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**"In the Name of the Father": Ovid's Theban Law**

Rejecting epic's preoccupation with either founding or defending polities, Ovid's Metamorphoses has but one extended foundation story, of Thebes (Met. III-IV)-a civic history nonetheless strangely full of surrealistic landscapes (Hardie 1990). Cadmus sought to found Thebes because he failed his father King Agenor's command to find his sister Europa (Zeus' abductee) or else remain exiled from Tyre. He loses his followers almost immediately, slain by a monstrous snake hidden in a cave (marked by a vine-arch) next to a lonely spring (Met. 3.6-94). Cadmus' vengeance discovers the snake's supernaturalism: the beast changes mysteriously in magnitude and force. It matched the constellation Draco when attacking the followers (3.43-45), but shrinks to a tree's height when Cadmus fatally pins it to an oak (3.90-92). This single oak stops a beast that-twelve lines and no significant wounds earlier-easily mowed down the woodlands in its path (3.80).

Such oddities metastasize across the Theban landscape. When Actaeon surprises the goddess Diana bathing, the unusual combination of features marking the serpent's lair-spring, cave, arch-distinguish her bath, too. Odd that elements from the site of Cadmus' first loss (his men) should "magically" recur at the site of his second (his nephew). Odder still the perfection of Diana's retreat-its crystalline water, impeccable grass margin, arch hollowed spontaneously from stone. Ovid paradoxically insists that while no artifice has shaped the site, nature's efforts look artificial (3.158-9).

All these highly improbable landscape details look like nothing so much as hallucinations. Yet they cannot spring from any one person's psychosis: different people observe them at widely various times-Cadmus' men, then Cadmus, then (a generation later) Actaeon.

Reading this "collective psychosis" requires reframing our understanding of the symptoms. Jacques Lacan's theory of hallucinations sees them in terms not solely of individual or even familial upheaval, but of societal crisis. He usefully maps phantasmagoria onto the social, cultural, and institutional forces that move through the subject and shape the apprehension of phenomena. Hallucinations represent a disturbance in our understanding of the world, in the conceptual categories Lacan collectively labeled the "Symbolic." Any system of categories only functions to the extent that each category can be distinguished from all others. The Symbolic fundamentally crystallizes the idea of distinction that prevents us from experiencing the world as a homogenous continuum. The question then is "What has so fundamentally disturbed Thebes' Symbolic that distinctions have disappeared between 'astronomically huge' and 'merely large,' 'here' and 'there,' 'then' and 'now,' 'artificial' and 'natural'?"

The answer lies with Thebes' first cause: Agenor. Commanding his son to "find your sister or don't come back," Agenor acts as king and father. His doubled authority aligns with the very anchor of Lacan's Symbolic: the Father qua abstract principle of legislative and punitive power, rather than biological function. The Father not only informs the Law-

the very basis of the ordered human community, like Thebes-but more abstractly "polices" the conceptual boundaries that are the Symbolic's essence. But Agenor's harsh command makes him "dutiful and criminal by the same act" (3.3-5)-the Father gone awry. Thebes and its hallucinations begin here, sprung from a crisis in the Law and in the function of the one who imposes Law.