

Oedipus' Body & the Riddle of the Sphinx

Rob Baum

MYTH

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about Woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Every-one knows that." She said. "That's what you think."

Muriel Rukeyser¹

Nor will you have escaped worrying over the problem, those of you who are men; to those of you who are women, this will not apply—you are yourself the problem.

Sigmund Freud²

Riddles, an under-studied element of folklore, concisely and expressively construct worlds of wonder and hardship. In *The Mahabharata* riddles distinguish the greedy from the good. In the Bible riddles underwrite tales of moral instruction—save animals from flood, pluck a son from sacrifice, turn a wife to salt. This article is a case study of a famous riddle—perhaps the most famous literary riddle in the

Rob Baum's research publications include *Female Absence: Women, Theatre and Other Metaphors* and journal articles on Palestinian ritual, dance, race/gender issues, and identity politics; Rob's current book project concerns the influence of the Shoah on Jewish identity. Rob performs in improvisational movement, circus, and theatre and trains disabled practitioners. Her feminist plays feature strong, desirable roles for women. *Every Woman's War* premiered in Singapore in 2006. Rob chairs the Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies at Monash University and has a clinical practice in dance movement therapy.

Western world: the Riddle of the Sphinx. Who is not acquainted with Oedipus' ill-starred psychology? Oedipus, born in Thebes of royal parentage, raised in Corinth by foster royals, escaped to Thebes to avoid killing his father and bedding his mother. Only to run straight into the monster's maw.

The playwright Sophocles gave Oedipus dramatic life, weaving his mythic misadventures into a long rich day of festival theatre. In his tragedy Sophocles bestowed upon Oedipus uncommon speech and common desires—the eloquence of a man born to rule, with the inability to rule himself. This version, or perversion, of the legend Sigmund Freud chose as the basis for a key trope in what was to become psychoanalytic theory—disregarding the fact, essential to both myth and play, that Oedipus did everything in his power to thwart his destiny (for which the gods also punished him). For Sophocles, *hybris* was the key, for Freud, base results: Freud showed himself less a student of the classics than a man of the theatre. As a result Freudian discourse about Oedipus has reshaped the Oedipal body, loading it with sexual signage: psychoanalysis obscures the tragically corrupt physique it means to expose. I propose *habeas corpus*; produce the body, to reveal what the mechanism of theatre has disguised. Beneath the sexualized and dramatized flesh of the king lies the *gestus* of a legend, obscene because unseen. The Ur-body of Oedipus itself answers the great Oedipal Riddle.

To analyse this riddle I bring together folklore, performance theory, psychoanalytic theory, kinesiology, and disability discourse. I intend to demonstrate how Sophocles' version of Oedipus radically differs from mythic origins; in answering the Riddle of the Sphinx, Oedipus never spoke the true solution to the Riddle; Oedipus' manner of reply provides evidence of both disability and impairment. And I will solve an additional riddle imposed by Sophocles, explaining why this most famous of riddling scenes—potentially an excruciatingly dramatic encounter between Oedipus and the Sphinx—is absent from the tragedy.

Riddle Unseen

The story seems simplistic and bare. The protagonist is merely a Corinthian prince named Oedipus who comes to Thebes, solves a riddle, and is rewarded with marriage to the newly widowed Theban queen. But it's not really that simple. A drifter enters a diseased city bearing both its cure and ruin: he matches himself against the monstrous figure that terrorizes Thebes, and outsmarts her; he brings the city down.³ This is the Corinthian Oedipus, who sought his fortune from the Delphic Oracle and thereby received his own first riddle:⁴ he would kill his father and sire with his mother. Like any sane man, he fled from home to avoid so awkward a scenario. Immediately upon Oedipus' emergence in Thebes, the *parachesis* occurs: Oedipus meets the waiting Sphinx, answers her Riddle, and promptly kills her, thus evading the fate of all previous heroes. The Corinthian prince is paid for

his services in royal coin, warm from a dead man's hand—to be blunt, the coin of Jocasta, who is offered as the prize for anyone lucky enough to best the Sphinx. (Did I say “lucky?”) So it is that, shortly after arriving in Thebes, Oedipus becomes both husband and king.

