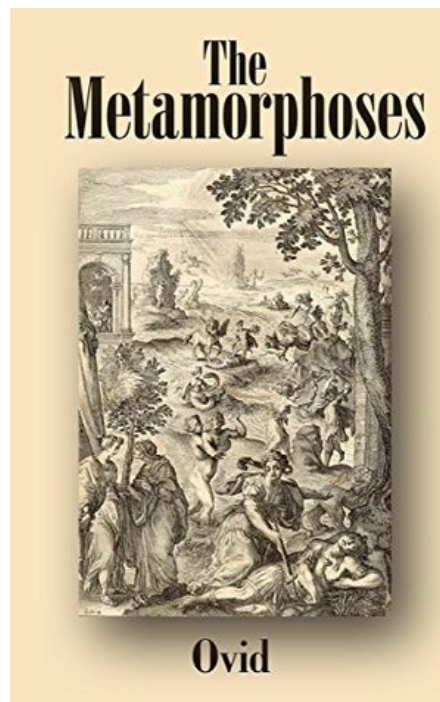




The Metamorphoses

Ovid

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The Metamorphoses

Ovid

The Metamorphoses Ovid

Finished in 8 AD, Ovid's *The Metamorphoses* is an epic and narrative poem of fifteen books, a stunning arrangement of countless mythological tales masterfully connected by the theme of transformation and love.

The Metamorphoses Details

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From Reader Review The Metamorphoses for online ebook

J.G. Keely says

Sex, violence, and humor are often painted as low and primitive: the signs of a failing culture. Yet it is only in cultures with a strong economy and a substantial underclass that such practices can rise from duty to pastime. As Knox's introduction reminds us, Ovid's time was one of pervasive divorce, permissive laws, and open adultery, and our humble author participated in all of them.

Eventually, the grand tyrant closed his fist over the upper classes, exerting social controls and invoking the moral standard of an imagined 'golden age' in order to snatch power and discredit his rivals. Though already a popular and influential author and speaker, Ovid was exiled for being wanton and clever--either one he could have gotten away with, but both was too much.

Both he and Virgil were sent to the extremities of the empire by Augustus, and both wrote epics to equal Homer's. While Virgil's was a capitulation to the emperor, honoring his fictitious lineage and equating heroism with duty, Ovid's was a sly, labyrinthine re-imagining of classic tales, drawing equally on the gold of Olympus' brow and the muck between a harlot's toes.

Ovid remained more coy about his dirt than Apuleius or Seneca, maintaining plausible deniability with irony and *entendre* throughout the complex work. Every view, vision, and opinion is put forth at some point, and very rarely are they played straight. Ovid's characters are remarkable creations, each one a subversion of the familiar legend that surrounds them. Of course, by this point many of us are more familiar with Ovid's versions than the ones he was making light of.

Virgil inspired the proud, righteous men of words: Dante, Tasso, Milton. Ovid created a style for the tricksters and the conflicted: Petrarch, Donne, Shakespeare, Ariosto, Rabelais. Each of Ovid's myths was a discrete vision, not only by plot, but by theme. His tales were not simply presentations of ideas, but explorations that turned back on themselves over and over.

The metaphysical poets would come to adopt this style, creating short works that explored themes, even ritualizing the idea's reversal in the sonnet's *volta*. The active, visual nature of Ovid was a progression from the extended metaphors of the philosophers to what could be called a true conceit: a symbolic representation at once supportive of and in conflict with the idea it bears.

Each of Ovid's tales flows, one into the next, building meaning by relations, counterpoints, repetition, and structure. Each small part builds into a grander whole. Just as all the sundry stories become a mythology, the many symbolic arguments become a philosophy.

Instead of the Virgilian heroic mode, where one man wins, thereby vindicating his philosophy, Ovid shows a hundred victories and losses, creating an aggregate meaning. Virgil was writing of what he thought one man should be: loyal, pious, righteous, strong, noble. Ovid was more interested in asking what it is possible for a man to be--what are the limits of the mind?

