

## **The Violator, The Violated and the Vehement Search for Vindication**

**ABSTRACT:** In Ovid's *Metamorphoses Book VI*, the poet explores the power of active objectivity and passive subjectivity of rape in order to enhance the understanding of roles of gender and sexuality, power and presence in society by studying the nature of the male gaze, violence and vengeance. In order to analyze the impact poetry had in constructing an engendered society, this research analyzes the roles of authority and superiority assumed men through Ovid's distinct subjective and objective terminology, prominence on female beauty and imagery detailing the sexual encounter, either observation or rapacious attack. The graphic imagery in *Book VI* provides an understanding of the societal gender roles and characteristics that were a priority in elegiac poetry in order to empower males through the value and distinctiveness of masculinity, heroism and power and the idealized form of a female – vulnerable, beautiful and sexually arousing. The main factor in rape poetry interpretation is dependent on the rape in Roman elegy in reference to terms used, descriptiveness and poet sympathy towards the situation in order to understand how males assume the right or ability "to rape". The transformative nature of Philomela to challenge the passive, female subjectivity provides hope for the increased attention and volume for the female voice to be heard. The vividness in Ovid's description of masculinity capable of violating and silencing allows for the characterization of one individual being the penetrator as the victimizer and one to be the penetrated and victimized thus establishing superiority –ultimately, the subjugation of women politically though physical domination.

In order to best understand the story of young Philomela being raped by her brother-in-law, one must take into account the history of how their families became aligned as well as the nature in which they were first introduced. Philomela's father Pandion, the king of Thrace, married his oldest daughter Procne to the King of Athens, Tereus, as a political tactic between territories. Upon Procne's request to have her sister visit her after five years of marriage to Tereus, her husband returns to Athens to ask Pandion to allow Philomela's travel. Her overwhelming beauty and charm have the immediate effect of provoking his passion and colorful inflammation of lust to corrupt her. Contrastingly, once one reaches the portion of the passage where the sea voyage from Athens to Thrace is complete, the burning red male desire of Tereus transforms into the female fear of Philomela's of being violated. His very eagerness and carnal craving to corrupt her is responded to

directly by “*pallentem*”, meaning to grow weak or pale from anxiousness or fear.<sup>1</sup> Linguistically, it is important to take notice how the degree of a male’s desire, in this particular instance through the incitement of color by another’s behavior, naturally overpowers that of a female. The transformative nature of Philomela to challenge the passive, female subjectivity provides hope for the increased attention and volume for the female voice to be heard.

Throughout the active violation of Philomela by Tereus, Ovid deliberately relates the rape of an innocent female with the similes of the mutilation of an animal. The nature of rape’s penetrator and the penetrated is vividly provided through the imagery of Philomela’s victimization. The reader is provided a depiction of her being violated through the frightened uncertainty of a lamb towards the oral viciousness of predatory wolf and trembling fear of a dove still bleeding from repeated wounding. The value of animal references to describe this violent penetration is within the poet’s intention to personalize the nature of rape in Philomela’s cry after the event as “*diris*” and “*crudelis*”. The nature of “*crudelis*” definition is understood first, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*’s account as “cruel, savage and inhuman” and second, the *New Latin Dictionary: Latin-German Lexicon* “moral insensitivity in conduct towards persons or things”.<sup>23</sup> The reiteration of Tereus’ actions as cruel and inhumane stresses the notion that the pursuit of and participation in rape is morally unfound and against the intrinsic course of human nature; to rape is to involve oneself in the active degradation of one’s morals and deprivation of humanity.

