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The Cambridge Companion to Homer, and: The Printed Homer: A
3000 Year Publishing and Translation History of the Iliad
and the Odyssey, and: The Homeric Hymns: A Translation, with
Introduction and Notes (review)

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REVIEWS

The Cambridge Companion to Homer. Edited by Robert Fowler. Pp. xx + 419. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pb. £18.99.

The Printed Homer: A 3000 Year Publishing and Translation History of the Iliad and the Odyssey. By Philip H. Young. Pp. vi + 481. Jefferson, N.C., and London: McFarland, 2003. Hb. £55.95.

The Homeric Hymns: A Translation, with Introduction and Notes. By Diane Rayor. Pp. xiv + 164. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. Pb. £9.95.

Whoever devised the term ‘companion’ to characterize a book-length, non-specialist guide to a particular area of knowledge clearly hit on a winning formula. More enduring than an introduction, less mundanely functional than a handbook, and more comprehensive than a case-book or a collection of essays, a Companion promises the congenial fellowship and guidance of a friend constantly at one’s side for the duration of one’s exploration of a subject. The original ‘Companions’ were the alphabetically organized reference books, on subjects ranging from Music and English Literature to Food, Wine, The Law, and Sport, published by Oxford University Press. The series is still very much in business, and has recently been extended to encompass a number of excellent volumes devoted to specific authors and musical composers. The ‘Companions’ currently being published by Cambridge University Press and Blackwell preserve the label (implicitly trading on some of the expectations which it generates) but are, in fact, rather different in conception and design from the Oxford volumes. The Cambridge Companions to Literature, 130 in number at the last count, are exclusively focused on particular literary topics (periods, themes, and individual authors) and on phases in cultural history. They consist of a series of discursive chapters rather than alphabetical reference-entries, and attempt, in the words of the editor of the *Companion to Homer*, ‘both to provide essential advice for the novice and to suggest future directions for research’. Despite their shared brief and uniform format, individual Cambridge Companions interpret their remit in notably different ways. One of the best, for example, Jill Kraye’s *Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, has a cultural sweep and density of documen-

tation that make it heavy going for the average undergraduate, but an invaluable resource for more advanced students. Greg Clingham's equally excellent *Companion to Samuel Johnson*, with its shrewdly judged focus on specific Johnsonian texts and themes, is more likely to offer direct help to hard-pressed undergraduates engaged on their weekly essay.

Robert Fowler's *Companion to Homer* combines broad-sweep preliminary surveys with more speculative and specialized essays. The volume's organization, in five main sections, is strong and clear, and the writing throughout is lucid, vigorous, and accessible. Section 1 offers a broad survey, in three chapters, of the main themes, characteristics, and narrative strategies of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Section 2 treats Homer's characters, male, female, and divine. Section 3 focuses on Homer's poetic craft, particularly his processes of composition and deployment of type-scenes, similes, and speeches. Section 4 situates the Homeric poems in the broad context of world epic, and in the more specific settings of the Greek epic tradition and Greek society, concluding with a discussion of 'the Homeric question' – the long-standing debate about the original circumstances in which the poems were composed and recorded. The final and longest section, 'Homeric Reception', concerns the afterlife of the Homeric poems from Greek and Roman antiquity to the present. This becomes increasingly selective as it progresses, its later chapters being mainly devoted to a series of snapshots of different moments in Homer's reception by English-speaking writers: Milton and Pope, the Romantic poets and critics, James Joyce, certain modern poets and dramatists (Christopher Logue, Derek Walcott, and Michael Longley). It also contains an essay considering 'Homer' as a cultural and aesthetic ideal, and concludes with a rapid survey by George Steiner (covering some of the same ground as his introduction to the Penguin anthology *Homer in English*) of 'Homer in English Translation'.

