

BRIDGE OF BRONZE: USING SHANOWER'S AGE OF BRONZE IN THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE CLASSROOM

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“Classics is about dead.”

—John Heath & Victor Davis Hanson

Laura Slatkin convincingly claims that “[i]t is a reasonable surmise [...] that numerous allusions to traditional material may go unidentified by the modern reader unless special effort is made to locate them” (Slatkin 15). When recently teaching a course in literary narrative, we were reading Sheri S. Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country*, which alludes to much of both the *Iliad* and the saga tradition that informs certain characters. In order to help the students with this information, I gave a lecture on the causes of the Trojan war given in the mythological tradition: the Treaty of Tyndareus, Judgment of Paris, marriage of Peleus to Thetis, etc. After that lecture, a few of my students approached me and asked if any other material existed in order to help with this information. I suggested Eric Shanower’s comic, *Age of Bronze* volumes 1 and 2. Many of my students were surprised that I would recommend a graphic novel might help them read classical texts. They expressed that they had not read the *Iliad* and only a few the *Odyssey*, somewhat confirming the concerns of “...those who fear that Ancient Greece and particularly Homer are losing their influence on contemporary culture thought due to the increased push for diversity in literary studies” (Belsky 216). I began to wonder, though, if perhaps the problem had less to do with diversifying literary studies (which I support), and more to do with the difficulty instructors feel when students express their trouble in reading Homer’s work. After all,

The saga background permits the poet to make allusions which are often obscure to us, but were very likely not obscure to his original audience. Having had the opportunity in the course of a lifetime to hear every episode of this almost endless chain of story, his audience could make clear sense of any chance reference. (Beye 19)

If this is the case, much of that difficulty is likely due to the struggle students feel in understanding the allusions Homer makes to earlier saga in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It seems to me that Shanower's text might provide instructors with a helpful bridge to bring that earlier saga material into the discussion. What might happen if we also use them as supplemental reading for those students who instead of lacking ability or motivation, merely lack background knowledge enough to tackle Homer on a given syllabus?

I propose that Shanower's *Age of Bronze* can fulfill a necessary role in any teaching of Homer to adolescent readers¹ by creating this bridging effect for them. It collapses time between the facets of other sagas that create the rich tapestry that flows underneath Homer's work that can so often seem disparate and confusing to students. Considering the amount of bibliographic information contained in the volumes, it is quite possible they were even written for this very purpose. Shanower's work is not merely a visual text to help reluctant readers, but is just as valid a translation as, say, Robert Fagles' or Bernard Knox's, of the saga tradition. Rather than stash the information in footnotes that distort time by moving too swiftly back and forth, Shanower creates a linear sense that is invaluable to contemporary students. This material can be put side-by-side on a syllabus with those translations of Homer's work to a beneficial effect for the student.

The Saga Tradition

Far too often, contemporary Americans see the weaving together of older tales into a coherent new work as somehow un-artistic. We have embraced the cult of the new. If a single author does not attempt to come up with something new, fresh and un-heard-of-before, we deem the text they produce inferior. We know, though, that this was not the case with the oral poets of ancient Greece. Their entire reputation hinged on whether or not they were able to tell the tales that were already known to an audience with sufficient flash. A truly good oral poet was able to weave the many different tales of the saga traditions together, making them feel seamless. I see this as the most logical way to enter the conversation about who Homer may have been (and by doing so, show that Shanower is not somehow a "lesser" artist for performing this exact same function). Cedric Whitman says of the process that "Homer's genius is like a shuttle drawing the warp of profound self-consciousness across the woof of

¹ Be they of high school or undergraduate age.

old, half primitive material, from the time when heroism meant chiefly physical prowess, murderous dexterity, colossal self-assertion” (26). This is exactly how I wish us to view the work that Shanower does as well: combing through the saga tradition, as well as the histories created by texts that came sometimes long after the saga tradition, into a coherent whole.

