

OVID'S METAMORPHOSES

A Reader for Students in Elementary College Latin



CHRISTINE L. ALBRIGHT



Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Ovid's Metamorphoses is a Latin reader designed to partner existing elementary Latin textbooks.

The book features thirty compelling stories, graduated in difficulty and adapted from Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses* into prose. The original poem contains many different stories united thematically by the transformation which occurs in all of them; the epic features romance, seduction, humour, violence, monsters, and misbehaving gods.

Each chapter contains:

- a Latin passage adapted from the epic
- an accompanying vocabulary list
- a short commentary to help with translation
- a concise review of the specific grammar covered
- a brief comment on a literary aspect of the poem, or featured myth.

Suitable for college students studying Latin at the elementary level, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* is designed to be used alongside elementary Latin textbooks. Preserving Ovid's language and highly vivid descriptions, this reader introduces students to the epic masterpiece, allows them to consolidate their understanding of Latin prose, and offers opportunities for literary discussion.

Christine L. Albright is Assistant Professor and Elementary Languages Program Coordinator at the University of Georgia, USA.



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Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A Reader for Students in Elementary College Latin

Christine L. Albright

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Abbreviations

abl.	ablative
acc.	accusative
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
conj.	conjunction
dat.	dative
defect.	defective
demonst.	demonstrative
f.	feminine
gen.	genitive
impers.	impersonal
indecl.	indeclinable
inf.	infinitive
interj.	interjection
interrog.	interrogative
m.	masculine
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
n.	neuter
nom.	nominative
numer.	numeral/numerical
pl.	plural
poss.	possessive
prep.	preposition
pron.	pronoun
reflex.	reflexive
rel.	relative
sing.	singular

Introduction

Publius Ovidius Naso, commonly known as Ovid, was born on March 20, 43 BCE at Sulmo, a town located about 100 miles east of Rome. He was born to a family of equestrian rank, and he received an excellent education which was meant to prepare him for a legal career. Although he did hold some minor public offices, Ovid instead felt compelled to write poetry. In *Tristia* 4.10.17–26, Ovid recalls his early devotion to poetry:

frater ad eloquium viridi tendebat ab aevo,
fortia verbosi natus ad arma fori;
at mihi iam puero caelestia sacra placebant,
inque suum furtim Musa trahebat opus.
saepe pater dixit “studium quid inutile temptas?
Maeonides nullas ipse reliquit opes.”
motus eram dictis, totoque Helicone relicto
scribere temptabam verba soluta modis.
sponte sua carmen numeros veniebat ad aptos,
et quod temptabam scribere versus erat.

My brother tended towards oratory from a young age; he was born for the strong weapons of the wordy forum. But for me already as a boy heavenly worship was pleasing, and the Muse stealthily was drawing me into her work. Often my father said: “Why do you attempt a useless pursuit? Homer himself left no wealth.” I was moved by his words, and, with Helicon altogether left behind, I tried to write words freed from meter. Of its own accord, song came to fitting numbers, and whatever I tried to write was verse.

Ovid enjoyed poetic success as a young man and eventually published many works in elegiac meter, including *Amores* (love poems), *Heroides* (letters from heroines to heroes), *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* (a poem about cosmetics), *Ars Amatoria* (a didactic poem about erotic pursuits), *Remedia Amoris* (a poem about how to disentangle oneself from relationships), *Fasti* (a poem about the Roman calendar), *Tristia* (poems written from exile), *Epistulae ex Ponto* (letters written from exile), and *Ibis* (a curse-poem).

In 8 CE, at the height of his career, Ovid was exiled to Tomis on the Black Sea by the emperor Augustus. His sentence was *relegatio*, which meant that he was banished from Rome but allowed to keep his property and citizenship. The exact cause for the punishment is not known, although in his later poetry Ovid himself tells his audience that his banishment was due to a *carmen* (poem) and an *error* (mistake). It is generally assumed that the *carmen* was the *Ars Amatoria*, although it had been published almost a decade before Ovid’s relegation.

The *Metamorphoses*, which was almost finished in the year Ovid's sentence was passed down, seems just as likely to have offended Augustus.

The *Metamorphoses* is Ovid's only surviving work in dactylic hexameter, the meter of Greek and Roman epic. It is organized in 15 books, and it contains a multitude of mythological stories from various cultures. The poem begins with a description of the creation of the universe and ends with a celebration of the political order of Rome under Augustus, so in general there is some sense of linear progression through the course of the text. The structure is quite complicated, however. Ovid embeds stories within other stories, allows stories to bleed from one book into the next, and uses multiple internal narrators. Transformation serves as a unifying theme, and Ovid's characters change into animals, birds, watery springs, constellations, and plants, for example.

