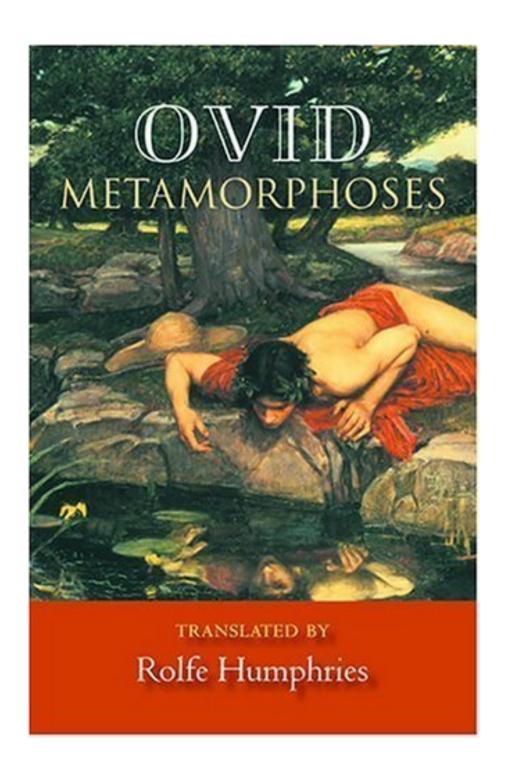


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Beware: Reviews Discuss Wildly Disparate Works

By R. Enos

The five stars are for Ovid. This note discusses the Indiana University Press edition of Rolfe Humphries' translation of the _Metamorphoses_.

Humphries provides a clear, workmanlike translation.

So far as I can tell, of all the editorial reviews and customer reviews currently (9/11/04) displayed on the page for Rolfe Humphries' translation of Ovid's _Metamorphoses_, only the customer review posted by "elemental master" clearly refers to the Humphries translation.

The _editorial_ reviews describe a Cambridge University Press _Latin_ edition containing only Book Thirteen. Humphries' translation includes all fifteen books, of course. Several customer reviews evaluate books containing translations by Dryden, Innes, and Melville. Often, it is not possible to determine which translation a reviewer is considering. The work offered for sale on the page for Rolfe Humphries' translation of Ovid's _Metamorphoses_ contains only Humphries' translation.

In short, shoppers should be aware that the reviews displayed on the page for Rolfe Humphries' translation of Ovid's _Metamorphoses_ actually discuss wildly disparate works; most of them have little or nothing to do with the book being offered for sale.

59 of 63 people found the following review helpful.

Superb Translation and Edition

By Vanessa

This book is wonderful. The Rolfe Humphries is THE translation. This printing is also very nice. The paper, the type, everything makes it a good book. When you turn the page, it turns nicely and lies flat; how refreshing.

The stories of the Metamorphoses are, of course, wonderful. It's the book itself that I want to talk about.

The beautiful Waterhouse painting on the cover spans the front and part of the back covers. The line numbers at the top of each text page are those of the Latin text in the Loeb edition; how many translators would go to that kind of trouble for you? Rolfe Humphries' introduction is light, funny, and enjoyable. His love of his

work shines through. The last line of his intro is, "So - here he is [Ovid], and I hope you like him."

The table of contents is annotated, making it easy to find any major story you are looking for. I also love the designs at the beginning of each book/chapter: such details enhance my enjoyment of reading this edition.

If you have never read Ovid's Metamorphoses, don't be intimidated. It is a collection of mythology stories, and you will find much that is probably familiar to you (Echo and Narcissus, Jason, Pygmalion, and more). If you are at all serious about literature, this is a basic building block in your knowledge. And even if you're not, it's just a damn good book.

The translation itself is so fluent and enjoyable. Just listen to the introduction:

My intention is to tell of bodies changed To different forms; the gods, who made the changes, Will help me - or so I hope - with a poem That runs from the world's beginning to our own days.

This is exciting, eloquent stuff! Please do yourself a favor and make sure you read this at some point during your lifetime.

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Things change...

By Mark Nadja

Maidens become trees. Young hunks turn into flowers. Men become women; women become invincible warriors. And every time you blink, another poor wretch becomes a bird or turns to stone. In Ovid's Metamorphosis, nothing stays the same for long. A rich compendium of Greco-Roman mythology and history all ingeniously linked together by the theme of transformation, the Metamorphosis is a surprisingly sophisticated, erotic, and gory classic of ancient literature.

Rapes, murders, wars, and all manner of perversion abound. Death is lingered over with almost forensic precision. The slaughter of arrogant Niobe's fourteen children, for example, is recounted in an exhaustive detail that would do any contemporary slasher flick justice, as one by one they're picked off in various grisly ways. This is classical gore--Ovid sounding like the Clive Barker of ancient Rome as in this excerpt from the massacre of the centaurs:

[Exadius] found a weapon, a stag's antlers Hung on a pine tree... And Gryneus' eyes were pierced by those twin prongs, Eyeballs gouged out; one of them stuck to the horn, The other rolled down his beard till a blood clot caught it.

This is the sort of wonderfully nauseating detail that is repeated countless times in a masterpiece that often reads like the National Enquirer. It's hard not to believe that Ovid, like Shakespeare, was aiming his work for the mass audience of his time, which just goes to show you that the product of one age's pop culture is another's venerated classic. One only has to read Ovid's over-the-top account of the love-sick Cyclops to realize that black comedy ala the B-movies of Herschel Gordon Lewis had already been mastered some two thousand years ago.

There are a bewildering proliferation of translations of Ovid's Metamorphosis to choose from. In selecting

Humphries, I chose the text that struck me as the least encumbered by the translator's attempt to distinguish himself from his rivals. Many translators feel the pressing need to do something new, and to 'recast' the Metamorphosis into what they consider a facsimile of contemporary poetry. The result is all-too-often a needless accretion of unnecessary words and poetic tropes that do nothing whatsoever to enhance the text, and much towards rendering it more difficult for novelty's sake alone, and to call attention to the translator-two things a translation should avoid at all costs.

Rolf Humphries renders the Metamorphosis into a clear, straightforward English verse whose easy-going casualness facilitates readability and comprehension, as well as reflecting the apparently colloquially style of Ovid's original. And Humphries accomplishes all this without sacrificing any of the poetry--his translation is often quite beautiful, not only in its clarity and apparent simplicity, but in its adept use of language that breathes life back into this ancient work. By stepping back and lending his breath to the ancient poet, Humphries allows Ovid himself to sing again.

One of the truly seminal works of world literature, not to mention an invaluable storehouse of myths and legends, Ovid's Metamorphosis is not only must reading for any lover of great literature, but also a heck of a lot of fun.

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