GRK 301  Homer and the Archaic Age

M and W 12:40–2:00

Textbooks


Homer *Odyssey IX*. J. Muir. 0-906515-61-0. (paper) Cambridge University Press.


Not ordered but assigned and in the library:


Objectives:

To learn about how to read Homeric and Hesiodic Greece, become acquainted with the criticism of the Homeric epics and Hesiod’s *Theogony*, read about history of Archaic Greece.

Standing Assignment:

The entirety of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Hesiod’s *Theogony* in translation. We will talk about these as we work through the semester. Pick a translation. For a guide in translation, use Lattimore. Try to agree on a separate translations for other purposes. I have assigned myself Michael Reck’s translation. It does not compare to Lattimore’s, but there is Fitzgerald, Rieu, Fagles, Lombardo, and others on web. Perhaps a web-published translation would be a good choice for variety. Getting published is not always easy as publishers want a name, but does not indicate the quality of the translator’s feel for the Greek. I will read Shaw’s *Odyssey*.

Resource: I’m sure you all know about: [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/). It is a dandy resource.

Reality: No resource, no matter what, replaces the text, the grammar, and the brain greased by hours of exercise. If you want to learn how to read Homer, read Homer. Every day.

Schedule:

We will commence reading the selections of Homer’s *Iliad* in Benner on August 29 and will read
whatever we are going to read by October 26. The pace will be as fast as you can read, that is, as many lines as possible—and then some. The goal is two hundred lines a week. Once we have met that, we’ll set a new goal. We should probably accomplish more Greek on Monday and use Wednesday mostly for other topics.

Poihtea and their Deadlines

_Iliad_


Powell, “Backgrounds,” in _Homer_, 1–61..........................................................September 14

Grammar Report on twenty lines of the _Iliad_....................................................September 21

Grammar Report consists of the explanation of the grammar (morphology and syntax) of every word in a twenty line passage written up in such a manner that allows photocopying and an enjoyable read by the others in the class, namely, clear and legible. After a review by the class, all errors will be corrected for resubmission to me and distribution to the class.

    Keyman is a good Greek system for PC. If you have trouble with Greek and PC, I have a dandy resource.


Powell, “The Poems. The _Iliad_” in _Homer_, 65–113..........................................September 28


Kirk, “Homer: The _Iliad_,” in _Cambridge History of Classical Literature_, 52–73 .......................................................................................................October 12

Report on Translation........................................................................................October 19

    Analysis of a published translation of a passage of 35 lines. How a translator translates a passage can only be determined in one’s judgment and then by closely reading his work for selections and compromises. If nothing comes to mind, get another 35-line passage, and start over. Keep at it until something comes to mind, bearing in mind that all somethings are not equal.

    See Appendix for Analysis of Translation of _Antigone_ line 1 that Larry J. Bennett and I did for our on-line translation of the play, available from Diotima and other sites
Report on an Article on Homer *Iliad* or Archaic Greece (thus far)..................October 26

Report of an Article requires the full bibliographical reference, statement of the author’s purpose(s) in the article, and summary of the arguments used. You do not have to criticize the article. An oral presentation to the class accompanies the submission of the written report. Articles may be found in the bibliographies of Kirk, Powell, and Snodgrass as well in other general books on Homer. Bibliographies abound on the web, and there’s *L'Année philologique; bibliographie critique et analytique de l'antiquité gréco-latine*, which, despite the French, you should look at.

It is hard to use on the web, but I have a dandy resource who recommends Perseus. The paper copy is in the library. This is/was a fundamental tool but one of written world and always years behind.

**Odyssey**

We will commence reading Homer’s *Odyssey* on October 31 with the proem and then turn to Book Nine to be finished by....................................................November 16

Kirk, “Homer: The *Odyssey,*” in *Cambridge History of Classical Literature,* 74–91.................................................................November 2


Snodgrass, “The Just City,” in *Archaic Greece,* 85–122..............................November 14

Report on an Article on Homer *Odyssey* or Archaic Greece (thus far)..............November 16

Report of an Article requires the full bibliographical reference, statement of the author’s purpose(s) in the article, and summary of the arguments used. You do not have to criticize the article. An oral presentation to the class accompanies the submission of the written report. Articles may be found in the bibliographies of Kirk, Powell, and Snodgrass as well in other general books on Homer.

**Hesiod, Theogony**

We will commence reading Hesiod’s *Theogony* on November 21 to be finished by December 7.


Examinations

Three fifteen-line twenty minute quizzes.............................................................September 7
.............................................................September 19
.............................................................October 3

Two fifty-line hour examinations

Iliad..................................................................................................................October 26

Odyssey.............................................................................................................November 16

Final Examination on fifty lines form Hesiod, *Theogony*

The University does not seem to have scheduled a final examination for classes meeting MW at 12:40, so we will set our own date and time.

