

## The Shaping of a Literary Cult

### The reception of Chapman's *Homer* from Jonson to Keats

#### I.

As Agamemnon and his generals pass before Achilles in the third act of *Troilus and Cressida*, they “put on / A form of strangeness [...] and either greet him not / Or else disdainfully” (III. iii. 50-53). And though Ulysses (the hero who remains polytropic even in Shakespearean burlesque) finds time to address the fierce Peleides, he does so only to deliver an impressive speech:

... The present eye praises the present object:  
Then marvel not, thou great and complete man,  
That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;  
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye  
Than what not stirs...

(180-184)

These words are not spoken in vain, since Achilles, who had been reluctant up to this moment to engage in combat, perceives at once that his “reputation is at stake” (226). Compared with the original Homeric tale, however, he cuts a rather ridiculous figure. In the *Iliad*, the efforts of Odysseus to appease the hero's wrath towards Agamemnon are (to say the least) unsuccessful, and Achilles's long speech of “exceeding vehemence”<sup>1</sup> suggests that he readily abandons even his *kleos* (his

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Iliad*, IX. 410-416.

renown or “reputation”), the foremost ideal of any Homeric hero, and is ready to return home just to show the extent of his displeasure. Needless to say, both the Homeric and the Shakespearean Achilles have “strong reasons of [their] privacy” (III. iii. 190-191) which are clearly related; still, there seems to be a world of difference between the indignant chieftain of the Myrmidons, and the love-fool of *Troilus and Cressida*.<sup>2</sup> The final irony, nonetheless, emerges only if we consider that in Shakespeare’s version, Hector is killed when he is ambushed by a large band of Myrmidons who are obliged to bear the message that “Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain” to the Greek camp (V. viii. 14).

However ludicrous a character Achilles may be in the Shakespearean “problem play,” along with Ajax and the other Greek heroes he still passes for an enduring literary figure. Indeed, it seems as if the Ulyssean admonition of the hero was but an ingenious definition of the concept of “the classic” elegantly positing one single criterion, “presence” as a prerequisite for a permanent reputation. And if we – somewhat arbitrarily – interpret Ulysses’s words by extending their possible frame of reference to include not only “heroic nature,” but also texts representing the very same concept, then Shakespeare’s aperçu becomes even more conspicuous. For it lies at the very heart of the critical enterprise (“the present eye”) to commend or condemn texts precisely because they do or do not exert (or – according to the persuasion of some critics – because they ought to exert) some desirable influence on either the creation or the reception of literature. These texts are the “present objects” that stir and make their constant presence felt. Of course, it is the peculiar characteristic of the reception of literature (and – we might hazard – literary works themselves) that some of the texts “stir” only for awhile, that is, they remain dead for a subsequent generation of readers, and as such, for a subsequent generation of texts, too. A small number of works, however, seem to have remained almost ever-present in critical discourse, but owing to this specific quality, have not received unanimous praise; on the contrary, they are likely to be – in the words of Ezra Pound – “stirrers up of strife.” And, as the presence of the strife stirred up by Achilles is revealed by the constancy of the interpretative strife his character has inspired, so

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<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of Achilles’s character as either an “insatiable womanizer” or Patroclus’s lover is, of course, not Shakespeare’s speciality. Such literary representations of the hero have been present ever since Aeschylus or Plato’s *Symposium*. Cf. Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer and Manliness* (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 99-109. Cf. also *Inferno* V. 65-6. where he is presented as a victim of love.

may the texts that we term "classic" remain classic only if they maintain their positions of eminence as objects of contention.

The little Shakespearean parable outlined above would be persuasive enough if we could ignore the fact that, according to George Steiner, "there are, at a very rough count, more than two hundred complete or selected English renditions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from 1581 to the present."<sup>3</sup> If we keep this in mind, the question arises: *which* English interpretation of Homer should intellectually curious readers use if they really want to compare the Shakespearean and the Homeric Achilles? A possible answer is Harold Bloom's who, compiling a survival-kit of canonical texts at the very end of *The Western Canon*, states that "[h]ere, as in the following lists, I suggest translations [of non-English canonical works] wherever I derived particular pleasure and insight from those now readily available."<sup>4</sup> But – and it is Bloom's own rhetoric that suggests this – the pleasure derived from, for example, Lattimore's or Fitzgerald's translations of the Homeric epics, however "particular" it is in the sense of "special" or "noteworthy," may only be "particular" in the sense of "specific" or "not general." Bloom's principle of selection is, of course, not the single example of such critical procedures. Ezra Pound, for example, says something very similar in his essay, 'How to Read,' when he draws up a list that bears basically the same function as Bloom's: "HOMER – in full (Latin cribs, Hugues Salel in French, no satisfactory English, though Chapman can be used as reference)."<sup>5</sup> One may apparently assume that both Pound and Bloom are in a position to judge, since their knowledge of both the source and target language allows them to decide upon the "adequacy" of one or other translation. An interesting forerunner of these writers may be Keats who clearly held different critical ideas, but who (Byron's condescending judgement notwithstanding<sup>6</sup>) in one of his sonnets seems to communicate his "first-hand experience" readily and easily upon first looking into one of the translations of Homer's works.

