

The story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6.424-674 is one of Ovid's most riveting tales. The myth is known from other sources, but Ovid's version is unique in the attention paid to the problems of communication, specifically Philomela's silence. Ovid focuses on modes of communication by using words like *fas*, *nefas*, and *fari* to draw a connection between speech and the unspeakable crimes in the story. His use of *fas* and *nefas* in the sense of "speakable" and "unspeakable" in the *Metamorphoses* parallels the use of *fastus* and *nefastus* to refer to days in the Roman calendar, and puns on this root occur in Catullus and Vergil. But in this episode Ovid draws out the association of *fas* and *nefas* with speech and silence with more dramatic purpose than other authors, and imbues the entire episode with significant verbal and non-verbal forms of communication that, in turn, relate to the motivations of the characters. Thus, the functions of various forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, are distinct in Ovid's telling and underline the connection between speech, silence, and cruelty; between *fas* and *nefas*.

Words from the *fas* and *nefas* root occur much more frequently in this episode than elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, and the connection to speech and silence is clear in the context of the episode. The various acts of direct speech in the episode share characteristics: they are all either self-serving, e.g. Procne's appeal to Tereus to allow her to see her sister (440-443), or vengeful, e.g. Procne's speeches about her revenge (611-619, 621-622, 631-635). These speeches generally express desires that are *fas* on the surface, but *nefas* at the core, and are generally unsuccessful in their objectives unless supplemented by non-verbal communication—the silenced Philomela can still communicate non-verbally. Ovid makes it clear that non-verbal behavior makes his characters convincing, not their words: for instance, Tereus' tears, *lacrimae fecere fidem* (566). Acts of non-verbal communication that do not depend on accompanying speech acts, such as Philomela's weaving about her rape (574-579) and Procne's stunned silence upon receiving the tapestry (583), are given prominence in the narrative and, in general, non-verbal communication in this episode proves more effective than verbal as all desire for *fas* becomes subsumed into *nefas*: Procne and Philomela's revenge is not achieved through mere words but by a cannibalistic banquet and the hurling of Itys' head (647-660). Throughout, this non-verbal communication is connected with the *nefas* of their actions, and the tension between speech and silence, verbal and non-verbal, is pronounced. By the conclusion of the story and the metamorphosis of the three main characters (667-674), the transformation from *fas* to *nefas* is complete and speech has been completely transformed to the non-verbal: the markings and calls of the birds are metaphors for their human misfortunes. Finally, the non-verbal has completely consumed the verbal, and all that remains are the products of the *nefas*.