

KEATS'S SONNET ON CHAPMAN'S
TRANSLATION OF HOMER:
EARLY DRAFT OF MANUSCRIPT
AND INITIAL PUBLICATION²

This work represents a comparative study of the earliest known manuscript of John Keats's sonnet devoted to the translation of Homer's "Iliad" performed by George Chapman in 1611, with the first publication of the sonnet in 1816.

Keywords: Keats, Chapman, Iliad, Indo-European.

СОНЕТ ДЖОНА КИТСА,
ПОСВЯЩЕННЫЙ ПЕРЕВОДУ
«ИЛИАДЫ» ГОМЕРА Д. ЧАПМЕНОМ:
ЧЕРНОВИКИ И ПЕРВЫЕ ПУБЛИКАЦИИ

Данная работа представляет собой сравнительное исследование самой ранней известной рукописи сонета Джона Китса, посвященной переводу «Илиады» Гомера, выполненного Джорджем Чапменом в 1611 г., с первой публикацией сонета в 1816 г.

Ключевые слова: Китс, Чапмен, Илиада, индоевропейский.

The purpose of the article is to present a copy of a manuscript of Keats's sonnet on Chapman's translation of Homer, in comparison with the text of the initial publication of this sonnet, along with related philological and literary comments.

Keats's sonnet on Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* is well known, having frequently been included in collections of Keats's works. Later authors with references to Keats's sonnet to Chapman include Poe, Nabokov and P.G. Woodehouse.

Following partial translations from the *Iliad* in 1598 and 1608, Chapman released the complete twenty-four books under the title *The Iliads of Homer* in 1611³.

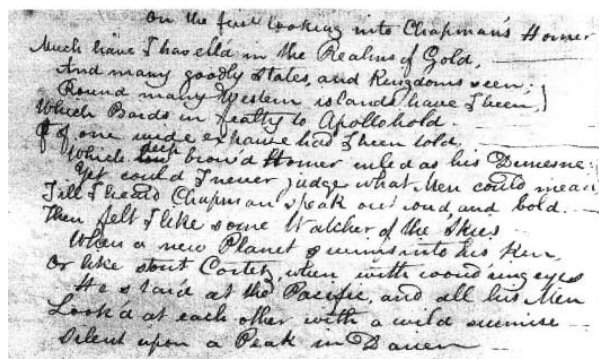
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² Faculdade de Letras Universidade de Coimbra Instituto de Estudos Classicos, Coimbra, 2013, Vol. LXV, pp. 251–262.

³ The complete title of the 1611 edition is *The Iliads of Homer, Prince of Poets. Never before in any language truly translated, with comments upon some of his chiefe places. Done according to the Greeke*. The preferred current edition is *Chapman's Homer, The Iliad*. Edited with Introduction and Glossary, by Allardyce Nicoll, with a new preface by Garry Wills. – Princeton NJ : Princeton University Press, 1998.

Prior to composing the sonnet (1816) on Chapman's work, Keats had completed a translation of *The Aeneid*, in 1811.

For purposes of reference, the manuscript reproduced below is identified as Keats, John, 1795–1821. Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold. A. MS., early draft, MS Keats 2.4, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MASS.



The following is a reading of the manuscript (Ms.), presented beside the text of the first publication of the same sonnet, for purposes of comparison.

On the first looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the Realms of Gold,
 And many goodly States and Kingdoms seen;
 Round many Western islands have I been,
 Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
 Which deep brow'd Homer ruled as his Demesne:
 Yet could I never judge what Men could mean,
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud, and bold.
 Then felt I like some Watcher of the Skies
 When a new Planet swims into his Ken,
 Or like stout Cortez, when with wond'ring eyes
 He star'd at the Pacific, and all his Men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise
 Silent upon a Peak in Darien.

Features of capitalization, punctuation and vocabulary in the Ms. and *The Examiner*.

Title: Ms.: On the first..., *Examiner*: On first... (without "the").

1.1. Ms.: Realms of Gold..., *Examiner*: realms of gold... (without capitalization).

1.2. Ms.: States and Kingdoms..., *Examiner*: States and Kingdoms... (later publ. w/o caps).

1.3. Ms.: Western..., *Examiner*: western... (without capitalization).

1.4. Ms.: Bards..., *Examiner*: Bards... (without capitalization in later publications).

1.5. Ms.: Oft..., *Examiner* But... (different wording).

1.6. Ms.: Demesne:, *Examiner*: demesne; (semi-colon instead of colon).

1.7. Ms.: Men, *Examiner*: men (without capitalization).

1.8. Ms.: loud, ... bold. *Examiner*: loud (no comma)... bold: (end w/colon, not period).

1.9. Ms.: Watcher of the Skies, *Examiner*: watcher of the skies.

1.10. Ms.: Planet... Ken, *Examiner*: planet... ken; (without capitalization).

1.11. Ms.: wond'ring eyes, *Examiner*: eagle eyes. (different wording).

1.12. Ms.: Pacific, ... Men, *Examiner*: Pacific, – ...men (dash after Pacific).

1.13. Ms.: surmise, *Examiner*: surmise, – (comma and dash after 'surmise').

1.14. Ms.: Peak..., Oxford: peak (without capitalization).

The following philological comments are made for the purpose of clarifying some of the words in

¹ As published *The Examiner*, December 1, 1816, p. 762. For a more recent publication of this sonnet, see John Keats, *Poetical Works*, Oxford University press (Eleventh impression. Oxford: 1992), p. 38.

