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# ANOTHER ODYSSEY

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Reference : *The Geography of the Imagination,* San Francisco, North Point Press, 1981, p. 29-44.

*Wie alles Metaphysische ist die Harmonie zwischen Gedanken und Wirklichkeit in der Grammatik der Sprache aufzufinden.*

*Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language.*

*(Wittgenstein,* Zettel, 55)

# Another Odyssey

Salvatore Quasimodo translates the three lines that begin the third book of the *Odyssey:*

> Il sole, lasciata la serena distesa dell'acqua,
> si levò verso il cielo di rame a illuminare gli dèi
> e gli uomini destinati alla morte sulla terra feconda.

What Eélios departs from here is not *thálassa* or *póntos* but *limne,* an inlet of the sea. The word later comes to mean a marsh or pooled tidewater, and is also used to mean a lake. Telemakhos and Athena are sailing into the Bay of Navarino where they see the sacrifices at Pylos of the Sands; the poet calls the bay a *limne,* and adds that it is very beautiful, *perikalléa.* Signor Quasimodo folds these two images together as *la serena distesa dell'acqua* as smoothly as he takes *polýkhalkon* as a color

adjective describing the glaring dawn sky. Richmond Lattimore gives *limne* the first meaning offered by the Revs. Liddell and Scott, "standing water":

> Helios, leaving behind the lovely standing waters, rose up.[1]

As for the sky, Professor Lattimore calls it "brazen," as do Samuel Henry Butcher and Andrew Lang, Robert Fitzgerald, William Cullen Bryant, and William Morris. Chapman understands the adjective to include both the hardness and gleam of bronze:

> The Sunne now left the great and goodly Lake,
> And to the firme heav'n bright ascent did make.

English words, Joseph Conrad complained, say more than you want them to say. "Oaken," for instance, has overtones which force one to say in remarking that a table is *de chêne,* that it is also solid and British. "Brazen" and "standing waters" are not phrases that a stylist, poet or prose writer, would consider without making certain that he wanted the overtones as well. Except, of course, when he is asking the reader to agree that he is writing in a high style the dignity of which prevents one from imagining anything but the purest lexicographic content of every word. Such a request might be backed up by asking the reader to keep well in mind at all times that the text before him tranlates a great poem, said by people who know to be magnificent. With such an understanding between translator and reader, the translator can then write "immortals" where Homer has *athánatoi* and "mortals" where Homer has *thnetoi* and forget that the two words were worn out years ago. A translator who dares not ask such an agreement feels compelled to convey the sharpness of the Greek. Signor Quasimodo has seen the interplay in the homily, has thought about it, and puts it into seamless contemporary words: the sun shines on the gods and on men who must someday die and on the fecund earth. Chapman manages to keep the two possible meanings of *zeídoros,* giver of life or giver of *zeia,* one of the most primitive of grains:

> To shine as well upon the mortall birth
> Inhabiting the plowd life-giving earth
> As on the ever-tredders upon Death.

Lattimore's "mortal men," Quasimodo's "gli uomini destinati alla morte," Chapman's "ever-tredders upon Death"—which replaces a Greek word with a dictionary equivalent and which tries to unfold the Greek sense?

"Show me," Wittgenstein liked to say, "how a man uses a word and I'll

[1]Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Odyssey of Homer,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

tell you what he really thinks about it." No word in a context can have more meaning than the writer thinks into it. When a writer does not care about the meaning of a word, we know it. We also know *how* a man cares about words; we know from his words what he honors, what he is unaware of, and how he modifies with his individual use of it the culture in which he exists. When, for instance, William Cullen Bryant translates the passage we are looking at,

> Now from the fair broad bosom of the sea
> Into the brazen vault of heaven the sun
> Rose shining for the immortals and for men
> Upon the foodful earth,

we see the translator shying away from particular description. He has a bay and a plowed field that he is content to render invisible; he introduces a bosom and a vault; and he is not afraid that in recitation the audience will hear "foodful" as a tongue-twisted "fruitful." There is a kind of thanksgiving piety in Bryant. The sea is a bosom (Homer elsewhere calls it unharvestable); the firmament is a bit of decorative architecture which we should no doubt stand in awe of; and the sun shines *for* gods and men. Homer merely says that it shines on them. Professor Lattimore has the sun shining on gods and men but *across* the grain field—a gratuitous angle that shows us that a grain field for Professor Lattimore is a pretty landscape primarily and the source of life secondarily.

