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Research Article

Iliad Translations in the Undergraduate Classroom

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Abstract

Teaching ancient literature in translation is increasingly common across schools and universities; however, there has been limited discussion of pedagogical approaches towards, specifically, *translated* literature. I discuss the findings of a study conducted on first-year undergraduates at Oxford University, who analysed translations of the *Iliad* as part of a taught course. The publication of Wilson (2023) offers an opportunity to see how students respond to very recent translations. I explore the pitfalls students encounter when analysing poetry in translation and the ways educators, whether in high schools or universities, can help students negotiate these pitfalls and develop a more sophisticated understanding of literary translation. In particular, I discuss how a student's level of familiarity with the Greek language affects the ways they analyse translations, and how educators can encourage students with little or no Greek to engage with translations successfully.

Keywords: pedagogy; translation; Wilson; Iliad; poetry; Greek

Introduction

It is increasingly common for ancient literature to be taught in translation, either alongside or instead of in the original language. Teaching literature in translation brings its own challenges, which are rarely acknowledged in discussions of classical pedagogy[1]. Conversely, translations are rarely discussed from pedagogical perspectives. Emily Wilson's translations of the *Odyssey* (2018) and *Iliad* (2023), for example, have been widely discussed in academic publications and in public-facing media[2]. These discussions have primarily adopted the perspectives of scholars, poets, and readers of poetry; creative and analytical responses from teachers and students have been conspicuously absent. Given that Greco-Roman literature is often taught in translation, effectiveness in school and university classrooms is a key measure of a translation's success (Found, 2017; Greenwood, 2023).

Many teachers will be familiar with the pitfalls encountered by students working with translated literature. Students who have not been taught Latin or Greek sometimes treat translations with suspicion, as a screen that restricts (rather than facilitates) their ability to read the "truth" of the original text; sometimes, on the other hand, they treat the translation as if it were the original, which elides the cultural and linguistic differences between ancient cultures and their own[3]. Meanwhile, students who have studied the Latin and Greek languages (and been taught to translate literally to ensure they receive full marks) often find themselves interpreting translations on a simplistic scale, from "taking creative liberties with the text" at one extreme to "accurate, but clunky" at the other[4].

These approaches, while understandable, are unhelpful if we wish students to understand the range of different judgements involved in translation, and the amount of personal and culturally-embedded interpretation present in even a seemingly "literal" translation. The proliferation of published *Iliad* translations gives teachers an opportunity to address this problem: we can encourage students to engage critically and creatively with different translations. In particular, Wilson's openness about the decisions she makes when translating offers a helpful entry-point for students to think about translators' craft (Wilson, 2019, 2023; Pache, 2018).

This article aims to address this gap in scholarship by discussing how students engage both with Wilson's *Iliad* translation, and with translations of the *Iliad* more broadly. It is based on a study conducted from October to November 2023, assessing how first-year undergraduates at Oxford University responded to different *Iliad* translations across an 8-week tutorial course (the parameters of this study are laid out in section 3). Many interpreted Wilson's translation as a literal, faithful, and even conservative rendering of the *Iliad*; some found it difficult to move past this point in their analysis. The fact that my students all focused on Wilson's handling of metre (specifically, her choice to use iambic pentameter) demonstrates how productive they found her translator's note, but also points more generally to the utility of metre- and rhythm-based approaches as a way to encourage students (with or without knowledge of Greek) to analyse translated poetry.

More widely, the students' written work and classroom discussions reveal some of the problems we encounter when introducing students to translated literature. Many – especially those who had studied Greek language previously – found themselves differentiating firmly between "literal" and "creative" approaches to translation, and adjudicating between the validity of different ways to translate specific lines. In contrast, students who

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were learning Greek from scratch found it easier to avoid being judgemental about different translations; however, these students also avoided the passage-comparison task in favour of the general essay task. This reminds us that students without knowledge of Greek often need encouragement to feel comfortable analysing the poetics of passages in translation, and responding creatively to these passages on their own terms.

