



The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (Princeton Legacy Library)

Garth Tissol

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In these reflections on the mercurial qualities of style in Ovid's *Meta-morphoses*, Garth Tissol contends that stylistic features of the ever-shifting narrative surface, such as wordplay, narrative disruption, and the self-conscious reworking of the poetic tradition, are thematically significant. It is the style that makes the process of reading the work a changing, transformative experience, as it both embodies and reflects the poem's presentation of the world as defined by instability and flux. Tissol deftly illustrates that far from being merely ornamental, style is as much a site for interpretation as any other element of Ovid's art.

In the first chapter, Tissol argues that verbal wit and wordplay are closely linked to Ovidian metamorphoses. Wit challenges the ordinary conceptual categories of Ovid's readers, disturbing and extending the meanings and references of words. Thereby it contributes on the stylistic level to the readers' apprehension of flux. On a larger scale, parallel disturbances occur in the progress of narratives. In the second and third chapters, the author examines surprise and abrupt alteration of perspective as important features of narrative style. We experience reading as a transformative process not only in the characteristic indirection and unpredictability of Ovid's narrative but also in the memory of his predecessors. In the fourth chapter, Tissol shows how Ovid subsumes Vergil's *Aeneid* into the *Metamorphoses* in an especially rich allusive exploitation, one which contrasts Vergil's aetiological themes with those of his own work.

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