

Alexander Pope

## PREFACE TO HIS TRANSLATION OF HOMER'S *ILIAD*

[1715]



¶1

§1 HOMER is universally allow'd to have had the greatest Invention of any Writer whatever. §2 The Praise of Judgment *Virgil* has justly contested with him, and others may have their Pretensions as to particular excellencies; but his Invention remains yet unrival'd. §3 Nor is it a Wonder if he has ever been acknowledg'd the greatest of Poets, who most excell'd in That which is the very Foundation of Poetry. §4 It is the Invention that in different degrees distinguishes all great Genius's: The utmost Stretch of human Study, Learning, and Industry, which masters every thing besides, can never attain to this. §5 It furnishes Art with all her Materials, and without it Judgment itself can at best but *steal wisely*: For Art is only like a prudent Steward that lives on managing the Riches of Nature. §6 Whatever Praises may be given to Works of Judgment, there is not even a single Beauty in them but is owing to the Invention : As in the most regular Gardens, however Art may carry the greatest Appearance, there is not a Plant or Flower but is the Gift of Nature. §7 The first can only reduce the Beauties of the latter into a more obvious Figure, which the common Eye may better take in, and is therefore more entertain'd with. §8 And perhaps the reason why most Criticks are inclin'd to prefer a judicious and methodical Genius to a great and fruitful one, is, because they find it easier for themselves to pursue their Observations through an uniform and bounded Walk of Art, than to comprehend the vast and various Extent of Nature.

¶2

§9 Our Author's Work is a wild Paradise , where if we cannot see all the Beauties so distinctly as in an order'd Garden, it is only because the Number of them is infinitely greater. §10 'Tis like a copious Nursery which contains the Seeds and first Productions of every kind, out of which those who follow'd him have but selected some particular Plants, each according to his Fancy, to cultivate and beautify. §11 If some things are too luxuriant, it is owing to the Richness of the Soil ; and if others are not arriv'd to Perfection or Maturity, it is only because they are over-run and opprest by those of a stronger Nature.

¶3

§12 It is to the Strength of this amazing Invention we are to attribute that unequal'd Fire and Rapture, which is so forcible in *Homer*, that no Man of a true Poetical Spirit is Master of himself while he reads him. §13 What he writes is of the most animated Nature imaginable ; every thing moves , every thing lives, and is put in Action. §14 If a Council be call'd, or a Battle fought, you are not coldly inform'd of what was said or done as from a third Person ; the Reader is hurry'd out of himself by the Force of the Poet's Imagination, and turns in one place to a Hearer, in another to a Spectator. §15 The Course of his Verses resembles that of the Army he describes,

**Oi d ar isag, {o}sei te puri chth{o}n pasa gemoito.**

§16 *They pour along like a Fire that sweeps the whole Earth before it.* 'Tis however remarkable that his Fancy, which is every where vigorous, is not discover'd immediately at the beginning of his Poem in its fullest Splendor : It grows in the Progress both upon himself and others, and becomes on Fire like a Chariot-Wheel, by its own Rapidity. §17 Exact Disposition, just Thought, correct Elocution, polish'd Numbers, may have been found in a thousand ; but this Poetical *Fire*, this *Vivida vis animi*, in a very few. §18 Even in Works where all those are imperfect or neglected, this can over-power Criticism, and make us admire even while we dis-approve. §19 Nay , where this appears, tho' attended with Absurdities, it brightens all the Rubbish about it, 'till we see nothing but its own Splendor. §20 This *Fire* is discern'd in *Virgil*, but discern'd as through a Glass, reflected, and more shining than warm, but every where equal and constant : In *Lucan* and *Statius*, it bursts out in sudden, short, and interrupted Flashes : In *Milton*, it glows like a Furnace kept up to an uncommon Fierceness by the Force of Art : In *Shakespear*, it strikes before we are aware, like an accidental Fire from Heaven : But in *Homer*, and in him only, it burns every where clearly, and every where irresistibly.

¶4

§21 I shall here endeavour to show, how this vast *Invention* exerts itself in a manner superior to that of any Poet, thro' all the main constituent Parts of his Work, as it is the great and peculiar Characteristick which distinguishes him from all other Authors.

¶5

§22 This strong and ruling Faculty was like a powerful Planet, which in the Violence of its Course, drew all things within its *Vortex*. §23 It seem'd not enough to have taken in the whole Circle of Arts, and the whole Compass of Nature ; all the inward Passions and Affections of Mankind to supply this Characters, and all the outward Forms and Images of Things for his Descriptions ; but wanting yet an ampler Sphere to expatiate in, he open'd a new and boundless Walk for his Imagination, and created a World for himself in the Invention of *Fable*. §24 That which *Aristotle* calls the *Soul of Poetry*, was first breath'd into it by *Homer*. §25 I shall begin with considering him in this Part, as it is naturally the first, and I speak of it both as it means the Design of a Poem, and as it is taken for Fiction.

