place that attracted Euripides. Hecuba had, doglike, borne many children, defended her house, and done the work of a fury, but above all she had dreamed the torch that was to burn Troy.[122] She is called "the dog of fire-bearing Hekate" in another Euripidean play (fr. 959 *TGF*), and now, like that torch-bearing goddess, she is to guard a gateway, taking the last of the Trojan fire as her implement. On this stage she has seen the Greek host more or less safely through its loss of ethical direction, and in the same way she will continue to take both Greeks and barbarians through a difficult passage. Her savage response to a savage outrage marked the place where mythic Greeks had to change course, for, like Kynossema, revenge is a danger that shows the way.

122. For the Paris torch, see Pind. *Pae.* 8.10–14; Eur. *Tro.* 922; schol. Eur. *Andr.* 293; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.5; Hyg. *Fab.* 91, 249.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Child-Killing Mothers

Sophocles' Tereus

Alcmena and Hecuba fulfilled the male vocation of revenge in the absence of son and husband, but nevertheless each attacked like a lioness in (delayed) defense of her young, so that it was paradoxically mother-love that made surrogate males of them. As old women miscast in an active male role, they brought irregularity to the revenges they performed, but neither of their retaliations could have stood alone as the single praxis of a tragedy because both were not only crudely just but also emotionally easy to perform. Of course the two heroines were physically weak and debilitated, but each responded to instinct and felt herself to be on unassailable ethical ground. The truly disturbing tragedy of female revenge would have to show a woman caught like Orestes between two equally fierce imperatives and forced to oppose the strongest part of her own nature as she followed the socially imposed rule of retaliation. Maternal love—the impulse that moved Alcmena and Hecuba to unsex themselves and behave like men—was often posited as the strongest of human passions.[1] Therefore, if a dramatist could bring to the stage a heroine who not only worked a revenge but did so in defiance of her own maternity, then chaos would truly attack the innate stability of the vengeance plot.

The killing of a boy child[2] by its mother was the ultimate act of Dionysi-

1. Paternal love, by contrast, might rank no more than second (after love of honor) judging from the mythic Oedipus, who cursed his sons in angry retaliation for slights (*Thebais* 2 *EGF*).

2. The male child was the most valuable to mother as well as to father, since through him she perfected herself as mother of the heir. Discussion of female infanticide in the Greek world is inconclusive, but it is clear at any rate that the death of a female child was of lesser significance; see summary in R. Oldenziel, "The Historiography of Infanticide in Antiquity," in *Sexual Asymmetry*, ed. J. Blok and P. Mason (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 87–107.

ac disorder,[3] but what, short of the god's madness, could make a woman perform this crime?[4] This was a question that had a practical as well as a theoretical interest because in early Greece, though all children belonged to their fathers, nurseries were under a separate and effectively feminine rule. When the time came, sons would be handed over to the world of men, but as babies and while they were little boys, their safety depended upon the mood of the women's apartments. Small male children were thus in a sense hostages of the household truce, and the paternal apprehension that resulted was explored in many popular stories about vicious women who attacked children. One favorite set banalized the nightmare of the destroying mother by introducing motifs of accident and villainy, producing women like Themisto[5] who brought punishment upon themselves by clumsily killing their own children when they meant to do away with those of a rival. This model was reassuring because it suggested that women's schemes, though dangerous, were fundamentally inept, and also because it tended to leave the true heirs of the house alive. And yet it begged the essential mythic question: Was it possible that a woman could with knowledge and intention kill a son she had borne to her husband?

The answer was affirmative, but it achieved its classic form[6] in a tale that is a consummate example of how storytelling works to assuage anxiety. The

3. Late antiquity told stories of child sacrifices offered to Dionysus Omadius on Tenedos (Porph. *Abst.* 2.55) and at Potniae (Paus. 9.8.2), and the child-killing Minyads supplied the aetiology for the Agriona at Orchomenos (Plut. *Mor.* 299E–300A). That any female child-killing could be referred to this Dionysiac model is clear from Nonnus, *Dion.* 44.265, where the knife that Procne used to kill Itys is said to have been buried by the Erinyes under the tree where Agave was to kill Pentheus.

4. The crime was not unknown in the real world, judging by Plato's discussion (*Leg.* 9.868c–d) of appropriate punishments for fathers or mothers who killed children in anger; these were the same as for killers of husbands or wives, brothers or sisters, in anger, and consisted of exile for three years, then prohibition of all contact with the household of the victim. A child who killed a parent, on the other hand, was guilty of *hierosulia* and was to be put to death. Antiphon (6.4; cf. 5.87) says that if a father kill a child, there may be neither prosecution nor revenge.

5. Hyg. *Fab.* 1, 4; Nonnus, *Dion.* 9.302–21; see chap. 6, n. 9. Creusa, in Eur. *Ion*, is a version of this figure, a woman who would (in ignorance) kill her own child in revenge upon a mate who has deserted her. The Aedon of the Boeotian and Asia Minor legends is another; moved by envy, she meant to murder Niobe's eldest son but mistakenly killed her own Itylus instead (schol. *Od.* 19.518; Hes. fr. 312 M-W; Paus. 9.5.9); see J. E. Harrison, "Itys and Aedon," *JHS* 8 (1887) 439–45.

