

**TRANSLATING THE POET:
ALEXANDER POPE’S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HOMERIC BIOGRAPHICAL
TRADITION IN HIS TRANSLATIONS OF THE *ILIAD* AND THE *ODYSSEY****

Abstract

This article explores Alexander Pope’s experience as a translator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, particularly his engagement with Homer as a poet and his biographical tradition. This study focusses on how Homer features in Pope’s correspondence as he works on the translations, how the Greek poet is described in the prefatory essay by Thomas Parnell and Pope’s own notes to the text, and finally how his physical presence materialises in the illustrations within Pope’s translations. This article suggests that by engaging with the biography of Homer Pope explores issues such as poetic authority and divine inspiration, promote his own translations against European competitors, and ultimately establish himself as a translator and as a poet. Throughout the process, Homer appears as a presence that forces Pope constantly to challenge himself, until he feels he can stand a comparison with the greatest poet ever.

Introduction

Among the most famous translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are those made by Alexander Pope between 1715 and 1726. They were a product of their times – a modern scholar commented that ‘this is Homer in a powdered wig declaiming in a baroque theatre’.¹ Yet, they

* *The Iliad of Homer*. Translated by Mr Pope. With notes partly by W. Broome. An Essay on the life, writings and learning of Homer by T. Parnell. (London: Printed by W. Bowyer for Bernard Lintot, 1715-1720); *The Odyssey of Homer*. Translated into English verse, by Pope, W. Broome, and E. Fenton; with notes by W. Broome. A general view of the Epic poem, and of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, extracted from Bossu. Postscript, by Mr Pope.

were influential enough to deserve a place in the major exhibition on Troy at the British Museum as one of the main phases of the transmission and circulation of Homeric poetry from antiquity to today, alongside, for example, the *editio princeps* by Demetrius Chalcondylas (Florence, 1488).² Homeric poetry, and the task of translating it, played a major role in Pope's life and work: his interest in Homeric poetry began very early, and lasted a lifetime. He was born in 1688 and, as he claims in the Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace (53-54):

Bred up at home, full early I begun,
To read in Greek the wrath of Peleus' son.³

In a similar vein, Pope writes in a letter that Homer 'was the first author that made me catch the itch of poetry, when I read him in my childhood'.⁴ Another of the 'early indications of his devotion to the poet'⁵ was a play based on the *Iliad* that he wrote at the age of twelve and that was then produced by his fellow pupils. His debut as a poet, in 1709, included a translation of

Homer's *Battle of the Frogs and Mice* translated by T. Parnell, corrected by Mr Pope. (London: Printed for Bernard Lintot, 1725-1726).

¹ L. G. Kelly, *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (Oxford, 1979), 59.

² *Troy: myth and reality*, British Museum (London), 21 November 2019 – 8 March 2020. Website: <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/troy-myth-and-reality>>, accessed 22 January 2020.

³ All quotations from Pope's works are from J. Butt *et al.* (eds), *The Twickenham Edition of the Works of Alexander Pope*, 11 vols (London, 1939-69) – henceforth abbreviated *TE*, followed by volume and page number.

⁴ The text of Pope's correspondence is taken from G. Sherburn (ed.), *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956) – henceforth abbreviated *Correspondence*, followed by volume and page number. This letter is addressed to Broome, 16 June 1715 (*Correspondence* 1, 297).

⁵ J. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca, 1991), 191.

the episode of Sarpedon in the *Iliad* (from books 12 and 16).⁶ Among other projects, he embarked on what was perhaps his most challenging poetic enterprise, the translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: the first volume of the *Iliad* was published in 1715 and the last in 1720, while the *Odyssey* was published between 1725 and 1726. As Shankman notes, that is ‘some sixteen years of a young poet’s life [...] spent with Homer’.⁷

Pope’s attitude towards Homer is to be understood within the trends of the literary debates that animated the eighteenth century, dominated by the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Battle of the Ancients and Moderns) started by Charles Perrault in 1688.⁸ Homer was then one of the main targets of the attacks of the modernists – ‘censured for his comic gods, his ill-mannered heroes, his digressive and garrulous style, and the frequency of ‘low’ details in his narrative, particularly in the similes’.⁹ But for Pope, Homer was an important witness of the heroic past and, more than that, a voice addressing questions of contemporary, indeed eternal, importance. In his Introduction to the *Iliad* (3) he claims that:

Homer is universally allow’d to have had the greatest Invention of any writer whatever [...] his invention remains yet unrival’d. Nor is it a Wonder if he has been acknowledg’d in That which is the very Foundation of poetry. It is the Invention that in different degrees distinguishes all great Genius’s.

⁶ J. Ferraro, ‘Political discourse in Alexander Pope’s Episode of Sarpedon: variations on the theme of kingship’, *The Modern Language Review* 88, 1 (1993), 15-25.

⁷ S. Shankman, ‘Pope’s Homer and his poetic career’, in P. Rogers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope* (Cambridge, 2007), 63.

⁸ On the *Querelle* and the place of Homer in it, see Levine (n. 5), 121-147.

⁹ R. Sowerby, ‘The Decorum of Pope’s *Iliad*’, *Translation and Literature* 13, 1 (2004), 50.

This great genius, Pope suggests, is able to drive his audience out of itself through the power of his poetry, and turns the reader ‘in one place to a Hearer, in another to a Spectator’ (4).¹⁰ As suggested in a famous passage from his *Essay on Criticism* (which was published in 1711, while Pope was working on his *Iliad*), Homeric poetry offers an all-encompassing gaze on the world, and mirrors the world in all its nuances, so much so that ‘Nature and Homer were, he found, the same’ (135).¹¹

It is clear, therefore, that Homeric poetry held a special place in the eighteenth century, and Pope engaged very closely with it. But how, precisely, did he engage with it? What did it mean for Pope, as a poet and as a man, to approach and bring to completion the task of translating the greatest poems of all time? While scholarship has long worked on the translations themselves, debating their poetic value and impact on Pope’s original poetry,¹² this article will focus on a different aspect, namely the personal relationship that Pope developed with Homer the poet. Throughout his works and indeed his life, Pope interacted not only with Homeric poetry, its values and its language, but also with Homer himself – almost as if he felt the Greek poet’s physical presence at his side. Recent scholarship has developed the idea of ‘embodiment of literature’: for example, Graziosi has suggested that the lived, embodied

¹⁰ In claiming so, Pope, like the ancient audiences, recognises the ἐνέργεια of Homeric poetry, its ability to draw in the mind of the reader or the hearer an image of the scene it describes. See for example Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (3.10.1411b-1412a), on which see M. Westin, ‘Aristotle’s rhetorical *Energeia*: an extended note’, in *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 20, 3 (2017), 252-261.

¹¹ See also *TE* 1, 228: ‘It is because Homer was able to see so clearly this nature in her original splendour, and thereby mirror her so faithfully in his work, that Pope can say that “Nature and Homer were the same”’.

¹² An overview of scholarship on Pope’s translation of Homer and its increase in the last few decades is given by P. Rogers, ‘Introduction’, in Rogers (n. 7), 8-9. A study of the influence of the Classics on Pope’s original poetry is offered in H. Weinbrot, ‘Pope and the Classics’, in Rogers (n. 7), 76-88.

experience of readers and admirers is one of the factors upon which authorial representations depend.¹³ Ancient and modern readers alike, ‘stimulated by a desire for the figure “behind” the texts’,¹⁴ establish a personal connection with a work of literature by drawing up in their mind – or on a portrait – the face of the ancient author as they imagine it, wishing they could meet them in person, and going to (or looking for) their tomb in order to feel physically closer to them. This, I argue, happens to translators as well. In every step of his development as a translator, as well as a poet in his own right, Pope confronts himself with Homer, a silent but tangible figure at his side.¹⁵

Although Pope is not the only author who engages in an embodied experience of Homeric poetry,¹⁶ his is a particularly interesting and important case. As has been noted, Pope’s is the last major translation of Homer published before Wolf’s revolutionary *Prolegomena ad*

¹³ B. Graziosi, ‘Embodiments of literature’, *Living Poets* (Durham, 2014), <https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Embodiments_of_Literature>, accessed 22 January 2020.

