European Review, Vol. 15, No. 2, 171–185 (2007) © Academia Europæa, Printed in the United Kingdom

Homer in Modern Europe

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Homer is considered the father of poetry in European culture, but the written Greek text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was for ages not available in modern Europe, and knowledge of Greek was almost completely lost. Homer entered European classrooms during the 19th century. The popularity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* coincided with the creation of modern educational systems in European empires and nation-states. At the end of the 19th century Homer was considered perfect reading material for the formation of the future elite of the British Empire. In the course of the 20th century teachers and pedagogues became increasingly accustomed to perceive Homer and his society as totally different from our times. All reading of Homer is contemporary reading.

Homer is considered the father of poetry in European culture, but the written Greek text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was not available in modern Europe for ages, and knowledge of Greek was almost completely lost. We know that Renaissance scholars knew their Homer, and that the epics were read in the 1440s with the help of more or less word for word interlinear translations and Latin prose translations. In the middle of the 15th century, the famous humanist Pope Nicolas V offered, in vain, a fabulous prize for the complete Latin translation of Homer.

The first printed translations from the Greek into Latin appeared decades later, the *Iliad* in 1474 and the *Odyssey* in 1497. Greek printed editions remained very expensive and rare for a long time, after the *editio princeps* of the Byzantine vulgate in Florence by Demetrius Chalcondylas (1488) and the famous first and second Aldine editions in Venice (1504 and 1517).

In the 16th century, Homer appeared in European vernaculars – in 1545 a translation in French of the first ten books of the *Iliad*, in 1577 the complete *Iliad* and in 1604 a translation of the *Odyssey*. In Holland, a translation of the Odyssey was published in 1561, translated from Latin into Dutch, under the title *De Dolinghe van Ulysse*, it included a biography of Homer. Apparently this Dutch translation was popular since there were four re-editions of the first 12 books and two editions of the second 12 books. The first Dutch translation of the *Iliad* was published only in 1611.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798707000191 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the course of the 17th century, the songs of Homer became more easily available, in Greek, in Latin and in various modern European languages. The largest number was published in France: 89 editions from 1600 to 1716.[1] The French translations by Houdart de la Motte (1701) and Anne Dacier (1711–1716) became hot topics of literary debate. The English translations by George Chapman (1611–1615), Thomas Hobbes (1676–1677) and Alexander Pope (1715–1720) were also judged according to contemporary poetic taste.[2]

Visual representations of the heroes and episodes of the *Iliad* are common in the palaces of early modern Europe, whereas those of the *Odyssey* are rare. The early popularity of the text of the *Odyssey* in Holland was not matched visually in Dutch painting.

Homer among courtiers and merchants

A change in literary taste is often related to socio-cultural history. In early modern Europe, the royal court was omnipresent in art and literature and permeated the collective behaviour and the mind of the courtiers, as Montesquieu observed astutely in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). The court formalised the norm by creating the academic system that defined literary and artistic standards. As the well-informed Thomas Blackwell irritably observed in the early 18th century, the 'pernicious influence of the French court' prescribed cultural taste and fashion. For this courtly society in Europe Homer had to be adopted and moralized. As Blackwell remarks, Fénélon, the archbishop of Cambrai had to reconcile, 'old heroism with Politicks and to make poetry preach Reasons of State'.[3]

This kind of moral judgement is, of course, quite different from the literary question about the right application of the rules of *poetica*, and for ages Homer had his literary critics. In the middle of the 16th century, Julius Caesar Scaliger, father of a famous professor at Leyden, Josephus Justus Scaliger, condemned Homer for not following the proper poetical rules. He criticized the trivial subject, the confused composition and lack of unity in Homer. By 1715, Alexander Pope still considered Virgil the better artist, although he regarded Homer as the greater genius. The comparison of Homer and Virgil often contains a moral disapproval of Homer. René Rapin remarks that we must pardon this weakness in Homer, who wrote in a time when the precepts of morality were not yet formed; the world was too young to have learnt the principles of true honesty. Morality was more developed in Virgil's time. Rapin confesses that he rather wished to have written the *Aeneid* rather than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[4] Courtly society disliked the rudeness of manners and vulgarity of behaviour in Homer: the term 'la grossièreté des héros' returns time and again. A general in the kitchen, the heroes preparing the roasted lambs, the princesses washing the dishes and their own clothes; all