In the first of the 'Observations' on his translation of the *Iliad*, Alexander Pope noted that Homer's commentators are 'voluminous in explaining those sciences which he made but subservient to his Poetry, and sparing only upon that art which constitutes his character'. Since, Pope judged, Homer's critics are 'fonder of shewing their variety of learning in all kinds than their single understanding in Poetry', their 'remarks' tend to be 'rather philosophical, historical, geographical, allegorical, or in short rather any thing than critical and poetical'. To what extent, on the evidence of the *Cambridge Companion*, are Pope's strictures still valid? The *Companion*, to be sure, offers ample guidance (of an expert and up-to-date kind) on many matters 'philosophical',

'historical', and 'geographical': the circumstances in which the Homeric poems came into being (Robert Fowler), the traditions of oral composition and bardic performance which lie behind the texts we read (Matthew Clark, Ken Dowden), the societies inhabited and depicted by Homer, and the audiences to which they might originally have been addressed (Robin Osborne). And one contributor (James Porter) chooses to consider the Homeric poems more in 'their role as cultural icons, as signifiers of value' than for 'their quality as great works of literature'. But the *Companion* is also fully attentive to specifically literary features of the Homeric poems. A reader who works through its chapters on the poems' main structure and design (Donald Lateiner, Michael Silk), on their narrative techniques (Ruth Scodel), similes (Richard Buxton), and speeches (Jasper Griffin), on their treatment of the gods (Emily Kearns), of manhood and heroism (Michael Clarke), and of gender (Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin), will come away with a greatly enhanced appreciation of the main thematic concerns of the Homeric poems, and the literary techniques deployed within them. It may, however, be felt that the 'historical' and 'literary' sections of the *Companion* fail to achieve entirely satisfactory integration, and that the 'critical and poetical' parts are more likely to appeal to those already convinced of Homer's merits and importance than to absolute novices or sceptics. In his Introduction, Robert Fowler takes Samuel Johnson to task for a 'totally unthinking confidence that there is no essential difference in the world observed and experienced by Homer and that observed and experienced by the eighteenth century. It does not even cross his mind, that mentalities might differ'. And James Porter later dismisses as 'rather unsatisfactory' Bernard Williams' assertion (*contra* Bruno Snell) that 'Homeric Greeks are recognisably unified selves, just like us.' Fowler misrepresents and Porter oversimplifies the author he reports. A glance at the entry on 'Criticism: Historical Method' in Joseph Epes Brown's *The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson* is sufficient to remind one of Johnson's acute awareness of the effects of historical change and contingency on literary (as on all other areas of human) affairs: Johnson was emphatically no naïve essentialist. And readers of Bernard Williams' *Shame and Necessity* will remember the scrupulous subtlety with which that author differentiates the precise ways in which he thinks the human beings depicted by Homer are both 'like' and 'unlike' 'us'. Fowler's and Porter's comments are, I think, significantly related to the ultimate failure of the *Cambridge Companion* to forge a coherent connection between historical contextualization (placing the Homeric poems in their own past moment) and critical appreciation (judging their value for readers in the present). Though one never

doubts the genuineness of the enthusiasm for Homer manifested on almost every page of the *Companion*, and though suggestive hints about the basis on which such enthusiasm might be grounded are offered in particular chapters (notably in Penelope Wilson's sophisticated account of the relations between Homeric and English epic, and Vanda Zajko's stylish essay on Homer in Joyce's *Ulysses*), no clearly articulated explanation emerges from the book as a whole as to why works so apparently distanced from us by the exigencies of oral-formulaic composition, and by historically contingent assumptions about gender, the gods, and heroism, should continue to be of living interest to readers today. A huge unexplained gap is apparent, for example, between Robin Osborne's account of the appeal of the Homeric poems for late eighth- and early seventh-century Greek audiences preoccupied by the conflict between 'old ways of asserting status and authority' and new possibilities of reshaping the 'sacred landscape' of their world, and Robert Fowler's characterization of Homer as a 'sublime' figure whose status as 'the supreme bard' and ability to 'speak forcefully for himself' will assure his central role in any 'new understanding of humanity' that might emerge from current cultural debates – claims which seem to rest on the very kind of transhistorical essentialism for which Johnson is elsewhere so roundly castigated. In this respect it is a pity that the *Companion* has relatively little to say about those aspects of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* that have most fascinated some of Homer's most distinguished recent commentators: the poems' presentation of human and divine psychology and motivation, and of moral and ethical values. Albin Lesky (in *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos*, 1961), John Casey (in *Pagan Virtue*, 1990), Bernard Williams (in *Shame and Necessity*, 1993), and Colin Burrow (in *Epic Romance*, 1993) have all offered powerful arguments for the enduringly challenging nature of the Homeric treatment of human motivation, action, personhood, responsibility, and virtue. Whatever one thinks of these critics' specific findings, it is surely only arguments *like* theirs, which combine in a single, coherent view an acute awareness of the original provenance of the Homeric poems with a simultaneous conviction of their capacity to speak (however problematically) to the needs and preoccupations of today, that will ultimately have any real chance of convincing readers outside the captive audiences of university Classics departments that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not merely (as Mark Pattison said of *Paradise Lost*) a 'monument to dead ideas'.