¶6

§26 Fable may be divided into the *Probable*, the *Allegorical*, and the *Marvelous*. §27 The *Probable Fable* is the Recital of such Actions as tho' they did not happen, yet might, in the common course of Nature : Or of such as tho' they did, become Fables by the additional Episodes and manner of telling them. §28 Of this sort is the main Story of an Epic Poem, *the Return of Ulysses*, *the Settlement of the Trojans in Italy*, or the like. §29 That of the *Iliad* is *the Anger of Achilles*, the most short and single Subject that ever was chosen by any Poet. §30 Yet this he has supplied with a vaster Variety of Incidents and Events, and crouded with a greater Number of Councils, Speeches, Battles, and Episodes of all kinds, than are to be found even in those Poems whose Schemes are of the utmost Latitude and Irregularity. §31 The Action is hurry'd on with the most vehement Spirit, and its whole Duration employs not so much as fifty Days. §32 *Virgil*, for want of so warm a Genius, aided himself by taking in a more extensive Subject, as well as a greater Length of Time, and contracting the Design of both *Homer's* Poems into one, which is yet but a fourth part as large as his. §33 The other Epic Poets have us'd the same Practice, but generally carry'd it so far as to superinduce a Multiplicity of Fables, destroy the Unity of Action, and lose their Readers in an unreasonable Length of Time. §34 Nor is it only in the main Design that they have been unable to add to his Invention, but they have follow'd him in every Episode and Part of Story. §35 If he has given a regular *Catalogue* of an *Army*, they all draw up their Forces in the same Order. §36 If he has funeral Games for *Patroclus*, *Virgil* has the same for *Anchises*, and *Statius* (rather than omit them) destroys the Unity of his Action for those of *Archemorus*. §37 If *Ulysses* visit the Shades, the *Æneas* of *Virgil* and *Scipio* of *Silius* are sent after him. §38 If he be detain'd from his Return by the Allurements of *Calypso*, so is *Æneas* by *Dido*, and *Rinaldo* by *Armida*. §39 If *Achilles* be absent from the Army on the Score of a Quarrel thro' half the Poem, *Rinaldo* must absent himself just as long, on the like account. §40 If he gives his Heroe a Suit of celestial Armour, *Virgil* and *Tasso* make the same Present to theirs. §41 *Virgil* has not only observ'd this close Imitation of *Homer*, but where he had not led the way, supply'd the Want from other *Greek* Authors. §42 Thus the Story of *Sinon* and the *Taking of Troy* was copied ( says *Macrobius* ) almost word for word from *Pisander*, as the Loves of *Dido* and *Æneas* are taken from those of *Medæa* and *Jason* in *Apollonius*, and several others in the same manner.

¶7

§43 To proceed to the *Allegorical Fable* : If we reflect upon those innumerable Knowledges, those Secrets of Nature and Physical Philosophy which *Homer* is generally suppos'd to have wrapt up in his *Allegories*, what a new and ample Scene of Wonder may this Consideration afford us ? §44 How fertile will that Imagination appear, which was able to cloath all the Properties of Elements, the Qualifications of the Mind, the Virtues and Vices, in Forms and Persons ; and to introduce them into Actions agreeable to the Nature of the Things they shadow'd ? §45 This is a Field in which no succeeding Poets could dispute with *Homer* ; and whatever Commendations have been allow'd them on this Head, are by no means for their Invention in having enlarg'd his Circle, but for their Judgment in having contracted it. §46 For when the Mode of Learning chang'd in following Ages, and Science was deliver'd in a plainer manner, it then became as reasonable in the more modern Poets to lay it aside, as it was in *Homer* to make use of it.

§47 And perhaps it was no unhappy Circumstance for *Virgil* , that there was not in his Time that Demand upon him of so great an Invention, as might be capable of furnishing all those Allegorical Parts of a Poem.

¶8

§48 The *Marvelous Fable* includes whatever is supernatural , and especially the Machines of the Gods. §49 If *Homer* was not the first who introduc'd the Deities (as *Herodotus* imagines) into the Religion of *Greece*, he seems the first who brought them into a System of *Machinery* for Poetry, and such an one as makes its greatest Importance and Dignity. §50 For we find those Authors who have been offended at the literal Notion of the Gods, constantly laying their Accusation against *Homer* as the undoubted Inventor of them. §51 But whatever cause there might be to blame his *Machines* in a Philosophical or Religious View, they are so perfect in the Poetick, that Mankind have been ever since contented to follow them : None have been able to enlarge the Sphere of Poetry beyond the Limits he has set : Every Attempt of this Nature has prov'd unsuccessful ; and after all the various Changes of Times and Religions, his Gods continue to this Day the Gods of Poetry.

¶9

§52 We come now to the *Characters* of his Persons, and here we shall find no Author has ever drawn so many with so visible and surprizing a Variety, or given us such lively and affecting Impressions of them. §53 Every one has something so singularly his own, that no Painter could have distinguished them more by their Features, than the Poet has by their Manners. §54 Nothing can be more exact than the Distinctions he has observ'd in the different degrees of Virtues and Vices. §55 The single Quality of *Courage* is wonderfully diversify'd in the several Characters of the *Iliad*. §56 That of *Achilles* is furious and intractable ; that of *Diomede* forward , yet list'ning to Advice and subject to Command : We see in *Ajax* an heavy and self-considering Valour, in *Hector* an active and vigilant one : The Courage of *Agamemnon* is inspirited by Love of Empire and Ambition, that of *Menelaus* mix'd with Softness and Tenderness for his People : We find in *Idomeneus* a plain direct Soldier, in *Sarpedon* a gallant and generous one. §57 Nor is this judicious and astonishing Diversity to be found only in the principal Quality which constitutes the Main of each Character, but even in the Under-parts of it, to which he takes care to give a Tincture of that principal one. §58 For Example, the main Characters of *Ulysses* and *Nestor* consist in *Wisdom*, and they are distinct in this ; the Wisdom of one is *artificial* and *various*, of the other *natural*, *open*, and *regular*. §59 But they have, besides, Characters of *Courage* ; and this Quality also takes a different Turn in each from the difference of his Prudence : For one in the War depends still upon *Caution* , the other upon *Experience*. §60 It would be endless to produce Instances of these Kinds. §61 The Characters of *Virgil* are far from striking us in this open manner ; they lie in a great degree hidden and undistinguish'd , and where they are mark'd most evidently, affect us not in proportion to those of *Homer*. §62 His Characters of Valour are much alike ; even that of *Turnus* seems no way peculiar but as it is in a superior degree ; and we see nothing that differences the Courage of *Mnestheus* from that of *Sergesthus*, *Cloanthus*, or the rest. §63 In like manner it may be remark'd of *Statius's* Heroes, that an Air of Impetuosity runs thro' them all ; the same horrid and savage Courage appears in his *Capaneus*, *Tydeus*,

*Hippomedon*, /&c./ They have a Parity of Character which makes them seem Brothers of one Family. §64 I believe when the Reader is led into this Track of Reflection, if he will pursue it through the *Epic* and *Tragic* Writers, he will be convinced how infinitely superior in this Point the Invention of *Homer* was to that of all others.

