

Lycaon: Ovid's Deceptive Paradigm in *Metamorphoses* 1

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As the first story of human metamorphosis in Ovid's poem, the account of Lycaon naturally tempts us to read it as paradigmatic and programmatic. We may yield to that temptation in two important respects: A. We might read the story as a whole as a coherent structure that anticipates the organization and rationale of subsequent tales. B. We might focus on the actual description of metamorphosis, where we expect Ovid to pursue themes and imply a meaning in change that he would then regularly employ in later parts of the poem. Both aspects of the Lycaon-paradigm have been commonly read in the past.¹ Increasingly, however, scholars have begun to question A and to dispute some details of B.² It is my purpose in this paper to review the entire matter: to suggest that Ovid carefully pretended to use Lycaon as a paradigm, that he then told the story so as to sabotage the status of the model, and that the subsequent tales of Book 1 and thereafter, by their patent flouting of the Lycaon-pattern, correct, re-shape, and then

¹ R. Heinze, *Ovids elegische Erzählung (Berichte . . . der Saechsischen Akad. der Wiss., Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Vol. 71 [1919], No. 7)*, 10 ff. and 69 ff., most forcefully argued that the whole passage, the Council of the Gods and Jupiter's story of Lycaon, was a serious epic opening to a basically epic poem. Many of his contemporaries and students followed him. Then, Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1970) generally re-stated the position of Heinze, with some modifications that recognized the humor and wit of the poet. Otis introduced the term "theodicy" into the discussion on pp. 86, 88, and 100. Franz Boemer, in his commentary on *Metamorphoses* Books 1-3 (Heidelberg 1969) agrees in the main with Otis (whose book in its first edition had appeared in 1966). For other bibliography up to 1969, see Boemer, pp. 74 ff. For discussion of the thematic language in the scene of Lycaon's metamorphosis, see W. S. Anderson, "Multiple Change in the *Metamorphoses*," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 5.

² Most of the controversy has focused, as Boemer notes, on the framing Council of the Gods. In the discussion, the lines have been drawn on whether the Council is a serious epic presentation or a parody with anti-Vergilian and/or anti-Augustan purposes. Thus, D. E. Hill, in his commentary on *Met.* I-IV (Aris & Phillips Ltd., Bolchazy-Carucci Inc., 1985), assumes without argument that Ovid is undercutting our epic expectations (*ad* 163-252, p. 174). J. B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (University of North Carolina Press 1988) 175-76, discusses Lycaon's transformation as a paradigm, but only after decisively denying the operation of morality, reward or punishment, in the rationale of metamorphosis.

shift the paradigm to the more disturbing, but productive, form that Ovid impresses on his *Metamorphoses*.

Ovid organizes and situates the story of Lycaon carefully. He inserts it into an account of a Council of the Gods, which discusses the total degeneration of human beings; and it serves Jupiter as absolute proof of the hopeless corruption on earth. Lycaon has conspired against him, Jupiter, and been appropriately punished (*ille quidem poenas . . . solvit* 1. 209); and so he insists on universal punishment at the conclusion of his narrative (*dent ocius omnes / . . . poenas* 241-42), since other men are as bad as, or worse than, Lycaon. The Council of the Gods constitutes a standard device of serious epic, at the beginning of poems (as in the *Odyssey*) or at key points in the narrative. Ovid in fact reuses the phrase *conciliumque vocat* (167) from *Aen.* 10. 2, where Jupiter summons a council that determines, by his command, the course of the war between the Italians and Aeneas' followers. Ostensibly, then, Ovid has created a situation where solemn moral issues are confronted by the gods and an important, intelligent decision emerges under the wise guidance of Jupiter. And the inserted tale of Lycaon serves as an example of Jupiter's justice meted out to one sinner, a foreshadowing of the justice that he will properly bring down on all mankind for its degradation. As Brooks Otis viewed this sequence, then, the framing Council of the Gods, which decided to destroy human beings, falls into the familiar epic type he called a theodicy; and the inserted account of Lycaon's sin and punishment is a "little theodicy."³ Zeus proclaimed the working of divine justice in *Odyssey* 1, and both Jupiter and Neptune show the benevolent divine pattern in *Aeneid* 1.

