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# KEATS'S SONNET ON CHAPMAN'S TRANSLATION OF HOMER: MANUSCRIPT OF EARLY DRAFT AND INITIAL PUBLICATION\*

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## **Resumo**

Este estudo apresenta o mais antigo manuscrito conhecido do soneto de Keats sobre a tradução da *Ilíada* por Chapman (1611), com uma leitura comparada dos textos do manuscrito e da primeira publicação do soneto (1816), junto com comentários filológicos e literários.

**Palavras chave:** Keats, Chapman, *Ilíada*, família indo-europeia.

## **Abstract**

This study presents the earliest known manuscript of Keats's sonnet to Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* (1611), in comparison with the first publication of the poem by Keats (1816). A comparative reading is provided, along with related philological and literary comments.

**Key words:** Keats, Chapman, *Iliad*, Indo-European.

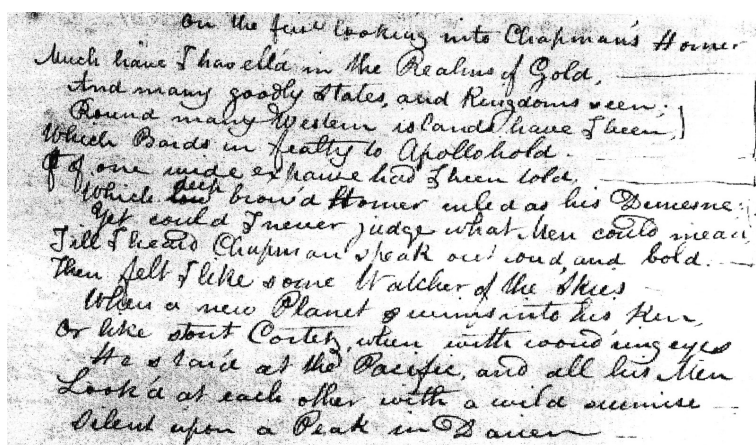
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The purpose of the present study is to present a copy of a manuscript of Keats's sonnet on Chapman's translation of Homer, in comparison with the text of the initial publication of this sonnet, along with some related philological and literary comments.

Keats's sonnet on Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* is well known, having frequently been included in collections of Keats's works. Later authors with references to Keats's sonnet include Edgar Allen Poe, Thomas Wolfe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Vladimir Nabokov and P.G. Wodehouse.

Following partial translations from the *Iliad* in 1598 and 1608, Chapman released the complete twenty-four books under the title *The Iliads of Homer* in 1611.<sup>1</sup>



Prior to composing the sonnet (1816) on Chapman's work, Keats had completed a translation of *The Aeneid*, in 1811.

For purposes of reference, the manuscript reproduced here is identified as: Keats, John, 1795-1821. Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold. A. MS., early draft, MS Keats 2.4, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MASS.

The following is a reading of the manuscript, presented beside the text of the first publication of the same sonnet, for purposes of comparison.

<sup>1</sup> The complete title of the 1611 edition is *The Iliads of Homer, Prince of Poets. Neuer before in any language truly translated. With comment upon some of his chiefe places; Done according to the Greeke*. The current edition is Chapman's *Homer, The Iliad*. Edited with Introduction and Glossary, by Allardyce Nicoll, with a new preface by Garry Wills. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

On the first looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the Realms of Gold,  
And many goodly States and Kingdoms seen;  
Round many Western islands have I been,  
Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,  
Which deep brow'd Homer ruled as his  
Demesne:  
Yet could I never judge what Men could mean,  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud, and bold.  
Then felt I like some Watcher of the Skies  
When a new Planet swims into his Ken,  
Or like stout Cortez, when with wond'ring eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific, and all his Men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise  
Silent upon a Peak in Darien

On first looking into Chapman's Homer<sup>2</sup>

Much have I travell'd in the realms of Gold,  
And many goodly States and Kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
But of one wide expanse had I been told,  
Which deep brow'd Homer ruled as his  
demesne;  
Yet could I never judge what men could mean,  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific, -- and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise, --  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Features of capitalization, punctuation and vocabulary in the early manuscript and in the *Examiner*:

Title Ms.: On the first..., *Examiner*: On first... (without «the»).