The Greek myths are an attempt to understand the mind, to observe what we do and create types, to develop a system for understanding man. In collecting these various tales, Ovid was creating the first psychological diagnostic manual, of which the DSM is the modern child. The Greeks invented everything, after all, and here, a few thousand years before Freud, is a remarkably coherent and accurate picture of the mind and its disorders.

Freud did little more than reintroduce the Greek system, which is why his theories--the Psyche, the Oedipus Conflict, Narcissism--are drawn directly from that source. Of course, to any student of literature, it's clear that this is how the terms have always been used. All the great works alluded to these Greek ideas because this was the central collection of knowledge about the mind, a set of terms, phrases, and examples which formed the basis of any discussion of the mind.

Indeed, the Greeks were much better at it than Freud was--he even screwed up the Oedipal Theory, the thing he's best known for, despite the fact that the Greeks had it right from the very beginning.

Freud's patients, being middle-class Europeans, were raised by nannies and nursemaids until they were of age, and had fairly little interaction with their parents. Human beings imprint on people who we are around a great deal before about age six as 'family', and therefore, out of bounds sexually. Since his patients were not around their parents much before this age, they did not imprint correctly. Now: what's the first thing that happens to Oedipus in the story? That's right, he's taken away from his parents and raised elsewhere. Cause, disorder, symptom--it was all right there, and Freud still missed it.

So, Ovid was indeed tackling a grand theme in his tales: the mapping of the human mind as it was known to Greece and Rome. That isn't to say that there isn't depth and conflict between characters and ideas in Virgil, but his centralized, political theme deprived him of the freedom to move from one idea to the next, as Ovid did.

This lack of freedom is a boon for most authors: structure gives tangible boundaries and tools with which to create. With no boundaries, the author has no place to start, and no markers to guide his path.

Imagine a man is given all the parts to a lawnmower. His chances of building a lawnmower are pretty high--but that's all he can do. Now give the same man all the uncut materials and tools in a shop. He could build a lawnmower, or nearly any other machine, but it's going to take a lot of doing. That kind of freedom--real freedom--tends to paralyze most people.

Likewise, it's easier to write good poetry when the rhyme scheme, scansion, and meter are pre-determined than to create a beauty and flow in blank verse. Yet Ovid deconstructed his stories, starting and stopping them between books and moving always back and forth. He provided himself with absolute freedom, but maintained his flow and progression, even without the crutches of tradition.

While his irony and satire are the clearest signs of his remarkable mind, the most impressive is probably this: that he flaunted tradition, style, and form, but never faltered in his grand work.

Virgil knew what he did when he attached himself to Augustus' train; likewise Ovid recognized how his simultaneous praise and subversion of Augustus' legacy would play: none could openly accuse him of treason, but anyone with a solid mind would see the dangerous game Ovid played with his king and patron.

He did not shy from critiquing Augustus even as he wrote for him, for his nation, and for history. Ovid's parting shot is the famous assertion that as long as Rome's name is spoken aloud, so will be Ovid's. This has been echoed since by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, so that what Ovid realized we would never doubt today.

Even banished to the wilderness, out of favor, the only way to silence the artist is to kill him, and this must be done long before he has an audience. Augustus got his month, but his empire fell. Ovid's empire grows by books and minds each year, and its capital is still *The Metamorphoses*.

I researched long trying to decide on a translation. Though there are many competent versions out there, I chose Martin's. I recall seeing the cover and coveting it, but distrusting the unknown translation. Imagine my

surprise when my research turned up my whim.

I enjoyed Martin's translation for the same reason I appreciate Fagles': the vibrancy, wit, and drive of the language. Both are poetic, exciting, risk-taking--but also knowledgeable and deliberate. Every translation is a new work of art, all its own, and I respect translators who don't pretend otherwise.

The translators of the fifties were more staunchly academic, capturing meaning and precision, but in enshrining the classics, they fail to take the sorts of risks that make a work bold and artful. Contrarily, the early translators, like Pope, recreated the work in their own vernacular--not merely as a translation, but as a completely new vision, as Shakespeare's plays are to Plutarch's Lives.