Overall, this was a successful and productive exercise: students were often richly sensitive in their analysis of the nuances that might develop from different translations of a certain word or phrase, enabling students to hone their analytical skills regardless of their level of Greek language knowledge. This led them to consider some of the crucial big-picture problems of translation (such as any translator's inescapable binding to the culture and norms of their time). In section 6, I demonstrate some of the most impressive arguments students were able to construct after a week of independent reading, and the different directions in which a teacher can help them to advance their understanding of this subject further. In particular, though the study of translations is a valuable subject in its own right, I emphasise its helpfulness for *ab initio* language learners: several students used word-level differences between published translations as a way to scaffold their analysis of the original Greek. Though rooted in an exercise from the Oxford degree course, the findings of this study articulate the problems and the possibilities which the study of translations offers for students and teachers in any educational context, including students with little or no knowledge of the Greek language.

Classics at Oxford University: A Brief Summary

To clarify the educational context of this study, I outline briefly the key points of the Classics BA degree at Oxford University[5]. This is, unusually, a four-year (12-term) full-time degree course, divided into the first five terms ("Mods") and the following seven terms ("Greats"). During Mods, all students are required to learn and be assessed in at least one of Latin and Greek language: those who enter the degree programme without having studied either language before must select one language to study intensively for Mods (and may, if they choose, take up the other language for Greats). In 2023, for example, 41% of undergraduates taking second-year exams had studied both Latin and Greek for A-level or equivalent[6]; 25% had studied either Latin or Greek (but not both) for A-level or equivalent, of which the vast majority had studied Latin; the remaining 34% started the degree course without a full A-level in Latin or Greek[7].

Most non-language papers in Classics at Oxford, such as first-year *Iliad*, are taught in weekly small-group settings ("tutorials"), with one tutor and between three and five students. These tutorials are compulsory for students, and are supplemented by optional lecture series. For each tutorial, students receive a reading list in advance and are normally expected to submit a piece of written work for the tutor's feedback (this work does not usually receive a formal number mark or letter grade, and is not assessed as part of the degree). Within the tutorial itself, there is considerable emphasis on discussion: students are encouraged to take the conversation in directions that interest them and challenge each other's views on the material they have studied[8]. Tutorial courses are normally either eight weeks (for Mods) or twelve weeks long (for Greats). So much is broadly consistent across the degree; beyond this, there is considerable room for variation, as tutorials (unlike lecture series) are entirely organised by individual colleges. What topics are covered and what types of work the students are asked to submit may vary widely, across the university, depending on tutors' preferences and students' strengths and weaknesses. However, tutors have no control over end-of-course assessment: this is almost always conducted through closed-book timed exams, which are set and marked centrally by the faculty. To some extent, then, tutors must teach to the exam rather than having total freedom to design and assess courses.

Parameters of the Study

This study draws on an eight-tutorial course on the *Iliad*, which I co-taught (with one other tutor), for undergraduates in their first term of the Classics BA. Eight students took this course in total, taught in two groups of four. These students came from various educational and linguistic backgrounds: four had A-level or equivalent in Greek, one had GCSE Greek, and three had studied the language intensively for several weeks (meaning that they were not yet expected to read the *Iliad* in the original Greek, but were encouraged to use their existing knowledge, supported by published translations, to try to identify key Greek words in the sections they were analysing). Teaching groups were mixed, rather than divided between those with and without previous Greek language qualifications. All students were given the choice to opt in to this study, in line with the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) guidance; all opted in, and none reported any concerns. It is possible that students' knowledge that they were participating in a pedagogical study may have interfered with the data it produced (leading them, for example, to advance the arguments that they hoped I wanted to hear)[9]; however, quite apart from the ethical implications of unnecessarily deceiving experimental subjects, I felt that my students would benefit from knowing that they were involved in a pedagogical research project[10]; that teaching practice, especially on an evolving area like translation theory, is a work in progress, and that many tutors actively work to study and improve their own pedagogy.

