9. RHETORIC

νῦν δ' οὐδέν εἰμι χωρίς. ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
ἔβλεψα ταύτῃ τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
ὡς οὐδέν ἐσμεν. αἳ νέαι μὲν ἐν πατρὸς
ἥδιστον, οἶμαι, ζῶμεν ἀνθρώπων βίον·
τερπνῶς γὰρ ἀεὶ παῖδας ἀνοία τρέφει.
ὅταν δ' ἐς ἥβην ἐξικώμεθ' ἔμφρονες,
ὠθούμεθ' ἔξω καὶ διεμπολώμεθα
θεῶν πατρῴων τῶν τε φυσάντων ἄπο,
αἱ μὲν ξένους πρὸς ἄνδρας, αἱ δὲ βαρβάρους,
αἱ δ' εἰς ἀήθιη δώμαθ', αἱ δ' ἐπίρροθα.
καὶ ταῦτ', ἐπιειδὰν εὐφρόνη ζεύξῃ μία,
χρεὼν ἐπαινεῖν καὶ δοκεῖν καλῶς ἔχειν.
νόμῳ μὲν [
εἰ δ' ἐκ τοιοῦ[
ἴδοιμι και[
τὸ γὰρ ποῦ [
Χο<ρός> ἀλλ' εὖ τελ[
χρηστὴν φ[
Ποιμ<ήν> δέσποινα[ ] [
θέλων τι[
<Πρόκνη> οὐκουν δ[
λόγων με[
<Ποιμήν> ὅρκον γαρ[
φράσειν α[
<Πρόκνη> λέξασα [
κοινον [
<Ποιμήν> εἶρπον μ[
ἀλλ' ἐξ ἄγρα[ς
ὅς ἡμιν ερ[
στείχων δ[
ἔνθεν χοαι[
ἔστην ὑπο[
τερραμν' ὑπ[
] παρ [
. . .

[Procne] . . .As it is, I am nothing on my own. But I have often regarded the nature of women in this way, seeing that we amount to nothing. In childhood in our father's house we live the happiest life, I think, of all mankind; for ignorance always rears children in happiness. But when we have understanding and have come to womanhood, we are pushed out and sold, away from our paternal gods and from our parents, some to foreign husbands, some to barbarians, some to unfamiliar homes, and some to homes that are opprobrious. And this, once a single

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night has yoked us, we must approve and consider to be a good thing. . .custom. But if after such. . .I should. . .see. . .too. For what. . .
Chorus: Well,. . .end. . .good. . .
Shepherd: Lady. . .wishing. . .something. . .
[Procne:] Then. . .words. . .
[Shepherd:] . . .an oath. . .shall speak. . .
[Procne:] By speaking. . .For. . .shared. . .
[Shepherd:] I was making my way. . .but from a hunt. . .who. . .to us. . .things. . . Travelling. . .from where libations. . .I stood ?under. . .hut. . .
(*Tereus* fr. 583 + *POxy.* 5292)

The first twelve lines of this text were ascribed to Sophocles' *Tereus* by the fifth-century AD anthologist Stobaeus, whose works, unlike Sophocles' play, did survive antiquity; they appear in Radt's edition of the fragments as fr. 583. Scholars have long supposed, rightly, that they were delivered by Procne, daughter of Pandion, king of Athens, and wife of Tereus, king of Thrace. After living with her husband for a while she grew lonely, and asked him to fetch her sister Philomela from Athens. Tereus did so, but on the return journey he raped her, cutting out her tongue to prevent her accusing him. She was, however, able to communicate to her sister what had happened by weaving the story into a tapestry; together, the sisters conspired to kill Tereus' child by Procne, Itys, and served the poor boy's flesh as a meal to his unsuspecting father. Once he discovered the truth he pursued them, and the gods turned all three into birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a nightingale, and Philomela into a swallow. Procne in her new form became a byword for misery: the nightingale's call was thought to symbolize her perpetual lamentation for her own child, whom she had killed in pursuit of a terrible revenge.[1]

The twelve quoted lines are a powerful statement by a female character about a central aspect of women's life in the ancient world, namely marriage.[2] οὐδέν εἰμι ('I am nothing', 1) is picked up by οὐδέν ἐσμεν ('we are nothing', 3), emphasizing the similarity between Procne and her (evidently female) auditors; Procne presents herself as χωρίς ('on my own', 1), though her language is designed to make

[1] Finglass 2007d on *El.* 107.
[2] For a discussion of the fragment, together with the other evidence for the play then known, see Coo 2013b.

