

Ovid's Song of Philomela: "*germanaeque suae carmen miserabile*" (*Meta.* VI.582)

The publication of R. J. Tarrant's long awaited Oxford Classical Texts edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2004) invited new attention to a text filled with questioned and questionable readings. In the myth of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela (VI.424-674), line 582 has elicited such controversy that Reeve even suggested the line might better be omitted. Yet one can argue that this line is meaningful for interpreting both the story and the epic in terms of Ovid's own poetics, and that Tarrant's redaction of the verse, "*germanaeque suae carmen miserabile legit*," affirming the reading in Merkel's 1865 Teubner edition, possesses the most Ovidian sensibility. Tarrant's reading of "*germanaeque*" instead of "*fortunaequae*", the more frequent choice (e.g. Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 6-10*, 1972), coupled with his reading of "*carmen*" instead of the more frequent "*fatum*" (e.g. Goold's revised Loeb edition, 1977), fits much more closely to the agenda of a poet notable for his allusive language, dramatic flair, and emphasis on the visual.

Wheeler (*A Discourse of Wonders*, 1999) perceptively accepts and discusses *carmen miserabile* as evocative of Vergil (*Georgics* 4.514) and as an illustrative validation of his own theories on Ovid's representation of 'writing' itself. But Wheeler also prefers the reading "*fortunaequae*," as it supports his contention that Philomela's text represents her tragic misfortune. But while the terrible suffering of Philomela may foreshadow the Orphic cycle of tragedies in Book X and allude to Vergil's treatment of Orpheus and Eurydice in the *Georgics*, Ovid's description of Philomela's *carmen miserabile* is more evocative of Arachne than Orpheus. At the end of Book VI, the mute Philomela (*os mutum*) must weave words into a tapestry to substitute for her own voice, as Arachne's own tapestry voiced pictorially her indictment of divine passions at the beginning of Book VI. But Philomela weaves a tapestry of words not pictures, though the words may engender visual imagery, just as did Ovid's description of Arachne's tapestry, thus underscoring the relationship between visual imagery and language in the framing stories of Book VI. *Carmen miserabile* becomes an "ecphrastic presence" (Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion*, 2002) for the two sisters, and thus "*germanaeque*" is the more sensible Ovidian reading, as Philomela's "*carmen miserabile*" is really a self-portrait for and by a *germana*. The *carmen miserabile* recreates the identity and experiences of Philomela, while Ovid's account of Procne's silent reaction to the *carmen* reflects the mental processing of the semiotic nature of language, as well as intentionally mirroring her sister's own mute suffering. Thus, Philomela's song is really Philomela herself, an overpowering presence for and miraculous influence upon Procne (*mirum potuisse*, 583).

When Procne literally and figuratively uncovers Philomela in the cloth of the tapestry (*evolvit vestes saevi matrona tyranni*, 581), the *germanae* inevitably join together with Ovid the narrator in a united *carmen miserabile* of vengeance (*poenaeque in imagine tota est*, 586). Through emphasis on Philomela's verbal artistry (*ingenium...sollertia*, 575) and its capacity to create a visualized reality, Ovid again privileges textuality and narrative discourse (*purpureasque notas*, 577) as a means for creating reality, as he does so often in the *Metamorphoses*. Tarrant's reading of line 582, "*germanaeque suae carmen miserabile legit*," is the most Ovidian, as it invites critical appreciation for both the story and the storyteller.