‘Oh, what a tangled web we weave’: Jocasta’s Suicide in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1) *Od*. 11.271-280 | μητέρα τ᾽ Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,  ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν **ἀιδρείῃσι νόοιο**  γημαμένη ᾧ υἷι: ὁ δ᾽ ὃν πατέρ᾽ ἐξεναρίξας  γῆμεν: ἄφαρ δ᾽ ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.  ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων  Καδμείων ἤνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλάς:  ἡ δ᾽ ἔβη εἰς Ἀίδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,  ἁψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ᾽ **ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου**,  ᾧ ἄχεϊ σχομένη: τῷ δ᾽ ἄλγεα κάλλιπ᾽ ὀπίσσω  πολλὰ μάλ᾽, ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν. | And I saw the mother of Oedipus, beautiful Epicaste, who did a monstrous thing in the **ignorance of her mind**, wedding her own son; and he, when he had slain his own father, wedded her; and soon the gods made these things known among men. Nevertheless, in lovely Thebes, suffering woes, he ruled over the Cadmeans by the dire designs of the gods; but she went down to the house of Hades, the strong warder, making fast a deadly noose from **the high ceiling**, caught by her own grief; but for him she left behind countless woes, all that a mother’s Furies bring to pass. |
| 2) *OT* 1249-1250 | γοᾶτο δ᾽ εὐνάς, ἔνθα δύστηνος **διπλοῦς**  ἐξ **ἀνδρὸς ἄνδρα καὶ τέκν᾽ ἐκ τέκνων τέκοι**. | But she mourned over the **marriage-bed**, where the wretched woman gave birth to a **twofold** brood**: a husband from a husband, and children from her children**. |
| 3) *OT* 1252-1257 | βοῶν γὰρ εἰσέπαισεν Οἰδίπους, ὑφ᾽ οὗ  οὐκ ἦν τὸ κείνης ἐκθεάσασθαι κακόν,  ἀλλ᾽ εἰς ἐκεῖνον περιπολοῦντ᾽ ἐλεύσσομεν.  φοιτᾷ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἔγχος ἐξαιτῶν πορεῖν,  **γυναῖκά τ᾽ οὐ γυναῖκα**, μητρῴαν δ᾽ ὅπου  κίχοι **διπλῆν ἄρουραν** οὗ τε καὶ τέκνων. | For Oedipus burst in yelling, and because of him it was not possible to look upon the misfortune of that woman, but we were looking at him rushing around. For he went to and fro demanding us to give him a sword, asking where he could find **his wife, not a wife**, **but the twofold womb** of the mother of both himself and his children. |
| 4) Hippocrates' On Maiden Diseases, 30-37 | ἐχόντων δὲ τούτων ὧδε, ὑπὸ μὲν τῆς ὀξυφλεγμασίης μαίνεται, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς σηπεδόνος φονᾷ, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ζοφεροῦ φοβέεται καὶ δέδοικεν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς περὶ τὴν καρδίην πιέξιος **ἀγχόνας κραίνουσιν**, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς κακίης τοῦ αἵματος ἀλύων καὶ ἀδημονέων ὁ θυμὸς κακὸν ἐφέλκεται. ἕτερον δὲ καὶ φοβερὰ ὀνομάζει· **καὶ κελεύουσιν ἅλλεσθαι καὶ καταπίπτειν ἐς φρέατα ἢ ἄγχεσθαι, ἅτε ἀμείνονά τε ἐόντα καὶ χρείην ἔχοντα παντοίην. δονή τις ἀφ᾿ ἧς ἐρᾷ τοῦ θανάτου ὥσπερ τινὸς ἀγαθοῦ.** | When these things occur in this way, the young girl is mad from the intensity of the inflammation; she turns murderous from the putrefaction; she feels fears and terrors from the darkness. From the pressure around the heart, these **young girls long for nooses**. Their spirit, distraught and sorely troubled by the foulness of their blood, attracts bad things, but names something else even fearful things. **They command the young girl to wander about, to cast herself into wells, and to hang herself, as if these actions were preferable and completely useful. Even when without visions, a certain pleasure exists, as a result of which she longs for death, as if something good.** |