This study considers both "passive" and "active" use of different *Iliad* translations by the students. By "passive", I mean students' patterns of quoting different translations in their written work and in tutorial discussions across the term (i.e. when translation was not itself the focus of discussion). However, "active" discussion of translation was also a feature of this tutorial course: the final tutorial in the term was on "The *Iliad* in Translations". Students were given a short reading list (see Supplementary Appendix for the full task assigned) and a choice of two essay titles: either "Select one 20-line passage from the *Iliad*; compare, and contrast, two different translators' treatments of this passage" or "What makes a good translation? Answer, with reference to two different translations of the *Iliad*." Throughout the course, students had access to a range of different *Iliad* translations, through university libraries and online resources; in particular, I ensured that all students had access to Wilson (2023), given my particular interest in students' engagement with very contemporary translations. Seven students submitted written work, excerpts from which are analysed below.

The relatively small number of students involved in the study presents both limitations and advantages. With a sample size of only eight, quantitative analysis would be misleading: I will not, therefore, attempt to attach importance to such statistics as "29% of students used Green (2015) as the default translation they quoted in written work across the term". However, qualitative discussion of how exactly the students engaged with different translations –

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both in their written work and in classroom discussion – is facilitated by the small tutorial groups, which give every student opportunities to offer and reshape their ideas.

Contemporary Translations: The Case of Wilson

One motivating factor for this study was to examine how students respond to extremely recent translations, such as Wilson's 2023 *Iliad*. In itself, the awareness that their field (even including the texts they study) is subject to regular change poses challenges for students, especially first-year undergraduates whose school education has often encouraged them to seek solid answers rather than uncertainties. Furthermore, I wanted to find out whether students were aware of, and had been influenced by, discussion of Wilson's translations in public-facing media (including responses by antifeminist campaign movements)[11]. Since all seven of the students who submitted work chose Wilson as one of the two translations to analyse, it is possible to draw some conclusions about how they responded to this translation. In itself, the very fact that all seven students chose to comment on Wilson is noteworthy (although this may be influenced by my decision to recommend Wilson's translator's note as secondary reading).

My students' overwhelming impression of Wilson's translation was that it was extremely faithful to the Greek. The words "conservative" and "literal" recurred in their analyses, with one (post-A-level) student feeling that Wilson "religiously presents only that which is readily apparent in and supported by the Greek". Not all students felt that such precision was uniformly positive: one post-A-level student found Wilson's translation "weighed down by its literality". It is possible that some students were influenced by reviews of Wilson's translation: even in some conservative media, Wilson was praised as a "traditional" translator[12]. However, it is also likely that the students were influenced by the nature of the task: a comparison between two translations. Four students chose to compare Wilson's translation with the early 18th-century translation by Alexander Pope, a comparison which automatically makes Wilson's work seem highly literal, given Pope's widely-discussed habit of elaborating some sections of the text and eliding others[13]. Of these students, most felt that Pope's translation was "less a translation and more a retelling" and "content to remove, insert, and change beyond recognition in the pursuit of presenting the meaning in a clearer and more impactful way in English" (although one argued that Pope's and Wilson's translations were two "equally brilliant yet quite different" ways to approach the *Iliad*, moving away from the idea of judging one more faithful than the other). The (*ab initio*) student who chose to compare Wilson with Peter Green's 2015 translation, by contrast, found Wilson "more selective in what features of the original Greek she echoes" and argued that she writes "with an awareness that sometimes in order to capture the rhythm/tone/experience of listening/reading the text, she must sacrifice certain aspects of its original form". In classroom discussion, I encouraged students to find a middle ground between these approaches: in particular, I drew students' attention to the language used in Wilson's (2023) translator's note, which in some places reads like a prose poem, and even finishes with an invocation to the Muse Calliope[14]. Wilson's exploration of her own translation methods makes her an excellent case study to use as both a rigorously linguistic and a vibrantly poetic translation; in turn, this helps students to challenge their own instinct to dichotomise literal and poetic translations (on which see later).

