

Rhythmic Indeterminacy: On the Translations of the Homeric Hexameter into English and French

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This essay is a comparative approach to the role of rhythm in translations of Homer into English and French since early modern times. After briefly discussing the notion of rhythm as a component of literary works, referring to Benjamin and Deleuze, we will analyze how rhythmic articulations affect the Homeric notion of heroic *kleos* in *Iliad* 9, 410-416, and how rhythmic indeterminacy combines with aporetic semantic tensions. Selected translations of the same passage in English and French are subsequently compared. Their rhythmic variation echoes epochal and cultural shifts in literary trends, yet the overall image is also one of surprising constancies, as translations invariably tend to clarify the Homeric idea instead of voicing its enigmas. Although, in both prose and verse, the application of various rhythmic grids has often been coupled with tensions that counter dominant prosodic norms and expectations, translators have rarely opted for severe rhythmic breaks or leaps that might affect the very nexus of their syntagmatic articulations and thus effectively reinstate or even enhance Homeric aporias. Concluding remarks probe the theoretical implications of such translations as regards the endurance of influential literary works, and enquire into the corresponding role of translation as it resists modern cultural taxonomies without outdoing their territorial dialectics.

Keywords: translation, rhythm, classics, meter, Homer, hexameter.

Cet article aborde la question du rythme en comparant des traductions de l'Illiade en anglais et en français depuis le XVI^e siècle. Nous discuterons d'abord des aspects théoriques de la notion de rythme, composante de toute œuvre littéraire, en nous appuyant sur Benjamin et Deleuze, puis nous proposerons une analyse d'un passage qui met en relief les complexités et les incertitudes du rythme homérique ainsi que leurs implications quant à la notion de *kleos*, dont la signification demeure largement aporétique. Sont ensuite comparées des traductions de ce passage, leurs divergences reflétant des tendances propres à des époques et des cadres culturels donnés. On observe cependant des constantes surprenantes, liées au fait que les traductions modernes d'Homère tendent, en règle générale, à clarifier l'idée homérique plutôt qu'à en souligner les énigmes persistantes. Les traducteurs ne se sont que très rarement risqués à des ruptures rythmiques et syntagmatiques qui auraient pu réitérer ou amplifier les apories homériques. L'article conclut en s'interrogeant sur le rôle que la traduction joue dans la persistance des textes littéraires influents.

Mots-clés : traduction, classiques, rythme, métrique, Homère, hexamètre

Émile Benveniste has reminded us that the Greek word *rhuthmos* was originally close to a notion of form, in the ontological sense of the term, and that, gradually, its focus changed and came to denote orderly flow or movement: “À partir du ῥυθμός, configuration spatiale définie par l'arrangement et proportion distinctifs des éléments, on atteint le ‘rythme’, configuration des mouvements ordonnés

dans la durée.” (Benveniste, 1966: 335) Our current notion of rhythm, be it in English or French, with its privileged application to music and speech, echoes that ambivalence. It oscillates between, on the one hand, rather abstract features pertaining to the overall structure of a musical or literary piece, and, on the other, concrete characteristics concerning the way the work is perceived and understood by its listeners or readers. This ambivalence has a lot to do, in fact, with the double dimension of literary formations that Roman Jakobson, amongst others, has discussed: “There are many performances of the same poem differing among themselves in many ways. A performance is an event, but the poem itself, if there is any poem, must be some kind of enduring object.” (Jakobson, 1960: 365-366) Jakobson’s famous definition of the poetic function of language, based on the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to that of combination, is actually a way of describing how rhythm determines and shapes the very nature of poetic linguistic works. It should be noted that rhythmic structures, in this sense, also sustain the peculiar capacity for reiteration that characterizes literary works:

The repetitiveness effected by imparting the equivalence principle to the sequence makes reiterable not only the constituent sequences of the poetic messages but the whole message as well. This capacity for reiteration whether immediate or delayed, this reification of a poetic message and its constituents, this conversion of a message into an enduring thing, indeed all this represents an inherent and effective property of poetry. (*ibid.*: 371)

Literary works are thus seen as malleable matrices. They exhibit a kind of constancy through time, along with supple connections to changing cultural settings. This allows for different ways of reproducing them as objects of experience, be they written or recited, read or listened to, understood, and, ultimately, translated. Rhythm, Jakobson observes, is a crucial factor of this double bind. This means that rhythm also drastically affects the workings of linguistic signs as they combine their slowly changing signifying materiality with often abruptly shifting signified concepts. Henri Meschonnic, from his own perspective, taking translation very much into account,

has insisted on how the notion of rhythm can offset the tendency to overestimate the role of semiotic theoretical polarities. He has proposed that rhythm should not be seen as a distinct layer of strategies superimposed on otherwise given links of semiotic structures but as the very ground on which signifier and signified are molded into their running discursive unity. Rhythm would concern “non plus l’opposé du sens mais la signifiante généralisée d’un discours.” It constitutes the very principle governing “l’organisation et la démarche même du sens dans le discours” (Meschonnic, 1999: 99). Meschonnic also suggests that literature is marked by an “historicité radicale,” that is, a strict connection between historical conditions and discursive practices on the grounds of culturally specific linguistic constraints which determine how literary texts are and should be understood (*ibid.*: 196). Insightful though this approach may be, it tends to disregard the crucial question of what exactly it is that persists through different modes of reproduction and reading; the distinction, that is, between the very matrix of a literary work, and its various instances or enactments; which also involves a distinction between, on the one hand, rhythm in a strict sense of the term, pertaining to the literary thing as such and to its range of possible enactments, and, on the other hand, culturally determined prosodic usages that concern the specific cadence and beat that the work acquires in different historical settings and conditions.

Walter Benjamin’s notion of a monadic idea deploying its unspecified essence¹, as well as Gilles Deleuze’s notion of an abstract machine arraying its multiple energies², are both germane to the issue, especially when translation is taken into consideration. One can think of the literary work as an ideational machine that persists through time and space and is coextensive with all of its enactments, starting with the initial emergence of its original and continuing with its various reiterations, including translations. The work would also be irreducible to any specific one of these enactments, whether original or translation. The original thus holds the position of an initial stimulus or calling that does not contain or exhaust the idea as a whole, nor the momentum or

entropy of its continuing course. Benjamin sees the inaugural and subsequent occurrences of the idea as constituting its historical life or afterlife³. Deleuze, meanwhile, probes how differing installments of an abstract machine on various territories reinstates it through incongruous and largely indeterminate rhizomatic sequences and linkages⁴ rather than according to orderly generative dynamics. In a different terminological register, we could perhaps say that, between originals and translations, we have metonymic connections and transpositions; and these do not necessarily presuppose systematic resemblance between linguistic components of the original and those of its translations. If there is any question of resemblance, as a means of establishing such connections or operating these transpositions, it rather concerns fuzzy references to a fluctuating matrix in a state of perpetual formation. Rhythm can be seen as a constituent part of the overall network, very much responsible for its sustained and open-ended workings. Various situated meters or metrical systems, along with corresponding phonological, grammatical or syntactic patterns of recurrence and variation, would constitute ways of configuring a basic rhythmic substructure initially indexed by the original. The crucial question concerning the translation of rhythm would not be whether and how translation replicates specific metrical or other features of the original, but how it reconfigures the corresponding rhythmic core on the grounds of prosodic norms proper to its own epoch.

Our essay concerns the Homeric idea as exemplified by the transmitted text of the Homeric epics. We will discuss basic aspects of rhythm as a component of the original and of its translations into modern Western languages, specifically English and French, as they have evolved since early modernity⁵. We will first examine Homer as an ideational machine, taking into consideration the history of its textual support. We will concentrate on the rhythmic substratum of a specific passage of the *Iliad* and probe how hexametric articulations involve the significance of lexical constructs

affecting the configuration of the Homeric notion of the human. We will subsequently discuss corresponding configurations in selected translations of the same passage in English and French.

