



## POETA SOVRANO?: HORIZONS OF HOMER IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POETRY<sup>1</sup>

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Dr. Rouse found his Aegean sailors still telling yarns from the *Odyssey* though time had worn out Odysseus' name, down through O'ysseus, already latin Ulysses, to current Elias, identified with the prophet.<sup>2</sup>

My title begins with a citation from Dante, quoted in the call for papers for this Homerizon conference. The citation comes from *Inferno* 4.86 – 88: “*Mira colui con quella spada in mano, / che vien dinanzi ai tre sì come sire; / quelli è Omero poeta sovrano*” (Note him there with sword in hand who comes before the other three as their lord. He is Homer, sovereign poet). Homer is the first of “*quattro grand' ombre*” (four great shades, 83), followed by “*Orazio satiro,*” “*Ovidio,*” and “*Lucano*” (89 – 90).<sup>3</sup> Horace and Homer merit an adjective, Ovid and Lucan do not; Virgil is present in this scene, and as Dante's guide speaks the lines 86 – 93, so most of what I've quoted.<sup>4</sup> In this list, Homer stands out for four reasons: first, he heads this list, which although chronological also has qualitative implications—Homer is the “first” poet in the full polysemy of the term—and leads the other three as “sire” (lord); second, Homer is remarkable for his sovereignty (to follow Singleton's translation); third, Homer is the only Greek

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is itself a re-writing of an earlier conference paper. In November 2002 I had the pleasure of speaking on *Homère dans la poésie anglophone du XXe siècle* at the colloque *Homère virtuel* in Grenoble. I thank Madame Françoise Létoublon, organisateur extraordinaire, the Centre d'Études Homériques, and all present for their cordial reception and comments; I thank Casey Dué Hackney and Richard Armstrong, organizers of the Homerizon conference, as well as the Center for Hellenic Studies, for the opportunity to re-visit and strengthen this work.

<sup>2</sup> Pound 1938:79.

<sup>3</sup> Texts and translations from Singleton 1970:1.40 – 41 and Singleton 1972:40. Throughout I will use the name Homer as a portmanteau word designating the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as the multiplicity of myths sprung up around the figure of Homer the poet.

<sup>4</sup> As Hardwick 2003:87 observes, George Chapman's “Euthymiae Raptus” and T. S. Eliot's “Little Gidding” reproduce encounters with the ghost of Homer, turning this moment in Dante into a *topos* in later poetry.

poet in this list; lastly, Homer is the only poet of the four whose work Dante did not know directly.<sup>5</sup> Homer's sovereignty is reinforced later in *Purgatorio* 22.101 – 102: “*siam con quel Greco / che le Muse lattar più ch'altri mai*” ([we] are with that Greek whom the Muses suckled more than any other).<sup>6</sup> Despite his association with the Muses, Homer is present as a shade—a ghost, yes, but also an intangible presence; he is no less potent a predecessor for being a shade, as we shall see.<sup>7</sup> Now the balance of my title moves away from the Italian Trecento and towards a radically different time-period, one as unimaginable to Dante as to the ancients. I have chosen to focus on twentieth-century poetic invocations (and incarnations) of Homer precisely because this is a span of time during which the connection between Classical and contemporary culture has become more denaturalized.<sup>8</sup> The nineteenth-century passion for origins gives way to a more self-conscious relationship toward the Classical past; in twentieth-century poetry Homer signifies a wide array of meanings and it is this array which I shall trace herein. There is a tension between these two centuries, one amplified by the scholarship; according to Steiner, “The nineteenth century sharpened the dialectical tension between philology and poetics, between a scholarly and a literary ideal of translation.”<sup>9</sup> For Hardwick this tension becomes, in the twentieth-century receptions she studies, “often a fruitful correspondence between key debates in Homeric scholarship and the literary and dramatic analysis involved in modern reception studies.”<sup>10</sup> I will begin my analysis with comments on Matthew Arnold's *On Translating Homer*, an influential nineteenth-century essay which provokes reactions well into the twentieth. Earlier Victorian theories of translation viewed the process as one inherently melancholic and characterized by loss; paraphrase with explanatory footnotes was the order of the day. Arnold did not break entirely free of this mold, but did argue for poetry to be translated into poetry. What Arnold began Pound finished; after Pound, translation is no longer a servile paraphrase or “crib,” but a creative production which is simultaneously a literary and a critical work in its own right.<sup>11</sup> I have limited my enquiry to English-language poetry since the

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<sup>5</sup> On this last point, see Singleton 1970:2.62 – 63 and Singleton 1972:40, which observes, “A passage in *Vita Nuova*, XXV, 9, suggests that Dante may have formed his impression of Homer, in part, through Horace.”

<sup>6</sup> Singleton 1973:1.240 – 241. On Homer in Dante see the brief remarks of Steiner 2004:364 – 365.

<sup>7</sup> As Ambrose 2003:483 – 490 argues, these shades remain a persistent presence in Dante's poetics.

<sup>8</sup> Consider the spate of books examining the primary role of Classics in the nineteenth-century—in politics, religion, and culture. See Dowling 1996, Stray 1998, Gildenhard and Ruehl 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Steiner 2004:369. As we shall see, Steiner's observation is at odds with Matthew Arnold's *On Translating Homer*.

<sup>10</sup> Hardwick 2004:345.

<sup>11</sup> Apter 1984:57 – 68, 109 – 128 discusses Pound's translations and his relationship to Victorian models, including Arnold's.

increasing linguistic dominance of English the world over means that there is an abundance of poems to study within this designated area. My intention is not to examine all the poems which fit these criteria (although I shall allude to many in passing) but to examine a major work, Pound's *Cantos*, as paradigmatic of the array of significations of the figure of Homer in twentieth-century English-language poetry. By focusing on poetic invocations of "Homer" by name, I shall complement current reception studies of Homer (especially those focusing on translations of Homeric poetry) while also analyzing the wealth of meanings this name comes to bear. This reading will enable us to assess the horizon of meanings inhering in the name "Homer" over the course of the twentieth-century.

To say that Homer is a contested figure is nothing new; even the ancients fought over the man and his poetry.<sup>12</sup> Consider these five paradigmatic examples. First, there is the *Certamen*, a poem staging a poetic competition between Homer and Hesiod; here the two poets collectively represent epic and individually compete over the most appropriate epic theme—war (Homer) or peace (Hesiod).<sup>13</sup> The *Certamen* stands as one early textual manifestation of the competition over Homer's poetic predominance. Because it stages competing recitations between the two poets, much of the *Certamen* is written in dactylic hexameters; this is, then, competitive epic poetry. Second, there is Sappho fragment 16 V, there the speaking persona rejects the epic themes in favor of ὄτ- / τω τις ἔραται, what one loves," using the pronomial-cap priamel rhetorical structure to reinforce this sense of opposition.<sup>14</sup> Here we see an allusion to and rejection of Homeric epic within the bounds of lyric poetry; although Homer is unnamed, the allusion and rejection are made clear by the specific reference to Helen of Troy. Sappho considers Homer to be preeminent among all genres of poetry, not just epic; for Sappho, Homer is indicative of the entire poetic field precisely at the moment she surpasses this limitation.<sup>15</sup> Third, there is Xenophanes, fragment 10-DK: ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες,

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<sup>12</sup> As Hardwick 2004:345 notes, "Homer has provided a basis for aesthetic innovation and critical debate both within antiquity and subsequently."

<sup>13</sup> See Graziosi 2002:165 – 184; I am here condensing even further her conclusions on 184. The date of this poem is argued to fall between the sixth century BCE and the classical period; see Richardson 1981 for an argument in favor of the former. For our purposes the precise dating is less important than the fact that this poem is an early record of the competition over Homer and his poetry.

<sup>14</sup> See Voigt 1971:42 - 43 for the text; I am following the interpretation of Winkler 1990:176 – 177 and making explicit his invocation of Bundy 1986:5 – 7.

<sup>15</sup> As such, Sappho 16 V stands as a precursor to the ideas of Ion expressed in the Platonic dialogue of that name and so complements the argument of Graziosi 2002:182 – 184, who reads the collocation of Homer and Hesiod in that dialogue as representatives of all poetry. Like Pindar in Olympians 1.1, Sappho uses the combination of particles and rhetorical structure to surpass the superlative degree of adjectival comparison; for Sappho, it is not just the theme but also the poem itself which is "better than best."

“From the beginning according to Homer, since all have learned....”<sup>16</sup> This dactylic hexameter attests to the importance of Homer even as it stages a contest over the authority of knowledge expressed in dactylic hexameters. Note, too, the metonymic shift between Homeric poetry and the figure of Homer; the poet becomes a representative of the poetry.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, there is Plato’s *Ion*, in which Socrates interrogates the rhapsode Ion for his mistaken belief that knowledge of Homer equals knowledge of all technical matters touched upon in the Homeric epics.<sup>18</sup> Fifth, there are the Homeric Centos of Empress Eudocia. This fifth-century CE poem calls upon Homeric epic and the Bible to create a new work: a pastiche of “two very different sign systems” which simultaneously “affirms the cultural prestige of both Homer and the Bible” as it performs nominally Christian poetics.<sup>19</sup> Eudocia can stand in as one example, among many possible, for the Christian *détournement* of Classical poetics.<sup>20</sup> Throughout these examples, chosen for their chronological and generic disparities, we see two continuities emerge: first, Homer remains a potent poetic force; and second, even when bested, Homer does not disappear.

