The Myth of Tereus and the Nightingale Motif in Classical and Medieval Literature and in the Works of Chaucer

Betty Vanderwielen

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The Myth of Tereus and the Nightingale Motif
in Classical and Medieval Literature
and in the Works of Chaucer

by

Betty Vanderwielen

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The Myth of Tereus and the Nightingale Motif in Classical and Medieval Literature and in the Works of Chaucer

Betty Vanderwielen, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1989

In the myth of Tereus a woman is metamorphosed into a nightingale, in which form she perpetually laments her killing of her son. An investigation into the use of the myth in classical literature ranging from Homer to Ovid shows that certain themes recur: truth reveals itself in a non-conventional manner, sorrow is paradoxically linked with joy, the victim is the perpetrator of her own suffering.

In the Middle Ages the nightingale motif is associated with joy rather than lament and connected with love (both lascivious and sacred). References to the nightingale seem to have little connection with the myth, yet a careful analysis of a variety of works reveals the classical themes to be in evidence.

In Troilus and Criseyde and The Legend of Good Women, Chaucer uses both the myth and the motif to imbue his characters and situations with added dimensions of meaning.
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Betty Vanderwielen

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The myth of Tereus and the nightingale motif in classical and medieval literature and in the works of Chaucer

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Western Michigan University, 1989
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Long after the emerging Christian religion had successfully replaced the multiple deities of the Greeks and Romans with belief in the One God, the myths and stories of the classical gods and heroes continued to be told and retold. Indeed, the poets of the medieval period found in mythology a fertile source of material which they used not only for its intrinsic enjoyment but also in order to enhance their own writings. Of course, a different set of cultural values often called for changes in or interpretations of the tales; nevertheless, since the various manifestations of a given story all radiate out from the same central core, certain structural features remain constant and continue to generate recurring concerns or themes.

The situation becomes more complex in a tale involving metamorphosis. The bird, animal, or plant into which the human protagonist changes assumes an identity derived from its role in the myth (e.g., if a lamenting woman is changed into a nightingale the bird thereafter becomes a figure of sorrow). Yet the bird, animal, etc. also continues a separate existence in its
own right and various meanings and symbolisms become associated with it in this form (e.g. because of its migratory habits the nightingale becomes a herald of spring, or of dawn). Nevertheless, even these specific symbolisms of the metamorphosed creature usually resonate in some way with the fixed core of the myth. Such is the case with the nightingale and the tales associated with it (collectively referred to as the myth of Tereus). In an effort to understand this resonance, we shall first of all examine the major versions of the myth story and then we shall trace the uses of this myth and the motif of the nightingale in classical and medieval literature.

The etiological tales which explain the origin of the nightingale have their early beginnings in a folkloric tradition which associated the bird's song with lament. Around this perception grew stories positing a reason why the nightingale should be sorrowful. The most popular of these stories, and the one which was transmitted to the people of the Middle Ages by Ovid, is the tale of Procne and Philomela. The myth relates how Tereus raped his sister-in-law, Philomela, and then cut out her tongue so she would be unable to tell of his crime. Imprisoned and denied the ability to speak, Philomela nevertheless wove the story into a tapestry which she sent to her sister, Procne.
After receiving the message, Procne freed Philomela and the two carried out their revenge on Tereus by killing his young son, Itys, and then cutting up, cooking, and serving the body to the father. Ultimately the gods changed all three characters into birds, and ever after the two women perpetually lament in their avian forms.

Mythographers have offered a number of divergent hypotheses concerning the meaning and original purpose of the nightingale stories (taken individually, grouped together, or associated with other myths). Literary critics, on the other hand, who focus on the allusions to the nightingale as used by classical authors (ranging from Homer and Hesiod, through the Greek dramatists and the Roman poets and playwrights, Seneca, Statius, and Ovid as well as a scattering of lesser known writers) generally concur that lamentation forms the predominate theme.

Certainly it is true that in most of the classical works the primary reference links the bird and/or the myth to sadness and mourning of some kind (though the nightingale also was associated with springtime and with dawn and occasionally receives mention simply for its outstanding musical ability). It is my contention, however, that a closer analysis of the particular allusions and their relationship to the larger work in which they are contained indicates that the lament theme
is only peripheral. The literary works reveal that at its core, the myth is about the transmission of meaning: truth can be imparted even though the conventional avenues are blocked i.e. even with tongue cut out Philomela is able to proclaim Tereus' crime; even a bird lacking the power of human speech can make its message understood. Around this central core gravitate certain other recurring themes which, like the primary anomaly of truth speaking though denied words, are manifest in contradictory images: the references to lament are often juxtaposed to mentions of joy; the victim associated with the nightingale (or with Procne or Philomela) is often the perpetrator of her own suffering. In short, paradox is crucial to poetic and metapoetic interpretation of this particular set of symbols.

These recurrent values of the myth continue to be operative in literature of the Middle Ages, though the specific details or interpretations of the story and, in particular, the symbolisms of the nightingale sometimes appear to be radically changed from their earlier counterpart. In the medieval period the nightingale becomes closely associated with love. But consistent with its mythic connections which evidence an affinity for contradiction, the medieval bird represents radically divergent concepts. In the secular realm it
stands for both Platonic, idealistic love, and for sensuous, lascivious love; in the religious realm it symbolizes the purest form of love of God, and also the essence of worldly love which draws the soul away from God. The bird is the harbinger of Spring (the season of love), and also the inciter of violence and war with its incessant cry "oci, oci, oci—kill, kill, kill." Though the myth itself seldom receives overt reference when the nightingale is mentioned in the love poetry of the Middle Ages, the prevalence of oxymorons and paradox in such poetry bears mute testimony to the similar nature which infuses the poems and the myth.

Having completed a general investigation into the usages of the Tereus myth in classical and medieval literature, we will conclude this study by examining more extensively how one particular author of the late medieval period, Geoffrey Chaucer, utilized the potential of the myth in three of his works. In The Romaunt of the Rose Chaucer's use of the nightingale closely follows his source material as it offers a conventional picture of the bird singing in the Garden of Love. Though these nightingale references present no overt connections to the Tereus myth, a closer examination shows how they reflect the core message of the myth, truth revealed by indirection, and how they link the opposites of joy and sorrow.
In direct contrast to this work, in *The Legend of Good Women* Chaucer recounts major segments of the classical myth but omits all mention of the nightingale. Nevertheless, "The Legend of Philomela" offers a key to understanding the larger work as Chaucer uses it to convey a truth which is contrary to the explicit statement of the individual tales. Just as the storyteller cut off the myth in mid-telling, denying its anger and repressing the need for revenge, so the narrator himself has been forced to relate only fragmented and biased parts of his tales in order to make them conform to the dictates of those who assigned him the task of writing the Legend. This is, in fact, a not unfamiliar role for the medieval poet, who often had to write according to the preferences of a patron rather than merely for his own satisfaction (Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart* being another obvious example). Yet true to the paradoxical quality inherent in the myth, the poet does manage to convey to the reader a distaste for the task which obviously runs counter to his own desires.

The third Chaucerian work, *Troilus and Criseyde*, falls midway between the other two chronologically, and mid-way in terms of poetic strategy since it uses (and artfully mis-uses) both the nightingale's classical associations of rape and sorrow and the bird's medieval
associations of joy and love. Through his allusions to the Tereus myth (and other classical references thematically related to it) Chaucer suggests parallels between Philomela and Criseyde and between Troilus and Tereus which lead the reader to fear that Criseyde is destined to become the victim of male lust. Yet by the concurrent use of references to the medieval nightingale, Chaucer reveals their union to be a mutual exchange of love. One of the most skilled and most inventive of the poets of the Middle Ages, Chaucer stretches the contradictory possibilities of the Procne/Philomela/nightingale story to their limit and by doing so discloses new psychological depths in his characters.

The Tereus myth, and the nightingale motif which retains connections to it, signify more than sorrow and lamentation which curiously moderate to joy and love in the Middle Ages. Paradox and contradictory opposites are not a curiosity in this particular myth but rather a necessity, because at its core the myth is concerned with truth as revealed in indirect and often contradictory ways. To understand this is to realize why the myth was such a versatile and potent instrument in the hands of both classical and medieval writers.
CHAPTER II

VERSIONS OF THE TEREUS MYTH

The logical prerequisite to exploring the nightingale myth as a literary device is a careful examination of the original myth story or, in this case, stories. It also seems prudent to include a brief look at the conclusions mythologists have proposed following their various investigations into the origin and purpose of these tales. Surely the most thorough and impressive body of information on the myth was compiled by George Mihailov in 1955. As part of a larger project aimed at tracing the Thracian elements in Greek mythology, Mihailov examined every reference in classical literature and art which related to what he generically refers to as the "mythe ou légende de Térée."¹

Ultimately he identified four basic versions of the myth: two very ancient, two dating to the Alexandrian era. One of the early versions and both of the Alexandrian center upon a woman named Aëdon, daughter of Pandareus; the other centers around Procne and Philomela, the daughters of Pandion. Though the stories differ—sometimes radically—from one another, they agree on certain basic elements: a child named Itys (or
Itylus or Aktylos) is killed by his own mother; that mother is changed into a nightingale and in bird form she continues to lament her crime. Mihailov posits that the divergent tales further share a common origin in a folklore tradition which interpreted the nightingale's tune as mournful and translated the notes of the bird's cry into the word "Ityš" (Itylus/Aktylos).

The three Aëdon tales have an obvious etiological association with nomenclature since the Greek word for nightingale is aëdon. The earliest of these stories comes down to us not as a single, coherent entity but rather in bits and pieces derived from a passage in the Odyssey, a commentary on that passage by the Homeric scholiasts and by Eustathius, a fragment from a lost work by Pherecydes, a cursory mention by Pausanias in his Description of Greece, and a painted vase dating to the late sixth or early fifth century B.C. (possibly an imitation of an even earlier work). Despite divergences among these various accounts, Mihailov draws attention to the cohesive element which unites them—the motivation of maternal jealousy—and thus he labels them collectively "the Theban version."

According to this version Aëdon is the daughter of Pandareus of Miletus and the wife of Zethus, brother of Amphion. While Amphion's wife has borne her husband several children (six in some accounts, twelve according
to others), Zethus and his wife have only two, Itylus and Neis (although in some versions only Itylus is mentioned). Aëdon's jealousy over the other woman's accomplishment prompts her to instigate a plot to kill one (or more) of her brother's children.

Determined to carry out the deed at night while the children of both families are sleeping in a common room, Aëdon finds it necessary to take measures to enable her to identify her intended victim(s) in the dark. The various accounts differ on this; some record that she instructed her child (some say the victim) to use a specific bed that night; the vase painting suggests that she furnished Itylus with a nightcap by which she could distinguish him from the other sleeping forms but that the hat fell off during the night. Whatever the method, the scheme went awry and the mother ended up killing her own son by mistake. (One version reports that she succeeded in slaying Amphion's son, but out of fear of retribution she then killed Itylus as well.) Though the later accounts tell that Zethus, seeking to avenge the murder, chases his fleeing wife, the earliest versions record that Aëdon herself was so overcome with sorrow that she prayed the gods to allow her to disappear from the sight of men. Consequently Zeus changed her into a nightingale who ceaselessly laments for her son.

Another Aëdon myth, that of Helladius of Alexandria
as preserved by Photius,³ tells a different story of jealousy. In this tale, Aëdon, daughter of Pandareus of Doulichion and wife of Zetes, is jealous not because her marriage has produced only one offspring, Aktylos, but rather because she suspects her husband is in love with another woman, a hamadryad. She also believes that her son (a grown man rather than a child) knows of the affair and favors it, indeed, perhaps even acts as accomplice in the clandestine meetings. Consequently, Aëdon kills Aktylos as he returns from the hunt one day. She is then so overcome with sorrow that Aphrodite takes pity on her and changes her into a bird. (The type of bird is not specified, presumably because the meaning of her name makes it obvious). Henceforth the mother-turned-nightingale continually cries for her son, though she will never be able to expiate her crime.

The final Aëdon myth, the Asia Minor version, comes to us from the Metamorphoses of Antoninus Liberalis who cites Boeus as the original source for the story.⁴ Boeus was an early Hellenistic poet who appropriated the name (and the work?) of Boio, an ancient priestess of Delphi to whom was attributed the Ornithogonia, a work describing various bird metamorphoses.

In Liberalis' myth, Pandareus of Ephesus weds his daughter, Aëdon, to Polytechnus, a carpenter. The two enjoy a blissful marriage and, in a departure from the
earlier tales, Aëdon feels no jealousy though she has only one son, Itys; nor does she fear infidelity on her husband's part. Rather the troubles stem from the couple's indiscreet pronouncement that they enjoy a more loving relationship than do Hera and Zeus. Hera retaliates by sending Discord to initiate a contest between Aëdon, who happens to be working on a weaving, and Polytechnus, who is engaged in crafting a chariot seat. The two decide to engage in a competition: whichever of them finishes his or her project first must give a female slave to the other one.

Polytechnus, however, does not take it well when Aëdon wins the contest (secretely assisted by Hera). He goes to Pandareus and, on the pretext of being sent by Aëdon, gains permission to take her younger sister, Chelidon, to visit her. However, on the journey back, Polytechnus rapes Chelidon in the woods, cuts her hair, dresses her as a slave, and threatens to kill her if she reveals the crime to her sister. Then, in fulfillment of the terms of the contest, Polytechnus presents to his wife her new servant--the disguised Chelidon. Like the earlier Aëdon who did not recognize her own son, this Aëdon fails to recognize her own sister and burdens this new servant with heavy chores.

One day, however, Chelidon laments her misfortunes aloud while filling her jug at the spring. Aëdon
overhears, embraces her sister, and plots vengeance on her husband. She cuts up her child, Itys, cooks the pieces in a pot, and taking her sister, flees to the safety of their father's house, after arranging to have a neighbor tell Polytechnus to eat the food prepared for him. Polytechnus discovering what he has eaten, pursues the two women, is captured by Pandareus' men and as punishment for his crime is tied up, smeared with honey, and thrown into the sheepfold where he is set upon by flies. Aëdon, however, remembering their former love, takes pity on him and tries to shoo the flies away. Her brother and parents, despising her for her compassion, try to kill her, but Zeus, not wishing to inflict further misfortune on Pandareus' family, changes all the participants of the drama into various birds: Pandareus becomes a sea eagle, his wife a halcyon, his son a hoopoe, and Polytechnus a woodpecker. Aëdon becomes the bird who cries "Itys" near rivers and thickets (the nightingale); Chelidon (Greek for "swallow") becomes the bird which makes its nest in the eaves of homes.5

Since Liberalis' version includes the incidents of rape and anthropophagism which dominate the more familiar Procne/Philomela stories of the Athenian version (which will be discussed next), Mihailov considers it an Alexandrian attempt at combining the Theban and Athenian tales. Though this very well may be
true, archaeological evidence indicates that some version of the story which included the sister, Chelidon, and the killing of Itys was popular enough to be the subject of a portion of a Doric frieze as early as the seventh century B.C.  

If the Asia Minor version of the Aëdon myth has roots at least as far back as the seventh century and the Theban version dates back to Homeric times or earlier, the Athenian version is equally ancient as evidenced by both Hesiod and Sappho's casual mention of the swallow as Pandion's daughter. This story about the sisters, Procne and Philomela, was popularized by Sophocles in his tragic drama, Tereus, and though the play itself has been lost, enough fragments remain to piece together a fair approximation of the plot. This piecing together, however, proceeds by a somewhat circular method: since Sophocles' work is generally accepted as the version of the myth which inspired all subsequent authors up to and including Ovid, their accounts have been employed as the framework around which the fragments of the Greek play were reconstructed.  

Because of the Greek drama's curious dependence on later authors, then, and also because the Ovidian account in particular became the primary source for the myth in the Middle Ages—indeed, Mihailov observes that
it played the same role in popularizing the myth for future generations as Sophocles' tragedy had accomplished for the classical era— it will be more practical to look at the so-called "Athenian version" using the accounts of Apollodorus, Hyginus, and Ovid. 10

All three accounts begin with the situation (either stated or implied) wherein Pandion, king of Athens, gives his daughter, Procne, in marriage to Tereus of Thrace. Like Aëdon's union with Polytechnus, Itys is the sole offspring of this marriage, though none of the accounts suggest that the union of his parents is a particularly happy one. On the contrary, Ovid's tale deliberately includes the suggestive information that baleful omens accompanied their wedding ceremony— not the least of which was the absence of Juno/Hera, the goddess of marriage. (That the ill omens extend to their son as well is implied by Ovid who specifically places Itys' birth date on his parents' wedding anniversary.) Hyginus' account does not even bother to comment on the state of the marriage; without offering any preliminaries he begins with Tereus approaching Pandion, lying about Procne's death, and asking to wed Philomela.

Apollodorus, proffering the explanation that Tereus has fallen in love with Philomela, also has the Thracian king claim that his first wife is dead (though, as he
assures his readers, Procne actually has been hidden in the country). Ovid, however, introduces a more innocent reason for Tereus' visit to his father-in-law: Procne has begged to have her younger sister come visit and Tereus has gone to make the arrangements. This stratagem allows Ovid to focus, at some length, on the awakening not of Tereus' love but his unbridled lust at the first sight of the nubile Philomela and on his increasing passion which finally culminates in his dragging her off to a hut in the woods and raping her. Like Chelidon who in vain called on Artemis for help and who, with her sister, ultimately sought the protection of father and family, Philomela cries out for her father, her sister, and the gods above. But though the cries fail to bring rescue and Tereus easily victimizes her, nevertheless Philomela refuses Chelidon's subservient role. Unlike that frightened young girl who maintained silence out of fear for her life, Ovid's courageous Philomela declares she prefers death to defilement. Then, sublimating her need to hide her shame in favor of her desire to avenge herself against the man who abused her, she swears to proclaim Tereus' heinous deed publicly. He responds, not by cutting her hair and disguising her in servant's clothes, but by cutting out her tongue and imprisoning her in the hut. He then returns to his home and tells Procne that her
sister is dead.

Hyginus does not include Ovid's graphic mutilation scene. In his version, Tereus tries to keep his misdeed silent simply by sending Philomela away to a neighboring king. Apollodorus' version, however, is puzzling: since Tereus already has sequestered Procne, theoretically he is free to marry her sister and apparently does so; yet for some reason he still cuts out Philomela's tongue.11

Nevertheless—and this is the crucial turning point in all the stories—whether through the passive devices of overhearing a private lament (Liberalis), or the mediation of another woman (Hyginus), or the deliberately planned and meticulously executed device of incorporating the events into a weaving (Sophocles, Apollodorus, Ovid), Philomela does indeed disclose to her sister Tereus' violent acts and his infidelity.

In all the accounts, revenge follows swiftly upon discovery of the deed: the women kill Itys. The element of mistaken identity which precipitated Itylus' accidental death in the Theban Aëdon myth has no place in these stories.12 Procne, like Liberalis' Aëdon, sees clearly that the child is not only the most cherished part of the father, but the very continuation of him. Because Tereus has violated and nullified their marriage, Procne will force back inside him the fruit of
their union; because Tereus has taken her sister's virginity and left a mutilated body, Procne will take his son's life, cutting up the body and cooking it in a pseudo-sacrificial rite\textsuperscript{13} and serving it to the father as a solemn meal.

 Though Apollodorus and Hyginus, like Liberalis, record that the sisters flee as soon as the meal is served, Ovid gives them time to glory in their revenge: Procne triumphantly informs her husband that he now has his progeny inside him--he has consumed his own flesh and blood--and Philomela exultantly flings Itys' bloody head on the table. Then the women flee as Tereus pursues, intent on his own revenge.

 The bird transformations invariably conclude the tales. According to Apollodorus, the sisters reach Daulis in Phocis before Tereus catches up with them, whereupon (like Pherecydes' Aëdon) they beg the gods to transform them into birds, Procne becoming a nightingale, Philomela a swallow, and Tereus a hoopoe. On the other hand, Hyginus, like Liberalis, records that the gods carried out the transformations on their own initiative, apparently without the request or the consent of the participants. More importantly, Hyginus diverges from his fellow mythographers--and the Greek writers in general--in assigning the nightingale form to Philomela and that of the swallow to Procne.\textsuperscript{14} (As we
shall see later in discussing medieval allusions to the myth, this switch from correlating the nightingale and the mourning mother to correlating that bird and the ravished sister will create a completely different set of signifiers for the writers of the Middle Ages.)

Ovid mentions neither prayers nor gods; his characters simply assume avian form as if it were an inevitable consequence of their frenetic flight and pursuit. Ovid remarks how Tereus' drawn sword noticeably merges into the hoopoe's jutting beak, but fails to specify which sister becomes the nightingale and which the swallow. Indeed, he does not even identify these birds except to note that one flew to the woods, the other to the roof-top. In fact, though he emphasizes the unabsolvable nature of their crime by noting the blood-red marks permanently staining the bird feathers, he elects not to specify which sister is so marked.

Of course, based on earlier versions of the story as well as on knowledge of avian habitats, the commentators easily deduced that the two birds referred to were the nightingale and the swallow, and that the swallow, with its reddish-brown breast feathers, must be the "blood-stained" bird. Furthermore, from allusions to the myth in his various other works, commentators proclaimed that Ovid, like Hyginus, identified the
nightingale with Philomela and the swallow with Procne. This became the accepted ornithomorphism which most other Latin writers followed.

However, Ovid's allusions in these other works do not provide as definitive an identification as some commentators would make it seem. Indeed, one cannot always confirm with certainty whether a random reference to the nightingale mourning Itys refers to Philomela or to Procne; one cannot even say definitively whether the bird represents the mother or the aunt of the child.

To be sure, in his Fasti (2.853-56) Ovid explicitly calls the swallow Procne. And he certainly implies the same identification in the Tristia (2.12.9-10) and the Art of Love (2.383-84) when he refers to the swallow's reputation as a bad mother and as a parent whose breast is stained with blood. However in the Heroides (15.153-56) Ovid refers to the Daulian bird (an epithet usually associated with the nightingale, and the identification is further reinforced by the woodland setting which the poet has just described) as the mournful mother who grieves for Itys, thus making Procne the nightingale (or at least making the nightingale the mother).

The matter is further complicated by Ovid's allusion to Philomela in the Amores (2.6.7) as lamenting the "deed of the tyrant" referring, of course, to the rape by Tereus; but the sentence concludes with the
statement, "great cause for grief is Itys, but belongs to the ancient past." This passage suggests, then, that the sister, as well as the mother, laments for the child. And in a later passage from the same work (Amores 3.12.32) when Ovid casually drops the phrase, "the bird of Cecrops sings Odrysian Itys," the identities of both birds and sisters essentially remain ambiguous: both women trace their heritage to Cecrops and either one could be lamenting Itys. Nicolas Zaganiaris, in an article which makes an exhaustive attempt at untangling the dilemma of which sister was turned into which bird according to which author, finds this latter phrase from the Amores similar enough to the passage from the Heroides to conclude that it also alludes to Procne as the nightingale.15 Probably he is correct.

