The Suppliant’s Voice and Gesture in Vergil and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

WILLIAM S. ANDERSON

The Greeks and Romans believed that the emotions behind prayer and supplication resulted in universally recognizable gestures, which appear in Homeric poetry, then in Greek art and tragedy, and continue on into Roman art and literature. Because the gods were imagined to be above, human beings lifted up their hands and arms to the sky or heaven or Olympus when they appealed for divine help. In later times, when the gods were represented by physical images, acted on stage, or depicted in poetry and picture as anthropomorphic figures, there was little distinction between the positions of the two, and so the person praying would simply hold the hands out to the deity. Similarly, when one human being implored another human being for help or mercy or pity, the two were normally on the same physical level, and the supplicant extended his or her hands out to the other.

In the prose writers of Vergil’s youth, Cicero and Caesar, the language for representing prayer-gestures was already routine: One phrase, *manus tendere*, served all occasions, whether in fact the supplicant was holding out hands to the gods in heaven or to some military victor on earth. Although Catullus had ample opportunities to depict this gesture, notably in the desperate moments when Attis awoke from his frenzy in Poem 63 and Ariadne from her blissful sleep on Naxos in Poem 64, he had other concerns. And Lucretius had no need or desire to describe prayer when he was combating the very irrationality that he believed lay behind most

---


2. Sittl (previous note) 187 cites ps.-Aristotle *De Mundo* 6, 400a16 as the earliest comment on the universal prayer-gesture.

3. Caesar *BG* 7. 40. 6 and 7. 48. 3, *BC* 2. 5. 3 and 2. 11. 4; Cicero *Cat.* 4. 18.
religious activity. However, even if we now lack evidence for the Latin poetic repertoire that rendered the movement of the hands in prayer before Vergil, we may reasonably expect that it was somewhat more versatile than simple *manus tendere*.

I. Gesture and Prayer in the *Aeneid*

In the *Aeneid* Vergil continues the preferential use of the verb *tendere*, regardless of whether the speaker appeals to the gods in heaven (*ad caelum* or dative *caelo*) and among the stars (*ad sidera*) or to other human beings. Twice the poet uses the perfect form of *tollerere*, but he does not seem to aim at any particular effect other than variation in fixing on the “lifting” hands. In the final scene of the poem, to which I shall return, Turnus’ gesture of appeal gets the compound verb *protendens*, and that, we may suspect, has a special nuance.

Whereas the verb in the Vergilian gesture remains quite uniform, the description of the hands is freer. The standard phrase of prose, *manus tendere*, occurs often, but its utility is of course limited by its adaptability to the hexameter. Since the first syllable of *manus* is short, it must be preceded by a word whose final syllable is short; the noun cannot be the initial or the final word of any line. In practice, Vergil dealt with this matter smoothly: He would begin a new clause with the preceding word and attach to its ending the connective -*que* or he would expand the phrase to *cum voce manus*, thus satisfying the meter and also introducing the words of the prayer along with the gesture. Nevertheless, he preferred to use a synonym that consisted of two long syllables and allowed him more flexibility, namely, *palmas*. The palms, being more specific, were also more poetically expressive and more vivid to the imagination than ordinary hands. In the final appeal of Turnus in Book 12, before using his preferred *tenderere palmas* (936), Vergil tries the unusual and therefore more affecting *dextramque precantem / protendens* (930–31).

It remains to add that Vergil also sometimes attached an adjective to the hands (cf. above, 12. 930 *precantem*) or to the person performing the gesture and speaking the words of a suppliant. In making his or her appeal, the person praying extends both hands, and the poet notes that fact by using the adjectives * duplicis* or * utrasque*, the choice depending on the meter. Fixing on the hands more precisely, Vergil may note that they are

---

4 At 5. 1200–01 Lucretius does reluctantly and disapprovingly describe the prayer-gesture, with alliterative language that may well reflect the poet at work: *pandere palmas / ante deum delabra*.

5 F. A. Sullivan, “*Tenderere manus*: Gestures in the *Aeneid*,” *CJ* 63 (1967–68) 358–62, has collected much of this material and discussed some of the passages briefly, reaching different conclusions from mine in most cases.

