

Homer like Thucydides? Hobbes and the Translation of the Homeric Poems as an Educational Tool

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Résumé de l'article

Thomas Hobbes entretenait une relation profonde et, dans une certaine mesure, controversée avec les classiques et le monde classique. Au début de sa carrière de penseur politique, par exemple, il a traduit du grec en anglais *l'Histoire de la guerre du Péloponnèse* de Thucydide. Malgré cette implication initiale, le philosophe finit par cesser de traduire. Plusieurs décennies plus tard, dans la dernière période de sa vie, il a choisi de revenir à ce genre de travail en traduisant *l'Iliade* et *l'Odyssee*, apparemment pour son propre amusement, rien de plus. Cependant, des ouvrages récents avancent l'hypothèse que ces travaux, tout comme sa traduction de l'oeuvre de Thucydide, cachaient un autre motif : il voulait continuer à diffuser sa pensée politique dans un contexte où il ne pouvait plus le faire à sa manière habituelle, à cause de la vieillesse, de la maladie et, surtout, de la censure. En proposant une comparaison entre les textes grecs originaux et leurs traductions hobbesiennes, cet essai vise à montrer comment Hobbes a traité les éléments politiques de *l'Iliade* et de *l'Odyssee* qui ne cadraient pas avec sa théorie politique et, par là, risquaient de contrecarrer sa volonté d'enseigner la vertu morale et politique. Il s'attache en particulier à sonder le problème politique des souverainetés superposées, en vue de clarifier certains choix de traduction systématiques qui s'écartent clairement du grec.

Homer like Thucydides? Hobbes and the Translation of the Homeric Poems as an Educational Tool

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Abstract

Thomas Hobbes had a deep and, to some extent, controversial relationship with both the classics and the classical world. At the beginning of his career as a political thinker, for example, he translated from Greek into English the *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides. Despite this initial involvement, the philosopher subsequently stopped translating, although, several decades later, in the final period of his life, he decided to return to this activity, translating the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, apparently for his own amusement, nothing more. However, recent literature has suggested that these works, as in the case of his translation of Thucydides's work, hid another motive: he wanted to continue spreading his political thought in a period when he no longer able to do it in the usual way because of old age, illness, and, above all, censorship. By offering a comparison of the original Greek texts and Hobbes's translations, this essay aims to show how he handled the political elements of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that did not fit his political theory and ran the risk of undermining his attempt to teach moral and political virtue. It focuses in particular on the political question of overlapping sovereignties, with a view to explaining some systematic uses of translation choices that clearly deviate from the Greek.

Keywords: Hobbes, Homer, translation, sovereignty, king

Résumé

Thomas Hobbes entretenait une relation profonde et, dans une certaine mesure, controversée avec les classiques et le monde classique. Au début de sa carrière de penseur politique, par exemple, il a traduit du grec en anglais l'*Histoire de la guerre du Péloponnèse* de Thucydide. Malgré cette implication initiale, le philosophe finit par cesser de traduire. Plusieurs décennies plus tard, dans la dernière période de sa vie, il a choisi de revenir à ce genre de travail en traduisant l'*Iliade* et l'*Odyssée*, apparemment pour son propre amusement,

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Mots-clés : Hobbes, Homère, traduction, souveraineté, roi

Introduction

The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes had a deep and controversial relationship with classical culture (Skinner, 1996, pp. 215-293),¹ but he also was an important translator from Greek into English. The first work he published was the English version of the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre* (1629) by Thucydides (Schlatter, 1975, p. IX),² while many decades later, when the philosopher was in his eighties, one of his last exertions was the translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (Nelson, 2008a, pp. XII-XXIV; Davis, 1997, p. 231; Condren, 2013, p. 71). What he wrote and published in between was, broadly speaking, no less than his entire political and philosophical output.³ Hobbes's Thucydides and Homer, then, represent a sort of starting and ending point encompassing the vast majority of his works, the ideal boundaries of his career as thinker and as political writer.

Despite this, these translations have very different objectives or at least at first sight this would appear to be the case. For this reason,

1. As he confirms in his autobiographies, Hobbes had a profound knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics. We also know, for example from *Dialogue I of Behemoth* (Hobbes, 2014 [1679/1682], p. 110), that he considered several of these works, widely used in education in his day, to be politically dangerous. On the *curricula studiorum* in Hobbes's time, see Skinner (1996, pp. 19-65) and Iori (2015, pp. 3-32).

2. With regard to the publication date, see Raylor (2018, p. 69, n. 43): "The title page is dated '1629', but it was conventional for books published late in the year to be dated to the coming year."

3. Among his most famous works, *Elements of Law Natural and Political* was circulating in manuscript form since 1640, *De civē* was published in Latin in Paris in 1642, *Leviathan* in 1651 (see Gaskin, 1996, LIII-LV).

it seems useful to consider in detail some aspects of these objectives, focusing in particular on the translation of the Homeric poems, a work which, as will become clearer in what follows, has received less attention from critics.

