THEBES: or The Foundation of Instability:

Violence and Change

(from Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book III)

NB: Metamorphosis theme items are underlined; violence theme items are in bold font.

1. From cow Europa to a heifer in a trackless place:
etymological etiology for Boeotia (< Greek boûs, 'cow')

2. Cadmus, son of Agenor (King of Phoenicia and father of Europa, the cow loved by Zeus), is ordered by his father to look for his sister Europa; fails to find her and is exiled. Cadmus then is told to follow a cow (this cow seems to be different from Europa) and found a city where cow stops
   a. The serpent in the grove: Cadmus pins the monster to a tree
   b. Pallas Athena (= Minerva) bids him to do the 'obvious' thing: sow the monster’s teeth as seed > metamorphosis: Spartoi are born > Civil War and Fratricide: violence vs. kin

3. Cadmus marries Harmony, daughter of Ares/Mars and Aphrodite/Venus; their four children:
   a. Semele, mother of Dionysus, toasted by Zeus/Jupiter/Jove (see #4 below)
   b. Agave, mother of Pentheus (< Penthos, 'pain, grief'); Gr. sparagmos, 'ripping apart, dismemberment'
   c. Ino, wife of Athamas, stepmother of Phrixus and Helle (she tried to kill them)
   d. Autonoë, mother of Actaeon (the stag):
      i. Actaeon inadvertently peeped on Artemis/Diana naked and, turned into a stag, was devoured by a 'catalog' of dogs
      ii. Hera/Juno cares not much for Artemis/Diana’s excess in exacting punishment, for Actaeon descends from Europa

4. Jealous of Semele, Hera/Juno turns herself into an old hag and advises Semele to ask Zeus/Jupiter/Jove to show himself in his full splendor, just like he goes to Hera/Juno

5. Semele (see #3.a above) is incinerated and Dionysus is sawn into Zeus/Jupiter/Jove’s thigh

6. Mythological footnote: Twice born Bacchus/Dionysus/Zagreus: from his mothers toasted womb & from Zeus' thigh; but (alternate version, not in Ovid; see Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v. Dionysus, p. 481b)
   a. Zeus and Persephone conceive (Dionysus) Zagreus
   b. Ripped apart and eaten by Titans, except his heart
   c. Zeus swallows his heart; seduces Semele
      i. >>>>> Symbolic death/dismemberment and rebirth

7. Tiresias sees serpents mating, hits them with stick, is turned into a woman

8. Tiresias sees same serpents again seven years later and is turned back into a man

9. Tiresias agrees with Zeus/Jupiter/Jove that: Women get more pleasure out of sex:
   a. Hera punishes him with blindness
   b. Zeus rewards him with prophecy

10. Tiresias prophesies Narcissus will grow old if he does not know himself

11. Echo and Narcissus: Echo fades in a voice

12. Narcissus dies of love for himself and is turned into a flower