6 For *duplicis*, *Aen.* 1. 93, 9. 16, 10. 667; for *utrasque*, 5. 233, 6. 685.
supinas, with palms up and the backs turned to the ground. He can generate pathos by calling the hands helpless (inertes 10. 596) or by attaching an adjective like infelix to the person in prayer. Finally, he may emphasize the suppliant posture by adding the word supplex (3. 592, 12. 930).

Vergil regularly uses the prayer-gesture as introduction to a prayerful speech, to the gods, to another human being present who is asked to help in some way, and sometimes to absent people, dead or alive, or abstract powers, who are apostrophized. From this fairly stereotyped basis, the skillful poet can move out in different experimental directions, to achieve special effects. It is these unusual effects that I shall briefly review. The first instance of gesture and speech occurs in 1. 92–96:

extemplo Aeneae solvuntur frigore membra;
ingemnit et duplicis tendens ad sidera palmas
talía voce referit: "o terque quaterque beati,
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis
contigint oppetere! . . ."

Although the gesture is virtually identical with that of Turnus in 9. 16, which introduces a genuine prayer, Aeneas, who is here being dramatically presented to us for the first time, is in a state of total despair, unable to appeal to the gods, capable only of calling out to the Trojans who, as he implies, had the good luck to die and be buried in their native land. This is not pius Aeneas; he will have to earn that identity as we watch. In the storm of Book 1 he is helpless and must be rescued, without any action on his part, by benevolent Neptune. Later, on the other hand, in Book 5, when Juno again acts to persuade the Trojan women to fire the ships in Sicily, Aeneas does not indulge his despair, but immediately prays to Jupiter for help; and Vergil assigns him his rightful epithet (5. 685–87):

tum pius Aeneas umeris abscindere vestem
auxilioque vocare deos et tendere palmas:
"Iuppiter omnipotens . . ."

And Jupiter immediately responds with assistance, a rainstorm that puts out the fire.

In Book 2 Vergil describes the way Sinon works on the gullible Trojans. In the first two parts of his clever speech, the villain wins the pity of his captors, who release him from his chains and ply him with questions about the Horse (as he had planned). As he prepares to tell his ruinous lies, Sinon, a consummate actor, plays the role of the truly pious (and therefore trustworthy) man (152–57):

7 Tendoque supinas / ad caelum cum voce manus 3. 177.
8 Tendebat inertes / infelix palmas 10. 596–97.
9 Servius auctus somewhat dully complains about Aeneas’ irreverence in failing to pray as the gesture requires.
ille dolis instructus et arte Pelasga
sustulit exutas vinculis ad sidera palmas:
“vos aeterni ignes, et non violabile vestrum
testor numen,” ait, “vos arae ensesque nefandi,
quos fugi, vitiaque deum, quas hostia gessi:
fas mihi Graiorum sacra resolvere iura . . .”

Here, Vergil calls attention to the hands that have just been freed, for Sinon pretends to be grateful and tricks the Trojans by his seeming gratitude and pious words. An impious man is at work here, abusing both the words and actions of normal piety.

When, thanks to Sinon, the Horse is taken into Troy and its warriors emerge to bring about the city’s fall and capture, Vergil achieves a very special and famous scene with an altered prayer-gesture. He narrates how Cassandra is treated, dragged from the temple where she has been priestess, her hair wildly disarrayed (2. 405–06):

ad caelum tendens ardentia lumina frustra,
lumina, nam teneras arcebant vincula palmas.

In her role as both priestess and victim, Cassandra might naturally resort to fervent prayer for help. By contrast with slimy Sinon, however, she is bound, and so her hand-gesture is frustrated, and Vergil symbolically also silences the words of her prayer. The innocent remains bound and unable to reach the gods, while the guilty, freed of his bonds, exults in his impious lies. By commenting expressly in the nam-clause of 406 on the anomaly of the woman’s futile look at the sky, Vergil reminds his audience of the usual gesture-language, ad caelum tendens palmas,10 and he lays the groundwork for the many abortive gestures which Ovid will develop in his Metamorphoses.

In Book 10, after Pallas falls beneath Turnus’ spear, Aeneas goes wild with vengeful anger. He spurns the appeal of Magus for mercy; he barbarously butchers the priest of Apollo and Diana—and Vergil emphasizes the paradoxical behavior by the verb that should go with priestly sacrifice, immolat (10. 541); and he takes on two overconfident brothers, Lucagus and Liger. Aeneas’ spear downs Lucagus, and Vergil, calling him pius Aeneas (591), has the Trojan taunt the dying man. Then, it is the turn of Liger, who has been serving as the unarmed charioteer (595–98):

frater tendebat inertis
infelix palmas currui delapsus eodem:
“per te, per qui te talem genuere parentes,
vir Troiane, sine hanc animam et miserere precantis.”