6. The second major myth of son-killing by a mother was that of Althaia, but since this fiction (like that of Oedipus) allowed for killing from a distance, through curse or brand, the triumph of the vengeance passion over maternity was not so sharply drawn. On the development of this myth, see J. March, *The Creative Poet* (London, 1987), pp. 29–46; J. Brenner, "La plasticité du mythe," in *Métamorphoses du mythe* (Geneva, 1988), pp. 37–56. Althaia's vengeance may or may not have been central to the Euripidean *Meleager* (apparently it was to Accius' tragedy of the same name, for there Althaia engaged in an inner debate like that of Medea (frs. 443–47 *TRF*). Stesichorus' Althaia may also have argued within herself over the claims of sons and brothers; see R. Garner, "Stesichorus' Althaia: *P. Oxy.* 3876," *ZPE* 100 (1994) 26.

pan-Hellenic tale of Procne[7] took the most frightening creature a man could imagine—the son-killing mother—and wrapped her in song, so that as nightingale she became a figure of melody and grief.[8] Her child-killing rage was transposed into a lyric melancholy and then sent into exile among the members of another species, thus leaving the masculine auditor of this darkest of tales with his sense of safety mysteriously enhanced. In fact the legend eventually became positively reassuring, as storytellers directly addressed its priamel of female motives and produced a daughter's devotion to her father as the one emotion that might prove stronger than love of husband, stronger even than love of child.[9] Revenge provided the fictional structure: Procne killed her boy, yes, but she did this terrible thing in order to restore the honor of her paternal house, in retaliation against a husband who had broken faith with her father. And since, in most versions, the father who excited Procne's loyalty was a Greek, while the husband whose son she killed was a barbarian, the consumer of folktale found that his worst fear had been magically dissipated. The horror could in all mythic logic occur, yes—but only in the ultimate service of right Hellenic ways.

Nevertheless, as mythic cipher, Procne was like Orestes because she stood countercommanded by two immutable laws, and so, in spite of the awkward

7. The legend of the child-killing wife of Tereus was generally said to belong either to Daulis, in Phocis (Thuc. 2.29.3; Strabo 9.423), or to Megara. The name Tereus suggested that of a Thracian tribe, and Thucydides supposed that in Tereus' time Phocis had been occupied by Thracians. Pausanias (1.41.8) was shown a tomb of Tereus in Megara, and he supposed that the Megarians had borrowed the story from the region around Chaeronea. (A late version connected with Miletus appears at Ant. Lib. *Met.* 11.) Homer, however, makes Penelope tell the companion story of the daughter of Pandareus, wife of Zethus, who killed her son Itylus unwittingly and mourns forever as the nightingale (*Od.* 19.518–23). She, as Aedon, was painted with a sister named Chelidon in the act of killing the boy in a late-seventh- or early-sixth-century metope from Aetolian Thermon; see H. G. G. Payne, "On the Thermon Metopes," *BSA* 27 (1925–26) 124–26; M. Robertson, *La peinture grecque* (Geneva, 1959), p. 50. Meanwhile Hesiod calls the sister swallow "daughter of Pandion" (*Op.* 568), as does Sappho (fr. 135 LP). See M. Mayer, "Mythistorica," *Hermes* 27 (1892) 481–515; O. Schroeder, "Πρόκνη," *Hermes* 61 (1926) 423–36.

8. Hom *Od.* 19.518–23; Hes. fr. 312 M-W; Paus. 9.5.9. The nightingale's song was characterized as full of yearning (ἱμερόφωνος, Sappho fr. 136 LP); plaintive (πάνδυρτος, Soph. *El.* 1077); highly polytonal (πολυχορδότατος, Eur. *Rhes.* 550); most melodic (ἀοιδότατος, Eur. *Hel.* 1109). At Ar. *Av.* 212, Itys is πολύδακρυς. The story of Harpalyce belongs with the Procne tales, as shown by her bird transformation: she, raped by her father the Arcadian king Clymenos, killed their child and served it to him; he then hanged himself and she became a bird called *chalakis* (Parth. *Amat. Narr.* 13; Hyg. *Fab.* 292, 246, 255; Nonnus, *Dion.* 12.71 ff.)

9. In a parallel priamel, Sappho stated the feared alternative by capping love of parents, husband, and child with erotic love, though in the softened case of Helen in which the child was merely abandoned and was merely a daughter (16 Voigt).

birdification—the *apornithosis* that brought the legend to its feathered close—Sophocles made a play about her. This tragedy, called *Tereus* after the husband who was the enemy and indirect victim of its violence, is known only from fragments, and one's first task in discussing it is to try to forget the gorgeous horrors attached to the tale in book 6 of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid must have known the Sophoclean piece, but his narrative, with its panoramic stretches of time and place, certainly does not reflect the shape of an Attic tragedy,[10] as is demonstrated when scholars take it as blueprint for imaginary plays.[11] There are, however, a few trustworthy indications of the Sophoclean treatment in a hypothesis (*P Oxy.* 3013 = *TrGF* 4, p. 435),[12] in a more tenuous Byzantine summary (Tzetzes ad Hes. *Op.* 568), and in the handful of commonplace fragments that have been preserved. In addition, vase paintings offer one or two vividly concrete details that may have their origin in the fifth-century play. This is slight evidence indeed, but nevertheless, with an awareness of how Attic stage conventions worked, one can draw a few conclusions about this Sophoclean tragedy of female child-killing revenge.

First, it is evident that in the *Tereus* Sophocles used the West Greek and Attic version of the nightingale legend, making Procne the daughter of the Attic king, Pandion, and pairing her with a sister, Philomela, in the killing of a boy called Itys. Procne had been taken into the wilds by her Thracian husband, Tereus, and when she asked that her sister might be brought to her for a visit, he agreed. He went again to Athens, took Philomela as sister-guest in trust from the king, then raped and maimed her on the journey

10. Ovid's sources will have included, in addition to the Sophoclean play, a *Tereus* by another fifth-century poet, Philocles (*TrGF* 1, 24T6b), and also the dramas of Livius Andronicus and Accius. See B. Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 377–81; F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen VI–VII* (Heidelberg, 1976), pp. 117–18; H. Hofman, "Ausgesprochene und unausgesprochene," *Acta Classica* 14 (1971) 97 ff. Note the conclusion of Otis on the Ovidian version: "the masterly dramatic narrative seems to be entirely his own" (p. 410).

