

Cassandre Martigny
The Furor of the Mother-Wife.
The Monstrous Metamorphosis of Jocasta
in Seneca's Oedipus and The Phoenician Women

Abstract

Questo articolo esamina le variazioni sul mito di Edipo nell'*Oedipus* e nelle *Phoenissae* di Seneca, analizzando i cambiamenti nella rappresentazione di Giocasta rispetto ai modelli attici. Le tragedie di Seneca presentano i protagonisti come mostri, secondo una sequenza di tre categorie tragiche: *dolor*, *furor*, *nefas*. Questa rappresentazione non riguarda solo Edipo, ma anche Giocasta, il cui corpo incestuoso in queste riscritture viene esibito. La sua furiosa follia è visibile nei riferimenti a figure mostruose e nell'ambiguità di alcuni suoi interventi. La pericolosità di Giocasta è più che mai associata alla sua sessualità, un tema che diventa centrale nella rielaborazione di Seneca del mito di Edipo.

This article examines the variations on the Oedipus myth in Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*, analysing the changes in the portrayal of Jocasta in relation to the Attic models. Seneca's tragedies present Jocasta as a monster, following a sequence of three tragic categories: *dolor*, *furor*, *nefas*. This representation affects not only Oedipus but also Jocasta, whose incestuous body is exhibited in these rewritings. Her furious madness is visible in the references to monstrous figures and in the ambiguity of some of her interventions. Jocasta's dangerousness is more than ever associated with her sexuality, an issue that has become central in Seneca's re-elaboration of the myth of Oedipus.

The myth of Oedipus has been the subject of numerous variations¹, offering somewhat contradictory representations of the character of Jocasta. Indeed in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, probably written between 429 and 425 B. C., Jocasta changes from Oedipus' wife to Oedipus' mother during the dialogue with the Corinthian and when she reveals herself to be the mother of her son she disappears from the stage to take her own life. Euripides' tragedy *The Phoenician Women*, probably staged between 410 and 408 B. C., shows a very different situation. It takes up the subject of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, but makes a major innovation in that Jocasta has survived the discovery of the incest. She interposes herself between her enemy sons, Eteocles and Polynices, working to restore peace. In this play, she is not referred to as the incestuous mother-wife: she is shown in her capacity as queen mother and appears only as the mother of Oedipus' sons, not as the mother of Oedipus.

These representations of the character underwent major variations with Seneca, who rewrote the Greek tragedies in *Oedipus* and *The Phoenician Women*². The Latin playwright followed the footsteps of his Greek models, but adapted the Theban material to the specific challenges of Roman theatre. In Roman tragedies, special attention is paid to the representation of the character as a monster,

¹ GANTZ (1996).

² I will use the Latin texts as established by CHAUMARTIN (2008) and LE CALLET (2018).

following a sequence of three categories of tragedy: *dolor*, *furor*, *nefas*³. The character in the grip of *furor* temporarily loses his mind, but also his human bearings, his moral and social references. Blinded, he comes to commit the *nefas*, the supreme and inexpiable crime. This transformation affects not only Oedipus or his sons, as in *The Phoenician Women*, but also Jocasta. The Latin concept of fate (*fatum*) also raises new issues about the characters' responsibility for the crime, which in turn leads to the introduction of themes absent from Greek tragedies. The character's dangerousness is now more than ever associated with her sexuality and even with female desire, which has become central to Seneca's re-elaboration of the Oedipus myth.

1. From Oedipus Rex to Oedipus: the monstrous sexuality of Jocasta

The destinies of Oedipus and Jocasta are constructed in parallel in Seneca's *Oedipus*: both characters take the path of *furor* and *nefas*. Overcome by excessive pain, they distance themselves from humanity and show the face of the furious: «le *furor* c'est l'absence à soi-même» explains Florence Dupont (1995, 165), «une dépouille vide, cherchant à s'emplir d'une nouvelle identité, d'une nouvelle mémoire», that of the monstrous figure. In the play, this metamorphosis of the female character is linked to her transformation from wife (*coniunx*) to mother (*mater*). Jocasta is referred to as *unanima coniunx* by Oedipus, «wife with whom [he] is one» (*Oed.* 773). She conquers over the course of the play the title of mother, which Merope gradually loses⁴, and is consecrated in her new identity by Phorbas: *coniuge est genitus tua*, «your wife is the one who bore you» (l. 867). Shocked by the discovery of the *nefas*, Jocasta does not hide in the bridal chamber, as she did in Sophocles' tragedy. On the contrary, she appears on stage like a fierce-looking maenad (*saeua*), sign of her monstrous transformation (*Oed.* 1005-1007):

*Jocasta uaecors, qualis attonita et furens
Cadmea mater abstulit gnato caput
sensitue raptum [...].*

Jocasta, in delirium, like the Cadmean mother when, struck by a furious madness, she cut off her son's head or saw it torn off.