Whitman goes on to observe that,

We do not know anything substantial about pre-Homeric poetry, but the consistently warlike and generalized nature of the formulaic epithets, as well as of the stock-in-trade motifs of battle, council, secret exploit, discouragement, assistance by gods, sacrifice, and all the rest, which are Homer’s material, indicate a vast array of malleable rudiments, out of which the singer made what he could. (48)

This is key to our understanding what Shanower has done: Whitman sees the saga traditions as “malleable rudiments” and it is essential that we do the same. It is easy to see that these earlier traditional tales come together to form what many writers call a “back story” in the *Iliad*. Characters have previous relationships, settings have significance besides their immediate action, etc. Slatkin calls this grouping of older tales into coherence an “internally logical coherent system:”

The mythological corpus on which the poet draws, taken together, constitutes an internally logical coherent system, accessible as such to the audience. The poet inherits as his repertory a system, extensive and flexible, whose components are familiar, in their manifold variant forms, to his listeners. For an audience that knows the mythological range of each character, divine or human—not only through this epic song but through other songs, epic and nonepic—the poet does not spell out the myth in its entirety but locates a character within it through allusion or oblique reference. He thereby incorporates into his narrative another discourse, one that makes its appearance on the surface of the poem through oblique references, ellipses, or digressions, evoking for his audience themes that orient or supplement the events of the poem in particular ways. What becomes instrumental in this mode of composition is not only what the poet articulates by way of bringing a given myth (with its associated themes) into play, in relation to his narrative, but also what is left unsaid for his audience would hear that as well. (Slatkin xv-xvi).

It is important to recognize this when teaching the classics, and to acknowledge that often, contemporary students have less and less information about this early saga tradition. We must pay attention to this because, as Beye reminds us,

By contrast, lyric poetry, drama, and the novel in varying degrees continually focus on the moment in narration. In these genres it is not always sensible for a reader to consider events antecedent or sequel to the moment of action...This conception of structure does not apply

to epic, however. The details of the foreground and the background are so equally well known that the logical priorities of narration can be ignored. As the bard chooses he may depart briefly or at length into the side avenues of the saga tradition. (Beye 18-19)

In Homer's work, we see these detours often, and I believe it is those detours that cause the most trouble for contemporary students. It becomes very easy for contemporary students to lose their way among the digressions. We, as instructors, need a text to help them learn this early saga tradition so that these digressions are not as difficult for students to navigate on their own, without having to become too reliant on instructor intervention. In other words, Shanower may help us to create a reading experience for them that is less based on power relationships, handing them the power in the form of the ability to read these departures of the poet into older saga tradition without having to ask for our help.

Acts of Interpretation

When examining the *Iliad*, though, we must not ignore that the poet Homer has made choices about the parts of the tradition that he has included. He has made interpretive decisions about what should be explained further, and what can stand on its own as well as choices about how to view the particular characters which are inherited from those earlier tales. As Slatkin reminds us,

...the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* interpret the mythological material they inherit. As we shall see, they select not only from among different myths—combining those chosen into a narrative, within which certain central concerns illustrated by the myths are allowed full development—but also from among different variants and aspects of a single myth. (2-3)

It is imperative, then, that we see that this, too, is Shanower's project in *Age of Bronze*. He is collecting the early saga material that Homer has woven into the *Iliad*, but Shanower has also made some critical choices about that material. This is because "...allusions remind the audience of other enriching traditions and serve to alert us to instances not of invention but of selection and adaptation" (Slatkin 118)—in other words, instances of interpretation are shown in the way the allusions are carried out. When we see these processes at work, "[w]hat we have to allow for then is a process of reverberation between inherited material influencing the *Iliad* narrative and also the *Iliad* material influencing inherited material. Imitation and innovation go hand in hand on a two-way street" (Lang 140). We must recognize this in order to truly see what an incredible undertaking Shanower's work is, and how it can function to help us in the classroom. In other

words, even something as seemingly simple as Homer's direction to the Muse early in the poem can be seen as a critical interpretation. "By directing his Muse to that place in the saga where he wishes to begin his story he reminds his auditors that the epic story is without beginning or end, that it is made up of an infinite complex of events and people, all equally familiar to epic audiences" (Beye 18). We can see Shanower doing the same thing when, in the first few pages of volume 1, we start with Paris herding instead of with the Treaty or at the scene of the Judgment—a *critical* choice to begin at a different point than many might think of starting the weaving together of those early tales.

