

Dear Colleagues and Students,

What you have here is a draft of the fourth chapter of my book *Narrating Myths*. (Please do not share it outside of GISRAM or cite it without asking me first; thanks.)

The first chapter, 'Ritual's Handmaid,' analyzes why the tradition of interpreting ritual alongside myth arose amongst classicists and scholars of the ancient Near East, and the deleterious effects that it has had on the study of myth. In particular, it argues that the focus on a myth-ritual connection has led to a habit of excising a 'myth' from what are assumed to be merely its 'vehicles' (i.e., the literary or artistic compositions that narrate the myths). This chapter sets us up for Chapter Two...

Chapter Two, 'Narrating Myths: Story and Belief,' has been published in an early version in *Arethusa* 48.2. Using work done by social anthropologists, psychologists and narratologists, it argues that the vivid narration of myth in ancient Greece (through rhapsodic performance, tragedies, etc.), which deeply engaged audience members cognitively and emotionally, was an important factor in the construction and sustenance of belief in the gods and heroes whose stories the myths narrated.

Chapter Three, 'The Greek Mythic Story World,' will be published in an early version in a month or so in *Arethusa* 48.3. It builds on work that scholars of narrative have done on how credible and coherent story-worlds are built to argue that the cumulative story-world constructed by Greek myths was strong and yet flexible, and as such contributed significantly to the creation and sustenance of belief in the gods and heroes that was examined in Chapter Two.

The work that is included below in draft is Chapter Four, 'Metamorphoses.' It examines one of the most frequently occurring elements in Greek myths. In some sections, it uses a comparative approach to highlight features of Greek myths that are not often found in other cultures where we might expect them (e.g., Hindu India) and to ask why they *are* found among the Greeks. (One section, on Arachne, is an abbreviated version of a talk that some of you heard a couple years ago at the conference in honor of Adele Yarbro Collins.)

Chapter Five, which I am working on now, focuses on another frequently occurring element, the hero, and also uses a comparative approach, particularly comparing Greek heroes to those of the ancient Near East and the Norse tradition.

Chapter Six will address how Greek myths use names; Chapter Seven will look at the ways in which myths of creation and death are intertwined in Greece.

There will be an eighth chapter, set at either the beginning or the end of the book, that takes up the question of how we define 'myth,' both in respect to ancient Greece and more broadly.

I look forward to your responses!!

Chapter Four

Metamorphosis

(draft; not for sharing or citation, please!)

During the last few years, I've learned that when my grandson asks me to tell him a story, the story I tell must include at least one of two things: an episode in which something or someone turns into something else (a metamorphosis) or a creature made up of parts from other creatures (a hybrid). If I really want to please him, the story I tell must include *both* a metamorphosis *and* a hybrid. Having exhausted my supply of existing stories that meet these criteria (and silently justifying my actions on the basis of some of the principles that I discussed in Chapters Two and Three), I've developed a repertoire of new tales in which the Chimaera gives advice to Arachne, for instance, or young Pegasus takes flying lessons from Ceyx and Alcyone. Sooner or later, when my grandson starts to read, or to hear other, more canon-bound people narrate Greek myths, I'll have to admit that the Chimaera as we traditionally know her wasn't the sort of character who would be helpful to anyone else (even a spider), and that the circumstances surrounding Ceyx and Alcyone's transformation into sea-birds probably left them in no mood to tutor a horse. But for the moment, the more metamorphoses and hybrids I can weave into my stories, the more attractive they are, and therefore I give my imagination free rein.

Tales of transformation, populated by strange creatures, appeal to most of us, whatever our age, and over the course of the centuries humans have told a lot of them. In the Old Testament, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back at the burning city of Sodom – a transformation tale with which the New Testament Jesus admonished his apostles lest they tarry on Judgment Day to gaze at terrestrial spectacles. The Hindu god Prajapati lustfully pursued his daughter; she fled from him in the form of a doe, but Prajapati became a stag and raped her – a scandalous act that drove the other gods to create Rudra, who hunted down Prajapati and thereby earned the title 'Lord of Animals.' Prajapati's tale finds echoes in Greek stories of goddesses turning themselves into mares to evade lecherous gods, who then turned into stallions – which led, eventually, both to the birth of wonder horses and to the establishment of new

rituals to appease the angry mothers. We hear more distant echoes in the stories that American Indians told of women metamorphosing into human-horse hybrids after falling in love with stallions. The horse-women gave birth to valuable ponies, but became outcasts from their tribes or even were killed – yet another variation of the endless human thinking about what our relationship to animals could and should be. So, too, the world has known many stories about a girl who tries to rescue brothers who have been turned into birds, sometimes by clothing them in human attire that she has sewn herself. Racing against the clock, in some of these stories she fails to sew a single sleeve on a single shirt, and the brother who dons it carries a wing in place of an arm forevermore.¹

We have Ovid to thank for the fact that in the western world, our appetite for metamorphosis has always been fed to a significant degree by Greek myths. Whatever his formal and ideological reasons for taking metamorphosis as his theme, Ovid reveled in the opportunity to describe the fantastic, and the many artists and authors whom he inspired – Bernini, Dante, Titian, Carvaggio, Rembrandt, Moreau, Wharton, Updike, Harryhausen (to name only a few) – have reveled in that as well, arousing and then satisfying their audiences' appetites. As a result, Greek myths about metamorphoses and hybrids have remained so widely familiar that they still can serve as fodder for comic strips (a 2012 Bizarro Comic by Dan Piraro shows a bald woman sitting across the table from a man dressed in bishop's robe and mitre, with the caption: 'Ill-Fated Blind Date: St. Patrick and Medusa')². But some of the examples that I gave above of stories about metamorphoses and hybrids suggest that they offer more than just thrills or amusement. Frequently, they have been adduced to explain how rituals, gods, animals or interesting features of the landscape came into existence (late antique writers identified a pillar of halite near Mount Sodom as what remained of Lot's wife; similarly the Weeping Rock on Mt. Sipylus in Turkey was said to be the transmogrified Niobe). And the stories can also send messages about how one should and shouldn't behave – don't look at what a god has told you not to look at, don't have sex with your daughter – or with stallions – and do keep your fingers nimble enough to finish your needlework on time. The ease with which myths could be strait-jacketed into explanatory or admonitory texts was one of the reasons, in fact, that Ovid and the Greek myths

¹ Gen. 19:26 and Luke 17:32; *Aitareya Brahmana* 3.33-4, as taken from Doniger 1985:86-7; and for the ponies, e.g., Dorsey 1904:294-5 with footnote 295, and Boas 1917:53. Dorsey collected a number of other Pawnee stories about people turning into animals, sometimes after having sex with an animal.

² See Piraro's website: <http://bizarro.com/?s=ill-fated&submit=Search> .

he narrated were able to survive the Christian purge of pagan detritus; one could transform almost any myth into a moral lesson of which Jehovah would approve. In the *Ovid Moralisé*, Callisto, the innocent victim of rape became 'a hypocrite whose chastity was merely for show' and Myrrha, the virgin daughter who secretly seduced her father, could be compared to the Virgin Mary.³

Hybrids:

In later sections of this chapter, I'll discuss some of the ways that scholars have tried to understand Greek tales of metamorphosis – why they were told, what they meant to the tellers and their listeners, the 'rules' by which they seemingly worked. At that point I'll leave behind the topic of hybrids *per se*. The two are closely linked, of course: both hybrids and metamorphoses challenge the ontological boundaries of the world and its creatures as we know them. Hybridity, moreover, is sometimes the result of arrested metamorphosis, as in the case of the brother who changes first into a swan and then back again into a human but retains a swan's wing, in the American Indian tales of women who turn partially (but only partially) into horses after falling in love with stallions, or in one of several stories about the origin of Scylla, whose upper half remained a beautiful girl but whose lower body became a dreadful confusion of barking dogs after she waded (but only waist-high) into a pool of poisoned water. Whatever may be the particular roles played by such hybrids in the stories they inhabit, their very presence reminds us that there are more things in heaven and earth than we have yet encountered.

Or more precisely, they remind us that new things may continue to emerge in heaven and earth long after the formal creation of those spheres has come to an end. Implicitly, this is one of the points made by many other stories of metamorphosis, as well, even if they don't produce what we consider hybrids *per se*. This is most expansively so in Ovid's chain of tales borrowed from Greek sources. His epic starts with the self-assembly of a rudimentary physical cosmos out of raw, disordered matter, and then introduces an unnamed divinity who fashions the first plant and animal life. From there, Ovid rolls on through generations of humans that see the metamorphic emergence of swans, guinea hens, spiders and other animals; the celestial emplacement of the Big and Little Bears and the Corona Borealis; the bursting forth of newly transmogrified youths and maidens into trees, flowers and springs, and so on, until he finally reaches the catasterism of Julius Caesar – a modern metamorphosis that is meant to

³ *Ovide Moralise* 2.1365-819 and 10.3478-795; see also Dimmick 2002:264-87.

crown all the others. As seen through the lens of the *Metamorphoses*, then (and through the collective lens of the Greek authors who went before Ovid), the world has taken many centuries to become what it was, and is still a work in progress. It is also a place that has been created to a significant degree out of the raw material of human bodies and by the whim of the gods. Behind each man-turned-into-animal or girl-turned-into-plant lay divine anger, envy, pride or desire. It was Circe's jealousy that turned Scylla into a monster; it was Pan's desire that turned Syrinx into river reeds. Apollo pursued Daphne until she was desperate enough to prefer life as a tree; a spurned Leto changed peasants into frogs and a spurned Dionysus changed a king's daughters into bats. Callisto's double transformation – first into a bear and then into the Big Bear – was set in motion by a combination of Zeus' lust and Artemis' anger...and in some stories, by Hera's anger as well. It was Venus who orchestrated Caesar's rise to the stars. The continuing lability of the world that Ovid and his Greek predecessors described, in short, was powered by gods' emotions. Each transformation was a memento of, and thereby evidence for, the gods' ongoing, and very personal, engagement with the world and its mortal inhabitants.

But to return to my main point: in spite of certain similarities and narrative overlaps between hybrids and metamorphoses, there are also differences. Most importantly, in Greek myths, hybrids are not usually the products of sudden metamorphosis but rather are conceived, born and reared in more-or-less the normal biological way.⁴ The sea-goddess Ceto bore to her sea-god husband Phorcys the gorgons and Echidna, who was half-nymph and half-snake. Echidna, in turn, 'mingled in love' with Typhaeos (himself a hybrid with a hundred fiery snake-heads,) and bore to him the Chimaera and the two-headed dog Orthrus. Then, having been raped by Orthrus, Echidna gave birth to the Sphinx. The Minotaur was conceived during a sexual encounter that, although certainly odd, unmistakably mimicked the sort thing that took place in pastures every day: Pasiphae, desiring the great white bull that Poseidon had given to her husband, crawled into a hollow wooden cow and awaited the bull's attention. The centaurs were spawned by Ixion upon a cloud, but it was a cloud that Zeus had shaped to look like Hera. Pegasus' birth was unusual – he sprang from his mother's neck after she had been decapitated – but his conception, like that of so many other heroes and monsters in Greek myth, occurred when Medusa and Poseidon 'lay down in a soft meadow among spring flowers.' Other monstrous

⁴ In addition to snaky-haired Medusa and be-dogged Scylla, as examples of transformational hybridity, I can offer only Salmacis and Lamia, both of whom start out as women but end up as hermaphrodites.

creatures – the nine-headed Hydra, three-headed Cerberus, three-bodied (and three-headed) Geryon, the one-eyed Cyclopes – were similarly conceived during love-making between various gods – most typically sea-gods or their descendants.

The Greeks were insistent, in fact, that monsters were once somebody's babies. Their pedigrees could be announced like those of the heroes. Most famously, Polyphemus boasted to Odysseus that his father was Poseidon – indeed, the Cyclops' paternity drives the rest of the *Odyssey* – and even within our scant fragments of Stesichorus' lost *Geryoneis*, Geryon manages to announce that he is the son of Chrysaor (Medusa's son by Poseidon) and Callirhoe (an ocean-nymph).⁵ Just in case we missed hearing Geryon say it, Geryon's friend Menoites mentions it, too, and the narrator mentions it a third time.⁶ Callirhoe herself pleads with Geryon not to meet Heracles in battle, and opens her robe to display the breasts that once had suckled him – all three of him, I suppose, however odd a mental picture that may be.⁷ In a fragment of Euripides' lost *Cretans*, Pasiphae complains about what it's like to nurse a minotaur.⁸ Yet another monstrous baby at the breast is evoked by the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, which tells us that after Hera gave birth to the infant Typhaeos – a dreadful creature 'like unto neither gods nor humans,'⁹ – she gave him over to be nurtured by Python, the baneful super-snake. Hera herself nurtured the Hydra and the Nemean Lion, according to Hesiod. The verb that I translate here as 'nurture' – *trepho* – is frequently used of nursing and rearing children, and the poets' insertion of these phrases immediately after they have described the monsters' births makes it clear that more than just metaphorical 'nurturing' is meant.¹⁰ Someone, be it Hera, the Python or another extraordinary nursemaid, had to take these creatures in hand during those difficult years between infancy and adulthood.

