

ON THE LONGING FOR HOME

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The psychoanalytic literature has not been particularly attentive to the longing for home, this despite the fact that it has been central to the organizing narratives of the Western world since ancient times. Indeed, a nonpathological mourning for a lost home and efforts both real and symbolic to return would appear to be universals in human experience. The author examines the longing for home by presenting a series of narratives drawn from sources both heroic and quotidian in a kind of theme and variations. Appreciation of and clinical attentiveness to the longing for home would do much to broaden the understanding and investigation of some of our most important psychoanalytic ideas—even, and surprisingly, the oedipus complex.

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Here is a story several thousand years old: A man, the king of a small island nation, is called away to war along with the kings of other nations. The exciting cause is peculiarly domestic—the wife of an allied king has been carried off by the prince of a distant land. An armada is assembled: The boats are primitive, the distance great, the weapons of war are rudimentary. The story involves much human travail, sexual love, brotherly love, rivalry and jealousy, revenge, slaughter. The reasons, motives, and explanations for all this are primitive too: The gods want this, they want that, they intervene arbitrarily and for narcissistic reasons of their own. With the help of the gods, the king prevails in the war and in its aftermath. He is heroically strong but more important he is clever, “wily,” that is, he relies on distinctly human and psychological capacities. He is, for the story’s original audience, an everyman; his motives are their motives, his struggles are theirs. This is an orienting narrative for a seafaring people, people often far from home.

The war lasts ten years, a kind of mythic forever. And the return voyage takes another ten. You know by now that I am referring to Homer’s Odysseus and Odysseus’ *nostos*, his endless journey home. There are ill winds and detours, seductions along the way, nymphs with “beautiful braids,” demigoddesses who want him—dangers, temptations, monsters,

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the loss of his ship and the lives of his men, pitfalls of a cultural and social kind on islands where he washes ashore—along with offers of marriage to a beautiful princess; mythic detours too: a descent into hell. There are desperate physical and psychological trials—encounters with the endlessly mysterious and the often terrifying otherness of this world. But always, like a lodestar on the western horizon, there is home. Odysseus wants only to return home and to be at home with his family, with the loyal son who idealizes him, with the loving and loyal wife who waits for him—who herself can never be safely, comfortably at home until he is there. What is interesting—and the ancients understood this—is that homecoming is not simply a matter of landfall. Things have changed: There are enemies in waiting, intimates seem like strangers, there are reconciliations to accomplish.

I am going to alter the usual format for the presentation of psychological articles and offer instead a series of narratives in a kind of theme and variations. I draw on a range of sources: literary, cultural, historical, and clinical, and provide summing up narratives along the way. The subject, home and the longing for home, is largely ignored in the psychoanalytic literature. I hope to show that psychoanalysis has much to gain by paying attention to the matter of home, and that such attention would serve to broaden and make more useful some of our most basic psychoanalytic concepts.

When I was a child I loved my mother's stories of her own childhood. Here is one she would tell:

When she was a girl, her family had a dog named Benjy. Dogs ran free at that time in their suburban town, and Benjy, a big, friendly mutt with a lot of Newfoundland in him, liked to follow her and her brother to school in the morning. He would then go about his doggy day making his way home by evening, always showing up, my mother said, in time for dinner.

One Saturday morning when she and her brother were going not to school but to the city for the day with their father, Benjy followed them to the trolley stop. And after they got on, he followed the trolley car. They called to him through the windows and tried to order him to "go home." But he only wagged his tail as if this were a great game and continued to follow the streetcar. Eventually, he dropped out of sight. That night he did not show up for dinner. And there was no Benjy the next day either. Calls to the police were unavailing.

My mother remembered how upset she and her brother were. But my grandmother insisted that it was "good riddance." The dog was a nuisance: He threatened the mailman and chased cars that drove down their street; his barking disturbed the neighbors; he was expensive to feed.

Then on the third evening, there was a scratching at the door. I remember my excitement as my mother told of the scratching! They opened the door. Benjy! He had found his way home! He jumped up. He was big enough, my mother said, to put his front paws on my grandmother's shoulders. He licked my grandmother's face. My grandmother, my mother said, cried.