When we have read a few books of the *Metamorphoses*, we cease to be so credulous, and indeed we suspect, every time that Ovid borrows an obvious epic motif or flourishes a phrase from Vergil, that he will do something subversive. Here, however, it is early in the poem, and we are entitled to none but the obvious expectations: this seems like serious ethical epic material, so we anticipate a proper theodicy, that is, a principled decision taken under the aegis of an impartial and venerable Jupiter. When Jupiter and his Council amuse and shock us, then and only then do we realize how Ovid has abused theodicy and epic formula, how he is pointing away from the standard epic paradigm to something new. Thus, Ovid sets up a superficial situation of theodicy only to undo it by one detail after another. Let us look at some of his subversive techniques for presenting the Council: they will prepare us for a less than convincing theodicy when we come to the story of Lycaon.

When the supreme deity, Zeus or Jupiter, summons a standard epic Council of gods, he is concerned for the situation among human beings, worried that things are not going right, but hardly doubting that right can

³ See Otis, p. 100.

prevail. So anger or indignation does not motivate him, least of all anger over some particular crime that has been practiced against himself. The subordinate gods may have strong emotions and biases, but Jupiter weighs the issues calmly and decides on what the poet and the audience agree is a just course.

Ovid's Jupiter seethes with anger from the start; it is because of that wrath that he convenes the Council; it is with indignation (181) that he opens his speech to the gods; after they roar out their obsequious rage to match his mood (199), Jupiter continues in anger with his story of Lycaon (209–39), and he rises to a raging peroration (*frementi* 244) that ordains the total annihilation of human beings. This un-Vergilian wrath and its totally negative, destructive goal should make us wonder a bit about the theodicy of Ovid's Flood. And Ovid forces us to face this problem by insisting a bit too openly that Jupiter has taken on anger that is "worthy" of him (*dignas love concipit iras*, 166).

At the summoning of the Council, Ovid seizes his opportunity to describe the meeting-place and the homes of the gods in a flagrantly un-epic, anachronistic manner that repeatedly invites his audience to imagine Jupiter as Augustus, the other gods as prominent Romans, and the Council as a session of the Roman Senate hurriedly called on the Palatine Hill. This Romanization of the traditional divine Council works in at least two important ways: it encourages us to compare the decision which Jupiter forces on the rest of the gods with a political decision generated by the Roman Senate under the authoritarian direction of the Princeps; and it invites us to see these gods, in their interactions, as the typical political actors of Augustan Rome. Ovid re-inforces those political equations when he introduces his first "epic" simile to characterize the uproar that interrupted Jupiter's harangue (200 ff.). That makes it clear that the gods respond like Roman senators on a specific political occasion which the poet blandly evokes, but a writer like Tacitus would have developed with sardonic mastery. Jupiter has been the unscathed "victim" of a blundered assassination-attempt.⁴

We are familiar today with the way political leaders "orchestrate" their decisions, how they twist facts and simply lie, how they announce crucial actions after the event, and how their supporters and critics (if there are any that dare speak out) fashion their responses to please the leader and public opinion. Plots are not always real; they can be invented by a ruler or leader to get rid of rivals. In such murky and menacing situations, the prudent

⁴ It is still disputed what Roman Caesar we are to understand at 201. A. G. Lee, in his commentary on Book 1 (Cambridge 1968), *ad* 200, briefly weighs the evidence. Boemer discusses the problem more fully and finds it more likely that Augustus is meant than Julius Caesar, especially because of the probable symmetry of failed attempts. I follow Boemer's interpretation, as does Solodow p. 56. However, D. E. Hill (above, n. 1) opts for Julius Caesar and somewhat rashly asserts (p. 176): "There is no merit in the suggestion sometimes made that the reference is to one or other of the various attempts made on Augustus' life."

senator will follow the obvious cues of the "drama" and voice the expected indignation over the plot and its perpetrator, calling for the severest punishment.