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this was considered ridiculous. Homer is not representing 'un courtisan de Versailles ou de Saint James', a French or English courtier. There could not have been a greater difference compared with Virgil: when we read Virgil we enter 'un monde éclairé', we are in the enlightened world of a nation with taste, with all the arts, sculpture, painting, architecture; all the talents are united with enlightenment. This was the general opinion as rendered in the *Encyclopédie.* In the words of Turgot in his authoritative *Tableau philosophique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1750): 'Virgile est moins fécond mais plus sage, plus égal, aussi harmonieux'.

In the course of the 18th century, the interest in primitivism and pre-romanticism reversed the prevailing opinion. Simplicity of manners became an argument used against the court and the courtier. This reproach is clearly put forward in the *Encyclopédie*: 'La plupart de nos généraux qui portent dans un camp tout luxe d'une cour afféminée. Cette simplicité si respectable vaut mieux que la vaine pompe et l'oisivité dans lesquelles les personnes d'un haut rang sont nourries'. A clear distinction was made between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. According to the philologist Richard Bentley, '… for small earnings and good cheer, at festivals and other days of merriment, [Homer made] the *Ilias* for men and the *Odysseis* for the other sex'. Père Le Bossu shows more social awareness than the classical scholar in considering common people, both men and women, the proper audience for the *Odyssey*. Le Bossu's judgement is quoted in extenso in the *Encyclopédie*: 'l'Odyssée est plus à l'usage du peuple que l'Iliade, dans laquelle les malheurs qui arrivent aux Grecs viennent plutôt de la faute de leurs chefs que celle des sujets'. Odysseus represents 'autant un simple citoyen, un pauvre paysan que des princes'. Reading Homer is as beneficial for the common man as for kings. The *Odyssey* offers also the opportunity for stressing the importance of a *pater familias*. 'Le petit peuple est aussi sujet que les grands à ruiner ses affaires et sa famille par négligence'. And without a father there could be no proper household. 'Quand un homme est hors sa maison, de manière qu'il ne puisse avoir l'œil à ses affaires, il s'y introduit de grands désordres'. The absence of Odysseus is considered the main theme of the story: 'Aussi l'absence d'Ulysse est …. la partie principale et essentielle de l'action [et] la principale partie du poème'. To this crude perspective on Homer in early modern Europe, one can add a simple Marxist explanation: the bourgeois identification with Odysseus. A shrewd bourgeois appreciates the cleverness and prudence of Odysseus; how to survive, to escape and to fool others? One could not expect a merchant from Amsterdam to identify with the warriors and heroes in the siege of Troy. Perhaps the emergence of a commercial society in the second half of the 16th century offers an obvious explanation for the early popularity and cultural function of the *Odyssey* in Holland.

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All reading of Homer is contemporary reading. Moral principles were bestowed to fit contemporary social values, whether for courtiers in Versailles or for merchants in Amsterdam.