Home is an English word virtually impossible to translate into other tongues. No translation catches the associations, the mixture of memory and longing, the sense of security and autonomy and accessibility, the aroma of inclusiveness, of freedom from wariness, that cling to the word home. . . . Home is a concept, not a place; it is a state of mind where self-definition starts; it is origins—the mix of time and place and smell and weather wherein one first realizes one is an original, perhaps like others, especially those one loves, but discrete, distinct, not to be copied. Home is where one first learned to be separate and it remains in the mind as the place where reunion, if it were ever to occur, would happen.¹ (Giamatti, 1998, pp. 99–100)

In modern Japanese, there is a word that would seem to be much like the ancient Greek *nostos*. An American cousin, fluent in the language and who has spent much time living and working in Japan, tells me, “Japanese has a single verb, *kaeru*, that means return home, and only to your native home. . . . The Japanese also use *kaeru* when they talk about returning to their ancestral villages even if they have never lived there. There is a different word for simply coming back to a place that is not your home, *modoru*, and that’s the word I had to use to say I was coming back to Japan. . . . The return to the ancestral village is another interesting concept in Japan and China. The Japanese ‘go home’ to their villages once a year in August for the *O-Bon* holiday. The Chinese do the same thing for the Chinese New Year. At those times of year, huge numbers of people are ‘going home’” (M. Seiden, personal communication, March 15, 2008).

Here is a long-range perspective: “Because of the territorial behavior of the first modern humans, rigorously maintained as they invaded the world outside Africa, everyone stayed in place in their new home, except for those at the head of the wave of advance. . . . *For thousands of years thereafter, people lived and died in the place where they were born.* . . . [italics added] This conclusion emerges directly from the genealogies of the Y chromosome and the mitochondrial DNA” (Wade, 2006, p. 78).

The loss of home—banishment and exile—is an ancient terror and an ancient punishment. Examples spring to mind: Socrates chose poison over banishment from Athens. The poet Ovid was banished from Rome for the expression of anti-imperial sentiments. He died in exile, having petitioned repeatedly but in vain for permission to return. In 19th-century England, convicts and other undesirables were “transported” as a frequent form of punitive justice (and came famously to populate Australia—and our own Georgia). In the 20th century, the Soviet Union sent its politically suspect citizens to Siberia.

It is not too much to say that the history of an entire people, the Jews, has turned on the loss of home and the need to return to and to establish and protect a homeland; this return rises

¹ From *A Great and Glorious Game* by A. Bartlett Giamatti. Edited by Kenneth S. Robinson. Copyright 1998 by Kenneth S. Robinson. Reprinted by permission of Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. All rights reserved.

to the level of religious duty, *aliyah*, for believers. The history of our own United States has turned on the need of people leaving home to find and make a new one.

Anyone who as a child has ever gone off to school on a rainy morning—or sent a child off—knows about the compelling power of home and about the meaning of the threatened loss of it. John Bowlby, the great theorist of attachment and loss, began his interest in the problem at age two when he was sent off to boarding school—a painfully traumatic and life-shaping experience of early childhood mourning (Coates, 2004).

Lyrics from our popular music and our sentimental poetry are replete with themes of home, often intertwined with themes of love of a significant other, and the loss of each and both and the longing for return. Here is a sample narrative (from the popular music of my day) from among a multitude:

Homeward bound,
I wish I was,
Homeward bound,
Home where my thought's escaping,
Home where my music's playing
Home where my love lies waiting
Silently for me. (Simon, 1966)

And

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. (Payne, 1822)

And: “Home is where the heart is,” “my old Kentucky Home,” “sweet home Alabama,” “home for the holidays,” “home on the range,” “I feel so break up, I want to go home,” “show me the way to go home.” Also, “Georgia on my mind,” “California here I come, right back where I started from” and “Shennandoah” and “Swanee River” and “Subterranean Homesick Blues.” And ten more you can probably sing and hundreds more you could list if you sat down to do it with pencil and paper.