¹⁴ N. Goldschmidt and B. Graziosi, ‘Introduction’, in N. Goldschmidt and B. Graziosi (eds), *Tombs of the Ancient Poets: Between Literary Reception and Material Culture* (Oxford, 2018), 6.

¹⁵ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out that in Pope’s lifetime there seems to have been increasing interest in literary biography, which produced, among other works, various lives of Milton (including the one published in 1698 by John Toland) and Nicholas Rowe’s *Some Account of the Life & c. of Mr William Shakespeare* (1709). This contributes to putting Pope’s interest in Homer’s life into its historical and cultural context.

¹⁶ As suggested by the anonymous reviewer, it is useful to mention briefly the case of George Chapman. In particular, in the dedicatory verses to the Earl of Somerset in his *The Crowne of all Homer’s Workes* (London, 1624; including translations of *Batrachomyomachia*, *Hymns* and *Epigrams*) Chapman seems to draw a parallel between some features of Homer’s life and his own. This work also has an engraved title-page showing a blind and bearded Homer positioned strategically above a not dissimilar bearded Chapman.

Homerum (1795): we could say, with the editor of the Twickenham edition of Pope's work, that 'in a sense, Pope's translation is the end of an old Homer and F. A. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* the beginning of a new'.¹⁷ Wolf highlighted that the Homeric poems were initially composed and transmitted in oral form, as writing did not exist at the time in which Homer was supposed to have lived. Thus, after millennia, the focus was shifting away from the poet Homer as a genius creator, and onto the idea of a more fluid and lengthy process of transmission and refinement of orally composed poetry, only written down for the first time probably under the Peisistratids, and later edited further by the Alexandrian scholars. This means that it was in fact impossible to attribute with certainty any sections of the so-called Homeric poetry to 'Homer', if such poet ever existed.¹⁸ This was a major change in the way people approached and appropriated Homeric poetry and the poet Homer. Even the *Vitae Homeri*, the ancient biographies of Homer that collect centuries of biographical traditions about the poet which were transmitted in the medieval manuscripts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, stopped being published in editions of the Homeric works, and were reinserted only in the twentieth century in the Oxford edition by Thomas W. Allen.¹⁹ But all this happened after Pope, for whom Homer

¹⁷ *TE* 7, lxxi. See also L. G. Canevaro, 'Rhyme and reason: the Homeric translations of Dryden, Pope, and Morris', in S. Bär and E. Hauser (eds), *Reading Poetry, Writing Genre: English Poetry and Literary Criticism in Dialogue with Classical Scholarship*, London / New York (2018), 94.

¹⁸ On Wolf's work and its impact see A. Grafton, 'Prolegomena to Friedrich August Wolf', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981), 101-129; A. Grafton, G. Most, J. Zetzel, *F. A. Wolf: Prolegomena to Homer, 1795. Translated with Introduction and Notes* (Princeton, 1986).

¹⁹ *TE* 7, lxxv. The *Vitae Homeri* are published in the last volume of Allen's edition of Homer: T. W. Allen (ed.), *Homeri Opera*, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1912). This edition was particularly influential as it was part of the Oxford Classical Texts series and was used as the standard text of Homer and the *Vitae Homeri* for a long time. Allen

was still an individual, a real presence, one that he imagined in terms not dissimilar to those of the ancient biographical tradition: a divine, blind, and poor bard. This article will explore this peculiar case of embodiment of Homeric poetry by investigating not Pope's translations, but what stood behind and alongside them: how Homer features in Pope's correspondence as he works on the translations, how the Greek poet is described in the prefatory essay by Thomas Parnell and Pope's own notes to the text, and finally how his physical presence materialises in the illustrations within Pope's translations.

Pope's correspondence

Studying Homeric poetry was, for Pope, a pleasurable experience as well as an opportunity for personal growth. In his *Essay on Criticism* (124-125) he suggests:

Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night.

But translating it was a completely different affair. The task was demanding, at times even (and understandably) daunting, and Pope's correspondence offers interesting and honest glimpses into his feelings at various stages of this enterprise. Already in 1713/14 he claims that the translation was consuming all of his time, and even keeping up with correspondence – something that would give him some relief – was hard.²⁰ It would not take long for him to confess that translating Homer was in fact making him hate anything related to poetry, and writing more generally:

also published one of the first modern studies on the Homeric biographical tradition: T. W. Allen, *Homer. The Origins and the Transmission* (Oxford, 1924).

²⁰ In response to a letter from Addison, on 30 January 1713/14 he writes: 'Your letter found me very busy in my grand undertaking, to which I must wholly give myself up for some time, unless when I snatch an hour to please myself with a distant conversation with you and a few others, by writing' (*Correspondence* 1, 208).

To say truth I am weary of translating; I am weary of poetry itself; I am weary of prose
(thanks to my note). I begin to hate to write at all.²¹

By 1718, Pope comes to the realisation that he has set himself to a ‘cruel, unproportionable task’.²² On the year of the publication of his translation of the *Odyssey*, in 1725, after more than a decade of hard work, Pope states he has had enough of translating:

I mean no more translation, but something domestic, fit for my own country, and for my own time.²³

Only two months later, he expresses his feeling in even more colourful terms:

When I translate again I will be hanged; nay I will do something to deserve to be hanged, which is worse, rather than drudge for such a world as is no judge of your labour.²⁴

But Pope was aware that this task, wearisome as it might have been, was necessary in order not only to provide a wider audience with access to the Homeric poems, but also to prove himself as a poet: the physical presence of Homer and his heroes felt by Pope embodied poetry in its highest form, and Pope constantly measured and compared himself against this ideal, with its challenges and rewards.

The Homer imagined by Pope shares many features with the poet depicted in the ancient biographical tradition, and while trying to exercise his poetic skills and emulate him, the

²¹ To Caryll, 11 October 1715 (*Correspondence* 1, 318). See also the letter to Digby dated 2 June 1717 (*Correspondence* 1, 408): ‘It is not to be exprest how heartily I wish the death of Homer’s heroes, one after another’.

²² To Caryll, 11 August 1718 (*Correspondence* 1, 484).

²³ To Swift, 14 September 1725 (*Correspondence* 2, 322).

²⁴ To Caryll, 23 November 1725 (*Correspondence* 2, 341).

translator even acquired some of the Greek poet's features – but not quite the way he might have been hoping for. Only a few months before the publication of the first volume of the *Iliad*, Pope complains to a correspondent that Homer has taken up all his energy:

I have no better excuse to offer you, that I have omitted a task naturally so pleasing to me as conversing upon paper with you; but that my time and eyes have been wholly employ'd upon Homer, whom I almost fear I shall find but one way of imitating, which is, in his blindness.²⁵

One of the most distinguishing and common traits of the Homeric biographical tradition is that the poet was, or became, blind – for Homer, in some accounts blindness was a sign of his divine inspiration and closeness to the gods, a metaphor for his ability to see what no other human being could see.²⁶ Pope was working hard, but despite his attempts to imitate Homer he was still feeling very distant from achieving the Greek poet's glory – for Pope, blindness was a much more prosaic and human sign of extremely hard and even physically damaging work.