History of the Textual Support of the Homeric Epics

Through its long history of formation, reproduction, and relative standardization, the text of the Homeric epics has acquired its fluidity and multiformity, but also its overall constancy and basic uniformity⁶. Far from being simply dead, Homeric language can be seen both as having never actually existed and as having been persistently and variably present through time. It is not only the figure of the author which is thus being suspended by the Homeric Question. Called into question is also the very notion of a substantial connection between the literary work and a given, contemporaneous cultural setting that would include a natural, so to speak, audience holding the keys to an authentic enactment and understanding of the work. Homer, in fact, constitutes a crucial paradigm, if not the very prototype, of how literary works are somewhat disengaged from the specific historical and cultural conditions of their initial emergence. This entails an *aporia*, that is, a radical uncertainty as to the exact linguistic value of the basic components of the Homeric text—its vocabulary, its rhetoric but also, and perhaps especially, its rhythmic features. We insist on the notion of *aporetic* linguistic value: the problem is not simply the exact semantic or stylistic implications of one or the other component but, more basically, whether and how questions of meaning or style with respect to it can effectively be addressed and answered. Matthew Arnold, in his famous essay on translations of Homer, first published in 1861, has formulated the problem as follows, touching on specific aspects of rhythm:

When I say, the translator of Homer should above all be penetrated by a sense of four qualities of his author:—that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, [...] and, finally, that he is eminently noble;—I probably seem to be saying what is too general to be of much service to anybody. (Arnold, 1960: 102)

What this passage exposes as the most important characteristic of Homer is not any one of the four properties listed, but the property they all bear in common: eminence. Homer can and has indeed been eminently (which also means engagingly and debatably) almost anything: rapid—as he is bifurcating or deferring; plain and direct—as he is confusing and ambiguous; noble—as he is entertaining and even vulgar. The very possibility of validly predicating semantic and stylistic categories to textual formations is here at stake. With respect to rhythm, the question does not only concern the hypothetical passage from pre-classical oral tradition to the writing-down of the Homeric poems around the 6th century BC. There is the additional complication of the phonological and prosodic changes that have marked European languages, including Greek, as they evolved through late antique to medieval and modern cultural conditions. According to Paul Maas, the difference between ancient quantitative and modern accentual prosodies is such that “we have no means of reading, reciting or hearing Greek poetry as it actually sounded. It may be possible for us to form a mental notion of it; but such a notion is too shadowy to serve as a basis for the scientific investigation of the subject” (Maas, 1962: 3-4). Anything that has to do with how Homer was actually experienced as poetic discourse in antiquity would consequently be a “waste of time and effort to a phantom” (*ibid.*: 56).

There has, however, been an engaging way to address the phantom, an approach to the Homeric Question that convincingly combined philological expertise with ethnographic insight. We are referring to Milman Parry and Albert Lord’s “oral theory” of Homer which was based on the study of contemporary Yugoslav bards and their ongoing poetic tradition⁷. Very often, this approach has been taken to show that “it is the performance and not the text that counts” (Martin, 1989: 7). This should not be read, however, as directing attention to some hypothetical oral emergence of the poems, or to any specific one of their possible modes of performance, for that matter, thus disregarding the range of possibilities that are correlated with the very history of the transmitted

text. In fact, the effects of oral theory have been in an almost opposite direction. Having explained and accounted for peculiarities of the received text that had long been provoking suspicion or rejection (such as its all-encompassing repetitions or the paratactic structures affecting its cohesion), it actually corroborated the authority of the textual tradition, including the multiform variety that philological critique had been bringing to light. One may recall, in this respect, Albert Lord's notions of fluid and multiple poetic forms (2000:100), as well the concomitant observation of Gregory Nagy: "if you accept the reality of multiforms, you forfeit the elusive certainty of finding the original composition of Homer but [...] you recover a significant portion of the Homeric repertoire" (Nagy, 2004: 37). Oral theory, in other words, invalidates not the written tradition but rather the norms of modern textuality that have been largely determining our ways of approaching its offspring; it has shown that written literary works, especially old ones, may involve mechanisms of composition other than those of typically textual reliability and consistency, and that these mechanisms should also affect how we read and understand writing. The very distinction between written and vocalized word is thus being mitigated⁸. We should address Homeric poems as written formations but not as texts. The long-standing debate on the semantic and stylistic value of Homeric rhythms is accordingly rekindled. The terms of the problem have changed, but they remain aporetic. This, needless to say, is something that translation should also be expected to acknowledge and take into account.

Rhythm in the Episode of the Acheans' embassy to Achilles

We now turn to the rhythm of a passage in the *Iliad* and how it encompasses the meaning of specific phrases and words. We will concentrate on lines 410 to 416 of the 9th rhapsody, a central part of the episode known as the Acheans' embassy to Achilles⁹. Odysseus has presented to Achilles Agamemnon's conciliatory offer of gifts and Achilles retorts by refusing the offer. The passage is set towards the closing of Achilles' long and emotionally charged speech and concerns a

singular moment in which the hero talks of his fate as presenting him, according to what his mother has told him, with alternative possibilities, if not choices: either fight in Troy and die with *kleos* or return home and lead a life deprived of such *kleos*. *Kleos* is a noun central, indeed, to the Homeric idea, on which we will concentrate. Its Homeric use, anticipating its long history in Ancient and Modern Greek, include a paradoxical ambivalence. The noun, which also occurs in the plural, is related to the verb *kleiô*, meaning *to celebrate* but also simply *to tell*. The Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* presents us with a semantic field ranging from *rumour* and *tidings* of a person or action to *fame* and *glory*, but also including mere *report* as opposed to certainty¹⁰. Our main point is that rhythmic features of the chosen passage not only highlight the notion of *kleos* but also expose an ambivalence in its very core, a crack or blur that accompanies its vital significance for the Homeric idea and enhance its aporia.

One way of approaching the rhythm of the passage is, of course, to scan the lines according to their quantitatively defined hexametric structure: six feet of either three-syllable dactyls (one long syllable is succeeded by two short ones) or two-syllable spondees (two long syllables), the last syllable being an ambiguous anceps. The last two lines of the passage clearly display the monotony of the corresponding schema. They happen to be metrically very similar, since dactyls are preponderant in both, and look as follows:

IL.9.415 — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — — — ◡◡ — —
IL.9.416 — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — ◡◡ — —

It is doubtful, however, whether this waltz-like pulse was ever heard as such in early performances or even later readings of Homeric poetry, outside classes of Greek prosody. Its grid is not necessarily perceptible as such. An additional mechanism of segmentation is superimposed on it, the one of the caesuras, a central and two secondary ones. Caesuras are pauses between words or

groups of words, usually situated within, not between metrical feet. Each falls within a given range of possible positions. We thus have, for each colonic position, a limited number of possible colonic types, unequal in syllabic and metrical length and structurally dissimilar. Each line is accordingly divided into four divergent and variable cola that constitute its elementary semantic and syntactic units. From the point of view of their colonic composition, the two lines of our example present a very different image than the previous one. Instead of similar arrays of metrical feet of two or three syllables, we have different combinations of differently structured colonic groups with basic semantic coherence:

IL.9.415 — u u — | u u — u || u — | — u u — —
IL.9.416 — u u | — u u — u || u — | u u — u u — —

Such groups constitute the building-blocks of the epic idiom. Each possible variant, for each position, corresponds to a vast repertoire of fitting words or expressions that the bard learns to remember and modify, combine and juxtapose, producing cadence. This is where formulas enter the picture. A formula has been typically defined, on the basis of Parry’s paradigm, as “a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea” (Lord, 2000: 4). Philological research has also, however, proven formulas to be flexible units with wide ranges of variation and divergence¹¹. Their poetic use creates “anaphoric patterns of association and varied repetition” (Peabody, 1975: 182) on the grounds of which stanzas are built, like the one we are examining. Composition thus “moves from one position to another by jumps and then lingers while focus or definition is realized; then it jumps again” (*ibid.*: 159). The result has been likened to a highly uneven landscape:

The landscape of formula is not a level steppe with a horizon which equalizes all things in view, but rather a panorama of high mountains and deep valleys and of rolling foothills; and we must seek the essence of formula at all points in the landscape. (Lord, 2000: 31)

We have, as it was more recently remarked, “patterns of sentence, phrase, word, rhythm, and sound [that] are repeatedly returning, and recalling one another with a subtlety that defies precise definition and classification” (Russo, 1997:252). Specific words or expressions are being variously illuminated or shaded by rhythmic forces, such as repetitions, rare occurrences or unusual combinations, of uncertain effects. And the old question remains unanswered: “The problem remains with Homer’s formulaic poetry of determining the amount of difference in meaning at each new repetition of phrase or line.” (Martin, 1989: 154) Albert Lord has already noted the resultant “peculiar potency” of Homeric words or ideas (Lord, 2000: 65), their “aura of meaning” or “supra-meaning” (*ibid.*: 48). At the same time, sustained hesitation and even discordancy between repetition and variation, flow and stasis, continuity and rupture becomes a substantial feature of what is at issue, affecting the very figure of the Homeric configuration of the human condition. In that sense, it is not metrical monotony and semantic indifference but, on the contrary, rhythmic indeterminacy and semantic intensity that should be seen as one of a first constituent elements of the Homeric idea.

On the basis of the above, we propose the following visual representation of certain rhythmic characteristics of the passage under study. The image is not meant to be philologically exhaustive or flawless but could be, in certain respects, more accurate than the schemas of the previous two figures:

II. 9. 410 – – – / ∪ ∪ – ∪ // ∪ – ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ – ∪
 μήτηρ γάρ τέ μέ φησι θεὰ Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα
 mêtêr gar te me phêsi thea Thetis arguropeza
 for mother tells me goddess Thetis the silver-sandalled

II. 9. 411 – ∪ ∪ – / – – // ∪ ∪ – / ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪
 διχθαδίας κῆρας φερέμεν **θανάτοιο τέλος** δε.
 dichthadías kêras pheremen thanatoio telos de.
 double dooms I carry to death’s end.