I go to see my doctor—a woman in her mid-40s—who I have not seen in a while. She has a full life from what I can tell, a busy professional practice in Manhattan, and photographs of her husband and small children on her desk. She tells me that her mother died some months ago and that she has made peace with losing her. “But I’m homesick,” she says.

I have a patient—a man in his 50s—who has recently been obliged to find a new job, in consequence of “screwing up royally” on his old job—a place he had been working for 17

years. The circumstances have not been the easiest—his screw-up was the consequence of a manic episode from which he has recovered but for which he was fired. He seems to have come to terms with and to understand what happened to him. And he has settled down, more or less, in a new and what he calls a “good” job. The boss is OK, the work is fine, his coworkers are not a problem. But something is still wrong: There is a sadness he cannot quite dispel. I say, “I think you’ve lost a home.” “Yes!” he says.

I have another patient who is now in her 40s who I have been seeing on and off since she was in her early 20s. She came to New York City after college out of a need to escape from the stifling family home in the rural New Hampshire village where she was born. She married a man she met at work. Among the things she felt to be attractive about him was that he was from a world so different from hers: ethnic, loud, passionate (as well as arguing and complaining)—a welcome and liberating contrast, she said, to her tensely quiet, depressive, New England Yankee home.

But the marital relationship has always been fraught, her in-laws intrusive and difficult. I used to joke with her about being Goldilocks married to baby bear.

When she and her husband outgrew their small East Side apartment, and at her insistence, they moved to a northern suburb. They bought an old farmhouse and renovated their barn—which became her husband’s office. She is very proud of the fact that her now-teenage daughters are active members of the local 4-H club.

And as for calling her Goldilocks, it is worth pointing out that that story is all about finding the chair, the food, the bed—the place that is “just right”—which for Goldilocks turns out ultimately to be the home she started out from.

Now another folk tale: A man and a woman live like brother and sister in innocent delight in an extensive park. They are made for each other (quite literally) and happy in their home. But in time and in response to impulses beyond their control, they become less than innocent with each other. This is against the rules. The lord of the manor is enraged at their disobedience; he banishes them and sends them away to a life of humiliation, hard work, and pain. They, and indeed their descendants forevermore, are left longing to return. I am sure that you recognize the story: our own Judeo-Christian myth of origin. It gives us to believe that the longing for a lost home is essential to the human condition—there, as it were, from the beginning, the loss an inevitable consequence of growing up.

Thus far I have presented a theme and variations. The theme is home and the longing for it. The variations are expressions of and adaptations to that longing—a longing that persists even in the face of the powerful countervailing motive, the need to get away from a home that, for one reason or another, is limiting the development of the self. The need to get away from home, of course, is well studied and long remarked on and an honored narrative in its own right. It is familiar and daily matter for working psychoanalytic clinicians who think of it in terms of separation–individuation.

To be sure, the longing for home is a longing to repair two kinds of separations—one in place, one in time. A home lost to time is no longer there and cannot be. This is true of my childhood Bronx. It is gone—along with my parents, my childhood friends, the neighbors on my block, along with the smell of my grandmother’s soup cooking on the stove in the kitchen of our fourth-floor apartment. It was true, even as she told the stories, of my mother’s Yonkers and her dogs. It was true—because separations in place become separations in time—of Odysseus’ Ithaca, of Adam and Eve’s Eden. It is true of the immigrant experience in general and often in the extreme: The old homeland is transformed, destroyed, or otherwise terrifyingly inaccessible—it exists, perhaps idealized, but on the other side of a temporal horizon.

Alfred Kazin (1951) in his affecting memoir *A Walker in the City* says of his childhood in Brooklyn,

Often, those Friday evenings, they spoke of der heym, “Home,” and then it was hard for me. Heym was a terrible word. I saw millions of Jews lying dead. . . . I was afraid with my mother’s fears, thought I should weep when she wept, lived again through every pogrom whose terrors she chanted. I associated with that old European life only pain, mud, and hopelessness, but I was still of it through her. . . . In many ways der heym was entirely dim and abstract, nothing to do with me at all, alien as the skullcap and beard and frock coat of my mother’s father. . . . Yet . . . I often felt odd twinges of jealousy because my parents could talk about that more intense, somehow less experimental life than ours with so many private smiles between themselves. (pp. 58–59)²

The need to return and the need to leave require a rapprochement. The only possible real solution is to find a new home that incorporates vital elements of the old. Sometimes this accommodation is obvious and conscious and social in the widest sense: Think of all the place names in the English speaking world that begin with “new.” Think of all the hyphenated Americans: at home, more or less, in two places.