<sup>3</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: OUP, 1977) p. 401. Steiner's count is, however, more than twenty years old, and one cannot be sure to what extent the figure has increased since 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Bloom. *The Western Canon. The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) p. 531.

<sup>5</sup> Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1960) p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Keats "who was kill'd off by one critique, / Just as he really promised something great, / If not intelligible, without Greek." *Don Juan*, XI. lx.

It is not to be overlooked that Keats allegedly glossed Chapman's *Homer*, a fact or fiction that attains special significance when one considers that by Keats's time Homer had been translated into English by quite a number of eminent translators, i.e. Pope and Cowper just to name two of the most important ones. It might not be generally known that the only alternative version of Homer available to Keats was Pope's, and thus for some readers it might well appear that 'On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*' – besides being a testimony of poetic self-election<sup>7</sup> – takes a clear position as to *which* translation of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* should be read. Keats's praise of Chapman, and that this praise has been confirmed by a large number of readers over the past almost two hundred years is a phenomenon worth close consideration, all the more so, since with the publication of scholarly prose-translations – as we may expect – such individual and idiosyncratic choices as the Romantic poet's should have been disregarded once for all both by the most ardent champions of fidelity and by those who search for some specific "Homeric" criteria in the translated texts. Unfortunately, such expectations are not met when we begin to read such prose-renditions. Let us, for example, take A. T. Murray's translations the *Odyssey* rendered in 1919 and the *Iliad* in 1924, published together with the Greek text in the *Loeb Classical Library*, and read what the distinguished Homer scholar, George E. Dimock says about it:

No more faithful translation of Homer was ever made, and its elegance matches its fidelity. Homer's formulaic epithets, phrases, and sentences were consistently rendered, and his artificial amalgam of dialects and archaic vocabulary were, as was perfectly acceptable in those days, reflected in archaic English.<sup>8</sup>

After this panegyric, it is quite interesting and rather perplexing that Dimock actually *revised* Murray's translation "in such a way as to preserve its excellences while bringing all that sounds unnatural into line with today's canons of English."<sup>9</sup> But it is even more interesting that, in spite of the availability of such translations, the view that Chapman is "faithful to the essence of Homer's conception" more than most other translators frequently occurs in the scholarly

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jamey Hecht, 'Scarcity and Poetic Election in Two Sonnets of John Keats' in *ELH* 61 (1994) pp. 103-120.

<sup>8</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol. 1, transl. A. T. Murray, revised by George E. Dimock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919, 1995<sup>2</sup>) p. vii.

<sup>9</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*.

discourse.<sup>10</sup> Chapman's *Homer*, or, rather the effect it made upon the speaker of Keats's sonnet overshadows most major translations of the Greek epics; the Renaissance translation constantly makes its presence felt in the academic discourse about Homer-translations, it lurks there like the promise of some final argument too profound to put up.

My purpose within the confined scope of this paper is to expound, and at the same time question this argument. In what follows, therefore, I shall be concerned with outlining the interpretative strife that, in the long run, had ensured and strengthened the presence of Chapman's *Homer* in the scholarly discourse. As I shall argue, it is the period from Jonson to Keats that with its commendations and condemnations of this translation had – somewhat against the individual interpreters' motives – set the bases for later scholarly perspectives. Presenting the early reception history of Chapman's *Homer* from such an angle, of course, requires reflection on the underlying principles governing these responses. One model for this type of inquiry is hinted at by Dr. Johnson himself who – at the close of the *Life of Milton* – claimed rather sarcastically that “his [Milton's] work is not the greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first.”<sup>11</sup> Johnson appears to argue that Milton can only be second to Homer, but his emphasis (“*only because...*”) also suggests that all this is said with a certain amount of cynicism. In this way, the hierarchy posited between (say) the Homeric works and *Paradise Lost* is not a matter of some objectively definable poetic merit, but rather of temporal precedence, a factor irrelevant from the perspective of either poetics or aesthetics. Likewise, one may safely apply the Johnsonian criterion to each and every Homer translation that followed Chapman's without falling into the trap of either asserting or negating the “greatness” of any one text. It is, however, my contention that in the case of the critical evaluation of Chapman's *Homer*, something more than the text's obvious temporal precedence over all English language Homer translations<sup>12</sup> is at stake;

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<sup>10</sup> George de Forest Lord, *Homeric Renaissance. The Odyssey of George Chapman* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956) p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* vol. 1., (London: Dent, 1968) p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Actually, almost all of them. As David Penon George points out in his Latin dissertation on the *versiones Homeri Anglicae*, “[a]tque primus quidem omnium Arthurus Hall Homerum in linguam Anglicam transferre conatus anno p. Chr. n. MDLXXXI. decem priores Iliadis libros Anglicae redditus edidit.” But Arthur Hall's version, as Penon hastily adds quoting “Thomas Wartonus,” “has no other merit than that of being the first appearance of a part of the *Iliad* in an English dress,” since

therefore, in the final section of my paper I shall provide a possible theoretical context for the responses I shall now enumerate.