1.1. Ms.: Realms..., *Examiner*: realms... (without capitalization).

1.2. Ms.: States and Kingdoms..., *Examiner*: States and Kingdoms... (same)<sup>3</sup>

1.3. Ms.: Western...been, *Examiner*: western (without capital)... been (no comma).

1.4. Ms.: Bards..., *Examiner*: Bards... (without capitalization in later publications).

1.5. Ms.: Oft..., *Examiner* But... (different wording).

1.6. Ms.: Demesne:, *Examiner*: demesne; (without capital, and with semi-colon instead of colon).

1.7. Ms.: Men, *Examiner*: men. (without capitalization).

1.8. Ms.: loud, ... bold. *Examiner*: loud (no comma)... bold: (colon, instead of period)

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2 As published *The Examiner*, December 1, 1816, p. 762. For a more recent publication of this sonnet, see Keats, J. (1992), *Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press: 38.

3 Some of the later publications have one or both of these words beginning with a small letter.

- 1.9. Ms. Watcher of the Skies. *Examiner*: watcher of the skies. (without capitals)
- 1.10. Ms.: Planet... Ken, *Examiner*: planet... ken; (without capitalization).
- 1.11. Ms.: wond'ring eyes. *Examiner*: eagle eyes. (different wording).
- 1.12. Ms.: Pacific, ... Men, *Examiner*: Pacific, -- ...men (with dash after Pacific, men not capitalized).
- 1.13. Ms.: surmise *Examiner*: surmise, -- (comma and dash after surmise).
- 1.14. Ms.: Silent ... Peak ... Darien, *Examiner*: Silent peak, Darien.

The following philological comments are made for the purpose of clarifying the lexical structure of the sonnet, in addition to indicating the nature of Keats's vocabulary. Line 1: *realm*, Middle English *roialme*, *realme*, Old French *realme*, French *royaume* «kingdom», from late Latin *\*rāgālīmen*, accusative of *rāgālīs* «royal», from Indo-European *\*reg-* «to move in a straight line» with derivatives meaning «to direct in a straight line», oldest form *\*hreǵ-*. Lengthened-grade form *\*rēg-* was Indo-European word for a tribal king, source of Old High German *-rīh* «king, ruler», suffix in personal names. Suffixed *\*rēg-en-*: source of Sanskrit *rājā*, *rājan-* «king, rajah», *rājñi* «queen, rani», *rājati* «he rules». Greek *οπέω* «reach, stretch», Latin *regere* «direct, lead», Irish *rigim* «stretch out», Gothic *uf-rakjan* «stretch out». Lehmann (1986: R18) lists Sanskrit *rāt*, *rāja*, Latin *rēx*, Old Irish *rī* «king» from Proto-Indo-European *\*rēǵ-s* «ruler». (Watkins 2011: 72b, Pokorny 1. *reǵ-* 854.)<sup>4</sup>

Line 2: *goodly* is the combination of *good* plus the suffix *-ly*, meaning «somewhat large, considerable», with *good* via Old English *gōd*, from Germanic *\*gōdaz*, «fitting, suitable», allied to Old Slavonic *god* «fit season», Russian *годный* «fit, suitable» and Polish *godny* «worthy», from common

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4 The principal source for identification of Indo-European roots is Watkins (2011), with additional information from Pokorny (1959) and from data from on-going Indo-European research on Proto-Indo-European Etyma (Pokorny Master PIE Etyma) at the Linguistics Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Skeat (1980) is a useful source for cognate forms in the Germanic languages and for description of words from Latin via Old French, Vasmer (1958, 1987) for related forms in the Slavic languages, Lehmann (1986) for Gothic and related words in other Indo-European languages, and Johnson (1755) for earlier meanings of English words.

origin in the earlier Indo-European **\*ghedh-** «to unite, join, fit» (Watkins 2011: 29a, Pokorny *ghedh-* 423.)

