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Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World

READINGS AND SOURCES

*Edited by
Laura K. McClure*

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FOR RICHARD

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νόημασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
ἀνήρ ἠδὲ γυνή.

Homer, *Odyssey* 6

THE VOICE OF THE SHUTTLE IS OURS

Patricia Klindienst



Figure 9 *Procne and Philomela Prepare to Kill Itys*. Attic red figure kylix, c.490 BCE. Musée du Louvre, Paris, G 147. Created several hundred years before Ovid's version, this vase attests to the widespread popularity of the Procne and Philomela story among the ancient Athenians.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics* (16.4), records a striking phrase from a play by Sophocles, since lost, on the theme of Tereus and Philomela. As you know, Tereus, having raped Philomela, cut out her tongue to prevent discovery. But she weaves a tell-tale account of her violation into a tapestry (or robe) which Sophocles calls 'the voice of the shuttle.' If metaphors as well as plots or myths could be archetypal, I would nominate Sophocles' voice of the shuttle for that distinction. (Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature")¹

Why do you [trouble] me, Pandion's
daughter, swallow out of heaven? (Sappho)²

I do not want them to turn
my little girl into a swallow.
She would fly far away into the sky
and never fly again to my straw bed,
or she would nest in the eaves
where I could not comb her hair.
I do not want them to turn
my little girl into a swallow.

(Gabriela Mistral, "Miedo"/"Fear")³

In returning to the ancient myths and opening them from within to the woman's body, the woman's mind, and the woman's voice, contemporary women have felt like thieves of language⁴ staging a raid on the treasured icons of a tradition that has required woman's silence for

centuries. When Geoffrey Hartman asks of Sophocles' metaphor 'the voice of the shuttle': "What gives these words the power to speak to us even without the play?" (p. 337), he celebrates Language and not the violated woman's emergence from silence. He celebrates Literature and the male poet's trope, not the woman's elevation of her safe, feminine, domestic craft – weaving – into art as a new means of resistance. The feminist receiving the story of Philomela via Sophocles' metaphor, preserved for us by Aristotle, asks the same question but arrives at a different answer. She begins further back, with Sappho, for whom Philomela transformed into a wordless swallow is the sign of what threatens the woman's voiced existence in culture.

When Hartman exuberantly analyses the structure of the trope for voice, he makes an all too familiar elision of gender. When he addresses himself to the story or *context* that makes the metaphor for regained speech a powerful *text*, the story is no longer about the woman's silence or the male violence (rape and mutilation) that robs her of speech. Instead, it is about Fate. Hartman assumes the posture of a privileged "I" addressing a known "you" who shares his point of view: "You and I, who know the story, appreciate the cause winning through, and Philomela's 'voice' being restored but by itself the phrase simply disturbs our sense of causality and guides us, if it guides us at all, to a hint of supernatural rather than human agency (p. 338). In the moment she reclaims a voice Philomela is said to partake of the divine; her utterance "skirts the oracular" (p. 347). Noting how Philomela's woven text becomes a link in the chain of violence, Hartman locates behind the woman weaver the figure of Fate, who "looms" like the dark figure of myth, spinning the threads from which the fabric of our lives is woven in intricate design. But if Hartman is right to locate the problem or mystery in the mechanism of revenge, and right to suggest that Philomela's resistance has something of the oracular in it, he nonetheless misses his own part in the mystification of violence.

How curiously the critic remains unconscious of the implications of his own movement away from Philomela, the virgin raped, mutilated, and imprisoned by Tereus, and toward the mythical figure of Fate, the dangerous, mysterious, and enormously powerful "woman." Why is the figure of a depersonalized and distant Fate preferable for this critic? Perhaps because he cannot see in Philomela the violated woman musing over her loom until she discovers its hidden power. Perhaps because he cannot see the active, the empowered, the resistant in Philomela, he cannot see that the *woman* makes her loom do what she once hoped her voice/tongue could do. In Book Six of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the most famous version of the tale,

after Tereus rapes her, Philomela overcomes her training to submission and vows to tell her story to anyone who will listen:

What punishment you will pay me, late or soon!
Now that I have no shame, I will proclaim it.
Given the chance, I will go where people are,
Tell everybody; if you shut me here,
I will move the very woods and rocks to pity.
The air of Heaven will hear, and any god,
If there is any god in Heaven, will hear me.⁵

For Philomela, rape initiates something like the "profound upheaval" Lévi-Strauss describes as the experience of "backward subjects" when they make "the sudden discovery of the function of language."⁶ For Philomela, ordinary private speech is powerless. No matter how many times she says "No," Tereus will not listen to her. Paradoxically, it is this *failure* of language that wakes in Philomela "the conception of the spoken word as communication, as power, as action" (p. 494). If this concept of speech as powerful action is one essential or "universal" aspect of human thought that both Lévi-Strauss and Hartman celebrate, neither addresses the conflictual nature of the discovery of language. No sooner do structure, difference, and language become visible in Lévi-Strauss' system, than violence is present. No sooner does Philomela uncover the power of her own voice, than Tereus cuts out her tongue.

But Tereus' plot is mysterious in its beginning and in its end. What initially motivates him to violate Philomela? And why, having raped and silenced her, does he preserve the evidence against himself by concealing rather than killing her? What is "the cause" that wins through when Philomela's tapestry is received and read, and why is her moment of triumph overcome by an act of revenge that only silences her more completely? To reconsider these questions is to reappropriate the metaphor of weaving and to redefine both the locus of its power and the crisis that gives rise to it. As Hartman suggests, the tension in the linguistic figure "the voice of the shuttle" is like "the tension of poetics" (p. 338). But for the feminist attending to the less obvious details of both text and context, the story of Philomela's emergence from silence is filled with the tension of *feminist* poetics.

Prior Violence and Feminist Poetics: The Difference a Tale Makes

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf provides us with a comic metaphor for feminist poetics in the tailless Manx cat, unfortunate inhabitant of

the Isle of Man. Woolf's narrator, moving to the window after luncheon at Oxbridge, suddenly sees the Manx cat crossing the lawn. She notes the cat's apparent "lack" but wonders if its condition is not primarily only a "difference" from cats with tails. Is the cat with no tail a freak of nature, a mutation? Or is it a product of culture, a survivor of some lost moment of amputation, mutilation? The cat, lacking its tail, of course cannot tell her. The figure is mute but pregnant with suggestion. While testifying to a real sense of difference, and a gender-specific one at that, the lost tail as *tale* craftily resists the violence inherent in Freud's reductive theory of women's castration as the explanation for our silence in culture. The narrator perceives a difference so radical that the tailless cat seems to "question the universe" and its Author, simply by being there.⁷ This question echoes Woolf's rejection of Milton's bogey, his borrowing of religious authority to explain women's silence in terms of our original fall.⁸ For Woolf, the lost tail signifies a present absence: X marks the spot where something apparently unrecoverable occurred; the extra letter signals a broken-off story. It designates mystery, it designates violence.

The lost tail, made known by its stumpy remnant, not only represents our broken tradition, the buried or stolen tales of women who lie behind us in history. It also signifies the cut-off voice or amputated tongue: what we still find it hard to recover and to say in ourselves. We are not castrated. We are not less, lack, loss. Yet we feel like thieves and criminals when we speak,⁹ because we know that something originally ours has been stolen from us, and that the force used to take it away still threatens us as we struggle to win it back. Woolf meets this threat with her own carefully fabricated tale. Employing old literary strategy to her new feminist ends, Woolf counters the violence implicit in Freud's and Milton's fictions with her own resisting, subversive fictions, which ask similar questions but refuse the old answers. Woolf's metaphor for muteness, the Manx cat, presses the ambiguities in Freud's and Milton's fictions which, like the myth of Philomela, conceal and reveal at once. For all posit an original moment in which an act of violence (the transgression of a boundary, the violation of a taboo) explains how difference became hierarchy, why women were forbidden to speak.¹⁰

In the myth of Philomela we can begin to recover the prior violence Woolf ironized in the punning metaphor of the tailless cat. Our muteness is our mutilation; not a natural loss but a cultural one, resisted as we move into language. Woolf has taught us to see the obstacles, and to see that chief among them is internalization of the deadly images of women created in art. Any writer's desire to come into language is a burden. Why have so few women who have carried the burden before us been

heard? Like men, women feel the keen anxiety of the writer's approach to the furthest reach of language, the limit or boundary where expression fails, and intimate the moment when death alone will speak. But for the woman writer coming into language, especially language about her body, has entailed the risk of a hidden but felt sexual anxiety, a premonition of violence. When Hartman ends his essay by noting that "There is always *something* that violates us, deprives our voice, and compels art toward an aesthetics of silence" (p. 353, my emphasis), the specific nature of the woman's double violation disappears behind the apparently genderless (but actually male) language of "us," the "I" and the "you" who agree to attest to that which violates, deprives, silences only as a mysterious, unnamed "something." For the feminist unwilling to let Philomela become universal before she has been met as female, this is the primary evasion. Our history teaches us that it is naive to trust that "the truth will out" without a struggle – including a struggle with those who claim to be telling us the truth. It may be that great art always carries within it an anxious memory of an original moment of rupture or violence in coming into being, but the woman writer, and with her the feminist critic, must also ask why art has been so particularly violent towards women, why the greatest of our writers, like Shakespeare, represent their own language anxiety in terms of sexual violation of the woman's body. It is the poet's struggle with words we hear speaking when Shakespeare, depicting the raped Lucrece pacing her bedchamber in grief and rage, says:

And that deep torture may be called a hell,
When more is felt than one has power to tell.¹¹

What in the text "the voice of the shuttle" feels archetypal for the feminist? The image of the woman artist as a weaver. And what, in the context, feels archetypal? That behind the woman's silence is the incomplete plot of male dominance which fails no matter how extreme it becomes. When Philomela imagines herself free to tell her own tale to anyone who will listen, Tereus realizes for the first time what would come to light, should the woman's voice become public. In private, force is sufficient. In public, however, Philomela's voice, if heard, would make them equal. Enforced silence and imprisonment are the means Tereus chooses to protect himself from discovery. But as the mythic tale, Tereus' plot, and Ovid's own text make clear, dominance can only contain, but never successfully destroy, the woman's voice.