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her anything but. Procne's self-assimilation to other women continues with four first-person plural verbs in the next four lines, generalizing her fate among her audience and women as a whole. This unified female experience is then shattered as different women are sent out to different marital fates, a point highlighted by the repeated αἱ μὲν. . .αἱ δὲ. . . clauses emphasizing the scattering of a previously homogenous group. The shift of verbal voice, from intransitive to passive, and the emphatic placing of the passive verbs in line 7 at the beginning and end of a line, signals the women's loss of agency and thus inability to control their fates.

Relatively few Greek women will have married outside their community, and fewer still ended up with a foreign king as their spouse, but the force of Procne's language universalizes her experience. This not only makes her more sympathetic to the internal audience (for, as Aristotle points out at *Rhetoric* 1386a25–7, we tend to pity people who are most similar to us); it conveys to the audience of the play her ability to speak on behalf of all womankind, making what might have seemed a personal complaint, unrelated to any situation in which the spectators could imagine themselves or their loved ones, into an inclusive statement of imaginative sympathy.

This is a moving speech, then, but also a carefully crafted one, intended to win over its audience through its assertion of a shared perspective. But its context has remained unclear. When does Procne deliver these reflections? At the start of the play, or later on? And when she does so, does she know anything about the suffering endured by her sister? Thanks to an early second-century Oxyrhynchus papyrus from an ancient book containing the play, published in 2016, the first three lines of which overlap with the last three lines of Stobaeus' quotation, and which provides the opening of a further twenty-two lines, we can venture answers to these questions, and appreciate the context of Procne's rhetorical display.[3]

The new manuscript reveals that Procne's speech cannot come from the play's prologue or opening scene, since the chorus are already present; that Procne's speech extends for only four more lines beyond the general reflections quoted by Stobaeus; and, crucially, that these words do not seem to involve any discussion of Philomela. If Procne thought that anything had happened to her sister, it would be unthinkable for

[3] Finglass 2016c, 2017g, 2019; Slattery 2016.

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her to mention her general criticisms of marriage without segueing to the particularly bitter personal pain which any injury to Philomela, real or imagined, would have caused her. That does not mean that Philomela has not yet experienced her trauma – only that, if she has, Procne as yet knows nothing about it.

The revelation of the crime probably arises from the intervention of the Shepherd, who, the papyrus tells us, arrives shortly after Procne's speech; his entry seems to be accompanied by a hope from the chorus that he is bringing good news (17–18), which in tragedy almost guarantees that he is not. The narrative which begins in line 27, and is still ongoing when the papyrus runs out a few lines later, is set in the countryside, and refers to the Shepherd's movements in the aftermath of a hunt. It is likely that he is narrating some discovery, and in this myth it is hard to see what else he could have discovered apart from the mutilated Philomela, who (if this argument is correct) must have been confined by Tereus there, almost certainly in the hut mentioned in line 33. This confinement is attested in other versions, for instance by Ovid and Libanius; now we see that Sophocles probably used it too.

The announcement of the discovery must have been followed by Philomela's appearance on stage, brought either by the Shepherd (who returned to fetch her) or by his associate. And that appearance will have led to Procne's discovery of her sister's terrible suffering, and to the conspiracy of the sisters against Procne's husband and son. In other words, the Shepherd's entry provides the key information that sets the plot in motion. Procne's realization of the truth and the actions that she commits as a consequence were fixed elements of the myth which Sophocles could not have done without; but thanks to the papyrus, we learn that, immediately after Procne delivers the lament about marriage found in Stobaeus' anthology, a character enters who will give Procne news that will make these general complaints about marriage seem trivial. When she utters these words, likening her wretched situation to that of all married women, she is tragically unaware of the unique horror about to confront her, something that will drive her to an action – the killing of her own child – that utterly separates her from conventional female, from conventional human, values, and that makes her name into a byword for uniquely intense grief. And that vengeance which the sisters take gives the lie in the most forceful way to the idea, voiced in her speech, that women are 'nothing'. The rhetorical force of Procne's speech, then, already identifiable in Stobaeus' quotation, becomes so much more intense once we

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know its context; its resonances become more profound because of the Shepherd's awful news.

