Epic as History Book: Newman's Archaizing Translation of the *Iliad*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Newman rewrites the Homeric original as a historical text through the practice of archaism, influenced by his time's fascination with history. In his translation Newman approaches and reconstructs Homer's *Iliad* as a history book. He intends to represent Homer's antiquity as an ancient poet's belonging to a barbarian age. For that purpose, he practices archaism by employing archaic words and invented words; he refuses to satisfy modern tastes. Hence, Homer's epic is reborn as an informative historical source that provides its readership with Homer's antiquity and historical facts about the ancient world.

KEYWORDS

Newman, archaizing translation, history, Homer, the Victorian age

Introduction

In his 1856 English translation of Homer's *Iliad*, Francis Newman (1805-1897) made use of a specific form of archaic language. This so-called 'archaizing translation' was the subject of a heated debate with his famous contemporary, the critic and poet Matthew Arnold

over how Homer was best translated. Publically criticizing Newman's *Iliad* in his 1861 text *On Translating Homer*, Arnold espoused a specific translation strategy for Homer. Newman was galvanized by this critique and in the same year wrote a counter-argument, *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice* to justify his own archaizing principles and to argue against Arnold's criticisms. In a final rejoinder, Arnold published *Last Words on Translating Homer* (1862), making clear once again his intense scepticism of Newman's archaism.

This essay will explore the distinctive stylistic device of archaism as the overarching characteristic of Newman's Homeric translation. His archaizing translation of the *Iliad* was often criticized by Arnold in the debate for a lack of nobility of manner. It will first look at archaizing translation of the Victorian period and relate Newman's archaizing translation to the context of his time, namely, the preoccupation with history. Although there was a powerful trend of archaizing translation in the nineteenth-century, as Susan Bassnett and J. M. Cohen note in *Translation Studies* (2002) and *English Translators and Translations* (1962) respectively, it has not been examined in much depth. Then, this paper will investigate how Newman transformed and (re)-wrote the Homeric original through the practice of archaism to meet the demands of his age. In the meantime, Newman's English translation of the ancient Greek epic is reborn as a history book that emphasizes philology and knowledge of the ancient past. In order to examine Newman's archaism, this essay will analyze his paratexts such as his essay, *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice*, footnotes and preface to the translation as well as his actual translation of the *Iliad*. Newman's paratexts contain a great deal of useful and detailed information about his translation principles and methods on Homeric translation, providing

explanations for his choices, in particular, of diction, epithets and style.

1. Newman and Archaizing Translation

Archaizing attempts to achieve the effect of antiquity by using a form of archaic language or inventing words. As Cohen argues, it aims to "convey the remoteness both in time and place of the original work by the use of a mock-antique language, called by William Morris 'Wardour Street English' after the fake-antique language and theatrical costumiers' shops which were to be found there" (1962: 24). Archaizing was widespread among many translators and historical novelists of the Victorian period: Bassnett points out that the "need to convey the remoteness of the original in time and place is a recurrent concern for Victorian translators" (2002: 71). Cohen also states its prevalence in comparison to earlier times: "Distance of time and place counted for nothing [for the Elizabethans]. The Victorian, by contrast, insisted on it as a prime reality of which the reader must be constantly reminded" (1962: 24). Victorian translators such as Thomas Carlyle, Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti used archaism as a significant translation strategy (Bassnett and France 2006: 52; Bassnett 2002: 71). A. Lang, W. Leaf, E. Myers, and S. H. Butcher also chose archaic language in their respective translations of Homer. As Cohen mentions, Morris, in particular, is "one of the most extreme practitioners" of archaism: with his collaborator A. J. Wyatt he translated the Saxon epic *Beowulf* in a "language such as English might have been had there been no Norman conquest and no cultural traffic with the Latin world"; its language was "formal and archaic . . . But Morris felt it necessary to stress its antiquity in every

line" (1962: 24). Morris' translations are "deliberately, consciously archaic, full of such peculiarities of language that they are difficult to read and often obscure" (Bassnett 2002: 71).