As we read in Hobbes's *Vita* in verse and his *Vita* in prose,⁴ he chose to translate the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre* with a view to achieving a peculiar objective. The philosopher writes in the former:

Flaccus, Virgilius, fuit et mihi notus Homerus,
Euripides, Sophocles, Plautus, Aristophanes,
Pluresque; et multi Scriptores Historiarum:
Sed mihi prae reliquis Thucydides placuit.
Is Democratia ostendit mihi quam sit inepta,
Et, quantum coetu plus sapit unus homo.
Hunc ego scriptorem verti, qui diceret Anglis,
Consultaturi rhetoras ut fugerent.
(Hobbes, 1839, p. LXXXVIII)

[I knew Flaccus, Virgilius, Homerus,
Euripides, Sophocles, Plautus, Aristophanes,
and many more; and many historians;
but most of all, I liked Thucydides.
He showed me how unsuitable democracy is,
and how one man is wiser than the masses.
I translated this writer, who told the Englishmen
to flee the rhetoricians they were about to consult.⁵] (my trans.)

In the latter we read:

Inter historicos Graecos Thucydidem prae caeteris dilexit, et vacuis
horis in sermonem Anglicum paulatim conversum cum nonnulla
laude, circa annum Christi 1628, in publicum edidit; eo fine, ut

4. These two autobiographies were written by Hobbes “in the last decades of his life” (Baumgold, 2008, p. 829).

5. In translating this passage from Latin into English, I have greatly benefited by Luca Iori's (2015, p. 216) Italian translation.

ineptiae Democraticorum Atheniensium concivibus suis patefierent.
(Hobbes, 1839, p. XIV)

[Among the Greek historians he loved Thucydides above all others, and gave it to the press translated gradually in his spare time into English, around the year of the Lord 1628, with a certain success, with a view to letting his fellow citizens know the ineptitude of the Athenian democrats.⁶] (my trans.)

As Hobbes states, he wanted to show his contemporaries the disadvantages and dangers of democracy.⁷ In his view, such a political regime was unable to assure long-lasting peace and safety, the final and real objective of politics. In short, Hobbes assigned an educational role to his translation of Thucydides, which was conceived of as a means of teaching a crucial aspect of his political theory.

With regard to the translations of Homer's poems, things were different, if only on the surface. Hobbes published them in the period from 1673 to 1677, that is, in the last years of his life (Nelson, 2008a, pp. XII-XIV). In the essay entitled *To the reader. Concerning the virtues of an heroic poem*, which he first published in the 1675 edition of the *Odyssey* (Nelson, 2008a, pp. XV and LXXVII), his aim appears extremely evident. He rhetorically wonders "why then did I write it?" (Hobbes, 1844, p. X) and his answer sounds clear enough: "Because I had nothing else to do" (*ibid.*). Despite this, recent literature has begun to consider the translations of these poems from a different perspective. The question has been raised as to whether similar conclusions can be drawn regarding Hobbes's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as for the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre*, namely that they too might have had an educational and thus political intent. Starting from this assumption, the objective of this article is to give examples of the linguistic tools used by Hobbes to translate Homer's poems from a political standpoint.⁸

6. On how to interpret these passages from Hobbes's autobiographies, see Iori (2015, p. 217).

7. It seems appropriate to point out that Thucydides (cf. Book I, 22, 4) had conceived of his work as something that should be useful forever, that is, as something with an educational value as well. In this sense, Hobbes's use of Thucydides work seems to move in that direction.

8. This article is based on material from my book published in 2019. I have also benefited greatly for the theoretical framework and the materials from Nelson

The translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

The purported aim of the English versions of Homer's poems appears to be radically different from that of the translation of Thucydides's work. On the one hand, Hobbes unequivocally acknowledged his deliberately educational and clearly political intentions. On the other hand, he described his objective as a form of mere amusement (Molesworth, 1844). This is one of the reasons why his translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have long been relegated to the background and considered simply as an enjoyable way for the philosopher to spend time in the last period of his life. While works of secondary literature on this topic are not so numerous (Nelson, 2008a, p. XIV),⁹ some of their findings deserve to be stressed here; moreover, a few contextual remarks are essential before starting the analysis.

As previously stated, when the philosopher began translating the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he was in his eighties. Some years earlier, he had been struck by a disease that prevented him from being able to write on his own (Malcolm, 2002, p. 24; Nelson, 2008a, p. XVI). He was also on the fringes of political life and, more importantly, a target of censorship (Nelson, 2008a, pp. XIX-XXII; Fabbri, 2010, p. 154; Davis, 1997, p. 236). As Malcolm (2002, p. 348) writes: "Ever since the so-called Licensing Act came into force in June 1662 (requiring books on most subjects to be licensed by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of London), a general ban seems to have been imposed on the publication of any works by Hobbes in the fields of politics, law, ecclesiology, or theology. [...] Thereafter, the only books by Hobbes to be published in his lifetime (and the lifetime of the Licensing Act, which lapsed in the year of Hobbes's death, 1679) by Andrew Crooke or his cousin, William Crooke, were either mathematical and scientific treatises, or translations of Homer". To mention one significant example, his *Behemoth*, which he finished at the end of the 1660s, was denied publication and only printed about ten years later (Seaward, 2014, pp. 6-17).¹⁰ While

(2008, 2012).

9. Nelson mentions: Martinich (2001); Davis (1997); Ball (1996); E. and I. Kontiados (1966); Riddehough (1958). See also Lynch (1998); Fabbri (2010); Nelson (2012); Condren (2013); Wolfe (2015); Catanzaro (2016, 2017, 2019).

10. See Seaward (2014, pp. 12-13): "Hobbes and Aubrey clearly indicate that the text of *Behemoth* was submitted to the King for his approval, and that this approval was withheld, although it is only Aubrey who reports that the King had actually read it [...]. Aubrey is contradictory, stating in one letter that the obstacle to publication

his status as a sick man—especially with an illness that affected the act of writing itself¹¹—makes it difficult to accept the idea that these translations were just a hobby designed to amuse himself, the other two elements, his marginality and his status as an object of censorship, encourage us to look at them from another point of view.

