



Metamorphoses

Author: Ovid, (translated by A. D. Melville)
Genre: Literature
Publisher: Oxford: OUP, 1986
ISBN: 978-0-19-953737-2
RRP: £7.99 (+£2.80 p&p)

Metamorphoses is a collection of very old and famous short stories in one poem... Practically everything that was written down was considered a poem, even if it wasn't.

At a glance you may not have heard of Ovid, or this, one of his most famous works; but the fact is you probably do. Many of the characters and short stories put together here are engrained so deeply into our psychology that we don't even register them. Everything from 'The ages of Mankind' (a kind of alternate version of the Old Testament) right through to the famous stories such as that of Icarus and his wings are told in an interesting way, no doubt assisted by the translation by highly respect Cambridge academic A. D. Melville.

Over the 15 books spread over 380 or so pages, we are told of the siege of Troy, the voyages of Ulysses, the lives of the great gods and many other stories, a cast list that ranges from Diana to Apollo, Orpheus to Ajax, and of course the great Hercules and Julius Caesar.

The writers name is Ovid (full name Publius Ovidius Naso), who was born in Rome in 43BC, just as the war that would eventually Place Augustus on the throne as Rome's first Emperor was underway. He, with the other great Roman poet, Virgil, were the giants of their time, and their work was a major milestone in the evolution of Western arts and literature, and highlights an important point: far from being an insult to the Greeks, the fact that the Romans 'borrowed' their stories is actually quite a compliment. The achievements of a lesser civilisation would have just been ignored, or at best stolen without acknowledgment, but the Greek contribution to science and art was so enormous that even the Romans would not dare ignore it. Many of the works and theories originating in Greece several centuries before (by writers such as Sophocles and Aristotle) were changed from Greek to Latin, with a full acknowledgement as to their source. As a result, Odysseus did become Ulysses; Zeus, Jupiter and so on... but the essence of their stories remains, and is arguably by the Roman 're-make'.

So, what you have here, really then, is a massive collection of cool short stories involving some of the most famous (fictional and non-fictional) people in history, with a cool introduction, bibliography, set of notes, glossary (to help with the names) and of course the happy thought that it's all been turned into nice readable English for you. So I suggest you give this a try... after all, if *Metamorphoses* is still popular after 2000 years, it can't be that bad!

7 sausages out of 10

RW Oct 2014