Behind all of these creatures' monstrous features we glimpse a weird version of the idea that heredity counts, just as it does for humans: if your father was the Lord of Horses, you might end up as a winged horse (Pegasus); if your mother was a snake from the waist down (Echidna), you might have nine snaky

⁵ Hes. *Th.* 288, 351, 979 ff.

⁶ Stes. *Ger.* fr. 10, 11. Another case is Scylla; at *Od.* 12.124-6, Circe advises Odysseus that when he sails past Scylla, he should call to Krataiis, the mother of Scylla, asking her to hold back her daughter.

⁷ Stes. *Ger.* fr. 12, 13.

⁸ *POxy* 2461 = fr. 81 Aus.

⁹ *HHAp.* 351; Hes. *Th.* 824-8.

¹⁰ Hes. *Th.* 313-15 and 328-29.

heads (the Hydra) or a snake's head growing alongside those of a lion and a goat (the Chimaera). If your brother was a two-headed dog (Orthrus) you might be a three-headed dog (Cerberus). Behind the idea that heredity counts, we also glimpse a determination to bind these hybrids into that network of relationships that I discussed in Chapter Three. One way of being linked in was to be killed by a hero, but another way was to be born from the gods. Most hybrids were both.

No such genetic principle underlies myths of metamorphosis—narratively, it is the whim of a god that determines the end-point of a change. It may *seem* as if a principle similar to heredity underlies many of them: after all, 'Spider'-girl (Arachne) becomes a spider, 'Wolf'-man (Lycaon) becomes a wolf, the youth named Narcissus becomes the narcissus flower and the nymph named Laurel (Daphne) becomes the laurel tree (*daphne*). Doesn't this amount to a *nomen est omen* sort of cosmogonic thinking, a nominative determinism whose rules are just as inescapable as those of biological heredity? But a moment's thought suggests that most such stories developed 'backwards.' Someone, at some time, was asked where the spider had come from, with all of its distinctive talents and habits, and answered with a story involving a girl who shared the spider's talents and habits—and who gave the spider her name. It is not only metamorphic myths that work this way; it is, rather, a principle of aitiological nomenclature that runs through many types of Greek myths. Otherwise hazy characters with meaningful names hang off the branches of royal family trees to explain (or rather, to lay claim to) a kingdom's geographic reach, for example. Achaïos, a son of the Athenian princess Creusa and her husband Xuthus, furnishes an eponym for the Achaians—thus tying the Athenian line firmly to the luster of Greek glory as Homer presented it—and then he disappears from view.

I will return to the issues raised by *nomina* that seem to be *omina* later in this chapter. But before we leave the topic of hybrids, we should remember that, as I noted in Chapter Three, many—perhaps most—of the monsters who terrorize Greek myths are not hybrids or teratomes at all. They are simply larger or stronger versions of the animals that populated Greek forests and fields: the Erythmanthian and Calydonian Boars, the Crommyionian Sow, the Mares of Diomedes, the Cretan and Marathonian Bulls, the Python, the Nemean Lion and Sciron's giant turtle. In contrast to some other cultures' myths, where hybrids proliferate, Greek myths kept them at bay. Genetically speaking, moreover, those that did exist tended to cluster on one branch of the divine family tree, which grew from the union of Ceto and Phorcys, which may express the ungovernable, unpredictable nature of the sea, an element with which the Greeks

were never completely comfortable.¹¹ (In contrast, the main branch of the gods – culminating in Zeus, his siblings and his children – is almost completely anthropomorphic, even if, as we’ll see, its members chose to disguise that fact on occasion.)¹² When hybrids do enter the Greek mythic story-world, they enter not as Dunwich Horrors, evoking existential revulsion as well as fear, but as variations on themes that were visible in everyday nature – the bird, the snake, the fish, the horse, the lion, the bull (and, just once, the goat – an odd detail in the Chimaera’s make-up). In Chapter Three, I suggested that the story-world of the Greeks was not a strongly secondary one, and even here, in its determination to contain the monstrous within certain bounds, it tethers itself firmly enough to the Primary World to preserve credibility. What was truly amazing was the fact that many creatures, plants and minerals were created by divine *fiat* – and those were almost always creatures, plants and minerals that were familiar from the everyday world.

But What Does it All Mean?

Is it really only divine whim that determines the end point of a metamorphosis? Scholars have made an industry out of decoding stories of transformation on the assumption that much more than a whim lay behind them. One of the most enduringly popular approaches focuses on determining what the animal, plant or mineral into which someone was changed ‘meant’ to the culture concerned. Sometimes, little work on the part of the scholar seems to be needed; the answer already seems obvious from the story. Lycaon, whose name is built on the Greek word for ‘wolf,’ slaughters a child in order to test the omniscience of the gods: will they realize that the stew he is serving to them is full of human flesh? They do, and Lycaon, punitively transformed into the wolf whose name he has carried and whose outrageous alimentary habits he has adopted, snarls off into the woods.¹³ Infanticide and cannibalism are wrong, the story tells us – but didn’t we already know that? Is that really why this story was told?¹⁴ Similarly, the nymph Lynx, who used magic to seduce Zeus, was

¹¹ Hes. *Th.* 270-336; cf. Gantz 1993:19-25.

¹² Cf. West 1966: *ad loc.*

¹³ We get the whole story from ps. Eratosth. *Katastr.* 8, who cites Hesiod as a source (= fr. 163 MW).

¹⁴ One reason that the story was told was it could be used to explain a cult established near Mt. Lykaos in Arcadia (see, e.g., Pl. Rep. 565d, Pliny *HN* 8.81 and discussion in Buxton 1987 and Burkert 1983: 83-10). But from an early time (apparently already Hes. fr. 161-68, see Fowler

transformed by Hera into a bird called the *inyx*, whose body was used in love charms. Anthos, who was killed and partially eaten by horses, became a bird called the *anthos*, which had a habit of fleeing from horses.¹⁵ Even when the protagonist's name does not proleptically signal his or her fate, the plot of the story often makes the connection between personal behavior and metamorphosis abundantly clear, or other clues seem to help us build a reassuringly logical network of associations. It could be said to 'make sense' that Hera turned Io into a cow because Io was the priestess of Hera, who was particularly fond of cows. The fact that Io later became identified with Isis, to whom the cow was also sacred, rounds things off nicely.¹⁶ Callisto, a nymph who had sworn to emulate Artemis' eternal virginity, was raped and impregnated by Zeus; Artemis punished her by turning her into a bear, a fate that can be said to 'make sense' for any or all of several reasons: bears are creatures of the wild, and thus fall prey to the goddess's arrows, for example; Callisto became the mother of Arcas ('Bear'), the eponymous ancestor of the Arcadians.¹⁷ The Lycian peasants who purposefully muddied the water that Leto and her infant twins wished to drink were turned into frogs, which 'makes sense' (as Leto herself explained, in Ovid's narration of the story) because frogs are repulsive creatures who spend their lives wallowing in mud.¹⁸ It's not only the Greeks and Romans who played these games. As one Jewish tradition has it, Lot's wife begrudged her husband's angelic visitors the salt that was a basic requisite of hospitality; ordered by her husband to provide it, she purposefully betrayed the angels' presence by borrowing extra salt from her neighbors.¹⁹ And so, a quintessentially bad hostess found an appropriate end as the very stuff she should have been serving.

But there are problems with tying things up so neatly. First of all, some of the stories I just mentioned have variants in which the narrative logic that glues them together doesn't work so well. It's not always Hera who turns Io into a cow, in order to punish her; more often, it's Zeus himself, transmogrifying the

2014:104-9 and Gantz 1993:728), the story was well-known outside of Arcadia, suggesting that its appeal was not due only to the cult.

¹⁵ *Iynx*: Call. fr. 685 (= schol. Theocr. 2.17) cf. schol. Pi. N. 4.56a and cf. Forbes-Irving 1990:243-4. *Anthos*: Ant. Lib. 7, citing Boeos.

¹⁶ Io turned into cow by Hera: Aes. *Suppl.* 299. Io as priestess of Hera: Hes. fr. 124 (MW) and later sources including Aes. *Suppl.* 291-3; Io equated with Isis: first certainly at Call. *Epig.* 57 but perhaps also Hdt. 1.1. Cf. also Seaford 1980: 23-90 and Forbes-Irving 1990: 212-15; Gantz 1993:198-203.

¹⁷ Artemis transforming Callisto and Callisto as mother of Arcas: Eratosth. *Katast.* 1, citing Hes.; Amphis fr. 47.

¹⁸ Lycian herdsmen muddying water: Ant. Lib. 35, crediting Nicander and Menecrates the Xanthian (*FrGH* 769F2); Ov. *M.* 6.339 ff.

¹⁹ Midrash Aggadah [Buber] Gen. 19:26.

lover whom he is trying to hide from his wife into the very creature that would particularly attract her attention.²⁰ It's not always Artemis who turns Callisto into a bear, either – sometimes it's Zeus or Hera.²¹ We might still argue that cow-hood and bear-hood make sense insofar as these heroines become emblematic of the goddesses whom they first served and then offended, or make sense in some other encoded way (the bear, which was understood in antiquity to be an especially maternal animal, could be taken to represent the mothers that all young dedicatees of Artemis must one day become, when they leave her care – hence, the ritual called 'playing the bear' that ancient girls performed in honor of Artemis at Brauron, for example),²² but in championing these views, we'd still have to admit that *as part of a story*, the transformational logic we expect to see no longer works, and we'd also have to concede that some of our own analyses would have been far less obvious to many members of an ancient audience than they are to us (was mint, formerly the nymph Mintha, really understood by the ancients to be diametrically opposed to the cereal grains associated with Mintha's persecutor, Demeter, as Marcel Detienne suggests?²³).

Another problem is that there are stories where a name may foreshadow a transformation but the behavior does not. Anyone could guess that a girl named Arachne would end up as a spider, and we might even guess that the story of how that happened would involve spinning or weaving, which are well-known occupations of spiders. But the element of hubris that motivates the story as Ovid tells it is not otherwise associated with spiders in any of our ancient texts.²⁴ The story of Arachne is different from the story of Lynx, then, in which the use of sex-magic 'logically' leads to the nymph's new form and function as the magical bird to which she gives her name. Other, more appropriate motivating behaviors (appropriate, that is, according to the ancient understanding of spider behavior) could also be used to explain Arachne's transformation, as we'll see, but it's Ovid's tale that remains well-known; it sticks in the mind and surfaces over-and-over again in modern anthologies of ancient Greek myths. A big part of the reason for this, again, is Ovid's brilliant narration: we remember a story because it is intrinsically interesting, not because (or at least, not primarily because) it encodes information that makes sense in a strictly logical way according to the precepts of

²⁰ Zeus turning Io into cow: Apollod. 2.1.3-4, probably drawing on Hesiod (Gantz 1993:199-201)

²¹ Zeus turning Callisto into bear: Apollod. 3.8.2. Hera turning Callisto into a bear: Call. Fr. 632 Pf. and later sources including Ov. *M.* 2. 476-88 and *F.* 2.177-8.

²² On playing the bear, with full ancient sources and citations to earlier scholarship, Faraone 2003.

²³ Our sources for Mintha are late but numerous enough that it is hard to imagine the story was not popular from an early time: Oppian *H.* 3.486 ff., schol. Nic. *Alex.* 375, Photius s.v. *Mintha*, Strabo 8.3.14. Ov. *M.* 10.728 hints at it. See also Detienne 1994:chapter 4.

²⁴ Ov. *M.* 6.1-145.

natural history, alimentary codes, astronomy, ritual practices or anything else. Things usually run exactly the other way, in fact; if the story is engaging, it is better able to send messages about natural history, alimentary codes, astronomy, ritual practices, etc. Scholars of religion have had trouble accepting this in their dealings with myths – that is one reason that the myth-and-ritual approach that I looked at in the first chapter of this book took hold so strongly and for so long, and the structuralist and psychological approaches as well. Each offered a way of reading myths that made sense to twentieth (or nineteenth, or twenty-first) century scholars. The assumptions behind these approaches are not completely wrong – each has the merit of revealing some of the ways in which myths affect or reflect the cognitive, emotional and social worlds of their audiences – but they tend to ignore the hook embedded in the sheer pleasure of the story itself.

