

From Figure to Plot: Innovative Embodiment of Metapoetic Metaphors in Sophocles' *Tereus*

This paper explores the innovative use of two well-established metapoetic motifs in Sophocles' lost tragedy *Tereus*: the act of weaving and the song of the nightingale. Indeed, in the *anagnorisis* scene, Philomela - having had her tongue cut out by Tereus - manages to communicate her rape to her sister Procne by embroidering it onto a *peplos*; later, at the end of the play, Procne is transformed into a nightingale. I argue that Sophocles dramatized these metaphors within the plot of his tragedy, bringing them to life on the stage. Therefore, *Tereus* offers a striking example of Sophocles' ability not only to reflect on his own poetic craft, but also to vividly stage it in tragic performance.

The metaphor of weaving is a common image for poetic composition in Greek and Indo-European traditions (Bergren 1983; Nagy 2017). As a result, Philomela's weaving her story into her *peplos* in Sophocles' *Tereus* functions as a visual counterpart of poetic creation. In the *anagnorisis*, I argue, weaving becomes an act of visual storytelling: deprived of her tongue, Philomela shows her rape on the *peplos*, to communicate her story to her sister Procne. In this metaliterary framework, the *peplos* becomes the tragedy itself, with Procne as audience and Philomela as author. This is similar to what we find in the *Iliad* (3.126-7), where Helen represents on her tapestry scenes from the Trojan War. In both cases, a woman weaves an autobiographical and mournful story on a cloth. An ancient scholiast recognized Helen's weaving as an archetype of Homer's poetry (Scholia b e T ad *Iliad* 3.126-7). In similar terms, I suggest, Philomela can be seen as a poetic double of Sophocles.

On the other hand, the nightingale as a metaphor of poetic voice and lament is a well-established motif in Greek literature (Sotiriou 2012). Therefore, the transformation of Procne

into a nightingale at the end of Sophocles' *Tereus* also stages a figure of tragic poetry. At the conclusion of the play, Procne's metamorphosis into a nightingale crystallizes her cry for Itys in eternal mourning. Thus, Sophocles evoked on stage the etiological origin of a metaphor for mourning recurrent throughout the tragic corpus, always with metapoetic implications. While Philomela's *peplos* recreates a performance on stage as a play-within-a-play, Procne's nightingale song is potentially unending. This opens up a metapoetic horizon at the very ending of the play: the nightingale, according to the myth, will mourn forever the death of her son.

Building on the works of scholars who have highlighted the use of metatheatrical and metapoetic features by Sophocles (Faulkner 1993; Ringer 1998; Dobrov 2001, esp. 57-69, 105-26; Lada-Richards 2009; Dunn 2011; Cowan 2014), I argue that the recurrence of these two motifs in pivotal scenes, the *anagnorisis* and the etiological ending, hints at Sophocles' original treatment of the myth of Tereus. Interestingly, within the literary sources of this narrative, the motif of the speaking *peplos* first appears in Sophocles, who also seems to expand the final metamorphosis (Mancuso 2019). By introducing these metapoetic metaphors as plot elements, I conclude, Sophocles crafted his *Tereus* as a unique metapoetic experiment. In this light, this fragmentary play can offer valuable glimpses into Sophocles' conception of tragic aesthetics.

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