

{none so, the whole world}: blind

by Valentine Carter

*No Beast is there without glimmer of infinity/ No eye so vile nor abject that
brushes not/ Against lightning from on high, now tender, now fierce.*

Victor Hugo

*...there is no invention possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic,
without the presence in the inventing subject of an abundance of other...*

Hélène Cixous

*Oedipus's misfortune is that it no longer knows who begins where, nor who
is who.*

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Look at me. I am an awkward gangle of eight years old. I am sitting behind a desk that has a lid and an inkwell. It has been my desk for long enough for me to have stopped lifting the lid up in wonder during class, but not long enough that I am able to stop checking that the back of my shirt is still tucked into my skirt every time I stand up in case I get a detention. I want to do well, to be worth my place here. But right now I am not paying attention. I am gazing out of the window.

I would prefer, if it is all right with you, to slip the noose of this story. (So soon?!) Not to say that it didn't happen but to say that it is has become something else. That it is the way I see it.

CHORUS:

Listen. This is a story about a robbery,
And about a murder. Although it is untold,
It is not unseen, not by those who have eyes
That refuse to see right and straight and blue.

Levi-Strauss says that myths are best understood as a language, as units of meaning alongside other units of meaning. Each of these myths form parts of a larger constellation. If they create a universe which we must also live in, with our own stories, why not fling ourselves up into the stars too. Why not write ourselves into the drama?

Even though I am not paying attention I will be able to answer the question I've been asked. Teachers hate this talent. Listen. 'Blue,' I say.

See? The answer is blue.

But what is reading, if not the writing of ourselves in?

Freud believes Oedipus is a man driven by the desire to murder his father and marry his mother because this ultimately is what all little boys want, in a metaphorical sense. How lucky that *antiquity has furnished us with legendary matter which corroborates this belief, and profound universal validity of old legends is explicable only by an equally universal validity of the above mentioned hypothesis of infantile psychology.*¹ Little girls want something else but that grand theory is not as famous because: little girls. And they're really little boys anyway. Thankfully no one is suggesting that the world is full of murderous motherfuckers. (It is!)

See how I have become flippant and dismissive already? Even though we have only just begun.

TEIRESIAS:

And now Oedipus comes towards us like dusk
Falling, bringing the promise of a clear dark sky.
At this moment it is a sky full of bright points
Of constellations, but listen as fate dulls them.
Oedipus already wears the black frown of dread
Suspecting what hand Life has dealt from her
deck.

OEDIPUS:

What? Is this a delegation, blind man, seer?

TEIRESIAS:

There are facts you must be shown.

OEDIPUS

By a sightless man?

TEIRESIAS:

I see more clearly than you. You are wrong-eyed.
You think you have the eyes you were born with.
They lie.

‘Both of them?’ my science teacher says.
 I have forgotten her name.
 ‘Yes,’ I say. Confident.
 ‘They can’t have,’ the girl in front turns around.
 Olivia. Her father owns the shopping centre. But
 not the shops in it.
 I want to knot my arms and legs around me and
 hide because everyone is looking at me. Maybe
 I have got something wrong. I am sure that the
 question I have been asked is:

‘What colour eyes do your parents have?’

I have managed harder questions with only half an
 ear. The answer is blue. I look around for a clue.
 The blackboard has a diagram which seems to
 explain how your parents’ eye colour affects your
 own. The word “Genetics” is written in capitals at
 the top and underlined.

I am flippant and dismissive because I cannot
 see, no matter how many times I read this, how it
 applies to me. I feel as though I am being *reduced*
to the endless dreary discovery of Oedipus: ‘So,
it’s my father, my mother?’ We cannot answer
these two questions at this point. We merely see
how very little the consumption of pure intensities
has to do with family figures, and how very
*different the connective tissue*² *that binds me to*
 my parents is to yours. (What an assumption!)

Oh, Oedipus. Why the attraction? Perhaps *his fate*
moves us only because it might have been our
own, because the oracle laid upon us before our
*birth, the very curse rested upon him,*³ *or perhaps*
 filth and misfortune really get us off.

OEDIPUS (aside):
 These words spring wildly as if spun from a folk
 tale,
 But in myself I feel them lie heavy as secrets.
 They echo old whispers from places I have never
 been.
 The sense of this is hidden like a bomb ticking
 away quietly, all alone and unseen. Well, let it go
 off.

CHORUS:
 It takes a mazy run to dodge fate, to slip through
 those
 Corridors evading minotaurs and snake-headed
 crones.
 It will take an explosion to out run destiny.