Robert Fitzgerald sees the generosity of the sun:

> —all one brightening
> for gods immortal and for mortal men
> on plowlands kind with grain,

and hides altogether the idea of death and fecundity occurring together under the eyes of the gods and the indifferent sun. Mr. Fitzgerald likes to freeze time when he comes to the lovely passages, savoring a still beauty; Homer's very beautiful bay is "the flawless brimming sea." He removes Homer's shadows and makes the scene golden, "kind with grain."

If you don't care about words at all, it can be translated thus:

> As the sun rose from the beautiful mere of the sea
> To climb to the brazen heaven and shine with his light
> On gods and on men that inhabit the grain-giving earth.

This is simply a rewording (executed in 1948 by S. O. Andrew) of William Morris's

> Now uprose the Sun, and leaving the exceeding lovely mere
> Fared up to the brazen heaven, to the Deathless shining clear,
> And unto deathful men on the corn-kind earth that dwell.

Morris was at least trying to keep the reader aware that the poem is of an age. Mr. Andrew has sealed himself up in himself and is having a wonderful time.

But back to Professor Lattimore. Here is the beginning of the account of the hunt on Parnassos where Odysseus was scarred by the boar:

> But when the young Dawn showed again with her rosy fingers,
> they went out on their way to the hunt, the dogs and the people,
> these sons of Autolykos, and with them noble Odysseus went.

Is it not a bit chewing-gummy to say that Dawn showed? Johnson gives ten definitions of "show," none of which sanctions this suppressed reflexive, and Fowler clucks his tongue if consulted on the matter. Webster's Third International describes the intransitive "show" and takes its example of usage from H. A. Sinclair: "I'm glad you showed, kid." And "out on their way"? As for the "went," that's where Homer put it. And dear rosy-fingered Dawn, she turns up in *The Faerie Queene* about the time Chapman was putting her into his *Iliads;* it's a toss-up as to who stole her from whom. She is the Kilroy of Homeric translation.

Professor Lattimore continues:

> They came to the steep mountain, mantled in forest,
> Parnassos, and soon they were up in the windy folds.

(Colonel Lawrence has "wind-swept upper folds"; Morris, "windy ghylls.")

> At this time
> the sun had just begun to strike on the plowlands, rising
> out of the quiet water and the deep stream of the Ocean.
> The hunters came to the wooded valley, and on ahead of them
> ran the dogs, casting about for the tracks, and behind them
> the sons of Autolykos, and with them noble Odysseus
> went close behind the hounds, shaking his spear far-shadowing.
> Now there, inside that thick of the bush, was the lair of a great boar.
> Neither could the force of wet-blown winds penetrate here,
> nor could the shining sun ever strike through with his rays, nor yet
> could the rain pass all the way through it, so close together
> it grew, with a fall of leaves drifted in dense profusion.
> The thudding made by the feet of men and dogs came to him
> as they closed on him in the hunt, and against them he from his woodlair
> bristled strongly his nape, and with fire from his eyes glaring
> stood up to face them close.

"Plowlands" is an archaic word, once an exact measure. "The quiet water . . . of the Ocean" avoids the traditional "soft-blowing," but what does it mean? Surely Homer meant to describe a calm sea, not to calcu-

late the amount of noise it was making. "Casting about for the tracks"—here Professor Lattimore should have kept to Liddell and Scott, who say "casting about for the scent." Dogs do not follow tracks, a visual skill, but the smell of their prey. Why "noble" Odysseus? He is no nobler than his uncles, and to single him out with such a word seems to put him in contrast to his very family. He's a stripling here; surely Homer means "charming" or "handsome."