But Homer himself helps Pope to build a strategy in order to tackle his task: as early as 1714, Pope writes that the poet demanded he 'write fifty verses a day, besides learned notes';²⁷ and, just as Homer appeared and accompanied his translator through his work, so when the first

²⁵ To Caryll, 25 July 1714 (*Correspondence* 1, 238).

²⁶ For modern interpretations of Homer's blindness see e.g. B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic* (Cambridge, 2002), 138-163; see also A. Beecroft, 'Blindness and literacy in the *Lives* of Homer', *The Classical Quarterly* 61 (2011), 1-18. As will become clear in what follows, Pope engaged extensively with Homer's blindness, as it features in his notes and illustrations as well.

²⁷ To Gay, 23 September 1714 (*Correspondence* 1, 254).

volume of the *Iliad* is ready for publication Pope announces to his relief that ‘Homer’s image begins already to vanish’ from before him.²⁸

Parnell’s *Essay on Homer* and Pope’s notes

Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) was a poet and friend of Pope, and composed for his friend’s *Iliad* an *Essay on the Life, Writings, and Learning of Homer*. The inclusion of Parnell’s essay is another sign of Pope’s interest in Homer as the embodiment of poetry in its highest form, against which he could measure himself. Two features of this essay, in particular, stand out as revealing of the attitude to Homer behind the translation of his works: its high level of engagement with the ancient biographical tradition, and its overall encomiastic, even apologetic approach to Homer.

Parnell offers a comprehensive and informative biographical introduction to the Greek poet, but also engages critically with the biographical tradition. In his essay, he ‘shall consider him [Homer] Historically as an Author’, while recognising that ‘his Life has been thus rather invented than written’ (27).²⁹ Later, he claims (31):

It looks as if Men imagin’d the Lives of Poets should be Poetically written, that to speak plainly of them, were to speak contemptibly; or that we debase them, when they are plac’d in less glorious Company than those exalted Spirits which they themselves have been fond to celebrate.

Parnell does not question the historicity of Homer’s existence – after all, as explained, this is a work before Wolf – but acknowledges clearly that the biographical tradition of the poet did not necessarily transmit reliable historical information about his life, and might have been

²⁸ To Dr Arbuthnot, 2 September 1714 (*Correspondence* 1, 250).

²⁹ Quotes from Parnell’s essay are from the *TE*.

influenced by audiences' perceptions of his poetry. For example, Parnell suggests, some of the stories circulating about Homer were the 'Effects of extravagant Admiration' and 'Indulgence of Fancy' – as in the case of the genealogies where the poet was connected to other mythical poets and even gods, with the aim 'to raise our Idea to the highest' (30).³⁰ On the other hand, the tradition has handed down less flattering stories that, he claims, must proceed from mere envy – such stories include the episode of Homer's death 'in a manner altogether beneath the Greatness of a Genius' (31), following his inability to solve a riddle posed to him by some fisher-boys, and his defeat in a poetic contest against Hesiod. Parnell seems to deny or contradict anything that might not fit his, or indeed Pope's, idea of the great Homer, and in doing this he adopts an approach that resembles the ancient one. For example, while some biographers claimed that Homer died of despair as he failed to solve the riddle, some make the riddle a simple *terminus post quem* for his death, so as not to question his wisdom; similarly, the vast majority of the ancient sources strive to find a way to mitigate Homer's defeat at the contest, or deny it altogether.³¹ The conclusion of Parnell's essay is just as apologetic (67):

³⁰ Versions of Homer's genealogy – featuring Apollo, the Muses, Orpheus, and Hesiod among others – are found in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 4, in Proclus, *Life of Homer* 4, and in *Suda* s.v. 'Homer' 1. For discussion see M. Kivilo, *Early Greek Poets' Lives: The Shaping of the Tradition* (Leiden, 2010), 12-17 and P. Bassino, *The Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi: A Commentary* (Berlin, 2018), 131-136.

³¹ On Homer's death, compare for example the versions given by Anonymous, *Life of Homer* 1.6 where Homer died 'after finding himself at a loss, since he was not able to solve the riddle', and Ps.-Herodotus, *Life of Homer* 36 where Homer dies 'as a result of illness [...] not from his failure to understand what the boys said'. See overview and discussion of the sources in F. Kimmel-Clauzet, *Morts, tombeaux et cultes des poètes grecs. Étude de la survie des grands poètes des époques archaïque et classique en Grèce ancienne* (Pessac, 2013), 38-48 and 285-297. On the contest with Hesiod, see e.g. the scholium on Hesiod, *Works and Days* 650-662, reporting Plutarch's opinion that the story contains 'nothing of value'. Discussion of the sources in Bassino (n. 30), 5-46.

If ever he appears less than himself, it is from the Time he writ in; and if he runs into Errors, it is from an Excess, rather than a Defect of Genius. Thus he rose over the Poetical World, shining out of like a Sun all at once, which if it sometimes makes too *faint* an Appearance, 'tis to be ascrib'd only to the unkindness of the Season that clouds and obscures it; and if he is sometimes too *violent*, we confess at the same time that we owe all things to his Heat.

The only problem with a poet of Homer's stature is that it is virtually impossible to emulate him and reach his heights (80):

A Work which shall always stand at the top of the sublime Character, to be gaz'd at by Readers with an Admiration of its Perfection, and by Writers with a despair that it should ever be emulated with Success.

Indeed, as we have seen, Pope did feel this despair as he measured himself against Homer, and the feelings expressed in his private correspondence are shared with his public in his notes to the translated text. In the Introduction to the *Iliad* (21) he declares himself 'utterly incapable of doing Justice to *Homer*', and that he merely attempted to offer 'a more tolerable Copy of him than any entire Translation in Verse has yet done'. But at least, unlike Homer, he found support: in the Preface to his *Iliad* (40) he claims:

I have found more Patrons than ever *Homer* wanted. He would have thought himself happy to have met the same Favour at Athens, that has been shewn me by its learned Rival, the University of Oxford. And I can hardly envy him those pompous Honours he

receiv'd after Death, when I reflect on the Enjoyment of so many agreeable Obligations,
and easy Friendships which make the Satisfaction of Life.³²

The comparison with Homer continues and develops in biographical terms. According to his *Vitae*, Homer did receive honours after his death, but constantly struggled to find support in his lifetime: he was a poor, wandering poet, who made his living by teaching letters or reciting his poetry.³³ Pope, on the other hand, received financial benefit from his hard work, and acknowledged it. In *The Second Epistle of the Second Book of Horace* (68-69) he writes:

But (thanks to Homer) since I live and thrive,
Indebted to no prince or peer alive.

As he reflects on the labour required to tackle another massive poetic enterprise, namely the translation of the *Odyssey*, Pope continues to imagine what Homer's experience must have been, and how his own experience relates to it. Both poets faced a demanding task in composing and translating the poem respectively, but it was necessary. In his Postscript to the *Odyssey* (391) Pope writes:

If, after the unmerited success of that translation [i.e. of the *Iliad*], any one will wonder why I would enterprise the *Odyssey*; I think it sufficient to say, that Homer himself did the same, or the world would never have seen it.

³² Another reference to Homer's looking for patrons is found in Pope's notes to *Odyssey* 8.57ff.: remarking that Homer shows his 'colleague' Demodocus receiving all sorts of honour and respects at the court of the Phaeacians, Pope claims: 'Some merry wits have turn'd the last circumstance into raillery, and insinuate that Homer in this place as well as in the former means himself in the person of Demodocus, an intimation that he would not be displeas'd to meet with the like hospitality'.