I begin with these examples in order to frame this study concerning a much later period of time. These texts stage a contest over the importance of Homer in the poetic domain. At the same time, we see that Homer can be invoked in varying ways: the *Certamen* re-presents Homer performing his poetry; Sappho rejects not Homer but Homeric themes; Xenophanes and Ion invoke the personage of Homer, who stands in metonymically for Homeric poetry; and Eudocia invokes Homer through “his” words. In this study, I will concentrate my reading on the metonymic invocations of Homer by name in twentieth-century English poetry. This focus allows us to study Homeric reception within poetry (like latter-day descendants of Xenophanes); we shall see Homer interrogated, re-worked, challenged. In the process, we can gage the horizon of meanings encoded in the name, Homer.

This horizon is founded on a question of translation. The “translation act,” to use Steiner’s term, which brings Homeric Greek into English begins sometime in the early fourteenth century with *Seege of Troye* and includes Caxton’s 1475 *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, the first book printed in English; these translations (of originals known at second-, or third-, hand), together with “two masterpieces of indirection” (i.e. Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*) stand as early beacons in the long chain of “English’d

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<sup>16</sup> This is my own, literal, translation.

<sup>17</sup> Foley 1998:167 – 169 offers one survey of evidence and scholarship on how “Homer” came to stand in for “Homeric poetry” in ancient Greek culture.

<sup>18</sup> In the *Ion* the rhapsode performs Homer the poet as well as Homeric poetry; see Nagy 2003:37. We can also say that Ion re-performs Homeric authority and wisdom—even as Socrates challenges this re-performance.

<sup>19</sup> Usher 1998:11 and 11 – 13 for a rapid survey of the problems posed by this syncretism and the reactions of early Church fathers as well as recent scholars.

<sup>20</sup> See Schnapp 1992 for a further explication of this *détournement*.

Homers.”<sup>21</sup> While none of these early works are translations, strictly speaking, all of them do mark subsequent English-language engagements with Homeric poetry. Translations multiply: in the twentieth-century, “Kitto follows immediately on Rieu, Robert Fitzgerald on Lattimore, Fagles on Fitzgerald, Mandelbaum on Fagles, Martin Hammond on Mandelbaum.”<sup>22</sup> Translations (*stricto sensu*) mark the first point of contact and dissemination of an original-language text within the culture of a second language, so this is a logical starting-point for studies of Homer in English. With emphasis now on reception studies, we move towards studies more broadly conceived than translations alone.<sup>23</sup> The long history of English translations of Homer poses another set of challenges: English Homer is now a palimpsest of Chapman, Pope, Cowper, Tennyson, Arnold, etc.—plus the translations adumbrated above. Today we could modify Shelley’s aphorism and proclaim, “We are all Homers.” While the study of these translations is an important component of Homeric reception, I will focus more on what we might term “re-writings” (to translate literally the French critical term *réécriture*): the invocation, usually in a modified form, of an earlier literary work in a later literary work.<sup>24</sup> Such invocations do not always (or exclusively) refer back to the ancient Greek original of Homeric poetry; Homer has acquired a separate entity in translation, and this facet of Homeric reception is embedded in the poetic re-writings we will examine. At the same time, the plethora of translations (not only into English) means that the figure of Homer is multiply re-written in manifold cultural traditions.<sup>25</sup> The translations of Homeric poetry subtend the poetic invocations of Homer, especially (although not exclusively) in the case of poets who know no ancient Greek and so rely on translators for their experience of Homeric poetry. In the case of Ezra Pound, oft critiqued as a translator, the boundaries between translation and *réécriture* are inseparable.

Matthew Arnold’s influential ideas *On Translating Homer* mark twentieth-century receptions (more than just the translations) of Homer; the title of Pound’s essay “Translators of the Greek: Early Translators of Homer” marks his debt to Arnold. Arnold states his “one object is to give practical advice to a translator” and begins with the overriding, although vague, notion that the translator “should try to affect Englishmen powerfully, as Homer affected Greeks powerfully” and that the translator’s aim is “to reproduce on the intelligent scholar, as nearly as

<sup>21</sup> Steiner 1996:xv – xvi and Steiner 2004:364 – 365.

<sup>22</sup> Steiner 2004:372; the previous sentence proffers context: “What remains arresting, and not totally explicable, is the readiness of publishers to commission and print new ‘Homers’ on both sides of the Atlantic.” Homeric poetry is such a highly fetishized and commodified object that it seems to surpass the logic of capitalist economics.

<sup>23</sup> Hardwick 2003:1 – 11 discusses the shift from classical tradition to reception studies, and 18 – 22 discusses translation studies within the field of reception studies.

<sup>24</sup> One starting point for an understanding of *réécriture* is Domino 1987.

<sup>25</sup> In the words of Hardwick 2004:349, “Homer can no longer be regarded as a pillar of any one cultural tradition.” She offers a case-study of Christopher Logue, who produces his versions of Homer based on a collation of translations; see 347 – 349.

possible, the general effects of Homer.”<sup>26</sup> Arnold proceeds to reduce the power and affect of Homer to “four cardinal truths which I pronounce essential for him who would have a right conception of Homer: that Homer is rapid, that he is plain and direct in word and style, that he is plain and direct in his ideas, and that he is noble.”<sup>27</sup> Arnold, by way of critiquing Newman’s translation, directs future translators in their reading of Homeric poetry; thus, this is an extremely influential piece of literary criticism, governing readings and interpretations of Homeric poetry beyond the sphere of translators. Arnold reifies the “primordial stature” of Homer as a powerful and affective poet.<sup>28</sup> By appealing to scholars of ancient Greek as arbiters of English translations of Homer, Arnold seeks to reproduce in English poetry the function of Homer within the hermeneutic world of ancient Greek literature: this Homer we might summarize as simultaneously the fountain of ancient Greek literature and a revered and respected poet-teacher. At the same time, Arnold “presupposes that Homer should be translated because he is a great poet.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Pound’s essay presupposes the greatness of Homer, but over and above Arnold he stresses the musicality (the “magnificent onomatopoeia”) of the language, the need to translate poetry into poetry, and to capture the comprehensive reality of the Homeric epics, both the “mental attitude” of the characters and the “raw cuts of concrete reality” embodied in the epics.<sup>30</sup> By studying re-writings of Homer rather than translations, we see this presupposition of greatness made explicit; creative receptions of Homer give us a truer understanding of both the positive and the negative values inhering in the figure of Homer.

One of the most important re-writings of Homer in twentieth-century English-language poetry, and one of the most complex, is in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*; which I take to be paradigmatic of Homeric receptions in the twentieth-century. Pound’s poem is a Modernist epic of fragmentation which remained unfinished at the time of the author’s death. Pound attempted to render the “experimental age” into epic; as he said, “The modern mind contains heteroclitite elements” and the six centuries between Dante’s *Commedia* and Pound’s *Cantos* “hadn’t been packaged”—a lofty task Pound set himself.<sup>31</sup> Given the thematic fragmentation, the polyglot

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<sup>26</sup> Arnold 1905:34 – 35, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Arnold 1905:67. The last point is the most curious to our sensibilities; Arnold writes, “[Homer’s] translator must not be tumid, must not be artificial, must not be literary,—true: but then also he must not be commonplace, must not be ignoble” (59 – 60). While Arnold refers to the translations, there are ways in which he assimilates nobility of style to nobility of character and so implies the translator must also be noble, or not contain the traits enumerated.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase quoted is from Steiner 2004:364.

<sup>29</sup> Apter 1984:59.

<sup>30</sup> Pound’s essay, originally published serially and later condensed and redacted, is available in Eliot 1954:249 – 275; see the discussion at Coyle 1995:86 – 99.

<sup>31</sup> The quotes are from Donald Hall’s *Paris Review* interview with Ezra Pound, published in 1962 and excerpted in Cookson 2001:xxvii – xxx.

language, the writing and re-writing of the *Cantos* between 1917 (publication of the “Ur-Cantos,” reworked by the 1925 publication of *A Draft of XVI Cantos*) and 1972 (Pound’s death), and the personal and political upheavals inherent in Pound’s life (and in the twentieth century) it is hardly surprising the task remains incomplete.<sup>32</sup> Since Pound lived much of his life in Europe and was in Italy during World War II (including the infamous Rome Radio broadcasts from 1941 – 1943), he was an eyewitness to the upheavals of war; World War II seems to have coincided with Pound’s intention to write his own *Paradiso* and so draw the *Cantos* to a close; history demonstrated to Pound the impossibility of narrative closure in an age of experiment.<sup>33</sup> Epics are never easy to conclude; when a major theme of the epic is fragmentation, narrative closure is well-nigh impossible to attain. These same facts, coupled with the publication history of Pound’s work, spanning England, France, and the United States, result in a difficult text to edit. Consider Richard Taylor’s stemma of Canto I (figure 1); each individual canto in the *Cantos* demands a stemma of equal complexity. There is, further, no coherent publication strategy, neither a variorum edition nor a corrected text. Add the panoply of editorial corrections and typographic mistakes: Pound’s poem is as multiform as the Homeric epics.<sup>34</sup> As with Homeric epics, no “corrected” text is possible; in the words of Peter Glassgold of New Directions Publishing Corporation, “we differ with those scholars proposing a corrected text and believe such an edition to be contrary to what Pound personally would approve and that it would compromise the integrity of the *Cantos* as presently published under our imprint.”<sup>35</sup> In the absence of “the” text we work with “a” text.<sup>36</sup> Thus, all references to the *Cantos* will be to the

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<sup>32</sup> The *Cantos* includes words or characters from some eighteen different languages, ranging from Ancient Greek, to Old French, modern Italian and Arabic; originally Cantos 71 – 72 (and parts of 73 – 75) were written in Italian and later “translated” (and substantially altered) by Pound, while Canto 75 is largely in musical notation (pages 464 – 465). There are also dialectical variants of English, as at 80. 359 quoted below.