Professor Lattimore in his faithfulness places himself at the mercy of the merciless Greek language. His boar "bristled strongly his nape, and with fire from his eyes glaring / stood up to face them close." The verb is most certainly "bristled" and the noun "nape," but a boar is a very special kind of animal whose bristling is a thing unto itself, and his nape, like a snake's neck, is more a word than a reality. The very same words might be used of a cat, and we would have to translate "camelled his back and bushed." A boar bunches his shoulders. He *hackles.* He *hurrs up.* Mr. Fitzgerald has:

> with razor back bristling and raging eyes
> he trotted and stood at bay.

Splendid, that "trotted and stood." Professor Lattimore has the boar lying down until the dogs are at his door, which is a bit cool even for such an insolent beast as this one.

Here is how Mr. Fitzgerald begins the boar hunt:

> When the young Dawn spread in the eastern sky
> her finger tips of rose,

(Both Chapman and Pope ducked having to do something with a *rhododaktylos Eos* here, Chapman looking to the sun's heat and Pope to its color for a paraphrase. Chapman knows his out-of-doors, and has not forgotten that the hunters have just spent the night on the ground; Pope saw the dawn through windows; Fitzgerald, writing in a century whose every gesture is timed, adds motion to the venerable epithet.)

> the men and dogs
> went hunting, taking Odysseus.

(Odysseus loses his *dios,* and the sons of Autolykos their patronymic: no matter—that information is well-established, and Mr. Fitzgerald doesn't need *formulae.*)

> They climbed
> Parnassos' rugged flank mantled in forest,

(Pope's "Parnassus, thick-perplex'd with horrid shades" has alternately an English and a Latin word: what we are looking at is a line of Vergil

every other word of which has been glossed into English. Homer, we might note, is at some distance, and his more cultivated imitator has the stage.)

> entering amid high windy folds at noon
> when Hêlios beat upon the valley floor
> and on the winding ocean whence he came.

(The "amid" is not current English; "fold" is not good American, but British [Lawrence: "wind-swept upper folds"]; and is it at noon or just after sunrise that they reach the high gorges? The "winding" is taken from Homeric cosmography rather than from the text, which says "deep." But what a clear, solidly paced three lines! Bryant's ". . . airy heights. The sun, new risen / From the deep ocean's gently flowing stream, / Now smote the fields" misses the look of a great mountain, tries [like Fitzgerald] to tuck in Homer's earth-encircling ocean and makes a mess of it—the kind of paralytic total miss with an image that drives clever children and the literal-minded away from poetry altogether. Yet genteel readers in Bryant's day took that "stream" as a refinement, and the "gently," their experience of the sea to the contrary, as evidence of Bryant's higher soul. The version reaches solid ground with the Biblical "smote." But Bryant is simply Wordsworthing around here; four words on he's talking about "a dell.") Fitzgerald continues:

> With hounds questing ahead, in open order,
> the sons of Autólykos went down a glen,
> Odysseus in the lead, behind the dogs,
> pointing his long-shadowing spear.

Fitzgerald deploys dogs and hunters in a forward motion: "questing ahead . . . in the lead . . . pointing"; Professor Lattimore scatters the motion: "casting about . . . behind them . . . close behind . . . shaking." There is an outwardness to Fitzgerald's rhythms that makes Lattimore sound distinctly bumpy.

Translation involves two languages; the translator is in constant danger of inventing a third that lies between, a treacherous nonexistent language suggested by the original and not recognized by the language into which the original is being transposed. The Greek says "of Odysseus the loved son," and Professor Lattimore translates "the dear son of Odysseus." Who uses such language in English? Chapman's "Ulysses' lov'd sonne" seems more contemporary. Bryant says "dear son," perhaps with an impunity that we feel we ought to withhold from Professor Lattimore. I once dined with Professor Lattimore and he did not speak like William Cullen Bryant. He spoke a charming and fluent and even racy colloquial English.