Π. 9. 412 - - / - ∪ ∪ - // - - ∪ ∪ /- ∪ ∪ - -
 εἰ μὲν κ' αὐθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,
 ei men k'authi menōn Trōōn polin amphimachōmai,
 if by staying here the Troyan city I fight around,

Π. 9. 413 - ∪ ∪ - / - - ∪ // ∪ - / ∪ ∪ - ∪ ∪ - -
ὄλετο μὲν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται
 ôleto men moi nostos, atar kleos aphthiton estai;
 lost is then to me my return, but kleos aphthiton there will be;

Π. 9. 414 - ∪ ∪ / - ∪ ∪ - ∪ // ∪ - / - - ∪ ∪ - ∪
 εἰ δέ κεν οἴκαδ' ἵκωμι φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,
 ei de ken oikad' hikōmi philēn es patrida gaian,
 if however I go home to beloved father land,

Π. 9. 415 - ∪ ∪ - / ∪ ∪ - ∪ // ∪ - /- - ∪ ∪ - -
ὄλετό μοι κλέος ἐσθλόν, ἐπὶ δηρὸν δέ μοι αἰὼν
 ôleto moi kleos esthlon, epi dêron de moi aiōn
 lost is to me **kleos esthlon**, but long to me life-time

Π. 9. 416 - ∪ ∪ / - ∪ ∪ - ∪ // ∪ - ∪ ∪ - ∪ / ∪ - -
 ἔσσειται, οὐδέ κέ μ' ὄκα τέλος θανάτοιο κίχθει.
 essetai, oude ke m' ôka telos thanatoio kicheiê.
 there will be, nor to me swiftly the end of death would reach.

For each line, we give the Greek text, its transliteration into Latin characters (Allen edition, 1931) and a tentative interlinear rendering into broken English. Line 416 was athetized by Alexandrian scholars. Our additional spaces between words correspond to caesuras. Italics mark clearly formulaic expressions. One could note, amongst such formulas, the ones of line 414 which deploy and emphasize the notion of *nostos*, that is, of return. We have underlined a figure crucial to the rhythm of the passage as well as to the concomitant significance that the term *kleos* acquires along with its accompanying epithet. The figure is included between two slightly different occurrences (marked in bold) of a formulaic expression denoting the end that comes with death: *thanatoio telos de* (line 411) and *telos thanatoio* (line 416). Between these occurrences we have two conditionals introducing the two possibilities Achilles confronts (*ei men [...] ei de ken*, lines 412 and 414).

The figure we are referring to is the quasi-chiasmic schema formed by the corresponding main clauses, in which the term *kleos* occurs in two structurally dissimilar expressions (also marked in

bold, not translated), each time coupled with a different adjective: “lost is to me my return [...] but *kleos apthiton* there will be” (line 413) connects to “lost is to me *kleos esthlon* [...] but long to me life-time / there will be” (line 415). Note the typically Homeric enjambment that disrupts the closure of the figure. The expression *kleos esthlon* is formulaic, *esthlon* being a rather common epithet denoting positive value and emotional attachment, most often linked to *kleos*, as are other epithets such as *euru* (vast) or *mega* (grand). The expression *kleos apthiton*, on the other hand, is noticeably not formulaic. Both its words are rather common in Homer but their combination is practically unique in the Homeric corpus: *apthiton* usually qualifies the durability of material things such as wood or gold. At the same time, philological studies have traced the history of the expression to older Indo-European origins (Nagy, 1981). The occurrence of *apthiton* thus acquires an exceptional aura, in juxtaposition to the stereotyped familiarity of *esthlon*. The joining of *kleos* to these such differently charged epithets, entangled within the rhythmic complexities of the overall passage, stresses the enigma of this core element of the Homeric idea of humanness as heroic.

Modern English and French Translations of Homer

Let us now see how the Homeric idea has survived and worked in modern English and French translations of Homer. Numbers, it should be noted, are striking, especially since the 19th century¹². Homeric translation seems to have constituted a somewhat autonomous field of a literary activity that has been proliferating on the ground of its own dynamics, quite irrespective of criteria of either strictly literary or book market interest. It is, indeed, as if the machinery of the Homeric idea has been somehow fueling its own persisting function¹³. The overall tendencies confirm what historical scholarship leads us to expect: translations of Homer have been registering the history of linguistic forms and literary styles of each translating language, including versification trends, parallel to more general cultural trends identified by categories and taxonomies of European literary history.

They have thus been echoing a constant oscillation between two antithetical but complementary poles that have been configuring the Homeric idea: the aesthetic quest of a prime ideal, very much in tune with the learned tradition of Latin and modern epic poetry; and the historical quest of primal beginnings, often connecting to folk or medieval paradigms. Each epoch has had its own ways of transcribing this ambivalence in translation: perplexed view of antiquity proper to early modernity; elaboration and eventual predominance of classicist and neoclassicist aesthetics, especially during the 18th century; emergence and development of diverse forms of historical sensibility linked to the romantic and post-romantic turns of the 19th century. Modernist trends are also present, although less conspicuous, while various eclectic strategies since the 1950s can be seen as corresponding to postmodern developments.

From the point of view of translation strategies, the juxtaposition of “fidelity” and “freedom” proves of little value as an analytical tool, in spite of the constant use of the schema by translators, in their prefaces, and by critics, in their evaluations. Translations diverge mainly as to which components of the original they follow more or less literally. There is, however, a general trend towards more literal approaches to the syntagmatic articulations and the rhetoric of original, including repetitions of words, rhetorical figures and syntagmatic constructions, especially since the 19th century. The categories of domestication and foreignisation, as elaborated by Antoine Berman (1985) and Lawrence Venuti (1995) are theoretically better informed and can be methodologically more interesting as descriptive devices. Epochal trends are, in any case, differently imprinted in each language. And one of the dimensions on which differences are more pronounced is rhythm, which connects to culturally specific prosodic tendencies, more specifically to the crucial divergence between syllabic French prosody and accentual-syllabic English verse¹⁴.

We will now present elements of a closer reading of the analyzed Iliadic passage in selected translations. We will be asking whether and how the above outlined general trends also involve

diverging ways of coping with the rhythmic indeterminacy and semantic intensity of the Homeric idea, especially as regards the notion of *kleos*. We have chosen a number of basic, well known and often discussed paradigms, but have also added less conspicuous cases that can be seen as particularly indicative as regards rhythm—without of course aiming at an exhaustive overview. The presentation is roughly chronological but also ventures to assemble and compare analogous tendencies in the two languages: 15th and 16th century first modern translations; 17th and early 18th century classicism in French prose and English verse; verse translations in the two languages through the 19th century; prose translations through the 20th century; relatively recent trends of verse translations¹⁵. The first complete translations of Homer in French and English, in the early phases of modern formation of their languages, are noticeably influenced, with respect to their syntax and vocabulary, by the mediation of Latin, which occurs both at the level of general influence and at the more practical one of preceding Latin translations. On the other hand, questions of rhythm are interestingly uncertain: in both French and English, we have the use of different meters within the corpus of the same translation.

In French we have, quite characteristically, an important edition of the translation of the whole *Iliad* and parts of the *Odyssey* in two meters: 11 first rhapsodies by Hugues Salel are in rhymed decasyllables, while the remaining ones by Amadys Jamin (or Jamyn) are in rhymed alexandrines¹⁶. It is difficult not to read in Salel accentual iambic metrical resonances, as lines are articulated in four- and six-syllable hemistiches while rhyme imposes couplet regularity. The structure of the passage juxtaposes the sharply concise *Mais j'y mourray* with *En ma Maison*, highlighted by the enjambment. *Kleos* is domesticated through stereotypical expressions such as *Gloire immortelle* and *grand Honneur* but *immortelle* can be seen as tellingly distanced from *Gloire* by the enjambment that the caesura implies:

Thetis ma Mere aultrefois m'a compté,
Que je ne puis de mort estre exempté:
Et que ma vie a esté assignée
De **prendre fin**, par double Destinée.
Si je demeure icy faisant la Guerre,
Je pourray **Gloire immortelle** conquerre.
Mais j'y mourray. Et si je m'en retourne
En ma Maison : & que la je sejourne,
Mes ans seront tres longs, vivant en Heur.
Mais despouillé **de Gloire & grand Honeur**¹⁷

In English, George Chapman completes his translations of the “whole works of Homer” during the second decade of the 17th century¹⁸. He gives an *Iliad* in a fourteen-syllable verse, but passes to decasyllables for his *Odyssey*. His long Iliadic line, with a caesura after the fourth foot, combines alliterative tendencies with rhyme in a way that constantly seems on the verge of losing its metrical grip, thus resonating with Homeric rhythmic complexities. The repetitive structures of *My safe return, my fame, if my return, much of my fame* are substituted for the original chiasmic figure but forcefully underscore the notions of both *return* and *fame*:

And therefore since my mother queen (fam'd for her silver feet)
Told me two fates about my **death** in my direction meet:
The one, that if I here remain t'assist our victory,
My safe return shall never live, **my fame** shall never die:
If my return obtains success, much of **my fame** decays,
But **death** shall linger his approach, and I live any days¹⁹.