## ¶10

§65 The *Speeches* are to be consider'd as they flow from the Characters , being perfect or defective as they agree or disagree with the Manners of those who utter them. §66 As there is more variety of Characters in the *Iliad*, so there is of *Speeches*, than in any other Poem. §67 *Every thing in it has Manners* (as *Aristotle* expresses it) that is, every thing is acted or spoken. §68 It is hardly credible in a Work of such length, how small a Number of Lines are employ'd in Narration. §69 In *Virgil* the Dramatic Part is less in proportion to the Narrative ; and the *Speeches* often consist of general Reflections or Thoughts, which might be equally just in any Person's Mouth upon the same Occasion. §70 As many of his Persons have no apparent Characters, so many of his *Speeches* escape being apply'd and judg'd by the Rule of Propriety. §71 We oftner think of the Author himself when we read *Virgil*, than when we are engag'd in *Homer* : All which are the Effects of a colder Invention, that interests us less in the Action describ'd : *Homer* makes us Hearers, and *Virgil* leaves us Readers.

## ¶11

§72 If in the next place we take a View of the *Sentiments*, the same presiding Faculty is eminent in the Sublimity and Spirit of his Thoughts. §73 *Longinus* has given his Opinion, that it was in this Part *Homer* principally excell'd. §74 What were alone sufficient to prove the Grandeur and Excellence of his *Sentiments* in general, is that they have so remarkable a Parity with those of the Scripture: *Duport*, in his *Gnomologia Homerica*, has collected innumerable Instances of this sort. §75 And it is with Justice an excellent modern Writer allows, that if *Virgil* has not so many Thoughts that are low and vulgar, he has not so many that are sublime and noble ; and that the *Roman* Author seldom rises into very astonishing *Sentiments* where he is not fired by the *Iliad*.

## ¶12

§76 If we observe his *Descriptions*, *Images*, and *Similes*, we shall find the Invention still predominant. §77 To what else can we ascribe that vast Comprehension of Images of every sort , where we see each Circumstance and Individual of Nature summon'd together by the Extent and Fecundity of his Imagination ; to which all things, in their various Views, presented themselves in an Instant , and had their Impressions taken off to Perfection at a Heat ? §78 Nay, he not only gives us the full Prospects of Things, but several unexpected Peculiarities and Side-Views, unobserv'd by any Painter but *Homer*. §79 Nothing is so surprizing as the *Descriptions* of his Battels, which take up no less than half the *Iliad*, and are supply'd with so vast a Variety of Incidents, that no one bears a Likeness to another ; such different Kinds of Deaths, that no two Heroes are wounded in the same manner ; and such a Profusion of noble Ideas, that every Battel rises above the last in Greatness, Horror, and Confusion. §80 It is certain. there is not near that Number of Images and *Descriptions* in any Epic Poet ; tho' every one has assisted himself with a

great Quantity out of him : And it is evident of *Virgil* especially, that he has scarce any Comparisons which are not drawn from his Master.

¶13

§81 If we descend from hence to the *Expression*, we see the bright Imagination of *Homer* shining out in the most enliven'd Forms of it. §82 We acknowledge him the Father of Poetical Diction , the first who taught that *Language of the Gods* to Men. §83 His Expression is like the colouring of some great Masters, which discovers itself to be laid on boldly, and executed with Rapidity. §84 It is indeed the strongest and most glowing imaginable , and touch'd with the greatest Spirit. §85 *Aristotle* had reason to say , He was the only Poet who had found out *Living Words* ; there are in him more daring Figures and Metaphors than in any good Author whatever. §86 An Arrow is *impatient* to be on the Wing, a Weapon *thirsts* to drink the Blood of an Enemy, and the like. §87 Yet his Expression is never too big for the Sense, but justly great in proportion to it : 'Tis the Sentiment that swells and fills out the Diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it. §88 For in the same degree that a *Thought* is warmer, an *Expression* will be brighter ; and as That is more strong, This will become more perspicuous : Like Glass in the Furnace which grows to a greater Magnitude , and refines to a greater Clearness , only as the *Breath* within is more powerful, and the *Heat* more intense.

¶14

§89 To throw his Language more out of Prose, *Homer* seems to have affected the *Compound-Epithets* . §90 This was a sort of Composition peculiarly proper to Poetry , not only as it heighten'd the *Diction*, but as it assisted and fill'd the *Numbers* with greater Sound and Pomp, and likewise conduced in some measure to thicken the *Images*. §91 On this last Consideration I cannot but attribute these to the Fruitfulness of his Invention, since (as he has manag'd them) they are a sort of supernumerary Pictures of the Persons or Things they are join'd to. §92 We see the Motion of *Hector's* Plumes in the Epithet **Kornthaiolos**, the Landscape of Mount *Neritus* in that of **Einosiphullos**, and so of others ; which particular Images could not have been insisted upon so long as to express them in a Description (tho' but of a single Line) without diverting the Reader too much from the principal Action or Figure. §93 As a Metaphor is a short Simile , one of these Epithets is a short Description.

¶15

§94 Lastly, if we consider his *Versification*, we shall be sensible what a Share of Praise is due to his Invention in that also. §95 He was not satisfy'd with his Language as he found it settled in any one Part of *Greece*, but searched thro' its differing *Dialects* with this particular View, to beautify and perfect his Numbers : He consider'd these as they had a greater Mixture of Vowels or Consonants, and accordingly employ'd them as the Verse requir'd either a greater Smoothness or Strength. §96 What he most affected was the *Ionic* , which has a peculiar Sweetness from its never using Contractions, and from its Custom of resolving the Diphthongs into two Syllables ; so as to make the Words open themselves with a more spreading and sonorous Fluency. §97 With this he mingled the *Attic* Contractions, the broader *Doric*, and the feebler *Æolic*, which often rejects its Aspirate, or takes off its Accent ; and compleated this Variety by altering some Letters