11. E.g., W. Calder, "Sophocles' *Tereus*," *Thracia* 2 (1974) 87–91; A. Kiso, *The Lost Sophocles* (New York, 1984), pp. 51–86; D. F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (New York and London, 1984), pp. 127–32; N. C. Hourmouziades, "Sophocles' *Tereus*," in *Studies in Honor of T. B. L. Webster*, vol. 2, ed. J. Betts, H. Hooker, and J. Green (Bristol, 1987), pp. 134–42; G. Dobrov, "The Tragic and the Comic Tereus," *AJPhil.* 114 (1993) 189–234. Calder supposes an action containing a time lapse of one year; the others assume a praxis of one day's duration which includes confrontation between Procne and Tereus, discovery of an imprisoned Philomela, her active rescue by a disguised Procne, recognition and intrigue which may be complicated by an attempted rescue for Itys—all this preceding the climax of killing, banquet, pursuit, and divine announcement of transformations.

12. The digest is entitled *Tereus* and refers almost certainly to the Sophoclean tragedy, though no poet is named; see P. Parsons, *P Oxy.* 42 (1974) 46 ff.; M. Haslam, "The Authenticity of Euripides, *Phoenissae* 1–2," *GRBS* 16 (1975) 150 n. 3; 154 n. 20; 172 n. 79; T. Gelzer, "Sophokles' *Tereus*," *Jahresbericht der Schweizerischen Geisteswiss. Gesell.*, 1976, pp. 183–92.

back to Thrace. Once returned, he reported the girl as dead.[13] That was the background situation. The fragments suggest that the play proper began with a lament by Procne, grieving over her sister's death and her own isolation and looking back (like Deianeira) to girlhood as the only happy time in a woman's life (frs. 583–84 *TrGF*). She seems to have been answered by a friendly servant or perhaps a sympathetic chorus (fr. 585).[14] Next there seems to have been a scene in which Tereus, on his way out (probably to hunt, since he was a Thracian), repeated his lies about Philomela and urged his wife to accept her present situation (swearing falsely by the Thracian Helios? fr. 582). Then someone—a bribed servant or guard? (587)—brought a gift to Procne from an unknown source: Philomela's "speaking" robe. The bit of weaving will have worked like a messenger speech, as Procne made her half-joyful, half-uncomprehending interpretation of images that told her that her sister had been attacked but was alive and near. The servant was evidently sent back to bring the weaver of the web, preparing for a third episode containing the recognition and the formation of the scheme of revenge—an intrigue which may have been inspired by the inopportune entrance of little Itys. Procne's words and Philomela's gestures probably made it clear that the villain was to be presented with his dead son in the unrecognized form of a meal, since audience knowledge of this point would be necessary for the fullest exploitation of the scenes to follow. With the plan made, the sisters will have led the child into the palace,[15] where a swift offstage killing would inspire a choral song to cover the time of cooking. Then Tereus must have entered, returning to the palace from some outdoor place, to be met by Procne, come out to waylay him with summons to a ceremonious and solitary meal. This very particular invitation had to separate the lord from his followers, and in choreography it will have been something like the parallel scene from *Agamemnon*, though here it is the pleasures of table

13. Neither the hypothesis nor Tzetzes suggests local imprisonment for Philomela; she simply arrives, as if she had been left for dead along the way. The Ovidian complications surrounding the imprisoned Philomela and her liberation could not have been staged within the Attic conventions, for nowhere does a female principal go out to perform a secular project and return, at the end of a choral ode, with project complete, as is required by the reconstructions of Calder, Kiso, Sutton, Dobrov, et al. This anomalous sequence would also mean either that the recognition took place offstage or that it was postponed until the already reunited sisters returned to the playing area, neither of which is conceivable as theater.

14. Nothing in the fragments determines the sex of the chorus (usually reported as male because of their philosophical tone), but if at the end of the play the two women must run out of the palace, through the dancers, and up one of the parodoi, their maneuver is much easier to imagine if these dancers are women.

15. On the Louvre cup by Macron, ca. 480 (Louvre G 147.1, *EAA* s.v. "Filomela," 836), Philomela is moving rapidly, holding the child, while a gesticulating Procne follows, a sword hanging from her sash.

that are offered. The vengeance itself—the presentation of the stew, its consumption, and the revelation of its ingredients—will have been reported by a domestic witness, presumably a woman, since the false celebration must have excluded all men but Tereus.[16] She told of a feast held in the presence of an unknown veiled woman,[17] and of the horrid revelation engineered most probably, as in the Thyestes case, by a show of the boy's severed head.[18] Evidently this servant concluded by remarking sententiously that the two women had invented a cure worse even than the husband's crimes (589 *TrGF*),[19] which means that Procne had denounced Tereus and revealed the identity of Philomela, even as she disclosed the nature of the feast. In the final scene, Procne and Philomela

