The Nightingale's Lament and Itys' Identity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The story of the nightingale has many versions, but these can be reduced to two plots from which the others grow. In the first, Aedon, married to Zethus, kills her son by accident. She intends to kill the oldest son of Niobe, who is married to the brother of Aedon's husband. In the second version, Procne kills her son to avenge the rape of her sister, Philomela, at the hands of Procne's own husband. The stories end in the same way: both mothers are transformed into a nightingale and lament their son Itys, singing his name eternally. In most versions of the story, Itys' identity is defined by the nightingale's lament. Ovid, however, suppresses the lament. The effect of this is to give Itys and his mother, Procne, identities that are separate from the nightingale's lament, and to give Itys a voice of his own.

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Introduction

The nightingale's lament is a song of inconsolable grief, an eternity of remorse for an unpardonable crime. Greek mythology is replete with tales in which mothers kill their children, or children are fed to a parent. Procne's story uniquely features both. She kills her son, Itys, and feeds him to his father. In Ovid's version, this is the ultimate form of revenge. She considers other options, all relating closely to what Tereus had done to her sister, Philomela. Patricia Salzman-Mitchell points out that these punishments are related to Tereus' masculine power over the women: mutilation of his tongue, eyes, or genitals.[1] These three elements represent his speech, of which he deprived Philomela; his sight, which objectified her and turned her into a victim of the male gaze; and his male sexuality, with which he assaulted her. Here, Itys becomes a surrogate Tereus. His identity as the inheritor of Tereus' bloodline is a matter of great importance in this story of vengeance. In previous versions of the nightingale myth, Itys is present only in connection with his death or the nightingale's lament. Only Ovid presents him separately, with his own identity.

Identity in general is, in fact, a crux of this myth. Who is the nightingale, and what are her relations to the other characters in the story? There are two central versions, each with its own variants, and each presents an entirely different set of relationships. The Ovidian version operates on a framework of disrupted order (*omnia turbasti*, Ovid, *Met.* 6.537), the Homeric version on a frame of a mother's folly (δι᾽ ἀφραδίας Homer, *Odyssey* 19.523). The two threads

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[1] Patricia B. Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 146.

have very little to do with each other, other than the simple fact that a mother kills her son, and his name is Itys or Itylos.

The earlier version recorded by Homer, Pherecydes, and several vase paintings, shows a pattern that involves an "other woman." Martín Rodríguez places the nightingale Aedon in this category with Ino and Themisto (who, each as a second wife, tries to favor her own children's lineage over that of her rival's), Phaedra (also a second wife, but tries to seduce her husband's son), and Hera and Medea (who try to destroy the other woman and her children after they are superseded).[2]

The nightingale Aedon finds herself in a similar position. Her relationships are laid out in Figure 1. There are two supposedly healthy marriages presented in the genealogy: Aedon has married Zethos, while Niobe has married his brother Amphion. Both have children with their respective husbands, and raise them together. Aedon, jealous of Niobe for having so many more children, tries to kill Niobe's oldest son and kills her own by accident. Frontisi Ducroux points out that this version is quite similar to the Tom Thumb fairy tale, in which Tom Thumb switches the hats of his brothers with those of an ogre's children so that the ogre kills his own children by mistake instead of Tom Thumb and his brothers.[3] Aedon does not intend to kill her own child; it is an accident.

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[2] Antonio María Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela : génesis, sentido y comentario de la versión ovidiana del mito* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Vicerrectorado de Investigación, 2002), 38.

[3] Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *L'homme-cerf et la femme-araignée* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 225.
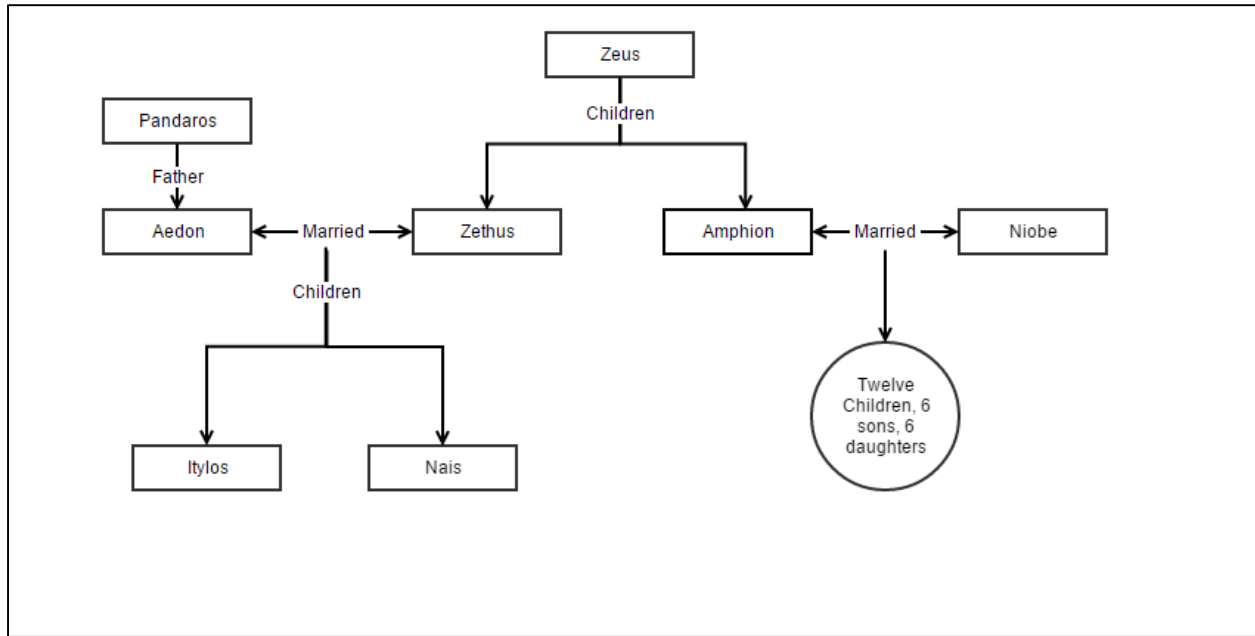
Figure 1: Genealogy of Aedon (Homer and Pherecydes)

In the Sophoclean version, Procne's motivation is entirely different: her murder of Itys is quite purposeful, and it is a clear result of the perversion of the family structure. Figure 2 shows the genealogy of Procne, Philomela, Tereus, and Itys. There is an element of the "other woman" in this version as well, though that is hardly the motivation for killing Itys. Philomela fears her sister's anger (*Met.* 6.605-609), but it is made clear that she has nothing to fear. The sibling relationship outweighs the marital relationship. This does not seem to be particularly common with women like Procne, who have married foreign men, or are foreign women. Ariadne, for instance, betrays her father to help Theseus defeat the Minotaur. Medea kills her brother Absyrtus and dismembers him to help her new husband escape. Yet that very foreignness may influence this loyalty. Procne is parallel to Medea, and yet opposite. Like Medea, she kills her child in revenge against her husband. Unlike Medea, she is a Greek woman who marries a

foreigner, not a foreigner marrying a Greek man. To accomplish her goal, Medea must cut ties

with her family; Procne needs only to recall them.
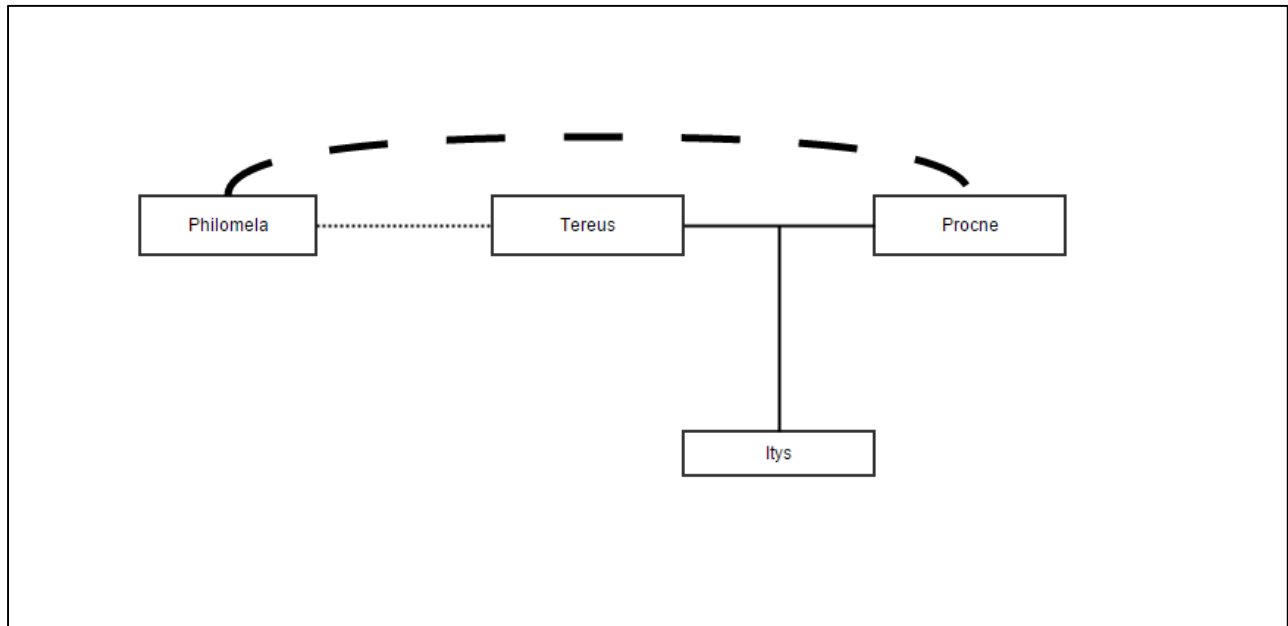
Figure 2: Family Dynamic of Procne, Tereus, Philomela, and Itys (Ovid)

Althaea, therefore, is perhaps the only true parallel, and Ovid certainly engages with this:

her speech when she debates killing her own son mirrors Procne's own inner debate. Procne asks

"How can he call me mother, why does she not call me sister?" (*quam vocat hic matrem, cur non

vocat illa sororem* Ovid, *Met.* 6.633). The two family members are standing in front of her, one

who can speak and therefore verbally claim his relationship to her, the other who cannot.

Furthermore, Philomela thinks of herself as a *paelex* now (Ovid *Met.* 6.537), not a sister. Tereus

has not only committed an act of horrific violence, but has disrupted Procne's relationship with

her sister. The evidence of that—Philomela's silence in contrast to Itys' *blanditias* (6.632) is what convinces Procne to kill her child.

Althaea, however, is alone, and must convince herself: *pugnat materque sororque, et diversa trahunt unum duo nomina pectus* (Ovid *Met.* 8.463-4). "Both the mother and the sister struggle, and the two divided names drag at her one heart." Althaea, like Procne, is caught between avenging her sibling and preserving her child's life, but her sibling and son are not standing before her. Rather, a surrogate for her son—the wood that represents his life—and her brother's absence are parallel with Itys and Philomela standing before Procne. The crime that has taken place is not physically present, and in fact it is quite different from the crime Tereus committed.