There are also cases in which the kernel of a good story takes off on its own, leaving behind some or all of the ‘logical’ connections between the main characters and their transformations as it develops new vehicles in which to travel. Let us take the various stories about the origin of the nightingale (*aedon*) and the swallow (*chelidon*) as a case study.²⁵ All of these center on a mother who has killed her child and who, as a result, is turned into a mournful bird – either as a punishment or out of the gods’ pity. In the earliest such narration, in *Odyssey* 19, Penelope calls this mother Aedon (Nightingale), the daughter of Pandareus, and explains that Aedon eternally laments her child, Itylos, whom she slew while maddened. This story ‘makes sense’ because the song of the nightingale was perceived by the ancient Greeks, like many peoples, as having a mournful sound quite apart from its association with a lamenting mother.²⁶ But two early allusions to similar stories, from Hesiod and Sappho,²⁷ call the main character Chelidon (Swallow), the daughter of Pandion, and we presume that if had we the fuller stories behind these allusions, we’d learn that a swallow is what she was turned into. ‘Logically,’ this makes little sense, given that the song of the swallow was characterized by the Greeks as a twittering noise similar to the speech of barbarians²⁸ – far from the melodious, if mournful, sound associated with a lament. These stories have relinquished, in other words, any obvious connection between their main character’s behavior and the behavior of the animal into which she is transmogrified. In a fragment from another

²⁵ Discussions of the stories to be discussed in this section can be found at Gantz 1993:239-41, Forbes-Irving 1990:248-49, Fowler 2014: 365-6, Burkert 1983: 201-7, Levaniouk 2008, Johnston 1994.

²⁶ See, e.g., Parthenius 11, quoting Apollonius Rhodius (nightingales mourn Adonis).

²⁷ Hes. *WD* 568, Sappho fr. 135 LP, cf. 136 LP.

²⁸ Swallow’s song as barbarian: *LSJ s.v. chelidon*.

Hesiodic work, we learn that *both Aedon and Chelidon* suffered eternally because of a crime they had colluded in committing. Aelian, the author who transmits the fragment to us, goes on to say that Aedon and Chelidon committed their crime during a feast held in Thrace.²⁹ Judging from what we hear about that feast in later sources, the crime was again infanticide.

We learn more about these two groups of stories in narrations from the fifth century onwards. In the first group, a daughter of Pandareus, acting alone, kills her own son, whose name is Itys or Itylus. She turns into a nightingale who laments her slain child forever. Three narrations of this story are set in Thebes;³⁰ other versions are set on the island of Dulichium or in Ephesus.³¹ In the second group, two daughters of King Pandion of Athens, one married and one unmarried, collaborate in slaughtering the child of the married sister in order to avenge the fact that her husband, a Thracian king named Tereus, has raped the unmarried one. The sisters serve the dismembered child to his father in a stew. The sisters (and the husband) are turned into birds – a nightingale, a swallow and either a hawk or a hoopoe – and the nightingale laments her slain child forever.³²

The name of the main character and the bird into which she is transformed remain stable in the first group of stories as time goes by – she is always called Aedon and she always becomes a mournful nightingale whose name she proleptically bears. Plot details do change, however: sometimes Aedon mistakenly kills her son thinking that he is the child of her sister-in-law, whose fecundity she envies;³³ sometimes she kills him because she thinks he has aided his father's adultery,³⁴ sometimes no reason is given other than 'madness.'³⁵ In contrast, by at least the fifth century the names of the characters in the second story begin to vary. The role played by Aedon is often filled by Procne, daughter of King Pandion of Athens, and her sister is called Philomela rather than Chelidon.³⁶ Not only have we lost any direct aitiological connection between the women's names and the birds into which they are eventually transformed in these stories, but another 'logical' connection disappears as well. Behind the

²⁹ Hes. fr. 312 MW = Ael. *VH* 12.20.

³⁰ *Od.* 19.518-23, *Pher.* fr. 124 = schol. *Od.* 19.518; Paus. 9.5.9.

³¹ Helladius *ap.* Phot. *Bibl.* 531; Ant. Lib. 11.

³² Aes. *Suppl.* 58-65 and *Ag.* 1144-45, Soph. fr. 585 Radt, Th. 2.29, Ov. *M.* 6.424-676, Apollod. 3.14.8, Paus. 1.5.4 and 1.41.8.

³³ Ant. Lib. 11.

³⁴ Helladius *ap.* Phot. *Bibl.* 531.

³⁵ e.g., *Od.* 19.518-23.

³⁶ Soph. fr. 585 Radt, Th. 2.29, Ov. *M.* 6.424-676, Apollod. 3.14.8, Paus. 1.5.4 and 1.41.8.

name ‘Philomela,’ the Greeks (and the Romans) would have heard the words ‘lover of song’ (*philo-mela*) – an apt name for a nightingale but not for the twittering swallow that Philomela would become.³⁷ The poor fit between name and fate is ‘fixed’ in stories told by Sophocles and later authors, according to which Philomela’s rapist cut out her tongue to prevent her from telling what she had suffered; she could make only the most guttural of sounds and was compelled to communicate instead through tapestries that she wove.³⁸ Ovid, a great fan of nominative determinism, conveniently sidesteps this problem by not telling us which girl turned into what bird – or even exactly what the birds were. Later narrators eventually ‘correct’ the story by reversing the transformations: Philomela turns into the nightingale and Procne into the swallow. Some of these narrators also omit the episode of the tongue-cutting, so that the nightingale can still sing melodiously.³⁹ But in those cases, we end up with the *aunt* of the slaughtered child becoming a mournful nightingale and his *mother* a twittering swallow, which upends the familial logic of earlier versions even as it attempts to restore ornithological propriety. One of the latest narrators of all, Eustathius, once again tries to impose sense by remodeling the early part of the story. Philomela becomes the wife of Tereus and Procne becomes the sister whom he rapes and whose tongue he cuts out. But Eustathius then reverts to the older stories at the end by having Procne turn into the melodious nightingale, in spite of her severed tongue, and Philomela into the twittering swallow.⁴⁰ And thus, we are back in the soup.

What are we to make of all this? How did the story of the bird who mourns for the child she slaughtered survive, even thrive, in spite of the fact that, for centuries it didn't make much sense, aitiologically speaking and sometimes narratively speaking? Clearly, we need to try a different tack. As Wendy Doniger has pointed out, myths are mercenaries, serving the needs of whoever expends the effort to narrate them effectively.⁴¹ In the myths that we have been looking at, what catches the imagination and remains in the mind – what makes these myths powerful mercenaries for anyone who cares to hire them – are two sensational elements: a mother kills her child and the mother is subsequently transmogrified into a bird. Once it has used these elements to hook us, the myth

³⁷ This meaning cannot be correct (‘Philomela’ would more accurately mean ‘lover of sheep’) but would have been heard nonetheless.

³⁸ The cutting of the tongue appears first in Sophocles but most elaborately, and famously, in Ovid.

³⁹ Hyg. *Fab.* 45, Serv. *Ec.* 6.78 (both of whom omit the tongue-cutting); *Myth. Vat.* I 4 and II 261 (who retain it).

⁴⁰ Eustath. *Od.* 1875.15-27 (ad *Od.* 19.518).

⁴¹ Doniger 1996:119.

can expand itself to provoke thought on various issues (e.g., the debt a woman that owes to her natal family versus the debt she owes to her marital family), can serve as an anchoring back-story for various ancestral or social groups (e.g., Athenian women, by Demosthenes' reckoning),⁴² and can furnish various points of meditation: the nightingale story can be evoked by a lonely wife who fears for her son's safety (Homer's Penelope) and by a friendless woman to whom the infanticidal mother's fate looks better than what she herself is about to suffer (Aeschylus' Cassandra) – neither of whom adheres very closely to its original 'logic.' Formally speaking, on one level these are all still stories about the origin of the nightingale and the swallow, but the ease with which they slip free of certain moorings that seem essential to us tells us that transformations into animals in Greek myths are *not*, first and foremost, encoded lessons in etymology or natural history. It also tells us that the search for a single interpretative strategy that can be applied to all of them – or even a set of interpretative strategies – is fruitless.

As a second case study let us take Hecabe – the very poster-child of interpretative difficulties for those who seek tidy correspondences between a character's back-story and the nature of the beast into which she is transmogrified.⁴³ We first get a full tale of her travails from Euripides, in his play of the same name: when Hecabe learns that King Polymestor has treacherously murdered her son, she kills his children and blinds the king himself. Polymestor then prophesies that Hecabe, who is about to set sail for Greece as part of the Trojan war-spoils, will be transformed into a dog with fiery eyes, run up the mast of the ship that bears her, leap overboard and perish at a place along the Thracian coast that would thereafter be known as Cynossema – the Dog's Tomb.⁴⁴ Other stories have Hecabe leaping into the sea in grief as soon as Troy has fallen, and then turning into a dog;⁴⁵ or being stoned to death by Polymestor's followers and simultaneously turning into a dog;⁴⁶ or being stoned to death by the Greeks for unspecified reasons, and turning into a dog;⁴⁷ or being stoned by Polymestors' followers, turning into a dog and yet surviving to wander the Thracian wilds;⁴⁸ or turning into a *stone* dog while still in Troy;⁴⁹ or

⁴² Dem. 60.30.

⁴³ The meaning of Hecabe's transformation has been treated by Forbes-Irving 1990:207-10, Burnett ****, Franco 2014:**-**, Buxton 2009:58.

⁴⁴ Eur. *Hec.* 1259-73.

⁴⁵ Nic. fr. 62 = schol. Eur. *Hec.* 3.

⁴⁶ Lycophr. 333.

⁴⁷ Lycophr. 1174-88

⁴⁸ Ov. *M.* 13.565-75.

simply turning into a dog, for unspecified reasons, after her son Helenus has taken her safely to a new home.⁵⁰ The only consistent element amongst these remarkably varied stories is her transformation into a dog.⁵¹

This metamorphosis is apt to bedevil one, if one looks behind it for logical reasons. What does the dog *mean*? Exactly how does it reflect anything that Hecuba did, or was, in this variety of stories? Is there, perhaps, an inherent savagery in the ancient Greek view of the dog, that resonates in Hecabe's deeds as we see them in Euripides' treatment of her story, for instance? This would seem to be hinted at in our earliest trace of Hecabe's transformation: an unattributed lyric fragment says it was the *Erinyes* who turned her into a howling dog with flashing eyes.⁵² The *Erinyes*, after all (who were occasionally portrayed with doglike features themselves), were goddesses bent on avenging wrongs, sometimes with dreadful ferocity. We could choose to understand this story to be telling us that, like the *Erinyes*, Hecabe did something that was dog-like in its savagery. Hecabe's declaration, at *Iliad* 24.212-13, that she would like to sink her teeth into Achilles' liver, might have laid the groundwork for such an association—or might have reflected that association, if the story of her metamorphosis into a dog was older than the *Iliad*. But still we must be cautious: we have no direct statement that Hecabe was turned into a dog *because* she was savage (and indeed, in some of the stories about her transformation, she does nothing savage at all). There is, moreover, no simple, one-to-one association between dogs and savagery in antiquity: dogs could also be portrayed as loyal friends, for example, or trustworthy guardians, and on the negative side (especially for women), as shameless as well as savage.⁵³

Or perhaps (as at least one scholar suggested) Hecabe's transformation into a dog was inspired by the similarity of her name to that of the goddess Hecate, to whom dogs were sacred.⁵⁴ Temptingly, a fragment from another work by Euripides does seem to bring the two together, when someone proclaims (to Hecabe, scholars presume) 'you will become a bitch, the delight of

⁴⁹ Quint. Smyrn 14.347.

⁵⁰ Apollod. *Ep.* 5.23.

⁵¹ Some but not all of them manage to connect Hecabe's transformation, or at least her burial, with the Cynossema on the Chersonese—but that may well have been Euripides innovation. (And there were plenty of other Cynossemata in antiquity that didn't manage to attract such a myth.) **check Franco and Burnett

⁵² *PMG* 965.

⁵³ See also Franco 2014: **.