16. It is possible that this bogus ceremony pretended to honor Dionysus, but, however that may be, it will have been like the bogus funeral in Eur. *Hel.* or the bogus purifications of Eur. *IT,* an exceptional rite explained as dictated by the heroine's native customs. Because of the Bacchic masquerade in Ovid's tale, it is almost always assumed that the action of Soph. *Tereus* took place during a festival of the Thracian Dionysus (e.g., S. Luria, "Miszellen," *Hermes* 64 [1929] 496; Dobrov, "Tragic and Comic Tereus," pp. 200 n. 29; 205). F. G. Welcker, *Die griechischen Tragödien,* vol. 1 (Bonn, 1839), p. 381, even claimed a phrase from Conon (*FGrH* 26 F 1 xxxi) as a *Tereus* fragment on the grounds that it contained the presumably Bacchic word *thriambos,* but the attribution is not generally accepted (see the objections of A. Brinkmann, "Lückenbüsser," *Rh. Mus.* 64 [1909] 479). There is in fact no hint of Bacchism in the fragments, the hypothesis, Tzetzes' account, or the vase paintings, *pace* L. Koenen, "Tereus in den Vögeln," in *Studien zur Textgeschichte und Texthritik,* ed. H. Dahlmann and R. Merkelbach (Cologne, 1959), p. 84 n. 1, who erroneously reports that M. Bieber, "Tereus," *MDAI(A)* 50 (1925) 11–18, identified the scene on the Dresden sherd as Dionysiac. (Koenen is persuaded that, in the sherd's representation, fold lines descending from Tereus' belt represent a Bacchic wool tuft.) Even A. Cazzaniga has to admit that the trieteric celebrations that appear in Ovid cannot be postulated for Sophocles; see *La saga di Itis,* vol. 1 (Milan, 1950), p. 52. The Ovidian masquerade probably came from Accius (fr. 4 *TRF*) or perhaps from Verg. *Aen.* 7.573; its employment renders unnecessary Procne's description of the banquet as a paternal rite (*Met.* 6.648), giving that detail the look of a fossil from an older source.

17. Philomela appears veiled on a Paestan fragment which shows the emergence of Tereus from the banquet hall; see Bieber, "Tereus," Taf. 2; also A. D. Trendall, *Paestan Pottery* (London, 1936), p. 88. In order not to give the purpose of the false feast away too soon, she would have to be disguised.

18. A very late reflection of this messenger speech may be found on a sarcophagus from Intercisa (Bieber, "Tereus," Abb. 1), where Tereus has knocked over a table (like Thyestes with his curse?) and seized his sword; an arm and the head of Itys fly through the air, one sister stands at center excitedly accusing (has she thrown the head?), while the other runs away, her figure balancing that of Tereus.

19. It is often said that fr. 589 *TrGF* expresses the tragedy's condemnation of the sisters' deeds, but it seems rather to be a simple closing commonplace: "Anyone in misfortune who angrily applies a medicine worse than the sickness is a doctor who does not understand suffering." The verb for what the women were doing, ἠμύναντο, often associated with revenge, is explicitly mild and unaggressive, and the speaker's disapproval is merely pragmatic: the sisters have made things worse for themselves. Meanwhile, the audience may be expected to understand that a tragic principal (like Epicurus) is not ashamed to use cures harsher than the illness he treats (fr. 278 Usener = Themistius in Arist. *Ph.* 6.1).

must have burst forth (like Hecuba and her women from the tent), and an enraged Tereus (like Polymestor) will have pursued them, carrying an axe or perhaps a bone from the stew, if we can trust a vase painter's version.[20] The women fled up one of the gangways and their victim was about to follow when a god[21] interrupted. Whoever this divinity was, he/she announced (but not with the words of fr. 581 *TrGF*)[22] that the sisters were out of his reach, changed in this moment into nightingale and swallow, and that Tereus too would be transformed, to spend the rest of time as the crested dung-nesting Hoopoe.[23]

This minimal outline of the *Tereus* action reveals the essential dramaturgical difficulty that its poet had to face. How could an audience of parents be asked to watch first a representation (albeit offstage) of the killing of Itys by his mother and aunt, and then a miraculous release for the two blood-stained women and also for the man who was the cause of their crime? And how could that release be rescued from its dangerously comic feathers? Sophocles must have been powerfully attracted, to risk the naive horror and too wondrous resolution of this tale, and something of his engagement as well as a hint of his technique can be extracted from the hypothesis written for his play. First of all he set against the ugliness of the child-slaughter, as provocation and response, two acts of equivalent ugliness: the cutting of the rape victim's tongue (ἐγλωσσοτόμησε τὴν παῖδα, *P Oxy.* 3013.19), and the

20. On the Dresden sherd from Paestum, see Bieber, "Tereus," and Trendall, *Pottery,* p. 88.

21. Welcker, *Tragödien* 1:383–84, named Hermes; Calder, "*Tereus,*" p. 88, named a Thracian Ares, which seems excessively unlikely. Given her cult association with Procne, Athena would seem to be a possibility, but at any rate this is a message of rescue and pacification, whoever speaks it.

22. This fragment was attributed to Aeschylus by Aristotle (followed by Wilamowitz, *Aischylos: Interpretationen* [Berlin, 1914], p. 283), to Sophocles by Welcker (generally accepted). It does not seem worthy of either poet in sense or style; see J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Aves* (Leiden, 1902) ad *Av.* 264, where it is suggested that this is the work of an inferior poet, possibly Philocles. The lines create a mood almost comic, with their heavily emphasized pun (ἔποψ, ἐπόπτης, line 1), their frivolous echo of the notion of decorated fabric (πεποικίλωκε, line 2), and their gross, almost Senecan reference to the belly of Tereus (line 6).