Rediscovery of Homer

A radical change in the appreciation of Homer becomes apparent when the literary debate of whether modern European writers had surpassed the Greek and Roman authors, the *Querelle des Anciens et des modernes*, was over. Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) is considered to have been the *auctor intellectualis*. Passing over poetics, he was the first to consider Homer as a collective expression of a primitive society.[5] Homer was not an individual genius, but rather Greece itself was singing its own heroic history. This was a profound insight to which only later scholars could do justice.[6] Without any philological expertise and poor knowledge of the Greek language, Vico anticipated the idea of multiple authorship. Vico was conscious of the oral tradition preceding the written text. Scholars knew that the songs were collected during the reign of Peisistratos in Athens in the sixth century BC and that the texts were edited and commented on by Hellenistic scholars in the library of Alexandria in the third century BC. According to his cyclical theory of history, Vico saw a parallel between Greek and Roman history. Homer and the twelve tables both summarized various stages of cultural history from barbarism to the heroic age. Ingenious interpretations have been given for the fact that Vico maintained a separation between profane and sacred history, unlike Hobbes, Spinoza and others. Spinoza was rightly considered the most extreme representative of research blurring the boundaries of sacred and profane history. One explanation is perhaps that in his youth Vico had friends among freethinkers, who were indicted by the Holy Office. It is understandable that Vico, in precarious circumstances with a large family and always in financial trouble, had become a cautious man. Vico wrote to Cardinal Lorenzo Corsini, who became Pope Clement XII in 1730, that he intended his *Scienza Nuova* to refute both Hobbes and Bayle by demonstrating that 'the world of nations could not be ruled for an instant without the religion of a provident divinity'.[7] In 1744 the new edition of *Scienza Nuova* was published with a dedication to the influential Cardinal Troiano Acquaviva, a member of the powerful hispano-neapolitan ducal family and ambassador of the King of Spain in Rome. The cardinal paid part of the costs of this edition, and *Scienza Nuova* passed through ecclesiastical censorship without difficulties. But prudence is perhaps not the sole explanation for Vico's position in the old conflict between the sacred and the profane. He strongly believed in holy Providence and in his attack on the philosophers of the Radical Enlightenment, Vico relied on the regained prestige of Catholic scholarship. The Protestant challenge had provoked a forceful response: fundamental and

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methodical study of historical sources by members of monastic orders, of Jesuits and Benedictines like Bolland, Mabillon and De Montfaucon, but also Italian historians such as Maffei, Muratori and others.

Leaving aside the ideological and historiographical context of Vico's rediscovery of Homer, he lived too early to experience the general acceptance of this fundamental new appreciation. Only much later did the emergence of primitivism and pre-romanticism alter the climate of opinion and taste, and the dominance of romanticism in the 19th century created an appropriate cultural context for the acceptance of Homer as the undisputable original master of European poetry.

In the second half of the 18th century the geographical scenes of Homer were rediscovered and aroused lively archaeological interest. The first step was taken in 1767 by the well-educated gentleman Robert Wood. For Wood, Homer was not only the most original of all poets, but also the 'most constant and faithful copier after nature'. Homer was the best, not only thanks to his inspiration but also because of his accurate powers of observation.[8] Wood could present his judgement with authority for he had visited the scenes described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, during his Grand Tour in Greece and Asia Minor. In contrast to Vico's complex *Scienza Nuova*, Wood's essay was immediately highly appreciated by the growing European audience interested in Homer and in Greek classical studies and it was translated into French, in German and Italian.

Wood, like Vico, possessed no philological or archaeological expertise, but he was an eye-opener for Herder and Goethe and we all know the incredible adventure of Heinrich Schliemann who took the story of Homer seriously and so inaugurated Homeric archaeology.[9] Even in very technical modern studies on versification, tribute is paid to Wood for his remark that '… we in this age of dictionaries and other technical aids to memory [cannot] judge what her use and powers were at the time when all a man could know, was all he can remember'. Wood's study is one of the landmarks of the rediscovery of Classical Greece by observation on the spot, just as were the early *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, de Grèce et du Levant* (1679) by Jacques Spon and *The antiquities of Athens* (1762) by James Stuart and Nicolas Revett. The images of classical Greece through a Roman prism changed completely, preparing the way for neoclassicism in Europe and for the so-called cultural 'tyranny of Greece' in Germany during the 19th and 20th centuries.

The re-appreciation of Homer goes side by side with the rediscovery of 'true' Greek art and architecture. Homer was given pre-eminence in European poetry and took over the position Virgil had occupied for centuries. The most audacious romantics even preferred Homer to the Bible.

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Homer and the Bible

The comparison of Homer with the Bible was a problem in a European society dominated by a dogmatic biblical view of the past. Comparing Homer with the Bible was an aspect of mental modernization and was one of the consequences of the historicizing of the worldview. At the beginning of the 19th century, the idea of the Creation as the work of God in six days was rarely questioned. Scientific explanations about mammoths and human life on earth in historical terms were still exceptional. During the religious revival and in the reaction to the tenets of the Enlightenment, historical images and publications were extremely popular. The idea of the Middle Ages was renewed, and medieval art admired and architecture imitated.

