

## Study Questions for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Please write out your answers to the questions that follow and/or take notes on the relevant areas in the text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is best to get into the habit of doing this while reading. You should complete this exercise after you have read and highlighted, or noted, areas of the text that you think are important. The purpose of this exercise is to help you follow the author's arguments and to think critically about this text's teachings. Below are a list of questions that, once answered, will ensure that you have a good outline of the text's purpose and an in-depth understanding of its historical importance.

### Context:

*Metamorphoses* is a Latin narrative poem written in 8 A.D. by Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.–18 A.D.), better known as simply Ovid. Divided in fifteen books, *Metamorphoses* contains 250 myths, and it is our main source of classical Greek mythology. Starting from the story of creation and the flood to the deification of Julius Caesar and reign of Augustus, the poem contains many famous mythical stories such as that of Daedalus and Icarus. Even with its complex narrative structure, modern scholars see four major divisions to *Metamorphoses*: “Divine Comedy” or “Gods in Love,” books 1-2; “Avenging Gods,” books 3-6 (to line 400); “Pathos of Love” the rest of book 6-11; and “History of Rome and the Deified Caesar,” books 12-15.

*Metamorphoses*, Ovid's magnum opus, is considered by current scholars as a masterpiece of Latin literature. With translations into just about every European language, it became the most-read of all classical works during the Middle Ages. The myths contained in this poem have inspired works in every medium for centuries. Ovid's work has inspired writers such as Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlow, and Milton; painters such as Brueghel; and composers such as Händel among many others. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has exerted a profound influence on Western culture.

### Note on Reading:

Even though first time readers tend to view the *Metamorphoses* as a collection of 250 individual stories, Ovid stated in the prologue that he had written this epic to be read as one ‘continuous poem’ —a *Carmen perpetuum*—in which all stories are connected to each other.

### Questions:

1. How is the world depicted in *Metamorphoses*? Are the setting of the myths safe and peaceful places, or dangerous and chaotic?

2. How does Ovid represent the gods in *Metamorphoses*?
3. How are women depicted in *Metamorphoses*?
4. What is Ovid's view of love?
5. Why do you think Ovid uses humor in *Metamorphoses*?
6. What does *Metamorphoses* tell us about Augustan Rome?
7. Is there a moral lesson to *Metamorphoses*?