A very effective summary of this perspective can be found in the *General Introduction* to the Oxford University Press edition of these translations by Eric Nelson: “Hobbes’s *Iliads and Odysseys of Homer* are a continuation of *Leviathan* by other means” (2008a, p. XXII). In other words, the philosopher appears to have used the translations as a vehicle for continuing to spread his political thought in a period when, as we have just seen, he was subjected to censorship and felt it unsafe to write about both politics and the contemporary political situation openly. Accordingly, he had had to come to terms with his personal condition and find an alternative means of making his voice heard again.

Furthermore, as Nelson highlights in another essay, from a Hobbesian perspective “poetry [...] should teach moral virtue” (2012, p. 127), and a

faithful translation, as we understand it, is immoral. It can never be right to propagate what is contrary to the demands of peace—whether in one’s own voice or in the voice of another. The translator ought, therefore, to be a rescuer of texts, one who saves past authors from their own indiscretions. Hobbes saw himself as just such a translator. (*ibid.*, p. 139)

If we consider this element as well, similarities begin to emerge with the English version of the *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre*.

We need to look, then, at Hobbes’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from a different perspective in order to conceive of them as something more than a mere form of amusement. In short, we should consider Hobbes’s versions of the Homeric poems not only in relation to what they technically are—that is, translations from Greek into English—

was the bishops’ refusal to license [...], in the other that it was the King’s fear of offending them. There is no evidence when, or in what circumstances, Hobbes’s attempt to secure publication might have happened, beyond that it was between the completion of the work and Aubrey letters of 1673.”

11. See Malcolm (2002, p. 24): “[Hobbes] continued writing until his final year (aged 91). This productivity is all the more impressive when one remembers that the ‘shaking palsy’ (probably Parkinson’s disease) from which he suffered was so severe that he was forced to dictate his writings to an amanuensis from late 1656 onward.”

but also to what they mean from the perspective of political theory. About fifty years after Thucydides, Homer too becomes a tool in the philosopher's hands, a tool with which to achieve, once again, an educational purpose, and the possibility of remaining part of the political debate, in spite of censorship. Hobbes's educational purposes come to light through a comparative analysis of the original Greek text—which he almost certainly read in the Stephanus edition¹² (Nelson, 2008a, p. XXIV)—and his English version. However, this analysis must be preceded by a few preliminary remarks.

Many elements change when translated from one language to another, and Hobbes's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are certainly no exception to the rule. In this instance, metrical and stylistic reasons play a major role in the alterations (*ibid.*, pp. XXX-XXXI; Ball, 1996, pp. 4-15; Riddehough, 1958, pp. 59-61; Condren, 2013, p. 74). However, some words, lines and sections of lines seem to have been altered for other reasons, which can be effectively explained by taking into account the educational and political perspectives informing these works.¹³

With a view to classifying these alterations, it may be helpful to use two main categories related to Hobbesian political theory, which assumes that the main aim of politics is to create long-lasting conditions of peace and safety. This aim concerns at once escaping from the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [war of all men against all men] of the natural condition of mankind and, after the creation of the State, the removal of all internal conflict and the assurance of protection from external enemies. Establishing a covenant among individuals is the only means by which the achievement of these aims can be guaranteed. Such a covenant entails—among the others—two elements that are particularly crucial for the classification we are attempting to outline.

The first consists of the creation of a clear-cut dichotomy between sovereign and subjects, given that only this can guarantee the singularity of the entity in command: when a sole source of power is clearly identified, there can be no misunderstanding about the legitimacy of orders, and, accordingly, no conflict. As Hobbes clarifies in chapter XVII of *Leviathan*:

12. Possible discrepancies between the line numbers in Stephanus's edition of the Homeric poems and those used in this essay are marked by [Steph. *line number*].

13. On the relation between translation choices and politics as a whole, see Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002, p. XVIII).

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person: and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment [...] And he that carrieth this person, is called SOVEREIGN, and said to have *sovereign power*, and every one besides, his SUBJECT. (Hobbes, 1996 [1651], p. 114; uppercase and italics in original)

The second element deals with the nature of the power provided by the covenant: it is exclusively human. No divine element is allowed to take part in it or legitimize its holder. The reason for this is very similar to the previous one: since peace depends on the singularity of the command, no subject who claims to hold an alleged legitimacy because of his relation to a deity can be obeyed in place of the real sovereign (Hoekstra, 2004, pp. 126-127). Both dichotomies—the clear-cut detachment between sovereign and subjects and the deep cleavage between the human and the divine with respect to the genesis of political power—represent the two categories we wish to highlight. They allow us to classify those alterations in Hobbes’s translations that do not—or do not exclusively—depend on metrical and stylistic factors, but that can also be explained by taking into consideration the philosopher’s intent to write “a continuation of *Leviathan* by other means” (Nelson, 2008a, p. XXII).

The comparison between the Greek and English texts reveals a number of translation choices that derive from each of these dichotomies. In what follows, however, I will give examples of translation choices that depend specifically on the first dichotomy, since they reveal more clearly Hobbes’s political and educational intentions. I will also make a brief reference to the second dichotomy, in order to stress a significant finding of critical works on Hobbes that appears to be consistent with the outcomes of the analysis of the first dichotomy.

