

**THE ODYSSEY OF HOMER.
TRANSLATED
INTO ENGLISH
BLANK VERSE. VOLUME I**

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The Odyssey of Homer. Translated into English blank verse. Volume I by Homer & William Cullen Bryant

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HOMER & WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

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THE
ODYSSEY OF HOMER.

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BY

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

VOLUME I.



BOSTON:
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1873.

P R E F A C E .

THE kind reception which my translation of the Iliad has met with from my countrymen has encouraged me to attempt a translation of the Odyssey in the same form of verse. I have found this a not unpleasing employment for a period of life which admonishes me that I cannot many times more appear before the public in this or any other manner. The task of translating verse is not, it is true, merely mechanical, since it requires that the translator should catch from his author somewhat of the glow with which he wrote, just as a good reader is himself moved by the words which he delivers, and communicates the emotion to his hearers; yet is the translator spared the labor of invention,—the task of producing the ideas which it is his business to express, as well as that of bringing them into their proper relations with each other. A great part of the fatigue which attends original composition, long pursued, is therefore avoided, and this gentler exercise of the intellectual faculties agrees better with that stage of life when the brain begins to be haunted by a presentiment that the time of its final repose is not far off.

Some of the observations which I have made, in my Preface to the Iliad, on that work and the translation which I have made of it, apply also to the Odyssey and to the version which I now lay before the reader.

The differences between the two poems have been so well pointed out by critics, that I shall have occasion to speak of but two or three of them. In executing my task, I have certainly missed in the *Odyssey* the fire and vehemence of which I was so often sensible in the *Iliad*, and the effect of which naturally was to kindle the mind of the translator. I hope that the version which I have made will not on that account be found lacking in a sufficient degree of spirit and appearance of freedom to make it readable. Another peculiarity of the *Iliad*, of a less agreeable nature, consists in the frequent recurrence of hand-to-hand combats, in which the more eminent warriors despatch, by the most summary butchery, and with a fierce delight in their own prowess, their weaker adversaries. These incidents so often occur in the narrative, being thrown together in clusters, and described with an unsparing minuteness, that I have known persons, soon sated with these horrors, to pass over the pages in which they are described, and take up the narrative further on. There is nothing of this kind in the *Odyssey*, at least until near the close, where Ulysses takes a bloody vengeance on the suitors who have plundered his estate, and conspired to take the life of his son, and in that part of the poem the horror which so enormous a slaughter would naturally awaken is mitigated by the recollection of their guilt. The gods of the *Odyssey* are not so often moved by brutal impulses as those of the *Iliad*, nor do they seem to dwell in a sphere so far removed from the recognition of those rules of right and wrong which are respected in human society. In the composition of the two poems, one of the most remarkable differences is the abundance of similes in the *Iliad*, and their comparatively rare appearance in the *Odyssey*. In the *Iliad*

the desire of illustrating his subject by a similitude sometimes seizes the poet in the midst of one of the most interesting parts of his narrative, and immediately there follows a striking picture of some incident bearing a certain resemblance to the one which he is relating. Sometimes, after one simile is minutely given, a second suggests itself, and is given with equal minuteness, and there is one instance at least of a third. It is curious to mark what a fascination the picturesque resemblance of objects and incidents has for the poet, and how one set of these images draws after it another, passing in magnificent procession across the mirror of his imagination. In the *Odyssey* are comparatively few examples of this mode of illustration; the poet is too much occupied with his narrative to think of them. How far this point of difference between the two poems tends to support the view of those who maintain that they could not have proceeded from the same author, is a question on which it is not my purpose to enter.

In the Preface to my version of the *Iliad*, I gave very briefly my reason for preserving the names derived from the Latin, by which the deities of the Grecian mythology have hitherto been known to English readers, — that is to say, Jupiter, Juno, Neptune, Pluto, Mars, Venus, and the rest, instead of Zeus, Herè, and the other names which are properly Greek. As the propriety of doing this is questioned by some persons of exact scholarship, I will state the argument a little more at large. The names I have employed have been given to the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece from the very beginnings of our language. Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and the rest, down to Proctor and Keats, — a list whose chronology extends through six hundred years, — have followed

this usage, and we may even trace it back for centuries before either of them wrote. Our prose writers have done the same thing; the names of Latin derivation have been adopted by the earliest and latest translators of the New Testament. To each of the deities known by these names there is annexed in the mind of the English reader — and it is for the English reader that I have made this translation — a peculiar set of attributes. Speak of Juno and Diana, and the mere English reader understands you at once; but when he reads the names of Herè and Artemis, he looks into his classical dictionary. The names of Latin origin are naturalized; the others are aliens and strangers. The conjunction *and* itself, which has been handed down to us unchanged from our Saxon ancestors, holds not its place in our language by a firmer and more incontestable title than the names which we have hitherto given to the deities of ancient Greece. We derive this usage from the Latin authors, — from Virgil, and Horace, and Ovid, and the prose writers of ancient Rome. Art as well as poetry knows these deities by the same names. We talk of the Venus de Medicis, the Venus of Milo, the Jupiter of Phidias, and never think of calling a statue of Mars a statue of Ares.

For my part, I am satisfied with the English language as it has been handed down to us. If the lines of my translation had bristled with the names of Zeus and Herè, and Poseidon and Ares, and Artemis and Demeter, I should feel that I had departed from the immemorial usage of the English tongue, that I had introduced obscurity where the meaning should have been plain, and that I had given just cause of complaint to the readers for whom I wrote.

W. C. BRYANT.

AUGUST, 1871.

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