Giamatti (1998) says of baseball that it is the great American game, in his phrase it is “. . . the Romantic Epic of homecoming America sings to itself” (p. 104), a game for a nation of immigrants, because the contestants strive to get home and score by getting home safely. Still, getting home, each run scored, changes the game. There is no perfect circle here: The return is to a new and transformed situation.

And the ancient Odyssey is a metaphor for all our human odysseys, but (to the extent that separation in place becomes separation in time) these can never be perfect completions. Odysseus does return to Ithaca, but, significantly, to a home transformed. He and Penelope test each other elaborately to reassure themselves that the transformed other is not an impostor. The ancient myth would have us understand that the place may be the

² Excerpt from *A Walker in the City*, copyright 1951 and renewed 1979 by Alfred Kazin, reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

same one, but the home you find is not the same as the home you have left and have ever since been dreaming of. And the one who waits is not identical with the one you have been dreaming of either.

A proper review of the (Western) literature on the longing for home would begin at least with Odysseus nostalgia. It would include references to Gilgamesh, the Aeneid, as well as the Book of Genesis—that is, to the major organizing narratives of the Western world. It would take note of the fact that our more ordinary narratives too are replete with the theme of longing for home (and with the pain of separation from home): our folk tales, folks songs, poetry, movies and novels, our politics and economics give expression to the deeply felt need to return or the need to make a new home that celebrates and integrates elements of the original. And they express too the inevitable impossibility of a complete return: Something is always transformed. Gilgamesh returns home himself transformed; Aeneas must reestablish his ancestral home in a new place. Odysseus finds that on reaching Ithaca his problems have just begun.

Despite the universality of the theme of longing for home and the extensive exploration of its twinned opposite, the separation motive, the psychoanalytic literature has not been particularly attentive to it.

Freud (1919) does begin his essay on “The Uncanny”—which is German is “Das Unheimliche,” literally the *unhomelike*—paying close attention to the word *heimlich* and its attendant affective meanings. These include a longing for the familiar comforts of home. But Freud’s interest here is in what is frightening in the familiar (and in the way feelings of uncanniness signal a repression of unconscious motives and feelings toward familiar “objects”). He is not interested in home in and of itself. Nor have psychoanalysts since been particularly interested.

Bettleheim’s (1975) classic study of fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment*, has no listing for “home” in the index! This despite the necessary embeddedness of children in their homes and despite the message of such tales as Goldilocks, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, and Cinderella, which is all about home: whether finding it, escaping it, or returning to it. Even the supremely and unabashedly oedipal Jack of Jack and the Beanstalk, who ends up living with his mother, lives we are assured, happily ever after—and at home.

The term *nostalgia* (meaning originally the pain of longing for home—from the ancient Greek *algos*, pain; and *nostos*, the voyage home) was medicalized as early as the 17th century as painful homesickness and a form of depression. But psychoanalysts working in this area since Freud have focused on lost objects, mothers in particular, rather than on the loss of home as such, that is, the larger family, the particular place, the broader experiential and subcultural context that mothers would inhabit. Sterba (1934) thought homesickness involved a longing for the mother’s breast; Fenichel (1945) treated nostalgia as

a matter of longing for the preoedipal mother; Fodor (1950) went back further still, attributing nostalgia to a longing for the undisturbed prenatal state.