⁵⁴ E.g., Burnett 1994.

light-bearing Hecate.⁵⁵ This line was well enough known for Aristophanes to spoof it,⁵⁶ and Lycophron ran with its apparent connection between Hecate and Hecabe: in his story, Hecabe becomes part of the goddess's uncanny nocturnal kennel, charged with terrifying anyone who fails to worship her. In return, Lycophron goes on to say, Hecate compels Odysseus, who had thrown the first rock at Hecabe's stoning, to erect a cenotaph in her honor.⁵⁷ But explaining Hecabe's metamorphosis by reference to Hecate (that is, as a sort of one-off application of the *nomen est omen* principle) is a ticklish affair, for two reasons. First, the earliest possible attestation of the connection between Hecate and dogs comes from the very fragment of Euripides that is presumed to describe Hecabe; the argument becomes circular, in other words. Second, it's likely that Hecate's own connection to dogs originally sprang from her work as a birth goddess (to whom dogs were sacred in antiquity more generally), rather than any uncanniness that the dog and the goddess later came to share.⁵⁸ Of course, one might simply switch strategies and start anew from the association between dogs and birth, arguing that it was Hecabe's fame as a *mother* that led to her transformation into a dog (she did bear 19 sons to Priam, after all, as well as an undisclosed number of daughters). A combination of the two aspects – savage and maternal – might be better still: the ancient Greeks, like us, used the simile 'a bitch protecting her pups,' to describe savage attacks on behalf of something one loved – the very sort of deeds that Euripides and some later authors describe Hecabe as committing.⁵⁹

But all of this is learned speculation – none of these suggestions is provided by the ancient stories themselves, and none provides the same satisfying click of a puzzle-piece that we get, for example, from Lycaon's metamorphosis into a wolf following his cannibal feast or Lynx's transformation into a tool for love magic after seducing Zeus. This prompts two observations. The first is a reiteration of something I have already said several times in this book: myths were able to communicate ideas first and foremost because myths were entertaining, not because they were encoded with information that was meant to be puzzled out by the audience members. Later in this chapter I will

⁵⁵ Eur. fr. 968.

⁵⁶ Ar. Fr. 604 PCG: 'I will become a nasty-tempered bitch, the *agalma* of light-bearing Hecate'.

⁵⁷ Lycophr. 1174-88.

⁵⁸ Johnston 1999:203-215.

⁵⁹ E.g., Od. 20.17-18, Sem. Fr. 7 West lines 32-36. I thank my colleague Tom Hawkins for pointing this out. See also Franco 2014:108, who understands the trope as a more strongly negative one than I do; and Burnett 1994, who argues that the canine transformation is Euripides' own development on Hecabe's previously existing reputation as a mother.

consider more closely what it was that myths of metamorphosis, as a group, were meant to communicate. The second observation concerns the rich diversity of potential meanings that we have been able to read into Hecabe's transformation, which spring forth from the diversity of associations that the dog had in antiquity. What sort of interpretative methodology can we use to approach such a situation that will enable us to appreciate, rather than try to eliminate, this diversity, at least in some cases?

Arachne and her Brother:

Like the dog, many animals, plants and other metamorphic endpoints in Greek myths have spectrums of associations, rather than single, simple meanings. Even the wolf, as Richard Buxton has shown, could be admired for its community spirit, as well as feared as a ruthless predator.⁶⁰ Had Lycaon not tried to serve up his son to the gods in a stew – had he instead run off into the woods after some other transgression, such as trying to share the gods' food with his mortal tablemates (like the similar Tantalus had, according to one story⁶¹), we might see a very different logic behind his metamorphosis: we'd probably say that he became a wolf because like a wolf he shared his food...but shared it with the wrong friends.

As a more extended case for investigation and for the testing of a particular methodological approach, I want to look at a myth that is not familiar to most of my readers – one whose apparent meanings have not already been well-burnished by scholars. I will use a myth about Arachne. I do not mean the famous story about Arachne that we inherit from Ovid, but rather another, older story that runs quite differently. It comes to us from a scholiast to Nicander's *Theriaca*, a poetic treatise on dangerous animals:⁶²

Theophilus, of the School of Zenodotus,⁶³ relates that there once were two siblings in Attica: Phalanx, the man, and the woman, named Arachne. While Phalanx learned the art of fighting in arms from Athena, Arachne learned the art of weaving. They came to be hated by the goddess, however, because they had sex with each other – and their fate was to be changed into creeping creatures that

⁶⁰ Buxton 1987.

⁶¹ Pi. O. 1.61-64.

⁶² 12a, Crugnola.

⁶³ Theophilus can be dated to the Hellenistic period – probably the late fourth and early third centuries. For more on this, see Johnston 2009.

were eaten by their own children.

The scholiast's reason for mentioning Theophilus' story is Nicander's use, in his poem, of the word *phalangia* (the plural of *phalangion*, and a cognate of Phalanx's name).⁶⁴ *Phalangia*, in contrast to *arachnai*, are spiders with venom strong enough to kill humans. What we have here, then, at least on the most obvious level, is an aitiology for two different families of spiders.

Transformation into a spider has a connection with the earlier pursuits of the sister: she was, after all, a weaver who had learned her skills from the very goddess of weaving herself. But what about Phalanx? Why did it 'make sense' for him to turn into a spider? And what about the story's other sensational elements, the siblings' incest and the fact that they were doomed to be eaten by their own children? Do these plot twists somehow play into the metamorphic logic, or are they simply a spine-chilling transgression and its equally spine-chilling punishment?

To figure this out, we need to take a more thorough look at ancient ideas about spiders, but we also need a methodological tool that will help us make sense of the material we examine. For the tool, I propose that we use the concept of *affordances*. The concept was invented in 1979 by the perceptual psychologist J.J. Gibson to designate a characteristic feature of an object, to which an individual (human or animal) can react in various ways, depending on the individual's own perceptions and capabilities. A stick, for example, may offer the affordances of straightness, length and a tapering tip, but it is understood as 'good to dig ants out of a hole with' only if the individual who picks it up possesses the fine motor skills necessary for the task and the cognitive sophistication to conceive of the possibility. A stick that is straight and long with a tapering tip might also be perceived as a weapon or a scepter, for example. *Affordances circumscribe* the potential meanings or uses of phenomena to which they are attached, but they do not *determine* those meanings and uses.⁶⁵

Maurizio Bettini adapted the term 'affordance' to the study of cultural phenomena, and particularly to thinking about the ways in which human observers react to animals' characteristic appearances and habits⁶⁶. He

⁶⁴ As we learn both from Nicander and from other ancient writers, the term *phalangion* could designate any member of a whole family of venomous spiders. In some discussions, ancient authorities distinguish between *phalangia* and non-venomous spiders, to which they apply the term *arachnai* but other authorities understand both *phalangia* and non-venomous spiders to be sub-groups of a more inclusive family, to all of which the term *arachnai* can be applied. Further on methods of categorization: Bevis 1988:34-5, Scarborough 1979.

⁶⁵ Gibson 1979. The example of the stick is mine.

⁶⁶ Bettini 1998:202-11; see § 1.8.2 in particular for the concept of affordances.

suggested, for example, that the weasel's habit of carrying her pups in her mouth is an affordance that gave rise to the ancient belief that weasels give birth through their mouths, and that the weasel's slim, tubular body is an affordance that led to her ancient reputation as a helper of women in labor – it was hoped that, like a weasel sliding through a hole, the baby might slip easily through the narrow space of the birth canal⁶⁷. Bettini emphasizes that neither characteristic of the weasel *compelled* ancient thought in a particular direction; rather they *afforded* opportunities for thought that could lead in any of a number of directions, depending on the backgrounds of the observers – in another place or another context, the weasel's carrying of her pups in her mouth might be interpreted to mean that weasels ate their young. (And of course, there isn't necessarily any connection between the ancient associations of an affordance and its actual function within the life of the animal as we now perceive it from our lofty perch of 21st century zoology.)

'Affordance' is a more useful concept than 'symbol' for articulating the ways in which myths and other cultural products – rituals and art, for instance – accumulate and convey ideas. A symbol usually has an essential and nearly static meaning (X symbolizes Y, or perhaps X can symbolize *both* Y and Z, but X usually can't move amongst symbolizing Y, Z, A, B, C, D, etc.). This essentialism is, in fact, crucial to the success of many of the symbols that we encounter: unless they can convey ideas clearly to a fairly wide range of observers, they fail in their task. Had the symbol of the lily not become associated almost exclusively with purity in Christian thought, for example, it could not have represented Mary across so many centuries and such a broad geographic span as it has.⁶⁸ But an affordance, in contrast, because its meaning arises from interaction between the observer(s) and the thing in question, allows the development of *spectrums* of associations. Some stories draw on some of these, and others upon others. A particular spectrum might even include associations that seem to clash with each other – as we just saw, the dog can be associated with loyalty and shamelessness, savagery and maternal love. Some or all of these associations might be pondered by someone who watches a bitch protecting her pups, and used by a skillful narrator to produce a subtly complex story about a dog.

⁶⁷ Bettini 1998:144-97 = §1.7.

⁶⁸ Of course, the original meaning of *symbolon* relies on this restricted one-to-one relationship; see Struck 2004: 78-84. The essentialism of symbols was developed by Neoplatonists; subsequently, during the middle ages and Renaissance, a greater range of potential meaning might be admitted to a given symbol, but in any particular instance, its meaning was set by the artist or author. Works such as Vincenzo Cartari's *Le imagini degli dei antichi* (ca. 1400) were handbooks intended to aid in the assignment of proper meaning (cf. Graf 2008:153-7).

But to get back to Arachne and Phalanx: what then, were the spider's most striking affordances in ancient eyes, and how can they help us to understand the way that Theophilus' story might have been received by ancient ears? I'll look at three that are most mentioned by ancient authors⁶⁹.

Weaving webs: The affordance most often mentioned is the spider's ability to spin fiber and weave it into a web. The associations of this affordance vary quite a bit, however. It could indicate industriousness – spiders were almost as highly esteemed, in this respect, as were ants and bees⁷⁰. Yet spiders' webs could also be used to signify neglect, in the sense that their presence indicated that an object or place had been abandoned by humans.⁷¹ Sometimes, the spider's web was lauded as a work of delicacy, produced by an intelligent creature⁷², but at other times it was viewed as a repetitively symmetrical product, created by dumb animal instinct rather than skill and art⁷³. The ease with which a web could be destroyed suggested the transitory nature of artifice.⁷⁴ Finally, a spider's web could evoke entrapment and a predatory nature – the best-known case being Aeschylus' description of Clytemnestra capturing Agamemnon in a web-like net.⁷⁵

Spiders and parricide: In the tale from Theophilus, Arachne and Phalanx are said to be 'changed into creeping creatures that are eaten by their own

⁶⁹ Except where noted, for the rest of the essay I subsume both *arachnai* and *phalangia* under the word 'spider.'

⁷⁰ E.g., Hes. *Erg.* 777, Aristot. *Hist. An.* 622b23; Ael. *Nat.* 1.21; further at Bevis 1988:39.

⁷¹ Although this could have a negative valence (Odysseus' marital bed is said to be covered with webs after his twenty years of absence) it could also be positive (Bacchylides describes peace as a time when shields are covered with webs) Bacchyl. fr. 4.69-70; cf. Hom. *Od.* 16.35, Hes. *Erg.* 475, Eur. fr. 60 Austin; Aratinus fr. 190, Pherecrates fr. 142, Soph. fr. 264, Theocr. 16.96; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.28.2; further at Bevis 1988:40.

⁷² Hom. *Od.* 8.280, Aristot. *Hist. An.* 623a8, AP 9.372; Plut. *Soll. Anim.* 966e-f; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.28.1, Plin. *Nat.* 11.79-82; cf. Paus. 6.26.7. 'A spider-like thread' (*arachnaios mitos*) proverbially meant a 'very fine thread,' e.g., *Anth. Pall.* 6.39.3.

⁷³ Aristot. *Phys.* 199a20-22; Ael. *Var.* 1.2 and *Nat.* 1.21 (but cf. *Nat.* 6.57, which is more nuanced); Pliny *Nat.* 11.80.2, Sen. *Ag. Epist.* 121.23. Cf. Feeney 1991:193-4. Aristot. *Hist. An.* 622b28-623b1, distinguishes amongst different types of spiders, some of whom spin webs that are sloppy and crude, and others of whom spin webs that are clever and polished. Plut. *Soll. Anim.* 966e-f, lauds the fineness of the thread and regularity of the weaving but notes that there is no warp – i.e., he confirms its simplicity even as he admires it. Pliny, on the other hand, mentions both warp and a woof (*tela* and *subtemina*) at *Nat.* 11.80. Further at Bevis 1988:39.

⁷⁴ E.g., Plat. *Com.* fr. 22 line 2 Kock; many other citations, mostly from later antiquity, are offered at Bevis 39-40. Cf. Plut. *Is.* 358f, where the spider's web is compared to hasty, poorly developed thoughts.