On first looking into Chapman's Homer¹

Much have I travell'd in the realms of Gold,
 And many goodly States and Kingdoms seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
 Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 But of one wide expanse had I been told,
 Which deep brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
 Yet could I never judge what men could mean,
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
 He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise, –
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

the sonnet, as well as indicating the nature of Keats's vocabulary.

Line 1: realm, Middle English *roialme*, *realme*, Old French *realme*, French *royaume* "kingdom", from late Latin **rēgālimen*, accusative of *rēgālis* "royal", from Indo-European **reg-* "to move in a straight line" with derivatives meaning "to direct in a straight line", oldest form **hreg-*. Lengthened-grade form **rēg-* was Indo-European word for a tribal king, source of Old High German *-rīh* "king, ruler", used as a suffix in personal names. Suffixed form **rēg-en-* was source of Sanskrit *rājā*, *rājan-* "king, rajah", feminine *rājñi* "queen, rani" and *rājati* "he rules".

Line 2: goodly is the combination of *good* plus the suffix *-ly*, meaning "somewhat large, considerable", with *good* via Old English *gōd*, from Germanic **gōdaz*, "fitting, suitable", allied to Old Slavonic *godŭ* "fit season" and Russian *годный* "fit, suitable", from common origin in earlier Indo-European **ghedh-* "to unite, join, fit", while *kingdom* "country, state ruled by a king" is from Old English *cyningdōm*: *king* + *dom*, hence literally the "domain of a king"; *state* comes via Old French *estat* from Latin *statum*, accusative of *status* "standing, condition", supine of *stāre* "to stand", earlier Indo-European "stood", **stā-* "to stand", with derivatives meaning "place or thing that is standing", oldest form: **steh*, colored to **stah*, contracted to **stā-*. Also origin of Greek *στην* "I stood", Sanskrit *sthā* "to stand". (For numerous related words in English, see Watkins 2011: 86b-87b.)

Line 4: Bards is from Welsh *barrd* and Gaelic Irish *bard*, origin of Greek *βάρδος*. In Latin, the term *bardus* is found in Lucan. The word was originally used in reference only to Celtic poets and, in lowland Scotland, to wandering minstrels; the meaning was later extended for general reference to poets. Although both the *New English Dictionary* (Oxford

1884) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1971) indicate that the earliest documentation of the word is from the mid-fifteenth century, *Bard* had already become a surname by the end of the thirteenth century. Cf. Scottish surname *Baird*. The Indo-European root is *g^werə- “to favor”. Celtic **bardo* refers to a “praise poet”, one who produced and bestowed praise poetry as gratification to his patron.

Line 5: expanse is related to the Latin verb *expandere*, from *pandere*, *pans-* “to spread”. The Indo-European root is *petə- “to spread”, also the origin of Old English *fæthm* “fathom”, from Germanic **fathmaz* “length of two arms extended”. There are numerous derivatives from Latin *patēre* “to be open” and *pandere* (past participle *pāssus* < **patto-*) “to spread out”, as well as from Greek πέταλον, “thin plate”, neuter of πέταλος, origin of French *pétale* and English *petal*, πατανέ (?<*πετάνα [petanā] > Latin *patina*) “platter” and πέτασος “broad-brimmed hat”.

Line 5 begins with “Of” in the manuscript, with “But” in the first published version. The former emphasizes the frequency of a certain special reference to Homer, the latter contrasts Homer’s domain with that of other literary references in the sonnet.

Line 6: low brow’d changed to deep brow’d. The word ‘low’ has meanings similar to those of ‘deep’: “deep browed” (or “low browed”) implies profound knowledge and intellectual powers. The term *lowbrow* (based on *highbrow*) in the sense of ‘unsophisticated’ or ‘trivial’, is documented beginning in the early 20th century. In general, “brow”³ refers to the ridge above the eyes, also to “contenance”. The Indo-European root is *bhru- “eyebrow”, contracted from *bhruh, which yielded Middle English *browe*, from Old English *brū-*, via Germanic **brūs*. Related forms include Icelandic *brūn* and, from other branches of the Indo-European family, Lithuanian *bruwis*, Russian «бровь», Greek ὄφρυς, Persian *abrū*, Sanskrit *bhrū*.