## II.

In his "Preface" to the *Whole Works of Homer*, Chapman mentions with great indignation "a certaine envious Windfucker,"

that hovers up and downe, laboriously engrossing al the aire with his  
luxurious ambition and buzzing into every eare my detraction –  
affirming I turne Homer out of the Latine onely, & c – that sets all his  
associates and the whole rabble of my maligners on their wings with him  
to bear about my empaire and poyson my reputation.<sup>13</sup>

This person, according to Phyllis Bartlett, must have been Ben Jonson,<sup>14</sup> Chapman's one-time friend, whose 1618 poem, 'To my worthy and honour'd Friend, M<sup>r</sup> George Chapman, on his Translation of Hesiods Works, & Dayes,' seems to contradict the aggressively self-justifying tone of the 'Preface':

Whose worke could this be, *Chapman*, to refine  
Old *Hesiods* Ore, and give it us; but thine,  
Who hadst before wrought in rich *Homers* Mine?

What treasure hast thou brought us! and what store  
Still, still, dost thou arrive with, at our shore,  
To make thy honour, and our wealth the more!

If all the vulgar Tongues, that speake this day,  
Were askt of thy Discoveries; They must say,  
To the Greeke coast thine onely knew the way.

Such Passage hast thou found, such Returnes made,  
As, now, of all men, it is call'd thy Trade:  
And who make thither else, rob, or invade.<sup>15</sup>

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it was done exclusively from a French translation. Cf. David Georgius Penon, *Versiones Homeri Anglicae. Inter se Comparatae* (Bonnae: Apud Adolphum Marcum, MDCCCLXI) p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> All quotes are from the following edition: Allardyce Nicoll, ed., *Chapman's Homer* 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956, 1998<sup>2</sup>) p. 17. I will only deal with excerpts from the *Iliads*.

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis Bartlett, 'Chapman's Revisions in his *Iliads*' *ELH* 2 (1935) pp. 92-119.

<sup>15</sup> C.H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *The Works of Ben Jonson* vol. VIII. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) pp. 388-389.

Thus, even though Chapman rages against Jonson in the "Preface," the "Windfucker" published the very first significant response to the famous translations. But let us consider the rhetoric of this short encomium by Jonson. The speaker's use of a nautical metaphor to pay tribute to Chapman's Homer translations is later picked up in Gay's "Welcome from Greece" written on the occasion of Pope's finishing his translation of the *Iliad*:

Long hast thou, friend! Been absent from thy soil,  
Like patient *Ithacus* at siege of *Troy*;  
[...]  
Did I not see thee when thou first sett'st sail  
To seek adventures in *Homer's* land?  
Did I not see thy sinking spirits fail,  
And wish thy bark had never left the strand?  
Ev'n in mid ocean often didst thou quail,  
And oft lift up thy holy eye and hand,  
Praying the Virgin dear, and saintly choir,  
Back to the port to bring thy bark entire.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding the apparent similarity between the discovery motifs in Jonson's and Gay's poems, it is important to note that while the former defines Chapman's endeavour as "Discovery," the latter regards Pope's completion of his enterprise as something akin to Ulysses's homecoming. The comparison of these two tropes may throw new light on the interpretative practices they represent. Although both works pretend to be written only to praise the person of the translator, the rhetoric of Jonson's dedication turns the readers' attention to the Chapman translations themselves. While Gay's Ulysses parallel emphasises the perseverance of the poet-translator (since Ulysses himself is the ante-type of the "enduring" hero), Jonson's reflection on Chapman's "Discovery," and that this discovery is authorized by the quality of the enterprise (Such Passage... such Returnes) discloses that the speaker positions Chapman as the only true interpreter of Homer in the English speaking world of the time. Moreover, this identification goes hand in hand with denying the possibility of a "better" or simply a "later" version of either Hesiod or Homer, which would of course be robbing or "invading," an opinion that seems especially ironic from the perspective of Gay's poem, since the *Ithacus* mentioned in "Welcome from

<sup>16</sup> David Nicol Smith, ed., *The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966) pp. 164-168.



Greece" was indeed one of those invaders who caused the destruction of Troy. With this manoeuvre of "idolising" Chapman and his translations, therefore, Jonson prepares the ground for the later strains of condemning Pope, a critical trend that – as we shall see – reaches its height with the early Romantics. Two hundred years had to pass until (say) Coleridge re-opened Chapman's translation. In the meantime, Jonson's praise of Chapman turned abruptly into Dryden's hardly explicable scorn and contempt.

