

## Transition, Transformation, and Transgender: Tiresias in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

This paper focuses on the account of Tiresias' sex change from a gendered perspective: specifically, transgendered. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.316-339) contains the first surviving mythological account of the sex change of Tiresias, the famous blind prophet who advises both Odysseus in the underworld and several kings of Thebes throughout Greek tragedy. This particular version of Tiresias' sex change is not only the most extant, but additionally the most known throughout the ancient world, with both Apollodorus and Phlegon of Tralles tracing its history back to Hesiod, seven hundred years before Ovid's birth (Russell 2022). The story of Tiresias' sex change comes at a point of transition within the work. In book three, Ovid begins with the mythology of the house of Cadmus, starting from the foundation of Thebes and ending with the birth of Dionysus, which covers roughly three hundred lines. However, before Ovid moves on to discussing the case of Narcissus and Echo, he uses the transformation of Tiresias to connect Semele to Echo, since all three of these characters suffer from the wrath of Juno. Therefore through a close reading perspective of this passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I explore how Tiresias' sex change into a woman and then back into a man can be elucidated by a specifically trans perspective, especially through the nature of this section as a transition between two larger stories.

Crucially, in using the term "trans," I am not taxonomizing Tiresias' identity, nor am I ascribing any fixed identity to him (Manion 2020); I follow Stryker's definition of "trans" as such: "people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (Stryker 2008). This term applies to Tiresias' mythological sex change caused by the gods,

which had him living as a woman for seven years. By taking this trans-forward approach that centers Tiresias' gendered experiences, I show how we can further our understanding of how ancient trans experiences were perceived. In addition, I demonstrate how this transgendered experience connects Tiresias more broadly within the structure of the *Metamorphoses* itself, connecting him to Semele and Echo through the shared gender experience of womanhood, for example in the experience of sex as a woman.

### Bibliography

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