

TWO FORMS OF HEROIC ACTION
IN TRAGIC DRAMA

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Two Forms of Heroic Action
in Tragic Drama

I

The three plays by Sophocles which concern the family of Oedipus were written in the following order: Antigone, Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus. Antigone is generally regarded as a fairly straightforward play about a man who makes an error of judgment and learns his mistake too late. Creon is a monarch of limited sight, who refuses to accept anyone's judgment but his own. He sets his own personal evaluation of the situation over that of Antigone ("No woman rules me while I live"), Haemon ("At my age I'm to school my mind by his?"), the people ("Is the town to tell me how I ought to rule?"), and even Tiresias, the spokesman for the gods. When Creon is finally made to realize that his actions are affecting all of Thebes, he relents. But he relents too late, the misfortunes and evil having already taken place. Here, man in the person of Creon learns of the terrible consequences that his limited sight and self-centeredness may bring about. The themes of the play are tied together in the final speech as the chorus says,

Our happiness depends
on wisdom all the way.
The gods must have their due.
Great words by men of pride
bring greater blows upon them.
So wisdom comes to the old.¹

The painful acquisition of the knowledge that the will of the gods is supreme constitutes the Sophoclean idea of tragedy: wisdom gained through painful experience.

¹David Grene and Richard Lattimore, eds., The Complete Greek Tragedies, II (Chicago, 1960), p. 204.

These major themes of man's impotency and nobility, and of the omnipotence of the gods, find further expression and development in the plays which follow: Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus. Both of these plays are directly concerned with man's relationship with the gods. Both are considered tragedies, and yet they are remarkably different from each other. Taken as a unit, the two plays may be seen as a final and complete examination of the theme that was tentatively approached in Antigone, centering mainly on man's responsibility, power, and position in a universe that includes powers beyond his control.

The major difference between the two plays is one of dramatic form. In simple terms, the protagonist moves in Oedipus Rex from the top to the bottom, and in Oedipus at Colonus from bottom to top. In the first, catastrophe is the end toward which the events move; in the second, final acceptance by the gods. In Oedipus Rex, good appears to be engulfed by evil and misfortune. In Oedipus at Colonus, the reverse appears to be true.

Another major difference between the plays is that of the basic plot motivation. In Oedipus Rex, the "fall" of Oedipus is motivated almost exclusively by his limited knowledge or sight. This is a greatly deepened elaboration of Creon's lack of judgment in Antigone. Creon's error was inherent in himself, and he admits at the end that he is at fault, and that he had allowed his egoism to overshadow his judgment. Oedipus, however, is not so clearly guilty.

Before the play opens, Oedipus has already committed an error of judgment based on a limited view of his (man's) situation. In all innocence, he has sought to avoid a prophecy of evil by fleeing. With his limited insight, he could not see that there are powers beyond his personal control

whose will cannot be evaded. Here, a perfectly innocent, human, and even virtuous desire -- the wish to prevent crime, pain, and death -- is a major cause of the evil.

As the play opens and progresses, Oedipus begins to compound his original innocent error with Creon-like errors of personal, defensive, ego-centered judgment. He disregards and insults the messenger of the gods (Tiresias) and refuses to accept the possibility of his guilt. He cannot see that there can be a power with a broader view of life than his own. The gods, speaking through Tiresias, can see the situation in its total context, through his own eyes. Accusing Creon is plainly a defensive, ego-based reaction. It is here that one feels that Oedipus is beginning to hide from a truth that he suspects. Fearing the possible truth of the prophet's words, he begins to shore up defenses against the truth. He compounds the original, blameless, and unknowing error of trying to avoid the oracle with the Creon-like error of attempting to place his own position and judgment above those of all others, including the gods. In this, he crosses the border between "innocence" and "guilt" and becomes a responsible participant in sin.

It is also worth noting that, as the truth becomes more and more evident, Oedipus' "blindness" to it becomes more acute. And yet his desire to know still drives him on. This part of the play is complex, revealing that Oedipus is both innocent and guilty. He somehow maintains his ruler's responsibility -- he must root out the evil in the land -- and his persistence, though virtuous, again leads to misfortune. On the other hand, the whole of society (Jocasta and the Chorus) urges him to desist from his quest. In addition to providing dramatic suspense, this reveals

that, in general, the society has a fear of such a truth as Oedipus is coming upon, and a desire to avoid confronting it. But Oedipus does keep on with his quest, and, as is typical with Sophocles, when he learns the truth, it is too late: error and error-compounded have built together to a double misfortune almost too terrible to contemplate. Oedipus, at last recognizing man's limited sight, puts out his eyes and becomes strikingly like Tiresias -- physically blind, but possessed of an "inner sight."

In Oedipus at Colonus, on the other hand, it is his possession of knowledge or inner sight, and not his lack of it, that motivates him. In this play, Oedipus knows something more of man's position in the universe, the true meaning of oracles, and the futility of attempting to impose personal will on the will of the gods. In short, he knows how to live, and he knows what he must do. Phoebus has declared that Oedipus will find his resting place at Colonus, and bring good fortune to that city.² Creon, committing Oedipus' original error of attempting to manipulate divine will, seeks to return Oedipus to Thebes to reap the benefits. Here, there is plainly a conflict of oracles and of attitudes toward them. If Oedipus is buried elsewhere, misfortune will befall Thebes. Creon, like Oedipus in Oedipus Rex, seeks at first merely to avoid the misfortune. But as his will is blocked, he begins to compound his error with force, threats, and defiance of the gods' will. Unlike Oedipus here, he cannot accept a prophecy as unavoidable, but must seek, through some human contrivance, to change the course of events.

