

Commentary On The English Translation Of Robert Fitzgerald

Robert Fitzgerald's English translation of the Iliad, first published in 1974, has been widely praised for its readability, accuracy, and faithfulness to the original Greek text. However, some critics have argued that Fitzgerald's translation is too literal and misses the beauty and grandeur of Homer's poetry.

In this article, we will take a closer look at Fitzgerald's translation of the Iliad, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of his approach through a critical analysis of key passages. We will also compare Fitzgerald's translation to other notable English translations of the Iliad, such as those by Richmond Lattimore and Alexander Pope.



A Guide to The Odyssey: A Commentary on the English Translation of Robert Fitzgerald by Dante Alighieri

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Accuracy and Faithfulness

One of the most important criteria for evaluating a translation is its accuracy and faithfulness to the original text. Fitzgerald's translation of the Iliad is generally considered to be one of the most accurate and faithful English translations available. He takes great care to render the original Greek text as literally as possible, while still maintaining the readability and flow of the English language.

For example, in the opening lines of the Iliad, Homer describes the wrath of Achilles as "a grievous plague" that brought countless sorrows upon the Greeks. Fitzgerald translates this passage as follows:



***“Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus;
His baneful wrath that brought ten thousand woes
Upon the Greeks, and sent untimely down
To Hades many valiant souls, and gave
Their flesh to dogs and birds to be devoured.”***

As you can see, Fitzgerald's translation is very literal, following the original Greek text closely. He uses words like "baneful" and "untimely" that are not commonly used in modern English, but which are faithful to the original Greek. He also avoids using poetic devices like alliteration or assonance, which would have made the translation less faithful to the original.

However, some critics have argued that Fitzgerald's literal approach results in a translation that is too dry and academic. They argue that Fitzgerald sacrifices the beauty and grandeur of Homer's poetry in order to achieve accuracy. For example, in the following passage, Homer describes the Greek warriors marching into battle:

“

***“And as when a fire falls upon a great forest on the hills,
And the wind seizes on it and drives it along,
And the trees fall crashing before the fierce blast,
So beneath the tread of the warriors the earth groaned.”***

Fitzgerald translates this passage as follows:

“

***“As when a forest fire devours a mountain range,
And in the wind's grip races on and on,
And tree by tree crashes as roars the blast,
So under the men's tread the earth groaned out.”***

As you can see, Fitzgerald's translation is very literal, but it lacks the vivid imagery and energy of Homer's original. He uses words like "devours" and "races" that are not as evocative as Homer's words, and he breaks up the long, flowing lines of the original into shorter, more choppy lines.

Readability and Flow

In addition to accuracy and faithfulness, another important criterion for evaluating a translation is its readability and flow. Fitzgerald's translation of the Iliad is generally considered to be one of the most readable and fluent English translations available. He uses clear, concise language and avoids archaic or obscure words. He also takes care to create a smooth, flowing rhythm that makes the translation easy to read aloud.

For example, in the following passage, Homer describes the Greek warriors preparing for battle:

““

***“And now from their ships and from their tents they poured,
Like bees that stream forever from a hollow rock,
Cluster on cluster issuing, and the meadow flowers
Are loud with humming.”***

Fitzgerald translates this passage as follows:

““

***“And now they swarmed forth from their ships and shelters,
As when bees stream out in steady clouds
From some hollow rock, and hang in clusters there,
And loud the meadows hum with their pouring.”***

As you can see, Fitzgerald's translation is very readable and fluent. He uses clear, concise language and avoids archaic or obscure words. He also creates a smooth, flowing rhythm that makes the translation easy to read aloud.

However, some critics have argued that Fitzgerald's focus on readability and flow sometimes leads him to sacrifice accuracy and faithfulness. For example, in the following passage, Homer describes the Greek warriors fighting in close combat:

““

***“And they hacked each other with their keen swords,
And the air was thick with the smell of blood.”***

Fitzgerald translates this passage as follows:

“

***“Their hacked swords made a godawful mess,
And the air stunk with gore.”***

As you can see, Fitzgerald's translation is more readable and fluent than Homer's original. However, he also sacrifices some of the accuracy and faithfulness of the original text. For example, he replaces the more neutral word "hacked" with the more graphic word "hacked," and he adds the slang term "godawful" to make the passage more colloquial.

Comparison to Other Translations

In addition to Fitzgerald's translation, there are many other notable English translations of the Iliad. Two of the most popular are the translations by Richmond Lattimore and Alexander Pope.

Lattimore's translation is known for its accuracy and faithfulness to the original Greek text. He takes great care to render the original Greek text as literally as possible, while still maintaining the readability and flow of the English language. His translation is often used by scholars and students who want to get as close as possible to the original Greek text.

Pope's translation is known for its beauty and grandeur. He does not take as literal an approach as Fitzgerald or Lattimore, but he instead focuses on

creating a translation that is both accurate and poetic. His translation is often used by readers who want to enjoy the Iliad as a work of literature.

Here is a comparison of the three translations of the opening lines of the Iliad:

Translation	Lines
Fitzgerald	Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles; His baneful wrath that brought ten thousand woes Upon the Greeks, and sent untimely down To Hades many valiant souls, and gave Their flesh to dogs and birds to be devoured.
Lattimore	Sing, goddess, the ruinous wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son, that brought on countless ills to the Achaeans, hurled down to Hades untimely many valiant souls, and made their bodies spoil for dogs and birds of every kind.
Pope	Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing! That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain; Whose bones, unburied on the desert shore, Devouring dogs and hungry vultures tore.

As you can see, Fitzgerald's translation is the most literal of the three, while Pope's translation is the most poetic. Lattimore's translation falls somewhere in between, offering a balance of accuracy and readability.

Robert Fitzgerald's English translation of the Iliad is a major achievement in the field of classical scholarship. It is a highly accurate and faithful translation that is also readable and fluent. However, some critics have argued that Fitzgerald's focus on readability and flow sometimes leads him to sacrifice accuracy and faithfulness. Ultimately, the best translation of the Iliad for you will depend on your individual preferences.



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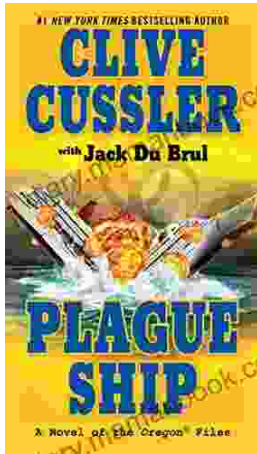
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