Certain features of Wilson's translation caught multiple students' attention. Several observed the close attention Wilson pays to sound patterns, such as alliteration, which often reflects the presence of sound patterns in the Greek (without necessarily using the same sound). Especially strikingly, every single student commented on Wilson's choice to use iambic pentameter, with over half of the students either quoting or paraphrasing her translator's note on this point (Wilson, 2023, lxiv-lxv.). It is unsurprising that students found their way to the translator's note: after all, it was starred (as a good starting point/particularly recommended read) on the reading list I set for their written work. However, I was surprised to see them all focusing on Wilson's point about metre (and, more widely, discussing the importance of replicating the experience of hearing the *Iliad* performed). The student who compared Wilson with Green emphasised Green's closeness to "original Greek rhythms, word order and style of the original", especially his use of hexameter. Does this show that students were influenced by public discourse on Wilson's translation, which often highlighted her eventual choice of "the metre used by Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton"? (Higgins, 2023). Or does it suggest that students – regardless of their Greek language level – instinctively found it accessible to discuss metre, as well as (less prominently) sound effects? While I cannot answer this question with certainty, this evidence suggests that encouraging students to evaluate a translation's metre, rhythm, and pace (perhaps by comparing it to other poetry, or music, they have encountered) is an accessible way to help them think about the decisions made in translation, without requiring a reading knowledge of the original language. In future exercises, it might be productive to give students translations in different metres (but without translators' notes), to see if they focus on this without the prompt.

Wider Patterns

Although discussing Wilson's translation was a particular feature of my approach, the main emphasis (both in written work and in classroom discussion) was on translation of the *Iliad* more generally: both how to approach it, and how to evaluate existing translations. In this section, I discuss the patterns that emerged in students' wider engagement with translations of the *Iliad*: both the elements that especially caught their attention, and the aspects they found particularly difficult. These difficulties highlight avenues for improving the ways we teach students at all levels to engage with ancient texts in translation.

Both in their written work and in classroom discussion, many students found it difficult to move past the idea of some translations as "better" and "more accurate" than others. They all agreed that all translation is a work of interpretation; implicitly, though, many seemed to feel that it is possible for a translator to avoid their own interpretation by being more "literal". The exact nature of the translator's relationship with the Greek was a difficult issue: one student (*ab initio* Greek) argued that "I would be more sceptical of labelling works that seem inspired by the *Iliad* as translations – such as Logue's"[15]. In particular, students who answered the passage comparison question often focused on highlighting "more faithful" and "less faithful" ways to translate specific lines of Greek[16]. Although they did not construct "literal" and "creative" translation as a binary choice, they often treated them as two extremes on a sliding scale (which is also limited as an approach to translation studies, as it implies that a completely literal translation is possible, even if undesirable)[17]. Interestingly,

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this was more of a problem for students who had studied Greek at school: of these, the majority reached conclusions that relied on judging how far from the original Greek a given phrase or word in the translation was[18]. I reproduce below an example from one of their essays (post-A-level):

> The phrase in Greek [from *Iliad* 8.562-3] "πὰρ δὲ ἑκάστῳ/ ἥατο πεντήκοντα σέλᾳ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο." literally reads "and next to each light of a blazing fire there sat fifty men", which is hardly pleasant in English. Wilson chooses to evoke the image of the fires, which is brought out by the profusion of diction of light and burning in the Greek here, with an additional image "their faces/lit by the gleam of burning wood." This is an elegant way of bringing out the force of the passage while avoiding clunkiness in translation.

