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Ovid , Harold Isbell (Translator)

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In the twenty-one poems of the Heroides, Ovid gave voice to the heroines and heroes of epic and myth. These deeply moving literary epistles reveal the happiness and torment of love, as the writers tell of their pain at separation, forgiveness of infidelity or anger at betrayal. The faithful Penelope wonders at the suspiciously long absence of Ulysses, while Dido bitterly reproaches Aeneas for too eagerly leaving her bed to follow his destiny, and Sappho - the only historical figure portrayed here - describes her passion for the cruelly rejecting Phaon. In the poetic letters between Paris and Helen the lovers seem oblivious to the tragedy prophesied for them, while in another exchange the youthful Leander asserts his foolhardy eagerness to risk his life to be with his beloved Hero.

Heroides Details

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From Reader Review Heroides for online ebook

Rea says

Okay but letters from the women who always get left behind in greek myths? YES PLEASE. There are two letters from the men but the majority of them are from them and I didn't know I needed this until I read the first letter from Penelope.

Nikki says

I'd never thought about reading more by Ovid, and then I came across The Heroides while showing someone else the wonders of my city's central library. (Before I knew it, I had a stack of nine books in my arms, despite the fact I'm about to go visit my parents via train, meaning I can't carry *that* many books.) Anyway, I was delighted to find this, and it's a nice edition too, with explanations of all the myths and extensive notes (which for the most part I don't need, but which were a handy refresher when I couldn't quite remember) and introductions to each poem. The translation seems good to me, in that it's readable and flows well, and doesn't get in the way of experiencing the poems.

In a way it seems almost a modern, feminist thing to do, giving these female heroines the space to make their complaints (though some of the poems are 'written' by men, they are the ones paired with a female response). Penelope voices her worries about Odysseus' long absence -- something I remember all the girls in my class being offended about on her behalf, since he spends most of the time in Circe and Calypso's beds. Medea pours out her outrage, Dido her heartbreak; Phaedra tries to manipulate Hippolytus into her arms. Not all of them are exactly wonderful women -- Medea is downright wicked -- but they're all given a chance to speak of their pain and the wrongs done to them.

Rebecca says

immenso

Cassandra Kay Silva says

Ovid you are truly a master. Your poetry always reaches all the places in my heart and touches me deeply. I can absolutely sympathize with the women and men in these works. Love is complicated, love lost leaves much to scorn and curse in this world. Circumstance is the root of so much mischief and so much heartache, this and the fickleness of men. Absolutely beautiful. .

Evan Leach says

For mythology buffs, these poems are pure joy. The *Heroides* are a collection of 21 poems written from the perspective of heroines and heroes of epic and myth (*the original "fan fiction?"*). Written in the first person, each poem is addressed to the writer's lover. The literary device most commonly deployed by Ovid is tragic

irony. While the characters writing the poems do not know the outcome of the story, the reader (presumably) does. Ovid is able to give each writer their own unique voice, and displays a sharp understanding of human nature throughout the poems.

To really get the most out of the poems, a working knowledge of Greek mythology is a must. Most of the poems were published around 15 b.c., so Ovid could safely assume that the stories surrounding these characters were common knowledge to his audience. He therefore wastes little time in setting up backstory between the characters within each poem. The translation contains a glossary & index which provides a brief summary of the relevant mythology, but it's safe to say that you'll probably enjoy a letter from Penelope to Ulysses more if you're familiar with the Odyssey, for example.

There's really not a subpar poem in the bunch. V (Oenone to Paris), X (Ariadne to Theseus), XII (Medea to Jason), XIII (Laodamia to Protesilaus), XVI (Paris to Helen) and XVII (Helen to Paris) were some of my personal favorites. The conceit of giving a realistic, human voice to these famous heroes and heroines is a great one, and the execution is top notch. This is a worthy companion to the more famous *Metamorphoses*, and should not be missed by fans of mythology and Roman literature alike. **4.5 stars.**

spacenaids says

fireworks emoji, x100 I'm DONE TRANSLATING THE SAPPHO AGHHHH!!!!!!! 220 lines!! what the hell ovid!! I'm done, Dobby is a free elf! I translated Ariadne, Penelope and Sappho (~500 lines total(!)) this term, and read the rest of the single Heroides in translation. I'm planning on reading the doubles at a later date, but I didn't want it to interfere with my schoolwork. I'm so happy! It's DONE!!