10 Servius auctus dutifully comments on the normal gesture.
Not content with the objective adjective *inertis*, which represents accurately the helplessness of a charioteer, Vergil also includes in the scene his subjective *inflexi*, which almost inevitably engages our sympathies with Aeneas’ victim. So when Aeneas spurns the gesture and the verbal appeal and, as the poet puts it, after a second taunt, opens up the man’s chest with his sword, his famous *pietas* comes seriously under question.

Aeneas emerges as superior to Turnus in the treatment of a young and brave foe: Turnus’ disrespect for Pallas’ body and armor differs sharply from Aeneas’ sympathetic tenderness for Lausus’ self-sacrifice and for his corpse (cf. 10. 821 ff.). Aeneas also differs strikingly from the father of Lausus, Mezentius the scorners of the gods. Mezentius expresses his blasphemy as he responds sardonically to a dying enemy (10. 743–44) and as he prepares to encounter Aeneas and addresses his own right arm and spear as gods, whose presence he “prays for” (773–74). But at the moment when he learns of Lausus’ death and bitterly condemns himself, his gesture of despair might be misinterpreted (844–45):

```
canitiem multo deformat pulvere et ambas
ad caelum tendit palmas et corpore inhaeret.
```

Mezentius’ hand-gesture closely resembles the abortive moves of Cassandra and a definite scene of gesture and prayer by Aeneas in 3. 177 ff. And it has been interpreted as a sign of his tragic defeat, of his return to prayer. However, in the words that the Etruscan now speaks, Vergil makes it obvious that he does not pray: He apostrophizes his dead son in the corpse and expresses despair, but no reverence for any god. Lausus is the only person who means anything to him. Though he has lost him and is desolate, he does not abandon his contempt for the gods. Far from defining his conversion, then, the gesture, much like the first gesture of Aeneas to the stars in 1. 93, reminds us of Mezentius’ godless loneliness and identity with the dead.

The final scene between Aeneas and Turnus includes a special description of the prayer-gesture that precedes the very special appeal of Turnus to his conqueror (12. 930–32, 938–39):

```
ille humilis supplicesque oculos dextramque precantem
protendens “equidem merui nec deprecor” inquit;
“utere sorte tua . . .”

stetit acer in armis
Aeneas volvens oculos dextramque repessit.
```

When Turnus describes his own gesture at 936, he declares that he has extended both hands and that everybody could see it: *victum tendere palmas / Ausonii videre*. Why, since the meter allowed it, did Vergil not use

---

11 Sullivan (above, note 5) rejects Servius’ interpretation: *increpans deos, quasi sacrilegus*. I would, too, without adopting Sullivan’s conclusions.
palmasque precantes in 930? This is the only instance in the poem where he so alters both terms of the customary phrase. It seems obvious that the compound form of *tendere* is more expressive. The emphasis on the right hand serves at least two purposes in addition to denoting prayer. First, that pleading right hand has dropped its sword and dramatizes the total helplessness of the once-proud warrior, now crippled and defenseless. Second, as the description of Aeneas, which I cited, suggests, the swordless right hand of Turnus and his humble prayer evoke an immediate response from the right hand of Aeneas, which he has poised for the killing stroke. He checks his hand, pulls it back, sincerely affected by that extended hand of Turnus. Vergil has placed *dextramque* each time in the same metrical position, with a verb following and *oculos* preceding.