23. Tereus seems to have begun his legendary life as the human version of the aggressive hawk as contrasted, in popular imagery, with the shrinking nightingale (e.g., Hes. *Op.* 202–12, see West ad loc.; Aesch. *Supp.* 62). Aristophanes gives the impression that it was Sophocles who altered his bird form to that of the aggressive, crested hoopoe (*epops,* overseer); at any rate the comic Tereus blames his particular form on the poet (τοιαῦτα μέντοι Σοφοκλέης λυμαίνεται / ἐν ταῖς τραγῳδίαισιν ἐμέ, Ar. *Av.* 101–2). Sophocles will not, however, have brought a bird-man on stage, *pace* Dobrov, "Tragic and Comic Tereus," pp. 196–97; the Aristophanic creature is funny because he is the visible embodiment of the tragic poet's (risible) words. In later times the hoopoe was notorious for his filthy habits (Ael. *NA* 3.26; Plin. *HN* 10.29); see D'Arcy Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 54–57; R. Drew Griffith, "The Hoopoe's Name," *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 55 (1987) 59–63. Not all versions of the Procne tale included a transformation for Tereus; in the Megarian telling, he killed himself because he could not catch the women, who had fled to Athens (Paus. 1.41.9).

final cannibal feast (ὁ δὲ τὴν βορὰν ἀγνοῶν ἔφαγεν, *P Oxy.* 3013.29–30). It must be remembered that these two events, so familiar to us from Ovid, were, if not Sophoclean inventions, at least floating motifs that a storyteller or dramatist was free to take up or ignore.[24] It is clear, moreover, that Sophocles made central use of these elective atrocities, and his tragic purposes in doing so are not hard to recognize. With the maiming of Philomela, the immediate effect is both to intensify and to generalize the savagery that already marked the Thracian Tereus of folktale, making him almost a caricature of the canonical vengeance victim. The rape by itself was an outrage against the father who had trustingly given first one daughter and then another into this man's keeping, as the hypothesis notes when it says that Tereus deflowered his ward, "not caring about his pledged faith" (*P Oxy.* 3013.16).[25] Sophocles, however, has pushed his villain into a superabundance of outrage, the purpose of which was well appreciated by Pausanias. Tereus follows the rape—which was in itself "contrary to Hellenic custom," as the Traveler unnecessarily remarks—with mutilation of the girl's body, "thus drawing the women into the necessity of retaliation" (Paus. 1.5.4). With the cutting of the girl's tongue the Sophoclean Tereus gives his work of dishonor a permanent external mark, while he also attacks the entire girl, not just the part of her for which a father is responsible. This second act of violation thus fixes Tereus not just as a barbarian opposed to Greek ways but as an enemy to the whole human race—one who not only dismantles Greek marriage, breaks oaths, and insults an Attic king, but also represents mating itself as a barren cutting of female flesh.[26] And this means that the place where he rules, the Thrace where Procne will take her revenge, is a place where men are far worse than beasts.[27]

Tereus' knife-wrought horror evidently gave shape to the large design of the Sophoclean revenge, since it called for an answering use of a knife upon innocent flesh in the retaliation, and also for an answering use of the villain's tongue in the tasting of his punishment. The poet's most professional use of the severed tongue, however, is found in the ingenious inner plot where Philomela's speechlessness first stops retaliation by blocking any disclosure of the initial outrage,[28] then releases it in a scene-sequence one longs to see played—first the "reading" of the woven gift,[29] then the pitying, passionate reunion of an articulate sister with one who makes only animal sounds. (Aside from the two voices and the necessity for extreme gestures there will have been the spectacle, for surely Philomela had a special mask that made her clipped tongue somehow visible, like Lavinia's bloody stumps.) After which will have come a unique scene of plotting in which an unspeakable crime is urged by a crime victim who cannot speak. Such were the superb scenic effects made possible by the shorn tongue and the woven denunciation, but Sophocles made another more subtle use of them in his implied definition of the women who would soon, behind the scenes, carve up a little boy and feed him to his father.

The tongue was presumably a woman's most dangerous part, her one powerful member. Think of Hesiod on the subject of Pandora's voice, which collaborated with her falsehood, her wily arguments, and her thievish character (*Op.* 78–80). Think of Electra's tongue, honed to be an instrument of harm (Soph. *El.*), and Iphigeneia's that had to be forcibly stopped from cursing (Aesch. *Ag.* 235–38).[30] Tereus evidently supposed that, raped and with her tongue cut out, Philomela would be rendered impotent, would be castrated as far as a woman could be. She would be without the ability to testify even in private, and she would also be robbed of her sex (i.e., her potential of maternity) since, as a deformed creature, she could never be married. The Sophoclean Tereus had, however, forgotten one important fact which was that Philomela, like Pandora and all other women, was doubly equipped. As a man had sword as well as penis, so a woman had shuttle as well as tongue, and this implement—the gift of Athena Ergane (Hes. *Op.* 63–64)[31]—allowed her to work, to make, and so to communicate. The Greek shuttle was likened to a bird because it flew, because it sang, and

24. West, ad Hes. *Op.* 568, seems to assume that the swallow-sister had always been thought of as maimed ("to the Greeks she was Philomela with tongue cut out"), but note Aesch. *Ag.* 1050–51, where to speak χελιδόνος δίκην is to use a barbarian language, not to be unable to speak. The motif is missing in the versions of Hyginus (*Fab.* 189) and Apollodorus (3.14.8).

25. The agreement, with exchange of oaths (πιστά, 16) will have been like that between Oedipus and Theseus at the end of Soph. *OC* 1632–34 and 1637, when Theseus is sworn into taking solemn charge of Antigone and Ismene. Thracians, according to one proverb, do not understand oaths; barbarians, according to another, are not satisfied with one wife (Achilles Tatius 5.5.2).

26. *Suda*, s.v. "Chelidon" lists the bird-name of Philomela as a slang term for female sexual parts, presumably because both were "cut" and had no "tongue."

27. In later thinking this action also marked Tereus as a tyrant: all are without speech under a tyrant (Ant. Lib. *Met.* 11).

28. Here and in Eur. *Hec.* are found the first appearances of the later vengeance twist, the initial crime that has been hidden and must be discovered by the avenger in the course of the drama; cf., e.g., *Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*.

29. The notion that the reading of a text can bring its author to the reader (found at Pl. *Phdr.* 228) is here given scenic form. For the identification of web with text, cf. *Anth. Pal.* 9.372, where the cicada caught in a spider's web figures the song captive in the text, to be liberated by a singer's voice.

