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Title of extract: **Animals, 1 The Ritual Theory**

Name of Author: **Forbes, I.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Metamorphosis in Greek Myths. Forbes. I.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Oxford University Press**

Pages scanned: **38 - 57**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Monsters, Ghosts and RevenantsCLCS6015**

Name of Designated Person
authorising scanning:

E. L. Harris

Date authorised: 24.10.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Animals, I

The Ritual Theory

It is the stories of transformation into large mammals that have most frequently prompted religious explanations, for several reasons. First, most of them appear early and have therefore been seen as belonging to the more primitive stage of Greek mythology. Secondly, most of them are not aetiological in form and therefore cannot be explained as animal just-so stories. Thirdly, in most of them the gods play a central role as characters and often have an intimate connection with the human heroes: Io, Callisto, and Taygete are all loved by Zeus, and Actaeon is Zeus' rival in love. Fourthly, the animals of the transformations have a close connection with the gods of the stories as their sacred animals: Io is a cow, the sacred animal of Hera; Callisto, Taygete, and Actaeon are bears and deer, the sacred animals of Artemis.

For an earlier generation of scholars the conclusion was obvious: we should seek the origins of these myths in historical animal cults. Cook wrote: 'I think we may venture on the general statement that within the bounds of Hellenic mythology animal metamorphosis commonly points to a preceding animal cult.'¹ Bubbe in his dissertation on metamorphoses used this principle to explain all the transformations into animals.

Although the influence of ritual on myths is now treated more cautiously by many scholars,² and the notion of an animal-god is no longer a fashionable one or a starting point for new research, it seems worth devoting some space to considering what appears in

¹ *JHS* 14 (1894), 160.

² See e.g. J. Fontenrose, *The Ritual Theory of Myth* (Berkeley, 1966); G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1974), ch. 10; W. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley, 1979), 56–8.

many standard reference books as the explanation of metamorphosis stories.

There has recently been much more interest in explaining myths in terms of initiation rituals; in the second part of this chapter I shall consider whether these theories throw any light on the stories we are considering.

THE ANIMAL-CULT THEORY

In its traditional form this view supposed a general evolution from a naïve worship by primitive people of the animals around them to a belief in remoter anthropomorphic beings;³ these new gods are, however, unable to shake off their animal associations completely and transfer their animal form to a human servant or enemy in a transformation story. This theory has been applied to all the stories,⁴ but most frequently and with greatest enthusiasm to those of Io and Callisto, who are considered to be in origin the bear-goddess Artemis and the cow-goddess Hera. Since similar arguments arise in the case of every story I shall confine myself to considering these two.

Before we look at the individual stories, however, it is important to consider what the notion of an animal-god actually means, what form (if any) animal-gods took or had taken in ancient Greece, and how we may expect them to have influenced myths. Rather than assume some general a priori scheme of religious evolution, it seems more helpful to look for particular illustrations of what is meant by animal-cults among the Greeks' neighbours in the Near East.

As far as the Greeks were concerned the place most notorious for

³ See e.g. S. Eitrem, *RE* s.v. *Tierdämonen*.

⁴ See e.g. on Taygete, Rose, *Handbook*, 111–19; on Actaeon, Bubbe, 3, S. Reinach, *Cultes, mythes et religions* (Paris, 1908), iii. 24–53; on Hecuba, *RE* s.v. *Hekabe*, col. 2662; on Lycaon, the works cited in M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*³, i (Munich, 1967), 398.

its animal-gods was Egypt. Here one can distinguish at least three forms of animal-worship:⁵

1. the worship of particular animals, for example, the bull Apis, who was kept in a special enclosure, regarded as having magic powers of fertility, fed and bathed by special attendants, and given an elaborate and ceremonial burial; according to Greek writers he had actual priests and was called a god;⁶
2. the worship in a more limited sense of a group or a whole species; these were surrounded with special taboos and again received sometimes a special embalming and burial;
3. the representation in physical images and hymns of the major gods in animal form; among the Egyptian remains are cult statues of gods in wholly animal form, and in particular in the characteristic animal-headed human form.

However, these simple categories raise important problems of interpretation. We may wonder first of all about the exact relation of Apis to the gods. His cult seems to have assumed a much greater importance in later times, but he is thought in the earlier stage of his worship not to have had his own priests. He lived not in his own temple but in that of the god Ptah, with whom his relation is a vague one; he is described as the herald of Ptah or the soul or manifestation of Ptah, never as Ptah himself. There was clearly felt to be some distinction between the manifestation of the god and the god himself.

The force of the animal representations of the major gods is also not clear; it has been suggested that the mixed type, for instance, are not portraits at all, but what Frankfort calls pictograms,⁷ a symbolic representation of some sort. This raises the obvious question of

⁵ In this discussion of Egyptian animal-gods I have drawn upon: W. Helck and W. Westendorf (ed.), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden, 1972-), s.v. *Tierkult* and *Götter, Tier-*; T. Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter* (Vienna, 1913); H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York, 1948), 8-14; E. Hornung, *Studium Generale* 20 (1967), 69-84, and *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (Eng. trs. London, 1983), ch. 4; ANET. The main Greek sources are Hdt. 2. 37 ff.; DS 1. 83 ff.; Strab. 17. 1. 38 ff.; Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 71 ff.