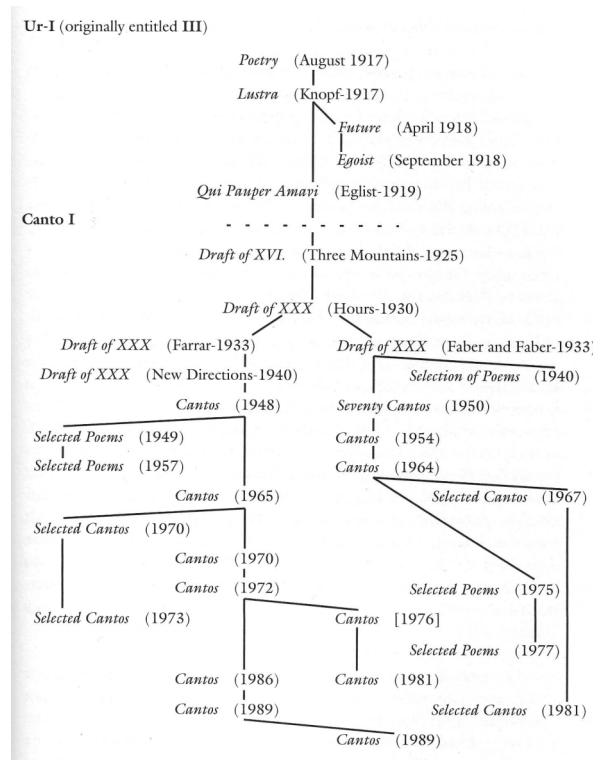
<sup>33</sup> See the comments and bibliographic references at Cookson 2001:113.

<sup>34</sup> Not all mistakes are typographic; Kenner in Rainey 1997:24 describes how Pound followed a mistake in the smaller Greek-English lexicon in giving a rough breathing to a verb used by Sappho in his poem “Imerro,” later “Himmero.” See further the discussion by Sullivan 1964:95 – 104 concerning the mistakes, “unexpected translations which can be defended on good philological grounds” (96), and Pound’s mistranslations based on a theory of infectious multilingual homophony. Although Sullivan discusses Pound’s *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, these remarks are equally pertinent to the *Cantos*.

<sup>35</sup> Glassgold, “A Statement from New Directions” in Rainey 1997:275. See also the remarks and unattributed citations of Pound at Eastman 1979:29 on this score. I do not mean to imply that authorial intention should govern our interpretations, as Glassgold and Eastman do; instead, I think textual editors must admit defeat in the face of Pound’s *Cantos* and additional corrections or emendations further obscure already murky textual waters and leave readers and scholars without even the illusion of a text (definitive or otherwise).

<sup>36</sup> Gurd 2004 argues that there are no definitive texts of Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and that all editions of Classical texts represent not so much a definitive edition as another chapter in the

New Directions edition of 1975 and are cited parenthetically in the text using the format: (<Canto>, <Lines>; <Page>).<sup>37</sup> Rather than correct errors in the diacritical markings of ancient Greek, I reproduce the state of the text as I find it. Pound's knowledge of the several languages used in the *Cantos* was imperfect, so the mistakes are, at times, deliberate markers calling the attention of the careful reader to the textual artefact itself. Pound's polyglot artefact bears witness to the interstices of languages, and to the rise of standardized languages (a process reinforced by the twentieth-century's rise of global media).



**Figure 1: Taylor's stemma of Canto I; from Rainey, ed. (1997) 247.**

Now, to the poem itself; I will begin by reading and commenting on the references to Homer in the *Cantos*, before extrapolating the meanings of "Homer" from Pound's work and correlating these with the selected works of other poets. The "magical first *Canto*," as Steiner calls it,<sup>38</sup> begins *in medias res*:

And then went down to the ship,

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history of a text. These arguments are equally valid for Pound's *Cantos*, doubly so because of the polyglossia.

<sup>37</sup> Actually, the 1975 edition (now the standard reference edition, shared jointly between New Directions Publishing Corporation in the United States and Faber and Faber Ltd. in England) is the fifth printing of the 1970 edition. See Eastman 1979 for a history of the printings of the *Cantos* and a detailed study of the 1975 edition.

<sup>38</sup> Steiner 1996:xvi.



Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and  
We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,  
Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also  
Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward  
Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,  
Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.

(1.1 – 7; 3)

Only in the seventh line, as we draw near the end of this opening sentence, do we find confirmation of what we may have begun to suspect: this opening is a version of the Nekuia from the *Odyssey*. Arnold's call for rapidity, plainness, and simplicity find their expression in Pound's text; the run of clauses pile up, propel us forward, as the winds do the ships, and the epithetic adjectives grant these lines an old-fashioned quality while not impeding the lines' momentum. The Nekuia breaks off with Tiresias' prophecy that Odysseus' will "'Lose all companions.' And then Anticlea came" (1.67; 5). Here Tiresias can offer no advice, no direction or roadmap; Pound's Nekuia promises divagations but no "predetermined plan."<sup>39</sup> Here the fragment breaks off, reinforcing the absence of a master narrative and the lack of direction. The narrator interrupts the Homeric reverie:

Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus,  
In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer.  
And he sailed, by Sirens and thence outward and away  
And unto Circe.

(1.68 – 71; 5)

Circe metamorphoses into Aphrodite, and the Canto ends with a Latin tag from the Hymn to Aphrodite. The "god" (*divus*, literally "divine") commanded to lie quiet turns out to be Andreas Divus, author of a sixteenth-century Latin translation of Homer.<sup>40</sup> As Cookson observes, this rather simple over-layering foreshadows swift jump cuts in later cantos; here only four elements come into play—"Greek foretime translated via Renaissance Latin into a twentieth-century form

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<sup>39</sup> Durant 1981:47.

<sup>40</sup> Pound translates and quotes from a volume containing a Latin *Odyssey* translated by Andreas Divus Justinopolitanus together with the *Hymni Deorum* rendered in Latin by Georgius Dartona Cretensis; see Pound's description of this book at Eliot 1954:259 – 267.

of Anglo-Saxon heroic verse.”<sup>41</sup> Pound’s approximation of Anglo-Saxon English (both diction and metre) coupled with the Latin tag descriptive of Aphrodite mark the first of many metamorphoses in the *Cantos*; even this translation of Divus’ Homer is a metamorphosis. The Nekuia is re-written: excerpted, condensed, and altered to new poetic ends.

I want to pause at the end of this first canto to consider the musicality of Pound’s language, which was for him coupled with a type of orality. One of the traits Pound praises in poetry is *melopoeia*—“the maximum of [which] is reached in Greek,” as he wrote.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, Pound wrote: “I have never read half a page of Homer without finding melodic invention.”<sup>43</sup> This melodic invention finds its counterpart in Canto I, where the musicality of Homeric Greek is mediated by Pound’s sense of Anglo-Saxon poetic music in this “translation.” Pound placed great emphasis on the connections between music and poetry (as his *ABC of Reading* makes clear).<sup>44</sup> As Hugh Kenner writes, “if there was ever a modern poet it would seem pertinent to compare to Homer ... it was Ezra Pound” because he “composed orally/aurally.”<sup>45</sup> Pound lays great emphasis on the sounds of words, to the point of transcribing dialectical pronunciations.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the emphasis on language as spoken or heard finds a counterpart in the multiplicity of voices in the *Cantos*, be they quoted or impersonated. These voices resonate from the opening of the first canto; long before we reach the break at the end of Canto I and read/hear that we have been cast into a fragment of Divus’ Homer, we find an old-fashioned voice, incantatory, narrating a textual raising of the voices of the dead. As Rabaté writes:

the interaction between Homeric heroes and the souls of dead men produces a whirling node of speeches and voices which intertwine around each other. At a first level of the resolution of the antagonism between oral and written literature we find we must come to terms with the implications of the ‘voices’ in the text.<sup>47</sup>

The textual artefact of the *Cantos* records a collision of voices, at times a swirling eddy of voices inside the mind of Ezra Pound; all of these voices are captured on the page in language aiming to

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<sup>41</sup> Cookson 2001:4. Kenner 1971:351 offers a detailed reading of the Anglo-Saxon “sonorities” of Pound’s Homer in Canto I.