| 4) *OT* 1263-1267 | οὗ δὴ κρεμαστὴν τὴν γυναῖκ᾽ ἐσείδομεν,  **πλεκταῖσιν αἰώραισιν ἐμπεπλεγμένην**.  ὁ δ᾽ ὡς ὁρᾷ νιν, δεινὰ βρυχηθεὶς τάλας  χαλᾷ κρεμαστὴν ἀρτάνην. ἐπεὶ δὲ γῇ  ἔκειτο τλήμων, δεινὰ δ᾽ ἦν τἀνθένδ᾽ ὁρᾶν. | There we looked upon the woman suspended, **entangled by a πλεκταῖσιν αἰώραισιν**.  But when he saw her, after he groaned  he loosened the hung rope. But when the wretched woman lay on the ground, what followed was terrible to behold. |
| 5) *Od*. 22.461-467 | τοῖσι δὲ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἦρχ᾽ ἀγορεύειν:  ‘μὴ μὲν δὴ **καθαρῷ θανάτῳ** ἀπὸ θυμὸν ἑλοίμην  τάων, αἳ δὴ ἐμῇ κεφαλῇ κατ᾽ ὀνείδεα χεῦαν  μητέρι θ᾽ ἡμετέρῃ παρά τε μνηστῆρσιν ἴαυον.  ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἔφη, καὶ πεῖσμα νεὸς κυανοπρῴροιο  κίονος ἐξάψας μεγάλης περίβαλλε θόλοιο,  ὑψόσ᾽ ἐπεντανύσας, μή τις ποσὶν οὖδας ἵκοιτο.' | Then wise Telemachus was the first to speak to the others, saying: “Let it be by no **clean death** that I take the lives of these women, who on my own head have poured reproaches and on my mother, and were wont to lie with the wooers.” So he spoke, and tied the cable of a dark-prowed ship to a great pillar and flung it round the dome, stretching it on high that none might reach the ground with her feet. |
| 6) OT 1275-1277 1280-1281 | τοιαῦτ᾿ ἐφυμνῶν πολλάκις τε κοὐχ ἅπαξ  ἤρασσ᾿ ἐπαίρων βλέφαρα. **φοίνιαι δ᾿ ὁμοῦ**  **γλῆναι γένει᾿ ἔτεγγον, οὐδ᾿ ἀνίεσαν**.  ...  τάδ᾿ ἐκ δυοῖν ἔρρωγεν οὐ μόνου κακά†ἀλλ᾿ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ **συμμιγῆ κακά**. | Groaning such things, he struck his eyes and not once but many times struck them; **the bleeding eyeballs soaked his cheeks, and did not cease to drip**.  ... And these horrors came forth from these two, but also brought mingled woes not only to the man but also the woman. |

Select Bibliography

Blundell, Sue and Margaret Williamson. *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*. Routledge: 1998.

Dillon, Matthew. *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion.* Routledge: 2002.

Flemming, R., and Hanson, A. *Hippocrates' "Peri Partheniôn' (Diseases of Young Girls): Text and Translation*. Early Science and Medicine, 3(3), 241-252. 1998.

Foley, Helene P. *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy.* Princeton: 2001.

Loraux, Nicole. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman.* HUP: 1987.

March, J. *The Creative Poet: Studies on the Treatment of Myths in Greek Poetry*. BICS Supplement, 49. London. 1987.

Murray, A.T. *Odyssey:* *Books 1-12.* Loeb Classical Library. HUP: 1919.

Murray, A.T. *Odyssey:* *Books 13-24*. Loeb Classical Library. HUP: 1919.

Rehm, R. *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in*

*Tragedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1994.