

## BOOK REVIEW

*Stattus: Achilleid*. Translated by STANLEY LOMBARDO. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015. Pp. xxxvi + 60. Paper, \$9.00. ISBN 978-1-62466-406-9.

After completing the *Thebaid*, Statius began an epic on the life of Achilles, but died only a book and a half into his story. The *Achilleid* relates how Thetis disguised her son in women's clothes and concealed him on the island of Scyros in an effort to prevent him from participating in the war at Troy that she knew would result in his death. The poem has attracted increased scholarly attention in recent years as Statius' place in the Latin canon has become more secure. The *Achilleid* has been translated into English twice before in the last twenty years, but neither previous translation addressed the needs of the undergraduate or general reader. Slavitt's version (1997) relies too much on summary, paraphrase, and interpolation, while Shackleton Bailey's Loeb Classical Library edition (2003) is intended for the scholarly reader, uses Victorian diction, and costs three times as much.<sup>1</sup> Lombardo has not only made the *Achilleid* truly accessible for the first time to the Latinless reader of English, but has also produced an elegant and witty English poem.

Readers familiar with Lombardo's renderings of Homer, Virgil, and Ovid will recognize many of the translator's typical choices, such as a loose five- or six-beat line and italicized similes set off from the narrative text.<sup>2</sup> The diction is a successful blend of demotic American ("his mother sees him waffling, / sees he wants to be forced, and drapes the dress on him," 368–369), occasionally varied with the classicizing ("Such are Phrygian compacts, such the commerce / between the two continents!," 457–58). Here is Lombardo's rendering of the crucial moment of the poem in which Achilles is revealed as a man to the Scyrians,

<sup>1</sup> Slavitt, David R. 1997. *Broken Columns: Two Roman Epic Fragments: The Achilleid of Publius Papinius Statius and The Rape of Proserpine of Claudius Claudianus*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Shackleton Bailey, D.R. 2003. *Stattus*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad* (Hackett, 1997); *Odyssey* (Hackett, 2000); *Aeneid* (Hackett, 2005).

for whom he has been disguised as a woman for the whole of the previous year (*Achilleid* 1.878-882):

The clothes fell from Achilles without being touched.  
His hand swallows up the shield, and the spear,  
believe it or not, looks too short; his shoulders  
dwarf the Ithacan and the Aetolian captains,  
so terrifying is the light and the martial heat  
from the sudden weapons that astound the house.

Comparison with Slavitt illustrates the tremendous improvement offered by Lombardo's rendering. Slavitt elected to condense and omit much of the passage:

But Achilles, strange to believe,  
Grows taller, broader ... Amazing! He towers over Ulysses.  
That spear in his huge hand now seems like a mere toy  
As he waits, poised, ready for Hector or anyone else.

Even in this brief text (roughly one thousand lines), Lombardo has the opportunity to demonstrate impressive range. He misses virtually none of Statius' jokes or witty formulations. Thetis calls Venus "our ingrate nursling" (*hoc gratae munus alumnae, Achilleid* 1.81) when complaining to Neptune. The narrator asks "what mood derailed / indocile Achilles?" (*indocilem quae mens detraxit Achillem?* 1.284) as he spots Deidamia and accedes to his mother's plan to disguise him. Where appropriate, however, Lombardo can also offer a higher register that shows the epic's constant negotiation with its "Very Serious" tradition. The passage when Calchas enters his prophetic trance is a case in point (*Achilleid* 1.514-522):

All this while Calchas was nervously scanning the distance,  
and when he suddenly turned pale it was clear  
that the god was entering him. Soon he is rolling  
fiery blood-red eyes that see neither comrades nor camp,  
blind and in another world. Now he apprehends  
the great assemblies of the exalted ones in heaven,  
now he talks to sagacious birds, anxiously consults  
the Sisters' inexorable threads and incense-bearing altars  
snatches tips of flames, feeds on dark sacred smoke.

The introduction by Peter Heslin complements the wittiness of Statius' work and Lombardo's translation. Heslin emphasizes the difference between the *Achilleid* and the "Very Serious Epic" tradition from which it comes. Instead, the poet's later work was an Ovidian take on heroism where the earlier *Thebaid* amplified Virgilian pessimism. Heslin also examines the characters' apparent self-consciousness of their roles within the mythological tradition.

The lack of explanatory notes is one feature that may threaten this book's ready adoption as an undergraduate textbook. A glossary of names identifies Pharsalia as "a region of Thessaly," for example, without suggesting its connection to Lucan's work. The undergraduate reader is left to puzzle out why Antiochus might "worry / about his age" (*Achilleid* 1.468–469) or who the "young Olympian" of the simile at 1.588ff is. But these are small concerns next to Lombardo's achievement of bringing Statius' final epic to a wider audience.

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