As Jupiter opens his indignant mouth (181), the poet gives him a dramatic gesture reminiscent of Zeus in Homer:⁵

*terrificam capitis concussit terque quaterque
caesariem, cum qua terram, mare, sidera movit.* (179–80)

However, though reminiscent, it is significantly different. In Homer, Zeus does not wildly shake his hair: on the contrary, he nods his head, and at the nod his great mane of scented hair sweeps grandiosely back. The nod signifies solemn authority; the movement of the hair adds to the sense of majesty; and Olympus, the home of the gods, shakes with fear and reverence. Ovid has set up his description in 179–80 in a way to undermine Jupiter's majesty: he makes us focus on the hair instead of the head; he chooses a verb of wild motion (*concussit*) and a noun that is poetic (*caesariem*) but also reminds us of the link with the political scene in contemporary Rome; and he alliterates like mad. This great god does not, then, really act with the authority of Homer's Zeus or Vergil's Jupiter, for he neither nods firm assent nor confirms an assertion of his own; he is so wildly aroused that he rather resembles, with his convulsed shaking hair, so heavily alliterated, the frenzied Cretan Curetes and their heavily alliterated hair crests, which Lucretius described so memorably:

terrificas capitum quatientes numine cristas (2. 632).

The poet has emphasized Jupiter's self-righteousness and thus affected to make this a scene of theodicy, where divine justice surely operates. But Ovid's Jupiter cannot match up to the grandeur of his epic prototypes in Homer, Ennius, and Vergil. He quickly announces that he must destroy the race of mortals (187–88). This drastic decision is of considerable interest, but in varying degrees, to two audiences: Jupiter's divine council and Ovid's human readers. And whereas the gods can be manipulated by Jupiter's emotional rhetoric, we are more likely to keep insisting on an answer to our question: why must human beings all be destroyed? Jupiter introduces a medical analogy: if the human body has a diseased growth or limb that will not submit to medicine, but instead threatens to invade and disease other parts of the body, the only medical option is drastic surgery, removal of the diseased part before it is too late. We are all familiar with this rationale behind surgery in the case of cancer, gangrene, and other infections. Surgical "intervention" is the only way to save a life. Jupiter, accordingly,

⁵ Cf. *Iliad* 1. 528–30, in Lattimore's translation: "He spoke, the son of Kronos, and nodded his head with the dark brows, / and the immortally anointed hair of the great god / swept from his divine head, and all Olympus was shaken."

implies that he assumes the role of a concerned doctor. We are especially interested to hear him explain such radical surgery on men.

The initial elaboration and application of the medical analogy is not very re-assuring. Without clarifying the incurable nature of the human disease, the god explicates the "body" which he is concerned to preserve (192 ff.). I have, he says, a group of semigods (nymphs, fauns, satyrs, etc.) whom we don't allow to inhabit Olympus with us: we do not consider them worthy of that honor. This housing discrimination, which Jupiter blandly admits, seems to be based partly on the fact that these beings are not full gods, but very definitely also on the fact that they are crude rustics, not qualified to live in the urban mansions of this most civilized, most "Roman" of divine dwellings.

*sunt mihi semidei, sunt, numina rustica, Nymphae
Fauunique Satyrique et monticolae Silvani.* (192-93)

By putting the appositional phrase *numina rustica* at the head of the list, Ovid manages to convey the aristocratic snobbery in Jupiter. And he ends the list with a flamboyant adjective-noun unit that is too "poetic" to stand inspection. The adjective *monticolae* has never been seen before and will never be used again, by Ovid or any Latin writer. It combines with the three long syllables of the noun to produce a double-spondee ending of a most unorthodox type: a polysyllabic Latin formation + a trisyllable, which causes the metrical stress to fall roughly on the final syllable of the adjective. That, in turn, would tend to call attention to the special adjective which Ovid has here invented. It of course tells us where, if not in Olympus, the Silvani live; and it also sets up a clash between these rough mountaineers and Ovid's quite urbane human audience, us who feel rightly superior to these creatures whom Jupiter somewhat casually prefers to us. (As it turns out, Jupiter does not seem to figure out how to save these semigods when he sends the Flood and inundates not only the country haunts of nymphs and satyrs but overwhelms the mountains and their entire habitat of Earth.)