²"Colonus" means "blessed," and, interestingly enough, "Prometheus has his influence" in the city (Greene and Lattimore, p. 82, l. 56). Prometheus, as bringer of hope, fire, and knowledge to man, is a suitable patron for the city which will witness Oedipus' final resolution with the gods.

Oedipus, on the other hand, has learned through hard experience that you must go along with the gods. His duty is clear -- he must be buried in Colonus. Creon cannot persuade or force him to do otherwise, and Polyneices' offerings are openly scorned. Oedipus, seeing both of these men as being subject to petty, self-centered desires, overcomes Creon and Polyneices, and fulfills the oracle. The description of his death leaves little doubt that the gods have at last rewarded him.

It is paradoxical that Oedipus, at the end of Oedipus Rex, maintains that he is guilty, when in fact the evidence would suggest that he is innocent. The paradoxical use of "guilt" and "innocence", along with "good" and "evil," provides a fundamental key to the meaning of the plays. A man is "good" if he attempts to follow the will of the gods. He is "evil" if he puts his own personal judgment or will over that of the gods. He is "innocent" only if he has done the best he could do, in accordance with his knowledge of what the gods require of him. He is "guilty" if he deludes himself, refuses to see the truth, or attempts to evade what the gods have ordained. When Oedipus, at the end of Oedipus Rex, considers himself to be guilty, he is referring to the overwhelming physical catastrophe that has come about, with himself as the prime instrument of destruction, and the evil which he has done by attempting to hide the truth from himself. In Oedipus at Colonus, when he maintains his innocence, he is no longer thinking of the physical catastrophe, but of the original error in which he unwittingly and innocently participated.

Oedipus Rex, then, shows the terrible consequences of attempting to evade the will of the gods and of deluding one's self as to the truth of the situation. Oedipus at Colonus shows the end waiting for those who learn

from experience to live according to the gods' laws, or the inner sight.

It seems strange that two such different plays are both "tragedies." In general, the term "tragedy" is used to refer to plays similar in pattern to Oedipus Rex, such as King Lear, Doctor Faustus, Tamburlaine, and Bussy D'Ambois. But such strikingly different plays as Samson Agonistes and Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, which roughly follow the pattern of Oedipus at Colonus, are also thought of as tragedies. The two Oedipus plays seem to function as the two halves of a unified whole: the second following in natural order the first. Samson Agonistes and Murder in the Cathedral both assume a preceding "catastrophe" or downfall, of which they are the natural continuation. It seems very likely that the whole range of the "tragic experience" involves not only a development to a catastrophe or a realization, but also a development after the catastrophe, in which the protagonist employs his insight and fulfills man's desire to "know how to live."

Thus the major concern of man's relationship to powers beyond his control appears to find both a negative and a positive expression in tragedy. To discover a common basis for these expressions, it becomes necessary to investigate the sources of the tragic experience itself.

II

The problem of man's relationship to powers beyond his control has always been a central one for myth, religion, and analytical psychology. The problem has always appeared to center in certain basic themes or images, one of which is the recurring theme of the "quest" or "journey." Reasons for the predominance of the journey theme may possibly be found in man's basic experiences with natural occurrences: man's "journey" from birth to death, the sun's progress from east to west, and the earth's movement through the seasons provide a ready and possibly ingrained source. Physical and geographical exploration add to the idea in that expanding frontiers, the human desire to discover and explore new regions, and the simple process of moving from one place to another can provide a source of metaphor. The workings of the human mind may also be seen in terms of a "journey." The mind begins at one point, and moves, through thought or the natural flux of feelings, to another.

Links between these natural, geographical, and psychic journey patterns are many. Researchers in anthropology and psychology have noted connections between the changing seasons and man's ritual observation of this change.³ Speculations have also been made which suggest the possibility of a link between these ritual expressions of change and primitive religious expression, the development of myth, the Homeric poems, and Greek drama.⁴

³See especially Carl Jung, "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass," Psyche and Symbol (New York, 1958), pp. 148-224.

In the field of analytical psychology, Carl Jung and Erich Neumann have conducted extensive research into the "journey myth." Establishing, mainly by the empirical evidence of case studies, that man tends to "figure" psychic events in terms of certain standard symbols, they have succeeded in revealing some of the connections between the journey motif and the development of man's consciousness, linking the natural, geographical, and psychic areas of experience in terms of the journey or process of change. Without getting too involved in psychological terminology, it will be useful to look at some of the major ideas of Jung and Neumann in this area.

Generally speaking, Jung and Neumann hold that the pre-conscious state, of man in general or of the individual, tends to be represented to consciousness as some variation of the Uroboros symbol -- the snake biting its own tail -- or the circle, egg, or seed.⁵ This unified, unseparated whole becomes the figure of a man and a woman embracing -- opposites that are still inseparable but now distinguishable. As consciousness develops, the male and female figures (called by Neumann the "World Parents") separate, signifying a separation of opposites, or a new awareness of the difference

⁴See Herbert J. Muller, The Spirit of Tragedy (New York, 1956), pp. 25-47 for a discussion of the myth-ritual stages of Judaism, Christianity, and Greek Culture, including comments on the origins of the Homeric poems and Greek drama; Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven, 1959), pp. 4-7 for a discussion of the origins of tragic drama in "primitive" society, relying mainly on anthropological findings; Richmond Y. Hathorn, Tragedy, Myth, and Mystery (Bloomington, 1962), pp. 11-37 for a discussion of myth and ritual, and their connections with tragic drama; and William Van O'Connor, Climates of Tragedy (New York, 1965), pp. 32-43 for a discussion of an age's attitude toward collectivism or individualism, and the reflection of the dominant attitude in the protagonist of tragic drama.