In his translation of the *Iliad*, Newman too uses archaic words and syntax, and invents words for ones that he found untranslatable, attempting to convey the antiquity of Homer's work (Bassnett 2002: 71); when mentioning the debate between Newman and Arnold, Bassnett and Peter France point out that the former prefers "the faux-archaic English" (2006: 52). Indeed, Newman refuses to modernise the ancient original for modern tastes. He openly states his aim and method of archaizing translation both in his preface to the translation and in his essay called *Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice*. In discussing his diction for Homer, Newman states that "to shed an antique hue over Homer is of first necessity to a translator" and to do otherwise is an "*injustice*" both to the reader and the poet (1906: 326); thus constructing antiquity is of critical importance in a loyal representation of Homer. He criticizes Arnold, saying that Arnold is wrong to esteem old words are ignoble (1906: 325). Newman expresses the purpose of archaism succinctly in his preface to the *Iliad*: the translator should "retain every peculiarity of the original," so far as he is able, "*with the greater care, the more foreign it may happen to be*" (1856: xvi). For Newman, that peculiarity derives from the spatial-temporal difference of the original and Homer is "not the personification of Hellenism and the grand manner, but an old bard and ballad-monger, often odd, archaic and remote" (Willey 1956: 42).

Accordingly, Newman objects to modernizing translation: a modernizing approach in Homeric translation is "[t]o throw the poet into your crucible, and bring out old Pelias young", which cannot be Homeric; "to melt up the old coin and stamp it with a modern image"

cannot be the Homeric translator's task (1906: 311). Newman believes that modernizing denies readers of the opportunity to *learn* about Homer as an ancient poet because it "smoothes down the stamp of Homer's coin, till nothing is left even for microscopic examination" (Newman 1906: 312), a figurative effacement of the archaeological quirks of the Homeric mold. When Arnold denounces his archaism in favor of modernising, Newman insists that "[Arnold's] very arbitrary condemnation of *eld, life, in sooth, gait, gentle friend* in one passage of mine as 'bad words,' is probably due to his monomaniac fancy that there is nothing quaint and nothing antique in Homer" (1906: 327). To Newman, the modernizing translation method was a form of suppression that betrayed the true purpose of translating Homer in the first place: the conveying of knowledge about his ancient culture.

For Newman, peculiarity is everywhere in the *Iliad*: "Homer is extremely peculiar, . . . the proof on all sides is overpowering" (1906: 305). The simple evidence that sufficed to support this view was cultural separatism, taking in the changes of the preceding millennia; Homer was so peculiar precisely because of his 'coarse' classical world, considered in sharp distinction to the sophistication and modern condition of the nineteenth century. Thus, Homer has "archaisms in every variety" (1906: 296), and Newman backs this up with numerous examples in the original Greek; not only is Homer "antiquated, relatively to Pericles, but *is* also absolutely antique, being the poet of a barbarian age"; vitally, "[a]ntiquity in poets is not . . . a question of years, but of intrinsic qualities" (1906: 303). Translation must therefore maintain the essential qualities, barbarianism and coarseness that Newman sees in Homer's context:

> The Homer of the Iliad is morally pure and often very tender; but to

> expect refinement and universal delicacy of expression in that state of civilisation is quite anachronistic and unreasonable. As in earlier England, so in Homeric Greece, even high poetry partook of the coarseness of society. This was probably inevitable, precisely because Greek epic poetry was so *natural* (1906: 318).

Hence, Newman recognizes the incongruity between perspectives, of the poet and the translator, that they do not see in the same "proportions" (1906: 308): translation must recognise and convey the antiquity of Homer. He asserts that the translator should respect the unique characteristics of Homer's ancient world. This is the reason why Newman chose to practice archaism in his Homeric translation.

