

## THE EVOLUTION OF A CLASSICAL WORK THROUGH ITS TRANSLATIONS ACROSS CENTURIES

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### Abstract:

*This paper examines the study of classical literature and their translated works. It focused on how meaning, style, and cultural context are conserved or changed through translation. The paper emphasized that translation is not only about linguistic translation but a inventive process that redefines classical texts for new readers. It explored the Homer's translation of The Odyssey by different authors in different language. This paper particularly discussed from George Chapman's translation to 21st century writer Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's original epic The Odyssey.*

**Keywords:** Classical, literature, western, epic, translation, translator, renditions, poetic, modern

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### Introduction:

Classical literature is the study of the literary achievement of an ancient Greece and Rome. The Classical refers to a standard writing and timeless relevance that has not only influenced literature but also philosophy and the arts for more than two millennia. Class literature works depict humanity's earliest exploration of truth, morality, existence and beauty. In *The Greek Experience* (1957) C.M. Bowra represents classical literature as "the beginning of intellectual freedom and the artistic expression of human ideals," a foundation upon which the modern world continues to build. Greek classical literature can be seen around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It studied various kind of genres such as epic, tragedy, comedy and philosophical work. Homer's *the Iliad and Odyssey* were an epic poetry that was dominated the Archaic period (c.800-500 BCE). In *The Songs of Homer* (1962) G.S. Kirk appreciated Homer works and said that, "Homer's narratives established not only the poetic form but also the ethical framework of Western storytelling. Along with the Homer Hesiod presented mythological genealogy such as *Theogony and Works and Days*.

The Greek dramatist such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides wrote with the themes of fate, justice and divine will. In *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles described human tragedy. The era was also enriched by the philosophy where Socrates, Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations of western ethics, logic and metaphysics. Comedy was represented by Aristophanes who described the Athenian society in *Lysistrata and The Clouds*. In the Hellenistic period (323-31 BCE), Alexander the Great focused on Greek culture and spread throughout the Mediterranean and Asia. Roman classical literature period was around 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, inherited from the Greece but followed the Roman ideas, patriotism and civic virtue. Writers such as Livius Andronicus and Plautus adapted Greek plays into Latin. Virgil's *Aeneid* called as Rome's national epic which blending Homeric grandeur with Roman values of discipline and destiny. Horace, in his Odes and Epistles depicted lyric grace with philosophical reflection. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reflected Greek mythology through tales of transformation and love. L.P. Wilkinson in *The Roman Experience* (1974) discussed about Augustan literature that "combined artistic perfection with political purposes," reflecting

Romes's confidence in its imperial destiny. The silver age of Roman literature marked by Seneca's tragedies and philosophical essays. Satirists such as Juvenal and Martial described the Roman society with powerful wit. Historian like Tacitus explored tyranny and moral decay in his work *Annals* and *Histories*. There were many writers who influenced from the classical literature. Writers such as Dante, Shakespeare and Milton reinterpreted classical myths and philosophies to explore Christian and humanists' ideals. Modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot and James Joyce depicted classical motif to express anxieties of modern life. Gilbert Highet, in *The Classical Tradition* (1949) emphasized that "every age finds its own reflection in Greece and Rome." Underscoring the adaptability and universality of classical thought.

Translation is the communication of the meaning of a text in a source language (SL) into a comprehensive version of target language (TL) without causing any loss to the original message. It is often thought that if one is a bilingual s/he can be a good translator, which is not the truth. People having good communicative and writing experiences in both the languages can be good translators, which includes their being bilinguals.

Translation plays vital role in human communication. It transfers the ideas, culture and information from one language to another language. Translation acts as a bridge that connects people and conserve the traditions and help to promote mutual understanding among societies. Translation also plays the important role in language. according to Halliday „Translation is a process which makes it possible to establish a connection between two languages and the readers of these two languages”.

Roman Jakobson, a leading linguist and noted expert in the subject of translation, defined translation as "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language." Through this process of translation, texts in one language are transformed into texts in another

language with the same meaning. These materials range from the isolated words in a language to the complex network of sentences of philosophical texts. Oxford University defines translation as 'The process of translating words or text from one language into another.' The Cambridge Dictionary also endorses that. This can mean the word to word rendering of the text in one language to another or replacing the equivalents of the words or phrases in one text to another. The translated text may have formal equivalence when the source text and the translated text look alike in form. Translation creates new vocabulary, idioms and styles. During renaissance many words came from French and Latin and translated into English. Translation also benefits in the standardization of grammar and the conservation of ancient knowledge. It permits languages to develop and adapt to new cultural and intellectual influences, keeping them energetic and relevant. Translation also performs an equal role in literature. It reflects to understand the beauty and depth of worlds classics written in different languages. We cannot understand classical or ancient text without translation.