Distortions of the family are not at the root of the murder, nor is Meleager an innocent victim. Figure 3 shows a simplified version of Althaea's family tree. Like Procne, she is married and has children (though only Meleager is shown). Furthermore, it is not her husband who commits violence against a sibling, but her son. In a sense, Althaea has a different kind of debate: a life for a life, not merely family ties. Tereus, however, distorts his legitimate marriage with the rape of Philomela. Procne's connections to her family members drive her murder of Itys.
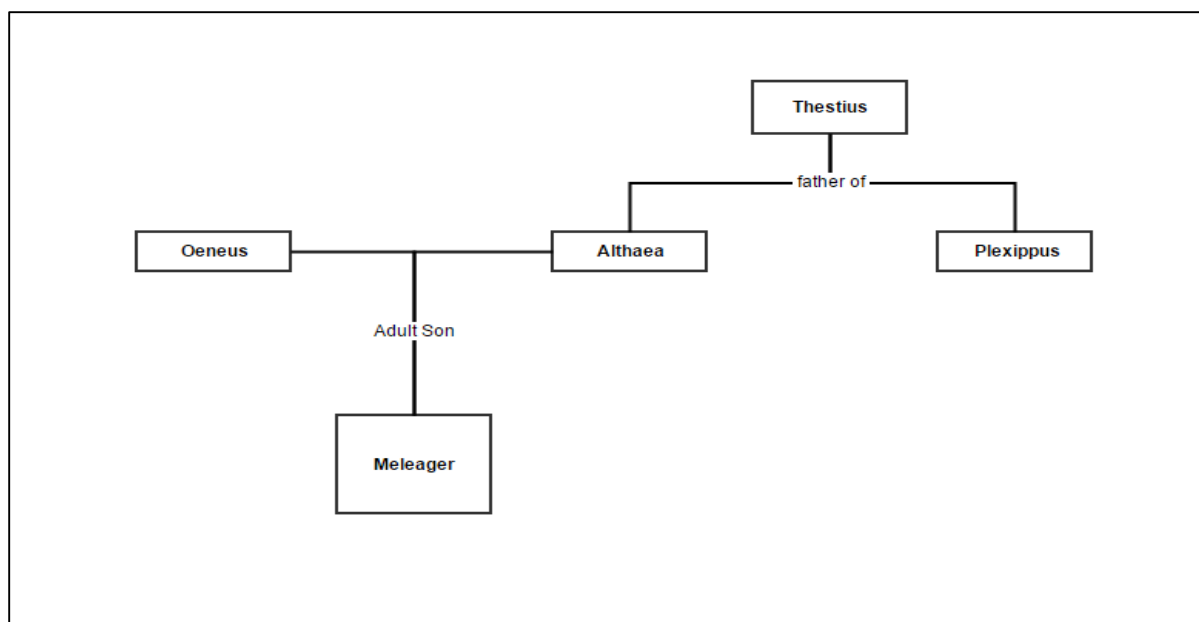
Figure 3: Althaea's family tree (simplified)

That murder, regardless of its reason, prompts the key aspect of the nightingale's mythology. After the mother kills her son, she is metamorphosed into a nightingale and sings her son's name in eternal mourning. This aspect is well known to authors across genres and centuries, appearing in Homer's *Odyssey*, in Athenian tragedy and comedy, in Hellenistic poetry, and in the poetry of Roman elegists.[4] The nightingale, whether she has a sister or not, whether her husband's name is Tereus or Zethus, whether she is Aedon, Procne, or Metis,[5] is inextricably tied to her song—and that song is her son's name.

That name, and the repetition of that name, are the primary source of Itys' identity. In general, Itys as a character is unremarked 1upon. In fact, he is rarely given an identity at all. Later authors have found something to turn the now-deceased child into: Maurus Servius

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[4] See D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1895), for a complete list of references to the nightingale and her story.

[5] Only in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* does her name appear as Metis (Μήτιδος οἰκτρᾶς ἀλόχου, 61).

Honoratus, in his commentary on Vergil's *Eclogues*, ends the tale with *omnes in aves mutati*

sunt: Tereus in upupam, Itys in fassam, Procne in hirundinem, Philomela in lusciniam (Servius,

In Vergilii Bucolicon Librum 6.78.15).[6] "All were turned into birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Itys

into a woodpigeon,[7] Procne into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale." This is not the case in

Ovid's version (nor in the brief reference in Vergil's *Eclogues*, it should be noted); in fact, Itys is

not transformed in any of the early works. His identity is solely connected to his short existence

as the child of the nightingale and her husband, and his mother's lament. Little about his identity

is specified in any version, but it is a trigger for his mother's folly or vengeance, and then her

song.

      In this paper, I will explore the implications of Itys' identity and his connection to the

nightingale's song. Ovid's version of the tale is unique in that it never explicitly defines which

sister becomes which bird, nor does it refer to the nightingale's song in any way. I intend to show

that, while Itys' identity is tied to and defined by the nightingale's lament in most versions of the

myth, Ovid creates identities for Itys and Procne that are distinguished from the lament. Procne

becomes the barbarian queen who destroys a royal household, and Itys becomes a victim who,

far from silent, actively tries to prevent his own slaughter.

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[6] *fassa* is a rare word in Latin, borrowed from the Greek φάσσα, wood-pigeon.
[7] I leave aside the matter of the logic of Itys' transformation after he has been killed and eaten by his father.

Chapter 1: From Aedon to Procne

Versions of the Nightingale Myth

There are myriad references to the nightingale in Greek and Roman literature, but few complete versions. Some of the most complete, extant versions we have come from Homer, the scholiasts on Pherecydes, the fragments and hypothesis of Sophocles' *Tereus*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hyginus' *Fabulae*, Pausanias, and Marcus Servius Honoratus' *Commentary on the Eclogues of Virgil*. Most of these follow the Sophoclean version, which eventually overtakes the Aedon version in the literature. In the versions that exist before Ovid's retelling, Procne/Aedon's lament functions as the identity of Itys, who does not truly exist outside it. The earliest extant reference is presented in Homer's *Odyssey* as part of a simile comparing the grief of Penelope to that of Aedon, the nightingale.[8] It immediately offers a connection between the child, Itys (here Itylos), and the nightingale:

> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτε Πανδαρέου κούρη, χλωρηῒς ἀηδών,
> καλὸν ἀείδησιν ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο,
> δενδρέων ἐν πετάλοισι καθεζομένη πυκινοῖσιν,
> ἥ τε θαμὰ τρωπῶσα χέει πολυηχέα φωνήν,
> παῖδ᾽ ὀλοφυρομένη Ἴτυλον φίλον, ὅν ποτε χαλκῷ
> κτεῖνε δι᾽ ἀφραδίας, κοῦρον Ζήθοιο ἄνακτος,
> ὣς καὶ ἐμοὶ δίχα θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα (Homer Od. 19.518-524).

> Just as when the daughter of Pandareos, the pale-green nightingale,
> Sings the fresh beauty of the beginning spring,
> Sitting in the thick leaves of trees,
> And often modulating, pours out her many-toned voice
> Lamenting her dear son Itylos, whom once with bronze
> She slew through thoughtlessness, the son of Lord Zethos.
> So also my heart urges me in two directions, here and there.[9]

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[8] See Katz Anhalt (2001-2002) and Levaniouk (2008) for a full discussion of Penelope and the Aedon simile.
[9] Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

While this abbreviated version of the tale does not describe the lament itself, it does establish the

central feature of every version of the nightingale myth: the nightingale sings eternally because

she killed her son. The reason is vaguely described as δι᾽ ἀφραδίας, "folly" or "thoughtlessness,"

and tells nothing of the details in the story. Cazzaniga, in fact, suggests that Homer did not know

more than what he includes here,[10] though that may be oversimplifying the matter. More likely,

the audience would have known this story, and it was therefore unnecessary to give more

information. Furthermore, this Homeric version did not completely disappear when the alternate

version became popularized by Sophocles' play, though it does seem to disappear from the

extant literature with the exception of Pherecydes' text. Images of Aedon's slaying of Itys have

been identified on a variety of vase paintings,[11] and a later version recorded by Antoninus

Liberalis uses the names Aedon and Chelidon. The plot of the story, however, is much closer to

the Sophoclean version than to the Homeric version.

  Nonetheless, those versions—as well as the many short references in Greek and Latin

literature—preserve several key qualities. The brief version presented by Homer introduces some

of these details, namely her association with the spring season and her song, that become

canonical in the symbolism of the nightingale. She is the χλωρηῒς ἀηδών, the "pale-green" or

"greenwood" nightingale. Her connection with springtime is also associated with the swallow,

who is identified by an alternative version of the myth as the nightingale's sister.[12] Nonetheless,

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[10] I. Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana, I : La tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana da Omero a Nonno Panopolitano* (Milano-Varese: Ed. Cisalpino, 1950), 6.

[11] For a full discussion of these images, see Jennifer R. March, "Vases and Tragic Drama : Euripides' « Medea » and Sophocles' Lost « Tereus »," in *Word and Image in Ancient Greece*, 2000, 119–39.

[12] The earliest extant version of this story is Sophocles' *Tereus*, though Hesiod writes that the swallow is the daughter of Pandion, and a harbinger of spring (τὸν δὲ μέτ᾽ ὀρθογόη Πανδιονὶς ὦρτο χελιδὼν/ἐς φάος ἀνθρώποις, ἔαρος νέον ἱσταμένοιο, Hes. *Works and Days*, 568-9). This association seems to become more defined once the Roman tradition switches the transformations of the sisters. Ovid himself associates Procne as the swallow with the coming of spring in his *Fasti*: (*Fallimur, an veris praenuntia venit hirundo,/ nec metuit ne qua versa recurrat hiems?/ saepe tamen, Procne, nimium properasse quereris,/ virque tuo Tereus frigore laetus erit*, Ovid *Fasti* 2.853-6)

the association remains: in that version of the myth, the nightingale dwells in the woods while the swallow stays in the urban areas. This is also Ovid's sole distinction between the transformation of the sisters: *quarum petit altera silvas,/ altera tecta subit* (Ovid *Met.* 6.668-669). He does not specify which sister flies to the woods and which stays in the urban areas, and for his purposes in this story, it does not seem to matter.[13] The association with the murder remains with both sisters, and there is no mention of Procne as a bird lamenting her actions.

The nightingale's quality as a singer (χέει πολυηχέα φωνήν), nonetheless, survives, though Ovid does not mention it. Pliny's *Natural History* (10.43) discusses it at length, and completely divorces the bird from the myth. It survives beyond the classical period as well, long after the Greek tradition of the sister's transformations was lost. For instance, Chaucer's "nightingale upon a cedar green/Under the chamber window where [Criseyde] lay/ Sang out loudly against the moony sheen" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, 2.132). Chaucer follows the Roman tradition, though his nightingale's song is repurposed as "a lay of love" (2.132).[14] Nightingales still appear as symbols of song in formal laments as well. Margaret Alexiou quotes a lament from the sixteenth century in which the subject is compared to several birds, including a swallow and a nightingale: Χελιδόνι ἡ γλῶσσα του, ἀηδόνι ἡ φωνή του, παγώνι ἡ μορφή του: "His tongue a swallow, his voice a nightingale, his form a peacock…"[15] Here the allusion is undoubtedly to the nightingale as a singer, though not necessarily a mourner.

These qualities appear in most references to the nightingale and her lament, or the associated swallow. Nevertheless, despite the widely different stories, each version has the

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[13] The Greek tradition typically makes Procne the nightingale and Philomela the swallow; the Roman tradition typically reverses the transformations.

[14] Procne, Tereus, and Philomela all appear at different points throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, yet the intertextuality and his declaration that this is a "lay of love" requires an analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper.

[15] Valetas 1.88-9, qtd. and translated in Margaret Alexiou, Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, and Panagiotis Roilos, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 2nd ed, Greek Studies (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 185–6.

singular commonality of the murder of the child Itys. When the relationships between the characters in the stories are mapped out, Itys is at the core, connecting the two versions (see Figure 4). It is likely, as Cazzaniga, Halliday, and Rodríguez suggest, that the different versions are linked to different places.[16] Itys' name seems to be the common element, but different regions of Greece associated different stories with that name.[17] Ovid's version transplants a woman from Athens to Thrace, where the main action of the story takes place. Cazzaniga and Martín Rodríguez associate the early Homeric version and the Pherecydean version with Thebes,[18] a city typically associated with Athenian tragedy. Martín Rodríguez traces the names of the parents to the locations with which the stories are associated: Zethus was a local hero of Boeotia, and Tereus belongs to Megara, where Pausanias places the story.[19] Martín Rodríguez and Cazzaniga also cite a version attributed to Heladius, placing the story in Dulichion, an island near Ithaka (Homer *Odyssey* 1.245-248). In this version, Zethus' affair with a hamadryad prompts Aedon's retribution.[20] Pollard, in addition, suggests that there was historical basis for the Sophoclean version, since Thucydides was aware of it (Δαυλιὰς ἡ ὄρνις, Thuc. *The Peloponnesian Wars* 2.29.3) and "took it seriously, making the point that Daulis was formerly inhabited by Thracians."[21] Each of these locations is associated with a slightly different version, but the murder remains constant. Only the characters and motivations change.