If we take everything in Greek in a literal, grammar-book sense, obviously we are going to come up with some strange locutions. If Homer says "And in his hand he had a bronze spear," by what determined deafness to English must Professor Lattimore write "in his hands holding a bronze spear?" The verb is "have," not "hold." One may say "in his hand a bronze spear," or "holding a bronze spear," but not a mixture of the two. And why "hands"? The Greek is "hand." To read Professor Lattimore's *Odyssey* we must simply accept the curious fact that he is writing in a neutralized English wholly devoid of dialect, a language concocted for the purpose of translating Homer. It uses the vocabulary of English but not its rhythm. It has its own idiom. One can say in this language such things as "slept in that place in an exhaustion of sleep" (for Homer's "aching with fatigue and weary for lack of sleep"), and "the shining clothes are lying away uncared for" (for "your laundry is tossed in a heap waiting to be washed").

Professor Lattimore adheres to the literal at times as stubbornly as a mule eating briars. When, for instance, the Kyklops dines on Odysseus's men, he washes his meal down with "milk unmixed with water." But why would anyone, except a grocer, water milk? The word that makes the milk seem to be watered is the same as the one that turns up in the phrase "unmixed wine," meaning neat. But even there the wine is unmixed because it is for dipping bread into; so the word comes to take on the latter meaning. What the homely Kyklops was doing was dipping the meat in his milk.

There is a chill puritanism about Professor Lattimore's program: which is to render the *Odyssey ad verbum* into English. Tone be damned, rhythm and pace be damned, idiom (like the milk for dunking) be damned; this version is going to be punctiliously lexicographic. I need not labor the truism that the literal translator can be at a great spiritual distance from his original, and I realize that this is something of a galling paradox. Of the two most exciting translations from Homer in recent years, one, Robert Fitzgerald's, is as accurate as that of Professor Lattimore's, but it is not obsessed with a verbal game as desperate as Russian roulette; the other, that of Christopher Logue, departs from Homer's words altogether (so do all other translators, for that matter) and reconstructs the action as his genius dictates. Look at a passage near the beginning of the nineteenth book of the *Iliad* as translated by Lattimore and Logue. Lattimore:

> The goddess spoke so, and set down the armour on the ground
> before Achilleus, and all its elaborations clashed loudly.
> Trembling took hold of all the Myrmidons. None had the courage
> to look straight at it. They were afraid of it. Only Achilleus

looked, and as he looked the anger came harder upon him
and his eyes glittered terribly under his lids, like sunflare.

Logue:

And as she laid the moonlit armour on the sand it chimed:
and the sounds that came from it
followed the light that came from it,
like sighing,
saying,
Made in Heaven.
And those who had the neck to watch Achilles weep
could not look now. Nobody looked. They were afraid.

Except Achilles. Looked,
lifted a piece of it between his hand; turned it;
tested the weight of it; then,
spun the holy tungsten like a star between his knees,
slitting his eyes against the flare, some said,
but others thought the hatred shuttered by his lids
made him protect the metal.

His eyes like furnace doors ajar.

We have all been taught to prefer the former, out of a shy dread before Homer's great original; we instinctively, if we have ever felt a line of poetry before, prefer the latter. And the kind of paranoia fostered by graduate schools would choose to have Professor Lattimore give his imagination more tether and Mr. Logue rein his in, so that we could be certain that it's all Homer that we are enjoying.

Chapman translates the tale of the boar:

When the Sun was set
And darknesse rose, they slept, till daye's fire het
Th'enlightned earth, and then on hunting went
Both Hounds and all Autolycus' descent.
In whose guide did divine Ulysses go,
Climb'd steepe Parnassus, on whose forehead grow
All sylvan off-springs round. And soone they rech't
The Concaves, whence ayr's sounding vapors fetcht
Their loud descent. As soone as any Sun
Had from the Ocean (where his waters run
In silent deepnesse) rais'd his golden head,
The early Huntsmen all the hill had spread
Their Hounds before them on their searching Traile.
They neere, and ever eager to assaile,
Ulysses brandishing a lengthfull Lance,
Of whose first flight he long'd to prove the chance.