But where is Jocasta's first husband? He, we find out (although much later), was King Laius who, travelling in stately procession, was knocked off the road by an unknown man. As it happens, this was just about the time Oedipus wandered into town. Could the two events be connected? It is much, much later that the audience—not Oedipus!—answers the Delphic Riddle. The audience recognizes that Oedipus' biological father *must* be Laius, the man he has killed, and his biological mother must be Jocasta, the woman he has married. Then the whole saga comes out, and at last Oedipus also learns: how Laius and Jocasta had their baby tendonstrung to prevent just such an outcome, how the infant was rescued and brought up in Corinth, how he was cruelly named “Oedipus” (club-foot). Which explains the odd deep scars on his legs, about which the audience belatedly hears, with which Oedipus has lived all his life, about which even his wife has been in the dark, and which Oedipus appears to have accepted as an unanswerable riddle.

The theatre audience's relationship to Oedipus is predicated upon the legend of the Riddle with its puzzling aftermath: this event establishes Oedipus' heroism, intelligence, and valor. Ironically this scene, though pivotal in the Oedipal story, is not staged but occurs before the tragedy begins. This choice, I suggest, also constitutes a significant riddle. *Theatron* was a site for spectacle, as Michael Walton writes: “The Greeks went to the theatre to witness a performance... the theatre of the Athenians was one of the more spectacularly visual in the history of the drama.”⁵ To exclude a guaranteed spectacle makes little sense. Though structurally unnecessary as plot, the Sphinx's Riddle is not extraneous: her question provides sub-text and character background for the play. It is undoubtedly good theatre. Yet the audience never actually *sees* Oedipus' moment of glory, only learns—from Oedipus (echoed by the Chorus as “corporate identity”⁶)—that he has outwitted the villain Sphinx. In this regard the Chorus, that ancient kaleidoscopic form of character that has no single shape or function, serves as narrator and (oral) backdrop but *not witness*: the Chorus was not present at the exchange, and in echoing Oedipus only reinforces the story its members have already heard (because Oedipus has already told them). As a result of Oedipus' zeal in dispatching the monster, his *resumé* of heroic employment can never be checked; we have only Oedipus' word on it. Thus, he becomes the mystery he claims to have mastered.

It is said that when Aeschylus' *Erinyes* came onstage in the play of the same name, women miscarried. This small reference to women in the audience⁷ also assures us that monsters were achievable as onstage entities. And yet, despite its dramatic dynamism and enticing spectacle, Sophocles leaves the Riddle unstaged, reporting it as background to the tragedy. It is as if the Riddle's only purpose is

to explain why Oedipus is in town, or how he has so quickly won the hand of the widowed queen. Little is told and less is clarified, and, as events continue their inexorable push, the audience believes it knows what happened without having seen the referent scene. This scene takes place, or rather does *not* take place, in a world of critical female absences. The Sphinx, representative of the powerful feminine, bearer of the Great Riddle, is *never* seen. Is it because of the Greeks' understandable repugnance for violence onstage, or is there another reason? And Jocasta, the primal wife/mother dialectic, a riddle herself, does not tell what she knows until near the end of the tragedy—then answers with her life, completing the absence of women from the Riddle.⁸ Because of this, the unseen, or un-scene, is based upon Oedipal memory (or imagination) and accounts for Oedipus' transformation from nameless traveller to hero. As audience we do not know Oedipus apart from his own speech—he is, after all, a stranger in town, unknown to the Thebans; even his new wife Jocasta does not have crucial intelligence about her husband (and like many modern couples they do not seem to talk much). But we have no reason not to believe Oedipus' tall tale. His credibility as hero hinges upon another unseen performative, the murderous gesture that destroys the fabulous monster. Unseen gestures of riddling and murder define Oedipus *in absentia*. Because of the outcome of the riddling (Oedipus answers correctly; *therefore*, he kills the monster) unstaged scenes become conflated, inseparable, and mutually supportive. Might Oedipus have lied about his meeting with the Sphinx? What if the whole Riddle episode is another example of Oedipus' difficulty with speaking the truth?