⁵The ideas in this discussion, to page 11, are taken mainly from Erich Neumann, The Origins and History of Consciousness (New York, 1954), passim; and Carl Jung, Basic Writings (New York, 1959), pp. 293 ff., et passim.

between, mainly, "self" and "other." The meaning of the process is simply that the individual becomes aware of himself as an identity separate from everything else, as a child gradually becomes aware of his surroundings and his separation from them. Passing through a transitional stage where the ego is alternately conscious of itself and not conscious of itself, the individual consciousness gradually becomes stronger and attempts by asserting itself to prevent itself from "falling" back into the unconscious state.

Here, the "Great Mother," or "that from which we come," takes on a dual aspect -- "good" (that which bore us and still sustains us), and "evil" (that which seeks to engulf us or reclaim us back into herself). The metaphor for self-assertion is often a fight with the "evil" Great Mother, usually in the form of a dragon, for a reward of either treasure or a captive. The other "World Parent" also takes on a dual aspect. The Father-figure, according to Neumann, is generally a metaphor for cultural or group authority, and is seen as both "good" (a helper, knowledge-giver, and protector), and "evil" (a force which seeks to engulf the individual ego in the "group consciousness"). This "parent" must also be symbolically slain, signifying the assertion of the individual in the face of cultural or group forces as well as natural forces.

The individual is here not completely "free." As the dual aspects of the Mother and Father figures suggest, the ego asserts itself against the "evil," engulfing, ego-threatening aspects of forces beyond its control, but is still subject to the "laws" of the opposite aspect -- the sustaining and nourishing principle. And, of course, the "evil" side is not obliterated -- death still exists -- but is only defied. In other words, though man (ego) asserts himself as separate, he is still not independent. Man,

becoming aware of himself as a personal being, is also aware of the forces beyond his control, to which he is inevitably subject. The seasons progress, the day turns from light to dark, and man moves from birth to death. These are, for Jung and Neumann, universal, unalterable occurrences, which continually become metaphors for those forces which the ego cannot bend to its own will. They become for man the objects of reverence, awe, and ritual expression, and are all linked to the idea of the "Great Natural Mother." Similarly, the "Father" figure, of cultural or group authority, becomes generalized, and may show up as the worship of ancestors, totem animals, "wise man" figures, or Jehovah-like God figures.⁶

In the period following self-assertion, the ego takes on more strongly the role of "Hero," as it attempts to stand up to or cope with the forces that threaten its existence. This is the period of "struggling," according to Neumann, and is the period in which modern man still finds himself. The whole race of man, in this stage, is similar to the individual who considers himself "mature" and "independent" but who is really bound for the most part by parental influences from childhood, and by group pressures and authority. There is simultaneously a desire to conform and "belong", and a desire to be completely free, independent, and self-sustaining.

It is natural to find these two conflicting desires wrapped up in one ultimate "goal," which mainly takes the form of a "once and for all" confrontation of the powers beyond the ego's control, and a fusion or reconciliation of the opposites of "selfhood" and "otherness." The period of struggling is the period of opposites -- good-evil, life-death, light-dark, self-other -- and the conflicts of these opposites cause much anxiety

⁶See Carl Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," Psyche and Symbol, pp. 113-131.

and instability. The customary Western approach, according to Jung, Neumann, and Alan Watts, is to attempt to ignore one of the opposites.⁷ Characteristically, Westerners favor life over death, good over evil, and self over other. And yet they are always painfully aware of the claims of the opposite side, and seek to somehow reconcile the two. Here, Neumann's "Hero" meets his major test -- to confront the problem head-on, and yet to survive. The confrontation is central to many of the basic myths of mankind, both secular and religious.

A main position of analytical psychology is that myth is a projection of internal (psychic) events into outward or external forms. To the "dawn man," according to Neumann, the world is "an interior world experienced outside himself."⁸ Jung notes that the "naïve man of antiquity" projected his inner experience of reality into his myths, endowing certain things with divinity, and others with deviltry, and creating a "world" which did not correspond to the objective view, but to his inner, subjective experience.⁹ This mechanism of projection remains with man in the "struggling" stage of existence. The original "participation mystique" where, as Neumann says, "everything changes into everything and acts upon everything," gradually crystallizes into myth-systems. The myth-systems gradually become more elaborate, concrete, and lifeless as they begin to "stand for" themselves and not inner reality. As science with its externalized view of life begins to dominate in a culture, the inner experience may be with-

⁷See Alan Watts, This Is It (New York, 1967), pp. 44-45.

⁸Neumann, Origins and History of Consciousness, p. 276.

⁹Carl Jung, Basic Writings (New York, 1959), p. 24.

drawn from the myths; and the shells of myth, now devoid of any life-giving meaning, may crumble, to be replaced almost wholly by the new "external myth" of science.¹⁰ This has generally been the case with Greek, Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu mythology.

But these myths are still available, and can be reinfused, using the research techniques of anthropology and psychology, with some measure of their original meaning. In From Ritual to Romance, Jessie Weston has done much to reveal the origins and central meaning of one such myth, that of the "grail quest," and has provided a particular example to stand in front of the generalized "journey" myths of Jung and Neumann.¹¹

As previously mentioned, this type of journey myth is peculiar to the "struggling" period of the development of consciousness. Centrally, the goal is rebirth. Neumann calls the process "Heroic Incest," as the individual ego (Hero) must "reenter" the source of its being ("the Great Mother"), and somehow survive as an entity. Classically, the myth is cast in the form of a difficult and dangerous pilgrimage, complete with oracles, hazards, and riddles, at the end of which lies the goal, usually a symbol of rebirth (Grail) or immortality. The individual who completes the tasks and gains the goal is the "twice born," and is truly worthy of the name "Hero." He is a "Divine Hero" -- one who has achieved rebirth and immortality, or the status of a god.