This reader offers 30 stories which have been adapted from Ovid's verse into Latin prose. The reader is intended to complement elementary Latin textbooks and aims to help bridge the often wide gap between the elementary and intermediate reading levels by providing compelling, challenging passages. The reader has been designed as a supplementary text; ideally, students will attempt these stories after translating simpler passages in a primary textbook. The stories are graduated in difficulty and introduce grammatical topics typically covered during the first year of studying college Latin. In general, the length of the stories increases as the reader progresses, although a few shorter examples are found in the middle chapters which reflect the concise nature of Ovid's own narratives. As they work their way through the reader, students will encounter elements of Latin which tend to be difficult to negotiate when they first begin to read actual texts, such as relative pronouns which begin sentences, epithets, and plural words used when singular words are expected. The stories feature much of Ovid's own vocabulary and syntax.

The reader also aims to introduce students to Ovid's epic masterpiece. Thus, Ovid's poetic language and highly vivid descriptions have been preserved wherever possible. His graphic presentation of the mythical material has been retained. Sexual situations and raw violence are pervasive in the epic, and the content of Ovid's stories has not been sanitized. Most of the stories in the reader appear in the first half of the epic, but the last five stories are taken from Books 14 and 15. Like the epic itself, the reader begins with the story of creation and ends with the story of the apotheosis of Julius Caesar. Thus, if read from beginning to end, the reader will provide a sense of the structure and linear progression of the *Metamorphoses* and offer opportunities for robust literary discussion.

Each chapter includes a Latin passage adapted from the epic, an accompanying vocabulary list, a short commentary to help with translation, a concise review of the specific grammar covered, and a comment about a literary aspect of the poem or the featured myth. Students should note that vocabulary words are glossed the first time they appear but are not glossed in subsequent chapters. Some commonly used words such as *nōn* and *sed* appear only in the final glossary. Participles are glossed as adjectives until Chapter 18, when participles are introduced. After Chapter 18, vocabulary lists include the verbs from which participles are derived. Comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs appear in vocabulary lists and the final glossary in their comparative or superlative forms.



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1 Creation begins

(*Met.* 1.5–150)

At the beginning of Book 1, Ovid offers an account of creation. He calls this primordial state “Chaos,” borrowing the term from the Greek poet Hesiod.

- 1 Ante terrās et aquās, nātūra est ūna sphaera. Sphaera nōn ordināta est. Massa
- 2 indigesta est. Nōn sunt stellae. Nōn est lūna. Terra, aqua, et aura sunt, sed terrae,
- 3 aquae, et aerae sine formā sunt. Nōn sunt silvae. Nōn sunt āreae. Nōn sunt bestiae.
- 4 Nōn sunt casae. Nōn sunt undae. Nōn rīpae sunt. Nōn piscīnae sunt. Nōn nāviculae
- 5 sunt. Nōn Eurus, Zephyrus, Boreās vel Auster. Nōn sunt muscae. Chaos est. Nihil
- 6 suam formam servat. Aliud aliīs obstat. Tum aliquis inordinātam mātēriam ordinat.

Commentary

4 *Nōn sunt undae. Nōn rīpae sunt:* Notice that the subject of the sentence can appear in various positions with respect to the verb. That they are in the nominative case indicates that *undae* and *rīpae* are the subjects of these sentences.

5 *Nōn Eurus, Zephyrus, Boreās vel Auster:* The names of the winds are all in the nominative case.

5–6 *Nihil suam formam servat:* The Latin word *suus, a, um* is a reflexive adjective, which means that it reflects back to the subject of the sentence and takes its meaning from that. Thus, it can mean *his own, her own, its own, or their own*. Like any adjective, it agrees with the noun it modifies in case, number, and gender, but you must determine what the subject is to translate it correctly. Here, the subject is *nihil*, so it should be translated *its own*.