⁷⁵ Aes. *Ag.* 1492 and 1516; id. *Suppl.* 887; Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.6; AP 9.372; Philostr. *Imag.* 2.28.3-4.

children.’ This reflects an affordance of spiders that we first hear about from Aristotle, who says that young *phalangia* ‘when they grow to full size, very often surround their mother and eject and kill her; and not seldom they kill the male as well, if they can catch him.’ This information is repeated by several later authors, with Pliny adding the detail that the murderous spiderlings subsequently eat their parents’ corpses. (There is, in fact, one species of Mediterranean spiders, *Stegodyphus lineatus* [Latreille, 1817], that eats its mother – it’s possible that Aristotle, Pliny and others observed young *Stegodyphi lineati* taking their meals.)⁷⁶

Little needs to be said about the significance of this affordance – parricide can hardly be anything but negative – but it’s worth noting that in ancient thought, parricide was often paired with incest, another transgression against the integrity of the family, and that cannibalism was also paired with either incest, interfamilial murder or both to further mark their gravity – the tangled histories of the House of Atreus and the House of Laius furnish ready examples of these combinations. It is mythically ‘logical,’ in other words, for incestuous siblings such as Arachne and Phalanx to turn into creatures doomed to be killed by their progeny and then end up as the victims of cannibalism as well.

Spiders and priapism: one of the most horrifying *phalangia* in Nicander’s catalogue is the *rhôx* (also called the *rhax*). According to Nicander, its bite caused the victim’s eyes to turn reddish and a shivering to settle upon his limbs; numbness overcomes his hips and knees. So far, this is not very different from the effects of a few other *phalangia* that ancient authors describe, but a further symptom is quite striking: ‘[the victim’s] skin and genitals grow taut, and his penis projects, moistened with ooze.’ Several other authorities describe the same symptom, either echoing Nicander’s phrases or using their own words; most of them extend this symptom to the family of *phalangia* as a whole⁷⁷.

Working from ancient descriptions of its appearance and behavior, modern zoologists have identified the *rhôx* as a member of the genus *Latrodectus* (Walckenaer, 1805), still alive in Mediterranean countries today.⁷⁸ The bite of any member of the *latrodectus* genus really does cause priapism and involuntary

⁷⁶ Aristot. *Hist. An.* 555b10-15 and 555a23-6 (where he uses *arachnai*, not *phalangia*); cf. Antigonus, *Hist. Mir.* 87 and schol. Nic. *Ther.* 715a; Plin. *Nat.* 11.85. In the fuller version of this discussion at Johnston 2009, I include a discussion of spider cannibalism based on modern arachnological data.

⁷⁷ E.g., Pliny *Nat.* 24.61-3; Ael. *Nat.* 17.11, schol. Nic. *Ther.* 721-4, Paul of Aegina *Epitomae medicae libri septem* 5.6t1; [Ps.] Dioscorides *De iis* 4; Philumenos *De venen.* 15.6; Aetius *Iatr.* 13.20; Eutecnius Soph, *Paraph. Nic. Ther.* 59.

⁷⁸ E.g., Scarborough 1979:7-8. Species are found throughout the world; the American variety is the black widow (*Latrodectus mactans* [Fabricius, 1775]).

ejaculation if antivenin is not administered within a reasonable amount of time.⁷⁹ Thus these ancient reports, incredible though they may seem, are almost surely based on something that ancient observers saw – that is, on an affordance of the *phalangion*. Nowadays, we know that the distressing symptoms Nicander described are produced by neurotoxins that the spider injects into its victim, but in antiquity, not surprisingly, the symptoms were understood to mean that the spiders *themselves* were filled with an excessive lust with which they could infect others through their bite.⁸⁰

These, then, were the affordances of spiders that the ancient audience would have had in mind when they encountered the story of Arachne and Phalanx for the first time: an ability to spin and weave; a habit of parricide, sometimes followed by cannibalism; and a lustful nature. The associations of the second and third affordances are quite limited, which might lead to our simply reading this story straightforwardly as a cautionary tale in which sexual transgression within the family leads to other horrible abnormalities, but two things should encourage us to think further. First, the spider's most frequently mentioned affordance – the ability to spin and weave fibers – is still up for interpretation. Second, Phalanx is given a characteristic of his own that he shares neither with Arachne nor with the race of spiders: when the story opens, he is undergoing military training. The word '*phalanx*,' which means 'battle-array' as well as 'poisonous spider,' epitomizes this (the double connotation of the word probably helped to inspire the story, in fact).⁸¹ Finally, both Arachne and Phalanx are pupils of Athena, within a story set in Athens, which suggests that what is at issue is not just the fact that Arachne and Phalanx failed to behave like proper humans, but the fact that they failed to behave like proper citizens of their city, even when nurtured by its leading divinity. How did weaving, warfare, sexual misconduct and civic duty come together in the Athenian imagination?

⁷⁹Scarborough 1979:8 n. 70; web-sites for physicians mention it, e.g., <http://precordialthump.medbrains.net/2008/12/06/problems-in-toxicology-003/> and <http://medbrains.net/tag/toxicology/>.

⁸⁰ Further at Johnston 2009, Von Staden 1993:36-7, for whom see citations and detailed discussion and Gow and Scholfield 1953:18; Scarborough 1979:3-6.

⁸¹ The basic meaning of *phalang-* is 'beam' or 'plank' (IE *bhelg-*); from this it comes to refer to a number of things that are long and relatively slender. Most notably, the word '*phalanx*' can also mean a finger or toe bone. The application of the words *phalanx* and *phalangion* to spiders is established by the classical period (e.g., Aristoph. *Ran.* 1314, Plat. *Euthyd.* 290a and Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.6), but it is unclear why; perhaps it is because their legs, which have two joints, look like fingers (this is especially so in the *Latrodectus* genus, where the legs tend to be longer and more slender than in other genuses). Ovid appreciates this similarity: *Met.* 6.143 (cf. Aristoph. *Ran.* 1314, Ov. *Am.* 1.14.7, *Anth. Pal.* 9.372).

Weaving frequently served as a metaphor (in Athens and elsewhere) for two institutions that underpinned a proper society: marriage and the coming together of the families resulting from those marriages into civic groups.⁸² Particularly resonant for these representations was that fact that weaving began with fibers that could be viewed as opposing one another: some ran vertically (the warp) and some ran horizontally (the woof). And yet, the proper combining of these fibers produced a textile that was strong, useful and beautiful – and so it was also with marriage, which combined the ‘opposites’ of male and female⁸³, and with civic coalitions, which combined groups that might otherwise be at odds with one another.

The metaphors of ‘weaving a marriage’ and ‘weaving a city’ from disparate fibers are familiar from their extended use in Plato’s *Statesman*, Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and other texts.⁸⁴ But the metaphors were important as well at the Panathenaia, the main festival of the Athenian year, in which all members of the city, high and low, joined together to celebrate its accomplishments. A cluster of associated myths emphasized the festival’s annual re-articulation of Athenian unity: Theseus was said to have founded the Panathenaia to celebrate the unification of the previously independent villages of Attica, for example.⁸⁵ The celebration culminated in the dedication of a new *peplos*, woven by girls and women from noble Athenian families, to Athena, Protector-of-the-City, (Athena Polias) at her main city temple on the Acropolis, in hopes of renewing her affection for the city that carried her name.

It was not only civic unity that the Panathenaia and its *peplos* celebrated, however; the preparation of the *peplos* brings us back to weaving as a metaphor for marriage and its extended significance as a task that every properly raised girl had to master before her wedding. For although the bulk of the work of weaving Athena’s new *peplos* was done by older females, the ritually important inception of the project included young girls who served in another cult dedicated to Athena.⁸⁶ They were called Arrhephoroi, and their most important duty, performed during the night of a festival called the Arrhephoria, was to

⁸² The significance of weaving within Athenian society has been well studied by several scholars, most importantly by Scheid and Svenbro 1996. I will not repeat the details of their analyses here, but will instead summarize those of their conclusions that will be of the greatest significance for us.

⁸³ The fact that words for the warp have masculine connotations and words for the woof have feminine adds strength to the metaphor. Scheid and Svenbro 1996:13.

⁸⁴ Further on all of this at Johnston 2009 and Scheid and Svenbro 1996.

⁸⁵ Further examples at Johnston 2009.

⁸⁶ Reviews of the issues and evidence at Barber 1992 and Burkert 2001.

receive a mysterious package from the priestess of Athena on the Acropolis and carry it, unopened, down a special staircase to a temple of Aphrodite. The priestess of Aphrodite gave them another package to carry back, again unopened, to the priestess of Athena.⁸⁷ The myth associated with this journey told of how Aglauros, Pandrosus and Herse, daughters of Athens' first king, Cecrops, had once been charged by Athena with guarding a basket into which they were not allowed to look. They looked anyway and caught sight of Athena's foster child Erichthonius, who was part-snake and part-human – another natural-born hybrid. Maddened with fright at the sight, the girls jumped off the Acropolis to their deaths⁸⁸.

Walter Burkert has noted that whereas the myth narrates a premature, improper introduction to motherhood and its concomitant sexuality, the ritual enacts a proper introduction, during which girls leave the realm of Athena, the virgin goddess, briefly visit the realm of Aphrodite, the goddess of sexuality, but and then travel back again to Athena, whose duties also included receiving, at her temple on the Acropolis, each and every Athenian bride on the eve of her marriage.⁸⁹ All the while, these girls resist the temptation that the daughters of Cecrops did not: they do not peer into the secret boxes they have been told to protect. Burkert has also stressed the coherence of the two tasks with which the Arrhephoroi were charged: a girl's preparation for marriage properly comprised both an introduction to sexuality, in preparation for her role as a mother, and the mastery of spinning and weaving, a good wife's tasks *par excellence*. Other myths bring the two fields of activity together by associating the daughters of Cecrops not only with their flawed introduction to sexuality but also, more successfully, with weaving and the care of textiles (traditional tasks that every well-brought-up virgin learned before marriage). Aglauros and Pandrosus were the first wool-workers and all three sisters wove the first clothing for the people of Athens. Aglauros also established the Plynteria and Kallynteria (festivals at which the statue of Athena and its clothing were cleansed)⁹⁰.

And Phalanx? If Arachne represents the failed virgin, then what does he represent? Our clue comes straight from Theophilus' story itself: Athena was teaching him *hoplomacheia*, 'fighting in arms,' a type of war-craft in which young

⁸⁷ Our main source is Paus. 1.27.3; further at Kearns 1989:21-7; Burkert 2001 and Goff 2004:198-205.

⁸⁸ Discussions of and citations for the myth given by the scholars in the previous note.

⁸⁹ Goff 2004:198-205, offers an attractive interpretation that downplays the secrecy of the myth and ritual; her differing conclusions do not affect my argument here.

⁹⁰ Phot., Hesych. and Suda. s.v. *protonion*; Phot. s.v. *Plynteria* and Hesych. s.v. *Kallynteria* and *Plynteria*.

Athenian men were trained.⁹¹ One of the occasions on which young men's preparation for military service was highlighted was the Panathenaia, during which they competed in a variety of contests designed to display their military might, including a hoplite race – that is, a race while dressed in full armor.⁹² At the Panathenaia, in other words, young men exhibited their prowess in the skills that defined maturity as an Athenian male, just as women exhibited their accomplishment in one of the skills that most centrally defined Athenian femininity.⁹³ Phalanx served as a (failed) representative of all Athenian youths and their potential just as Arachne served as a (failed) representative of all Athenian girls – and both failed not because of any lack of skill on their parts (they had been trained by Athena, after all) but because they could not channel their sexuality properly.

Theophilus' story of Arachne and Phalanx, then, explored some of the same ideas as were articulated in Athens' most important festival: weaving and military skills were the proper pursuits of young people, on which both strong marriages and strong cities could be built, but properly controlled sexuality was essential as well. If a strong city is built upon the union of diversified families and a strong family is built upon the union of diversified spouses, then the union of siblings, by definition, weakens the fabric of both. This brings me to my final observation about the affordance of a spider-web. Spiders, as the ancients already observed, are isolated creatures who share their webs only when they mate.⁹⁴ Indeed, our only ancient description of spiders sharing a web reads like a parody of marital unification: the female sits in the middle of her web and the male sits on the periphery. She pulls on a strand to move him a bit closer, and then he pulls on a strand to bring her a bit closer. They repeat this until their hind-parts finally meet, and it is in this awkward position that they clumsily engender the offspring that will eventually kill and consume them⁹⁵. The spider's web, then, is very different from the cloth under which the new bride lay with her husband, which she had woven while still a virgin, and very different as well from the metaphorical textiles that Plato's Statesmen-Weavers produce: the

⁹¹ Plat. *Leg.* 833d-e; cf. *Lach.* 181e-182a, *Gorg.* 456d; Kyle 1992:87-8; Wheeler 1982.