The detachment between sovereign and subjects. The *Iliad*

Although Homer's epics are conceived by the philosopher as an educational means, unfortunately for him, the scenarios they describe do not fit his political theory. Taking into account the dichotomy between sovereign and subjects, the Achaean army, for example, immediately poses a huge problem for Hobbes. Although Agamemnon is the commander-in-chief, there are many characters who are *anax* and *basileus* [kings¹⁴], to quote only the most important words used by the Homeric lexicon to identify the holders of a monocratic power (Benveniste, 2016, pp. 319-382). This leads to a situation where Agamemnon's power, which should be unique in Hobbes's view, is affected by the overlapping authorities of other comrades in arms.¹⁵ However this is exactly what happens, for example, in the episode of Achilles's wrath, which gives the *Iliad* its *raison d'être* (Nelson, 2008a, p. LXII). Recent studies have shown how the philosopher handles these thorny situations through systematic translation choices aimed at strengthening Agamemnon's position and weakening that of his dangerous competitors.¹⁶ Hobbes clearly chooses the son of Atreus as his champion, the model for the kind of sovereign whose existence he had theorised in his previous political works (Nelson, 2008a, p. LXII; Fabbri, 2010, pp. 151-153 and 2009, p. 23; Lynch, 1998, pp. 27, 30, 34). Accordingly, while translating, he systematically supports Agamemnon's position.¹⁷ An example

14. Commentators (see Nelson, 2008a, p. XXV; Iori, 2015, p. 163) have made it clear that Hobbes had at his disposal as a translator the *Lexicon Graecolatinum* of Johannes Scapula, a work whose first edition is dated 1579. I was not able to find the 1579 edition and we do not know which one Hobbes actually used, since, as Iori (2015, p. 163) highlights, several editions were published subsequent to the original one. For the analysis conducted in this article, I used an edition published in 1593. According to this lexicon (p. 153 and p. 259), the translation for the words *anax* and *basileus* is primarily the Latin noun *rex*, although for both (p. 259) it also says "dicuntur etiā quilibet clari & excellentes viri." [They are also called any famous et excellent men].

15. It was a problematic scenario for Hobbes whose educational intent was to highlight the necessity for security purposes of the separation between the sovereign and the subjects.

16. See for example Catanzaro (2016, pp. 660-679; 2019, pp. 67-146).

17. To cite a parallel, in Edmund Spencer's *Letter to Raleigh* (2006, p. 205), we find a reference to Agamemnon as a model of a good ruler. The other character of the Homeric poems who is mentioned in a similar sense is Ulysses, certainly not Achilles. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this important reference.

from book II of the *Iliad* is an emblematic example of this situation. With a view to spurring on the soldiers to fight more vehemently, Agamemnon falsely announces the retreat from the siege of Troy, confident that the army will unanimously protest. Unfortunately, the Achaean warriors start fleeing to their ships, desirous of returning home. When order is at last restored, Thersites's protest occurs and this is dangerous for Hobbes for several reasons. First, it involves a subject speaking evil of the commander-in-chief or, in Hobbes's view, the sovereign, and this cannot be allowed according to his political theory. Second, Thersites criticizes not only Agamemnon, but the Achaean "kings" (*basiléis*) as a whole. Third, two of those referred to as *basiléis* are Odysseus and Achilles, two of the most dangerous competitors (particularly the latter) of the commander-in-chief for leadership of the army.

The *Iliad* itself does not accept Thersites's protest; accordingly, its narrative solves the first problem by describing the famous and violent reprimand by Odysseus. However, the other problems remain. Differences are immediately visible when the original Greek text is compared with its translation by Hobbes.¹⁸

Modern English

What a flood of abuse, Thersites! Even for you,
fluent and flowing as you are. Keep quiet.

Who are *you* to wrangle with **kings** [*basiléis*], you alone?

No one, I say—no one alive less soldierly than you,
none in the ranks that came to Troy with Agamemnon.

So stop your babbling, mouthing the names of **kings** [*basiléis*],

flinging indecencies in their teeth, your eyes
peeled for a chance to cut and run for home
[...]

A thousand terrific strokes he is carried off—Odysseus,
taking the lead in tactics, mapping battle-plans.

But here's the best thing yet he's done for the men—

18. The transliterated Greek text and Hobbes's translation is here preceded by a modern English translation of the excerpts. Italics, emphasis and square brackets added to the examples throughout this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

he's put a stop to this babbling, foulmouthed fool!
Never again, I'd say, will our gallant comrade
risk his skin to attack the **kings** [*basiléis*] with insults.
(Homer, 1991, II, 284-292 and 319-324)

Greek original

*Thersíte'akritómythe, lighýs per eòn agoretés,
íscheo, med'éthel'óios erizémenai basiléusin;
u gàr egò séo phemì chereióteron brotòn állon
émmenai, hóssoi hám' Atréides hypò Ílion élthon.
tò ouk àn basiléas anà stóméchon agoreúois,
kài sphin oneídeá te prophérois, nóstón te phylásois.
[...]*

*"ò pópoi, é dè muri' Odysseús esthlà éorghe
boulás t'exárchon agathàs pólemón te koryýsson;
nýn dè tóde még'áriston en Arghetoisin érexen,
hòs tòn lobetéra epesbólón éch'agoráon.
Ú thén min pálin aútis anései thymòs aghénor
neikeitéin basiléas oneidetóis epéessin."*

(Homer, 1950, II, 246-251 and 272-277)

Hobbes's translation

Prater, that to thy self seems eloquent,
How darest thou alone **the King** t'upbraid?
A greater Coward than thou art there's none
'Mongst all the *Greeks* that came with us to *Troy*.
Else 'gainst **the King** thy tongue would not so run.
Thou seek's but an excuse to run away.
[...]