These semigods, then, constitute the important part of the "body" which Jupiter wishes to spare the contagion of human beings. The analogy may sound plausible, because we have heard earlier the poet describe the degeneracy of the Iron Age (127 ff.). However, when we start to ask how that "contagion" will spread, the fallacy of Jupiter's argument becomes manifest. Human beings do not normally in myth attack and pollute the semigods. Occasionally, nymphs become interested in human males and pursue them aggressively; occasionally, a faun like Pan disturbs human activities. But it is much more common for satyrs to chase after nymphs; and in Ovid's poem it is a rule of the early books that the gods, especially Jupiter, have erotic contact with innocent nymphs that leads to unwanted pregnancy and misery. So what in fact Jupiter desires to preserve is a private sphere where he and the other gods can exercise their corrupt lusts, a

"body" where gods can be the undisputed corrupters. There was and is no convincing danger to the semigods from human beings.

The apparent theodicy in Ovid's Council of the Gods at this prominent early position in the poem has been seriously undermined. Now let us turn to the "little theodicy" of Lycaon's crime and punishment. Jupiter is the narrator, it should be remembered, and he has an interest in presenting situations in black and white colors that favor himself and his sense of his justice. Hoping to find the corruption on earth less than was reported, he went down to check on conditions, and he took a human form. But things were even worse than he had heard (215). Eventually he came to the kingdom of Lycaon in Arcadia. When he entered the palace, he indicated in some fashion that he was a god. For all the ordinary people, this was sufficient: they began to pray. But Lycaon ridiculed their piety and declared that he would test the so-called divinity of this guest. The test involved one perpetrated crime and another planned. At dinner that night, Lycaon served Jupiter the cooked flesh of a human hostage he had killed; and after dinner, when his guest was asleep, Lycaon intended to attack and kill him (if he were human). There is no question that Lycaon lived up to his reputation for bestial savagery, but it is clear that Jupiter was never seriously endangered and, in his omniscience, was able at any time to punish the evil king. Which he did as soon as the human meat was set in front of him; Lycaon never had a chance to attack the sleeping god. Thus, the terrible "plot" that Jupiter finally reveals to the council of gods was nothing but a plot: it never got beyond the planning stages before Justice stepped in and crushed it.

Jupiter's story causes some difficulties for itself, but in the main it does sound like a simple account of Good (Jupiter) vs. Evil (Lycaon). We might sympathize with Lycaon's incredulity about this guest in human form. We might wonder what convincing sign Jupiter gave of his divinity; and it would not be inappropriate to remember that, in other versions of the myth, the god chose this occasion to rape Callisto, Lycaon's daughter. That would not exactly be the sign of divinity that the god would want us to be thinking of as he proceeded in his narration. The contrast between naively superstitious common people and the one suspicious realist can usually be rigged against the individual, as here and in the myth of Pentheus in Book 3, but it need not be. Had Lycaon only been suspicious, we might have approved of him. But he made that suspicion criminally impious by what he then did. So he deserved his punishment.

The punishment-phase of this theodicy exhibits some definite signs of divine clumsiness and inelegance. As soon as the human flesh appears for eating at the table, Jupiter acts. He uses his normal weapon, the thunderbolt (*vindice flamma* 230), to strike at Lycaon. However, since Lycaon is inside his palace and Jupiter presumably has risen to the sky—though the narrator does not explain the problem—, the thunderbolt can be imagined as crashing down from outdoors. At any rate, it misses the culprit