The audience does not learn until much later of the hot-tempered actions of the virile young man as he enters Corinth, leading him (we gather) to bump his elder, a monarch, off a road. This behavior demonstrates a certain coarse imperiousness, but then Oedipus is royalty himself, likely also unused to giving way for others. So what if Oedipus is an impetuous murderer, faithless son, and opportunist? The audience has heard worse. Yet in Oedipus' attempt to solve the problem of the king's murder, he curiously produces a new riddle:

*Now if he [the Messenger] uses the same number,
One man cannot be the same as many. (O. T. 844)*

Oedipus is not typically interpreted as being cognizant of the Phocal murder. While he has not forgotten his violent encounter at the crossroads—another unseen meeting—Oedipus does not connect it with the king's death. As Sandor Goodhart remarks, when the shepherd arrives, Oedipus neglects to ask the one question that might lead to the correct answer.⁹ (He is much more concerned with the Chorus's interpretation of events.) If this riddle is told of an animal, then the point is lost; the riddle is necessary to prove that Oedipus is a *man*. Why?

The Body of Afternoon

In the course of the story, Oedipus kills a man and a monster, imperils his community, causes the suicide of his wife, and destroys himself. The body of Oedipus is invisibly designed as a trail of torturous events: the initial scar initializes, just as the name defines the man. But this wounded *body* typically disappears in the theatre—as it does from psychoanalytic theory—lost in the background of an old-fashioned monster story. Although the Oedipal name is understood to describe a specific childhood scar endemic to the story, the injury itself is accorded no signifying importance: the feature of the man's disability—physically, psychologically and emotionally—linked to personality development—is given the barest of mentions. A severe injury plays an obvious part in early childhood development, affecting the individual's behavior for an entire lifetime. Children with mobility issues, particularly in the centuries prior to the invention of prostheses or chemical cures, learn to move differently, to ignore, compensate, overcome, or surrender. Injuries, accidents, and birth defects help to determine other characteristics (not only physical ones) throughout a person's life. When the actor plays this character onstage, the wounding would affect body, movement, and psyche. Conversely, from these character affects negotiated by the actor onstage, we can infer that this disability would (or did) affect the progenitor's body, movement, and psyche. Just as the life of the Sophoclean character of Oedipus preceded Freud's notion, construction of a mythic Oedipus preceded Sophocles' play. I am implying that the *mythic* Oedipus was also based upon another Oedipus, in this case a real individual with real and horrifying leg wounds. From this original Oedipus it would have been observable how crucial were the wounds he received. Not that any of that alters the essential argument: it is enough to conjecture that the Oedipus of tragedy walks with pain, childhood pain, or that his life has been marked by, one could say riddled with, this injury.

To follow the language of the Sphinx's Riddle, the Sophoclean Oedipus is human in the afternoon; yet in embodiment this dramatic Oedipus must carry the burden of his infancy, as well as the lechery of his age, or appear deconstructed, an Oedipus awakened as it were in the footlights. The "afternoon" of Oedipus is marred by the shameful injuries of morning past and night to come. I find these dramatic choices the more interesting given the history of this legend. In the original performance of the *myth*—Oedipus' characterization prior to Sophocles' engagement with the legend—the solving of the Riddle seems to have been handled very differently, directly engaging the body. As historian Lowell Edmunds writes:

The *parachesis* at Soph[ocles] *O. T.* 397 even suggests that it was the deformity of Oedipus' feet that gave him the clue to the answer; and there was a tradition that Oedipus gave the answer

by pointing to himself . . . These are the only indications of a connection between the riddle and particular details of the legend.¹⁰

In this tradition, the *parachesis* is not literary but an embodied text, and the answer to the Riddle of the Sphinx is no more—and no less—than a gesture: “Oedipus gave the answer by pointing to himself.” Not ordinarily mentioned in folktales, where para-language and gesticulation are (like emotional interiority) confined to performance, this reference may indicate the *pre-language* of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, restoring the essence of the Oedipal tale forgotten during centuries of oral honing.¹¹ I propose that this forgotten gesture is a *citation*, in this case making a physical and personal reference. The legend no doubt served a purpose or purposes other to its current sexological usage as the foundation of Freudian psychoanalysis; it was grounded in a physical, performance modality that conveyed information absent (perhaps deliberately so) from the literal, linguistic text. Thus, the tale as transcribed and transmitted (including the Freudian sub-text) may have lost its essence, and the forgotten gesture may represent not a variant of the original story, but the story *itself*. As Alessandra Ponte writes,

[W]ords are only types and symbols of ideas, and therefore must be posterior to them, in the same manner as ideas are to their objects. [Regarding t]he words of a primitive language, being imitative of the ideas from which they sprung, and of the objects they meant to express, as far as the imperfections of the organs of the speech will admit, there must necessarily be the same kind of analogy between them as between the ideas and objects themselves.¹²

Gestural communication precedes the compression of phonemes into verbal language. The organizing principle of “oral gesture” theory posits that writing originally formed from gestures as a means of mirroring and trapping gestural communication for its (re)viewing, much in the way that Labanotation attempts to record dancing bodies in space. Early writing is another form of building, of concretizing signs “writ” in air: words articulate these same signs. D’Hancarville’s proposition, that “letters, used in place of signs . . . painted the word and they gave . . . a body to the discourse,”¹³ infers the appearance of corporeal gestures in which a body is always apparent. A man pointing to himself cannot be adequately quoted—*except by repetition of the same gesture*, and with the same intention.¹⁴ I suggest that the Oedipal body thus becomes its own discourse, a textual body reflexively indicated by a sub-linguistic sign.

Gesture calls forth a complicit and self-referential body. Therefore, when Oedipus says that “Polybus [my Corinthian father] has packed the oracles off with him underground. They are empty words” (*O. T.* 970), he again “points” to a fundamental physicality. Un/spoken prophecies are emptied of referent when (or because) the body that issued them is itself empty and wordless. In this case the Oracle has not really gone “underground” to Hades, but the capacity of the parent (an oracular word-source) to articulate, punish and protect (embodied by the dead Polybus) has gone. Sophocles implies that at the death of a parent words lose their meanings; even oracular language departs below the surface of consciousness. That which is empty has no body: the dead are bodiless, and cannot be brought back to life except through the failure of memory,¹⁵ in the ancient Greek period one of the most awful of crimes.

The modern Western tradition of self-referencing commonly targets the sternum. When I point to my chest, I simultaneously signify myself—my name or identity. “Pointing out” most any other body part signifies an emphasis upon the anatomy in association with another text; if I point to my foot I refer to the foot itself rather than to my identity; I mean to indicate something about the foot rather than my *self*. This kind of physical, referent marking often accompanies verbal conversation as a tool of reference, unless the gesturer’s body is known (in which case the gesture specifies an individual rather than a generic part—*my* foot rather than *a* foot). But in the ancient world the context for gestures is quite different, as sculptures and vase paintings bear witness: to transliterate ancient positions of the body in modern terms, particularly the use of the upper extremities, is as linguistically unsound as any uncontextualized translation. We can be reasonably certain of how people held the cup when worshipping the gods, or conveyed affection between males of different ages, both issuing from quite complex, encoded social behaviors. But we cannot be sure how the ancients moved when they danced (hence the difficulty in adequately reconstructing the plays), or how they gestured when communicating, orally or silently. Therefore, although Oedipus is well known to auditors, without the specificity of his gesture in its cultural and performative context, that gesture’s translation remains unclear. Edmunds does not explicate *which* self is “pointed”; one cannot know, therefore, what—or which—Oedipus is indicated.