30. One might add Sappho's which, powerless, proves that she is near death (31 Voigt).

31. Hes. *Op.* 63–64; according to local tradition it was Procne who brought the first statue of Athena Ergane to Daulis (Paus. 10.4.8). For the conventional opposition of shuttle to weapons, cf. Eur. *Mel.* fr. 522 *TGF*.

because in the house of an industrious woman it marked the dawn.[32] And so the Sophoclean Philomela, the girl who would become a swallow, used this musical tool as an alternate tongue and wove her recent history into a fabric (δι' ὕφους ἐμήνυσε, *P Oxy.* 1303.23) or, as Shakespeare had it, "in a tedious sampler sewed her mind" (*Titus Andronicus* 2.4.38). She made a web that was both text (γράμματα, schol. Ar. *Av.* 212.6) and song (ἡ τῆς κερκίδος φωνή, Arist. *Poet.* 1454b)[33] and got it into Procne's hands, where it spoke like a messenger about a lost sister, a criminal husband, and a father's ruined honor.[34] All of which means that the violent female revenge treated in the *Tereus* was made to grow directly from a denunciation which, as the work of her shuttle, represented the best and most "Athenian" side of this unfortunate Attic princess.[35] What is more, it expressed the aspect of women that in the best cases rendered these Pandora-like creatures valuable as wives—their potential for chaste[36] and silent work. Other tragedies have dealt with women who used woven stuffs to destroy manifestly virtuous heroes, but in the Sophoclean *Tereus* this peculiarly feminine skill denounced a villain whose crimes would otherwise have been hidden. Indeed, Philomela's visual representation of truth worked much like a play-

32. At *Anth. Pal.* 6.160, Telesilla dedicates her shuttle: one that with the swallow in the morning sings to Athena, whose own shuttle is a halcyon (cf. Ar. *Ran.* 1315–16, where halcyons are weaving a song). A similar dedication in 6.247 is of κερκίδας ὀρθολάλοισι χελίδοσιν εἰκελοφώνους; cf. 6.174.

33. For the "song" of the shuttle, cf. Soph. fr. 804 *TrGF;* Eur. fr. 523 *TGF.* Aristotle characteristically classifies Philomela's bit of weaving among the less good recognition tokens because it is manufactured instead of being congenital (like a birthmark). One wonders if he had seen the play performed. More generally on the "weaving" of texts, see J. Scheid and J. Svenbro, *Le métier de Zeus* (Paris, 1994), pp. 119–62.

34. It is not clear whether Philomela's threads are supposed to have made pictures or letters (as at Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.8), nor does it matter. This combined denunciation and recognition token is unique in surviving tragedy; closest to it is the prepared letter that triggers recognition in Eur. *IT* 725 ff., which is coupled with a remembered bit of tapestry as official token (814 ff.). Somewhat similar is the piece of writing that makes a false denunciation at Eur. *Hipp.* 856 ff. The satyrs of Sophocles' *Amphiaraos* danced out the alphabet (fr. 121 *TrGF*), but we don't know why.

35. Compare the funerary praise of a woman as *ergatis* (C. W. Clairmont, *Gravestone and Epigram* [Mainz, 1970], no. 49, p. 126). P. Brulé, *La fille d'Athènes* (Paris, 1987), p. 343, reports this as accounting for 8 percent of such praise, a figure that defies verification.

36. At *Anth. Pal.* 6.47, Bitto, about to turn prostitute, dedicates the shuttle of her respectable life to Athena; at 6.285 the future prostitute burns her weaving implements because she will no longer be "slave to her shuttle"; cf. 288. The wedge-shaped shuttle was so closely associated with femininity that it could stand for female parts at Ar. *Av.* 831: what sort of city has both a goddess who wears armor and a Cleisthenes with a *kerkis*? (The straight version of this world-upside-down trope is found at Eur. fr. 522 *TGF.*) The shuttle that Philomela used against Tereus thus represented both of her injured parts.

within-the-play, for it was a bit of *poiesis* that inspired its special spectator with a new emotion.

The maiming of Philomela thus paradoxically resulted in a work of art around which Sophocles made his tragedy of *Tereus,* but what of the cannibal feast?[37] Procne's legendary choice of father's honor even over son's life will have been visually conveyed in the moment that she and her sister laid hands on the boy and pushed him off stage. A minimal revenge would demand further only that the body should be shown to Tereus, so that he could recognize it, suffer, and know who had in this grisly way repaid his breach of faith. And meanwhile what would seem to be a maximum of horror would be achieved in the report of the act of killing, as the painter of the Munich kylix so well understood when he pointed the maternal sword directly into the throat of a squirming Itys.[38] Sophocles could have made a Tereus play without the nauseous meal; it is a motif of choice,[39] which means that it must have been the source of important tragic effects. But what effects exactly? When he put Itys on his father's table, did their poet, as many believe, label Procne and Philomela as a pair of fiendish monsters and the female equivalents of Seneca's Atreus?