As Lawrence Venuti suggests, Newman's archaizing is a form of foreignizing translation, and for him, foreignizing "necessarily involved a discourse that signified historical remoteness—archaism" (1995: 121-122). Newman "recommended a translation method that signified the many differences between the translation and the foreign text, their relative autonomy from one another, their composition in different languages for different cultures" (1995: 121-122). He recognizes a spatial and cultural gap between ancient Greece and modern England, and he argues that a translator should show that difference. In this respect, Newman's stress on Homer's antiquity and efforts to represent it take the form of ethical translation: he respects the otherness of the ancient Greek poet.

2. Archaizing Translation and History

The trend of archaizing in the Victorian period exemplified by Newman's archaic version of the Iliad cannot be separated from that

period's more general preoccupation with 'history' or the 'past'. The word 'history' resonated through Victorian society as the subject of empirical knowledge and a mode of explanation. Hilary Fraser argues for a "heightened awareness of history in the nineteenth century" (2010: 123): "The past as we know it was largely created by the Victorians. Historical terms and concepts such as the Renaissance, the Augustan, Modernity, the Zeitgeist – indeed, the very coinage 'Victorian', and even the idea of periodicity itself, were nineteenth-century inventions" (2010: 108). Many Victorian writers such as Robert Browning, Ruskin, Rossetti and Vernon Lee were fascinated by history. H. Fraser observes Victorian writers' passion for the past:

> Newly exposed, as [Victorians] were, to the dizzyingly rich repository of material culture of the past in museums and galleries and special exhibitions up and down the country . . ., it was not unusual for Victorian writers to access the past and build their readings of history around an intense personal encounter with a historical artefact. This enabled them to reflect not only on the past culture that is embodied in the artefact but also on the meaning of their encounter with it; it enabled them to explore, that is, larger questions of history and historical consciousness (2010: 112).

Indeed, as H. Fraser argues, "that profound historical sensibility and impulse, that 'obsession' with history, so variously inflected and so fundamental to what it meant to be a Victorian was textually realised in the writing of the past" (2010: 124). Hence, Newman's (re)-writing of a Homeric past through archaizing translation was a natural response to this obsession with history and his use of archaizing was an expression of it.

This fascination with history is also shown in the genre of

historical fiction and its popularity. Walter Scott, whose work is often considered to be the "first substantial expression of the historical consciousness in literature" (Bell 1980: 58), is often regarded as the first and most influential historical novelist: novels such as *Waverley* (1814), *The Tale of Old Mortality* (1816) and *Rob Roy* (1818), used the drama of Scottish history including the Jacobites, Covenanters and romantic rebels, as the inspiration for his fictions. History captured the attention and imagination of many scholars such as Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Babington Macaulay; in "On History" (1830), Carlyle states that "[history] lies at the root of all science" (1893: 83) and commands his readers to "[e]xamine history, for it is 'Philosophy teaching by Experience'" (1893: 85). Carlyle and Macaulay shared "the gift of making history alive for the ordinary reader" (Chapman 1968: 87). Macaulay's *History of England*, "urbanely bright and easy to read" and Carlyle's *French Revolution* (1837) attempted to "free historical prose from remoteness and the reader of serious books from virtuous resignation to being bored" (Chapman 1968: 87); they "presided over an efflorescence of narrative history" (H. Fraser 2010: 108). Nineteenth-century Britain witnessed the foundation of the oldest journal of historical scholarship that dealt not only with British history, but also with many aspects of European and world history; in 1866, the academic journal *The English Historical Review* was founded and published by the Oxford University Press. In addition, historicism, a "critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds" was in vogue in the nineteenth century in Europe (Hamilton 1996: 1-2).