⁶ See e.g. Hdt. 3. 27. 9.

⁷ See Frankfort (op. cit. n. 5), 12; cf. E. Hornung, *Conceptions* (op. cit. n. 5), 109-25.

pictorial metaphors and convention. From the earliest times we find representations of the king as a bull. We can assume that nobody thought the king looked like this or ever became a bull; we may wonder, therefore, whether he is not so much becoming an animal-god in the strict sense as demonstrating the power and strength that the gods too can manifest in the form of a bull. In the same way the honorific title 'mighty bull' is applied to gods and kings. Also it is quite normal for a god to have various manifestations; Thoth is connected with the ibis, the moon, and the baboon. In such a case it seems necessary to suppose that Thoth exists apart from any of his manifestations.

If the link between god and animal is a complex one somewhere between metaphor or symbol and identification, it also seems that the evidence of historical Egyptian cults does not support a simple evolutionary pattern of change from primitive animal to human gods. We have noted that the Apis cult only assumed a special prominence later on, and the huge graves of embalmed sacred animals are also a late phenomenon; the mass of animal superstitions and taboos reported by the Greek writers belong to their own time and are not necessarily a picture of earlier beliefs. Frankfort argues against the view that the mixed figures are a transitional form between primitive animal representations and human ones; in fact some gods receive animal images throughout Egyptian history, and some totally human figures appear right at the start.

We find similar uncertainties in a stronger form with the gods of Mesopotamia.⁸ We do not hear about individual animal-worship here. What we do find are frequent references in hymns and myths to the gods as bulls and representations of them in art wearing crowns of horns.⁹

Here the connection of the bull with fertility is particularly clear; for instance, the partners in the sacred marriage ceremonies are

⁸ See ANET; S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (New York, 1944); L. Maltén, *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 43 (1928), 90-139; K. V. H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1973); J. R. Conrad, *The Horn and the Sword* (London, 1959); M. C. Astour, *Hellenosemitica* (Leiden, 1965), 85-91.

⁹ We also find, at a lower level, a class of demons who have a mixed or monstrous form: see J. Black, *Bulletin of the Society of Mesopotamian Studies* 15 (1988), 19-25. There seems no reason to believe that these were the predecessors of the major anthropomorphic gods.

described as bulls and cows. This seems part of a wider system of natural metaphors for fertility,¹⁰ though the bull can also be seen as a destructive force. What counts against the view that bull and god should be closely identified is that we very frequently find in the same hymn a whole series of other titles and metaphors (e.g. most commonly the lion),¹¹ and as in Egypt these are applied to human beings as well as gods.¹² Also the myths treat the gods as human beings even when they describe them as mighty bulls. Such myths do not offer support for the view that transformation stories arose as a means of explaining animal-gods; and in fact the earliest recorded transformation is of an anthropomorphic god to other human beings.¹³

How much of this do we find in Greek religion? As has often been pointed out, the worship of particular animals is almost non-existent, and although there seem to have been local taboos on certain animals, these take a very much more limited form than in Egyptian practice.¹⁴ The main gods too are hardly ever worshipped in animal images or referred to as animals; the animal names in some of their epithets can usually be explained in some more obvious way.¹⁵ Plutarch's comment on the Greek attitude to animals by contrast with the Egyptian seems to support this:

For the Greeks in these matters speak correctly and consider the dove to be an animal sacred to Aphrodite and the snake to Athene . . . but most of the Egyptians serve and treat these animals themselves as gods.¹⁶

¹⁰ Compare the metaphors of ploughing and plant growth for the marriage of the goddess (ANET 637–45), and the connection of bulls and water.

¹¹ e.g. ANET 578: 'Ishkur lion of heaven, noble bull'.

¹² See e.g. the hymn of *Shulgi* (ANET 585) who calls himself a lion, a donkey, and a horse. The gods also tend to be closely linked with natural phenomena such as storms and water.

¹³ In the story of the begetting of Nanna: see Kramer (op. cit. n. 8), 43; H. Behrens, *Enlil und Ninlil* (Rome, 1978), 220–7.

¹⁴ See Nilsson, GGR 212–16; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Eng. tr. Oxford, 1985), 64–6.

¹⁵ Some explicitly make a distinction (e.g. *ἐλαφιβόλος*), some refer to a sacrificial victim (e.g. *ταυροφάγος*), some refer to a special sphere of activity presided over by a god (e.g. Athene *ἰππία*), and some are thought to suggest an apotropaic function (e.g. Apollo *αμυνθεύς*).

¹⁶ *De Is. et Os.* 71.

The obvious exceptions to this attitude are the worship of Dionysos and the river gods.¹⁷ Dionysos is pictured in later art, though not in earlier representations, as horned, like one of the Near Eastern gods; he is also summoned in cult hymn as a bull.¹⁸ However, two qualifications are necessary. First, Dionysos belongs to a class of magical shape-shifters;¹⁹ in myths he goes through a whole series of different shapes and can also inspire delusions. This magical power is perhaps different from a permanent nature as a particular animal. Secondly, and in keeping with this, we find him being summoned by his devotees in a variety of animal forms simultaneously;²⁰ this again recalls the Eastern hymns and the distinctions between the god and his cult title and particular manifestation.