Here is a sample psychoanalytic contemplation of *nostalgia*. You will note that the longing for home has only a kind of fossil presence in it:

Nostalgia is distinguished from homesickness from which it was originally derived, and from fantasy to which it is related. It is described as an affective-cognitive experience, usually involving memories of places in one's past. These memories are associated with a characteristic affective coloration described as "bittersweet." It is concluded that the locales remembered are displacements from objects whose representation was repressed. Nostalgia is a ubiquitous human experience that is evoked by particular stimuli under special circumstances, and, while it is generally a normal occurrence, pathological forms occur. Among those . . . are: nostalgia as a substitute for mourning, as an attempted mastery through idealization and displacement of a painful past, as a resistance in analysis, and as a counter-phobic mechanism. Nostalgia not only serves as a screen memory, but may also be said to operate as a screen affect. (Werman, 1977, pp. 397–398)

Winnicott (1950) does speak of the "ordinary good home" and seems to be referring to the culture of the home. But he never develops the idea. Kohut in his last book (1984, p. 203 and footnote) remarks almost in passing on the alter-ego selfobject function of one's "homeland." (A *selfobject* in his terms of course is a presence that completes the experience of self.) And although the relatively sparse psychoanalytic literature on immigration (e.g., Akhtar, 1995, 1999; Boulanger, 2004; Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989) does deal with the matter of home and of losing it in its most extreme forms, it either tends to see the longing for home clinically as "homesickness" and a form of neurosis or it makes the struggle of the immigrant largely a matter of accommodation to a new world.

Sandler (1960, 1985, 2003), in his effort to shift the focus of psychoanalysis from the biological to the social (by way of integrating object relations theory with attachment theory), comes close to acknowledging the importance of home. In his paper on "reconsidering psychoanalytic motivation" (1985), he makes a point of quoting his own earlier paper on "safety" (1960). "Familiar and constant things in the child's environment may . . . carry a special affective value for the child in that they are more easily perceived—colloquially we say that they are known, recognizable, or familiar to the child. The constant presence of familiar things makes it easier for the child to maintain its minimum level of safety feeling" (1960, p. 355). From "familiar" to "home" is a small enough step—but Sandler does not take it. He has much to say about "phantasy" objects, but nothing to say about fantasies of home.

"You can't go home again," Thomas Wolfe (1934) insists famously in his semiautobiographical novel of that title and this, because it is a matter of a dislocation in time, a psychological and developmental matter and not merely a matter of place. Not being able to go home again can be painful indeed, and the acceptance of one's new home can be reluctant, its rejection disguised. Some examples of such disguise from my own clinical practice come to mind:

A young woman who had come to treatment for help with depression and marital

problems talked about her inability, to the point of “paralysis,” to buy a sofa for the living room. She had spent much time and energy shopping over many years but just could not find one that was right. The house was otherwise furnished; only this was missing.

Another couple I saw in family treatment had similar problems finding a dining room table. They ate dinner sitting on their sofa!

A young teenager refused get his hair cut. His very long hair, because of his baby face, made him look like a girl and he was suffering for it socially. The story: His mother had died. He was living with his aunt in her house. His mother had been the one who cut his hair—in their old kitchen—back home, he said, he wrapped in a towel and with a sheet spread on the floor beneath his chair.

Typically, psychoanalytic clinicians would look first for explanation for each of these puzzling “paralyzes” to object relational issues—which, of course, were at play. The matter of home as a time, a place, a family, and a culture tends to stay under the clinical radar. But it is clear, in each case someone was saying, “This may be where I’m living, but I’m not at home here.”

There are moments of reunion too—moments when the chronic sense of loss is lifted. A patient of mine, a Jewish New Yorker and a frequent traveler, says that when his plane lands in Israel, something feels different: He is home. When he tells me this, I am reminded of my father who said with delight on returning from a first and only trip to Israel, “Even the streets have Jewish names!”

Home is a place, a time, a family, and a culture. Its story has distinguishable elements: an original home supporting an original, authentic sense of identity; a necessary and inevitable leaving of one’s home (and therefore loss of it) in the service of a new self and new authenticity; an accommodation in which the new must honor the old and incorporate elements of it. And finally—because the return is necessarily incomplete—a variety of shifting affective self states. These will involve variously and in different degrees of intensity a sense of longing, an idealizing nostalgia, sometimes a sweet sense of orientation and value, and often a chronic sense of loss.

