

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

This paper explores how the identity of Itys, the murdered child of the nightingale, is affected by Ovid's elimination of the nightingale's lament in *Metamorphoses* Book 6. Ovid does not give Procne a lament after her transformation, and thus silences Itys, while in earlier versions, the lament becomes his voice, as projected through his mother, Procne.

Indeed, earlier versions of the story, in which the woman who becomes the nightingale is named Aedon, refers to the nightingale's song as a lament for her son (Homer *Odyssey* 19.512-524; Pherecydes *Hist. frag.* 102). Two pieces of evidence suggest that an alternate version, on which Sophocles' *Tereus* is based, existed at the same time. Hesiod refers to the swallow as the daughter of Pandion (*Works and Days* 569), and an image from a metope on the temple at Thermon shows two women, supposedly Aedon and her sister Chelidon, the swallow, with the child Itys after he has been killed (see Fitzpatrick 2001, 90; March 2000, 126-7; Payne 1926, 124-5). The two stories are quite different, but are connected by the murder of Itys and the lament that follows.

The lament itself is an onomatopoeia derived from the child's name (Cazzaniga 1950, 44). When authors quote the lament, it is often doubled in imitation of birdsong, as Daniel Curley notes (Curley 1997, 321). Aedon's lament is described in the full narration of the story given by Pherecydes (Θρήνει δὲ αἰεὶ ποτε τὸν Ἴτυλον, ὡς φησι Φερεκύδης, *Frag.* 102) and in Aeschylus' reference to the myth (ξυντίθησι δὲ παιδὸς μόρον, ὡς αὐτοφόνως/ ὄλετο πρὸς χειρὸς ἔθεν/ δυσμάτορος κότου τυχῶν, *Suppliants* 65-67). The fragments of Sophocles' *Tereus* do not include the lament. Sophocles does use it in his *Electra* (ἂ Ἴτυν, αἰὲν Ἴτυν ὀλοφύρεται, 147), and Aristophanes refers to the lament in the *Birds* 211-212 (οὗς διὰ θείου στόματος θρηνεῖς/ τὸν ἔμὸν καὶ σὸν πολύδακρον Ἴτυν). This suggests that it was included in the *Tereus*.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, Procne gives voice to a different silenced victim: Stephen Wheeler suggests that when Procne reads Philomela's *carmen miserabile* (Ovid *Met.* 6.582), she is in fact reading aloud, and perhaps Philomela's voice is realized through her (Wheeler 1999, 52-3). Philomela's weaving is significant for most analyses of the story (see Salzman-Mitchell 2005, Wheeler 1999, Ahl 1985, et al.), and the parallels between Itys and Philomela have often been drawn (Gildenhard and Zissos, 2007, Larmour 1990). Both are innocent victims of someone they trusted and both are mutilated in a way that silences them (Philomela is the one who cuts Itys' throat, *Met.* 6.643).

Philomela finds a new avenue for her voice: the so-called κερκίδος φωνή (Sophocles *Tereus* f595). Itys tries—in fact, Curley suggests that Itys' own cry (*mater! mater!*, Ovid, *Met.* 6.640) is an echo, or rather, precursor, of Procne's absent lament (Curley 1997, 322)—but his mother ignores him and feels no remorse for what she has done. She never echoes her son's cry, suppressing his voice as she did not suppress that of her sister. Philomela may fill the role of Tereus to wield the iron that silences Itys, but it is Procne in the role of potential helper who permanently silences her son. In essence, Itys' *mater! mater!* is his plea for help; his “κερκίδος φωνή.” Yet while Procne gives voice and action to her sister's cry, she ignores that of her son. He is silenced, killed, and lost when Procne, Philomela, and Tereus are transformed. No one sings his name and he has no voice to preserve him.

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