OEDIPUS:
 Tell me the truth. Tell me what you can see of me.

TEIRESIAS:
 You are not a person. But an event. A complex.
 Yours is only the face of an unknowing cuckoo,
 Blank, a silhouette stolen from your own story.

‘You have brown eyes,’ Clarissa, two seats to my right, says.

She makes a great effort to tell me this as if I do not know, as if I have been paying so little attention I am not aware of what my own face looks like, even though I look at it with the very eyes in question every morning while brushing my teeth, because they are my eyes.

‘Blue?’ the teacher says.

I think. I can’t even make my eyes hazel. They are a sticky brown. Everyone is still looking at me, mostly with blue eyes that blaze.

‘Yes,’ I say. I don’t know what to do.

Although *we may well ponder the possibility that the analytic imperialism of the Oedipus led Freud to rediscover and lend all the weight of his authority to an unfortunate misapplication.*⁴

Perhaps Freud is simply incorrect and Oedipus wants no such thing for no such reason (Such a thing cannot be possible!)

What a powerful thing an assumption is.

Oedipus’s punishment is blindness. He tears out his own eyes.

‘Liar,’ Madeline says. She hates me but no one likes her because her mother is the headteacher so it doesn’t much matter.

‘Madeline,’ the teacher says. ‘I will take a house point from you.’

‘What for?’ Madeline says. ‘She’s the one –’

‘Leave it,’ the teacher says.

I enjoy Oedipus, I do. Honestly. I can stretch out in it like a warm cat for a whole afternoon. Who doesn’t love the revenge story of an adopted child more than an adopted child nursing a furious thirst for vengeance?

Or, if you prefer, who doesn’t want to fling themselves up into the stars?

OEDIPUS:

Who am I?

TEIRESIAS:

You are no one. You are a black space, a wide void.

If you do not take care a world will pour in and Fill all the spaces meant for you to grow in. Run child.

OEDIPUS:

Where to? Where could I run to on these hobbled feet?

TEIRESIAS:

Run towards revenge.

CHORUS:

No, that is the wrong path.

TEIRESIAS:

Quiet you.

CHORUS:

Do not take directions from a man who only Sees the future. Who cannot see the now passing.

OEDIPUS:

Might I find hope here?

TEIRESIAS (laughs):

There is no hope for you.

And then I know what to do. I start talking. I am full of words all of a sudden: 'I suppose actually if I think about it my dad's got green eyes and my mother has got grey eyes, like they're a little bit blue but you could say they were grey...' and so I go on. I talk and talk and talk. My accent comes back and I trip over my words. The teacher tries to shut me up but I am unstoppable in my need to fill the space that is opening up because I know why I have the wrong eyes. I have looked at the blackboard again and there is a word beginning with 'a' listed as a reason why someone might not have the same colour eyes as their supposed parents. I can't look at the rest of this word, I am too busy trying to hold myself together with explanations that belong in wild and magical tales.

*Like Oedipus we live in ignorance of...the desires that nature has forced upon us and after their unveiling we may well prefer to avert our gaze from the scene of our childhood*⁵ or we might just decide to acknowledge that *the writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death*⁶ and stares until their eyes bleed.

OEDIPUS:

Someone will help me. If I explain I need them. If I say that otherwise I would explode with it.

TEIRESIAS:

You are a wrong-eyed monster now. They all see that.

These imposter's eyes, clear and brown. Yet you roar red like Geryon.

They all know. You are a plague that lays siege to cities.

Wrong, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

They should weep that this has been done to you, for all

That has been stolen and hidden. They all know but walk by.

It is up to you now to save yourself from fate.

OEDIPUS:

Hope, like a held breath, sets its trap. For it is only Suffocation that will save me from drowning.

TEIRESIAS:

Do what you want.

OEDIPUS:

And what is that?

TEIRESIAS:

Burn everything.

I wonder now if I perhaps was listening all along, if maybe I was just looking away.

‘How was school?’ my mother says. Later.
 ‘We’re doing genetics, you know, about how you inherit eye colour and stuff,’ I say, because I am still full of words.
 She looks at my dad who is busying picking something unchewable out of his mouthful of sausage. He puts it on the edge of his plate and it slides into his beans, almost disappearing in the watery sauce. I think it might be a bit of tooth or a claw and want to be sick. I would rather be sick than talk but that’s what I do.
 ‘You know, like, how if you have two blue-eyed parents you can’t have a brown-eyed child?’