The reference to Agave draws attention to the similarities between the two women: both have accomplished *furor* as mothers, one by killing her son Pentheus, the other by committing incest. The *nefas* has physically transformed the two protagonists: Jocasta, turned into a menad, faces the hideous mask of Oedipus, his face awash in blood. *Vultus Oedipodam hic decet*: «this face is that

³ DUPONT (1995).

⁴ PARÉ-REY (2012, 60). See the terms used to designate Merope: Sen. *Oed.* 794: *matrem*; 800: *matris*; 806-807: *parenti*; 797: *uiduam*; 802: *Merope uera non fuerat parens*.

which befits Oedipus», «Oedipus now has [his] true face⁵», just as Jocasta finds hers in the figure of Agave, another example of perverted «maternal love» (*maternus amor*, l. 630). The adjective *uaecors* associates the wife-mother with other transgressive female figures of Seneca's *corpus*, such as Phaedra, Medea and Clytemnestra⁶. The description of the action of the female character, who «leaps wildly with swift steps» (*rapido saeua prosiluit gradue*, l. 1004) should also be compared with that of the cohort of *Spartoi*, who «leap wildly» (*saeua prosiluit*, l. 586) when Tiresias invokes the ghost of Laios. This comparison emphasizes not only the infernal nature of the character⁷ but also her monstrous nature. Born from the teeth of the dragon killed by Cadmos, the founding hero of Thebes, the people of the «sown men» (*Σπαρτοί*)⁸, conflate life and death in the same movement: as soon as they are born, the Spartans kill each other in a civil war. According to schol. *ad Eur. Phoen.* 942⁹, Jocasta is the direct descendant of one of the five *Spartoi* who survived the original massacre. Linked with the land of Thebes and the crimes that have plagued it since its foundation, she represents the mother earth in which a perverted filiation germinates.

The reference to Theban history also shows that incest is part of a long tradition of crimes from which it is impossible to escape. Indeed, for Seneca, «fate (*fatum*) is nothing other than the concatenation and entanglement of causes (*series implexa causarum*)» (*Ben.* 4, 7, 2). Compared to its Greek model, Seneca's *Oedipus* emphasizes the causal knot that governs destiny (ll. 980-90):

*Fatis agimur: cedit fatis;
non sollicitae possunt curae
mutare rati stamina fusi
[...]
Omnia certo tramite uadunt
primusque dies dedit extremum:
non illa deo uertisse licet,
quae nexa suis currunt causis.*

It's destiny that leads us; let destiny lead you; our anxious cares are powerless to alter the spindle chain, set forever. [...] Everything follows a road already mapped out: from our first day, the last is decided. Not even a god can change the chain of causes that weave the course of things.

The thought of *fatum* allows Seneca to question the freedom of the characters in his theatre. The apparent confrontation between divine causality and human responsibility becomes an important tragic device. In *Oedipus*, the dramatic

⁵ DUPONT (2012, 848): «(Edipe a maintenant [son] vrai visage)».

⁶ Sen. *Phaed.* 1155, *Med.* 123, *Ag.* 734.

⁷ See BOYLE (2011, 344).

⁸ Eur. *Phoen.* 638-75, 818-82, 930-41.

⁹ METTE (1959, 247): οἱ περιλειφθέντες τῶν Σπαρτῶν, ὡς Αἰσχύλος φησὶν, ἦσαν Χθόνιος Οὐδαῖος Πέλωρ Ὑπερήνωρ Ἐχίων, ὃς ἐγημεν Ἀγαύην τὴν Κάδμου, ἐξ ἧς ποιεῖ Πενθέα, οὗ Ὀκλασος, οὗ Μενοικεύς, οὗ Κρέων καὶ Ἰοκάστη. See VIAN (1963, 184), and MASTRONARDE (1994, 144).

intensity is due to the fact that the characters, caught up in this inextricable chain of events, are driven to make mistakes against their will, as they repeatedly make clear¹⁰. However, after the crime of incest is revealed, only Jocasta maintains her husband-son's innocence and her own: *fati ista culpa est: nemo fit fato nocens* («fate is guilty of these crimes: no one is made guilty by fate», l. 1019). According to Jocasta, only fate is the culprit for the misfortunes: the emphasis on the *fatum*, placed at the beginning of the verse and repeated in the fifth foot in polyptoton, underlined by the alliteration, indicates this reading¹¹. However, Oedipus cannot hear this argument, because of the monstrosity of the crime. The very fact that Jocasta dares to state the incest takes her out of humanity.