entirely, smashing first down on the palace and causing its roof to fall in on everything below. Jupiter reports with some righteous satisfaction that the collapsing roof struck in particular the household gods; he claims that they "deserved their master" (*domino dignos . . . penates* 231). However, that is a significantly trivial viewpoint of gods for the Supreme Deity to express: to suggest that household gods serve the houseowner and are tainted by his moral character. Some of the commentators, like Boemer, ignore this comic theological error of Jupiter and insist that we are to interpret *penates* in an exclusively figurative fashion as part of the palace. But they then imagine what happens to the simple pious ordinary people inside the ruined building: they must have been innocent victims of Jupiter's wrath, while Lycaon escaped to the woods unscathed.⁶ In any case, the notorious thunderbolt proves a pretty ineffective instrument, no matter what Jupiter may claim about the Penates.

Continuing his story, Jupiter admits that Lycaon fled in terror into the open countryside. There is no indication that Lycaon had any awareness that Jupiter's justice had caused the collapse of the palace and that then he was consciously fleeing punishment. He acted no differently from the panicky survivors of earthquakes, who abandon their homes and make for the open, away from all dangerous structures. When he reached the country, he began to change, to become the literal beast which most closely fitted the bestiality of his character. Most readers have assumed that Jupiter caused this metamorphosis, which then would clearly support a sense of theodicy; since the punishment has supremely fitted the crime, and the *feritas* for which Lycaon was notorious at his introduction (198) becomes his characteristic *imago* (239), justice has triumphed. That indeed is the simple-minded way in which Hyginus does report the transformation.⁷ However, either Jupiter proves singularly incompetent as a narrator of his own great achievements or Ovid slyly raises a doubt about theodicy: nowhere does Jupiter declare that he caused any of the changes.⁸

What clearly emerges in the process of metamorphosis is the impression of logical origin and continuity. The mouth exhibits wildness (*rabiem* 234) that has been taken over directly from Lycaon; and he practices

⁶ Boemer refers to the "drastic metonymy" by which *penates* is made by Ovid to refer to a part of the palace; and he mentions with sympathy Bentley's conjecture *ministros*, which would have removed the problem (and, of course, the meaning which, I think, Ovid in fact sought). Boemer, *ad* 230, claims that Ovid's awkward effort to combine his mythological sources led to the inconsistency, "dass der Blitz das unschuldige *vulgus* (I 220) trifft; den Lycaon dagegen erreicht die Strafe erst auf der Flucht." Ovid says nothing about the fate of the ordinary people.

⁷ Hyginus 176 ends his account of Lycaon by saying that Jupiter changed him into a wolf. Apollodorus 3. 8. 1. 6 says, on the other hand, that, when the king and his sons served Zeus the flesh of a murdered local child, the god overturned the table and struck them all dead with his thunderbolt. Thus, there was no metamorphosis.

⁸ Ovid, whether through Jupiter's narration or by any intrusive comment of his own, does not allow it to be said that Jupiter or any personal force caused Lycaon's metamorphosis. This point has been ably made by Solodow (above, n. 2), 168-69.

his customary murderous ways, but now against cattle, still lusting for blood. After Jupiter briefly describes how the king turns into a shaggy quadruped, the sameness of this beast's basic nature receives full emphasis (238-39). Now, we may conclude from all that detail that this transformation is a condign punishment, which just Jupiter in theodicy has visited on him.⁹ But we might consider some alternate explanations: e. g.,

1. It would really have been more just if Lycaon had been eliminated right at the start by the thunderbolt. After all, he was a murderer with no excuse.
2. Metamorphosis is a perpetuation of that bestiality which has already done enough damage to human beings; why is it just to shift its operation against innocent animals? Doesn't Lycaon continue to get pleasure?
3. Although Lycaon has been "reduced" to an animal which lives out his essential blood-thirsty bestiality, he did escape, in a real sense, the angry punishment of Jupiter (precisely that annihilation which Jupiter's strange logic now demands and carries out against the rest of mankind, men, women, and children, guilty and innocent alike). It is possible, then, that metamorphosis may not necessarily be connected with the gods or with justice.

