

Thyesteis mensis: The Missing Cannibalism Episodes in the *Metamorphoses*
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Of several incidents of cannibalism mentioned in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes only two at length: Lycaon (I. 218-231) and Procne and Philomela (VI. 412-674). These two episodes immediately call to mind two other, arguably better-known incidents of cannibalism, briefly mentioned by Ovid but not presented in detail: that of Tantalus and Pelops (VI. 403-411) and of Atreus and Thyestes' children (XV. 459-462). These two episodes concern the family of Agamemnon and were likely better-known to Ovid's contemporary audience than the two he describes in detail. The virtual absence of these two better-known stories is all the more striking given the length and detail he lavishes on the Lycaon and Philomela/Procne episodes. The Lycaon story, portraying a violation of *pietas* towards the gods, immediately recalls the similar story of Tantalus; in the same way, the Procne episode, demonstrating a violation of *pietas* towards the family, strongly calls to the reader's mind the similar story of Thyestes.

Ovid draws attention to the Lycaon and Philomela/Procne episodes by placing them near the beginnings of what Alessandro Barchiesi, Karl Galinsky, and E.J. Kenney have identified as the first two of the three major sections into which the poem can be divided: the first focusing on gods (I. 451 – VI. 420) and the second on heroes (VI. 421 – XI. 193). Thus Ovid's account of the gods begins with a violation of *pietas* towards the gods, and his account of mythic heroes begins with a violation of *pietas* towards family. Again, the striking similarity of the Tantalus and Thyestes stories to the ones which Ovid narrates in detail immediately recalls them to the mind of the perceptive reader. The third section, focusing on human beings (XI. 194- XV. 744), begins with the origins of the Trojan War, prominently featuring the family of Agamemnon. He includes the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia (XII. 1-38); though there is no explicit cannibalism, this involves the killing of a child by a parent.

By his prominent placement of these stories, which call to mind the history of the family of Agamemnon, Ovid draws attention to the violations of *pietas* committed by its members. *Pietas* is the quality stressed above all others by Vergil in his account of Aeneas, the progenitor of Augustus and the Principate. By vividly recalling the violations of *pietas* committed throughout the history of Agamemnon's family, Ovid is here casting doubt on the *pietas* underlying the entire Trojan War as an enterprise, and by extension, its aftermath, including the journey of Aeneas, the founding of Rome, and, ultimately, the legitimacy of the Principate.