And, Oh said one t'another standing near;
Ulysses many handsome thing has done,
When we in Councel or in Battle were,
A better deed than this is he did none,

That has so silenced this railing knave,
 And of his peevish humour stay'd the flood,
 As he no more will dare **the King** to brave.

(Homer, 2008a, II, 219-224 and 241-247)

In the space of about thirty lines, the Greek text says that the protest aims to criticize the “kings,” clearly revealing the simultaneous presence of several holders of sovereignty over the same group. According to Hobbes, this cannot be allowed without undermining the safety of the community; therefore, the philosopher chooses to modify these lines using a simple, but very effective linguistic tool. He moves from the original plural form—*basiléis*—of the Greek text to the English singular one—king—with a view to bypassing the problem. The threefold reiteration of this in such a short number of lines allows us both to exclude that it might have been done by chance and to ascribe it to the deliberate intent of the translator.

As to the third problem, that is, the presence of both Achilles and Odysseus in the group of *basiléis*, Hobbes's choice appears subtler and less evident at first sight, but it is just as effective as the previous one. Referring to Thersites, the *Iliad* says: “*écthistos d’Achilēi málist’èn ed’Odusēi / tò gàr neikeíeske*” (Homer, 1950, II, 220-221). The two heroes are clearly mentioned here and, given what has previously been said about these lines as well as in the narrative as a whole, they must be included in the group of *basiléis*. Hobbes's translation is highly significant: “*Ulysses and Achilles most him hated/For these two Princes he us’d most chide*” (Homer, 2008a, II, 197-198). Here, the anomalous element is the addition of the term “Princes”; it is not only totally absent in the original poem, but it is also unnecessary. Why does the philosopher add such an element, when he has no need to do so?

In an attempt to answer this question, we must turn to Hobbes's political theory, and in particular to two very similar passages taken respectively from *Leviathan* and *Behemoth*. We read in the former:

And as the power, so also the honour of the sovereign, ought to be greater, than that of any, or all the subjects. For in the sovereignty is the fountain of honour. The dignities of lord, earl, duke, and prince are his creatures. As in the presence of the master, the servants are equal, and without any honour at all; so are the subjects, in the presence of the sovereign. And though they shine some more, some less, when they are

out of his sight; yet in his presence, they shine no more than the stars in the presence of the sun. (Hobbes, 1996 [1651], pp. 121-122)

The latter sounds similar:

Lastly the people in generall were so ignorant of their duty, as that no one perhaps of ten thousand knew what right any man had to command him, or what necessity there was of King or Commonwealth, for which he was to part with his money against his will; but thought himselfe to be so much master of whatsoever he possest, that it could not be taken from him vpon any pretence of common safety without his owne consent; King they thought was but a title of the highest honour, which Gentleman, Knight, Baron, Earle, Duke were but steps to ascend to, with the helpe of Riches. (Hobbes, 2014 [1679/1682], pp. 110-111)

No authority can exist where the holder of sovereignty does not create it. As a consequence, a king's power is greater than anything else crafted by him. By moving from the plural to the singular form of the term *basiléus*, Hobbes avoids showing a regime where there is a plurality of kings; adding the word "prince" in relation to Achilles and Odysseus, he presents them at a lower rank than Agamemnon, as his subjects. This is fully consistent with the philosopher's absolutist political theory.

In Hobbes's view, a clear explanation of the political problems connected to the lack of detachment between the sovereign and the subjects can be found in a passage in book I. During the assembly in which Achilles's wrath explodes, Agamemnon replies as follows to Nestor, who is trying to restore order:

True, old man—all you say is fit and proper—
But this soldier wants to tower over the armies,
He wants to rule over all, to lord it over all,
Give out orders to every man in sight. Well,
There's one, I trust, who will never yield to *him!*
(Homer, 1991, I, 334-339)

naì dè taùta ghe pánta, ghéron, kata moiran éeipes;

*all'hód'anèr ethélei peri pánton émmenai állon,
pánton mén kratéein ethélei,
pántessi d'anássein,
pâsi dè semáinein, há tin'u
péisesthai oío.*

(Homer, 1950, I, 286-289)

I nothing can deny of this at all.

But he amongst us thinks he ought to reign,

And **give the Law to all as he thinks fit.**

But I am certain that shall never be.

(Homer, 2008a, I, 271-274)

Agamemnon's complaint regards the action of giving "the Law to all as he thinks fit," which is, as has been noted, "the essential attribute of Hobbes's sovereign" (Nelson 2008a, p. 12). Achilles's protest is not conceived as a mere protest, but as an attempt to snatch power from the legitimate holder of sovereignty. This is why Hobbes protects and supports Agamemnon's position so vehemently. If, in the real world, a man tried to do the same, at least for some period there would be two sources demanding obedience; this would cause a deep cleavage within the society and undermine its peaceful living.

Another significant example of modifications caused by the need to stress the detachment between sovereign and subjects is provided by a term that only occurs once in the *Iliad*, in relation to the commander-in-chief of the Achaean army. The term is *basiléutatos*, a superlative form, whose meaning can be translated by the expressions "the most king" or "the greatest king." Clearly, this word is problematic from a Hobbesian perspective: if someone is "the most king" or "the greatest king," then there must be someone else, or others, who are simply "kings."