Salel and Chapman, both celebrated by Ezra Pound, are exemplary of how the strange, almost awkward tonalities and rhythmic patterns of older translations, can acquire, with time, a particularly poignant interest.

During the second decade of the 17th century, Mme Dacier, as the representative of the *Anciens* proposes her translations of the Homeric epics in a prose that alters the paradigm of the *belles infidèles*, especially their strategies of elaborate rhetorical emphasis and adornment. Her preface insists on the need for an approach in accordance with philological sources. Indeed, her translation is accompanied by extensive commentary²⁰. Her choice of prose is largely based on arguments

concerning the need but also the difficulty of modern French to follow the power and intricacies of Homeric Greek. She thus constitutes a basic reference in the longstanding debate over the possibility or need to render Homer in prose, given the drastic differences between antique and modern prosodic norms²¹. She correlatively reconfigures her Homer in a direction that she identifies as not only “élégante” but also “noble et généreuse” as opposed to a “traduction servile qui par une fidélité trop scrupuleuse devient trop infidèle”²². The norms of classicist *bienséance* are thus quite present, while exegetical additions and divagations entail an articulate flow of correspondingly stylized prose. The chiasmic structure of the passage is somewhat retained but the notion of return is rather shadowed and the persistent *gloire immortelle* effaces differences between *keos aphthiton* and *kleos esthlon*:

La Déesse ma mere, la belle Thétis, m’a souvent dit que les Destinées m’avoient ouvert deux chemins bien differens pour arriver à **la mort** : que si je m’opiniâtrois à demeurer ici, pour combattre devant Troye, toute espérance de retour étoit perdue pour moi, mais qu’en revanche j’acquerois **une gloire immortelle** ; au lieu que si je prenois la resolution de m’en retourner dans ma patrie, il n’y avoit plus pour moi de **gloire immortelle**, mais qu’aussi je jouirois d’une longue vie, & que **la mort** ne viendroit trancher mes jours qu’au bout d’une très-longue & paisible carriere²³.

English translations since Chapman insist on verse, in particular on decasyllabic lines that culminate in the imposing paradigm of Alexander Pope’s heroic couplets, first published gradually, between 1715 and 1726. Pope explicitly connects his work to Mme Dacier’s precedent. Like her, he accompanies his translation with extensive commentary, often based on old exegetical material. He famously opts, however, for Homeric “Invention” as opposed to Virgilian “Judgment” and for a “wild Paradise” as opposed to an “order’d Garden”²⁴. The rhymed iambic decasyllables of his heroic couplets could also be seen, of course, as taming Chapman’s eccentric precedent. At the same time, Pope’s verse, in spite of its often elaborate or even confusing rhetorical decorum, imprints on the Homeric idea a distinctive, if not singular tone that could be considered as

paradoxically equivalent to the semantic intensity of its original, albeit on a radically different register²⁵:

My Fates long since by Thetis were disclosed,
And each alternate, Life or **Fame**, propos'd;
Here, if I stay, before the Trojan Town,
Short is my Date, but **deathless myRenown**:
If I return, I quit **immortal Praise**
For Years on Years, and long-extended Days²⁶.

Figures like the chiasm of the original are effaced, but Achille's argument is condensed into an articulate dilemma and the passage acquires the tempo of proverbial brevity. Death is no longer clearly in the picture, and the notion of *kleos* breaks down to a series of quasi-synonyms that may be seen as alluding to tense semantic uncertainty. At the same time, rhyme underscores and juxtaposes crucially related notions: *Town* and *Renown*, *Days* and *Praise*. The iambic beat, which does not exclude the rivalry of current word stress, also highlights significant individual words as in *and each alternate, Life or Fame, propos'd* or in *If I return, I quitimmortal Praise*²⁷.

English verse translations of Homer proliferated from the end of the 18th through the 19th century. A variety of metrical alternatives were proposed, from William Cowper's more flexible but not always more literal blank verse of Miltonian overtones, to various imitations of ballad patterns alluding to romantic or postromantic imageries of folk literature. We will only insist on an example which is also the one that Matthew Arnold targeted in his famous critical essay on Homeric translations: Frances Newman's 1856 *Iliad*. It is metrically structured as a non-rhyming political verse (fifteen-syllable iambic line) explicitly borrowed from post-Byzantine and Modern Greek folk poetry and presented with a typographically marked central caesura after the fourth foot:

For, Thetis of the silver foot,	my goddess mother, often
Warneth me, that by double fates	I unto death am carried.
If, here abiding, round the walls	of Ilium I combat,
<u>No backward voyage waiteth me,</u>	<u>but deathless is my glory:</u>
But if I homeward sail, and reach	my native land beloved,
<u>No noble glory waiteth me,</u>	<u>but days of life extended</u>
<u>Shall long endure,</u> nor quickly shall	the end of death o'ertake me. ²⁸

The long line permits occasional interplay between metrical beats and word stresses that breaks metrical monotony and favors a precarious prose-like flow, broken, in turn, by the conspicuous caesura. The chiasmic figure of the original, including an enjambment, is retained while the adjective *deathless* does convey a sense of strangeness in spite of the commonplace *glory*. At the same time, the notion of return is highlighted by the inversion and alliterations of *if I homeward sail [...] my native land beloved*. More generally, lexical and syntactic archaisms suggest not only the sense of a disturbing historical gap but also the one of an oddity, reminiscent of the peculiar challenge of Homeric verse.

Countering Newman's claim of Homer as "absolutely antique" and consequently "quaint"²⁹, Matthew Arnold, in quest of an uncompromised nobility of tone, has argued for a style closer to consecrated models of learned epic traditions, such as those of Virgil or Dante, analogous to the tone of English Bible translations. When it comes to the question of meter, Arnold (1960) opts for the re-invention of a modern accentual hexameter, following the example of the celebrated German Homer of Johan Heinrich Voss. Here is an example of the numerous hexametric ventures that followed Arnold's encouragement (with our own tentative scansion including indication of the central caesura):

I have been / warned by my / mother ||—the / Goddess whose /
 feet are as / silver—
 Warn'd of my / twofold / **doom**, ||and / alternate / Fates that a /wait me.
 If by the / Trojan / wallIa/bode,|| taking / part in the / contest,
Home I re/turn no / more;|| but / **high honor** / will ever a / ttend me.
 If I de / part at / once, far / hence,|| to the / land of my / fathers,
Farewell / then to my / **fame** ||—but / long life comes / in lieu of my / **glory**;
 Long-pro / tracted / life;||—**death** / moved far a / way to a / distance³⁰.

Note, in the above passage, not only the retained elements of a chiasmic figure but also the emphasis placed on *doom* and *fame* by their positions as first syllables of quite ambiguous

spondees(which could also be seen as iambic) broken by central caesuras. Also noticeable is the scattering of *kleos* into three of its possible English equivalents.

Hexametric translations continue to our days and often attempt a line per line close following of the original implying strict fidelity to and recovery of authentic Homeric cadences³¹. Arnold, however, was rather ambiguous in this respect. He saw the hexameter, which he acknowledged as rather foreign to English poetic usage, not as a reiteration of the original meter but as a rhetorical allusion functioning as its “representative” for the modern English ear (Arnold, 1960: 193). In fact, the significance of a modern hexameter maybe lying in what has been seen as its weakness and is clearly felt in the cited example; namely, the difficulty of sustaining identifiable metrical regularity, given the constant risk of discrepancy between precariously positioned metrical beats and resistant word or sentence stress. The result, interestingly enough, is often closer to a perturbed prose flow than to metrical cadence and the strain is perhaps more vague, but also more suggestively disquieting than stylistic archaisms as exemplified by Newman.