Perhaps the most interesting of these self states is the chronic and not-necessarily-neurotic sense of loss that we carry into and through our adulthood: an affective state that might be thought of as a chronic mourning.

It is worth recalling Freud’s (1917) distinction between mourning and melancholia (i.e., depression): “Mourning,” he says, “is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on . . . although mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, *it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition*. . . [italics added] We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time. . .” (p. 243).

“Normally,” he goes on, “respect for reality,” that is, the reality of the loss, “gains the

day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy. . .” (Freud, 1917, p. 244). So mourning, Freud thinks, can be protracted without being pathological.

It is my observation that one’s original home is a lost, and mourned for, “abstraction”—although I argue with the notion that such abstractions are only substitutes for lost objects. I think that the mourning is there as a lifelong longing at some level of consciousness in all of us. Indeed, Freud himself knew the longing all too well. In a letter written at the end of his life—after he had to leave Vienna for London, Freud says, “The feeling of triumph at liberation is mingled too strongly with mourning, for one had still very much loved the prison from which one has been released” (letter to Max Eitingon; Freud, June 6, 1938, quoted in Gay, 1988, p. 9).

The mourning—for a time and place together—is there in our dreams, in the songs we sing to ourselves, and in the lullabies we sing to our children, in the foods we want to eat.

If I were to obey my early training as an empiricist and develop a structured interview for assessing the strength of a subject’s longing for home, I would include a section on food—the foods of childhood. Do you remember what you loved to eat? Do you find yourself looking for it now? And when you find it, does it taste the same?

Queens, New York, where I live, would be my testing ground for this research. There is an uncountable number of small, authentic, ethnic restaurants, each catering to its own seekers. There is a Polish place in my neighborhood, for example, with simple wooden tables, food-stained menus, and reasonable prices. It has windows on the boulevard and is always decorated simply for the season. Nice place, I have always thought, yet there is a sadness about it. The young waitresses, while efficient enough, seem depressed and distracted. The clientele are largely older, mittel-Europeans. They order goulash, potato pancakes, blintzes, pirogies; they drink hot tea and talk quietly. A kind of mourner’s club, I have come to think, a sort of temple of mourning-for-home. I ask the waitress to recommend a Polish beer to go with my goulash. She lights up for a moment, smiles at me, and names one. “It’s the best!” she says. The restaurant, in case you want to go there, is called “Just Like Mother’s.”

Here is a story of mourning for home about to begin: 17-year-old Maria had been seeing me in treatment because of school attendance difficulties. She “couldn’t get herself to school.” This, it quickly became clear, was related to a sharp separation anxiety, and related in turn to the impending death of her grandmother who, she said, had always been “like a mother” to her. But Maria had broken off treatment—I think because the pressure to grow up and move on, of which therapy had become a part, had felt too strong. She had been spending her time at home caring for and worrying about her grandmother.

I had not seen her for many months when her grandmother died. Maria appeared to be doing well in the still-acute phase of her reaction to the loss but had come back to see me at her mother’s and an aunt’s urging. She seemed genuinely to have some perspective on the loss; she acknowledged feeling sad but feeling relieved that the long anxious period

of her grandmother's illness was over. She sounded as if she was getting ready to get on with her life.

Then I asked what would happen to the two-family house that was her grandmother's—and which from what I had heard could be described as rundown and in a marginal neighborhood. Maria had lived all her life with her divorced mother in the upstairs apartment. Her grandmother, and grandfather when he was alive, had lived below. "Oh!" she said, "they're all talking about selling it. My mother and I would move." She began to tear up—and then began to cry. "First my grandfather," she said, "then my grandmother, then my house!"

Here is a case of what might be called mourning for the lost ability to mourn: I have been working with Willy, a man in his 80s and a refugee (in his childhood and along with his mother father and younger brother) from Hitler's Europe. Our psychotherapy exchange has focused largely on Willy's fraught relationship with his wife of many years—herself a holocaust survivor—around their difficulties with each other, with their children and their grandchildren. A year or so ago, his oldest daughter died. I had come back from a vacation to his numbness and his literally inexpressible grief.