The rivers too are sometimes depicted in bull form or half bull form.²¹ The important point in this case is perhaps that river-gods already have a basic natural embodiment in water. The bull here is necessarily a secondary development and of metaphorical origin. With both Dionysos and the river-gods bull form seems connected with metaphors of fertility, as it was with the Mesopotamian bulls.²²

Rather than arguing, therefore, that these traces of bull-worship in the case of Dionysos and the rivers are a memory of a stage when Dionysos was simply a bull, we should see them as a belief, or a memory of a belief, in animal manifestations or the animal epiphany, something more than metaphor but less than the worship of actual animals. Just as the Eastern parallels suggest an ambiguous nature for the animal-god and certainly do not suggest a clear pattern of evolution from animal to human worship, it seems that in Greek religion the worship of the bull Dionysos became most

¹⁷ It is sometimes thought that the role of the bull in Cretan religion is another exception. However, although the bull plays an intriguing role in the myths of the Cretan royal family there is no evidence of a historical cult: see Burkert, GR 40.

¹⁸ For Dionysos as a bull see H. Grégoire, in *Mélanges C. Picard*, ii (Paris, 1949), 401–5. For artistic representations in bull form see Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 35; LIMC s.v. 'Dionysos', nos. 154–9.

¹⁹ See below, ch. 8.

²⁰ See e.g. *Bacchae* 1017 ff.

²¹ See RE s.v. *Flussgötter*, col. 2780.

²² This is seen most clearly in the concept of Achelous' horn of plenty. For Dionysos and the fertility of the earth see *Bacchae* 705 ff.

popular in the later period, and that the evidence for Minoan-Mycenaean animal-gods is very limited.²³

Having arrived at this more restricted view of what is meant by an animal-god we should perhaps consider whether general considerations or the comparative evidence suggest anything about the way such a conception might have influenced myths. First of all, we might expect the belief in animal epiphanies to be reflected in stories of the appearance of the god in animal form even when human beings are not present. We do in fact find this both in Greek and Near Eastern myths.²⁴ But whereas it is one thing for gods to manifest themselves in animal form in culture and myth it seems quite another for humans to do so. One may wonder why a belief in epiphanies of the gods should give rise to the stories of the transformations of human beings. In fact the transformations of human beings, though a dominant type in Greek myths, seem comparatively rare in Mesopotamian mythology. In the tale of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh and Enkidu are frequently compared to bulls but they are never transformed. Dumuzi attempts to escape the demons in the form of a gazelle, and Gilgamesh recounts the transformations of the lovers of Ishtar into a wolf and a mole, but in both these cases the choice of animal is clearly dictated by the logic of the story and seems to have no special connection with the gods concerned (in particular there is no transformation into a bull among Ishtar's lovers).

We can conclude, therefore, first that there is little reason to assume a simple general change in Greek religion from the worship of animals to a conception of human gods; even in Egypt and Mesopotamia the picture seems to be more complicated than this. Secondly, the Near Eastern parallels do not suggest that belief in animal epiphanies is a likely origin for stories of the transformation of human beings.

Once we cease to assume a general religious evolution of the type

²³ See M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion*² (Lund, 1950), 48–9 and 368–82.

²⁴ e.g. the transformation of Seth into a hippopotamus in his fight with Horus is perhaps connected with his worship in this form: J. G. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth* (Cardiff, 1960), 46–7.

proposed by the animal-cult proponents the particular evidence in relation to the stories of Callisto and Io looks much less convincing.

CALLISTO

Callisto is a virgin huntress and companion of Artemis who is seduced by Zeus and then expelled from Artemis' band and turned into a bear. She gives birth to Arcas, the ancestor of the Arcadians, and is then either shot or set in the stars.²⁵

The animal-god theory runs that Callisto is in origin Artemis herself, a bear-goddess and ancestress of the Arcadians, but that when the comparatively recent conception of Artemis as a virgin made her motherhood an impossibility a companion was invented to whom her stories were transferred. With her role as a bride and mother Artemis also handed over to Callisto her bear form. In support of the identification of Artemis and Callisto it is pointed out that not only are they very similar figures, both virgin huntresses, but that, more specifically, a reputed tomb of Callisto lay beside a temple of Artemis Calliste near Cruni in Arcadia.²⁶ In support of the claim that Artemis was a bear-goddess there is cited the ritual *arkteia* ('bear-service') at Brauron, in which little girls consecrated to Artemis lived for a period as 'bears',²⁷ and the fact that the priestess of Artemis at Cyrene was known as 'bear'.²⁸ Supporters of this view, therefore, reconstruct an older myth in which Zeus and Artemis, the bear, bore the father of the Arcadians.²⁹

²⁵ For a fuller account of the myth see Cat. 14 s.v.

²⁶ Paus. 8. 35. 8.

²⁷ See L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin, 1932), 205–7; L. Kahil, *AK* 20 (1977), 86–120; E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica* (Wisconsin, 1983), 83–8; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Studies in Girls' Transitions* (Athens, 1988); and the works cited in n. 58, below.

²⁸ See LSS no. 115b. 16. Cf. Hsch. s.v. *arkos*.