⁹² Kyle 1992:88-9.

⁹³Further on the complementarity of the roles at Johnston 2009.

⁹⁴ According to I. Agnarsson, Director of the Zoology Museum at the University of Puerto Rico, only 20 to 25 species of spiders (out of about 39,000) are 'quasi-social'; most of these are tropical See (<http://theridiidae.com/Social%20Spiders.html>).

⁹⁵Aristot. *Hist. An.* 542a12-17. If Plutarch's opinion that a spider's webs were all wool and no warp was shared then this, too, would have signaled failure on the spider's part to weave opposites into a single whole (above n. **).

spider's web is a marital bed from which only catastrophe can arise. Athena's erstwhile wards, Arachne and Phalanx, fail in their transitions to both sexual and civic maturity and doom themselves to lives as lonely creatures that lack any community at all.

I have managed to wring quite a bit of meaning out Theophilus' story of Arachne. If I am right, then we have to assume that it also had a lot of meaning for the ancient Athenians who were its original audience – and for later ancient readers, for whom the metaphors of weaving and marriage and weaving and the city-state would have still resonated. Why, then, did it languish, ignored by everyone except the scholiast to Nicander? Why doesn't it show up in Ovid or anywhere else? Certainly, it was lurid enough to be attractive: what more could an audience want than incest, cannibalism, parricide and creepy creatures?

A first, easy answer is that Ovid chose to narrate another story about Arachne – a story that he may have picked up from a Lydian tradition about the spider or may have made up himself. His enormous success as a narrator guaranteed that any other version would be forgotten: it is Ovid's Arachne whom Dante met in Purgatory, among the proud, and Ovid's Arachne whom Velázquez and Rubens painted.⁹⁶ But this only pushes the question back a step: why didn't Ovid choose to narrate the Athenian story?

Programmatically and thematically, the story set in Lydia serves Ovid's purposes very well. Arachne gets in trouble for her skills as a weaver of textiles, an undertaking that already in antiquity was used metaphorically to represent the construction of texts – of stories. And a story-teller is exactly what Ovid presents himself to be in the *Metamorphoses*. A meta-commentary on his own art is surely embedded in his narration of the contest between Arachne and Minerva. The stories that Arachne and Minerva weave into their tapestries, moreover, gave Ovid ample opportunity to narrate numerous further myths of transformation. Truly, myths are mercenaries, and Ovid's band of warriors beat out any army that may still have been fighting on behalf of Theophilus.

The Power of the Gods:

So far, what have we been able to conclude about Greek metamorphic myths? Sometimes, they seem to have clear messages or at least make clear connections: Apollo's ardor causes Daphne to turn into a *daphne* tree; therefore the *daphne* becomes sacred to Apollo. Lycaon is willing to serve up human flesh as stew-meat, therefore he becomes a wolf – and therefore, dear listeners, be sure

⁹⁶ *Purg.* 12.43-5.

you don't serve human flesh. At other times, messages and connections seem to get lost in transmission as a great story is passed from narrator to narrator, each of whom crafts it to suit his or her own desires and purposes: Aedon becomes a tunefully lamenting *aedon* and her sister Chelidon becomes a twittering *chelidon*; then the Athenians push Aedon aside in favor of someone named Procne, and her sister takes the new name of Philomela – the tuneful one – but has her tongue severed. Then before you know it, it's the sister with a severed tongue who turns into the nightingale – a nonsensical transformation, zoologically speaking, but meanwhile, the luridly attractive story has managed to do a lot of important work on behalf of its multiple narrators. Adopting the concept of affordances helps us see that myths can send more complex messages than those I've just mentioned, and to better understand a myth against the background of other myths, rituals and social institutions with which it is in dialogue – but even the concept of affordances can't elucidate every myth. We still have no satisfying solution as to what is going on with Hecabe, for example. Sometimes, it seems awfully hard to squeeze much sense at all out of a metamorphosis.

If anything is really clear so far, then, it's that there is no standard key or even set of keys that's guaranteed to unlock the meanings of all metamorphic myths, and that some metamorphic myths may not have any 'meanings' at all, in the sense that we have traditionally expected them to. The one unassailable observation that we circle back to over and over again, instead, is that whatever other aitiological, ideological or cautionary work was done by stories of transformation, one of their primary obligations was to be great *stories* – ripping good yarns about extraordinary events, about 'wonders' (*thaumata*, the Greeks would call them), as Richard Buxton has recently reminded us.⁹⁷ Indeed, as if to make sure we don't miss that point, characters in the narrations sometimes express wonder – or horror – at the events themselves. The most extended instances of this, before Ovid, come from Aeschylus' two descriptions of Io. In his *Suppliant Maidens*, the chorus describes the Egyptians who received her as 'trembling at her strangeness, with pale fear at their hearts,' as they beheld 'a mixed-breed creature, half-cow, half-human – a monster to be marveled at.' The verb 'marveled at' – *ethamboun* – is a cognate of *thaumata*. The chorus of his *Prometheus Bound* declares that they have never seen something 'so offensive to

⁹⁷ Buxton 2009.

their eyes, so shameful and frightening, so chilling to the soul' – and this in spite of the fact that Chorus members themselves are ocean nymphs.⁹⁸

With this point in mind, we should step back a little further and ponder the sheer number of stories of metamorphosis that we inherit from Greek myths and, at the same time, the particularity of each. Already from Hesiod we hear about Actaeon, Battus, Lycaon, Callisto, Ceyx and Alcyone, Atalanta, Io, and Hyacinthus – and if we had more than fragments of his *Catalogue of Women*, we would undoubtedly hear about others. Our extant tragedies narrate or allude to 22 metamorphoses; titles of lost tragedies promise quite a few more. Other genres are less lush in their offerings, but nonetheless, we glean some examples from lyric⁹⁹ and the local historians and early prose mythographers supply quite a few.¹⁰⁰ Then there is the huge flowering of metamorphic narrations during the Hellenistic period, when poets such as Nicander and Boios assembled them from earlier sources, preserving for us some stories that we would not otherwise have. Finally, let us not forget, in addition, visual representations: on vases we find pirates turning into dolphins, Actaeon as a human with stag's horns (even in the Underworld!), Io as a cow with the face of a maiden, Niobe turning into stone.¹⁰¹

Amongst all of these materials, remarkably, seldom is there much room for confusion. Usually, each name is linked to only one story, or cluster of similar stories, and there is generally only one back-story, or cluster of similar back-stories, for each animal, plant or mineral that started out as a human. It's unlikely that an ancient listener, hearing the name of Io, would think of any metamorphosis other than that of woman into a cow, or, hearing about a hunter who was turned into a stag and then torn apart by his own dogs, would think of anyone other than Actaeon. Of course, there were some local stories that complicate this picture – the stories of Aedon and Chelidon seem to have co-existed alongside those of Procne and Philomela, each leading to transformations in a nightingale and a swallow. There were two different Scyllas – one turned

⁹⁸ *Suppl.* 565-70; *Prom.* 687-92. Cf. also, for example, *Il.* 2.308-20. Buxton 2009 comments on passages in which characters express their astonishment at a *god's* transformation, e.g., *Od.* 3.371-3 (Buxton 2009:29).

⁹⁹ E.g. Corinna sang of the daughters of Minyas (fr. 665), Bacchylides of Io and Niobe (10 and 20D).

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Pherekydes told of Aedon (fr. 124) and the Hyades (fr. 90), Acusilaus told of Io (frs. 26 and 27) and Aktaion (fr. 33), Menecrates told of Leto turning peasants into frogs (fr. 2), several told of Niobe (see Fowler 2014:366) and Deilochus told of how Kleite's tears turned into a spring called after her (fr. 4-10).

¹⁰¹ Add LIMC numbers for vase paintings **

into the monster with dogs below her waist and the other into a sea-bird.¹⁰² In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, it must have been very clear which metamorphosis went with which name. This specificity is one of the reasons that Greek metamorphic myths survived through the centuries as allegories, metaphors, and significant allusions: each is so vividly distinct from the others that it can reliably convey a whole set of images and ideas through little more than a name and perhaps a telling detail. Virgil, in listing creatures that thwart the bee-keeper's work, can refer to 'the spider, cursed by Minerva,' and expect us to know the story of Arachne; Francis Bacon can describe traitorous servants as plotting to treat their master like Actaeon and expect us to know that the servants will tear him apart, literally or figuratively.¹⁰³ It is one of the lures of modern works such as John Updike's *The Centaur*. Once we have realized who Iris Osgood really is, with her bovine eyes and milky arms, we are eager to see how her transformation into a cow will play out within the confines of a 1940s high school classroom in rural Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁴

Many metamorphosed characters, moreover, are tied into one of the great ancestral families of Greek myth: among other things, Actaeon's story is a story about the dissolution of the royal family of Thebes, and Io's story is about the royal family of Argos (and how one branch of it ended up in Egypt). This gives the characters, and their stories, a concrete link to the lives of their audiences: these are the great-grandfathers and grandmothers from whom their city (or their neighbors' city) sprang, and to whom noble families still trace their lineage; these are the heroes and heroines who are worshipped at local shrines. So persistent is this idea that even a royal maiden transmogrified into a bear (Callisto) may nonetheless give birth to a son (Arcas) who becomes the eponymous king of a land (Arcadia) and the progenitor of a dynasty.¹⁰⁵ The story of the nightingale and the swallow, once it had been firmly tied into the Athenian line of descent by its association with Procne and Philomela, daughters of the primordial king Pandion, could be used by Demosthenes to exemplify the patriotic heroism of Athenian women: the sisters' infanticide was their own way of rebelling against a northern barbarian.¹⁰⁶ Nicander, in his *Metamorphoses*,

¹⁰² For a fascinating study of the two Scyllas – which aims at showing that they developed from a single collocation of ideas – see Hopman 2012.

¹⁰³ Virg. G. 4.246-47; Bacon *The Wisedome of the Ancients* (1619), (STC 1130), X

¹⁰⁴ Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ The earliest source for Callisto as the mother of Arcas is Charon of Lampsacus *FGrH* 262F12 but the story probably goes back to Hesiod; see the fuller story at Paus. 8.3.6-7 and Fowler 2014:105-108 and Gantz 725-9.

¹⁰⁶ Dem. 60.30.

carefully ties each story to a locale: it was in Calydon that the Meleagrides turned into guinea-hens, in Orchomenos that the daughters of Minyas became bats, on the farthest border of Thessaly that Aegyptius and Neophron became vultures. Sometimes one of his stories has aitiological implications for a local cult: Leucippus turned from a girl into a boy on Crete, giving rise to a new festival there in honor of Leto, who had worked the trick.¹⁰⁷ In part, Nicander's focus on places bespeaks the same learned love of obscure local histories as we see in Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets, but the information had to be there for these poets to use: they inherited older stories that had shaped local self-perceptions. We are a long way, in other words, from the nameless swan brothers and their sister whom I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, and the anonymous women who married stallions; Greek myths are most often about people who are entrenched in the larger history of a particular place. They are not 'once upon a time in a kingdom far, far way.' In fact, Greek myth more generally seems determined to tell stories about specific individuals who lived in specific places, in contrast, once again, to fairy tales. This does not mean that the Greeks did not tell what we would call fairy tales. It would be remarkable if they did not, given that fairy tales are found in almost every culture. What it means, rather, is that myths and fairy tales serve different purposes, even if they draw on a shared pool of motifs such as the wicked stepmother, or plot themes such as the little man overcoming a giant or ogre through cleverness. A wicked stepmother is dreadful, but a wicked stepmother (Medea) who persecutes an ancestral hero of the Athenians (Theseus) is dreadful in a more interesting and resonant way.