The papyrus allows us to reassess the rhetorical power of a speech from a fragmentary Sophoclean tragedy. It is of particular interest as being a speech delivered by a woman, about women in general, which turns out to have particular application to her own situation and that of another woman, her sister; and attention to the rhetoric employed by women in particular has been a growth area in recent discussions of tragedy, including with specific reference to Sophocles.[4] Procne's speech in *Tereus* recalls another such speech from a Sophoclean female character powerfully expressing the nature of female suffering:

ὡς δ᾽ ἐγὼ θυμοφθορῶ
μήτ᾽ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα, νῦν δ᾽ ἄπειρος εἶ.
τὸ γὰρ νεάζον ἐν τοιοῖσδε βόσκεται
χώροισιν αὐτοῦ, καί νιν οὐ θάλπος θεοῦ,
οὐδ᾽ ὄμβρος, οὐδὲ πνευμάτων οὐδὲν κλονεῖ,
ἀλλ᾽ ἡδοναῖς ἄμοχθον ἐξαίρει βίον
ἐς τοῦθ᾽, ἕως τις ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνὴ
κληθῇ, λάβῃ τ᾽ ἐν νυκτὶ φροντίδων μέρος,
ἤτοι πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἢ τέκνων φοβουμένη.
τότ᾽ ἄν τις εἰσίδοιτο, τὴν αὑτοῦ σκοπῶν
πρᾶξιν, κακοῖσιν οἷς ἐγὼ βαρύνομαι.

May you never learn to know through suffering such agony of heart as mine, of which you now have no experience. For such are the places of its own where what is young is nourished, and neither the sun god's heat afflicts it, nor rain, nor any winds, but it uplifts its life in pleasures, untroubled, till the time when one is called a woman rather than a maiden, and gets during the night one's share of worries, fearing for one's husband or one's children. Then someone could see, looking at their own condition, what evils I am burdened with. (*Trachiniae* 142–52)

This speech from Heracles' wife, Deianira, occurs in the second scene, immediately after the entrance of the chorus, to whom the words are addressed. The chorus had come to console Deianira, who is suffering because of the long absence of her husband; in this speech Deianira rejects that consolation, implying that the chorus lack the authority to make it because of their youth. Her language mitigates any bluntness in

[4] Mossman 2001, 2005, 2012; Lewis 2015. Also McClure 1999; Foley 2001; Chong-Gossard 2008; Van Emde Boas 2017; Finglass and Coo 2019a.

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that rejection, emphasizing the blissful state of the innocent girls; the repeated negatives (145–6) stress their invulnerability to each of the mighty elements, using language elsewhere associated with heaven itself.[5] But we then reach the phrase ἐς τοῦθ' ('to this point'), emphasized by run-on followed by pause, which signals the transition from girl to wife. The protected state of the girl yields to the state of a woman perpetually afraid for her close family, whose fear is all the more apparent because of the blessedly carefree existence which Deianira has only just described.

Like Procne's speech in *Tereus*, the full force of this speech can be appreciated only within a broader context. Deianira's own painful transition from maiden to wife is the subject of her opening speech, and of the chorus's song in the first stasimon. Yet despite the universalizing account of that transition in the speech above, Deianira's experience was unique, fought over as she was in a public contest between two suitors, the river-god Achelous, and Heracles, son of Zeus (see above, p. 46). Such a fate is unlikely to befall any of the girls to whom she is speaking, and so it is hard to see how (by Deianira's terms) they could ever be qualified to discuss her suffering: Deianira's situation already sets her apart from any other woman.

Shortly afterwards a messenger enters, with news of Heracles' imminent return. Then Lichas, Heracles' herald, comes on stage with a crowd of women captured by Heracles in his recent sack of Oechalia, including Iole, daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia – Heracles sacked the city to possess her. Those women, particularly Iole, visibly instantiate the transition that Deianira has only just been describing: until recently happy in a protected environment, they have been brutally snatched away thanks to the lust of a man. Their transition does not, however, involve acquiring the name of wife. Heracles' limitless passion means that the status of Iole and Deianira, not to speak of the other girls, is thrown into confusion, and neither could fully regard Heracles as her husband (cf. 550–1). Deianira's moving description, which encapsulates so powerfully the emotions stimulated by this central transition in a woman's life, again proves insufficient when confronted with Heracles, whose transgressive actions cause even fundamental transitions to break down.

A further irony arises from Deianira's reference to the fear that a married woman feels for her husband and children. She begins the

[5] Hom. *Od.* 4.566–8, 6.43–5.

