



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

By 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.

Originally published in 1997.

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Review

"Tissol's book offers ample evidence of the poem's perennial appeal. . . . His generally effective English versions of his Greek and Latin sources enrich and broaden the book, thus extending its functional importance well beyond the classics seminar."--**Choice**

From the Back Cover

"This book makes the first sustained argument (and a convincing one at that) for thematic significance of the poem's characteristic stylistic and narrative features. There are many excellent analyses of the designed instability of Ovid's text in general and Ovid's narrative indirection and downright deception in particular. I know of nothing comparable on this poem."--**John F. Miller, University of Virginia**

About the Author

Garth Tissol, Professor of Classics at Emory University, is the author of *The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (1997) as well as articles on Ovid, Virgil and Dryden's translations of Latin literature. He is currently writing a commentary on Books XI-XV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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