It is also the particularity of these stories that keeps each of the marvels marvelous – that allows each to seize the imagination without sating the palate. Indeed, the lack of reliable 'rules' or 'logic' that govern metamorphoses enhances that particularity; the wonders offered by these stories cannot be circumscribed within any grammar of correspondences and therefore cannot become rote, predictable. They remain wondrous. But it is the sheer *number* of metamorphoses, cumulatively, that carries another kind of weight: as consumers of Greek myths, we are constantly reminded of something that I said earlier in this chapter: that the gods can do almost anything they please; what we are accustomed to think of as reality remains fluid under their touch and is at the mercy of their emotions. In this sense, it becomes even clearer that the metamorphosis of humans into other creatures and things is just one, although an especially spectacular, type of a larger category of wondrous events (*thaumata*)

¹⁰⁷ Ant. Lib. 17.

that we hear about both in myths and in other types of narrative. Gods can enhance the beauty of an individual's true form, as Athena does for the wave-swept Odysseus before he meets Nausicaa on the Phaeacian shore.¹⁰⁸ They can cover great distances in the blink of an eye, as they do when darting on and off of the Trojan battlefield, or send a winged golden ram to rescue their children from the sacrificial altar, as Nephele does in our earliest stories of the Golden Fleece.¹⁰⁹ They can work miraculous cures, as we hear from the Epidaurian *iamata*, even performing surgery while the patient is asleep.¹¹⁰ They can fight alongside their worshippers against the barbarian Gauls, as Apollo and two 'white maidens' (Artemis and Athena?) did in Delphi in 279 BCE, and as Demeter and Persephone did in a naval battle.¹¹¹ And of course, they can change their own forms as easily as we change clothing – not only in myths (where they disguised themselves as humans as well as animals) but in real life: St. Elmo's fire was understood as an epiphany of the Dioscuri, Asclepius appeared to the son of his worshipper Isyllos as a man gleaming in golden armor, but sometimes appeared to other worshippers as a snake. A priestess of Demeter named Alexandra asked Apollo, at his Didymean oracle, why the gods had recently manifested themselves so often in the forms of maidens, women, men and children.¹¹²

Of course, manifestations such as those that Alexandra talks about were usually understood to have happened more recently than the mythic ones, perhaps in the generation of their audiences' parents or grandparents, perhaps even in the audiences' own. These wonders had the advantage, therefore, of temporal proximity and the credibility that comes with it, as well as the credibility that comes from a reasonable degree of experiential verisimilitude: 'real-life' sources do not mention humans turning into plants and animals, but they do mention gods taking on human forms (and occasionally, snake-form) to appear to their worshippers. And after all, who is to say that the gods aren't lurking amongst right now, disguised as sausage-sellers, nursemaids or the boa constrictor that's for sale in the local pet store? But the wonders described by myths had advantages as well. Most importantly they included – indeed, they

¹⁰⁸ *Od.* 6.229-31.

¹⁰⁹ The story seems to be as old as Hesiod and Pherecydes. See Hes. Fr. 68 MW, *FGrH* 3F98 and 3F99, and discussions at Fowler 2014:195-201 and Gantz 1993:176-80. A complete version appears at Apollod. 1.80-3.

¹¹⁰ For an overview of Asclepius at Epidaurus and similar healing shrines, see Johnston 2008:90-95.

¹¹¹ Apollo: Cic. *Div.* 1.37, D.S. 22.9, *SIG* 398, Pomp. Trog. 24.8, Paus. 10.23-4 and 1.4, and cf. Call. *H.* 4.171-84; Demeter and Persephone: Plu. *Timoleon* 8.

¹¹² St. Elmo's fire: ** Isyllos: ** Asclepius as snake: ** Demeter: ** See also Henrichs 2010, Graf 2003, Bravo 2003 and Versnel 1987.

fervently embraced – the negative side of the gods’ power and how it affected humans. Many mortals were transmogrified because of a god’s anger or lust, and many of those who were transmogrified because of divine pity landed in their pitiable circumstances because of divine anger or lust – perhaps even the anger or lust of the very same god who later took pity. Myths, then, were a place where the Greeks could talk about an aspect of the gods’ nature, and its potential to explode at any moment into mortal life, that they did not care to confront in other venues, such as public inscriptions and prayers. And so has it always been: narratives that stretch the imagination, narratives about the wondrous (whether they are strictly regarded as ‘fictional’ or not), provide space to entertain all sorts of issues that are hard to address elsewhere. Indeed, the further they stretch the imagination, the safer they may seem, detached as they are from everyday experiences. As Victoria Nelson has observed, for example, representation of the supernatural in contemporary films predominantly takes the form of the grotesque and demonic, rather than the benign and angelic. Nelson attributes this to the secular, Aristotelian world-view that has sway in the west for the past four centuries, which she suggests has repressed all religious thought outside of that prescribed by doctrine (which, in western Judaism and Christianity tends to emphasize the benign aspects of divinity). The repressed thoughts – the negative side of the transcendent – bubble to the surface in media that can be neatly compartmentalized away from normal life.¹¹³

This is not exactly the case for antiquity, of course; practices and beliefs that we might describe as ‘demonic’ in nature, or as directed against the demonic, were widely practiced – binding spells, amulets, monthly suppers left at the crossroads to avert bad luck. Yet the parallel holds insofar as almost all formal declarations about the gods in antiquity emphasized their benignity towards mortals. As Diogenes the Cynic said, if everyone who foundered on the sea had made offerings to the gods at Samothrace, they would have by far outnumbered the existing dedications, which had been thankfully set up by those who had survived the rigors of the waves.¹¹⁴ Are those who suffer at the hands of the gods in any position to advertise the fact, and if they are, would they bother to do so? Would they dare? Myths were the proper places to explore the darker side of the mortal-divine relationship, whether it ended in metamorphosis or some other ill. These tales were closely tied to their audiences

¹¹³ Nelson 2001. The specific reference is to page viii, but the topic forms one of the foci of the book as a whole.

¹¹⁴ D.L. 59.

through ancestry, through the local landscape, and through cultic aitiology, but they were conveniently kept at a distance through the perceived gap of time.

Many of these narrations – performed in the theater, danced at a victory celebration or sung from the rhapsode’s dais – were delivered during festivals meant to honor the gods. The dark side of divine power was nonetheless power and there is no question but that some myths of divine *thaumata* (metamorphic or not) were meant to remind listeners of the damage that that gods could do when they were not happy with their treatment at the hands of mortals. Here, we drift into the category of the aretology – a narrative meant to exalt a god’s works. Typically, aretologies focused on the good things that a god had done, but goodness always lies in the eyes of the beholder. We may sympathize with Dionysus’ decision to turn the pirates who have kidnapped him into dolphins, and therefore describe that part of his Homeric *Hymn* as an aretology, but we may also sympathize, when reading the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, with Metaneira’s outcries when she sees Demeter placing her infant son in the hearth fire.¹¹⁵ What are we to call the famine that follows this incident, signaling Demeter’s rage? That it establishes Demeter’s absolute power over the growth of grain is indisputable, but it surely brings no benefit to humans. Or to take a real-life example, in the third century BCE, a man on Delos set up an inscription praising Isis and Sarapis for striking his opponents dumb in court – the lawsuit concerned his right to establish a temple for the two gods in the agora. This was a demonstration of the gods’ powers, indeed, and we might understand it to have been justified by their desire for a permanent home on the island, but then, we don’t know the other side of the story. Or to which gods the other side might have been praying.¹¹⁶

Transformation and Identity:

Wonders, whether they happened in narrative or real life, changed the lives of the mortals whom they touched. Those that involved metamorphoses altered their victims’ exterior forms. But did metamorphosis alter the essential self? It seems not: narrators could present the person as being aware of what was happening during the change, and as reflecting on their new life in a new body after it had happened. Ovid is the master of this. For his Callisto,
 human feelings remained, though she was now a bear; with
 constant moanings she shows her grief and stretches up such hands

¹¹⁵ *HHDem.* 243-83 and 305-13.

¹¹⁶ *IG XI.4* 1299 and see Engelmann 1975.

as are left to her to the heavens, and, though she cannot speak, still feels the ingratitude of Jove.

And his Actaeon,

marvels to find himself so swift of foot, and when he sees his features and his horns in a clear pool, tries to say 'O woe is me,' yet no words come.¹¹⁷

But we find authors earlier than Ovid exploiting the possibilities as well: as Achilles tells her story, Niobe 'although being stone,' still 'broods over the sorrows the gods gave her,' Euripides' Cadmus cries out, in mid-transition, that his lower half has already become a serpent, and Aeschylus' Io remembers the horrible moment when her 'form and her wits were distorted.'¹¹⁸ Moreover, even as a cow she is able to carry on a detailed conversation with Prometheus about what her future holds.¹¹⁹ In other cases, preservation of identity is poignantly suggested by the fact that the newly transmogrified mortals are compelled not only to continue doing whatever it was that led to the transformation in the first place, but to continue feeling the emotion that accompanied it: Phaethon's mourning sisters cry forever, even after they become poplar trees,¹²⁰ Alcyone and Aedon mourn for their lost loved ones even after they become birds,¹²¹ Anthos flees in terror from horses, even after he has become a bird. Arachne spins and weaves forevermore.

One easy conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the Greeks understood humans to be dual in nature: there was the outer body, which might be changed, and then there was something else, representing the essential person, which remained stable. The *Odyssey*, describing the transformation of Odysseus' men into pigs, makes that stable element the mind (*nous*), but most narrators leave the details vague. Ovid occasionally also specifies that it is the mind (*mens*),¹²² but then very late in his narrative he seems to imply that it was the soul (*anima*) that survived transformation instead of, or as well as, the mind: he introduces Pythagoras, who claims that after the deaths of our current bodies, our souls will enter into new bodies, perhaps even those of animals or plants — metempsychosis.¹²³ From here Pythagoras turns to discussing all sorts of transformations, including some that are not very different from those that Ovid

¹¹⁷ Ov. *M.* 2. 484-88; *M.* 3 198-201.

¹¹⁸ *Il* 24 617; Eur. fr. 930 Radt; Aes. *Prom.* 673=74.

¹¹⁹ Aes. *Prom.* 673-4.

¹²⁰ Eur. *Hipp.* 732.

¹²¹ Eur. *IT* 1089-92.

¹²² E.g. Callisto at *M.* 2.485, Actaeon at 3.203.

¹²³ Ov. *M.* 15.158. At 167, he calls it the *spiritus* instead; at 172 and 175 he again uses *anima*.

has been narrating all along: Hyperborean men who grow feathers after bathing in a pool belonging to Minerva, hyenas that can change their gender as needed. Metamorphosis and metempsychosis are two ways in which a soul might experience different forms of embodiment – the first being a premature, and divinely imposed, version of the second.

Once having entered the Greek world with Pythagoras in the sixth century, the idea of metempsychosis never departed, persisting as a familiar alternative to the more traditional belief that the soul, after parting from the body at death, would spend eternity in the Underworld – in pleasure, in pain or simply in boredom as its corpse rotted away in the soil of the upper world. Under either scenario, the soul – implicitly the location of the self, eschatologically speaking – was separable from any body that it had inhabited or would inhabit in the future. From the concept of the separable soul there also grew tales of extraordinary men who could temporarily send their souls out of their bodies while they were still alive, to travel the world and gather information before returning home: Abaris, Aristeas, Hermotimus, Apollonius of Tyana and, earliest of all, Pythagoras himself.¹²⁴ From the concept of the separable soul, too, grew the Greek fear of ghosts – the souls of those whom death had not been able to restrain inside Hades' walls.¹²⁵ In other words, the duality of self that is explored in stories of metamorphosis underlies other Greek ideas as well.

Yet, although peoples other than the Greeks similarly understood humans to be dual in nature, none of them developed myths of metamorphosis of the same type, or with the same vigor, as the Greeks did. In spite of the deeply rooted Hindu belief in metempsychosis, for example, the Hindus have no stories of humans changing into other creatures or things, as far as I can discover. And in many other cultures where stories of human metamorphosis do develop, the metamorphoses are only temporary, in contrast to Greek metamorphoses, which are almost always permanent.¹²⁶ Temporary metamorphoses can be reversed when a spell is broken, as in many fairy tales (the swan brothers return to human form when they don the shirts their sister has sewn; the Beast returns to human form when Beauty's tears fall upon his prostrate form; the frog turns back into a prince when the princess kisses him – or, as in the earlier version of the story,

¹²⁴ Bremmer 1983:24-53.

¹²⁵ Johnston 1999.

¹²⁶ Io and Odysseus' men are rare exceptions, as if, in later times, the hero of Lucian's *Ass* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. Teiresias has a similar experience, given that he is turned from a man into a woman and then back again in some versions of his story: Hes. fr. 275 MW and see Gantz 1993:529-30.

when she throws him against a wall in frustration). Or, temporary metamorphoses might be deliberately undertaken by those with the ability to shape-shift back and forth of their own volition: the Norse Berserker who shifts between man and bear, the Welsh Selkie who shifts between seal and woman, the American Indian skin-walker who shifts into whatever form he desires, the European were-wolf and his various relatives – the Chinese were-fox and were-dog, the African were-hyena, etcetera. The Greeks had notably few stories about human shape-shifters: Periclymenus and Mestra are the only two names that come down to us, both of whom were given their special ability by an affectionate Poseidon, one of those multi-morphic gods of the sea.¹²⁷ The were-animal enters the Greek imagination only as something that outsiders believe in: the distant Scythians say that their neighbors, the Neuri, turn into wolves and then back again; the Arcadians (paradigmatic primitives of the Greek world) claim that boys undergoing rites of social maturation occasionally change into wolves for nine years and then return to human form if they have avoided eating human flesh.¹²⁸ In Greece, in other words, shape-shifting was a talent reserved almost exclusively for the gods – not only sea-gods like Thetis, Nereus and Proteus, who had a habit of changing from one form to another as rapidly as water runs between your fingers, but also Olympian gods like Apollo, who changed form three times within 50 lines of his Homeric *Hymn* (into a dolphin, a star, and a young man).¹²⁹

All of this re-emphasizes, by contrast, certain implications of mortal metamorphoses as we find them in the Greek world: not only are the changes almost always permanent (no tears, no kiss, no sisterly shirts will reverse them) but they also occur at a god's behest, rather than that of the individual who undergoes them. And they are presented as dire – descending either upon an unwilling human or upon one who is in such desperate straits that metamorphosis seems preferable.