This is good analysis: the student uses their knowledge of Greek and sensitivity to Wilson's English to identify several crucial features of Wilson's translation, and comments thoughtfully on the effect this creates. Crucially, they acknowledge that "bringing out the force of the [original] passage" is a worthwhile goal for a translator, as opposed to focusing on specific words. The next step for this student is to move past the idea of a "literal" or "default" translation: even in the student's literal translation, they have made decisions with word-choice and word-order, so the throwaway judgement of their own translation as "hardly pleasant in English" needs to be explained further, and perhaps challenged. An important step for classroom discussion, then, is to encourage students to think about the aesthetic and stylistic decisions they have found themselves making, even when attempting to translate "literally", in order to push past the idea of a simple sliding scale between "literal" and "poetic" translation.

This sliding scale is a useful starting point for discussion, but has several negative consequences. It encourages students to develop the idea that some published translations are for quoting and referring to (as relatively "literal" renderings of the Greek text), while others are for analysing. In effect, this means students pigeonhole translations as if "literal" and "creative" were a neat dichotomy, even where their analysis treats these concepts as a spectrum. One (post-A-level) student opened a comparison of Pope's and Wilson's treatments of a passage by offering "my own translation of *Iliad* 24.477-506 (as well as the Greek text), which itself was devised with reference to Lattimore's fairly literal rendering of the passage". The student did not consider this hybrid translation unproblematic: they argued that "Despite such a translation undoubtedly serving as a useful tool with which to approach the original Greek, in and of itself it completely fails to mimic the power of Homer's words" and consequently labelled it "an entirely unfaithful representation". This analysis is striking for several reasons: a) it makes the intelligent point that being "literal" and "faithful [to the power of the *Iliad*]" are not the same thing; b) more troublingly, it assumes that more "literal" translations, such as that of Lattimore (1951), cannot meaningfully be analysed. Perhaps for this reason, only one student chose to discuss Lattimore in their written work.

My own approach to setting their written task may have been partly at fault in leading students into a false dichotomy between quoteable and analysable translations: I asked students to compare two verse translations of the *Iliad*. This was partly intended to help them leave their comfort zone (many students who have studied classical poetry at school, either in the original or in translation, are used to working with prose translations, such as Rieu, 2003) and partly to give them texts that they felt more comfortable analysing: with a verse translation, students are able to mobilise the techniques they have been taught to look for when analysing English poetry (rhyme, enjambment, rhythm). In doing so, however, my guidance may have implied that prose translations should be treated as "literal" and used when referring to the *Iliad*, whereas verse translations should be analysed and critiqued: we then spent some time dismantling this false dichotomy in tutorials. In short, students often instinctively differentiate between "literal" (often prose, but apparently also Lattimore) and "creative" (often verse) translations, and consider only the latter worthy of analysis and critique: when teaching the use of translations, it is important to avoid fixating only on translations that make obvious creative and poetic decisions.

On the other hand, students who answered the general essay question found it much easier to articulate the importance of compromise in translation, and the impossibility of conveying everything which might be conveyed in the original Greek: this essay question, in short, helped students to move past the idea of "faithfulness" as a paramount criterion to use when judging translations, and indeed the necessity of judging one translation "better" than the other. All the students with previous qualifications in Greek chose the passage comparison question, while all the students learning Greek from scratch chose the wider essay question (although one of the latter group did not submit written work). This may indicate a wider problem when teaching translations: often, students without Greek (at all levels, both school and university) are unwilling to engage with a translation's language on its own terms. It is, of course, important for students to remain conscious that they are dealing with a translation, not the original work: an alliterative pattern in Lattimore's translation would not necessarily have been there for an archaic Greek audience to hear. However, it is also important for students to respond sensitively to the language of poetry (whether translated or original) and think about word choice, word order, and sound effects, as long as they remain aware that these are features of the translation. We should think, then, about how to encourage students working only in English to engage critically with the language used in translations, without analysing the translation as if it were the original. The following section highlights several ways in which my students achieved just that, as well as several routes by which they could be encouraged to advance their ideas further.

