

OVID AND PLATO

The Roman poet Ovid, while sailing across the Black Sea to Tomis, considered his exile to have cosmic proportions; in the surging waves he sees his world seemingly veering back towards primordial chaos. Throughout his work Ovid seeks to depict the vast heterogeneity of the world, its creation and destruction, and the interconnection between humans and their unstable environment. This book explores how Ovid turns to philosophy, and especially the dialogues of Plato, to find meaning in a world that is fluid, uncertain, and dangerous. Rather than seeking recourse in an exact science of knowledge or a world of Forms beyond the here and now, Ovid sets himself apart from the philosophers. Instead, he highlights the limits of philosophy to capture the changing nature of reality and realigns the boundaries between poetry and science so as to create a more suitable medium for representing our entanglement with this complex world.

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OVID AND PLATO

Disturbing Realities

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For my parents, Patsy and Annetje

And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of feathers
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?
W. B. Yeats, 'The Shadowy Waters: Introduction'

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This work began its life cycle as a PhD thesis, funded by the Irish Research Council and Hardiman Fellowship, in the classics department of the University of Galway, then the National University of Ireland, Galway. I owe a huge amount to the supportive and nurturing environment of the classics department. Foremost thanks go to Michael Clarke, who was my primary supervisor and who developed expertise in a branch of research unrelated to his own in order to ensure the intellectual rigour and completion of this project. I was co-supervised in the early days of my PhD by Amanda Kelly, whose leap of discipline was arguably greater and who set the ball rolling for developing avenues for disseminating this research. When I returned to Galway as a lecturer some years later, I worked closely with Pádraic Moran, who also helped greatly in developing my thesis into a book. Far beyond their guidance in advancing my research and aiding my professional development, it is their long-lasting friendships over the succeeding years that have been the most valuable product of this work. My thesis also benefitted from the input of Mark Stansbury, Jacopo Bisagni, Edward Herring, and Brian Arkins.

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