We find this word in a section of the *Iliad* where Nestor, with a view to restoring order after a violent argument between Agamemnon and Diomedes during an assembly, suggests that the former hold a banquet so that the discussion can continue in a better context. He knows that such an action can only be ordered by the commander-in-chief; this is why he says: "*Atréide, sý mén árche: sý gàr basiléutátos essi*" (Homer, 1950, IX, 69). Referring to Agamemnon,

he uses the expression, *basiléutatos*. Hobbes's translation appears particularly significant: "And let them all from you [Atrides] take/ Their Orders. For you are our General" (Homer, 2008a, IX, 61-62).¹⁹

This lexical solution has a twofold value. First, it allows the philosopher to bypass the problem of the presence of a plurality of kings within the same group. However, there is something more: by switching the meaning from the political to the military sphere, and by moving Agamemnon's power from the political arena to the military one, the leadership of the army, Hobbes achieves another important objective, profoundly related to his political theory. For example, if we consider his *Behemoth*, we clearly read that "he that hath the Power of leuying and commanding the Soldiers, has all other Rights of Soueraignty which he shall please to claime" (Hobbes, 2014 [1679/1682], p. 211). A little further on, the philosopher writes: "So stupid they were as not to know that he that is Master of the *Militia*, is Master of the Kingdome, and consequently is in possession of a most absolute Soueraignty" (*ibid.*, p. 236).²⁰ In this way, by using one simple word, Hobbes is able both to avoid any problems concerning the overlapping of sovereignties and to strengthen the position of Agamemnon, his model of king.

We find another example of the difficulties faced by the Malmesbury philosopher regarding the singularity of the holder of sovereignty in a significant passage of the opening lines of the *Iliad*. What is more, the same excerpt also presents an element related to the issue of the human genesis of political power, the other major issue behind many of the changes made by Hobbes in his translations.

In the first book of the poem, as the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon mounts, the former threatens to desert unless he receives satisfaction. To this, the latter replies:

Desert, by all means—if the spirit drives you home!
I will never beg you to stay, not on *my* account.
Never—others will take my side and do me honor,
Zeus above all, whose wisdom rules the world.

19. See Nelson: "The Greek term is 'the greatest king' [...]. Again, Hobbes translates his way around the fact that Agamemnon is one king around many" (2008a, p. 134); see also Fabbri (2010, p. 153); Catanzaro (2016, p. 677).

20. See also Hobbes (2014 [1679/1682], pp. 241, 265 and 303, 389).

You—I hate you most of all the warlords loved by the gods [*diotrepheon basiléon*].

Always dear to your heart,
strife, yes, and battles, the bloody grind of war.

(Homer, 1991, I, 204-210)

*phéughe mál', eí toi thumòs epéssytai, oudé s'égoge
líssomai heínek'emeío ménein; pár'emoighe kai álloi
hoí ké me timésousi, málista dè metíteta Zeús.*

*échtistos dé moí essi diotrepheon basiléon;
aièi gár toi éris te phíle pólemoi te máchai te.*
(Homer, 1950, I, 173-179)

Go when you will, [said *Agamemnon*] fly,
Ile not entreat you for my sake to stay.
When you are gone more honour'd shall be I,
Nor *Jove* [I hope] will with you go away.
In you I shall but loose an enemy
That only loves to quarrel and to fight.

(Homer, 2008a, I, 169-174)

Leaving aside the issue raised by the use of the adjective *diotrepheos*—literally “fostered, cherished by Zeus” (Liddell *et al.*, 1996, p. 435)—since it pertains to the second dichotomy, from the Hobbesian perspective a twofold problem arises in these lines. First, the partitive complement *diotrepheon basiléon* clearly reveals the simultaneous presence of more than one king in the Achaean army; second, Agamemnon himself puts his rival in the category of kings: by saying that the son of Peleus is *échtistos*—the “most hateful” (*ibid.*, p. 748)—of the other *basiléis*, he clearly reveals Achilles’s status as such. For Hobbes, this was the worst-case scenario come true: in one single verse—or better, in just a couple of words—the *Iliad* describes a situation that is very difficult to accommodate within the boundaries of his political theory. What is more, it occurs at the very beginning of the poem, that is, in a position immediately visible, even to casual readers. Hobbes’s translation is thus aimed at solving the problem effectively and radically: by replacing the original

problematic lines with “In you I shall but loose an enemy/That only loves to quarrel and to fight,” the philosopher is able to completely bypass the twofold issues just mentioned. On the one hand, he removes the plural noun *basiléus*, and, incidentally, the troublesome adjective *diotrephés*, profoundly altering the original meaning of the Homeric line; on the other hand, by swiftly returning to a faithful translation of the Greek text which is now very conducive to his own cause, he presents the more dangerous competitor of Agamemnon as an enemy and a man who is constantly on the look out for a quarrel.