As Boemer remarks, the story of Lycaon's transformation is the one story that Jupiter narrates. Placed as it is by Ovid in the context of this epic Council of the Gods, he seems to demand our serious attention and to promise the theodicy that many readers have assigned it. I believe, however, that Ovid chose this context and this narrator for his first metamorphosis in order to raise, then disappoint and re-direct our expectations. The details that I have singled out undermine the solemnity and moral authority of the Council and of the Supreme Deity, and the way the story of Lycaon develops denies the working of theodicy: Jupiter's thunderbolt misses its primary target and victimizes the innocent household gods and pious ordinary people, and the metamorphosis just happens, letting Lycaon's bestiality escape to bedevil the animal world forever. Nevertheless, even if Ovid's reader, after listening to Jupiter's clumsy and biased narrative, misses the clues planted by the skeptical poet and believes that theodicy functions in this Ovidian poem and specifically in the rationale of metamorphosis, the stories that follow decisively call for a re-adjustment of expectations.

The Flood itself constitutes a botched and distorted theodicy. Jupiter again realizes the inefficacy of his thunderbolt and resorts to torrential rains. Although those rains, with the help of Neptune's overflowing rivers, do their deadly task, they sweep up the innocent animals in their ruin and would appear to have made Earth uninhabitable for the semigods (about whom Jupiter professed such great concern, 192 ff.). The tone of the

⁹ Jupiter does say, in answer to the outcry of assembled gods, that Lycaon has paid the penalty (209). Such a statement, however, is capable of several interpretations; we must not rule out the possibility that Ovid lets the god misinterpret events and imply at this point more than the situation actually warrants.

narration, which shocked Seneca, remains light and distant, ignoring all the obvious pain and panic which any human being would attribute to the scene, quite indifferent to the theme of justice or to the suffering of the innocent.¹⁰

The clearest revision of the false paradigm in Lycaon's crime and punishment starts with the series of erotic stories that occupy the last third of Book 1. Although Apollo's love for Daphne strikes him unwittingly and affects him, at first, much as love subdues the elegiac lover, it turns into rapist pursuit when politeness and courtly ardor prove useless. Transformed into a virtual beast or bird of prey, the god is about to seize the nymph and gratify his lust when her prayer to her parents produces her metamorphosis, which permits at least escape from sexual violation. However, much as the meaning of this transformation has been debated, no reader construes it as theodicy. The nymph has been utterly innocent—let us not argue that virginity should be viewed as some sort of moral fault—, and her freedom has been attacked, her body reduced to wood and branches, and that new form possessed by her would-be rapist. Apollo suffers no punishment for the pain he has caused Daphne and her family: mildly frustrated in his lust, he still ends up as Daphne's possessor. Thus, this first story of divine love demonstrates that nymphs were always more endangered by amoral gods, that gods can commit crimes with impunity, and do, and that metamorphoses have little or nothing to do with morality and justice.

The second story makes these points even more sharply, because it features Jupiter himself, shows him as a successful and amoral rapist, capable of twisting ethical terminology (cf. 617 ff.), and makes the innocent nymph, not the god, the victim of a metamorphosis which, itself manifestly unjust, then initiates a train of suffering for Io the cow while her divine lover continues to deny his responsibility. Jupiter approaches Io in some indefinite but visible form and identifies himself as a god, not a lower plebeian deity but the one who controls the heavens with his sceptre and shoots thunderbolts (595–96). Such detail invites us to think back to the flawed "theodicy" of the earlier Council and to the occasion when he visited Lycaon, gave a sign of his deity (he claimed), and was greeted by scornful laughter by the king. Io does not believe this speaker either. So he rapes her, transforms her into a cow, and, when he gets a confused attack of ethics, delivers the animal over to the savage jealousy of Juno. The metamorphosis is, if anything, the proof of divine injustice. The only continuity between Io and the cow, registered in a curiously inept parenthetical remark, 612, that serves to emphasize this inhuman injustice, consists in the beauty of both nymph and beast. Needless to say, however,