<sup>42</sup> Pound 1960:42.

<sup>43</sup> Pound 1960:43. The same paragraph from which I have quoted also includes the observation, “I have ... found also in Homer the imaginary spectator, which in 1918 I still thought was Henry James’ particular property.” This imaginary spectator is clearly present in Pound’s *Cantos*, but this critical observation precedes later narratological scholarship on this point.

<sup>44</sup> Pound 1934:14.

<sup>45</sup> Kenner quoted in Cookson 2001:xxii.

<sup>46</sup> One example in English is quoted from Canto 80, below. An example in French is found at 16.192 – 197; 73, and a discussion of this passage at Rabaté 1986:38 – 39.

<sup>47</sup> Rabaté 1986:39.

reproduce their melody and rhythm.<sup>48</sup> In this sense we can say that Pound has learned his lesson well from those half-pages of Homer. At the same time, and in an effort to expand upon the work of George Steiner, we can say that Canto I is more than a translation at two or three removes from Homer's Greek; Pound begins the *Cantos* by performing Homer. The orality and musicality of Canto I (so manifest in recordings of Pound's own, incantatory, readings of it) intersect with the scholarly study of performance in Homeric poetry.<sup>49</sup> Much as the Homeric Nekuia which it translates, Pound's Canto I gives the dead a fresh voice; this invocation simultaneously re-animates the dead Greek heroes, the Homeric bard, and Anglo-Saxon bards—while translating them into a modern English approximation of Old English verse. Just as quickly as Pound “picks up” Homer, he “puts down” the page torn from his translation of Divus' Latin translation of Homeric poetry.

Returning to the end of the first canto, Pound's first metamorphosis (Homer into a translation from the Old English) propels us forward into the second canto, whose theme is precisely metamorphosis.<sup>50</sup> The first canto ends, “So that:” and we must proceed forward for our conclusion—of thought, of sentence. Narrative conclusion is postponed; we turn the page to find, “Hang it all, Robert Browning, / there can be but the one ‘Sordello’” (2.1 – 2; 6). We jump from one over-layering to another, Homer fading from the foreground until this image passes. Lines 10 – 14 return to the figure of Homer:

And the wave runs in the beach-groove:

“Eleanor, ἑλέναυς and ἐλέπτολις!”

And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,

Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices: ....

(2.10 – 13; 6)

The old men proceed to voice sentiments cobbled from *Iliad* III.155 – 160, where the Trojan elders voice the wisdom of Helen returning “among Grecian faces.” In the passage quoted, Eleanor of Aquitaine merges with Helen of Troy, the connection introduced by the epithet *elenaos*, homophonous with Eleanor. By invocation and accretion, we face a more complex over-layering: Eleanor, Helen, Browning, Aeschylus, Homer, and through it all the narrative

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<sup>48</sup> As Rabaté 1986:40 – 46 demonstrates, Pound worked to incorporate different speeds (of talking, of reading) into the *Cantos*.

<sup>49</sup> Nagy 1996 offers one lucid and concise presentation of the rhapsodic re-composition in performance of Homeric poetry. I thank Richard P. Martin for encouraging me to consider Pound's Canto I not just as a translation (as do most scholars) but also as a performance of epic poetry.

<sup>50</sup> See Davidson 1995:123 – 129 for a detailed examination of Pound's metamorphosis in this Canto II of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Homeric Hymn to Dionysus.

voice of Ezra Pound.<sup>51</sup> Homer and Helen, poet and character, are both present as primordial archetypes. The *topos* of Homer “blind, as a bat,” recalls, in the manner of a fugue, the blind seer Tiresias in the first Canto; literal blindness, in both instances, brings insight—into Odysseus’ homecoming for Tiresias, into the wiles of the beautiful Helen (and Eleanor) for Homer. This over-layering returns, fugue-like, in the seventh canto, which begins:

Eleanor (she spoiled in a British climate)

Ἐλανδροσ and Ἐλέπτολις, and

poor old Homer blind,

blind as a bat,

Ear, ear for the sea-surge;

rattle of old men’s voices.

And then the phantom Rome, ....

(7.1 – 7; 24)

The seventh canto recalls as it varies the second canto; spanning Homer to Pound’s early twentieth-century, it traces the passion of love and poetry’s memorial power.<sup>52</sup> Blind Homer cedes to phantom Rome: omnipresent shades and antecedents. Homer’s proverbial blindness also finds its counterpart in the exquisite music; the references to “beach-groove” and “sea-surge” quoted demonstrate the rhythmic and melodic qualities Pound borrows from Homeric epic. Here Pound’s melodic invention is manifest in the echoing sea, not unlike the Homeric “the turn of the wave and the scutter of receding pebbles.”<sup>53</sup> Homer becomes now the primordial

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<sup>51</sup> Although Cookson 2001:8 traces the Greek adjectives to Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 689 – 90, the invocation is not so simple, as Baumann 2000:86 notes. Pound quotes the first and third adjectives, omitting the second (“man-destroyer,” ἔλανδροσ. Even in quotation, Pound engages in criticism: for the first adjective, ἔλέναυς the manuscript tradition reads ἔλένας; see Fraenkel 1950:1.132 (text and apparatus) and 2.331 *ad loc.* 688. This passage from the second Canto, then, sits at the juncture of citation, interpretation, and translation.

<sup>52</sup> Cookson 2001:18; on 19 he notes that this canto is open to several interpretations. This is especially true as one proceeds through the *Cantos* and the fugal themes accrete beyond the power of any one narrator to control or limit interpretations of them. The seventh Canto revisits these opening lines: “Ἐλέναυς, ἔλανδροσ, ἔλέπτολις / The sea runs in the beach-groove, shaking the floated pebbles, / Eleanor!” (7. 60 – 63; 25), this time with all three Greek epithets in place. As Baumann 2000:86 observes, “manifestations of the female principle can be dangerous,” and the fact that the two women invoked are Helen of Troy and Eleanor of Aquitaine—both famous for their love(s)—reinforces Baumann’s insight.

<sup>53</sup> Cookson 2001:6 quotes this, Pound’s translation of *Odyssey* xiii.220 (... παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης), from Pound’s correspondence.

source of poetic music, of *melopoeia*. In the second canto, the music remains but the figure of Homer recedes; the narrator passes from Scios to Naxos, from Homer to Dionysus' metamorphosis of sailors into fishes.<sup>54</sup> In the seventh canto, Homer remains in the background, the first among a long line of poets to withstand the ravages of devouring time.

As befits a vision of Homer as a primordial source of poetry, Pound invokes Homer these four times at the opening of his own epic *Cantos*; explicit reference to Homer then disappears from Pound's text for sixty-one cantos but does return three more times, fugue-like, in later parts of the *Cantos*. In the course of the "John Adams Cantos," an extended meditation on American history and patriotism spanning cantos 62 to 71, Pound follows Adams in invoking the classical past.<sup>55</sup> Homer here returns:

Mr Pope has conformed it to the notions  
of Englishmen and Americans  
in Tacitus and in Homer, 3 orders, in Greece as in Germany  
and mankind dare not yet think upon

#### CONSTITUTIONS

(68.22 – 26; 395)

Homer stands at the head of a continuum of political systems; three orders (or, we might say, classes) represented in Homeric society, in Tacitus' take on ancient Rome, and in 1930's Germany.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, we find Homer mentioned in Canto 80, at the beginning of a new stanza:

It is said also that Homer was a medic  
who followed the greek armies to Troas  
so in Holland Park they rolled out to beat up Mr Leber  
(restaurantier) to Monsieur Dulac's disgust  
and a navy rolls up to me in Church St. (Kensington End) with:

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<sup>54</sup> As Cookson 2001:6 – 8 explains, Pound refers to Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Scios is Golding's spelling for Chios. The narrator bypasses the island most frequently associated with the birthplace of Homer and heads for Naxos, an island linked in myth with Dionysus and Ariadne.

<sup>55</sup> To give a pertinent example, Canto 68, which concerns us here, begins with a citation of Polybius as quoted by Jonathan Swift, presumably quoted by Adams and now referenced by Pound; see Cookson 2001:92 – 93, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Cantos 52 – 71 were published in 1940.

Yurra Jurrmun!

(80.354 – 359; 517)

Here a medical doctor, a restaurantier, and a poet/artist rub shoulders, conflating banausic and noble occupations.<sup>57</sup> The context of this passage portrays Homer as an outsider, like Mr. Leber, Dulac (addressed with the French title Monsieur), and finally Pound himself, accosted in London as being a German or “szum kind ov a furriner” (80.361; 517). Lastly, Homer is named in Canto 94 when Pound quotes a tag in Greek:

“We are the plant.” said Hugo Rennert

or

as Homer says:

πολλαῖς ιδέαις

not merely set stone

πράττειν ἕκαστον ... οἷ τι δύναται

ἐπὶ τὴν ναῦν ἐσπέρας ἤδη

embarking at sunset.