We find another significant example of Hobbes’s support for Agamemnon and his criticism of Achilles a few lines later, when the *Iliad* describes the mission of the delegates of the commander-in-chief who aim to take Briseis away from the son of Peleus. As they are approaching Achilles’s tent, they stop out of respect for the *basiléus*. Hobbes translates “And they silent were,/And stood still, struck with fear and reverence” (Homer, 2008a, I, 316-317),²¹ completely removing the noun *basiléus*. Another few lines later, Achilles calls his rival “*basiléos apenéos*” (*ibid.*, 340)—literally “king ungentle, rough, hard” (Liddell *et al.*, 1996, p. 188), clearly speaking ill of Agamemnon. The philosopher’s translation is “unbridled man” (Homer, 2008a, I, 322),²² a phrase that again removes any link between Agamemnon and his status as *basiléus*.

On both these occasions, Hobbes chooses to omit the same word, albeit for different and contrasting reasons. In the first case, the removal serves to avoid characterizing Achilles as a king; in the second, it allows him to detach Agamemnon’s royalist charge—and, perhaps, the monarchical institution itself—from the very negative connotation assigned to it by the adjective *apenés*, since, as Nelson observes, “Hobbes routinely declines to translate the word ‘king’ when Agamemnon is being attacked or is described behaving badly” (2008a, p. 14).

Hobbes’s *reductio ad unum* strategy which aims to force the Homeric plurality of kings within the strict borders of the Hobbesian sovereign-subjects dichotomy, is again visible in a significant excerpt of book IX of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon sends a reconciliation delegation, led by Odysseus, to Achilles with a view to persuading the son of Peleus to come back to fight. The attempt is unsuccessful,

21. See Nelson (2008a, p. 14, n. 27); Fabbri (2010, p. 153).

22. See also Fabbri (2010, p. 153).

but it is worth emphasizing a linguistic element found—or, better, if we consider the Hobbesian version, not found—in Achilles’s speech. He says:

But now that he’s torn my honor from my hands,
 robbed me, lied to me—don’t let him try me now.
 I know *him* too well—he’ll never win me over!
 No Odysseus, let him rack his brains with you and
the other captains [*basiléis*]
 how to fight the raging fire off the ships. Look—
 what a mighty piece of work he’s done without me.
 (Homer, 1991, IX, 417-423)

*nŷn d’epēi ek cheirón ghéras heíleto kai m’apátēse,
 mé meū peiráto eū eidótos; oudé me peísei.
 all’, Odysēu, sùn soi te kai álloisin basileúsi
 phrazéstho néessin alexémenai déion pūr.
 (Homer, 1950, IX, 344-347)*

But since she by *Agamemnon* from me take is,
 Ne’er think [*Ulysses*] to prevail with me.
 He shall not twice deceive me. But provide
 [*Ulysses*] that your Ships not burned be.
 (Homer, 2008a, IX, 342-346)

On this occasion, Hobbes has two problems: on one hand, the Greek text uses the word *basiléus* in its plural form; on the other hand, this noun is joined to the adjective *állos*, literally “another” (Liddell *et al.*, 1996, p. 70), an adjective which clearly gives even more emphasis to the simultaneous presence of several kings within the Achaean army than that which would have been expressed by the noun on its own. Hobbes opts for a radical solution, removing the entire section of line 346 containing both these problematic words; the final outcome is a line changed so drastically that it contains no elements to suggest that more than one king existed.

About ten books later, we find a very similar Greek expression which is handled differently by Hobbes, though in accordance with

the same *ratio* and with the same educational objective in mind. In this situation, he uses the tool of downgrading from the rank of *basiléus* to that of prince, as in the case of Achilles and Odysseus in the episode involving Thersites, as we have seen. As a whole, this is a very common technique if we consider that the philosopher adopts it, in the *Iliad* alone, in books VII (100ⁿ/106),²³ IX (699ⁿ/710 [Steph. 706]), XII (302ⁿ/319), XIV (346ⁿ/379), XIX (289ⁿ/309); in books XVIII (512ⁿ/556)²⁴ and XXIII (33ⁿ/36) he translates using the English word “lord” and in book XXIV (372ⁿ/404) the noun “leader”²⁵ (Catanzaro, 2019, p. 107). In the particular occurrence I want to focus on, the original Greek line contains the word *basiléus* joined with the adjective *állos*. The *Iliad* says “*állous (...) basiléas*” (Homer, *Il.*, XIX, 309) and Hobbes replaces it using the expression “other Princes” (Homer, 2008a, XIX, 289). He does not need to remove the adjective in this case, given that his decision to use the downgrading technique eliminates all the problems connected to the existence of a plurality of kings.

To touch briefly on the group of words related to the Greek noun *ánax* and the verb *anáссо*, another frequent and important semantic family of words used to pinpoint the holder of a monocratic power (Benveniste, 2016, pp. 319–322), we find many analogous situations to those already mentioned. I will present a single archetypal example worthy of consideration due to its emblematic value in relation to what we have discussed so far.

In book XV of the *Iliad*, Zeus, the father of the Olympian Gods, is fiercely criticized by Poseidon after straying from the battlefield against his will. When responding to Iris who is issuing the order for the retreat, he says:

What outrage! Great as he is, what overweening arrogance!

So force me, will he, to wrench my will to his?

I with the same high honors?

Three brother we are, all sprung from Cronus,

all of us brought to birth by Rhea—Zeus and I,

Hades the third, **lord** [*anáссо*] of the dead beneath the earth.

23. The Homeric expression is “*basiléis Achaiôn.*” Here and in what follows “ⁿ” indicates the number of the verse in Nelson’s edition.

