

BOOK REVIEW

The Fate of Achilles: Text Inspired by Homer's Iliad and Other Stories of Ancient Greece. By BIMBA LANDMANN. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011. Pp. 32. Hardcover, \$19.95. ISBN 978-1-60606-085-8.

Although this book's target audience is young children, it can be pleasantly read by adults. Landmann once again, after the successful editing of "The Incredible Voyage of Ulysses," tackles in a competent way the story of Achilles, which is difficult to reconstruct as a complete whole due to the diverse and fragmentary nature of the surviving sources. The *Iliad* is undoubtedly the main source, and hence the starting point, which presents a portrait of Achilles during the Trojan War. However, the material about his birth, early years, unique fate and death is sparse and drawn from early Greek poetry, tragedy fragments and later mythographers, such as Apollodorus. The author knows her material and manages to combine the different versions of the myth into a coherent story that focuses on the unique fate of the hero and the way he faced it.

Being the son of a man and an immortal goddess, Achilles was destined to possess extraordinary power and heroic temper. However, he was still a mortal and, as such, pain and death were inherent in his nature. Although the gods and Fate defined his destiny, he made his own choices based on his desire for honor and recognition that would eventually cost his life. He overcame the boundaries that restrict mortals and became a hero. This heroic world and the ideology that pervades it are very well reflected in Landmann's work, despite its orientation as a book for children. It represents a magic heroic world that could easily draw the interest of young children who are attracted to stories about heroes.

The narration starts with Thetis' marriage to Peleus after a prophecy. It includes Achilles' birth, his baptism into the river Styx and the Trojan War up to the point of the return of Hector's body to Peleus. It ends with the quick reference to Achilles' death, and his eternal glory, thus closing the circle of his short life. His tale is satisfactorily brought to life since it includes almost all of the important events that proved Achilles to be a legendary hero. Perhaps the only episode that is omitted and could have contributed to the understanding of the hero is the one taking place in Syros: Peleus, eager to prevent his son from taking part

to the Trojan war, tried to hide him by dressing him as a girl, but Achilles spontaneously responded to the sight of a sword, an action that betrayed him to be a man.

Written in rich verse, the story follows closely its main source, the *Iliad*, which was also written in verse, and succeeds in conveying the poetic atmosphere of the original. The third-person narrative is interrupted by directly addressing the hero in the same way that Homer addresses his favored heroes in the *Odyssey*, thus rendering the text more dramatic. The language is simple and the book is straightforward for a child to read, whereas the short sentences add to its dramatic and poetic style. The Arial fonts may allude to ancient Greek writing but their small size makes reading tedious and tiresome.

The bold and extraordinary illustrations are reminiscent of ancient Greek art and, in that respect, their use is felicitous especially with regards to the human characters depicted. The lunar landscapes are fitting the divine episodes of the story concerning Thetis and the gods. However, it could be argued that the “cosmic” landscapes look a little over the top for the world of mortals and, perhaps, superfluous. Indeed, the aesthetic of the illustrations creates reservations as to their potential appeal to children, but does nevertheless add to the overall magic of the book.

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