(94.132 – 139; 652)<sup>58</sup>

Over-layering Homer and Philostratus’ *Apollonius of Tyana*, Pound introduces Greek phrases from the latter while attributing them to the former.<sup>59</sup> The “many shapes” of Homer and of

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<sup>57</sup> I understand “Monsieur Dulac” to be a reference to Edmund Dulac, modernist author and artist of, among other objects, a seal purchased by Pound in 1917 (described at Kenner 1971:247). “Mr Leber” is identified as “a confectioner of Notting Hill in Kensington, London, 1915. The name of the shop, mentioned again [in this same canto] is not known. He was apparently a harmless German victimized by wartime hysteria”; so Terrell 1978 – 1984:II.437. The spelling Leber is perhaps Pound’s rendering of the British pronunciation of the German Liebherr. As for the idea of Homer as a medic, surely Pound is referring to the work of Frölich 1879, although I do not know whether he knew this work directly or indirectly; at the same time, as Constanze Güthenke points out to me, Pound is surely over-layering nineteenth-century Homeric scholarship with some allusion to the fierce and bloody 1915 – 1916 Battle for Gallipoli.

<sup>58</sup> The opening line by Hugo Rennert, University of Pennsylvania professor who taught Pound ancient Greek, is a volley in on-going battles between academics and university administrators. I quote Pound 1960:238 – 239: “I remember Hugo Rennert remarking on some ballyhoo about ‘the plant,’ the U. of Penn. ‘plant’ was, according to the ballyhoo, not to lie idle. Rennert observed on the part of himself and faculty: ‘But damn it we are the plant.’ Naturally the gombeen men weren’t ready for any such outbreak of real humanism.”

Philostratus refers to words of Apollonius to the Smyrnaeans regarding the many and wondrous shapes of the Homeric Zeus.<sup>60</sup> The canto proceeds with “I, Philostratus” performing a Nekuia “on the mound of Achilles,” but this time ““It was not by ditch-digging and sheep’s-guts”” (94. 140 – 145; 652). Fittingly this second Nekuia is the last reference to Homer in the *Cantos*.<sup>61</sup> These last three references to Homer all portray the bard as a source of wisdom—political, medical, or theological. Not unlike Plato’s Ion, Pound’s Homer is here a revered font of technical knowledge, frequently invoked because of his archaic or foundational status.

At the same time Pound praises Homer, he also changes Homer; translation and criticism serve the purpose of Pound’s own epic poem, the *Cantos*. Returning to Canto 1, when Pound turns away from the Homeric Nekuia, the narrator commands, “Lie quiet Divus.” The divine Homer is bid be silent and lie aside, out of the narrator’s way. Pound’s re-performance of Homeric poetry ends and a new narrative voice (one we may wish to identify with Pound himself) continues voicing the text. Homer may be cast aside, but he is not cast off; this Homeric opening to the *Cantos* is a crucial beginning for Pound, emphatically so since the Nekuia episode did not open the Ur-*Cantos* of 1912 but came to occupy the initiatory place as Pound embarked on his epic journey.<sup>62</sup> The first canto situates Pound and the *Cantos* within a tradition of Homeric, specifically Odyssean, poetics: this is an epic which will follow the meandering journey of its hero (here the narrative voice of Ezra Pound himself) as it seeks to embrace and order the known world. Unlike Homeric epics, however, Pound’s *Cantos* begins with a retrospective glance. Tellingly, Pound’s Nekuia has Tiresias asking, “A second time? why? man of ill star” (1.60; 4); the “second time” translates Divus’ *iterum*, an approximate crib for the Greek αἵτε in *Odyssey* 11.93 (perhaps produced under the influence of Virgil’s twofold *bis* at *Aeneid* 6.134). The “second time” also points to the narrative voice of Ezra Pound being interpellated by the shade of Tiresias: “The first time he was a Greek hero looking for his home; this time he is an American poet living in European exile. ... The roots of the future are buried in the past,” as Wilmer observes.<sup>63</sup> Although the *Cantos* begin *in medias res*, this opening is an extended fragment, a page torn from the tradition of Homeric epic. A new epic begins with a backwards glance, a “weeding out” (to use Pound’s phrase), a “throwing out the entire work

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<sup>59</sup> Cookson 2001:208 provides exact citations for the Greek quoted.

<sup>60</sup> Cookson 2001:208 quotes this passage; the reference is to Philostratus 4. 7.

<sup>61</sup> To be precise, this is the third Nekuia; in the manuscripts Pound referred to Canto 74 as a Nekuia, although the title does not survive in the printed collection of cantos. With only two Nekuiai in the *Cantos* (admittedly, as the text stands), there is added weight to the line spoken (presumably) by Tiresias in Canto I: “A second time?...”

<sup>62</sup> This shift occurred sometime between 1919 and 1925, the latter being the publication date of *A Draft of XVI Cantos*; see the stemma constructed by Taylor in Rainey, ed. 1997:247, reproduced herein as figure 1.

<sup>63</sup> Wilmer 1997:138.

done by generations and generations of artists, scholars and men of affairs.... [to] return to arbitrarily selected primal sources.”<sup>64</sup> The Nekuia, I would argue, is not an arbitrary selection. Pound firmly believed this part of the Homeric epic to be the ur-“record / the palimpsest” (116.9; 795); as he wrote to W. H. D. Rouse, “The Nekuia shouts aloud that it is older than the rest, all that island, Cretan, etc., hinter-time, that is not Praxiteles, not Athens or Pericles, but Odysseus.”<sup>65</sup> Canto I traces an arc of history from the earliest stratum of the ancient epics to Pound’s own visit to the underworld; the tradition is then cast aside before Tiresias can prophecy Pound’s homecoming. This creative translation of the Homeric Nekuia partakes of Pound’s Modernist poetics; here Pound “makes it new” by “making it old.” That is to say, Pound’s Modernist innovation is to return “the proper archaic flavour” to the Nekuia “by a stylistic sleight-of-hand, i.e. by over-layering it with suggestions of a ‘hinter-time’ relative to the history of English literature.”<sup>66</sup> Pound further “makes it new” by re-animating the tradition of rhapsodic performance of Homeric poetry; yet even as the tradition of re-composition in performance kept Homeric epic alive as an oral tradition for centuries, Pound breaks off his own Homeric performance to signal the absence of any such continuity (oral, poetic, or otherwise) in his fragmented Modernist world. The *Cantos* are marked by a plurality of voices, both ventriloquized (as seems to be the case with the opening of Canto I) and read (as in the page ripped from Pound’s English translation of Divus’ Latin translation of the Homeric *Odyssey*). Rhapsodic performance cedes to Pound’s own, virtuosic performance of Western history and literature since Dante—all the more compelling for being, ultimately, unresolved. Lastly, the *Cantos* begin with a visit to the dead in the underworld; for “a poem containing history” (Pound’s definition of his epic) to begin with the spirits of the predecessors is telling. Homer stands at the beginning of the inherited poetic tradition which has shaped European culture; Pound acknowledges this debt in Canto I by returning to the beginning (via a doubly-displaced translation) and re-articulating it in order to move into the future (of epic, of World literature).<sup>67</sup> This is a translated, re-performed re-writing (or, indeed, re-working) of Homer; the dead offer

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<sup>64</sup> Baumann 2000:93.

<sup>65</sup> Letter to Rouse dated 23 May 1935; Paige 1951:363.

<sup>66</sup> Baumann 2000:88.

<sup>67</sup> Durant 1981:53 remarks: “The *Cantos* calls upon both a trans-historical fixity of interpretation for quoted texts, and yet also a historical mutability to be resisted in the project of ‘making new.’ This ‘making new’ can only be achieved by a writer who, controlling the effects of his writing through all the heterogeneous instances of reading, is able by reworking ancient texts to align new effects with those from an original historical conjuncture.” Rather than seeing a trans-historical fixity of interpretation in the texts Pound quotes, as does Durant, I would argue that the quoted texts possess a degree of importance which is trans-historical; it is thus not the interpretation which is unchanging but the trans-historical assignment of value (a loaded term for Pound) to the quoted texts. Even as the precise value assigned, by a culture or cultures, to a given text changes, the fact that the text is valuable remains constant through time.



suggestive models but do not dictate future courses of action, poetic or otherwise. The Homeric Nekuia becomes a precedent authorizing Pound's own over-layering, his "palimpsest."<sup>68</sup>

Thus far, I have commented upon the meanings associated with Homer through the course of Pound's *Cantos*; now it is time to step away from Pound's words and text so that we may see how Pound is a paradigmatic text for the horizon of expectations inhering in the name Homer in twentieth-century English-language poetry. In this respect, I am following the work of Hans Robert Jauss. As Hardwick observes, Jauss is one of the three theoretical touchstones for reception studies; I find Jauss useful in this context because of his insistence upon the changing role of a work of literature in the minds of addressees, conceived as active participants in the historical life of a literary work.<sup>69</sup> In his own words:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence: "words that must, at the same time that they speak to him, create an interlocutor capable of understanding them."<sup>70</sup>

Jauss opposes readings which find in a literary work some timeless and unchanging essence—an idea oft promulgated by the construction of literary canons or discourses of classicism. Thus I find an idea such as Werner Jaeger's notion that Homer was the Bible of the Greeks to be of limited value; even theological understandings change over time.<sup>71</sup> As we saw at the beginning of this paper, ancient Greeks contested the values and meanings inhering in the figure of Homer and of Homeric poetry; we find similar contests staged in twentieth-century poetry. By bracketing off English-language poetry of the twentieth-century we can situate Pound's *Cantos* in its historical perspective. Unlike Jauss's study of such scandalous works as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, we cannot limit Pound to one year; sixty-odd years

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<sup>68</sup> I repeat Pound's term guardedly. Because of the complexity of Pound's poetics of translation, citation, allusion—begging, borrowing, stealing—I would rather refrain from using the term palimpsest, articulated within a critical vocabulary by Genette 1982 as a less complex process whereby hypotexts are easily discernible and the aim is humorous. As readers of Pound know, many passages of the *Cantos* are so over-layered only Ezra Pound himself may have known all the hypotexts involved. Further, although Pound uses humor, unlike a parody or pastiche, his ultimate goal is not humorous but serious.