The derived form *kingdom* «country, state ruled by a king» is from Old English *cyningdōm*: *king* + *dom*, hence literally the «domain of a king». The base word *king* is from the Indo-European root **\*genə-**, also **\*gen-**, «to give birth, beget, with derivatives referring to aspects and results of procreation and to familial and tribal groups»; oldest form **\*ġenh-**. The word *king* is from the zero-grade form **\*gṇə-**. Related words in English include, among many others, *gene* and *indigenous*. Related forms in other languages include Anglo-Saxon *cyning* «king» (literally, a man of good birth), *cyne-* «royal», *cyn* «tribe, kin, race», Latin *gignere* (past participle *genitus*) «to beget» and *gnāscī*, *nascī* (*gnātus*, *natus*) «to be born», Greek γόνος «procreation» and γονή «seed, offspring», and Sanskrit *janahv* «offspring», *jāta-* «born», *janate* «he is born» (Watkins 27a, Pokorny 1. *ġen-* 373.)

The ultimate source of the suffix *-dom* is from the Indo-European root **\*dhē-** «to set, put» (contracted from earlier **dheh-**), origin of Old English *dēd* «doing, deed» via Germanic **\*dēdiz**. Variant **\*dhō-** is origin of current English «do» from Old English *dōn* «to do», Germanic **\*dōn**. Suffixed o-grade form **\*dhō-mo-** is origin «doom» from Old English *dōm* «judgement», while *-dom* is from Old English *-dōm*, abstract suffix indicating state, condition or power, also Old Norse *-dōmr* «condition» in compound *hōrdōmr*. Related forms in other branches of Indo-European include Russian дума «thought, council» and Ukrainian дума «thought, narrative poem», both from a Germanic source akin to Gothic *dōms* «judgement». (Watkins 2011: 18a-b, Pokorny 2. *dhā-* 235.)

The word *state* comes via Old French *estat* from Latin *statum*, accusative of *status* «standing, condition», supine of *stāre* «to stand», Indo-European root **\*stā-** «to stand», with derivatives meaning «place or thing that is standing», oldest form: **\*steh**, colored to **\*stah**, contracted to **\*stā-**. Also origin of Avestan and Armenian *stāya* «stand, place», Latin *sistō*, *stō* «stand», Anglo-Saxon *standan* «stand», Old Irish *tair-* «stand», Old High German *stān*, *stān* «stand», Greek εστην «I stood», Sanskrit *sthā* «to stand», Russian стоятъ «to stand», Lithuanian *stóju* «stand», Tocharian B *ste* «is». (For related words in English, see Watkins 2011: 86b-87b; Pokorny *stā-* 1004.)

Line 4: *bard* is from Welsh *barrd* and Gaelic Irish *bard*, origin of Greek βάρδος. In Latin, the term *bardus* is found in Lucan. The word was originally used in reference only to Celtic poets and, in lowland Scotland, to wandering minstrels; the meaning was later extended for general reference

to poets. Although both the *New English Dictionary* (Oxford 1884) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1971) indicate that the earliest documentation of the word is from the mid-fifteenth century, *Bard* had already become a surname by the end of the thirteenth century. Cf. Scottish surname *Baird*. The Indo-European root is **\*g<sup>w</sup>era-** «to favor». Celtic **\*bardo** refers to a «praise poet», one who produced and bestowed praise poetry as gratification to his patron. (Watkins 2011: 35b, Pokorny 4. *guer(ə)*- 478.)

Line 5: *expanse* is related to the Latin verb *expandere*, from *pandere*, *pans-* «to spread». The Indo-European root is **\*petə-** «to spread», also the origin of Old English *fæthm* «fathom», from Germanic **\*fathmaz** «length of two arms extended». There are numerous derivatives from Latin *patāre* «to be open» and *pandere* (past participle *pāssus* < **\*patto-**) «to spread out», as well as from Greek πέταλον, «thin plate», neuter of πέταλος, origin of French *pétale* and English *petal*, πατανέ (?<\*πετάνα [petanā] > Latin *patina*) «platter» and πέτακος «broad-brimmed hat». (Watkins 2011: 69b, Pokorny 2. *pet-* 825.)

Line 5 begins with «Oft» in the manuscript, with «But» in the first published version. The former emphasizes the frequency of a certain special reference to Homer, the latter contrasts Homer's domain with that of other literary references in the sonnet.