However, concerning the early history of mankind, a biblical view was dominant in this period. After the revolutionary turmoil had subsided, Bossuet's dogmatic *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, first published in 1681 and unaltered since, became a bestseller in the first half of the 19th century. It was only during the second half of the 19th century, with the rise of atheism and the scientific study of the text of the Bible, that both Homer and the Bible were seen in a common historical perspective. In order to avoid problems with public opinion, extreme prudence in religious affairs remained strong. Expressing daring opinions about biblical history could easily damage a man's prospects in society and especially his expectations for a position as a teacher at a school or university.

Of course, it was not unusual, to give one example, to compare the innocent behaviour of Homer's heroes to the manners that characterized the patriarchal age of the Old Testament. Anne Dacier already did so in her preface to her translation (1701): 'Homère parle souvent de chaudrons, de marmites, de sang, de graisse … on y voit des princes dépouiller eux mêmes les bêtes et les faire rôtir. Les gens du monde trouvent cela choquant, mais … tout cela est entièrement conforme à ce que on voit dans l'Ecriture Sainte … L'histoire sainte et l'histoire profane nous enseignent également que c'est alors la coûtume de se servir soi-même … Les patriarches travaillent eux-mêmes de leurs propres mains; les filles les plus considérables allaient eux mêmes à la fontaine Rebecca et Rachel … y mènent leurs troupeaux'.

Such comparisons in a courteous feudal society were not harmful for the established church, but the French Revolution caused a dramatic change in the situation. Not only were all the privileges of the ecclesiastical order abolished but also extremely aggressive anti-Catholic sentiments were released. After the period of revolutionary vandalism in the churches and abbeys, the demolition of Christian images and the burning of bibles, Chateaubriand initiated brilliantly the defence of the spirit and beauty of Christian religion. His seminal *Génie du Christianisme* (1802) metamorphosed Chateaubriand into 'maître à penser'. As forerunner of

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the Romantic Movement he took up the task of defending the Bible and re-establishing the primacy of the words of Moses over the words of Homer. In order to denigrate the popular adulation of Homer by primitivists, Chateaubriand makes a stylistic comparison under the title 'Why the Bible is more beautiful than Homer'.[10]

Chateaubriand begins by comparing the languages. Hebrew is concise and full of energy and combines primitive simplicity with the profound knowledge of man. The Greek language has the diffuse eloquence of a nation with imitative and social genius, of a gracious and vain nation, melodic and prodigious in words. He then compares the style of both authors. The simplicity of the old priest Moses' style is short and grave; Homer, the traveller, narrates also with simplicity but his descriptions are longer and more amusing. Homer is full of proper names, digressions, long comparisons and descriptions of vases, arms and sceptres. The narration of the bible is rapid and direct, without digressions, incidental circumstances and persons are named without flatteries. For Chateaubriand even the sublime is different. In Homer the sublime arrives gradually, in the Bible it is always a surprise. '[Le sublime] fond sur vous comme l'éclair- souvent en contraste entre la grandeur et la petitesse, quelquefois même la trivialité'. So Chateaubriand concluded magnificently: 'Il en resulte un ébranlement, un froissement incroyable pour l'âme convient singulièrement à un Etre immense et formidable qui touche à la fois aux plus grands et aux plus petites choses'. Chateaubriand used all his weapons to demolish the irresistible rise of Homer as the divine founder of the epic tradition with all the implications for the cultural dominance of Christianity in European education, but it was in vain.

Homer entering school

Homer entered the European classroom in the 19th century. Greek was introduced in the classical school programmes of the Latin schools in modern Europe. England and Germany were ahead, other European countries followed more slowly. Good research has been done into the history of the development of the different educational systems in different countries. Much less attention has been paid to the comparison of the national systems. According to a widely accepted view, the Germans were the first to rediscover classic Greece and also took a special road compared to other countries, the so-called *Sonderweg*. After the Napoleonic occupation of German territories, French culture and Roman past were identified with the French empire and sharply rejected. Hellas was accepted as the incarnation in the past of the present ideals of the *Bildungsbürger*. Ancient Greece was considered to embody the ideals of freedom, beauty and knowledge. It is indubitable that many Germans were fond of Greece, but they were not the only ones, all well-educated Europeans were, particularly the British.