Let us turn now to French verse paradigms. Émile Egger (1862) overviews French Homeric translations to his days and could be considered analogous to Arnold’s, although not of the same scope. Egger, however, argues in a direction quite different than Arnold’s. He underscores the historical specificity of Homeric poetry and calls for new strategies that would bring this to the fore by more literal approaches to the peculiarities of the original³². This also involves a reaction against the authority of classicist alexandrine, very present in the field of Homeric translations since the end of the 18th century. One could recall, in this respect, the influential case of Guillaume Dubois de Rochefort whose translations of Homer, which include philological notes, are perhaps the first French translations in verse based on the Greek text. His *Iliad* remolds his original into a classical alexandrine that seems, however, to be translating Pope rather than Homer, albeit without

reaching analogous acuteness. Syllabic discipline proves less flexible than iambic beat (we mark the central caesura):

Thétis de mes destins / me découvrant les loix,
De deux chemins divers / m'avoit laissé le choix.
Si sur les pas des Grecs, / je vole à la victoire,
Au dépens de mes jours / j'éternise ma gloire;
Et si je leur refuse / un dangereux secours,
Au dépens de mon nom / je prolonge mes jours³³.

Alexandrine verse persists in the field of Homeric translations well into the 20th century, resisting innovation in ways that largely justify its ill repute³⁴. We have, for instance, the rather marginal case of Victor Thouron, whose *Iliad*, a century after the one of Dubois, insists on syntagmatic regularity and periphrastic structures that impose rhythmic monotony and blur semantic poignancy. Rhyme, which often allows great flexibility, as in the case of Pope, clearly functions here as a constraint. It tends not only to accentuate regularity but also to establish conspicuous orderly links between words or expressions that obstruct other patterns of needed repetition or emphasis. There are no signs of the articulations and figures of the original and the notion of *kleos* is confined by conventional terms and metaphors:

Je le sais dès longtemps, / et ma mère m'a dit
Que le sort me réserve, / ou beaucoup d'ans sans **gloire**
Ou peu de jours suivis / d'une **illustre mémoire**,
Que tel est mon destin, / et que j'ai devant moi
Deux routes à tenir / et qui sont à mon choix.
En restant devant Troie, / obstiné pour combattre,
D'un coup prématuré / **la mort** viendra m'abattre,
Et **mon nom en aura / du retentissement;**
Mais si de nos combats / éloigné prudemment,
Je pars sur mes vaisseaux / pour revoir ma patrie,
Je puis longtemps **sans gloire** / y prolonger ma vie.³⁵

Let us now turn to examples of 19th century prose translations, which seem to have proliferated during the first half of the 20th century echoing, in a way, post-romantic and modernist tendencies. In French, of course, prose had long been predominant as the sole alternative to alexandrine verse.

During the 19th century, it is mainly prose that echoes Egger's historical concerns. Most interesting is the case of Leconte de Lisle, a leading figure of the Parnassian circles, who connects aesthetic preoccupations with an idiosyncratic historical sense. His *Homeris* marked by archaisms such as those of transliterated proper names or of phrasal and syntactic structures alluding to older literary idioms and to Biblical tones but breaking with classicist tonalities. In the passage we are examining, although the basic repetitions of the original are somewhat retained, *gloire immortelle* still configures the Homeric *kleos*:

Ma mère, la Déesse Thétis aux pieds d'argent, m'a dit que deux Kères m'étaient offertes pour arriver à **la mort**. Si je reste et si je combats autour de la ville des Troiens, je ne retournerai jamais dans mes demeures, mais ma gloire sera immortelle. Si je retourne vers ma demeure, dans la terre bien-aimée de ma patrie, je perdrai toute gloire, mais je vivrai très-vieux, et **la mort** ne me saisira qu'après de très longues années³⁶.

Note how the notion of return, along with *Akhilleus*' dilemma, gains in emphasis, if one forces French prosody in order to discover precarious accentual dactylic and spondaic or trochaic beats perhaps as follows: Si je re / tourne / vers ma de / meure / dans la / terre bien ai / mée de ma / patrie / je per / drai toute / gloire, / mais je / vivrai / très-vieux.

In the case of English, prose seems to have emerged as a systematic alternative to verse translations only towards the end of the 18th century, in response to romantic concerns. The 1773 *Iliad* of James MacPherson who adds Homer to the legend of his Ossian, deserves, we think, attention more than it has attracted. His prose is structured in short sentences the contours of which are stressed by a fragmenting of punctuation and syntax (note especially the repetitive and rather unorthodox use of *that* throughout the passage) alluding to paratactic structures or broken verse. The retention of a quasi-chiasmic figure highlights the Homeric notion of *kleos* while aptly stressing its relation to the lexical constellation of *fame*, *name* and *renown*. Alliteration also works in the same direction as it connects *the return shall be lost to my land to that renown shall be lost to my name*:

My mother-goddess has foretold,—the silver-footed Thetis brought to mine ear—that double is the path of my fate,—through life to the **dreary tomb**. That here if I remain at Troy,—waking battle around her walls: My

return shall be lost to my land,—but that my fame shall forever live. But should I, in my ships return,—to the loved shore of my native land: That renown shall be lost to my name: But far shall my life extend in years:— That late the cloud of death shall descend,—to hide me from the world³⁷.

Biblical tones are more emphatically present in the prose of Andrew Lang and his collaborators, in an English *Iliad* that has constituted a most influential prose alternative to Pope's paradigm, venturing to reconfigure the eccentricity of the Homeric epic on historically informed grounds. Archaistic morphological and unusual syntagmatic traits combine with literal renderings of original phrases and figures, on a prosaic grid the flow of which often resonates with iambic beats with suggestive rhythmic uncertainty. Dactylic overtones underscore the notion of return in *if I go / home to my / dear native / land*. The chiasmic structure of the original establishes its schema, framed by the repetition of *issue of death* and efficiently juxtaposing *fame imperishable* and *high fame*:

For thus my goddess mother telleth me, Thetis the silver-footed, that twain fates are bearing me to the **issue of death**. If I abide here and besiege the Trojans' city, then my returning home is taken from me, but my fame shall be imperishable; but if I go home to my dear native land, my high fame is taken from me, but my life shall endure long while, neither shall the **issue of death** soon reach me³⁸.

20th century prose has taken many directions. In French, the most influential models have been those of philologically controlled poetic prose versions of scholars such as Paul Mazon³⁹ for the *Iliad* and Victor Bérard for the *Odyssey*. Bérard's case is quite distinct, as he tends to outdo the alternative between prose and verse with the systematical use of a prosaic non-rhyming “alexandrin du XX^e siècle” which “de douze à dix-sept syllables [...] est extensible et compressible à plaisir⁴⁰”. This loosening often involves a fluctuation between syllabic French prosody and accentual iambic or anapestic metrical beat, reminiscent of Homeric uneasiness. In the Pleiade edition of Homer, the *Iliad* of Robert Flacelière reworks and often simplifies the lexical material of Mazon's precedent in accordance with Bérard's rhythmic paradigm. The result shows the tenacity of conventional alexandrine dodecasyllables that impose their regularity. They also allow, of

course, an often literal approach to the original, including the retention of original figures—but with no signs of enjambment. In the case of our analyzed passage we have (with tentative scanning of hemistiches and lines):

Oui, ma mère Thétis, / déesse aux pieds d'argent, // m'a révélé mon sort: / par deux chemins distincts // je puis être conduit / au **terme de mes jours**.// Si je reste à combattre / autour de Troie, ici, // c'en est fait du retour. / mais je gagne en échange // une gloire immortelle; / si je rentre au contraire // en ma chère patrie, / c'est en fait de la gloire. // mais j'aurai longue vie, / et **la mort** ne saurait // m'atteindre de longtemps⁴¹.

In English there is a variety of rather novelistic styles and tones, to which we cannot refer here in more detail. Such is the case, for instance, of Victor Rieu's Penguin Homer who has not only had enormous market success but has also suggested a paradigm which efficiently combines colloquial vocabulary with peculiarly archaizing tonalities and close adherence to syntagmatic features of the original. *Undying fame* and *good name* are interesting suggestions highlighted by a chiasmic structure the second part of which is clearly iambic:

My divine Mother, Thetis of the Silver Feet, says that Destiny has left two courses open to me on my **course to the grave**. If I stay here and play my part in the siege of Troy, there is no home-coming for me, though I shall win undying fame. But if I go home to my own country, my good fame will be lost, though I shall have long life, and shall be spared an **early death**⁴².

One should also note the more complex endeavor of Robert Graves, combining running prose with different verse patterns in specific passages⁴³.

During the second half of the century, postmodern eclectic tendencies could be seen as expressed in a series of free or quasi free-verse versions, involving distances from but also eclectic reminiscences of older metrical schemas. In English, Richmond Lattimore's extremely influential *Iliad*, first published in 1951⁴⁴, is based on a long line that closely follows the original line for line, including many of its syntagmatic structures. This sense of philological discipline is quite perplexingly combined with a vocabulary and style of prosaic overtones. As we see below, the chiasmic structure is retained, along with the repetitions regarding death and *kleos*; but *kleos*

returns to its configuration as *glory* and its epithets are analyzed into phrasal structures. Rhythm displays an analogous ambivalence. Lines tend to be structured on a basis of six loosely hexametric beats that convey a distinct sense of contained discrepancy, as their rather heavy flow appears to be constantly tending towards suspended metrical beats. The effect is stronger where hexametric reminiscences are more clearly felt, as in *if I re/turn home / to thebe/loved / land of my / fathers*:

For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me
I carry two sorts of destiny toward the **day of my death**. Either,
if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
my return home is gone, but my **glory shall be everlasting**;
but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
the **excellence of my glory** is gone, but there will be a long life
left for me, and **my end in death** will not come to me quickly⁴⁵.