So, as we can see, modifications can show very clearly a level of critical thinking about the material to be included. This will become very important later as we consider the validity of Shanower's translation of the early saga tradition into comic form and the adjustments that he makes in doing so. As Slatkin reminds us,

The discovery that the dynamics of selection and combination, modification and revision, are intrinsic to participation in an oral poetic tradition—that is, are traditional operations themselves—applies, as I will argue in the present study, to the relationship the epic has with the mythology that is its medium, from which it derives both its identity as part of a system and its distinctive individuality. But if one suggests that modifications of formula, phrase, or type-scene find an analogy in the poem's handling of mythological variants, it is important to stress that no aboriginal prototype of a myth exists that can claim priority over other versions. (5-6)

It is within this process of adaptation, then, that we can see the critical faculty of the person who is working with the saga tradition. We can see this both in Homer's as well as in Shanower's works: how the artist deals with any particular character, for instance, and what digressions are made versus which are not, shows us this process. Slatkin reminds us of this:

To an audience familiar with the mythological corpus available to the poet, the digressions create a topography the recesses of which reveal a rich and dense foundation beneath the evenly illuminated surface...the more we are able to perceive the range and coherence of the references themselves, the more we can see how they serve to provide a context and a perspective in which to account for—to make sense of—character, action, and theme. (114)

Whitman provides us with an example from Homer while, later, we shall see an example that an interviewer points out to Shanower, and then see Shanower's response. Whitman says,

In the *Aethiopsis*, Nestor's son Antilochus loses his life rescuing his father from a maimed and tangled chariot on the battlefield, and there are those who believe that the scene in the eighth *Iliad*, where Nestor

is rescued by Diomedes, is based on this scene. Certainly the episode preceded both poems, and was one of the traditional stories told of the gallant Antilochus, whom Achilles especially loved. In giving an identical action to Diomedes, Homer created a father-son relationship, which becomes quite outspoken in the Embassy... (35-36).

As we can see, choices have been made by the poet in this instance. We can see that Shanower is making these same choices as he weaves the various relationships within *Age of Bronze*, up to and including the relationship he narrates between Patroclus and Achilles, one of the most difficult relationships to explain in contemporary adaptations of the story—witness the film “Troy” and how it elides the relationship’s underlying roots entirely. Shanower shows us the complexities of Achilles’ sex life in the volume 2, refusing to give in to our contemporary way of reading sex act as identity.²

Notice, too, the stylistic change from a realist mode to a much more rounded and somewhat “cartoony” style of representing people that occurs in the art as Priam recounts the taking of Hesione early in volume 1. He means for us to understand that we are in the recollections of a child about a past reality—hence the distortion. This is especially important to note, because in comics, artistic shifts are a stylistic choice. They help us, as reader, by signaling shifts in interpretive strategy. He is not just making choices about the characters and their interrelated stories, but stylistic choices based on the conventions of the comics medium, just as an oral poet would make choices about style given the metrical restraints placed upon him.

Shanower also makes choices about the Judgment of Paris episode in volume 1. As Ovid tells us, it is often the case that when the Gods work around humans, they either disguise their godlike appearance or make humans to fall into some kind of sleep or deep forgetting. So, Paris perceives the entire incident of the judgment as a dream in Shanower’s work. While some scholars might believe this invalidates the argument that these books may be used as a resource to help students understand the saga tradition that forms the background of the *Iliad*, I believe that this opens up the conversation about how the Gods figure into the tradition via the question “how might real humans perceive the interventions?” Remember that Homer tells us not many can see the Gods for who they truly are when they are in a corporeal form. We know that Diomedes was one of the few granted the ability, and we know that Homer believes Paris was not

² Unfortunately, Shanower has made the choice to not number the pages—a choice that does create some difficulty in using the resource in the classroom, but a difficulty that can be easily overcome, I believe.

one who could see the Gods unless they revealed themselves. Hence Shanower's choice that the judgment is shown in the only way Paris might be able to deal with the incident: as a dream.