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The example of Britain proves that the so-called German 'Sonderweg' was not so special and a comparative approach makes it clear that a Napoleonic occupation is not a necessary condition for a profound admiration of Hellas. Everywhere in Europe, Greek authors were introduced in the classical school programme. Thomas Arnold, the most famous English schoolmaster, promoted the study of Greek authors. Preoccupied by utilitarian and evangelical public concerns, Thomas Arnold added a moral dimension to public school life. He introduced Homer, Plato and modern history to the curriculum, but at the same time he encouraged games and sports of every kind. A healthy body and high moral standards, knowledge of affairs and skill in speaking – according to Thomas Arnold, all educational ideals were to be found in classical antiquity and especially in Greek authors. Of the Greek classics, first and foremost came Plato. His *Republic* took its place in the set books for the final degree.[11] Homer also became increasingly important in classical education inside and outside the classroom in Britain, as in Germany and elsewhere in European countries.

For a generation of pedagogues after Thomas Arnold – the generation of his son Matthew Arnold – the reading of Homer in formative years was considered as crucial. Less preoccupied by public political interest and strongly influenced by Graeco-German idealism, the younger generation stressed mythology and aesthetics more than the older generation had. For Matthew Arnold, Greek tragedy and poetry even more than philosophy, were among the most precious classical legacies. Greek literature teaches us about life and beauty. Therefore Greek authors must have a primary place at school. The generation of Thomas Arnold had been preoccupied by the French Revolution, the class struggle of his own time was compared with the repressions of proletarian revolutions in ancient Rome. Visiting France in 1825, he was delighted to see feudal castles in ruins. While his father Thomas had disliked the rich and the powerful, his son Matthew enjoyed their company. Thomas had a simple faith in the New Testament, Matthew in a sort of Idealist Philosophy.[12] According to Matthew, poetry organises our experience in an aesthetically satisfying manner. Poetry creates beauty, which is an expression of the deepest roots of our being. Therefore, Greek literature, the most beautiful we possess, will be our best instrument for training the young.

Therefore, in the 19th century – Britain's period of rapid industrialization – English pedagogues promoted the study of the Greek language just as German pedagogues did in pre-industrial Germany in the first half of the 19th century. The professors defending classical education were called the 'German mandarins' by Fritz Ringer.[16] According to Ringer, the important role of classical education was a major legacy of pre-industrial society. However, according to many contemporary educationists, classical education was considered very adequate to industrial society, it all depended on how the classical tradition was used or abused. Around 1900, in the process of rapid European colonization, British

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imperialists in favour of expansion stressed the necessity of Greek classical literature in the school programme. Although in France and in other profoundly Romanized countries, such as Italy and Spain, the role of Latin authors remained predominant, Greek authors were introduced in the classical school programme in every European country.

Of course the maintenance of social identities and the exclusion of outsiders played a role in this elitist educational system, but this kind of social analysis offers no explanation for the changes in the classical programme and the national differences.

Deliberate choices were made as regards the targets. The German *Bildungsbürger* and the British utilitarians were fascinated by Plato. The social Darwinists and late Victorian Edwardians cherished Homeric ideals. One can identify differences according to political groups and cultural affinities in national traditions.

The French never venerated Homer as much as the British did. In France, the Greek language was also introduced in classical education, but never met the same success as in Britain or Germany. In the 1850s and 1860s, during the Second Empire in France, the emphasis was on the Gallo-Roman past. In the 1870s and 1880s, French republicans, opportunist or radical preferred the culture of classical Athens. During the Third Republic, Greek drama and philosophy became more important, but Greek poetry did not acquire a prominent place in the program. In France, Homer belonged to a past aristocratic society. A telling example is provided by the historian Jules Michelet who was struck by the rediscovery of Homer by Vico. Michelet introduced and translated Vico's work into French, but for the populist Michelet, Homer remains a historical testimony of a heroic past. Anyway, in Republican France, where Michelet became 'le grand instituteur', Homer never was a main source of identification.

