»HAS OMNES DIFFICULTATES… AMOR PERVICIT«: THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF THE FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE *DAVIDIAS*

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This article recounts the experience of translating the *Dauidias* into English. It highlights two types of difficulties: a) those specific to translating Latin hexameters into English heroic verse (iambic pentameter) and b) those shared by both Marulić and the translator, particularly the rendering of Hebrew names within the confines of metrical constraints. Marulić himself spoke of these difficulties in his letter to Cardinal Grimani. Different solutions to these problems are discussed. A passage from *Dauidias* Book One is used as an example of how the different solutions to a) are operative within the translation. These solutions include using one syllable synonyms, transferring a noun or adjective metaphor into a verbal image, and using enjambment. Next, some solutions to the b) are shown. The translation of *Dauid*. XIII. 145–172 is included as an example of an especially frustrating passage. The motivation for persevering despite the difficulties was appreciation for Marulić's genius and gratitude toward the community that has kept his works and memory fresh.

This article stems from a presentation given in April 2023 when the first English translation of the *Dauidias* was being prepared for publication. It was published, with a newly edited Latin text and a full *apparatus fontium* in April 2024 by Lysa Publishers.

Keywords: *Dauidias*, translation, meter, Cardinal Domenico Grimani

Before I begin to speak about the trials and triumphs of translating the *Dauidias* into English, I think I should start by explaining when and how I heard of

this *magnum opus* in the first place. While teaching in New York almost twenty years ago, I tutored a student in Latin. His name is Anthony Valle, and his father was from near Pula, in Istra, and his mother, née Martinović, was from Olib. He asked me if I had ever heard of Marulić or of the *Dauidias*. I had not. Intrigued, I searched online and found a copy (in a Vienna bookstore) of Glavičić's 1974 edition. The origin of my translation thus comes from the pride and knowledge that Croatian Americans have of their literary ancestors.

Thus, having learned of the *Dauidias* and owning a copy, I carried it to Atlanta where I taught for six years, and then to Kansas. It was always in the back of my mind as a possible translation project. And then the opportunity presented itself with the University of Kansas offering a small grant, and, above all, a quiet office for a few summer weeks. I knew if I could get three books translated that summer, then I would be able to push myself to finish, if only out of Irish stubbornness.

I ended up translating the first four books that summer. Thereafter, it was a matter of finishing one or two books on each break from teaching over the next few years (Christmas break and summer break) until the spring of 2020. I was scheduled to come to Split and speak with Dr Lučin, and the whole world ground to a halt. Just being able to visit Split, therefore, is both an honor and a triumph. Now, let's look at the trials and triumphs of the text itself.

In his dedicatory letter to Cardinal Domenico Grimani, Bishop of Porto and patriarch of Aquileia, Marko Marulić confesses the difficulties inherent in making a Latin epic out of an Old Testament story.[1] He goes on to list them, above and beyond the exacting care needed to write Latin verse, and the fact that his writing was done amidst interruptions.[2] The difficulties include the unaccustomed relationship between Hebrew names and the Latin tongue[3] and geographical place names that nobody else has previously explained.[4]

So let me speak of the »trials« in terms of two difficulties, one common for anyone translating Latin dactylic hexameter into English iambic pentameter, and the second difficulty specific to this epic, the need to include many Hebrew names and places, a difficulty shared by Marulić himself.

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[1] »ad hoc perficiendum multa mihi impedimento erant.« *Letter from Marulić to Cardinal Grimaldi,* 2 (Marko M a r u l i ć, *Davidijada*, ed. Glavičić and Lučin, Zagreb, 2019, 12).

[2] »intermissa condendi carminis cura«, *ibid.* »Intermissa« suggests that he had not written Latin verse for some time, or, better, that his efforts on the epic were accomplished amidst interruptions. It probably took about seven years to finish the epic. After some youthful compositions about mythology, he had written his famous *Judith* in Croatian verse a decade before starting the *Dauidias*, and most of his published works up to his work on the *Dauidias* had been in prose.

