

Len Krisak, trans. with an Introduction by Sarah Ruden, *Ovid's Erotic Poems: Amores and Ars Amatoria*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Pp. 243. ISBN 978-0812246254.

Translation is always a matter of interpretation, and when rendering a text from Latin to English many decisions must be made, beginning with the text itself—is it correct? are there emendations? how should it be punctuated?—proceeding through the language of the text—are the word choices correct? are they capturing the nuances of the Latin? how literal should you be—and finally addressing substantially the poetry of the text, both its appearance and sound. The task is tough, thankless, and very often underrated, but essential if these texts are to remain known to audiences who are not educated in the original language. Translators make their choices according to their personalities and principles, and these choices become a matter of personal taste. By the same token, assessing a translation also is a matter of personal taste: the reviewer either accepts or rejects the choices made by the translator. That said, my reaction is mixed to the translation of Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* by Len Krisak. The translation is meant for the general reader and/or student, and contains an introduction by Sarah Ruden, a translator's preface where Krisak lays out his choices and his reasons for them, the translations themselves, notes to the poems, most of which deal with mythological, cultural and political references and which are wisely positioned after the translation instead of as footnotes on the page (which are always distracting), and a glossary of names and terms. Someone coming to Ovid for the first time via this text will come away with a fair grasp of the essence of the poet and a good understanding of what these poems are saying. A Classicist, or someone with greater technical experience, may have some difficulties with some of the choices that have been made.

Krisak's primary concerns are to preserve Ovid as Ovid, and at the same time to preserve his poems as poetry. This is a tricky road, since one concern might be seen to cancel out the other. He achieves his goals first by preserving the shape of the elegiac couplet, although, wisely, he does not attempt to preserve the meter. Instead, he translates in iambics, a meter more suited to the rhythm of English than dactylic hexameter and pentameter, and he maintains the design of the couplet with its characteristic pause in the pentameter line. He also rhymes his couplets, which is not as successful, although he justifies it by calling on earlier translators of Latin and Greek poetry who have used rhyme. The decision to rhyme leads to challenging lines, e.g. "Then I was done, and Cupid fetched an arrow fletched / for me (since on its shaft my name was etched). (*Am.*1.1.21–22), which has a highly specialized term "fletched," and which also does adequately capture the phrase *in meum exitium*: the translation "since on its shaft my name was etched" bypasses the humorous bathos. Similarly, this couplet in *Am.*1.10.51–52 jars: "Or one who had her womb son-lashed, from there to here / The lowly cause some gaudy lavalier."

More successful is his emphasis on poetic devices, not necessarily the same devices that Ovid is using at any given point, but word order, alliteration, assonance, anaphora—all of these elements add to the poetry of the poems and are pleasing. There is also a

breeziness of tone that is distinctly Ovid's and, despite the formality of the structure, much of the language is up to date. Some lines are wonderful. "Eleven-footed Muse of Elegy" (*Am.* 1.1.30) captures the Latin as best as anything I've ever read, although it is not a literal translation, and the final couplet of *Am.* 1.15 does the same. Thus, Krisak's translation compares well to others, notably Green's Penguin translation and Humphries's *The Art of Love*. The latter two are readable, but Krisak's is updated. In general, he has brought Ovid into the 21st century.

If anything is missing, it is nuance. Corinna appears with a bang, in *Amores* 1.5.9 (*ecce Corinna*), an emphasis that Krisak misses or downplays, and in *Amores* 2.4.22 he turns the most sexually explicit suggestion in the *Amores* into a hug. I would also want Nape's drunkenness to be noted in *Amores* 1.12.6 because the accusation is so entirely unjust and speaks to the poet-speaker's complete failure to accept responsibility for his complete failure. There are also mistranslations: the phrase "my darling" in *Am.* 1.8.21 is not in the Latin and changes the identity of the *puella* in the poem. And there are mistranslations that are bolstered by erroneous notes. In *Amores* 1.2.45–46, we read "Boy Archer, all your arrows are their own. Blind seer, / They scorch and singe whatever they come near." And on p. 192 the phrase "blind seer" is glossed as follows: "Cupid was often depicted as blindfolded." There is no mention of a blind seer in the original poem (I am using Kenney's *OCT*), and the portrayal of Cupid as blind seems a later innovation in art.

The introduction by Sarah Ruden touches on many of the issues concerning Ovid the poet and Ovid the man. We read, e.g., that Ovid is a rich resource on *otium*, that his love poems are rhetorical *tours de force*, and that the *Ars Amatoria* is a parody of a didactic poem. Although there is nothing really wrong with any of these assumptions, they do little to get to the essence of Ovid and on some levels do him a real disservice. Yes, he is frivolous and, yes, he is really writing more about poetry than love, and, yes, he is brilliant and modern, but there is also a depth to his erotic poetry that Ruden is not addressing in any real sense. It is not enough to say that the *Amores* are "...a dramatization of undying infatuation with writing" and that the *Ars Amatoria* "is an instruction book for judging, pursuing, and possessing the art of words." Ovid brings many things into play in his construction of a short or long poem: his characters, his audiences, his ability to play his characters and audiences against each other so that one is often more aware than the other of the reality of any given situation, his Callimachean, comic and elegiac roots, all of which inform the very many levels of his poetry, and of course, his ability to transform genre, which adds considerably to the very poetic and deeply intelligent nature of his poetry.

Her introduction is for the general reader, not the Classicist or the student of Latin, and I understand that therefore it is not meant as a scholarly discussion, but it also should be nuanced more. Some of it oversimplifies fairly complex cultural and literary contexts to the point of being misleading. She falters especially in her discussion of the political backdrop to Ovid's life and career. She assumes, for instance, that Ovid chose poetry over politics because "he perceived early on that politics was no longer the best

choice for a really ambitious man,” but there is nothing in Ovid’s own words that suggests he felt himself thwarted politically—he talks only about the stress associated with a political career at *Tristia* 4.10.38. She bases her assumption on the authoritarian rule of Augustus, but at the time Ovid began his poetic career (ca. 26/25 BCE), Augustus was in the process of establishing himself politically. His rule was not absolute in any sense: there were open threats to his power and he himself was careful to listen to public opinion and to base his decisions accordingly. She assumes further that Augustus promulgated his political program through poets who were recruited by Maecenas and Messalla (whom, disturbingly, she calls talent scouts). But the system of literary patronage was not as overt as she implies; there was not a blatant exchange of cash for poetry that disseminated the Augustan program, and indeed how thoroughly poets like Vergil and Propertius supported Augustus continues to be the subject of much debate. The one poet, Horace, whom she specifies as being funded by Augustus, earned a very respectable living as *scriba quaestorius*. She also seems to connect Ovid’s relegation to the scandal of the elder Julia, not her daughter, also Julia, who was sent from Rome around 8 CE.

At the end of the day, a general reader, who is not bothered by rhyming poetry, will be delighted with these translations. Although I have kept specific comments to the *Amores*, the entire collection is readable and pleasantly so, and the supplementary materials are, for the most part, useful. Anyone versed in the original Latin and in the issues and controversies surrounding Ovid will be less happy with some of the particulars of both the translation and the introduction.

CAROLINE A. PERKINS
MARSHALL UNIVERSITY