However, to be overly concerned with which is what is, I think, to miss an important point. The very merging of the symbolism of the two sisters indicates something crucial to Ovid's perception of this myth and probably accounts for his deliberate refusal to delineate the metamorphosed characters more explicitly in his retelling of the story: both women were equally victimized by Tereus, both equally driven to a desperate act of revenge, both have equal cause to mourn not only the crime done to them, but also the crime done by them.
The similarities between them are more important to the poet than the differences.

These, then, are the four basic versions of the nightingale myth. All versions agree on three principle events: the murder of the child, Itys, (or a similar variant of that name) at the hand of his own mother; the metamorphosis of that mother into bird form (either a nightingale or a swallow); and the continued lament of the mother in her avian aspect. Apart from these points of similarity, the narratives diverge considerably, though certain elements of one set of tales overlap with those of one or more of the others. The motivation of jealousy (albeit different types of jealousy) recurs in Liberalis, Helladius and the Theban Aëdon stories. The Theban tales and Liberalis and Hyginus' account all include the mistaken identity theme or a variant of it. And Liberalis' version and the Procne stories all repeat the rape of a younger sister by her brother-in-law as well as the elaborate anthropophagism ritual.

Various mythologists have researched the Aëdon-Procne myths and have subsequently proffered a wide range of conclusions and interpretations. Joseph Fontenrose, in an extensive study which related this myth group to the Athamas legends (and several other legends which he feels interconnect) presents an extremely reductive reading which distills these tales
into a single "generic type": "A husband takes a second wife or a concubine; jealousy or rivalry occurs between the women; as a result the husband loses his children."16 Fontenrose understands the myths as typifying a common problem of a polygamous society and feels the Greeks "seized upon these widespread folktales to supply the chain of events" when they attempted to present the etiological explanation for such things as "the sad song of the nightingale and the like."17

It is, of course, easiest to motivate such a deduction using as a focal point Helladius' rendition of the myth which introduces the supposed affair with the hamadryad. However, the three other versions fit less willingly into Fontenrose's mold. While the Theban version centers around jealousy between two women, the issue is purely maternal. None of the accounts implies that Zethus expressed a desire for a concubine or even drew an unfavorable comparison between his own wife and that of his brother. Liberalis' version strays even farther from the "type" since that myth story pointedly asserts the blissful nature of the couple's marriage and relegates the element of jealousy to their crafting skills. The rape of Chelidon is an act of retribution, not a desire for a polygamous relationship.

The Procne stories do present certain incidents which might be interpreted as supporting Fontenrose's
hypothesis. Hyginus and Apollodorus both have Tereus
approach Pandion and ask for Philomela's hand in
marriage; Ovid has the raped maiden label herself
"paelex" (a term used for a concubine) and there is also
the suggestion that Tereus keeps Philomela imprisoned in
order to facilitate his continued sexual pleasure.
Nevertheless, the main issue in these tales is not
jealousy between the two women but rather the
uncontrolled lust of the man. Fontenrose's generic
encapsulation provides an interesting insight into one
aspect which exists as a theme in some of the myth
stories, but it does not offer a thesis which accounts
for the full range of the myth.

Paolo Scarpi, also concerned with the problems of
bigamy, juxtaposes the myths of Procne and Celeus, which
he sees as opposite poles depicting the ideal family
life.18 According to his interpretation, even more
devastating than the sexual violence which Tereus
perpetrates is his "bigamous" act of taking a
concubine/second wife and thereby initiating the
dissolution of the family, a dissolution which
eventually ends in ornithomorphism, symbolic of a
descent "en dessous de l'échelle humaine."19

Scarpi's identification of the theme of dissolution
is valid and important; all the various segments of the
myth do indeed ultimately end with the disintegration of
the family. I would argue that bigamy cannot be the motivating cause, however, since the Theban and Liberalis accounts do not present bigamous relationships and the Athenian account only does so by a stretch of the imagination. I would credit jealousy as the motivating factor in the former myth tales and infidelity in the latter (Helladius' version incorporates both jealousy and infidelity).

Marcel Detienne, focusing on the strange incident of Polytechnus smeared with honey and thrown to the flies which defecate upon him, situates the Aëdon-Procne myths within a different ensemble of tales centered around honey and the Greek concept of the honeymoon. He sees the myth as both condemning excessive sexual indulgence and as teaching the proper use of honey and the dangers of the putrefaction which results from its improper use.20

Detienne's discussion is fascinating, but it seems that if honey really were such a central aspect of the myth, it would have received mention in more than one of the versions. There is no question, of course, that Liberlis' tale, the Procne stories, and even Helladius' account offer a condemnation of excessive sexual indulgence. However, Detienne's theory presents no frame of reference which relates it to the Theban version of the nightingale myths.
Robert Graves, on the other hand, insists the Procne/ Philomela myth derives from the misreading of a set of Daulian temple wall-paintings which actually illustrated different methods of prophecy. Accordingly, the scene of a priest handing a laurel leaf to a priestess who chews it, thereby inducing a prophetic trance, was misinterpreted to signify Tereus cutting out Philomela's tongue. Likewise, the scene of a priestess who has cast oracular sticks onto a cloth and is preparing to read them was misinterpreted as representing the weaving which Philomela sent to Procne. The killing, cooking, and eating of Itys was deduced from a scene depicting a priestess divining omens from the entrails of a sacrificed child, while the bird transformations originated from the scene of a priestess wearing a feathered robe and divining auguries from the flight of a swallow.

It would be easier to evaluate Graves' hypothesis if he had provided references to his source material. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any corroboration for this intriguing painting, though several commentators have quoted Graves' interpretation, citing him as sole verification for the existence of the temple artwork. The curious thing is that while the accounts of the four versions of the myth have little association with divination, the allusions to the Aëdon-
Procne tales in both classical and medieval literature show a distinct affinity for various forms of augury. More than that, in my opinion, the central core of this myth is concerned with the transmission of truth by non-conventional means—which is, in fact, one way of defining prophecy. However Graves arrived at his certainty that this myth is integrally connected with divination and prophetic insight, the linkage is cogent.

Interesting and enlightening as are these various scholarly attempts to determine the origin and original purpose of the Aëdon-Procne stories, none of their explanations in itself satisfactorily identifies those elements which inspired dramatists and poets to allude to this myth over and over again. If we wish to understand the meanings which medieval authors intended when they alluded to Procne, Philomela, or the nightingale, we will find it more helpful to set aside (at least temporarily) the deductions of the mythologists and examine those uses of the myth which recur in Greek and Latin literary references.

Though a number of researchers, tracing the Tereus myth through Graeco-Roman literature for their own purposes, have enumerated several (perhaps all) of the references, they have seldom looked beyond the phrase which contained the key reference word--Pandion/Pandareus, Aëdon, Procne, Philomela, Tereus,
Itys/Itylus, nightingale, swallow. Literary allusions, however, are more comprehensive than one-word references. To understand an individual author's use of the myth, it is necessary to consider the particular allusion within the context of the meaning of the work in which it has been relocated.
CHAPTER III

CLASSICAL REFERENCES TO THE MYTH

Pausanias, traveling through Greece sometime around A.D. 170, like a devoted pilgrim eager to see and touch the places and shrines mentioned in the classical writings, sometimes found local legends at variance with the more familiar mythological narratives. He describes the barrow in Megara where Tereus reportedly committed suicide and he also records that Procne and Philomela returned to Athens where "lamenting their sufferings and their revenge" the two women "perished through their tears." To help reconcile these details with the ornithomorphic legend, Pausanias comments, "their reported metamorphosis into a nightingale and a swallow is due, I think, to the fact that the note of these birds is plaintive and like a lamentation."

This association of the bird song with lamentation forms the point of departure for most of the classical references to the Tereus myth. Such references divide fairly easily into three basic categories: (1) allusions which rely on the myth to help intensify emotions, (2) allusions used as poetic devices for identifying the time or the season, and (3) allusions
concerned primarily with the musical quality of the
bird's song.

These divisions are not absolute and more often
than not a given reference will qualify for more than
one category. So, for instance, in the *Odyssey* when
Penelope mentions the myth in describing to the stranger
(Odysseus in disguise) how she continually laments for
her missing husband and how she fears for the future of
her son:

> Even as when the daughter of Pandareus, the
nightingale of the greenwood, sings sweetly,
when spring is newly come, as she sits perched
amid the thick leafage of the trees, and with
many trilling notes pours forth her rich voice
in wailing for her child, dear Itylus, whom she
had one day slain with the sword unwittingly,
Itylus, the son of king Zethus; even so my heart
sways to and fro in doubt.\(^{24}\)

Homer's allusion primarily uses the myth to intensify the
audience's empathy for Penelope's distressed state by
comparing it to Aëdon's distress over the accidental death
of her son (category 1); but in doing so it also mentions
the nightingale's role as the harbinger of spring (cate­
gory 2) and comments at some length on the bird's melodious
and melancholy song (category 3). Nevertheless, though
these divisions are not always mutually exclusive,
grouping them according to their main type permits a
thematic rather than a chronological approach.\(^{25}\)

Not surprisingly, the largest number of references in
classical works belong in the first category— allusions
which rely on the myth to help intensify an emotion. Like Penelope's nightingale reference in the *Odyssey*, examples from this category often are connected with grieving, either for some past or projected sorrow or for a death. Thus, in a poem addressed to Hortalus, Catullus, bereaved over the death of his brother, associates himself with the bird who mourns for her dead son:

Never shall I speak to thee, never hear thee
tell of thy life; never shall I see thee again,
brother more beloved than life: but surely I
shall always love thee, always sing strains of
mourning for thy death, as under the thick
shadows of the boughs sings the Daulian bird
bewailing the fate of Itylus lost.26

"Lost" is too weak a translation for *absumpti*; the Latin verb *absumo* means to consume, to destroy, to waste (literally it insists something has been taken away from something: *sumere* to take, *ab* away from). Catullus would have found all these connotations of the word appropriate for conveying the sense of loss which Itylus symbolized: the child was destroyed—consumed physically by his father, metaphorically by his mother's passion for revenge—and above all, the young life was wasted. The poet evokes the emotions of the bird/mother's sadness over this wasted life and transfers them to his own sense of loss for a brother consumed, destroyed, wasted by death. In addition, Catullus draws on the nightingale's proverbially endless singing to emphasize the duration of his own grief—"always I shall love, always I shall sing
sorrowful songs."\(^{27}\)

This emphasis on the ceaseless quality of the nightingale's lament is shared by many of the classical references. Sophocles' Electra, mourning the death of her father Agamemnon, is prompted to declare her affinity with the nightingale's unending grief:

But, for my part, I
will never cease my dirges and sorrowful laments,
as long as I have eyes to see
the twinkling light of the stars and this daylight.
So long, like a nightingale, robbed of her young,
here before the doors of what was my father's house
I shall cry out my sorrow for all the world to hear.\(^{28}\)

Though the connection between this particular nightingale allusion and the mythical tales is so tenuous that it seems more appropriate to assign this reference to category three (concerned primarily with the bird's sound), nevertheless, Electra's mention a few lines later of the grief-stricken bird who laments for Itys confirms Sophocles' intention of drawing on his audience's familiarity with the myth of Tereus which he himself had helped promulgate in an earlier work.

In fact, since throughout the major portion of this drama Electra portrays a woman in mourning, the Tereus myth assumes a function in the play which transcends the individual allusions to it. Comparisons and contrasts
between Procne and Electra reverberate throughout the whole work so that at every turn the nuances of the myth intensify the audience's response to the protagonist. Electra herself announces this resonance between the two women with her early declaration that she intends to identify with the persona of the nightingale: "The grief-stricken bird it is that fits [lit. 'has fitted', once for all] my mind." ²⁹

Indeed, when the chorus of Mycenean women points out the excessive quality of Electra's grieving, ³⁰ she herself equates that excess with the extravagant lamentation of the woman turned into a nightingale. Yet, while Electra eagerly embraces Procne as the model for grief, she gives no indication that she understands the degree to which the mythic woman herself created her own sorrow by slaying her child, no indication that she realizes the excessive lamentation of the bird directly corresponds to the excessive retribution which Procne exacted for her husband's crime. However, cued by the reverberations of the Tereus myth, the audience can recognize not only these correspondences but also the parallel between Procne, who sacrificed her son to fulfill her need for revenge on her husband, and Electra, who is willing to kill one parent in the name of avenging the other.

The comparison also suggests a further irony in that Electra, who so readily identifies herself with the lament
of this mythical bird/mother, refuses to recognize the
grief and consequent vengeance of her own mother,
Clytemnestra, who initially watched Agamemnon kill her
firstborn child by dashing his brains out, and then was
tricked by this same man into giving her eldest daughter
over to be sacrificed. If Electra really understood the
nature of grief, she would realize that Clytemnestra had
even more reason than herself to identify with Procne.

While Clytemnestra's motives are not entirely pure
(there is the matter of her lover Aegisthus), neither is
Electra's grief solely for her father. Like Procne, who
laments the loss of her child though she herself brought
about his death, Electra laments her "unwed, childless,
desolate" state (164) though it is her obsession with
revenge which ultimately bars her from marriage (since
Aegisthus fears she might bear sons who will someday carry
out her retribution).

Electra is depicted throughout the drama as passive—
perpetually mourning, perpetually seeking revenge but
powerless to effect it, perpetually waiting for her
brother, Orestes, the male who will be able to act. This
sense of female powerlessness also echoes the plight of
Procne whose only effective method of punishing her
husband was one which also involved unending suffering for
herself. In the scene where Electra decides to cast aside
her passive role, her impassioned plea urging her sister,
Chrysothenis, to join her in slaying Aegisthus again echoes the Tereus myth in a way which cues the reader but leaves the protagonist unaware of the parallelism.

What countryman, what stranger will not greet Our presence, when he sees us, with acclaim? "Look, friends, upon this sister pair," he'll cry, "Who raised their father's house, who dared confront Their foes in power, who jeopardized their lives In bloody vengeance. Honour to the pair, Honour and worship!"31

The image of the two sisters and their bloody vengeance—in a play which twice already has mentioned the nightingale myth and will do so once again after Chrysothenis rejects Electra's plea (1. 1079)—subtly hints at the Daulian pair. But, once again, when the audience makes such an association it also understands (as Electra seems unable to do) the ambiguous fame which that pair of sisters attained: yes, they will always be remembered, but they are destined to lament their crime—and their loss—forever.

Chrysothenis' refusal reiterates the powerlessness of women:

Can you not see? You are a woman—no man. Your physical strength is less than is your enemies'! Their Genius, day by day, grows luckier while ours declines and comes to nothingness.

Be sensible, you, and, at long last, being weaker, learn to give in to those that have the strength.32

Even this passage, which has no overt relationship with the Tereus myth, nevertheless suggests at least a tenuous connection to the myth for an audience sensitized
to the nuances of the nightingale theme, for the emphasis on weakness and strength, introduced earlier (219-20; 340) and reaching a culmination in Chrysothemis', speech brings to mind Hesiod's famous tale of the hawk who has caught a nightingale and carries her aloft in his talons. When the captured bird struggles and cries out, the hawk responds:

What is the matter with you? Why scream?
Your master has you.
You shall go wherever I take you,
for all your singing.
If I like I can let you go. If I like
I can eat you for dinner.
He is a fool who tries to match his strength
with the stronger.
He will lose his battle, and with the shame
will be hurt also.33

Yet the Procne/nightingale found a way to defeat the more powerful, though at a devastating personal price. The lesson Electra will learn by the close of the drama is that, indeed, the weaker can avenge themselves against the stronger. Though she appears to acquiesce to Aegisthus' dominance when she murmurs: "time hath taught me / The wisdom of consenting with the strong" (1464-65), her words carry a double meaning, for, in fact, time has finally brought her long-awaited revenge and the burial cloth which Aegisthus assumes covers Orestes actually conceals Clytemnestra, killed by her own son to avenge his father's death. The disguised Orestes offers double-edged words also when, responding to Aegisthus' call for Clytemnestra to join him in viewing the body he replies with a phrase

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that will echo in the speech of Ovid's Procne: "She is beside thee; look not otherwhere" (1474). (It is interesting to speculate whether one of the lost fragments of Sophocles' Tereus contains a similar phrase.)

In Electra, then, the nightingale of the Tereus myth serves not merely as a convenient image to underline the mourning exhibited by the main character; rather the myth permeates the drama, and the audience is afforded a deeper insight into Electra because of the comparison to Procne. Sophocles draws upon the myth's presentation of Procne as a woman who exacts excessive and extravagant revenge and one who does so by striking not directly at the source of her hatred (as Clytemnestra did to Agamemnon), but indirectly in a manner which ultimately exacts an equally excessive cost on herself. Electra's need for revenge is similarly excessive and similarly destructive--if she finds her life wasted, herself unwed, childless, and treated like a slave in her own house, if her role is that of a woman perpetually in mourning, it is the consequence she accepts for clinging tenaciously to her desire for vengeance.

Since these consequences precede the act of retribution (rather than follow it as in the case of Procne), maybe Electra finally will gain that liberty which Orestes in his ending speech so boldly proclaims to be the future of the house of Atreus: "O seed of Atreus,
how, having suffered much, you have at long last made your way to liberty, having been made perfect through the present onset!" But his very words (perhaps subtly reinforced by the drama's emphasis on the unceasing quality associated with the nightingale's lament) compel the audience to recall the seemingly endless cycle of crime and revenge which plagues that house—Clytemnestra, with the help of Aegisthus, killed her husband to avenge his killing of her two children; her other children, in turn, avenge the murder of their father by killing her. In addition, Aegisthus himself was motivated by more than love for Clytemnestra or greed for power when he assisted in killing Agamemnon. Aegisthus was fulfilling his own vendetta, for Agamemnon's father, Atreus, had killed his own nephews, the children of his brother, Thyestes (who later fathered Aegisthus). The lesson of the past has not shown vengeance to be the end, but only the beginning of another cycle of violence and outrage.

Aeschylus's drama, *Agamemnon*, which unfolds the story of that Greek hero's return from the Trojan War and his ensuing death at the hand of his wife, interposes reminders of Atreus' crime to elicit a sense of the sins of the father being visited upon and perpetuated by the son. Since Atreus did not stop at merely killing Thyestes' children, but dismembered the bodies, cooked them, and then served them to their father—much as Procne and
Philomela served Itys to his father—it is not surprising to see Aeschylus' play, like Sophocles', relying on both subtle and overt correlations to the Tereus myth to help create greater depth of perception for his audience.

Aeschylus primarily uses the myth to help illuminate the character of Cassandra, who has been brought to Argos as Agamemnon's concubine, one of the spoils of war. When she makes her appearance on the stage she is already caught in the grip of a prophecy which she struggles against; consequently Clytemnestra's commands to her meet with a garbled, incoherent response. Agamemnon's wife finally addresses the chorus composed of the old men of Argos:

If she has anything besides her swallow twitterings,  
a barbaric speech that no one knows, 
I'll try to persuade her within her understanding.  

When Cassandra still does not respond, Clytemnestra instructs the chorus "Don't speak to her any more; use your hands" (1060).

Associating the swallow with a female unable to speak and reduced to making her meaning known by sign language, a woman who has been appropriated by a man primarily for his sexual purposes, surely would evoke the myth of Procne and Philomela to an audience familiar with that tale. Thus Cassandra, as soon as she appears in the play, is subtly cast in the role of a violated and mutilated
victim.

When Cassandra finally does regain power over her voice she cries out against her victimizer--but it is Apollo, not Agamemnon, whom she names as her "destroyer," for it was Apollo who granted her the gift of prophecy and then repaid her refusal to yield her body by spitting in her mouth. As effectively as Tereus' sword silenced Philomela's speech, Apollo's action silences the truth of Cassandra's predictions to all those who hear her. Yet she remains powerless to reject the visions of the past and future which the god continues to inflict upon her.

The similarities between the killing and cooking of Itys and of Thyestes' children affords the audience another unobtrusive opportunity to see a connection between Cassandra and the women of the Tereus myth. One of the visions Cassandra reveals to the Argive men concerns "the children, the babies screaming of their cut throats, / of their flesh roasted and eaten by their father" (1096-97). She mentions no names and the chorus readily accepts her words as recounting the crime of Atreus against Thyestes. But the audience's insight that Cassandra's words are seldom correctly perceived leaves open the possibility of other interpretations and allows the memory of Itys' death to insinuate itself also.

When Cassandra's prophetic frenzy compels her to foretell her own death along with Agamemnon's, the chorus
understands only that she presages evil and that she laments her own impending fate. Even this veiled comprehension prompts them to look upon her no longer as the swallow but rather as the other bird of the Tereus myth:

You are someone god-possessed;  
the god carries you along.  
It is for yourself you cry out this tuneless tune.  
Like the brown nightingale, that can never have enough of song,  
as she cries "Itys! Itys!" for her life rich in sorrows,  
and her mind loves pity for herself.  (1140-45)

Cassandra's reply to this comparison is surprising. She ignores the image of the bird condemned to a future filled with sorrow and reinterprets the ornithomorphosis as a sign of the gods' favor:

Oh! The life of the shrill-voiced nightingale!  
The gods covered her with a feathered body;  
I tell you, they gave her a sweet life,  
and her cries are not cries of sorrow.  
But what remains for me  
is the splitting of the flesh with the two-edged sword.  (1146-49)

Perhaps the fear of her own death makes Cassandra focus on the nightingale as a figure typifying miraculous rescue rather than unceasing lament, though she harbors no hope for her own rescue. More likely it is the unfortunate circumstances of her own life which permit Cassandra to see the bird's future as "sweet": having been condemned to foresee the destruction of her city and all its people, and compelled to warn them over and over with every
warning rejected while she herself becomes an object of ridicule, Cassandra feels somewhat envious of a woman permitted to chant her story in melodious song which is readily understood and acknowledged by all.

Having assumed that her burden of prophecy would end with the destruction of Troy, Cassandra's new wave of visions and the all too familiar obtuseness with which they are met convince her that death, painful though it may be, offers her only release. Having determined to meet death boldly, she flings away the wand and the other insignia of her prophetic office, calling them "these mockeries about me" and proclaiming, "Before I die myself, I shall at least destroy you. . . Thus I requite you." (1266-68). If Procne and Philomela felt they could only get revenge for Tereus' violence by sacrificing the life of Itys, Cassandra can only avenge herself against Apollo's cruelty by sacrificing her own life.

Aeschylus, then, does more than link Cassandra to the traditional image of the nightingale as the model of unceasing lament. He draws upon the myth for its portrayal of the victimized and powerless female, the woman whose only recourse against one stronger than herself is to embrace an action even more violent than that perpetrated by the overpowering male, even though such an action has as its concomitant increased suffering for herself. The fact that Cassandra looks upon her fellow victims, Procne
and Philomela, as fortunate allows Aeschylus to imply that the violence done his protagonist exceeds that done the protagonists of the ancient myth.

