

Sara Mack, *Ovid*. Foreword by John Herington. Hermes Books. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988. Pp. xii+180. Cloth \$ 27.50. Paperback \$ 9.95.

Certainly Ovid is a major Latin poet who should be included in any series that purports «to guide the general reader to a dialogue with the classical masters» (John Herington, General Editor), for Ovid is a master storyteller who «never tells a story the way it has been told before —whether by Greek poets, Roman poets, or himself» and who «molds his material into something uniquely his own» (p. 106), whose greatest and most irreplaceable gift to Western literature has been his spirit, his élan, his *color*» (p. 154), a master of transitions, whose interest in narrative technique Sara Mack, who teaches at the University of North Carolina, feels is much like what modern critics call «reader-response».

As a book for the general reader, whether that be «the literate but nonspecialist adult» or «the intelligent but uninstructed beginning student» (to use John Herington's words from his Foreword), this book, the first since 1955 to deal with all of Ovid's writings, after briefly demonstrating how Ovid's genuine fascination with the human condition and the human psyche is similar to our own and deserves to be labeled modern, surveys Ovid's works chronologically, if not prosaically, before critically examining in some detail his most influential poems, namely, the *Amores*, *Heroides*, *Art of Love*, and the *Metamorphoses*, in which she discovers the poet posing as lover; the cynical professor of seduction who wrongly believes that he has reduced love to a science; the brilliant recreator of great moments of heroic mythology from the feminine point of view; and the great experimenter in an «epic» poem on the countless changes of mythology and history. Sara Mack also includes a sweeping chapter on Ovid's influence on the arts (music, art, literature).

Organizationally, the book is divided into six chapters entitled «Ovid Today»; «Ovid in His Own Time»; «Ovid's Love Poetry»; «The Metamorphoses»; «Ovid, the Poet»; and «I Shall Live». The book also contains a metrical appendix, a short descriptive bibliography, and an index.

So far volumes on Homer, Pindar, and Aeschylus have been produced in the Yale Hermes series. Ovid is the first Latin author to appear, and this is entirely consistent with Sara Mack's conviction that of all the poets of ancient Rome Ovid had the most influence on the art and literature of Medieval and Renaissance Europe and remains even today the most accessible of all classical poets to the nonspecialist, both in terms of subject matter and style. Popular in his own day, and in ours, Ovid «has been a favorite with most readers, for he is both human and humane, and his subjects are of timeless interest: love, sex, friendship, the relations between man and gods, the individual and the state, art and life, words and things» (p. 1). What more could we ask for?

Sara Mack's *Ovid* encourages the reader to read Ovid, even in Latin, and provides the reader with some measure by which to gauge him as an author of considerable creativity, admirable wit, psychological insight and good humor.

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