As far as we know, cannibalism in fifth-century Athens was more strongly associated with the avenger's hunger for violence than with a possible mode of punishment. Homer had made his Hecuba long to devour Achilles' liver (*Il.* 24.212), while Achilles had wished to chop the meat from Hector's bones and eat it raw (*Il.* 22.346, an urge that Richard the Third shared, except that he wanted his enemy's heart "panting hot with salt").[40] In the *Tereus,* by contrast, the meal is not enjoyed in fantasy by the avenger but

37. W. Burkert believes that the cannibalism of the *Tereus* represents the original element of a myth that reflected a Dionysian Agriona rite and described "unspeakable night-time rituals" that included the eating of human flesh (*Homo Necans* [Berkeley, 1972], pp. 179–85). He supposes a mythic model parallel to that of the Minyads: women overdevoted to hearth and Hera are maddened and driven into an opposite overdevotion to Dionysus that ends in bird transformations. It must be noted, however, that in the Sophoclean version the killing and eating of Itys is a specifically indoor daytime domestic event which includes cooking; furthermore, the household art of weaving, instead of being exaggerated and set over against this activity, signals its beginning. Burkert's interpretation must overlook the fact that Procne's mythic cipher, the nightingale, is consistently associated with grief and song (e.g., Aesch. *Supp.* 64; *Ag.* 1144–45; Soph. *El.* 148–49; *Aj.* 627–30; Eur. *HF* 1021; *Hec.* 337; *Hel.* 1110, etc.), not with madness or cannibalism. The nightingale was messenger of spring (Sappho 135 Voigt) and Zeus' messenger (Soph. *El.* 150); she was also an emblem for sister-love and for the healing need to work (Pl. *Phd.* 85a)—a most un-Dionysiac significance.

38. *ARV* 1:456; Harrison, "Itys and Aedon," fig. 1.

39. The cannibal meal had already been associated with the tale, as witness Hes. fr. 312 M-W, but it was not necessary to the mechanics of this plot.

40. At *Anth. Pal.* 9.519.3–4, Alcaeus of Messene longs to drink Philip's brains from his skull.

forced in actuality upon his victim, and it is not enemy flesh that is eaten but that of the dearest of friends. According to this design, the victim's repayment is a gory parody of triumph and pleasure, a source of invincible uncleanness, and the worst conceivable human experience.[41] (The most notorious expression of the gods' hatred of such an action came in the tale of Tydeus, who lost his chance at immortality by devouring Melanippus' brains.) The tyrant was a figurative cannibal (Alc. 70.7, 129.23 Voigt), while monsters such as the Cyclopes and the Laestrygonians, distant peoples like the Scythians and the Massagetae (Hdt. 4.34; 1.216),[42] were thought to be actual man-eaters. Consequently, on the most obvious level, when the sisters force Tereus to swallow human flesh they make him act like what he is, a wild man from the outer regions.[43] More specifically the meal is appropriate to one guilty of incest,[44] because eating human meat stands to acceptable dining much as raping your sister-in-law does to acceptable mating: cannibalism is a kind of dietary incest.[45] The consumption of a son, moreover, has a terrible suitability in the case of Tereus, the oath-breaker and author of sexual violence, because with this action he destroys himself and his progeny, eating up his chance to have grandsons. He, the cutter of Philomela's tongue, performs a kind of self-castration by devouring what would have given him futurity.[46] And finally, with this feast Procne gives

41. So, at Callim. fr. 530, there is the request that an enemy should take part in a cannibal feast; similarly in Near Eastern treaty curses he who breaks faith is to eat the flesh of his son or daughter.

42. On the Scythians, see too Strabo 4.5.2; Plin. *HN* 7.2. Herodotus reports cannibalism also among the Anthropophagoi (1.18.106), the Essedonians (4.26), the Kalati (3.38), and the Padei (3.99). The cannibal meal, used as a test of the immortals (as in the Tantalos story), is a separate motif and one that evidently could bear a comic treatment if it is true that the feast of Lycaon was the subject of the Aeschylean satyr play, *Leon;* see Sutton, *Lost Sophocles,* pp. 23–24.

43. Hades of course was the ultimate cannibal (Soph. *El.* 543). Pausanias finds Tereus distinguished at Daulis as the first inventor of "pollution at table" (10.4.8), this being the same place that knew Procne as the bringer of Athena, but there is no way to gauge how early or late this polarization entered the story.

44. At Pl. *Resp.* 9.571c–d, incest, rape, and parricide are the savage appetites of the soul given free rein in sleep and in the tyrant's behavior, which is also a form of eating one's children (10.619b–c). Strabo describes the Irish as man-eaters and incestuous; see M. Detienne, *Dionysos Slain* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 58–59. For other cultures, see D. Labley, "Incest and Cannibalism," *Journal of Polynesian Society* 85 (1976) 171–79, and more generally, P. Brown and D. Tuzin, eds., *The Ethnography of Cannibalism* (Washington, D.C., 1983).

45. The connection between sibling in-law incest and cannibalism is found again in Atreus' vengeance on Thyestes (as at Aesch. *Ag.* 1191–93) which was well known to Attic theatergoers. Plato (*Leg.* 838c) speaks of the many tragedies of Thyestes staged, and we know of at least eight with this title, including one by Sophocles, though it seems to have dealt with the exile's post-banquet Sikyonian meeting with his unrecognized daughter, Pelopeia.

46. The suggestion is deepened if Itys was decapitated and his head used in the identification. Ovid's Procne considers an actual castration as a means of revenge (*Met.* 6.616).

back to her faithless husband the product of her own misplaced faith, returning her son to his source.

We cannot know exactly what points of justice the Sophoclean heroines saw in their vengeance design, for these will have been brought out in the half-spoken, half-mimed scene in which they took their decision. Nevertheless one effect of the cannibal meal is certain, and it will have been crucial to the play's close. A Tereus punished only by the murder of his son would have rushed from the palace as a man like us—a knife-wielding incestuous rapist but a human being all the same, and one whose visible anger and grief would be available to our understanding, perhaps even to our pity. And on the other hand, as a more or less ordinary man who had been deprived of a son in repayment for savagery and broken faith, this justly punished vengeance victim would have been of no interest to the daimonic world. Too close to us, too far from the gods, such a figure could hardly have been the object of a major miracle of transformation. The Sophoclean Tereus, by contrast—as a man who has just dined on his son's flesh—has a colossal negative stature when he bursts out of the palace.[47] He provokes disgust and revulsion in the audience, but also awe, because of his incomparable internal pollution. And at the same time he compels the attention of the gods because he has broken a primary tabu sanctioned by Zeus (Hes. *Op.* 276–78). A creature so unclean cannot be dealt with by men, and so, while the women are transformed that they may escape his rage, he is exiled from the human species because he is beyond purification.