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[16] W. R. Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend* (Cambridge University Press, 1933), 104; Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela*; Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana, I*.

[17] See Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela*. Martín Rodriguez analyzes and charts the different versions of the myth with reference to the location and localization of the myth.
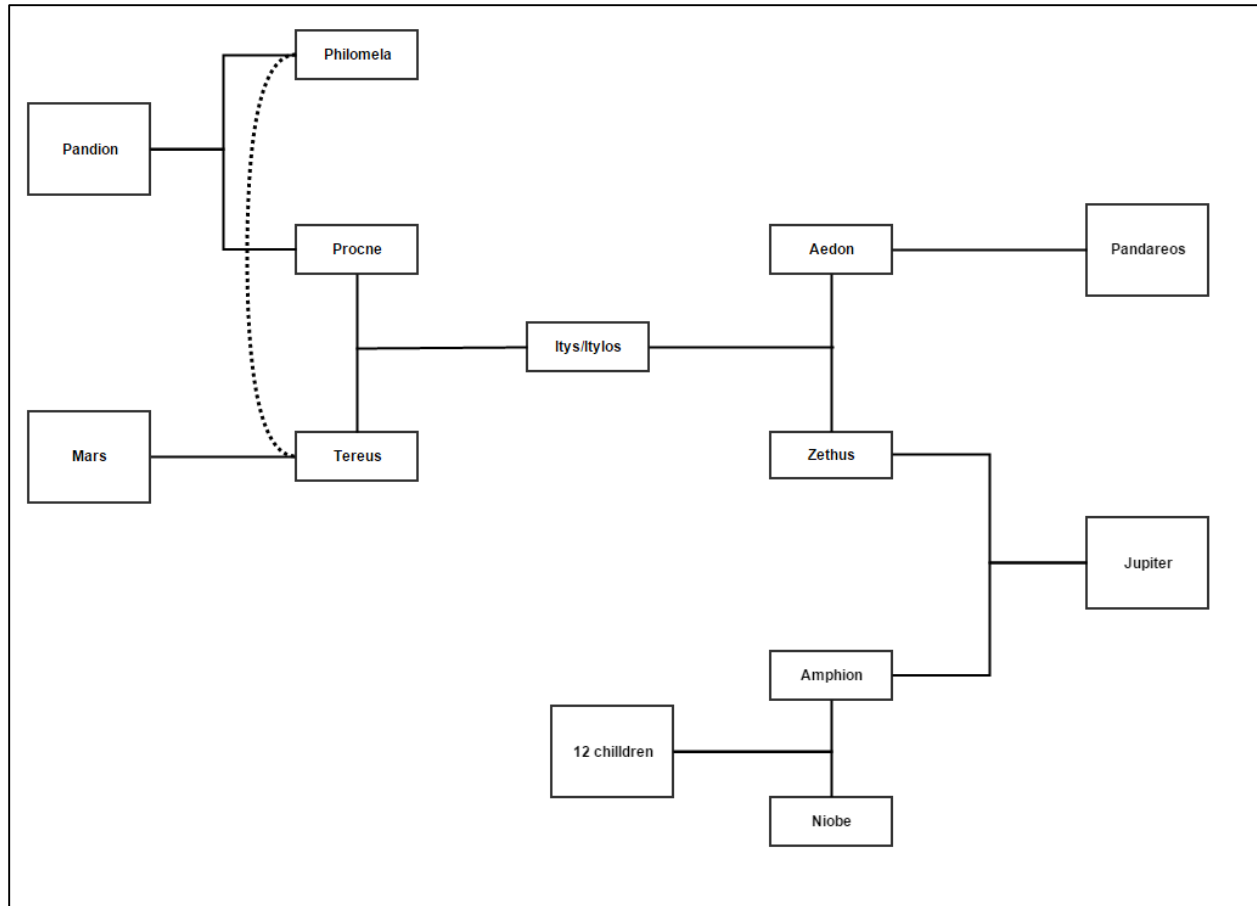
[18] Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana, I*, 6; Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela*, 36.

[19] Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela*, 43.

[20] Ibid., 49; Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana, I*, 16–17.

[21] John Pollard, *Birds in Greek Life and Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1977), 165.

Figure 4: Itys as the connection between the two myths

The Nightingale's Song

With that commonality and the sound of Itys' name as a constant element, it certainly seems that the different versions grew up around an aetiology for the nightingale's song. Cazzaniga suggests that the name Itys is an onomatopoeia itself.[22] The disparate versions of the myth stemmed from an attempt to explain the nightingale's mournful singing, and were eventually conflated. This seems likely, based on the frequent identification of the nightingale as a singer. The swallow shares the role of announcing springtime, but the nightingale alone is

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[22] Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana, I*, 44.

recognized for her song. The swallow, therefore, was an addition to the explanation in one particular version. That version was the one that became popularized by Sophocles' *Tereus* and later Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

While most of the stories that refer to the nightingale as a brief allusion are likely referring to the Attic Sophoclean version, especially considering that the majority of the Greek sources were Athenian playwrights, it is clear that more than one version was extant at the same time. The version presented in the *Odyssey* did not precede the Sophoclean version, but rather was extant alongside it. A temple at Thermos that shows evidence of this has been dated to the 7th century BCE,[23] which is approximately the time that the *Odyssey* was written down. On one of the metopes, two women with a child appear. These are thought to be Aedon and Chelidon, after they have killed the child Itys.[24] One apparently was labeled with an A, which has since faded,[25] and the other is labeled "Chelidon," which is the Greek word for "swallow." The version with the two sisters clearly had developed at the same time as the version with Aedon as a jealous childkiller.

A scholiast on Pherecydes tells a version that seems to be an expansion on the version given in the *Odyssey*. In this story, Aedon is jealous of Niobe, the wife of her brother-in-law. While trying to kill Niobe's son, Aedon accidentally kills her own (Pherecydes *Hist,* fr. 102).[26] This is far closer to the version to which Penelope alludes in the *Odyssey*, yet Pherecydes was writing closer to the time in which the Athenian tragedians were using this myth. Both versions are represented in the literature; as mentioned previously, it is possible to speculate that the

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[23] LIMC, Prokne et Philomela, 1

[24] H. G. G. Payne, "On the Thermon Metopes," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 27 (January 1, 1925): 125.

[25] Ibid.

[26] This is one of several stories that involves the trope of "the other woman" as a motive for a mother killing her children. Similar stories include the story of Ino and Medea, who will be discussed later in this paper.

Sophoclean version was more popular, and overshadowed the other version. Even when Aedon

returns, in Antoninus Liberalis' *Metamorphoses* 11, the actual plot of the story is reflective of the

Sophoclean version, though the names hearken back to the original bird-transformation names.[27]

Itys' name, however, remains constant. It is the source of and sole lyric to the nightingale's song.

The song itself has been represented in literature many times, always using Itys' name.

Daniel Curley points out that "Although references to the nightingale's song are common in

Greek tragedy, either as an ornament of an idyllic landscape (eg. Sophocles, *O.C.* 671ff.) or as an

example of insurmountable woe (e.g. Euripides' *Helen* 1107ff.), in three cases the song itself is

reported through onomatopoeic gemination."[28] That is, when Aeschylus writes Ἴτυν Ἴτυν

στένουσ᾽ ἀμφιθαλῆ κακοῖς ἀηδὼν βίον (Aeschylus, Agamemnon 1144), and Euripides Ἴτυν

Ἴτυν πολύθρηνον (Euripides *Phaethon* 70), they are directly mimicking birdsong, or at least

how the Greeks perceived birdsong. Aristophanes uses it in his *Birds* (for instance, Epops' call:

ἐποποῖ ποποποποποποῖ, Arist. *Birds* 227), though he does not use Itys' name in this way. This

doubled name connects Itys and his identity with the mourning lament itself. The "mimetic

effect"[29] occurs in Sophocles' *Electra* as well, even though the meter requires the name

repetition to be separated:[30] ἄ Ἴτυν αἰὲν Ἴτυν ὀλοφύρεται (Sophocles Electra 148). These

references support the conclusion that Itys' name is an onomatopoeia at its core.

At the end of the Pherecydean tale, the scholiast quotes Pherecydes' description of the

lament itself: Θρήνει δὲ ἀεί ποτε τὸν Ἴτυλον, ὥς φησι Φερεκύδης (fr. 102.12-13). This verb

specifically means "to sing a dirge" or "bewail." Lamentation is a woman's prerogative, and "it

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[27] Halliday argues that these names are personal names created by Sophocles without etymological significance, though it is possible that Philomela became the nightingale through a mistaken etymology as "lover of song." Halliday, *Indo-European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend*, 101.

[28] Daniel Curley, "Ovid, Met. 6.640: A Dialogue between Mother and Son," *The Classical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1997): 321.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

is women who tend to weep longer, louder, and it is they who are thought to communicate

directly with the dead through their wailing songs."[31] Because of this, the nightingale's lament

for her son is not just fitting, but necessary. Once a woman gave birth, her job was to make sure

her child—especially if it was a son—stayed alive.[32] Procne/Aedon failed in this, in a practical

sense, but as a nightingale she can use her lament to keep her son present.

The formal lament was a significant part of the mourning ritual, carried out in large part

by women.[33] For instance, the *Iliad* presents women as chief mourners: Briseis, Hecuba,

Andromache, and Helen each sing for a dead hero (Patroklos in the case of Briseis, and Hector in

the case of the other three), and other women "mourn after." (ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες, Homer

Iliad 24.746). The men can mourn, but without the elaborate song. For instance, Achilles holds

funeral games, but he does not sing a lament himself. Instead, the women he has captured

"mourn after" Briseis' lament (Homer *Iliad* 19.301-2). Achilles himself was mourned in an

annual festival by "the women of Kroton, Elis, and Thessaly."[34]

Furthermore, mourning is designated with a specific memorial purpose:

> θυγατέρες δ' ἀνὰ δώματ' ἰδὲ νυοὶ ὠδύροντο,
> τῶν μιμνησκόμεναι, οἳ δὴ πολέες τε καὶ ἐσθλοὶ
> χερσὶν ὑπ' Ἀργείων κέατο ψυχὰς ὀλέσαντες (Homer, *Iliad* 24.166-168)

> The daughters and the daughters-in-law were mourning in the house
> Remembering those men, indeed, both numerous and good,
> Who were lying dead, having lost their lives at the hands of the Argives

The women of Priam's household are mourning not only Hector, who has just been killed, but

also the other men who have been killed on the battlefield. Specifically, they are μιμνησκόμεναι.

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[31] Holst-Warhaft (1992), 2

[32] Nancy H. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, Ancient Society and History (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 22.

[33] Alexiou, Yatromanolakis, and Roilos, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 6.

[34] Ibid., 61.

The songs have a specific memorial purpose, and even the unnamed soldiers lying on the battlefield are recalled. The three women who mourn Hector each sing about what he meant to them personally. For Andromache, he was a husband, and a father to her son (Homer *Il.* 6.429-30). For Hecuba, her child. For Helen, a friend and protector (24.768-772). Briseis, too, sings about Patroklos as a person and what he meant to her (19.286-300). Each of these women humanizes the deceased person and calls to mind specific memories of him through their song.