²⁹ See K. O. Müller, *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie* (Göttingen, 1825), 73–6; L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford, 1896–1909), ii. 435; G. Maggiali, in *Mythos: Scripta in honorem M. Untersteiner* (Genoa, 1970), 179–85; P. Lévêque, *L'Information historique* 23 (1961), 94–8; Kahil (art. cit. n. 27); J. Fontenrose, *Orion: The Myth of the Hunter and the Huntress* (Berkeley, 1981), ch. 4. J. J. Bachofen, *Der Bär in den Religionen des Altertums* (Basle, 1863), sees a common ancestor for Artemis and Callisto in a mountain mother-goddess who took bear form.

This argument is open to objection at every stage. First, it seems entirely unnecessary to suppose that Callisto has replaced Artemis herself in the myth.³⁰ The conception of the virgin hunter/huntress is thought to have its origins in primitive hunting taboos,³¹ and thus the virgin Artemis is not necessarily a new civilized creation as opposed to the ancient nature-goddess. Her companions too should be seen as an integral part of the conception of the goddess rather than as a group of substitutes; they seem to correspond to the groups of young girls associated with her in historical cults.³² The evidence of the names is hardly conclusive; there are other cases of companions and priestesses of the gods receiving as names the epithets of the god, and this is different from saying that they have taken over the myth of the god; one could also argue that the goddess has taken over the name of one of her companions or local rivals.³³

Secondly and more fundamentally, there is no real evidence that Artemis ever was a bear-goddess. In no myth does she take the form of a bear, nor do any of her epithets or any representations of her in art suggest that she had ever been imagined in bear form.³⁴ Indeed a bear epiphany would be very strange since the bear is invariably ascribed a repellent character in ancient sources.³⁵ 'bear' could hardly be a laudatory metaphor as 'bull', 'horse', or 'cow' could be. She is of course *potnia theron*, mistress of wild animals,³⁶ and bears,

³⁰ This identification has been questioned by W. Sale, *RhM* 108 (1965), 11–35; cf. L. Bodson, *IEPA ZΩIA* (Brussels, 1978), 136–44; P. Borgeaud, *Recherches sur le dieu Pan* (Rome, 1979), 51.

³¹ See Burkert, *GR* 150.

³² See Burkert, *GR* 151. The *arkteia* is an obvious example.

³³ In the first group are e.g. Hekaterge and Opis (see Paus. 5. 7. 8). We need not assume that their stories as well as their names were derived from Artemis. For the second group see e.g. Zeus Agamemnon or Dionysos Cadmus, or the relations of Apollo and Hyakinthos.

³⁴ Contrast her connections in myth and art with deers. She is *ἐλαφοκτόνος* and *ἐλαφιβόλος*. In one story she becomes a deer: Apollod. 1. 7. 4 (for further connections see Paus. 2. 30. 7; 7. 18. 12; 8. 10. 10). As for representations in art, Kahil (art. cit. n. 27) cites a vase illustrating the *arkteia* which shows the priestess wearing a bear mask (although Simon (op. cit. n. 27) considers that this is a depiction of the myth of Callisto). But since the picture also shows the goddess in completely human form it seems rather to distinguish priestess and god.

³⁵ It is seen as the type of irredeemable savagery, often in contrast with the 'noble' lion: see Ael. *NA* 3. 21; Artem. 4. 56; Oppian, *C* 3. 157).

³⁶ *Il.* 21. 470.

considered the wildest of animals, came under her care. In this sense bears are parallel to the consecrated girls at Brauron, or a priestess of the goddess, and this seems a sufficient explanation of why these human servants of the goddess should be called bears.

Thirdly, the animal-god explanation at best explains just one element in the story, that Callisto is a bear rather than any other animal. It does not explain the pattern of punishment and persecution or the change from human to animal that are the story's distinctive features. In reconstructing an original myth as a story that the bear Artemis and Zeus had a child we have lost most of the point of the story.

IO

Io is a priestess of Hera at Argos who is seduced by Zeus and then turned into a cow by, or in fear of, Hera.³⁷ As Callisto is considered to be a double of Artemis, so Io is considered to be in origin Hera herself; her union with Zeus and her transformation are, according to this view, a sacred marriage of the great gods in cow form similar to the marriage of Ningirsu and Baú celebrated in an annual ritual in Sumeria.³⁸ An obvious question is why Hera should be replaced in the myth by a mortal, even though, unlike Artemis, Hera did not develop a role as a virgin goddess but rather continued to be the regular partner in the Greek sacred marriage.³⁹ It is therefore argued that the direct source of the myth was a ritual in which the priestess impersonated the cow-goddess Hera in the sacred marriage, as a sacred slave represented the goddess in the Sumerian form of the rite.⁴⁰

Hera clearly had a close connection with cows. In Homer she is

³⁷ For a fuller account of her myth see Cat. 1a s.v.

³⁸ For Ningirsu and Baú see Astour (op. cit. n. 8), 85.

³⁹ See Nilsson, *GGR* 429–33; Burkert, *GR* 132–5, and more generally, S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington, 1969); G. W. Elderkin, *AJA* 41 (1937), 424–35. For new Attic evidence see F. Salviat, *BCH* 88 (1964), 647–54, and R. Parker, in T. Linders and S. Nordquist (ed.), *Gifts to the Gods* (Uppsala, 1987), 142–3.