Then found they lodg'd a Bore of bulke extreame
In such a Queach, as never any beame
The Sun shot pierc'st, nor any passe let finde
The moist impressions of the fiercest winde,
Nor any storme the sternest winter drives,
Such proofe it was: yet all within lay leaves
In mighty thicknesse, and through all this flew
The hounds' loud mouthes. The sounds, the tumult threw.
And all together rouz'd the Bore, that rusht
Amongst their thickest: all his brissels pusht
From forth his rough necke, and with flaming eyes
Stood close, and dar'd all. On which horrid prise
Ulysses first charg'd, whom above the knee
The savage strooke, and rac't it crookedly
Along the skin, yet never reacht the bone.

There were still queaches near Hitchin in Chapman's day from which the more sanguine gentry might rout a boar. He blurs the mountain scenery ("Concaves, whence ayr's sounding vapors fetcht") but deploys the hounds and moves in on the kill with a clear sense that the *tremendum* of the scene is in the ruckus of the dogs and the fury of the boar. William Cullen Bryant, the Henri Rousseau of Homer's translators, has the hunt unfold at a genteel pace:

Up the steeps of that high mount
Parnassus, clothed with woods, they climbed, and soon
Were on its airy heights. The sun, new risen
From the deep ocean's gently flowing stream,
Now smote the fields. The hunters reached a dell;
The hounds before them tracked the game; behind
Followed the children of Autolycus.
The generous youth Ulysses, brandishing
A spear of mightly length, came pressing on
Close to the hounds. There lay a huge wild boar
Within a thicket, where moist-blowing winds
Came not, nor in his brightness could the sun
Pierce with his beams the covert, nor the rain
Pelt through, so closely grew the shrubs. The ground
Was heaped with sheddings of the withered leaves.
Around him came the noise of dogs and men
Approaching swiftly. From his lair he sprang
And faced them, with the bristles on his neck
Upright, and flashing eyes.

The boar dies "with piercing cries amid the dust." Bryant smacks of Currier and Ives; Chapman is closer to a Mantegna drawing. Bryant's

"thicket," "covert," and "shrubs" are wispy and feathery, and he has a humanitarian tenderness toward the badgered boar that is in contrast to Chapman's bloody delight in the kill ("And shew'd his point gilt with the gushing gore"—Chapman's world still thought of hunting as providing food for the family. And Bryant rejoiced when he got to a line he could silver over: "And sacred rivers flowing to the sea" (10.422). His Homer is Vergilian, or at least Wordsworthian.

Pope, Fenton, and Broome give us:

> Soon as the morn, new rob'd in purple light,
> Pierced with her golden shafts the drear of night,
> Ulysses, and his brave maternal race
> The young Autolyci, essay the chase.
> Parnassus, thick-perplexed with horrid shades,
> With deep-mouth'd hounds the hunter-troop invades;
> What time the sun, from ocean's peaceful stream,
> Darts o'er the lawn his horizontal beam.
> The pack impatient snuff the tainted gale;
> The thorny wilds the woodmen fierce assail:
> And, foremost of the train, his cornel spear
> Ulysses wav'd, to rouse the savage war.
> Deep in the rough recesses of the wood,
> A lofty copse, the growth of ages, stood;
> Nor winter's boreal blast, nor thunderous shower,
> Nor solar ray, could pierce the shady bower.
> With wither'd foliage strew'd, a happy store!
> The warm pavilion of the dreadful boar.
> Rous'd by the hounds' and hunters' mingling cries,
> The savage from his leafy shelter flies;
> With fiery glare his sanguine eye-balls shine,
> And bristles high impale his horrid chine.

One would like to know how Pope imagined that one could make a fifteen-foot spear out of a cherry branch; *dolikhoskios* ("long of shadow") isn't all that hard to make sense of. But if one has set out, Handel-like, with purple light fleeing from golden arrows, a cherry-wood spear is no matter. In such a rendering, worthy of Salvator Rosa, all reality is subsumed in stage sets, costumes, and music; it is opera, and Italian opera at that. When Eurykleia speaks, the words come in a contralto burst: "My son!—My king!" (Is that the Eurykleia who lifts her skirts and dances in the gore of the suitors, cackling with laughter?) Odysseus's reproof is baritone and Rossini:

> Thy milky founts my infant lips have drain'd:
> And have the Fates thy babbling age ordain'd
> To violate the life thy youth sustain'd?