This is the intent of the nightingale's lament as well, though it does not extend beyond a repetition—a confirmation, perhaps—of Itys' presence and identity. As the lone son of Zethos or Tereus, he is the sole inheritor of the lineage of his father. The preservation of his name, in fact, indicates this. Jesper Svenbro suggests that sons were often named for their fathers' epithets, as a reminder of the father's κλέος.[35] Thus, for instance, Telemachos' name means "far-fighter," which actually describes his father, Odysseus. Odysseus' κλέος was remembered whenever his son's name was said.[36] The nightingale's repetition of Itys' name is similar to this, though instead of hearkening back to a specific quality of his father, it is his lineage and family story that is recalled. Aedon/Procne fails in her duty as a mother and wife when she kills Itys, but she keeps his memory alive, and therefore the memory of his father's progeny, with her song.

The lament, therefore, is crucial to establishing Itys' importance and presence and, to an extent, his voice. In no extant version besides the one presented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* does Itys speak. He appears solely in the context of his murder or mourning, and occasionally his birth. The extant fragments of Sophocles' *Tereus* do not even confirm that he made an appearance onstage, though Fitzpatrick and Sommerstein's suggestion that he, like Philomela,

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[35] Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1993), 65.
[36] Ibid., 78.

appeared as a silent character seems likely.[37] The fragments do not reveal whether Sophocles

included a lament, though it is certainly possible. He knew of the doubled "Itys" birdsong

mimicry; as mentioned before, he and other tragedians used it. Furthermore, Aristophanes,

whose Epops claims to be Sophocles' Tereus himself (*Birds* 100-101), describes the nightingale

in terms of her lament:

> ἄγε σύννομέ μοι παῦσαι μὲν ὕπνου,
> λῦσον δὲ νόμους ἱερῶν ὕμνων,
> οὓς διὰ θείου στόματος θρηνεῖς
> τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ σὸν πολύδακρυν Ἴτυν (Aristophanes *Birds* 209-212)
>
> Come my flockmate, stop your slumber.
> Let loose the custom of sacred hymns,
> Which you sing through your divine mouth
> Mine and yours, much-lamented Itys

The wife of Epops/Tereus is the nightingale Procne, who is defined by her song, specifically for

her son. There is no other mention of Itys or of the tragedy. If Aristophanes' reference to Tereus

as a bird on Sophocles' stage does, in fact, refer to the costume Tereus wore in Sophocles' play,

it is not beyond speculation that Procne, too, would have appeared onstage as a bird and, as is

characteristic of the nightingale, sung the name of her dead son.

Ovid's Use of the Lament

Ovid, however, suppresses the lament in the version he presents. And yet, there are

allusions to the doubled cry through echoed language and words placed in the tale. Ovid is aware

of the birdcry pattern used by the Greek tragedians. The beginning of the tale describes the

wedding of Tereus and Procne with a great deal of anaphora that seems to recall a hymn or an

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[37] Fitzpatrick and Sommerstein, "Introduction," 149–150.

invocation.[38] *Eumenides…Eumenides* (Ovid, *Met.* 6.430-1), *Hac ave…hac ave* (6.433-434), and *quaque…quaque* (6.436-7) are all examples of this, and while it is possible that this is a stylistic choice for reason of emphasis or otherwise, it seems likely that it is meant to stand in for the Greek conception of birdsong. The first bird to be mentioned, the owl, is mentioned here, and it oversees the bedchamber (6.432), an ill omen indeed. It is possible to speculate that the birdsong representations are in fact the owl's curses.

The repetition does not disappear after the opening lines. The pairing *dextera dextrae* (6.447) occurs just a few lines later, and **fac**undum **fac**iebat amor (6.469) as Tereus is falling in love with Philomela. The echo returns again when Philomela sends her web (*gestu rogat; illa rogata,* 6.579) and when Procne decides what to do (*sed fasque nefasque*, 6.585; *nocte…nocte* 6.589-590, *rapit raptaeque* 6.598), and finally when they turn into birds (*Pennis pendere putares/Pendebant pennis* 6.667-8). The most significant, perhaps, is one of the most subtle. Tereus—not Procne—calls for his son, and the name appears subtly in the echo: *Atque, ubi sit, quaer**it**: quaerenti **ite**rumque vocanti* (6.656). Tereus is repeatedly seeking his son and calling his name. While Itys is not explicitly named here, the sound of his name occurs in the repetition. Tereus is asking *ubi*, the Latin equivalent of Greek ποῦ. This is Tereus' own cry, once he has been metamorphosed into a hoopoe. What remains of the lament is never in Procne's mouth.

Nonetheless, in the context of the *Metamorphoses*, we find Procne's story placed conspicuously between two women with whom she has a stark connection: Niobe, who mourns her dead children and is the sister-in-law of the Homeric nightingale, and Medea, who, like Procne, killed her own children in the name of harming her husband. Niobe's own name, in fact, is doubled like a birdcry: *Heu quantum haec Niobe Niobe distabat ab illa* (6.273). Furthermore,

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[38] Ingo Gildenhard and Paul Andrew Zissos, "Barbarian Variations : Tereus, Procne and Philomela in Ovid (Met. 6. 412-674) and beyond," *Dictynna ; Revue de Poétique Latine* 4 (2007): 4.

the preceding stories lay the foundations for what Ovid's version will present, and even subtly points to the absent lament. The nightingale's transformation is located at the pinnacle of an ever-ascending chain of crimes against the gods, but is a story of wholly human brutality. This chain begins far back in Book 3, with the downfall of the house of Cadmus at the hands of Diana, Juno, and—most prominently—Bacchus. The tale of Perseus interrupts the chain, however, and thus the first tale in the series that begins to build towards the nightingale story is that of Minerva's visit to the Muses. The first of the embedded stories is of a Thracian king who attempts to pursue women as they turn into birds. Unlike Tereus, however, Pyreneus does not manage to become a bird himself, and thus falls off the roof and dies (Ovid, *Met.* 5.290-293). The second is the tale of the Pierides, singing women who are transformed into birds when they lose a contest with the Muses (Ovid, *Met.* 5.296-301). These are the first signposts towards the tale of Procne, and they lay out certain expectations: a male pursuer may not capture his prey, and birds will lament their fate in the trees.

The Muses continue to tell Minerva of their adventures with defiant mortals, and begin the tale of the Rape of Proserpina. This, too, is part of the chain of stories leading up to the tale of Procne. Direct parallels are drawn between Proserpina and Philomela at the moment of the rape. The rape itself uses similar language to describe both girls' cries for help. Proserpina shouts for her mother: *dea territa maesto/ et matrem et comites, sed matrem saepius, ore/ clamat* (Ovid. *Met.* 5.396-398). Philomela, using the same language, shouts for her father and sister: *Vi superat frustra clamato saepe parente/ saepe sorore sua, magnis super omnia divis* (Ovid, *Met.* 6.525-526). The structure of the sentences is parallel: they cry for someone, and someone else, but most of all a third. In the case of Proserpina, her mother is the more important subject of her cries, and her mother spends much of the rest of the story travelling the world searching and mourning for

her "dead" daughter. In the case of Philomela, she calls on the gods more than anyone—and the gods are conspicuously absent from her story. In fact, the only gods that are explicitly present are the Eumenides (Ovid *Met.* 6.430-1)—Hymeneus and Juno, the gods who are supposed to oversee marriage, are pointedly absent from Procne and Tereus' wedding (Ovid *Met.* 6.428-9). This sets an ominous tone, enhanced by the doubled *hac ave* (Ovid, *Met.* 6.433, 434) referring to the owl. The owl is connected very specifically to the Underworld in the tale of the Rape of Proserpina. Proserpina changes Ascalaphus into an owl, *dirum mortalibus omen* (Ovid *Met.* 5.550) as punishment for revealing that she ate seeds of the pomegranate. The *hac ave* repetition certainly mimics the doubled birdcry. These ties between the two stories draw the connections between the themes in each: the relationship between a mother and child.

When Minerva has listened to the Muses' song, she travels to punish Arachne for boasting of her skills in weaving. Minerva, quite appropriately, weaves a tapestry depicting stories of her own victories and of mortals who were punished for defying the gods. Arachne, for her part, weaves a tapestry filled with stories of gods raping women. It has been noted that this reflects "Ovid's own aesthetics in the *Metamorphoses*"[39] and that an anti-Augustan reading can be drawn from it.[40] It also, however, plays into the chain of stories leading to Procne's tale: Philomela weaves a story of her own rape. In fact, Salzmann-Mitchell suggests that when Minerva *rupit pictas* (Ovid *Met.* 6.531), she has symbolically perpetrated a rape of Arachne, whose cloth "could be metaphorically assimilated to her virginity."[41] Thus, the tapestry of divine rapes also foreshadows the very mortal rape of Philomela.

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[39] Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies*, 126.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 137.

The last stories before the tale of Procne are the slaughter of Niobe's children, the transformation of the Lycian farmers, and a short digression on Pelops. Niobe's tale especially connects, because Niobe is explicitly tied to both a mother's lamentation and the nightingale story. She is married to Amphion, the brother of Zethus, who is married to Aedon (see Figure 5). In Pherecydes' version, it is Niobe's oldest child whom Aedon intends—and fails—to kill (Pherecydes Fr. 102). This is reminiscent of Latona's punishment of Niobe for her boast about her number of children—leaving one to wonder if some similar boast inspired Aedon—but Latona is successful where Aedon is not.
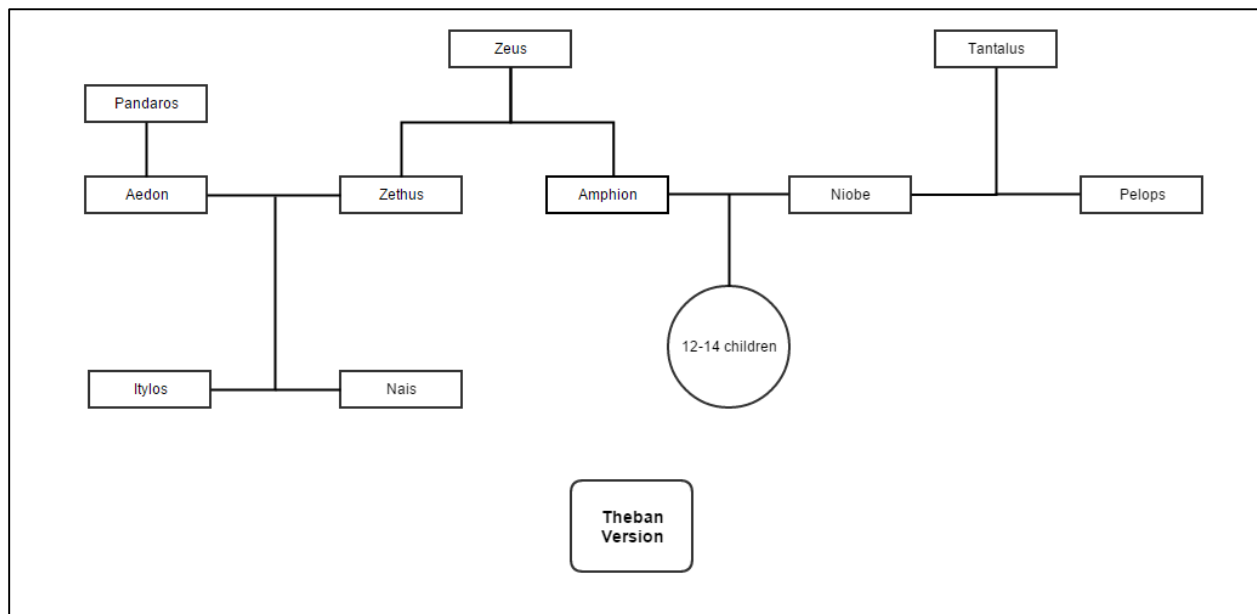
Figure 5: The Theban Genealogy of Niobe and Aedon

Ovid includes several other signposts that point towards the next tale. First, Niobe claims her lineage from Tantalus. A strange claim, since she is trying to prove that she is a goddess (Ovid *Met.* 6.172), but Tantalus is notorious for having tried to feed his son to the gods. She is predicting her own doom, claiming kinship with one who defied the gods as she does herself. Yet

this is also connected to the theme in the next story. Tantalus is not the only parent in the *Metamorphoses* who kills his child for a feast—Procne is another. The story of Pelops is in fact used to transition to the wedding of Procne and Tereus (Ovid *Met.* 6.403-404). Fratantuono points out that "Tantalus had less reason to slaughter Pelops than Procne Itys, some might argue; further, Procne will serve the child to his monstrous father and not to the gods."[42] This is a story of human brutality, not divine punishment, but there are divine parallels brought down to a mortal level and made ever more horrible.

