

George Chapman  
(1559?-1634)

HOMER'S *ILIADS*  
[1598]  
[ed. Allardyce Nicoll, Princeton, 1956]

TO THE READER

[...]

- 90 Which how I have in my conversion prov'd  
I must confesse I hardly dare referre  
To reading judgements, since so generally  
Custome hath made even th' ablest Agents erre  
In these translations: all so much apply
- 95 Their paines and cunnings word for word to render  
Their patient Authors, when they may as well  
Make fish with fowle, Camels with Whales engender,  
Or their tongues' speech in other mouths compell.  
For even as different a production
- 100 Aske Greeke and English, since, as they in sounds  
And letters shunne one forme and unison,  
So have their sense and elegancie bounds  
In their distinguisht natures, and require  
Onely a judgement to make both consent
- 105 In sense and elocution, and aspire  
As well to reach the spirit that was spent  
In his example, as with arte to pierce  
His Grammar and etymologie of words.  
But as great Clerkes can write no English verse
- 110 Because (alas! great Clerks) English affords,  
Say they, no height nor copie—a rude tounge  
(Since 'tis their Native)—but in Greeke or Latine  
Their writs are rare, for thence true Poesie sprong—

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Though them (Truth knowes) they have but skil to chat-in  
115 Compar'd with that they might say in their owne,  
Since thither th' other's full soule cannot make  
The ample transmigration to be showne  
In Nature-loving Poesie: so the brake  
That those Translators sticke in that affect  
120 Their word-for-word traductions (where they lose  
The free grace of their naturall Dialect  
And shame their Authors with a forced Glose)  
I laugh to see—and yet as much abhorre  
More licence from the words than may expresse  
125 Their full compression and make cleare the Author.  
From whose truth if you thinke my feet digresse  
Because I use needfull Periphraes,  
Read Valla, Hesus, that in Latine Prose  
And Verse convert him; read the Messines  
130 That into Tuscan turns hin, and the Glose  
Grave Salel makes in French as he translates—  
Which (for th' aforesaide reasons) all must doo—  
And see that my conversion much abates  
The licence they take, and more shoves him too,  
135 Whose right not all those great learn'd men have done  
(In some maine parts) that were his Commentars.  
But (as the illustration of the Sunne  
Should be attempted by the erring starres)  
They fail'd to search his deepe and treasurous hart.  
140 The cause was since they wanted the fit key  
Of Nature, in their down-right strength of Art,  
With Poesie to open Poesie—

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Which in my Poeme of the mysteries  
Reveal'd in Homer I will clearely prove  
145 Till whose neere birth suspend your Calumnies  
And farre-wide imputations of selfe love.

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