History inspired intellectual discoveries in many areas such as geology, evolution, biblical criticism, archaeology and anthropology (Gilmour 1993: 25); in the field of literature and translation, philology

and etymology were developed. According to Gilmour, the search for origins and continuities was common to agnostic scientists like Darwin and an Anglo-Catholic theologians like Cardinal Newman; in almost every area of Victorian intellectual life, one encounters a "preoccupation with ancestry and descent, with tracing the genealogy of the present in the past, and with discovering or creating links to a formative history" (1993: 25). This characteristic of public discourse applied to individuals' lives: autobiography became very prevalent in the nineteenth century (1993: 25). Gilmour states that the "autobiographical pressure which is felt so strongly in Victorian writing of all kinds – fiction, poetry, literary criticism, theology – is an expression of the desire to make sense of an evolutionary universe by discovering evolution in one's own universe of memory" (1993: 27). H. Fraser argues that the Victorians were "not only writing, but also building, painting, reading, translating, excavating, restoring, collecting and displaying the past" (2010: 112); history was a great source for arts, literature, humanities, sciences and religion; it was treated as if it was the key to inspiring ideas and unlocking all kinds of learning and knowledge.

I want to suggest that Newman's archaizing translation reflects, perhaps too literalistically, this fascination with history, evidenced particularly by its dependence and emphasis on philology. Arnold condemns Newman's philology with the diagnosis that "[p]erplexed by his knowledge of the philological aspect of Homer's language, encumbered by his own learning, Mr Newman, I say, misses the poetical aspect, misses that with which alone we are here concerned" (Arnold 1906: 352). Newman's philology was key to his translation, a fact scorned by Arnold who suggested that Newman's "far broader historical and philological view" meant that he applied "the 'philological view' where it was not applicable, but where the "poetical

view" alone was rightly applicable" (1906: 350). Another Victorian practitioner of archaism, J. S. Blackie recognised the importance of philology in his Homeric translation in the same way Newman did. Blackie's fourth volume, *Notes Philological and Archaeological*, published along with his translations reveals his passion for philology and archaeology.

Considering the fascination of his time with history, it seems natural that Newman approaches and reconstructs Homer's work as a useful text about history, the ancient past of Homer. His preface reflects this, where he acknowledges that "I have myself been urged to this labour of translation, by a belief that our countrymen will never become familiar with the old civilized world, and feed on the instruction which its contrast to ourselves suggests, except by entering through the gate of Homer" (1856: xix). Newman regards Homer's epic as a history book that gives a wealth of information about ancient Greek society:

> If such a people as the ancient Greeks were at this moment existing in the Eastern Archipelago; and if an Englishman who had resided many years among them were faithfully to describe their manners and sentiments, the state of religion and of knowledge, the organization of society, and the arts of peace and war among them; —the book would probably be a universal favourite. Homer himself has done this, and done it with native simplicity and vividness. He sets us as in the midst of the most ancient Greeks. We may disbelieve, as in a modern novel, every individual fact; yet from his poem, as from a good novel, the stranger will imbibe a perfect idea of the state of society. Homer is in truth to his reader better than the best book of travels into old Greece (1856: iii).

Homer's antiquity is a route to knowledge about ancient Greece. The oddities are thus pertinent, as they engender interest; this is

"just why people want to read an English Homer – to know all his oddities"; he is a "phenomenon to be studied. His peculiarities, pleasant or unpleasant, are to be made known" (1906: 309). Examining Newman's footnotes to the *Iliad* are instructive in understanding his ambitions to convey a truly historical Homer and to provide knowledge about the ancient world and Homer's original. In these footnotes, he engages in a process of historicizing, listing, speculating, asserting and narrating around Homer: "*Troy*, is often said by Homer for the district *Troas*; while Ilium is specially the *city of Troy*" (1856: 26); "*Hellas*, which afterwards became the name of all Greece, in Homer denotes a limited district of Thessaly" (1856: 39); "*The Achaians*. The phrase here suggests, that the Epeians of Elis were *not* strictly Achaians" (1856: 200). Newman constantly attempts to historicise Homer and make him an object of reality. His pursuit of archaism in his translation is illustrated in his choices in terms of diction, epithets and style.