with the License of Poetry. §98 Thus his Measures, instead of being Fetters to his Sense , were always in readiness to run along with the Warmth of his Rapture ; and even to give a farther Representation of his Notions, in the Correspondence of their Sounds to what they signify'd. §99 Out of all these he has deriv'd that Harmony, which makes us confess he had not only the richest Head, but the finest Ear in the World. §100 This is so great a Truth , that whoever will but consult the Tune of his Verses even without understanding them (with the same sort of Diligence as we daily see practis'd in the Case of *Italian Opera's*) will find more Sweetness, Variety, and Majesty of Sound , than in any other Language or Poetry. §101 The Beauty of his Numbers is allow'd by the Criticks to be copied but faintly by *Virgil* himself, tho' they are so just to ascribe it to the Nature of the *Latine* Tongue. §102 Indeed the *Greek* has some Advantages both from the natural *Sound* of its *Words* , and the Turn and *Cadence* of its *Verse*, which agree with the Genius of no other Language. §103 *Virgil* was very sensible of this, and used the utmost Diligence in working up a more intractable Language to whatsoever Graces it was capable of, and in particular never fail'd to bring the Sound of his Line to a beautiful Agreement with its Sense. §104 If the *Grecian* Poet has not been so frequently celebrated on this Account as the *Roman*, the only reason is, that fewer Criticks have understood one Language than the other. §105 *Dionysius* of *Halicarnassus* has pointed out many of our Author's Beauties in this kind, in his Treatise of the *Composition of Words*, and others will be taken notice of in the Course of the Notes. §106 It suffices at present to observe of his Numbers, that they flow with so much ease, as to make one imagine *Homer* had no other care than to transcribe as fast as the *Muses* dictated ; and at the same time with so much Force and inspiriting Vigour, that they awaken and raise us like the Sound of a Trumpet. §107 They roll along as a plentiful River, always in motion, and always full ; while we are born away by a Tide of Verse, the most rapid and yet the most smooth imaginable.

¶16

§108 Thus on whatever side we contemplate *Homer*, what principally strikes us is his *Invention*. §109 It is that which forms the Character of each Part of his Work ; and accordingly we find it to have made his Fable more *extensive* and *copious* than any other, his Manners more *lively* and *strongly marked*, his Speeches more *affecting* and *transported*, his Sentiments more *warm* and *sublime*, his Images and Descriptions more *full* and *animated*, his Expression more *rais'd* and *daring*, and his Numbers more *rapid* and *various*. §110 I hope in what has been said of *Virgil* with regard to any of these Heads, I have no way derogated from his Character. §111 Nothing is more absurd or endless, than the common Method of comparing eminent Writers by an Opposition of particular Passages in them , and forming a Judgment from thence of their Merit upon the whole. §112 We ought to have a certain Knowledge of the principal Character and distinguishing Excellence of each : It is in *that* we are to consider him, and in proportion to his Degree in *that* we are to admire him. §113 No Author or Man ever excell'd all the World in more than one Faculty, and as *Homer* has done this in *Invention*, *Virgil* has in *Judgment*. §114 Not that we are to think *Homer* wanted *Judgment*, because *Virgil* had it in a more eminent degree ; or that *Virgil* wanted *Invention*, because *Homer* possess a larger share of it : Each of these great Authors had more of both than perhaps any Man besides, and are only said to have less in Comparison with one another. §115 *Homer* was the greater Genius, *Virgil* the better Artist. §116 In one we most admire the *Man*, in the

other the *Work* . §117 *Homer* hurries and transports us with a commanding Impetuosity, *Virgil* leads us with an attractive Majesty : *Homer* scatters with a generous Profusion, *Virgil* bestows with a careful Magnificence : *Homer* like the *Nile*, pours out his Riches with a sudden Overflow ; *Virgil* like a River in its Banks , with a gentle and constant Stream. §118 When we behold their Battels, methinks the two Poets resemble the Heroes they celebrate : *Homer*, boundless and irresistible as *Achilles*, bears all before him, and shines more and more as the Tumult increases ; *Virgil* calmly daring like *Æneas*, appears undisturb'd in the midst of the Action, disposes all about him, and conquers with Tranquillity : And when we look upon their Machines, *Homer* seems like his own *Jupiter* in his Terrors, shaking *Olympus*, scattering the Lightnings, and firing the Heavens ; *Virgil* like the same Power in his Benevolence, counselling with the Gods, laying Plans for Empires, and regularly ordering his whole Creation.

¶17

§119 But after all , it is with great Parts as with great Virtues, they naturally border on some Imperfection ; and it is often hard to distinguish exactly where the Virtue ends, or the Fault begins. §120 As Prudence may sometimes sink to Suspicion , so may a great Judgment decline to Coldness ; and as Magnanimity may run up to Profusion or Extravagance, so may a great Invention to Redundancy or Wildness. §121 If we look upon *Homer* in this View, we shall perceive the chief *Objections* against him to proceed from so noble a Cause as the Excess of this Faculty.

¶18

§122 Among these we may reckon some of his *Marvellous Fictions*, upon which so much Criticism has been spent as surpassing all the Bounds of Probability. §123 Perhaps it may be with great and superior Souls as with gigantick Bodies, which exerting themselves with unusual Strength, exceed what is commonly thought the due Proportion of Parts, to become Miracles in the whole ; and like the old Heroes of that Make, commit something near Extravagance amidst a Series of glorious and inimitable Performances. §124 Thus *Homer* has his *speaking Horses* , and *Virgil* his *Myrtles distilling Blood* , without so much as contriving the easy Intervention of a Deity to save the Probability.

¶19

§125 It is owing to the same vast Invention that his *Similes* have been thought too exuberant and full of Circumstances. §126 The Force of this Faculty is seen in nothing more, than its Inability to confine itself to that single Circumstance upon which the Comparison is grounded : It runs out into Embellishments of additional Images, which however are so manag'd as not to overpower the main one. §127 His *Similes* are like Pictures, where the principal Figure has not only its proportion given agreeable to the Original, but is also set off with occasional Ornaments and Prospects. §128 The same will account for his manner of heaping a Number of Comparisons together in one Breath, when his Fancy suggested to him at once so many various and correspondent Images. §129 The Reader will easily extend this Observation to more *Objections* of the same kind.