As the result of these didactic choices, British schoolboys were much better trained in Greek verses than French lycéists. The perspicacious French traveller Hippolyte Taine who knew the French lycées very well was amazed by the knowledge of Homer in English colleges. He was conscious of the fact that classical education in Britain was only accessible to a small elite. Classical education was much more expensive in Britain than in France, but the English education was less rigid, had a better relationship to nature and paid attention to physical training. Sport had a prominent place in British schools. Physical training and team-spirit were instilled by athletics and rowing. As a French intellectual, Taine was amazed by the toughness and violence of the English methods for educating the upper-classes: '… vouloir être bon athlète, combattre avec ses poings, l'enfant devient combattant, boxeur'. Taine is conscious of the fact that the 'manie de muscularité' relates to the 'pauvreté des résultats intellectuels'. He observed that English schoolboys often had no historical knowledge and the verses

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were recited without comprehension. But in the end, compared to France, Taine is very positive: 'L'éducation anglaise est meilleure, elle prépare mieux au monde et fait des âmes plus saines … L'éducation endurcit le corps et trempe le caractère'.[13]

Some of Taine's astute observations influenced educationalists. Gymnastics was introduced in the school programme of the French lycées, a long time after the British and German schools. But Republicans kept a historical preference for Athenian democrats and Roman Republicans. As Samuel Butler remarked: real democrats are anti-Homer.

In Germany, the reappraisal of Homer is considered as the true sign of a great revolution in the aesthetics in Europe and of the revolt against the old humanistic and classicist taste. For the historian of education Friedrich Paulsen, Homer is the key figure in the contrast between the appreciation of 'das Natürliche' versus 'das Volkstümliche', of 'das Gemachte und Konventionelle' versus 'das Gewordene und Gewachsene'.[14] The flood of German translations continued during the first part of the 19th century. At the same time, Germans became prominent in philological study.

In Holland, Homer arrived comparatively early with an impressive number of translations in the 17th century. After this remarkable effort there was a slowdown in the 18th century with only six translations. In the 19th century again, following the German example, a respectable number of 28 new translations were published. The German neohumanist idealist approach and 'embourgeoisement' of Homer were fully absorbed in Holland by Petrus van Limburg Brouwer with his essay on the moral beauty of the poetry of Homer. Brouwer's verbose moralism and pedagogical use of ancient texts was held in utter contempt by the next generation of classical philologists.

Homeric ideals in Britain: appropriations and identifications

In the middle of the 19th century, when in Germany and Holland the interest in Homer stabilized, the British reached a Homeric climax with 12 complete verse renderings of the *Iliad* in a period of 20 years. It was somehow assumed that translating Homer was a worthwhile activity, like doing charitable works, as Richard Jenkyns remarks in *The Victorians and ancient Greece* (London, 1980). Also in Britain the interest in Homer had a clear political and moral dimension. Homer played a role in 19th century liberalism. That is why the influential liberal statesman William Gladstone, in the midst of immense political activities, wrote so many articles and books on Homer. We have to take seriously his famous expression that there were still two things for him to do: 'one is to carry Home Rule [for Ireland] and the other is to prove the intimate connection between the Hebrew and Olympian revelations' – in fact between the Old Testament and

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Homer. For Gladstone, Homer was an introduction to man in every aspect of his being.

In order to explain the fascination with Homer it is illuminating to go into some detail. Why was reading Homer for Gladstone and others not just another exercise in Greek language but a compelling moral lesson? Gladstone explains for a large audience, in a short book in a popular series, why Homer offers a full study of life in every one of its departments. Homeric heroes offer a rich potential for identification. 'In solemn games … Achilles exhibits in its perfection the character of the liberal and courteous gentleman'. Homer is full of moral adjustment and law of duty. The *Iliad* has a highly national character and embodies the Greek idea of a state. The *Odyssey* is focused on family life and the re-establishment of Odysseus in his dominions. 'While Achilles exults in arms, Odysseus unites to the highest qualities of a statesman and a warrior not only extraordinary excellence in race, the quoit, the boxing and the wrestling match, but he is ready to mow or to plough a field …'.

