

Myth

Myth is curative for the hurting social whole. It enables the individual to account for his actions, potential, and future horizons, and by sketching them out to provide himself with a working model for success as a social good. The way the myth of Oedipus works is a good illustration. A serious crime has been committed, a murder in the past. The city of Thebes is hit by the subsequent plague and its ruler, the confident Oedipus, proclaims that the perpetrator of the crime, which is ravaging the countryside, must be brought to justice. As it turns out, of course, Oedipus himself turns out to be the criminal. Forced in the end to make public confession of his guilt, Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile. We are to assume that the plague is cured, and that Oedipus—in the following play,—‘is taken up,’ freed of his mortal condition, hallowed but then once more plunged into the human arena, where the possession of his body becomes a bone of contention between rival states. The social work being carried out by this tale results in the city’s talking to itself in a play, Oedipus the King. The play is the audience’s reflection back onto itself of a collective realization, that we ourselves are often the guilty parties when we point our fingers at the guilt of others. We learn through acting out in outrage. No one has said this more subtly and sharply than Andre Gide, in his *Oedipe*.