Jordan says

One of Ovid's most interesting works; a series of poetic letters written (with a few exceptions) from heroines in Greek myth to men in their lives. Medea to Jason, Penelope to Odysseus, etc. One or two are responses from the men, including the useless Paris.

This edition (Penguin Classics) has good, readable translations in good poetry. The introduction, introductory notes, and endnotes are detailed but tedious. The introductions to each poem dwell mostly on form, content, irony, and other critical considerations, but never relate the relevant myth, which would be helpful for some of the more obscure ones.

Recommended.

Benji says

Pro's : Very accessible, very personalized portraits, genuine emotion and insightful that is missing in most mythology. Even better is the Woman's vantage point in all the letters

Con's : Repetitive after a certain point. A lot of time is spent explaining the myths that the letters touch, which is both bad and good.

This book... if you are a person that has a semi-interest in mythology but find much of it too dry, this is the book that rips open the stuffiness, the tight Victorian corset placed on the stories over time but that also had its own dryness in the 2000 year old writing style.

When you read this; however, that's all gone. You read in the words of the characters themselves through these epistles, these unbearably earnest and insightful letters between characters.

One of them goes like this, for example: How can people call you a hero when you have left me and the life of your own wife to wasted? What glory is that? How can I congratulate you on your courage fighting the three headed dog when I only spend my time imagining how close I came to losing you?

Highly recommended, it is especially good because the letters come in small chunks and can be served alone. Previous mythology experience isn't necessary.

Daniel Chaikin says

31. **Heroides by Ovid, translated by Harold Isbell**

original date: circa 16 bce

translated 1990

format: Paperback

acquired: Half-Price Books in October 2016

read: July 8-22

rating: 4

There are, apparently, many different Ovids, or he was a writer who worked in multiple distinctly independent styles. I would have said that differently if I hadn't started **Metamorphoses** before reviewing, and I would have had a vastly different impression of this if I hadn't read **Amores** and **The Art of Love** beforehand. Ovid's love poems introduced me to a hyper-witty and hyper-clever really knowledgeable but insincere poet. This was not that voice.

Heroides is a collection of letters written mainly by spurned heroines in Greek mythology to lovers. Fifteen of the letters come from the likes Penelope, Ariadne or Medea, or more obscure women like Laodamia to Proteus or Canace to Marceus. The sixteenth letter comes from Sappho. And six more are back and forth with lovers. Paris writes Helen to woo her, and Helen writes back with what amounts to something that is not no. And so on.

I'm sure the modern ear can find much to make fun of, and any reader in any age will easily pick up the many levels of satire. But, oddly, these aspects don't color these letters. On the surface they are sincere. The heavy satire is mostly in the situations, the set-up if you like. The letters themselves are straightforward... often romantic, even when or because they are bitter. And they are occasionally moving. Laodamia's letter to Proteus stands out. In mythology Proteus leaves for Troy shortly after their marriage, and becomes the first casualty in the Trojan war. He is brought back to life for three hours to see Laodamia, who afterward commits suicide. She writes this letter as an unknowing widow. I found it a memorable and touching letter of love, bitter in its irony and yet tangible. Phyllis writes to Demophoon who, when she fell for him only to be abandoned, was not only hurt, but ruined. And she writes longingly.

A note about the translator, Harold Isbell. There are many oddities about him that give me pause. He was a bank director, not a professor. He provides a summary of each major character, a wonderful resource, but they are iffy and partial summaries. Each is simplified leaving a clean and often appealing impression, but

one that may contradict or disregard major versions of these stories. His citations of ancient literature are incomplete and a bit haphazard. And, despite all his notes, he never once brings up anything about the translation or original Latin. But, I really enjoyed reading this. So... ??

Ariadne to Theseus

You would have died in the twisting halls without
the string that I gave to be your guide.
You said to me, 'I swear by these perils that
as long as we live, you will be mine.'
We are alive, Theseus, but I am not yours;

Laodamia to Protesilaus

I'm told the winds detain you at Aulis;
where were these winds when you sailed from me?
Then the tides should have risen against your oars;
then was the time for a raging surf.
I could have kissed my lord and given him more
requests, I wanted to say so much.
But you were hurried away by a wind your
crew loved; it was not a lover's wind.