The mother-wife calls out to Oedipus *gnatus es* («you are my son», l. 1010), expressing the unspeakable *nefas*. Seneca makes a major innovation compared to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, in which Jocasta is unable to name Oedipus after learning his true identity: ἰὸὺ ἰοῦ, δούστηνε· τοῦτο γάρ σ' ἔχω | μόνον προσειπεῖν, ἄλλο δ' οὔποθ' ὕστερον («alas, wretch! Wretch! yes, that's the only name I can call you. You will never have another in the future», l. 1071-72). According to Alice Bonandini (2019, 137-38), this is not just a pathetic formulation: «Giocasta non può più chiamare Edipo in altro modo perché non esistono parole per definire il rapporto che lo lega a lei, e che è per lei indicibile». In Seneca's tragedy, the *pudor* gives way to the *furor* and its scandalous word: Jocasta forces Oedipus to hear the unbearable and reminds him by her voice but also by her very presence, of the sacrilegious act that should be hushed up. After turning his head away, blind Oedipus begs her to be silent in order to «spare» him¹², as if the mere utterance of the *nefas* were enough to reproduce it, to contaminate him once again¹³. Oedipus then uses words very similar to those of Pentheus to his mother Agave who mutilates him in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*¹⁴, another possible source of inspiration for Seneca in his reinterpretation. Jocasta finally defines herself as *mater nefanda*, «sacrilegious mother» (l. 1031) or, if we refer to the etymology of the word *nefas*, «unspeakable mother», whose horrific crime cannot be expressed in words.

Seneca also brings to light what was hidden in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*: the wife-mother's body and perhaps also her desire as a woman. In *Oedipus Rex*, the sight of Jocasta's anguished body is unbearable for Oedipus: this blinding vision is that of the wife's body becoming the mother's body. If Jocasta's body bears witness to the incestuous crime in Sophocles' play, it becomes part of the *nefas* in Seneca's tragedies. The way in which Jocasta kills herself, by plunging Oedipus' sword into her womb, reveals the *furor* that inhabits her. Her body and sexual attributes are no longer evoked through the diversions of metaphor: the female character herself draws attention to her breast, *pectus*, her throat, *iugulum*, and then her

¹⁰ Sen. *Oed.* 659-67, 765-67.

¹¹ PARÉ-REY (2002, 284-302).

¹² Sen. *Oed.* 1020 : *iam parce uerbis, mater, et parce auribus*.

¹³ BONANDINI (2019, 137-38).

¹⁴ VIAL (2014, 163-95). Sen. *Oed.* 1020-23; Ov. *Met.* 3, 723-25.

womb (*uterum*)¹⁵. Seneca, more than his Greek predecessors, makes the womb a symbol of women's guilt. In his time, it was Agrippina who epitomized unusual sexuality and maternity. She was accused of committing incest with her own son Nero. It is revealing that the account of Agrippina's death in Tacitus' *Annals* has much in common with that of Jocasta's suicide in *Oedipus*. According to the historian, Agrippina asks Nero's servant «to strike her in the womb»: *uentrem feri*¹⁶. Like Jocasta, Agrippina draws attention to her monstrous maternity. The fact that, in Seneca's tragedy, Jocasta chooses Oedipus' sword to kill herself also reveals the scandalous nature of her suicide. By thrusting her son's weapon into her womb, she is reenacting the scene of patricide, but also, symbolically, that of the incestuous coitus. For Seneca, suicide represents both the punishment and the repetition of the crime, all the more so since Jocasta, like Phaedra facing Hippolytus, asks her son to take up the sword to accomplish this ultimate task¹⁷.