aliquis, aliquid: someone, something
aliud . . . aliis: one thing (nom.) . . . the others (dat.)
ante: (adv. and prep. + acc.) before
aqua, ae f.: water
ārea, ae f.: open space, plain, threshing floor
aura, ae f.: air, breeze, wind
Auster, Austrī m.: Auster, the south wind
bestia, ae f.: beast, animal
Boreās, ae m.: Boreas, the north wind
casa, ae f.: cottage, cabin, house
Chaos n.: Chaos, boundless empty space
Eurus, ī m.: Eurus, the east wind
forma, ae f.: form, shape
indigestus, a, um: confused, unarranged
inordinātus, a, um: disordered, confused
lūna, ae f.: the moon
massa, ae f.: a mass, lump
māteria, ae f.: matter, material
musca, ae f.: a fly
nātūra, ae f.: nature
nāvicula, ae f.: little ship, boat

nihil n.: (indecl.) nothing
obstō, obstāre, obstī, obstātum: to stand against, oppose (+ dat.)
ordinātus, a, um: ordered, organized
ordinō, ordināre, ordināvī, ordinātum: to put in order, arrange
piscīna, ae f.: a fishpond, reservoir
rīpa, ae f.: river bank, shore
servō, servāre, servāvī, servātum: to keep, save, preserve
silva, ae f.: wood, forest
sine: (prep. + abl.) without
sphaera, ae f.: globe, sphere
stella, ae f.: star
sum, esse, fuī, futūrum: to be
suus, a, um: (reflex. poss. adj.) his, her, its own
terra, ae f.: land
tum: (adv.) then, at that time
unda, ae f.: water, wave
ūnus, a, um: one, single
vel: (conj.) or
Zephyrus, ī m.: Zephyr, the west wind

NOUN AND VERB BASICS

First declension

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Nominative</i>	terra	terrae
<i>Genitive</i>	terrae	terrārum
<i>Dative</i>	terrae	terrīs
<i>Accusative</i>	terram	terrās
<i>Ablative</i>	terrā	terrīs

First conjugation present indicative active

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>1st Person</i>	obstō	obstāmus
<i>2nd Person</i>	obstās	obstātis
<i>3rd Person</i>	obstat	obstant

Present indicative of *esse*

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>1st Person</i>	sum	sumus
<i>2nd Person</i>	es	estis
<i>3rd Person</i>	est	sunt

Ovid introduces his epic with a short statement about his poetic agenda. He says: “My mind compels me to tell of forms changed into new bodies. Gods (for you all also have changed those forms), breathe favorably upon my beginnings and draw out an everlasting song which runs from the first origin of the universe to my own time.” The opening statement thus highlights the theme of the epic: transformation. Change occurs within each story included in the poem, and the opening account of creation, in which an ordered universe develops from a state of chaos, certainly is in keeping with Ovid’s stated theme. If read from beginning to end, the entire epic may be interpreted as a political cosmogony which celebrates the grand political metamorphosis of Rome under Augustus.



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2 Creation continues

(*Met.* 1.5–150)

Ovid continues his account of creation by describing how one god brings order to the universe by arranging things in their proper place. Various living things occupy their respective habitats, and man is born.

- 1 Subitō deus mundum fabricat. Quid fabricat? Sunt terrae. Sunt tumulī et campī.
2 Sunt silvae. Est herba. Cicādae et muscae sunt. Arāneae sunt. Cervae, ursae,
3 cunīculī sunt. Caprae sunt. Aquae sunt. Pontus est. Rīpae et stāgna sunt. Pluvia est.
4 Sunt conchae et delphīnī. Cocleae, salamandrae, et anguillae sunt. Caelum est.
5 Sunt stellae. Est lūna. Virgō, Capricornus, Aquārius, Piscēs, Leō, Ariēs, Geminī,
6 Taurus, Libra, Sagittārius, Cancer, et Scorpiō sunt. Est orbis lacteus. Ventī et aurae
7 sunt. Eurus, Zephyrus, Boreās, et Auster sunt. Hūmānī autem nōn sunt. Tum virī
8 sunt—sīve deus sīve terra virōs creat.
- 9 Sunt quattuor aeva mundī. Prīmum aevum aureum est. Terra ipsa multa sine rastrō
10 dat. Nōn est tuba. Nōn galeae, nōn gladiī. Flāvum mel stillat. Tum aevum argenteum
11 est. In aevō argenteō prīmum virī casās optant. Cultūra terrae est. Tertium aevum
12 aēneum est. Multa arma sunt, sed aevum tamen nōn est scelerātum. Ultimum
13 aevum dē dūrō ferrō est. Virī vēla ventīs dant, et ad terrās novās nāvigant. Bella
14 sanguinea sunt. Virī dīs nōn sacrificant. Iuppiter nōn beātus est.

