

Ovidian  
transformations  
change readers'  
perceptions



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At the end of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid boldly states “ I will be borne, /The finer part of me, above the stars, /Immortal, and my name shall never die” (XV. 877-78). For Ovid, metamorphosis is a path to eternity and the preservation of time. Characters no longer remain permanent in his stories. Instead, their physical and emotional changes immediately reshape their natural environment. He makes the actions of mortals and gods unforgettable by writing about the morphing of memorable figures into common objects, which the readers can easily recall. He utilizes metamorphosis as a powerful tool to change our perception of the world. More specifically, his stories enable us to understand the reasons for the existence and placement of natural objects. These tales give previously unrelated and random events profound connections and shape the fundamental structures of both culture and nature. Ovid challenges traditional notions of the world by using transformations to establish order, teach lessons, and explain natural phenomena. His originality in writing about transformations also transcends philosophy-driven poetic imitations. Neglecting Ovid’s careful arrangements, some readers find spurious *metamorphoses* ephemeral and random. Professor Elizabeth Drumm concludes that Ovid is mainly concerned with instability and disorderly changes. By relating his myths to distinct symbols, however, Ovid orders a chaotic world and links mankind to its roots in nature. The broad system of symbols makes his work accessible to readers at different cultures and time periods. The transformations of Leucothoe and Clytie, for example, emphasize a deep connection to the natural world (IV. 170-284). When people see frankincense and violet in nature, their memories inevitably trace to Ovid’s work. The aroma of frankincense is no longer a natural coincidence <https://assignbuster.com/ovidian-transformations-change-readers-perceptions/>

but a representation of the Sun's love for Leucothoe. These symbols, moreover, are most people's familiar daily objects and patterns. Ask the readers to take a close look at their surroundings, Ovid defines previously insignificant objects. The tear drops of Phaethon's sisters, as another example, "[d]rip and are hardened in the sun to form /Amber" (II. 367-68). After this change, amber has a new meaning to Roman brides, who used it as decorative jewelry. Ovid's transformation stories paint a monumentum with interrelated documents. Readers can never completely escape his stories because they connect directly to the familiar natural environment. Ovid's brilliance lies in that he does not only transforms the characters he writes about but also changes his audience's perception of the world. Through the stories of transformations, Ovid can draw the boundaries of acceptable religious behaviors and attitudes toward the divine. Transformations result in a more peaceful relationship between mortals and gods. After Arachne boasts, " My own advice is all I need. Don't think /Your words have any weight. My mind's unchanged," Pallas punishes her by turning her into a spider (VI. 42-3). In a similar case, Juno suppresses Ino's seductive beauty by making her " crazed /By grief or by the sprinkled poison's power" (IV. 20-21). Also, she turns Ino's attendants into birds, thereby admonishing their impiety. These punishments control unruly behaviors to create stability in the divine and earthly worlds. With tales about physical changes, Ovid expounds the principle that humans must accept their inferiority to the gods. The Muses, as another example, says to the Pierides " you add /Insult to injury. Our patience has /Its limits; we'll process to punishment" (V. 666-68). Magpies, then, symbolize the dire consequences for sacrilege. As a result, his stories serve as lessons and

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models for proper behaviors. By guiding people's interactions with the immortal forces, Ovid delineates the appropriate relationship between humans and the divine. Besides religion-based organization, Ovid uses symbols to reshape the way people perceive political authority. The myth of Apollo and Daphne has significant implications on Augustus' reign. The laurel tree symbolically represents not simply a virtuous woman but admirable peace and honor. Apollo says to Daphne, " You shall attend conquering lords of Rome /When joys shouts triumph...you shall stand /Beside Augustus' gates" (I. 559-62). Ovid turns a previously insignificant laurel tree into a symbol for the sanctity and authority of the emperor. After reading Ovid's story, the Roman audience's perception of the laurel tree differs from the uninformed reader. In addition to the laurel tree, the apotheosis of Julius Caesar profoundly impacts the political order. Venus, ordained by Jove, saves Julius' soul "[s]o that great Julius, a god divine, /From his high throne in heaven may ever shine /Upon the Forum and our Capitol" (XV. 40-42). Ovid's original account of Julius' transformation probes the Roman citizens to question Augustus' political authority. Ovid not only literally deifies Julius but also figuratively mocks Augustus' illegitimate heritage. This refiguring of the transfer of power from Julius to Augustus allows Ovid to express his opinion on Rome's political order. Thus, Ovid, through original stories of metamorphoses, actively shapes both the Romans' and modern readers' views on the political atmosphere in Augustan Rome. Another way Ovid reshapes a culture, in addition to religious and political structures, is the institution of a social order by mediating conflicts between two sexes. His stories draw sexual boundaries by emphasizing women's unfaltering devotion to chastity. For example, avenging Actaeon's violation of her virtue, <https://assignbuster.com/ovidian-transformations-change-readers-perceptions/>