¹⁰ Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 3. 27. 13, praised parts of Ovid's account of the Flood, but harshly attacked 1. 304 as "childish incompetence," continuing with this explanation of his criticism: *non est res satis sobria lascivire devorato orbe terrarum*. For a more penetrating analysis of Ovid's Flood, see Solodow pp. 122 ff.

the beauty is not of the same order, and Io, retaining her human consciousness inside that bovine form, does not find herself beautiful at all (cf. 640–41). Jupiter does have a sneaking realization that he has done wrong, though not so much to Io as to his bitchy wife Juno, but he has no capacity to face and rectify his guilt. After Io has been harried over the landscape, about to give birth, she groans piteously and prays that the god end *her* punishment (735). He then finally negotiates with Juno. Notice the dishonest way in which he speaks:

*"numquam tibi causa doloris
haec erit" et Stygias iubet hoc audire paludes. (736–37)*

After the enjambement, the pronoun should have been *ego* (or some metrically appropriate reference to Jupiter). By twisting the subject to the innocent Io, the victim of Juno's wrath, the god distracts his wife (but not us) from the obvious fact that he has left himself free to commit repeated adulteries. And the oath by the Styx, another trivialization of the solemn epic vow, as earlier during the Council (cf. 188–89), merely emphasizes the ethical vacuity of this Ovidian Jupiter.

We need not go into the third and briefer erotic story, which Ovid designs as a clever repetition of theme: namely, the account of the chase of Syrinx by the lustful Pan, her avoidance of rape by transformation into a reed (689–712). This simply illustrates the fact that there is no safety or justice among the semigods. The metamorphosis once again victimizes the innocent nymph; the male deity, on the other hand, gets compensated for his frustration by being given the reed as a musical plaything. So much for theodicy as a paradigm in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. So much for an ethical rationale behind metamorphosis.

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At an early point in his first book, where his epic forebears Homer, Ennius, and Vergil introduce the gods in council or in well-deliberated action (the *Aeneid*), defining a moral order that prevails in human affairs and even constrains the gods, Ovid provides his Jupiter with a speciously similar occasion and an opportunity to present a theodicy. Jupiter declares his bitter hostility to all human beings, his determination to wipe them out because they are irredeemably corrupt. Both his wildly angry mood and gestures and his extreme decision disagree with the normally positive, helpful nature of divine action at the start of other epic. Jupiter then goes on to recount the story of Lycaon's criminal behavior, from which he gets most of his indignation. Because the god raves about punishment, readers have tended until recently to regard Lycaon's metamorphosis into a wolf as a penalty inflicted by Jupiter. In fact, as Jupiter narrates it in Ovid's careful version, the god used his thunderbolt ineptly on the palace where Lycaon dined, causing it to collapse on pious servants and innocent household gods, but utterly missing the king, who fled outdoors. At that point, Jupiter's

specific part in what happens to Lycaon ends; Ovid does not let the god claim, even when he is the narrator, that he changed man into wolf. If the god's role in the metamorphosis can be challenged, then it is also legitimate to question the assumption that this first metamorphosis in Ovid's poem is an intelligent punishment, a possible model of theodicy for future transformations. Instead, I have argued that Jupiter's story, like his behavior at the Council of the Gods, contains so many problems for a theory of theodicy that Ovid's audience should have been alerted. Then, as he continued with the stories of divine abuse of nymphs, in which rape is perpetrated with impunity and foiled rape compensated, in which metamorphosis is visited upon victims rather than criminals and involves a drastic violation of ethical standards respected by any Roman audience, it would have become clear that the flaws in the pseudo-paradigm set forth by Jupiter are in fact the rule: the gods of Ovid do not operate within ethical boundaries, and indeed they regularly act in ways that would earn human beings severe punishment; metamorphosis cannot be simply allegorized or viewed as a clear punishment or reward. There are disturbing ethical problems in Ovid's stories, but neither what the gods say nor what people experience provides a clear ethical interpretation. Instead, the audience must keep using its own ethical perceptions to come to grips with the dismayingly incomplete morality of events as Ovid narrates them.

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