

Mother, Mother!: Human Sacrifice, Cannibalism, and *Pietas* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

In this paper I argue that the act of throat slitting in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is an act of human sacrifice, based on Burkert's description of sacrifice (Burkert 1983), and carries undertones of cannibalism. Human sacrifice, and thus throat slitting, is a violation of religious *pietas* and occurs at parts of the *Metamorphoses* where *pietas* is an important theme. It acts as an enactment of a character's interaction, whether violating or upholding, with *pietas*. In many cases the sacrifice is done as atonement for a violation. To make this argument I look at five stories in the *Metamorphoses* which feature throat slitting; all but one of these include the slitting of a human's throat, and the last clearly links the killing of an animal with human sacrifice and cannibalism. The stories I consider are those of Lycaon in book one; Tereus, Procne, and Philomela in book six; Medea in book seven; Polymnestor and Polydorus in book twelve; and Protagoras in book fifteen. My connection of these stories and *pietas* builds on David Larmour's 1990 article on *contaminatio* in the *Metamorphoses*. Ultimately I find that human sacrifice, cannibalism, and *pietas* are major themes in the *Metamorphoses*, as well as in the miniaturization of the story in book 15's speech of Protagoras (Hardie 1995), and conclude that the Augustan context of the work could be a reason for this.

Bibliography

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