³³ For example, in Ps.-Herodotus' *Life of Homer* the poet repeatedly needs to rely on other people taking pity on him and offering help (e.g., 9 and 21).

The enterprise might be equally challenging, but the two poems are very different from each other – Pope reflects on this as well, again taking the clue from the thoughts of the ancient audiences, claiming in his postscript to the *Odyssey* (384):

In his own particular taste, and with respect to the Sublime, Longinus preferred the *Iliad*: and because the *Odyssey* was less active and lofty, he judged it the work of the old age of Homer. If this opinion be true, it will only prove, that Homer’s age might determine him in the choice of his subject, not that it affected him in the execution of it: and that which would be a very wrong instance to prove the decay of his imagination, is a very good one to evince the strength of his judgment.

According to part of the tradition aiming to explain the reasons behind the different subject and tone of the two poems, Homer composed the *Iliad* in his youth and the *Odyssey* as an old man. Pope reports only Longinus’ opinion, but the relative chronology of the two poems was a hotly debated topic throughout antiquity.³⁴

While it is becoming clear that Pope is creating his own image of Homer to embody his perception of Homeric poetry, and does so by drawing extensively from the ancient biographical tradition, a comment on one of the most famous passages and characters of the *Odyssey* shows that, for Pope, engaging with this tradition was also a way to establish his own authority as a translator, against his competitors. In a note on *Odyssey* 8.57ff., Pope remarks:

³⁴ The fact that Lucian makes a parodic allusion to this debate in his *True History* (2.20), where he asks Homer himself about it in the famous encounter between the two in the Island of the Blessed, shows how widespread the debate must have been. More generally, Pope is engaging with the very common habit of assigning different poems to different phases of Homer’s life and poetic career depending on their contents, quality, and genre. The comic *Margites*, for example, was often considered as part of Homer’s juvenile production (e.g., *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 3).

It has been generally thought that Homer represents himself in the person of Demodocus: and Dacier imagines that this passage gave occasion to the Ancients to believe that Homer was blind. But that he really was blind is testify'd by himself in the Hymn to Apollo, which Thucydides asserts to be the genuine production of Homer.

As noted, between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century Homer was at the centre of learned discussions all around Europe, and several translations were made available in different European languages.³⁵ The competition between Pope and Anne Dacier, who published translations of Homer in French between 1699 and 1708, is articulated also through their different views on Homer's life. While Dacier follows those who suggest that the tradition of Homer's blindness was inspired by Demodocus, Pope (with the support of Thucydides, 3.104) claims to find a more reliable source in Homer himself, who signs the Hymn to Apollo (169-172) as the 'blind bard from Chios'. This might be, perhaps, a way for Pope to claim a stronger and closer connection with the Greek poet, and a more developed ability to understand him and his works, thus ultimately lending stronger authority to his own interpretation – and translation – of the poems.³⁶

³⁵ For example, Homer was translated into French by Hugues Salel (1580) and into English by George Chapman (1614-1616).

³⁶ The identification of the 'blind bard from Chios' with Homer was not universally accepted in antiquity (the scholium to Pindar's *Nemean Ode* 2.1, for example, attributes the Hymn to the rhapsode Cynaethus). Talking about the 'riddle' of verses 169-172, Graziosi (n. 26), 67 convincingly claims that 'the various hints ... point toward Homer, without making the identification unavoidable'. We do not know whether Pope was aware of the debate surrounding the authorship of the Hymn in ancient and modern times, but Thucydides offered the solution that best served his purposes.

The illustrations

More evidence of Pope's interest in Homer as a person comes from the extreme care he took, from the very beginning of his enterprise, over the illustrations featured in his translations. As early as 1714, before publishing the first volume of the *Iliad*, Pope writes that 'Homer advances so fast, that he begins to look about for the ornaments he is to appear in, like a modish modern author'.³⁷ He took on the administration of the illustration project himself and, in the case of the *Odyssey*, he even personally commissioned the plates from the architect William Kent (1685-1748).³⁸ The editor Lintot seems to have had 'ill designs' and caused some problems,³⁹ but on 15 April 1725 Pope could advertise in the *Evening Post* the imminent publication of his *Odyssey*, taking particular pride in its illustrations that could not be compared to anything ever published before:

In a few days will be published the translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Mr. Pope hereby gives notice, that the first three volumes are ready to be delivered to the subscribers. [...] No other edition of this work is printed on the same paper, or in the same size, or with the ornaments on copper, which are fifty in number, designed by Mr. Kent. Nor will any ever be exposed to sale, or to be procured by any but the subscribers.⁴⁰

In both translations, we find a great number of portraits of Homer alongside several images of the events narrated in the poems. But what did Homer look like? At the time of Pope, it was

³⁷ To Jervas, 16 August 1714 (*Correspondence* 1, 243).

³⁸ G. Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford, 1934), 316.

³⁹ To Broome, 5 March 1725 (*Correspondence* 2, 288). See also *Correspondence* 2, 285 n. 3. On the conflicts between Pope and his editor, and the production and commercialisation of the books, see D. Foxon and J. McLaverty, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade* (Oxford, 1991), 51-101.

⁴⁰ On this advert see also *TE* 9, xiii.

acknowledged that no extant image of the Greek poet could represent his true likeness. In his essay on Homer, Parnell notes (54):

It could not be thought that they who knew so little of the Life of *Homer*, could have a right Knowledge of his *Person*; yet they had Statues of him as of their Gods, whose Forms they had never seen [...]

And yet these fictional portraits offer a consistent image of him – one that seems to emphasise his wisdom and his divine inspiration. Indeed, Parnell continues (54):

but tho' the ancient Portraits of him seem purely notional, yet they agree (as I think *Fabretti* has observ'd) in representing him with a short curl'd Beard, and distinct Marks of Age in his Forehead.⁴¹

There is a clear relationship between these illustrations and the written description of the Greek poet in Pope's *The Temple of Fame* – a work published in 1715, the same year as the first volume of Pope's *Iliad*:

High on the first the mighty Homer shone,
Eternal adamant composed his throne,
Father of verse! in holy fillets drest,
His silver beard waved gently o'er his breast, 185
Tho' blind, a boldness in his looks appears,
In years he seem'd, but not impair'd by years.

⁴¹ The reference is to R. Fabretti, *De columna Trajani syntagma* (Rome, 1683), 345: 'barbam habet horridulam, et crispam, nec nimis longam, caput diadematum' ('he has an unkempt beard, curly but not too long; wears a diadem on his head'). Text and translation from N. Spivey, 'Homer and the sculptors', in J. Bintliff and K. Rutter (eds), *The Archaeology of Greece and Rome: Studies in Honour of Anthony Snodgrass* (Edinburgh, 2016), 119.

As well as adding decorative (and economic) value to the books, the representations of Homer found in Pope's translations illustrate who Homer was for Pope and what he, and his poetry, meant for him.

Busts of Homer: the frontispieces of Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

It is precisely as an old, blind, but inspired and powerful character that Homer appears in the two busts of Homer that decorate the frontispieces of both Pope's *Iliad* and his *Odyssey*.