In fact, one of the only places where one of the Gods does show themselves in a way that the characters perceive as corporeal is in volume 2, where Cassandra relates the incident where Apollo "blesses" her, but even here we are left unsure as to the God's actual presence because of the sheer sexual nature of the incident in the way Shanower depicts it. Stylistically, the panels are fragmented, and the linework faded so that we know we're in Cassandra's skewed-by-trauma recollection of events. The reader is left asking whether or not she was the victim of a mortal rather than the blessings of a God. We can see, again, that Shanower is making decisions about not only what to include but how to treat the included material, stylistically. This is the strength of the comics medium: that the artist is thinking very consciously about how we read the intersections of visual as well as written material as a singular process, and not a mish-mash of separate ones.

Not an Apology for the Medium of Comics

Though this is changing, graphic novels in the classroom space are often thought of as a strategy to help remedial or reluctant readers to engage in the act of reading. The perception is that because of the presence of the visual material, the reader has less work to do. However, remember that several prominent scholars in the field wish us to see the art form as precisely that: an art form all its own. They feel that one should not see the medium of comics as some bastardized blending of many different art forms, but one in its own right. Comics critic Douglas Wolk tells us that,

Comics are not prose. Comics are not movies. They are not a text-driven medium with added pictures; they're not the visual equivalent of prose narrative or a static version of a film. They are their own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own genres and traps and liberties. The first step toward attentively reading and fully appreciating comics is acknowledging that. (14)

This is precisely where I wish to center my argument: comics are not an alternative to reading prose—they are their own medium. Comics are not somehow a lesser textual option for material, but a specialist literacy all their own. The formulaic use of visual stereotypes as Eisner describes them is not somehow a "dumbing down," but is instead a complex rhetorical choice. Here we might remember that the oral poet was no stranger to using formulaic

phrasing and repeated stylistic devices in much the same way a comic artist uses the panel, frame and gutter to achieve a particular effect. The metrical rhythm and rhyme patterns created by the oral poet for an audience as ways of tying ideas together are very similar to the way a comics artist uses panel size and frame composition (as well as color and many other particular stylistic choices) to tie ideas together for a visual culture. As we can see, both are types of “stylistic device” used logically within their genre, and which are not as separate as they might seem (Beye 33). This is necessary to understand in order to see how Shanower’s work can stand on its own within the context of the syllabus of a course in the classics. Speaking of the tendency for French critics to call Comics the “9th Art,” Wolk tells us that he doesn’t agree with the numbering of the arts, but does agree that such a move helps because it suggests to critics that comics must be measured on their own merits. That we must use a vocabulary specifically geared for comics in order to criticize them (15). Consider, too, critic and artist Scott McCloud’s point of view on the subject,

Throughout its history, Comics has harnessed the power of cartoons to command viewer involvement and identification—and realism to capture the beauty and complexity of the visible world. The dance of the visible and the invisible is at the very heart of the comics through the power of closure! Creator and reader are partners [...] creating something out of nothing time and time again. (204-205)

Comics is an art form perfectly suited for identification. As Will Eisner points out, there is never a time when the artist of a comic is separated from considering the experience of their audience. While a good translation of Homer can evoke this same level of identification, it is in the realm of comics that we find an art form ideally suited for the purposes of identification via such techniques as iconic abstraction (as McCloud points out) and the use of expressively-correct anatomy (as Eisner points out). These create a particular rhetorical effect on an audience, especially one that is visually oriented rather than aurally oriented, as Homer’s audience would have been.

