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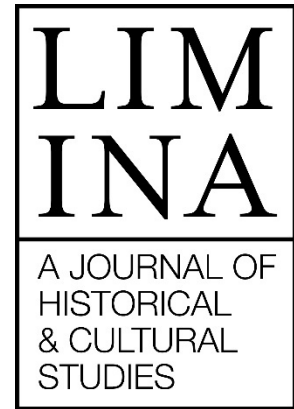
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Submitting to Limina

Details about the journal and how to submit can be found at www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au.

Cover Image

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Soucy, C. Luke, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: A New Translation*, World Literature in Translation Series 27; Oakland, University of California Press, 2023; paperback; pp. 680, 11 b/white illustrations, 1 map; \$17.95 USD; ISBN: 9780520394858.

Of new embodied shapes transformed, my mind
Is moved to speak! (Ov. *Met.* 1.1–2)

In these opening lines of *The Metamorphoses'* prologue, we are met with the Roman poet Ovid's thesis statement for his work: the theme of transformation prevalent across tales of the Greek and Roman mythological landscapes. This fifteen-book epic was composed in the early first century C.E., only a handful of months prior to the poet's exile. Ovid's work has been a vital basis for reception and interpretation of these mythologies since it was written, particularly as, for some tales, this is the only surviving source. It is difficult to overstate the impact of this work – both in terms of its depictions of mythology but also in terms of its poetry. Since its first full English translation in 1480, *The Metamorphoses* has been translated many times across numerous languages, with a list of more than half a dozen English translations alone currently in print. What then does C. Luke Soucy's 2023 translation add to this legacy and to how we receive this text?

Soucy's Translator Notes state that 'the goal of this work is to provide an accurate, poetic, and open-minded translation of *The Metamorphoses'* (21). In his decision to translate the dactylic hexameter of the original Latin into the iambic pentameter of blank verse, he trades the meter of ancient Greek and Latin epic for that of English epic – retaining the poetic conventions of the 'epic' across his translation. His choice of displaying the text as verse allows for Soucy to play with the poetical nature of this work in a way that stands out to me more than in prose translations of the text that I have read. Soucy makes clear that he is comfortable with the poetic nature of the material he is translating and takes full advantage of the opportunity to play with linguistic and poetic techniques.

Displaying a wonderful ability to create a play on words in his translations, Soucy provides a playfulness and creativity of language that is very in-line with the work that Ovid sets before us: a work which finely treads the line of the comedic and the tragic. An example of this appears in the Orpheus and Eurydice narrative:

*Fax quoque, quam tenuit, lacrimoso stridula fumo
usque fuit nullosque invenit motibus ignes.*

His torch spat smoke that wrung tears from the eyes
And would not catch, however it was held. (Ov. *Met.* 10.6–7)

Implementing these parallel actions of 'catch' and 'held' (with 'catch' having the in-text meaning of a fire being lit) is a tiny detail but one which adds to the greater enjoyment of the reader's experience. This example diverges from other translations

that have approached the same lines with a much more one-dimensional description of a torch unable to be lit. Such minor acts of wordplay, scattered across this text, create a wonderful effect of adding depth to the work while retaining its accuracy to the Latin. They also serve a further purpose: to concisely translate the narrative, which Soucy deemed vital to the impact of this translation.

Other modern English translators, he notes, have sacrificed the quickness of Ovid's wording, its 'snappiness', adding more lines to get their point across. He argues this has resulted in some rather clunky translations – removing part of the charm of the Latin text (22). Soucy's translation is notable in that he favours brevity. Indeed, his work is unique in that it retains the same number of lines as the original Latin. In most instances I find that this worked in his favour, as he keeps the narrative running swiftly and smoothly while maintaining the integrity of the episodes of Ovid's work.

Examining now what has become one of the more controversial elements of Ovid's works in recent years, and something that contemporary translators have shone light upon, is the translation of the rape narratives that are rampant in this poem. Soucy draws explicit attention to this in his introduction, and his use of language shows a conscious effort towards treating these narratives with the gravity they deserve (29-32). I argue that Soucy implements abrasive language in these rape narratives to build tension and sympathy towards the victims and heighten the power imbalances – removing any hint of the romantic and eroticized interpretations of some of some other translations. This is especially apparent within his depiction of the myth of Apollo's pursuit (and attempted rape) of the nymph Daphne:

*ut canis in vacuo leporem cum Gallicus arvo
vidit, et hic praedam pedibus petit, ille salutem;
alter inhaesuro similis iam iamque tenere
sperat et extento stringit vestigia rostro,
alter in ambiguo est, an sit comprehensus, et ipsis
morsibus eripitur tangentiaque ora relinquit:
sic deus et virgo est hic spe celer, illa timore.*

A Gallic hound who spies a hare afield
and seeks his prey while it seeks to be safe
Will, when about to grab hold, now – and now! –
Think that he has and come upon its tracks.
The hare, too, cannot tell if it's been caught,
But flees the fangs and leaves the crushing jaws:
So ran the god and girl, with hope and fear. (*Ov. Met.* 1.533–539)

We see more small details throughout the narrative. The god 'denied her rest' (*Ov. Met.* 1.541) and her fleeing is described as her 'toil' (*Ov. Met.* 1.543) – these lead us to be reminded of Daphne's lack of consent and suffering. He presents this for what it is: an attempted rape, not a 'ravishment' or any other diminishing language of which other translators have been guilty. Throughout his work, he consistently translates these narratives as rape and uses powerful language (Callisto in Book 2, Medusa in Book 4, Proserpine in Book 5, Philomena in Book 6, and Caenis becoming Caeneus in Book 12, just to list a few). I am glad that Soucy (and indeed other recent translators

such as Stephanie McCarter) have moved toward these more serious translations of the rape narratives – engaging with a complex and sensitive topic without shying away from it.

Where the Soucy publication falls short for me is not actually in his translation itself, but with the inclusion of images throughout the text. If I was being generous, I would say that the images add a sense of the expanse of the reception of these myths and Ovid's work – that they add a layer of seeing how these myths have been depicted. If I were to remove such generosity, I would say that the combination of the types of images selected – often photographs of museum exhibits – and the black and white print of the images, lend the text the air of an academic textbook. It draws my focus away from my enjoyment of a piece of literary work. If this text were intended solely for an academic audience – particularly a student one, then I suppose that is somewhat defensible – but my impression from the translator's note is that this was meant for a broader readership.

Despite my reservations regarding the images included in this publication, this is a thoroughly enjoyable and engaging translation of Ovid's work. Soucy succeeds in his goals by providing an accurate and open-minded translation as well as an excellent piece of poetry in its own right. It is my hope that those who seek to expand their horizons in ancient Greek and Roman literature beyond such texts as Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, would turn next to this modern translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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