Reading Homer is inspiring, not only for men but also for women. On the position of women, Gladstone explains, Homer compared advantageously with those women commended in the Old Testament. Homer describes female characters such as Penelope, the 'queenly matron', and Nausikaa with 'her maiden freshness and her great intellect of an Elizabeth'. Even Helen, 'not only grace but a deep humility and a peculiar self-condemnation which comes nearer to the grace of Christian repentance than anything that has come down to us with ancient learning'. In Homer, Gladstone finds a great sense of virtue. Divorce is unknown and incest abhorred, Homer points to the moral fellowship of man and woman. The strict monogamy of the Greeks is compared with the polygamy of Priam. Gladstone even identifies a European distinction. 'A finer sense, a higher intelligence, a firmer and more masculine tissue of character, were the basis of distinctions in polity which were then Achaian and Trojan only, but have since, through long ages of history been in no small measure European and Asiatic respectively'.

Also in political life, Homer is near for Gladstone. Monarchy is the form of government, but not the divine or despotic kingship of the oriental empires. Public questions are raised in an assembly. Decisions are made mainly by reasonable persuasion. For Gladstone, Homer reveals the origins of the modern English monarchy tempered by parliament. Regarding religious affairs in Homer, there is no theocracy, omnipotent church or infallible Pope. The Homeric man ordinarily communicates with the gods directly, and not through a caste of priests.[15]

Gladstone is very simplistic in his Homeric identifications, but more prudent authors like R.C. Jebb in his widely read *Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey* (1886) was not short of moralistic identifications. Jebb presents the

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Homeric world as our world in a rude age. There is no trace among the Homeric Greeks of oriental vice and cruelty in its worst forms. 'Manners of the noblest chivalry and truest refinement are strangely crossed by traits of coarseness and ferocity. There are moments when the Homeric hero is almost a savage'. What makes Homer ideally suited to education is his skill and delicacy as a poet. Not only Homeric polity, religion and ethics, but also in concrete social manners, Homer presents his readers with a striking contrast: in the house of Menelaus a scene of noble and refined hospitality, and in the invaded home of Odysseus a scene of coarse riot. Is it his experiences as a supervisor in boarding schools that makes Jebb mention the misbehaviour of a suitor who throws an ox's foot at Odysseus, missing him and hitting the wall of the dining hall? On a more general level one could say that Homer, according to liberals such as Gladstone and Jebb, was prepared to educate the middle classes and is the earliest messenger of a kind of neohumanist world view. Homer as 'the purveyor of sweetness and light to the middle classes', as Frank Turner puts it in his *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981). Homer and Hellenistic humanism seemed firmly linked. The epics of Homer fused in a civilized mission.

The age of imperialism: 'aristocratization' of Homer

The steady 'embourgoisement' of Homer was disturbed by the enchanting discoveries of Schliemann and subsequent archaeological research at the end of the 19th century. For a large interested public, the Homeric world became suddenly tangible and appeared to be quite different from Hellenic culture. The epic was seen as Mycenaean and not Hellenic. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are first and foremost court poems, as Walter Leaf explained in his summary of Homeric scholarship in *A Companion to the Iliad for English Readers* (1892). The poems were to be sung in the splendid palaces of the ruling aristocracy. The songs of Homer were aristocratic and courtly, not folklore. The songs of Homer are a mirror of the primitive age, but also a product of high civilization and aristocratic excellence. This aristocratic Mycenaean Homer was considered even more perfectly fitting for the education of the future elite of the empire than the neohumanist-bourgeois Hellenic Homer. Aristocratic excellence was required in British schools during the highest stage of European imperialism.

In a certain way, an elitist view on education reinforced the position of Homer on the school program. Despite all the differences, society and education in European countries became intensely competitive at the end of the 19th century. The idea of the survival of the fittest, Social Darwinism and theories of the necessary role of elites gained ground and the moral code of the *Iliad* was condensed into the device 'always excel over others'.