The stress on Turnus’ eyes adds to the power of this scene. In the usual prayer-vocabulary of the poem, Vergil has ignored the eyes, although we can easily imagine a pleading look that would accompany the hand-gesture and verbal entreaty. Only where Cassandra was bound and prevented from using her hands has the poet ostentatiously substituted the eyes and still used, in a daring manner, the verb *tendere* (cf. 2. 405–06). That precedent allows us to explain the grammar of *oculos* in 930 as an instance of zeugma\(^\text{12}\) with the verb *protendens*, though we could also suggest that *oculos* functions with *supplex* as accusative of specification. The pleading look of Turnus, then, elicits from Aeneas’ eyes a rolling motion that betrays his hesitation.\(^\text{13}\) Unfortunately for Turnus, Aeneas’ sympathetic reaction to Turnus’ appeal is his first response; his second is triggered by the sight of Pallas’ baldric on Turnus, at which he erupts in a short angry speech, stabbing his enemy in the chest while speaking.\(^\text{14}\)

These passages from Vergil indicate that he established prayer and prayer-gestures as a significant and serious form of communication between human beings and gods and among human beings. Prayers for help and for mercy merit hearing and evoke in Vergil’s audience a sympathetic response. The misuse of prayer by Sinon awakens antipathy. Refusal by a human being of another’s appeal, even of an enemy’s, as Aeneas, in different ways, rejects the pleas of helpless Liger and fallen Turnus, stirs mixed feelings in us, most particularly, of course, at the end of the epic, when the first inclination to mercy proves abortive and is replaced by savage killing. Using the stereotyped language for prayer-gestures, the poet gains emphasis by fixing on anomalies: on the failure of Aeneas to pray at his first opportunity; on Mezentius’ dreadful remorse that still proudly refuses to invoke the despised gods; on Cassandra’s frustrated gesture and silenced

\(^{\text{12}}\) So R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (London 1973), in his note on these lines.


\(^{\text{14}}\) That is the obvious implication of *hoc vulnere* (948) and of the present participle, *hoc dicens* (950).
appeal with the eyes; and on the combined entreaty, of hand and eyes, by Turnus that does earn a first humane response from Aeneas of eyes and hand.

II. Abortive Gesture and Prayer in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*

If *pietas* and the impassioned needs of prayer are the standards in the *Aeneid*, from which the hero and the poet move only in exceptional circumstances that serve to reinforce the accepted value of prayer and the importance of the divine realm over human beings, in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid makes a theme of the way human expectations from prayer suffer regular violation, most notably from the gods themselves. Prayer-contexts form a very common scenario in Ovid’s poem, and he enriches the Vergilian language for the situation. He uses the epithet *supplex* to emphasize the situation of supplication, focusing like Vergil on the one who prays as subject.\(^\text{15}\) But he often also turns the entreatee into the object and collects a series of accusative participial clauses around him or her before revealing the violent verb that cruelly destroys all. Consider little Learchus and Itys (4. 516–19 and 6. 639–41):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{deque sinu matris ridentem et parva Learchum} \\
\text{bracchia tendentem rapit . . .} \\
\ldots \text{rotat . . .} \\
\text{discutit ora . . .}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{tendentemque manus et iam sua fata videntem} \\
\text{et “mater, mater” clamantem et colla petentem} \\
\text{ense ferit Procne.}
\]

Ovid brings out the grim irony in the first passage, that Learchus does not anticipate what is going to happen and happily holds out his arms to his father, just asking to be picked up and cherished. The crazed Athamas does snatch him up, but only to smash his brains out. In the case of Itys, the boy senses what his mother intends and uses every means at his command to break through her madness and make her respond as mother. But all four participles are negated by the one verb of stabbing. Thus, Ovid does not use so much the single pathetic adjective, but rather forces on his audience by these fuller descriptive details and by his new grammatical presentation a much more insistent response.

Vergil had limited himself to two words for the hands in the prayer-gesture, which could serve as metrical alternatives, the iambic *manus* and the spondaic *palmas*. And he contented himself with the simple verb *tendere*. Ovid uses both *manus* and *palmas*, but, probably because he seeks to expand the dactylic range of his hexameter, he prefers the dactylic

\(^{15}\) E.g. Callisto: *tendebat bracchia supplex* 2. 477.
bracchia. He is the first Latin writer, in prose or poetry, to make elaborate use of the arms in his prayer-descriptions. The two passages which I have just cited show Ovid employing the two words, “arms” and “hands,” without apparent distinction (other than meter and order) in virtually identical situations. The poet continues to use tendere as the principal verb for the gesture, but he also often chooses the metrically equal but denotatively different tollere, especially when the prayer goes to a god in heaven, not one present on earth. I find one instance of dextram in a prayer context. Since it comes in the form dextramque precantis, at the end of a hexameter, I suspect that Ovid echoes the scene of Turnus at Aeneid 12.930, and it will repay us to compare the way the two poets worked out their situations of desperate appeal. Ovid describes the bloody end of Pentheus (3.719–25):

saucius ille tamen “fer opem, matertera” dixit
“Autonoe! moveant animos Actaeonis umbrael!”
illa, quis Actaeon, nescit dextramque precantis
abstulit, Inno lacerata est altera raptu.
non habet infelix, quae matri bracchia tendat,
trunca sed ostendens deiectis vulnera membris
“adspice, mater!” ait. 725