Seneca also writes a version of the *Agamemnon* play for a later Latin audience and he too uses the Tereus myth—along with three other mythological figures of lament (Cygnus, Ceyx, and Attis)—to amplify the audience's conception of Cassandra's suffering. For Seneca, Cassandra functions primarily as the representative of the house of Priam, and, by extension, the embodiment of all the Trojan misfortunes. In union with the chorus of Trojan women, she also stereotypically represents the lot of the conquered woman: widowed, torn from her native country, often subjected to the sexual desires of the conquering soldiers, destined for slavery in a strange land; looking back on the happier lot of those blessed with a quick death. The chorus insists,

> Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission. Not the sad nightingale, which from the vernal bough pours forth her liquid song, piping of Itys in ever changing strains; not the bird which, perching on Bistonian battlements [the swallow], tells o'er and o'er the hidden sins of her cruel lord, will e'er be able, with all her passionate lament, worthily to mourn thy house.36

Seneca's Cassandra, like Aeschylus', also casts off her prophetic insignia in an attempt to rid herself of Apollo's cruel domination. Yet when the god overpowers her and thrusts upon her his prophetic announcement of
Agamemnon's impending murder and her own similar fate, she welcomes the bloody crime in the same way that Procne welcomed the ill-omened arrival of Itys. Cassandra sees Agamemnon's violent death as the vindication of all Troy's suffering as well as her own: "Rise up, my soul, and take the reward of thy madness—we are conquerors, we conquered Phrygians! 'Tis well! Troy has risen again!" (868-70). She even welcomes her own death as an opportunity to bring the triumphant news of the Greek leader's downfall to the Trojan host now inhabiting the realm of the dead.

In another play, Hercules Oetaeus, Seneca again uses the Tereus myth (again accompanying it with other lament tales) to hyperbolize the grief of his character, Iole, by declaring the mythological figures of mourning inadequate to express her grief. Iole has much in common with Cassandra; she too has seen her country conquered, her father and brother brutally killed, herself claimed as the concubine of the conqueror (Hercules) and destined to live as a slave in the house of his jealous wife (Deianira). Like Aeschylus' Cassandra, Iole can only look upon the terrible fate of the Daulian bird as happy:

her human form has Philomel escaped, and still the Attic maid bewails her son. 37 Why not yet do my arms become swift wings? Happy, ah, happy shall I be when the woods shall be called my home, and, in my native meadows resting with plaintive strains I shall recall my fate, and fame shall tell of winged Iole. 38

In the same play Seneca uses an allusion to Procne,
coupling her with Medea, to amplify the characterization of his other female protagonist, Deianira. Realizing that, tricked by Nessus and motivated by jealousy for Iole, she has sent her husband a poisoned cloak, Deianira is horrified by the enormity of what she has done. In an effort to convey to the audience the extent of the revulsion she feels, the dramatist draws on the abhorrent image of the mother who kills her own child:

Take me as thy companion, O Phasian wife [Medea]; my deed is worse, far worse than both thy crimes, whether as mother or as cruel sister thou hast sinned; let me be comrade also to thy crimes, thou Thracian wife [Procne]. (949-53)

It is significant that Seneca alludes to two wives who killed their own children in order to avenge the infidelity of their husbands. It is even more significant that he limits the Medea allusion to include the slaying of her brother and her sons but excludes the sorceress' successful plot to trick Pelias' daughters into killing their father. He likewise excludes the incident of the poisoned robe which Medea sent to her rival, Creusa (Seneca enumerates both episodes in his play, Medea). Logically, the topoi of murder by trickery and murder by a poisoned robe share more points in common with Deianira's crime than the deliberate killing of little children. But Seneca does not wish to exonerate Deianira by emphasizing that she was tricked, nor does he wish to focus on her jealousy, what he wants is for his audience to realize the
horror and guilt she feels because of what she has done to her lover; he wants the audience to understand that she suffers as much as does Hercules. And the most poignant image Seneca can find to embody that concept is the myth of the mother who kills her own child, and who simultaneously inflicts greater suffering upon herself.

In the *Hercules Oetaeus*, then, Seneca elicits two quite different images when he employs the myth of Tereus (and each of these images contains a further contradiction within itself): first Iole presents the paradox of the lamenting bird heralded as an exemplar of happiness, and then Deianira presents Procne as model of the perpetrator who is concomitantly a victim. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, both of these interpretations of the myth receive support from earlier Greek dramatists.

In fact, the dichotomy of the bird which traditionally epitomizes lament yet is seen as a harbinger of happiness receives a curious sort of justification from Socrates himself. During his last conversation with his friends before he drinks the fatal hemlock, Socrates insists he greets his death with anticipation rather than mourning and draws on ornithological examples to reinforce his point. Refusing the traditional account that swans receive prophetic knowledge of their impending death and that this motivates them to sing their own lament before they die, Socrates declares instead that their song is a
But men, because of their own fear of death, misrepresent the swans and say that they sing for sorrow, in mourning for their own death. They do not consider that no bird sings when it is hungry or cold or has any other trouble; no, not even the nightingale or the swallow or the hoopoe which are said to sing in lamentation. I do not believe they sing for grief, nor do the swans; but since they are Apollo's birds, I believe they have prophetic vision, and because they have foreknowledge of the blessings in the other world they sing and rejoice on that day more than ever before.\textsuperscript{39}

Socrates' statement that men project their own feelings when they interpret avian warblings helps explain why Aeschylus' Cassandra and Seneca's Iole can acknowledge the nightingale's universal symbolism of lament and still personally regard it as a symbol of happiness.

But a more pertinent observation to be derived from Socrates' pronouncement is that even though he disagrees with the conventional interpretation of what the bird's singing means, the philosopher nonetheless supports the perception that bird sounds do indeed convey specific meaning. This is the other point which repeats over and over again in the classical references to the myth of Tereus: it is not merely that the nightingale sounds "plaintive and like a lamentation" and therefore reminds the listener of the myth; the literary allusions insist that the bird actually is lamenting or is telling some part of the myth-story. Thus Penelope hears not just a bird warbling but Aëdon "wailing for her child," and a
chorus of Trojan women hears the swallow telling "the hidden sins of her cruel lord."

Statius explicitly states this principle in his *Thebaid*:

So when Pandion's birds seek once more trusty welcome and the homes they left when winter drove them forth, and they stand over the nest and tell to the house the old story of their woe, a broken, dolorous sound goes forth: they deem it words, nor in truth does their voice sound other than words. 40

And later when describing the mourning procession of Argive women protesting Creon's decree forbidding burial for the bodies of the enemy slain in the war, Statius asserts,

No lengthier plaint do the Getic birds utter upon the foreign housetops in mutilated speech, when they exclaim against the treachery of the wedding bower and Tereus' cruel deed. 41

Aeschylus, in his *Suppliant Maidens*, also notes this close association between bird sound and human language, though he offers an inversion of the more common paradigm of avian notes signifying speech:

If a diviner of birdsong comes near a landsman who hears our heartfelt lamenting he will think that he listens to her who was wife and now sings out her heart's darkness, a hawk-shadowed nightingale

Barred from her nest in the green leaf

she trills strange sweetness lamenting her exile

and the notes spill old tears with new

as she sings her son's doom:

he was killed and she by her own hand's anger unmothered 42
This passage is recited by the chorus of the daughters of Danaüs who have fled to a strange country to avoid enforced marriages with their cousins. The daughters realize that, since they are speaking in a language foreign to the inhabitants of the region, their words will not be understood. Nevertheless they expect their message to be comprehended because their fears and sorrows have so much in common with those of Procne of the Tereus myth that, to the ear of anyone listening, their words surely must duplicate the sounds the nightingale makes as she tells of her woes; and since the listener no doubt understands the message of the nightingale, he or she also will understand the plight of the Danaids.

The elements which the chorus of women professes to hold in common with the protagonist of the myth include first of all the flight from a husband intent on violently avenging a perceived wrong (the chorus will later state, "For the males of the race of Aegyptus, intolerable in their wantonness chase after me, a fugitive, with clamorous lewdness and seek to lay hold of me with violence"43), and secondly the necessity of enduring exile. The lament for the killing of Itys, though acknowledged, is blended with the sorrow of having to leave a familiar home and, furthermore, the unnaturalness of the act is emphasized ( Smyth, in a translation which comes closer to the Greek text, labels Procne an
"unnatural mother," i.e., she was so overcome with anger by Tereus's crime against herself and her sister that she was transposed to an entirely different—unnatural—state of being which compelled her to carry out her radical act against her own son, just as the Danaïds have been driven to the unnatural act of rejecting their intended husbands and seeking shelter in a foreign country.)

Once again the theme of perpetrator as victim recurs, for the accent in the passage is as much on the bird/mother's own suffering (her fear, her banishment) as it is on her mourning for her child. Likewise the Danaïds, in implementing the course of action they have chosen, subject themselves to the sufferings of exile. Amazingly, the daughters of Danaüs confidently expect all these nuances of their plight to be picked up by any passer-by who hears their sounds and initially assumes it is the nightingale singing.

From Aeschylus' "hawk-shadowed nightingale" of the Suppliants who "sings out her heart's darkness," to Sophocles' bird in the Electra which "griev'st from eve to morn," from the Senecan nightingales whose "passionate lament" can never adequately express the woes of his protagonists, to the birds of Statius who proclaim "Tereus' cruel deed" for all to hear, the classical allusions assert over and over again that the nightingale and/or swallow—creatures which do not properly possess
the power of speech—nonetheless can and do transmit a message which men hear and understand.

In the Theban Aëdon myths and Helladius' version, only the bird transformations and the subsequent lamentation in avian form give evidence of this concept that meaning does not depend upon human modes of speech. The concept receives double emphasis in the other versions of the myth which introduce the need for Aëdon/Procne to be informed of her husband's crime despite the inability of her sister to speak (or speak openly). It receives its most definitive—and most graphic—statement, of course, in Ovid's account (deriving from Sophocles) which presents a Philomela physically incapable of speech yet nonetheless able to transmit her story.

It is this paradox, then, which constitutes the central core of the nightingale myth stories: truth is able to speak, even when denied a human voice. And because paradox lies at the heart of the myth, it seems to invite other dichotomies also i.e., the recurring image of perpetrator as victim, of lamenting bird representing happiness, even the mix-up over which woman becomes which bird.

Logic lies on the side of the Greeks in the confusing issue of the ornithomorphoses: the nightingale, whose call sounds like repetition of the name "Itys," logically represents the child's mother; the swallow, whose notes
are truncated rather than melodious, aptly represents the sister whose tongue has been cut out. Pathos lies on the side of the Romans: the swallow seeks human habitation where it can be seen industriously engaged in the maternal tasks of nest-building and raising young— an image, which when applied to Procne, suggests an unceasing attempt to compensate for her crime against her human child; the nightingale avoids the homes of men, preferring to hide in the woods and thickets— an image suggestive of the shyness associated with maidenhood, or of the shame, fear and suspicion evidenced by the violated maiden. But beyond these associations, I suspect the Latin writers embraced the transposition of the ornithomorphosis precisely because it reinforced the paradoxical nature of the myth. As Martial marvels in his epigram: "Philomela laments the crime of incestuous Tereus: she who was a silent maiden is acclaimed as a bird of song." The muted Philomela transformed into the nightingale is the quintessential image of suppressed truth finding eloquent voice.

If the myth readily surrounds itself with dichotomies because of its inherent concern with the revelation of truth that cannot be spoken, it also seems to associate itself with other unconventional modes of expressing truth such as prophecy, dreams and auguries. The linkage of the myth with the prophetess Cassandra is the most obvious instance of this. Other examples are more casual, such as
Socrates' inclusion of the birds of the Tereus myth when speaking of the prophetic swans of Apollo, or Penelope's allusion to the nightingale just prior to asking the stranger to interpret her dream and, similarly, Ismene's allusion to "Pandion's birds" prior to unfolding her dream to her sister.

Aristophanes suggests a subtle connection between the nightingale and the words of the gods when, in *The Birds* the hoopoe comments that his wife's notes even entice Apollo to pluck his lyre, thereby eliciting "a divine reply" from "the blessed lips on high / Of immortal Gods." Electra, in speaking of the bird, chooses the epithet "messenger of Zeus" (because the nightingale presages the coming of Spring). More blatantly, Achilles Tatius deliberately links augury with the myth when he foreshadows the kidnapping and attempted rape of his heroine, Leucippe, by first relating an "evil omen": "a hawk chasing a swallow struck Leucippe's head with his wing." When the hero of the piece, Clitophon, asks Zeus for a "clearer augury" he turns to find himself looking in the window of a painter's studio at a picture portraying the myth of Tereus.

But perhaps the most telling example of an allusion to the myth being linked to truth which makes itself known by indirections is evidenced in works such as Catullus' poem to Hortalus in which the poet sends his apologies for
having failed to create any verse for his friend. Catullus explains that he cannot seek inspiration from the Muses because his grief over his brother's death is too overpowering; he even offers the translations of another poet's verses as a conciliatory offering. Yet the apology is itself a poem—and a beautiful one, which contains not only the touching lament for his brother but also the lovely image of the young girl who has tucked an apple, a secret gift from her lover, into the folds of her lap. Momentarily having forgotten about it, she rises to greet her mother. As the apple rolls to the floor, a blush spreads across the maiden's face. Among other things, the image suggests Catullus' own awareness of the gentle irony involved in having actually written a poem about not being able to write a poem and about the relationship of the art of allusion to the art of poetry-making.

In looking, then, at various allusions to the myth of Tereus used by classical authors primarily as a literary device intended to reinforce the audience's empathy with the emotions of a particular character, we find that, though on a superficial level the nightingale is associated with mourning, a deeper analysis includes the additional connotations of perpetrator as victim, the confusion of lamentation and happiness, and the necessity of revealing truth in an unconventional manner. Examination of our other two categories—wherein the
nightingale allusions are employed primarily as a time reference, or the emphasis is on the musical quality of the bird's song—also will reveal associations beyond the nightingale's obvious role in the various texts.

Euripides, in his play *Rhesus*, clearly uses the nightingale as a time signifier: daybreak is evidenced by the song of the nightingale, the bleating of flocks being driven to pasture, the piping of the herdsman. Yet, true to the pattern we have noticed before, the chorus of Trojan sentinels hears not merely avian warbling but rather the grief-stricken lament of the mother for her slain child. Moreover the tenor of the passage sets a tone of foreboding:

I hear, I hear—'tis the nightingale! The mother that slew her child—
As broodeth her wing o'er the fearful thing, the eternal murder-stain—
By Simois chanteth her heart-stricken wail; the voice of her woe rings wild,
As passions a lute of many a string,—winged poet of hopeless pain! 48

Unconsciously prompted by the bird's "wail," the sentinels' thoughts turn to Dolon, the man sent out to spy on the Greek camp. As the audience soon learns, the apparently casual connection between Dolon and the mourning bird is an apt one: the Trojan agent has already been killed by Diomedes and Odysseus, out on a spying mission of their own. But, in fact, the nightingale's wild lament augurs an even more significant death: the
Greek spies also kill the powerful Thracian hero, Rhesus, who had arrived that very night with horses and troops to reinforce the Trojan side. Thus, the mourning begun by the nightingale, ostensibly to signal the coming of day, will be echoed at the end of the drama by Rhesus' mother, the Muse Terpsichore, as well as by the Thracian and Trojan armies.

The brief allusion to the Tereus myth in Seneca's Hercules Furens also clearly signals daybreak (but ultimately signifies more): Juno speaks of the activity of the shepherds, the bulls, cows, and goats, and of the nightingale

perched on the topmost bough, shrill-voiced, amid her complaining young, the Thracian paramour is eager to spread her wings to the morning sun; and all around a mingled throng sounds forth, proclaiming the dawn of day with varied notes.49

Though Juno simply enumerates a series of normal morning events, her choice of words in describing the nightingale presages her real concerns and intentions. She identifies the bird as Philomela, and, commensurate with her attitude toward Jove's numerous extramarital affairs, views the violated sister of the myth as a "paramour," an accomplice rather than a victim. Instead of an adjective denoting the melodious quality of the bird's morning song, Juno uses the word stridula which suggests a harsh, strident sound, related to a hissing or grating noise; the goddess
hears no message of lament, does not identify with a woman wronged. For Juno, the Philomela/nightingale is just another example of a rival who has won a husband’s attentions—an act which she is in the habit of punishing severely.

In fact the drama recounts Juno’s punishment of Hercules for his bastard origins (he was fathered by Jove on the unsuspecting Alcmene). This day, which begins with the nightingale in the nest surrounded by her young, will end with Hercules, during an unnatural frenzy induced by Juno, killing his own wife and three young children. The play closes on a Hercules, sane again, fully cognizant of his crime, crushed with sorrow, and mourning that his hands will never be cleansed of the blood of his own sons—emotions equally familiar to the nightingale of the Tereus myth. In both the Rhesus and the Hercules Furens, then, the allusion to the myth seems only a poetic device to announce the new day; in reality it portends an impending event which will bring sorrow and lamentation.

If the nightingale sometimes functions as a herald of morning, both birds of the myth also were considered by the Greeks to be harbingers of spring; Penelope and Electra verify this role for the nightingale, Hesiod for the swallow. Martial also alludes to it in an epigram in which he describes the advent of the season: "winter has fled . . . smiling is the field, earth is putting on her
garb, the tree too its garb, the Attic adulteress mourns for Thracian Itys.  

Nor does Martial seem concerned at the apparent contradiction of using an image of lament as he announces the joys of springtime in Ravenna: "O sunny hours, O rest in tunic clad! O thou grove, O ye founts." But he extolls these glories of the season to Faustinus, a man compelled by business demands to stay in Rome, though obviously he would much prefer to join Martial in Ravenna. Ultimately, then, the message of the bird connotes sadness for Faustinus even though its very presence bespeaks a time of joy.

Similarly, Ovid alludes to the myth in the Tristia as he enumerates various welcome signs of spring though the season holds a note of sadness for him personally: "the chatty birds from unschooled throats utter a song of spring, and the swallow, to put off the name of evil mother, builds beneath the rafters the tiny house that cradles her young." However, Ovid's paean delineates the joys of spring for those who live in what he calls the "unforbidden" city of Rome; he himself has been banished from that home and lives as an exile in the marginally civilized town of Tomis on the Black Sea. The particular image he chooses of the swallow/Procne trying to expiate her crime suggests his own fruitless attempts to mitigate the punishment he has incurred for his unnamed crime. His recounting the joys of springtime in Rome, then,
actually constitutes a lament for those things of which he has been deprived. He reinforces this dichotomy at the end of his letter when he fantasizes meeting a chance visitor who will give him news of his beloved homeland: "He who tells me such things as these—things it will grieve me that I have not seen—shall be forthwith a guest within my home" (49-50).

The classical allusions, then, which purport merely to use the birds of the Tereus myth as time referents actually carry a more important message. In some instances that message constitutes an augury of mourning, in others it intermingles happiness and sadness in a manner reminiscent of Aeschylus' Cassandra and Seneca's Iole. Similar implications make their way into the allusions which deal primarily with the musical quality of the bird's song, even those which carry no signifiers connecting the bird with the myth.

Callimachus' hymn "On the Bath of Pallas," for instance, reaffirms the relationship between the avian song and a meaning perceived by humans; in addition it provides a reevaluation of lamentation (redefining it in terms of happiness) and it also includes prophecy. The hymn relates how young Teiresias was struck blind by Athena because he accidentally came upon her as she was bathing. His mother, Chariclo, a favored companion of the goddess, grieves for the boy's loss:
Therewith the mother clasped her beloved child in both her arms and, wailing the heavy plaint of the mournful nightingale, led him away. 53

Even though this time the bird is not connected specifically to the Tereus myth, the suggestion that the mother's grieving can be considered synonymous with nightingale's sounds parallels Aeschylus's use of the same motif in the Suppliant Maidens.

Athena comforts Chariclo by urging her to look upon the event as joyful rather than sorrowful and the goddess compares Teiresias' misfortune to that which will befall Actaeon for unintentionally viewing the bathing Artemis:

Nay, his own dogs shall then devour their former lord. And his mother shall gather the bones of her son, ranging over all the thickets. Happiest of women shall she call thee and of happy fate, for that thou didst receive thy son home from the hills—blind. (113-16)

Athena goes on to mitigate her former punishment by decreeing that Teiresias shall become a famous seer, especially talented in bird augury ("He shall know the birds—which is of good omen among all the countless birds that fly and what birds are of ill-omened flight" [123-24]).

Another example of the nightingale's music being so closely linked with human lamentation as to render the two virtually indistinguishable occurs in Euripides' drama, Helen, as the chorus of captive Greek maidens implores:

Sweet nightingale, nested deep in your shadowed grove,
Perched in your place of song,
Of all birds queen of melody and sorrow,
I cry out to you...come to me.
Spread wide your brown quivering mouth
And sing with me.
Accompany my laments.
I sing of Helen, her burdens and her misery.
I sing of Troy's mournful destiny.\(^{54}\)

(Indeed, though the passage shows no definitive connection
to the Tereus myth, its tone and the sentiments are so
similar to other typical lament references employing the
myth that at least one translator has taken the liberty of
rendering "aëdon" as "Philomela": "Thee let me invoke,
tearful Philomel, lurking 'neath the leafy covert..."\(^{55}\)

The lament which the nightingale-accompanied chorus
sings evidences once again the Tereus myth's affinity for
hidden truths, for their song decries the ironic fate of
Helen who has been falsely branded "godless, impious,
traitorous, and faithless" when in fact she is none of
these and herself "reel[s] with blow after blow / In a
life fit only for pity."\(^{56}\) In actuality (so Euripides'
play asserts), she never ran away with Paris nor was she
abducted by him, instead Hera deceived Paris with a wraith
bearing Helen's likeness while Zeus spirited off the true
Helen to Egypt. Throughout the duration of her exile she
has remained faithful to her husband, Menelaus, and anxiously awaits his return.

Though the chorus' invocation constitutes the sole
mention of the nightingale in the play, nevertheless the
convolutions of truth and deception which follow—unfolded in terms of apparently sorrowful events which ultimately will be revealed to be joyful and joyful events which actually will be cause for sorrow—seem invested with the atmosphere which we have become accustomed to find surrounding the nightingale myth. Helen is being kept in virtual captivity by Theoclymenus in an effort to coerce her to agree to wed him. She professes to be in mourning because purportedly she has just received word that Menelaus died at sea—in reality she rejoices because she has just been reunited with her husband and plots to escape to Greece with him. Theoclymenus greets the news of Menelaus' demise with ill-disguised happiness—though it actually presages sorrow for him. Likewise he acquiesces to the funeral rites at sea for the dead Greek hero, "rites" which instead will result in Helen's liberation from his captivity. At the same time Theoclymenus initiates preparations for a joyous wedding feast—destined to become an occasion of lament when he learns his bride has escaped with her rightful husband.