<sup>69</sup> Hardwick 2003:7 – 8, Jauss 1982b:19. For one relevant example of Jauss' method in practice see Jauss 1982a:263 – 293, specifically "La douceur du foyer: lyric poetry of the year 1857 as a model for the communication of social norms"; more briefly see Jauss' remarks on *Madame Bovary* at 1982b:27 – 28.

<sup>70</sup> Jauss 1982b:21, quoting G. Picon, *Introduction à une esthétique de la littérature*.

<sup>71</sup> In this regard, see the perceptive remarks of Ellen Aitken in this volume.

of poetry are synchronous with Pound's *Cantos*. Thus, in what follows I will be arguing for a synchronicity of a century's duration. I make no claims that each of the poets referred to in the balance of this paper knew or read Pound's *Cantos*; this is then not so much an argument about direct literary affiliation as it is about the larger cultural reception of Homer in a span of time which overlaps, in part, and succeeds, in part, Pound's own reception of Homer. Since the scope of twentieth-century English-language poetry is vast, thanks to the global spread of English and the proliferation of the printed word, in what follows I have relied upon a computerized search; while the full-text database "Literature Online" aims to be comprehensive, I make no claims for its being exhaustive. Searching this database for poems containing the word "Homer" published between 1900 and 2000 by poets living during that same period returns 419 entries and 543 hits.

<sup>72</sup> The examples cited below, drawn from these results, I take to be indicative of this corpus of poetry.

While Pound's complex and lengthy *Cantos* touches upon the seven different meanings of "Homer," other poets, typically (although not exclusively) in shorter works, tend to invoke these meanings one at a time. To recapitulate our reading of Pound's *Cantos* above, we have seen Homer signify:

- all of ancient Greece (where Homer stands in metonymically for the culture which produced him and his poetry);
- the beginnings of poetry (and, at times, civilization);
- the poetry of war (both its humanity and its inhumanity), especially the *Iliad*;
- the poetry of journeys, such as Odysseus' in the *Odyssey*;
- a poetic genius, acknowledged master of the craft and the mark against which all subsequent poetry is measured (especially the musical use of language);
- an epic poet; &
- a traditional poet, employing rhythm and metre as opposed to free verse.

Of these meanings, arguably all but the last are applicable to invocations of Homer in poetry of earlier time-periods; with the rise of free verse (of which Pound himself was a proponent), Homer in the twentieth-century acquires this additional stratum of signification. This scheme is clearer in the abstract than in the actual poems, as was the case with Pound's *Cantos*; the stratigraphy of Homers in the following examples is less clear-cut, with invocations of Homer being over-determined in many instances. The name of Homer, like Empson's complex words, have layers of meanings;<sup>73</sup> I have grouped the examples under what I consider to be the most

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<sup>72</sup> A difference between these numbers reflects multiple invocations (or, hits) in one poem (or, entry). I accessed this database through McMaster University's Mills Library; Literature Online © 1996-2005 ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

<sup>73</sup> I am here referring to Empson 1951. In an earlier version of this paper, I analyzed the name "Homer" as a complex word in these poems. That approach, I now believe, does not capture the

prominent signification. In the following paragraphs, I survey poems which support these readings, both of Pound and of the significations just attributed to Homer; under each rubric I have chosen examples with the objective of spanning time and space.<sup>74</sup> While this survey must perforce be cursory, I have quoted from the poems to contextualize my claims as much as space allows.

Just as the name Homer becomes a metonymic reference for the Homeric poems in ancient Greece, so too does the name of Homer become a metonym for all of ancient Greek culture and literature, especially within poetic discourse. Olga Broumas, a Greek-born poet living in America and writing in English, makes this connection clear in her poem “The Massacre.”<sup>75</sup> This poem begins with “I understand Xerxes’ command to wield the whips / on the intractable, bereaving apron of the sea” and proceeds to express the narrator’s outrage at the massacres and wars committed worldwide, ending “What I don’t understand / holds us back.” Within this framework Homer stands for the Greek world, here understood less as the modern nation-state than as the extent of Greek speaking peoples in the Eastern Mediterranean in classical antiquity:

I hate the arrogant  
poet who last night remarked  
how much the natives recollect their wars  
beside the birthplace of the ancient  
memory he came to paste  
onto his suitcase between Rome  
and Istanbul, Berlin, New York, a gaggle of invaders

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full complexity of these poetic invocations of Homer, since this name is arguably more complex than a “complex word,” being also a trope, a body of poetry, and a master poet. From Empson’s analysis I preserve the idea of multiple meanings being present simultaneously, of “over-determined invocations” of Homer.

<sup>74</sup> In what follows, I acknowledge the limitations imposed on this survey by the span of Literature Online. At present, this database offers more comprehensive coverage of the post-World War II period, especially for North America, Britain, and Ireland. I have attempted to counteract these limitations. Obviously more work remains to be done in the receptions of Homer in Africa, Australasia, and the Caribbean; the *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* conference at The Open University (May, 2004) laid the groundwork for this future research (select papers forthcoming, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> This poem was published in the 1989 collection *Perpetua* and is now available in the collected volume *Rave*; see Broumas 1999:240 – 243.

around the nameless, dusty, unmarked shore  
young Homer roamed.

The larger context of this poem recalls the *Iliad*, even as this specific passage of voyages recalls the *Odyssey*. By choosing Homer rather than a poet such as Cavafy, Broumas reduces modern Greece (indeed, all of post-classical Greece) to ancient Greece; the opening reference to Xerxes reinforces this metonymic reduction, and it is only some nine lines after those quoted that we find ourselves in twentieth-century Greece under German occupation—“The fabled / light of Athens shone / on the protruding bone” of a boy’s arm “cracked” by two Germans.<sup>76</sup> Broumas invokes Homer here, a poet who is no longer the icon of any single literary tradition (an apt choice in light of Broumas’s theme of massacres). A simpler, yet similar, invocation occurs at the beginning of the century, in Edward William Thomson’s 1909 “The Many-Mansioned House”: “Ere Homer sang from shore to shore.” In a survey of the progress of world civilization, Homer stands in for all of Greece.<sup>77</sup> As a second example, consider “The Lyre Degenerate,” published 1903 by the Canadian poet Wilfred Campbell, which opens “Vanished the golden Homer, / Vanished the great god Pan, / Vanished the mighty mind of Greece, / The ancient visions of man.”<sup>78</sup> Homer is equated with the “mighty mind of Greece” in Campbell’s melancholic nostalgia for lost songs of greatness, and signifies all of ancient Greek literature—a lost “golden age” of poetry which Campbell, in this plea to be wakened “unto my highest, my best, / Or waken me not at all” (to quote the poem’s concluding verses), seeks to regain. While Campbell bemoans the lowered state of poetry, he evidently considers himself on a par with the great classics named in “The Lyre Degenerate,” a worthy heir and successor to the ancient Greece for which Homer stands (among other luminaries). As a third example, I offer Hugh MacDiarmid’s “England is Our Enemy,” which bookends:

The glorious names of all the imaginative writers  
From Homer to the Brothers Grimm,  
From Flaubert back to Apuleius,  
From Catullus to Turgenev,  
All these form the glories of Europe,

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<sup>76</sup> Broumas is playing with time in this section; the “fabled” light of Athens would transport us to ancient times, but the “protruding bone” recalls the “Two Germans walking home one dusk” four lines earlier; belatedly those Germans are placed in space and time.

<sup>77</sup> Thomson 1909:3. Thomson’s poem has social Darwinist implications and partakes of racial discourses of the early twentieth century which are highly inflammatory today; for this reason I have only quoted the one line in isolation.

<sup>78</sup> Campbell 1905:42; the poem continues to page 45.

Their works going together to make one whole, ....<sup>79</sup>

Homer represents ancient Greece as well as epic poetry; the pairing with the Brothers Grimm also creates a genealogy of folklore, of which Homer is the precursor. In these examples we see how the poet Homer comes to stand in for the poetic tradition and the culture which produced it.