Philip H. Young is a university librarian, whose previous major publication was *Children's Fiction Series: A Bibliography, 1850–1950* (1997). The main purpose of *The Printed Homer* is to utilize newly available

computerized databases of library holdings worldwide to compile 'a comprehensive list of all known editions' of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and other works attributed to Homer, from 1470 to 2000. Young's inventory, which occupies over half his book, encompasses translations in all languages as well as editions of and commentaries on Homer's Greek text, and is presented in a single chronological sequence, subdivided by period. A series of subsequent indices allows the reader to locate editions and translations by their author, publisher, or place of printing. Young's lists are invaluable in providing a sense of the relative popularity and currency of the main editions and translations of Homer in any period, and will thus provide a useful tool for all those working in the field of Homeric reception. (They show, for example, that despite the renewed interest in George Chapman's Homer displayed by a number of Romantic writers – illuminatingly discussed by Timothy Webb in the *Cambridge Companion* – Pope's version emphatically remained the preferred version for general readers: no new editions of either Chapman's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* were printed between 1770 and 1830, whereas Pope's Homer was reprinted forty-three times during the same period.) Readers should, however, be aware that Young's lists have defects resulting from the somewhat mechanical circumstances in which they were compiled. They are, for example, selective and arbitrary in their recording of partial translations preserved in miscellanies and anthologies. To take some instances from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: John Dryden's translation of Book I of the *Iliad*, in *Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700), is listed, but the same author's version of 'The Last Parting of Hector and Andromache', in *Examen Poeticum* (1693) is not. Thomas Yalden's rendering of 'Patroclus's Request to Achilles for his Arms', in *The Annual Miscellany: For the Year 1694*, is included, but not Arthur Maynwaring's translation of *Iliad* I in *Poetical Miscellanies: The Fifth Part* (1704), or Knightly Chetwood's 'Last Parting of Hector and Andromache' in Nahum Tate's *Poems by Several Hands* (1685) and *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1693). (For a fuller listing of later seventeenth-century English Homer translations see Stuart Gillespie's bibliography in *T&L* 1 (1992), 52–67.)

Such limitations notwithstanding, the second part of Young's volume can be warmly welcomed. But the critical sections which make up the first 169 pages of the book, and which attempt a comprehensive account of Homer's reception, are, unfortunately, another story. They are so riddled with errors and peculiarities that readers will be hesitant to trust any of their findings without independent corroboration. On p. 9, for example, a quotation from Thomas Heywood's *Hierarchie of the*

Blessed Angels (1635) is offered as an example of 'eighteenth-century couplets'. Later Thomas and Richard Bentley are twice confused (pp. 19, 108), Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* is said to have been 'written in Latin' (p. 81), Tolstoy is described without further qualification as 'the Russian playwright' (p. 164), reference is made to 'an anthology series called *Johnson's Works of the English Poets*' (p. 119), James Scudamore's *Homer à la Mode* (1664) is attributed to 'Lord Scudamore James' (p. 108), John Dryden's fall from public office in 1688–9 is attributed to his having fallen 'out of favor with James II' (p. 108), and the rival translation to the first instalment of Pope's *Iliad* (1715) is said to have been by 'Thomas Ticknell' (p. 119). Some of Young's judgements and observations are as bizarre as his facts are inaccurate. He is probably the only critic ever to have judged the Homer translations of Ogilby and Hobbes 'better' than those of Chapman (p. 106). And most readers, I'd guess, will hesitate to rely on a commentator who declares baldly that Alexander Pope was 'not a very pleasant individual', that his 'physical deformity and stunted growth' gave him 'low self-esteem' (p. 113), that he 'was more interested in the sound of his translation [of Homer] than in scholarship', and that he 'did his translation in rhyming couplets of blank verse, not everyone's favourite' (p. 118). And while Young's enthusiasm for his author is commendable, he does Homer no favour by describing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in terms more fitting to a soap opera. Among Homer's 'universal themes' are included 'To what lengths should a friend go to help out a friend?' and 'How can a person conduct himself or herself honorably when playing second fiddle to a superstar?' And Homer's cause is surely not assisted by such demonstrations of his modern 'relevance' as this:

Several modern names derive from Homer, both for people and products. We have a cleanser called "Ajax" and prophylactic condoms called "Trojans", both presumably indicative of strength. I wonder whether their parent companies considered that Ajax committed suicide because he was shown not to be the best and that the protective wall of the Trojans was breached!