The frontispiece of the *Iliad* (fig. 1) was engraved by George Vertue, and the original size of the plate is 25 x 18 cm. The caption under the image reveals that it is a reproduction of a bust of Homer from the Farnese collection. This bust has been dated to the third quarter of the second century AD on stylistic grounds and belonged to the Farnese family who displayed it in their palaces in Rome (first at Palazzo Farnese and then at Villa Farnesina). It was then passed on to the Borbone family, and has been held in the Archaeological Museum in Naples since 1790.⁴² The bust of Homer on the frontispiece of the *Odyssey* (fig. 2) was also engraved by George Vertue (size 24 x 18 cm) and represents the so-called 'Arundel' Homer, a bronze head of Homer dating from the Hellenistic age. It was brought to Thomas Howard, the second Earl of Arundel, from Constantinople or Smyrna, and Pope's friend Dr Richard Mead bought it in 1721 – just when Pope was working on his Homeric translations. It has been held in the British Museum since 1760.⁴³ On its arrival in the West, it was a sensation – in the Preface to

⁴² See the *scheda* of the bust at the Museum's website: <<https://www.museoarcheologiconapoli.it/en/portraits/>>, accessed 22 January 2020. See also S. De Caro, *The National Archaeological Museum of Naples* (Naples, 1996); C. Gasparri, *Le sculture Farnese* (Verona, 2009), 15-16.

⁴³ <https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=46042&partId=1>, accessed 22 January 2020. Modern scholars doubt that the bust represents Homer, or indeed any poet, and it is thought that it might represent a Hellenistic ruler. See also R. Harding, 'The head of a certain

his *Itinerarium Septentrionale* (1726), Alexander Gordon said it was ‘most capital in its Kind’, and thus established it as an ‘icon of contemporary British taste’.⁴⁴ It is not surprising, then, that Pope chose it for his frontispiece.

There are many other busts of Homer in Pope’s translations, and all seem to offer the same view of Homer. For example, the decorated initial letter of Parnell’s essay (fig. 3) represents a bust of Homer resting on the poet’s tomb and being contemplated by Apollo – showing once again the twofold nature of Homer, a mortal who has gained eternal glory through poetry and is honoured by the god of poetry himself. But an interest in the physical representations (and, more specifically, the bust) of Homer pervaded Pope’s whole life, not only his work. Indeed, some sources indicate that Pope liked to surround himself with figures of Homer in his own house and garden. According to the inventory of his possessions compiled after his death, Pope kept a drawing of Homer in a bedroom and one in the great parlour, as well as a bust of Homer in the library.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a drawing by William Kent (dated ca. 1725-30) indicates that there might have been a bust of Homer in Pope’s garden at Twickenham. To be sure, there are elements in the drawing, with its ‘luxuriance and exuberance’, that suggest that the drawing represents ‘the power of the poetic imagination’,⁴⁶

Macedonian King: an old identity for the British Museum’s Arundel Homer’, *The British Art Journal* 9 (2008), 11-16; *TE* 9, xiii; Spivey (n. 41), 121.

⁴⁴ I. G. Brown, ‘Most Capital in Its Kind: further observations on Dr Richard Mead’s head of Homer’, *The British Art Journal* 10 (2009), 9.

⁴⁵ *TE* 9, xiii. This bust, which according to the records was displayed in Pope’s library together with other busts of notable intellectuals (such as Newton, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden), might be the same one that Pope in his will leaves to Lord Mansfield. In the will it is called ‘Marble head of Homer by Bernini’, although the *TE* suggests that the authorship by Bernini is highly improbable.

⁴⁶ *TE* 9, xiv; the drawing is reproduced on plate 21.

rather than the actual garden. Therefore, the bust of Homer might or might not have been in Pope's garden, but it certainly held an important place in the ideal representation of it.

Finally, it seems significant that, while the two frontispieces feature busts of Homer, the tailpiece of the twenty-fourth and final book of the *Odyssey* (fig. 4) hosts an image of the head of Pope himself. Homer has been with him throughout the project, challenging and inspiring him as a model to emulate; now, as he draws his biggest poetic enterprise to a close, Pope seems to indicate that, thanks to Homer, he has established his poetic authority. In his well-earned place among symbols of poetry and celestial figures, he can finally look up with pride.

Homeric coins: the decoration on Parnell's essay

As well as sculptures and busts, antiquity has transmitted several representations of Homer on coins; two important ones appear in Pope's *Iliad* at the beginning of Parnell's biographical essay, one from Amastris and one from Chios (fig. 3). As Parnell explains (55), 'the most valuable with respect to the Largeness of the Head is that of *Amastris*',⁴⁷ a very influential depiction of the Greek poet which was reproduced in Orsini's book,⁴⁸ and, due to the similarity, has later been used as a criterion for the identification of the *Apollonius of Tyana* type Homer.⁴⁹ But if the Amastris coin is notable for the largeness and success of its depiction of Homer, the Chian coin is equally interesting, influential, and meaningful.

⁴⁷ For more information on the depiction of Homer on the Amastris coin, with further bibliography, see <https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Amastris_Homer_Coin>, accessed 22 January 2020.

⁴⁸ F. Orsini, *Imagines et elogia virorum illustrium et eruditorum ex antiquis lapidibus et nomismatibus expressa cum annotationibus* (Rome, 1570), 20-21.

⁴⁹ W. Wallis, 'Homer: A guide to sculptural types', *Living Poets* (Durham, 2014), <https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Homer:_A_Guide_to_Sculptural_Types>, accessed 22 January 2020.

Chios has always held a special place in Homer's biographical tradition, and was one of the places with the strongest claims to be Homer's birthplace.⁵⁰ Depictions of Homer on Chian coins date back at least to the early first century AD, and although these coins never became part of the regular coinage of the island, they may have covered a need for money within the context of a local festival honouring the poet.⁵¹ Parnell describes the coin by noting that (46) 'the *Chian* Medal of him (which is of great Antiquity, according to *Leo Allatius*) seats him with a Volume open, and reading intently' (which, incidentally, for Parnell is evidence that the poet 'who thus inimitably copies Nature' could not have been blind from birth);⁵² and it is by reading Leo Allatius' own words that the full extent of the relevance of this coin to Pope's project becomes clear. A Chian himself, Allatius included in his treatise *De Patria Homeri* (Lyon, 1640) a lengthy discussion of the Chian coin, using it as evidence that Homer too was from Chios; but he gives more than a simple description: Allatius unpacks the meaning

⁵⁰ See Bassino (n. 30), 118-123.

⁵¹ C. Lagos, *A Study of the Coinage of Chios in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Doctoral thesis, (Durham University, 1998), 400 and 681 (available at <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1050/>>, accessed 22 January 2020). On depictions of Homer on coins see also K. Esdaile, 'An essay towards the classification of Homeric coin types', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 32 (1912), 298-325; Graziosi (n. 26), 85-86.

⁵² Depicting Homer sitting and holding a book was quite common not only on ancient coins, but also in later manuscripts. See for example F. Pontani, 'A Byzantine portrait of Homer', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 68 (2007), 1-26. Chatzidakis suggests that the Chian coin influenced the drawing of Homer made by Ciriaco d'Ancona in the MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Codex Hamilton 254 (1436-1447), fol. 90r. See M. Chatzidakis, 'Die Bedeutung der Münz- und Gemmenkunde für die Altertumsforschungen des Ciriaco d'Ancona', in *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 54, 1 (2010-2012), 31-58; and 'Auf der Suche nach dem großen Epiker. Die Kenntnis und die Rezeption der antiken chiotischen Numismatik in einer Berliner Zeichnung Ciriacos d' Ancona', in U. Peter and B. Weisser (eds), *Translatio Nummorum. Römische Kaiser in der Renaissance* (Rutzen, 2013), 47-57.

of each and every element of that representation of Homer, which appears to fit exactly Pope's views on the Greek poet: his cloak and beard emphasise his wisdom giving him the look of a Greek philosopher, the open book in his hands marks him as an erudite teacher, the hair-band and the fillet as a poet and a seer – one that, ultimately, should be venerated as a divinity.⁵³