Unravelling the Mythic Plot: Boundaries, Exchange, Sacrifice

... but Athens was in trouble
 With war at her gates, barbarian invasion
 From over the seas, and could not send a mission –
 Who would believe it? – so great was her own sorrow.
 But Tereus, king of Thrace, had sent an army
 To bring the town relief, to lift the siege,
 And Tereus' name was famous, a great conqueror,
 And he was rich, and strong in men, descended
 From Mars, so Pandion, king of Athens
 Made him a son as well as ally, joining
 His daughter Procne to Tereus in Marriage.
 (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 319–424)

Terminus himself, at the meeting of the bounds,
 is sprinkled with the blood of a slaughtered lamb ...
 The simple neighbors meet and hold a feast, and sing
 thy praises holy Terminus: thou dost set bounds
 to people and cities and vast kingdoms; without
 thee every field would be a root of wrangling.
 (Ovid, *Fasti*)¹²

In most versions of the myth, including Ovid's, Tereus is said to be smitten with an immediate passion for the beautiful virgin Philomela, younger daughter of Athen's King Pandion.¹³ What is usually not observed is that both Philomela and her sister Procne serve as objects of exchange between these two kings: Pandion of Athens and Tereus of Thrace, Greek and barbarian. For the old king to give his elder daughter to Tereus is for Greece to make an alliance with barbarism itself, for the myth takes as its unspoken pretext a proverbial distinction between "Hellenes, Greek speakers, and barbaroi, babblers."¹⁴ In the myth, the political distinction between Athens and Thrace recedes. As the beginning of the mythic tale suggests, Athens was in trouble, but the invasion of the gates by barbarians that brings Tereus into alliance with the city initiates a new crisis of invasion, one that removes the violence from Athens' walls to the home of the barbarian himself: Thrace.

Philomela is the marriageable female Tereus seizes to challenge the primacy of Pandion and the power of Athens. His mythic passion is a cover story for the violent rivalry between the two kings. Apparently, the tragic sequence gets its start not from Tereus' desires, but from Procne's.

After five years of married life in Thrace, she becomes lonely for her sister and asks Tereus to go to Pandion to ask that Philomela be allowed to visit her. When Tereus sees Philomela with Pandion, his desire becomes uncontrollable, and he will brook no frustration of his plan to take her for himself.¹⁵ First, the political anxieties that fuel the myth are transformed into erotic conflicts; then the responsibility for Tereus' lust is displaced onto Philomela herself: as Ovid has it, the chaste woman's body is fatally seductive.¹⁶ We are asked to believe that Philomela unwittingly and passively invites Tereus' desire by being what she is: pure. But if it is Philomela's purity that makes her so desirable, it is not because purity is beautiful. Tereus' desire is aroused not by beauty but by power: Pandion holds the right to offer Philomela to another man in a political bargain because Philomela is a virgin and therefore unexchanged. Tereus is a barbarian, and the giving of the first daughter as gift only incites him to steal the withheld daughter. But both barbarian and virgin daughter are proverbial figures of the Greek imagination. They are actors in a drama depicting the necessity for establishing and keeping secure the boundaries that protect the power of the key figure, that of Pandion, the sympathetic king who disappears from the tale as soon as he gives up both his daughters.¹⁷ The exchange of women is the structure the myth conceals incompletely. What the myth reveals is how the political hierarchy built upon male sexual dominance requires the violent appropriation of the woman's power to speak.

This violence is implicit in Lévi-Strauss' idea that "marriage is the archetype of exchange" (p. 483) and that women are exchange objects, gifts, or "valuables *par excellence*," whose transfer between groups of men "provides the means of binding men together" (pp. 481, 480). In Lévi-Strauss' view, women are not only objects, but also words: "The emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged" (p. 496). But this discovery began with a connection between prohibitions against "*misuses* of language" and the incest taboo, which made Lévi-Strauss ask, "What does this mean except that women are treated as signs, which are *misused* when not put to the use reserved for signs, which is to be communicated?" (pp. 495–96, emphasis in original). In this light, Tereus' rape of Philomela constitutes a crisis in language – the barbarian refuses to use the women/signs as they are offered him by the Greek – and a violation of the structure of exogamous exchange – the barbarian does not exchange, he steals and keeps all to himself. But nothing in Lévi-Strauss prepares us for the effects of this transgression upon the woman. Though he minimally recognizes that "a woman can never be merely a sign but

must also be recognized as a generator of signs," Lévi-Strauss can still envision only women speaking in a "duet": monogamous marriage or right exchange (p. 496). Since marriage is the proper use of woman as sign, it is therefore *the* place where she has the power to speak. But is this pure description? Or does the modern anthropologist share a bias with his male informant, both satisfied that the male point of view constitutes culture? In effect, women are silenced partly by being envisioned as silent. The inability to question (on Lévi-Strauss' part), like the unwillingness to acknowledge (on the men's part) any articulated bonds between women, suggests how tenuous the bonds between men may be. That the bonding of men requires the silencing of women points to an unstated male dread: for women to define themselves as a group would mean the unraveling of established and recognized cultural bonds. Lévi-Strauss acknowledges the ambiguous status of women: woman is both sign (word) and value (person). That is, she is both spoken and speaker. However, he does not perceive either the violational or the potentially subversive aspects of women's position within the system of exchange.

Rather, for Lévi-Strauss, the contradictory status of woman as both insider and outsider in culture provides for "that affective richness, that ardour and mystery" (p. 496) coloring relations between the sexes. Like Ovid, Lévi-Strauss would preserve the "sacred mystery" (p. 489) marriage signifies, preferring the myth of passion to any serious investigation of the implications of the exchange of women for those cultures that practice it.

In the work of René Girard, who refuses to respect mythic passion, the origin of symbolic thought and language is linked not to the exchange of *women*, but to the exchange of *violence*: "The origin of symbolic thought lies in the mechanism of the surrogate victim."¹⁸ For Girard, the mechanism by which the community expels its own violence by sacrificing a surrogate victim, someone marginal to the culture, is linked to the *arbitrary* nature of signs (p. 236). In Girard's revision of Lévi-Strauss, we come closer to a view of exchange that sheds light on some of the paradoxes in the Greek myth:

The ritual violence that accompanies the exchange of women serves a sacrificial purpose for each group. In sum, the groups agree never to be completely at peace, so that their members may find it easier to be at peace among themselves. (p. 249)

For Girard, as for Mary Douglas, the aura of the sacred and the mysterious that envelops married sexual relations is a sign of the human need for

clear boundaries to contain violence. But while both Douglas and Girard make extremely interesting connections between ritual pollution, violence, and the prohibitions focused on female sexuality in particular (especially on menstrual blood), neither presses these observations far enough.¹⁹ Girard argues that "exchange ritualized into warfare and . . . warfare ritualized into exchange are both variants of the same sacrificial shift from the interior of the community to the exterior."²⁰ But Girard, too, tends to equate the male point of view with culture, so that he does not pause to see how the woman, in exchange, becomes the surrogate victim for the group. Her body represents the body politic.