If Oedipus meant to cite an anatomical part, then one could speculate that he directed the gesture at his own eyes, interminably referenced in the Tragic script as portals, gates, doors, openings, shrouds, seeing organs, unseeing organs, inward-seeing organs, crutches, and oracles, as well as sites for memory, grief, guilt, disgust and love. Sophocles’ referencing is not arbitrary. Eyes strongly signify:

*These fastenings of the gates are opening
Soon you will see a sight that even the one
who loathes it will take pity (O. T. 1294-96).*

The “royal doors” (of the palace) open only when Jocasta is already hanging, her own royal doors closed, denying the sight and site of such pollution. At this moment Oedipus’ eyes, once “blind” to truth, are literally blind, permitting him to radically re-see his life and revise the way the audience sees “home.” Blinding infers the ability to see as if a “seer,” a truth-sayer: by this performative of opening, revealing the internal to the external, Oedipus admits entrance to the *relative* truth. He becomes Teiresias, another man with a staff, or another father figure, Oedipus in the evening, “again” himself.

But Oedipus’ unseen gesture might logically have signified his feet, troublesome stumps that carry the fleeing body from safety to horror, mother to mother, man to monster. Feet evoke foundations, stances, ground, origins, pain, infancy, conveyances, scars, binding, bonds, bounds. A gesture towards his feet would pun synechdochally on Oedipus’ life-long foot complex,¹⁶ on marks that somehow never become question marks, and are never recognized as self-same. These marks, encapsulating the ambiguity of the gesture, would be worthy of an Oracle who answers (and a man who asks) the wrong question.

The impossibility of rendering any performance into speech ill serves ancient cryptograms like the myth of Oedipus. Sophocles posits the Oedipal answer as *anthropos* (human being). In the poem with which I began *my* riddle, Muriel Rukseyer translates this response as “man.” Her decision is not without cause, as all but the most pedantic or feminist of readers historically accepted “man” and “human being” as synonymous, while “man” was expected to include “woman” (in the unlikely event women were considered at all). In fact, the *gestural* response I discuss might really say none of the above, might recognize the specific rather than the generic, not “human being” or even “man” but “Oedipus.” Pointing to himself, Oedipus may simply reference himself. Is this so outrageous, given what we know of Oedipus from myth, from Tragedy, or from the difficulty of embodying this character onstage? Imagine the arrogance in his gesture, knowing that the answer to the Riddle can only ever be oneself. In the Tragedy, Oedipus’ tendency towards wounded speech reflects his infantile body, Oedipus in the morning. In the myth, he appropriates a self-reflexive gesture that is both sensible and legible, a reversion to pre-oral signage, “saying” himself.

Disabled and abandoned, the infant “luckily” becomes a foster-child to good, royal Corinthians—who, however, fail to impart the most basic of children’s stories to Oedipus. As a result he grows up believing they are really his parents. Thus, he runs away from home—or, rather, ambles—into Fate. The line of Oedipus is pre-determined as one of disability; for three generations this family’s men have been known by deformity, one could say by their walks:

Labdakos (father of Laios)	=	“Lame”
Laios (father of Oidipus) ¹⁷	=	“Left-sided”
Oidipus	=	“Swollen-foot” ¹⁸

