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Archilochus

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Archilochus

“Pass softly stranger lest it be your doom
To wake the wasps that settle on his tomb.” –Leonidas of Tarentum

On the islands, it was all
bronze and painted
marble, war just another

extravagance, a way
for poor men to slip
into scented boudoirs,

and he, the “thistle
with graceful leaves,”
pretended no illusions,

his iambs sharp
as a bronze sword
on a bronze shield.

Horace owned thirty
scrolls, but we have
shredded papyrus,

glued into masks
for the mummies
of rich merchants.

The work of years
torn to cover
a shriveled face,

scraps stiff and frail
as the husks of wasps
littering his grave.

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Author biography

Richard Spilman is the author of *In the Night Speaking* and of a chapbook, *Suspension*.