### **Homer's The Odyssey:**

Homer was one of the greatest ancient Greek poets, who is known for his two greatest epics of the world literature – The Iliad and The Odyssey. He lived around in 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. He shaped the foundation of Western literature. In *Odyssey* epic poem Homer explored the brave journey of hero Odysseus, return home to Ithaca after Trojan War. The poem was written in 24 books. It depicted the encounter with mythical beings such as Cyclops, Circe, and the Sirens which symbolizes the fight against fate and temptation. the poem highlights the strength of both Odysseus and his wife, Penelope. There are many have influenced by his narrative style, use of epic similes and rhythmic verse. It became the masterpiece because it reflects

universal human emotions such as love, hope, perseverance and quest for belonging.

### **Comparative Analysis of Translations of Homer's The Odessey:**

There are many writers have translated Homer's *The Odessey*. Each one of them have different perspective, style of writing and language. Following are the writers and their work.

#### **1. George Chapman (1614–1616)**

George chapman translated The Odessey into Elizabethan English. He used heroic couplets with archaic expression. He emphasized on original epic with heroism and divine justice. Champman's version inspired poets like John Keats who used in his sonnet "On *First looking into Chapman's Homer*."

#### **2. Alexander Pope (1725–1726)**

Alexander pope's translation of The Odessey was one of the most musical renditions of Homer's epic. It was written in rhymed heroic couplets with neoclassical taste. Pope's translation was different than George Chapman. He focused on order, harmony and refined expressions. He portraited Odysseus as civilized hero but many critics criticised for his translation. But many of them inspired from his style of writing, rhythm, wit and poetic style.

#### **3. William Cowper (1791)**

William Cowper's translation of The Odessey was totally different from Alexander Pope and George Chapman but he followed Homer's original work. He wrote in blank verse. He sustained the Homer's dignity of writing style. It reflects Enlightenment ideals of truth and simplicity, offering a thoughtful and solemn interpretation of Homer's timeless narrative of endurance and homecoming.

#### **4. Samuel Butler (1900)**

There are clarity, simplicity and accessibility in Samuel Butler translation. He ignored poetic

embellishment of Homar's work. Butler's version was like a historical adventure rather than mythical poem. Butler anticipated that *The Odessey* was written by a woman, perhaps from Sicily, his translation, which stresses human relationships and psychological realism.

#### **5. T. E. Lawrence (1932)**

T.E. Lawrence who is recognized as "Lawrence of Arabia," also translated *The Odessey* into modern prose in the 1930s. His version echoes a soldier's understanding of adventure, leadership, and endurance. Lawrence depicted Odysseus as wanderer and thinker. He ignored the It avoids the magnificence of poetic style. His close familiarity of travel and hardship gives the translation authenticity and Vigor.

#### **6. E. V. Rieu (1946)**

His translation of *The Odessey* was published in Penguin Classics. It was extensively available to modern readers. It was written in simple, graceful prose, it prioritizes legibility and narrative continuity over strict literalness. This version became one of the most popular versions of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. But after some days later his son D.C.H. Rieu revised it with accuracy.

#### **7. Robert Fitzgerald**

Robert Fitzgerald translation focussed with poetic and balance between accuracy and design. It also followed the rhythmic style of Homer's writing. It also focused on the character of Odysseus with intellect and emotive complexity. His version of translation has been used in schools and universities.

#### **8. Robert Fagles (1996)**

Robert Fagles' translation was written in free verse with poetic rhythm which keeps alive Homer's work. His translation discussed about the battle scenes and complexity of homecoming. His translation captures the complexity of Odysseus's

character. It balances loyalty to the Greek with expressive modern phrasing. This translation has been widely read and quotations also inspired to the readers.

#### 9. Emily Wilson (2017)

Emily's translation was one of the first translation by a woman. It was in iambic pentameter. She avoided archaic language but focused on moral and emotional things with the power, gender and justice. She depicted Odysseus as ambiguous and complex. Critics also praise Wilson's *Odyssey* for its stylishness, justice, and courageous reimagining of an ancient classic.

#### Conclusion:

Homer's *Odyssey* by various writers reflects not only the linguistic skills but also changed the literary styles, values to the culture and depicted their perspectives with the times. From George Chapman's to Emily Wilson's each translator has reimagined Homer's ancient epic for new generations of readers.

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