

1st Shot: Our usage of the term, “Oedipal detective game,” is meant to work in a couple of different ways. In terms of environmental and climate concerns, the name of Oedipus has been strongly linked by Timothy Morton to what he terms “agrilogistics,” a term meant to denote the ways in which early agricultural humanity related to the nonhuman realm by constantly striving to “delete” this region of being. Offering another term for the last roughly 11,000 years differing slightly from the more common ones of either the Holocene or the Anthropocene, Morton’s work not only connects Oedipus and the agricultural society he is “charged with saving” to questions of climate and criminality, but also to the “noir detective story” in particular (“Oedipal Logic” 16, 15). Morton’s intervention puts forward Oedipus as the main exemplar of a form of thinking that marshals this “deletion” of the nonhuman in service of a picture of humanity as itself autochthonic, as purely *causa sui*, and thus reads Sophocles’ titular character as the first of many “climate criminals.” Moreover, Morton wishes to draw an intimate connection to questions of genealogy and origin as well: “There is nothing but Oedipus and his parents, Oedipus who thinks he acts autonomously, exemplifying the agrilogistic meme *We came from ourselves*” (*Dark Ecology* 62). This triangulation of Oedipus, questions of climate and criminality, and genealogy give us sufficient warrant to speak of this “Oedipal detective game” as perfectly operative in the novel as a whole and gives us a language with which to start tying together some of the various threads in the narrative.

Although Morton’s account of Oedipus and agrilogistics here gives us some justification for our term, his treatment of the crime fiction/criminality point of the triangle needs a bit of tweaking. *Dark Ecology* is quite content to pull out what it claims is the quintessential “noir fiction” element:

I am a responsible member of this species [humanity] for the Anthropocene. Of course I am formally responsible to the extent that I understand global warming. That’s all you need to be responsible for something. You understand that this truck is going to hit that man? You are responsible for that man. Yet in this case formal responsibility is strongly reinforced by causal responsibility. I am the criminal. And I discover this via scientific forensics. Just like in noir fiction: I’m the detective and the criminal! I’m a person. I’m also part of an entity that is now a *geophysical force on a planetary scale*. (8-9)

We cannot help but wonder if Morton doesn’t beg the question here with regards to the role of one’s “knowledge” and whether such a thing is somehow sufficient for anything beyond one’s awareness that they too “are the criminal.” As we noted earlier, the children and their parents are deeply aware of their role in the climate crisis—knowledge here in Millet’s novel does not seem to be the major issue. Now, to be fair to Morton, there are spots in his text where he seems to grant that there is something deeply “unconscious” about this knowledge (58). Furthermore, Morton’s mention of methods of rationality and science do quite nicely link back up with standard treatments of Oedipus—as he notes:

“Oedipus’ *hamartia* is his reason, and his hubris is to use his wits to command everything, as if reason could shrink-wrap the universe” (62)—so where exactly would we like to do our tweaking? The context of all of this within Millet’s novel forces one to wonder quite a bit about whether all of these methods and tools of rationality are functioning within the noir universe.

Notes Fuller treatment of this is available in Morton, Timothy. “The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness”. *Environmental Humanities*, Volume 1 (November 2012): 7-21.

References:

Morton, Timothy. “The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness”. *Environmental Humanities*, Volume 1 (November 2012): 7-21.

———. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia UP, 2016.