His daughter's death had not been unexpected. She had had advanced liver disease—the consequence of intravenous drug use earlier in her life, and the consequence, Willy himself had acknowledged ruefully many times, of a life of promiscuity and drug abuse. Now of her death and his inability to mourn her, he would say, with a kind of shrug, "I lost my daughter many years ago."

But at the same time he would also say, "There must be something wrong with me. I can't cry. I can't mourn. . . ." "I don't know, Doc," he would say, "What's wrong with me?" Over the weeks that followed, he would lapse into a numb silence and then into repetitive questioning and fruitless self-examination. I sat with him, I felt for him, I tried to give him a way to think about himself in all the ways psychoanalytic clinicians do: How he might feel; how I might feel; what it all might mean: the frustrated anger with his daughter compounding the sense of loss, the disappointment, his self-protective distancing from his own feelings. . . . All to no avail.

Then in a session some months after the event, Willy was talking about his wife. He was remembering the early sweetness of married life, how much his wife had wanted a baby girl, a little *meidlele*, he said in Yiddish, and how when the baby was born, he said, "We had our little meidlele." And at that his voice broke and he cried.

There was nothing I needed to say at that moment; I offered him the box of tissues; I took one myself.

Surely, this moment of breakthrough invites commentary from a range of perspectives, among them the meaning of having long been the helpless, angry parent of a chronic substance abuser; the conflicted mixture of love and rage and guilt engendered in the lifetime family romance (this was a child that Willy and his wife fought about passionately); the nature of adult onset trauma and its attendant numbness; the immigrant experience generally, the sequelae of the holocaust experience in particular; and the interpersonal context of the treatment.

But my sense is that what is most interesting here is the nature and power of early language. Stern (2003) tells us that words allow us to formulate unformulated experience. Words have resonances, connotations, extended meanings, associations; they connect us

to and are evocative of differing self states. And old words, like old songs, connect us to and evoke old self states. In what language do we talk to ourselves at our most intimate and unguarded moments? In that session and at that particular moment in treatment, Willy was talking to himself in the language of his home.

English, the language of our treatment exchange, is a language Willy learned late. Indeed, although it is his language of today, it is his fourth language. His family came to America from Europe where as a boy he spoke the language of the country where they lived but only at school and outside the house. His family spent some years in the course of their emigration in a Latin American country. There, in his adolescence, he spoke Spanish at work and on the streets. But Yiddish is his first language, the language he heard first—and spoke first at home. And it is the language he spoke with his young wife when they first met more than 50 years ago in New York, when she was a recent immigrant and a stranger to English. It was the language of the home they made together—and so the language of both his first and his second family home.

Meiddele, of course, means *little girl* in Yiddish. In its metaphorical resonances, it is a term of endearment and tenderness, the *le* at the end a diminutive—not just girl but little girl, little baby girl, evoking all the feelings of parental love. And evoking the fragileness of the tiny babe-in-arms and the deeply felt need to care for her—to hold her and keep her warm and fed and safe at whatever parental sacrifice. To say that *heimish* word made Willy into a young father and husband again. And, of course and painfully, into a father who had lost his infant daughter—a daughter he was helpless to save. Now, in that self state, it was that lost infant he could mourn.

And it was about that mourning that he and I could talk—although (and perhaps, alas!) in English.

I began this article with story from classical antiquity; I end with another—this one familiar and particularly dear to psychoanalysts: Sophocles' version of the Oedipus myth.

On the basis of prophecy, the infant Oedipus is cast out of his home—a death sentence. He is rescued and given another home but leaves that one in dread of enacting the same prophecy. The story is familiar: His escape takes him through an early recorded episode of fatal road rage, in which unknowingly he kills his biological father, and to his apparently successful encounter with the Sphinx. He succeeds in making a new home, becomes its king, marries its queen (unknown to him, of course, his own mother) and, for a time thrives there. Alas, Thebes his new (old) home is “polluted” by virtue of his unwitting patricide and incest. He does not want to see and finally literally cannot bear to see what he has been made to do—by fate and the gods—and blinds himself. Again he is cast out, again banished.