When we address the question of the body of the king's daughter, we approach the structure Mary Douglas sees as a dialectical interaction of the "two bodies," the actual physical body and the socially defined body generated by metaphor:

. . . the human body is always treated as an image of society. . . . Interests in apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions. If there is no concern to preserve social boundaries, I would not expect to find concern with bodily boundaries. The relation of head to feet, of brain and sexual organs, of mouth and anus are commonly treated so that they express *the relevant patterns of hierarchy*.²¹

The exchange of women articulates the culture's boundaries, the woman's hymen serving as the physical or sexual sign for the limen or wall defining the city's limits. Like the ground beneath the walls of Athens (or Rome),²² the woman's chastity is surrounded by prohibitions and precautions. Both are protected by political and ritual sanctions; both are sacred. But female chastity is not sacred out of respect for the integrity of the woman as person; rather, it is sacred out of respect for violence. Because her sexual body is the ground of the culture's system of differences, the woman's hymen is also the ground of contention. The virgin's hymen must not be ruptured except in some manner that reflects and ensures the health of the existing political hierarchy. The father king regulates both the literal and metaphorical "gates" to the city's power: the actual gates in the city's wall or the hymen as the gateway to his daughter's body. The first rupture of the hymen is always a transgression, but culture articulates the difference between the opened gate and the besieged fortress.²³ Pandion will give Tereus free entry to Procne's body if he will agree not to use his force against Athens. Exchange of the king's daughter is nothing less than the articulation of his power and the reassertion of his city's sovereignty.

In the marriage rite the king's daughter is led to the altar as victim and offering, but instead of being killed, she is given in marriage to the rival king. War is averted. But in a crisis, the woman can become identified with the very violence the exchange of her body was meant to hold in check.

The violence implicit in the exchange of women is central not only to Philomela's tale, but to one of Greek drama's great tragedies. The sacrificial nature of the exchange of women is terrifyingly clear in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which the king's daughter is literally led to the altar as sacrifice under the ruse of wedding her to Achilles.²⁴ And as the play reveals, the king's daughter is finally a surrogate victim for the king himself: it is Agamemnon the mob of armed and restive Hellenes would kill, were Iphigenia not sacrificed.²⁵ The threat, as Achilles makes clear, is "stoning."²⁶ Like the myth of Philomela, the story of Iphigenia reaches back to Greek prehistory (Pandion's boundary dispute was said to have been with Labdacus, of a generation before Laius, Oedipus' father).²⁷ But both stories were retold in Athens during the years of the Peloponnesian War, when it became clear to the Greek dramatist's mind that the differences that give rise to human sacrifice were located within the city itself.²⁸

In Euripides' tragedy it is peace (the stillness or quiet when the wind will not move the ships toward Troy) that makes discord among brother Greeks visible. Euripides interprets the current Greek crisis, imperial Athens' engagement in a protracted war, in terms of the distant past, Homer's tales of the Trojan War. Both are seen in antiheroic terms. The unmaking of Homeric heroes is also the unmasking of the cultural fictions that veil the sacrificial violence at the basis of political domination. As rivalry between brothers threatens to explode into internecine war instead of war against the common enemy, the culture represented by the amassed armies is reunited under Agamemnon's authority only through a ritual sacrifice. And Agamemnon knows that *he* weaves the plot that determines his daughter's destiny.²⁹

Two things must happen in order for Iphigenia to undergo her startling transformation into a willing sacrificial victim who forbids her mother from exacting revenge and absolves her father of all responsibility for her death. First, Iphigenia must hear from Achilles that the mob is calling for her and that even if she resists she will be dragged by her hair, screaming, to the altar.³⁰ And second, Iphigenia must begin to speak the language of the victim: she blames Helen, she sees the Trojan War as an erotic conflict, and she echoes the men who arranged her sacrifice by finally displacing responsibility for her death onto the goddess Artemis.³¹

The myth of Philomela insists upon the difference between legitimate exchange, marriage, and the violent theft, rape. But this difference almost dissolves in Euripides' tragedy not only in Iphigenia's sacrifice, but in Clytemnestra's accusation against Agamemnon. It seems he is guilty of the same crime as Paris; if he is different from Paris, it is only because his later crime was worse:

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Hear me now –
 For I shall give you open speech and no
 Dark saying or parable any more.
 And this reproach I first hurl in your teeth,
 That I married you against my will, after
 You murdered Tantalus, my first husband,
 And dashed my living babe upon the earth,
 Brutally tearing him from my breasts.
 And then, the two sons of Zeus, my brothers,
 On horseback came and in white armor made
 War upon you. Till you got upon your knees
 To my old father, Tyndareus, and he
 Rescued you. So you kept me for your bed. (ll. 1146–58)

In the ambiguities of his final plays, Euripides comes as close as anyone to suggesting that Helen always was a pretext, and that the women who are violated (or, like Clytemnestra, who become violent) in exchanges between men are victims of the polis itself. In the myth of Philomela the fact that both acts are performed by the same man, Tereus, and that both daughters are taken from the same man, Pandion, suggests that the difference between the generative rite (marriage) and the dangerous transgression (rape) is collapsing within the Greek imagination. The myth records, but tries to efface, the political nature of the crisis of distinctions: the trouble at Athens' gates, or the fear that the most crucial distinction of all is about to give way, the identity of the city itself. The first exchange was meant to resolve the threat to Athens but instead brought on the invasion of the virginal daughter's body.

The relationship between the cure (marriage) and the cause (rape) of violence relies upon the assent of the males involved, who must agree to operate on the basis of a shared fiction. We can recover what the Greeks of fifth-century Athens feared by viewing barbarian invasion/rape as an unwilling recognition that fictions of difference are arbitrary, yet absolutely necessary. The effects of invasion we can see symbolized in Philomela's suffering once she is raped. The transgression of all bonds, oaths,

and unstated but firmly believed rules initiates a radical loss of identity, a terrible confusion of roles:

Were my father's orders
 Nothing to you, his tears, my sister's love,
 My own virginity, the bonds of marriage:
 Now it is all confused, mixed up; I am
 My sister's rival, a second-class wife, and you,
 For better and worse, the husband of two women,
 Procne my enemy now, at least she should be. (ll. 533–39)

Philomela experiences rape as a form of contagious pollution because it is both adultery and incest, the two cardinal transgressions of the rule of exogamy. Should the rule collapse altogether, chaos would ensue. Then fathers (Pandion instead of Tereus) could have intercourse with daughters and brothers (Tereus as brother rather than brother-in-law) with sisters.

As the sign and currency of exchange, the invaded woman's body bears the full burden of ritual pollution. Philomela experiences *herself* as the source of dangerous contagion³² because once violated she is both rival and monstrous double of her own sister. If marriage uses the woman's body as good money and unequivocal speech, rape transforms her into a counterfeit coin, a contradictory word that threatens the whole system. This paradox, the raped virgin as redundant or equivocal sign, is the dark side of Philomela's later, positive discovery about language: once she can no longer function as sign, she wrests free her own power to speak. To tell the tale of her rape is to hope for justice. But justice would endanger not only Tereus, but Pandion himself. For once raped, Philomela stands radically outside all boundaries: she is exiled to the realm of "nature" or what Girard calls undifferentiated violence; she is imprisoned in the woods. There, she may see just how arbitrary cultural boundaries truly are; she may see what fictions prepared the way for her suffering. The rape of the king's daughter is like the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Both threaten to make fully visible the basis of structure by bringing to light the violence implicit in culture's inscription of its vulnerable exits and entries on the silenced woman's body.

Clytemnestra does not remind Agamemnon what the history of their own union is until the fiction of Iphigenia's marriage gives way to the reality of her sacrifice. This is precisely the paradoxical nature of domination: authority founded upon the suppression of knowledge and free speech relegates both the silenced people and the unsayable things to the interstices of culture. It is only a matter of time before all that has been

driven from the center to the margins takes on a force of its own. Then the center is threatened with collapse. The system of differences the powerful had to create to define themselves as the center of culture or the top of the hierarchy turns against them. To the Greek imagination, this moment of transition was terrifying and in both Euripides' drama and the mythic tale the dread of anarchic violence is obvious. As effectively and as ambiguously as Agamemnon in the act of sacrificing his own daughter, Greek culture uses the myth of Tereus' rape of Philomela on Thracian soil to avoid the knowledge that the violence originated within Athens, with the father/king himself. But like Agamemnon, who begins to see the truth only to turn his back on it, the myth preserves but transforms essential elements in the actual story.³³ The invasion of Athens/Philomela by Thrace/Tereus/barbarism collapses the sacrificial crisis into an isolated moment when the kinship system turns back upon itself. Memory of the chaos that follows unbridled rivalry between brothers is condensed into the moment when Philomela sees Procne as "the enemy." This confusion is part of the face-to-face confrontation with violence itself.

For Agamemnon to refuse to sacrifice his virgin daughter, he would have to relinquish his authority. For Philomela to refuse her status as mute victim, she must seize authority. When Philomela transforms her suffering, captivity, and silence into the occasion for art, the text she weaves is overburdened with a desire to tell. Her tapestry not only seeks to redress a private wrong, but should it become public (and she began to see the connection between the private and the political before her tongue was cut out), it threatens to retrieve from obscurity all that her culture defines as outside the bounds of allowable discourse, whether sexual, spiritual, or literary.

Art and Resistance: Listening for the Voice of the Shuttle

Arachne also

Worked in the gods, and their deceitful business
 With mortal girls . . . To them all Arachne
 Gave their own features and a proper background.
 Neither Minerva, no, nor even Envy
 Could find a flaw in the work; the fair-haired goddess
 Was angry now, indeed, and tore the web
 That showed the crimes of the gods, and with her shuttle
 Struck at Arachne's head, and kept on striking,

Until the daughter of Idmon could not bear it,
Noosed her own neck, and hung herself.