The desire to find out who I am compels me to return to this again and again. I am dragged back, it’s *as though one were constantly bringing back home the person capable of setting whole continents and cultures adrift. [I am] not suffering from a divided self or shattered Oedipus but from having been brought back to everything [I] had left.*⁷ And I am set adrift. I have lost my faith. *How can belief continue after repudiation, how can we continue to be pious?*⁸

‘How ridiculous,’ she says.

Submitting to your own fate, agreeing to your place in a family, performing your role, these are feats requiring faith, piety. But I have neither. *Shit on your whole mortifying, imaginary, and symbolic theatre.*⁹ (Harsh!)

CHORUS:

If not for all the shattered children this world
 would sing.

TEIRSIAS:

Wait for your moment, here at the house,
 Make this the scene of their crime, the scene of
 your own
 And fix your story, pin your innocence to it with
 alibis.

OEDIPUS:

He will be back from work any minute now, my
 not-father.
 I could not have murdered him before but now,
 Now he is not my father but only a spectre,
 A shadow who preferred to abandon me
 Like a sick sheep on the side of a mountain left
 To the sky and its weather, to a mislaid cruelty
 Shrouded now in the billowing rags of a not-
 family.
 Oh, now you will see me in the blue of your eye.

‘How ridiculous,’ she says. Again.
‘It’s science,’ I say. ‘Genetics.’
‘Then science is ridiculous,’ she says. ‘Isn’t it
Ron?’
‘Yeah,’ he says.
‘Why do I have brown eyes then?’ I say.

But now this child does not know who she is
anymore. She is a not-child, a not-daughter. She
is in the wrong place at the wrong time. She is no
longer a right object against which the rightness
of other objects can be oriented. She is unfixed.
No longer the subject of the particular story that
was being told.

‘You were born with blue eyes,’ she says.
‘They went brown. I’m sure we have a photo
somewhere. Isn’t that right Ron?’
‘Yeah,’ he puts his knife and fork down.
She looks at him with a look I have not seen
before, as if she has done something terrible and
is about to be found out.

She looks at him in terror.

LAUIS enters

OEDIPUS:

This knife is heavy in my hand yet agile, quick
and keen.
His thick collar burns as it slides through my
fingers, I grip
Tighter holding him fast against me his breath
panics in my
Ears, as does mine. The first time the blade
Leaps his flesh resists, so I drive harder
And he sighs against me, folds a little and I stab
His broad chest until the white shirt is rosetted red
The uniform of ritual slaughter suits him
But this is our own private blood bath, so
Domestic, tamed here by this black car
Parked neat and straight now with blood puddling
beside it.
I will leave a photograph near his hand, thrown
out
Over his head as he falls. A picture of no one
With a blue balloon at a carnival, feet grounded.
But wait! She comes to the window having heard
my cry.

Because I know.

And I am no longer certain if there is a way back.

8

‘Honestly,’ she says. ‘Honestly, I don’t know why we’re paying for you to go to that school.’
‘You’re not,’ I say. ‘I’ve got a scholarship.’

I cannot help myself. I want to put my hands over my mouth. Over my ears. But most of all over my eyes.

‘It’s supposed to be the best school in the county. And this is what they’re teaching you. Nonsense. As if you can’t have brown eyes. You are sitting there with brown eyes. Isn’t she, Ron?’
‘Yeah’ he says.

One problem with this situation of foggy uncertainty is that the world around me begins to slide away too, because *families mediate social reality to their children. If the social reality in question is rife with alienated social forms then this alienation will mediate to the individual child and will be experienced as estrangement.*¹⁰ (Oh no, I am rife with alienation!)

If I can’t even fit into a family, a simple unit of meaning arranged around a table in front of a meal, then how can I navigate a world of infinite complexity? If I have not mastered my half of this parent-child creature, how can I master anything? If the man (upon whom fate bestowed the ability to wield a penis thus lending him authority) is not who he says he is, then who is any man to have any authority at all?

JOCASTA enters

OEDIPUS:

See how even now she performs her role,
See how even now the hand flies to her opening
mouth

In perfect horror. Give this woman an audience.
“Oh, what have you done now, what this time?
Why must you do these things? I don’t deserve a
child like you.”

Now I slip in, silent as the beat of her heart.

(Who is anyone to have any authority over me at all?)