There is more: In Part two of the Sophocles trilogy, Oedipus is a blind old man wandering the world and led by his daughter Antigone. He is homeless. He rages against the brother-in-law and son who banished him from Thebes; banishment from home is their crime against him. He has his revenge; now he refuses to help them keep and defend Thebes—their home. The good king of Athens offers him sanctuary but on “foreign soil,” which he cannot accept. He dies and with the help of the gods is interred in a secret tomb in a sacred grove—his final home.

Freud (1900) insists famously that Oedipus' "destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse toward our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (p. 262). Pace Freud! Hidden incestuous traps and murderous provocations clearly are at the heart of the Oedipus story. And I agree that Oedipus' struggle with what might be called the unconscious—with at once knowing and not knowing one's fate—is what moves us. But I do think that Freud's interpretation, because it serves a foregone conclusion, is anachronistic in its emphasis on an infantile sexual triangularity.

Even an amateur reading of ancient history tells us that in Sophocles' lifetime, home—the having, the losing, the longing for return—was a deep and abiding concern. Herodotus, Sophocles' contemporary, in his *Histories* (Strassler, 2007) makes it plain that in 5th-century BCE Greece, the problem could start early—and that Oedipus' treatment as an infant was not so unusual: Unwanted infants were regularly exposed and abandoned.

And more: Banishment and exile were frequent and painful outcomes for the losers in personal and political struggles. Herodotus tells us, for example, of Hippias, the turncoat tyrant and son of the deposed ruling family of Athens, who finds himself leading the barbarian Persian army against his own ancestral city. The night before the battle at Marathon he had a dream: "Hippias dreamt that he was sleeping with his own mother. He interpreted this to mean that he would return to Athens, recover his rule, die as an old man there in his native land. . ." (p. 470). The interpretation does fall strangely on a post-Freudian ear—the manifest content is incest! The disguised wish is an exiled traitor's longing for home.

Reading Herodotus makes it clear that the threat of loss of home was demographic in its proportions: Mass relocation was a common consequence for the vanquished in endless wars between ever-contending city-states. Moreover, the Homeric epics, already then some three centuries old and recording as they did a still more ancient story of *nostalgia*, were an important part of Sophocles' cultural patrimony. Not incidentally, these stressed not rivalry but paternal love and filial loyalty, that is, the continuity of home and family and tribe.

Sophocles' trilogy works variations on a theme of ever-present dread and archaic anxiety. But this is not of incestuous sexuality; it is of the loss of home. The context for all that happens in the play cycle is home: losing it, finding it, spoiling it, losing it forever, finding it only in death. Incest is a danger because it threatens the order and stability of the home; so too, murderous filial rivalry. For Sophocles, Oedipus' fate is homelessness. His Oedipus, it might be said, struggles with an Odysseus complex.

I conclude: Although it is more algebraic to talk about longing for an object than to talk about the smell of our mother's kitchen, her tired smile, and her favorite rocking chair in the corner of our remembered living room, the reduction is seriously narrowing. Objects, that is to say, the people there or remembered there, are surely at the center of the longing for home. But there is more to it.

The fantasy of home when we are separated from it—which it turns out that as adults we always are—offers an orienting comfort and expresses a chronic sense of longing. This

longing is deeply human and in evolutionary terms ancient. The story of Odysseus can be seen as expressive of an ever-present, nonpathological mourning for home—home as embodied in a mother of course, but also in a father, a family, a house, a place and time in one's development, a neighborhood, a culture, a love life, a religious sense, and a state of mind that reflects belonging, safety, self-definition, comfort, and unquestioned acceptance.

Many of our most important psychoanalytic ideas and much of our clinical awareness of them—separation-individuation, attachment, object relations, applications such as the psychoanalytic understanding of immigration and cultural diversity, indeed the oedipus complex itself, to name some—would be deepened by an explicit broadening of our psychoanalytic thinking to include the importance of a longing for home. Indeed, I have come to think of Odysseus—and not Oedipus—as the figure from antiquity most representative of the universal psychological experience of our species.

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