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 79–84, my emphasis)

The explicit message of the myth can still be questioned and criticized from a standpoint that has never been tried and that should be the first to be tried since it is suggested by the myth itself . . . All we have to do to account for everything is to assume that *the lynching is represented from the standpoint of the lynchers themselves.* (René Girard)³⁴

Once Procne receives Philomela's text, reads it, interprets it, and acts upon it by rescuing her, myth creates a dead end for both the production and the reception of the woman's text. The movement of violence is swift and sure: there is hardly any pause between Procne's hatching of a plot and its execution.³⁵ Nor is there any hesitation between Tereus' recognition that he has devoured his own child and his choice to rise up to kill the bloody sisters. The space most severely threatened with collapse is that between Tereus and the sisters themselves. Here, the gods intervene: the three are turned into birds. But paradoxically, this change changes nothing. Metamorphosis preserves the distance necessary to the structure of dominance and submission: in the final tableau all movement is frozen. Tereus will never catch the sisters, but neither will the women ever cease their flight. Distance may neither collapse nor expand. In such stasis, both order and conflict are preserved, but there is no hope of change.

Metamorphosis and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* fix in eternity the pattern of violation-revenge-violation. Myth, like literature and ritual, abets structure by giving the tale a dead and deadly end. The women, in yielding to violence, become just like the man who first moved against them. The sisters are said to trade murder and dismemberment of the child for rape and mutilation of the woman. The sacrifice of the innocent victim, Itys, continues, without altering it, the motion of reciprocal violence. And as literary tradition shows, the end of the story overtakes all that preceded it; the women are remembered as *more* violent than the man.³⁶ This is done by suppressing a tale: the sacrifice of an actual woman, or the long history of scapegoating women. The social end toward which fictional closure reaches in this myth is the maintenance of structure. But narrative, like myth and ritual (like culture or consciousness), also preserves the contradictory middle. Because the end of the tale fixes itself against the middle so strenuously, we come to see it as false. It is the middle that we recover: the moment of the loom, the point of departure for the woman's story, which might have given rise to an unexpected ending.

Imprisoned in the plot, just as Philomela is imprisoned by Tereus, is the anti-plot. Just as Philomela is not killed but only hidden away, the possibility of anti-structure is never destroyed by structure; it is only contained or controlled until structure becomes deadened or extreme in its hierarchical rigidity by virtue of all that it has sought to expel from itself. Then anti-structure, what Victor Turner calls *communitas*, may erupt. And it may be peaceful, or it may be violent.³⁷ The violence that ensues when Philomela is rescued and she brings back into culture the power she discovered in exile inheres not in her text, but in structure itself.³⁸ The end of the tale represents an attempt to forestall or foreclose a moment of radical transition when dominance and hierarchy might have begun to change or to give way. Culture hides from its own sacrificial violence. The Greek imagination uses the mythic end to expel its own violence and to avoid any knowledge of the process. Patriarchal culture feels, as Tereus does, that it is asked to incorporate something monstrous when the woman returns from exile to tell her own story.

But myth seeks to blame the women for the inability of the culture to allow the raped, mutilated, but newly resisting woman to return: the sisters must become force-feeders, they must turn out to be blood thirsty. Supposedly, the sisters quickly forget their long-delayed desire to be together in giving way to the wish for revenge. But the tale can reach this end only by leaving out the loom. There are, after all, two women, and peace (making) and violence (unmaking) are divided between them. Over against Procne's rending of her child and the cooking of the wrong thing which culminates in an inverted family meal – Tereus' cannibalism – myth preserves but effaces the hidden work of Philomela at her loom. Revenge, or dismembering, is quick. Art, or the resistance to violence and disorder, inherent in the very process of weaving, is slow.

Philomela's weaving is the new, third term in what Greek culture often presents us as two models of the woman weaver, the false twins: virtuous Penelope, continually weaving and unraveling a shroud, and vicious Helen, weaving a tapestry depicting the heroics of the men engaged in the war they claim to fight over her body. But in either case the woman's weaving serves as sign for the male poet's prestigious activity of spinning his yarns, of weaving the text of the Trojan War. For their weaving to end, Homer's text/song must end. Both women weave because the structure of marriage is suspended. They will stop weaving when they are reunited with their proper spouses, when the war ends.

To this pair of weavers, Euripides and Aristophanes, writing when Athens was in extreme crisis, add metaphors of *unweaving*. In *The Bacchae*, the metaphor for violent anti-structure is the bacchante, the woman

“*driven* from loom and shuttle” by the god Dionysus. And the image Pentheus uses for the reimposition of structure is the bacchantes as women “sold as slaves or put to work at my looms” where they will be *silenced*.³⁹ But these are also false twins: both represent forms of violence between men worked through the “freeing” of Theban women from their looms (Dionysus’ revenge) or the enslaving of the Asian bacchae to the Theban loom (Pentheus’ threat).

In Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, the crisis in Athens is not depicted as women fleeing to the hills to celebrate the rites of Dionysus, but as women occupying the Acropolis in an attempt to restore a true sense of differences among Greeks. To remind the men who their common enemy is will apparently stop their in-fighting. This requires the reassertion of gender as the primary difference, which makes marriage a comic replacement for war. In *Lysistrata*, the men try to lure their wives home by bringing them their babies and by telling them that the chickens have gotten into the work on their looms.⁴⁰ In both the tragic and comic representation of disorder as the abandonment of the loom, a return to order, or weaving, is a return to the gender status quo, to the rigid hierarchical roles that gave rise to the crisis at the beginning.

There is another kind of weaving: Arachne’s tapestry at the opening of Book Six of the *Metamorphoses* and Philomela’s at the close. For these two women, weaving represents the unmasking of “sacred mystery” and the unmaking of the violence of rape. Before the angry goddess Athene (Minerva) tore Arachne’s cloth, the mortal woman weaver told a very specific tale: women raped by gods metamorphosed into beasts. Before the advent of the jealous goddess, Arachne was the center of a community of women. Unsurpassed in her art, Arachne was so graceful that women everywhere came to watch her card, spin, thread her loom, and weave. Gathered around her are other women watching, talking, resting. Here, the loom represents the occasion for *communitas*, or peace, a context in which it is possible for pleasure to be nonappropriative and nonviolent. In this, Arachne suggests Sappho, who was also the center of a community of women and who also, in Ovid, meets a deadly end. Ovid codified the tradition of slander that followed Sappho’s death and passed on in his own work the fiction that she died a suicide, killing herself out of desire for a man who did not want her.⁴¹ Sappho’s surviving work and the testimony of others enable scholars to reject Ovid’s fictional end as false. But only by an act of interpretation can we suggest that Arachne, the woman artist, did not hang herself but was lynched. Suicide is substituted for murder. Arachne is destroyed by her own instrument in the hands of an angry goddess. But who is Athene? She is no real female but sprang,

motherless, from her father’s head, an enfleshed fantasy. She is the virgin daughter whose aegis is the head of that other woman victim, Medusa. Athene is like the murderous angel in Virginia Woolf’s house, a male fantasy of what a woman ought to be, who strangles the real woman writer’s voice.

Athene is the pseudo-woman who tells the tale of right order. Central to her tapestry are the gods in all their glory. In the four corners, just inside the border of olive branches, Athene weaves a warning to the woman artist that resistance to hierarchy and authority is futile:

The work has Victory’s ultimatum in it,
 But that her challenger may have full warning
 What her reward will be for her daring rashness,
 In the four corners the goddess weaves four pictures,
 Bright in their color, each one saying *Danger!*
 In miniature design. (ll. 81–86)

Arachne’s daring rashness is only apparently her pride in her own artistry (which is justified: she wins the contest). In truth, she is in danger because she tells a threatening story. Among the women represented with “their own features and a proper background” in Arachne’s tapestry is Medusa herself. To tell the tale of Poseidon’s rape of Medusa is to suggest what the myth of the woman who turns men to stone conceals. The locus of that crime was an altar in the temple of Athene. The background of the crime was the city’s need to choose what god to name itself for, or what is usually represented as a rivalry between Poseidon and Athene for the honor. Was Medusa raped or was she sacrificed on the altar to Athene? Was the woman “punished” by Athene or was she killed during a crisis as an offering to the “angry” goddess by the city of Athens, much as Iphigenia was said to be sacrificed to a bloodthirsty Artemis?