The essence of the male savagery in the act of rape is further influenced by the specified animals of prey and the size of their predators. The frightened and confidence lacking lamb to be safe

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<sup>1</sup> Andrews, E. A., and William Freund. *A New Latin Dictionary: Founded On The Translation of Freund's Latin-German Lexicon*. Rev., enl., and in great part rewritten / by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short. ed. New York: Harper, 1891. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Glare, P. G. W. *Oxford Latin Dictionary: A-Libero*. Oxford: Clarendon Press ,1968-1982. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Andrews, E.A. and William Freund

from the wounding ability of the wolf suggests the inherent domineering potential the male aggressor has over the female. A white female dove, prized for its beauty and purity, similarly represents the image of Philomela and her virginity. Ovid easily transforms the image of both into a tainted and bloodied form thus showing the impotency of the females to be protected or defend themselves against the “*avidos*” of males. The selfishness within males intent to rape, whether long thought out or immediately acted upon, can best be understood with the term “*avidos*” in which the *New Latin Dictionary: Latin-German Lexicon* defines as the “longing for something (lawful or unlawful), avaricious, greedy and eager for gain”<sup>4</sup>. This understanding contributes to the defenseless manner of females to resist the relentless and insatiable desire for males to overcome what it is within the female essence and beauty- males cannot but help act upon what they gaze and, as such, they must dominate the opposing force that seemingly weakens their power to resist.

Elegiac poets have attempted to engender their works have intentionally structured their words to inject the subjectivity of the male, active voice and an objectivity of the passive female voice. In the moments leading up to the violence of the rape, Ovid’s implementation of the perfect passive participle “*clamato*”, particularly in relation to Philomela’s calls to her sister, father and gods, reinforces the cultural disregard of the importance of female speech and the lacking impact of female’s voice. Throughout this passage, the infrequency of Ovid’s usage of the male, active subject and the female passive object does not diminish the cultural context in which it was first conceived; this Elegiac poet implements the regular usage of intransitive verbs to evoke the representation of injury or feeling directed. The descriptiveness of the disheveled state of Philomela’s hair and the intransitive verbs of “*lugenti*”, grieving, and “*turbasti*”, disrupted, are reflective of poetic invention of human emotion in nature as well as their sympathy towards women. The image of Philomela’s rape invited the reader to understand the immediate result of the violence, the physically disrupted

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<sup>4</sup> Andrews, E.A. and William Freund

state of the victim as well as the resultant chaos. The emotional turmoil that is extended affects the nature of the relationship that she had with her sister, her duties to steadfastly abide by the rules of her father within the patriarchal system and the societal statutes enforcing female piety and morally commendable social behavior.

The social and cultural toleration of rape, in the sense that it became commonplace to include rape scenes in comedic poetry to make fun of the sexual potency or morally dishonorable female behavior and mock the weakness and ability to be defeated like military enemies, was instilled by the construction of gender roles. The recognition of males as militaristically valuable and politically, able bodied participants guaranteed that an understanding of females would naturally be the opposite: unable to contribute to the defense of the city state and their speech rendered utterly useless. These gender roles affected the hierarchy of their social relevance and thus grammatically, their importance compared to one another. The integration of “super”, referencing the heavenly bodies above the claimant and “*superat*”, “over, a positioned higher than, and positioned to imply circumstances” suggests the poets reiteration of the societal standard of understanding: males over females and gods over all.<sup>5</sup> The sympathy of the poet towards the female physical and emotion state in regards to this *super-superat* word choice does suggest not that he agrees with the nature of their susceptibility to the likelihood of being overcome. Rather, grammatically speaking, the present active indicative nature of *superat* assumes the role of men to be above women thus subjecting women to a lower and inferior role socially and physically. It is alongside the sense of entitlement within the gender centralized hierarchy of authority and capability that males nonchalantly disregard “*nefas*”, the violation of divine law, “*coniugalia iura*”, vow of obedience to marriage and respect to “*virginitas*”. The notion of male supremacy over females enables their active separation of standards that are seemingly neutral. Tereus’ deliberate choice to admit to the violation of a divine law, one that is

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<sup>5</sup> Glare, P. G. W. *Oxford Latin Dictionary: Libero-Zythum*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968-1982. Print

gender neutral in its enforcement on citizens, demonstrates the lack of retaliation for males as compared to the prism of female passivity that prevents challenge to anything; Tereus' confession is meaningless in its verbalization and to the effect of the subordinate listener.