The stories of the Lycian farmers and of Marsyas are both told as part of the overarching framework of Niobe's story. Over and over, up to this point in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid is telling stories of what happens to those who defy the gods. Finally, with the tale of Procne, he tells a story entirely of mortal brutality. The gods are nowhere to be found, except in omens. Gildenhard and Zissos suggest that this makes Philomela the "victim not just of Tereus, but of a hostile or uncaring cosmos in which she has naively placed her faith."[43] In contrast, the tale that follows returns to Ovid's former theme of gods raping mortal women with Boreas' rape of Orethyia. Boreas is a failed Tereus figure in his story. The rumors of Tereus' behavior keeps Boreas from his beloved, whom he tries to woo with pleas and flatteries (Ovid *Met.* 6.681-685). Unlike Tereus, Boreas is not successful and resorts to open assault. Ovid has returned to the divine-rape formula of the earlier books.

He uses that story to transition into a tale of another mythological childkiller: Medea. Ovid spends far more time developing Medea's passion for Jason and her own conflict over whether or not to come to his aid than he does describing the murder. In fact, he devotes only a

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[42] Lee Fratantuono, *Madness Transformed: A Reading of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 171.
[43] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Barbarian Variations," 7.

single line to it: *sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis* (Ovid *Met.* 7.396). While he does not usually treat the same story at length multiple times (he did write a *Medea* that is now lost, and when he mentions the tale of Procne and Philomela in his other works it is rarely more than a line or two), one line about the murder of the children seems insufficient. Yet Procne has already killed her child, and the two mothers are quite parallel here. He does not need to give another detailed description of a child murder so soon after the last. The placement of the story of Procne's slaughter of Itys shifts the focus of the story from the rape of Philomela, which actually takes more space on the page, to the relationship between mother and child.

Chapter 2: Procne as the Barbarian Queen

The state of the familial relationship is a fulcrum in the story. Each character is tied to another in a way that is destroyed when Tereus rapes Philomela. Her own biting words to him address this confusion at length: *omnia turbasti: paelex ego facta sororis!/ Tu geminus coniunx! Hostis mihi debita poena!* (Ovid, *Met.* 6.537-8). "You have thrown everything into confusion: I am made my sister's concubine! You, brother, a husband! The punishment of an enemy is owed to me!" Barchiesi calls this "a standard reproach for incest."[44] Once Tereus commits this crime, there is no longer a sense of order. The word *paelex* never refers to a legitimate marriage, and often has the sense of "rival," as well as "concubine." In Hyginus' version (*Fab.* 45.2.1-5), Tereus actually takes Philomela under the pretense of a legitimate marriage, and then sends her to king Lynceus as a *paelex*. This is not the case in Ovid's version, in which Philomela is held captive by Tereus instead, but the idea of an illegitimate relationship remains the same. The marriage, its disruption, and the subsequent distortion of relationships in the story cause the vengeance of Procne.

The Context of Marriage

Despite its origins as a Greek story, Ovid's retelling of the myth must be seen through a Roman lens as a product of its time. In Athens, a woman never completely broke ties with her *oikos*; thus the connection and loyalty to her father would remain.[45] Fitzpatrick and Sommerstein point out that in the Sophoclean version, Procne's revenge may very well have been supported

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[44] Alessandro Barchiesi, "Voices and Narrative 'Instances,'" in *Oxford Readings in Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies, 2006, 293.

[45] Alan H. Sommerstein, David Fitzpatrick, and Thomas Talboy, eds., "Tereus," in *Selected Fragmentary Plays*, by Sophocles, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts (Oxford [England]: Oxbow Books, 2006), 154.

by the Athenian audience. While she is often compared to Medea, she is different in that she did

not give up ties to her father's family. Her revenge on Tereus is, in a sense, a vengeance on

behalf of her father's family for a ruined marriage.[46] Procne is separated from her family by

distance, if not legality, but she is able to convince Tereus to bring Philomela to visit her. She is

able to accomplish the same in Ovid's version, but her reaction to the event is different.

Sommerstein et al. place fr. 583 after Procne has been told that Philomela is dead;[47] Fitzpatrick

argues that it comes after she has learned the truth and before she reveals her revenge.[48]

Nonetheless, in the text that we have, Procne's thoughts are directed to herself and her own

plight, not to that of her sister:

> νῦν δ' οὐδέν εἰμι χωρίς. ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
> ἔβλεψα ταύτῃ τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
> ὡς οὐδέν ἐσμεν. αἳ νέαι μὲν ἐν πατρὸς
> ἥδιστον, οἶμαι, ζῶμεν ἀνθροπων βίον·
> τερπνῶς γὰρ ἀεὶ παῖδας ἀνοία τρέφει.
> ὅταν δ' ἐς ἥβην ἐξικώμεθ' ἔμφρονες,
> ὠθούμεθ' ἔξω καὶ διεμπολώμεθα
> θεῶν πατρῴων τῶν τε φυσάντων ἄπω,
> αἱ μεν ξένους πρὸς ἄνδρας, αἱ δὲ βαρβάρους,
> αἱ δ' εἰς ἀγηθῆ δῶμαθ', αἱ δ' ἐπίρροθα.
> καὶ ταῦτ', ἐπειδὰν εὐφρόνη ζεύξῃ μία,
> χρεὼν ἐπαινεῖν καὶ δοκεῖν καλῶς ἔχειν (Sophocles *Tereus* fr. 583)[49].

> But now I am no one, living apart. But many times
> I saw a woman's life in this way,
> As we are no one. For as young women
> in the father's home, I think, we live the most pleasant life of all humankind;
> For ignorance always raises children in contentment.
> And when we arrive sensible at the prime of youth,
> We are thrown out and sold
> Away from our paternal gods and parents,
> Some to foreign men, and some to barbarians,

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[46] Ibid., 155.
[47] Ibid., 165.
[48] David Fitzpatrick, "Sophocles' 'Tereus,'" *The Classical Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2001): 101.
[49] Greek text from Alan H. Sommerstein, David Fitzpatrick, and Thomas Talboy, eds., "Tereus," in *Selected Fragmentary Plays*, by Sophocles, Aris & Phillips Classical Texts (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2006)

> Some to a joyless home, and some to an abusive one.
> And it is necessary, when one night has bound us,
> To approve this and to think to regard it well.

The loneliness she describes is supported by marriage customs in ancient Greece. Nancy Demand writes:

> But at the heart of the trauma of marriage was departure from her own *oikos* and entrance into a new household that, even if it were composed of kin, still appeared, in the context of the *oikos* system, as part of the hostile external world and that, in fact, had its guard up against her as an intruder.[50]

This is distinctly different from Ovid's Procne. In Ovid's version, she falls silent, and Ovid reveals nothing about her thoughts, other than the fact that she is plotting revenge. (634)

> et (mirum potuisse!) silet: dolor ora repressit,
> verbaque quaerenti satis indignantia linguae
> defuerunt, nec flere vacat, sed fasque nefasque
> confusura ruit poenaeque in imagine tota est (6.583-586).

> And (strange that she was able![51]) she is silent: pain restrains her expression,
> And indignant words lack a seeking tongue,
> Nor is she free from weeping, but both right and wrong
> Rush and everything is jumbled together in the image of punishment.

There is no mourning for her own position as a woman alone in her barbaric husband's home. One possible explanation is that she is accustomed to being alone. Roman marriage in Ovid's time was generally one of two kinds: a "free marriage," (*sine manu*) where the woman remained part of her father's family, and the rarer, stricter form of *cum manu* marriage, where the woman became a part of her husband's family. She becomes, in a legal sense, a daughter to her husband and a sister to her children.[52] This was for the purpose of inheritance—a son and a wife could

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[50] Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, 14.
[51] This seems to refer to the Latin from the previous lines, in which Procne is able to read Philomela's weaving.
[52] Archie C. Bush and Joseph J. McHugh, "Patterns of Roman Marriage," *Ethnology* 14, no. 1 (1975): 27, doi:10.2307/3773205.

inherit equally.[53] Regardless of which kind of marriage it was, a woman would leave her father's

house and family behind, but a *cum manu* marriage solidified the separation more firmly.[54] Ovid

transposes what seems to be the *sine manu* system onto a Greek story by giving Procne a

connection to her former family. In the moment of her decision, that connection is the deciding

factor. It is her relationship to her sister and to her son that matter, as we discover later when

they take their revenge. When she faces the choice of killing her son, Itys, she calls herself

Pandione nata (Ovid *Met.* 6.634). Despite the fact that she is legally bound to her husband, it is

her father's lineage she recalls here—she considers herself part of his household. Procne is

enacting the Athenian-approved vengeance in a Roman context.

There is no explicit evidence in Ovid's version, however, that she was unhappy with

Tereus at all, up to that point, except perhaps the fact that she wanted to see her sister. Never in

Ovid's text does Procne explicitly complain about her own situation. She is saddened by the

report of Philomela's "death" and is horrified when she learns the truth, but we are not told what

has passed in the five years of marriage up to this time. It is, perhaps, reasonable to hypothesize

that Procne and Tereus' five years of marriage were successful. She bears him a child and that

child is greeted with great festivity (*festum iussere vocari*, Ovid *Met.* 6.437). Were it not for the

ill omens of the Furies and the hooting owl, this would be, on the surface, a happy marriage.

The Abandoned Woman's "Marriage"

The omens at the beginning of their wedding, however, call to mind tragic marriages.

Ovid's use of *pronuba Iuno* (Ovid *Met.* 6.428) echoes Vergil's use in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 4.166),

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[53] Ibid., 26.

[54] Judith de Luce, "The Helpful Princess," in *Compromising Traditions: The Personal Voice in Classical Scholarship*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Thomas Van Nortwick (Psychology Press, 1997), 34.

which Ovid's audience certainly would have known. Vergil is, in fact, the only author to use that phrase before Ovid. In the *Aeneid,* Juno is present at the "wedding" of Dido and Aeneas, and yet that marriage ends with Aeneas' denial of its existence (*nec coniugis umquam/ praetendi taedas aut haec in foedera veni* 4.338-9) and Dido's suicide. Ovid's addition of *non* in the case of Procne and Tereus may suggest that the legitimacy of the marriage should be questioned. Indeed, while he does not include the presence of *Pronuba Iuno* in Dido's letter to Aeneas, he does have Dido wonder if she was mistaken about one of the other signs of the marriage, (*ulularunt…nymphae*, Vergil *Aeneid* 4.168), the nymphs howling: *nymphas ululasse putavi/ Eumenides fati signa dedere mei* (Ovid *Her.* 7.95-6). Dido seems to have mistaken the sound for approval, but now realizes that it was an ill omen from the Furies. The Furies, not the nymphs, were her wedding attendants at the false marriage.