Line 6: demesne refers to “possession of own land”. The term entered English in the fourteenth century, via Old French *demeine* “belonging to a lord”, from Latin *dominus* “lord” (allied to verb *domāre* “to tame”), *dominicus* “pertaining to a lord”, also the source of English *domain*, a more modern form, from the 15th century French *domaine* through alteration of *demeine* ‘demesne’, source of English *demesne* (ultimately from Indo-European **dem-* “house, household”, with reflexes in several branches, such as Greek δέμω, Old Irish *pátir*, Avestan *dam*, Armenian *tun*, Tocharian A *tam-*, Tocharian B *tem-*; Watkins 2011: 16b, Pokorny 198). Cf. Johnson 1755 q.v.

Line 7: mean (in both early draft of Ms. and in

the earliest printed version of the sonnet, *The Examiner*, December 1, 1816) comes from Middle English *menen*, Old English *mænan*, Germanic **mainjan*, hence allied to Icelandic *kenna*, Swedish *känna*, Danish *kiende*, all of which are ultimately from Indo-European **mei-no-* “opinion, intention”.

A later version (2011, see n. 1) has a different text for this line, ending with *serene*, from Latin *serenus*, via French, with the derivatives *serenity*, French *sérénité* and Latin *serenitas* used as honorific forms in certain titles. The use of *serene* (“Yet did I never breathe its pure serene”) is in accord with the reference to the *Pacific*, in the second and final simile in the sestet, in comparison with the experience of reading Chapman’s translation of Homer, “till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold”. Both the early manuscripts and the first printing indicate the unique nature of the experience (“Yet could I never...”). The Indo-European root is **ksero-* “dry”.

Line 10: planet is from Middle English *planete* < Old French *planete* < Latin *planēta* < Greek πλανής “a wanderer”, plural πλάνητες “wandering stars, planets”, from Indo-European root *pelə- “flat; to spread”, also ultimate origin of поле “field” in Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Bulgarian and Macedonian, *pole* in Polish, Czech, and Slovakian, *polje* in Serbian and Slovenian, in addition to other related words of Slavic languages, such as *Polanie* (in reference to Polish people), literally “dwellers of the field” (i.e., Poland).

Line 10: ken, meaning “can” and “know” is from Anglo-Saxon *cennan*. Cognate forms are well attested in the Germanic languages: German *kennen*, *können*, Dutch *kennen*, Old Norse *kenna*, Gothic *kannjan* “to make known”. The root is from Indo-European **gnō-* “to know” (oldest form **ǵneh-*, altered to **ǵnoh-*, contracted to **ǵnō-*), also origin of Latin *gnārus* “one who knows” (with numerous derivations and compounds) and its antonym *ignārus*, as well words in other branches of Indo-European; Hellenic: Classical Greek: γνῶσ- root of “to know” and related words, such as the coinages *gnosis*, from γνῶσις in the sixteenth century, and *agnostic*, based on ἀγνώστος (suggested in Acts xvii: 23), by Huxley in 1869; Avestan *zainti* “knowledge”. (Watkins 2011: 33b, Pokorny 2 *ǵen-*, *ǵenə-*, *ǵnō-*, 376.)

Line 15: wild, meaning here “unrestrained, frenzied, full of intense emotion, bewildered”, is ultimately from the Indo-European root **welt-* “woods, wild”, which yielded forms such as Old English *weald*, *wald*, from Germanic **walthuz*; *wild* from Old English *wilde*, *wild*, derived from Germanic **wilthja-*. Cognate forms in other Germanic languages include Dutch *wild*, Icelandic *villr*, Danish

and Swedish *vild*, German *wild*, Gothic *wiltheis*. (In Pokorny 4. *ǔel-* 1139.)

Line 15: surmise, meaning “guess or notion based on intuition or limited information”, is based on **mittere* “to let go, send off, throw”, of uncertain origin, with the likely oldest form being **smittere*, as in the archaic spelling *cosmittere*, of the Classical Latin compound *committere* “to bring together”. (Watkins 2011: 57b, Pokorny **smeit-* 968.) The English verb *surmise* comes from Latin *mittere* via Old French *surmise*, feminine singular of the past participle of *surmettre*. The original sense in English is that of supposing or conjecturing, to which the meaning of Keats’s phrase *wild surmise* clearly indicates. The component *sur-* recalls *brow*, from line 6.

In terms of punctuation and the use of capitalization, there is close affinity between the formal features of manuscript shown above and those of the version of the sonnet as first published in *The Examiner* on December 1, 1816¹. Many of the capital letters of the manuscript (– although not all...) are preserved in the initial publication of the sonnet. The uses of capitals in the manuscript is more extensive, including words that take the place of proper nouns, as well as some for emphasis. The punctuation is similar: both divide the octave into just two sentences, of four lines each, and both treat the sestet as a single sentence. It can be noted, however, that later publications have more differences, in relation to the texts considered here, with regard to the use of both punctuation and capitalization, with the later publications tending to be increasingly conservative with regard to pedagogical norms (hence, reflecting to a lesser degree the features of earlier versions)².