Nowhere is this process more apparent than in religious myth. The end of Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian mysticism is a union with the All, or God, and a rebirth to a new life. The Upanishads ask men to attain to the

¹⁰Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (New York, 1954).

¹¹Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (New York, 1920).

"highest knowledge;" and give the seeker detailed instructions on how to proceed.¹² The goal is knowledge of the "Self" or of the "All," which turns out to be the same thing. This is plainly a reunion with the "One" and a rebirth achieved through a subjective "journey." The Bhagavad-Gita takes a symbolic individual and leads him, by means of the teachings of a god, step by step to "selfhood." The individual is at first confused, inert, and unable to decide what to do (the conflict of opposites). He is led through stage after stage of insight, being continually admonished to persevere and avoid falsehood, to the final goal. Similarly, the Bardo Thodol, or Tibetan Book of the Dead, provides a detailed guide for the "soul" after death which, in its esoteric interpretation, becomes a guide to rebirth or divinity in life.¹³ The Bardo Thodol also commands perseverance in avoiding delusions or petty, ego-based desires. This amounts to the step by step relinquishing of the "control" of which the ego has so carefully convinced itself. It is a recognition and confrontation of the "forces beyond the ego's control." The delusions to be avoided on the "journey" are those of power, sensuality, mundane desires, and vanity.¹⁴

¹²See Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and Charles A. Moore, eds., A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (Princeton, 1957) for the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita.

¹³W.Y. Evans-Wentz, The Tibetan Book of the Dead (New York, 1960). (It is significant that the "Bible" of the experimenters with consciousness-expanding drugs is The Psychedelic Experience, by Leary, Alpert, and Metzner, (New York, 1964), which is a translation and adaptation of the Bardo Thodol. The LSD "trip" has stages which closely parallel those of the mystic journey myths.)

¹⁴See Jung, "Commentary on the Secret of the Golden Flower," Psyche and Symbol, pp. 302-351.

Buddhism, in its esoteric form, states the same themes. Zen Buddhism, today the only flourishing form of esoteric Buddhism, also has as its "goal" a knowledge of self-hood for the individual.¹⁵ The process of Zen meditation also takes the form of a subjective journey, with progressive stages of awareness and insight, culminating in the goal of self-realization.

In the West, the journey theme takes the form of a spiritual quest which results in a reunion with God, and immortality for the individual. Again, esoteric Christianity (notably that of the Gnostics) reveals a similar union of "ego" and "All", or "Self" and "Other," and a rebirth of the individual as a result of this experience.

All of these doctrines can be seen -- to return to the terminology of Jung and Neumann -- as expressions of the same "Heroic Incest"; and the follower of the "directions" is the Hero endeavoring to overcome hazards, misunderstandings, and delusions to gain the goal, which is the resolution of "self" with "other". All of these myth systems are products of the "struggling" phase of the development of consciousness, and are built mainly with the tools provided by the earlier stages -- experience of the original One and separation from it, and projection of inner events into outward manifestations. As products of the "struggling" stage, each of these systems has as its goal the termination of struggling, and the resolution of the opposites which cause the struggle. In short, each of these systems is an expression of man's immediate situation, and a guide to a "higher" state, which is termed either selfhood, enlightenment, or divinity.

The religious scriptures adequately portray the dangers of failing in the quest. The Upanishads picture the lowest type of man, who is essen-

¹⁵ See Philip Kapleau, ed., The Three Pillars of Zen (Boston, 1967).

tially unconscious and does nothing toward gaining knowledge of himself or the gods; the kinds of men who succumb to various types of sensual lust; and the higher man who lets nothing interrupt his quest for self. The "lower" types of men are portrayed complete with their self-inflicted sufferings -- feelings of anxiety, guilt, hate, and so on. The Bardo Thodol personifies the hazards in the form of "deities," both "peaceful" and "wrathful." The peaceful deities can lead the individual to a siren-entrapped existence, and the wrathful deities can lead the individual to unspeakable tortures.¹⁶ In Zen meditation, hallucinations and "psychosomatic" pains and pleasures are common. The ego, refusing to give up its delusions of "control" and "separateness," creates the hallucinatory obstacles to further effort. In Christianity, of course, there is the exoteric Heaven (achieved by leading a "good" life), and Hell (a "bad" life). Esoterically, these can be seen as the same opposing mental states dealt with by the other religions mentioned.

Neumann further points out that the "Heroic Incest" myth results, if the Hero should fail in his quest, in castration, confinement, or blinding, which signifies powerlessness and helplessness. That such "punishments" are often self-inflicted reflects the mythological character of the acts, as taking place in the mind and being externalized as physical phenomena.

To sum up, it can be held that man, as an individual self who sees himself partly in control of his destiny and partly at the mercy of super-human forces, has a driving need to resolve this experience of conflict. From a state of confusion and internal conflict, he projects for himself a

¹⁶ Again, these are paralleled in the LSD experience, the mind projecting these pleasures and tortures as hallucinations.

goal which embodies the resolution of the fundamental opposites, mainly good-evil, life-death, and self-other. Once the goal is projected, the individual self attempts, with different degrees of success, to move toward and gain it. Such a hero as Oedipus may experience either failure or success in his confrontation with the forces that oppose him. But significantly, it is the unsuccessful hero, rather than the successful one, who has most engaged the imagination of Western man. The implications of his suffering and his defeat are spelled out not only in myth but especially in a form unique to Western literature, tragic drama.

