooches).

(8) The 'dramatische Technik' explanation does not exclude the possibility of justifying a seemingly illogical detail in tragedy *also* by means of depth psychological considerations.

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<sup>65</sup> G. and J. W. Devereux, 'Les Manifestations de l'Inconscient dans Sophokles, *Trachiniai* 923 sqq.', *Psychoanalyse et Sociologie comme Méthodes d'Etude des Phénomènes Historiques et Culturels*, 1971 (actually 1973),

121-152. In the same study it is also noted that the baring of a woman's breasts tends to be linked with death or danger of death, not only in Greece, but also amongst the Mongols.