Martin (and Fagles) take the more modern approach, championed by the literary style of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, whose works are solidly grounded in their tradition, deliberately and knowledgeably drawn, but with the verve and novelty of the iconoclast. There is something particularly fitting in this, since Ovid himself was an iconoclast who mixed formalized tradition with subversion and irony.

Martin proved himself utterly fearless in the altercation between the Pierides and the Muses: he styles their competing songs as a poetry jam, drawing on the vocal forms of rap music. I must admit I was shocked at first, and unable to reconcile, but as I kept reading, I came to realize that it was not my place to question.

Translation is the adaptation of one style to another, one word or phrase or invocation to something more familiar. In his desire to capture the competition and skill of song in these early contests, he drew on what may be the only recognizable parallel to modern man. What is remarkable is not how different the two styles are, but how similar.

It is comical, it is a bit absurd, but so was the original--and in any case, he is altering the original purpose less than Pope, who translated all of the poetry into anachronism. I never thought I would prefer a translation of Ovid which contained the word 'homie', but if Martin can be true enough to the poetry to write it, I must be brave enough to laud it.

I still laugh, but only because Martin has revealed to me something of the impossibility and oddity inherent to translation. This certainly isn't your grandfather's Ovid, but then, your grandfather's Ovid wasn't the real one, either.

I also appreciated Knox's introduction in both Martin's and Fagle's work, though Knox's Homeric background is stronger. I found the end-notes insightful and useful, though they are never quite numerous enough to suit me--but such is the nature of reading a work in translation.

Rachel Smalter Hall says

I bought this copy of Ovid's Metamorphoses when I was living in Rome. It's the book I was reading on the plane when I left Rome, as the realization sunk in that an awesome and strange adventure was drawing to a close, and it's the book I was still reading when I moved back to Minneapolis and attempted to readjust to life as a Midwestern college undergrad.

I was reading Metamorphoses at the cafe a few blocks away from my apartment when a strange man gave me that little terror of a kitten, Monster. And Monster used to bite my toes when I was reading Metamorphoses in bed.

I was in love, so much in love, when I read Metamorphoses, with someone I would surely never meet again. And I was so lonely. And Metamorphoses was just beautiful, all the forlorn humans going up against the gods, only to be transformed into plants, animals, birds~

To read the great Roman poet while living in Rome, and to continue reading him while you are in mourning for the city once it's gone ~ was outrageous. In the best way. Grand. Epic. Eternal.

C says

What the fuck Ovid. Save some brilliance for the rest of us.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

I'm re-reading this from bits I consumed throughout my youth as a mythology dork, but the use of Roman names rather than their Greek equivalents requires a lot of stopping and re-referencing to figure out who the F. is being discussed. My Roman numerals suck too, since we're on the subject. Anyway, I decided to restart this in conjunction with reading *Venus in Furs* because that novel brought to mind the Pygmalion myth, which brings to mind *The Sea Came in at Midnight*, and somehow these all conglomerate in my head in a scattered mess which I hope to some day knit into a scarf for the frigid, blistery-cold Austin, Texas summer. It also reminds me of the movie *Mannequin* and what naturally and immediately follows, the American band Jefferson Starship (the last part being of no consequence whatsoever, just a side note). Don't judge me. Why am I spending my time this way? Because I was an 8 year undergraduate, and I am a bit lost without a project, so I decided to invent one. Don't judge me; I went out for 3 or 4 hours on Saturday. I will rehash these points in my von Sacher-Masoch review, once they make some semblance of sense. Don't juuuudge me.

Fernando says

Siempre es vital, en todo lector de clásicos que se precie de tal, recorrer las páginas de los pioneros, los creadores, los que antecedieron a toda la literatura moderna, tal es el caso de Ovidio como también lo son Virgilio, Homero, Sófocles, Esquilo, Eurípides y tantos otros. He leído con interés la mayoría de las transformaciones narradas en Las Metamorfosis y por supuesto, algunas me gustaron más que otras; por eso enumero la galería de mitos que desfilan por sus gloriosas páginas.

