

Early Thoughts on the Oedipus Complex

by Rebecca Coffey

Conversation becomes Electra, as do her eyes. Electra's head is grey, like the head of my Frau Freud, Martha. Her intelligent irises are darkly pigmented, and her sclerae are edged with a dramatic, black line of the sort that Cleopatra affected. In our fifty years of marriage, Martha has never thought to adopt such a style, though one or two actresses I've known have.

My favorite moments with Electra are when I ask her a question. She widens her eyes in patient thought while closing the irises a bit, as though signaling both receptivity and a reluctance to take in metaphorical light. Quite unlike Martha, Electra thinks for a long time before speaking. While she thinks, she seems to hold her breath, though it may be that parrots cannot hold their breath at all. I don't know. I read *Jungle Book*, but I don't remember it telling me much about parrots.

Remnant sounds from Vienna's café life creep under the window sash this evening as Electra and I enjoy private time in my consulting room. I need not cage her; she is would never soil the Persian rugs or alight roughly on a delicate figurine. She is a recent gift from an admirer; she and I have spent the past hour talking about crackers and someone from her infancy whose name may have been Paula. Whenever she talks, her larynx moves significantly, vertically, in her neck. It's such a shockingly male mannerism! I laugh when I first see it, and I make careful note of it in my journal. But I want to see it again! And again!

And so now that the hour is getting late and Martha is safely asleep, I decide to evoke from Electra whole thoughts and sentences. For if "cracker" produces one up-down motion, how many will a whole life story produce? In my kindest clinical voice I

say, "Please, Electra, tell me the first thing that comes to your mind, as soon as it comes to your mind."

On cue, her sclerae get big and her irises small. Again, I think her breathing stops.

But her larynx does not bob. Indeed, her breathing re-starts. For there occurs a prolonged conversational pause while Electra shuttles about on her perch, carefully wrapping her talons about the wood. I am not disappointed that she doesn't answer me straight off. Few do. And the undue attention that she is clearly giving to maintaining her upright posture helps me fancy that she knows that, despite her occasional mannishness, I intuit an inner loveliness that awaits my gentle touch.

I remove a cigar from the humidor. Normally when I take a cigar, my analysand cannot see me eagerly sniff its length and place my lips tenderly around its butt, for the analysand is reclining on a divan, and I am sitting behind the spot upon which his or her gaze would rest. The analysand only smells the cigar and hears my sighs of deep pleasure.

But because Electra stands, she can watch me, and I think I see her react to the sight of my loving approach of the cigar.

"A penny for your thoughts," I say. I hold the cigar to a flame until it flowers into aromatic cinders.

Electra stares at me silently for another long while, and so it is with a bit of impatience that I blow a smoke ring at her. She nimbly escapes from both it and me into her cage, where she drinks water—I suppose to clear her throat and sinuses from the shock of what I have made her take in. Even so, I say again, "Please tell me the first thing that comes to your mind, as soon as it comes to your mind." This time when I say it, I am prepared to wait her out more contentedly, for I do have my cigar.

It takes perhaps a quarter of an hour but, indeed, Electra eventually emerges from her cage. To my delight, she dances back and forth on her perch, as though expecting—or even inviting—me to do something. That is why I blow another smoke ring in her direction. And this time, she pokes her head through it! What's

more, she allows it to dissolve luxuriously around her neck! Now, that's a trick that Martha has never even tried. Then, perfect parrot that Electra is, she twitches prettily and seems ready to accept another smoke ring. So I blow another, and she does her little womanly neck poking trick again.

Or is it really a manly trick? After all, Electra is putting something (in this case, her head) into and through a circular shape.

No matter. No time to wonder! For when I blow a third smoke ring, Electra steps through the ring entirely, and flutters to the floor.

My breathing stops and my eyes grow big. My own larynx bobs up and down as I swallow with tension. Electra is moving towards me in a delicate, sideways dance, and as she does she leaves fecal droppings on the floor, as though to signal me about the depth and occasional wretchedness of the story that she will unfold just as soon as she reaches my lap. Perhaps my irises have narrowed or even gone half shut, but her grey feathers seem to have acquired a hallucinatory green, yellow, and orange. I see her articulate her neck, breast, and tiny rump in ways that invite deciphering. I believe I hear jungle drums.

And now she is gyrating her way up my leg. Her large sclerae, dark pupils, and Cleopatra makeup approach my most tender parts. Here she is! Oh! I feel her talons pierce the light wool of my pants when she, at long last, steps onto my lap.

The moment is exquisite. I wish my mother could see me now! For this, a man could kill his father. Or his father's parrot.

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