III

Tragedy has something in common with the "Divine Journey" partly because it has its roots in mythology, which has already been related to basic human concerns and insights, and partly because it is built around the "Hero figure." In both tragic drama and Neumann's account of the stages of the development of consciousness, there appears an individual figure confronting life's most basic and central problems, usually at the expense of his own sense of control over himself and his environment. Neumann notes the connections between Oedipus as Hero, and the "Divine Hero" when he says:

There are three fateful points in the myth of Oedipus which must be borne in mind if we are to give him his rightful place in the evolution of human consciousness: firstly, the victory over the Sphinx; secondly, the incest with the mother; thirdly, the murder of the father.¹⁷

He suggests that the Sphinx is the Uroboric dragon, and that Oedipus becomes a Hero because of his successful confrontation with this Great Mother figure. The incest with the mother represents the same process -- that of assertion of the ego and the gaining of "manhood." The murder of the father represents the assertion in the face of cultural or group forces. All these actions are typical of the Divine Hero, but there is one important difference. As Neumann puts it, "What distinguishes the (Divine) hero is an active incest, the deliberate, conscious exposure of himself to the dangerous influence of the female, and the overcoming of man's immemorial fear of woman."¹⁸ "Woman" is, of course, a metaphor for

¹⁷Neumann, p. 162.

¹⁸Neumann, p. 156.

the "Great Mother" principle, in both its good and evil aspects. Neumann continues:

If we follow up this line of thought and disregard for the present the meaning of the father-murder, we can see why Oedipus was only half a hero, and why the real deed of the hero remained only half accomplished: though Oedipus conquers the Sphinx, he commits incest with his mother, and murders his father, unconsciously.

He has no knowledge of what he has done, and when he finds out, he is unable to look his own deed, the deed of the hero, in the face. Consequently, he is overtaken by the fate that overtakes all those for whom the Eternal Feminine reverts to the Great Mother: he regresses to the stage of the son, and suffers the fate of the son-lover. He performs the act of self-castration by putting out his own eyes.¹⁹

This, in its essence, is the key to the difference between Oedipus and the Divine Hero. Though both go through essentially the same progress, the Divine Hero (as suggested in the section on religious scriptures) goes through it consciously and deliberately. Oedipus, on the other hand, represents what Neumann calls an "abortive" attempt to gain divinity, and can be related to those in the religious scriptures who fail. Oedipus is not conscious of the significance of his actions and has no knowledge that he is committing a crime. He is a Divine Hero who fails. Such an abortive attempt to gain divinity or self-realization, based on a lack of insight into the meaning of the necessary actions, may well be at the heart of tragedy. The failure is related to the central psychic experience of seeking "selfhood," Neumann's final stage in the evolution of consciousness. Implicit in tragedy is the unreadiness of man to achieve or even recognize this goal.

¹⁹Neumann, p. 163.

It has been noted that tragedy is a peculiarly Western phenomenon. The difference between what most commentators prefer to call the "Eastern mind" (meaning a set of attitudes, thought patterns, responses, and so on -- a general and fairly consistent way of reacting to existence) and the "Western mind" is postulated mainly because observers have noted that the Eastern mind appears to be more "internally" oriented, while the Western mind is more "externally" oriented. Such a difference reveals two ways of dealing with Neumann's separation of the opposites. The West has based its approach mainly on science -- the investigation and manipulation of the "external" world. Jung, in his "Commentary on the Secret of the Golden Flower," says:

Science is a tool of the Western mind and with it more doors can be opened than with bare hands. It is part and parcel of our knowledge and only obscures our insight when it holds that the understanding given by it is the only kind there is. The East has taught us another, wider, more profound, and higher understanding, that is, understanding through life.²⁰

Both Jung and the philosopher Alan Watts are greatly concerned with the differences between East and West, and both go on from this basic internal-external distinction to approach the problem of opposites. Watts, who speaks of the Eastern attitude in terms of "action by instinct," and the Western attitude in terms of "action by intelligence" (Jung's equivalents are "non-directed" and "directed" thinking), sees the method of "action by intelligence" as causing anxiety. The method works by dividing up experience into manageable parts. A "sense of responsibility" develops with the realization that there are an infinite number of ways to make the

²⁰Jung, Psyche and Symbol, pp. 303-4.

division. This sense of responsibility tends to heighten the feeling of independence in the individual, often arousing a feeling of isolation and hostility toward forces beyond the control of the intellect.²¹ Oedipus, as he gradually becomes more aware of the forces beyond his control, illustrates the almost chronic need of an individual to resolve this self-other conflict. In his conversation with the herdsman, he says that he is on the brink of "frightful hearing," and adds, "But I must hear."²²

Both Jung and Watts go on to consider the effects of different attitudes on the methods of coming to grips with the problem of opposites. Both note that the "Eastern mind" does not so much divide up experience, as it tends to see an event, such as A being followed by B, as a process, rather than as a cause-and-effect relationship. Similarly, the Eastern mind sees the individual as part of the process of existence, and not as a cause (feeling of control) or an effect (sense of independence) of existence. As Watts says:

Their goal is a state of inner feeling in which oppositions have become mutually co-operative instead of mutually exclusive, in which there is no longer any conflict between the individual man and nature, or between intelligence and instinct. Their view of the world is unitary (or, to be quite technical, "nondualistic"), and in such a world there is no absolute over-whelming urgency to be right rather than wrong, or to live rather than die. It is, however, quite difficult for us to understand this point of view, for the very reason that we habitually regard opposites as mutually exclusive, like God and the Devil. Because of this, our idea of unity and our way of solving conflicts is simply to eliminate one of the two parties.²³

²¹Watts, This Is It, pp. 44-45.