Episodes from the life of Homer: the title-page of Pope's *Odyssey*

The final, but perhaps most interesting, illustration analysed in this article is the title-page ornament of the first volume of the *Odyssey* (fig. 5), engraved by Paul Fourdrinier after William Kent (1725; original size of the plate 14 x 11.5 cm). This illustration, which has often been ignored in modern studies of Pope's translations, draws on an episode of the Homeric biographical tradition that originated in antiquity, interested Renaissance poets, and inspired seventeenth-century painters and scholars. In the title-page of Pope's *Odyssey*, the tradition appears to be carefully constructed and crafted to represent Pope's views on Homer and his poems. The image represents Achilles, now dead, sitting on his own tomb while a ray of light emanating from him blinds Homer. The identification of the two characters is certain: the tomb on which the hero is sitting carries the inscription ἔνθα δ' Ἀχιλλεύς ('Here lies Achilles'),⁵⁴ while the head of the other figure is the same as the Homer bust bought by Richard Mead and reproduced on the frontispiece of the *Odyssey*.⁵⁵

⁵³ Leo Allatius, *De Patria Homeri* (Lyon, 1640), 28: 'dum eum et pallio, et barba Philosophum; tunica manicatum, Graecum scilicet; Volumine adaperto Doctorem, ac Magistrum; taenia et vitta Poëtam, Vatem, Sacerdotem, Ducem, et quid non? Sella Iudicem nomine perpetuum, et gloria aevo comparem, immo, quod omnium maximum est, Deum veneraretur, et coleret'.

⁵⁴ The expression ἔνθα δ' Ἀχιλλεύς comes from *Odyssey* 3.109 (Nestor laments to Telemachus, his guest in Pylus, the death of many Achaeans at Troy including Achilles).

⁵⁵ As noted by Brown (n. 44), 12.

Both characters in this scene inspire reflection on several interrelated issues connected to Pope's engagement with the *Odyssey*. To start with, the *Odyssey* is where Achilles makes an appearance as a dead character. In book 11, Odysseus undertakes a journey to the Underworld where, among other things, he consults Tiresias about how to get home. There, Achilles addresses Odysseus with a controversial statement (*Od.* 11.488-491): 'I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, some landless man with hardly enough to live on, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished'.⁵⁶ These words clash with the heroic system of values that Achilles championed in the *Iliad*, where he was ready to welcome an early death in exchange for eternal glory. But it is precisely this sharp contrast that emphasises their message: the *Odyssey* is the poem of homecoming, where the familial dimension becomes prominent, and even the quintessential epic hero seems to prefer a perhaps less glorious, but quieter and more domestic life. Pope was aware that this enhanced focus on the family and the return home is an important feature of the *Odyssey*: as we have seen, he was aware that this is reflected in the style and energy of the poem, and that already ancient critics such as Longinus thought the poem 'less active and lofty', so much so that it was judged the 'work of the old age of Homer'. The image of a dead Achilles, therefore, recalls an episode that emphasises a particular feature of the work, one that has an impact not only on the original poem, but also, necessarily, on the translation.

Furthermore, with its explicit reference to Homer's blindness, this illustration explores the figure of the poet, his relationship with the characters, and his divine inspiration – again, all issues that are at the core of the *Odyssey* and are relevant to Pope himself. It is in the

⁵⁶ On Odysseus' encounter with Achilles see, most recently, G. Gazis, *Homer and the Poetics of Hades* (Oxford, 2018), 182-195.

Odyssey, indeed, that we find Demodocus, an important character on whom, according to some ancient and modern scholars, Homer modelled the image of himself that he wanted to transmit to posterity: a bard who can count on the divine inspiration granted by the Muses, but who lost his sight for that. As we have seen, Pope engages on several occasions with the figure of Demodocus, the blindness that affects both Homer and his character, and its meaning.⁵⁷ Finally, the background of the scene, with the tomb and the arch, offers the chance to the creator, the architect William Kent, to engage in an exercise of imagination and reconstruction of ancient material remains that suited both his taste and the taste of his time: the result is a combination of Greek and Roman architecture that might not reflect any actual ancient setting, but does reflect the contemporary taste of mixing the two.⁵⁸

This image, with its reference to a dead Achilles and a blind Homer, engages with issues that are crucial to the *Odyssey* and to Pope as a poet and translator, and therefore fits very well as the title-page of Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*. But where does the inspiration for this image come from? What sources tell us about Homer being blinded by Achilles? As Parnell reports in his discussion of Homer's blindness (31), 'some [...] will not allow even this [i.e. blindness] to have happen'd after the manner in which it falls upon other Men: Chance and Sickness are excluded'. Instead, Parnell continues, Hermias in his commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* informs us that the poet became blind as a result of seeing the ghost of Achilles in his shiny armour. Hermias' commentary is lost, but the relevant passage is preserved by Leo Allatius (144):

⁵⁷ See above for the discussion of Homer's blindness and the dispute between Pope and Anne Dacier, as well as the letter by Pope in which he fears that blindness is the only way in which he might imitate Homer.

⁵⁸ I owe this remark to Ian Gordon Brown who pointed this out to me in an email exchange.

varios tamen de caecitate Homerica rumores in unum nobis Hermias collegit in Phaedrum Platonis, a quo sua Politianus, aliique recentiores habuere. Illius verba, quia inedita sunt, lege per me lector: Περὶ τῆς Ὀμήρου τυφλώσεως διάφοροι φέρονται ἱστορίαι. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν καὶ τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς λέγουσι καὶ οὕτω τετέχθαι, οἱ δὲ ποιμαίνοντα παρὰ τῷ τάφῳ τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως πολλάς τινας καταβαλέσθαι εἰς τὸν ἥρω χοὰς καὶ στεφάνους, καὶ παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ὀφθῆναι αὐτῷ. Ὁ δὲ ἥρωσ ὤφθη μετὰ τῆς πανοπλίας λάμπων, καὶ ὁ Ὅμηρος μὴ ἐνεγκὼν τὴν θέαν καὶ τὴν λαμπηδόνα τῶν ὄπλων ἐτυφλώθη.

Hermias has collected many stories about Homer's blindness in one place for us in the commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, from which Politian and other more recent authors made their own version. Reader, you can read his words thanks to me, since they are unpublished. 'Many different stories are told about Homer's blindness. For some say that he was blind from birth and was born that way, some others that while shepherding around the tomb of Achilles he offered many libations and garlands to the hero and prayed that he would appear to him. The hero appeared in his splendour with his armour and Homer, who could not bear the sight and the shine of the armour, was blinded'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The Greek text of Hermias is that in C. M. Lucarini and C. Moreschini, *Hermias Alexandrinus: In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia* (Berlin, 2012). Translation is my own. Another ancient witness of this story that, to my knowledge, has never been mentioned is the so-called *Vita Romana*, an ancient biography of Homer that reports two stories about the poet's blindness. In relation to Achilles, it says (5): τυφλωθῆναι δ' αὐτὸν οὕτω πως λέγουσιν· ἐλθόντα γὰρ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέως τάφον εὔξασθαι θεάσασθαι τὸν ἥρωα τοιοῦτον ὅποιος προῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν μάχην τοῖς δευτέροις ὄπλοις κεκοσμημένους· ὀφθέντος δὲ αὐτῷ τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως τυφλωθῆναι τὸν Ὅμηρον ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν ὄπλων ἀύγης· ἐλεθθέντα δὲ ὑπὸ Θετίδος καὶ Μουσῶν τιμηθῆναι πρὸς αὐτῶν τῆ ποιητικῆ, 'They say that he became blind in the following way: when he went to the tomb of Achilles, he prayed that he might see the hero just as he was when he proceeded to battle adorned in his second set of armour. When he saw Achilles, Homer

Parnell (and Pope) likely knew the story from Allatius, a source he used on many occasions (see the discussion of the coins above). But between antiquity and Pope, the story was transmitted by several other sources, including Politian (1454-1494),⁶⁰ and a drawing by Pietro Testa (1612-1650).⁶¹ For the title-page of his *Odyssey*, Pope commissioned an image that is full of significance, one that embodies issues of poetics by exploring an ancient and long-lived (albeit today largely neglected) episode from the Homeric biographical tradition.