(p. 162)

Diane Rayor is a Professor of Classics at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. Her previous translations have included a version of Callimachus' Hymns and Epigrams (with Stanley Lombardo, 1988), a collection of Greek women's poetry (1991), and an anthology of Latin lyric and elegiac poetry (with William Batstone, 1995). Her new version of *The Homeric Hymns*, accompanied by an elegant Introduction and informative notes, attempts to combine 'accuracy' ('I never intro-

duce new images or otherwise add anything that I do not see in the Greek') with a vocal euphony, tested in public readings during the period of the volume's gestation. Rayor's aim is to 'use modern poetic language' and to avoid 'archaic devices'. Though she retains 'the ancient images' and avoids substituting 'modern or more familiar ones', she makes no attempt to reproduce the metre of the *Hymns* in English. A fair sample of her method is provided by her rendering of the moment in the 'Hymn to Hermes' where the infant god returns slyly to his mother's cave after his theft of Apollo's cattle:

Going straight through the cave, he walked softly
into the rich temple, with no usual sounds on the floor.
In haste, glorious Hermes climbed into his cradle.
Wrapping his swaddling clothes around his shoulders
like a newborn, he lay fingering the cloth about his knees,
keeping the lovely tortoise to the left of his hand.
But the god did not escape the notice of his goddess mother:
"Where have you been, you trickster, coming here
at night wrapped in shamelessness? Now I truly believe
that soon, bound by Leto's son with unbreakable chains
around your ribs, you'll leave through these doors,
or, meanwhile, you'll be a thief who raids mountain glens.
Away again! Your father bore you to be a great pest
for mortal men and immortal gods."
Hermes answered her with cunning words:
"Oh mother, why put these things to me
as if to a newborn, whose heart scarce knows evil,
who cowers in fear, behind its mother's scoldings?
I'll practice whatever art is best to serve
you and me forever. And the two of us
won't put up with staying here, as you insist,
the only mortal gods with no gifts and no food."

This reads fluently, and (despite a few small infelicities: 'with no usual sounds', 'a great pest') has little of the jarringly incongruous diction that so often mars modern academic translations from classical poetry. But its qualities surely pale when juxtaposed with the subtle wit and deftly modulated melody of Shelley's classic version of the same passage:

Right through the temple of the spacious cave
He went with soft light feet – as if his tread
Fell not on earth; no sound their falling gave;
Then to his cradle he crept quick, and spread
The swaddling-clothes about him; and the knave
Lay playing with the coverage of the bed

With his left hand about his knees – the right
Held his beloved tortoise-lyre tight.

There he lay innocent as a new-born child,
As gossips say but though he was a God,
The Goddess, his fair mother, unbeguiled,
Knew all that he had done being abroad:
'Whence come you, and from what adventure wild,
You cunning rogue, and where have you abode
All the long night, clothed in your impudence?
What have you done since you departed hence?

'Apollo will soon pass within this gate
And bind your tender body in a chain
Inextricably tight, and fast as fate,
Unless you can delude the God again,
Even when within his arms – ah, runagate!
A pretty torment both for Gods and Men
Your father made when he made you!' – 'Dear mother,'
Replied sly Hermes, 'wherefore scold and bother?

'As if I were like other babes as old,
And understood nothing of what is what;
And cared at all to hear my mother scold.
I in my subtle brain a scheme have got,
Which whilst the sacred stars round Heaven are rolled
Will profit you and me – nor shall our lot
Be as you counsel, without gifts or food,
To spend our lives in this obscure abode.'

The closer proximity of Rayer's version to the literal meaning of the Greek will no doubt make it a first choice for Classics in Translation courses. But readers who wish to see 'Homer's' subtly nuanced play of mutual divine deception reborn in exquisitely nuanced and harmonious English verse will surely feel that Shelley's translation operates at an altogether different level of poetic (re)creativity.

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The Sea! The Sea! The Shout of the Ten Thousand in the Modern Imagination.
By Tim Rood. London: Duckworth, 2004. Pp. ix + 262. Hb. £25.

'Many who have echoed Xenophon's shout', Tim Rood writes, 'have, it seems, simply been fond of the sound of "Thalatta! Thalatta!".' The appeal of the Greek words enters this book as a story about translation,