I do understand that there are concerns about using comics in the classroom, though. We must remember that comics are a *medium*. Far too often, because of the massive popularity of one particular genre, the superhero comic, many associate the word comics with only one type of comic. This is unfortunate, because there are as many different types of stories being told in the medium of comics as there are in the medium of prose or poetry or on television or in movies. The content, in other words, is not entirely bound by the medium. Eisner goes on further to say,

For reasons having much to do with usage and subject matter Sequential Art has been generally ignored as a form worthy of scholarly discussion. While each of the major integral elements...have separately found academic consideration, this unique combination has received a very minor place (if any) in either the literary or art curriculum...Certainly, thoughtful pedagogical concern would provide a better climate for the production of more worthy subject content and the expansion of the medium as a whole... (5)

In other words, though I have no desire to belittle genre comics, I think that many feel “worthy subject content” may be a concern.³ All one has to do is open Shanower’s work and it is easy to see that this is not early saga traditions taken into the realm of the superhero.

Instead we see costuming and equipment that shows careful research into the areas and traditions of all of the various technologies and peoples represented. Shanower himself has been critical of how often he sees what he calls a mish-mash of traditions thrown together for popular representation of the peoples of this time period. He said recently in an interview with Elias Katirtzgianoglou for *Comicdom*, a major Greek website for criticism as well as information on comics, that, “I didn’t hate the recent movie, ‘Troy’, directed by *Wolfgang Petersen*. It was better than I feared. It had major departures from the traditional story, and the so-called period costumes and sets were an annoying mishmash...” In terms of the level of research Shanower has done into the history as well as mythology of these peoples and this epic, all one has to do is take a look at the material at the back of the first collected edition to see that he has studied a great deal of information in order to help him make critical choices about the work he is doing. One is reminded of the excellent translations Robert Fagles has put together over the years. Shanower provides an extensive bibliography, as well as helpful genealogical charts and glossaries. Further, he provides an afterword, which functions as a type of “translator’s note.”

Elias Katirtzgianoglou asked Shanower more about his research process and bibliography during that same interview:

EK: Another thing that’s impressive is the bibliography you used for reference on *Age of Bronze*. What did you do when you came across a controversy or discrepancy between different historical records?..

ERIC SHANOWER: Well, let’s first make the distinction between history and the tradition of literature and art known as the story of the Trojan

³ Indeed, I firmly believe that superhero comics are where much of the saga tradition from various cultures is currently being played out in contemporary settings. I adopt a tone somewhat critical of the genre though I have to admit that I have a lifelong love of that very genre in order to address the concerns I anticipate from the audience I expect here.

War. Achilles and his characteristics are not history. There's no proof that a person named Achilles fought at Troy or did any of the things we read about in Homer's *Iliad*. There's not even any real evidence that the story of the Trojan War in its general outline took place. Troy is in a strategic location and evidence indicates that conflicts took place in the general area, so we can pretty safely assume that the actual city was involved in some sort of military strife, probably many times over the centuries. But will anyone ever know how closely history may match the traditional Trojan War we know? I couldn't say...

As we can see, Shanower isn't just attempting to uncritically insert that early saga tradition directly into his comics. He is thinking through the problem of how to address concerns over translation, historical accuracy as well as mythology and religion. He is approaching that saga tradition with a critical eye, up to and including a decision about the intervention of the Gods, one of the most enduring characteristics of Homer's epic. When asked about that, Shanower showed further evidence of critical attention to his work:

EK: In the *Age of Bronze* comic, there have been on instances of divine intervention, although characters have been projecting their own feelings and decisions to supernatural elements. Do you aim to say a completely realistic story?

ERIC SHANOWER: I have endeavored to remove all supernatural elements from the story in *Age of Bronze*. The closest I get to the supernatural is to allow characters to have dreams and visions. These aren't supernatural; they happen to real people in real life. But they certainly can be interpreted to have supernatural sources, and I'll let the characters in *Age of Bronze* interpret dreams and visions that way. So, yes, I intend to tell the story in way that could have actually happened.