Grades: Total points: 295 points

Fifteen-line quizzes..................................................................................45 points

Fifty-line examinations...........................................................................100 points

Grammatical Analysis...............................................................................20 points

Translation Report....................................................................................30 points

Article Reports...........................................................................................50 points

Reading and Contribution to class............................................................50 points

Grading Scale Used for Calculating Raw Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100–94%</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93–87%</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86–80%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All dates are subject to change on class/instructor consultation. I would like to stick to the schedule of Greek readings. Students can work out the order of reports.

Homer rewards persistence.

wbt
Sophocles taught his *Antigone* to a chorus of fifteen young men for the contest in tragedy. He wanted to entertain and educate his audience, for these had been the duties of poets since time immemorial. He also sought to defeat his two competitors for the prize in tragedy and be honored as best. How he fared with the judges that morning in Elaphebolion (roughly March) is not known. Never in doubt, however, has been the value that modern audiences have placed upon *Antigone* as a means for understanding the Athenians as well as their own experiences. Many have had access to Sophocles’ Greek, but far more have read the play in translation. All of these readers are dependent upon the decisions made by the translator. For this reason, we begin with the assumptions that have guided our selection of one meaning or form of a sentence over others and the context that we have imagined for the play’s original performance.

Translation consists of bringing the words of one language across a no-man’s-land, as it were, in the translator’s mind into those of another. It cannot be accomplished without the translator’s having the necessary background knowledge and some notion about what the original is saying, as the apocryphal translation machine illustrates. Instructed to bring into Latin the English: “The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak,” the machine, lacking a context for human courage facing its own frailness, set the statement in a dietary context by taking “spirit” as alcoholic “spirits.” It was then forced to take “flesh” as “meat,” and came up with: *Vinum valebat sed caro mitigata est* (the wine was strong, but the meat was tender). The machine also shows that translation is not a process of substitution. The simplest words, *thyra*/door, as well as the pregnant ones, *phronein/to think/be minded/have understanding*, do not have identical connotations much less identical meanings. Moreover, Greek and English have different structures, different ways of integrating words into sentences. Whereas English usually depends upon word order and less upon changing the shapes and sounds of words, such alterations or inflections are the rule in Greek and enable the order of the words itself to convey far more meanings and nuances than the basic order in English of subject-verb-object. Sophocles, for instance, places the adverb *eti* of line 3 in such a position as to modify either the verb (“Zeus is yet to fulfill”) or the participle (“for us two yet living”), thus gaining two meanings from the single adverb. The translator, however, must choose between one or the other, limiting the text to one meaning, or duplicate the adverb, as we have done. To the extent that multiplicity is lost or distortion introduced, the translator mistranslates the text, the inevitable sacrifice to the goal of reading *Antigone* in English.

From the first line, the translator confronts the abyss separating Sophocles’ Greek from English. Our translation, “O common one of the same womb, dear head of Ismene” uses eleven words for five of the original. An endearment like “dear heart, Ismene” would be more readily understood than “head of Ismene” but with a false familiarity: the Greeks spoke of the head, not the heart, as the center of love and affection. Richard Jebb’s translation, “Ismene, my sister, mine own dear sister,” forfeits the slight delay in discovering the identity of the addressee and dilutes the hyperbolic expression of kinship. Elizabeth Wyckoff’s “My sister, my Ismene” and Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald’s “Ismene, a dear sister” further diminish the urgency perceptible in the words of kinship. Kinship is emphasized in Andrew Brown’s “Sisters, closest of kindred, Ismene’s self”
and in Richard Emil Braun’s “Ismene? Let me see your face,” although “Ismene’s self” is no more 
English idiom than the literal “head of Ismene,” and looking upon Ismene’s face is not in the Greek. 
Robert Fagles’ “My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene” highlights the physicality of the 
kinship Antigone asserts with Ismene at the price of abandoning the Greek. “Ismene, my dear sister 
whose father was my father” (Grene) stresses the notion of the sisters’ kinship shared through the 
father, an emphasis on father that not only is not in the Greek but imports father into words that 
denote kinship through the womb. Each version of line 1 promises a faithful translation, but they 
are not the same English, since the translator cannot escape imposing his or her layer of meaning 
upon Antigone of the written page.

