

(Half a) Song for Vibius Maximus*(Statius Silvae 4.7.1-24)*

Nów a wíhíle you've wándered a wíder plaín so
 pút off, stéady Érato, thís heróic
 stúff for nów and shíft the enórmous lábour
 ínto a lów gear.

You, the band's lead lyricist, Pindar, let me 5
 borrow (just a moment) a new poétic
 pick, if I a Látian song to Thebes have
 ever devoted.

Trying to, for Maximus, pare down poems,
 now I have to weave out of úncut myrtle 10
 crowns; I grow more parched and a purer stream now
 has to be sipped from.

When to charming Látium shall the mountains
 send you back, Dalmátia, where pásty díggers
 faint-faced, dug down halfway to Hades, surface 15
 stained by their gold-ore?

Take me, born a couple of countries closer,
 still my laid-back Baíae with pleasant port can't
 keep me nor the trumpeter's cape well-known through
 combat with Hector. 20

Our Carménas dawdle without you, even
 Thymbra's ruler, later than usual, comes and
 my Achilles look how he stalls before he
 reaches the first turns!

Discussion

It would be tough to find a sterner challenge than translating Aeolic metres into English verse! It is perhaps telling that, to the best of my knowledge, only one verse translation of this poem has been undertaken and even then Nagle opted for an easier metre! However, a quick look at couple of prose translations (Coleman's and Shackleton Bailey's) showed—to my surprise!—that the syllable-counts almost match up with the Latin. This motivated me to do Nagle one better and bring the Sapphic stanzas over intact.

Unfortunately English is not equipped to deal with rows of 'long' (stressed) syllables, like those that occur at syllables 3, 4 and 5 of the Latin Sapphic:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
—	u	—	—	—	u	u	—	u	—	x

So I have had to recourse to the standard (very trochaic) English version:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
—	u	—	u	—	u	u	—	u	—	x

My translation, although not literal, is very much grounded in the Latin. In addition to the metre, the progression of ideas is maintained, as are the proper names (with the exception of *Dis* v.14) and where deviations in sense have been introduced, it has been done with a sensitivity to the allusions and metaphors behind the text; for example: the racing metaphors of the first and last stanzas have been preserved despite some changes.

The biggest change is in the register. The tone of my version is more casual. This change provided the opportunity to produce verse that was not only metrical but also poetic. I hope this change is not too jarring for an occasional poem that presents itself as consciously 'lower' (*minores* v.3) than epic.

Dactylic names and adjectives proved particularly troublesome (vv. 2, 7, 9, 13) as they were restricted to one position, the central first three syllables of the choriamb, making it difficult to work around them. This combined with the two gerundives of the third stanza made it the least successful of the translation. It is some consolation to note that it is not without problems in Latin!

I have followed the OCT except v.1: *spatiata*.

References

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