

‘SPEAK TO ME, O MUSE... OF HARRY POTTER’

a retired Classics master prayed, as he wrote to J.K. Rowling’s publisher, offering to take up the author’s request and translate *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* into ancient Greek. Calliope, and perhaps Clio and Thalia* also, responded favourably. Andrew Wilson’s specimen chapter was accepted and he was given a contract.

[* respectively the Muses of epic poetry, history and comedy]

Thus began what we mere mortals would consider an unachievably-huge exercise in prose composition. Just as the ancients described the walls of Mycenae as ‘Cyclopean’ – they could not envisage the massive blocks being put into place by anyone other than a giant – in such a way should we view AMW’s completion of his gargantuan task in only a year.

All those of us, who have struggled with reading *Alicia in Terra Mirabili* or *Winnie-ille-Pooh*, realize that the success of such ‘ancient’ versions, and the pleasure derived from them, depend on a knowledge of the English original, with its established context, loved phrases and idiosyncratic humour. We need the ‘crib’, in order to appreciate fully the translator’s skill. *Hareios Poter kai h_ tou philosophou lithos* is no exception, and AMW does not disappoint.

In conveying the style and atmosphere of the original, AMW ranges from the gravity of Thucydides’ narrative to the elegance of Plato’s dialogue. The Sorting Hat’s song, at the start-of-term banquet in Hogwarts’s Great Hall, is a *tour de force* in Euripidean iambic trimeters.

Letters preserve the ancient form of address, as when ‘Minerva McGonagall, the Deputy Headmistress, sends greetings to Harry Potter’ (*Athéna Magonogalea Hyparkhégos Hareiói Potéri khairein*). JKR’s own subtle Greek satire is expertly captured. Who does not admire, for example, the Cerberus-substitute, Fluffy (*Oulothrix*, ‘Woolly-hair’, with a nod to Herodotus)?

Proper names, a particular challenge, are occasionally transliterated and inflected, but more often they acquire an Aristophanic portmanteau dimension (Quidditch is *Ikarosphairiké*, ‘Icarus’ ball-game’) or they are interpreted (Norbert’s epithet, ‘the Norwegian ridgeback’, becomes *Norbertos ho glyptonótos hyperboreos*, ‘the sculptured-back beyond the North Wind’). Was POTTER so established a commercial, best-selling surname that it could not be translated as *Kerameus*?

An essential delight of this book is that it resembles an Oxford Classical Text, with the familiar Greek font, accents, punctuation and capital letters (not inverted commas) to introduce speech. So, OBMs, salute Andrew Wilson and put this celebration of his scholarship, and continuing energetic commitment, on your shelves with pride. *Chronia polla, o Andrea!*

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J. K. Rowling: *Hareios Potér kai hé tou philosophou lithos* Ancient Greek edition translated by Andrew Wilson, Bloomsbury (2004) Hbk £14.99 ISBN 0 7475 6897 9