Though some might say that this reduces the comic's usefulness in terms of explaining the saga tradition⁴ which is woven into the *Iliad*, I say that it opens up areas for discussion. We must remember the longstanding debate about the purpose of the Gods within Homer's text. Here, Shanower shows that he does not wish to create the comic effect that is sometimes produced for contemporary readers when the Gods quarrel. He instead achieves what Wolfgang Petersen attempted but mostly failed: a version of the war for Troy that is based in the ambitions and lusts of the characters rather than motivated in large part by outside forces.

Another instance of showing inclusion and adaptation involves the relationship of Achilles to Patroclus in *Age of Bronze*. Within the

⁴ Not to mention that I agree with Norman Austin when he says that we cannot be blind to the fact that "we love the Homeric Gods" (66). A translation without the presence of the Gods does feel "a little flat" to those of us who have already encountered the Homeric telling of the Trojan war.

story, we can see Shanower's guess as to the Greek conception of the act of same-sex attraction and sex in the much more complex way that this society viewed such a relationship rather than the simplistic view that our contemporary one tends to assign to such an act. When asked about Achilles' "bisexuality" in the interview with Katirtzigianoglou, Shanower comments:

The tradition of Achilles and Patroklos being lovers is centuries and centuries old. I set out to tell a version of the Trojan War that assimilates every other version I can find. Of course, I've had to streamline and make choices among versions for the sake of clarity and storytelling. But I couldn't have excluded an element of the tradition so entrenched as Achilles's love for Patroklos without betraying my purpose. I didn't want to exclude it anyway. One of my purposes in creating AGE OF BRONZE is to show human nature, and Achilles's love for Patroklos gives me a chance to present that aspect of human nature. Whether my portrayal of their type of relationship is historically accurate, I don't think anyone knows for sure. We don't know what the attitude toward sexual and romantic love between males was in the 13th century BCE. Actually, the relationship between Achilles and Patroklos is relatively easy to present. It's Achilles's relationships with all the other men and women he falls in love with that tend to be problems. I think I handled his momentary passion for Iphigenia well.

Again, we can see that Shanower, functioning like an oral poet in some ways, is making decisions about the material he is including and how he wishes to portray characters that come to him from myriads of older works as he brings them together.

Instruction in Translation

Eric Shanower's series *Age of Bronze* does in comics what is most necessary for those of us who teach the classics to both children and undergrads: fills in necessary back story of the early saga tradition that forms much of the tapestry of Homer's *Iliad* (as well as other texts from this period) in an approachable way. What is Shanower's series but a translation of many of the texts that tell us about the precursors to the Trojan War into a format that is vital and accessible to students newly discovering those older texts? He is very consciously bringing together much of the early saga tradition that leads into the back story of Homer's work.

Of course, we cannot talk about the changes in teaching the classical tradition without having to engage with the arguments of John Heath and Victor Davis Hanson. They specifically lambast the contemporary group of classical scholars they feel failed miserably when "[o]ur generation of classicists, faced with the rise of Western culture beyond the borders of the West, was challenged to explain the

importance of Greek thought and values in an age of electronic information, mass entertainment and crass materialism.” They lament the fall of “pure” classical study into such areas as culture studies—one can only imagine what they would say seeing someone suggest that comics might help students read Homer more independently (and therefore, have more agency in their reading). While I have no desire to attach myself to their incendiary rhetoric, I offer it here as a way of contextualizing my point. Other scholars have already been engaging with this argument for quite some time and, at the risk of making myself one of those very “conference hopping” academics they lambast, I will say that I do not wish to engage with them on any of their points save this one: that the contemporary university has moved away from the study of classical Greek texts. Of course, we do not need to go to Heath and Hanson’s argument to make note of this fact.