Todos ellos me han maravillado con sus variadas transformaciones, a saber:

Apolo, Europa, Júpiter, Dafne, Narciso, Perseo, Medusa, Teseo, Proserpina, Palas, Jasón, Medea, Minotauro, Dédalo, Ícaro, Aquiles, Ulises, Orfeo, Eurídice, Ganimedes, Pigmalión, Ifigenia y sobre todo mi admiradísimo Eneas.

Para finalizar, debo remarcar cómo Ovidio aseguró su nombre en letras de oro para la posteridad a través del Epílogo. Es como si él mismo hubiera sido Tiresias, el sabio ciego que podía adivinar el futuro (algo que Edipo no logró entender):

“Y ya he dado fin a una obra a la que no podrán destruir ni la cólera de Júpiter, ni el fuego, ni el hierro, ni el tiempo voraz. Que aquel día que no tiene ningún derecho más que sobre mi cuerpo, cuando quiera, ponga

término a curso incierto de mi vida; sin embargo, inmortal en la parte más noble de mi persona, seré llevado sobre la alta región de los astros y mi nombre será indeleble; y por cualquier parte por donde aparezca el dominio de Roma sobre la tierra seré leído por los pueblos y por todos los siglos; viviré, si algo de verdad existe en el presentimiento de los poetas, gloriosamente.”

Darwin8u says

“Happy is the man who has broken the chains which hurt the mind, and has given up worrying once and for all.”

? Ovid, Metamorphoses

Ovid -- the David Bowie of Latin literature. I chewed on this book of myth-poems the entire time I was tramping around Rome. I was looking for the right words to describe my feelings about it. It isn't that I didn't like it. It is an unequivocal masterpiece. I'm amazed by it. I see Ovid's genes in everything (paintings, sculptures, poems and prose). He is both modern and classic, reverent and wicked, lovely and obscene all at once. It is just hard to wrestle him down. To pin my thoughts about 'the Metamorphoses' into words. Structure really fails me.

That I guess is the sign for me of a book's depth or success with me. It makes me wish I could read it in the original form. I'm not satisfied with Dante in English. I want him in Italian. I'm not satisfied with Ovid in English. I want to experience his poetry, his playfulness, his wit in Latin.

I still prefer the poetry of Homer and Dante, but Ovid isn't embarrassed by the company of the greats; so not Zeus or Neptune, but maybe Apollo.

Lisa says

"Throughout all ages,
If poets have vision to prophesy truth, I shall live in my
Fame."

Thus the closing lines of Ovid's "Metamorphoses". He was certainly right in his statement, but it feels like an appropriate irony that his work has been transformed, metamorphosed, over the millennia since he wrote his compilation of Roman and Greek literature. I have known most of the collected stories since my early days at university, but only now finished reading the "Metamorphoses" as a whole, from cover to cover, and my impression is that Ovid's fame is mostly due to the brilliant interpretation of his text by European visual artists over the centuries.

Through the metamorphosis from text to visual art, Ovid has stayed famous. Bernini's "Apollo and Daphne" symbolises it more accurately than any other myth retold in the collection: a god chasing a young nymph, who slowly transforms into a laurel tree to avoid sexual assault, only to find herself the eternal symbol of Apollo's high status, and the honorable prize for literary or artistic fame. Ovid is resting on those laurels, wearing his Apollonian laurel wreath - as is Bernini, who can proudly compete with Pygmalion in the skill with which he made the marble leaves come alive, transforming hard stone into delicate art.

I knew I would be going on a tour through art history when I embarked on the Ovid journey, and I enjoyed every minute of it, often reading with a pile of art books next to me. As a pleasant extra surprise, I found myself revisiting several favourite Greek plays from a different narrative perspective, focusing on the transforming powers of dramatic storytelling rather than on unity of time, place and action. Hercules' story unfolded from a new angle, as did many of the Trojan and Minoan adventures.

After finishing Virgil's *The Aeneid* a couple of months ago, the short summary of Aeneas' adventures was welcome as well. Generally speaking, the "Metamorphoses" can be viewed as a Who's Who in the Ancient Roman and Greek cosmos, with a clear bias in favour of the Roman empire and its virtues. There are fewer long fight scenes than in the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, which makes it a more pleasant, less repetitive narrative, once the Centaurs and Lapiths are done with their violent duties.