Every translator responds to the author’s plea, “Translate my meaning, not my words,” by 
holding that meaning in the highest. But translators differ in how they articulate meaning, because 
their aims for their translation and their interpretations of the original differ. Condensation 
(Wyckoff, Fitts and Fitzgerald), paraphrasing (Braun, Fagles), and inserting interpretative glosses 
(Grene) familiarize the sense of things but easily slip into anachronism and inaccuracy. A translation 
produced by a scholarly poet (Braun) that strives for a text to be savored on its own merits serves 
well an audience that knows the original and can appreciate how the poet has refashioned its lines. 
For an audience that is ignorant of or not interested in the original, such a translation appears as the 
creation of a Sophocles fully at home in English. But Antigone is not a modern text and was not 
composed with a modern audience in mind. Whenever possible, we have used the same English 
word or phrase for the Greek so that verbal patterns and reminiscences may be traced throughout the 
play. We have on occasion departed from idiomatic English by beginning the sentence with a direct 
object of the verb or otherwise postponing full recognition of meaning. In line 557, for example, 
“Nobly you seemed to some, and I to others, to think,” captures the pith of the Greek sentence in its 
first and last words. This allows the translation, at the cost of some ease of reading, to approach 
more closely the word order of the Greek and its unfolding impact upon Sophocles’ audience.

Language can communicate thoughts, in part, because its speakers share the same context. 
No word can be so clear as to lack any element of doubt. Ambiguities and multiple meanings are 
the very marrow of Greek tragedy, and the medium capitalizes on the dependence of language on 
context for communication. The translator must choose from a word’s semantic range to fit the 
context, but some words are more crucial than others. For Antigone, one such word is kakos, used 
as a noun and adjective and translated usually as “evils” or “evil.” In each instance, the reader may 
substitute a more specific evil, for example, “exposure of corpses,” for the evils in line 10. Another 
word is the noun taphos and its related verb thaptein, respectively, “burial, funeral feast, wake, 
funeral rites, grave, tomb” and “to perform funeral rites, bury, inter, entomb.” Their exact meaning 
depends upon the context, which itself may be uncertain. Although taphos may be translated 
“mound” each time and thaptein “to bury,” we have had to choose which English phrase best 
describes what we believe has happened. This selection is complicated by the need to avoid the 
English word “burial” whose strong associations with complete interment tend to destroy the 
ambiguities of the Greek, ambiguities both inherent in the word and often, it would seem, intended 
by Sophocles.

In one case, however, the Greek is so fraught with nuances for an English reader that we have 
chosen to naturalize rather than translate this series of words by defining and using them as if 
English words. The adjectives philos/philoi, respectively, the masculine singular and plural forms,
and *philē*/*philai*, respectively, the feminine singular and plural forms of the noun *philotēs*, are usually translated “friendly” and “loved” and when used as substantives, as “friend” and “loved one.” For instance, David Grene has Antigone say for line 73 of the Greek: “I shall lie by his side, / loving him as he loved me;” for line 81: “But I will go to heap the earth on the grave of my loved brother;” for line 523: “My nature is to join in love, not hate.” Ismene speaks of Antigone in terms of love: “that though you are wrong to go, your friends are right to love you” (99), where “friends,” it seems, is used to avoid the equally possible “your loved ones are right to love you.” On the other hand, Creon must have his nephew Polyneices in mind in his opening address (162-90) and uses the same masculine adjectives, but *philos/philoi* become “friend(s).” Since the meanings of “friend” and “loved one” are simultaneously present, translation of these key words unavoidably introduces a dichotomy in the English that is not in the Greek. More significantly, translation obfuscates the semantic substratum that joins these words as expressions of obligation in a relationship.

*Philotēs,* as Emile Benveniste has shown, belongs to a vocabulary of moral terms that is “strongly permeated by values which are not personal but relational.” Rather than denoting psychological states, these words refer to the relations that an individual has with members of his group who are bound to one another by reciprocal duties and obligations. In its earliest known form, *philotēs* expresses the obligations a member of a community has toward a *xenos* (stranger/guest). In Benveniste’s words, “the behaviour expressed by *phileîn* [verbal form] always has an obligatory character and always implies reciprocity; it is the accomplishment of positive actions which are implied in the pact of mutual hospitality.” This is the behavior expected of a host toward his guest, or the head of the household toward its members, particularly his wife. Such relationships readily extend beyond their institutional basis in hospitality or marriage to bonds of friendship, affection, and love, but these emotions are not essential to the bonds of *philotēs.* Consequently, *philotēs* need not indicate friendship, only an agreement concerning an action binding on its partners. When Hector and Ajax break off their duel in *Iliad* 7, they agree to exchange weapons and gifts. Their action constitutes a *philotēs* between them. “They parted, having joined in *philotēs*” (*Iliad* 7.302). They separate still enemies but now *philoi,* men obligated by an agreement.


3. For this approach to Greek tragedy, see Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-32.