2. From Euripides' *Phoenician Women* to Seneca's: the queen mother in the grip of furor

In Euripides' tragedy, Jocasta embodies the voice of common good against particular interests, the benefits of *φιλία* in the face of the civil war (*στάσις*). In the Roman context, she becomes a figure of peace and non-violence¹⁸ who defends the two founding pillars of Roman ideology, state and family. She opposes the Roman value of *pietas* to the *furor* that has seized Oedipus and his sons, leading them to the fulfillment of *nefas*, the crime of fratricidal war. The authority conferred on the mother in Seneca's tragedy is explained by her status as a matron, an exemplary figure whose function is to produce legitimate children for Roman citizens and to protect Roman values.

However, despite these qualities, Jocasta also seems to be struck by the *furor* that has seized Oedipus and their sons in Seneca's *Phoenician Women*. This characterization is due to the spectacular dimension of Roman theatre but also to the tragic conception of *fatum*: the fratricidal war appears as the consequence of incest and the culmination of an unbroken chain of crimes. Jocasta represents the link between past and present and is therefore designated as the cause of the fratricidal war. The question of the character's guilt takes on major importance in Seneca's tragedies. To highlight this issue, the Latin poet preserves between his two Theban tragedies a certain psychological consistency in the characterisation of Jocasta, assimilated in both plays with the figure of Agave. In the first part of the *Phoenician Women*, Oedipus refers to the murder of Pentheus and his dismembering by his mother, accompanied by her sister Ino, who are both plunged into drunken delirium. These women, who have caused the death of their descendant, are seen by Oedipus as better mothers than Jocasta: *felices quibus* |

¹⁵ Sen. *Oed.* 1038-39.

¹⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 14, 8, 5.

¹⁷ Sen. *Oed.* 1032-33; *Phaed.* 713-14. See FANTHAM (1983, 69); LITTLEWOOD (2004, 87).

¹⁸ See FRANCHET D'ESPÈREY (1999).

fortuna melior tam bonas matres dedit! («happy are those to whom a better fortune has given such good mothers!», *Phoen.* 25-26).

The crime of incest surpasses that of infanticide and is aggravated by the fact that the mother has given birth to sons with her own son. Jocasta herself underlines her tragic destiny as she takes up the story of Agave, paradoxically described as *felix*, happy and wealthy (ll. 363-70):

*Felix Agaue: facinus horrendum manu,
qua fecerat, gestauit et spoliū tulit
cruenta nati maenas in partes dati;
fecit scelus, sed misera non ultra suo
sceleri occucurrit. Hoc leue est quod sum nocens:
feci nocentes. Hoc quoque etiam nunc leue est :
peperi nocentes*

Happy Agave! She has brandished the object of her horrible crime from the hand that committed it, the bloody maenad, she has carried the remains of this son torn to pieces; she has committed a crime, but for the unfortunate woman this encounter with crime has not gone any further; for me it is too little to be guilty: I have raised guilty men; it is still too little: I have given birth to guilty men.

The mother compares herself with the Bacchante to underline the atrocity of her own crime, that of procreating children through incest. She envies this mother who has unknowingly dismembered her own son, Pentheus, and considers her guilt to be «light» (*leue*) compared to her own. In fact, not only has Jocasta «made men guilty» (*feci nocentes*), she has also «given birth to guilty men» (*peperi nocentes*). The absence of precise names makes the present participles ambiguous: Jocasta's language confuses Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, all three of whom she has given birth to, and who are all *nocentes*.

Jocasta is associated with other dangerous and destructive female figures. She summons three female monsters to assist her as she rushes onto the battlefield to separate her sons: the Sphinx, the birds of lake Stympalus and the Harpyes (ll. 420-26):

*Quis me procellae turbine insanae uehens
uolucer per auras uentus aetherias aget?
Quae Sphinx uel atra nube subtexens diem
Stymphalis audis praepetem pinnis feret?
Aut quae per altis aeris rapit uias
Harpyia saeui regis obseruans famem
et inter acies proieciat raptam duas?*

What swift wind, taking me up in the whirlwind of its tempest, will push me through the air? What Sphinx or bird of Stympalus, darkening the day beneath a black gauge, will take me with swift flight on its rapacious wings? Or what Harpye, watching for the hunger of the cruel king, will ravish me through the paths above

and, having ravished me, will throw me into the middle of the two lines of battle?