Conclusion

Alexander Pope's experience as a translator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is driven and influenced by a deep engagement not only with the Homeric texts, but also with Homer as a poet. This, to an extent, is due to the cultural environment in which the translations were

was blinded by the gleam of his armour; but Thetis and the Muses, feeling pity for him, honoured him with the gift of poetry' (Text and translation my own, from <https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Anonymus_Life_of_Homer_1>, accessed 22 January 2020. Both Hermias and this *Vita* add the version according to which Homer was blinded by Helen, angered at him because he depicted her in a negative light. The *Vita* is anonymous, cannot be dated with certainty and does not report the name of the source for either episode. We cannot therefore know what relationships existed between the two witnesses of the story, but they are likely to be part of the same strand of biographical tradition.

⁶⁰ *Ambra* 279-284: Ipse ardens clypeo ostentat terramque, fretumque, / Atque indefessum solem, solisque sororem / Iam plenam, et tacito volventia sidera mundo. / Ergo his defixus vates, dum singula visu / Explorat miser incauto, dum lumina figit / Lumina nox pepulit, 'That blazing figure displayed in his shield the earth and the sea and the tireless sun, and the sister of the sun now in her fulness, and stars revolving in the silent heavens. The poet was transfixed by these, and even while the unfortunate man gazed heedlessly on each, even while he fixed his lights upon them, night put out their brightness'. Translation from E. Cropper, 'A scholion by Hermias to Plato's *Phaedrus* and its adaptations in Pietro Testa's Blinding of Homer and in Politian's *Ambra*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), 264 n. 10.

⁶¹ See Cropper (n. 60).

produced: Homer was then at the centre of debates about the value and relevance of ancient authors to modernity, and Wolf's studies had yet to shake the belief in the ancient and lasting image of Homer as an inspired poet. But Pope also establishes his own unique personal relationship with the Greek poet: the figure of Homer that emerges from the sources considered in this article embodies what Homer and his poetry mean for Pope. Modern scholarship has enhanced our understanding of the embodied experience of ancient poetry, and how the desire for the ancient author stimulates later audiences and readers. This article has shown that this can be applied to the experience of a translator as well: engaging with the biography of Homer allows Pope to explore issues such as poetic authority and divine inspiration, promote his own translations against European competitors, and ultimately establish himself as a translator and as a poet. Furthermore, this contribution has highlighted how a full understanding of an embodied experience of literary reception of ancient poetry needs to include an analysis not only of the receiving and the received literary works, but also of the elements that surround both. It is in Pope's correspondence, his and Parnell's biographical notes to the poems, and the illustrations by Kent included in the translations that Homer appears as a presence that forces Pope constantly to challenge himself, until he feels he can stand a comparison with the greatest poet ever.

Appendix

Images are taken from the digital collection of the British Library.

For Pope's *Iliad*: General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 12270.k.9.

For Pope's *Odyssey*: General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 12270.k.8.