[3] »Hebraicorum nominum Latinae linguae inusitata relatio«, *ibid.*

[4] »locorum quoque a nullo prorsus geographorum nostrorum satis explanata uocabula«, *ibid.*

1. Latin Dactyls to English Iambs

The choice to translate Marulić's Vergilian dactyls into English iambic pentameter was made initially because I did not deem any other choice appropriate. Iambic pentameter is used in Shakespeare's plays, of course, but above all in the great English epic, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I also sought to emulate some translators of Vergil, especially Robert Fitzgerald and admired Robert Fagles, who uses a looser configuration of a line that often extends to six rather than five beats.

The other decision, to translate line by line as closely as possible, came from my respect for Richmond Lattimore's translations of Homer. But I also soon became aware, during my labor of translation, that Glavičić's translation of the *Dauidias*, which I had owned for years, was being re-edited by Bratislav Lučin. It was a comfort to me that one of the world's top experts on Marulić was working on editing a line-by-line translation. But, then again, Croatian is a language which can support dactyls way better than English can.

As you know, dactylic hexameter is a line of six feet and can include both spondees and dactyls. It can therefore be between twelve and eighteen syllables, and, with elided syllables, a lot can fit into a line. In iambic pentameter, five two syllable feet are used. And English often requires one to use the definite article and prepositions that Latin can dispense with (by using the ablative, for instance).

Besides this consideration of syllable count, to the English speaking ear (and in the tradition of poetry in English and in many modern European languages), poetic meter relies not on the length of vowels as in Latin, but on a pattern of stressed and non-stressed syllables. And, to sound like an epic in English, there needs to be a greater use of alliteration than in Latin, though both Vergil and Marulić are master »alliterators.«

Among the solutions that can be offered for these difficulties, three stand out:
1. One advantage English does have is that many words are monosyllabic. I found myself using a one-syllable synonym when one was available.
2. Another was to enjamb the verse line and use an occasional acatalectic line, ending with an extra short syllable which would carry over into the first iamb on the following verse.
3. Yet another was to take a word used figuratively in the Latin, and transfer the figurative image onto another word, a kind of grammatical *hypallage*, if you will.

Rather than pick out different examples of these solutions scattered throughout the translation, it will be helpful to show a passage where all of these solutions are present and operative. Here is the Latin text and my translation of *Dauid*. I. 24–38.

Ergo Iudaicę primus moderamina gentis	So, first to steer the Jewish race was Saul
Ciso natus erat Saul et regni sceptra tenebat,	Who, born the son of Cis, the scepter held.
Non recto officio nixus nec legibus ęquis,	He stood not on right duty or just law.
Quum Samuel uates dictis mordacibus illum	Him prophet Samuel chides with biting words,
Aggrediens et facta Deo non grata reuoluens	Reflecting that his deeds displeased his God,
Hęc responsa dedit: »Quoniam tibi certa Tonantis	With this remark, »Since you care not to heed
Iussa sequi nulli fuerit post talia curę,	God's thundering commands, from now henceforth
Isto te indignum, quo te dignatus honore est,	Unworthy He declares you of the honor
Censuit atque alium, regni cui tradat habenas,	He had deigned. Another He shall grant.
Iam sibi prospexit successoremque regendo	The kingdom's reins. His watchful eye has picked
Constituit populo, notum pietate fideque,	The next to rule the race, one loyal and true,
Quanquam humili plebe uirum. Sed sanguinis omnes	Although from humble stock. For virtue does
Exuperat tenebras cum laudum lumine uirtus.«	Surpass all blood obscure with light of praise.«
Hęc effatus abit moestum tristemque relinquens	He spoke and went, both sad and downcast leaving
Iam Saulem et multa perculsum pectora cura.	Saul with smitten heart and worries sore.

In line 24, the noun image of *moderamina* is rendered as a one syllable verb »steer,« thus making the objective genitive *Iudaicae gentis* into the direct object. It also adds to the alliteration of »s« sounds.

In line 27–28, »chides« is a one syllable word that catches the sense of *aggrediens* and *dedit*, and »biting words« renders *dictis mordacibus* in a diction that is less colloquial than my first attempt, which had »chewed him out.«

In line 30, the translation transfers the image of God as the *Tonans* to an adjective for »commands.« In English, »thundering« can be pronounced as two or three syllables. Here, by intending it as three syllables (thún-der-íng) the word is linked to the word »God« by making it the stressed syllable of the line's first iamb.