The second signification of Homer, the beginnings of poetry, is at times closely allied with the first; under this heading I group both those assessments which positively praise Homer for his innovation and those which negatively view Homer as a simpler predecessor. As do the centos of Eudocia mentioned earlier, these are poems which refer to Homer by way of returning to the source or origin of poetry, much as Pound returned to what he perceived as the oldest stratum of Homeric epic. In Iain Crichton Smith's "For John Maclean, Headmaster, and Classical and Gaelic Scholar," Homer is positively associated with the beginnings of culture: "it was the case that Homer lived / in our fluorescence, that Ulysses homed / through our stained and plaguey light, that Hector grieved / in his puncturable armor." This flowering of Greece in Homer's age is a precious flower which John Maclean kept alive in a less fertile age as one "who knows / that what protects us from the animals / is language healthy as a healthy pulse."<sup>80</sup> Thanks to Maclean's philological activities, this language remained healthy; since Crichton Smith is writing this poem some forty years after Maclean's death, the idea of a decline from Homer's age (and from Maclean's) is thus reinforced. An earlier poem is more optimistic about preserving Homeric poetry; e. e. cummings responded to some of Pound's early cantos in his "[pound pound pound]" from the 1920s, addressing Ezra Pound "Speak speak thou Fearful guest; tell me, immediate / child of Homer."<sup>81</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century Bliss Carman uses Homer in a genealogical metaphor in "At the Road-House" (1903): "the brood who sprang / From Homer through a hundred lands / Singers of songs on all men's lips, / Tellers of tales in all men's ears, ...."<sup>82</sup> This poem envisions a road-house gathering admitting the newly deceased Stevenson (to whose memory the poem is dedicated); of the many authors invoked by name in this short poem, Homer stands in for all of ancient Greece, as well as for bards and folklorists. The progenitor of a worldwide brood, Homer is here construed as the beginning of a long lineage of classics. Similarly the poet Manmohan Ghose invokes Homer as an early poet and wise-man, in his series *Immortal Eve (Songs of the triumph and the mystery of Beauty)*:

Long ere I dared the prize of you,

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<sup>79</sup> MacDiarmid 1994:870. The poem first appeared in his 1950 collection, *A Vision of World Language*.

<sup>80</sup> Crichton Smith 1981:139 – 140. This poem first appeared in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

<sup>81</sup> This poem was not published during Cummings' lifetime and can be found at Cummings 1983:96.

<sup>82</sup> Carman 1929:185 – 186.

'Twas piracy, I swear,  
Arctinus or great Homer's self  
Dreamed of your beauty rare.

Already you were Sparta's queen  
And I the Phrygian boy,  
When to our future fame he fired  
And sang the fall of Troy.

He fabled surely. How should towers  
Crash for a woman's face,  
Or to a hair-brained headstrong lad  
Kingdoms their ruin trace?

With deep sad insight sure he sang,  
Life sobs the echoed truth,  
You beauty's dear illusion were  
And I was flaming youth.<sup>83</sup>

In an example of over-layering of antecedents similar to Pound, Ghose's narrator addresses Eve and sees in Homer's Helen an incarnation of "immortal Eve," and in himself "great Homer's self." Homer is here a metonymic reference to the greatness of Greek epic poetry and the "future fame" which it preserves for the ancient Greek heroes, and also a paradigm of the fabulist; this is both a positive and a negative invocation, thanks to Ghose's idea of immortality (hinted at in this passage) which views Homeric epic in slanting Christian light.<sup>84</sup> The negative view of Homer as the beginnings of poetry is often linked to a theory of progress and advance. One early

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<sup>83</sup> Ghose 1974:245 – 246.

<sup>84</sup> The use of "our" in "our future fame" is the clearest signal in the verses quoted of this idea of immortality. The speaker addresses Eve, Helen-qua-Eve, and Ghose's own beloved; these three women, really three manifestations of one immortal Eve, plus the narrator himself, are the antecedent of this "our."

expression of this idea is in the widely circulated *Ars Poetica* of Horace (358 – 359): *et idem / indignor quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*, It saddens me that even Homer nods.<sup>85</sup> The nodding of Homer, the tension between the poet's greatness and his slips, has become its own *topos*; one recent example is from A. R. Ammons, *Glare*, a book-length apocalyptic poem which observes, "if Homer can nod, I can have / narcolepsy."<sup>86</sup> While Homer's nods are traditionally considered the human slips of a divine poet, so overlooked for that reason, Ammons turns this *topos* around and wills for forgetfulness in the face of the bleak visions which haunt *Glare*.

The third signification of Homer, the poet of war (especially associated with the *Iliad*), has greater currency at the beginning and end of the twentieth century, so the poems I cite will cluster around those times.<sup>87</sup> In his poem "Lincoln" (published in 1903) the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar praised the former president (and the man who emancipated the poet's parents): "Grave Lincoln came, strong handed, from afar, / The mighty Homer of the lyre of war."<sup>88</sup> This "mighty Master of the mighty lyre" taught Earth by "thy strains of fire: / Earth learned of thee what Heav'n already knew, / And wrote thee down among her treasured few." Like Homer's selection of one episode near the end of the Trojan War in the *Iliad*, Lincoln authors the end of the war and is the mightier for it. Joyce Kilmer, writing in 1918, is less sanguine about war poetry; the narrator of "The Proud Poet" addresses a Devil who appears "one winter night" and sits upon the bed. The narrator rejects the Devil's proffered domestic task of sewing in favor of poetry; among the martial poets called upon in defense of this decision, "There was the poet Homer had the sorrow to be blind / Yet a hundred people with good eyes would listen to him all night / For they took great enjoyment in the heaven of his mind."<sup>89</sup> Homer is invoked after a lineage of military poets ranging from King Solomon to Rubert Brook; Homer's divine poetry makes tales of war entertaining and more than adequately compensates for the poverty of his blindness. Laurence Binyon's "Gallipoli" (a poem written in the wake of the 1915 – 1916 Battle of Gallipoli) likewise moves from Homeric wars to modern:

Isles of the Aegean, Troy, and waters of Hellespont!

You we have known from of old,

Since boyhood stammering glorious Greek was entranced

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<sup>85</sup> As an example of how widely Horace's text circulates, I quote J. D. McClatchy's translation in his collection of critical essays *Twenty Questions* 1998:193, which was released simultaneously with his poetry collection *Ten Commandments*.

<sup>86</sup> Ammons 1997:25; this is the opening of Part 1, Strip, § 8.

<sup>87</sup> The existence of Simone Weil's treatise, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, demonstrates that the idea of Homer as the poet of war remained prevalent in mid-century, but is not expressed in poetry.

<sup>88</sup> Dunbar 1993:184.

<sup>89</sup> Kilmer 1918:I. 135.

In the tale that Homer told. ...

ut now shall our boyhood learn to tell a new tale,

.... Deeds of this our own day...<sup>90</sup>

Homeric epic offers a way to conceive of the Great War, and grant nobility to the soldierly sacrifice. Moving to the latter part of the century, there is less nobility in Homer's martial music. Ted Hughes, in "Criminal Ballad" from his 1971 collection *Crow* mentions Homeric war poetry as an indicator of a man's learning, fading from him as he loses consciousness and dies: "An old man pulled from under the crush of metal / Gazed towards the nearby polished shoes / And slowly forgot the deaths in Homer."<sup>91</sup> More recently, Alicia Ostriker writes in her 1989 "The Death Ghazals": "Heroes lay with the ash-spears through their brains / And Homer sang of them, striking the harp."<sup>92</sup> Homer's military epic maintains the cycle of "the clean dead refresh[ing] the ground"; Ostriker indicts this cycle which began so long ago and continues in contemporary wars conducted in the name of religion. Lastly, Jorie Graham in "Manifest Destiny" sets the scene of the poem's second section in a "Peach Orchard, Shiloh Battlefield" where a man and a woman have sex while on the sidelines "For the first time since Homer . . . whispers his open book, / spine up to the light."<sup>93</sup> As the century progresses, poets seem less inclined to view war nobly; Dunbar's mighty Homer leads to Ostriker's gruesome dead and Graham's renunciation of the death of war for the joys of life.

The fourth signification of Homer, the poet of journeys (especially the *Odyssey*), complements the previous, taking its cue now from the *Odyssey*; Pound's *Cantos* makes this point clearly by embarking on a journey with the Nekuia fragment. In Robert Bridges's 1921 poem "Cheddar Pinks" the journey is a mental one which begins with the narrator "Mid the squander'd colour / idling as I lay / Reading the *Odyssey* / in my rock-garden." From reading and rocks the narrator's thoughts wander:

There as I lay along

idling with my thoughts

Reading an old poet

while the busy world

Toil'd moil'd fuss'd and scurried

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<sup>90</sup> Binyon 1931:224.

<sup>91</sup> Hughes 1971:27.

<sup>92</sup> Ostriker 1989:35.

