

P. J. HESLIN: *The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2005. ISBN 978-0-521-85145-9. XX, 349 pp. GBP 48, USD 80.

Rarely does one come across a work of a classical author that has been studied as little as Statius' *Achilleid*. Even though the poem was widely read in Europe through the Middle Ages, in the modern times it has received relatively little attention among classical scholars. The unpopularity of the work might be due to its unfortunate incompleteness and to the extent on which it has been overshadowed by Statius' epic masterpiece, the *Thebaid*. When studying Roman literature and imperial epic, the *Achilleid* is all too often bypassed, and indeed, no comprehensive monograph on the subject has been published before. In his book, Peter Heslin attempts to respond to this void and restore to the *Achilleid* some of the appreciation it deserves. The pursuit is admirable and well-justified. Despite its incompleteness, the *Achilleid* is a splendid expression of Statius' witty, ironic and eloquent style and his elaborate reworking of the Greco-Roman tradition and literary models, and as such, it is high time for the work to be examined as a classical epic *par excellence*, not merely as a fragmentary piece of minor Latin poetry.

The central theme of Heslin's study is Statius' way of exploring the nature of sex and gender in the *Achilleid*. Through the conception of transvestism the author digs deep into essentialist and constructivist views of gender, and the perceptions of the issue in classical literature and ancient cultures. Beside Latin epic, Heslin studies Homeric tradition, cyclic epic, Greek drama, and Roman love elegy as reflecting on Statius' work. The theoretical framework through which he approaches the subject is wide and impressive. Besides the classical scholarship, the author utilizes previous studies of psychology and social sciences to create a background against which Statius' work is analyzed.

Heslin considers the *Achilleid's* role as a part of Latin epic tradition carefully and in detail. His profound familiarity with classical literature enables him to approach the issue from a wide perspective and pay attention to versatile conventions and details. Through structural and linguistic analysis the author is able to expose Statius' subtle and humoristic treatment of classical literature. Heslin convincingly presents the *Achilleid* to the reader as a skillfully polished, justifiable member of the epic continuum, and an intended final masterpiece of a great poet. He considers the work as constructing an alternative epic tradition that both completed and parodied the Homeric tradition with help from the cyclic epic, Alexandrian literature and the Roman Hellenistic tradition. His analysis of Ovid's major influence on the *Achilleid* is convincing, and helps the reader to better understand the seemingly non-heroic epic style of the *Achilleid*, and its characteristics typical to philosophical and mythological epic, elegiac tradition and classical drama. Heslin's profound orientation on the subject enables the reader to consider the *Achilleid* not only as a successful epic narrative, but also as a reflection of the whole range of classical literature preceding the imperial era – a respectful nod to the great classical authors, and a witty parody of genre-related clichés.

From the general characteristics of the oeuvre Heslin moves on to focus more intensely on expressions of gender in Statius' narrative. The third chapter is dedicated in its entirety to the examination of the female and femininity in the *Achilleid*, and to the expectations placed on feminine behavior by the epic tradition. Through the principal female characters of the poem, Heslin comprehensively discusses the different roles available to women in epic, and reasons for their success or failure in these roles. He stresses Statius' depiction of womanliness as a

performative construct, not only for the cross-dressing Achilles but for the women of the story as well. Altogether, the author laudably discusses Latin epic as a gender-normative genre, and is able to expose to the reader Statius' subtle way of both confirming the predominant norms and ridiculing them.

Besides the gender issue, Heslin examines Statius' Achilles as struggling with other problems concerning the construction of identity. One of the most accomplished sections of Heslin's monograph is the fourth chapter, in which the author discusses young Achilles' identity based on his unusual upbringing. The absence of Achilles' mortal father, and the boy's relationship to his bestial foster father, Chiron the centaur, is examined with deep psychological sensitivity, as is Achilles' complex relationship with his divine mother. The author presents young Achilles as trapped between two worlds in more sense than one. He is, as Heslin states, "caught between child and adult, male and female, divine and human, nature and culture" (p. 181). Achilles' inability to find a role model for humanity and manliness is examined as reflecting his later actions in Statius' work. The chapter works impressively as framing the discussion concerning the construction of identity, which the author broadens and completes in the concluding chapters of the book.