Thus, both Callimachus' and Euripides's casual allusions to the mourning song of the nightingale actually lead to the familiar motifs which accompany the other classical references to the myth: prophecy, the joy/sorrow dichotomy, and the revelation of truth in an unconventional manner.
One of the most famous descriptions of the nightingale's song, that of Pliny in his *Natural History*, looks at the bird in a scientific light ostensibly devoid of any mythic connotations; nevertheless, Pliny concludes by associating the bird with prophecy and revealed truth. He also points to another classical association which will become increasingly important in the Middle Ages, the relationship between the nightingale and the poet.

Nightingales pour out a ceaseless gush of song for fifteen days and nights on end when the buds of the leaves are swelling—a bird not in the lowest rank remarkable. In the first place there is so loud a voice and so persistent a supply of breath in such a tiny body; then there is the consummate knowledge of music in a single bird: the sound is given out with modulations, and now is drawn out into a long note with one continuous breath, now varied by managing the breath, now made staccato by checking it, or linked together by prolonging it, or carried on by holding it back; or it is suddenly lowered, and at times sinks into a mere murmur, loud, low, bass, treble, with trills, with long notes, modulated when this seems good—soprano, mezzo, baritone; and briefly all the devices in that tiny throat which human science has devised with all the elaborate mechanism of the flute, so that there can be no doubt that this sweetness was foretold by a convincing omen when it made music on the lips of the infant Stesichorus.57

Stesichorus was a prominent Greek poet of the sixth century B.C.; according to legend, a nightingale perched on his lips and sang when he was an infant.

This connection between the nightingale and the poet is not a casual one; the core of the myth coincides with the essential nature of poetry, for poetry itself is the
telling of truth by indirection, the conveying of meaning in a manner which transcends the normal modes. As we have already seen, Euripides unites the nightingale and the poet in Rhesus when he labels the bird the "winged poet of helpless pain." Aristophanes, in the The Birds, does not even confine the linkage to the bird's association with lament: his chorus, without restriction, acclaims the nightingale as she "who chants in the choir of the Muses her lay" (659). In fact, the chorus suggests that it is unable properly to perform its role of poet/storyteller without the assistance of the nightingale: "Playmate and sweet partner in / All my soft lays" (678-79). The Greek identification of the poet with the nightingale is further verified by a sepulchral epigram: "I am the Syracusan Rintho, one of the lesser nightingales of the Muses; but from my tragic burlesques I plucked for myself a special wreath of ivy." And Callimachus, in an epigram which again links the bird with mourning for a poet (Heraclitus), labels the poems themselves with the bird's appellation:

Thou, methinks, Halicarnasian friend, art ashes long and long ago; but thy nightingales still live, whereon Hades, snatcher of all things, shall not lay his hand."

Ovid, however, makes the most telling connection between the bard and the bird of the Tereus myth when, in "The Amores" he claims in the name of all poets: ""Tis
due to us that the bird of Cecrops sings Odrysian Itys.\textsuperscript{60} The phrase is one among a list of many accomplishments which Ovid credits to poets who "placed wings on feet and mingled snakes with hair," "made the traitor Tantalus thirst in the midst of the stream," "made of Niobe a rock, and turned a maiden into a bear," and even caused "Jove himself to transform now to a bird, and now to gold, or again to cleave the waters as a bull with a maiden on his back." Indeed, the poets deserve credit for giving life to all the myths. Left to the scientists, the nightingale's song would sound as Pliny describes it; it is the poet who reveals the bird's message and lineage.

Typical of the dichotomous nature of the nightingale myths, Ovid's poem which rejoices in the power of the poet is framed within a lament in which the persona mourns the loss of his love. His own verses have made her charms (and her availability?) so well known that other lovers have sought her out--and been welcomed by her. The persona ends by disparaging poets and lamenting that their words ever gain credence: "Measureless pours forth the creative wantonness of bards, nor trammels its utterance with history's truth. My praising of my lady, too, you should have taken for false; now your easy trust is my undoing" (41-44). Yet, since we can hardly be expected to believe that these are Ovid's true feelings about his craft, once again we find a literary work connected with
the Tereus myth unfolding truth through a series of indirects.

Ovid's ingenious poem not only juxtaposes the nightingale with the poet, it also introduces another classical association which will claim importance in the Middle Ages, the relationship between the nightingale and love. A brief look at some of the love poems of Ovid and of his contemporary, Propertius, which contain allusions to the myth or the birds connected with it will show familiar themes: lament, excessiveness and unceasing repetition (now linked to constancy), the oxymoron of joy/sorrow, the issue of truth being other than what is seems to be.

Propertius alludes to the nightingale in its familiar context of lament in a poem where he protests his innocence to his lover, Cynthia, who has accused him of unfaithfulness:

Why do you tire the gods with cries of my inconstancy?  
More quietly mourns the bird of woe amidst the Attic leaves."\(^6\)

Not only does the persona use the poem to assert that Cynthia's information is false--for in truth he has always remained faithful to her--he also uses the allusion to point out the excessive quality of Cynthia's suspicion which contrasts unfavorably with his own averred constancy. (This element of excessiveness has a legitimate origin in the myth: in all versions the various Aëdon's
and Procne's reacted immoderately in response to jealousy or anger and their metamorphosed forms continue to exhibit immoderate grief. Similarly, Pliny "scientifically" verifies the excessive nature "attributed to the nightingale when he explains about the nightingales' warbling competitions: "They compete with one another, and there is clearly an animated rivalry between them; the loser often ends her life by dying, her breath giving out before her song" [10.43.83-85]).

In another poem written on the occasion of Cynthia's birthday, Propertius refers to another aspect of the myth. In this poem he initiates the conjoining of joy and sorrow. Though the occasion is a happy one and there is no apparent reason for foreboding, the persona nevertheless feels a need to petition that the day be unmarred by "grief or woe." The image he chooses to embody that concept is a plea that "the mother hush her bitter cries / for Itys lost" (3.10).

Ovid, too, writes occasional poems, including one on the death of his lover's pet parrot (Amores 2.6). While the poem professes to be a sorrowful eulogy for the deceased bird, Ovid's incorporation of an allusion to the Tereus myth points to an entirely different message. By enjoining Philomela to set aside her mourning for Itys and to assist instead in the lament for Corinna's parrot, Ovid offers a standard by which the reader can measure his
In other poems Ovid displays a more serious tone toward both love and the nightingale as he focuses on the aspect of the myth which emphasizes the mother who can avenge herself on her husband only by destroying a part of herself—the theme of perpetrator as victim. Formulating a hypothetical letter from Sappho to Phaon (the lover who has rejected her), Ovid in the Heroides represents Sappho lamenting the emptiness of the forest glade which was formerly a favorite trysting spot:

Nay, even the branches have laid aside their leafage, and no birds warble their sweet complaint; only the Daulian bird, most mournful mother who wreaked unholy vengeance on her lord, laments in song Ismarien Itys. The bird sings of Itys, Sappho sings of love abandoned—that is all; all else is silent as midnight.⁶²

The only recourse which presents itself as an antidote to the emotional emptiness and silence is a self-destructive one. Sappho sees in a vision a Naiad who advises the poetess that the only way to extinguish her passion for her unrequited love is to fling herself from the "high Leucadian cliff."

In another poem in the Amores Ovid censures Corinna for aborting an unwanted pregnancy (presumably one for which he shared responsibility), comparing her to Medea and Procne and finding more sympathy for the mythical figures. Yet his portrayal suggests that Corinna is as much victim as perpetrator:
Ah, women, why will you thrust and pierce with the instrument, and give dire poisons to your children yet unborn? The maid of Colchis [Medea] stained with the blood of her children, we condemn, and lament the murder of Itys by the mother who brought him forth; but each was a cruel parent, each had tragic reasons for avenging herself on the husband by shedding blood that she shared with him. Tell me, what Tereus provokes you on, what Jason, to pierce your bodies with aggrieved hand? (2.14.27-34)

The persona of the poem seems truly not to understand that he himself has acted the role of Tereus in seducing Corinna, a woman who now finds herself carrying a child which is unwelcome to her husband. Though she does not affect vengeance through her killing of the child, nevertheless, as the poet points out, the medical risks place her in the role of perpetrator/victim: "woman does it--but not unpunished; oft she who slays her own in her bosom dies herself" (2.14.37-38). In the end, as if suddenly cognizant of the strong prophetic linkage associated with the Procne-Philomela allusions, the poet begs that his "ominous speech have no ill end." Thus, in Ovid's poetry, as in other classical references, the myth characterizes women who essentially become victims by the actions they take to remedy situations caused by their lovers. There is also the suggestion of prophecy or, at least, of the poem itself revealing more than it apparently says.

Our investigation into the ways in which the Tereus myth functioned in Graeco-Roman literary works, then, does
not necessarily negate the conclusions of the various mythologists. One could argue that the inclusion of the myth in works such as the two Agamemnon plays and the Hercules Oetaeus—which associate the nightingale's lament with the problems of the concubine—supports Fontenrose's premise that the myth essentially has to do with the female jealousy inherent in a polygamous society. Scarpi's theory that the myth presents a model of the dissolution of the ideal family life certainly could be verified by analyzing its role in Hercules Furens, and, depending upon how liberally one wanted to extend the concept of dissolution, in many of the other works also. Marcel Detienne's association of the myth with excess finds support, as we have noted, in Sophocles' Electra, Pliny's Natural History, and in several love poems. As for Graves' postulation that the myth has its origin in misinterpreted artwork intended to elucidate various methods of divination, the heart of the myth does indeed deal with unconventional methods of revealing truth and the majority of the allusions we have examined link themselves either deliberately and overtly or casually, and probably unconsciously, to incidents of prophecy or augury of some sort.

But beyond the correspondence between various references and the conclusions of individual mythologists, the key to the myth as far as literary usage is concerned,
lies in the paradox that a bird, which ought not to have the power of speech, tells a tale and is understood. Similarly, a woman whose tongue has been cut out finds a way to reveal her story: truth is able to speak, even when denied a human voice. And as the violated woman with the severed tongue finds a way to speak, similarly she and her sister find a fitting method of vengeance: the weak are able to avenge themselves against the strong. But the words of the bird's lament reveal that the price is a devastating—and inherently self-destructive—one. The classical allusions to the myth often reiterate this dichotomy of the perpetrator/victim. Yet if the tale the nightingale tells is one of lament for herself and for her crime, the classical authors insist the bird also paradoxically brings a message of happiness—or conversely, a message of joy also harbors a premonition of sorrow. And finally, the literary works reveal a kindred relationship between the nightingale and the poet, who also tells truth by indirections.

The writers of the classical period introduced into their works these various associations of the Tereus myth. Even more eagerly will the writers of the medieval period—especially the love poets—embrace the myth, particularly its nightingale manifestation, with all its rich paradox of meaning.
CHAPTER IV

MEDIEVAL MANIFESTATIONS OF THE MYTH

Medieval writers of lyrics (both love and religious), of narrative stories and of debates enthusiastically embraced the nightingale as a poetic image. Several modern scholars have traced the imagery of the bird through these medieval genres and they marvel at the radical shift from the mythical connections of rape, mutilation, revenge, infanticide, and anthropophagism to a tradition which hails the nightingale as joyous harbinger of spring and representative of love (symbolizing both human, sensual—sometimes lustful—love, as well as love of God).

While the Greeks and Romans primarily heard the word "Itys" and the sounds of lamentation in the notes of the nightingale, medieval authors, reflecting the increasing importance of vernacular languages, were more likely to hear sounds of joy, or, paradoxically enough, perhaps the French word "oci" (kill). Where the classical authors emphasized the role of Procne as grieving mother, medieval writers, associating the nightingale with Philomela, were more inclined to
connect the bird with images of the desirable maiden.

Like their earlier counterparts, medieval authors found compelling resonances between the nightingale and the bard and often the mere sight or song of the bird incited the poet to pour forth his own lyrical offering. But while in Greek and Latin the nightingale was signified by a feminine noun and etymologically connected to the women of the classical myth (aëdon, luscinia, and later philomela or philomena), in the Old French vernacular the bird became masculine (li rossignol--it is, in fact, the male rather than the female bird which sings). The French troubadours and trouvères (predominately male) tended to interpret the nightingale not as spokesperson for the sentiments of either Procne or her sister but rather as a vehicle which permitted the poet to disclose his own desires for his lady-love; and he often revealed an attitude only slightly more refined than that of Tereus.

In the classical era, the largest number of references to the myth functioned to point out a similarity between a given protagonist and one or both of the women of the Tereus tale. A lesser number were used as poetic time markers (spring, dawn) or focused primarily on the bird's vocal abilities. By the twelfth century the majority of the nightingale references were connected with spring, and the bird even became part of a stock
"nature theme" introduction for love poems. Indeed, James Wilhelm insists the bird rapidly loses all its classical connections and becomes "just a common, lower-case nightingale."64 To a certain extent he is correct: in some poems the nightingale allusion bears no conceivable relationship to the Tereus myth. But in a great number of other cases where scholars have denied a connection between the bird reference and its Graeco-Roman roots, a more careful analysis reveals that those basic themes culled from the classical allusions in the last chapter remain operative even though most of the signifiers identifying them with the myth have been left out.

So, for instance, the medieval nightingale may warble a joyous tune of love, but the poet will promptly counterpose its message with his own lament that his lady does not return his love. Bernard de Ventadour, one of the greatest of the troubadours, illustrates this attitude in his poem "Can l'erba fresch'e. l'h folha par," commonly cited by scholars to exemplify the changed role of the nightingale:

When the fresh grass and the leaf appears, and the flower blossoms on the bough, and the nightingale raises high and clear its voice and pours out its song, joy I have for it, and joy for the flower, and joy for myself and for my lady yet more: on all sides I am bound and circled by joy, but that is joy which all other joys overwhelms.65
Yet this ecstatic outcry is immediately followed by the second stanza which begins "Ai las!" as the speaker reveals his misery because he is "consumed by desire" for his lady whom he depicts as toying with his affections: "...she's aware of my pain and my sorrow, and when it pleases her she does me honour and good, and when it pleases her I am content with less..." (29-31).

Wendy Pfeffer confirms the dichotomous role which characterizes the nightingale in Ventadour's poetry: "The bird is always happy in its song and in its surroundings, while it signals and represents for the Provençal poet unhappiness." Nor is this juxtaposition of opposites confined to Ventadour; rather it becomes a common stance in the troubadour and trouvére lyrics. As it did for Aeschylus' Cassandra, Seneca's Iole, Martial's Faustinus, Callimachus's Chariclo, an exiled Ovid, and the poet Propertius, the nightingale still generates the paradox of lament coupled with happiness. If, in the medieval period, the bird appears to have shifted its traditional position to the opposite end of the joy/sorrow axis, what seems most cogent is that the paradox itself is nevertheless maintained.

Similarly, the central theme of the Tereus myth, that truth will be transmitted even though the method be unconventional--the theme powerfully imaged by the mute Philomela weaving her message in cloth--also finds echoes
in Ventadour's poem (as well as well as in the lyrics of his fellow bards). Though his lady may suspect his feelings and play upon them, the poet himself has been unable "to reveal to her my longing" (18): he avers, "I never dared speak to her of myself" (27). Later, he proposes that the two of them "should speak with secret signs" (47). But in the end, like Philomela of the myth, he cannot himself tell his lady what he wishes her to know and instead sends by way of a messenger the poem in which he has just unfolded his interwoven emotions.

Though Philomela's message was one of rape and infidelity, the persona of the poem purportedly sends his lady words of love and adoration. Yet, despite what the speaker intends to say and what he thinks he does say, the poem hints at another side of the man's character. Along with his protestations of love the speaker exhibits a thinly disguised lust as, with a sudden vehemence which he quickly tempers, he discloses what he would do were he not constrained by what others might think or say:

I would cover her mouth with kisses so that for a month the mark would show. Well would I like to find her alone while she slept or pretended to, that I might steal from her a sweet kiss. (39-43)

Likewise his profession of fidelity comes with a thinly disguised threat—unless his lady acknowledges and returns his favors, he will only feign love for her while actually bestowing his affections elsewhere:
A man should indeed blame his lady when too much she goes putting him off... For one can love and make a pretence elsewhere, and smoothly lie there where there's no sure proof. Good lady, if only you deign to love me, I will never be tainted by lies" (49-56).

Ventadour's poem, then, reflects the Philomela myth in that it juxtaposes the inability to speak and the subsequent sending forth of a message nonetheless. And like Catullus' poem to Hortulus and several of Ovid's poems which use nightingale allusions, Ventadour also reveals a truth, which the speaker himself perhaps was not entirely cognizant of.

Additionally, Bernard's lyric also evidences some interesting variations on the perpetrator/victim theme, for the poet-persona, who presumably is in control of his own poetry, depicts himself as essentially a pliant victim at the mercy of his lady's whims. At the same time, he also controls the poem's portrayal of his lady and has the power to manipulate that portrayal as he wishes. As R. Howard Bloch contends, the attitude which moderns have labeled "courtly love" actually embodies an inverted form of misogyny. According to the convention, the troubadour regards his lady with quasi-religious adoration; nevertheless his poem always manages to disclose that she responds to his love capriciously—thereby implying that she is unworthy of such adoration. If the poet chooses to depict himself as a victim, he
simultaneously allows his verse to disparage, and thus victimize, the lady.

Although Ventadour's poem only mentions the nightingale briefly at the beginning as a symbol of spring and of joy, a closer analysis of the poem shows it to be infused with the themes associated with the Tereus myth. Nor is this atypical. On the contrary, as Thomas Shippey notes, "in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, poets all over Europe are stimulated to use it [the nightingale] as a theme, and with a strange unanimity in the handling of it." Nevertheless Shippey, like many critics, insists that "the Ovidian story [the Tale of Tereus] seems to make no impression at all on the love tradition."

If, on the whole, the allusions to the nightingale during this period fail to mention the myth of Tereus and apparently refer instead to an unpersonified bird, nevertheless, it would seem that the essential themes attached to the nightingale in the classical era—the paradoxes of joy/sorrow, silence/speech, perpetrator/victim, and truth revealing itself to be other than what the speaker thinks he is revealing—continue to surround the bird in the troubadour lyrics of the Middle Ages. Nor is it entirely coincidental that the nightingale became one of the most common images of the genre of so-called courtly love poetry, which delighted in paradox and oxymoron.

As with the love poetry, so also the religious lyrics...
of the Middle Ages which mention the nightingale, though often evidencing only nebulous connections with the myth, still perpetuate the themes which invest it. These lyrics also show an increased tendency to emphasize the bird's association with happiness rather than lament—although both poles of the joy/sorrow axis generally are presented. In fact, Wilhelm credits religious influence as the primary cause for the change of the nightingale's image as a bird of sorrow to one of joy; he asserts, "The happy nightingale is a heritage of early Christian hymnologists."70

Like Ventadour's "Can l'erba fresch" which scholars point to as exemplifying the changed role of the nightingale in secular lyrics, Venantius Fortunatus' Ad Felicem episcopum de pascha is heralded as exemplifying a similar change in religious poetry.71 The poem begins with a lengthy description of spring emerging from winter, and the lines concerned with the nightingale devote particular attention to the contrast between the activities of the bird in the two seasons:

 Called back to song is the bird who, mute from the winter cold, was quite sluggish. Henceforth the nightingale [filomela] adjusts her instrument to the reed pipe and the air becomes sweeter from the reverberating melody. (27-30)

Fortunatus proceeds to connect the springtime rebirth of the world with the Resurrection of Christ, and specifically with Jesus' descent into the "gloomy underworld"
(tristia Tartara) to free the souls confined there awaiting the New Dispensation.

Wilhelm hails the nightingale passage as one of the earliest uses of the bird completely separated from its classical connotations:

"The classical Philomela . . . is finally freed from her pagan heritage of bloodshed and loss. She is no longer the beautiful but miserable prey of Tereus, as the poets of Greece and Rome knew her. She is now among the lower-case species of the bird kingdom who . . . are harbingers and symbols of Christ."72

On the whole, Pfeffer agrees with his analysis, though she is troubled by the contradictory evidence implied in the fact that Fortunatus chose the word "filomela" rather than "luscinia" (the Latin word for nightingale most commonly used in religious poetry because of its association with "lux"). Though uncomfortable with the issue, Pfeffer sees no other signals that the myth is operative and finally submits that possibly the word indicates "no more than a lexical borrowing."73

It seems to me, however, that the very combination of the word "muta," in relationship with nomenclature which emphasizes the classical personification of the bird, entices the reader to recall the tongueless Philomela and argues strongly for a deliberate mythical connotation. The nightingale in Fortunatus' poem stands balanced between the classical and the Christian concepts of the afterlife: just as she stands at the nexus of winter
changing into spring, so she stands at the nexus of the silence and gloom after the crucifixion changing into the joy of the Resurrection and of the Easter tradition.

The main message of the poem is that Christ, by his triumph over death, also frees man from death and leads him to a new form of life. Fortunatus reinforces this concept by depicting a hell which is predominantly classical in nature (though he also uses the medieval image of hellmouth—a huge, monster mouth which designated the entrance to hell in the iconography of the Middle Ages). According to the classical system, the deceased go to the underworld where they are confined, though not necessarily punished; "heaven" is inhabited only by the gods. Fortunatus' poem pictures man in the process of being released from this netherworld, which his classical heritage taught him would be his after death; man now can follow the resurrected Jesus to a new life.

Wilhelm and Pfeffer are correct in seeing Fortunatus' portrayal of the nightingale sweetly singing in the springtime as a change in the Philomela image, but the change is as deliberate as the poet's insistence on the transformed nature of man's afterlife. Fortunatus chooses the nomenclature, "filomela," because he wants to concentrate attention on the fact that a woman with that name was transformed to another mode of existence; the message of his poem is that Christians, too, have been offered a
new mode of existence. Although presenting a symbol traditionally associated with lament, he denies it that connotation: just as the Christian has been freed from sorrow and enters into joy, so the nightingale relinquishes her old associations and, ushering in the New Dispensation as she ushers in the spring, adjusts her notes to a sweeter song proclaiming the glory of God.

Possibly Fortunatus was particularly receptive to the nightingale's natural affinity for paradox since he himself obviously delighted in juxtaposing images to emphasize their polarities. For instance he stresses that it is the crucified God who reigns (37), and he inverts the roles of the wolf and the lamb in his description of the souls being led from hellmouth by the paschal lamb ("Fearfully the wild beast vomits forth the people it had swallowed, and from the throat of the wolf the lamb steals the sheep" [83-84]). In an another passage he refers to a vine which has been cut and he depicts it as shedding tears of joy, for "now it gives the water of life" (17-18). It is a curious Eucharistic image, (though one which perhaps suffers because it tries to include too many connotations). Presumably, a vine which sheds tears because it has been cut away from its trunk ought properly to be shedding tears of sorrow. That Fortunatus insists on changing them into tears of joy--as he similarly changes "filomela's" song which properly ought to be a
lament—presages the poem's exultation at the Christian transformation of the pagan afterlife.