By asking these dark forces for help, Jocasta betrays her inner disorder¹⁹. More than any other, the Sphinx symbolises the tangled family relationships that arise from the union of mother and son²⁰. However, the Sphinx is itself an ambivalent figure as is Jocasta: it is the cause of Oedipus' prestige and his downfall, since its death drives the son into his mother's bed and makes him king of Thebes. In a world where disorder alone rules the universe because of incest, monsters and plagues can become symbols of hope and peace. Oedipus saved the city by killing the Sphinx; Jocasta wants to save it once again by summoning the monster. This ambiguity is echoed in the character's transformation into a Fury during her frenzied race: *uadit furenti similis aut etiam furit* (l. 428). Jocasta becomes one with the Erinyes she invoked earlier. She is no longer a woman but a furious force, swept along by a «demented wind» (*insano uento*). However, the comparison with Fury is not entirely negative because it is her pain (*dolor*) that transcends the mother and makes her intervene as quickly as possible between the armies of Eteocles and Polynices. In Seneca's rewriting, Jocasta's ambivalent comparisons with chthonic creatures, whether monstrous or representative of female madness²¹, nuances the opposition between *pietas* and *furor*, between women and men, to highlight that the mother is not only a remedy for Thebes but also its scourge, since she has given birth to the fruit of incest.

3. *The Phoenician Women model contaminated by that of Oedipus?*

The thematic link between the two Seneca's tragedies, a veritable Theban diptych, suggests a continuity, or rather a kind of cycle. From *Oedipus* to the *Phoenician Women*, the past and the *nefas* repeat themselves and we can ask ourselves whether the incestuous and monstrous wife really disappears behind the queen mother.

The ambiguity of Jocasta's actions and feelings can be seen in the reunion scene with Polynices. Seneca makes him the double of Oedipus: father and son, both associated with a prosperous kingdom, Corinth for one, Argos for the other, arrive in Thebes as powerful conquerors. They belong to this land but are strangers to it: Oedipus is unaware that he comes from this city, while Polynices, through his marriage to Argia, is divided between Thebes and Argos. But while Oedipus chooses exile and a foreign marriage to avoid marrying the woman he takes to be his biological mother, Merope, Polynices returns to the woman he knows to be his mother²². The tragic irony is omnipresent in this scene, where the language of

¹⁹ FRANK (1995, 191): «The incongruous idea that these creatures, whose involvement with men was traditionally to the detriment of the latter, should perform a helpful action suggests the extent of Jocasta's distraction».

²⁰ See also Sen. *Oed.* 640-41 and *Phoen.* 138-39.

²¹ HERSHKOWITZ (1998).

²² GINSBERG (2018, 62-63).

maternal love merges with that of incestuous desire. Seeing unconsciously in Polynices a new Oedipus, Jocasta links the marriages of these two men, two unions made, according to her, in error (*Phoen.* 513-15):

*Ne quid e fatis tibi
desset paternis, hoc quoque ex illis habes,
errasse thalamis*

So that you lack nothing from your father's destiny, you also have this: you made a mistake with your marriage

Polynices had succeeded where his father had failed by marrying Argia, a native of Argos, a foreigner rather than a woman of his own lineage. However, from Jocasta's point of view, this union kept her son away from her and her marriage bed: *non te duxit in thalamos parens | comitata primos*, «your mother did not lead you and accompany you to the bridal chamber» (l. 505). The verb *duco* is reminiscent of the Roman tradition of *deductio*, whereby the father takes his daughter to the house of her future husband at the time of the wedding. This practice is overturned here, since it was the mother who wanted to take her son to the bride's house. The connection between the expression *thalamos primos*, which is a common euphemism for first sexual intercourse²³, and *parens* recreates in the verse an incestuous union already expressed in these terms by Oedipus at the beginning of the tragedy: *in thalamos meos | deducta mater* «into my nuptial bed my mother was led» (ll. 270-71). This sentence echoes certain lines in Seneca's *Oedipus*, where the son complains of the horrible fate promised by the oracle, that of being united with his mother in the nuptial bed, recurrent symbol of the incest at the heart of Theban power²⁴. While for Jocasta the foreign marriage of Polynices seems to repeat the mistake of Oedipus, the audience glimpses the real error that threatens the mother if she welcomes a second son to Thebes. In Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, Jocasta's anger is primarily political: Polynices, by marrying Argia, has formed an alliance with a foreign city; in Seneca's tragedy, it is more a reflection of the playwright's concern about incest. Jocasta expresses her desire to see her body joined to that of Polynices, breast to breast (*Phoen.* 467-76):

*accede propius, clude uagina impium
ensem et trementem iamque cupientem excuti
hastam solo defige; maternum tuo
coire pectus pectori clipeus uetat:
hunc quoque repone. uinculo frontem exue
tegumenque capitis triste belligeri leua
et ora matri redde [...]
Affusa totum corpus amplexu tegam,
tuo cruori per meum fiet uia.*

²³ ZWIERLEIN (1986, 126); FRANK (1995, 213).