There is, as might be expected, a considerably ambivalent stance towards Chapman's works in the prose writings of Dryden who also translated parts of the *Iliad* and the whole *Aeneid*. In his "Dedication of Examen Poeticum," for instance, there is a parallel strain of agreeing with and, at the same time, condemning Chapman's methods. The speaker of the dedication (Dryden) defends the paraphractical rendering of Chapman and considers it superior to the methods of those who "run into the other extream" (i. e. those who translate word-for-word); furthermore, he also approves of the occasional use of *synaloepha* in Chapman's *Homer*, "which lyes before me" (an unwise confession that was going to be an easy prey to Johnson and Pope – as we shall see). Nonetheless, towards the end of the "Dedication," we find the following bold assertion:

The Earl of Mulgrave and Mr. Waller, two of the best judges of our age, have assured me that they could never read over the translation of Chapman without incredible pleasure and extreme transport. This admiration of theirs must needs proceed from the author himself; for the translator has thrown him down as low as harsh numbers, improper English, and a monstrous length of verse could carry him.<sup>17</sup>

Dryden's inconsistent evaluation of Chapman's *Homer* is, of course, ruthlessly exploited by the generations that followed. Although Pope laments that "Mr. Dryden did not live to translate the *Iliad*," he also observes that the *poet laureate* was too indebted to Chapman's translation: "[h]e seems to have had too much regard to Chapman, whose words he sometimes copies, and has unhappily followed him in passages where he wanders from the original."<sup>18</sup> Dr. Johnson goes even further when he claims that "[Dryden] gives a false account of Chapman's versification, and he discovers in the preface to his *Fables* that he

<sup>17</sup> John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays* vol. 1. (London: Dent, 1971) pp. 163-67.

<sup>18</sup> 'Preface to Homer's *Iliad*' in Maynard Mack, ed., *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope* vol. 7. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967) p. 22.



translated the first book of the *Iliad*, without knowing what was in the second.”<sup>19</sup> However, the famous lexicographer has a couple of words to say about Pope’s translation, too:

With Chapman, whose work, though now totally neglected, seems to have been popular almost to the end of the last century, he [Pope] had very frequent consultations, and perhaps never translated any passage till he had read his version, which indeed he has been sometimes suspected of using instead of the original.<sup>20</sup>

Pope, naturally, thinks differently about the matter. The *marginalia* in his copy of Chapman’s *Homer* clearly indicate the translator’s dissatisfaction with the Renaissance version of Homer. One of these notes is especially interesting; it is written beside and under Chapman’s rendering of a passage from the first book of the *Iliad* and reads: “Vd. Dryden/WT [wit] is mark’d not in Homer.”<sup>21</sup> If we consider the Augustan poet’s critique of Dryden’s version, the implication of this passing remark, that is, the application of Dryden’s criteria to Chapman’s *Homer*, is rather startling. Nevertheless, it seems that, in Pope’s “Preface to Homer’s *Iliad*,” the two classicists, for once, unite to find fault with Chapman’s version. In the “Preface,” Pope is dissatisfied with Chapman’s *Homer* on precisely the same grounds as Dryden was, i.e. the length of the verse-line, the “expression involved in fustian,” the unnecessary enthusiasm of the speaker and, furthermore, the infamous interpolations or digressions that, even to this day, have annoyed so many critics of Chapman.<sup>22</sup>

As it seems, the reactions to Chapman’s *Homer* and to Jonson’s reflections on the very same work emerged within the context of a critical triangle two of whose members (Dryden and Pope) try to play down the importance of Chapman’s translation on the basis of its poetic diction. Johnson’s role in this scenario seems to be that of the sober scholar who tries to harmonise this unique, and by all means fruitful interplay of responses by pointing out the indebtedness of both Dryden and Pope to Chapman. However, when Johnson claims Chapman’s version to be “totally neglected,” his critical position seems to fail. “Total neglect” would obviously imply the disappearance of the text from either the scholarly discourse or the later translations, but this – as we shall see – does

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, vol. 1, p. 228.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, vol. 2, p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> Mack, vol. 10, p. 475. Cf. also *Iliads* I. 447-9.

<sup>22</sup> Mack, vol. 7, p. 21.

not happen. It is precisely with the two Augustans, Dryden and Pope, that mere opinion is reinforced by the creative re-readings and re-writings of Chapman's texts. How are we to decide about the "presence" of Chapman's *Homer* in the discourse of later epochs, when we observe the obvious difference of opinion in Johnson's account and the personal remarks of the translators? The best way is to contrast the contending texts, especially since the direct influence of Chapman's *Homer* is all the more conspicuous in these early versions. Let us, therefore, take a glance at how the three translators interpret the opening lines of the *Iliad*:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος  
 οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,  
 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν  
 ἠρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν  
 οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἔτελείτο βουλή,  
 ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε  
 Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

The wrath do thou sing, O goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans, and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of warriors, and made themselves to be the spoil for dogs and all manner of birds; and thus the will of Zeus was being brought to fulfilment; – sing thou thereof from the time when at the first there parted in strife Atreus' son, king of men, and goodly Achilles.<sup>23</sup>

Achilles' banefull wrath resound, O Goddess, that imposd  
 Infinite sorrowes on the Greekes, and many brave soules losd  
 From breasts Heroique – sent them farre, to that invisible cave  
 That no light comforts; and their lims to dogs and vultures gave  
 To all which Jove's will gave effect; from whom first strife begunne  
 Betwixt Atrides, king of men, and Thetis' godlike Sonne.

(*Iliads*, 1-6)

The wrath of Peleus' son, O Muse, resound;  
 Whose dire effects the Grecian army found:  
 And many a heroe, king, and hardy knight,  
 Were sent, in early youth, to shades of night;  
 Their limbs a prey to dogs and vultures made;

<sup>23</sup> Homer, *The Iliad* vol. 1., transl. A. T. Murray (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998) p. 3. – henceforth *Loeb*.