Line 6: *low brow'd* changed to *deep brow'd*. The word 'low' has meanings similar to those of 'deep': «deep browed» (or «low browed») implies profound knowledge and intellectual powers. The term *lowbrow* (based on *highbrow*) in the sense of 'unsophisticated' or 'trivial', is documented beginning in the early 20th century. In general, «brow» refers to the ridge above the eyes, also to «contenance». The Indo-European root is **\*bhrū-** «eyebrow», contracted from **\*bhruh**, which yielded Middle English *browe*, from Old English *brū-*, via Germanic **\*bhrūs**. Related forms include Icelandic *brūn* and, from other branches of the Indo-European family, Lithuanian *bruwis*, Russian бровь, Greek όφρύς, Persian *abrū*, Sanskrit *bhrū*. (Watkins 2011: 14a, Pokorny 1. *bhrū-* 172, 2. *bhrū-* 173.)

Line 6: *demesne* refers to «possession of own land». The term entered English in the fourteenth century, via Old French *demeine* «belonging to a lord», from Latin *dominus* «lord» (allied to verb *domāre* «to tame»), *domini-cus* «pertaining to a lord», also the source of English *domain*, a more modern form, from 15th century French *domaine* through alteration of *demeine* 'demesne', source of English *demesne*, ultimately from Indo-European **\*dem-** «house, household», with reflexes in several branches, such as Greek

δέμω «build», δόμος «house», Old Irish *doim* «in the house», Avestan *dqm*, *dqmi* «in the house», Armenian *tun* «house», Tocharian A *tam-* «produce, to be born», Tocharian B *tem-* «produce, to be born». (Watkins 2011: 16b, Pokorny *dem-*, *demā-* 198). Cf. Johnson 1755 *q.v.*

Line 7: *mean* (in both early draft of ms. and in the earliest printed version of the sonnet, *The Examiner*, December 1, 1816) comes from Middle English *menen*, Old English *mēnan* «to intend», Old Irish *mían*, Brittonic *mwyn*, Old High German *meinen* «to think», *meina* «thought» (related to *minni* «memory»), Germanic *\*mainjan*, Dutch *meenen*, Danish *mene*, Swedish *mena*, as well as slavic *meinō*, Old Church Slavonic *měnjo*, *měniti*, Russian мненье «opinion», all ultimately from Indo-European *\*mei-no-* «opinion, intention». (Watkins 2011: 54b-55a, Pokorny *mei-no-* 714.)

A later version (1992, see n. 2, *supra*) has a different text for this line, ending with *serene*, from Latin *serēnus*, via French, with the derivatives *serenity*, French *sérénité* and Latin *serēnitās* each used as honorific forms in certain titles. The use of *serene* («Yet did I never breathe its pure serene») is in accord with the reference to the *Pacific*, in the second and final simile in the sestet, in comparison with the experience of reading Chapman's translation of Homer, «till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold». Both the early manuscript and the first printing indicate the unique nature of the experience («Yet could I never...»). The Indo-European root is *\*ksero-* «dry», of Greek ξηρος «dry» (applied only to ground, according to Ernout-Meillet 1939: 928), Latin *serenus*, and Tocharian A *ksär* «morning», among others. (Watkins 2011: 46a, Pokorny *ksē-ro-* 625.)

Line 10: *planet* is from Middle English *planete* < Old French *planete* < Latin *planēta* < Greek πλανής «a wanderer», plural πλάνητες «wandering stars, planets», from Indo-European root *\*pelə-* «flat; to spread», also ultimate origin of поле «field» in Russian, Ukrainian, and Old Russian, поле, with a cognate form in Old Slavonic; Bulgarian, полé; Serbo-Croatian, поље; Slovenian, *poljê*; Polish, Czech and Slovakian, *pole*; in Upper Sorbian, *polo*; Lower Sorbian, *pólo*; and Polabian (now extinct), *püliü* (Vasmer 1987: III, 307), in addition to other related words in Slavic languages, such as *polak* (in reference to Polish people) and *polka* (a Polish dance, originally only in reference to a Polish woman). (Watkins 2011: 66b, Pokorny *pela-* 805.)