It was Procne, however, who was the principal of this tragedy, a woman who not only killed her son but used his corpse in this unspeakably ugly outrage. Both the killing and the cooking must have been organized by the sister who could speak and who was mistress of the household, and according to every literary and graphic witness it was Procne who actually attacked the boy. Finally, it will have been she who played the scene in which the royal victim was inveigled with promises of pomps and solemnities into the place of revenge. This entire responsibility for son-killing and cannibal feast has caused the few critics who write about her to assume that Procne was proposed as the surpassingly hideous principal of a tragedy that repudiated her.[48] The poet, they say, has proved that the vengeance wish, once harbored, is so virulent a poison that it can deprave even an Attic princess, rendering her more savage than a Thracian brute.

47. Contrast the Polymestor of Eur. *Hec.*, who is not to be the subject of any miracle: he is labeled as a savage by his wish to be a cannibal, but he is not permitted the exalted aberration of the actual practice.

48. See, e.g., Dobrov, "Tragic and Comic Tereus," p. 213. The twentieth-century response is much like that of John Bereblock, who in 1566 watched a production at Oxford of a play called *Progne:* "It is wonderful how she longed to seek vengeance for the blood of her sister. She goes about therefore to avenge wrongs with wrongs, and injuries with injuries; nor is it at all

This presumed condemnation of revenge—the same that is supposed to inhere in the Euripidean *Hecuba*—is a simple impossibility. No drama played at the city festival could have used the daughters of Pandion to represent depravity for the plain reason that Procne and Philomela were the heroine sponsors of the Pandionid tribe, roughly one-tenth of the watching audience. What is more, it was precisely this Thracian exploit that caused the two princesses to be cherished, as we know from a funeral speech attributed to Demosthenes (60.28). Members of their tribe went off courageously to war, ready to risk all, according to the orator, "because they held before themselves the example of Procne and Philomela, the daughters of Pandion, and remembered how they avenged themselves upon Tereus because of the outrage he had offered them. Pandionids hold that life is not worth living if they cannot show a spirit that is akin to these women's spirit, when an outrage is given to Greece." The speaker, indeed, is ready to compare the two sisters' punishment of Tereus to the self-sacrifice of the Hyacinthides, to Acamas' exploits at Troy, and to Theseus' establishment of *isagoria* among his fellow citizens (60.28). Pandion, moreover, was the only eponymous hero to be honored not just in his own tribe but in an all-city festival, the Pandia,[49] and Procne shared in this general regard. Sometime in the late 430s a more-than-life-sized statue was put up so that the whole of Athens could admire her as she strode along at the northeast corner of the Parthenon, little Itys clinging to her knee.[50] She was a princess who had spent what was dearer than life itself, her son, in order to harm her father's and the city's enemy.

The revenge deed of Sophocles' *Tereus*, a contest play roughly contemporary with Procne's statue,[51] must have been intended and understood as one in which Athenians struck back against foreign injury. In it a not unsympathetic female principal will have been forced to deny her own nature in obedience to a patriarchal imperative stronger even than that of the womb.[52] This does not, however, mean that the poet must have romanticized or softened his heroine, nor does he seem to have delivered a crowd-pleasing patriotic message.[53] The play's remnants suggest rather that in it Sophocles represented an inner transformation, in its way as strange as the final birdification, as a passive, isolated, Deianeira-like wife was changed into an indignant daughter of Pandion. And whereas it was a god who worked the feathered metamorphosis, the active forces in this psychic change were pity for the suffering of a royal sister, and anger at the betrayal of a father. These other-centered emotions proved to be stronger even than mother love, and according to Sophocles' showing they were also detached and pure because they were inspired by a work of art. Procne's revenge impulse was excited by a sister's dishonor and pain,[54] as these were represented in a tapestry that was both spectacle and song.

reverent to add crimes to crimes already committed. . . . And that play was a notable portrayal of mankind in its evil deeds, and was for the spectators, as it were, a clear moral of all those who indulge too much either in love or wrath" (trans. W. Y. Durand, *"Palaemon and Arcyte, Progne,"* *PMLA* 20 (1905) 502–28, esp. 515–16).

49. E. Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica*, *BICS* Suppl. 57 (London, 1989), p. 81; for his cult as tribal hero, ibid., 191–92. On the glory of the Pandionids, see J. E. Harrison, *Mythology and Monuments* (London, 1890), p. lxxxviii.

50. G. P. Stevens, "The Northeast Corner," *Hesp.* 15 (1946) 10–11; H. Knell, *BSA* Suppl. 3 (1966) 89–92; M. Robertson, *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 286.

51. It is usually dated ca. 430; it must be pre-414 (Ar. *Av.*).

52. This is why the Sophoclean Ajax says that Procne may regard Itys' death as honorable, whereas his own mother will be ashamed of his (Soph. *Aj.* 627–30). The same attitude is reflected in Euripides' phrase about Procne's "slaughter-sacrifice to the Muses" (*HF* 1021–22), though its overt meaning is simply that she provided a subject for song.

53. Such a message may have been delicately suggested by Philomela's part in the reprisal, however, since it figures the triumph of the arts of Athens, as represented by weaving (of the "speaking robe," and by extension of Athena's peplos), over aggressive savagery.

54. In that a kin-recognition inaugurates new passions that respond to the sufferings of another, and a consequent resolve built upon these, Procne will have been similar to the Sophoclean Orestes.

SATHER CLASSICAL LECTURES

Volume Sixty-Two

Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy

Anne Pippin Burnett

1998

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

BERKELEY · LOS ANGELES · LONDON