After decades of immersing myself in the world of ancient mythology, I found the "Metamorphoses" to be an easy and lighthearted reading experience. When I read excerpts from it during my early university years, I struggled to recognise and place all those famous characters. It is a matter of being able to see the context, and background knowledge is a clear advantage.

I just wish my Latin was strong enough- it must be a special pleasure to read it in original!

Claude opus!

Bradley says

I read this for one of those bucket-list reasons, having read a bunch of scholarly articles in college that constantly quote from Ovid... but I had NEVER READ THE ORIGINAL.

Alas. How many years has it been, with that guilt slowly creeping up on me?

So I did it. I read Ovid.

And I fell in love.

What the hell was I thinking? Avoiding this? I mean, how many damn mythology books have I read that go on and on about all the Greek classics, touted for their clear and concise styles, but really what I should have been doing is read the damn book of prose/poetry by the first-century master!

Even in translation, it's clear, entertaining, full of action and wit and subversiveness and plain JOY. And get this: it's not much longer than those full mythology books.

SO SILLY! Enjoy the ART! The action! The joy of beautiful text!

We even get poetical treatments of segments of the *Illiad* and *Odyssey*! But my favorites were Orpheus and the whole damn slew of the poor mortals getting f****ed over by the gods. :)

Granted, if you're not already familiar with the kind of name-dropping that comes with a world that normally knows all these legends, it might seem rather overwhelming, but for all of you who've read at least one book on the Greeks and are tolerant of learning on the fly, I TOTALLY recommend Ovid.

I fairly danced with fun as I read this. I felt like I was watching the original Clash of the Titans for the first

time. This had some really bloody sequences! The funny ones and the clever ones and even the LGBTQ ones are spread throughout, too! :) I'm frankly amazed we don't just have THIS to read in school. It's much better than most!

lol *shakes head*

Praj says

Gods and their love affairs. Gods and their love affairs with mortals. Fate, covetousness, allegiance, brutalities, treachery and chastisements metamorphosing from the cocoon of mighty love. The discordant waves of love dangerously destabilizing romantic notions; overwhelming morality and raison d'être of Gods and mortals alike. Ovid makes you want to write intense poetry and feel affectionate to the idea of love as a device of alteration for better or worse. Love does not conquer all; it destroys and alters everything it touches. That is the best part in Ovid's poems. They do not have happy endings. Lust or romantic love or ardent worship, acquired in any form changes a person, landscapes, communities mutating elements of fate and tragedies.

Metamorphoses elucidates the consequence of origin and transformation in its entirety.

My soul is wrought to sing of forms transformed to bodies new and strange! Immortal Gods inspire my heart, for ye have changed yourselves and all things you have changed! Oh lead my song in smooth and measured strains, from olden days when earth began to this completed time!

Ovid commences his poems by showing appreciation to God (which he says is yet unknown) for carving a loose mass of earth into a picturesque bounty of nature. The amorphous chaos changed into a convex ecstasy of pathless skies, terrains, rivers, the color and prototypes of birds and animals came through a process of love and hate. Ovid represents the mythical world of story telling and repeating fables with morality lessons. The justifications of rape or incest in Ovid's works segregate the idea of faithful devotion from the viciousness of powerful acquisition that overcomes delusional love. Betrayals are penalized and loyalties are commended. The treatment of love is sagacious and didactic in this book as compared to his other works in the relating genre. It moves onto a broader scenario, becoming a defining factor in wars, altering powers between constituencies, breaking and making of civilizations. Ovid intends the reader to see the probable metaphoric significance of change as a crucial and homogeneous factor in life itself.

And now, I have completed a great work, which not Jove's anger, and not fire nor steel, nor fast-consuming time can sweep away. Whenever it will, let the day come, which has dominion only over this mortal frame, and end for me the uncertain course of life. Yet in my better part I shall be borne immortal, far above the stars on high, and mine shall be a name indelible. Wherever Roman power extends her sway over the conquered lands, I shall be read by lips of men. If Poets' prophecies have any truth, through all the coming years of future ages, I shall live in fame.