The epic adventure embarked upon by Homer in the *Odyssey* set the precedent for military glorification, divine supremacy and gender roles that would socially construct ones value politically, economically and domestically. The first time the ancient world is exposed to an engendered society and the standards for the roles that ought to be filled is when Telemachus interrupts, corrects and instructs his mother Penelope who merely questioned the song selection at hand. Telemachus instructs his mother to go back to her quarters, "take up her own work" and informs her that "speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household".<sup>6</sup> This Homeric instruction served as the primary guide to organize the hierarchy within the sphere of domesticity in regards to the supremacy of a male over a female, namely a husband over his wife or son over mother. Most remarkably it extended towards the "idea of the silencing of women in the process of their transformation" and general nature of disempowerment. Any attempt of a female to exert the authoritatively masculine skills of "public speaking and oratory", it was seen as a challenge to the status quo to assume the attributes of "male-ness". As a result, males have historically sought to "remove the authority,...force...and humor from what women have to say" in order to prevent their gender from having a voice or contribution to society. In order to minimize the power or authority women could have, men had to mitigate the access females had for public speech and the idea that what they said could ever affect another or be effective; resultantly, the notion of the suppression of a gender's voice provided for the hierarchy of authority in the house, society and public forums.

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<sup>6</sup> Beard, Mary. "LRB · Mary Beard · The Public Voice of Women." *London Review of Books*. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n06/mary-beard/the-public-voice-of-women>>.

Poetry was one of the main perpetrators in the documentation of history: the topics focused on the narratives of militaristic conquering, male strength and the necessary characteristics of masculinity and heroism. The absence of females to be documented in what was considered culturally relevant advanced the notion of “active male subject matter” with the “subjugation of a passive female subject”.<sup>7</sup> Earth and the essences of nature became associated with the nurturing qualities of a female. With the feminization of landscape came the value of masculine territorial conquest which in turn enabled the acquisition of universal knowledge, mastery and control over the land it was a member of. Engendered metaphors have such been constructed to introduce women as the “fertile ground for Roman epic narrative” and the masculine characters to “step to the forefront of the narratives”. The previously discussed notion of *superat* referencing Tereus’ physically violating position on top of Philomela can thus be extrapolated to the socially constructed norms of having a higher political ranking or degree of involvement as well as a higher level of social respect. The assumption of power of men over women entitled their behavior to sexually dominate those that could easily be overcome, overpower and subjected under male authority: females. The tie between the intrinsic nature of males to assume roles of authority and rape in a patriarchal society is its serving as the “ultimate metaphor for domination, violence, subjugation and possession’... in a phallogocentric culture”<sup>8</sup>. The goal of rape and the goal of war are similarly one in the same: dominate and defeat the weak. It is the understanding that within “patriarchal societies women are always aligned with nature (through childbirth) and men with culture; since culture dominates nature, the sexual function of women must be derogated”. It is widely perceived that “mastery of nature” is required to advance the knowledge and control<sup>9</sup>. The very fear of being vulnerable to nature or lack of knowledge to master it has

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<sup>7</sup> Keith, A. M. *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Richlin, A. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Keith, A. M

led to the male “fantasy that both denies female sexuality and silences the women”.<sup>10</sup> The previous inexplicability to understand the male desire to overpower females is eradicated when understands the risks associated with upholding the engendered hierarchal system. If “masculine is the aggression, victory, rape and the satisfaction of desire”, then it is necessary for males to maintain the veil of an oppositional defense by acting upon their fantasies to further the gap assimilating the characteristics and rights of men and women<sup>11</sup>.

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, there is no one passage that is more interconnected with the thematic principles of transformation, loss of speech and gender and sexuality than within the rape of Philomela by Tereus. Ovid is able to fully express his literary sympathy towards females in the vocal expression of Philomela after she has been raped through her active devaluing, insulting, challenging and threatening of the very source that violated her. The nature of one’s masculinity is protected by the “perpetuated stereotype of the normalcy of male dominance”: conquer and victimize to ensure intimidation.<sup>12</sup> Tereus succeeds in physically transforming Philomela through genital damage endured in the physical rape; Philomela’s body is changed in its nature of having been violated. In addition to the physical mutilation, rape accounts for the symbolic violation of its damage to radically having altered the nature of Philomela’s relationship with her sister, father, behavioral code of ethics and religion. Prior to the rape, the reader’s only understanding of Philomela is through Terseus’ lustful eyes describing her beauty and femininity; the scene directly preceding the rape shows her attempt to be heard but according to the construct of society, her voice is ineffective and therefore, unheard. It is not until after the rape does the transformative quality of sexuality evoke Philomela’s power of