¶20

§130 If there are others which seem rather to charge him with a Defect or Narrowness of Genius, than an Excess of it ; those seeming Defects will be found upon Examination to proceed wholly from the Nature of the Times he liv'd in. §131 Such are his *grosser Representations* of the *Gods*, and the vicious and *imperfect Manners* of his *Heroes* , which will be treated of in the following \* *Essay* : But I must here speak a word of the latter, as it is a Point generally carry'd into Extrems both by the Censurers and Defenders of *Homer*. §132 It must be a strange Partiality to Antiquity to think with Madam *Dacier*, "that † those Times and Manners are so much the more excellent, as they are more contrary to ours." Who can be so prejudiced in their Favour as to magnify the Felicity of those Ages, when a Spirit of Revenge and Cruelty reign'd thro' the World, when no Mercy was shown but for the sake of Lucre, when the greatest Princes were put to the Sword, and their Wives and Daughters made Slaves and Concubines ? §133 On the other side I would not be so delicate as those modern Criticks, who are shock'd at the *servile Offices* and *mean Employments* in which we sometimes see the Heroes of *Homer* engag'd. §134 There is a Pleasure in taking a view of that Simplicity in Opposition to the Luxury of succeeding Ages ; in beholding Monarchs without their Guards, Princes tending their Flocks, and Princesses drawing Water from the Springs. §135 When we read *Homer*, we ought to reflect that we are reading the most ancient Author in the Heathen World ; and those who consider him in this Light, will double their Pleasure in the Perusal of him. §136 Let them think they are growing acquainted with Nations and People that are now no more ; that they are stepping almost three thousand Years backward into the remotest Antiquity , and entertaining themselves with a clear and surprizing Vision of Things no where else to be found, and the only authentick Picture of that ancient World. §137 By this means alone their greatest Obstacles will vanish ; and what usually creates their Dislike , will become a Satisfaction.

\* *See the Articles of Theology and Morality, in the third Part of the Essay.*

† *Preface to her Homer.*

¶21

§138 This Consideration may farther serve to answer for the constant Use of the same *Epithets* to his Gods and Heroes, such as the *far-darting Phæbus*, the *blue-ey'd Pallas* , the *swift-footed Achilles*, /&c./ which some have censured as impertinent and tediously repeated. §139 Those of the Gods depended upon the Powers and Offices then believ'd to belong to them, and had contracted a Weight and Veneration from the Rites and solemn Devotions in which they were us'd : They were a sort of Attributes that it was a Matter of Religion to salute them with on all Occasions, and an Irreverence to omit. §140 As for the Epithets of great Men, Mons. *Boileau* is of Opinion ; that they were in the Nature of *Sir-Names*, and repeated as such ; for the *Greeks* having no Names deriv'd from their Fathers , were oblig'd when they mention'd any one to add some other Distinction ; either naming his Parents expressly, or his Place of Birth, Profession, or the like : As *Alexander* Son of *Philip* , *Herodotus* of *Halicarnassus*, *Diogenes* the *Cynic*, /&c./ *Homer* therefore complying with the Custom of his Country , us'd such distinctive Additions as better agreed with Poetry. §141 And indeed we have something parallel to these in modern

Times, such as the Names of *Harold Harefoot* , *Edmund Ironside* , *Edward Long-shanks* , *Edward the black Prince*, &c./ If yet this be thought to account better for the Propriety than for the Repetition , I shall add a farther Conjecture. §142 *Hesiod* dividing the World into its Ages, has plac'd a fourth Age between the Brazen and the Iron one, of *Heroes distinct from other Men, a divine Race, who fought at Thebes and Troy, are called Demi-Gods, and live by the Care of Jupiter in the Islands of the Blessed\**. §143 Now among the divine Honours which were paid them, they might have this also in common with the Gods, not to be mention'd without the Solemnity of an Epithet, and such as might be acceptable to them by its celebrating their Families, Actions, or Qualities.

\**Hesiod, lib. I. {ver}. 155, |&c.*|

¶22

§144 What other Cavils have been rais'd against *Homer* are such as hardly deserve a Reply, but will yet be taken notice of as they occur in the Course of the Work. §145 Many have been occasion'd by an injudicious Endeavour to exalt *Virgil* ; which is much the same, as if one should think to praise the Superstructure by undermining the Foundation : One would imagine by the whole Course of their Parallels, that these Criticks never so much as heard of *Homer's* having written first ; a Consideration which whoever compares these two Poets ought to have always in his Eye. §146 Some accuse him for the same things which they overlook or praise in the other ; as when they prefer the Fable and Moral of the *Æneis* to those of the *Iliad*, for the same Reasons which might set the *Odyssees* above the *Æneis*: as that the Heroe is a wiser Man ; and the Action of the one more beneficial to his Countrey than that of the other : Or else they blame him for not doing what he never design'd ; as because *Achilles* is not as good and perfect a Prince as *Aeneas*, when the very Moral of his Poem requir'd a contrary Character. §147 It is thus that *Rapin* judges in his Comparison of *Homer* and *Virgil*. §148 Others select those particular Passages of *Homer* which are not so labour'd as some that *Virgil* drew out of them : This is the whole Management of *Scaliger* in *his Poetices*. §149 Others quarrel with what they take for low and mean Expressions, sometimes thro' a false Delicacy and Refinement , oftner from an Ignorance of the Graces of the Original ; and then triumph in the Aukwardness of their own Translations. §150 This is the Conduct of *Perault* in his *Parallels*. §151 Lastly, there are others, who pretending to a fairer Proceeding , distinguish between the personal Merit of *Homer*, and that of his *Work* ; but when they come to assign the Causes of the great Reputation of the *Iliad*, they found it upon the Ignorance of his Times, and the Prejudice of those that followed. §152 And in pursuance of this Principle, they make those Accidents (such as the Contention of the Cities, &c.) to be the Causes of his Fame, which were in Reality the Consequences of his Merit. §153 The same might as well be said of *Virgil* , or any great Author , whose general Character will infallibly raise many casual Additions to their Reputation. §154 This is the Method of Mons. *de la Motte* ; who yet confesses upon the whole, that in whatever Age *Homer* had liv'd he must have been the greatest Poet of his Nation, and that he may be said in this Sense to be the Master even of those who surpass'd him.