For the passage under consideration, Robert Fagles's *Iliad* is perhaps the most interesting among a series of more recent ventures combining academic authority with lyrical and dramatic as well as colloquial tones, often presented or seen as particularly suited for public reading or oral performance⁴⁶. His line is quite variable, alluding to both hexametric and pentametric tendencies. What we have is an eclecticism that tends to fragment and remold a variety of poetic tones on the grounds of which Homeric indeterminacy is reshaped:

Mother tells me,
the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,
that two fates bear me on to **the day of death**.
If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
my journey home is gone, but **my glory never dies**.
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
my pride, my glory dies...
true, but the life that's left me will be long,
the stroke of death will not come on me quickly⁴⁷.

Little is left of the chiasmic structure, yet other modes of repetition are at work and quite efficiently so, as in the case of *my glory never dies [...] my pride, my glory dies*. Analogous tendencies characterize Frédéric Mugler's *Iliad*, first published in 1989, which deploys a long and quite disciplined line tending to a fourteen-syllable pattern with a caesura after the fourth foot. The

ensuing rhythm involves tense distances from (but also allusions to) the alexandrine model and even tentative resonances of quasi-hexametric accentual beats, as lines tend to begin with somewhat stressed syllables. We could also note the retention of the chiasmic structure and of the corresponding repetitions, emphasizing the alternation of *renom sans borne* and *beau renom*, both significantly far from the older stereotype of *gloire immortelle*.

Que deux sorts peuvent me conduire **au terme de mes jours**.
Si je reste à me battre ici devant les murs de Troie,
C'en est fait du retour, mais j'y gagne un **renom sans borne** ;
Si au contraire je rejoins les rives de mes pères,
C'en est fait de ce **beau renom**, mais j'aurai longue vie
Et je n'atteindrai que sur le tard **le terme de mes jours**⁴⁸.

We will close with a brief reference to two very recent cases of translations in accentual hexameters: the *Iliad* of Rodney Miller⁴⁹ that follows older English examples to which we have already referred; and the *Iliade* of Philippe Brunet which presupposes accentual-syllabic metric principles in ways that singularly challenge basic norms of the French prosodic tradition⁵⁰. To the degree that they counter current prosodic expectations and entail intriguing rhythmic quests, these ventures could, indeed, be considered as related to wider tendencies to disengage verse translation from conventional prosodic norms, shown in the examples we quoted above. They present a particular interest, not because they bring us closer to alleged specific patterns and conditions of archaic singing, but because the idea of the hexameter stimulates idiosyncratic metrical tensions and uncertainties, distinctly evocative of rhythmic indeterminacy.

Perspectives on Comparing Translations

Alongside close readings and inventories of variants, the comparative history of translation necessitates an additional, somewhat more distant perspective: the one of a critique that would address the very question of difference in translation, from the point of view of the idea and machinery that are at issue. One should thus probe the exact significance or indeed the eventual

insignificance of translation differences with respect to the life that the Homeric idea has led or to the way its machine has functioned, in the segment of Western modernity that we have been examining.

On the whole, differences between translations range, as expected, from more or less trivial adjustments to more or less impressive shifts. Epochal and linguistic trends have marked Homer's oscillation between classicist and historicist configurations, as well as between diverging strategies of eclectic literal connection to the original, with varying estranging or domesticating implications. As regards rhythmic features there have been clearly distinct, culturally determined alternatives: early modern verse patterns, alexandrine and pentameter models, prose versions, ballad, blank and free verse patterns, modern hexameters. Technically, prose has allowed, of course, more literal approaches to vocabulary and syntax, but this has been at the cost of rhythmic and semantic intensity, unless prosaic flows have been interwoven with elements of syntagmatic and even metrical variation. From a more substantial point of view, cultural memory of prosodic norms plays a crucial role in the corresponding configurations of Homer. The tenacious alteration between stylized prose and alexandrine verse, in French, as opposed to the variety of metrical patterns and prose tonalities in English, may be connected to a stronger influence of classicism and, more particularly, of the Virgilian paradigm, with its consistently demarcated figures and values of heroism. However, one should refrain from reifying the notion of cultural memory as regards metrical patterns: the use, in a translation, of a meter with specific cultural connotations does not necessarily imprint these connotations on the Homeric idea; on the contrary, the idea may drastically affect and alter the cultural significance of the tried pattern.

In addition to the above, is important to notice that the composite field of modern Homeric translations in French and English surprises us not only by its diversity but also, and perhaps more acutely, by its constancies; its overall image is one of multiple facets of the same prism, diversely

illuminated or shaded⁵¹. What strikes us is that the same Homer shows to have persistently endured through marked variation, if not to have encouraged and anticipated it. Furthermore, there is a common thread running through translations in their relation to the original. Translations constantly tend to clarify the Homeric idea instead of voicing its enigmas, to stabilize its machinery instead of loosening its joints. Didier Pralon's observation concerning French translations may be of more general validity. The imposition of textual models on translation, he notes, has prevented modern translations from integrating the oral processes of their original: *Tous ces procédés spécifiques passent mal à l'écrit, plus mal encore dans les traductions. Chacun retouche son Homère, le rend plus littéraire, lui impose, plus ou moins, l'uniformité lexicale, une syntaxe de rédaction, un style écrit.* (Pralon, 1993⁵²)

Developments in the philological debate since the beginning of the 20th century, especially the resultant oral theory of Homer, have had, of course, their repercussions within the fields of Homeric translations. These, however, mostly consisted in reorientations of linguistic or stylistic registers: the turning towards colloquial or conversational linguistic idioms, the underscoring of the dialogical or even dramatic components of the epics, the limited use of traditional elevated rhetoric in favor of more equivocal poetic tones⁵³. We have not had alterations of perspective, such that would affect the very mode in which different registers are put to work, eventually in combination with or juxtaposition to each other. In fact, the problem may lie, not so much in how translations have responded to the philological idea of epic orality, as in how they have followed or failed to follow developments that have marked the literary field at large. However akin translation was to the history of literature until the middle of the 19th century, it has lagged behind radical post-romantic trends, and so has only faintly echoed breaches that have drastically affected literary writing, especially in symbolist and modernist movements.

As regards, more specifically, the notion of *kleos*, translation has not adequately highlighted how the Homeric epic thwarts its connection to modern notions of *glory* or *gloire*. The use of *fame* or *renom* may be quite suggestive in this respect, but lexical selection is not the main issue. This is mostly a problem of rhythm. A more effective approach to the challenge would not necessarily imply different lexical choices but, rather, combinations of choices that would unsettle rhythmic grids and induce semantic strain. The alternative between prose and verse, or between rhymed and unrhymed verse, or, more generally, between prosodic traditions, may consequently be of less import than usually thought. What matters is not what rhythmic patterns have been chosen, but whether and how their regularities have been evocatively disrupted and eventually combined. In both prose and verse, the application of one or the other rhythmic grid has, indeed, been coupled with tensions that resist and complicate dominant prosodic norms and expectations. As we saw, there has often been discrepancy between metrical constraints and current word or sentence stresses, perhaps more arresting than in other instances of literary writing.

This applies to both French and English, although the English literary fields seem to have provided for a wider range of disparity. French syllabicity favors well-articulated syntagmatic units that do not easily allow individual words to retain the conspicuous position that Homeric rhythms attribute to their enigmas; Homeric alexandrines, however, especially when unrhymed and hidden in poetic prose, have accepted or called for an accentual scansion and pulse that French prosody normally resists. On the other hand, the inclination of English towards flows of duple or triple metrical feet tends to offset the role of syntagmatic cuts and breaches; at the same time, iambic beat can be read as favoring dactylic and spondaic cadences as well as reminiscences of older accentual metric patterns. English prosody has also favored hexametric experimentation, which French has resisted until recently. In both cases, hexametric patterns acquire their significance, as we have suggested, because of the challenging rhythmic strains that they involve. All of the above has, indeed,

involved telling traces of rhythmic indeterminacy and semantic intensity. But translations have rarely opted for severe rhythmic breaks or leaps that might affect the very nexus of their syntagmatic articulations and thus effectively reinstate and even enhance the Homeric *aporia*.