⁴⁰ See A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (Cambridge, 1914–40), i. 437–57. Cf. F. Wehrli, *AK Suppl.* 4 (1967), 196–200.

known as *boopis* ('cow-eyed') and her image at Samos appears to be decorated with horns. Her cult at Argos involved cows in a number of different ways: they were offered to her in sacrifice, her priestess was brought to the city on a cart drawn by oxen, her temple stood on a hill called Euboea ('rich in cows'), and a herd of cattle belonging to the goddess was kept nearby.⁴¹

It is also true that some accounts suggest a sacred marriage of the traditional Eastern type. Io is described as the 'famous wife' of Zeus,⁴² and her cow form is sometimes seen as a symbol of fertility and motherhood, and linked with the general fertility of the land.⁴³ Most striking perhaps is the version of the story in which the earth brings forth flowers for the cow Io after her union with Zeus in a way that recalls not only Eastern hymns and myth but the union of Zeus and Hera in the *Iliad*.⁴⁴

However, again the theory is very implausible. First of all, as with Callisto, the evidence falls short of suggesting that Hera was ever an animal-goddess. The Argive evidence points to her ownership of, and wealth in, cows rather than to identity with the cow and can perfectly well be understood in terms of the more limited concept of the holy animal.⁴⁵ It makes sense that Io, the human servant or property of a goddess whose holy animal is a cow, becomes that holy animal in a myth; we need not suppose that in doing so she becomes the goddess. The epithet *boopis* and the horned image do not take us very far either. In Homer *boopis* is used of other women and clearly refers to no more than their beauty; and the horns at Samos seem more likely to be a decorative feature borrowed from Eastern models than to reflect the original animal nature of the goddess.⁴⁶

⁴¹ For *boopis* see e.g. *Il.* 1. 551; see further U. Pestalozza, *Athenaeum* 17 (1939), 105–37. For the Samian image, Cook, *Zeus*, i. 444–5; C. Kardara, *AJA* 64 (1960), 343–58; Burkert, *SH* 129–32. For the Argive connections, W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: Interpretationen altgriechischer Opferriten und Mythen* (Berlin, 1972), 181–7.

⁴² Aesch. *PV* 834.

⁴³ See e.g. Aesch. *Supp.* 41 f; cf. 300. Zeus as father of the cow's child becomes *φύττοργός* and *φυσίλοος*: Aesch. *Supp.* 592 and 584.

⁴⁴ See A. Westermann, *Mythographi* (Brunswick, 1843), 374, and *EM* s.v. Euboea.

⁴⁵ In fact the holy marriage myth connected with the image of Hera at her Argive temple was of her seduction by the cuckoo Zeus: Paus. 2. 17. 4.

⁴⁶ See G. Zuntz, *Persephone* (Oxford, 1971), 131–5; Kardara (art. cit. n. 41), 353.

no Minoan-Mycenaean evidence suggests the existence of a cow-headed goddess.⁴⁷

As for the sacred marriage with a masked priestess, the sacred marriage was a feature of Greek religion; however, we simply do not know what role was played by the priestess of the god,⁴⁸ and we have no evidence at all that animal masks ever played a part in such rites, or indeed in any cult of Hera.⁴⁹

The fact that the myth plays upon ideas associated with the traditional sacred marriage does not require us to imagine that Io is Hera herself. In fact, whereas Hera is above all the goddess of the order of marriage,⁵⁰ the story of Io celebrates (in so far as there is any celebration) the more basic themes of fertility and motherhood within the context of an illegitimate liaison. Hera is almost invariably seen, in cult and myth, as a wife, not a mother, whereas Io is above all a mother and an ancestress. The essence of the story of Io lies in the distinction between the goddess and her errant priestess: its distinctive feature, as with the story of Callisto, is her punishment, her transformation and frenzied flight, which an identification of goddess and mortal does not begin to explain. One may compare by contrast the Sumerian cult myth of Sin and Amat-Sin⁵¹ which told simply of the seduction of a cow.

My conclusions therefore are basically negative. The explanation of transformation stories by reference to a theory of animal-gods is first, and most fundamentally, open to a charge of circularity: in each case the chief evidence for the existence of an animal-cult is the very metamorphosis story that such a cult is supposed to explain. But we have seen already that the comparative evidence does not suggest that animal-cults do give rise to such stories. Secondly, such

⁴⁷ See Nilsson, *GGR* 350 n. 4.

⁴⁸ See Burkert, *GR* 108–9.

⁴⁹ On masked priests the best evidence is perhaps the bull masks discovered in Cyprus (see V. Karageorghis, *HTR* 64 (1971), 261–70), but we do not know their function and how much they represent Eastern rather than typically Greek customs. The many masks found at the shrine of Artemis Orthia tend to be grotesque human rather than animal ones (see G. Dickins, *JHS*, suppl. 5 (1929), 163–86). Animal masks are most popular in the *komos* and old comedy, but the relation of this to rituals of the kind we are considering is uncertain. See further Burkert, *GR* 65 and 103–5.

⁵⁰ See Burkert, *GR* 132–5.