Leander to Hero (across the water)

she is so near, but 'almost' starts tears.

Roman Clodia says

In the 21 poems of the Heroides, Ovid inserts himself into classical myth and epic by interjecting letters written by the heroines of larger stories. So, for example, he has Penelope write to Odysseus while he is lost on his way back to Ithaca from Troy; Dido to Aeneas after he has left Carthage for Rome; Briseis to Achilles after she has been passed to Agamemnon etc.

Usually lauded as giving a 'female' voice to masculine epic, the Heroides, I think, is doing something more complex than that - and we should never forget that these 'female' voices are as ventriloquised by a male author as their originals.

These poems were hugely popular in the Renaissance and gave rise to a large number of translations as well as looser imitations such as Marlowe's superb Hero and Leander, based on Heroides 18 & 19.

I think a fairly close acquaintance with the source text(s) is essential to really 'get' these poems but for an alternative reading of classical epic in Augustan Rome they are illuminating.

Jesse says

The pain that love brings upon separation from a loved one is certainly a theme that resonates with every human being (besides the Stoics who proclaim that true friends and lovers are never separate if they have minds to meet within). Ovid is, here as always, the most penetrating observer of human psychology this side of Shakespeare, and no amount of Freud or Jung will yield to the questing mind the insights the former pair have to offer. These poems are so intimate that I by chance read aloud Dido's letter to Aeneas to an ex-girlfriend of mine, and she became so incensed at how she thought it bore upon her own life that she became hysterical. Such is, and has always been, the reaction of the religious to the humanist looking life in the face.

Crito says

This is an interesting and inventive work but I'd warn not to get too caught by the novelty of the idea. While you'd be tempted by the line of "giving the women of mythology a voice" you'd remember that aside from the obvious fact that it's written by a man, there is more trickery Ovid is pulling poem by poem and nearly everything here requires you to read into the words rather than taking them at face value. An early example of this is the letter of Briseis to Achilles at the point of the Iliad where Agamemnon took her for himself. On one hand there's the concubine being passed around as chattel, but then there's the perverse addition of her being in love with Achilles, with most of the letter chiding Achilles for not doing enough to get her back. We read this against the major plot point of the Iliad that Achilles protesting his loss of Briseis is losing the war for the Greeks. But this isn't enough for Briseis, she's rather he just behead Agamemnon so they could ignore the war and bang all day. You could read this back into her unfortunate status of concubine but Ovid managed to make even that absurd.

Many of the letters are as multifaceted as that, but while many of them are interesting, a chunk of these do manage to be rote and formulaic. He succeeds with slipping into the psychology of the characters fairly consistently, but some he's better at giving voice to than others. It's possible that may be a quirk of translation though. But the reality is that characters such as Medea, Dido, or Helen are by simple virtue of their stories automatically more interesting than some of the others. Medea is probably the high point of the Heroides with her swirling and chaotic narration. At its best these have a haunting atmosphere which reads like the laments of spirits, reliving and recounting their saddest moments of which most will never have any closure. That said, this is a work to be read after all the major classics. Ovid has some unique inventions of his own, such as his fictionalized Sappho, and in some others he revitalizes some more obscure corners of mythology. In any case a solid foundation in classics is necessary, and even then Ovid can be a test. But overall it's interesting seeing Ovid turn familiar subject matter (both in mythology and in his usual fixation on passion) and make something unique of it.

ilknur a.k.a. iko ? says

koskoca ovidius'u heroides (kitab'n ad?) yapm??s?n?z asdfasads
nys yaz?verdim gruba düzeltilmesi için.
iyi güldüm gece gece :D

Ana Rînceanu says

Once I found out Ovid wrote an epistolary book from the perspective of such important figures as : Helen, Paris, Leander, Madea, I just had to read it. So we finally know how to woe, to faint modesty, voice despair, threaten as only the ancients could (with a heavy dose of passion and misogyny). This was a good book if you're a fan of Greek mythology, but are not fluent in each protagonist's story since the letters themselves often make notice of the royal lineage and history of the lover so as to give more importance to his/her suit. Depending on the sender, the letter either explores unrequited love, incest, betrayal, the validity of a vow and so much more. This translation makes for a quick read and I look forward to other books by the author.

Elie F says

A horrible fan fic.