<sup>93</sup> Graham 1995:186 – 188.



worried bought and sold  
Plotted stole and quarrel'd  
fought and God knows what.  
I had forgotten Homer  
dallying with my thoughts  
Till I fell to making  
these little verses....<sup>94</sup>

The Homeric epic of journeys inspires this transport from the idyllic world of the narrator's garden. The idea of war forms part of the background to Bridges's poem; the coming Second World War is similarly in the background to Lawrence Durrell's "At Epidaurus." Praise of the ancient world and lament over modern intrusions into such places as Epidaurus ("this world which is not our world") ends:

The somnambulists walk again in the north  
With the long black rifles, to bring us answers.  
Useless a morality for slaves: useless  
The shouting at echoes to silence them.  
Most useless inhabitants of the kind blue air,  
Four ragged travellers in Homer.  
All causes with the great Because.<sup>95</sup>

Here Homer inspires a literal journey; the mental transport is passage back to ancient times, although such imaginative travellers are useless in the predicament of modern Greece, as Durrell acknowledges. The ways in which Homer can stand for journeys is perhaps best crystalized in John Ingram's "Streams" (1900), a two-sonnet sequence; the second opens: "Yes! all the noblest of the tuneful train / Lov'd running waters and have sung their praise. / Xanthus and Simois in old Homer's lays / Still rush in whirling eddies to the main."<sup>96</sup> Physical geography is placed on

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<sup>94</sup> Bridges 1953:507 – 508. Cheddar pinks are a pungent variety of the flower *dianthus*.

<sup>95</sup> Durrell 1985:98. Written in 1941, this poem was first published in 1943.

<sup>96</sup> Ingram 1900:75. Binyon's "Gallipoli," 1931:224 – 225, cited earlier, similarly invokes cultural geography in its opening lines, demonstrating again how these various meanings of Homer overlap in individual poems.

the cultural map by Homer's art, and there it remains as long as the poems endure, invitations to a reader's own journeys across time and space.

The fifth signification of Homer, poetic genius, is implicit in every poem cited; the following poems ostensibly name Homer's poetic genius. This set of meanings is not unlike those Ion ascribes to Homer in Plato's dialogue, regarding Homer a genius by virtue of being a performer of wisdom. Ambrose Bierce's "The Passing of Shepherd" (1903) chronicles the death of a Robin Hood figure; in the midst of this tale of "a grief that's half remorse" Bierce quotes (presumably words of "Boss" Shepherd, although this is not clear) the anecdote of Homer's poverty:

"Seven Grecian cities claim great Homer dead,  
Through which the living Homer begged his bread."  
"Neglected genius!"—that is sad indeed,  
But malice better would ignore than heed,  
And Shepherd's soul, we rightly may suspect,  
Prayed often for the mercy of neglect ....<sup>97</sup>

Bierce's poem is not alone in portraying Homer as the suffering genius; indeed the quoted "Neglected genius" is a commonplace response to the translated Greek epigram quoted before it, suggesting that Bierce is here being slyly ironic. Madison Julius Cawein praises Homer for his musicality, writing in his "In Middle Spring" a horticultural excursus on literary genres:

So, ho! for the rose, the Romeo rose,  
And the lyric it hides in its heart!  
And, oh, for the epic the oak-tree knows,  
Sonorous as Homer in art!  
And it's ho! for the prose of the weed that grows  
Green-writing Earth's commonest part!<sup>98</sup>

Homeric sonority is not limited to the resounding sea of which Pound is so fond; here it embraces the rustle of oak trees, and becomes an organic extension of the earth. The interface of nature and poetics resurfaces in "Summer Solstice":

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<sup>97</sup> Bierce 1910:198.

<sup>98</sup> Cawein 1911:13.

Orioles live in the elms, and in classical verse  
the length of the vowels alone determines the measure.  
Once and once only a year nature knows quantity  
stretched to the limit, as in Homer's meter.<sup>99</sup>

The equation of Homer's poetic genius with nature demonstrates how accepted and prevalent this idea is; the great antiquity of Homeric poetry may, in some circumstances, also link it to ideas of natural perfection.

The sixth signification of Homer, metonymic representative for all epic poetry, carries both positive and negative connotations depending on the poet's relationship to the genre of epic. Sappho fragment 16 encapsulates this tension, rejecting epic themes while retaining epic myths; a similar ambivalence obtains in more recent poems. In his lyric poem of 1951, "The Sirens," Lawrence Durrell describes the siren-song of poetry, concluding "Homer and Milton: both were punished in their gift."<sup>100</sup> Homer, unmoored from ancient Greek culture, joins Milton as representative of the genre of epic; for this exacting genre the sirens exact a punishing price. Similarly, in her 1996 "Getting the Message," Maxine Kumin presents a tripartite foundation for epic: "I like my Bible tales, like Scotch, straight up / incontrovertible as Dante's trip / through seven circles, Milton's map / of Paradise or Homer's wine-dark epic."<sup>101</sup> Meditating upon the flame of divine election, Kumin still takes delight in the power of tales and epics. Anne Waldman fights against Homer in her epic, *Iovis* (1997). Virgil can be dismissed as the "not-so-great-as Homer sophisticate Latin poet, stealing fire from his Greek models" but this dismissal comes at the beginning of a section of Waldman's own epic written "in part in partial Latin, in art of Latin" as she stretches the bounds of the genre.<sup>102</sup> While her poem has very little in common with Homeric epic, it still exists under the tangible shade of Homer.

The seventh, and final, signification of Homer, as a traditional poet, presents Homer as an inherited classic, both good and bad. This is not unlike the fragment of Xenophanes I mentioned at the beginning of this paper; there is no denying the tradition of Homer, even when one

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<sup>99</sup> Text from Kunitz 1971:25, but marked "from Osip Mandelstam." This volume, *The Testing-Tree*, is a collection of poems by Kunitz with seven translated fragments interspersed throughout the volume. The note at Kunitz 1971:65 identifies this as a translation of an "early lyric by Mandelstam," which Kunitz translated with the assistance of Andrew Field; the text of the Russian original, with a different English translation, can be found in Mandel'shtam 1973:40 – 41, where this poem is dated to 1914. Despite the "from" in Kunitz's note, his poem translates the full Russian text.

<sup>100</sup> Durrell 1985:220.

<sup>101</sup> Kumin 1996:27.

<sup>102</sup> Waldman 1997:197.

disagrees with that same tradition. This is not to say that Homer, or the traditions upholding and promulgating him, has not been a positive cultural icon. In this respect Lionel Pigot Johnson's 1892 "The Classics" encapsulates *obiter dicta* of generations of teachers: "Fain to know golden things, fain to grow wise," it begins and forty-four verses later this one-sentence recital of Classical authors and their virtues ends, "And Homer, grand against the ancient morn."<sup>103</sup> Here Homer is ensconced as an anachronistic classic, against which idea Jauss writes. George Meredith expresses similar ideas, this time from a vantage point more familiar to generations of pupils, in his 1909 "The Point of Taste": "Unhappy poets of a sunken prime! / You to reviewers are as ball to bat. / They shadow you with Homer, knock you flat / With Shakespeare...."<sup>104</sup> Homer represents the tradition of rhyme, the unattainable standards of poetical taste. This idea spans the century in question. Returning to Anne Waldman's *Iovis* we find a riff on this idea: "The Joyces, Catherine & Alex, are going to Naples to clear up their inheritance from Uncle Homer, a bachelor of great taste (obvious irony of names and play on Ulysses. Uncle Homer is instigator, perpetrator of their voyage)."<sup>105</sup> Over-layering Homer and Joyce, the entire tradition of "great taste" and the bachelor-like sterility that tradition implies, Waldman engages in her own, complex poetics of fragmentation and assemblage. I will end this survey here, since this final example returns us to the earlier reading of Pound's *Cantos*, a complex Modernist epic of fragmentation which prefigures Waldman's post-modernist epic on similar themes.

I began with Ezra Pound's repetition of the findings of W. H. D. Rouse on the persistence of Homeric tales. Like these tales, the Homeric poems, indeed the figure of Homer, continue to circulate and have long since become loosed from their moorings in ancient Greece. Homer remains a potent figure, albeit a contested one. As my reading of Pound's *Cantos* demonstrates, the phenomenon of Homer is now so complex and polyvalent that Homer can signify differently. From the fixed canon of ancient Greek literature, Homer now figures in ever-expanding literary horizons. Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1992) is a Caribbean epic which revisits these Homeric horizons while demonstrating the ability of Homeric poetry to inspire more poems, more receptions, more re-visions of ancient epic.<sup>106</sup> Just as poets inherit these antecedent assumptions of Homer, so too do scholars (consciously or not). By tracing the horizon of expectations of Homer in twentieth-century poetic receptions, I have shown how Homer is altered yet persistent:

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<sup>103</sup> Johnson 1953:103 – 104.

<sup>104</sup> Meredith 1919:188.

<sup>105</sup> Waldman 1997:237.

<sup>106</sup> I regret that space constraints prevent me from discussing Walcott's *Omeros* here in detail; I have written on Walcott's use of the Classical past (primarily in his 1973 book-length autobiographical poem, *Another Life*) in "A Divided Child, or Derek Walcott's Postcolonial Philology," forthcoming in Lorna Hardwick, ed., *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (Oxford University Press). See also the Spring 1997 issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (96, 2), edited by Gregson Davis on intertextual perspectives on Walcott's *Omeros*.

the significations change, but the figure remains a constant. Now I invite scholars to contemplate the horizon of their understandings, and assumptions, of Homer.

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Armstrong, Richard and Dué, Casey, eds, Classics@ Issue 3. For the full citation for this article please consult <a href="http://www.chs.harvard.edu/publications.sec/classics.ssp">www.chs.harvard.edu/publications.sec/classics.ssp</a> .
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