²²Greene and Lattimore, p. 12, l. 1170.

²³Watts, op. cit., p. 48.

Jung notes essentially the same thing when he says, "Therefore, the Chinese have never failed to recognize the paradoxes and the polarity inherent in what is alive. The opposites always balance one another -- a sign of high culture. One-sidedness, though it lends momentum, is a mark of barbarism."²⁵

This Western one-sidedness (which Watts calls "sawing off one horn of a dilemma") is especially demonstrated in the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. Jung speaks of the confusion, in the period following the Middle Ages, of "intellect" and "spirit", and of the gradual dominance of the intellectual approach, and relates this directly to the Judaeo-Christian tradition.²⁶ With regard to the idea that the cause-effect approach has tended to suppress one opposite in favor of the other, George Steiner, in The Death of Tragedy, notes that the Hebrew culture developed at a very early date an all-inclusive, all-powerful, all-knowing God who was the cause and dispenser of good and evil, life and death, and most importantly, justice. This justice sees all things as being in God's hands, making everything, if not all right for the individual, at least just in the end. Steiner sees this as one reason for the lack of tragedy in the Bible, suggesting that a sense of blind fate cannot exist along with a sense of guided justice.²⁷ Neumann sheds further light on the creation of the Hebrew Jehovah by noting that the earlier "primitive" Canaanite attitudes were superseded by the paternal authority figure of Jehovah. This amounts to an assertion of the intellect, or self-governing principle, over the "evil" aspect of the Great Mother which threatens annihilation.

²⁵Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 306.

²⁶Jung, pp. 306-7.

²⁷ George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York, 1961), pp. 3-5.

Steiner further notes the connection between Jehovah and the scientific viewpoint: "The Judaic spirit is vehement in its conviction that the order of the universe and of man's estate is accessible to reason."²⁸ And Watts adds, "Likewise God as the rational principle of the universe stands on the side of intelligence rather than instinct..."²⁹ The entire process amounts to an assertion of the intellect's "power" to remain self-sufficient and to control the "external" world, at the expense of "instinct" or the idea of the unity of "self" and "other."

Christianity, according to Jung and Watts, represents a further step in this process. God is all-good as well as all-just. Evil is relegated to an insignificant position under God's direct control. Death is made relatively unimportant, and sin is made pardonable, because of God's merciful justice. Watts points out again the fundamental difference between the Eastern religious attitude, which in general seeks a resolution or co-ordination of these opposites in life, and Christianity, which seeks to deny one of the opposites in favor of the other. Watts says that, "In Christianity it matters not just very much but absolutely that one chooses good rather than evil, for one's eternal destiny depends upon the decision."³⁰

It is worth noting that much the same process showed signs of occurring in Greek culture. Neumann notes that in keeping with the general "guilt" felt by the individual ego at the separation of the World Parents, an event which occurred both with and without the ego's assent, that the Greeks felt that "original guilt is cosmic."³¹ Neumann notes the similarities between

²⁸ Steiner, p. 4.

²⁹ Watts, p. 49.

³⁰ Watts, p. 49.

³¹ Neumann, p. 118.

the Judaic process of favoring consciousness and intellectuality over co-ordination of the self-other opposites, and a Greek confrontation of this problem which likewise favors the intellectual approach. D.D. Raphael, in The Paradox of Tragedy, further notes that Prometheus Bound and the Orestiad may indicate an attempt to solve this problem as the Hebrews had done, by developing, from out of the various conflicting gods, a system by which an all-inclusive order could be maintained. Zeus, in Prometheus Bound, is portrayed as "immature" and not yet able to rule with full wisdom. Of the Orestiad, Raphael says, "Older ideas of justice lead to unending evil and conflict; and Aeschylus gropes his way to the conception of a divine justice that will result in unmixed good."³²

Yet tragedy as it manifests itself in Western culture seems incompatible with any fully developed system of a completely good or just universe. Some notable paradoxes begin to emerge here. First, tragedy appears to be alien to any system which has suppressed or diminished in importance the role of evil, suffering, and death. And yet tragedy seems to occur within the cultures which have developed, or are in the process of developing, this type of system; and is vitally concerned with evil, suffering, and death. Possibly, the reaction between the concerns of tragedy and a culture that seeks to deny or diminish the importance of these concerns constitutes at least part of the process by which the effect of tragedy is made.³³

³²The Paradox of Tragedy (Bloomington, 1960), p. 44. (Raphael also notes the similarities between this process and the development of Judaic and Christian ideas of God, pp. 44-53.)

³³It should be noted here that it is modern man who sees Greek tragedy as tragedy. Modern observers have no way of knowing how Greek audiences felt or how they regarded the plays. The view of modern observers is also necessarily coloured by the Judaeo-Christian influence, and by the effects of a highly developed scientific rationalism.

This point can be made more clearly by taking a closer look at some of the actual elements of tragic drama.