²⁴ Sen. *Oed.* 20; 635. See BOYLE (2011, 117).

Come closer, lock your unholy sword in its scabbard, plant your trembling spear in the ground, already eager to be thrown; your shield prevents your mother's breast from uniting with your breast: put it down too. Rid your forehead of that thong, take off that sinister helmet protecting your head in war, give your face back to your mother. [...] Clinging to you, I will cover your whole body with my embrace, and then your blood will flow into mine.

The language of maternal love is unwittingly mixed with that of sexuality to heighten the tragic intensity of this scene. *Accede, uagina, hasta* are all sexual euphemisms²⁵, to which we should also add *ensis*, a term that designates both weapon and virility, and *solum*, which was already used by the Greeks to associate women's wombs with cultivated fields²⁶. The order of the words in line 470 – *coire pectus pectori* – can reveal the desired entanglement of the bodies, expressed more explicitly in the following sentences. Through her language, the female character produces incestuous images that go beyond her conscience and reinforce the tragic irony that presides over this reunion.

The heroic action of Jocasta, who interposes herself between her sons to restore peace, is also diverted to increase the dramatic intensity of the scene. Physically opposing the conflict is the duty of a matron, as recalled by the prayers of the messenger²⁷ and those of Antigone, who urges Jocasta to «put her bare breast between the enemy swords» in order to «break the war or receive death first» («*nudum inter enses pectus infestos tene: | aut solue bellum, mater, aut prima excipe*», ll. 405-406). This image of women's bodies, symbolising *pietas* and *fecunditas* and interposing themselves between men to prevent the outbreak of civil war, has been a feature of Roman history since the founding of the Urbs and the Sabine women episod²⁸. Seneca is in fact rewriting a topical situation in Latin literature, that of mothers who intervene in the male domain of war in an attempt to end it, which has a probable origin in the Virgilian epic²⁹. Heiress of the Sabine women, Seneca's Jocasta invites the men to turn their anger and their swords against her: *in me arma et ignes uertite* (l. 443). She turns her own body into a physical and moral obstacle, an impregnable and inviolable barrier that contains the hatred of the men on both sides and forces them to lay down their arms. However, Jocasta's body, stained by incest, also symbolises impurity and *impietas*, and invites transgression, suggested by the four elisions in line 443 – *in m(e) arm(a) et ignes uertit(e), in m(e) omnis ruat* – which convey the character's frenzy by breaking all boundaries between words and ideas. The anaphora *in me*, *in me* draws attention to her body, whose various parts – face, chest, eyes – are stressed by demonstrative deictics.

²⁵ ADAMS (1982, 180); FRANK (1995, 204).

²⁶ See Soph. *Oed.* 1256-57; *Trach.* 31-33; *Ant.* 569; Eur. *Or.* 533.

²⁷ Sen. *Phoen.* 401-402.

²⁸ See CALABRESE (2017).

²⁹ See LA PENNA (1994).

4. Conclusion

Jocasta undergoes a metamorphosis, not only in relation to her Attic models, but also within Seneca's tragedies themselves. The ambiguity of the character's interventions and the insistence on her body, hitherto hidden in the bridal chamber, combine her danger with her sexuality, producing intense tragic effects. These variations on the myth of Oedipus and Jocasta had a considerable influence on its reception in later centuries. The representation of the mother-wife was clearly taken up again in the reelaboration of ancient tragedies in order to make the female character feel guilty: in a Christian context, Jocasta, as a descendant of Eve, appears as the mother of all evils, including in rewritings of *The Phoenician Women* such as Garnier's *Antigone ou la Piété* (1580) or Robelin's *Thébaïde* (1584). During the absolute monarchy in France, her sexuality is presented as responsible for the chaos into which the State sank³⁰. With Seneca, Jocasta came to embody the enigma of female sexuality, which would also feed into Freud's psychoanalytical in the 19th and 20th centuries, another crucial turning point in the construction of Jocasta and in the variations of the myth³¹.

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³⁰ BIET (1994). See Racine's *Thébaïde* (1664), La Tournelle's *Œdipe ou Les trois fils de Jocaste* (1730), Houdar de la Motte's *Œdipe* (1765).

³¹ On the reception see MARTIGNY (2025).

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