So was the sov'reign will of Jove obey'd:  
 From that ill omen'd hour when strife begun  
 Betwixt Atrides great, and Thetis god-like son...<sup>24</sup>

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring  
 Of woes unnumber'd, heavn'ly Goddess, sing;  
 That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign  
 The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain;  
 Whose limbs unbury'd on the naked shore,  
 Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore:  
 Since great Achilles and Atrides strove,  
 Such was the sov'reign doom, and such the will of Jove!<sup>25</sup>

Chapman's characteristic rendering of these first lines provides some of the important guidelines for the two Augustans who follow. Thus, the translator's synecdochic rendering of the Greek pronoun "αὐτούς" (referring to the bodies of the "ἥρωες") as "limbs" is conscientiously followed by both Dryden and Pope, just as the apparent *periphrases* of the underworld which, nevertheless, are handled differently by all three translators. None of the texts mentions the name of Hades straightforwardly, but Chapman's "invisible cave that no light comforts" besides being an actual intratextual reference to the description of the sudden appearance of Hades's domain in Book Twenty,<sup>26</sup> is also explained by one of the translator's etymologizing notes in the "Commentarius" to the First Book:

Αἰδι προϊάψεν: αἰδης (being compounded *ex à privativa*, and εἶδω, *video*) signifies, *locus tenebrosus*, or (according to Virgil) *sine luce domus*; and therefore (different from others) I so convert it.<sup>27</sup>

As his *marginalia* testifies, Pope took heed of Chapman's gloss,<sup>28</sup> and probably that is why "gloomy" is added to "Pluto's reign," the *duplicatis verbis* in which – again, possibly due to Chapman's mention of Vergil – the Latin name of the underworld-deity is used. Dryden's "shades of night" in turn, is the most remote figurative rendering of the original: instead of the Greek god, it recalls such

<sup>24</sup> John Dryden, *Fables Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid, W. Creech and J. Balfour, 1773) – henceforth *Fables*.

<sup>25</sup> Mack, vol. 7, pp. 82-85 – henceforth Pope's *Iliad*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the "dread and dank abodes" of Hades "wherfor the very gods have loathing" (*Loeb* XX. 64-5)

<sup>27</sup> *Iliads*, I. 3n.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Mack, vol. 10, p. 475.

Homeric stock-euphemisms of death as “and down upon the eyes of him came the darkness of night, and enfolded him.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it is essential to note that Dryden falls into his own trap in translating the original’s seventh line by Chapman’s own words. Only two words differ in Dryden’s “Betwixt Atrides great, and Thetis’ god-like son” from Chapman’s “Betwixt Atrides, king of men, and Thetis’ godlike Sonne.” But while the latter’s heptameter (fairly faithful to the original) is in perfect accord with the fourteeners surrounding it, Dryden’s alexandrine (a feet Dryden actually attributed to Chapman) sticks out from among the heroic couplets.<sup>30</sup> From this angle, Pope’s claim that Dryden had “too much regard” for Chapman appears to be justified. Nonetheless, it appears that Pope also had too much regard for Dryden. As his earliest versions of the opening line show, he used Dryden’s phrase (“The Wrath of Peleus’ Son”) to translate the sublime Μῆνιν...Πηληϊάδεω. Another excerpt that will hopefully show that Pope owes at least as much to the Renaissance translator as his predecessor is one of the climaxes of the *Iliad*, the lament of Andromache in the sixth book:

Ἔκτορ, ἀτὰρ σύ μοι ἔσσι πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ  
 ἤδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δέ μοι θαλερὸς παρακοίτης·  
 ἀλλ’ ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν’ ἐπὶ πύργῳ,  
 μὴ παῖδ’ ὀρφανικὸν θήης χήρην τε γυναιῖκα

Nay, Hector, thou art to me father and queenly mother, thou art brother, and thou art my stallwart husband. Come now, have pity, and remain here on the wall, lest thou make thy child an orphan and thy wife a widow. (Loeb, VI. 429-432)

...Yet, all these [my mother and father] gone from me  
 Thou amply renderst all: thy life makes still my father be,  
 My mother, brothers – and besides thou art my husband too,  
 Most lov’d, most worthy. Pitie then, deare love, and do not go,  
 For, thou gone, all these go againe; pitie our common joy,

<sup>29</sup> Cf. e.g. *Loeb* XIII. 580. for only *one* appearance of the stock-phrase.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Dryden’s opinion on the alexandrine: “I frequently make use of the triplet rhymes, and for the same reason, because they bound the sense. And therefore, I generally join these two licences [the Pindaric line and the triplet] together, and make the last verse of the triplet a Pindaric [...]. Spenser is my example for both these privileges of English verses; and Chapman has followed him in his translation of Homer.” John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, vol. 2, p. 247. To my knowledge, Chapman never used the alexandrine in any of his translations.