Even the ambiguous “Left-sided” infers a physical imbalance, perhaps in the lower limbs. These are men who drag their feet yet destroy women—in short, a family of extremities, men of violence, prescriptions, and proscriptions, about which little is known, only a series of footnotes. But the family reference, the resemblance, or *footprint*, is undeniable. And the question asked by the Sphinx could have one answer alone: “Oedipus.” An Oedipus pointing to himself does not precisely correspond with the spoken answer to the Riddle as it is given in either legend or Tragedy: in performance mere speech cannot convey this gesture’s simple, self-reflexive eloquence. Oedipus is not only a human being but also a man named “Oedipus”; the Riddle’s solution, spoken or gestured, is peculiarly his own. The early wounding, this marking of the body, does not signify in Freudian psychoanalysis, concerned with an entirely different kind of wounding. In fact, Freud constructs theory around the riddle of Oedipus’ birth, not his body; the marks made by his human torturers do not feature in the notion of a man possessing his mother. If they did, then we might construct another story, the tale of a young man bent upon revenge for the insult of his infancy, a man who kills because of his *name* rather than his fate. But Oedipus is unaware of the consequences of his actions because he is convinced of his (foster) parents’ love, as well as their honesty. He does not consider other narratives than that he received, and does not consider the implications of his own body upon his future.

To bring Oedipus to life onstage, his physical beginnings must be imagined in accordance with an actor’s discipline, then made psychologically “more real” through the process of embodiment. This embodiment would necessarily employ knowledge of Oedipus’ traumatic pathology. The period of infancy predates most children’s memories, which customarily comprises verticality, the time of walking. Because of the original wounding, however, Oedipus is likely to remember his late infancy as months of crawling and difficulty with movement. Tendon-stringing most likely contributed to an aspect of the infant’s developmental delay, manifested in the difficulty of learning to walk.¹⁹ Oedipus would therefore have experienced a protracted time of crawling on all fours, or moving like a beast. This figurative “bestiality” perhaps foreshadows incest, the child’s inability to escape the mother. William Poole discusses the *father’s* predilection for young men, in a tale of seduction and death, when King Laius carries off a “reluctant boy” in his chariot and rapes him, prior to the boy’s mortal wounding.²⁰

The Riddle of the Sphinx describes transfiguration: the movement of an unknown beast from four legs to two, and then to three. I have already suggested that Oedipus’ early childhood development on four legs was of longer than normal duration. Consequently, Oedipus would reach his afternoon body much later, his period of walking on two legs being briefer and more pronounced than for most (non-disabled) humans. The third and final position seems to describe the body of an aged person now unable to travel on only two legs and requiring a prosthetic aid.

As an old man—even as a youth—a person who is *injured* is more likely to require support than one who is not—including a hale father. Lévi-Strauss suggests that father and son travel similarly,²¹ their lineage expressed in their bodies, sharing a physical impairment. Yet the Messenger also mentions seeing a staff in the hand of *Laius*, who is only travelling out from his city. A man on three legs might therefore be elderly, past the afternoon of his adult body, or only a traveller. He might also be the Oedipus of another Tragedy, whose twilight walking is not alone at all, as his small daughters led him out from the cursed town and into the desert. But in each respect, “Oedipus” remains the answer.

Under the Sign of Oedipus

All these versions of Oedipus are based on the notion of a real Oedipus, one who preceded and influenced both mythic and dramatic realization. Having worked clinically with the elderly, disabled adults, and children with developmental delay,²² I cannot disassociate from the awareness of how this category of difference affects individual and society. Because of its reception as a different, not-same body, the disabled body becomes a marker for a difference that may only be imagined. Consciousness of disability has its own weight, which must also be negotiated. I suggest that Oedipus’ behavioural issues—his stubbornness, secrecy, and violent anger, perhaps even his Tragic eloquence—are over-determinations, compensatory for the physical crippling the infant endured.

