

## BOOK REVIEW

*Homer: The Iliad: Translation, Introduction and Notes.* By BARRY B. POWELL. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xxv + 596. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-932610-5.

Powell's *Iliad* is more than a new and accessible translation: he offers a thorough introduction, an accompanying recording, footnotes on almost every page, and over 60 illustrations with explanatory notes. All of these resources serve to draw readers into the epic poem and into the world of Homer and Homeric studies.

The thirty-nine page Introduction is preceded by eight clearly labeled maps (The Aegean; Mainland Greece; The Troad; The Catalog of Ships; Origins of Heroes; The Trojan Catalog; The Mediterranean; The Ancient Near East) and a Homeric Timeline. Locations on the maps are printed upper-case when they are first mentioned in the poem.

The tone of the Introduction is scholarly and accessible. Powell considers questions thoroughly and with good humor: "What are these gods doing here? Is he being funny? What is the joke? Why is this passage here? Where do all these names come from?" (1) He covers all of the traditional topics in the Introduction: The Difficulty of Homer; Who was Homer?; The Text of Homer; The Oral-Formulaic Theory; Homer and the Alphabet; Homer and History; Homer's World; The Plot: The Rage of Achilles; The Powers Beyond; Homer's Audience; On Translating Homer. Most of this information will be a useful reference source for instructors, but the sections on the Alexandrian vulgate and oral-formulaic theory seem to be providing too much for the intended audience of undergraduates.

Powell employs a fast-paced five-beat rhythm in his verse translation. His choice of words often recalls other English versions (repetitions of "So he spoke," "In answer," "Even so"), but he updates the tone. Instead of "Come now ..." Powell prefers "Go ahead, try it!" (Zeus to the gods in Book 8, page 193). As he writes in his Introduction, Powell takes a middle-road approach to repetition of formulae (for the most part keeping the iteration in responses and speeches), epithets ("Achilles the fast runner," "Iris, her feet like the wind") and Greek transcriptions (Achilles and Priam, but Greek spelling for less familiar characters or for place

names). I especially enjoy the way Powell keeps the emphasis found in the Greek as much as possible. To give one example: when Andromache tells Hector that she has no family left, she mentions her father first and Achilles name ends the Greek line (*Il.* 6.414). Powell translates this in two lines, keeping the focus on the father: “My father / Achilles killed ...”

Sometimes, I am challenged by Powell’s approach to humor in Homer, but I also recognize that these modernizations or somewhat quirky moments may be just what appeals most to today’s students. To give a few examples: after Agamemnon addresses the troops in Book 2 they race to the ships “With a Huzzah!” (66). In Book 5, the Argive forces are described as standing “in gangs” (143) and the goddesses are “nervous pigeons,” (154). In Book 8, Zeus addresses Iris, “This war will not be a pretty one.” (207). He also prefers to call the aegis a “goat-skin fetish,” explaining the obscure origins of the object in a note (48).

Recordings are signaled in the margins and are available at [www.oup.com/us/powell](http://www.oup.com/us/powell). Powell reads the proem in Greek and has also recorded fifteen selections from his translation. The well-chosen passages are drawn from Books 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 24. While some of these passages are quite serious moments (Hector’s farewell to Andromache or Priam’s visit to Achilles), Powell continually brings his sense of humor into play when portraying the complaints of gods and mortals. The interactions between Agamemnon and Achilles, Thersites and Odysseus, Achilles and Thetis, Zeus and Hera are all entertaining, if at times a bit silly in tone. His falsetto during the interaction of Aphrodite and Helen in Book 3, however, makes me wonder if another reader, or second reader, may have been a better choice.

The footnotes and the illustrations are excellent for students and any new readers of Homer. Powell clarifies the narrative with useful commentary (e.g. 102 “as an archer, Paris has no breastguard;” 297, “In Book 8 Teucer was wounded by Hector ...;” page 404 on Ajax, “Last seen in Book 16 fighting over the body of Sarpedon.”). He also points out inconsistencies (page 90, “Pylaimenes: Famous in Homeric studies because he is killed in Book 5, then is alive again in Book 13.”). The family tree of the Dardanian line (89), a note on the geographical range of the Catalog of Ships (e.g. 76), and information on the battle formation in Book 13 (325) are especially helpful. He includes lighter notes also, as in the case of the embassy to Achilles in Book 9. Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix, he notes, do indeed feast “aplenty” in both Agamemnon’s tent and with Achilles (p. 219). The primary evidence of ancient vase paintings or friezes, all have their own informative captions

and the sources of these images are listed on 571–572. A “Pronunciation Glossary/Index” (573–596) includes all Greek names that appear in the poem.

Powell’s translation reads quickly, contains abundant information for any instructor or student and is, therefore, an excellent choice for undergraduate survey courses of epic poetry. I think students will appreciate the effective breaks in the verse that allow him to emphasize narrative transitions, character descriptions, speeches, and similes. This new *Iliad* contains resources that should encourage readers to examine the Iliadic story more critically and to consider the entire story of the epic cycle.

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