Ovid does use *pronuba Iuno* at one other time: *Heroides* 6, in which Hypsipyle, caught in much the same situation as Dido, argues that "Juno the *pronuba* was there, and Hymen, his temples bound with garlands" (*pronuba Iuno/ adfuit et sertis tempora vinctus Hymen*, Ovid *Her.* 6.43-44). Then, curiously, that argument is followed by *at mihi nec Iuno nec Hymen sed tristis Erinyes/praetulit infaustas sanguinolentes faces* (6.45-6). Juno and Hymen were present at the marriage of Hypsipyle and Jason, as they were for Dido and Aeneas, but they did not carry the torches. Instead, the Furies bore them, just as they oversaw the marriage of Tereus and Procne. There is a steady degeneration of legitimacy. Vergil's Dido and Aeneas had all of the signs of marriage, and it failed; Ovid's Dido and Aeneas had the Furies instead of the nymphs; Hypsipyle and Jason had Furies for torchbearers; and finally, Procne and Tereus had no one but the Furies at their wedding. Of the three marriages, that of Procne and Tereus is the only one that should

have been legitimate: in general, the parents of the bride are responsible for matchmaking,[55] and this was arranged by Tereus and the father of Procne. The marriages of Dido and Hypsipyle were "arranged" (as near as either marriage can be said to have been arranged) by the female participant, and therefore should not have been legitimate. Nonetheless, it is Tereus and Procne's marriage that seems to be the most cursed. Ovid builds upon and exceeds Vergil's marriage omens.

Furthermore, each of the previously mentioned relationships began happily and successfully before the protagonists' fates called them away. Procne's state in the five years of marriage are therefore left—perhaps deliberately—ambiguous. Perhaps they imply what the fragments of Sophocles' play suggest: that Procne is unhappy in her marriage and is quite desperate for her sister's company (Sophocles, *Tereus* Fr. 583). I would argue the opposite, however. Ovid's use of *pronuba Iuno* in the same metrical position in only these specific places suggest that Procne's marriage is designed to parallel the pseudo-marriages of Hypsipyle and Dido. If it is indeed meant do so, then, in accordance with the story, Procne would be content until her husband abandons her—in this case, not for fate, but for another woman, namely her sister.

There are two other mythological women who are parallel to Dido and Hypsipile: Medea and Ariadne. Of the two, Medea is the closest analogue to Procne, as the child-killing mother. Gildenhard and Zissos point out that Medea, like Procne, finds herself caught between enacting vengeance on her husband and her love for her children.[56] Ovid's mythologies tend to be rather Euripidean in their tone and sensibility, and certainly he mimics Euripides' *Medea* when he gives

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[55] Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, 1991, 134.
[56] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Barbarian Variations," 9.

Procne similar sentiments about killing her son. Medea's children come to her smiling after their

reprieve from exile and she nearly loses her resolve, asking:

> φεῦ φεῦ: τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ᾽ ὄμμασιν, τέκνα;
> τί προσγελᾶτε τὸν πανύστατον γέλων;
> αἰαῖ: τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται,
> γυναῖκες, ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων (Euripides *Medea* 1040-1043)

> Alas, alas: why do you look at me with your eyes, children?
> Why do you smile that very last smile?
> Ah! What will I do? For my purpose has vanished,
> Women, when I saw the bright look of my children.

Medea then recovers her resolve, reminding herself that this is weakness, and she must not

tolerate mockery from her enemies (Euripides *Medea* 1049-1052). She hardens her heart against

her children and her own weakness.

Yet it is still important to note that Medea is a barbarian—she is not Greek. The Chorus

compares her to Ino (Euripides *Medea* 1282-1289), but Ino was "driven mad by the gods" (Ἰνὼ

μανεῖσαν ἐκ θεῶν, Euripides *Medea* 1284). Jason cries that "there is no Greek woman who

would dare to do this" (οὐκ ἔστιν ἥτις τοῦτ᾽ ἂν Ἑλληνὶς γυνὴ/ ἔτλη ποθ᾽, Euripides *Medea* 1339-

40). The message is clear: good, sane Greek women do not kill their own children. Medea is

neither. Jenny March briefly explores other comparisons the Chorus could have used and settles

on Procne as the only possible equivalent for Medea.[57] She argues that Euripides' *Medea* was, in

fact, the inspiration for Sophocles' *Tereus*, and that "Sophocles would have not only a Greek

woman, but an Athenian woman committing this terrible murder."[58] In addition, Larmour points

out that Tereus' behavior in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* seems connected to his identity as a

Thracian.[59] He is *Threicius Tereus* (Ovid, *Met.* 6.424), *rex Odrysius,* (Ovid *Met.* 6.490), and

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[57] March, "Vases and Tragic Drama," 121.
[58] Ibid., 136.
[59] David H. J. Larmour, "Tragic Contaminatio in Ovid's Metamorphoses : Procne and Medea ; Philomela and Iphigeneia (6. 424-674) ; Scylla and Phaedra (8. 19-151)," *Illinois Classical Studies* XV (1990): 133.

barbarus (Ovid *Met.* 6.515). Being a foreigner—a non-Greek or, in this case, a non-Roman—

seems connected to true barbaric behavior.

Thus the Athenian Procne assumes the role of the barbarian Medea. Ovid, however,

seizes upon this and takes it further. Procne does not merely perform a barbaric act that,

supposedly, is uncharacteristic of a good, sane Greek woman, but she becomes the husband she

despises. It is Itys' very voice (*cur admovet, inquit,/ alter blanditias rapta silet altera lingua*,

Ovid *Met.* 6.631-2) and his resemblance to his father (*a quam es similis patri* Ovid *Met.* 6.621-2)

that causes Procne to harden her resolve. Bettini points out that women in the ancient world are

"receptacles;" their children's identity comes entirely from the father.[60] Itys is more than just

similar to his father; he is the inheritor of his father's identity, both in Procne's eyes and in the

eyes of the ancient world.

Just as Tereus is compared to an eagle carrying off a rabbit (Ovid *Met.* 6.516-517),

Procne is compared to a tiger carrying off a fawn (Ovid *Met.* 6.636-7). Tereus *Pandione*

*natam…**trahit*** (Ovid *Met.* 6.520-1); Procne *Ityn **traxit*** (Ovid *Met.* 6.636). Both ignore their

victim's cries, though Itys' are all the more poignant because he is crying out to the very person

who is killing him (*mater, mater* Ovid *Met.* 6.640). Philomela takes on the role of silencing Itys

when she slits his throat (Ovid *Met.* 6.643). In the final phase of the punishment of Tereus,

Procne parallels the rape of Philomela. "By literally 'penetrating' Tereus with his own son she

achieves a figurative rape…while feminizing and grotesquely 'impregnating' her hateful

spouse."[61] It also continues the undertone of incest: Tereus is violated by his own child.

Gildenhard and Zissos suggest that Procne's vengeance is beyond what is necessary to "equal the

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[60] Maurizio Bettini, *Women & Weasels: Mythologies of Birth in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 19.
[61] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Barbarian Variations," 10.

score;"[62] it is not an equal punishment at all. I would speculate, however, that this is an equal punishment: that the destruction of one's lineage is the worst that can happen to a man in the ancient world, just as rape is the worst that can happen to a woman.

It is also worth noting the resemblance of the situation to Althaea's murder of her son, Meleager, a mere two books later. Like Procne, she is debating whether or not she should kill her son to avenge her sibling. The difference is that Meleager has actually killed her brother. This is simple, straightforward revenge that fits the framework of *ius talionis*, (equal punishment for the crime, or, put simply, an "eye for an eye.").[63] There are a few echoes: Althaea, like Procne, has an inner debate with herself. She calls her son *sceleratus* (Ovid *Met.* 8.497), and Procne justifies her crime with the same word (***scelus*** *est pietas in coniuge Tereo* Ovid *Met.* 6.635). She also echoes the 'drag' repetition of both Procne and Tereus, and recognizes that if Meleager dies, it will mean the end of his family's lineage: *spemque patris regnumque* ***trahat*** *patriaeque ruinam* (Ovid *Met.* 8.498). Her similarities to Procne recall the murder of Itys. Read together, these stories inform the victim's identity: Itys is made more guilty, Meleager more innocent. Meleager truly is a murderer in the story, and Itys has done nothing; yet this is irrelevant to his mother's cause. In Procne's eyes, Itys is Meleager by analogy and Tereus by descent. He cannot possibly be innocent.

Nonetheless, whether Procne has surpassed Tereus in barbarism or merely equaled him, she has certainly assimilated to the barbarism of her Thracian husband and adoptive homeland. Ovid adds the additional detail that Procne disguises herself as a Bacchante. He has already mentioned Bacchus earlier, in the stories of Pentheus and the daughters of Minyas. He firmly establishes Bacchus as a foreign—and therefore barbarian—deity in these stories. The chorus of

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 11.

worshippers praises him for his conquest of India before he came to introduce his cult to Greece

(Ovid *Met.* 4.20-21). The moment that Procne dons the garb of a Maenad and dresses her sister

in the same (Ovid *Met.* 6.598) is the moment her Athenian civility begins to vanish. She

dismembers her son, as Agave does to Pentheus and the Maenads to Orpheus. It is worth noting

the Bacchic connection with regard to Medea's dismemberment of Absyrtus as well. Though

Medea is never explicitly a Maenad, these actions connect Procne and Medea, another barbarian.

Procne can therefore be added to the list of women who fit what Otis calls the 'bacchic

motif,' in which a mother kills her son under what seems to be Bacchic possession.[64] It begins

with Agave killing Pentheus, then Ino and Athamas killing their children, then Procne, and

finally Althaea killing Meleager.[65] Procne is, truly, a barbaric Medea.

Ariadne and Phaedra

Thus far I have discussed the similarities between Procne and several abandoned women:

Dido, Hypsipyle, and Medea. There is another pair of forsaken women, Ariadne and Phaedra,

that reflects some similarities of the distorted family life caused by Tereus. Their stories are not

similar at first glance: Procne does not help a hero and gain a marriage, nor is she abandoned

alone on a shore. Yet, like Ariadne, her husband abandons her and marries her sister. When

Philomela screams at Tereus *omnia turbasti* (Ovid *Met.* 6.537), she refers to this problem. She no

longer knows what relationship she has with her sister because now she has become a *paelex*

(Ovid *Met.* 6.537).

Ariadne's sister also becomes her rival in a sense, though it is never explicitly stated. In

fact, the myth of the nightingale is perhaps the only extant story that involves the coupling of two

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[64] Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 2d ed (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1970), 79.
[65] Ibid.

sisters with the same man. Phaedra mentions her family in Euripides' *Hippolytus* mourning the

cursed loves that she and her mother and sister had, though there is no mention of Theseus:

> **Φαίδρα**
> ὦ τλῆμον, οἷον, μῆτερ, ἠράσθης ἔρον.
> **Τροφός**
> ὃν ἔσχε ταύρου, τέκνον, ἢ τί φὴς τόδε;
> **Φαίδρα**
> σύ τ᾽, ὦ τάλαιν᾽ ὅμαιμε, Διονύσου δάμαρ.
> **Τροφός**
> τέκνον, τί πάσχεις; συγγόνους κακορροθεῖς;
> **Φαίδρα**
> τρίτη δ᾽ ἐγὼ δύστηνος ὡς ἀπόλλυμαι (Euripides *Hippolytus* 337-341)
>
> **Phaedra**
> Oh suffering mother, you desired such a love!
> **Nurse**
> Is it that love of the bull she had which you speak, child?
> **Phaedra**
> And you, oh wretched sister, the wife of Dionysus.
> **Nurse**
> Child, what do you suffer? Do you revile what is inborn?
> **Phaedra**
> And I the third unfortunate one, so I am destroyed.

It is not the relationship to Theseus that has Phaedra upset, but her attraction to his son.

Her marriage to Theseus is, in fact, perfectly legitimate. Apollodorus records that Phaedra's

brother, Deucalion, gave her in marriage to Theseus after succeeding Minos on the throne of

Crete (Apollodorus *Epitome* 1.17). And yet, this is the most detail we get in extant sources about

Phaedra's marriage to Theseus. Many authors seem to find the subject of her forbidden love for

Hippolytus more intriguing, and begin the story after she has already been married to Theseus.