In lines 30–31, »deigned« is used mainly because it is cognate with *dignor*, but it does lessen Marulić's verbal contrast of *indignum* and *dignatus* in such close proximity. Translation is a frustrating exercise which involves many such trade-offs.

In line 33, the image of the verb *prospexit* is transposed to the noun phrase »watchful eye,« and in line 34, »loyal« is a word which in English can be pronounced as two syllables or one. Here the meter demands it be only one. The entire verse, then is made up of monosyllables.

Line 37, in the word »leaving« has an extra syllable, but the line 38 begins with a stressed syllable, so the meter enjambs to the next line, the first iamb of line 37 beginning on the last syllable of line 37.

Hundreds of other such examples could be found throughout the translation of the epic. These suffice to show the most common solutions and how they are employed in rendering Marulić's hexameters into English heroic verse (iambic pentameter).

2. Hebrew Names in English Poetry

I wish I could say that, while Marulić had such difficulty putting Hebrew names into Latin verse, I was translating into a language that cuts through Hebrew like a warm knife through butter. Alas, it is not the case. I will not try to argue about who had the worse time of it. But it certainly did add to my problem with syllable count, since just to mention »Ahimelech« or David's royal city of »Jerusalem« takes 4 syllables, 40% of an iambic pentameter line. (For *Dauid*. XIII. 134, where Marulić wrote, »Et tu, Ioiadę, Banaias uiuida proles,« my translation simply says, »And you, Benaiah of Jehoiadah.«) Though I could often cheat and shorten the city name to »Jerus'lem,« doing it too often would make the diction too colloquial. I want the poem to be read outside places where such pronunciation is common such as the Southern United States or Texas. Moreover, there is no way that such a solution would work with names like Ahimelech, Ahithophel, Mephibosheth, or Hadadazer.

I soon realized that both Marulić and I had the same problem. We were not inventing, we were essentially translating. I was translating his epic into English. He was not translating the Hebrew Old Testament into Latin, but he was translating the Latin Vulgate narrative into Latin epic poetry. St. Jerome had lots of things to worry about in his effort to translate the Books of Samuel and Kings, but meter was not one of them. Marulić could not change the names to simplify them for meter.

So when David begins to recount old friends in 2 Samuel 23, I could feel Marulić losing his hair. I felt it because I was losing my hair, too. Drs Glavičić and Lučin, no doubt, are also brothers of this thin-haired »quadrivirate«!

When needed, I looked at different Old Testament translations, and often used a name slightly different than one based on the Vulgate. Sometimes it was due to the number of syllables, sometimes to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in the pronunciation of the name. At *Dauid*. XIII. 158, where Marulić says *Banais* following the Vulgate, and the New American Bible uses »Benaiah« meaning »son of the Lord«, I use another possible translation of *Banais*, a common name in Modern Hebrew and Arabic meaning »slender«: Bá-a-nah. I am not sure how much Hebrew Marulić knew. His comments on Hebrew names lead me to suspect he or a close friend knew a fair amount. For he says »Banais ingenti uirtute et corpore paruo.« (*Dauid*. XIII. 159) clearly following the meaning of »slender« rather than »son of the Lord.«

Let me include a few lines from a particularly challenging passage to show my adaptations of Vulgate names (*Dauid*. XIII. 145–72):

Besides these, thrice ten names of men remain
To be commemorated, whose right hands
Were always prompt for battle: Joab's kin
And colleague Asahel, Elhanan great,
His in-law, also Shammah, great in name,

From Arar. Let's to these Elika add,
From En-harod; Helez, from Beth-pelet;
Then famous Ira in Tekoa born,
And Abiezer, called from Anathoth.
A Hushathite, Mebunnai[5], famed for strength,
Comes after these; then Zalmon from Ahoh;
Let Maharai from Netophah them guide,
And with his brother Heled reckoned be,
Next Ittai, son of Ribai; Baanah,
Of Pirathon, small bodied but great souled.
Then Hiddai, from the valley of Gaash;
Abibaal, from Arabah; and from
Bahurim, Azmaveth; Eliahba
As well; and Shammah of Orori, too;
Ahiam, Sharar's son; Eliphelet,
Ahasbai's son; and next fierce Eliam
From Gilo; Hezrai from Mount Carmel, too;
The Arbite, Paarai; Igal, whose birth
Cheered Zobah's lands; and Bani, born in Gad;
And Zelek, who farmed mid the Ammonites;
Naharai, who bore Joab's arms; and then
Gareb and Ira, both born in Jattir;
Uriah, Hittite, too, wailed by my tears.