Vergil isolated the actions of Turnus’ appeal in a separate sentence, so he gave the “praying right hand” its own special verb, protendens. Then he showed Aeneas starting to answer it humanely in gesture and look, also in a separate sentence. Here, Ovid works quite differently. The wounded Pentheus addresses what in Ovid’s poem is a formulaic prayer for help, fer opem, to his aunt, reminding her of her own recently dead son Actaeon. She is too crazed to recognize the name of her own son, let alone the humanity of Pentheus. Now, we hear of the prayer-gesture (721) and immediately, after the run-on, the verb changes the focused Vergilian viewpoint and turns Pentheus into the typical Ovidian victim, violated as he prays. The very right hand with which he pleads becomes a bloody stump as we watch: With superhuman maenad strength, Autonoe has wrenched it off. Ino does the same with the left. He had been holding both arms out in prayer (cf. 723); his family rejects him grotesquely and wordlessly, with no such poignant motivation as Vergil assigns to Aeneas in Aeneid 12. Ovid goes on to elaborate the frustration of the appeal of handless Pentheus to his mother. Deaf to him, as Procne to Iys, she tears off his head. That is the final answer to his anguished prayers. What in Vergil was a special, understandable, but regrettable violation of human entreaty, to capture the great issues of the epic in supreme starkness, has become for Ovid an all too regular theme. Human beings behave inhumanly toward each other, crazed

16 I find no instances in Vergil, Caesar, Cicero, or Livy.
17 Cf. 2. 487, 3. 404, 9. 175, 10. 580.
by their passions or possessed by the terrible hatred of the Ovidian gods. As he describes their rejection of prayer, Ovid epitomizes their inhumanity.

In the death of Pentheus, the agents are human beings, the female members of his family, whose superhuman strength comes from their religious frenzy. They do not know what they are doing. Ovid does not say or imply, in contrast to the themes of Euripides in the Bacchae, that they are carrying out the vengeful will of their god Bacchus. From the way he lets his narrator join in the hymn to the god shortly after this (4. 17 ff.), we may well infer that he exempts Bacchus from the charge of cruelty. Pentheus has not remorsefully prayed to the god, and we cannot assert that Ovid has shown the god spurning prayer. Earlier in the poem, however, that had been precisely the Ovidian theme: that the gods abort and pervert human prayer in the most appalling and grotesque manner.

The first instance of this perversion involves Io. Unlike Calvus before him, who anthropomorphized the cow that Io had become and addressed it with a variety of pathetic fallacies,18 Ovid makes the important innovation of presenting human beings who have suffered metamorphosis and retain, when they become animals, their human consciousness inside the animal form, and thus are fully aware of the poignant frustrations which the poet delineates. Io inside the bovine form knows that she has been raped, that in her innocence she has been turned into a cow by guilty Jupiter, and that, further to conceal his guilt, Jupiter has delivered her over to the savagery of suspicious Juno. Three times in the narrative Io’s human instincts impel her toward prayer that she cannot consummate. Ovid uses those scenes as marks against Jupiter above all, to suggest that, in raping and changing Io, he has bestialized her and himself, ending the proper Vergilian communication between almighty god and needy human beings (1. 635–38):

\[
\text{illa etiam supplex Argo cum brachia vellet} \\
\text{tendere, non habuit, quae brachia tenderet Argo,} \\
\text{et conata queri mugitus edidit ore} \\
\text{pertimuitque sonos propriaque exterrita voce est.}
\]

This first description in Ovid’s poem of prayer proves to be one of total frustration. In a line (636) that anticipates the grotesque scene of Pentheus’ handless stumps, Io fails to make the routine gesture because she has hooves and cannot extend them like human hands or arms. What should follow the prayer-gesture, of course, would be the words of appeal, but her miserable sounds emerge as somewhat comic mooing, sounds which, being so entirely unnatural to Io, terrify her. Io’s frustration, which will eventually end in release, can be dismissed as merely comic by some readers,19 but it points

---

18 Calvus, fr. 9 M, a virgo infelix, herbis pasceris amaris; to which we can compare Ovid’s objective description (1. 632) of the human feelings inside the cow.