3. Newman's Archaic Version of the *Iliad*

In order to retain Homer's antiquity in his translation, most of all Newman employs archaic words intentionally. For example, he uses antiquated words, such as "*blore* for *blast*, *harry* for *harass*" and the "antiquated participle *hoven* from *heave*, as *cloven*, *woven* from *cleave, weave*" (1906: 302). Archaic dictions include "perchance" (Book I, Line 65), "verily" (Book I, Line 77), "haply" (Book I, Line 82), "puissance" (Book VII, Line 111), "ween" (Book VIII, Line 34), "hearken"(Book IX, Line 509), "guerdon" (Book IX, Line 511), "hardiment" (Book X, Line 245), "yore" (Book XI, Line 112), "twain" (Book XI, Line 136), "sooth" (Book XII, Line 165), "forsooth" (Book XII,

237), “thither” (Book XIII, Line 784) and “spake” (Book XIV, Line 41). These words appear in different places repeatedly; in particular, the archaic words such as “verily”, “ween”, “spake” and “haply” are used frequently throughout Newman’s *Iliad*.

These archaic terms even support the inclusion of a glossary, designed to aid comprehension of his *Iliad*; examples from the glossary include “*Aye*, always”, “*Bale*, severe harm”, “*Beknow*, recognize”, “*Beweep*, weep for”, “*Bulkin*, calf”, “*Doughty*, formidable”, “*Eke*, also”, “*Eld*, old age,” “*Fain*, glad and gladly”, “*Height*, named”, “*Leech*, surgeon”, “*Lief*, willing”, “*Pight*, built”, “*Sake*, cause”, “*Sith*, asmuch as”, “*Sithence*, ever since”, “*Troth*, faith”, “*Tryst*, meet in rendezvous”, “*Wis*, know”, “*Wend*, go, proceed” and “*Wight*, living, vigorous” (1856: xxi-xxii). His dedication to archaic words inclines him to prefer a highly specific vocabulary; he states that “for the entire dialect of Homer being essentially archaic, that of a translation ought to be as much Saxo-Norman as possible, and owe as little as possible to the elements thrown into our language by classical learning” (1856: vi).

As well as using old-fashioned words, Newman often invented words particularly to deal with Homeric epithets. Epithets, which interrupt the flow and convey an unnatural feeling to the verse, have baffled and challenged many Homeric translators, creating a great deal of controversy because of their frequent occurrence in the *Iliad*. Celebrating the disorienting novelty of the epithet, Newman happily implements new epithets for the sake of a sense of oddity, which invites Arnold’s criticism: “voice-dividing,” “fair-thron’d” and “rill-bestream’d”. Pointing to Shakespeare’s “‘heaven-kissing,” or “man-ennobling”, he sees no reason why others cannot do the same (1906: 310). Newman finds absurd Arnold’s argument that Homer’s epithets should be renounced often because they tend to be

unnatural and strange in English.

In Hector's monologue before his dual with Achilles in Book XXII, Newman's choice of diction is striking when compared to the mid-twentieth-century English translator, I. A. Richards' modern *Iliad*. Richards says:

> "Alas, if I go inside the gates Polydamas will be the first to say that this is my doing. For he told me to bring the Trojans into the city that terrible night, when Achilles came out. But I would not hear him—how much better if I had! But now that I have brought destruction on us all, blind fool that I was, I cannot face the Trojans and their wives. Some worse man may say: (1951: 175-176).

Newman says:

> "Ha, wretched! If I enter now within the gates and rampart,
> Polydamas will earliest reproaches lay upon me,
> Who plainly counsell'd, to conduct the Troians to the city,
> During the deadly night, which first arous'd divine Achilles.
> But I his counsel follow'd not, which verily was better.
> Now, sith infatuate I was, and many lives have wasted,
> I blush before the men of Troy and trailing-robed women,
> Lest haply some one, than myself far worser, say hereafter : -
> (1856: 407)

When Richards uses his own style of modern English, Newman uses archaic words such as "verily", "sith" and "haply". Richards' "how much better if I had!" becomes "which verily was better" in Newman's translation. When Richards articulates simply that "some worse man may say", Newman employs the convoluted and old-fashioned, "Lest haply some one, than myself far worser, say hereafter". In addition, Newman retains the Homeric epithet 'trailing-robed', memorably

criticised by Arnold as unnatural because it "brings to ones' mind long petticoats sweeping a dirty pavement" (1906: 266). Richards discards the epithet and simply says "wives". Richards' and Newman's respective translations above are vastly different from each other; the comparison between them demonstrates Newman's archaism in terms of diction.

