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Diana Pringle

Where Three Roads Meet

Salley Vickers. (2007). Canongate: Edinburgh. Hardback £12.99.

Vienna, 1923

Sigmund Freud's life has been mysteriously saved after his first operation for cancer. A figure appears in his imagination – or is it? - and wants to talk to him. Freud tells him to make an appointment. He reappears without an appointment but with a story. Freud sends him away saying *'I've no time for stories.'*

London, 1938.

Freud's life has been saved from the Nazis. And he is dying of cancer. A figure appears – in his imagination? - and wants to tell him a story. *'It's been my life's work, listening to stories.'* replies Freud.

The story that Tiresias has to tell is, as we know from the title, the story of Oedipus, a complex tale, and one in which Freud sees common-sense and Tiresias some 'non-sense'.

'Who are you?', asks Freud.

And Tiresias, replies, *'I have come to you to find out, Dr. Freud'*.

Tiresias has been a priest to the Pythia at the Delphic Oracle. Like a psychoanalyst, he has lived by interpretation. But his assumption that Freud respects the gods because he attributes his escape to England to the statue of Athena on his desk does not go down well. While Tiresias talks about the immortal forces, Freud talks about defences against reality. Dementia praecox and psychotic inflation rub up against Pythian utterances and mantic inspiration. Are the gods a desire to revert to infantile dependency? or are they the forms the Real takes before they become categories in human understanding?

Such questions, and the many quotations from Heracleitus, remind us that this is Heidegger's pre-Socratic Greece just as much as Oedipus'. It is the Greece (pace Freud) of the gods, of the clear skies of Being. The signs given by the Lord of the Oracle at Delphi are actually the symbols which as Ricoeur tells us, are an invitation to situate ourselves better in Reality.

As in many an analysis, both Freud and Tiresias are struck by what hasn't been noticed. Perhaps Oedipus' name, 'the man with the swollen foot', was chosen by himself to make a very different impression. It is after all from the root 'oida', meaning 'I know' – ultimately 'I have seen' -

absitomen! As we know, the Sphinx framed the question in terms of legs and feet so when Oedipus guessed the riddle, was it his head, not his foot, that was swollen? Jocasta, his wife... and mother, jumped off the cliff... or claimed to. Marie-Louise von Franz once said to me, '*I bet there was a mattress!... But Oedipus believed her...*' and then added, '*...and so did Freud.*' Yes, there are more ways than blindness not to see things. Did Jocasta not recognise the father-husband in the son-husband? In the matter of gods and reality, Tiresias seems to think that Freud may be missing something himself.

As Freud's health deteriorates, his agony increases. But Tiresias, the blind eyewitness of the Freudian myth, the story of Oedipus, is generous, attentive and familiar with agony and is present to the very end....and beyond; as Tiresias says, the deathless ones are outside time. In his own world Tiresias is a psychopomp; in ours he is an analyst of the existential.

Freud: '*You promised me the end.*'

Tiresias: '*I promised you an end.*'

Salley Vickers joins the bright stars in Canongate's Myth Series with this deep, lucid and subtle enquiry into the myth of Oedipus and Freud. In a music shop I once heard someone ask for 'Torville and Dean's Ravel's Bolero!' In such a way, we now have Sigmund Freud's Myth of Oedipus. Vickers leads us vividly to imagine how it might have been if Freud, with his well-known preoccupation with his own death, had ... an analyst ... a psychopomp...a daimon...the person whom in the book he calls, '*my old friend*' with whom to talk about existence and reality as he died.

I see in Tiresias an exemplar of the generosity and culture, the personal sympathy and professional relativity of fine existential analytical practice. From my knowledge of her previous books, I am sure that it expresses Salley Vickers' own analytical praxis.

The three roads, where choice either narrows or opens out, depending on the direction you're going in, are of course to (or from) Thebes, Daulis and Delphi. But they are Freud's, Tiresias' and Oedipus' road too. And every crossroad leads to the underworld. Every individual's crossroad has a direction to (or from) the unconscious. Delphi and the Pythia sit, like Freud, on a tripod above the unconscious/underworld. So we too sit, as analysts, not only between past and future, but in a present in synchronic and diachronic time, time both mythical and quotidian.

How vital are the depths of existential work; yet how hard to express. '*Where Three Roads Meet*' expresses it with lightness and vitality as well as wisdom and charm.

Any book by Salley Vickers is a treat. This one in particular has turned for me into a point of reference and reflection for the delicate and mysterious, audacious and loving business of being with another.

A personal note

Like Salley Vickers, I was educated as a Jungian and I trained as a Jungian analyst with Dr. Marie-Louise von Franz and Dr. Dieter Baumann in Zürich. For some thirty five years I have been in practice with those in the healing and spiritual vocations, doctors, clergy and psychotherapists. I always have the *Fragments* by Heracleitus by my bed and that night, as I read '*Where Three Roads Meet*' I was struck by a collection of those effects called synchronicity and there were two in particular that struck me. Each of these fragments – and only these - were quoted before the story even began. I thought about them for a bit, then continued '*Where Three Roads Meet*'. One of the threads, one of the three roads in the story, is Freud's conduct as he lives towards his death and the help he gets as he does so.

I too am dying and the existential resonances from the book, concern about my own conduct on the way to death and the people who help me live and die (Heracleitus is one!) are panoramically reflected by Salley Vickers and her characters.

Nicholas Spicer

Editors note. Nicholas Spicer died 6 weeks after writing this review.

Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method

Darren Langdridge. (2007). Pearson Education. £28.99.

When I was invited to review this book, I agreed happily and without a second thought. After all, I was already in possession of not one but two inspection copies of the book, I had read parts of the book and I had been recommending it to students enthusiastically. What could be easier than to write a brief review of this text? Or so I thought. When I started to re-read the book with a view to review it for *Existential Analysis*, I was surprised to find that my experience of the book had changed. All of a sudden, I noticed what appeared to be unwarranted simplifications and generalisations, and I began to think of possible qualifications and limitations to claims and arguments presented in the text. What was going on? I realised that I was now reading the book with the eye of a critic whereas before I had been approaching it as a teaching and learning tool for myself and my students. In other words, and as a phenomenological perspective would lead us to expect, intentionality made all the difference! After all, it is not really possible to review the 'book' itself (as object); instead, the 'review' arises from, and tells us about, the relationship between the reviewer and the book.

It is with these reflections in mind that I decided to approach Langdridge's text in my role as a psychology lecturer and research