Commentary

5–6 *Virgō, Capricornus, Aquārius, Piscēs, Leō, Ariēs, Geminī, Taurus, Libra, Sagittārius, Cancer, et Scorpiō sunt*: You will no doubt recognize these signs of the zodiac. In Latin, the names mean *The Virgin, The Goat, The Water Carrier, The Fish, The Lion, The Ram, The Twins, The Bull, The Scales, The Archer, The Crab, and The Scorpion*. You will see these signs again in the story of Phaethon, where they are represented both on a work of art and as giant forms in the sky.

9–10 *Terra ipsa multa sine rastrō dat*: The word *ipse, ipsa, ipsum* is an intensive pronoun or adjective which is used to add emphasis or to focus attention on a word, so its meaning depends on what it is intensifying. Here, it agrees with *terra*, so it should be translated *itself*. Ovid means here that the land produces food easily without agriculture.

10 *Flāvum mel stillat*: *mel, mellis n.* is a noun of the third declension and is in the nominative.

14 *Virī dīs nōn sacrificant*: *dīs* is dative plural of *deus*.

ad: (prep. + acc.) to, towards	ipse, ipsa, ipsum: himself, herself, itself
aëneus, a, um: bronze	Iuppiter, Iovis m.: Jupiter/Jove,
aevum, ī n.: age, period of time	ruler of the gods
anguilla, ae f.: eel	mel, mellis n.: honey
arānea, ae f.: spider, web	multus, a, um: many
argenteus, a, um: of silver	mundus, ī m.: world, universe
arma, ōrum n. pl.: arms, weapons	nāvigō, nāvigāre, nāvigāvī, nāvigātum:
aureus, a, um: golden	to sail
autem: (conj.) but, however	novus, a, um: new, young
beātus, a, um: happy	optō, optāre, optāvī, optātum: to desire,
bellum, ī n.: war	wish for
caelum, ī n.: heaven, sky	orbis lacteus: Milky Way
campus, ī m.: field	pluvia, ae f.: rain
capra, ae f.: goat	pontus, ī m.: sea, ocean
cerva, ae f.: deer	prīmum: (adv.) at first, first
cicāda, ae f.: cicada	quattuor: (indecl. numer. adj.) four
coclea, ae f.: snail	quis, quid: (interrog. pron.) who, what
concha, ae f.: sea-shell, shell-fish	rastrum, ī n.: rake, hoe
creō, creāre, creāvī, creātum: to create,	sacrificō, sacrificāre, sacrificāvī,
make	sacrificātum: to offer sacrifice
cultūra, ae f.: cultivation, tilling	salamandra, ae f.: salamander
cuniculus, ī m.: rabbit	sanguineus, a, um: bloody
dē: (prep. + abl.) from, down from, about	scelerātus, a, um: wicked, profane
delphīnus, ī m.: dolphin	sīve/seu ... sīve/seu: (conj.) whether ... or
deus, ī m.: a god	stāgnum, ī n.: standing water, pond
dō, dare, dedī, datum: to give	stillō, stillāre, stillāvī, stillātum: to drip
dūrus, a, um: hard	subitō: (adv.) suddenly
fabricō, fabricāre, fabricāvī, fabricātum: to	tamen: (conj.) however, nevertheless
make, construct	tertius, a, um: third
ferrum, ī n.: iron	tuba, ae f.: military horn
flāvus, a, um: blonde, yellow	tumulus, ī m.: hill, burial mound
galea, ae f.: helmet	ultimus, a, um: last, final
gladius, ī m.: sword	ursa, ae f.: bear
herba, ae f.: herb, grass	vēlum, ī n.: sail, covering
hūmānus, a, um: human	ventus, ī m.: wind
in: (prep. + abl.) in, on; (prep. + acc.) into	vir, virī m.: a man

SECOND DECLENSION**Masculine**

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Nominative</i>	ventus	ventī
<i>Genitive</i>	ventī	ventōrum
<i>Dative</i>	ventō	ventīs
<i>Accusative</i>	ventum	ventōs
<i>Ablative</i>	ventō	ventīs

Neuter

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Nominative</i>	caelum	caela
<i>Genitive</i>	caelī	caelōrum
<i>Dative</i>	caelō	caelis
<i>Accusative</i>	caelum	caela
<i>Ablative</i>	caelō	caelis

Ovid presents the creation of the universe in terms of an artist fashioning a work of art, although he is vague about which god serves as the cosmic fabricator. An obvious choice would be Vulcan, who is a craftsman-god. Art and artists figure prominently throughout Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In fact, some scholars believe that, by focusing on the fates of so many mythological artists in the poem (many of whom suffer unpleasant outcomes), Ovid is making a statement about the role of artists in Augustan Age Rome.