Medusa does not become a beautiful human virgin in Greek myth until very late. Behind the decapitated woman’s head Perseus uses to turn men to stone lies the ancient gorgon. The gorgon or Medusa head was also used as an apotropaic ritual mask, and is sometimes found marking the chimney corners in Athenian homes.⁴² The mythical Medusa may recall a real sacrificial victim. The violence is transformed into rape, but the locus of the act – the altar – is preserved, and responsibility for the crime is projected onto the gods. But even there, it must finally come to rest upon another “woman,” Athene. Behind the victim’s head that turns men to stone may lie the victim stoned to death by men. Perhaps it is the staring recognition of human responsibility for ritual murder that is symbolized

in the gaze that turns us to stone. The story is eroticized to locate the violence between men and women, and Freud, in his equation “decapitation = castration” continues the development of mythological and sacrificial thinking inherent in misogyny. If Medusa has become a central figure for the woman artist to struggle with, it is because, herself a silenced woman, she has been used to silence other women.⁴³

For Arachne to tell the most famous tales of women raped by the gods is for her to begin to demystify the gods (the sacred) as the beasts (the violent). But it is also for Arachne to make Ovid’s text unnecessary: he can spin his version of *Metamorphoses* only because the woman’s version of the story has been torn to pieces and the woman weaver driven back into nature. Just as Freud, terrified of the woman-as-mother and the woman weaver, uses psychoanalysis to drive women’s weaving back into nature, so myth uses Athene to transform Arachne into the repellent spider who can weave only literal webs, sticky, incomprehensible designs. Metamorphosis (like psychoanalysis in Freud’s hands) reverses the direction of violence: Medusa, like Arachne, threatens men. The spider traps and devours the males who mate with her. But Athene, who punished both Medusa and Arachne, does not threaten the male artist. The weaver’s instrument, a shuttle, is used to silence her. But it is not used to silence the male artist who appropriates the woman’s skill as a metaphor for his own artistry. As an instrument of violence, Athene is an extension of Zeus. However, revenge on the woman artist who uses her loom to tell stories we are never allowed to hear unless they are mediated by men is not the vengeance of the god, but of the culture itself.

When Philomela begins to weave over the long year of her imprisonment, it is not only her suffering but a specific motive that gives rise to her new use of the loom: to speak to and be heard by her sister. As an instrument that binds and connects, the loom, or its part, the shuttle, re-members or mends what violence tears apart: the bond between the sisters, the woman’s power to speak, a form of community and communication. War and weaving are antithetical not because when women are weaving we are in our right place, but because all of the truly generative activities of human life are born of order and give rise to order. But just as Philomela can weave any number of patterns on her loom, culture need not retain one fixed structure.

The myth would have us think that after all her long patience and endurance, Philomela would be willing to turn from the labor of the loom to instant revenge. We are asked to believe that the weaver’s supple and stubborn transformation of the prison into the workshop, the transfer of the old discipline of feminine domestic work into one year of

struggle, would leave her unchanged; that Philomela’s discovery would not have the power to change her sister or their situation. For the myth would also have us think that after grieving and mourning over her sister’s grave for a year, Procne would make way for a rite not of reunion, but of murder. The one most important alternative suggested by Philomela’s tapestry is the one never tried: the power of the text to teach the man to know himself. Is it the barbarian, Tereus, or the Greek male citizen who would respond to the woman’s story with violence? Within the Greek tradition, the myth was used to teach women the danger of our capacity for revenge. But if the myth instructs, so does Philomela’s tapestry, and we can choose to teach ourselves instead the power of art as a form of resistance. It is the attempt to deny that Philomela’s weaving could have any end apart from revenge that makes the myth so dangerous, for myth persuades us that violence is inevitable and art is weak.

But the myth, like Ovid’s text, testifies against its own ends: for if Arachne’s and Philomela’s art is truly weak it would not be repressed with such extreme violence. Why does “the voice of the shuttle” have the power to speak to us even without the *woman’s* text? Because we have now begun to recover, to preserve, and to interpret our own tales. And our weaving has not unraveled culture, though we do seek to unravel many insidious cultural fictions. Women’s texts of great vision, like Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, ask us to remember against all odds what we have been required and trained to forget. Philomela and her loom speak to us because together they represent an assertion of the will to survive despite everything that threatens to silence us, including the male literary tradition and its critics who have preserved Philomela’s “voice” without knowing what it says. Philomela speaks to us and speaks in us because, as the woman warrior knows when she puts down her sword and takes up her pen, her body was the original page on which a tale was written in blood. Kingston’s tale, like Arachne’s and Philomela’s weaving, represents a moment of choice, the *refusal* to return violence for violence:

What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for revenge are ‘report a crime’ and ‘report to five families.’ The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words – ‘chink’ words and ‘gook’ words too – that they do not fit on my skin.⁴⁴

But the writer’s act of renunciation and writing as the healing of what is torn in herself and in her community requires that she be *heard*.

The work of modern women writers speaks of the need for a communal, collective act of remembering. Like Gabriela Mistral, some women writers offer their words as food to feed other women. In "El Reparto" ("Distribution"), Mistral offers her poem not as a dismembered body but as a sacramental text:

If I am put beside
the born blind,
I will tell her softly, so softly,
with my voice of dust,
"Sister, take my eyes."
.....
Let another take my arms
if hers have been sundered
And others take my senses
with their thirst and hunger.⁴⁵

For us, both the female sexual body and the female text must be rescued from oblivion. We rouse ourselves from culturally induced amnesia to resist the quiet but steady dismemberment of our tales by misogynist criticism. We remember and then hope to forget. Amnesia is repetition; it is being haunted by and continually reliving the pain and rage of each moment we have yielded to the pressure on us to not-see, to not-know, and to not-name what is true for us.

If women have served as a scapegoat for male violence, if the silenced woman artist serves as a sacrificial offering to the male artistic imagination (Philomela as the nightingale leaning on her thorn – *choosing* it – to inspire the male poet who then translates her song into poetry), the woman writer and the feminist critic seek to remember the embodied, resisting woman. Each time we do, we resist our status as privileged victim; we interrupt the structure of reciprocal violence.

If the voice of the shuttle is oracular it tells us Fate never was a woman looming darkly over frightened men; she was a male fantasy of female reprisal. But in celebrating the voice of the shuttle as ours, we celebrate not Philomela the victim *or* Philomela waving Itys' bloody head at Tereus. Rather we celebrate Philomela weaving, the woman artist who in recovering her own voice uncovers not only its power, but its potential to transform revenge (violence) into resistance (peace). In freeing our own voices, we need not silence anyone else's or remain trapped by the mythic end. In undoing the mythical plot that makes men and women brutally vindictive enemies, we are refusing to let violence overtake the work of our looms again.

NOTES

- 1 *Beyond Formalism, Literary Essays 1958–1970* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), p. 337. Further citations will appear below.
- 2 LP 135. See also Fragment #197 in *Greek Lyric Poetry, Including the Complete Poetry of Sappho*, trans. Willis Barnstone (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 83.
- 3 *Selected Poems*, trans. and ed. Doris Dana (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1961), p. 68.
- 4 The phrase is taken from the title of Claudine Harrmann's *Les Voleuses de langue* (Paris: des Femmes, 1979). Alicia Ostriker uses it as the title of her important essay about the ways American women poets have transformed received mythical images. See Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking," *Signs*, 8 (Autumn, 1982), 69–80. My essay began as a commentary on Ostriker's paper, delivered at the Stanford University Conference on Women Writing Poetry in America, April, 1982.
- 5 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1955), p. 147. All further references to the text will appear above. The reader should note that Humphries' line count at the head of each page in his text is only an approximate guide to the number of each line.
- 6 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham; ed. Rodney Needham; rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 494. Further citations will appear below.
- 7 *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), pp. 11ff.
- 8 Hartman discusses the line "O Eve in evil hour..." (*Paradise Lost*, IX. 1067) in "The Voice of the Shuttle" without discussing the "reader insult" or "language injury" Milton works here.
- 9 For Woolf's own account of her struggle not to be silenced or to feel that she should be punished for speaking/writing with authority, see "Professions for Women," *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1942, rpt. 1970), pp. 235–42, and the earlier, angrier version of the same essay, "Speech of January 21, 1931," in Mitchell A. Leaska, ed. *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), pp. xxvii–xliv.
- 10 For Milton, the prohibition is God-given, and the transgression is the distance/difference between the mortal and the divine. Why this had to become the difference between male and female is, of course, the obvious question. For Freud, the problem of origins does not begin in relation to the sacred but in relation to violence: that which men most fear happening to themselves has always already happened to women: castration. But as his brooding and strange thoughts on "Medusa's Head" indicate, the prior violence he refuses to name as that which gives rise to Medusa's power to turn men to stone is rape. For his absurd but telling attempt to repress