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play with concern for her absent husband; but in time that becomes a fear that she will lose him to another woman (550–1, 630–2), which drives her to actions which lead (against her intention) to the destruction of her husband, and to her own cursing by her son, which causes her to kill herself. In other words, the emotion here associated with concern for the new family members which marriage brings a woman, ends by bringing about the destruction of that family unit, provoking hatred where it should have brought love. So, although Deianira's eloquence here is perfectly motivated by her immediate situation, its memorability gives it an impact well beyond that.

Tereus and *Trachiniae* have much in common in their treatment of female suffering, and of female descriptions of it.[6] In each case the woman's response to suffering gives her an agency beyond the power of her words; their speeches are rhetorical set-pieces which reflect on the human condition, while having a closer application to the speaker's present situation than she could have anticipated. Yet women's rhetoric in Sophocles is not limited to reflections. A key function of tragic rhetoric is to persuade, and attempts at persuasion are a mainstay of speeches in Sophocles, including those by women.[7] Not every such attempt succeeds; Sophocles regularly brings out the intransigence of certain characters by having them reject speeches whose persuasive power ought to have been overwhelming. Perhaps the best example of this is Tecmessa's speech in the first episode of *Ajax*, in which she appeals to Ajax not to kill himself. Because it fails in its purpose, and because of a widespread paradigm which contrasts the decisiveness of the central character with the weaker, yielding nature of other figures (see Chapter 10 below), the speech is sometimes dismissed as a failure or merely ignored; yet its clear rhetorical power demonstrates just how set Ajax is in his purpose that he is able to ignore words even as persuasive as this.[8] After describing how she was the daughter of a rich man, but has now been reduced to the condition of a slave, Tecmessa brings her speech to the following culmination:

> ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐκέτ' ἔστιν εἰς ὅ τι βλέπω
> πλὴν σοῦ. σὺ γάρ μοι πατρίδ' ἤστωσας δορί, 515
> καὶ μητέρ' ἄλλη μοῖρα τὸν φύσαντά τε
> καθεῖλεν Ἅιδου θανασίμους οἰκήτορας.

[6] Finglass 2016c: 76–7, 2019.
[7] Buxton 1982.
[8] Finglass 2009b: 92–5, 2011b on 485–524, 2020.

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τίς δῆτ' ἐμοὶ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀντὶ σοῦ πατρίς;
τίς πλοῦτος; ἐν σοὶ πᾶσ' ἔγωγε σῴζομαι.
ἀλλ' ἴσχε κἀμοῦ μνῆστιν· ἀνδρί τοι χρεὼν 520
μνήμην προσεῖναι, τερπνὸν εἴ τί που πάθοι.
χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἡ τίκτουσ' ἀεί·
ὅτου δ' ἀπορρεῖ μνῆστις εὖ πεπονθότος,
οὐκ ἂν γένοιτ' ἔθ' οὗτος εὐγενὴς ἀνήρ.

Since for me there is no longer anything to which I can look for help apart from you. For you razed my fatherland with the spear, and another fate laid low my mother and the man who begot me, to be dwellers of Hades. So what fatherland could there be for me apart from you? What wealth? My welfare wholly depends on you. But have some thought for me too. A man ought to remember, if he experiences something pleasurable. For it is always one kindness that begets another. But when a man's memory of the benefits which he has received flows away, this man could no longer be noble. (*Ajax* 514–24)

Tecmessa subtly avoids mentioning that Ajax killed her parents, or at least caused them to die; in a speech which highlights his agency, with the second-person pronoun repeatedly prominent, their deaths are attributed merely to 'another fate', since admitting the truth would have impeded her rhetorical purpose. This is followed by the modest, and yet clear, reference to sexual passion in lines 520–2: Tecmessa reminds Ajax of the pleasure which she has given him, venturing to ask for a return by citing a key principle of reciprocity. Her unusually direct reference to sex, picking up an earlier reference to how she 'came to Ajax's bed' (491), succeeds her invocations of him by the other members of his family, his father, mother, and child; they all have their particular connections, but the link caused by sex is unique to his relationship with her. She has experienced Ajax both as dreadful warrior and as partner in bed, where she has given him pleasure and conceived a male child; invoking him by all these aspects shows her appreciation of him under every possible heading, and creates a mighty plea that only a man as stubborn as Ajax could possibly ignore. Not a bad rhetorical achievement, we might think, for a 'minor' character.

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