⁵¹ See Astour (op. cit. n. 8), 85.

explanations are inadequate. At best they explain one feature of the story, why the heroine becomes a particular animal, without in any sense explaining the story as a whole. It is a general criticism of such explanations that they tend to treat a myth as a quite arbitrary collection of details from which some motif may be extracted and identified with some external cult practice or belief.⁵² This leads on to a third charge, of redundancy. While over-determination may well be a feature of Greek myths, and an element may be explained in terms both of its part in the structure of the story and of its ritual and historical origin, it is much less plausible to look for an inevitably speculative ritual explanation of a myth when we can already explain its details in some other way. I hope to show in the following chapter that these myths do form coherent structures.

If the animal-god is not a helpful notion, none the less the connection of the god with his or her particular animals does play a part in the story, particularly in that of Io. It is clearly not coincidental that Io, a priestess of Hera, becomes a cow, and Callisto, a companion of Artemis, becomes a bear. But it should be stressed that such a connection only takes us so far. No more than the supposed animal-cult can it explain what is really distinctive about these stories, why a human being is transformed into an animal at all.

INITIATION

It has become increasingly common to explain Greek myths by reference to initiation rituals.⁵³ It is claimed that the myths reflect rituals similar to the elaborate rites of passage that in various primitive societies accompany the passing of a person from one

⁵² The limitations of such an approach to Greek myths are discussed in Vernant, *Myth and Society*, 186–242.

⁵³ See e.g. J. Bremmer, *Studi storico-religiosi* 2 (1978), 5–38; P. H. J. Lloyd-Jones, *JHS* 103 (1983), 87–102; Burkert, *HN* 189–200; P. Vidal-Naquet, in R. L. Gordon (ed.), *Myth, Religion, and Society: Structuralist Essays by M. Detienne, L. Gernet, J. P. Vernant, and P. Vidal-Naquet* (Cambridge, 1981), 147–62; and for more wholesale approaches, A. Brelich, *Paides e Parthenoi* (Rome, 1969), H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes: Essai sur l'éducation spartiate et sur les rites d'adolescence dans l'antiquité hellénique* (Lille, 1939), and C. Calame, *Les Chœurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque* (Rome, 1977), *passim*.

social state to another. The major attraction of such theories is that they offer an explanation not just of one motif of the stories but of their whole structure. Such rites tend to have a common pattern of separation from family and society, a liminal period often associated with a reversal of status (and sometimes including a disguise or disfigurement) and a final reintegration into society.⁵⁴ These elements suitably translated into mythical terms bear an obvious relation to the patterns of many myths.

It might seem that initiation is a particularly appropriate explanation in the case of metamorphosis stories, since it is the ritual concerned with a process of change;⁵⁵ and it has indeed been claimed that the transformations of Callisto and of Lycaon, the Arcadian king who becomes a wolf, correspond to the liminal stage in a ritual initiation.⁵⁶

This is not the place for a general discussion of the initiation theory, but I would like to begin with a number of preliminary reservations about this whole approach. First, it is necessary to emphasize the highly speculative nature of the theory. Evidence for age-group initiations in ancient Greece is extremely scarce,⁵⁷ and so most discussion has been concerned with the ritual consecrations of a small group such as the *arkteia* at Brauron;⁵⁸ it is argued that these are survivals of a more general rite.

Secondly and more fundamentally, it is not clear what explanatory force is being claimed for such hypothetical rites. It is claimed that the heroes of these stories are mythical prototypes of the initiands: but does this mean that a pre-existing story was adopted as a model for the experience of the initiands (in which case we learn little about the creation of Greek myths), or that the myth was created by a process of translating the various stages of the ritual into mythical episodes? The problem with the second account is

⁵⁴ See A. van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Eng. tr. London, 1960); V. Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London, 1969) and *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, 1967).

⁵⁵ See e.g. M. Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago, 1969), 112: 'The novice emerges from his ordeal a totally different being: he has become another.'

⁵⁶ On Callisto see Lloyd-Jones (art. cit. n. 53), 98; R. Arena, *Acme* 32 (1979), 6–26; cf. Borgeaud, 51–5. On Lycaon see works cited in n. 68, below.

⁵⁷ They appear to have existed in classical times only in Crete: see Burkert, *GR* 260–1.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Jeanmaire, *Couroi*, 257–64; Brelich, *Paides*, ch. 2; Lloyd-Jones (art. cit. n. 53).

that the initiatory pattern reduced to its most basic terms is essentially the pattern of most traditional stories: a boy or girl is removed from his or her home and undergoes a number of adventures before being restored to live happily ever after. With a certain amount of ingenuity almost any Greek myth can be made to reveal an initiatory structure (and any aberrant features can be explained away as imaginative extensions of the ritual motif). In short, the theory that such rituals gave rise to the transformation stories, or to any other group of myths, is almost impossible to prove or disprove.