¶23

§155 In all these Objections we see nothing that contradicts his Title to the Honour of the

chief *Invention* ; and as long as this (which is indeed the Characteristic of Poetry itself) remains unequal'd by his Followers, he still continues superior to them. §156 A cooler Judgment may commit fewer Faults, and be more approv'd in the Eyes of *One Sort* of Criticks : but that Warmth of Fancy will carry the loudest and most universal Applauses which holds the Heart of a Reader under the strongest Enchantment. §157 *Homer* not only appears the Inventor of Poetry, but excells all the Inventors of other Arts in this, that he has swallow'd up the Honour of those who succeeded him. §158 What he has done admitted no Encrease, it only left room for Contraction or Regulation. §159 He shew'd all the Stretch of Fancy at once ; and if he has fail'd in some of his Flights, it was but because he attempted every thing. §160 A Work of this kind seems like a mighty Tree which rises from the most vigorous Seed, is improv'd with Industry, flourishes, and produces the finest Fruit ; Nature and Art have conspir'd to raise it ; Pleasure and Profit join'd to make it valuable : and they who find the justest Faults, have only said, that a few Branches (which run luxuriant thro' a Richness of Nature) might be lopp'd into Form to give it a more regular Appearance.

¶24

§161 Having now spoken of the Beauties and Defects of the Original, it remains to treat of the Translation , with the same View to the chief Characteristic. §162 As far as that is seen in the main Parts of the Poem, such as the *Fable*, *Manners*, and *Sentiments*, no Translator can prejudice it but by wilful Omissions or Contractions. §163 As it also breaks out in every particular *Image*, *Description*, and *Simile* ; whoever lessens or too much softens those, takes off from this chief Character. §164 It is the first grand Duty of an Interpreter to give his Author entire and unmain'd ; and for the rest, the *Diction* and *Versification* only are his proper Province ; since these must be his own, but the others he is to take as he finds them.

¶25

§165 It should then be consider'd what Methods may afford some Equivalent in our Language for the Graces of these in the *Greek*. §166 It is certain no literal Translation can be just to an excellent Original in a superior Language : but it is a great Mistake to imagine ( as many have done ) that a rash Paraphrase can make amends for this general Defect ; which is no less in danger to lose the Spirit of an Ancient, by deviating into the modern Manners of Expression. §167 If there be sometimes a *Darkness*, there is often a *Light* in Antiquity, which nothing better preserves than a Version almost literal[.] I know no Liberties one ought to take , but those which are necessary for transfusing the Spirit of the Original, and supporting the Poetical Style of the Translation : and I will venture to say, there have not been more Men misled in former times by a servile dull Adherence to the Letter, than have been deluded in ours by a chimerical insolent Hope of raising and improving their Author. §168 It is not to be doubted that the *Fire* of the Poem is what a Translator should principally regard, as it is most likely to expire in his managing : However it is his safest way to be content with preserving this to his utmost in the Whole, without endeavouring to be more than he finds his Author is, in any particular Place. §169 'Tis a great Secret in Writing to know when to be plain, and when poetical and figurative ; and it is what *Homer* will teach us if we will but follow modestly in his Footsteps. §170 Where his Diction is bold and lofty, let us raise ours as high as we

can ; but where his is plain and humble, we ought not to be deterr'd from imitating him by the fear of incurring the Censure of a meer *English* Critick. §171 Nothing that belongs to *Homer* seems to have been more commonly mistaken than the just Pitch of his Style : Some of his Translators having swell'd into Fustian in a proud Confidence of the *Sublime* ; others sunk into Flatness in a cold and timorous Notion of *Simplicity*. §172 Methinks I see these different Followers of *Homer* , some sweating and straining after him by violent Leaps and Bounds, (the certain Signs of false Mettle) others slowly and servilely creeping in his Train, while the Poet himself is all the time proceeding with an unaffected and equal Majesty before them. §173 However of the two Extrems one could sooner pardon Frenzy than Frigidity : No Author is to be envy'd for such Commendations as he may gain by that Character of Style , which his Friends must agree together to call *Simplicity* , and the rest of the World will call *Dulness*. §174 There is a *graceful* and *dignify'd* Simplicity, as well as a *bald* and *sordid* one , which differ as much from each other as the Air of a *plain* Man from that of a *Sloven* : 'Tis one thing to be tricked up, and another not to be dress'd at all. §175 Simplicity is the Mean between Ostentation and Rusticity.

¶26

§176 This pure and noble Simplicity is no where in such Perfection as in the *Scripture* and our Author. §177 One may affirm with all respect to the inspired Writings , that the *Divine Spirit* made use of no other Words but what were intelligible and common to Men at that Time, and in that Part of the World ; and as *Homer* is the Author nearest to those , his Style must of course bear a greater Resemblance to the sacred Books than that of any other Writer. §178 This Consideration (together with what has been observ'd of the Parity of some of his Thoughts) may methinks induce a Translator on the one hand to give into several of those general Phrases and Manners of Expression, which have attain'd a Veneration even in our Language from their use in the *Old Testament* ; as on the other, to avoid those which have been appropriated to the Divinity, and in a manner consign'd to Mystery and Religion.

¶27

§179 For a farther Preservation of this Air of Simplicity , a particular Care should be taken to express with all Plainness those *Moral Sentences* and *Proverbial Speeches* which are so numerous in this Poet. §180 They have something Venerable , and as I may say *Oracular*, in that unadorn'd Gravity and Shortness with which they are deliver'd : a Grace which would be utterly lost by endeavouring to give them what we call a more ingenious ( that is a more modern ) Turn in the Paraphrase.

¶28

§181 Perhaps the Mixture of some *Gracisms* and old Words after the manner of *Milton* , if done without too much Affectation, might not have an ill Effect in a Version of this particular Work, which most of any other seems to require a venerable *Antique* Cast. §182 But certainly the use of *modern Terms* of War and Government, such as *Platoon*, *Campagne*, *Junto* , or the like (which some of his Translators have fallen into) cannot be allowable ; those only excepted , without which it is impossible to treat the Subjects in any living Language.

