Greek 304: Poetry
Homer

Who is the writer or the author of texts? I work by way of language, by voice, by music, not only work but am written by a certain type of language. Our Russian poets insist on the fact that they write but that they are also written by Russian, which I'm sure is absolutely true. It's true of all poets, that they are being written through by a certain type of tongue... But how do we define a writer? Who is the author of a poem that is written by a tongue? A sore point with everybody who reads is of course the problem of translation. It's true that it's a wonderful thing that books should be written in a foreign tongue: but it's a painful thing for all readers standing at the door of that tongue, except if we are inhabitants of this precise language.

Hélène Cixous, "Difficult Joys"

Course Description

Translation is a science and an art. We need to have the science part down before we can act as artists with someone else's text. The first year of study was about getting the science part down. This term, in addition to grammar, verse, vocabulary and syntax, we'll be thinking about the difficulties of translation, some would say the "impossibility of translation." We will read articles on the art of translation, on translating Homer, literary criticism, and articles on the influence of Homer on poetry. I will provide the articles to the class.

We will begin our course with an overview of dactylic hexameter, the meter of epic poetry. We will then scan the first 10 lines of the Iliad and commit these lines to memory. Memorizing poems is good for you. Then we will translate and discuss the first 50 lines of western literature. Also from the Iliad we will read:

5.334-384, when men fought with gods
6.440-475, Hector and Andromache

Our remaining time will be dedicated to the translation and discussion of Homer's Odyssey. We'll begin again with scansion and memorization, then move on to all of the purple passages we can cover, in this order:

4.219-243
5.200-224
8.001-

Course Objectives

Our objective is to read as much of Homer as we can, but also, to read Homer well; To appreciate the sound, the swiftness and the sophistication of this most ancient text. People throughout history have consistently given their highest praise to Homeric Epic, the Iliad and Odyssey are translated with each generation. My goal is to show you why this is so.

Grading

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Texts. Homer's Greek (as supplied) and Autenrieth, A Homeric Dictionary for Schools and Colleges, or Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (Abridged or Intermediate).