An exile have I told, with weeping eyes,
Full twenty annuals suns in distant skies.

Here's the hunt as a Victorian painting by Landseer, the prose version of Butcher and Lang:

> Now so soon as early Dawn shone forth, the rosy-fingered, they all went forth to the chase, the hounds and the sons of Autolycus, and with them went the goodly Odysseus. So they fared up the steep hill of wood-clad Parnassus, and quickly they came to the windy hollows. Now the sun was but just striking on the fields, and was come forth from the soft flowing stream of deep Oceanus. Then the beaters reached the glade of the woodland, and before them went the hounds tracking a scent, but behind came the sons of Autolycus, and among them goodly Odysseus followed close on the hounds, swaying a long spear. Thereby in a thick lair was a great boar lying, and through the coppice the force of the wet winds blew never, neither did the bright sun light on it with any rays, nor could the rain pierce through, so thick it was, and of fallen leaves there were a great plenty therein. Then the tramp of the men's feet and of the dogs' came upon the boar, as they pressed on in the chase, and forth from his lair he sprang towards them with crest well bristled and fire shining in his eyes, and stood at bay among them all.

A boar is never "at bay"—he attacks from the beginning. A stag at bay is one who is either trapped or winded and turns in desperation to fight. Homer's boar greets his enemies at his door, disdainful of their folly. In a boar hunt, technically it is always the hunter who is at bay, for one discovers the boar tracking the hunt and turns on him. He is a fearless and ill-tempered beast. Words to Butcher and Lang are invariably decorative, swatches of color all. So that dogs *tramp*. And when there is a paucity of adjectives for fringe, Butcher throws in a "yea" ("many were the men whose towns he saw and whose minds he learnt, yea") and Lang throws in a "lo" ("lo, the dogs withhold him from his way").

It was Samuel Butler who conceded that "Wardour Street has its uses" (what if "The Ancient Mariner" were called "The Old Sailor"?), but his *Odyssey* (1900) is an obvious movement away from the gorgeous antiquing of Butcher and Lang (1879) and of William Morris (1887). Butler hoped for biscuit-plainness and sinew. "Here was the lair of a huge boar among some thick brushwood so dense that the wind and rain could not get through it. . . ." Odysseus has simply "a long spear in his hand"; Butler slices away its shadow and whatever Odysseus was doing with the spear (shaking, swaying, brandishing, waving). Butler tidies up; he knows the difference between poetry and prose. Yet he remains respectful toward Homer's stock images and is not embarrassed by them. He keeps "the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn" while his successor Colonel Lawrence thinks it too literary and writes instead a pukka "at dawn."

Ennis Rees is equally eager to hide Homer's *formulae* and atheizes rosy-toed Eos into "the first red streaks / Of morning." Butler's boar "raised the bristles of his neck, and stood at bay with fire flashing from his eyes." Lawrence's has a "bristling spine and fire-red eyes." Rees: "bristling back and eyes aflame."

A strange entropy runs through the translations of Homer into English, from Chapman to Colonel Lawrence. The descent might be plausibly ascribed to the revolt of the masses, the democratizing of literature. Another cause is just as plausibly a settled desire for gentility, for wistful sweetness, for taming. Both Butler and Lawrence concocted Homers of their own imagining, and both wanted to see him as a literary bloke up to no discernible good; and both were men who delighted to do things which they protested weren't worth doing, while secretly hoping that they would be praised for ascribing virtues to Homer that we can no longer see. Butler's novelistic Homer and Lawrence's bookish rescinder of ancient tales are masks that we don't care to bring down from the attic any more. The end of entropy is to fall into one's own source of energy and die. The death throes came with W. H. D. Rouse—the drift toward making Homer an old salt's yarn complete. The names became Dickensian; every episode was gilded over with a William Morrisy coziness, and Homer was perhaps irretrievably a northern European, a Romancer, a Bard.