Like Ventadour's unobtrusive mention of the nightingale which nevertheless seems to radiate its themes through the rest of the poem, so Fortunatus' mention of the bird in his poem seems like a casual reference to spring yet actually represents a larger truth which is central to the message of transformation which pervades the whole work.

The symbolism of the nightingale in religious poetry reached its highest use in the thirteenth century with John Pecham's poem *Philomena praevia temporis amoeni* (a work which also enjoyed great popularity through an anonymous French translation).74 Like Fortunatus' poem, Peckham's has no signifiers directly connecting it to the Tereus myth except for the choice of the Latin word used to name the bird. Nevertheless, as in Fortunatus' work, the naming is important, for like the nightingale of the myth which even after the metamorphosis retained a certain human identity and human emotions, Peckham's nightingale also exhibits human emotions. Just as the song of the mythic bird was understood by those who heard her, so Peckham's bird sings a poem understood by humans. In addition to embodying this core meaning of the myth—truth told by unconventional means—a closer study will show that Peckham's nightingale also embodies the joy/sorrow
and the perpetrator/victim themes.

Peckham begins by addressing the nightingale as Avis prudentissima "most wise bird" (1), and he also makes explicit the bird's allegorical nature: "understand that the nightingale (philomena) is the soul full of virtue and love . . . who weaves (texit) the familiar song" (12). As the bird in the classical allusions warbled an avian tune which was interpreted into human speech, Peckham's Christianized nightingale makes known the glories of the Creation, Incarnation, and Passion, timing her message to correspond to the canonical hours.

It is her emotional involvement with Christ's passion which evidences the theme of perpetrator/victim. The bird actually precipitates her own death in the midst of the intense mystical ecstasy engendered by her meditations. Peckham portrays her physical death in terms of the classical account from Pliny (which testified that the bird sometimes sang with such ardor that it actually sang itself to death), but he also introduces secular love elements into the death scene. In addition, on an allegorical level, the bird's dying typifies the Pauline doctrine of death to the old self and rebirth in Christ. By combining these three divergent associations, Peckham manages to Christianize the secular love convention which had attached itself to the Philomela myth; at the same time he sublimates the self-victimization of the bird by
equating it with martyrdom.

In the "Prooemium" of the poem, Peckham graphically foretells how the prolonged rapture of the nightingale's passionate singing will cause its entrails to break, its organs to shatter, and all the veins of its body to burst asunder (9-10). But in the poem proper, the nightingale's end is less gory; instead the bird's agony suggests a Dido consumed with love for Aeneas, or the languishing of a courtly lover:

Afterwards, the sweet soul, seething with passion more and more, fails in all her senses, her body consumed. Now, scarcely able to speak, though the intensity of her feelings increases, she leans back on her bed, all the while growing weaker. (73)

Then, in another reiteration of the theme of speaking without words, the next stanza elaborates how the bird's throat has been shaken after enduring the sounds of "the tongue throbbing so much," but the bird compensates for the loss of language by weeping instead (fletu compensato). Finally, at the hour of Nones, the nightingale "dies utterly, when the force of love bursts the constraints of the flesh" (78). Though it is the bird herself who brings about her own death, since she does so as a form of empathetic participation in Christ's passion, her dying takes on the aura of martyrdom. Thus Peckham's nightingale Christianizes the theme of the perpetrator/victim; at the same time he elevates it to its highest possible form.
As for the theme of joy/sorrow, Baird comments at some length on Peckham's masterful handling of that paradox in his poem:

Peacham's [sic] most notable achievement in this mystical poem, however, is his thorough merging of the two widely divergent traditions of joy and sorrow. For the poem depicts not only *philomena leta* [the joyful nightingale] singing ecstatically at Matins the joys of creation, but also *philomena querens* [the lamenting nightingale] at Prime, weeping with the weeping child of the Nativity, and, at Meridiem, lamenting inconsolably at the sight of the Christ on the cross. Yet the merging is not simply a matter of bringing together the two motifs, alternating the one with the other within the bounds of a single poem; rather it is an absolute fusion of the two. For what finally emerges, in the mystical vision of the poet, is *gaudium in luctu*, joy in grief or, perhaps, joy as grief and grief as joy.75

As with the perpetrator/victim theme, the poet raises the joy/sorrow paradox to its most sublime form. Indeed, though the poem never mentions Tereus or Procne, or even Philomela in the context of the myth story, with his "philomena" who represents the Christian soul, Peckham reinterprets all the themes which surround the myth, ultimately imbuing them with new religious significance.

The genre encompassing the medieval bird narratives and bird debates is not as concerned with the joy/sorrow axis (though the strains of that theme are not entirely absent) as with the bird's didactic role, a logical outgrowth of the theme of truth revealed in an unconventional manner. Josepha Gellinek-Schellekens testifies
that in Middle English the nightingale developed into "an authority on various subjects" and that "as an advisor she draws on the multiple strands of pagan and Christian tradition." Pfeffer verifies that in French debate literature also the bird's role included such prominent positions as leader of the avian courtly garden, judge on issues of love, and even priest of Venus.

As with the other poems we have looked at, the nightingales who engage in the debates have no overt connections with the Tereus myth except for the fact that despite their avian forms their message is understood by humans. Yet not only does the framing situation, wherein a bird essentially pronounces on human values and morals, reflect the myth's central message that truth can reveal itself in unexpected ways, but the poems themselves often have that peculiar twist which reveals that their deeper implications contradict their surface meaning. As Gellinek-Schellekens states in regard to the particular narratives she analyzed:

> when listened to closely without preconceptions (the reader/dreamer has to put his expectations aside), [the nightingale] turns out not to be the anticipated champion of love, but a moralizing, Christian nightingale who is perhaps not very original in her arguments.

Likewise the sense of truths hidden within other layers of meaning also characterizes the bird debates. Scholarly contradictions continue to proliferate, for
instance, over the precise meaning hidden in "The Owl and the Nightingale" (there is even critical supposition that the poem originally had a formal allegorical explanation which subsequently has been lost\textsuperscript{79}). Yet, though they differ on their conclusions as to the meaning behind the debate, scholars continue to feel that the poem speaks as much (maybe even more) by indirections as by its surface presentation (which somehow seems a fitting way for a nightingale poem to behave, given the nuances of its mythic connections).

Shippey, for instance, posits that the poet deliberately misdirects the reader ("we are from the start, encouraged to join the wrong side"\textsuperscript{80}) in order to compel that reader personally to experience "the inevitable humiliation of the righteous"\textsuperscript{81} which Shippey interprets as the final denouement of the poem. This critic, along with several others,\textsuperscript{82} sees the owl as the victor in the debate—despite the fact that the poem depicts the nightingale, supported by a diverse avian chorus, rejoicing in the owl's defeat (1661-62).

The issue that the owl and the nightingale debate is which of them is the better bird, and, as Brian Stone points out, this implies a judgement of the values traditionally associated with each of the birds\textsuperscript{83}. Thus the nightingale in the poem finds herself in the position of defending her image—which means her secular medieval
image including its innuendoes of sensuous love and lecherous behavior.

Though the poem makes no direct allusions to the classical nightingale or to its myth story, what is striking is the way in which the character traits of the nightingale in the poem tend to reflect characteristics of the mythic Philomela. From the beginning of the poem the nightingale is presented as more attractive and appealing than the owl. In fact, Shippey even goes so far as to suggest that the opening description of the two birds hints at Hesiod's fable (retold in the medieval era by Marie de France) of the hawk and the nightingale "where the nightingale is an innocent victim of violence." I would argue that a linkage to the Tereus myth is even more apt; consider for instance the language used by the nightingale, whose springtime melody is interrupted at sight of the owl:

Me is yeo vvrs yat ich ye so.
Iwis for yine vwię lete
Wel oft ich mine song forlete.
Min horte atflî & falt mi tonge
Wonne þu art to me iþrone.

(I am worse off because I see you. Indeed, because of your evil behavior often I must leave off my song. My heart flees and my tongue fails when you thrust yourself upon me.)

The nightingale's reaction to the presence of the owl—especially the phrase "falt mi tonge"—strongly suggests a parallel to Philomela in the presence of Tereus.
Despite the implication that the nightingale should be regarded as a frightened victim, Shippey and Gellinek-Schellekens insist that the reader's assessment of the two birds slowly reverses as the debate proceeds. One of the main supports for their contention that the owl is winning the arguments hinges on the nightingale's reactions to the predator bird's various verbal assaults (391ff., 659ff., 1291ff.); she is depicted as anxious, fearful, sometimes completely taken aback by his verbal thrusts and temporarily unable to form a rebuttal. While various critics interpret this to signify the nightingale's inferior debating prowess, it seems to me that it is perfectly in character with the opening position of the poem: just as the smaller bird is terrified by the owl's potential for physical violence, so she greets his verbal thrusts with initial panic. But like Ovid's Philomela who valiantly pulled herself together after the rape and found the courage to fling accusations at her assaulter, so the nightingale of the poem rallies her defenses, counters the accusation, and attacks in turn.

The most damning passage (659ff.), which apparently has the nightingale completely stymied by the owl's claim that she is worthless because her only talent is singing (a truth which the nightingale cannot deny) suggests a parallel with a Philomela whose severed tongue forces her to find a more ingenious way to deliver her message.87
Like the mutilated girl, the nightingale stretches her ingenuity in this crisis and comes up with the discovery of her own source of strength: that her one talent is sufficient in itself and worth more than anything the owl can boast.

For ich kan craft, & ich kan liste,
An þæreuore ich am þus þriste.
Ich kan wit & song mani eine,
Ne triste ich to non oþer maïne. (757-60)

(For I am skillful and I am cunning and for that reason I am thus bold. I am wise and know many a song, nor do I trust to any other strength.)

There follows a long oration on the merits of intellectual prowess over brute strength, in the course of which the nightingale unequivocally states, "Vor mine crafte men me luuie [loveth] / Vor þine strengþe men þe shunieþ" (791-92). Not only does this passage, found midway in the poem, reiterate the characterization presented at the beginning, but the ending will reinforce it once again as the nightingale is shown singing, joyfully confident of her victory, while the owl reacts by threatening violence with his sharp talons.

I find it difficult to accept Shippey's changing-image theory, though I don't deny the possibility that the poet might have expected the reader to arrive at conclusions different from those held by either of the debate's participants--such a twist of interpretation would be entirely consistent with the main message of the
nightingale myth which provides truth by indirection.

The other theme associated with the myth, that of the nightingale as victim, is evident throughout the "The Owl and the Nightingale" debate by virtue of the smaller bird's constant fear of the owl's violence. However there does not seem to be any implication that the nightingale shares any responsibility for perpetrating her victimization—a strong corollary to the theme in all the other literary works we have examined.

Nonetheless, the sense of the nightingale as a victim—though a victim in a moral rather than a physical sense—insinuates itself into the various bird debates: her avian opponent invariably attacks the nightingale by disparaging her association with human sensual love. Peckham may have understood philomena to be "the soul full of virtue and love," but as the medieval period proceeded, her reputation in the secular realm spanned a range extending from innocent harbinger of the season of love all the way to a euphemism for the sex act and for the male sexual organ itself.88 In a sense, the symbolism associated with the nightingale itself became victimized and degraded in the Middle Ages.

Already in the Owl and the Nightingale (the oldest of the English bird debates, dated to the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century), the nightingale finds herself defending charges that "of
golnesse [lechery] is al Ðì [thy] song" (49). The nightingale denies the accusation, protesting that though she does indeed sing of love, she advocates conjugal fealty and honorable relationships:

For god wif mai i spusing
Bet luuien hire ojene were
Þane awer hire copenere,
An maide mai luue cheose
Þat hire wur schipe ne forleose,
An luuie mid rihte luue
Þane Þe schal beon hire buue
Swiche luue ich itache & lere. (1340-47)

(For a good wife can better love her own husband within wedlock than her lover anywhere, and a maiden may choose love that will not cause her to lose her honour and she may love with rightful love him who shall be master over her. Such love I teach and instruct.)

The nightingale further insists she herself cannot be held responsible if some of those who hear her message misinterpret it and turn to lascivious love.

Nevertheless, throughout the debate genre, the nightingale continues to find that her stand on love opens her to accusations of inciting lust. In "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale," her avian adversary condemns her precisely because her warbled notes convey ambiguous messages:

And euvery wight may vnderstonde me,
But nyghtyngale, so may they not the,
For thou has mony a nyse, quente crie.89

["nyce" - ignorant, foolish, silly, wanton
"queynt(e)" - strange, curious, curiously contrived, artful, sly; subst. - pudendum]

Perhaps the real irony here is that though the cuckoo
boasts of the directness of his own speech and accuses the nightingale of ambiguity, it is in the cuckoo's mouth that the poet places the words "nyse" and "quente" which, as the gloss indicates, have such a range of meaning that they could indicate anything from innocent foolishness to sexual innuendoes. The cuckoo has attempted to disparage the nightingale, but it is he who has become the victim of his own verbal trumpery.

In "The Thrush and the Nightingale" the nightingale embodies woman as victim. In this debate she is called upon to defend all womankind against accusations of falseness, deceitfulness, lasciviousness, even garrulousness, with the implication that the bird herself is the symbolic representation of all these feminine evils. But the nightingale gains the victory in this verbal battle principally by drawing on the figure of the Blessed Virgin as the model of all women. The cuckoo leaves vowing never again to disparage the female sex. This debate, while it provides the most definitive example of victimization associated with the nightingale, nevertheless denies any affiliation with the mythical linkage of perpetrator/victim.

An unusual transformation of the nightingale's role takes place in the fifteenth century debate of "The Merle and the Nightingale" by William Dunbar. In this debate, the nightingale is able not only to repudiate the de-
grading associations to which her image was sometimes subjected throughout the medieval period; she is also able to transcend them. The merle [blackbird] takes on the function which has formerly been assigned to the nightingale in the debates, that of defender of human love. In his repeated refrain, the merle advocates "A lusty lyfe in lufes service" and, though he pretends to back up his claims with religious justification and even includes an enumeration of love's power to ennoble, his ultimately lascivious attitude reveals itself in such arguments as "God bad eik lufe thy nychtbour fro the splene, / And quho [who] than ladeis suetar nychbouris be?" (70-71).

Like Peckham's philomela, Dunbar's nightingale is elevated to the role of singer of divine love. Her refrain insists, "All lufe is lost bot upon God allone." In the end, her arguments prevail; the merle is both convinced and converted. Gellinek-Schellekens makes the interesting observation that this debate essentially pits the nightingale against her own alter ego: "Dunbar allows the Ieta and lascivia nightingale (i.e., the merle) to give in to the nightingale luscinia and singer of divine praise."92

In one sense, the nightingale debates provide essentially the same function as Philomela's woven cloth: they become a vehicle whereby the innocent victim can reveal

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her version of the story, can clear her name which has become tainted through the years with claims of incitement to sexual misconduct. Since the nightingale claims the victory in each of her debates (with the possible exception of "The Owl and the Nightingale" which still has critics disputing over which bird—if either—won), she herself becomes the embodiment of that lingering theme associated with the Tereus myth, that truth, overcoming all obstacles, finds a means to be heard.

Why the blame for lasciviousness should fall on Philomela, the innocent victim of the original tale, while Tereus himself virtually fades from memory in literary allusions presents an interesting puzzle. A partial answer can be traced to the sloppy sort of syllogism which links the nightingale with springtime, springtime with the season of animal matings, and therefore equates philomela/nightingale with physical sexuality. But another piece of the puzzle lies in the very treatment of the myth in medieval translations.

Probably the most influential retelling of the story comes from Chrétien de Troyes whose late twelfth century account survives today because it forms the basic story in the Ovid Moralisé (a late thirteenth to early fourteenth century work, attributed to Chrétien Legouais de Sainte-More, which took the Ovidian tales and attached allegorical meanings to them). Chrétien's account reflects and
promulgates the romantic mores of his favored literary conventions which hold the lady (whether consciously or unconsciously) as the primary instigator of love and the knight as caught in the throes of a passion which is almost beyond his power to control.

In the accounts of both Chrétien and Ovid, Tereus becomes inflamed at first sight of the beautiful Philomela; but the differences in the two authors' descriptions of the event are significant. Ovid manages to portray the young maiden as ingenuously provocative:

lo! Philomela entered, attired in rich apparel, but richer still in beauty; such as we are wont to hear the naiads described, and the dryads when they move about in the deep woods, if only one should give to them refinement and apparel like hers. (6.451-54)

Chrétien, however, writes, "Thereupon Philomena issued from the chamber, with her hair down—quite unlike a veiled nun" (124-26). Thereafter follow forty-three lines extolling the beauty of her "noble body and bright face" ending with the declaration that "Nature had taken more pains with her than with any other living creature, and had outdone herself with this maiden" (127-169).

Chrétien's Philomela is even more provocative than Ovid's—but no longer ingenuous; the negative comparison to the veiled nun insinuates worldliness and a conscious realization of the effect she creates on men. Nor is Chrétien satisfied to describe her beauty; he spends
another thirty-four lines enumerating her varied accomplishments: the games she could play (checkers, and chess, among others); her knowledge and familiarity with hunting birds and with fishing; her unequaled skill in embroidery and weaving; her competency at both reading and composing verse and prose; her exceptional talent for playing a variety of musical instruments; and her ability to "speak so wisely that by words alone she could teach."

No longer the shy young girl whose only apparent purpose in life is to please her father, Chrétien's Philomela functions gracefully and competently within her society. Indeed, she also is experienced at the game of love: "Because of her love of pleasures she was eyed and courted by high noblemen" (180-81), and even engages in a brief repartee with Tereus.

If Chrétien portrays his Philomela as less innocent than Ovid's, he also tends to mitigate Tereus' culpability. To emphasize the instantaneous arousal of Tereus' passion at the sight of his wife's young sister, Ovid introduces the agricultural simile of a fire sweeping through a dry crop. Nevertheless, he keeps responsibility firmly fixed on the man and his undisciplined nature which is further aggravated by his barbarian heritage:

Her beauty, indeed, was worth it; but in his case his own passionate nature pricked him on, and besides, the men of his clime are quick to love: his own fire and his nation's burnt in him. (458-60).
Chretien, on the other hand, characterizes Tereus as an unfortunate victim of love: "Amors vilainement le lie" (Love villainously binds him [214]). The poet even diverges from his narrative to explain that Tereus, being a pagan, operated under an entirely different code of conduct and indeed under his own laws "could defend any of his pleasureful acts whatsoever" (231-32) even sexual intercourse with his own sister! Then, turning from this pagan perspective, Chretien employs the aphorisms of his own age to exonerate the Thracian once again: "Who can contest Love or ever keep it from its goal? . . . for Love had begun its siege, tricking and mistreating him" (234-239).

Ovid remains consistent in depicting a Tereus burning with lust, scarcely able to curb his lewd desires long enough to seek the safety of the abandoned hut in the hills. The Roman poet twice compares the Thracian to a raptor bird whose hooked talons first frighten and then ravage its prey, and to the predatory wolf which has seized and torn the frightened lamb. Chretien, however, continues to expound on the tyranny of love and maintains that Tereus' primary intention is to "conquer through Love" (466), though the poet acknowledges Tereus's alternate plans are more reprehensible and avows that "the devil" has enchanted the man. As the Thracian plots to separate the maiden from her father's protective custody,
Chretien attributes his obsession to some form of insanity: "Tereus was quite mad now and kept getting worse" (487). Where both Ovid and Chrétien comment on the sleepless night which Tereus endures before he sets sail with Philomela, Ovid insists "he feeds his own fires" while Chrétien's passage parodies the convention of the alba or "dawn song" as the Thracian laments the lateness of dawn's coming (in contrast to the lover who, having spent the night in his lady's bed, laments the swiftness of dawn's arrival because it signals the end of his tryst).

Then, though Chrétien inserts authorial comments to forewarn the reader of the ultimate outcome of Tereus' plot, nevertheless he proposes that Tereus acts "somewhat courteously" in that, prior to resorting to violence, he professes his love to Philomela and invites her to be his secret lady-love. Only after the maiden rejects his offer and Tereus declares in most un-courtly fashion that he intends to sate his passion regardless—only then does Chrétien abandon his indulgent attitude toward Tereus and reveal the man as more callous and barbaric than even Ovid's version allows.

After Tereus' declaration that he intends to rape Philomela, Chrétien's sympathies are firmly fixed on the lady, for while the medieval convention approved of a knight pining away with unrequited love or fantasizing
however he wished, passion which actually allowed itself to lose control and explode into rape was a grave transgression of the courtly code. In fact, where Ovid's ornithomorphic ending focuses on the guilt of the women because of their crime against Itys, Chrétien completely ignores the injustice to the child and concentrates attention on the injustice to the maiden and to her avian manifestation: first he declares, "All who would believe the nightingale's reputation will be disgraced" (1454-55), and then he pictures the bird softly crying in the woods "Oci! Oci! Kill! Kill!" (1467) as she directs her hatred to those who act in inappropriate ways toward "a wise and courteous maiden."

Yet, even though the act of rape is condemned, the violated woman becomes a victim not only of her male oppressor, but also of society itself. A stigma attaches itself to her and implies that, despite all evidence to the contrary, she herself is somehow responsible for what happened to her— or, at any rate, that she now remains permanently defiled. These connotations associated with the raped victim (a societal version of the perpetrator/victim theme) account for the changed symbolism of the nightingale in the Middle Ages. When the bird represented Procne, the emphasis was on a mother's sorrow; but once the bird was viewed as representing Philomela it assumed the stigmas attached to the raped woman: the nightingale
became the inciter of love, the defiled woman.

While Chrétien's portrayal of Philomela seems to suggest that she bears some kind of complicity in arousing Tereus' emotions and thus bringing about her own violation, nevertheless his concluding comments warn against her continued victimization as he cautions his readers not to believe the nightingale's demeaned reputation. John Gower, however, who offers his rendition of the Tereus myth in his Confessio Amantis, portrays his Philomela/nightingale as painfully aware of the societal stigma which dictates she should feel shame because she has been raped. Gower even explains the migratory absence of the bird by declaring that the nightingale simply does not sing in winter because she cannot be adequately hidden when the trees are denuded of leaves:

Hir will was evere to ben hid,  
And forto duelle in prive place,  
That noman scholde sen hir face  
For schame, which mai nought be lassed [lessened]  
Of thing that was tofore passed,  
Whan that sche loste hir maidenhiede. (5950-55)

Gower hears in the bird's notes neither the classical lament for Itys, nor the French vernacular cry of revenge; he insists that those who understand her "pleignte" translate it as "O why, / O why ne were I yit a maide?" (5978-79). The poet, however, remains aware of the discrepancy between the traditional interpretation of her song as mournful and the contention of his own era that
she sings a joyful tune. Consequently he closes his account of the myth with an explanation which interweaves all the strands of the nightingale themes—the joy/sorrow axis, the avian notes conveying message and meaning, the perpetuation of victimhood, and the connections to love which the medieval authors had made an inseparable part of the nightingale image.