9

‘Don’t say yeah,’ she says. ‘Say yes.’
She has gone all shrill. Any minute now she will grip the edge of the table and her knuckles will go white.
‘I don’t know what to say,’ he says. ‘It’s quite simple. You were born with blue eyes. Besides your grandmother’s got brown eyes.’
‘No she hasn’t,’ I say. I wish I could stop answering back. Stop arguing.
‘The other one,’ he picks his knife and fork up and looks at my mother.
I’ve never met my other grandmother, she’s dead. I don’t know if he’s telling the truth.
‘What a waste of time getting you into that school was. All that hard work and this is what happens,’ she says. She has a nasty smile on her face now.
‘Well. We’ll have to see about this.’

Or, rather who will watch over me?

Or, perhaps, who will take care of me?

But who doesn’t wonder about this, on occasion?

(I am! I am rife! I infect the world like a plague!)

OEDIPUS (continues):

I will not rush this moment, longed for as it has been.
All my unconscious knowing as made my hands eager
For honest dirt, for nostrils drenched in earth and iron,
This is all that fills the red breadth of my mind now.
I would close these fingers around your throat until
The sharp hiss of your breath sings in finality.
And why should I not plunge this blade deep into your
Body? I have spared it so far. It is unmarked by me,
By my birth. I have not scarred you, or even touched you.
I am nothing to you, nothing but a barren thought.

And then a strange things begins to happen words begin to fail her. She senses something remains to be said that resists all speech, that can at best be stammered out. All the words are weak, worn out, unfit to translate anything sensibly.¹⁵

Sphinx-like in his near-silences. I will play the pervert too then.
 This not-mother like a Fury and the not-father who is
 (What a perversion!)
 I will become someone who takes the artifice seriously and plays the game...
 continually wandering about, migrating here and there and everywhere ...¹¹
 I have lost myself as subject of my own story. I reimagine myself as Other
 I create another me that fits this not-shape. This *Other* dispels
 the anarchic sorcery of the facts.¹² And what are facts
 when I am a half-known truth.

OEDIPUS (continues):

You are an unknown country to me.
 Unvisited.
 A not-mother.
 It is the nature of not-mothers to let
 The wrong words fall idly from mouths,
 Stop up ears and,
 worse even, hearts
 with not-truths,
 with not-love.

But the truth is a constellation
 That will catch in your narrow throat,
 Words will bubble red with the blood
 I will let from you, escaping,
 Leaving only the simple
 rightness of stars.

12. Levinas, 1979

‘I’m sorry,’ I say. ‘It’s my fault. I wasn’t paying attention. I was looking out of the window.’

‘I expect you were,’ she says. ‘We talked about this, didn’t we? We talked about how you wouldn’t be able to sit about daydreaming at that school. You’d have to work. We made the sacrifices so you could go to that school and this is what you do. Your father’s working overtime so you can go there.’

I don’t tell her I’ve got a scholarship again. It doesn’t matter anymore.

My Other comes from somewhere else, far away from this mess and noise, and their *silent world is a world that comes to us from the Other...an evil genius*¹³ for having created it and come to the rescue. I send my Other out in to the world like an emissary to negotiate on my behalf.

The next day I am kept off school.

And because I created my Other, imbued it with an artificial intelligence of my own making, it is as close to a wholly-known truth as I can get.

The next-next day my mother sits me down at the same table and tells me that tomorrow morning, even though it’s a Thursday, my dad will be driving me to a new school run by a vicar and that I should count myself lucky that they would take me in the middle of term. She tells me that I have let her down so badly she is worried she might never be able to forgive me. Genuinely. She says she is genuinely worried.

(Genuinely!)

OEDIPUS (continues):

Oh, not-mother I cannot hear you anymore,
Your voice is fading, like the hollow-hooved
clatter

Of cattle leaving the yard, or a distant dog
Barking into the night. I can no more ruin you
Than I can myself. You are armoured by blame,
Some inconvenient connection of, if not love,
Then time, only time and space. I am still star
struck.

This will not happen, I cannot do it to you.
I find that I simply do not love you enough.

These threads of myself are easily lost. Gather them up then, like Ariadne weaving red yarn for the Minotaur's labyrinth. Knot them together.

At my new school I start off at the back of the classroom sitting next to a boy who carries a roll of bubblewrap around so he can pop it when he gets stressed. I can't see the blackboard so they move me nearer and I sit next a girl who smells of old yoghurt and dustbins in the sun and says she talks to people only she can hear. I still can't see the blackboard so they put me in the front row next to a boy who seems ordinary but will end up in prison facing a life sentence. I still can't see. The vicar's wife takes me to the optician so I can have an eye test and they are so worried about how much my sight has deteriorated since the last test I have to go to the hospital.