Public domain: <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/>

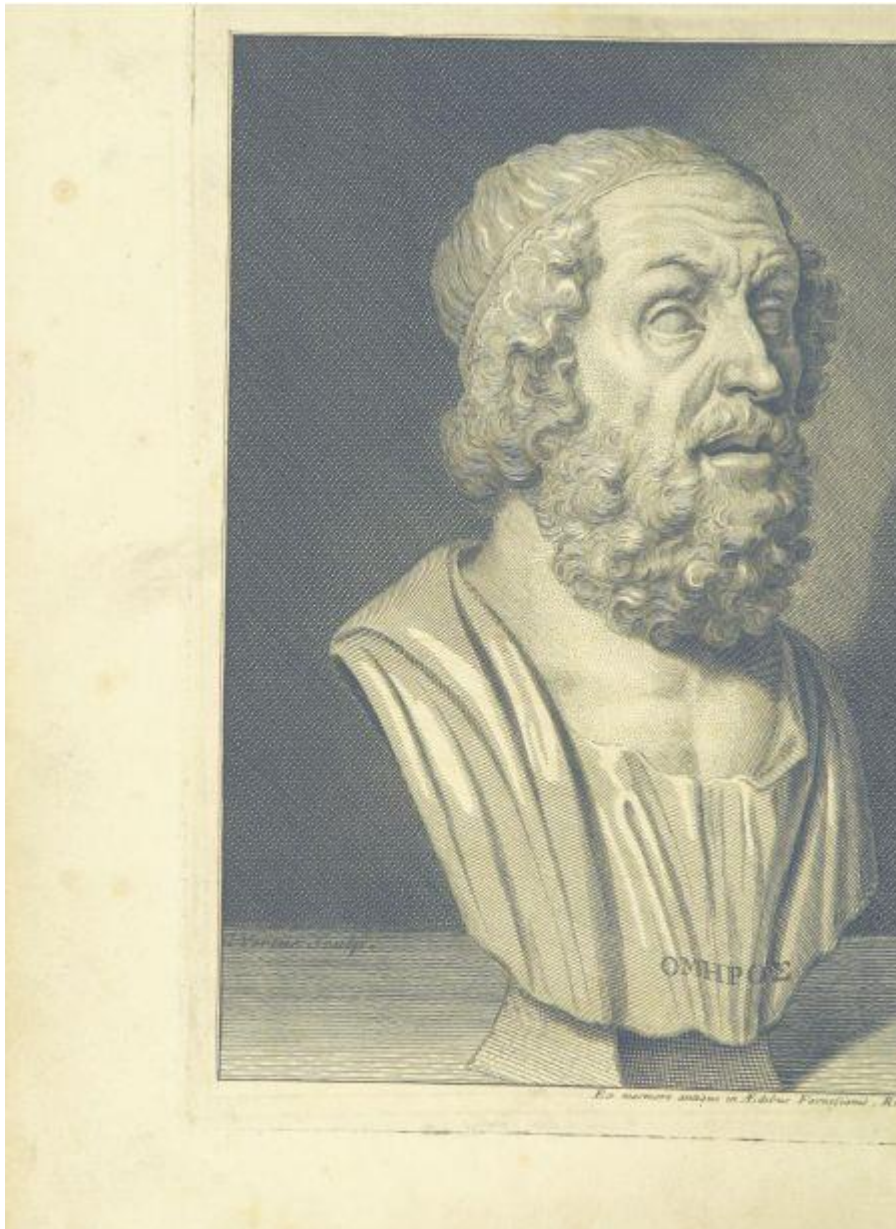


Figure 1: Frontispiece of Pope's *Iliad*

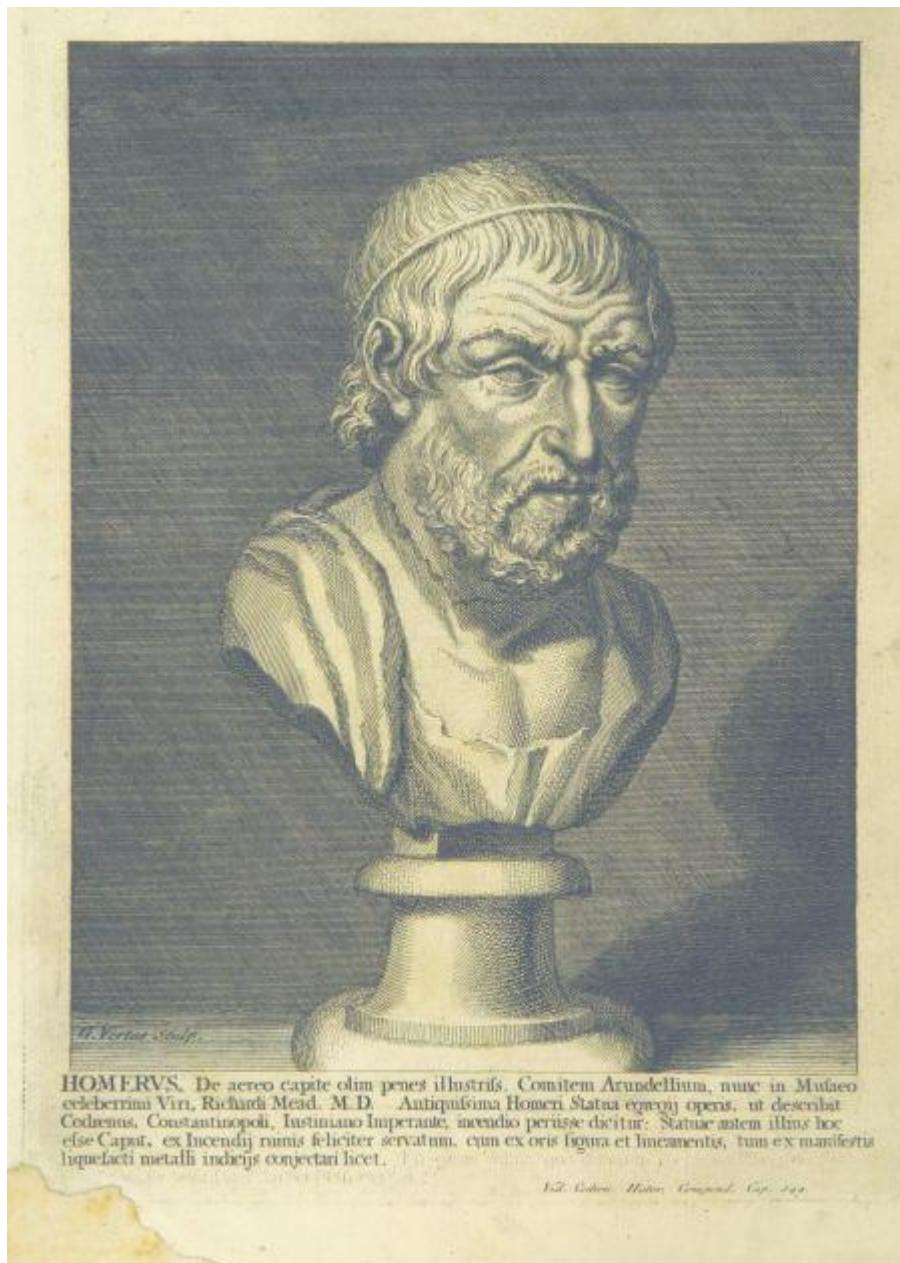


Figure 2: Frontispiece of Pope's *Odyssey*

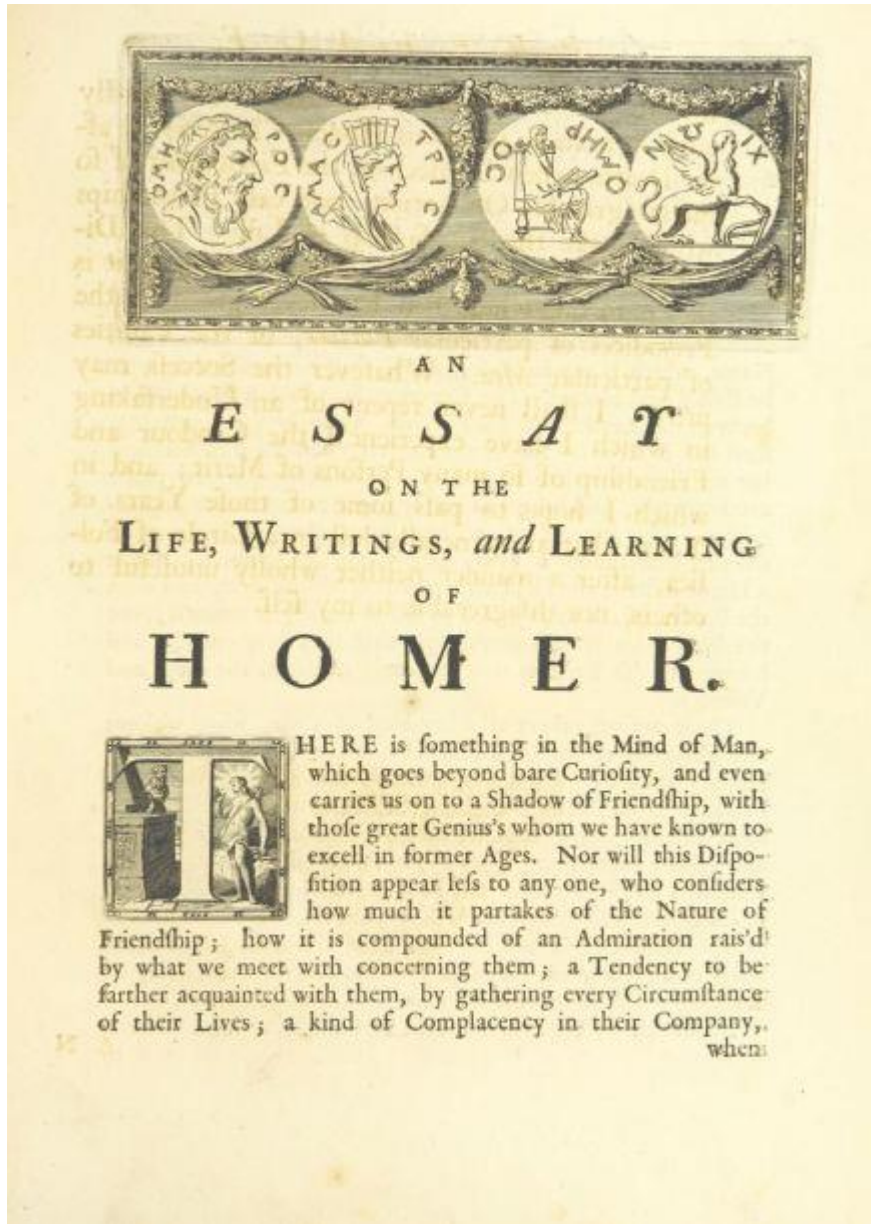


Figure 3: First page of Parnell's essay

Descended from the Gods! *Ulysses*, cease;
Offend not *Jove*: Obey, and give the peace.

So *Pallas* spoke: The mandate from above
The King obey'd. The Virgin-seed of *Jove* 630
In *Mentor*'s form, confirm'd the full accord,
“ And willing nations knew their lawful Lord.



O B S E R-

Figure 4: Tailpiece of Book 24 of Pope's *Odyssey*

THE
ODYSSEY
OF
HOMER.



LONDON:
Printed for BERNARD LINTOT.
MDCCLXXV.

Figure 5: Title page of Pope's *Odyssey*