Moving from diction to the fresh but related terrain of style, Newman asserts that the style of Homer is "quaint" (1856: iv) and that English translators should represent that style faithfully[1]. Newman argues that quaintness is ubiquitous in the *Iliad*; he provides many examples of what he considers 'quaint' in the *Iliad*, using his own translations: it is quaint to call Juno "*white-arm'd goddess* and *large-ey'd*,"; it is "quaint to say, 'the lord of bright haired Juno lightens' for 'it lightens'; or 'my heart in my *shaggy* bosom is divided,' for 'I doubt'"; it is "quaint to call waves *wet*, milk *white*, blood *dusky*, horses *singlehoofed*, a hero's hand *broad*, words *winged*, Vulcan *Lobfoot* (*Κυλλοποδίων*), a maiden *fair-ankled*, the Greeks *well-greav'd*, a spear *longshadowy*, battle and council *manennobling*, one's knees *dear*" (1906: 304). To Newman, all these expressions are quaint and old-fashioned, not modern. He draws attention to the almost 'comical' quaintness of Homer further in the *Iliad*:

> Many phrases are so quaint as to be almost untranslatable, as *μήστωρ φόβοιο* (deviser of fear?) *μήστωρ ἀϋτῆς* (deviser of outcry?): others are quaint to the verge of being comical, as to call a man an *equipoise ἀτάλαυτος* to a god, and to praise eyes for having a *curl* in them. It is quaint to make Juno call Jupiter *αἰνότατε* (grimmest? direst?), whether she is in good or bad humour with him, and to call a Vision *ghastly*, when it is sent with a pleasant message. It is

> astonishingly quaint to tell how many oxen every fringe of Athene's aegis was worth. – It is quaint to call Patroclus "a great simpleton," for not foreseeing that he would lose his life in rushing to the rescue of his countrymen. . . . It is quaint to say: "Patroclus kindled a great fire, *godlike man!*" or, "Automedon held up the meat, *divine* Achilles slic'd it:" quaint to address a young friend as "Oh Pippin!" or "Oh softheart!" or "Oh pet!" whichever is the true translation (Newman 1906: 305-306).

Conclusion

Through Newman's archaizing translation strategies, such as the use of archaic words, inventions of words particularly for Homeric epithets and keeping Homer's quaint style in his translation, which are motivated and influenced by his time's preoccupation with history, Homer's *Iliad* turns into a distinctive genre of nineteenth-century England: a history book. Acutely aware of the fact that Homer belongs to a barbarian age, Newman intends his translation to be a text that provides a wealth of information about Homer's ancient Greek world rather than the beautiful poetry supported by Arnold. Newman argues that a considerable part of the *Iliad* is not poetry but rhythmical prose and is "interesting to us not as poetry but as portraying the manners or sentiments of the day" (1906: 330). His firm commitment to conveying historical facts of the *Iliad* in order to capture Homer's antiquity makes him oblivious to the awkward style that his translation might have, lacking poetic, aesthetic qualities. What Arnold scornfully sees as pedantry, literalism and a reliance on philological knowledge comes from Newman's attitudes towards the source text as a history book. Newman employs his extensive knowledge about the Greek language

and the ancient Greek world. In conceiving of how he reconstructs, restores and represents the Ancients in the present, it would be useful to borrow the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher's concept: Newman attempts to take the modern reader to the ancient author by rewriting Homer's epic as a history book.

NOTES

1. Newman insists that apart from quaintness, Homer's style is "direct", "popular", "forcible", "flowing" and "garrulous" (1856: iv).

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