Wrath and Woe of Heroes: Translating Male Grief in Homer’s *Iliad*
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Background
Homer’s *Iliad* has always held a fascination for me in the drama of its central heroes, particularly when it comes to Achilles. The original Greek text holds little back in its depictions of its heroes; Achilles wails as he rips off his clothes and in other moments of heroic redemption drags a body around the city. While there are obvious displays of masculinity within the *Iliad*, what is often overlooked is a softness and emotional intelligence with which the Ancient Greek portrays these men. My research has been not only locating and examining these moments of purposeful change, but also finding the reason for why they have come to be.

In studying translations of Homer’s *Iliad*, I have found what appears to be a tendency to not only subvert the emotional responses of men, but to masculinize them, especially when it comes to displays of grief. This study pulls from literary theory fields of both translation studies as well as affect theory to examine how translators have interpreted Homer’s original Greek to fit their contemporary standards. My research focuses on three translations of this text: Alexander Pope’s 1715 edition, Samuel Butler’s 1898 edition, and Caroline Alexander’s 2015 edition. Pope takes on the challenge of this translation by updating the text into a metered verse in English, while Butler takes a more standard approach in keeping his translation in prose. However, I found it necessary to include Alexander’s approach, in that her translation provides us the lens of both a contemporary translator and a woman. From these three translations, I have been able to evaluate how translations of this text have changed within a 300 year period, and how these translations represent the cultures of masculinity from which they were created.

Methods
Survey of Ancient Greek Language
-Course Taken: GREK 1001 Beginning Classical Greek

Culture and History Review:

Translation Studies and Theory Review:
- Heaney, Seamus. “Earning A Rhyme: Notes on Translating.” *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field*
- Mendelsohn, Daniel. “Englishing the Iliad: Grading Four Rival Translations.” *The New Yorker*
- Venuti, Lawrence. The Translation Studies Reader

Side by Side Comparison:
- See example provided

Results
Research culminates in a three chapter thesis with support and funding from the GW English Honors Program.

Alexander Pope, 1715
A sudden horror shot through all the chief,
And wrapp’d his senses in the cloud of grief;
Cast on the ground, with furious hands he spread
The scorching ashes o’er his graceful head;
His purple garments, and his golden hairs,
Those he defiles with dust, and these he tears;
On the hard soil his groaning breast he threw,
And roll’d and grovel’d, as to earth he grew.
The virgin captives, with disorder’d charms,
(Won by his own, or by Patroclus’ arms.),
Rush’d from their tents with cries; and gathering round,
Beat their white breasts, and fainted on the ground:
While Nestor’s son sustains a manlier part,
And mourns the warrior with a warrior’s heart;
Hangs on his arms, amidst his frantic woe,
And oft prevents the meditated blow.

Far in the deep abysses of the main,
With hoary Nereus, and the watery train,
The mother-goddess from her crystal throne
Heard his loud cries, and answer’d groan for groan.
The circling Nereids with their mistress weep,
And all the sea-green sisters of the deep.

Death of Patroclus: Book 18, Lines 24-39
Samuel Butler, 1898
A dark cloud of grief fell upon Achilles as he listened. He filled both hands with dust from off the ground, and pressed it over his head, disfiguring his comely face, and letting the refuse settle over his shirt so fair and new. He flung himself down all huge and haggard at full length, and tore his hair with his hands. The bondswomen whom Achilles and Patroclus had taken captive screamed aloud for grief, beating their breasts, and with their limbs failing them for sorrow. Antilochus bent over him the while, weeping and holding both his hands as he lay groaning for he feared that he might plunge a knife into his own throat. Then Achilles gave a loud cry and his mother heard him as she was sitting in the depths of the sea by the old man her father, whereon she screamed, and all the goddesses daughters of Nereus that dwelt at the bottom of the sea, came gathering round her.

Caroline Alexander, 2015
So he spoke; and a dark cloud of grief enveloped Achilles.
Taking with both hands the fire-blackened ashes, he poured them down upon his head, and defiled his handsome face; On his fragrant tunic the black ash settled;
And he lay outstretched in the dust,
A great man in his greatness, and with his own hands he defiled his hair, tearing at it.
And the female slaves, whom Achilles and Patroclus had seized as plunder,
Stricken at heart cried loud and ran outside
Around brilliant Achilles, and all with their hands
Beat their breasts, and the limbs of each went slack beneath them;
On the other side Antilochos wept, pouring tears,
Holding the hands of Achilles as his noble heart groaned.
For he feared lest Achilles cut his own throat with iron
Dreadful were Achilles’ cries of grief; his lady mother heard
As she sat in the depths of the sea beside her aged father.
The she wailed in turn; and all the goddesses gathered round her.
Who, down in the depths of the sea were daughters of Nereus.

Discussion
It is imperative when examining these texts that one does not subject them to ideals of “good” or “bad” and “right” and “wrong”. While the art of translation is of course subjective, these texts must be viewed through the lens of “foreignizing” and “domesticating” texts, as coined by Venuti. This being his idea that translation is a “prism of culture which refracts the source language cultural norms and it is the translator’s task to convey them.” Moreover, we must consider the circumstance and history from which these translations emerged. While Pope’s *Iliad* at times appears sentimental, is it as its core an intellectual exercise written for his contemporaries. Samuel Butler’s later use of prose gives light to a more free flowing narrative, that is not forced to push up against the societal confines of Pope’s. Lastly, Caroline Alexander’s text is an incredible feat in that she maintains the same number of lines as the Original Greek, yet is not limited to metered verse like Pope. While all three translators are tasked with the same challenge, each varied approach represents a drastic change in its interpretation of the original Greek.

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