Heslin's ability to move from classical scholarship to social and literary sciences, and to utilize theories of various disciplines is one of the greatest advantages of his work. Nevertheless, from time to time the author's wide interest in cultural, social and psychological dimensions of the gender issue causes some trouble as well. Although I find laudable the extent to which Heslin attempts to create an understandable background for Statius' narrative, I feel that occasionally all the background information provided was hardly necessary for the understanding of the issue at hand. In the fifth chapter, for instance, the author examines the origins of the "Achilles on Scyros" myth, discussing, thoroughly and at length, ritual transvestism and scholarly discussion on the subject. Even though Heslin's comparison of ritual practices in different world cultures is intriguing, all of it does not seem crucial for the understanding of the issue in classical Greek culture. In other chapters as well, the extensive and cross-disciplinary background occasionally tends to distract the reader from the central issue, and lead the line of thought far from Statius' poetry.

Problems caused by wide framework are the most eminent in the beginning of the book, namely, in the first chapter, which is entirely dedicated to versions of the Achilles-myth in 17th and 18th century operas. The author draws an intriguing picture of how the central themes of the myth, such as heroism, gender roles, and the construction of identity have been treated in post-classical European tradition. Even though later representations of the story provide a comprehensive framework for the gender issue, in Heslin's study they seem from time to time to overshadow the *Achilleid* itself. The significance placed on rereading and rewriting Statius' work is well justified in later chapters of the book, but in the first chapter, it somewhat distracts the reader from the main pursuits of the work. The various opera episodes are seemingly disconnected, and it is relatively difficult for the reader to understand what part they play in the study as a whole.

Nevertheless, in most chapters the extensive and cross-disciplinary background really proves its worth, providing the author's conclusions with remarkable depth and perceptiveness. I was especially impressed by the concluding chapter, in which the author discusses Achilles' gradual transformation into a Homeric hero, and the construction of his manliness. The subject is dealt with already in the previous chapter "Rape, Repetition, and Romance". Heslin percep-

tively notes Achilles' failure to constitute his manhood by raping Deidamia, and, based on a lengthy discussion of gender and sexuality in ancient mystery cults he attempts to track Statius' line of thought and examine the construction of the episode. The conclusions are convincing, and they show the author's familiarity with both cultic life in the classical Greece and its later literary representations. According to Heslin, the rape of Deidamia in the *Achilleid* fulfilled its purpose in cult and community – as a response to Euripides' *Bacchae*, Statius used the violent episode to transfer the power in a Bacchic rite from the female to the male sex. On a personal level, however, the act is stated as insufficient, as the sexual violence on its own was not enough to constitute an epic hero's manliness. In the conclusion of the book, Heslin considers the reasons that led to Achilles' failure and the consequences that finally enabled him to gain his masculinity.

The author approaches the subject through Achilles' complex relationship with his father. With outstanding perceptiveness, Heslin analyzes the almost complete absence of the hero's father in the story of his childhood, and the failure of numerous father figures to fulfill the role. The author considers Statius' view that the right kind of a father figure is crucial for a boy's transformation into a man, and that the acknowledgement of one's father is a necessary condition for a Homeric hero. Only upon the arrival of Ulysses and with his help, does Statius' Achilles fulfill these conditions, and is he able to leave his feminine *alter ego* behind. Heslin's perceptive reasoning, his psychological insight and his expertise in poetic and epic tradition enable him to draw a conclusion that is not only impressive and convincing, but also fresh and surprising. It connects the dots between the issues discussed in previous chapters and leaves the reader with broader understanding of Statius' poetry, and the value system within.

All in all, Heslin's survey is an admirable pursuit to fill the void concerning the study of the *Achilleid* by classical scholars. Heslin's open-minded approach to the subject, his deductive skills and his ability to effortlessly utilize cross-disciplinary theories and previous studies enables him to deal with a wide range of issues within the *Achilleid*. The book can be recommended not just for classical scholars, but for students of literature, gender theories and human behavior as well. The central issues of the book – construction of identity, the essentialist and constructivist nature of gender, and the blurring categories of feminine and masculine, humane and divine, and humane and bestial – are discussed in understandable and clear rhetoric that makes the book easily accessible. For further reading on the subject, the reader is provided with an extensive bibliography, and thorough notes on classical literature.

Elina Pyy

A. D. MORRISON: *The Narrator in Archaic Greek and Hellenistic Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007. ISBN 978-0-521-87450-2. XII, 358 pp. GBP 55, USD 124.

This book discusses the way the Hellenistic poets Theocritus, Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes reflect and develop archaic models in using an outside speaker, a primary narrator. As the author (= M.) himself formulates, this study is meant to ask the question "who is speaking" and attempts mainly to illuminate the ways in which the narrators are portrayed in Hellenistic poetry and how the Hellenistic poets adapted and renewed narratological techniques of the archaic period. In his foreword, M. reminds the reader of the eternal *caveat* in studies on ancient