Though not intended to be a response to the above, we must remember that in the introductory material to a volume of essays detailing many different approaches to teaching Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Kostas Myrisades notes:

Interestingly, few instructors alternate between verse and prose translations, depending on the type of course they teach, whether general or specialized. The remainder of the sample, largely those based in classics departments, think the course should dictate the choice of translation: upper-division courses that cover Homer’s oral art on the epic tradition should always use verse, whereas lower-division literature courses that focus on the plot, character, or mythology could more appropriately be taught in prose. (4)

As Alan Devenish reminds us, though, “Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have metamorphosed...Whether ancient Troy or Ithaca is transposed to the streets of Dublin, a German airport, or a Caribbean island, the heart of the story, the *mythos*, is alive and beating in the modern counterparts” (Devenish 409). So how is it that we wind up with an instructor from a two-year college believing that the tradition is alive and well, and those who teach the classical tradition more exclusively lamenting the death of the tradition? In fact, Heath and Hanson go so far as to say “Classics is about dead.” Though not everyone agrees with them. Responding to Heath and Hanson, Belsky says “This criticism seems shortsighted especially if these expanded scopes make the study of Classics relevant to the current student population” (217). He goes further to say “In response most classicists would argue quite the contrary, claiming they have reinvented themselves and their departments as a way of staying current while still providing the essential exposure to “Greek thought and values” (Belsky 217). It is this argument that I am aligning myself with here, obviously. The contemporary classics classroom needs the bridging effect that

Shanower's texts can provide between students who aren't familiar with the early saga tradition and Homer's *Iliad*.

The "current student population" no matter how dedicated to reading is likely not able to read in the original Greek. This may account for some of the doom that Heath and Hanson feel. If this is the case, then translation is the issue. Burian reminds us that "All version are inevitably re-visions from the perspective of their own moments in time and space" (302). This could be seen by some as bastardization of the text, but couldn't we also see this adaptation as a strength? Translation of such beloved classics as the *Iliad* or the saga traditions that inform it becomes an issue of purity to many. Think about what Zaslavsky says,

The question of what constitutes adequate translation must be answered, in our own minds at least, before we enter the classroom. Our answer can be based on critical evaluations of various translations or on our own knowledge of ancient Greek. But we can also thematize the issue of translation in the classroom as a way of penetrating the work itself. This approach alerts students to the problem of translation as a propaedeutic to the use, an immunization to the lures, of any particular translation, even the "best." (41)

Indeed, in using translations, we can engage the students with issues of how translations affect them and are affected by them, which are important considerations. Why should we as instructors not begin to see that in order to facilitate the shift for the student from visual culture to print-based appreciation of the classical tradition we might need to provide a mediary text? Shanower's work is just such a mediary text, creating a double bridge between today's more visual culture and the print culture of the *Iliad* (remembering at the same time that those translations themselves are meant to be a bridge between the written and the oral culture that the text initially comes from), as well as between the *Iliad* and its own back story, which can often be unwieldy to teach to adolescents (be that at the middle- or high school level or in undergraduate learning) in lecture or handout format. The re-assembly of saga into a linear time perspective is key to this bridging. It helps students to make meaning of that which seemed, formerly, protected knowledge. Devenish asks us "[i]n teaching the classics to undergraduates at a community college, how is the transformation from academic agenda to personal meaning made and how does this occur, for example, in a required course taken by commuting students, many entering or reentering college, sometimes years after their last schooling?" (408). It is important to understand the roots of Devenish's project (and those like it that occur in classrooms across the United States every day): that be they 2 year college students like Devenish's, or 4 year university students, or even students taking

summer courses for free sponsored by the community, there are many who *do* want to read the classics, who want to interact with these texts, but find the task too difficult because of their lack of knowledge about the sagas that the poems are built from. Are we to turn them away from our classrooms simply because they don't have that pre-existing knowledge? Our job, it seems to me, is to find ways to get those earlier traditions to them so that they may then engage with the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* in more meaningful ways. Via the collapsing of time into linear motion rather than the continuous back and forth of endless footnotes, it seems to be Shanower's, too. It is this very fact that makes his work invaluable to us as instructors.

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