Line 10: *ken*, meaning «can» and «know» is from Anglo-Saxon *cen-nan*. Cognate forms are well attested in the Germanic languages: German *kennen*, *können*, Dutch *kennen*, Old Norse *kenna*, Gothic *kunnan* «to know, recognize» and *kannjan* «to make known». The root is from Indo-European



**\*gnō-** «ken, know, recognize» (oldest form **\*ġneh-**, altered to **\*gnōh-**, contracted to **\*ġnō-**), also origin of Latin *gnārus* «one who knows» (with numerous derivations and compounds) and its antonym *ignārus*, as well words in other branches of Indo-European: Classical Greek: γνῶς- root of «to know» and related words, such as the coinages *gnosis*, from γνῶσις in the sixteenth century, and *agnostic*, based on ἄγνωστος (suggested in Acts xvii: 23), by Huxley in 1869; Avestan *zānāiti* «know» and *zainti* «knowledge»; Old Irish *ad-gnimin* «recognize»; Lithuanian *žinoti* «know», Old Prussian *ersinnat* «recognize», Armenian *caneay* «I Know» and *an-can* «unknown», Greek γνωτός, Latin (*g*)*notus*, Old Irish *gnath*, Lithuanian *pa-žintas* «known», Old Slavonic *znati*, Russian знать «know», Albanian *njoh* «know», Tocharian A and B *knā-* «know, recognize». (Lehmann 1986: K38, Watkins 2011: 33b, Pokorny 2. *ġen-*, *ġenā-*, *ġne-*, *ġnō-*, 376.)

Line 11: *stout*, Middle English *stout*, Old French *estout* «stout, bold», related to Anglo-Saxon and Low German *stolt*, with the same meanings, is ultimately from the Indo-European root **\*stel-** «to put, stand», with variant forms giving origin to diverse words, such as Old English *stille* «quiet», current English *Apostle*, *stallion*, *stolid*. The modern meanings of *stout* include «determined, bold, brave» and «strong, sturdy». Other words from the same Indo-European root include, among others, Greek *στήλη* «pillar», *στολή* «garment», Russian *стойкий* «firm», Flemish *stilte* «stick». (Watkins 2011: 88a-b, Pokorny 3. *stel-* 1019. See also Skeat 1980: 522.)

Line 15: *wild*, meaning here «unrestrained, frenzied, full of intense emotion, bewildered», is ultimately from the Indo-European root **\*welt-** «woods, wild», which yielded forms such as Old English *weald*, *wald*, from Germanic *\*walthuz*; *wild* from Old English *wilde*, *wild*, derived from Germanic *\*wilthja-*. Cognate words in other Germanic languages include Dutch *wild*, Icelandic *villr*, Danish and Swedish *vild*, German *wild*, Gothic *wiltheis*. (Watkins 2011: 101a, Pokorny 4. *ŷel-* 1139.)

Line 15: *surmise*, meaning «guess or notion based on intuition or limited information», is based on *mittere* «to let go, send off, throw», of uncertain origin, with the likely oldest form being **\*smittere**, as in the archaic spelling *cosmittere*, of the Classical Latin compound *committere* «to bring together». (Watkins 2011: 57b, Pokorny *\*smeit-* 968.) The English verb *surmise* comes from Latin *mittere* via Old French *surmise*, feminine singular of the past participle of *surmettre*. The original sense in English is that of supposing or conjecturing, to which the meaning of Keats's phrase *wild surmise* clearly indicates.

In terms of the use of punctuation and capitalization, there is close similarity between the features of the early manuscript shown above and those of the version of the sonnet first published in *The Examiner* on December 1, 1816.<sup>5</sup> Most of the capital letters of the manuscript are preserved in the initial publication of the sonnet. The use of capitals in the manuscript is more extensive, including words that take the place of proper nouns, as well as some employed for emphasis. The punctuation is similar, with few differences. Both versions divide the octave into just two sentences, of four lines each, and both treat the sestet as a single sentence. It can be noted, however, that later publications have more differences, in relation to the texts considered here, with regard to the use of both punctuation and capitalization, with the later publications tending to be increasingly conservative with regard to contemporary pedagogical norms (hence, reflecting to a lesser degree the features of earlier versions).<sup>6</sup>

Keats's generation was familiar with the translations by John Dryden and Alexander Pope, in blank verse or heroic couplets, rendering Homer in a way similar to Virgil.

From the content of the sonnet, it is evident that Keats was profoundly impressed by Chapman's rendition. Keats had a special affinity with Chapman: both possessed good knowledge of classical culture, both were poets and Keats also translated a classical epic poem.