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<sup>10</sup> Richlin, A. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*

<sup>11</sup> Neumann, Erich. *Amor and Psyche*. Routledge: The International Library of Psychology, 1999. Print.

<sup>12</sup> Richlin, A. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*

speech. This is a direct contradiction with the expectations held by the male having gazed upon her in the sense that her purpose was to be beautiful and serve as the benefactor to male desire to possess<sup>13</sup>.

The activation of Philomela's speech enables the reader to sympathize alongside Ovid and see the immediate consequences of female suffering resultant upon male invasion. The role reversal between the violated and violator accompanied by the transformation of Philomela to be as vocally liberated as a male allows for her to "discover language" and thus challenge her assaulter.<sup>14</sup> After Tereus hears the devoutness and determination in Philomela's voice, he perceives her words as a threat to the societal construction of suppressing gender role opposition as well as the social risk he runs in losing honor and assumed masculinity. As a direct consequence of Philomela's linguistic transformation, the threat she poses in her ability to understand the "violence implicit in culture's inscription" and accessibility to the silenced female body. "The nature of male domination... was founded on the suppression of knowledge and free speech (of women to) regulate both the silence(d) people and unsayable things to the interstices of culture".<sup>15</sup> It is therefore the reason why Tereus is enraged, not by her beauty, but by her disposition to oppose the status quo of gender structure.

Out of fear and anger, Tereus cuts out Philomela's tongue to prevent her from seeking justice and disclosing the means in which society is skillfully suppressed to the advantage of men. Tereus' first violation against Philomela was resultant upon his desire to possess her sexuality and disfigure her beauty; the second time he raped her was in attempt to eradicate the influence of her speech and return her to the docile and submissive image that provoked his primary passion<sup>16</sup>. While "first the literal rape produces a linguistic, articulate, and articulated response from Philomela", this second

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<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, Patricia B.. *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Klindienst, Patricia. "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours." *The Stanford Literature Review* 1 (1984): 25-53.

<sup>15</sup> Klindienst, Patricia

<sup>16</sup> Richlin, Amy. *Pornography and representation in Greece and Rome*. New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.



rape- the cutting off of the tongue – represents a “symbolic violation of stripping (her) of a language” to share the story of her violation and thus further symbolizes her lost ability to speak.<sup>17</sup> The loss of Philomela’s tongue is a literal transformative moment of her metamorphoses in the sense that it is what inspires her refusal to accept her victimization warranting the achievement of Tereus’ original goal, aversion to return to her previous submissive, female passivity and desire to obtain the authority of language in any way she can.

The passage of Philomela’s rape by her brother-in-law Tereus represents the nature in which ancient society became engendered and perpetuated the disparity between the roles designated and respect given towards males and females. The *Metamorphoses* is overwhelmed with stories narrating the pathway of physical, figurative and symbolic transformations as a result of having violated religious customs, having sought revenge or upset the gods. Surprisingly enough, the active involvement of divine authority is missing from the story of Philomela for the demonstrative purpose of Ovid showing off his poetic innovativeness to idealize the modern, real world. In its basest form, Ovid presents the original reasoning to the suppression of female voice and the brutality ends males are willing to meet to advance that understanding. Though history has been constructed to value, prioritize and perpetuate the accomplishments of men, males fear the chaotic involvement and outcomes of the female voice in anticipatory fear of vulnerability to unknown information. As means of protecting and increasing their realm male authority and influence, poetry and those with social influence have continuously advocated for intensifying the gender gap.

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<sup>17</sup> Marder, Elissa. *Hypatia*, Vol 7, No 2, Philosophy of Language (Spring 1992), pp 148-166  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810003>