Historically there seems no doubt of Oedipus’ disability, etched in his psyche as well as his name. But the gestural tradition suggests an impairment that is distinct from the mutilation of his infancy in which his very limbs were marked with neglect and abandonment. In the presence of the Sphinx’s Riddle, Oedipus shows an absence of speech. Does he know the answer to the Riddle? Is he buying time to answer, by pointing to himself? Or is Oedipus scared speechless? In comparison with Oedipus, it is not the Sphinx but Oedipus who appears the beast—mute, canny. At the juncture of the Riddle, Oedipus has already killed a man (not knowing it is his father); he will soon bed a woman (not knowing it is his mother). He is halfway to becoming a monster himself.

Oedipus’ only known relations with adult females are with his Corinthian mother, Merope, the monster Sphinx, and his Theban mother, Jocasta. Even in the legend predating the Sophoclean Tragedy, the Sphinx is located as a bridge between two women who never meet. In the Sphinx we are meant to recognize the monster at (and as) the heart of mother-love, chance linking mother and son en route to their rendezvous, the specter of childhood and incest at another crossroads.²³ The Oedipal quest’s eerie riddle intimately concerns women planted as grotesques in the way of men, their questions deadly foreplay: Oedipus overcomes the Riddle and its disturbing female origins by denying their mutual anatomy. Having decapitated

women's consuming power, Oedipus continues to Thebes with the head of a monster and the body of a lover.²⁴ But just how monstrous is this monster? Is she more monstrous than the King? Unlike King Laius, who drives Oedipus off the road like an animal, who initially hamstringed him—again like an animal, the Sphinx treats Oedipus as a man. Yet Oedipus treats the Sphinx like an animal. Why is a monster representative of this monstrous story, and why is this monstrous Other a female—like Oedipus' mother, wife, and daughters (his sisters, as it turns out)?²⁵

In the gestural tradition Edmunds discusses, "Man" becomes performative, a being whose gestures replace him. Not "man" in this society, and never "Oedipus," *female* is thus divorced from this gesture as well as from its theoretical conclusion. This performative history is of vital significance for women. In one of the most dramatic performative gestures (also unseen), when Oedipus's pointing results in his blindness, his mother's own robed body is robbed to provide a weapon. It would seem that, as the myth of Oedipus gathered importance, heading towards the destiny of Tragic representation, the kinetic origins of Oedipus were viewed as materials too crude for the stage; thus, the physical gesture of pointing, which might anyway have been lost before a large audience, became speech, general yet pointed: *anthropos*. The Riddle's answer required clarity, logic, and imagery, employed as it was to replace an event unseen, the crux of a cautionary tale. None of the essential riddles addressed here are staged, adding to their inscrutability. As in much Western mythology, the human presence (in contrast to that of the gods') often seems incidental. Not so Oedipus. Fundamental to Western *mythos* and *persona*, Oedipus is our holy father, *enigma* and *synecdoche*, a man whose afternoon begins too late and ends too soon.

Notes

1. Muriel Rukeyser, *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978) 498.

2. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* [1933], *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-74) 22:154-155.

3. That will be some years hence, but part of the same play. Fortunately, the Greeks were not constrained by the unities later ascribed to them. Instead, this play, with *Oedipus Colonus* and *Antigone*, are unified by Oedipus' body.

4. This story is full of riddles. Baby Oedipus is born into a riddle, which leads to the intended infanticide.

5. Michael Walton, *The Greek Sense of Theatre: Tragedy Reviewed* (London: Methuen, 1984) 3.

6. 69.

7. The common belief is that women were not present in the audience. For example, David Wiles writes, "Greek tragedy also favoured a female chorus because women's relationship to the community was established through ritual rather than politics . . . the gender gap between the male audience and the female chorus created a degree of critical distance." Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 144.

8. Were I to stage the Riddle scene, I would find irresistible the theatrical possibility of doubling the rarely seen character of Jocasta with the Sphinx. This meta-theatrical device involves making two

characters parallel each other, thus suggesting that a single actor plays them both; in this case, the characters are physically mirror opposites but, I feel, essentially or spiritually the same.