Diana turns him into a stag and “ not until so many countless wounds /Had drained away his lifeblood, was the wrath...of chaste Diana satisfied” (III. 237-39). Such a punishment exposes the repercussion of violating the sphere of the opposite sex. The love story of Pyramus and Thisbe shows another type of sacrifice. Thisbe’s unwavering loyalty made her a heroine for women to emulate. She bravely states, “ Love will give strength to strike. To death I’ll follow!...Death now shall have no power to part us ever” (IV. 149-53). The color of the mulberry tree serves as an eternal reminder of the price paid for love. Ovid employs natural objects, such as the mulberries, to catch readers’ attention because they can relate his stories to the familiar natural world. Ovid carefully chooses the end product of a transformation so that the character gains a new identity but still traces back to the original story. The mulberry tree, again, permanently bears red berries to symbolize the two lovers’ bloody sacrifice. Ovid sets up a memory palace, allowing the readers to see beyond the superficial appearance and remember the distinct origin of each natural object. The products transformations that end gender strife significantly alter readers’ conceptualizations of the world. Despite creating a social order, Ovid often problematizes the relationship between men and women. He takes advantage of every opportunity to demonstrate the power of metamorphoses by resolving the problems associated with the disruption of gender roles. Although Ovid shows that a distinct social sphere confines women’s activities, he recognizes that irrational eros often cause clash of the two genders. The Thracian family is one prominent example that shows the destructive nature of inappropriate sexual bonds. Ovid tries to impose order on the family through a series of transformations. He compares Tereus, charmed by Procne’s sister Philomela, to “ bird of prey has caught a

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hare.../To his high nest, the captive has no chance /Of flight, the captor  
gloats over his prize" (VI. 518-21). Tereus' attempt to debilitate Philomela  
fails and he eventually consumes his son's flesh. The family's tragic end  
reveals the difficulty for women to live up to the highest moral standards,  
especially under men's unpredictable eros. Furthermore, Ovid starkly shows  
the consequences of crossing inviolable boundaries. To relieve this tension  
involving betrayal, cannibalism, and taboo relations, Ovid changes the  
characters into birds with distinct characteristics. To this day, "[t]he marks of  
murder show upon a breast /And feathers carry still the stamp of blood" (VI.  
672-73). In several stories, Ovid reveals women's vulnerability and difficulty  
in maintaining their dignity. Through transformations, these conflicts among  
men and women can terminate peacefully. Thus, Ovid lessens the  
inconsistencies in gender roles, which helps to foster healthy domestic  
relationships. In addition to the various foundations of order, Ovid explains  
the existence of common natural phenomena, thereby helping his readers  
grasp the significance and causation of natural events. Although Perseus  
tamed the frenzied Gorgon, gods' irrationality constantly threatens the  
mortal realm. Ovid, however, turns disorder into a peaceful hierarchy of  
forces governing the world. For instance, he utilizes the story of the rape of  
Proserpine to show how the fundamental pattern of seasonal changes  
originated. Through compromises, Ceres and Pluto agree that Proserpine "  
spends with her mother half /The year's twelve months and with her  
husband half" (V. 563-64). This incident starts chaotically but ends by  
profoundly affecting people's lives in terms of agricultural production and  
seasonal habits. As a result of this change, definitive and predictable  
patterns replace arbitrary natural events in influencing human actions.

Metamorphoses intricately blend characters in Ovid's tales into the readers' environment and rationalize why certain natural phenomena persist. Beyond the originality of directly linking nature with the products of changes, Ovid adopts metamorphosis as a means to solely direct the writing of poetry. Often, poets depend heavily on philosophical ideas to justify their work. Ovid, on the other hand, demonstrates originality because he manipulates Pythagoreanism to reflect *Metamorphoses'* major themes. He shapes an assortment of philosophical ideas to mirror the diverse array of genres in his stories. Pythagoras, speaking through Ovid, endorses the theme of immortality through changes and rearrangements. He states, "In all creation, be assured, /There is no death—no death, but only change" (XV. 251-52). Unlike poets such as Lucretius and Virgil, Ovid does not accept particular philosophical doctrines. Without persistent ideology, the poet becomes the principal director of his own spectacle, which challenges the readers' world view. Instead of remaining faithful to traditional philosophy, Ovid creates a kaleidoscopic poetic tradition where the poet rises above the rapid changes. Ovid prevents the erosion of human deeds by time's progression. He documents transformations to illustrate religious, political, and social order. In addition, he shows that certain events are destined to repeat but every mortal will fall into his or her proper place. The same principle applies to Ovid, whose work makes his name everlasting. "As not the wrath of Jove, nor fire nor sword /Nor the devouring age can destroy," Ovid crosses the threshold between death and eternity (XV. 872-73). By profoundly restructuring people's interactions and recognitions of objects and patterns in nature, he justifies his conspicuous claim of immortality. His stories, with strong associations to the natural world, were easily transmitted

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from generation to generation. Centuries later, Ovid's narratives influenced numerous writers and artists around the world. More importantly, just before the dawn of Christianity, the *Metamorphoses* transformed Romans in Ovid's era to a higher degree of spirituality.