In order to give the theory some useful explanatory role one would need to be able to look at a number of connected rites and myths and identify a common pattern of translation from ritual to myth. However, if we look at the stories told in connection with the historical ritual consecrations that we know of, it is very hard to produce such a scheme. In the most common pattern the consecration or service is an act of expiation for an earlier crime, usually an unlawful killing which has caused a plague or famine.⁵⁹ It makes little sense to talk here of translation from a ritual into a mythical structure. It is undoubtedly interesting that consecration is seen as an expiation for a death, but one should emphasize that such stories do not reflect the ritual structure of separation/marginalization/reintegration: myth is not here being used to give imaginative expression to the stages of the rite, but to establish an imaginative background against which the rite is set.

But this leads on to a third point, which applies as much to any ritual explanation as to the initiation theories. If the original appeal, and hence the origin, of these stories depends on their listeners' experience of certain rituals, why did the stories continue to appeal once the rituals had been forgotten? This is another form of the argument from redundancy. In so far as one can provide a coherent analysis of the stories in terms of their appeal to a classical listener, one may wonder why it is necessary to posit an entirely hypothetical ritual to explain their meaning for their original audience.

⁵⁹ See e.g. the *aitia* for the *arkteia* in honour of Artemis Brauronia and Mounichia (in Brelich, *Paides*, 248–9), or for the consecration of seven boys and girls in the shrine of Hera Akraia at Corinth (schol. on Eur. *Med.* 273) cf. the *aitia* in Paus. 7. 19. 1 (the shrine of Triklarian Artemis), and Paus. 3. 16. 9 (the shrine of Artemis Orthia).

Turning now to the particular stories that this theory has been applied to, I shall deal first, and fairly briefly, with Callisto. No source connects her with any ritual consecration or indeed with any rite at all. But it is claimed that she is a mythical parallel to the young girls at Brauron, who during their consecration were known as 'bears'.⁶⁰ As I pointed out above, one cannot prove that her story is not a mythical projection of such a ritual, and it is quite likely that some of the same attitudes to the wilds and to the goddess Artemis underlie the story of the transformation and the metaphorical description of young girls as bears; on the other hand Callisto's experiences are so far removed from such a ritual consecration that any direct influence of ritual on myth seems very implausible.

Callisto's transformation and exile is not a preparation for reintegration into society and a model marriage but a prelude to death (or catasterism); it follows rape by a married god and is closely linked with illegitimate childbirth. It is not connected with a period of devotion to the goddess, but rather with her expulsion from Artemis' band. There is a much more obvious episode in the story that does correspond to the initiatory exclusion, and that is when she joins the band of Artemis in the first place.

The theory is sufficiently flexible to get round all these points of difficulty. Callisto's death, it is said, is a symbolic one,⁶¹ or her experiences are a warning of what can go wrong and illustrate the dangers of transition.⁶² But since, as I shall argue in the next chapter, the story can be understood in terms of a purely mythical logic, there seems little incentive to try to force the myth into such a scheme. One may note finally that there is already a cult story attached to the Brauron *arkteia*; this belongs to the pattern noted above, in which the consecration becomes an expiation for a past death, and bears no resemblance at all to the story of Callisto.⁶³

The story of Lycaon requires more detailed consideration. He is

⁶⁰ See the works cited in n. 56 above.

⁶¹ See Brelich, *Paides*, 263, and more generally in *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honour of M. Eliade* (London, 1969), 195–207. Cf. R. Arena (art. cit. n. 56). For the idea that rebirth inevitably involves death of the old self compare M. Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth* (Eng. tr. London, 1961), 13–14.

⁶² Cf. Calame, 270–2, on the 'plant' heroines.

⁶³ See above, n. 59.

an early king of Arcadia who entertained Zeus as a guest and served him up a human child (normally his grandson Arcas). Zeus turned him into a wolf. Unlike any of the stories we have considered so far, this myth is linked by an ancient source to a rite. 'They say', says Pausanias, 'that since the time of Lycaon a man always turns into a wolf at the sacrifice to Zeus Lycaeus, but not for life, for if he abstains from human flesh, in the ninth year he changes back again.'⁶⁴ Earlier he has told us of Damarchus, an athlete who is supposed to have done this before becoming an Olympic victor.⁶⁵ He refuses to speak of the sacrifice itself, which he says is a secret, but Plato⁶⁶ tells us a *mythos* about the shrine of Zeus Lycaeus on Mount Lycaeon which has been thought to refer to it. Human flesh is mixed with the meat of other animals which is then shared out; whoever eats the human flesh becomes a wolf. There is also a report in Pliny and Augustine about an Arcadian werewolf custom:⁶⁷ a man from a certain family is chosen by lot and led to a pond; he hangs his clothes on an oak tree, swims across, and becomes a wolf. If he avoids human flesh for eight years he can swim back and become a man again. Some think that the same rite is being referred to, perhaps in a more developed form.

It has been suggested that the cannibal feast is the first step in an eight-year initiation ordeal for an Arcadian secret society.⁶⁸ The obvious models for this interpretation are African secret societies (e.g. the leopard men), but it is argued that a Greek parallel exists in the Spartan *krypteia*, the institution by which young Spartans spent a certain period in the wilds living virtually as outlaws. They would hide during the day, and at night would come out and murder passing helots. This was a preparation, it is argued, for joining an élite group of Spartan soldiers.