¶29

§183 There are two Peculiarities in *Homer's* Diction that are a sort of *Marks* or *Moles*, by which every common Eye distinguishes him at first sight : Those who are not his greatest Admirers look upon them as Defects, and those who are seem pleased with them as Beauties. §184 I speak of his *Compound-Epithets* and of his *Repetitions*. §185 Many of the former cannot be done literally into *English* without destroying the Purity of our Language. §186 I believe such should be retain'd as slide easily of themselves into an *English-Compound*, without Violence to the Ear or to the receiv'd Rules of Composition ; as well as those which have receiv'd a Sanction from the Authority of our best Poets, and are become familiar thro' their use of them ; such as the *Cloud-compelling Jove*, /&c./ As for the rest, whenever any can be as fully and significantly exprest in a single word as in a compounded one, the Course to be taken is obvious. §187 Some that cannot be so turn'd as to preserve their full Image by one or two Words, may have Justice done them by Circumlocution; as the Epithet **einosiphullos** to a Mountain would appear little or ridiculous translated literally *Leaf-shaking* , but affords a majestic Idea in the *Periphrasis* : *The lofty Mountains shakes his waving Woods*. §188 Others that admit of differing Significations , may receive an Advantage by a judicious Variation according to the Occasions on which they are introduc'd. §189 For Example , the Epithet of *Apollo* , **eknbolos**, or *far-shooting*, is capable of two Explications ; one literal in respect of the Darts and Bow, the Ensigns of that God ; the other allegorical with regard to the Rays of the Sun : Therefore in such Places where *Apollo* is represented as a God in Person, I would use the former Interpretation , and where the Effects of the Sun are describ'd , I would make choice of the latter. §190 Upon the whole, it will be necessary to avoid that perpetual Repetition of the same Epithets which we find in *Homer*, and which, tho' it might be accommodated (as has been already shewn) to the Ear of those Times, is by no means so to ours : But one may wait for Opportunities of placing them , where they derive an additional Beauty from the Occasions on which they are employed ; and in doing this properly, a Translator may at once shew his Fancy and his Judgment.

¶30

§191 As for *Homer's Repetitions*; we may divide them into three sorts ; of whole Narrations and Speeches, of single Sentences, and of one Verse or Hemistich. §192 I hope it is not impossible to have such a Regard to these, as neither to lose so known a Mark of the Author on the one hand, nor to offend the Reader too much on the other. §193 The Repetition is not ungraceful in those Speeches where the Dignity of the Speaker renders it a sort of Insolence to alter his Words ; as in the Messages from Gods to Men, or from higher Powers to Inferiors in Concerns of State, or where the Ceremonial of Religion seems to require it, in the solemn Forms of Prayers, Oaths, or the like. §194 In other Cases, I believe the best Rule is to be guided by the Nearness, or Distance, at which the Repetitions are plac'd in the Original : When they follow too close one may vary the Expression , but it is a Question whether a profess'd Translator be authorized to omit any : If they be tedious, the Author is to answer for it.

¶31

§195 It only remains to speak of the *Versification*. §196 *Homer* (as has been said) is perpetually applying the Sound to the Sense, and varying it on every new Subject. §197

This is indeed one of the most exquisite Beauties of Poetry, and attainable by very few : I know only of *Homer* eminent for it in the *Greek*, and *Virgil* in *Latine*. §198 I am sensible it is what may sometimes happen by Chance, when a Writer is warm, and fully possess of his Image : however it may be reasonably believed they design'd this, in whose Verse it so manifestly appears in a superior degree to all others. §199 Few Readers have the Ear to be Judges of it , but those who have will see I have endeavour'd at this Beauty.

¶32

§200 Upon the whole, I must confess my self utterly incapable of doing Justice to *Homer*. §201 I attempt him in no other Hope but that which one may entertain without much Vanity, of giving a more tolerable Copy of him than any entire Translation in Verse has yet done. §202 We have only those of *Chapman*, *Hobbes*, and *Ogilby*. §203 *Chapman* has taken the Advantage of an immeasurable Length of Verse, notwithstanding which there is scarce any Paraphrase more loose and rambling than his. §204 He has frequent Interpolations of four or six Lines, and I remember one in the thirteenth Book of the *Odyssees*, ver. 312. where he has spun twenty Verses out of two. §205 He is often mistaken in so bold a manner , that one might think he deviated on purpose, if he did not in other Places of his Notes insist so much upon Verbal Trifles. §206 He appears to have had a strong Affectation of extracting new Meanings out of his Author, insomuch as to promise in his Rhyming Preface, a Poem of the Mysteries he had revealed in *Homer* ; and perhaps he endeavoured to strain the obvious Sense to this End. §207 His Expression is involved in Fustian , a Fault for which he was remarkable in his Original Writings, as in the Tragedy of *Bussy d' Amboise* /&c./ In a word, the Nature of the Man may account for his whole Performance ; for he appears from his Preface and Remarks to have been of an arrogant Turn, and an Enthusiast in Poetry. §208 His own Boast of having finish'd half the *Iliad* in less than fifteen Weeks, shews with what Negligence his Version was performed. §209 But that which is to be allowed him, and which very much contributed to cover his Defects, is a daring fiery Spirit that animates his Translation, which is something like what one might imagine *Homer* himself would have writ before he arriv'd to Years of Discretion. §210 *Hobbes* has given us a correct Explanation of the Sense in general, but for Particulars and Circumstances he continually lopps them, and often omits the most beautiful. §211 As for its being esteem'd a close Translation , I doubt not many have been led into that Error by the Shortness of it, which proceeds not from his following the Original Line by Line, but from the Contractions above-mentioned. §212 He sometimes omits whole Similes and Sentences, and is now and then guilty of Mistakes which no Writer of his Learning could have fallen into, but thro' Carelessness. §213 His Poetry, as well as *Ogilby's*, is too mean for Criticism.

¶33

§214 It is a great Loss to the Poetical World that Mr. *Dryden* did not live to translate the *Iliad* . §215 He has left us only the first Book and a small Part of the sixth ; in which if he has in some Places not truly interpreted the Sense, or preserved the Antiquities, it ought to be excused on account of the Haste he was obliged to write in. §216 He seems to have had too much Regard to *Chapman*, whose Words he sometimes copies, and has unhappily follow'd him in Passages where he wanders from the Original. §217 However had he translated the whole Work, I would no more have attempted *Homer* after him than

*Virgil*, his Version of whom (notwithstanding some human Errors) is the most noble and spirited Translation I know in any Language. §218 But the Fate of great Genius's is like that of great Ministers, tho' they are confessedly the first in the Commonwealth of Letters, they must be envy'd and calumniated only for being at the Head of it.