The theoretical implications of the above should be probed in various directions. The potency and durability of Homer are brought to the fore as inescapable theoretical questions implying that the notion of the classic literary work should be critically revisited in liaison with basic philosophical questions. Homeric rhythm, in a sense, *is* the very strain between measured extremes, such as those of running prose and hexametric line, ballad and alexandrine verse, including arrays that lie in-between or cut through them. But what exactly is the ontological status of a poetic impetus that works through time and entails, through the original and its translations, the facets of such a persistent multiplicity? Whether idea or machinery, its nature has proven to be protean enough to bear and even, in a sense, to offset, a wide range of possible versions and transpositions, while still inviting new ones. The constancies and limitations of the actual range that has been covered since early modernity, in English and French, also have a lot to do, of course, with the position and function of translation within the corresponding fields of literary life. We should refrain from picturing the translator of Homer as immersed in a given epoch and culture, facing an original situated in its own. The relation to the original is always heavily mediated by older readings and entails the relative lack of homogeneity and consistency that characterizes the translator's choices and strategies, notwithstanding his intentions. Translation thus pinpoints openings or gaps that blur the margins of any given cultural setting.

The Homeric original, one may recall, also calls into question strict socio-historical affiliations. Both the original and its translations are thus situated within what Benjamin saw as a field of convergence between languages that are not essentially foreign to each other and that acquire their proper historical momentum to the precise degree that they are partly disengaged from cultural

conditioning (1968: 72). The past can be shown to be more disturbingly proximate than reassuringly remote; and one's own cultural present neither all that present or indeed one's own. For modern translations of Homer this appears to have worked as a conundrum that made it impossible either to fully reproduce their own cultural bias (and thus domesticate the original in entirely idiosyncratic ways) or to radically counter it (and thus adequately display or even accentuate the pending Homeric aporia). Aspects of the problem have been systematically addressed by translation theory, especially in the aforementioned work of Berman (1985) and Venuti (1995).

Such approaches, however, often tend to attribute a central significance to polarized distinctions between schemas of cultural identity and otherness, tributary to historicist premises that rather come undone in the case of Homer⁵⁴. The problem is not that translations may domesticate their original or that they may overly expose its foreignness, but that they fail to cut through this old dilemma, so as to outdo the surmised cultural distance from a strange past and iterate the disturbing closeness of a tenaciously indeterminate idea. Deleuze is again pertinent. The examined traditions of Homeric translations can be seen as striving to territorialize the machinery of the intended idea on grounds of cultural distinctions and taxonomies, instead of disseminating their rhizomes in ways that would provocatively disclose the antinomies of territorial schemas⁵⁵. It is as if translations have been venturing to respond in measured metrical terms to a properly rhythmic challenge that persists as the very heterogeneity of their multiplicity and keeps heightening the tension that Benveniste has discerned: "La mesure est dogmatique, mais le rythme est critique, il noue des instants critiques, ou se noue au passage d'un milieu dans un autre. Il n'opère pas dans un espace-temps homogène, mais avec des blocs hétérogènes." (Deleuze, 1980: 385)

Homer, one can observe before closing, has not been marked by ruptures analogous to those with which Klossowski enriched his French Virgil:

Les armes je célèbre et l'homme qui le premier des Troyennes rives
en Italie, par la fatalité fugitif, est venu au Lavinien
littoral ; longtemps celui-là sur les flots jeté rejeté sur le flot de toute la violence des suprêmes dieux, tant qu'à
sévir persista Junon dans sa rancune,
durement eut aussi de la guerre à souffrir, devant qu'il ne fondât la ville [...] (Virgile, 1964: 3)

One should also recall, however, the perplexing twists and turns that the Homeric idea has taken, especially in English, even if only in forms and contexts other than those of strict translation. There is, for instance, Christopher Logue's configuration of Homeric *kleos*:

Dividing man from beast, hero from host,
That proves best, best, that only death can reach,
Yet cannot die because it will be said, be sung,
Now, and in time to be, for evermore. (Logue, 2011: 24)

More pervasively, there has been the yet unequaled provocation of Ezra Pound's first Canto, translating from the *Odyssey*, with its differently, somewhat ominously promising closure:

Venerandam,
In the Cretan's phrase, with the golden crown, Aphrodite,
Cypri munimenta sortita est, mirthful, orichalchi, with golden
Girdles and breast bands, thou with dark eyelids
Bearing the golden bough of Argicida. So that: (Pound, 1987: 5)

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<http://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/homer/homertranslations.htm> (Published English Translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, by Ian Johnson).[31/10/2013]

1 See Benjamin (1977), especially the introductory part entitled “Epistemo-Critical Prologue”.

2 See Deleuze (1980), especially the “Conclusion: Règles concrètes et machines abstraites”.

3 We are referring to Benjamin’s notions of *Leben* and *Überleben* or *Fortleben* as presented in his essay on the task of the translator (Benjamin, 1968: 71).

4 See Deleuze especially the first chapter where the notion of *agencement* is of central importance (1980: 9-37).

5 Our discussion is based on our ongoing comparative study of long-term trends in the translations of Homer into modern languages (in particular English, French and Modern Greek).

6 Homeric bibliography is, of course, enormous. For the history of the Homeric Question, one can consult companions cited in our bibliography and especially: Fowler, R., 2004, “The Homeric Question”, in Fowler (ed.), pp. 220-234 Turner, F., 1997, “The Homeric Question”, in Morris and Powell (eds.), pp. 123-145; for a more recent and particularly helpful introduction to Homer see Martin (2011); for the study and critique of crucial specialized issues concerning the Homeric text and its tradition, see Nagy (1996; 2004). None of the above works, of course, necessarily agree with the inferences that we draw from their scholarship and insights.

7 Apart from Lord (2000) and Peabody (1975) one can consult, on oral theory: Foley, J., 1997, “Oral Tradition and its Implications” in Morris and Powell (eds.), pp. 146-173. Russo, J., 1997, “The Formula”, in Morris and Powell (eds.), pp. 238-260. For recent emphasis on performance, see Foley, J.M., 2002, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

8 We are, perhaps, close to an understanding of literature, whether oral or written, as always involving the discursive potential of an *oralité maximale* (Dessons and Meschonnic, 1998: 45).

9 For a specialized study that has informed aspects of our approach to the original, see Martin (1989), especially pp. 146-205, for a philological commentary of the passage in question see Hainsworth and Kirk (1993: 116-118), and for a more general approach to the question of *kleos* see Nagy (1999).

10 As in the famous line 486 from the 2nd Iliadic rhapsody: “but all we [mortals] hear is *kleos*, and we know not a thing” (our translation).

11 For an extensive and highly influential study of the formula, including complexities that the basic definition of formula tends to overlook, see J. P. Hainsworth (1968).

12 According to Steiner, the translation of Homer into English “surpasses in frequency [...] any other act of transfer into any other Western tongue and literature” (Steiner, 1996: xiv). Counting

only published translations of the whole *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, we can estimate, on the basis of the bibliographical sources we have already cited, that there have been more than 75 translations of the *Iliad* and more than 55 of the *Odyssey* in English, 40 and 25 respectively in French. Note that American translations of Homer have entered the scene in great numbers especially since the second half of the 19th century.

13 A very helpful source for bibliographical data on modern editions and translations is Young (2003) on which we have mainly based ourselves for related information. There are also a number of relevant internet sites (see bibliography) on which we partly rely for access to the text of some translations. Studies and criticism pertaining to specific translations, especially the most influential ones, are numerous and varied. For the overall tradition of translations of Homer, see the succinct overview of Armstrong (2005) but especially the invaluable Steiner (1996 and 2004) for English, and Pralon (1993) for French; for older analogous endeavors see Arnold (1960), a classic in its own genre, and, for French, Egger (1862). There is, moreover, R. L. Scott, 1994, *On Translating the Iliad in English*, Ph. D. Thesis, Michigan State University, with emphasis on metrical patterns, especially on the modern hexameter. Martin (2011) also discusses English verse translations of the *Iliad*, comparing them to that of Lattimore, including basic paradigms on which we also comment. Brunet (1991) offers a relatively recent critique of selected French translations.

14 For basic introductions to French and English prosody and meters see, amongst numerous other sources, Mazaleyrat (1974), Dessons and Meschonic (1998), and Attridge (1995).

15 In our text, quotations from translations follow the grammar and orthography of indicated sources. Within each quoted passage, we underline phrases that correspond to the chiasmic figure (marked by italics in our quotation of the original); we also mark in bold those that correspond to the repeated expressions concerning *thanatos* and the *kleos* (also in bold in the original).

16 Homère, 1577, *Les XXIII Livres de l'Iliade d'Homère, Prince des Poètes Grecs*, transl. Hugues Salel, Amadis Jamin and Jacques Peletier du Mans, Paris, Lucas Brayer. As the first whole Homer in French we should consider the one of Salomon Certon, published in 1615, also in rhymed alexandrines: Homer, 1615, *Les oeuvres d'Homère, Prince des Poètes* trans. Salomon Certon, Paris, Nic. Hameau.