By the time I finished this passage, I was indeed in need of more English sounding names, names like Jack Daniels and Johnny Walker.

But, in all seriousness, I felt I could not let these difficulties deter me because I knew that Marulić had struggled with them all. And, though I am not the accomplished Latinist or poet that he is, I know that he wished to share this story because he wanted to spread the story of David in heroic language, in a language he felt was worthy of the tale.

In doing so, he did not disparage Scripture any more than a painter who paints a Biblical scene employing his own talent and imagination to tell the tale. Marulić believed that David's story was epic, indeed more than epic, for it was not, as the poem's invocation says, »Troię / Excidium Thebasue (…) Sed cęlo cognatum opus arcanisque sacratum / Mysteriis« (*Dauid*. I. 6–10). It is a tale of the one true God working through imperfect men, and in one man, David, prefiguring the Greatest Man ever to live, the very Son of God.

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5 Some English translations of the Bible (NIV, NAB) call him »Sibbekai«, in which case he would be the same man mentioned in *Dauid*. XII. 440–41.

Marulić believed this deeply. To spend time with his words is to know this, to sense it. He wanted the tale of David told in the best medium he knew, and he put the best of his poetic talents at its service. The *Dauidias* is a true masterpiece. Some may dismiss it as Vergilian or Biblical fan-fiction. If so, then the *Aeneid* itself is Homeric fan-fiction. And for Marulić, not fiction either, but as *Dauid*. I. 16 says, »E cęlo afflatus certissima quęque prophetis.«

Marulić's clear love of the character of King David and of the scriptural story carries over from the writer to the reader. It is ultimately what brings any translator to want to share a text: the desire to grant to a wider audience access to something true and beautiful, and to attempt to replicate in the target language not only the words but the *experience* of reading the original (and, especially in the case of poetry, hearing it internally or even externally when recited). But in the case of Marulić, there is a deeper motivation still, this passing on a sacred story: »quae nostra fides scriptis testata vetustis / Hausit et arguto conata est promere cantu« (*Dauid*. XIV. 423–24).

Most epics begin with an invocation. A truly Christian one ends with *eucharistia*, with thanksgiving: »Illi ego Spiritui pro tali munere grates / Semper agam« (*Dauid*. XIV. 425–26). I shall also end with my translation of these lines, »This Spirit may I thank for such a gift / forever.« But together with my thanks to God ascend my thanks to Marko Marulić for his example of literary Christianity, and to all who labor to keep his works and memory fresh. I am proud to count myself among such a brotherhood.

Edward Mulholland

»HAS OMNES DIFFICULTATES… AMOR PERVICIT«: KUŠNJE I TRIJUMFI PRVOG ENGLESKOG PRIJEVODA *DAVIDIJADE*

Rad ukratko prikazuje izazove s kojima se susretao engleski prevodilac Marulićeva latinskog heksametarskog epa *Davidijada*. Izazovi su bili dvovrsni; s jedne strane, trebalo je nalaziti odgovarajuća leksička i metrička rješenja za hebrejska imena u Marulićevu biblijskom epu; s druge strane, sadržaj heksametra trebalo je smjestiti u odabrani ekvivalent, engleski *blank verse* redak. Prevodilac donosi kratka, ali utemeljena teorijska objašnjenja svojih odabira i rješenja.

Ovaj je rad nastao iz izlaganja u travnju 2023, održanog dok je prvi engleski prijevod *Davidijade* još bio u pripremi. Prijevod je, zajedno s novim izdanjem latinskog teksta i opširnim aparatom izvora, nakladnik Lysa Publishers objavio u travnju 2024.

Ključne riječi: *Davidijada*, prijevod, pjesnička stopa, kardinal Domenico Grimani