This is peculiar in Greek mythology: marriages and their circumstances are important for

female characters. The women mentioned above (as well as many other women in Ovid's

Heroides) are examples of this. A story about a woman depends on her marriage. This is how she

is judged. Iphigenia and Polyxena, for instance, are honored because they sacrifice their

marriages to Achilles in order to, in a sense, marry death itself. Marriage to Hades (or death) was

a metaphor for the deaths of unmarried girls,[66] though in this case the metaphor is nearly literal.

Ariadne and Medea find themselves in impossible situations, not truly married but unable to

return to the fathers they have betrayed.

Procne's marriage to Tereus is perfectly legitimate; it is only after Philomela's presence

is added that relationships fall apart. Sisters in mythology simply do not marry the same man.

The closest parallels are Helen and Clytemnestra's marriages to a pair of brothers. Nor, it seems,

can a man have two legitimate wives. In the *Iliad* Agamemnon claims that he loves Chryseis

more than his κουριδίη ἄλοχος and that he intends to take her back with him (Homer, *Iliad*

1.109-115). Never does he say Chryseis will become an additional κουριδίη ἄλοχος; she will

always be little more than a beloved concubine. Because she is a slave, this does not create a

familial problem. Philomela as the *paelex* to her sister's position as legitimate wife, however,

does. It creates a similar kind of problem to the one which Phaedra laments in Ovid's *Heroides*,

similarly to Euripides' version:

> Perfidus Aegides, ducentia fila secutus
>> Curva meae fugit tecta sororis ope.
> En, ego nunc, ne forte parum Minoia credar,
>> In socias leges ultima gentis eo!
> Hoc quoque fatale est: placuit domus una duabus;
>> Me tua forma capit, capta parente soror.
> Thesides Theseusque duas rapuere sorores—
>> Ponite de nostra bina tropaea domo! (Ovid *Heroides* 4.59-66)

> Treacherous Theseus, having followed a leading thread
> Fled the curved roofs with the help of my sister,
> Alas, I now, lest by chance I am believed too little a child of Minos
> I, the last of my kin, go into the shared laws!
> This also is fatal: one house was pleasing to two;
> Your beauty took me, my sister captured by your parent.

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[66] Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, 14.

> Theseus and the son of Theseus snatched two sisters—
> Place our trophies two at a time in the house!

The trouble is that Phaedra is just one more woman in her family to be caught in a problematic love, and this will distort the family structure. The relationships between Theseus, Ariadne, and Phaedra are different from the marriage between Tereus, Procne, and Philomela because Tereus' love is illicit, violent, and destructive. Theseus marries Phaedra after his 'marriage' to Ariadne is nullified by his abandonment of her. The second marriage itself does not cause a distortion; Phaedra's love for her stepson does. In contrast, Hyginus records a version of the story in which Tereus does marry Philomela by pretending Procne has died (Hyginus *Fab.* 45). This changes the dynamic: it is an instance of true polygamy with one man's marriage to two sisters.

Perhaps this is why few authors draw attention to Phaedra's legitimate marriage to Theseus. She and Ariadne represent the sole other extant sister pair who "marry" the same man. Though Theseus has many wives, he never has more than one at a time. Phaedra's love for Hippolytus would be incest if acted upon. Tereus' rape of Philomela is concubinage. Ovid does not shy away from accusations of incest. Myrrha and Byblis are two examples: the one loves her father, the other her brother. Philomela does not accuse Tereus of incest, however, and instead shouts *omnia turbasti*. Procne is an abandoned woman, and she has been abandoned for her sister.

This is a difficult situation; Fontenrose points out that "the other woman…has a malignant effect upon the first woman, the man's lawful wife or betrothed, who becomes a victim of jealousy and hate."[67] This is also not the first time that the nightingale has been a woman abandoned by her husband. There is the version mentioned previously, which Fontenrose

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[67] Joseph Fontenrose, "The Sorrows of Ino and of Procne," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 79 (1948): 125.

describes, in which Aedon takes revenge on her husband because of his affair with a hamadryad.[68] Thus, Procne fits oddly well with this collection of abandoned women, despite the fact that they are all *barbaroi* and she is an Athenian princess.

Yet she does not act like a typical abandoned woman. She does not kill herself, like Dido. She does not waste words cursing her abandoner, like Ariadne on the island. In fact, she proclaims to Philomela quite quickly that *non est lacrimis hoc…agendum,/ sed ferro* (Ovid *Met.* 6.611-12). She sides with the "other woman," rather than punish her with her husband, as Medea does to Creusa. She has become a barbarian in her actions, but not, perhaps, in her mindset.

I finally return to my earlier note on Procne's lack of pity for herself. The first possibility is that she has accustomed herself to solitude, in accordance with how a marriage works. In the face of so many parallels to abandoned, barbarian women, this seems the less likely option. More likely, it is because she has accustomed herself to living in a foreign kingdom. Yet Procne is still an Athenian woman at her core: in Ovid's version, she never fully succumbs to the tropes of the abandoned women, for all her parallels with them. Rather, like Althaea, she chooses her own *oikos* over the lineage she is fostering for her spouse: her father's family, not her husband's. Thus from the moment Philomela screams at Tereus *omnia turbasti*, just as Philomela is suddenly no longer Procne's sister, but a rival, Itys is no longer Procne's child. He is Tereus' son alone.

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[68] Ibid., 129.

Chapter 3: Itys' Identity

Procne views Itys as the heir to his father's identity. There are certain connections Ovid

conveys through his choices in diction. These choices, however, do not connect Itys to Tereus,

but rather to Procne and Philomela. Each of the three characters speaks *blanditias* at one point in

the story. It begins with Procne when she tries to convince her husband to allow Philomela to

visit her (*cum blandita viro…dixit*, Ovid *Met.* 6.440). The word is next associated with Philomela

as she embraces Pandion to convince him to let her leave. Her actions are quite similar to Itys'

later interaction with Procne:

> Quid quod idem Philomela cupit patriosque **lacertis**
> **Blanda** tenens umeros, ut eat visura sororem
> Perque suam contraque suam petit ipsa **salutem**.
> Spectat eam Tereus praecontrectatque videndo
> **Osculaque** et **collo** circumdata bracchia cernens (*Met.* 6.475-479).
>
> That same thing Philomela wished, and coaxing,
> Holding her father's shoulders, so that she might go to see her sister,
> And she herself seeks a greeting, both for herself and against herself.
> Tereus watches and fondles himself by watching
> And perceiving kisses and arms thrown around the neck.

This description of Philomela begging her father to allow her to go with her soon-to-be rapist,

unbeknownst to them both, is eerily similar to the description of Itys greeting his mother, his

soon-to-be murderer:

> Ad matrem veniebat Itys: quid possit, ab illo
> Admonita est **osculisque** tuens inmitibus 'a, quam
> Es similis patri!" dixit nec plura locuta
> Triste parat facinus tacitaque exaestuat ira.
> Ut tamen accessit natus matrique **salutem**
> Attulit et parvis adduxit **colla lacertis**
> Mixtaque blanditiis puerilibus **oscula iunxit** (*Met.* 6.620-626).
>
> Itys was coming to his mother: from that she was shown
> What she was able to do, and seeing him with unmoved eyes,

> "Ah, how similar to your father you are," she said, and said no more.
> She prepares the sad crime and seethes with silent rage.
> And as nevertheless her son gives a greeting for his mother
> He lifted [his arms] and embraced her neck with small arms
> And he joined kisses mixed with boyish caresses.

The passages are not identical, but there are enough similarities in diction to warrant a closer investigation. Tereus and Procne both watch their future victim, though Tereus is doing so sexually and Procne coldly. Both children embrace their parent with *lacertis*, which specifically refers to the upper arm. Physically, this is a very close embrace, and therefore a trusting one that certainly a child would give a parent. *Oscula*, too, are the kind of kisses a child would give a parent, as opposed to a lover's *suavia* or *basia*. There is also the common use of *salutem*: each wishes to greet Procne, and of course this desire will lead to doom for both of them. The act of embracing a parent regularly foreshadows such doom in the *Metamorphoses*. For instance, after Phaethon has asked to drive the Sun's chariot, Phoebus asks, *quid mea **colla** tenes **blandis**, ignare, **lacertis*** (*Met.* 2.100). In the end, he gives Phaethon the chariot, and Phaethon dies. Similarly, Philomela appeals to her father and unintentionally puts herself in the hands of her rapist. In all of these instances, the child appeals to a parent. Itys' is the only appeal that fails, but none of the appeals lead to anything positive.

It is also worthwhile to notice the intertextuality with another story that revolves around distorted family relationships. Byblis' embrace of her brother is described in much the same manner: *Nec peccare putat, quod saepius **oscula** iungat/quod sua fraterno circumdet **bracchia** **collo*** (Ovid *Met.* 9.458-9). Byblis' more-than-sisterly embraces use the same language as the embraces and kisses given by Philomela and Itys to their respective parents, but in the case of Byblis it is obvious that the innocence of the contact is a façade for the illicit passion beneath. It is a signal of something gone wrong. There is also that sense here: both Philomela and Itys trust

the parent who is about to betray them, though Pandion does so unknowingly. It is an innocent gesture of love, but seems to indicate a betrayal of familial trust. It is therefore unsurprising that the *blanditia* are passed from character to character in this tale: each is betrayed and then betrays in turn.

Philomela and Itys are each victims of treachery in the story. Cazzaniga identifies Procne also as a "future victim,"[69] adding her to the collection of victimized figures who direct *blanditia* at the very ones who will hurt them. It is a political marriage that victimizes her: she was sold to Tereus for an alliance to defend Athens from barbarians.[70] This suggests, however, that despite Tereus' Thracian origins, he does not begin as a barbarian, but as a defender from barbarians. In fact, his *innata libido* (Ovid *Met.* 6.458) is not woken until he sees Philomela. After this, he employs all manner of connivance to persuade Pandion, even crying (*addidit et lacrimas*, Ovid *Met.* 6.471), and thus his own fate is sealed.

This suggests, though, that there is another metamorphosis at play in this tale. At the end they all transform into birds, but first they all transform into barbarians. Otis writes that "Procne and Philomela are transformed and degraded into mere incarnations of vengeance. All they can do is to express their inhuman hostility to Tereus."[71] The *blanditia* seems to be an indicator that a character will be wronged by the very person to whom he or she is speaking endearments—and then metamorphose into the one who wronged them. I have already discussed how Procne becomes equated to Tereus; I will now discuss the transformations of Philomela and, to a lesser extent, Itys.

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[69] I. Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica grecoromana, II : L'episodio di Procne nel libro sesto delle Metamorfosi di Ovidio. Ricerche intorno alla tecnica poetica ovidiana* (Milano-Varese: Ed. Cisalpino, 1951), 8.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 210.

The Metamorphoses of Philomela and Itys

Philomela's transformations are forced upon her by the other characters. She is first "made her sister's rival" by Tereus' assault (*paelex ego facta sororis*, Ovid *Met*. 6.537). She has been irrevocably destroyed. She offers her throat to Tereus when he takes out his sword (*iugulum Philomela parabat/ spemque suae mortis viso conceperat ense*, Ovid *Met*.6.553-54), and he then violates her once again when he cuts out her tongue. She is permanently silenced for his purposes.

Because of this, she is forced to use abnormal means to reach her sister. She weaves her experience, and it is here that barbarism is first associated with Philomela: *stamina **barbarica** suspendit callida tela* (Ovid *Met.* 6.576). It is not the deed that is *barbarica*, but the *tela*, the weaving, itself. Her mode of communication is no longer civilized. Wheeler compares this to Io's attempt to communicate to her father, Inachus. Io successfully conveys that she is now a cow, but Inachus' reaction is to mourn that she cannot speak like a human being anymore, and therefore "is no longer fully 'human'."[72] He suggests as well that Philomela's communication is more effective because it elicits an empathetic response from its reader, Procne, rather than a denial of humanity.[73] There is, however, the problem of Philomela's *barbarica…tela*. It is possible that she is no longer considered fully human. Von Glinski certainly argues this when she discusses the dehumanizing effect of dismemberment:

> "The tongue becomes an alien animal, trying to rejoin its mistress.
> Its symbolism as externalized self which continues the faculty its
> mistress has lost anticipates Philomela's later, silent speech
> through communication through the tapestry"[74]

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[72] Stephen Michael Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders: Audience and Performance in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 51.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Marie Louise Von Glinski, *Simile and Identity in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.