- women's weaving back into Nature (our nature – they are the same), see also “The Psychology of Women,” *New Introductory Lectures*, xxxiii. For the short piece on Medusa, see “Medusa's Head,” *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), pp. 212–13.
- 11 William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, ll. 1287–88. Philomela plays an important role as icon in the dramatic poem. By imitating not Philomela the weaver, but Philomela the nightingale leaning on a thorn, Lucrece is shown learning how to complete the cycle of violence by taking revenge on herself: she chooses a weapon like the sword Tarquin held to her throat and kills herself (see ll. 1128–48). This essay is part of a longer study of the iconography of rape, which includes Lucrece and her later Roman counterpart, Virginia, and others who were written about and painted in very different ways to varying ideological ends over the centuries.
- 12 *Fasti*, trans. Sir James George Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931; rpt. 1959), pp. 105, 107. There is no room to explore the connections here, but three entries in the *Fasti* which follow each other without commentary or transition first made me study rape as a crisis of boundaries and as sacrifice: the sacrifice to Terminus, the rape of Lucrece, and the perpetual flight of Procne from Tereus. Note that Roman tradition reverses the sisters, Procne becoming the swallow and Philomela the nightingale, taken up in the English tradition as the bird pressing her breast to a thorn to make herself sing.
- 13 Frazer, in his edition of Apollodorus' *Library*, which also records the myth of Philomela, notes that Sophocles' lost play *Tereus* is the text “from which most of the extant versions of the story are believed to be derived.” See Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. Sir James George Frazer (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), II, 98. The myth was so well known in fifth-century Athens that Aristophanes could use it to make a lewd joke about the lust of women in his comic account of Athens in crisis, *Lysistrata*, trans. Douglass Parker (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 74.
- 14 Page du Bois, *Centaurs and Amazons, Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press: 1982), p. 78. See also Herodotus' interesting description of Thrace and Thracians at the opening of Book v of his *History*. In the Thracians, the Greek historian imagines the inverse of the virtues most highly valued among Hellenes.
- 15

... And Tereus, watching,

Sees beyond what he sees: she is in his arms,
That is not her father whom her arms go around,
Not her father she is kissing. Everything
Is fuel to his fire. He would like to be
Her father, at that moment; and if he were
He would be as wicked a father as he is husband. (ll. 478–84)

Ovid's choice to elaborate on the erotic theme of incest is not merely an element of his voyeurism; it is the sign of mimetic desire/rivalry: Tereus

- wants to become Pandion, not primarily to have full control over Philomela's body, but to control Athens. This is all, of course, seen from the point of view of the Greek imagination, first, then mediated by the Roman poet's perspective.
- 16 As Ovid does in his description of Tereus looking at Philomela, Shakespeare implicates himself in the very violence he is depicting in the curiously energetic verses about the sleeping Lucrece. The very bed she lies in is male and angry that she cheats it of a kiss. The chaste woman is a tease even in her sleep:

Her lily hand her rosy cheeks lies under
Coz'ning the pillow of a lawful kiss;
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombed is;
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes. (ll. 386–92)

The poet's eyes are hardly less lewd than the rapist Tarquin's in the lines that follow (393–420). Implicit in Shakespeare's description of Lucrece asleep is the violence of the male eye. Here, the woman does not turn the man to stone. Rather, the desiring gaze transforms her into a dead object: she is both “entombed” and as reified as a “monument.”

- 17 Ovid, following others, briefly mentions Pandion at the close of the tale as having been ravaged by grief at the loss of both daughters which shortened his reign (ll. 673–75). After his death, the exchange of women and violence between Athens and Thrace continues (ll. 675–721).
- 18 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), p. 235. Further citations will appear below.
- 19 See ch. 9 in Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, rpt. 1980); also ch. 1 of Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*.
- 20 When Girard says, “For me, prohibitions come first. Positive exchanges are merely the reverse of avoidance taboos designed to ward off outbreaks of rivalry among males” (p. 239), he assumes a hierarchical structure within culture in which men vie with each other for possession of the dominated group, women. He does not address the question of how gender difference becomes hierarchy any more effectively than does Lévi-Strauss. Both treat hierarchy as a given; both also assume that the male point of view constitutes culture. They work with male texts and male informants, with almost no recognition that the other part of the story – the woman's point of view – is not there. When Girard speaks momentarily of “a father and son – that is, a family” (p. 217), he is representing the most important weakness in his own approach: another person necessary to the birth of the son is left out, the mother. There is no serious discussion of women or of the role of the mother in Girard. I have also found that the denial or erasure of the mother

or any articulated community of women is a crucial aspect of the myths I am studying. Unlike Philomela who has a sister, Lucrece and Virginia have neither mother, sister, nor daughter.

- 21 *Natural Symbols, Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970, rpt. 1982), p. 70. Douglas does not pursue the question in feminist terms when she argues "There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experiences so that each reinforces the categories of the others" (p. 65). Feminist literary and art criticism demonstrates that this exchange of meanings becomes conflictual the moment the woman decides to reshape the reigning metaphors, whether in language or in the plastic arts. Then her art threatens the other "body" and does, indeed, represent a problem. By its implicit violence, literary criticism that resolves women's artworks back into known categories of bodily images helped give rise to feminist literary criticism: the recovery of a vocabulary to discuss the oppressive as well as the liberating dialectical exchange of meanings for the female body and the body politic.

For a brilliant discussion of one woman painter's use of a received image to represent her suffering when she was raped by her art teacher and then tortured with thumb screws during her suit against the rapist, see Mary Garrard's essay on Artemisia Gentileschi, "Artemisia and Susanna," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 147-72. The raped woman artist who repaints "Susanna and the Elders" reproduces the sacrificial crisis from the point of view of the falsely accused woman. In doing so, Artemisia takes over the role of Daniel and for the first time the woman can speak and free herself – in art – if not yet in law and the culture at large.

Ostriker (see note 4) has demonstrated how women poets first imitate, then deconstruct, and finally refashion the mythical images of their bodies.

- 22 See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1954), Bk. II, ch. 2, pp. 107-08. Thucydides notes that the population had to crowd into Athens, within the Long Walls, so that some had to settle on what was believed to be the sacred ground abutting the wall itself. Some believed that this transgression brought war and plague to Athens. Though skeptical himself, Thucydides carefully records both the mythic interpretation of violence and his own reading of events:

It appears to me that the oracle came true in a way that was opposite to what people expected. It was not because of unlawful settlement in this place that misfortune came to Athens, but it was because of the war that the settlement had to be made. The war was not mentioned by the oracle, though it was foreseen that if this place was settled, it would be at a time when Athens was in difficulties.

The echo of the phrase "Athens was in trouble" is noteworthy, as is Thucydides' description of the plague within Athens' walls following the settlement on sacred ground: it has all the elements of the sacrificial crisis – the collapse of all order and differences, legal and religious. See ch. 5 of *The Peloponnesian War*.

For a similar crisis in Rome that ends in rape and not war, see Livy's *Early History of Rome*, Bk. 1. There, he describes Servius' wall and the Tarquins' dangerous extension of both the city's wall and the monarch's power which give rise to the rape of Lucrece. As Livy's *History* and Ovid's *Fasti* suggest, the rape of Lucrece is a crisis of boundaries. The unsuccessful siege of Ardea's walls by Romans gives way to an assault within Rome: or, as Shakespeare puts it, Lucrece becomes the "sweet city" the king's son takes instead (see *Lucrece*, l. 469). In Rome, the women victims, Lucrece and Virginia, are not the daughters of kings, but of the leaders of the republican rebellions.

- 23 See Freud's essay "The Taboo of Virginity" (1918), in which he addresses the question of why so many cultures have generated rituals surrounding the first penetration of the hymen. Freud does not see the same implications that I argue for in this essay.
- 24 Agamemnon tells the Old Man, "Not in fact but in name only / Is there a marriage with Achilles" (ll. 127-28), and the Old Man replies, "To bring her here a victim then – a death offering – you promised her to the son of the goddess!" (ll. 134-35).
- 25 Menelaus chides Agamemnon, "You are wrong / To fear the mob so desperately" (l. 518).
- 26 See ll. 1345-50.
- 27 See Apollodorus, *The Library*, II, 98: "But war having broken out with Labdacus on a question of boundaries, he [Pandion] called in the help of Tereus, son of Ares, from Thrace, and having with his help brought the war to a successful close, he gave Tereus his own daughter Procne in marriage."
- 28 "Difference is represented by Euripides as *internal* rather than external, omnipresent in the body of the Greeks. In the *Bacchae*, Euripides' greatest masterpiece, the tragedian collapses all boundaries, fuses male and female, human being and animal, Greek and barbarian . . . The Peloponnesian War, which set Greek against Greek in *polemos*, war, which was also *stasis*, civil war, precipitated the crisis of language, of categories of difference." Du Bois, pp. 118, 119, 120; emphasis in original.
- 29 Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, "... I a conspirator / Against my best beloved and weaving plots / Against her" (ll. 743-45).
- 30 CLYTEMNESTRA: Will he, if she resists, drag her away?
ACHILLES: There is no doubt – and by her golden hair! (ll. 1365-66)
- The suggestion of a rape in the woman dragged by her hair and screaming is unmistakable.
- 31 See ll. 1379-1400. Iphigenia offers herself as willing, sacred victim, as "savior of Greece," to uphold the critical difference as her father offers it

to her. After Agamemnon later presents her with an image of Greek women raped by barbarians, Iphigenia says, "It is / A right thing that Greeks rule barbarians, / Not barbarians Greeks." Agamemnon knows, however, that the real conflict is "between brothers" (l. 507).