¹ The website <http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?action=GET&txtsid=36006> presents a text purported to be a copy of “On first looking into Chapman’s Homer”, as published in *The Examiner* (1 December 1816) 762. It is not, however, a faithful copy of the original publication, for, unlike *The Examiner*, it shows both of the names Chapman and Cortez completely in capital letters: CHAPMAN...CORTEZ.

² To the extent that they represent interference with the poet’s intended forms and meanings, such versions must be considered distortive. Without additional specific information, one can only speculate with regard to the causes of such textual interference, which seems to be the result of greater concern for normative grammatical features of common usage than for the special aspects of poetic discourse (such as linking and emphasis) in accordance with the poet’s own vision of his topic. One can imagine the distortions that would result from the use of normative principles by an overly zealous and misoriented editor for “correcting” the lack of capitalization in the poetry of e e cummings (Edward Estlin Cummings) or the lack of punctuation in the prose of Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago.

Keats’s generation was familiar with the translations by John Dryden and Alexander Pope, in blank verse or heroic couplets, rendering Homer in a way similar to Virgil.

From the content of the sonnet, it is evident that Keats was profoundly impressed by Chapman’s rendition. Keats had a special affinity with Chapman: both had good knowledge of classical culture, both were poets and Keats also translated a classical epic poem.

Formally, Keats’s poetic tribute to Chapman is a sonnet in the style of Petrarch, consisting of an octave and a sestet, in iambic pentameter. The meanings of the parts are closely interrelated. That the manuscript is a draft (rather than merely a copy) is indicated both by the change in the text (line 6) and by marks connecting paired lines.

It is clear the “realms of gold” refers to literary riches, as evidenced by the successive references, in the first eight lines, to the Aegean islands, to Apollo (god of poetry, born at the sacred island of Delos, in the Aegean), to Homer, then to Chapman, preceded by “Yet could I never know what Men could mean”, which calls attention to the value of literary translation in making works available to those who otherwise would not have access to them, and especially to the value of quality in translation. The sestet concerns the magnitude of the experience of the first reading of Chapman’s translation, through two comparisons: first with taking knowledge of a new planet, then with an initial sighting of the Pacific.

Keats’s generation knew of the discovery of Uranus, the first planet to become known in modern times (not known in antiquity). Uranus (named after the Greek god ruler of the heavens) had been found fortuitously by Herschel in 1781. The phrase “swims into his ken” suggests the mode of the discovery (– contrary to the case of Neptune, to be discovered more than half a century later, through mathematical calculations, in 1846). Literary connections with the planet Uranus include the names of its seventeen satellites, all for characters in Shakespearean plays.

The second and final comparison is with the initial viewing of the Pacific Ocean by Cortez with “eagle eyes” (as shown in Titian’s painting of this subject), changed from “wond’ring eyes”, hence denoting close attention, in addition to the wonderment indicated by “wild surmise” and “silent”), while “all his men look’d at each other in wild surmise”. The two comparisons show the vastness of the discovery and the nature of its impression.

There are several links between words of like meaning, such as “Realms” (line 1), “Kingdoms” (line 2) and “Demesne” [=domain] (l. 6), or between the reference to the Aegean Islands (l. 3), sug-

gesting water, extended through the use of “swim” (l. 10), culminating in the reference to the awe-inspiring Pacific Ocean, and between the vastness suggested by the use of *wide expanse* (l. 5), the reference to a *planet* (l. 10), the reference to the *Pacific* (l. 12). Such connections contribute to the emphasis and unity of the poetic composition. The climactic impression made by the total imagery of the paired comparisons is one of awe, imposing silence.

Historically, the reference to Cortez viewing the Pacific from the Darién province in Panama is an error: it was Balboa, not Cortez, who viewed the Pacific Ocean from Panama. It has been suggested that Keats did not change the reference to Balboa, because doing so would have added another syllable. Such a motive seems hardly likely: Keats gave ample evidence of poetic skill in more than fifty compositions. The differences both within the manuscript of the “early draft” reproduced here (line 6) and between it and the later publication (lines 7 and 11) show that it would not have been difficult for Keats to make additional changes required by alteration of the reference. The name of Cortez, who conquered Mexico and served as its governor, has different connotations from that of Balboa. Moreover, it is Cortez, not Balboa, who was immortalized in a portrait by Titian. Of course, many early explorers and *conquistadores* viewed the Pacific, with Cortez being one of the most famous leaders in the sixteenth century’s European expansion.

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