With regard to the legends of mount Lycaeon, it is thought to be significant first that Damarchus, the Olympic victor mentioned by Pausanias, spent eight years as a wolf before his victory; his period as

⁶⁴ 8. 2. 6.⁶⁵ 6. 8. 2.⁶⁶ *Resp.* 565 D.⁶⁷ Pliny, *NH* 8. 81; Aug. *De Civ. D.* 18. 17.⁶⁸ See Jeanmaire, *Cowroi*, 540–69; Burkert, *HN* 98–108; cf. R. J. A. Buxton, in J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), ch. 4; Lloyd-Jones (art. cit. n. 53), 98.

a wolf is therefore a preparation for a successful reintegration into society as a highly honoured citizen. Secondly, it is argued that the werewolf story in Pliny and Augustine shows familiar rite of passage motifs (removing clothes, immersion in water, crossing a river), while the communal cannibal feast in Plato's story is a feature in ancient and modern secret societies.⁶⁹ (Note, however, that whereas in these the communal guilt from the shared cannibal feast seems to be an important binding factor, here we have a single cannibal isolated from his companions). The myth of Lycaon is therefore a mythical projection of this rite, and Lycaon is the mythical prototype of each of the wolf men.

There are two problems here, the first as to the historical existence of the initiation rite, the second as to Lycaon's connection with it.

There is no external archaeological evidence that people ate each other on Mount Lycaeon. All the reports of this feast in ancient writers appear to derive from the playful allusion in Plato (even the account of the Arcadian Polybius cites Plato).⁷⁰ In fact it seems likely that Pausanias did not regard it as a local story at all: he speaks of the werewolf tradition with contempt and contrasts it with the ancient Arcadian story of the transformation of Lycaon.⁷¹

One might well be sceptical therefore about the tradition of the cannibal feast, but to combine this with the story of Pliny and Augustine seems even more questionable. This latter story has no link with Mount Lycaeon or with any rite, and in particular it misses out the human sacrifice that is a vital part of the other story. Furthermore, the story shows the familiar motifs of later werewolf stories (most obviously in the removal and careful preservation of the werewolf's clothes).⁷² This story perhaps only shows that there were in fact Arcadian werewolf stories which did originate in the sacrifice on Mount Lycaeon.

⁶⁹ See H. Webster, *Primitive Secret Societies*² (New York, 1932), 35.⁷⁰ Polyb. 7. 13. 7.⁷¹ Further, in his report of the werewolf athlete Damarchus he infers that the story of his transformation is not a tradition that the Arcadians held themselves since otherwise it would have been recorded on the inscription at Olympia. Whatever we may think of the grounds for this inference this at least shows that the story was not in Pausanias' time recognized as a local Arcadian one.⁷² Cf. Petronius 62 and Acsop 301 (ed. A. Hausrath², vol. ii, Leipzig, 1959).

In short, werewolf stories are a common feature in the European folk-tale; they are found frequently in late antiquity and probably existed in Arcadia. It may well be that one of these later became attached to the sacrifice on Mount Lycaeon, the secrecy of which may have encouraged dark rumours.⁷³ Perhaps the myth of Lycaon itself prompted such a development.

One may note further that there is no independent evidence for this secret society. The Spartan *krypteia* is perhaps not such a helpful parallel. Rather than a survival of primitive initiations it seems to have been an institution especially created or adapted for the Spartans' peculiar and relatively new problem of suppressing the helots.⁷⁴

We clearly do not know enough to say that there could not have been such a rite or secret society. But their existence is at least highly questionable, and this means that rather more hangs on the second issue of the inherent suitability of Lycaon as an initiatory model. In fact it is extremely difficult to see how he could have been invented for such a purpose.

First of all, he is the wrong age. Those figures normally considered to be initiatory models are heroic or divine equivalents of the initiands, young men or women like Theseus, Apollo, Artemis, or the daughters of Cecrops.⁷⁵ But Lycaon is invariably an old or middle-aged man.⁷⁶

Secondly, Lycaon's transformation is not a temporary prelude to reintegration or even to death. He is a permanent wolf, and his story belongs rather with the aetiological stories which explain animal characters in terms of past human crimes; we can compare the close parallel of the transformation of the savage Lyncus into a lynx. Lycaon is a real wolf, not a werewolf. It could of course be that the myth illustrates the dangers of what could go wrong at the rite, but this leads on to a third and most crucial point: Lycaon's crime is murder and abusing the rules of hospitality, never cannibalism; we

⁷³ See Nilsson, *GGR* 397-401; cf. Halliday on Plut. *GQ* 39.

⁷⁴ See P. Vidal-Naquet, in Gordon, 180-5.

⁷⁵ Or Pelops, Melikertes, Archemoros, the children of Medea, Iphigeneia, Kaincus, or Achilles.

⁷⁶ Ovid speaks of his 'canities' persisting in the wolf, *Met.* 1. 238.

find the same pattern in the story of Tantalus, where the only cannibal is the goddess Demeter. It is difficult to see how Lycaon could be an imaginary archetype for the banqueters at Plato's cannibal feast, where it is eating rather than killing that is at issue.

The myth and cults of Mount Lycaeon do not, therefore, provide a clear example of how a mythical structure can be explained by that of a rite. Again one is forced to rely on the myth itself as evidence for the existence of the rite that is supposed to explain it, and again, on closer examination, the myth is not very helpful material for such a purpose.