Formally, Keats's poetic tribute to Chapman is a sonnet in the style of Petrarch, consisting of an octave and a sestet, in iambic pentameter. The meanings of the parts are closely interrelated. That the manuscript is a draft

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5 The website <http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?action=GET&txtsid=36006> presents a version of the text as a *copy* of «On first looking into Chapman's Homer», as published in *The Examiner* (1 December 1816) 762. It is not, however, a *faithful* copy of the original publication, for, unlike the version published in *The Examiner*, it shows both of the names Chapman and Cortez completely in capital letters: CHAPMAN... CORTEZ. There is no apparent justification for this change.

6 To the extent that they represent interference with the poet's intended forms and meanings, such versions must be considered distortive. Without additional specific information, one can only speculate with regard to the causes of such textual interference, which seems to be the result of greater concern for normative grammatical features of common usage than for the special aspects of poetic discourse (such as linking and emphasis) in accordance with the poet's own vision of his topic. One can imagine the distortions that would result from the use of normative principles by an overly zealous and disoriented editor for «correcting» the lack of capitalization in the poetry of e e cummings (Edward Estlin Cummings) or the lack of punctuation in the prose of Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago.

(rather than merely a copy) is indicated both by the change in the text (line 6) and by marks connecting paired lines.

It is clear the «realms of gold» refers to literary riches, as evidenced by the successive references, in the first eight lines, to the Aegean islands, to Apollo (god of poetry, born at the sacred island of Delos, in the Aegean), to Homer, then to Chapman, preceded by «Yet could I never know what Men could mean», which calls attention to the value of literary translation in making works available to those who otherwise would not have access to them, and especially to the value of quality in translation. The sestet concerns the magnitude of the experience of the first reading of Chapman's translation, through two comparisons: first with taking knowledge of a new planet, then with an initial sighting of the Pacific.

Keats's generation knew of the discovery of Uranus, the first planet to become known modern times (not known in antiquity). Uranus (named after the Greek god ruler of the heavens) had been found fortuitously by Herschel in 1781. The phrase «swims into his ken» suggests the mode of the discovery (-- contrary to the case of Neptune, to be discovered more than half a century later, through mathematical calculations, in 1846). Literary connections with the planet Uranus include the names of its seventeen satellites, all for characters in Shakespearean plays.

The second and final comparison is with the initial viewing of the Pacific Ocean by Cortez with «eagle eyes» (as shown in Titian's painting of this subject), changed from «wond'ring eyes», hence denoting close attention, in addition to the wonderment indicated by «wild surmise» and «silent»), while «all his men look'd at each other in wild surmise». The two comparisons show the vastness of the discovery and the nature of its impression.

There are several links between words of like meaning, such as «Realms» (line 1), «Kingdoms» (line 2) and «Demesne» [=domain] (l. 6), between the reference to the Aegean Islands (l. 3), suggesting water, extended through the use of «swim» (l. 10), culminating in the reference to the awe-inspiring Pacific Ocean, and between the vastness suggested by the use of *wide expanse* (l. 5), the reference to a *planet* (l. 10), then the reference to the *Pacific* (l. 12). Such connections contribute to the emphasis and unity of the poetic composition. The climactic impression made by the total imagery of these comparisons is one of awe, caused by reading Chapman's Homer.

Historically, the reference to Cortez viewing the Pacific from the Darién province in Panama is an error: it was Balboa, not Cortez, who viewed

the Pacific Ocean from Panama. It has been suggested that Keats did not change the reference to Balboa, because doing so would have added another syllable. Such a motive seems hardly likely: Keats gave ample evidence of poetic skill in more than fifty compositions. The differences both within the manuscript of the «early draft» reproduced here (line 6) and between it and the later publication (lines 7 and 11) show that it would not have been difficult for Keats to make additional changes required by alteration of the reference. The name of Cortez, who conquered Mexico and served as its governor, has different connotations and imagery from that of Balboa. Moreover, it is Cortez, not Balboa, who was immortalized in a portrait by Titian. Of course, many early explorers and *conquistadores* viewed the Pacific, as did Cortez, one of the most famous leaders of sixteenth century European expansion.

The final comparison in the sestet, with «stout Cortez», recalls the attributes determined, bold and strong, qualities also to be associated, as mental courage and artistic prowess, with both «deep-browed Homer» and Chapman, the principal English translator of *The Iliad*.

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