9. I thank Bert O. States for pointing out this reference to me. See Sandor Goodhart, "Oedipus and Laius' Many Murderers," *Diacritics: Texts/Contents* (March 1978): 55-71.

10. Lowell Edmunds, *The Sphinx in the Oedipus Legend, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Königstein/Ts.: Verlag Anton Hain Meisenheim GmbH, 1981) 19.

11. The term "language" is sometimes used here for lack of a better term. In a movement context, gesture and other movement can appear a language, or language-like, even in the absence of a complete syntactical system. For this article I have used the following English translations: *Sophocles, The Oedipus Cycle*, trans. Dudley Fitts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1939); *Oedipus The King*, trans. David Grene, *Sophocles I: Three Tragedies* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1954) 9-76; *Oedipus Tyrannus*, trans. John Addington Symonds (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1970). See also Charles Segal, "Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*: Freud, Language, and the Unconscious," *Freud and Forbidden Knowledge*, ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky and Ellen Handler Spitz (New York: New York UP, 1994) 72-95.

12. Alessandra Ponte, "Architecture and Phallogocentrism in Richard Payne Knight's Theory," *Sexuality & Space*, Princeton Architectural Papers Series (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992) 285.

13. Cited in Ponte 285.

14. More work needs to be done in the area of para-language generally, and this area of gesture particularly. The concepts as I am using them have little correlation to signed language or sign languages.

15. See especially David Farrell Krell's reading of Kowtowski in his book *Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing: On the Verge* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

16. Vernant suggests that Oedipus, who unluckily sought to escape the fate of an "Oedipus," is thereby the only man *not* to have had an Oedipal complex: Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Oedipus Without the Complex," *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, trans. S. J. Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988) 85-111.

17. I have maintained Lévi-Strauss's spelling where he is being quoted or discussed by Edmund Leach, particularly in *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970).

18. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966); see also Rob Baum, *Female Absence: Women, Theatre and Other Metaphors* (Brussels: PIE-Lang, 2003) 47-69. I depart from my chapter "Hunting the Oedipal Woman" in *Female Absence* in my concentration upon the disabled and performed body.

19. Another aspect of developmental delay might have presented, in an extended form of separation anxiety, a condition apparent in children who have been removed from their mothers, either too soon, or for too long.

20. William Poole, "Male Homosexuality in Euripides," *Euripides, Women and Sexuality*, ed. Anton Powell (London: Routledge, 1990) 144-145.

21. Lévi-Strauss makes the connection between Oedipus and earth because, as Edmund Leach reports, "Oidipus' being exposed at birth and staked to the ground . . . implies that even though born of woman he was not fully separated from his natural earth" (Leach 70). This hypothesis is invalidated if you believe, with Bullfinch, that the herdsman who received Oedipus from the king could not bear to kill the boy, and so only pierced his feet and hung him from a tree; see Thomas Bullfinch, *The Ages of Fable, or Beauties of Mythology* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Co., 1903) 59.

22. I have a small clinical practice based in dance movement therapy and expressive movement.

23. "Tiresias tells Creon that the land has been sick since the time when Laius begot a child against the will of the gods"; see Poole 139. This is another version of Laius' source of guilt.

24. Vassilka Nikolova reports a stronger symbiosis between Jocasta and the Sphinx, averring that they are the same persona, in "The Oedipus Myth: An Attempt at Interpretation of Its Symbolic Systems," *Freud and Forbidden Knowledge*, ed. Rudnytsky and Spitz 105-106. I discovered her article, which is couched in classical, mytho-historical, and etymological analysis, after writing this one. I would still argue, however, that the Sphinx and Jocasta are the same character, not because mythically the one who asks a riddle is queen, or because "knowing" is lexicographically related to intimate knowledge, but because in the Greek cosmogony women who destroy their own children are monsters.

25. See again Rob Baum, *Female Absence* 47-69.