It has already been noted that Oedipus, as tragic hero, can be seen as a "Divine Hero" who fails. And yet he has completed essentially the same metaphorically presented "tasks" as must the Divine Hero -- the assertion of self against the "Great Mother" principle and the "Father" figure of cultural authority. The failure was seen to lie in Oedipus' not understanding the significance of his actions -- his lack of conscious action and insight. When the truth is revealed, Oedipus cannot accept it, and yet he is forced into realizing that he has done what he has done, and that he must somehow cope with this fact. The Hero in a great many, if not all, dramas which are generally considered to be tragic reaches a point at which he must recognize the existence of both the negative side to existence -- evil, death, and suffering -- and the powers beyond his control. Such recognition involves the destruction of any illusions of the individual's control over his environment, and of a wholly good universe. As the society or culture has generally sought to affirm just the reverse of what the Hero realizes (note the fear-based reactions of Jocasta and the Chorus as Oedipus nears the truth), the realization also involves the destruction of any notions of a security or validity provided by the culture. The two aspects of the Hero's realization take the form of the oracles, prophecies, and unalterable "will of the gods" in the first instance, and of banishment or removal (possibly by death) in the second. This is most plainly seen in Oedipus Rex, where the inevitability of oracles, prophecies and decisions of the gods is insisted upon, and where Oedipus asks to be banished from the city. But the same idea is found in a more modern tragedy, Macbeth, where

the riddles paradoxically come true, and where Macbeth's destruction is involved in his realization of their truth. In King Lear, the point is not veiled -- Lear is faced with an inevitable occurrence, that of growing old and eventually dying. This motivates him, while he is functioning as the protector of the people, to divide the kingdom among his daughters. Later, when he attempts to reassert his authority, he is plainly pitting himself against the inevitable. This abnormality leads to Lear's madness and eventual death. He is plainly subject to powers beyond the control of his personal will, and when he is forced to recognize that he has no power to assert himself, maintain his power and dignity, and defy death, he, like Oedipus, cannot face the truth, and seeks escape in madness and exile. The metaphor for Lear's realization is the storm, where Lear "contends with the elements," and where he faces, finally, in isolation, the truth about his illusion of power and the consequences of his folly.

In both Oedipus Rex and King Lear, the central conflict is between man, with his illusions of power and control, and those forces beyond his control which shatter these illusions. In each case, any cultural attempt to relegate suffering and death to an insignificant position is crushed. The hero fails in his battle with super-human forces, but gains a deep insight into the workings of the universe. Lear, in his final recognition of the fact of death, cries:

And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never!
 Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
 Look there, look there!

Act V, scene iii³⁴

³⁴G.B.Harrison, ed., Shakespeare, The Complete Works (New York, 1952), p. 1163.

Oedipus, in a similar frame of mind, prays for death and deliverance from a world in which now only the woes are evident. He says to the chorus:

I beg of you in God's name hide me
Somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,
or throw me into the sea, to be forever
out of your sight. Approach and deign to touch me
for all my wretchedness, and do not fear.
No man but I can bear my evil doom.

11. 1408-1415.³⁵

This violent assertion of the reality of suffering and death in the face of cultural or personal attempts to deny their importance contributes greatly to the effect of these plays.

The hypothesis of an "abortive" attempt by an individual to come to grips with powers beyond his control, can be seen to fit such plays as Oedipus Rex and King Lear. But, to return to the original question presented here, what of such plays as Oedipus at Colonus and Samson Agonistes? The basic difference as originally noted was between actions of a hero performed unconsciously and unwittingly (actions based on a lack of insight), leading to a "downfall"; and actions performed consciously and deliberately, leading to a resolution which, no matter how painful, the hero understands and accepts. The conclusions of such plays as Oedipus Rex are surrounded by misery, suffering, or terrible death, while the conclusions of such plays as Oedipus At Colonus carry a suggestion both of the hero's resignation and of his acceptance by the superhuman powers. How can both "types" be considered tragedies?

Though the two types differ in form and content, there are some basic similarities. For example, mention has already been made of Oedipus' feelings of "guilt" and "innocence." He considers himself guilty in Oedipus Rex because of the undeniable fact that he has helped to bring

about evil and disaster. He considers himself innocent, in Oedipus at Colonus, with regard to the original, unwitting error of attempting to avoid the fate ordained by the gods. In each instance, the fundamental issue is man's relationship with power beyond his control, and in each there is both the "guilt" and the "innocence." The difference is one of emphasis: guilt is emphasized in Oedipus Rex, in the moments following the revelation of the deeds; and innocence is emphasized in Oedipus at Colonus where Oedipus has had time to reflect on the events. Both plays, in other words, grow out of the same occurrence (the abortive confrontation with superhuman powers) and the theme which this occurrence represents (the gaining of insight into man's situation through his defeat).

The differences between the plays are not only related to the emphasis on guilt or innocence, but also to the conduct resulting from the emphasis. In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus is horror-stricken, and can only feel himself crushed under the heel of Fate. He blinds himself and seeks banishment and a quick death, revealing his overwhelming feeling of guilt and impotence. In Oedipus at Colonus, however, Oedipus reveals a definite strength of purpose, which appears to be based on an acceptance of, or reconciliation with, that very Fate which shattered his life earlier.³⁶

Neumann sees this change of attitude in terms of the completion of the "Uroboric circle," which begins with a unified One, divides into self and other, and reunites again into the One. Oedipus has asserted himself by solving the riddle of the Sphinx and committing "Heroic incest," and by slaying the father-figure. Unable to accept his actions, he succumbs to fate, or "regresses" to the Great Mother.³⁷In other words, he gives up the

³⁶(Note Oedipus' scrupulous adherence to the ritual observances, and his many references to fulfilling the gods' decrees as to his place of burial.)

³⁷Neumann, pp. 161-165.

struggle for self-assertion, and allows the superhuman powers to dominate. In Oedipus at Colonus, Neumann suggests, Oedipus has reconciled himself to the power of the Great Mother, and is at last solemnly taken back by the "ancient mother power."³⁸

Similarly, Neumann sees the Samson story in terms of an initial self-assertion, a succumbing to the "wiles" of fate, and a captivity and blindness, which symbolize again the giving up of the struggle and the domination by the "Mother powers."³⁹ Milton's Samson Agonistes pictures the gradual recovery of Samson, leading toward his decision to act. As with Oedipus, Samson must face certain temptations. Oedipus faces the logic and force of Creon, but sees through the narrow view presented by him; he rejects the appeal of Polyneices on the same grounds. Samson rejects Manoa's offer of escape and a life of indolence, Dalilah's offer of sensual pleasures, and Harapha's pride-tempting taunts. Samson, like Oedipus, has learned of the futility of earthly pleasures and rewards which can be changed at the slightest whim of the gods.