Successes and Case Studies

Regrettably, this was only a one-week component (and a one-hour tutorial) within an eight-week taught course, itself fitted within the students' demanding schedule (multiple lectures and between two and five compulsory language classes every week). As such, there was only so much progress we could make: even some of the preliminary steps outlined in Praet and Verhelst (2020) – problematising the idea of translational equivalence, for example – remained out of reach without risking overwhelming the students with new information.

That said, I feel that teaching this topic was a success: by the end of the week, students were comfortable discussing issues such as the importance of translators' (personal and cultural) positionality, audiences' different ways of experiencing the text, and different possible approaches such as "domesticating" and "foreignising" literary works[19]. Perhaps the most striking evidence of students' successful engagement with the topic, though, is seen in their analyses of specific details. Here, I quote several examples of

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analysis from students' written work, highlighting both their good qualities and the directions a teacher can take (in classroom discussion, for example) in order to help the students develop their arguments further.

Example 1 (ab initio Greek)

> "I also find interesting the way Wilson introduces the lamenting women in this scene [*Il.* 18.27-42], labelling them as 'the women whom Achilles and Patroclus had captured'. Green instead calls them 'the maidservants won as spoils by Achilles and Patroklos'. Whilst slight, this distinction also encourages us to reflect upon the way translations can often impose the ideals or norms of their times onto the work. As I myself do not have access to Homer in his original language, I do not bring this up to debate which translation is more accurate, but rather wish to point out the aspect of translation which can embed an ideology into the text, that perhaps did not exist before."

This is a perceptive point, revealing thorough and thoughtful reading of both translations: the conclusion that "translations can often impose the ideals or norms of their times onto the work" is an important step beyond judging translations on how "faithful" they are. There are various ways to help this student advance their ideas further. One could, for instance, encourage them to explain their point more thoroughly by outlining the (ideological or political) difference between "captured" and "won as spoils" (and indeed "women" and "maidservants"). One could also direct them towards Wilson's writing on this subject (e.g. Wilson, 2019), and use this as an opportunity to introduce them to the Greek ***δμῳαὶ*** δ᾽ ἃς Ἀχιλεὺς ***ληΐσσατο*** Πάτροκλός τε (18.28) in order to build their confidence and ability to recognise specific vocabulary items. In itself, though, this excerpt reveals how far students can advance without any formal teaching of translation theory, and without being able to rely on using the Homeric Greek to adjudicate between translations.

Example 2 (ab initio Greek)

> "The above lines [*Il.* 13.339-344] also demonstrate that translations are influenced by the biases of different translators and so there is no single ideal of accuracy. For example, different interpretations of the word 'θρασυκαρδιος', which does not easily have an English equivalent, portray their attitudes towards the *Iliad*'s presentation of war. [Wilson's] 'A person with the toughest heart' suggests a quality that the hypothetical individual already possesses, and 'tough' has negative connotations of a lack of emotion and empathy, while [Fagles's] 'a veteran steeled at heart' both suggests that the hardening of hearts was something that occurred to them due the passive participle 'steeled', and associates them with military excellence by adding the word 'veteran'."

This is impressively nuanced handling of the connotations that can be created through different translations of a single word. It reveals that a student can identify, look up, and create an argument using specific Greek vocabulary without needing months or years of Greek study. The student correctly decided that there was no need to adjudicate between the two translations, concluding (after further analysis) that "neither translation is inherently better in this difference, and both demonstrate the way in which translators can convey ideas about the tone of the poem as a whole through smaller choices". To help this student develop their argument further, one could encourage them to interrogate the idea of "biases of different translators" (Where might these biases come from? Are they personal, or cultural?). One could also encourage the student to decide how they would translate θρασυκάρδιος.

Example 3 (post-GCSE Greek)

> "As they go, the Greeks are "ἐν θυμῷ μεμαῶτες ἀλε#xi;έμεν ἀλλήλοισιν" (*Il.* 3.9), "eager in their heart to protect each other." The use of singular θυμῷ posits the army as a unified collective, sharing a heart. This, however, is not kept; Wilson says "their hearts [are] determined to protect each other," making θυμῷ nominative plural. Where the Greek paints a picture of the minds, bodies and hearts of them being in tandem, eager to aid each other, Wilson's translation almost defeats this and creates a more disjunct sense with their hearts being taken as a separate object, doing its own feeling and thinking independent of the soldiers themselves."