And ek thei seide hou in hir song
Sche maketh gret joie and merthe among,
And seith, "Ha, now I am a brid,
Ha, now mi face mai ben hid:
Though I have lost mi Maidenhede,
Schal noman se my chekes rede."
Thus medleth sche with joie wo
And with hir sorwe merthe also,
So that of loves maladie
Sche makth diverse melodie,
And seith love is a wofull blisse,
A wisdom which can noman wisse,
A lusti fievere, a wounde softe:
This note sche reherceth ofte
To hem whiche understonde hir tale. (5983-97)

But if these medieval renditions of the Tereus myth tended to hint that Philomela somehow provoked her own misfortune or that—innocent or not—she retained a stigma of shame, the moralization which was later added to Chrétien's translation left no doubt as to the associations to be attached to her. According to the Ovid Moralisé "Philomena signifies Unsatisfying and Impermanent Love, that is, the Transitory Goods of this World."96

The allegorist makes clear that "Worldly Goods" were created by God for man's well-being and that initially
when the Soul (Procne) sent the Body (Tereus) after them, she "sought nothing other than that which God had freely given, as long as it was used moderately" (3768-71). However, the Body "put all his thought and care in these things, and sought by force and violence to use them excessively, living a loose and dissolute life . . . indulging his pleasure with Worldly Delight" (3772-81).

Thereafter, the Soul mourned the loss of "Vain Delights" (the section of the tale where Tereus tells Procne her sister is dead), but by her sacrifices to Pluto (Chrétien de Troyes includes a lengthy elaboration of the funereal rites which Procne performs in her sister's name) she manages to regain them whereupon "the Soul indulges herself in excess, wallowing in frenzied pleasure, as if mad and unbridled" (3810-12). She then destroys the "Spiritual Fruit" of her life (Itys) and ultimately condemns herself to the fires of hell. Chrétien Legouais appends a final moral:

Therefore, it is clear that shortlived are the joys and quickly ended the delights of the one who seeks only to live in pleasure, pursuing merely the gratification of his disgraced and stinking flesh. For pleasure invariably escapes him faster than the nightingale can fly. (3824-31)

In the Middle Ages, then, the allusions to the myth of Tereus and particularly the image of the nightingale did undergo a radical change of emphasis from the figure of lament which was so common in classical times. The
medieval nightingale boldly embraced polar opposites: for some it the signified fleeting worldly delights, for others, the soul full of virtue and inflamed with love of God; the bird proclaimed joy but always managed somehow also to suggest sorrow; it was hailed as an authority on subjects dealing with women and love, but somehow it also found itself playing the role of victim; and always it had the mission of finding a unique method to send forth the message of truth.
CHAPTER V

CHAUCER'S USE OF THE TEREUS MYTH

The motif of the nightingale—with and without overt connections to the Tereus myth—became a versatile tool in the hands of the poets of the Middle Ages. Perhaps no one exhibits this as well as does Geoffrey Chaucer, a poet equally adept at working (and playing) with both the mythology of the classical era and the love conventions of his own age. A look at three of his early works reveals three distinctly different uses of the nightingale/Philomela imagery: in The Romaunt of the Rose the bird seems completely disassociated from the myth, appearing simply as one of the denizens of the Garden of Love whose apparent role is to convey an atmosphere of joy; in Troilus and Criseyde both the swallow and the nightingale appear and sing melodies which subtly, but unmistakably, attest to their connection with the myth story; in The Legend of Good Women the myth itself is retold, but the ornithomorphosis is omitted. Because Chaucer chooses such a wide range of use and exhibits such ingenuity in the handling of the allusions to Philomela and the nightingale, his artistry in these works not only
deserves a careful examination but the analysis of it provides an apt culmination to the study of the myth of Tereus as it is used from classical through medieval times.

To speak of Chaucer's nightingale imagery in The Romaunt of the Rose is, of course, problematic: first of all, the work is essentially a translation and each of the passages which mention the bird reflects the source material so closely that to speak of Chaucer's use of the imagery is actually to speak of Guillaume de Lorris' skill; and secondly, the extent (if any) of Chaucer's authorship of the English Romaunt continues to be a matter of some dispute. Nevertheless, Chaucer himself in The Legend of Good Women lists the translation of the French poem among his works, and most scholars agree that at least fragment A (which contains all of the nightingale references) can be attributed to him. We can, at the very least then, look upon the motif of the nightingale as a convention with which he refrained from altering it when he had the opportunity to do so.

In The Romaunt of the Rose the birds and their joyful melodies receive mention several times in the early part of the narrator's dream vision. Though each passage singles out several different avian species, the
nightingale is mentioned each time (generally at the beginning of the listing thereby giving the impression that she leads the avian chorus or at least leads in importance). Collectively, the birds are associated with springtime, with bliss, and with love—all connotations which are specific to the nightingale in medieval literature. However, a look at the extended passage shows sorrow lurking amid the joy, woe amid the bliss, a combination commensurate with the paradox which often accompanies nightingale imagery.

The first reference to the nightingale is preceded by a lengthy description of the deprivations of winter and culminates in a general image of "The byrdes that han left her song, / While thei suffride cold so strong" (71-72) now rejoicing at the return of the warming sun of spring. Among this throng of joyous birds the narrator initially singles out one, "Than doth the nyghtyngale hir myght / to make noyse and syngen blythe" (78). Further asserting that the avian "mirth" leads young folk to thoughts of love, the narrator concludes the bird passage with the strange characterization: "The smale briddes syngen clere / Her blisful swete song pitous" (88-89) (As oisaus les douz chans piteus [83]).

The action of the story up to this point offers no hint as to why the birds' music should be heard as simultaneously blissful and "pitous" [sad, sorrowful,
mournful]. Indeed the narrator himself confirms that these two emotions ought not to be harmoniously co-existing, for when he later examines the painting of the personified "Sorowe" he will conclude with the definitive statement "joy is contrarie unto sorowe" (348) (Car ioie e duel sont .ii. contreire [338]). Yet, still later, when Reason defines Love for the dreamer (a definition which consists of some fifty lines of juxtaposed opposites) she will include the joy/sorrow oxymoron: "A peyne also it is joious" (4733) (C'est païne qui est trop ioieuse [4317]); "And joie full of tormentrie [torment]" (4740) (Prosperité triste e iolie [4324]). The suggestion of sadness subtly introduced into the bird chorus, then, serves to connect the birds even more strongly with love and its ambivalent nature; it also functions as an augury of what will follow.

The anomalous message of the birds presents itself once again after the narrator has perused each of the images "ful of sorowe and woo" (611) painted on the outside of the wall which separates him from the Garden of Love. Completely ignoring the import of the paintings, the dreamer harkens rather to those birds on the other side of the wall whose songs lure him: "Ful blisful was the accordaunce / Of swete and pitous song thei made" (496-97) (Mout estoit bele l'accordance / De lor piteus chanz a oïr [184-85]). The narrator himself
unconsciously echoes the mixed tenor of their song, for he responds to the joyous bird sounds by lamenting that he cannot be in the garden of delight with them:

When I thus herde foules synge,  
I fel fast in a weymentynge (509-10)

Forment me pris a dementer (499)

Idleness, the gate-keeper of the garden, also reinforces the joy and sorrow juxtaposition when she explains that "Myrthe" and his retinue are inside listening to "The mavys and the nyghtyngele, / And other joly briddis smale" (619-20) as a way to "solace" and buffer themselves from the distressing realities represented by the paintings.

When the dreamer finally enters the garden, the birds again capture his attention: he recognizes and names several species—beginning with the nightingale; he insists he must be in paradise and he compares the avian chorus to angels performing their spiritual office. Chaucer then follows de Lorris in setting aside the religious imagery and searching for another way to express the dreamer's belief that it cannot be mere bird sound which he hears. The alternate simile which the narrator comes up with suggests even more forcefully the mixed nature of the avian message:

Sich swete song was hem among  
That me thought it no briddes song,  
But it was wonder lyk to be  
Song of mermaydens of the see,  
That for her syngyng is so clere,  
Though we mermaydens clepe hem here
In English, as is oure usuance,  
Men clepe hem sereyns in Fraunce. 
(677-84)

It is worth noting that these lines of the English differ from de Lorris' passage more radically than is the norm for Chaucer in this work, though the sense of the passage substantially remains the same. The French reads,

\begin{verbatim}
Tant estoit cil chanz doz e biaus
Qu'il ne sembloit pas chant d'oisiaus,
Ainz les peust l'en aesmer
Au chanz des seraines de mer,
Que, (pour leur) voiz qu'eles ont saines
E series, ont non seraines. (669-74)
\end{verbatim}

Where de Lorris goes into some depth associating the French word for "siren" with its adjectival corollaries meaning "serene, pure," Chaucer encapsulates this relationship into the single word "clere," and then focuses on equating the English word "mermaid" with the French term "siren." However, by choosing the word "clear" rather than the word "serene" (which has a more obvious connection to "siren"), and by distancing those two words with two intervening lines, Chaucer downplays the etiological connections of the passage and places emphasis instead on the sudden revelation that these creatures are not simply "women of the sea," as the English word states, but rather are allied with the sea creatures of classical lore whose singing lured men to destruction.

The final passage mentioning the nightingale (907-17)
returns again to the angelic imagery as the narrator describes the God of Love wearing a garland of roses around which nightingales fly while other nightingales and various other birds fly all around him so thickly that he gives the appearance of an angel descending from heaven. But the twice-repeated emphasis on the association of the nightingale with the God of Love suggests secular rather than religious connotations. Furthermore, the reference serves to cast a hint of suspicion on the veracity of the god since the previous comparison of the birds to angels resulted in the correction that actually they were sirens whose classical mission was to entice the unwary to their doom.

Thus, though the nightingales in The Romaunt (and the Roman de la Rose) have no direct connection with the myth of Procne and Philomela, and though most critics would dismiss them merely as stock features of the locus amoenus, a careful examination shows them proclaiming the message which lies at the heart of the myth as they promulgate the joy/sorrow dichotomy and presage that the truth will be other than what is displayed on the surface.

If Chaucer followed his source material almost verbatim in the The Romaunt of the Rose, he permitted himself more freedom in Troilus and Criseyde. Though the story of the Troilus closely parallels Boccaccio's Filostrato, even including occasional lines (and sometimes
whole stanzas) freely translated from that poem, Chaucer's work constitutes more than a mere paraphrase of the Italian poem. As Stephen Barney summarizes:

He [Chaucer] radically transforms Boccaccio's poem, redistributing the weight given various parts of the story, adding long scenes, wholly re-imagining the characters of Troilus, Criseyde, and Pandarus.  

Chaucer's protagonists do indeed incorporate a psychological depth which surpasses their characterization in the Filostrato. Though much of the augmentation of their personalities comes through the comments and personal reactions which Chaucer has assigned to the purportedly objective narrator, a more subtle shading of the characters results from the poet's masterful insertion of mythological allusions into the tale. Prominent among these are references to the myth of Tereus.

Chaucer first introduces the swallow at the beginning of Book Two as he describes the bird's song awakening Pandarus one May morning. But in addition to invoking the swallow's role as harbinger of spring, the poet immediately makes it clear that he intends the reader to recognize the bird's affiliation with the Tereus myth. This is no generic swallow but the bird of the myth tradition who recounts her sad tale which, though not spoken in human language, is nevertheless understood by her listeners.

The swalowe Proigne, with a sorrowful lay,  
Whan morwen com, gan make hire waymentynge,  
Whi she forshapen was ... (2.64-66)
Yet the poet informs us that Pandarus remains unaware of her message until she comes to that part of the story which deals with the rape of Philomela:

_and ever lay_
Pandare abedde, half in a slomberynge,
Til she so neigh hym made hire cheterynge
How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,
That with the noyse of hire he gan awake,

And gan to calle, and dresse hym up to ryse,
Remembryng hym his errand was to doone
From Troilus, and ek his grete emprise.
(2.66-73)

Now Pandarus' "grete emprise" is to serve as an intermediary between the love-stricken Troilus and his future lady love, Criseyde. Specifically, Pandarus considers it his role to render his niece compliant to the amorous desires of his best friend, and though Troilus asserts that those desires encompass neither "harm or any vilenye" (1.1033), yet Pandarus' laughter in response to this statement introduces an element of ambiguity and encourages the reader to draw other inferences from the mythical allusion. Pandarus' subsequent "remembryng" of his errand, which occurs specifically when the Procne swallow tells of her sister's rape, links those two events in a way which subtly implies that Criseyde, like Philomela, also may be destined to become a victim of the designs of male lust.

Just as this day began with an awakening precipitated by avian "cheterynge," it ends with Criseyde trying to
weigh her uncle's words and intentions and then falling asleep to bird song. This time the bird is not the "swalowe Proigne" but an unpersonified nightingale:

A nyghtyngale, upon a cedir grene,
Under the chambre wal ther as she ley,
Ful loude song ayein the moone shene,
Perauenter, in his briddes wise, a lay
Of love, that made hire herte fressh and gay.

(2.918-22)

If Chaucer deliberately connected the swallow to its classical heritage, he just as meticulously situates the nightingale within its medieval conventions: this bird elicits thoughts of love and joy. But Chaucer's treatment of the two birds includes enough parallelism— one beginning the day, the other ending it; one waking Pandarus to his "grete emprise," the other putting Criseyde to sleep after she has reflected on her uncle's words— to cause the reader to suspect that the poet may be weaving a more complicated message into the tapestry of his poem.

The simple word "perauenter" [perchance] (further reinforced by the phrase, "in his briddes wise") suggests the possibility of other interpretations beyond those to which the narrator subscribes: perhaps the bird is singing a song of love; perhaps she also sings a different tune. The perceptive reader recognizes the possibility that this may be the Philomela/nightingale singing a warning, unfolding the same tale her swallow/sister recounted earlier. But if the swallow's song established a rapport
with Pandarus' innermost desires, this nightingale generates no corresponding moment of enlightenment for Criseyde.

The hint that Criseyde is about to become a victim of male violence continues in the dream which follows her slumber induced by the nightingale's song. In the dream a white eagle "Under hire brest his longe clawes sette, / And out hir herte he rente" (2.927-28). But, like the "peraunter" which insinuated itself into the previous allusion of the nightingale to intimate that what Criseyde took to be love might instead presage rape, the dream leaves open the possibility that what seems like rape might really presage love, for the eagle replaces her heart with his own:

And did his herte into hire brest to gon,
Of which she nought agroos [felt dread], ne
nothyng smerte [felt pain];
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

(2.929-31)

Having maneuvered the reader into much the same quandary which Criseyde herself is experiencing—both dreading and anticipating an impending tryst with Troilus, worrying whether the affair will end in joy or shame—Chaucer inserts more classical allusions that serve to intensify the premonitions which the swallow introduced. On the way to Criseyde's bedroom Troilus pauses to invoke the aid of the gods in his forthcoming enterprise, an apparently pious and commendable attitude for a hero of
the classical era. However, prompted by the dark hints ushered in by the allusion to the Tereus myth, the discerning reader will discover that the particular gods cited and the specific situations referred to calls into question just how commendable Troilus' motives really are.

Troilus begins, fittingly enough, with an invocation to Jove, but rather than focusing on that personage in his position as head of the gods, Troilus cites his role in the abduction of Europa. That incident suggests correlations to Criseyde's situation since Criseyde, though she has not been abducted, has been deliberately misled and manipulated by her uncle who assured her that Troilus would not be present at the house, let alone conducted into her bedroom. Troilus' next invocation to Mars also seems not inappropriate since the Trojans are at war and Troilus is, after all, a war hero. However, the main focus of the invocation is not on Mars' role in battle but his relationship with Venus, a relationship which, due to Hephaestus' net trap, ended in their clandestine affair being exposed to all the other gods—precisely the kind of embarrassment and dishonor which Criseyde has so often begged Pandarus and Troilus to spare her.

The innuendo of rape, hinted at by the Procne/swallow, gains credence as Troilus next calls for aid from Apollo by virtue of his love for Daphne. Though he recounts Daphne's reaction to the god's unwelcome
advances, Troilus' empathies lie with the god, not with his female victim:

O Phebus, thynk whan Dane hireselven shette
Under the bark, and laurer [laurel tree] wax
[came into being] for drede,
Yet for hire love, O help now at this nedel

(3.726-28)

In fact, the implication that Daphne's response may be a reflection of Criseyde's own receives even stronger support when we recall that Troilus' pre-arranged excuse in case his absence was noticed was that he was at the temple of Apollo "to seen the holy laurer quake" (3.542). The quivering of the leaves on the sacred tree signified Apollo's message of an impending Trojan victory, but set in the perspective of Troilus' actual mission, the quaking laurel which he wishes to view would seem to augur Troilus' impending victory over a terrified Daphne-like Criseyde.

Troilus next calls upon Mercury and cites the god's love affair with Herse. According to the story told by Ovid, Mercury, having become enamored of the lovely Herse though he had only seen her from a distance, immediately flew to her home. He was stopped by her older sister, Aglauros, who questioned him as to the reason for his visit. Mercury boldly informed her that he sought the favors of a lover and that he had come to make her the aunt of his offspring. Aglauros, prompted by greed, demanded gold before allowing the god access to her
sister, and Mercury agreed to comply. But upon his return, Aglauros, infected with Envy, barred the way to her sister's room and refused to let the god pass; whereupon, his patience at an end, the messenger god simply turned the woman into stone. The fact that Troilus recalls this tale while on his way to Criseyde's bedroom seems to suggest the Trojan's desire to identify with Mercury's boldness, persistence, impatience, and, of course, erotic fervor; but it also implies Criseyde's identification with female weakness and vulnerability. Once again this allusion echoes the swallow's warning.

The next invocation, "and ek Diane, I the biseke / That this viage [undertaking] be not to the looth" (3.731-32), is the most inappropriate of them all. In the first place, Diana is the goddess of chastity and her vengeance against those violating her doctrine, whether through their own culpability or otherwise, was severe and well verified in mythological lore. In the second place, Criseyde is not a virgin (she is already a widow when Troilus meets her) and thus does not even come under the aegis of Diana's protection.

Throughout two stanzas, then, under the guise of a pious invocation to the gods, the poet has endowed the impending bedroom scene with premonitions of abduction, public humiliation, and rape. In fact, by depicting Troilus seeking Diane's pre-forgiveness, the poet has
succeeded in ending the invocation section with the illusion of Criseyde as a chaste virgin about to be violated. Certainly the classical references seem to support the contention that the swallow's account of the ravishing of Philomela may presage a similar victimization for Criseyde.

Chaucer further reinforces that possibility with other bird imagery as the inevitable denouement of the bedroom scene draws nearer. As Troilus "hire in armes faste to hym hente [seized]" (3.1187), the narrator comments "What myghte or may the sely [innocent, wretched, hapless] larke seye, / Whan that the sperhawk [sparrow-hawk] hath it in his foot?" (3.1191-92). Though the particular avian species have been changed, the phrase essentially echoes Hesiod's fable of the powerful hawk who has captured the helpless nightingale; it also recalls Ovid's simile from the Tereus story of the dove smeared with blood and palpitating with fright after being pierced by the raptor's talons.

Then, as if the narrator feared such an interpretation might be dismissed as merely his commentary rather than Criseyde's own reaction, he cites "clerkes in hire bokes olde" who affirm that "Right as an aspes [aspen] leef she gan to quake, / Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde" (3.1199-1201). The quaking leaf, of course, strongly recalls the terrified Daphne whose sole recourse

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against her male oppressor was to abnegate her femininity entirely and metamorphose out of human form. Nor is Troilus unaware of the overtones of Criseyde's trembling; in a return to the raptor imagery he declares, "Now be ye kaught, now is ther but we tweyne! / Now yeldeth yow, for other bote [remedy] is non! (3.1207-08).

Criseyde's answering response, however, reveals that Chaucer has been manipulating his classical allusions—and his audience's reaction—all along: Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte deere, / Ben yold [yielded], ywis [truly], I were now nought heere!" (3.1210-11). Criseyde may have had moments of fear and uncertainty, but she is no helpless maiden, defenseless against the machinations of a conniving uncle and suitor; she is no Philomela dragged unsuspecting into the woods, no Daphne enclosing herself in tree bark to avoid unwelcome embraces. Criseyde fully understands the designs of her lover and his pandering agent, understands and accepts them because they mirror her own desires. Though she may quiver with fear, she also quivers with anticipation. Despite the troublesome insinuation of the "peraunter" into the nightingale's song, it was Criseyde's choice to interpret the warbling as a message of love rather than a presage of rape. Likewise, in the bedroom scene, ultimately it is her choosing and her volition which determines the nature of the act.
Then, as if to apologize for encouraging his readers to arrive at false conclusions, Chaucer repeats and modifies his previous images—the nightingale, the invocation to the gods, the hearts exchanged by the eagle—disavowing their innuendoes of Criseyde's impending violation. However, as the ending of the story will reveal, Chaucer's modification of his allusions merely constitutes another indirection. Just as he carefully encouraged the reader to believe in the inevitability of Crisyede's victimization by Troilus, so he just as carefully leads the reader away from that characterization. Yet, once his new allusions have succeeded in engaging the reader's sympathies in that direction, Chaucer will reveal Criseyde as a victim of political exigency, a victim of Troilus' failure to act in her behalf, a victim of Diomede's desire for sexual conquest, even, in a larger sense, a victim of the narrator's (and also of the poet's) continual retelling of her story. Indeed, the "waymentynge" of the swallow and the victimization she hints at was prescient after all.

Chaucer begins his reworking of the allusions by introducing another nightingale image. The picture of the bird who stops her song in sudden alarm at the threat of danger, then recognizing she is safe, sings out more loudly and joyfully than ever, reflects a Crisseyde who finally relinquishes her fears of betrayal and dishonor.
And as the newe abased [suddenly startled] nyghtyngele, 
That stynteth [leaves off] first whan she bygynneth to synge, 
Whan that she hereth any herde tale [shepherd speak], 
Or in the hegges any wyght [person] stirynge, 
And after siker [with assurance] doth hire vois out rynge, 
Right so Criseyde, whan hire drede stente, 
Opned hire herte, and tolde hym hire entente.  
(3.1233-39)

If the sudden silencing of her bird's song suggests any relationship to the mute Philomela, or hints at other possibilities as did the "peraunter" nightingale, the final portrayal of the bird as "siker" would seem to repudiate those associations. As the nightingale rejects her former fear and sings out confidently, so Criseyde, for now, at least, accepts this love affair with Troilus consciously, and wholeheartedly rejoices in it.