If only it were possible right now, to detach oneself from existence, to submit oneself to the achievement of absolute wisdom ¹⁴ but I am encumbered by all these units of meaning I insist upon dragging around with me. (To the stars with you!)

I cannot see myself clearly, that is the problem. I do not have *eyes that recognise the right side, the wrong side, and the other side: the blur of defamation, the black and white of a loss of identity.* ¹⁵

OEDIPUS (continues):

And now here he comes to make his judgment
He will be fierce and foul no doubt, as if I have betrayed him.

TEIRESIAS:

It is done?

OEDIPUS:

Let us say that it is finished.

TEIRESIAS:

But is it done? Do not take me for a fool
Just because I can not see. It does not mean
That I do not know. It is you, not me,
You who is always the last to know, to see.

But the Other can see. 20/20 vision and hindsight. Foresight too. The Other is an evil genius. The free one. He has control, authority. *Over him I have no power. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension.* ¹⁶

It is not that I can't see. I know that. It is that I have lost faith in knowing what I see and because I am small I don't have the words to tell only the eyes to blind.

I want to be free of this but *the problem is not resolved until we do away with both the problem and the solution.*¹⁷ Or is it until we do away with the question and the promise of an answer?

In this situation *the absolutely foreign alone can instruct us...The strangeness of the Other, his very freedom.*¹⁸

My sister has to take me to the hospital because my mother is in a depressive phase and can't get out of bed. My sister has to bring my niece who is two. I have to go into the room on my own because it will be too upsetting for them.

But surely if I am the Other then the Other is not a stranger. And certainly not free.

But what about me, won't I find it upsetting?
I don't ask this because I have given up on questions. All the possible answers are knotted in my stomach like weeds choking a rudder.

(Add paradoxical to the list of my faults then!)

But is it not abject to escape into the strange embrace of this Other? Perhaps *I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of that will be "me".*²³ My beloved Other is not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be.²⁰

We are the same.

TEIRESIAS (continues):

There is no escape. Is it done? No.

A task undone. You have outrun nothing.

She will ruin you. Her mere presence in you

Will fester like a disease and ruin you.

OEDIPUS:

It will not.

TEIRESIAS:

You are abject now. Trapped. Blinded.

OEDIPUS:

I do not care. I can explain it all to you.

CHORUS:

Stop.

He will not listen. If you see him again he will

Deny you. You will be disavowed. You will learn

How easily those that can forget.

I sit in a chair like a dentist chair and a nurse in a blue uniform asks me questions she already knows the answers to, to distract me while she straps my wrists to the arms of the chair. I am not distracted. I am paying attention. A man in green appears and tilts the chair back so he can put some drops in my eye. I understand why they need to trap me. I fidget with fear. They keep asking me to read letters on a card and when I can't see them anymore they seem pleased. And then another man in white appears. He has no edges like a ghost. I can hear scratching metal and some tongs come into focus. Very close. These are used to hold my eye open. I can feel the seam that runs along the edge of the armrest under my fingers. Someone has their hand on my forehead and the man says something I don't understand and then a hook is coming close, so close, and I can't imagine what he is going to do and then pain sprays up the walls like blood.

And I wonder what terrible thing I have done.

I cannot see. I can hear people talking about me as if I'm not there anymore. I listen in silence until out of the grey words colour returns.

Let us not fear abjection. Let us see that *abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms the death drive into a start of life, of new significance.*²⁵

Let us have faith, piety, in ourselves.

(And in our selves!)

I can only promise you this a not-answer and an assurance that is, in its own way, a whole-truth.

And, if I may be so bold, I will voice this Other, this faith, *through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my [imagined] mother who I miss from now on more than ever, I [will] elaborate that want, and the aggressivity that accompanies it*²⁶ by saying these words to you.

TEIRESIAS:

Your fate is written like paw prints in fresh concrete, no more Portentous than that. But your need to be central Will cast you out into cold heaven; one of the bright stars. Put your blade to your own brown eyes, child. Put them out. Put them out so you can look away. This is your fate.

CHORUS:

I am not so sure of this, my ears still ring with explosions.

OEDIPUS:

Listen. This is a story about a robbery, yes, But about a not-murder. Although is now told It is still unseen, but only by those who have eyes That can only see right and straight and blue.

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