17 We cite the first edition of Salel's *Iliad*: Homère, 1545, *Les Dix Premiers Livres de l'Iliade d'Homère, Prince des Poètes*, trans. Hugues Salel, Paris, Vincent Sertenat. Access to text at: <http://iliadeodyssee.texte.free.fr/aatexte/salel/iliadesalel45/iliadsalel09/iliadesalel09.htm> [31/10/2013]

18 Homer, 1616, *The Whole Works of Homer; Prince of Poetts in his Iliads, and Odysseys*, trans. George Chapman, London, R. Field. Young (*ibid.*) notes that this is a reprint of a 1612 edition.

19 Homer, 2000, *The Iliad and the Odyssey*, trans. George Chapman, London, Wordsworth Classics, p.148.

20 Her commentary is explicitly based on old Byzantine exegeses, especially the 12th century one of Eustathius of Thessaloniki.

21 Madame Dacier, 2001, "Des causes de la corruption du goût", in M. Fumaroli (éd.), *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 494-518.

22 *ibid.*, p. 505.

23 We are citing the following edition: Homère, 1741, *L'Iliade*, trans. Mme Dacier, Paris, Gabriel Martin et al. Libraires, p. 374-375 [Digitalised by Google].

24 See Homer, 1967, *The Iliad: Books I-IX*, trans. Alexander Pope, Maynard Mack (ed.), London, Methuen & Co. p. 3.

25 Mason (1972) vividly argues in this direction.

26 Homer, 1967, *op.cit.*, p. 459-460. For the first edition: Homer, 1715-1720, *The Iliad*, trans. Alexander Pope, London, William Browyer.

27 In cases of shorter quotations of lines, integrated in our text, that can be read as accentual-syllabic, we mark with double underlining syllables that correspond to a metrical beat (ictus) and can also be felt as carrying a current linguistic word or sentence stress. We mark with single underlining metrical beats that fall on otherwise rather unstressed syllables.

28 Homer, 1856, *The Iliad*, trans. F. W. Newman, London, Walton & Maberly, p. 156.

29 Newman, F., 1861, *Homeric Translation in Theory & Practice: A Reply to Matthew Arnold, Esqu.* [Digitalised by <http://www.victorianprose.org/>; E-text Editor: Alfred J. Drake, Ph.D., Electronic Version 1.0 / Date 7-20-02], p. 48 and 55. [31/10/2013]

30 Homer, 1865, *The Iliad*, trans. J. Henry Dart, London, Longmans, Green & Co, p. 197.

31 A characteristic case of line per line hexametric venture is the one of: Homer, 1944, *The Iliad*, New York, MacMillan, in which Walter Miller reworks the material of an older unpublished hexametric endeavour by William Benjamin Smith (1850-1934).

32 One should also note the case of Émile Littré who argues for the use of an idiom inspired by 13th century *ancien français* as best suited for the translation of Homer (Littré, É., 1847, “La poésie homérique et l’ancienne poésie française”, in *Revue des deux Mondes*, 19, Paris, p. 409-461)

33 Homère, 1781, *L’Iliade*, trans. M. de Rochefort, Paris, Imprimerie Royale, lines 435-440. Access to text at:

<http://iliadeodysee.texte.free.fr/aatexte/duboisrochefort/iliaddubois1781/iliadubois09/iliaddubois09.htm> [31/10/2013]. First published in 1776-1770, Paris, Saillant.

34 In his study of the French translations of the Iliad, Didier Pralon notes that “Les traductions en alexandrins nous apparaissent désormais surannées. Elles affadissent le texte jusqu’à l’ennui. Le flou et le vague irritent. Les rares licences métriques de ces vers plats font l’effet de maladresses plus que d’audaces” (Pralon, 1993). Translations of Homer do not seem to have tried experiments such as those that Jacques Roubaud refers to as he argues in support of the alexandrine paradigm (2000, *La Vieillesse d’Alexandre*, Paris, Ivrea).

35 Homère, 1870, *L’Iliade*, trans. Victor Quintius Thouron, Paris, Durand et Pedone Lauriel. Text accessible at: <http://iliadeodysee.texte.free.fr/aatexte/thouron/iliadethouron/iliadethouron09.htm> [31/10/2013]

36 Homère, 1867, *L’Iliade*, trans. Leconte de Lisle, Paris, Librairie Alphonse Lemerre. Text accessible at :

<http://iliadeodysee.texte.free.fr/aatexte/leconte/iliadleconte/iliadlecont09.htm> [31/10/2013]

37 Homer, 1773, *The Iliad*, trans. James MacPherson, vol. 1, London. p. 265-266. [Digitalised by Google]

38 Homer, 1883, *The Iliad*, trans. Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf and Ernest Myers, Boston. The bibliography of Young (*op. cit.*) suggests that this translation was first published in Boston, 1882. Text accessible at <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3059/pg3059.html> [31/10/2013].

39 Homère, 1937, *L’Iliade*, trans. Paul Mazon, Paris, Les Belles Lettres.

40 Homère, 1924, *L’Odyssée*, trans. Victor Bérard, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, p. xxxiii. The first lines of the *Odyssey* could scan as iambic trimeters as follows: “C’est l’Homme aux mille tours./ Muse, qu’il faut me dire./ Celui qui tant erra/ quand, de Troade, il et/ pillé la ville sainte.”

41 Homère, 1955, *Iliade – Odyssée*, trans. Robert Flacelière and Victor Bérard, Paris, Gallimard, p. 243. The corresponding passage in Mazon’s translation, which displays the losses that metrical constraints imposed on Flacelière, reads as follows: “Ma mère souvent me l’a dit, la déesse aux

pieds d'argent, Thétis: deux destins vont m'emportant vers la mort, qui tout achève. Si je reste à me battre ici autour de la ville de Troie, c'en est fait pour moi du retour; en revanche, une gloire impérissable m'attend. Si je m'en reviens au contraire dans la terre de ma patrie, c'en est fait pour moi de la noble gloire ; une longue vie, en revanche, m'est réservée, et la mort, qui tout achève, de longtemps ne saurait m'atteindre." (Cited from the more recent edition of Homère, 1975, *L'Iliade*, trans. Paul Mazon, Paris, Gallimard).

42 Homer, 1950, *The Iliad*, trans. E. V. Rieu, Baltimore, Penguin Books, p. 172.

43 Robert Graves, 1959, *The Anger of Achilles*, New York, Doubleday.

44 The particular interest of this translation is well attested by its 2011 edition by Richard Martin.

45 Homer, 1951, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, p. 209.

46 We should mention in chronological order the following: Homer, 1975, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald, New York, Anchor Books, famous for its poetic remolding of Homer; Homer, 1990, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles, New York, Viking, on which we will insist here; and Homer, 1997, *The Iliad*, trans. Stanley Lombardo, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co. Fagles's Homer has been accompanied by recorded recitation of the poems. Lombardo's version has also been systematically connected to oral performances. Analogous ties to the idea of oral poetry, including material of recitation or performances on the internet, characterize recent hexametric versions such as the ones of Merrill and Brunet (*op. cit.*).

47 We cite from: Homer, 1998, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles, New York, Penguin Books. p. 265.

48 Homère, 1995, *L'Iliade*, trans. Frédéric Mugler, Actes Sud, p. 190.

49 Homer, 2007, *The Iliad*, trans. Rodney Merrill, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.

50 See Homer, 2010, *L'Iliade*, trans. Philippe Brunet, Paris, Le Seuil. The edition includes an introduction on questions of translation and rhythm and has been accompanied by a wide range of activities and debates, including recitations and an international conference on hexametric translations of Homer (*Dionysies 2012*, Théâtre Démodokos, 26 Mars 2012).

51 Our research on the question of Homeric translation suggests that it is interesting to inquire into the eventual specificity of the perspective added to the prism by Modern Greek, with its distinctly ambivalent historical relation to Homer's language.

52 <http://iliadeodysee.texte.free.fr/aacompar/compiliade/compiliad/compiliad03/01armeavance/pralon.htm> (accessed 31/03/14)

53 The relatively recent tendency to accompany newly published translations with recorded performances of recitation material is a further (and rather belated) echo of the oral theory of Homer. Older versions could be proven, of course, just as suitable for public recitation. Note that in the cases of the translations of Rodney Miller and Philippe Brunet, emphasis on oral performance concerns rhythmically unfamiliar hexametric versions.

54 One should also take into consideration, in this respect, not only the inconsistency of translation choices, noted above, but also complications such as the fact that compliance with a given set of domestic literary norms (as those of the epic decorum or the medieval ballad) may involve estranging distances from other, equally domestic cultural trends; or that any sense of familiarity or strangeness provoked by modes of writing in given epochs may drastically change with time.

55 For the notions of "territorialization" and "deterritorialization" see Deleuze (1980).