- 32 In this, as in many other details, Lucrece is described in terms that recall Philomela. Once raped, Lucrece, too, feels that she is polluted. Her body is her soul's "sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted" (l. 1172). But it is a temple built to male honor. Though Lucrece decides that only the spilling of her own blood can purge her of pollution, for one moment it is suggested that tears and the telling of her own tale might have served equally well:

My tongue shall utter all; mine eyes, like sluices,
As from a mountain spring that feeds a date,
Shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale. (ll. 1976–78)

But it is the poet, of course, who tells the tale, and not Lucrece. She feels like a sacked city, like Troy; and like Iphigenia, she moves toward death by learning to speak the language of the victim: she blames Helen for Tarquin's violence.

- 33 "It is the knowledge of violence, along with the violence itself, that the act of expulsion succeeds in shunting outside the realm of consciousness" (Girard, p. 135).
- 34 *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 188. Though Girard refers to the lynching of blacks in America in this chapter, "Violence and Representation in the Mythical Text," he does not go on to discuss that particular historical example of persecution. Had he done so, he would have had to discuss the rape charge as the excuse commonly used to lynch black men. A double process of scapegoating goes on in racist violence, with tragic results for both categories of victim: the black person, male or female, and the white female. As Ida Wells-Barnett, a militant and peaceful civil rights leader said in a speech to the 1909 National Negro Conference, "Lynching is color-line murder," and "Crimes against women is the excuse, not the cause." See *The Voice of Black America*, ed. Philip S. Foner, Vol. 2, pp. 71–75. Wells-Barnett's brief speech contains a superb example of a persecution myth generated by a white male racist who uses the image of the "mob" to his own ends. It has taken us a long time to see that actual rapes as well as the exchange of accusations of rape across the color line make use of the gender line within both groups; the line that precedes and also appears finally more intractable than the color line.
- 35 Frazer records, in a note to Apollodorus' text, that "Ovid . . . appears to have associated the murder of Itys with the frenzied rites of the Bacchanals, for he says that the crime was perpetrated at the time when the Thracian women were celebrating the biennial festival . . . of Dionysus, and that the two women disguised themselves as Bacchanals" (*The Library*, II, 99). See

Humphries' edition of the *Metamorphoses*, ll. 585–607. To frame the rescue of Philomela and the murder of Itys with details of the Bacchanal is to suggest a likeness between Procne as unnatural mother and Agave, her counterpart in Euripides' *Bacchae*, who rends her son, the king Pentheus, under the spell of the bacchic rites. Ovid presents the rites as degenerate: a festival that turns back into bloody and monstrous violence. He also trades on misogynist lore by making it clear that his Procne only pretends to be a bacchante, suggesting that the rites are or were only a cover for the unleashing of female revenge against men. But Ovid cannot draw on *The Bacchae* or other bacchic stories without drawing out the ambiguities within the whole tradition surrounding Dionysus. Greeks believed Dionysus' home was Thrace. The women in the myth are Greeks transported to Thrace. Among the reversals in the myth is this movement away from Athens, an actual center of Dionysian rites, back to the god's home to represent the crisis in Greek culture when invaded by foreign religion.

Girard is shrewd in his analysis of the predominance of women in the Dionysiac cult. For his discussion of the displacement of responsibility for the sacrificial crisis and the ritual murder of the king onto women, see ch. 5, "Dionysus," in *Violence and the Sacred*, especially pp. 139–42.

- 36 See, for example, Achilles Tatius' novel *Leukippe and Kleitophon*: "Prokne, learning the rape from the robe, exacted an exorbitant revenge: the conspiracy of two women and two passions, jealousy and outrage, plan a feast far worse than his weddings. The meal was Tereus' son, whose mother *had* been Prokne before her fury was roused and she forgot that older anguish. For the pains of present jealousy are stronger than the womb's remembrance. Only passionate women making a man pay for a sexual affront, even if they must endure as much harm as they impose, count the pain of their affliction a small price for the pleasure of the infliction."

I would like to thank John Winkler for pointing out this passage to me and for providing me with his own translation in manuscript. His translation is forthcoming in *The Ancient Greek Novels in Translation*, ed. Bryan P. Reardon (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press); emphasis in original.

- 37 See Victor Turner, ch. 3, 4 in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), and ch. 1, 6, 7 in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974). Turner says, "In human history, I see a continuous tension between structure and communitas, at all levels of scale and complexity. Structure, or all that which holds people apart, defines their differences, and constrains their actions, is one pole in a charged field, for which the opposite pole is communitas, or anti-structure . . . Communitas does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms, though this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion" ("Metaphors of Anti-Structure," in *Dramas*, p. 274). Structure is coercive, but anti-structure can be crisis or peace. If

Turner tends to spend more time looking at the peaceful dimensions of *communitas* and Girard attends more to the violent, it is nevertheless possible to find in the work of both the ground for symbolic or unbloody sacrifice in art. Or, as Turner suggests, "Metaphor is, in fact, metamorphic, transformative" (*Dramas*, p. 25). The loom as instrument of transformation, and wool as the hair of the sacrificial beast which women, by a long and careful process, transform into clothing suggest why weaving skirts the sacred and the violent. It also suggests why women's power at the loom is both derided and dreaded, transformed, like giving birth, into a sign of weakness by patriarchal uses of language and symbol. I am arguing that Philomela, and with her, feminist theorists and artists, use an old instrument/metaphor to new, positive ends. I am also arguing that this process need not reproduce violence.

- 38 See Mary Douglas, ch. 6, "Powers and Dangers," in *Purity and Danger*.
 39 *The Bacchae*, ll. 118, 512–15.
 40 See the exchange between Myrrhine and her husband, Kinesias.
 41 Ovid, *Heroides*, l. 15.
 42 See Hazel E. Barnes, "The Myth of Medusa," in *The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1974), p. 6; and Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1903), pp. 187–96. Douglas notes that in some cultures strict taboo regulates when a woman can work with fire. Girard notes that Hestia may be the locus of the early sacrificial rites, but he does not ask why the common hearth should be given a female identity and be identified with virginity. See ch. 9 of *Purity and Danger*, and *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 166–67 (on masks) and pp. 305, 314–15 (on Hestia). If the common hearth was in fact the locus of ritual sacrifice, it is all the more important that in myth Procne turns back to the hearth to cook her own child as she undoes all of her female roles in culture.
 43 Freud's formula can be found in "Medusa's Head," where it becomes clear that his greatest dread is the woman as mother: Medusa's snaky head is the sign of the mother's monstrous genitals. For a list of modern women's poems about Medusa and their intense struggle to free themselves from the mythic uses of her, see Ostriker.
 44 Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1977), pp. 62–63.
 45 *Selected Poems*, p. 204. This is not a new idea, nor is it exclusively a feminist idea. See, for example, "Revelation: The Text as Acceptable Sacrifice," in Dennis J. Costa, *Irenic Apocalypse: Some Uses of Apocalyptic in Dante, Petrarch, and Rabelais*, Stanford French and Italian Studies, 21 (Saratoga, Calif.: Anma Libri, 1981), 22–39. See also Costa's "Stuck Sow or Broken Heart: Pico's *Oratio* as Ritual Sacrifice," *JMRS*, 12 (Fall 1982), 221–35.

SOURCE

The Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) provides the fullest account of the story of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus in his epic *Metamorphoses* ("Transformations"), composed in 8 CE. He draws on Sophocles' *Tereus*, a tragedy produced in Athens during the fifth century BCE that now survives only in fragments. The myth tells the story of a woman's rape by a brutal king, her sister's husband, that results in a horrific act of female revenge, the murder of his son, Itys.

The translation refers to the text of W. S. Anderson (ed.), *P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoses* (Berlin, 1977).

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6. 424–623

The Thracian king Tereus had conquered these with the aid of his troops,
 and through his victory earned a great name for himself.
 Because he was strong in wealth and men
 and traced his descent perhaps from the great Mars,
 Pandion joined him in marriage to his daughter Procne.
 Neither Juno, goddess of marriage, nor Hymenaeus, god of weddings,
 nor the Graces attended the ceremony.
 Instead, the Furies carried torches stolen from a funeral,
 the Furies spread the coverings on the nuptial bed,
 while an owl of ill omen settled on the house,
 and sitting on the rooftop of the bedchamber.
 Under this omen Procne and Tereus joined in marriage,

under this omen they became parents. The Thracian people rejoiced with them; they gave thanks to the very gods and ordered that the anniversary of Tereus' marriage to Procne, daughter of the tyrant Pandion, and the birthday of their son Itys be called a public holiday, completely unaware of the omen's true meaning!

Now the Titan had led the seasons five times from autumn to autumn, when Procne coaxingly addressed her husband,
 "If I am at all dear to you, please let me visit my sister, or let my sister come here. You will promise my father that she will return after a little while. If you give me a chance to see my sister, you will confer upon me a great gift."
 Her husband ordered his ships to the sea; with oars and a fair wind, he entered the port of Cecrops and the shores of the Piraeus. When the meeting took place, the kings joined right hands in pledge, and began their conversation with that favorable omen. Tereus told him about his wife's request, the reason for his journey, and then promised a speedy return for her sister.