As he concludes this epic of transforming love, he credits the survival of Rome to his own prominence making it one of the most influential and renowned works over centuries. Metamorphoses is translated frequently by several modern poets and literary elites.

Riku Sayuj says

To read this in English is to not have read it. The few Latin verses I could read and understand were more pleasurable than all the wonderful myths and twisted fates. The verses take the form of what it describes, they flow or pause or rear up along with its subject. The translation feels beautiful at those rare times when I can call to mind some of the great works of art inspired by those artists who loved and lived these verses. No statues were made by artists inspired by translations.

Edward says

Preface

Chronology

Introduction & Notes

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--Metamorphoses

Notes

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Map of Ovid's Mediterranean World

Ana says

I've made my own version of the distracted boyfriend meme. It's called 'crazy girlfriend is obsessed with Greek mythology.'

Also-

Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Poseidon, Hestia, Hades, Persephone/Kora, Athena, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Ares, Dionysus, Helios, Selene, Eos/Aurora, Gaia, Cronus, Rhea, Nyx, Hypnos, Morpheus, Hecate, Thanatos, Nemesis, Prometheus, Eros/Cupid, Hebe, Muses, The Fates/Moirai, Narcissus, Echo, Psyche, Daphne, Boreas, Orithyia, Medea, Orpheus, Antigone, Ariadne, Achilles...

I can scarcely remember what I had for breakfast but I can tell you the name of Hades' pet dog. Truly, with this kind of research, it's a miracle I'm not single.

These were made by other people, not me.

#Keep calm and love Greek mythology.

P.S. Read Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes by Edith Hamilton & The Complete World of Greek Mythology by Richard Buxton.

Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Clevers Dickus: "Metamorphoses (Norton Critical Edition)" by Ovid (Author), Charles Martin (Translator)

“God himself helps those who dare.”

in "Metamorphoses (Norton Critical Edition)" by Ovid (Author), Charles Martin (Translator)

When I think on Ovid and Shakespeare, my own poetic streak resurfaces. Read at your own peril (word of warning: If you don't know either your Shakespeare or your Ovid, what follows won't make much sense):

Sentenced to exile! - be seated-
Let me roll back the years-
(Please lend me your ears)-
And give me the closure I've needed.

(...)

More stuff on the other side of the rainbow.

Emer says

Read as part of the ABN Summer Reading Challenge recommended by Gabby.

I'd meant to read this for years but it seemed somewhat daunting clocking in at 700 odd pages but honestly I breezed through this book like it was half that length. It's utterly accessible for which I give the translator David Raeburn huge credit. His translation is pacy, rhythmic and filled with fantastically helpful notes which make it utterly engaging for the lay classicist reader like myself.

And Ovid... He was born in 43BC, died circa AD 17.... DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT!!!! This book is laden with wit, with immense empathy at times, stories that will both haunt and disturb in good ways and bad, and you could damn well argue that on occasion he's quite the feminist with his depiction of some of the female

characters... Like he's superior to Homer in that regard... Sorry Homer buddy. I do love you though.

Favourite stories that appeared in this were probably about Medea; I enjoyed seeing her from Ovid's angle as opposed to Euripides'.

The Rape of Philomela was hugely stomach churning but wow.... #shook

And getting to read about my girl Circe was so interesting again after recently reading Madeline Miller's spin on her life.

Reading the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus was utterly compelling.

But always and forever I am a fan of Orpheus and Eurydice.... I CRY OKAY!!!! EVERY. DAMN. TIME.

Every single myth of ancient Greece and Rome is here and they are fabulous. And I utterly loved every second of this book.

five stars

Ahmad Sharabiani says

1000. Metamorphoses = Books of Transformations, Ovid

The Metamorphoses (Latin: *Metamorphoseon libri*: "Books of Transformations") is a Latin narrative poem by the Roman poet Ovid, considered his magnum opus. Comprising 11,995 lines, 15 books and over 250 myths, the poem chronicles the history of the world from its creation to the deification of Julius Caesar within a loose mythico-historical framework.

Metamorphoses, Ovid (from Greek)

Characters: Apollo, Hercules, Venus, Mars, Orpheus

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