Unlike the previous two examples, this student previously studied Greek at school, and uses this knowledge to analyse the significance of the singular noun θυμῷ in the context of a large collective. The result is a sharply perceptive and thoughtful point. One natural way for a student to advance this argument further is to research other uses of θυμός across the *Iliad*: is it commonly used in the singular for large collectives? How marked (and, therefore, how important for a translator to prioritise) is the singular number on this particular occasion? Asking a student to follow up these questions helps them to enter the mindset of a translator by addressing the problems which translators face.

In all these examples, we see students (with varying levels of familiarity with Greek language) engaging thoughtfully with the language used in translation(s) and, in several cases, using this to start engaging with the original Greek. This demonstrates a further way in which the study of translation theory is helpful for students at all levels: it offers them an accessible way to start thinking with, and advancing arguments based on, the original language of the text[20]. For a student at an early stage of language learning, this is a major source of confidence.

Conclusions

Translation theory deserves an entire module (whether assessed or unassessed), or exam paper, within a Classics degree course. Here, it received a week of students' independent research and an hour of class time. This is barely enough to scratch the surface of this richly fascinating topic, or for students to interrogate properly how central it is in their own education and enjoyment of ancient texts. However, this week-long topic is nonetheless an effective way for students to start thinking critically about the theory and practice of translating ancient texts. It prompts them to think about ancient literature (and their own reading of it) from a different perspective, which leads naturally into questions about reception and the history of Greco-Roman scholarship; it can also enhance their understanding of the ancient texts themselves.

No pedagogical study on students' experiences can claim to be definitive, and this one is no exception: it is limited by the relatively

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small group of students (and the narrow range of demographics they represent). In a larger and more diverse group of students, I would be interested (for example) in hearing perspectives from students with experience of modern languages: both those who have studied non-Anglophone literature and those who come from bilingual or ESL backgrounds. Furthermore, what works in small-group undergraduate teaching won't necessarily work in a lecture theatre or a school classroom. For all these reasons, this is an area ripe for further discussion and exploration; nonetheless, this study indicates certain ways in which the study of translation is beneficial, as well as the early pitfalls students often encounter.

Tasks which ask students to compare two passages may be more accessible, and certainly seem more attractive to students with considerable knowledge of Greek; however, it is important to encourage students to address this comparison in terms that do not simply involve choosing which translation is "more accurate", and to move beyond the idea that translations scale from "creative" to "literal". If handled badly, a comparison of two passages may lead students to entrench, rather than challenge, false dichotomies in their understanding of literary translation (by comparing translations from four centuries apart, for example). We can help students progress beyond this point by encouraging them to devise their own translations, as well as (re)consider the decisions they have previously made when writing "literal" translations for reference purposes. Furthermore, Wilson's translations (and discussions of her own approach) may help students to challenge their instinctive assumptions about translation. Many of my students were inclined to pigeonhole Wilson's *Iliad* as a "literal" translation; however, her discussion of metre gives students an accessible way to consider the importance and cultural significance of poetic rhythm, and her commentaries encourage students to assess a translator's positionality and confront the creativity that lurks even in the most seemingly "literal" translations. More general essay questions are more daunting, but help students to interrogate their own assumptions and think more expansively about what the point of translation is (in the process, often moving away from the idea of a "literal" translation as a desirable or even a possible goal).

Students with limited Greek often feel prohibited from analysing translations' language directly; when they do engage with it, however, they often find it easier to compare translated phrases without forming value judgements than students with proficient Greek do. Furthermore, in a world where beginning an undergraduate degree with qualifications in Latin or Greek is the exception rather than the norm, the study of translations provides an accessible springboard for undergraduates to start engaging with the original Greek, while simultaneously becoming acquainted with the history of scholarship and reception studies and honing their ability to analyse texts in their own language.

