

The Transformation of Adultery: Sexual Infidelity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*  
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Although Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* may be his best known and most scandalous work treating adultery and sex, the *Metamorphoses*, his "epic of love", also includes a wide range of episodes of sexual (mis)conduct and infidelity. Against the backdrop of Augustus' laws on marriage and adultery (including the revisions of A.D. 9), how does Ovid handle adultery in the *Metamorphoses*? Although Ovid seldom uses the legal term *adulterium* in the *Metamorphoses*, the instances he does and the situations involving sexual misconduct or infidelity are revealing as Ovid trivializes the laws, exposes their injustice, applies elegiac conceptions of fidelity, and offers a female perspective, namely that of the wronged wife.

In its narrowest legal sense, *adulterium* refers to sex between a married woman and a man not her husband. Ovid appropriately applies *adulterium* on several occasions, but in contexts likely to offend Augustus and/or mock the laws. Both Venus' affair with Mars and Pasiphae's with a bull are called *adulterium*; the former features a divine couple who suffer a minimal punishment of being laughed at by the other gods, the latter an unnatural and beastly coupling. Ovid further uses the term in its broader sense to define an unmarried woman's sexual relations with a man and to highlight several characters' biases or (mis)conceptions of a relationship. The raven reports to Apollo Coronis' *adulterium* with a mortal, while Clytie jealously tattles to Leucothoe's father about Leucothoe's *adulterium* with the Sun. Apollo elevates his affair with Coronis to the world of elegy as he angrily reacts to female infidelity, while Clytie imagines her crush as marriage and herself as a wronged wife. Both the raven and Clytie misrepresent sexual relationships in an effort to be rewarded, perhaps references to the notorious prevalence of informers at the time. Although both informers are punished, Coronis and Leucothoe also are punished, unjustly, providing further comment on the nature of the laws.

Although legally not a crime for a husband to have an affair (as long as the woman was unmarried and exempt), cheating husbands recur in the *Metamorphoses* (e.g. Tereus, Cephalus, Hercules, most notably Jupiter). Yet Ovid focuses on the wronged wife's viewpoint. Just as Clytie imagines Leucothoe the rape victim as her rival, so Juno especially takes offense at husband Jupiter's behavior and scornfully refers to any of his mistresses (although the women are innocent rape victims) as *paelex*, highlighting Juno's bias. Although legally women could not do anything about a cheating husband, wronged wives in the *Metamorphoses* get even against their husbands and/or the other women, further undermining the laws and showcasing their injustice and inequality.