In fact, so anxious is Chaucer to divorce Criseyde from the image of the victimized maiden and likewise Troilus from the image of the overpowering male that the poet presents his reaction to her unexpected acquiescence in terms which imply that it is Troilus, not Criseyde who has been rescued from danger:

And right as he that seth his deth yshapen, 
And dyen mot [must], in ought [for all] that he may gesse, 
And sodeynly rescous doth [lets] hym escapen, 
And from his deth is brought in sykernesse [into security], 
For al this world, in swych present gladnesse, 
Was Troilus.  
(3.1240-45)

Indeed, perhaps Troilus has been rescued from his own
dilemma of wanting to take that which he really wished to be given.

Then to verify the purity of Troilus' motives, which had been impugned by his unfortunate choice of deities in the earlier invocation, Chaucer now presents him offering thanks to the gods. But this time the specific gods he addresses emanate a very different quality: he thanks Venus, not in her aspect of illicit lover, but as the mother of "Love" and "Charitee." More significantly, he also thanks "Ymeneus" (Hymen) the god of nuptials, thus implying that god's sanctification of the consummation of the couple's love.

Finally, continuing his modification of those earlier images which followed the swallow's intimation of rape, Chaucer clarifies the ambiguity introduced by the dream-eagle. Troilus seemed to play the part of the eagle who would tear out Criseyde's heart, yet his heart has been riven from his own breast that he might offer it to her. And as if to verify that such a love exchange has indeed been completed, Chaucer depicts Troilus seeking Criseyde's assurance at his morning leave-taking:

That I, youre humble servant and youre knyght,  
Were in your herte iset as fermely  
As ye in myn. (3.1487-89)

To which Criseyde replies, "Ye ben in-with myn herte grave [buried], / That, though I wolde it torne out of my thought, / . . . I koude nought" (3.1499-02). Thus, with
both of his protagonists solemnly avowing that their nighttime tryst constituted a true and mutual exchange of love, Chaucer apparently silences the swallow's rumors of rape and returns her "waymentynge" into harmless birdsong.

Nevertheless, the poet soon reveals that he has allowed his allusions to mislead his readers once again for as he continues to unfold his story he reveals that, though Criseyde does not fall prey to violent physical abuse, as did Philomela, the swallow's lament and her hints of victimization were nonetheless accurate. Criseyde, without being consulted either by her father or by the Trojan leaders, becomes a pawn in their political maneuvering. Though Troilus bemoans the turn of events, he offers no remedy. Pandarus first counsels finding another lover—"Absence of hire [Criseyde] shal dryve hire out of herte" (4.427)—and when Troilus protests the impossibility of such a thing, Pandarus next recommends, "Go ravysshe [abduct] here!" (4.530). But Troilus' inability to take action is another sort of victimization which ultimately leaves Criseyde at the mercy of Diomede.

Chaucer makes Diomede's intentions quite clear from the start: the Greek warrior relishes the challenge of winning Criseyde's affections away from her Trojan lover almost as much as he anticipates the pleasures of her sexual surrender to him. In fact, Diomede's aggressiveness contrasts so dramatically with Troilus' passiveness
that the reader is forced to question the previous interpretation of the dream of the eagle which equated Troilus with the raptor bird. Chaucer discloses that he has managed to mislead his readers in this matter also, for it suddenly seems obvious that the bird who so violently rent Criseyde's heart from her breast actually represents Diomede.

The poet verifies this new interpretation of the eagle dream—and parodies Troilus and Criseyde's solemn exchange—when he makes his narrator reluctantly confess to Criseyde's affair with Diomede in terms of the familiar heart imagery: "Men seyn—I not [I don't know]—that she yaf hym hire herte" (5.1050). Even the small element of doubt presented by the narrator's "I not" is later eliminated by the dogmatic pronouncement of the prophetess, Cassandra, "thy lady, wherso she be, ywis, / This Diomede hire herte hath, and she his" [5.1516-17]).

But, being privy to Diomede's desires and intentions, the reader knows that this exchange of hearts in the Greek camp is more a true violation than all the maneuvering of Troilus and Pandarus, for Troilus' motives proved to be pure, while Diomede only feigns love to gain his pleasure. We were right after all to recognize the note of concern and the premonition of victimization in the song of the Procne/swallow, the error was in believing Troilus to be the Tereus figure.
If in *The Romaunt of the Rose* Chaucer accepted the medieval conventions of the nightingale's association with love and joy, while including (consciously or otherwise) its affiliations with truth and paradox, here in *Troilus and Criseyde* the poet deliberately manipulates both the classical and medieval connotations of the bird. Not satisfied with merely juxtaposing sorrow with the nightingale's joy or allowing the poem to give a message which reaches beyond the sum of its words, Chaucer supercharges all the normal resonances of the myth.

First the poet maneuvers his audience into believing that, regardless of the words being spoken by the panderer and the suitor, the discerning reader, clued by the message of the swallow and the nightingale, can distinguish the shadow of a Tereus where Troilus stands and the silhouette of Philomela just beyond the form of Criseyde. Then just when things look blackest and it seems the predicted rape is about to occur, Chaucer turns on the lights, dispels the shadows, and reveals two lovers locked in a mutual embrace. However, having successfully convinced his readers that though they were mistaken before, they now see the situation as it really exists, the poet once again turns the images around to ratify the message of victimization which was introduced by the birds of the Tereus myth.

Indeed, the poet himself is the real nightingale:
revealing truth by indirections, reminding us of a tale of lament and victimization while singing of love and of joy. Through his skillful control of the Tereus myth and the other classical allusions which he interweaves with it, Chaucer entices his readers to explore beyond the surface portraits and discover a new depth and complexity in his characters.

Having displayed his familiarity with classical mythology in general, and his firm grasp of the Tereus myth in particular, with all the complexities and nuances surrounding the nightingale in both its Graeco-Roman and its medieval manifestations, Chaucer's rendition of the tale itself in The Legend of Good Women comes as a distinct disappointment.

For one thing, the story makes an awkward addition to a collection which is supposed to contain tales of faithful female lovers; Philomela's story is one of lust and violation and has nothing to do with love. Some critics have suggested that the tale actually was meant to focus on Procne who was, after all, "trewe" to her husband up until the moment his crimes against her sister essentially nullified their relationship. In a similar vein, Ann McMillan, who defines the common denominator of the women's "goodness" as their fidelity to their marriage vows (perceived or actual), tries to explain Philomela's anomalous inclusion by suggesting that she was betrayed by
virtue of her trust in her sister's marital commitment. However, both the *incipit* and the *explicit* specifically label the tale simply "*Legenda Philomene*." The continued effort of scholars to justify Philomela's place in the compilation (and the even larger number who simply ignore it in their critique) testifies to its ill-fit.

Aside from the question of suitability, Chaucer's rendition of the Tereus tale is disappointing because the poet allows his narrator to condense the story so drastically that no character development is possible. In fact, the storyteller even cuts off the myth prematurely, omitting the entire sequence concerned with the revenge of the sisters and their subsequent transformations into avian form. And as if this weren't indignity enough, he tactlessly protests after only thirty lines that he is already bored with the tale.

Indeed, this line (2257) and others announcing the narrator's weariness with his assigned project of enumerating the stories of "goode women," helped form the basis for the theory (which originated with W. W. Skeat in the late nineteenth century and has been challenged only in recent times) that Chaucer himself found the writing of the legends boring and tedious and ultimately abandoned them. But surely *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales* confirm that Chaucer's storytellers speak from their own narrow viewpoints and categorically are not
to be equated with the poet himself. Granted, Chaucer seems to be identifying himself quite closely with the chronicler of the *The Legend of Good Women* since he attributes his own writings to that persona; nevertheless, to deny the narrator his separate fictive life is to rob the poet of part of his power to speak. And, on one level at least,\(^1\) The *Legend* is precisely about the poet's modes of speaking—the constraints placed upon him by patrons and the possibilities and strategies he develops for conveying his own meaning despite those constraints (i.e., his ability to weave into his tapestry the message he cannot relate in plain words).

Of course, this problem of not being permitted to speak as one wishes and therefore having to resort to a less conventional method of conveying meaning is the very issue which lies at the heart of the Tereus myth. This, then, accounts for the narrator's odd inclusion of that tale among the other legends of women dedicated to love: at its most basic level of meaning, the Philomela myth reflects the narrator's personal dilemma. In fact, Chaucer's very treatment of the tale provides a miniature model of the narrator's method of handling his quandry. As he ends the Legend of Philomela abruptly without reporting the anger and subsequent revenge of Procne and her sister, so he cuts short the other legends, deletes sections, even falsifies details, thereby denying the
anger, the revenge, or even simply the less edifying traits of the women of the tales. All this in an effort to make his rendition of the women's lives conform to the erratic dictates of the patrons who assigned the writing. The very inclusion of the Tereus myth, which exemplifies the distortion which is taking place in the other tales, allows the narrator to reveal by indirections that his personal opinion of these various women does not necessarily harmonize with the written account.

In order to understand this Chaucerian sleight-of-hand, we must examine in some detail the Prologue which establishes the framework and context for the compilation of the individual legends and we must analyze the difficulties which the narrator has in retelling the tales themselves. The prologue exists in two separate forms: the so-called "F" and "G" versions. Although some controversy still exists, modern criticism leans toward considering G as a later revision of F, probably written after the existing tales had already been completed.

Both prologues introduce the narrator as a bookish character who, one May evening, dreams that he is in a daisy-filled meadow where his dream-self observes the god of Love accompanied by his queen and a multitude of ladies. The god accosts the narrator with the stern rebuke:

Thow art my mortal fo and and me werreyest
[oppose],
And of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyest
[speak amiss],
And hynderest hem with thy translacyoun,
And lettest [hinder] folk to han devocyoun
To serven me, and holdest it folye
To truste on me. (G 248-53; F 322-27)

For evidence the god points to the narrator's translation of The Romaunt of the Rose ("That is an heresye ageyns my lawe, / And makest wise folk fro me withdrawe" [G 256-57; F 330-31]) and Troilus and Criseyde (which portrays "how that wemen han don mis" [G 266]104). Though in the F version these accusations are immediately followed by threatened punishment, G lengthens the reprimand by reviewing which "bokes olde" were available to the narrator and insisting that these contained ample stories of good women which he should have chosen to write about instead. It is doubtful that Philomela's story was one which the god of Love would have included.

The queen, Alceste, comes to the narrator's defense and insists that the accused must be given an opportunity to refute the charges--then she preempts his chance to do so. Like the muted Philomela, he is not permitted his own voice. On his behalf, Alceste posits three possible excuses: first, the poet may have been falsely accused out of envy by those desirous of ingratiating themselves with the love god (this implies that the god has not read the works and formulated his own conclusions but relies on the opinions of others); second, the poet may have merely
translated the words of other authors without really understanding the substance of what he wrote; or third, someone may have ordered him to translate the works whereupon he was obliged to comply despite what his own preferences may have been.

Although this last supposition presumably modifies the nature of the poet's own culpability by placing the majority of the blame on the patron, Alceste proceeds to become just such a commissioner of poetry herself (and even inveigles the god of Love into participating in such a commission). Without allowing the narrator to present a single comment on his own behalf, she assures the god of Love that the poet will swear never to offend against Love again and that, in recompense for his past crimes, he will henceforth write "Of women trewe in loyynge al here lyve" (G 428; F 438) and will further the cause of Love to the extent that he had damaged it with his earlier offensive works.

The god of Love accepts Alceste's statement of the poet's reform, grants her the authority to dispense punishment, and orders the cowed narrator to express appropriate thanks to his benefactor. Now at last the narrator is permitted to speak and, after his obligatory words of appreciation, he takes the opportunity to protest his innocence:

what so myn auctour mente,
Algate, God wot, it was myn entente
To forthere trouthe in love and it cheryce,
And to be war fro falsnesse and fro vice
By swich ensample; this was my menynge.

(G 460-474; F 470-74)

Alceste, however, appears little concerned with the issue of his actual guilt or innocence and she is eager to get on with his sentencing. She repeats and elaborates upon her former injunction: as "penance" for his "trespas" he must, for the remainder of his life, spend the greater part of his time writing "a gloryous legende / Of goode women" (G 473-74; F 483) ("goode" being defined as "trew in loyynge al here lyves" [G 474; F 484]); in addition he should tell of the false men who betrayed these women; and finally he must "spek wel of love" (G 481; F 491). Furthermore, she orders the poet upon completion of his work to present the collection of legends to the Queen of England (F 496-97).

There has, in fact, been a great deal of critical speculation concerned with whether Queen Anne actually commissioned Chaucer to produce such a work. John Fisher notes the points of similarity between The Legend of Good Women and Gower's Confessio Amantis and presents his theory that both stem from the same royal command. He suggests that King Richard II and his young wife, Anne of Bohemia, conceived the idea of "having the two premier poets of the kingdom write parallel poems in praise of love." Fisher even questions whether the format of a
collection of stories and also the convention of the "religion of love" ("Gower adopted for his work the fiction of a lover's confession and Chaucer the fiction of a penance for sins against love") might have been specifically included in the directive.  

Whatever the historical parameters of The Legend of Good Women, the Prologue testifies that Chaucer intentionally set up the paradigm of a poet who has been commanded, rather than consulted. The narrator represents a poet whose literary freedom has been abrogated by a more powerful personage, and he himself has been denied a voice in the proceedings. As we shall see, he in turn will cope with his imposed assignment by censoring the characterization of his literary protagonists and denying them their full voice.

The interpolations within the legends which characterize the narrator as bored with his task, then, are meant to personalize the fictional poet, to portray him as disgruntled at being forced to write according to someone else's preconceived mold. And, though the dividing line blurs somewhat (especially if we give credence to the theory of the historical command), the interpolations cannot be taken as proof of the poet, Chaucer's, dissatisfaction in quite the same sense. Indeed, if the G Prologue truly represents a revision undertaken after Anne's death (and therefore at a time
when the commission would no longer be binding), it clearly implies Chaucer's continued interest in the project. It also lends particular emphasis to four lines spoken by the narrator prior to his dream vision (lines which have no parallel in the F version):

For myn entent is, or I fro yow faire,
The naked text in English to declare
Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
As autours seyn. (85-88)

According to this declaration, the narrator's decision to translate stories from "bokes olde" pre-dates the directive to do so given him by Alceste and the god of Love. His displeasure then, stems not from the imposed duty of translating classical tales—that's what he wanted to do all along—but rather from the necessity of wrenching those tales to make them fit into the framework of "goode women" who were "trewe in lovynge al here lyves." More specifically, he had planned on writing a "geste," a chivalric romance, (possibly in a mode similar to his *Troilus and Criseyde*); instead he has been directed to translate the stories into "legends," that is, in keeping with the theme of the religion of love, he must use the techniques peculiar to hagiographical writing to portray his heroines as secular saints.107

The difficulties of conforming to this set of demands become evident from the very first tale which, according to the love god's own decree, is the story of Cleopatra.
The chronicler quickly finds that he must silence certain aspects of the Egyptian queen's story if he is going to turn her into a "saint." Indeed, the poor narrator cannot even define her as "trewe in lovynge" except by omitting her liaison with Julius Caesar. As Beverly Taylor, in her excellent article, "The Medieval Cleopatra: the Classical and Medieval Tradition of Chaucer's Legend of Cleopatra," aptly points out:

One of the matters on which Chaucer is notably silent is Cleopatra's relationship with Julius Caesar. Singling her out as the lover of Anthony is like praising Criseyde for loving Diomede while making no mention of her past relationship with Troilus.108

The narrator also runs into difficulties fulfilling the other assigned objectives. Antony will not fit conveniently into the pattern of "false men that hem betrayen, / That al here lyf ne don nat but assayen / How manye wemen they may don a shame" (G 476-78; F 486-88). Indeed, Antony is so devoted to Cleopatra that for her sake "al the world he sette at no value"; his betrayal is not to his lover, but to his faithful wife (who actually constitutes a better example of a "good woman" than does Cleopatra) whom he abandoned precisely because of his love for the Egyptian queen. As for the injunction given to the narrator that he make restitution for his previous objectionable writings by instead portraying faithful women, the problems associated with trying to present
Cleopatra as a moral opposite to Criseyde are almost insurmountable. As Taylor elucidates: "Traditionally depicted as the incarnation of fickleness dictated by political straits, Cleopatra may properly be viewed as the spiritual sister of Criseyde."\textsuperscript{109}

Despite these obstacles, the narrator dutifully attempts to chronicle the "legend" of Cleopatra. The methods he formulates to make her story meet his patrons criteria exhibit on a minor scale the pattern he will blatantly set forth in the Philomela tale. By omitting objectionable information from his source material and embellishing the more favorable incidents, he remolds the details of Cleopatra's life until she appears to fulfill the role of love's martyr. For instance, the narrator focuses dramatically on her death scene. Elaborating on historical accounts which mention one or two snakes, the poet details how she ordered that a pit be dug next to Antony's tomb and filled with "alle the serpentes that she myghte have" (679). Then, with her parting words proclaiming her own grounds for canonization--"[it] shal ben wel sene, / Was nevere unto hire love a trewer Quene" (694-95) -- Cleopatra jumped into the pit. The narrator verifies, in typical hagiographic style, that she received the fatal snake bites "with good cheere" (700).

Feeling relatively satisfied that he has managed to cast his protagonist in the proper role of love's martyr,
the narrator quickly tries to dispense with his patron's directive to emphasize female supremacy in regard to faithfulness in love. The poet attempts to imply male inferiority with the rhetorical question: "[who could] fynde a man thus trewe and stable, / And wol for love his deth so frely take" (703-04). His question, however, instead of confirming Cleopatra's superiority, challenges the audience to "fynde" Antony. For despite the narrator's careful cover-up, he cannot prevent the reader from realizing that Cleopatra's suicide was as motivated by fear of capture and disgrace as was Antony's, and Antony's death was at least as motivated by love as Cleopatra's.

Leaving the "Legenda Cleopatre, martiris" on somewhat shaky ground, the narrator proceeds to the tale of Thisbe. This story shows more promise, since Thisbe has no glaring flaws which require camoflaging; the poet consequently translates his Ovidian source quite accurately. However, at the end of the tale the narrator finds himself having fulfilled the directives to tell of a woman true in loving and to speak well of love, but failing, once again, to combine these with the story of man's betrayal. In fact his tale has reflected much too favorably on Pyramus. To placate the imagined displeasure of his patrons, the narrator hastily appends a disclaimer that his "bokes" tell of scarcely any other faithful men besides this one.

Having introduced this statement, the narrator finds
himself forced to verify it. In fact, the necessity of proving this claim causes the legends to evolve in a new direction governed more and more by this need to tell of "bad men." It is this continually escalating search for deceitful males which will eventually lead to Tereus.

The poet's insistence that virtually no faithful men exist compells him to use the same techniques which he employed in the Cleopatra tale. Even as he repressed the faults and embellished the merits of the females, now he begins silencing the virtues and exaggerating the failings of the male. The more his female protagonists fall short of sainthood, the more blame the narrator places on the male—and the more he must alter his source material to do so.

Yet the narrator is not as inept and out of control as he appears. Like Philomela patiently weaving her true story in cloth, the storyteller manages surreptitiously to weave other threads into his work. If he alters and subverts his stories, nevertheless he contrives to make sure the reader realizes the tales are being tampered with. In the Legend of Dido, for instance, he pointedly announces that he will be translating Virgil's version of her story but, as every learned medieval reader knew, while Vergil depicted Dido's plight sympathetically, he never wavered from his portrait of "pious Aeneas" whose duty to the gods superseded his personal desires. Vergil would scarcely
recognize the legend's callous and faithless "Eneas" who abandons Dido because he has wearied of her. The narrator challenges his readers to recognize that the Dido he has portrayed is not Virgil's; perhaps eventually they will realize it is not his either.

Besides pointing out his sources and urging the reader to compare his own work to them—a comparison which would reveal how drastically the legend has distorted the original portrayal of the characters—the narrator also uses the familiar medieval techniques of *abbreviatio* and *occupatio* in such a way as to alert his audience to his adjustments in the tales. *Abbreviatio* simply means condensing the source material to make it shorter. Obviously this constituted a logical technique for an author dealing with a compilation of stories and, in fact, in the F prologue of *The Legend*, the god of Love himself cautions the narrator not to "to longe dwelle" (577) on any one story. Nevertheless, the narrator uses this device not simply to condense a tale but as justification not to include material which would contradict the portrayal of his heroine as a good woman. In fact, the narrator often abbreviates precisely by directing the reader to look up the source material which, he promises, will give a fuller account—but which, as he well knows, will also contain a tale less biased than the one he is presenting.

*Occupatio* is a specific method of shortening a
story: the author alludes to an event but states that for the sake of brevity he cannot include any details. Again, this constitutes a valid (if sometimes tantalizing) device. However, the narrator quickly allows us to see that he does not use the technique wisely—after taking all of eight lines to explain that he cannot elaborate on Antony and Cleopatra's wedding feast for fear of making the story too long, he proceeds to expound at great length on the sea battle at Actium, including minute details which have no possible relevance to the story. Thus warned, the reader learns to take a closer look at what the storyteller chooses to delete.111

The narrator's increasing enthusiasm for denigrating the men as a method of elevating the women leads him to include even more disastrous choices in his selection of candidates for the Legend. Carried away with his castigation of Jason as a betrayer of more than one woman, the narrator suddenly finds himself forced to depict the infamous Medea in a saintly mode. Not surprisingly, the account of her life is very brief—a great deal must be left out.

The storyteller returns to safer ground, however, when he chooses to recount the tale of Lucretia. Indeed Lucretia seems the perfect model to fit the imposed pseudo-hagiographical pattern. Never wavering from her fidelity to her husband, she nevertheless was betrayed—
physically, by the lustful Tarquin, unwittingly, but just as surely, by her husband—and in response she embraced death rather than bring shame upon herself or her beloved spouse. Here, without need of additions or adjustments are all the elements required by Alceste: the despicable man, the "seantly" woman, the martyrdom for love. As in the legend of Thisbe, the narrator's translation follows his source quite faithfully in this tale.

Nevertheless, the narrator manages to undermine his heroine's perfection with his casual introductory comment on St. Augustine's "gret compassioun" for Lucretia. As the learned medieval would be aware, while Augustine may have sympathized with Lucretia, that did not stop him from condemning her act of suicide as motivated by pride. Had the narrator wished to cite an author who considered Lucretia's death unconditionally praiseworthy, he should have quoted from St. Jerome's treatise, "Against Jovinian," a work which the god of Love named in the prologue as one of the narrator's "bokes olde." By referring instead to Augustine's condemnation of suicide, the narrator insinuates that Lucretia's understanding of and reaction to Tarquin's act of defilement was inappropriate rather than laudatory. With this casual reference, then, the narrator primes the reader to compare his upcoming tale of rape (the legend of Philomela) to Lucretia's own and to judge whether this other victim found a better,
more Christian alternative to killing herself. Since, far from presenting a better solution, Philomela responded to Tereus' violation by murdering an innocent child, it would certainly seem preferable not to mention her story at all.