19 Bömer ad 635 offers us the choice of grotesque, highly comic, or tasteless.
for Ovid to the later ugliness of the miseries and ends of Callisto, Actaeon
and Pentheus.

Unable to communicate with her guardian Argus, Io is driven and
wanders until she comes to the river bank where her father Inachus stands.
Here again frustration in communicating with a beloved family member
anticipates such tragic scenes as those of Leachus and Itys. Inachus sees
only a tame cow and offers it grass (not at all what she likes; 646–50):

illa manus lambit patriisque dat oscula palmis
nee retinet lacrimas, et, si modo verba sequantur,
oret opem nomenque suum casusque loquatur;
littera pro verbis, quam pes in pulvere duxit,
corpus pro verbis. 650

equinam

She tries to give human kisses and shed human tears, but we can easily
imagine how Inachus greeted them, and Ovid permits us to smile at Io
(since we know the happy outcome of her temporary suffering). She would
like to ask for help and tell her story at length, but again the animal form
denies verbal communication. Then, in a moment of human ingenuity that
overcomes the animal limitations, she turns her hooves (which still cannot
achieve the prayer-gesture) into writing instruments, and she manages to
trace on the ground the two simple letter-forms that spell her name Io.
Inachus at least can then voice his sorrow, until Argus forcibly separates
father and cow-daughter.

At the end of her endurance, still pursued by Juno even after Mercury
has released her from Argus (by murder), Io slumps on the banks of the Nile
(729–33):

quem simulac tetigit, positisque in margine ripae
proculbuit genibus resupinoque ardua collo,
quos potuit solos, tollens ad sidera vultus
et gemitu et laetimis et luctisono mugitu
cum lave visa queri finemque orare malorum. 730

Again, Ovid develops the material of the abortive prayer. Io is kneeling as
best she can; she is trying to lift her eyes to heaven. In 731 the poet avails
himself of Vergil’s inventiveness in the Cassandra-scene, but the pathos of
this cow hampered by its non-human hooves is not supposed to match that
of manacled Cassandra, any more than the myth agrees emotionally with the
realistic scene of warfare at Troy. The abortive gesture leads to what seems
abortive, surely comic prayer. The three nouns of 732 all give detail
connected with the voicing of an entreaty, and the first two ambivalently
refer to both human and animal behavior. The third, set with a unique
Ovidian compound into a striking double spondee ending, makes for a
wonderful anticlimax. All that promise resulted in mournful mooring. But
then Ovid doubles the surprise. The cow seemed to communicate with
Jupiter; in fact, she did reach him and at last move him, so that she soon turns back into a woman (cf. 738 ff.).

Jupiter won over Juno to allow him to rescue Io by promising that he would never get involved with Io again. True to his words in his own way, he does not amuse himself with Io any more, but he soon has another target and consciously ignores his duty to Juno (that had clearly been established by the crisis over Io). 20 He disguises himself impiously as the revered goddess Diana and rapes her devoted attendant Callisto. Having suffered this divine abuse, Callisto encounters a series of others. Her own patroness Diana spurns her without consideration of her innocence and drives her away. When her baby is born, Juno swoops down and proceeds to harry her (2. 476–84):

\[
\text{dixit [sc. Juno] et adversa prenxis a fronte capillis} \\
\text{stravit humi pronam; tendebat bracchia supplex:} \\
\text{bracchia coeperunt nigris horrescere villis} \\
\text{curvarique manus et aduncos crescere in ungues} \\
\text{officioque pedum fungi laudataque quondam} \\
\text{ora Iovi lato fieri deformia rictu;} \\
\text{neve preces animos et verba precantia flectant} \\
\text{posse loqui eripitur: vox iracunda minaxque} \\
\text{plenaque terroris rauco de gutture fertur.} \\
\]

Juno has appeared on the same level with the girl, who holds out her arms in appeal to the goddess. The answer is savage: Those pleading arms become the first target of metamorphosis (478), 21 and soon the hands have turned into paws ending in claws, and both limbs serve as the forefeet of a bear. Worse still, Juno aborts the very words of prayer that Callisto tries to utter. She destroys the possibility of human communication (483), so that the human voice turns into a sound that bears no relationship with the bruised feelings of the girl.