Lest (of a father's patronage, the bulwarke of all Troy)  
 Thou leav'st him a poore widdowe's charge...  
 (*Iliads*, VI. 464-470)

But thou, my Hector, art thyself alone  
 My Parents, Brothers, and my Lord in one.  
 O kill not all my kindred o're again,  
 Nor tempt the Dangers of the dusty Plain;  
 But in this Tow'r, for our Defence, remain.  
 Thy Wife and Son are in thy Ruin lost:  
 This is a Husband's and a Father's Post...  
 (*Fables*, 82-88)

Yet while my Hector still survives, I see  
 My father, mother, brethren, all in thee.  
 Alas! my parents, brothers, kindred, all,  
 Once more will perish, if my Hector fall.  
 Thy wife, thy infant, in thy danger share:  
 Oh prove a husband's and a father's care!  
 (*Pope's Iliad*, VI. 544-549)

Chapman's influence is most easily detectable in the later translations. In the Greek text, Hector's wife first recounts the loss of her father, mother and family at the hands of Achilles, and then, as in the quoted excerpt, attributes the virtues of the lost relatives to the still-living Hector. This rhetorical device carries the *implicit* content that, with the loss of Hector, the woes of Andromache and the child shall be greatly multiplied: that is, she will probably relive all those sorrows that she felt upon the loss of her family. Needless to say, Homer leaves this inference to his readers/hearers. But if one turns to the *Iliads* of Chapman, it is clearly observable that the translator in lines 462-463 makes what is to be inferred in Homer explicit. Chapman's text does what structuralist translation theory terms the *amplification* of the subject matter's implicit status.<sup>31</sup> However, the fact that the first English translator of Homer "amply rendereth all" would not appear to derive from some semantical incommensurability between the two tongues (since one would be able to leave the content implicit just as easily in English), but rather from the necessity of some fine sparkle of wit which – as far as Pope and Dryden are concerned – "is not mark'd in Homer." It is rather strange then that

<sup>31</sup> Eugene A. Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) p. 227.

both of the later translators follow Chapman's conceit of the second death of Andromache's family, which in Dryden's version is reinforced by didactic passages on the role of Hector as a father and a husband.<sup>32</sup> All in all, it seems that Steven Shankman is right to point out that "[...In Pope's *Iliad*,] the gratuitous play on words and parenthetical prolixity as well as the gratuitous conceit recall precisely those elements of Chapman's style to which Pope objected."<sup>33</sup> As a result, we witness how the creative re-reading and re-writing of Chapman's *Homer* happens on at least two levels; for re-writing in the case of Dryden and Pope does not simply result in further (competing) alternatives, but also in a tutelage to the text they intended to replace.

Given that Dryden and Pope were indebted both directly and indirectly to Chapman, one would have expected that the scholarly and critical literature of Romanticism had objected to the Augustan versions on precisely the same ground. However, instead of the solemn critical strain of Johnson the Romantic evaluation of Chapman's *Homer* pursues the tradition of uncritical adulation initiated by Jonson. Lamb, for example, feels bound to contrast "the pert modern Frenchify'd notes" of Pope with the

solemn weighty prefaces of Chapman, writing in full faith, as he evidently does, of the plenary inspiration of his author, [Chapman's metre] is Milton's blank verse cloth'd with rhyme [...] I shall die in the belief that he has improved upon Homer, in the *Odyssee* particular...<sup>34</sup>

And Coleridge's is of the same opinion as Lamb. In his "Seven Lectures upon Shakespeare," he remarks that Chapman's *Homer* is "as truly original as the *Fairie Queene*," and if translator had been consistent enough with the use of the heroic metre (i.e., if he had used it in the *Iliads*, too), the outcome "might have saved us from Pope."<sup>35</sup>

The reception of Chapman's *Homer*, after the work's publication, has proceeded along two easily separable lines. On the one hand, there are Augustans who criticize the text but cannot help being influenced by it; but on the other hand, there is the emergence of a strong literary *cult* that adulates the translation

<sup>32</sup> Pope's version seems to suggest some borrowing from Dryden in this respect. On Pope's general indebtedness to Dryden's *Ilias* and the tribute of both of them to Milton in their translations of Homer see especially Peter J. Conelly, 'Pope's *Iliad*: *Ut Pictura Translatio*' *SEL* 21 (1981) pp. 439-455.

<sup>33</sup> Steven Shankman, *Pope's Iliad: Homer in the Age of Passion* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) p. 126.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Park, ed., *Lamb as a Critic* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 174.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in George de Forest Lord, *Homeric Renaissance. The Odyssey of George Chapman* pp. 20-21.

by providing ample praise *without* the deep knowledge of Chapman's text that is evident in the translations and commentaries of Dryden and Pope. It would be reasonable to expect that, with the advent of modern criticism, these competitive positions fade away, and so it is all the more intriguing to notice that, in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century, Chapman's *Homer* remains an object of contention just as it was for Pope, Dryden, Lamb, and Coleridge. The reminiscence of the classical tenet of "Wit *versus* Homer" reappears, for example, in Matthew Arnold's essay, "On Translating Homer," when the critic discusses one of Chapman's fanciful tropes:

I say, the poets of a nation that has produced such conceit as that, must purify themselves seven times in the fire before they can hope to render Homer.<sup>36</sup>

And, of course, we are told what that fire is:

He [the translator] will find one English book and one only, where, as in the *Iliad* itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness; and that book is the *Bible*. No one could see this more clearly than Pope saw it: "This pure and noble simplicity," he says, "is nowhere in such perfection as in the Scripture and Homer."<sup>37</sup>

Naturally, Pope's "mistakes" are pointed out in Arnold's grandiose coverage of two preceding centuries of Homer translations. What should be especially noted, again, is the application of Pope's criteria of "Homeric" qualities, i.e. "Simplicity," to Homer-translations, a trend that contributed to the appearance of the Lang-Leaf-Myers prose rendition whose scholarly translators claim that they have reverted to the language of the King James Version, for, just like the *Bible*, Homer uses "words old and plain." Such a position obviously requires the condemnation of Chapman's "luxurious conceits" and the dismissing of such anachronisms as Chapman's labelling the toils of Ulysses amongst the waves as "the horrid tennis."<sup>38</sup>

The reaction to such views was quick and strong. Ezra Pound at the beginning of this century asserts that "Chapman remains the best English

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Arnold, *The Works of Matthew Arnold* vol. 5, (London: Macmillan, 1903) p. 242.

<sup>37</sup> Arnold pp. 239-240.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Homer, *The Complete Works of Homer*. The *Iliad* and The *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* done into English Prose by Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, Ernest Myers. The *Odyssey* done into English Prose by S. H. Butcher and Andrew Lang (New York: Klopfer, n.d.) pp. v-viii.



'Homer', marred though he may be by excess of added ornament," but he also adds that

[t]he nadir of Homeric translation is reached by the Leaf-Lang prose; Victorian faddism having persuaded these gentlemen to a belief in King James fustian [...] In their preface they grumble about Chapman's 'mannerisms', yet their version is full of 'Now behold I' and 'yea even as' and 'even as when' tushery possible only to an age bent on propaganda.<sup>39</sup>

Let us, however, consider E. M. W. Tillyard's position, who makes yet another attempt to question the literary status of Chapman:

Judged as a feat of endurance, Chapman's Homer is indeed a prodigy; judged as a poem, the very things that made it a prodigy destroy its value.<sup>40</sup>

Contrary to the ire he exhibits, however, Tillyard does little actual analysis of the translation. For example, he refers to one of Phyllis Bartlett's articles to introduce the theme of the "ethical bias," but does not bother to name one section of the text where the alleged presence of the ethicist discourse is evident; moreover, he is content to leave the reader with the remark that "Chapman has been overestimated for his translation of Homer, as Pope has been underestimated."<sup>41</sup> But Pope, as we know, had "frequent consultations" with Chapman, hence, Tillyard's passing treatment of the text becomes at least as dubious an enterprise as Pope's was.

This somewhat random selection of judgements on Chapman's *Homer* from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is, of course, not representative. It is, however, not within the scope of this study to create an extensive typology of the modern reception of Chapman's *Homer*, and I have cited Arnold, Pound, and Tillyard only to show that the critical positions drawn as early as Jonson and Dryden have not undergone great change in modern times. It is my contention that the perennial terms of this debate may be found in Keats's sonnet and the problems it poses in relation to the earlier responses. In the final section of my paper, therefore, I shall interpret the special position of "On First Looking into

<sup>39</sup> Ezra Pound, op. cit., pp. 249-250.

<sup>40</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and its Background* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966<sup>2</sup>) p. 348.

<sup>41</sup> Tillyard p. 350. Cf. also Phyllis B. Bartlett, 'The Heroes of Chapman's Homer' *Review of English Studies* 1941, pp. 257-280.

Chapman's *Homer*" within the framework of the opinions we have seen emerging so far.

### III.

The powerful rhetoric of "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*" has been almost over-analyzed by critics, and it is of course not my concern to reproduce these arguments. Let it suffice that the poem may be interpreted as Keats's unfavorable reading of Pope, a quasi-biographical consideration that is likely to shape our reception of the text.<sup>42</sup> At first glance the tropes used by the speaker show the influence of the very first response to Chapman's *Homer*, Jonson's 'Dedication.' As in Jonson's text, we read about "rich *Homers* mine," "Discoveries," and "Passage," in "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*" there are "realms of gold," "western islands" and Cortez discovering the Pacific. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the sonnet is written on the occasion of *first* looking into Chapman's text concerned, as if the speaker were trying to reiterate Jonson's purpose of vindicating Chapman the right to be the only true interpreter of the Homeric epics.