The narrator, however, not only presents the Philomela story, he includes many details in Lucretia's legend which seem almost deliberately designed to evoke a link to the myth of Tereus. For one thing, when Tarquin first sees Lucretia,

This noble wif sat by hire beddes side  
Dischevele, for no malyce she ne thoughte;  
And softe wolle oure bok seyth that she  
wroughte. (1719-21)

In this case, "oure bok" refers to Ovid's Fasti (2.721-852) which does indeed record the detail that Lucretia's husband found her busy spinning wool with her handmaids when he brought Tarquin over for an unannounced visit. Ovid does not specify that her hair was down, however. That particular detail, followed by a qualifying phrase, carries faint echoes of Chrétien's striking description of Philomela issuing from her chamber "with her hair down—quite unlike a veiled nun."114 Perhaps it's the juxtaposition with the wool (with the barely noticeable change of the activity of spinning into the more generic "wroughte") which hints of Philomela's own needlework and increases the probability of mentally linking the two
women.

At any rate, Tarquin's immediate reaction to the sight of Lucretia—"his herte brende as any fyr / So wodly that his wit was al forgotten" (1751-52)—certainly mirrors Tereus' initial response to Philomela. Even Lucretia's reaction to Tarquin's drawn sword—"No word she spak" (1796)—seems to hint of Tereus' sword and Philomela's severed tongue. When the narrator projects Tarquin, "Ryght as a wolf that fynt a lomb alone" (1798), we not only recognize the wolf/lamb simile from Ovid's account of Philomela, but note the parallel phrase which appears in her own legend: "Right as the lamb that of the wolf is biten" [2318]. And when the narrator rhetorically asks "To whom shal she [Lucretia] compleyne, or make mone?" (1799) we hear Philomela answering from the Metamorphoses and again from her legend: "syster!" "fader dere!" and "help me, God in hevene!" [2328-29]).

The echoes between the two legends are too numerous to be coincidental. Tereus' "grisely . . . dede" certainly shares similarities with Tarquin's own and, without a doubt, the raped Philomela resembles the violated Lucretia. But Lucretia's unfailing faithfulness to her husband, which makes her tale so perfect for inclusion in the Legend, has no parallel in the tale of Philomela. On the contrary, the violent revenge which Philomela and her sister carry out strongly argues for the exclusion of
their story from the narrator's collection. All of which leads us to suspect that, in a work which so unabashedly manipulates classical mythology for its own ends, the narrator's insertion of this tale may have a raison d'être beyond his apparent enthusiasm for seizing on tales of "bad men."

The most striking aspect of the narrator's version of the Tereus myth is the truncated ending—and the storyteller contrives to keep us aware that much has indeed been deleted. Aside from the nudging provided by the "Legend of Lucrece" and the insinuations of the word "grisely" (the narrator offers it as a description of Tereus's crimes but it also tends to conjure up the scene of the sisters killing, dismembering, cooking and serving up Itys), the placement of the ending is also significant. As Donald Rowe points out:

given the fact that the traditional story has two distinct movements—one concluding in the rape and silencing of Philomela, the other in the sisters' vengeance—he should have ended his narrative after the rape, at the point where he calls on God to avenge Philomela and declares a time to "make an ende sone." For to tell us of Philomela's communication of her fate to her sister and of Procne's response is to begin the revenge movement of the tale and inevitably make us remember what he wishes us to forget: that the vengeance was not left to God. In short, once again the narrator's imperfect suppression of the unacceptable in his old books has undermined his efforts to advance the narrow dogmas of the Prologue.115

As if these factors weren't sufficient in themselves, the
narrator makes the act of suppression even more obvious as he protests at the end:

The remenaunt is no charge for to telle,
For this is al and som: thus was she served,
That nevere harm agilte ne deserved
Unto this crewel man. (2383-86)

But the reader knows very well this is not "al" and the narrator's abrupt ending of the tale of Philomela, which he has literally cut off in mid-story in order to suppress incidents of an unsaintly nature, suddenly mirrors the violated maiden whose tongue was severed so that she would not be able to reveal the crime done to her. What the narrator has done to his classical tales—cutting and mutilating them so they cannot tell their true stories—is as much a violation to them as Tereus' rape of Philomela.

Nevertheless, before condemning the narrator prematurely—as did the god of Love—we must look carefully at the evidence and even consider the mitigating circumstances previously suggested by Alceste. Has the poet been falsely accused of distorting his stories? No, we have read them and have seen the evidence for ourselves. Did the poet merely translate without understanding the substance? There are critics who have accused him (and Chaucer himself) of so doing, and who consequently have dismissed The Legend as virtually worthless. Has the narrator been obliged to translate the works according to
the dictates of others, despite his own feelings and opinions? Indeed, we know this to be the case; his own desire was to create a "geste" out of the stories in his classical collection. If, with his abbreviatio and occupatio, his additions and interpolations, he has maimed and distorted the myths of his source material, it is because his own authorial rights have been violated; he also is a victim.

The puzzling addition of the Philomela story, then, provides the discerning reader with a rosetta stone which offers the key to understanding the whole piece. Or rather, it unfolds a tapestry which presents in miniature what is occurring throughout the whole work. Literary tales are being taken from their source and then put into another format where they are forced and mutilated and denied the power to speak their own truth, and all this by a poet whose own voice likewise is being silenced while another message is being promulgated in his name.

But just as the narrator does not end his rendition of the story with Philomela's rape, but allows her to weave her message (significantly enough, not in pictures as some authors relate, but as letters woven into a tapestry because she is forbidden the use of pen and paper---"with a penne coude she nat wryte, / But letters can she weave to and fro" [2357-58]), likewise the poet who has been forbidden the use of "naked words" neverthe-
less interweaves his message among the other tales until it discloses its full meaning in the legend of Philomela. That message issues forth as a protest against the constraints placed upon the poet to write according to the dictates of others rather than according to his own inspiration.

Now the strange sort of schizophrenia exhibited by the narrator fits into place. For, while some critics have accepted the evidence of his ineptness—

When Alceste defends the narrator on the grounds that he is "nyce" and, hence, may have translated the offending works not from malice but from carelessness simply because "he useth thynges for to make" (F 364), as though he translated mindlessly and compulsively, she describes precisely what we find in the legends from the point of view of her demands, stories rather carelessly chosen and dubiously interpreted. The narrator is a man who gets little right, and that little is misunderstood.117

others have pointed out that many passages in the various legends exhibit great skill in translation and the artistry of the prologues themselves prove the narrator to be a gifted poet.118 But not even a gifted poet can create consistently good poetry when denied freedom of expression.

From classical through medieval times, the poet has been identified with the nightingale, and in The Legend of Good Women, without ever even mentioning the bird, Chaucer has contrived to link them once again. As Ann McMillan affirms, "the legends must be understood as much in terms
of what they avoid saying as of what they say."^{119} The tale of Philomela, seemingly denied its ending and its transformation, nevertheless manages to embody its essential characteristic of revealing truth in an unconventional manner and its auxiliary connotation of perpetrator as concomitant victim. Ultimately, the poet does express his true feelings—that the task he has been assigned is inherently contradictory and therefore impossible; that the women of his legends may have been heroines in their own right, but they were not saints; that defaming men instead of women will not lead anyone to trust in Love—but he does so by indirection and at the cost of his own victimization, by assuming the guise of an incompetent bungler.

If the narrator of *The Legend of Good Women* gives the appearance of incompetence, however, Geoffrey Chaucer certainly does not. His *Romaunt of the Rose* verifies his ability to render a faithful and unadulterated translation of another author's text; his *Troilus and Criseyde* shows his ability to take such a text and transform and enlarge it. In *The Legend of Good Women* he combines his careful translations with a completely innovative reworking of the stories to introduce an entirely new level of meaning which manages to subvert the message the work purports to convey.

Furthermore, Chaucer's use of the Philomela/nightin-
gale allusions in each of the works reflects his method of
dealing with the work as a whole. Just as his *Romaunt*
closely follows the wording of its source material, so the
allusions to the nightingale throughout the poem conform
to the conventions associated with it in the medieval
period: springtime, joy, love, but with underlying
connotations of sorrow and a hidden truth to be discov­
ered. Just as the *Troilus* accepts the general structure
of its source but infuses new vitality into it, so the
allusions to the Tereus myth in this work use both
familiar classical connotations and familiar medieval
conventions, and by playing off the one against the other,
imbue the characters and situations with a new dimension.
And in *The Legend of Good Women* the Philomela myth becomes
a miniature model of the victimization and mutilation
which characterizes the individual legends as well as a
reflection of the indignity endured by the poet who must
submit his own inspiration to the strictures of others.
Of course, a poet of Chaucer's playfulness and stature
delights in weaving subversive messages throughout the
warp and woof of such strictures.

The Greeks told stories of the nightingale based on
the conviction that contrary to the evidence of logic, the
bird's notes told of a mother's lament. Responding to
this image of meaning being conveyed in an unconventional
manner, classical poets alluded to the myth stories again
and again, associating them with divergent modes of reporting truth such as prophecy, augury, dreams and omens. Because of the myth's core sense of unveiling truth by indirection, the poets found it a welcome adjunct when dealing with paradox and contradiction, and they repeatedly associated it with the polar opposites of joy and lament, and the nuances of a victim who caused her/his own pain. Passing into the hands of medieval authors, the myth was used to suggest the ambiguities of love, developing a particular affinity for poetic oxymorons. Eventually, the image of the nightingale itself evidenced the paradoxical nature inherent in the myth as it came to symbolize such contradictory concepts as Christian love directed toward God and also sensuous, lascivious love. It is no wonder, then, that a poet such as Chaucer, responding both consciously and subconsciously to the multiple reverberations in the nightingale myth, found it a powerful and polysemous metaphor.
ENDNOTES


2 Homer, Odyssey 19.518-24; Phercydes, Pherecydis Fragmenta, ed. F. G. Sturz, (Lipsia: 1924), fr. 29, p. 130.; Pausanias, Description of Greece, 9.5.9; for the commentaries of Eustathius and the Homeric scholiasts see Mihailov p. 142-44; for the vase painting see Mihailov p. 154-55 and fig.4.


5 Since Chelidon had cried unceasingly to Artemis for help against Polytechnus' violence, that goddess decreed that as a swallow Chelidon should henceforth dwell in the homes of men—though it is somewhat ambiguous whether we are to interpret Artemis' decree as a condemnation of the girl for the losing her virginity (as in the case of Callisto) or as the goddess' attempt to make up for withholding her protection at the time of the assault by allowing the swallow the protection of human habitation.


9 Though it is known that other plays recounting this myth existed in ancient Greece— one by a lesser playwright named Philocles, perhaps one by Aeschylus— and their versions may have influenced later authors and perhaps account for some of the variations of the tale, nevertheless, Sophocles' work is held by Halliday and others to be "canonical." See Mihailov, p. 88-114; W. R. Halliday, Indo European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend (London: Cambridge U. P., 1933), 98.


11 Simpson ascribes the problem either to textual difficulties or to Apollodorus' attempt to integrate two differing versions (see Apollodorus, Gods and Heroes of the Greeks: The Library of Apollodorus, trans. Michael Simpson, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), n. 10.

12 Although Hyginus does introduce a vestige of the mistaken identity theme in the incident wherein Tereus is advised through some type of augury that Itys will be killed by a close relative (a propinqua manu). Falsely interpreting the sign to refer to his brother Dryas, Tereus subsequently kills him.

13 Ovid's account explicitly includes such details as the slitting of the throat, the dismemberment while the body still retains life, and the boiling of some parts, the roasting of others. For an explanation of the ritual significance of these activities see Marcel Detienne, "The Orphic Dionysos and Roasted Boiled Meat," chap. 4 in Dionysos Slain, trans. Mireille and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

14 Hyginus also records that Tereus transforms into a
hawk, rather than a hoopoe. Aeschylus, too, identified Tereus as a hawk in The Suppliant Maidens (60-67). In fact, in classical times these two avian species were held to be different manifestations of the same bird. According to Aristotle (History of Animals 9.49B.20), who quotes from a lost play of Aeschylus, the hoopoe was actually the form which the hawk assumed in the springtime. The reference from Aeschylus is sometimes credited to Sophocles' Tereus, however (see J. R. T. Pollard, "The Birds of Aristophanes--A Source Book for Old Beliefs," American Journal of Philology, 69, no. 4 (1948): 356-57; also Mihailov, 89).


17 Fontenrose, 161.


19 Scarpi, 216.


22 Among others, Beryl Rowland (Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism [Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1978], 168) recounts Graves' explanation, terming it "characteristically ingenious." Rowland must have found the search for Graves' source as frustrating as I did; she comments, "Unfortunately, Graves provides no evidence that such representations ever existed."


25 This type of thematic approach which ignores chronology sometimes makes it difficult to sort out whether a given allusion to the nightingale refers to Aëdon, Procne, or Philomela. However, given the purposes of this particular study, the attempt to verify the identity for each allusion only adds to the confusion and is largely non-productive.

26 "The Poems of Gaius Alerius Catullus," 65.10-14 trans. F. W. Cornish in *Catullus, Tibullus, and Pervigilium Veneris*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1913). Mihailov (p. 126) identifies "the Daulian bird" as the nightingale according to the evidence of Thucydides (2.29), and attributes the form "Itylus" to metric exigencies rather than affiliation with the older Aëdon story.

27 Catullus even reinforces this concept of ceaseless mourning by skillfully using the license peculiar to Latin poetry which allows the poet to elicit a more intense sensitivity through the juxtaposition of words which ultimately will not be translated together (i.e. at certe semper amabo, / semper maesta tua carmina morte canam, translates, "but certainly I shall always love [you], I shall always sing sorrowful songs about your death" while the Latin juxtaposition semper amabo, semper maesta literally reads "always I shall love, always sorrowful."


29 Kells, n. 147.

30 Margaret Alexiou, in *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), makes the point that the Electra's excessive lamentation coincides with the traditional role of women in
situations where vengeance was involved: "Although the act itself rested with the men, unless there was no male survivor, the women maintained the consciousness for the need to take revenge by constant lamentation and invocation at the tomb" (22).


34 Kells, n. 1508; see also his concluding remarks on p. 231.


37 Although Eustathius' commentary does identify Philomela as the mother of Itys and Procne as her unwed sister, this is generally considered to be not an authentic version of the myth but rather an attempt at forming a compromise between the Greek tales wherein Philomela becomes the swallow and the Roman identification of her with the nightingale (see Mihailov's explanation p. 144). Seneca's passage typifies this sort of slippage wherein the two women and their bird counterparts become confused. The playwright wishes to allude, as did Ovid, to the "Daulian bird" who "ever mourns her son" "beneath the the Ismarian shade" (Seneca Hercules Oetaeus; Ovid Heroides 15.154-55). Both are speaking of the nightingale, the bird of the woods (as opposed to the swallow, always associated with roofs and houses). Though Ovid does not name the woman, his epithet "maestissima mater" (most mournful mother)
implies that he means Procne (unquestionably the mother in his recounting of the Tereus myth in the *Metamorphoses*). Seneca, on the other hand, already heir to the Latin versions of the myth which labeled the nightingale as Philomela, is forced to conclude that if the nightingale laments her son and the nightingale is Philomela, then Philomela must be the mother.


41 *Thebaid*, 12.476-80. Mozley identifies both "Pandion's birds" and "the Getic birds" as nightingales. It seems to me that both passages actually refer to swallows both because the birds' speech is characterized as *truncus* and because they are associated with homes and housetops (see Zaganiaris, 208-09 for allusions which connect the swallow and the nightingale with their various habitats).

42 Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, trans. Janet Lembke (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 58-67. In the Greek text of this passage, Aeschylus refers to "Metis, Tereus's piteous wife"--an identification which has always presented problems for scholars. Since, as Smyth notes, this play "is unquestionably the oldest extant drama of European literature," it is not certain whether the dramatist draws on some version of the Ædon myth unknown to present scholarship or whether, as is more commonly believed, "Metis" represents another appellation for Procne (see Mihailov, 84-88 for a detailed investigation of the problem). As for the identification of Tereus with the hawk, we have earlier seen this association in Hyginus and have noted the belief of the early Greeks that the hawk and the hoopoe represent different manifestations of the same bird.


46 *Electra*, 149.


52 Throughout the period of his exile, Ovid continually wrote poems and letters in an attempt to have his banishment lifted or at least lightened. In one of his early letters he cites two examples from the animal world to emphasize his timidity at even approaching Augustus with his pleas:

> The least rustle of a feather brings dread upon the dove that thy talons, O hawk, have wounded. Nor does any lamb, once wrested from the teeth of a ravenous wolf, venture to go far from the fold. *(Tristia, 75-78)*

Ovid also linked these animals and their predatory activities in his tale of the rape of Philomela in the *Metamorphoses*:

> She trembled like a frightened lamb, which, torn and cast aside by a grey wolf, cannot yet believe that it is safe; and like a dove which, with its own blood all smeared over its plumage,
still palpitates with fright, still fears those greedy claws that have pierced it. (527–530, trans. Miller)

Perhaps the similarity is mere coincidence; more likely it is at least an unconscious reflection of Ovid's temporary identification with Philomela's feelings of horror, violation, and helplessness as he felt himself overwhelmed by the inordinately severe punishment meted out for a crime which he terms "foolish, but not wicked."


56 Meagher, p. 78–79; Loeb, 1. 1148ff.


59 Callimachus, Epigrams, 2.


62 Heroides, 14.151–56 in Ovid, Heroides and Amores,


66 Pfeffer, 87.


68 Shippey, 46.

69 Shippey, 48.

70 Wilhelm, 79.


72 Wilhelm, 79.

73 Pfeffer, 27.

75 Baird, 46-47.
76 Gellinek-Schellekens, 28.
77 Pfeffer, 186.
78 Gellinek-Schellekens, 29.
79 Shippey, 54.
80 Shippey, 56.
81 Shippey, 60.


84 Shippey, 56.
85 There may be further significance in the inclusion of a Latin incipit in the J manuscript which uses of the word "philomenam" rather than "lusciniam": "Incipit altercacio inter filomenam & bubonem."

86 The Owl and the Nightingale, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley, Old and Middle English Texts (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960; reprint, Manchester University Press, 1972), l. 34-38. All subsequent quotes are from this edition; translations are my own using Stanley's glossary.

87 Ovid, restating a proverb already old in his day, expressed it as, "Grande doloris ingenium est, miserisque venit sollertia rebus" (Met. 6.574-75). The Owl and the Nightingale poet quotes the proverb by way of Alfred, "Wone the bale is alre hecst / Thanne is the bote alre nest" (699-700). Today we say, "necessity is
the mother of invention."

88 Boccaccio's bawdy story from the Decameron (fifth day, fourth tale) tells how Caterina, planning a romantic interlude with her lover, convinced her parents to allow her to sleep out on the balcony on the pretext that it would be cooler and she could listen to the nightingale sing. Her lover, of course, climbs up to join her and "All through the night they took joy of each other, making the nightingale sing many a pretty song." They finally fall asleep locked in an embrace--with Caterina's left hand still clutching Ricciardo's penis. Her father comes upon the scene the next morning and hastens to tell his wife, "Quick, come and look at your little girl, who was so delighted with the nightingale that she has caught it and is holding it tight!" The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. Frances Winwar, Modern Library Edition (New York: Random House, 1955).


92 Gellinek-Schellekens, 166.


94 Translation my own.


96 Line numbers are from Ovide Moralisé: Poème du Commencement du Quatorzième Siècle, ed. C. De Boer, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: J. Muller, 1920), though here and in all subsequent quotes I have used Baird's English translation as given in his introduction to Rossignol, p. 8-9.


98 The French piteus does not have quite the same sense of sorrow which the Middle English conveys. Adhering more firmly to its Latin root word, pietas, the French means "pious, dutiful, devoted: compassionate; full of pity." In the context of the Roman de la Rose, where the birds have no reason for compassion or pity, the best translation is probably "dutiful" in the sense that it is obligatory in the birds' nature to sing the sweet song, or perhaps even part of their duties in the Garden of Love. Possibly Chaucer is merely retaining the word which is closest to his source when he writes "pitous," or perhaps he needs the word to supply the appropriate rhyme and meter (though he certainly has more flexibility when he uses it the second time [497]), nevertheless, he cannot be completely unaware (and disproving) of the fact that he has shifted the sense and meaning of the original phrase.

99 From Stephen Barney's introduction to Troilus and Criseyde in The Riverside Chaucer, p. 472.

100 Ovid, Metamorphoses, 2.708-831.


102 While my study focuses solely on this aspect of
how Chaucer uses The Legend of Good Women to explore the problems of poetic patronage, I do not wish to imply that this is the only issue Chaucer deals with in the work. As Lisa Kiser puts it,

Like many of the other poems, the Legend leaves us with a sense of the poet's wide vision, his tendency to take up a variety of topics in a single work, many of which at first seem only indirectly related to the issues at hand. The Legend, clearly existing primarily to describe and defend Chaucer's principles of classical storytelling as they had appeared in the Troilus, must also be viewed as a poem about metaphor, poetry's dependence on metaphor, the nature of poetic abstraction, the problems caused by reader's misunderstandings, the relation of Christian truth to secular art, translation, and the relative merits of experience and authority in our quest for knowledge. (151)

And, of course, other critics have found additional topics which they have found worth pursuing, also.


104 The F version differs slightly:
And of Creseyde thou hast seyd as the lyste,
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.(331-34)


106 For further discussion of the probable commissioning of The Legend of Good Women see the synopsis and sources listed in Robinson and Rowland (this question of patronage overlaps the issue of the dating and authenticity of the F and G versions).

107 Not only does Alceste label the proposed collection of stories as a "legende," but the god of Love reiterates the designation (F 549, G 539; F 557) and the narrator himself also uses the term in his tale of Phyllis (2456). In addition, when Chaucer alludes to
the work in his Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale, he refers to it as "the Seintes Legende of Cupide" (61).


109 Taylor, 259.


111 For a more complete analysis of Chaucer's use of these literary techniques, see Frank, 199-210.


114 For evidence that Chaucer used Chrétien's account of the Philomela tale see John Livingston Lowe, "Chaucer and the Ovide Moralisé," PMLA, 33, no. 1, (1918), 302-325. For a refutation of Lowe's argument see Shannon, 282.


116 E. T. Donaldson, in his 2nd edition of Chaucer's Poetry: An Anthology for the Modern Reader, (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1975) refers to the narrator's "unfailing stupidity" and, subscribing to the school of thought which believed Chaucer himself to be bored with...
the work, concludes his commentary: "We may safely share Chaucer's relief that the task did not have to be carried on" (p. 1123). In fact, Donaldson does not even bother to print the individual legends in his edition, merely offering the G prologue as sufficiently representative of The Legend of Good Women.

117 Rowe, 50.

118 See Kiser, 145 and Jonathan Sutton, "A Reading of Chaucer's The Legend of Good Women Based on Its Ovidian Sources" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1979), 41-44.

119 Mcmillan, 36.
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