And yet northern Europe was not all this time armoring itself in obtuseness against the ravishments of Homer. Far from it. At the moment we are watching the resurgence of a new cycle: the relocation by Robert Fitzgerald and Christopher Logue of the translator's energies. Homer *the poet* seems about to have his day again.

Between Bryant and Fitzgerald we have had no *Odyssey* from a major English poet. If we are willing to discount Pope's *Odyssey* as a work by Pope and take it as a work by apprentices capable of constructing with the master's example and direction a poem in the manner of his *Iliad,* we can then note an even wider span: two *Odysseys* only from poets in the history of English literature, Chapman's and Fitzgerald's. There are, at a guess, some fifty English *Odysseys.*

Morris *ought* to have given us an *Odyssey.* His *The Earthly Paradise,* a neglected masterpiece of English literature sorely needing restoration to the curriculum, is poetry of the highest order and displays a narrative skill beautifully suited to the rendering of a Pre-Raphaelite *Odyssey,* a verbal equivalent of Burne-Jones's *Circe.* He gave us instead a verbal equivalent of Burne-Jones at his most turgid: Tennyson gone high and about to wriggle into the fanciest convolutions of Art Nouveau. Morris satisfied all his need to do an *Odyssey* when he made his *Life and Death*

*of Jason.* The land of Morris's heart's desire was northern, a barbaric forest or Iceland or the Troll King's country.

The force that broke the palsied spell the Victorians and their German cousins cast over Homer was Samuel Butler. But the force flowed not from his plain-prose *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* It flowed from his fierce impatience with humbug.

Butler's real translation of the *Odyssey* is *The Authoress of the Odyssey,* a great burst of Sicilian light upon Homeric studies that made the classicists secure their dark glasses the firmer. Butler's offering an intelligent (and extremely funny) girl as a replacement of the Bard is a symbol of astounding importance. It was an event that has not yet been assessed, but its consequences are scarcely hidden. From Butler come many gifts that found their way to the worktable of James Joyce. The *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* derives from Butler's *Ernest Pontifex* (that we have to know under the un-Butlerian title *The Way of All Flesh*), and Butler's resurrection of the *Odyssey* precedes *Ulysses.* From Butler comes Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Professore e la Sirena,* a transmutation into fable of the essence of *The Authoress of the Odyssey* so pointed that it ought to be designated the highest moment of Homeric criticism in the twentieth century.

"The *Odyssey,*" Butler perceived while he was still in school, "is the wife of the *Iliad.*" And years later that astute perception grew into the insistent news that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not ruins, but alive. But the century wanted Homer to be a ruin; romantic distance was the sole perspective from which it could appreciate the two poems. The Renaissance was over; the Hon. William Gladstone, who was known to correspond with Schliemann and whose hobby was archaeology, took up the translating of Homer, thus:

> And the heralds ordered silence;
> And, on chairs of polished stone,
> Ranged in venerable circle
> Sate the Elders. One by one
> Each the clear-toned herald's sceptre
> Took, and standing forth alone
> Spake his mind. Two golden talents
> Lay before them, to requite
> Only him, among the Judges,
> Straightliest who should judge the right.

No wonder Butler flipped back his cuffs and made a plain prose translation, and went even further and imagined a sprightly girl to replace the harper of Khios, so that the Elder Statesman's wheezings would be the ultimate affront to her *élan.*

For the next half-century we get a curious pattern among writers involved with Homer either as translators or imitators. Charles Doughty is careful to make his epic *Dawn in Britain* half *Odyssey* and half *Iliad,* like the *Aeneid,* with the *Iliad* getting the lion's share, as he had already written his *Odyssey,* the *Travels in Arabia Deserta.* Colonel Lawrence translated the *Odyssey* as a companion piece to his *Iliad, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* Kazantzakis both translated the *Odyssey* into modern Greek and wrote a sequel. In just a few years, when a detached consideration of our age is possible, Joyce's *Ulysses* and Pound's *Cantos,* both versions of the *Odyssey,* will take their place in a complex of meaning that we can now only suspect. And at the heart of the complex will be the two Homeric poems.