All of sudden Philomela entered, attired in sumptuous clothing, but even more sumptuous her beauty, moving, so we often hear, like the water nymphs and wood nymphs in the depths of the forest, if only one should give them manners and clothing like hers. Tereus became inflamed at the sight of the maiden, just as if someone were to set fire to dry grain or leaves, or burn grass stored up in a hayloft. Although her beauty deserved this response, his lecherous nature spurred him on too. And because the Thracians are predisposed to lust, he burned not only with his own crime but that of his own people. His impulse was to corrupt her attendants' care and the loyalty of her nurse, and even by magnificent gifts to rape the girl and defend the rape with cruel war. There was nothing he would not dare, overcome by mad lust, nor could his breast subdue the flames residing there.

Now impatient of delay, he eagerly begged to accomplish Procne's injunctions, pleading his own cause under her name. Love made him eloquent, and as often as he asked, more insistently than was right, he maintained that Procne would also want it. To words he added tears, as if she had ordered them herself. By the gods, what blind nights hold mortal breasts! Tereus appeared pious in his criminal endeavor, receiving praise instead of blame for his crime – the more so as Philomela had the same wish. Throwing her arms around her father's neck, she begged to see her sister;

for her own sanity – and against it too – she entreated him. Tereus gazed at her and in looking seemed to feel her already in his arms, watching her little kisses, and her arms wrapped around her father's neck, all this worked like a stimulus on him, as fire or food for his madness. As many times as the girl embraced her father, Tereus wished to be him; indeed, even if he were, his intentions would be no less impious. The father yielded to their prayers; the girl rejoiced and thanked him and, unfortunate creature, thought it a blessing for both her and her sister.

Now Phoebus' work was almost done and his horses struck the road to Olympus with down-turned hooves. A royal banquet was placed on the tables and wine poured into golden cups; after that the bodies of the celebrants surrendered to peaceful sleep. But the Thracian king, although he had retired to his chambers, grew inflamed with thoughts of the girl; recalling her face, her movements and her hands, he imagined what he wished, what he had not yet seen. He fanned the flames of his passion, while his fantasies disturbed his sleep.

At dawn, Pandion clasped his son-in-law's right hand as he departed, and with tears welling up in his eyes entrusted his daughter to him, "I give this girl to you, dear son, because a pious cause has compelled me, both my daughters wished it, and you also wished it, Tereus. By fidelity, family and the gods, I beg you as your suppliant to guard her with a father's love and return her – a sweet solace to my anxious old age – as swiftly as possible, for it will seem a long time to me already. And you, too, Philomela, return to me as quickly as possible, if you have any piety at all; it is enough that your sister is so far away."
 As he commanded them, he gave his daughter kisses and gentle tears fell as he spoke. He asked for both of their right hands as a pledge of faith, and he joined their hands together, and entreated them to remember to greet for him his absent daughter and grandson. He could scarcely say goodbye, his voice was so choked with sobs, and he feared the ominous forebodings of his mind.

As soon as Philomela was placed on the painted ship, once the oars hit the water and the land had receded, Tereus shouted, "I have won! My prayers are coming with me!" The barbarian exulted, scarcely able to postpone his pleasure, never once turning his eyes from her. Just as one of Jove's predatory birds with his hooked talons deposited a hare into his high nest,

so the captor looked over his prize, his captive, unable to escape.
 Now the journey was over, now they left the tired ships
 and set foot on their own shores, when the king dragged Pandion's daughter
 into a secret hut deep in an ancient forest,
 and there he imprisoned her, pale, trembling and fearing the worst,
 and now with tears asking where her sister was.
 Then acknowledging his criminal intentions, he raped the virgin, all alone,
 as she called in vain on her father, on her sister, and above all the gods.
 The girl trembled like a frightened lamb wounded and cast aside
 by a grey wolf, and does not yet think itself safe;
 or like a dove, its feathers dripping with its own blood,
 that still bristles with fright, still fears the greedy claws of its captor
 Soon, when her reason returned, tearing her loosened hair,
 like one in mourning, her arms bruised with blows,
 she cried with outstretched hands, "What terrible deeds you have done,
 barbarous, cruel! Did not the injunctions of my father and his pious tears,
 my virginity, or the conjugal rights of my sister move you?
 You have confused everything; I am now the mistress of my sister's husband,
 you, husband to us both! As her enemy I must pay the price.
 Why do you not take my life, you traitor, so that no crime remains for you?
 I wish you had done this before you committed this outrage.
 Then my shade would have been pure of your crime!
 But if the gods see these things, indeed, if there are gods at all,
 if all things have not perished with me, someday you will pay for this.
 I will myself broadcast your crime, setting aside my shame.
 If there is an opportunity, I will go to the people; if I am kept
 imprisoned in this forest, I will fill the woods with my story
 and I will move the stones to witness.

Heaven will hear it, and if there is any god in that place, he will hear it too."
 These words aroused the wrath of the savage tyrant,
 but his fear matched his anger, and goaded on by both feelings,
 he pulled from its sheath his sword, with which he was girded,
 and catching her by the hair and twisting her arms behind her back,
 he bound them fast. Philomela offered him her throat,
 and entertained the hope of her death once she saw the sword:
 but he seized her tongue with tongs, and cut it off with his savage sword,
 even as it protested against the outrage, ever calling the name of her father,
 and struggling to speak. The stump of the tongue quivered,
 the severed tongue trembled on the dark earth, faintly murmuring,
 and as the tail of a severed snake normally writhes about,
 it twitched and dying sought the feet of its mistress.
 Even after this outrage – one can scarcely believe it – it is said
 his lust drove him on to attack repeatedly her battered body.

After such crimes, he had the gall to return to Procne,
 who, when she saw her husband, asked after her sister.
 Whereupon Tereus feigned grief and told a fictional account of her death,
 his tears lending credibility to his story. Procne ripped off her gown,
 gleaming with golden borders, and put on black clothing;
 she erected an empty sepulchre, brought offerings to her alleged spirit,
 and mourned the fate of her sister, although it did not need mourning.

The god showed through the twelve signs of the zodiac in a year's course.
 What will Philomela do? A guard checked her flight,
 the walls of the hut built of solid stone stood strong,
 its mute mouth did not bear any sign of the deed. But great is
 the power of sorrow; ingenuity arises from such sad circumstances.
 From her cunning loom hung a warp of Thracian thread;
 she wove purple signs into a white background,
 the story of the crime. Once completed, she gave it to her one servant,
 and with a gesture requested that she carry it to her mistress.
 The maid carried it to Procne as requested, not knowing its message.
 The wife of the savage tyrant unfurled the cloth
 and read of her sister's terrible fate, and said not a word,
 a miracle if she could. Grief checked her voice,
 her tongue failed to find words commensurate with her outrage.
 She did not cry, but right and wrong rushed together
 in confusion; revenge was the only thing on her mind.

It was the time when the Thracian matrons used to celebrate
 the biannual festival of Bacchus. Night was a witness to their rites:
 Mount Rhodope resounded with the shrill clash of their sharp bronze cymbals;
 at night the queen left her house, prepared for the rites of the god,
 and took up the markers and weapons of frenzy.
 Her head was wreathed with vines, a deer skin hung
 from her left side, and a light spear rested on her shoulder.
 Swiftly through the forest, with a throng of companions,
 Procne, dreadful and driven on by the madness of grief,
 imitated your madness, Bacchus. She came at last to the secluded hut,
 she cried aloud and shrieked "Euhoe!," broke down the doors,
 and abducted her sister. She then dressed the abducted girl
 with the trappings of Bacchus and hid her face with ivy leaves.
 Dragging the astonished girl along she led her within her own walls.

When Philomela perceived that she had reached the impious house,
 the unhappy girl bristled with fear and her whole face grew pale;
 finding a place Procne removed the trappings of the sacred rites,
 uncovered the ashamed face of her sister; and embraced her.

Since she thought of herself as the mistress of her sister's husband
 Philomela could not bear to meet her eyes;
 instead she turned her gaze to the ground, even though she wanted
 to swear by the gods and invoke them as witnesses to the dishonor
 that had been forced upon her; instead her hand served as her voice.
 But Procne burned and could not control her anger;
 rebuking her sister for weeping, she said, "This is no time for tears,
 but for the sword, or, if you have it, something stronger than a sword.
 I am ready for any crime, sister; I will burn this royal palace with torches,
 and send Tereus, the cheat, into the middle of the flames,
 or I will cut out his tongue, eyes, and the organs that took away
 your virginity, or I will drive his guilty soul out through a thousand wounds.
 I am ready to do something great; what that will be, I still do not know."

While Procne was saying these things, Itys came to his mother.
 His arrival gave her an idea; looking at him with savage eyes,
 she said, "Oh my child, how much you resemble your father!"
 Saying no more, she plans the terrible crime and seethes with silent rage.

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