Supplementary material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631024001193

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Author biography. Alexandra Hardwick is a Stipendiary Lecturer in Classics at Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

Notes

1 Jones (2017), though otherwise very wide-ranging in its discussion of teaching strategies for A-level students (aged 16-18), nowhere acknowledges this challenge.
2 E.g. Greenwood (2023). There are many public-facing reviews and discussions, e.g. Wood (2023).
3 The latter problem is especially frequent at the high school level; here, as elsewhere, I am indebted to the school teachers present at the 2024 Classical Association conference for sharing their experiences teaching ancient literature in translation.
4 On the divide between classroom "calque translations" and literary translation, and methods of bridging that divide at undergraduate-level teaching, cf. Praet & Verhelst (2020).
5 For a more detailed description of the course, see https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/course-listing/classics (accessed 25 October 2024).
6 In this article, I frequently refer to UK-wide academic qualifications usually taken in high school. For the benefit of readers from other educational systems: A-levels are exams taken by students in their final school year, aged 18. Students normally take 3 or 4 of these, and entry to British universities for academic degrees is usually conditional on specific A-level results. AS is the first year of a two-year A-level. GCSEs are exams normally taken by students aged 16, who normally sit them in between 6 and 10 subjects.
7 These statistics do not tell the whole story, as the latter group also includes students with a GCSE in Latin or Greek, and even some with AS or equivalent: not all have no experience whatsoever of Latin and Greek languages at school. Furthermore, plenty of students without Latin or Greek have a qualification (including A-level) in Classical Civilisation or Ancient History.
8 I offer here only a general summary: in practice, the structure and aims of tutorials can vary immensely, as laid out in e.g. Ashwin (2005), Palfreyman (2001), and Smith (2001).
9 More generally, using one's own students as participants in a pedagogical study is both ethically and methodologically complex, given the power differential between teacher and students: for a survey, cf. Ferguson *et al.* (2004).
10 I found no previous research on the benefits to undergraduate students of being subjects in pedagogical studies within humanities. On the benefits of being experimental subjects in psychology studies, cf. Beanland *et al.* (2020).
11 For a brief summary, cf. Maltby (2023).
12 The avowedly conservative Claremont Review of Books argued that Wilson "strives for traditional accuracy in her translations" https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/making-a-list-checking-it-twice/ (accessed 25 October 2024).
13 On which see Steiner (2004) 367-8 for a brief introduction; Lynch (1982) for a more detailed treatment.
14 "Now that the task is done, I lay my words at the feet of the goddess." Wilson (2023, lxxv).
15 This refers to Christopher Logue's War Music, a rendering of the Iliad which was created without knowledge of Greek using other published translations. For more information, see Logue (2001) vii-ix.
16 On the importance of questioning "the notion that every translational 'shift' away from the source text must necessarily constitute some sort of nefarious betrayal" cf. Praet & Verhelst (2020, 32).
17 An example from an essay by a post-A-level student: "Pope is consistently inconsistent with the Greek text, omitting and adding entire lines. Yet his translation also focuses much more on the emotions of the characters; at points it carries greater tragic force than Wilson's, which, I would argue, is somewhat weighed down by its literality."
18 The majority, but not all: one passage analysis essay by a post-A-level student argued that "Both Pope and Wilson provide successful translations insofar as they convey the elements of the text which they wish to emphasise - it is in this sense then that 'translations' are to be judged, carrying the inevitable, fundamental notion of personal interpretation."
19 For an overview of domestication and foreignisation in literary translation, cf. Koskinen (2012). Briefly, "foreignisation" means preserving lexically or culturally unfamiliar aspects of a text in its translation; "domestication" means replacing them with variants more familiar to the reader.
20 This is not to say that the study of literature in translation is *only* worthwhile as a means to access the original text, just that this is one of its benefits.

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