From this point, Callisto suffers from her inability to communicate with the gods and with other human beings, a victim of Juno’s continuing hatred. She endures frustration when she wants to protest to Jupiter (487–88):

\[
\text{qualescumque manus ad caelum et sidera tollit} \\
\text{ingratumque Iovem, nequeat cum dicere, sentit.} \\
\]

When she encounters her own son Arcas hunting in the woods, she appears (to the narrator) to recognize the young man: She stares fixedly at him and starts to move toward him. But Arcas of course only sees a bear menacing him with a fatal hug. As he prepares to defend himself with his spear and

20 Cf. his soliloquy at 2. 423 ff. before approaching Callisto.

21 In the next tale, Ovid lets a girl tell her story in almost the same words, as she is rescued from rape by being turned into a crow by Minerva, a change which she far from welcomes at the time; cf. 2. 580–81.
probably to kill his mother, Jupiter intervenes, with an unsatisfactory awkwardness that Ovid captures in zeugma (505–07):

arcuit omnipotens pariterque ipsosque nefasque
sustulit et pariter raptos per inania vento
imposuit caelo vicinaque sidera fecit.

The Almighty, who has caused all the original trouble (cf. 401) by his sly rape of Callisto, removes the possibility of kin-crime by totally removing the two animate beings from existence on earth. Although Juno may complain that the girl has been honored by being turned into a star, we can see that she has become lifeless. Unlike Io, she has not been restored to humanity or to her son, and she certainly has not been deified.

The next main step on the way to Pentheus’ killing by his aunts and mother, who cannot recognize him as a human being or respond to his prayers and handless gestures, is taken by Ovid in his story of Actaeon. Angry Diana turns him into a deer, with a taunt over the frustration that she will cause him (3. 192–93):

“nunc tibi me posito visam velamine narres,
si poteris narrare, licet.”

As if her main purpose were to silence his talkative voice and thus save herself embarrassment, she deprives him of human speech. Certainly, as a deer he is harmless. When he discovers in water’s reflection that he has become an animal, he tries to voice his human despair in words, but achieves only an animal groan (200 ff.). Then follows the true horror of frustrated communication. As his own dogs pursue the deer that masks him, he desperately wants to identify himself but cannot (229–31). They pounce on him and start tearing him apart, with the eager approval of his friends. Ovid captures the scene in terms of abortive prayer for human sympathy (by this human being inside a deer form that others perceive as only an ordinary deer; 237–41):

iam loca vulneribus desunt, gemit ille sonumque,
esti non hominis, quem non tamen edere possit
cervus, habet maestisque replet iuga nota querellis
et genibus pronis supplex similisque roganti
circumfert tacitos tamquam sua bracchia vultus.

Ovid has never implied, except through Diana’s cruel distortion, that Actaeon wanted to talk about the nude goddess. Here, he is vainly trying to save his life by speech, which is almost human, according to the narrator, but not recognized as such by the dogs and hunters.22 Failing that, Actaeon-Deer attempts to mime the prayer-gesture. His hands have become forefeet

22 Ovid probably remembers and possibly alludes to Vergil’s famous description of the almost human pet deer of Silvia in Aen. 7. 500 ff. Actaeon is no pet deer.
(cf. Callisto), so he kneels, like Io on the Nile bank, and tries to act like the stereotype *supplex*, using his anguished looks in place of the expected human arms. Io did move Jupiter, but Actaeon remains unrecognized by his friends and gleefully ignored by Diana. His death leads to the uglier death of Pentheus.

Ovid portrays a world where there is much prayer, but only rare success in the appeal, whether to a god or another human being. All too often, piety attracts destruction or metamorphosis. The prevailing effect that the poet aims at and achieves is of piety abused and of prayer aborted by the very gods and goddesses to whom prayer is addressed, of human entreaty unrecognized by the crazed or impassioned human beings to whom victims hold out their hands and appeal in words or in mute pantomime. What he does with the frustrated gesture of Vergil’s Cassandra and with the pleading hand of Turnus, which he perverts into the bleeding stump of Pentheus, epitomizes the grim inefficacy of prayer in the *Metamorphoses*.

*University of California, Berkeley*