Philomela's tongue writhes on the ground and acts as a separate creature. It is given its own

action and life, almost as if it contains a part of Philomela's humanity:

> Radix micat ultima linguae,
> Ipsa iacet terraeque tremens inmurmurat atrae,
> Utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae
> Palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit (Ovid *Met.* 6.557-560)
>
> The farthest root of the tongue quivers,
> The very one lies trembling and murmurs to the dark earth,
> And as the tail of a maimed snake is accustomed to jump about,
> It pulses and, dying, seeks the traces of its mistress.

Yet it is not merely the tongue that is animalistic, it is Philomela herself. The mutilation leaves

Philomela less than whole, lacking a key aspect of humanity: the ability to speak.

It also shows that Philomela is not and cannot be fully silenced. She has what Ahl calls "a

sure means of conveying one woman's message to another in woman's language—a language

that excludes man."[75] The κερκίδος φωνή (Sophocles *Tereus* frag 595) is powerful in her hands.

She passes her message and her silence to Procne.[76] Ahl goes a step further and argues that

Procne's silence is "beastlike," comparable to the reactions of those who saw a wolf in the

ancient world.[77] This perhaps furthers Tereus' characterization as a beast, rather than Procne's,

but her silence comes at an interesting juncture. This event is the impetus for their eventual

transformation into birds, which in Greek literature results in Procne as the nightingale and

Philomela as the babbling swallow. Perhaps Philomela's *carmen miserabile* (Ovid *Met.* 6.582)

and Procne's silence (Ovid *Met.* 6.583) are indicators of the Roman reversal: that Philomela will

become the singing nightingale and Procne the swallow. In any case, their transformation has

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[75] Frederick Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 229.

[76] Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders*, 51; Ahl, *Metaformations*, 229.

[77] Ahl, *Metaformations*, 229.

already begun. They have been silenced and have lost their humanity in a metaphorical sense.
Now they will do the same to Itys.

The timing of Itys' death is actually a matter of some confusion, as is his true killer.
Procne strikes him with a sword first, and "one wound was enough for his death" (*satis illi ad*
fata vel unum vulnus erat, Ovid *Met.* 6.642-3). This means that Procne's one blow should have
killed him—but it does not complete the revenge. Now Philomela cuts his throat (*iugulum ferro*
Philomela resolvit, Ovid *Met.* 6.643), a symbolic silencing of Itys. This hearkens back to
iugulum Philomela parabat (Ovid *Met.* 5.553), when she expected Tereus to kill her, and instead
he cut out her tongue. Still, this is not enough. The third "death" is Itys' dismemberment. This
form of metamorphosis, according to Von Glinski, is the most complete form of loss of self.[78]
More disturbing still is that he has not yet died. Procne's blow should have been enough;
Philomela cuts his throat. Yet "they tear apart his limbs, until now still living and retaining
something of animation" (*vivaque adhuc animaeque aliquid retinentia membra/ dilaniant,* Ovid
Met. 6.644-645). He is still alive, but the dismemberment dehumanizes and objectifies him.
Furthermore, there is a subtle reminder of Procne's original motive: *membra* can mean
"genitals," as well as arms and legs. He has been metamorphosed into an object of the sisters'
rage.

The Return of the Lament

Resolvit is a peculiar choice of words here: it means "loosen" or "unfasten," and usually
applies to knots, metaphorical or real. "Open" is another plausible meaning, in terms of injury,
and Tacitus' *Annales* has the only other example of its use in terms of cutting or severing

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[78] Von Glinski, *Simile and Identity in Ovid's* Metamorphoses, 14.

something, specifically *venas* (Tacitus *Annales* 6.9.11, 6.48.16). In this story, however, the

myriad subtle meanings are at play. The word also has the sense of "pay back," though usually in

much earlier authors and with an object of money or debt, but this meaning gives the word an

undertone of revenge. Philomela "paid back" the silencing she suffered at the hands of Tereus.

Yet there is another subtle meaning that is speech-related. In Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*, the

Earth calls out to Jupiter when Phaethon drives the chariot too close, and says *vix equidem fauces*

haec ipsa in verba resolvo (Ovid *Met.* 2.282.) "Indeed I scarcely open my throat into these very

words." It contains the implication of speech. This is not unique to the Earth's plea; Philomela's

actions are a speech act as well. Itys' head becomes her voice:

> Prosilu**it Ityos**que caput Philomela cruentum
> **Misit** in ora patris nec tempore malu**it** ullo
> Posse loqui et me**ritis** testari gaudia dictis (Ovid *Met.* 653-660).
>
> Philomela sprang forth and let loose the bloody head
> Of Itys at his father's face and not at any other time
> Did she prefer to speak and show her joy with merited words.

Misit is another word with speech implications. It carries the meaning of "announce," as well as

"send." The presentation of Itys' head is no mere reveal, it carries the weight of all of

Philomela's hatred for Tereus and everything she wishes to say to him. Itys has become her

voice, as well as the voice of the lament. As noted before, his name appears in Tereus' question

with onomatopoetic gemination (*atque, ubi s**it**, quaer**it**: quaerenti **ite**rumque vocanti*, Ovid *Met.*

6.656); it appears here as well. Itys' identity is still connected to the nightingale's lament, even

though it is only included in echoes in Ovid's text. Philomela is literally throwing the repetition

of Itys' name and wishes to say it herself.

Itys' identity is linked inextricably with the nightingale's lament in most of the versions

of the tale, and to a certain extent in Ovid's as well. Itys is mentioned only in the context of his

own death and the lament that follows. Ovid's is the only extant version that mentions his birth, ill-omened as it was, and gives the moment of his death more than a passing mention. The extant, identifiable images of the story only show the moment of his death as well, if he is pictured at all.

Yet here Ovid gives Itys an identity and a voice separate from the nightingale's lament. Not only is Itys given an existence outside his own murder, but he is clearly implied to be speaking. Procne wonders *cur admovet…alter blanditias, rapta silet altera lingua*? "Why does the one pile on endearments but the other is silent because of a stolen tongue?" Itys' ability to speak, in contrast to Philomela's, is one of the motivating factors for Procne to kill him. It then becomes his defense, as he cries *mater mater* (Ovid *Met.* 6.640) to Procne, trying to stop her. He is no passive victim here, mentioned only in passing, or described after his death as he would have been on the Sophoclean stage.[79] He also understands what Procne is about to do, and tries to stop her:

> nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae
> lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas,
> utque domus altae partem tenuere remotam,
> tendentemque manus et iam sua fata videntem
> et 'mater, mater' clamantem et colla petentem
> ense ferit Procne (Ovid *Met.* 6.636-641)
>
> Without delay, Procne dragged Itys, just like a tiger of the Ganges
> Drags a suckling fawn of a dear through the dark woods,
> And as they held a remote part of the high house,
> With a sword she struck him, stretching out his arms
> And now seeing his fate and crying "Mother, Mother!" and
> Reaching for her neck.

[79] In Greek tragedy, the action usually takes place offstage and is then discussed or displayed after the fact. Itys would have been killed beyond the audience's view, and the audience would have found out afterwards, perhaps at the same time as Tereus.

Curley suggests that Itys' *mater, mater* is Ovid's reinvention of the Greek tragedians' birdcall pattern, and in fact is his iteration of the nightingale's lament.[80] This would put the lament—linked with Itys' identity—in Itys' own mouth. He is therefore in control of his own identity, and has, in a way, flipped the situation. Just as the nightingale cries out "Itys, Itys" to his mother, Itys can now call out "Mother, mother" to Procne. Procne's ability to kill Itys unfeelingly, without turning away (*nec vultum vertit*, Ovid *Met.* 6.642), stems from her perception of her family as destroyed. She is of her sister's blood, and Itys is not her child—he is the heir of Tereus. Itys' lament, repossessed from the nightingale, is a reconfirmation of his identity: he *is* her son, and she is his mother, whether she cares to believe it or not.

Conclusion

Ovid's extant corpus has a number of examples of changes in identity and giving voice to silenced characters. His *Heroides* are a good example of this: women like Oenone and Briseis, who say very little and have almost no agency to change their situations, are able to speak and put their thoughts in a letter to the men who abandoned them. Itys is an eternal victim, perpetually silenced by his mother. His only existence is communicated through the nightingale's song.

Roman authors traditionally reverse the transformation of the sisters: Procne becomes the swallow and Philomela the nightingale. This loses the core of the lament: Philomela has no reason to mourn Itys, and Procne no longer bears that responsibility. Ovid leaves this ambiguous: *quarum petit altera silvas,/ altera tecta subit; neque adhuc de pectore caedis/ excessere notae,*

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[80] Curley, "Ovid, Met. 6.640: A Dialogue between Mother and Son," 322.

signataque sanguine pluma est (Ovid *Met.* 6.668-670). Martín Rodríguez suggests that Ovid may leave this ambiguous to avoid seeming less learned to his readers and to avoid the trap of assigning song to the seemingly mute sister.[81]

One effect of this ambiguity is that Philomela is allowed to be the silencer—she is the one who cuts Itys' throat, even though Procne strikes the (supposed) death-blow. The other effect is to give the "victory" to the two women. Procne does not lament her son, thus not giving him a memory. She chooses to give her sister a voice and agency through their vengeance. It would appear that there is no chance for further retribution because Tereus and the two sisters are all transformed. In versions where Procne becomes the nightingale explicitly, Itys' presence is continuous because of the lament. He is beyond help, but he gains a sort of vengeance through the eternal lament of his mother.

Yet in Ovid's version the lament is never mentioned, and Procne does not explicitly become the nightingale. There is no song for Itys. Instead, after his death the echo is clear in Tereus' question and Philomela's mute speech act. When they turn into birds, the echo is even more evident (*Pennis pendere putares/Pendebant pennis* 6.667-8). Thus, which sister becomes which bird is irrelevant. The lament is embedded in the story, and so too is Itys' identity embedded in the story. In a way, Itys himself is the story's fulcrum. He is the product of a nuclear family that cannot function, a dysfunction which causes the rape of Philomela and the ultimate breakdown of the relationships in that family. His identity is forever in question: is he Tereus' child, or is he Procne's? In his own voice, he claims to be Procne's.

Brooks Otis breaks down the organization of the *Metamorphoses* into four sections, each with a central panel with symmetrical stories that function as an introduction and conclusion to

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[81] Martín Rodríguez, *De Aedón a Filomela*, 259.

the panel.[82] He sets the story of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus in symmetry with the story of

Myrrha and that of Ceyx and Alcyone. Using the lens of "amatory *pathos,*" as Otis does, this

makes sense. He also breaks down the tale into two segments: in the first, Tereus' libido and

Philomela's rape dominates; in the second, Procne and her vengeance dominate.[83] I would,

however, add a third segment, in which Itys dominates. Once Itys is killed, he is the central

focus, and his name and echoes of the lament are scattered throughout. With this focus, I would

then argue that the tale of Procne, Tereus, and Philomela becomes a central panel for the entire

Metamorphoses. It functions as a center point: the stories previous and following share the same

themes and motifs. Philomela's weaving brutally emphasizes the theme of overcoming silence

through art, a central theme in the *Metamorphoses*, as exemplified in the story of Arachne.

Both Itys and Philomela are silenced in this tale. Philomela has her web, on which she

weaves her own story. Itys has the lament, through which traditionally the nightingale creates a

monument to him. Without the nightingale to voice that memorial, Itys would disappear, but

Ovid gives him control over it instead. The distortion of the family and Itys' identity are the core

of Ovid's version, and Itys' lament gives voice to both.

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[82] Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 85.
[83] Ibid., 211.

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