However, the poem also appears to reinterpret Augustan positions. We must not forget that Keats's speaker – in looking for Homer – actually found Chapman. This substitution and displacement (already considered at the beginning of my paper) represents a radical reinterpretation of Jonson's stance; all the more so, since it is immediately followed by another displacement. The grand simile at the very end of the sonnet transfers the reference of the "discovery" motif from the interpreter's enterprise to the reading process, whereby – considering the inter-texts of Jonson and Gay – the sonnet's speaker, as well as the sonnet's reader, are substituted for the translator, and through the persona of Chapman, for Homer. The basic mechanisms of this very same manoeuvre are nevertheless exactly those that we have witnessed in Pope's and Dryden's reinterpretation of Chapman's lines according to and or sometimes against their own particular philosophical or ideological dispositions. Thus, the two types of responses so far enumerated – the acclaim of Jonson, Lamb, and Coleridge, and the suspicion of Dryden, Pope, and Johnson supported by the actual and concrete

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ágnes Péter, *Roppant Szivárvány. A Romantikus Látásmódról* (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1996) pp. 175-76.

re-writing of the text – seem to have been synthesized in Keats's poem, which celebrates Chapman's translation through creative perusal, or we might say, re-creation. This synthesis is, in turn, of foremost importance, since it unites the specific cultic elements in the reception with the critical interpretative measures. Using Péter Dávidházi's terminology, we might say that Keats's sonnet represents a powerful *re-initiation* into the excellences of Chapman's *Homer* by both praising the author and allowing him to disappear behind the persona of the reader.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, the mention of literary cults in relation to the evaluation of reception history is not without problems. As Dávidházi himself points out, the survey of a cult has always to separate the critical response from attendant cultic phenomena, highly subjective occurrences of the reception.<sup>44</sup> Up to the appearance of Keats's sonnet, this was a more or less feasible enterprise, but as soon as the two positions became inseparably bound together in "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*," such a discrete division was no longer possible. It is evident that Dávidházi – discussing the veneration of an author and a set of primary texts that are related to that author – will foreground only one implication of "kultusz" (from the Latin "cultus" with the double meaning of both "worship" and "cultivation").<sup>45</sup> By contrast, Keats's sonnet embraces both meanings of "cultus," since it involves both the "cultivation" and the "worship" of a translation, a highly problematic situation, as here the worshipped and cultivated texts (and their interpreter) are but mere shadows of the "original." But it is exactly because of the secondary nature of all translations that their scholarly or professional critique must – in almost all cases – point out their failings and virtues by referring to other – sometimes only prospective – versions, which, in some favourable textual environment, engenders the inter-textual play we have seen in Pope's and Dryden's works. However, when this critical "cultivation" of the text is reinforced – as in Keats's sonnet – by "worship" that is, the cultic

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Dávidházi Péter, *Isten Másodszülöttje. A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989) Dávidházi's term is presented here in my translation.

<sup>44</sup> Dávidházi pp. 12-15.

<sup>45</sup> Dávidházi p. 4. Dávidházi, at length, votes for the "worship" use of the word, but his ironic self-reflexive remark on p. 296 makes it clear that the total "extirpation" of the cultic element is not possible, not even in such a semi-metacritical discourse as his. A little excursus on the same matter in a recent interview makes the underlying assumptions in the above mentioned textual locus even more explicit. Cf. "Siet valahová?" (Dávidházi Péterrel beszélget Szirák Péter) *Alföld* 47 (3-4); (1996) pp. 55-56.

element, we witness *the survival of an ephemeron* – as all translations may be handled as *ephemera*, especially in a textual universe in which there are more than two hundred of them. Thus, the unification of the cultic and critical elements in the reception of Chapman's *Homer* turns out to be the very factor that ensures the canonisation of the text. As a consequence, the presence of these often contradictory receptive strategies in Keats's sonnet does not only produce a situation which may best be signified by an oxymoron, the survival of an ephemeron, but – as we have seen – also contributes considerably to the ambivalent and sometimes contradictory critical positions in modern scholarly discourse.

That the Romantic sonnet is partly prone to assert its influence through a special cultic diction is hardly a new perception. Tillyard is probably the first to point this out:

Romantic prejudice prompted Keats to write an indiscreet sonnet on Chapman's *Homer*; a sonnet on the strength of which the book has enjoyed an undeserved reputation that has not yet been exploded.<sup>46</sup>

Tillyard may be right, but, as we can see, his rhetoric works against itself by allowing his diction to aspire to Keats's strength; that is, his critical stance remains ambiguous precisely because he wants to account for the strange shift in the reception history of Chapman's *Homer* that is best represented by Keats's sonnet. As a result, any attempt of his to "explode" the reputation of the text has to be a fiasco, since Keats's "indiscreet" sonnet always and already overshadows his discourse, containing an affirmation and a rebuttal of the "objective" scholarly enterprise.

Such considerations may only strengthen our conviction that the interpretative strife that Chapman's *Homer* is likely to stir up even nowadays is by and large due to the specific rupture in its reception-history. For Keats's sonnet proves to have set back the development of responses to the very beginning of the process of reception: the translator's comprehension. Surely, the sonnet maintains its influence through its "presence," thereby assuring a secure position for Chapman's *Homer*, too. However, it is precisely this duality, the presence of both Keats and Chapman, that frustrates any interpretative attempt to break from the praise of Johnson, or the ambivalent scorn of Dryden and Pope, since in this sonnet – whenever and wherever it is read – the reader is re-initiated into the very

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<sup>46</sup> E.M.W. Tillyard p. 348.

process of translating by assuming the position of the speaker / translator / discoverer / original epic poet. In other words, by the cult's necessary leaping over its own boundaries and entering the critical discourse, Chapman's *Homer* has remained, and is likely to remain, one of the most important "present objects" in the realm of Homer translations and translation studies in general.