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The Homeric world was not the only source of identification for sons of the English upper class. Another great source of inspiration revived the code of mediaeval chivalry, with knights, castles, armour, and heraldry. The impact of medievalism in art and literature in Britain and other European countries from the late eighteenth century onwards was considerable. In Catholic education in European countries much more attention was paid to the idealised Christian culture of the Middle Ages. It is tempting to compare this so-called 'Return to Camelot' with a 'Return to Troy'. Both the Medieval and Homeric worlds were 'imagined communities' and projections of present concerns, dreams and desires. Homer and Sir Walter Scott offered a different repertoire for identifications and spiritual appropriations. The Homeric world was not a Christian world. Homer inspired a liberal and more secular mental disposition. Homeric heroes were no Crusaders with the holy cross on their backs. They were heroes but engaged in a not so pious military expedition to bring back a beautiful princess. Reading Homer was definitely good stuff for making tough guys, but the siege of Troy was never transformed into a Crusade or an imperial mission in the name of modern civilization.

After the rediscovery of Homer as an emanation of Hellenic 'Volksgeist' by idealist philosophers and the 'embourgeoisement' of Homer by neohumanist 'Bildungsbürger', one can observe a certain 'aristocratization' of Homer by classically educated leading imperialists and pedagogues. At the end of the 19th century Homer was considered perfect reading material for the formation of the future elite of the British Empire. In a certain way the heroes of the *Iliad* were appropriated by British imperialism. Schoolboys could identify with the warriors on adventurous expeditions overseas. Homer offered ideal types for men in an age of colonial expansion.

But to fulfil a military expedition is one thing, to organize an empire another. Not Greek but Roman antiquity possessed the most instructive imperial paradigm for every modern European imperialist. The Roman Empire was considered the great predecessor of European empires. A perfect example is a lecture in 1910 by the first Earl of Cromer as president of the Classical Association. Until his resignation in 1907 the Earl of Cromer, Evelyn Baring, had been a very important person in colonial affairs. He had been British controller general in Egypt, finance minister in India, and returned to Egypt after Arabi Pasha's nationalist revolt to become the virtual ruler of Egypt. His analysis of *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (1910) is clear. 'The conception of imperialism as we understand and as the Romans (though with many notable differences) understood, was wholly foreign to the Greek mind'. Of course Alexander the Great was a conqueror, not an empire-builder. The 'Greek language [did] not even contain any expression to convey the idea of empire'. Not only was the imperial mind foreign to the Greek mind, the confederal conception was equally strange. Rome, Cromer explained,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798707000191 Published online by Cambridge University Press

gave rights of citizenship to those whom she had conquered ('cives vocavit quos domuit'), just as in the British Empire self-governing powers were given to Canada, to the Australian colonies and to South Africa.

The imperial identification with the Roman Empire in modern European countries is evident. English gentlemen and archaeologists identified with Roman officers, just as did Bonapartists and academicians of the French Second Empire, Prussian generals and professors of the newly founded German Kaiserreich after 1870, or the officials of the old Habsburg Empire, not to mention the new Italian elite of the Fascist Empire and other 20th century totalitarian regimes nurturing imperial dreams, but that is another story.

All Homeric ideals and chivalry ended in the dirty European war of 1914. But after that war Homer remained required reading and common ground in classical education during the 1920s and 1930s, in the old as well as in the newly created nation-states in Europe, Even after the Second World War, translating Homeric verses was required in the classical education in all European countries.

The popularity of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* coincided with the creation of modern educational systems in European empires and nation-states. Before the 19th century Homer had not been read by so many boys and girls in Europe. However, in the course of the 20th century, teachers and pedagogues became increasingly accustomed to perceive Homer and his society as totally different from our times. Homeric society is now no longer a distant mirror of the contemporary world. As the historical distance grows and identification disappears, it is not easy to defend reading Homer at school. Outside the classroom, however, Homer has become perfect popular entertainment on film and television. It was oral poetry from times immemorial, written down in the first millennium BC, printed innumerable times since the middle of the second millennium AD and visualized by mass media at the start of the third millennium, and never before was Homer enjoyed by so many.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798707000191 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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