This is not the case in every culture. In other places where stories of metamorphosis from human to animal are common, transformation is often presented as something to be celebrated, or at least as something that, at the time of the world's awakening, was normal. Particularly among African and American Indian peoples, myths tell of humans spontaneously metamorphosing

¹²⁷ Mestra's full story at *Ov. M.* 8.738-878. Mestra as lover of Poseidon: Hes. fr. 43a MW; as shape-shifter: *Palaiph.* 23, *Lyc.* 1391-96; see also Gantz 1993:68-69. Periclymenus: Hes. frs. 33a and 35 MW and Gantz 1993:184-85.

¹²⁸ *Hdt.* 4.105; *Pl. Rep.* 565d, *Paus.* 8.38.7, *Plin. NH* 8.81. Discussion at Buxton 1987 and Burkert 1983:83-10

¹²⁹ *HHAp.* 400-450.

into animals because it is simply the way things are: a woman who loved to swim became the first beaver, for example.¹³⁰ A Cherokee story tells of a man who began dwelling together with bears, living as they lived and growing thick fur. When he tried to return to his old life, with his human wife, he longed to be amongst bears again.¹³¹ These same cultures also tell stories of humans marrying animals and producing animal children, of humans and animals adopting and raising one another's children, and of humans, as a species, developing from animals. There is an implicit assumption of what two scholars of Andean culture have dubbed 'interpenetrability' amongst humans and animals, made possible by a core of sameness that underlies what are understood to be superficial differences.¹³² The issue of whether the self is dual – of whether something such a soul or a mind 'stays the same' even as the external body changes – is irrelevant, because the inner selves of humans and animals are not significantly different, even if they are clothed in varying exteriors.

Many Greek metamorphoses seem to be aimed at tidying up the world, by moving a self that doesn't belong in the human realm out into a realm where it is more at home. Cannibalism, incest, infanticide and lesser transgressions such as rape and theft – all fairly common events in metamorphic back-stories – are not tolerated in our world, but in the natural world, the world of animals, they can be tolerated. Indeed, they might even be considered characteristic of animals, as the story of Arachne and Phalangion demonstrated: parricide, lust and cannibalism are par for the course amongst spiders. What is bad behavior for a human, then, can be *naturalized* or *normalized* through metamorphosis¹³³ – a positive change for the world at large, which now has everything in its proper place, if not for the transformed, who find themselves forever exiled from the communities into which they were born. This may, indeed, be the most significant loss that the self experiences during metamorphosis: the essential self remains Io or Actaeon but he or she is no longer welcome amongst (and usually no longer recognized by) those whom he or she used to hold dear: Ovid's Io, to take an especially poignant case, finally has to write her name in the sand with her hoof, to make her family understand what has happened. The new community into which the transformed mortal must move, moreover, may be no

¹³⁰ Kemmerer 2011:43 citing Erdoes 1994:392.

¹³¹ Kemmerer 2011:43 citing Brown 1979:22.

¹³² Valladolid and Apffel-Marglin 2001.

¹³³ I thank my former student Karen Ravelli for discussing this idea with me – an idea that she subsequently developed in a master's thesis. The idea runs contrary to that expressed at Buxton 46-7, who does not understand metamorphoses as offering an 'exit route' for humans who have been drive beyond their limits.

community at all: Ovid's Callisto hides at the sight of other bears – forgetting what she has herself become – and flees from wolves, forgetting that her father (Lycaon) now runs with the pack.¹³⁴ Aeschylus' Io wanders the outer wastes of the world with only a gadfly for company. Procne, Philomela and Tereus are doomed to chase one another through the sky in an endless loop.

The stark divide between human and animal communities (and between humans and animals themselves) that is implied by metamorphic myths surfaces in other Greek stories, as well – most importantly, in the story of the great flood. In the Akkadian, Babylonian, Sumerian and Biblical tales of the flood, the human in charge of building an ark (Atrahasis, Utnapishtim, Ziusudra, Noah) takes on board animals, thus carefully ensuring that their species will continue after the waters recede – and so also in a Hindu story of the flood.¹³⁵ In all of these stories, in fact, where enough text remains for us to hear the beginning of the story, it is by divine command that the animals are included. In the Greek story, however (which may have been borrowed from the Near East and adapted to Greek tastes), Deucalion and Pyrrha, having been forewarned of the storm by Deucalion's father, Prometheus, ride it out alone in a *larnax* – a small chest usually used for storing household goods. Upon drifting ashore at Mt. Parnassus, they are told by the goddess Themis how to recreate human race.¹³⁶ Not a word is said about how the animals will be regenerated after the flood until we reach Ovid, who tells us that they spontaneously burst forth from the postdiluvian soil without any help from either gods or humans.¹³⁷ In contrast to both their Mediterranean neighbors (from whom they inherited a number of mythological themes), and one of their Indo-European neighbors, then, the Greeks did not imagine humans and animals making common cause against a god's destructive rage. For Greek narrators of the flood, humans and animals were categorically different; if humans had natural collaborators during this great disaster it was, rather, two of the more kindly gods.

¹³⁴ Ov. M. 2.485-94.

¹³⁵ *Atrahasis* Tablet III, *Epic of Gilgamesh* Tablet XI, Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature 1.7.4 (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.1.7.4#> last accessed Aug. 20, 2015), Genesis 6-7. The Hindu myth of the flood, the hero of which is Manu, is from the *Matsya Purana* 1.11-34m 2.1-19 (well narrated in translation by Doniger 2004:181-5).

¹³⁶ For a complete account we must go to Apollod. 1.7.2, but it is clear that the basic story was around already in the archaic period. We get fragments of it from Hellenicus (*FGrH* 4F117a), Andron fr. 8 and Epicharmus fr. 113, both of whom mention the *larnax* (Ov. M. 1.319 calls it *parva ratis*, 'tiny boat', and from Pi. O. 9.44-53, for example. See also Smith 2014, Bremmer 2008 and Fowler 2014:113-21.

¹³⁷ Ov. M. 1.416-21.

Striking, too, is the lack of any Greek myth justifying the sacrifice of animals. The tale of how Prometheus performed the first sacrifice explains why the victim's meat was divided up between mortals and immortals in the way that it was, but offers no justification for the act itself.¹³⁸ Stories about specific sacrifices trace their origins to bad behavior on the part of specific animals, thus placing the blame firmly on the victims. The *aition* for the Buphonia (literally the 'Murder of a Cow') that was performed each year in Athens, for example, said that a cow had once wandered onto the Acropolis and eaten the grain off of Zeus's altar, to which a pious bystander reacted angrily, killing the animal. After a kangaroo court exonerated the cow's murderer, an oracle ordered the Athenians to repeat the act every year thereafter.¹³⁹ Similarly, pigs were said to deserve being sacrificed to Demeter because a herd of pigs who happened to be in the vicinity when Persephone was dragged beneath the earth by Hades happened to be swallowed up as well – guilt through association.¹⁴⁰ It is also animal guilt that explains the *prohibition* of pig sacrifice in cults of Aphrodite: she developed an aversion to the entire porcine race after a wild boar killed her lover Adonis. (The same story could be used, however, to justify the sacrifice of pigs in a few of the goddess's cults – again, we see how flexible a mercenary myth could be).¹⁴¹

Quite different from these Greek stories is a Hindu myth about the origin of sacrifice: in the beginning of time there were five types of animals deemed appropriate for sacrifice: the human, the horse, the cow, the ram and the goat.¹⁴² The gods first sacrificed humans, until their sacrificial qualities had left them. At that point they moved on to horses, until their sacrificial qualities had left them, too, then to cows, and so on until the elusive sacrificial quality finally lodged itself in rice and barley – *et voilà*, vegetarianism. Once upon a time, then, humans were not only *a* sacrificial animal, but the sacrificial animal *par excellence*. When they escaped from this role, other animals escaped with them. No Greek would ever imagine such a thing – the few stories they told of human sacrifice associated it with barbarians in distant lands such as Libya and Tauris, with the maniacal rage of Achilles, or with an angry goddess who at the last moment

¹³⁸ Hes. *Th.* 535-64.

¹³⁹ For complete citations and discussion of the ancient sources for the Buphonia and its myth, see Burkert 1983:136-43 (although his tendency to export conclusions about the Buphonia to the rest of Greek sacrifice are overdone). The myth seems to be at least as old as the late fifth century.

¹⁴⁰ Clem Al. *Protr.* 2.17, Schol. Lucian 275-76 (Rabe).

¹⁴¹ See Pirenne-Delforge 1994:388-93.

¹⁴² From the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, as cited at O'Flaherty 1988:84.

changed her mind, sending a deer to fill in for the virgin she had demanded. It could never have been the norm, even at the beginning of time.

Animals were, at best, servants: Greek versions of the world-wide *topos* of the abandoned child protected by a friendly animal (Telephus, Peleus and Neleus, Atalanta, Paris, etc.)¹⁴³ end the idyll while the child is still an infant: herdsmen or hunters discover it being nursed by a mare, or doe, or whatever other animal has adopted it, and take it home to be raised among humans. For the Greeks there is no Enkidu, Mowgli or Tarzan who grows to young adulthood in intimate acquaintance with the ways of the animals, learning their skills and forming enduring bonds.¹⁴⁴ The few mythic figures who do obtain an animal talent do so without really interacting with them. Some seers obtain their prophetic abilities when snakes lick their ears, for example, and others have honey dropped on their lips by bees, but the recipients are asleep when it happens.¹⁴⁵ The healer-seer Polyeidus observes one snake curing another and adopts the technique for his own use, but the snake is not aware that he is instructing Polyeidus: there is none of the teacher-student relationship that normally underlies the learning of a skill.¹⁴⁶ Unlike in some other cultures, there are no Greek heroes who are part animal – the closest we come is Heracles wearing a lion skin – and the Greeks knew no paradisaical time or place where humans and animals peacefully could live side by side.¹⁴⁷

The dire tone of Greek myths about metamorphoses into animals, and their fascination with such myths, then, may express both the perception of a greater ontological division between humans and animals than other cultures seem to have had, and a greater anxiety about crossing it. This sharpens the formulation that I offered a moment ago about myths of metamorphosis: they were a place where the Greeks could talk about an aspect of the gods' nature, and its potential to explode at any moment into mortal life, that was central to their belief system but that they did not want to confront in other venues. The entertainment value that the myths offered heightened their usefulness as such

¹⁴³ Telephus: Apollod. 2.7.4, S. fr. 89, Ael. *VH* 12.42, Hyg. *Fab.* 252; Peleus and Neleus: Schol. *Il.* 10.334; Eust. ad *Od.* 11.253, p. 1681; Ael. *VH* 12.42; Atalanta: Apollod. 3.9.2 and Ael. *VH* 13.1; Paris: Ael. *VH* 12.42.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. too the story of the Iranian hero Zal as told in the *Shahnameh*. Zal is abandoned at birth and raised to adulthood by a bird. When he is a young man they part, but the bird later saves the life of Zal's wife Rudaba when she is giving birth to the hero Rustom.

¹⁴⁵ Anticleides *FGrH* 140F17, POxy 56.3830; Porph. *On Abstinence* 3.3, Pi. *O.* 6.44.

¹⁴⁶ Apollod. 3.3.1-2.

¹⁴⁷ In Vergil's fourth *Eclogue* we come close – but the paradise is a paradise by virtue of the lions *staying away* from the flocks and the serpents *dying*.

not only because the audience would be more deeply immersed in, and thus more deeply engaged with, their subject matter, but also because these myths were adamantly set in an earlier time. They were about ancestors: members of one's own group and yet distant. When effectively narrated, these stories provided an immersive way of exploring the existence of cosmically powerful forces of bad and good without transgressing the implicit prohibition.

[still lacks concluding paragraph]

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