And now real poets like Fitzgerald and Logue are returning to the poems themselves; which is to say that from the diffuse appearance of Homer in practically every form of art except translation, Homer is drifting back to his own pages. The dust of Butler's demolition settles nicely, and in place.

And Professor Lattimore's *Odyssey,* where does it fit in all of this? Like his *Iliad,* it will please professors and serve as a standard textbook, for to the professorial eye it is *accurate.* It fits almost word for word over the Greek text; it can be used as a crib by the student. Its architecture is this: there was an extensive wall made of Greek bricks. Brick by brick Professor Lattimore has taken down this structure, replacing each Greek brick with an English one, or perhaps a Basic English one. This is a mode of translation plumped for by Vladimir Nabokov, a translator of formidable talent and effectiveness (though it perhaps ought to be noticed, if only to catch in an inconsistency a man so sure of himself, that when Nabokov translates his own poems he takes his liberties). It is the mode by which hopeful Christians assume the Bible was translated.

And yet, and yet. This is a *new Odyssey;* it takes its place beside other *Odysseys* on the library shelf. There it sits, beside many *Odysseys* obviously less competent and in various Wardour Street and Walter Scott styles; and beside burly, noble Chapman; beside good old leafy William Cullen Bryant; beside the graceful and inventive Robert Fitzgerald. Not far down the shelf are the passages of the *Iliad* rendered by Christopher Logue, a miracle of the imagination. Professor Lattimore is aware that he does not have access to a language as rich as Chapman's, and says so in his introduction. No one has; that age is gone. Ours, he sighs, is not a heroic culture. So he feels he must make do with a diction all but featureless, all but denatured. Yet this is the age of Eliot and Pound and Joyce.

The curious thing about so many of Professor Lattimore's words and

phrases is that they aren't very different from those of the Victorians, or from those of the consciously mannered Colonel Lawrence. He demands, to be sure, a stark neutrality of his words, and keeps the *Zeitgeist* well out of it, so that nowhere do we smile at homely touches such as Bryant's having Odysseus visit "the capitals of many nations," as if he were Emerson on a tour. This neutrality is not total; the King James Bible rings in from time to time ("his time of homecoming," "nor among his own people"). There are, happily, grand lines throughout that reach for their resonance into the deepest traditions of English poetry; watch the alliteration and assonance in this:

slaughter his crowding sheep and lumbering horn-curved cattle;

the Milton in this:

and descended in a flash of speed from the peaks of Olympos.

Yet we must come across these lines in a style that by now can only be called Ageless Homeric Pastiche:

My child, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier?

And:

Then in turn the goddess gray-eyed Athene answered him.

Professor Lattimore is like an engraver copying a painting. The color of the original must everywhere appear in his work as monochrome shades. This need not have been, but Professor Lattimore chose to have it that way. He is *not* writing an English poem; he is writing a translation. He does not relish the half-compliment that Pope had to suffer; he has not written a very pretty poem that must not be called Homer. He has written a sprawling poem that imitates Homer along certain aesthetic lines. It is sometimes severely controlled, stately, grave; it is also a mussy poem, flaring out of control, losing contact with both Greek and English.

Professor Lattimore's careful erudition and earnest solicitude for accuracy led him to believe that the *Odyssey* would somehow write itself. If he stuck to his business, the poem would stick to its. Why should it not? The method is logical but wildly improbable, for the simple reason that words are not numbers, nor even signs. They are animals, alive and with a will of their own. Put together, they are invariably less or more than their sum. Words die in antisepsis. Asked to be neutral, they display allegiances and stubborn propensities. They assume the color of their new surroundings, like chameleons; they perversely develop echoes.

Words also live in history, aging, or proving immune to the bite of

time. Much that was thought clever in recent translations is already wilting and going quaint. A neutral vocabulary stands well against time and like the basic geometric figures never goes out of style. It is plausible that Professor Lattimore's *Odyssey* may weather our age and the next while translations more interesting to us at the moment will soon begin to sound like William Morris. But posterity is one audience, and we here and now are another. Homer, in defiance of Heraclitus, remains.