

Gattamelata

by Len Krisak (October 2017)



The Equestrian Statue of Gattamelata, Donatello, 1453

An upright man's head wouldn't reach the knee

(Not even if he'd scaled the marble base

Himself, to stand and measure up against

That figure). Honeyed Kitten, who made thee?

Who cast emaciated Maudlin's face

(She's like some Marsyas, gaunt and nearly flensed)?

Who propped a rent-boy David with a sword

Two-thirds his length, and in so doing, lent

“Standing it on its head” new meaning in
Goliath’s case? O *condottiere*, lord
Of war, it’s Donatello. What he meant
By Star-of-David rowels stopped mid-spin

(Your spurs are horizontal blades of bronze
That sidle up to monumental flanks),
You’ll never know. Nor I. Why do your horse’s
Ears curl, pricked up like fleshy devil horns?
Bare toes below the greaves that guard your shanks
Suggest Aurelius among your sources.

Might that explain the look, which seems half stoic,
Of resignation *and* resolve—the settled
Force of the grim acceptance in your eyes
And mouth? Did Padua believe heroic
The pose in which you have been metalled,
And glory in your charger’s daunting size?

That sword would surely reach your ropy neck,
Should you dismount and stand beside it, hilt
A cross across your breastplate. (God, the length

To which your maker went!) Now pigeons peck

(Say *doves*?) beneath what gratitude once
built:

A mercenary sitting in his strength.

Now like some saddled juggernaut, unhelmed,

You face down every day, and every threat

That time might make good on your naked head.

And those whom once your valor overwhelmed—

The vanquished and the grateful in your debt—

Alike look on at one alive and dead.

Len Krisak has published in *The London Magazine*, *The Oxonian Review*, *PN Review*, *Standpoint*, *Agni*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Dark Horse*, *Agenda*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Commonweal*, *Literary Imagination*, *The Oxford Book of Poems on Classical Mythology*, and others. His books include [Virgil's Eclogues](#), University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. Forthcoming: [The Carmina of Catullus](#), Carcanet Press, 2014, [Afterimage](#), Measure Press, 2014, [Rilke: New Poems](#), Boydell & Brewer, 2015 and [Ovid: The Amores and The Ars Amatoria](#), University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

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