Both Samson and Oedipus must also conquer their initial sense of guilt. Samson considers himself guilty because he did not obey God, and because he caused death and defeat. This corresponds to Oedipus' reaction to the results of his attempt to change the will of the gods. Like Oedipus, Samson recovers from the initial crushing blow, and lives to reconcile himself to the powers beyond his control. Like Oedipus, too, he learns to live according to his newly gained understanding: he does what he now knows to be right, conquers the foe, and renews himself in his death. Both Oedipus and Samson finally die "victorious," because they have succeeded in coming

³⁸Neumann, p. 164.

³⁹Neumann, pp. 164-65.

to terms with the superhuman powers against which they initially transgressed. As the chorus says after Samson's death:

O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
 Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
 The work for which thou wast foretold
 To Israël, and now ly'st victorious
 Among thy slain self-kill'd
 Not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold,
 Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
 Thee with thy slaughter'd foes in number more
 Than all thy life had slain before,
 ll. 1660-340

The apparent paradox of "victorious" and "not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold of dire necessity" gives the key to the final attitude of both Oedipus and Samson. The mention of the rebirth of the Phoenix, and the word-play on "blindness" suggest strongly that Samson has at last "seen" what he must do, and, like Oedipus, has been "reborn" in his action and his death.

Judging from these examples, then, both "types" of plays are essentially about the same thing: man and his position and responsibility in the face of powers beyond his control. The two forms represent two sides of the same process -- that of confronting and coming to grips with these superhuman forces. There is first the initial, usually unknowing, transgression against the "will of the gods," which is followed by the revelation of the overwhelming power of these superhuman forces. It is this terrible realization by the individual of his lack of understanding, of the damage caused by this lack, and of his complete impotency, that constitutes

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The Works of John Milton, I, pt. 1, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 356.

the heart of those dramas commonly regarded as tragedies, such as Prometheus Bound, King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello. After the initial blow, however, there may be an eventual reconciliation of the individual with himself, his guilt, and the gods.⁴¹ The hero is still a hero, but one who is shown learning to live in accordance with the will of the gods, rather than in opposition to it. He has learned that man's insight is limited, and that he can unwittingly transgress; but he accepts now the realities of suffering and death, and does not attempt to avoid divine decree by human device. It is significant that the form of tragedy which is most prevalent is not this latter one, but that in which the hero initially fails. The story of the hero gradually working his way to reconciliation with the gods is not often attempted; and perhaps, as the predominance of plays of the Oedipus Rex type reveals man's need to effect this reconciliation, the scarcity of such plays as Oedipus at Colonus reveals his unpreparedness to achieve it.

⁴¹This can occur, of course, only if the hero has been allowed to live. As Oedipus says:

I would not have been saved from death if not
for some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate
go where it will.

ll. 1457-59
(Greene and Lattimore, p. 73.)

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TWO FORMS OF HEROIC ACTION
IN TRAGIC DRAMA

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in Tragic Drama

The purpose of this report is to apply the findings of analytical psychology to tragic drama. In particular, the conclusions of Jung and Neumann are used to add to an understanding of the "tragic hero." The central problem considered is that arising from the differences of actions and attitudes displayed by the heroes of such different plays as Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus.

According to Jung and Neumann, the hero-figure of myth and literature is a product of an "in-between" stage in the development of human consciousness -- a stage in which man sees himself both as a separate identity and as a product and/or subject of natural forces beyond his control. The resulting conflict between "self" and "other" can be resolved by a confrontation of the individual with the superhuman forces. If this confrontation is undertaken consciously and successfully, the hero takes on the status of "Divine Hero," and is "reborn." If the confrontation is attempted unconsciously and unsuccessfully (and Neumann states that this is the case with Oedipus), the hero "regresses," or gives up the struggle for self-assertion. Sophocles' Oedipus is a Divine Hero who fails. The same is true of Shakespeare's King Lear, who attempts to assert himself against the forces of change and death; and, according to Neumann, of the Biblical Samson when he is tricked, captured, and blinded. In each case, the hero is overwhelmed by a sense of guilt, mainly because of his having helped to cause the physical catastrophe, and of impotence in the face of forces he cannot control.

In Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, however, Oedipus maintains that he is innocent, and moreover shows a definite strength of purpose. Here, Oedipus has been able to come to grips with the events of the past, accept his position in the face of the "will of the gods," and learn to live according to what he has learned. The same is true of Milton's Samson, who rises from despondency and inactivity to resolution and action. Tragedies such as Oedipus at Colonus and Samson Agonistes present heroes who have failed initially, but who have at last come to cope successfully with the self-other conflict.

According to Jung and Neumann, the process of man's confronting and attempting to cope with powers beyond his control is a fundamental psychic event. This event, and the process in which it is the focal point, is the subject of Western tragic drama, though different plays may dramatize different stages in the same process. The form of tragedy represented by such plays as Oedipus Rex and King Lear illustrates man's initial confrontation with the forces beyond his control, and his failure in that confrontation. Such plays as Oedipus at Colonus and Samson Agonistes, on the other hand, represent a second form of tragedy, which dramatizes man's successful resolution of the self-other conflict, and his learning to live and act according to his newly-gained insight.