¶34

§219 That which in my Opinion ought to be the Endeavour of any one who translates *Homer*, is above all things to keep alive that Spirit and Fire which makes his chief Character. §220 In particular Places, where the Sense can bear any Doubt, to follow the strongest and most Poetical, as most agreeing with that Character. §221 To copy him in all the Variations of his Style, and the different Modulations of his Numbers. §222 To preserve in the more active or descriptive Parts, a Warmth and Elevation; in the more sedate or narrative, a Plainness and Solemnity; in the Speeches a Fulness and Perspicuity; in the Sentences a Shortness and Gravity. §223 Not to neglect even the little Figures and Turns on the Words, nor sometimes the very Cast of the Periods. §224 Neither to omit or confound any Rites or Customs of Antiquity. §225 Perhaps too he ought to include the whole in a shorter Compass, than has hitherto been done by any Translator who has tolerably preserved either the Sense or Poetry. §226 What I would farther recommend to him, is to study his Author rather from his own Text than from any Commentaries, how learned soever, or whatever Figure they make in the Estimation of the World. §227 To consider him attentively in Comparison with *Virgil* above all the Ancients, and with *Milton* above all the Moderns. §228 Next these the Archbishop of *Cambray's Telemachus* may give him the truest Idea of the Spirit and Turn of our Author, and *Bossu's* admirable Treatise of the Epic Poem the justest Notion of his Design and Conduct. §229 But after all, with whatever Judgment and Study a Man may proceed, or with whatever Happiness he may perform such a Work; he must hope to please but a few, those only who have at once a Taste of Poetry, and competent Learning. §230 For to satisfy such as want either, is not in the Nature of this Undertaking; since a meer Modern Wit can like nothing that is not *Modern*, and a Pedant nothing that is not *Greek*.

¶35

§231 What I have done is submitted to the Publick, from whose Opinions I am prepared to learn; tho' I fear no Judges so little as our best Poets, who are most sensible of the Weight of this Task. §232 As for the worst, whatever they shall please to say, they may give me some Concern as they are unhappy Men, but none as they are malignant Writers. §233 I was guided in this Translation by Judgments very different from theirs, and by Persons for whom they can have no Kindness, if an old Observation be true, that the strongest Antipathy in the World is that of Fools to Men of Wit. §234 [Mr.] *Addison* was the first whose Advice determin'd me to undertake this Task, who was pleas'd to write to me upon that Occasion in such Terms as I cannot repeat without Vanity. §235 I was obliged to Sir *Richard Steele* for a very early Recommendation of my Undertaking to the Publick. §236 [Dr.] *Swift* promoted my Interest with that Warmth with which he always serves his Friend. §237 The Humanity and Frankness of Sir *Samuel Garth* are what I never knew wanting on any Occasion. §238 I must also acknowledge with infinite Pleasure the many friendly Offices as well as sincere Criticisms of [Mr.] *Congreve*, who had led me the way in translating some Parts of *Homer*, as I wish for the sake of the

World he had prevented me in the rest. §239 I must add the Names of [Mr.] *Rowe* and [Dr.] *Parnell*, tho' I shall take a farther Opportunity of doing Justice to the last, whose Good-nature (to give it a great Panegyrick) is no less extensive than his Learning. §240 The Favour of these Gentlemen is not entirely undeserved by one who bears them so true an Affection. §241 But what can I say of the Honour so many of the *Great* have done me, while the *First Names* of the Age appear as my Subscribers, and the most distinguish'd Patrons and Ornaments of Learning as my chief Encouragers. §242 Among these it is a particular Pleasure to me to find, that my highest Obligations are to such who have done most Honour to the Name of Poet : That his Grace the *Duke of Buckingham* was not displeas'd I should undertake the Author to whom he has given (in his excellent *Essay*) the finest Praise he ever yet receiv'd.

*Read Homer once, and you can read no more ;  
For all things else appear so mean and poor,  
Verse will seem Prose : yet often on him look,  
And you will hardly need another Book.*

§243 That the Earl of *Halifax* was one of the first to favour me, of whom it is hard to say whether the Advancement of the Polite Arts is more owing to his Generosity or his Example. §244 That such a Genius as my Lord *Bolingbroke*, not more distinguished in the great Scenes of Business than in all the useful and entertaining Parts of Learning , has not refus'd to be the Critick of these Sheets, and the Patron of their Writer. §245 And that so excellent an Imitator of *Homer* as the noble Author of the Tragedy of *Heroic Love*, has continu'd his Partiality to me from my writing Pastorals to my attempting the *Iliad*. §246 I cannot deny my self the Pride of confessing, that I have had the Advantage not only of their Advice for the Conduct in general, but their Correction of several Particulars of this Translation.

¶36

§247 I could say a great deal of the Pleasure of being distinguish'd by the *Earl of Carnarvon*, but it is almost absurd to particularize any one generous Action in a Person whose whole Life is a continued Series of them. §248 The Right Honourable Mr. *Stanhope*, the present Secretary of State, will pardon my Desire of having it known that he was pleas'd to promote this Affair. §249 The particular Zeal of Mr. *Harcourt* (the Son of the late Lord Chancellor) gave me a Proof how much I am honour'd in a Share of his Friendship. §250 I must attribute to the same Motive that of several others of my Friends, to whom all Acknowledgments are render'd unnecessary by the Privileges of a familiar Correspondence : And I am satisfy'd I can no way better oblige Men of their Turn, than by my Silence.

¶37

§251 In short, I have found more Patrons than ever *Homer* wanted. §252 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*. §253 If my Author had the *Wits* of After-Ages for his Defenders, his Translator has had the *Beauties* of the present for his Advocates ; a Pleasure too great to be changed for any Fame in Reversion. §254 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. §255 This Distinction is the more to be acknowledg'd, as it is shewn to one whose Pen has never gratify'd the Prejudices of particular *Parties* , or the Vanities of particular *Men*. §256 Whatever the Success may prove, I shall never repent of an Undertaking in which I have experienc'd the Candour and Friendship of so many Persons of Merit ; and in which I hope to pass some of those Years of Youth that are generally lost in a Circle of Follies , after a manner neither wholly unuseful to others, nor disagreeable to my self.

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Source: *The Iliad of Homer, Translated by Mr. Pope*. Vol. 1. London: W. Bowyer for Bernard Lintott, 1715.