24. See Nelson (2008a, p. 307).

25. The Homeric expression is “*basiléis Achaiôn.*”

The world was split three ways. Each received his realm.
 When we shook the lots I drew the sea, my foaming eternal home,
 And Hades drew the land of the dead engulfed in haze and night
 And Zeus drew the heavens, the clouds and high clear sky,
 But the earth and Olympus heights are common to us all.
 So I will never live at the beck and call of Zeus! No, at his royal ease,
 and powerful as he is,
 let him rest content with *his* third of the world.
 Don't let him try frighten *me* with his mighty hands—
 what does he take me for, some coward out-and-out?
 He'd better aim his terrible salvos at his own,
 all his sons and daughters. He's their father—
 they *have* to obey his orders. It's their fate.
 (Homer, 1991, XV, 220-238)

*hò pópoi, é r'agathós per èn ypéropion éeipen,
 èi m'òmótimon eónta bíe aékonta kathéxei.
 treis gàr t'èk Krónu eimèn adelpheoí, hús téketo Réa,
 Zeús kai egó, trítatos d'Aídes, enéroisin **anásson.**
 trichthà dé pánta dédastai,
 ékastos d'émmore times;
 étoi egòn élachon polièn
 hála naiémen aiei
 palloménon, Aídes d'élache zóphon eeróenta,
 Zeús d'élach'uranòn eurùn en aithéri kai nephélesi;
 gaía d'etí xynè pánton kai makròs Ólympos.
 tó ra kai ú ti Diòs béomai
 phresín, allà ékelos
 kai kraterós per èn menéto tritáte eni moíre.
 chersì de mé tí me pánych kakòn hòs deidíssétho;
 thygatéressin gàr te kai uiásin bélteron eíe
 ekpáglous epéessin enissémen, hús téken autós,*

hoi ethen otrýnontos akúsontai kai anánke.

(Homer, 1950, XV, 185-199)

For Sons and Heirs of Saturn we were three
Begot on Rhea. Pluto, Jove and I.
By lot the **Rule** o'th'Waters came to me.
To Jove the **Government** of Heaven fell,
And of the Clouds, and the Ethereal Sky.
To Pluto Darkness, and the **rule** of Hell.
Earth and Olympus did as Common Iye.
Let Jove then with his share contented be,
And not encroach on me. For well 'tis known
I hold not any thing of him in Fee,
But live as he should do, upon my own.
He should not unto me such language use,
But to his Children that will be afraid,
And dare not what he bids them, to refuse.
(Homer, 2008a, XV, 158-172)

It is clear in these lines that, in Greek mythology, each of the three sons of Cronus and Rhea is the holder of a peculiar and personal sovereignty over a specific part of the universe. However, although this was possible for the *Iliad* and for Greek culture, it was difficult for Hobbes to accept and, above all, to convey to his audience, given his educational perspective. In spite of the myth, Zeus, like Agamemnon within the Achaean army, should be the only sovereign of the community of the Olympian gods (Catanzaro, 2019, pp. 81-86).²⁶ Unfortunately, this passage does not support Hobbes's perspective, even though he seems to be very respectful of the original text in his translation, at least at a first glance: he does not alter the meaning of these lines and allows the three realms and their respective kings to coexist. As a linguistic confirmation of this lenience, we note that the words "rule" and "government" are fully in keeping with the original sense of the Greek lines.

26. See also the analysis by Nelson (2008a, p. 237, particularly n. 273).

All of this notwithstanding, the passage is tamed elsewhere by diminishing the positions of Hades and, particularly, of Poseidon—Zeus’s real competitor for supremacy over the Olympian gods in the *Iliad*, unlike Hades—albeit indirectly and less ostentatiously. To understand how Hobbes chooses to achieve his educational goal, we must consider book XV in its entirety, not just the passage in question. With a view to locating Zeus in a higher position than the other gods, the philosopher starts removing the epithets *ánax* associated with them. He does so, for example, in the case of Hephaestus (187ⁿ/214), Apollo (220ⁿ/253) and—apparently not by chance, given the relationship between these deities—Poseidon (6ⁿ/8, 50ⁿ/57, 131ⁿ/158). It is true that the book never uses the word *ánax* to refer to Zeus, but his position of supremacy is stressed over and over again in other sections of the poem, and the philosopher makes sure to highlight it. His removals of *ánax* aside, Hobbes reinforces the downgrading of Poseidon through another linguistic expedient that he uses some lines later. In his reply to Iris, the god says:

True Iris, immortal friend, how right you are—
 it’s a fine thing when a messenger knows what’s proper.
 Ah but how it galls me, it wounds me to the quick
 When the Father tries to revile *me* with brute abuse,
his equal in rank, our fated shares of the world the same!
 (Homer, 1991, XV, 245-250)

*Îri theá, mála túto épos katà moíran éeípēs;
 esthlòn kai tò tétyktai, hót’ángelos aísima eidé.
 allà tód’ainòn áchos kratíen kai thymòn ikáneí,
 hoppót’án isómoron kai omê peproménon aíse
 neikétein ethélesi cholotoísín epéssin.*
 (Homer, 1950, XV, 206-210)

[*Iris*, this word was spoken in good season.
 Much worth, I see, is a wise Messenger.
 But I was vexed, because thus without reason
(When I his equal am by Byrth and Lot)
Jove uses me as I if were his slave.
 (Homer, 2008a, XV, 178-182; parentheses in original)

On this occasion, Hobbes provides a fairly faithful translation of the original meaning of the adjectives *isómos*, “*sharing equally or alike [...] equivalent, corresponding*” (Liddell *et al.*, 1996, p. 838; italics in original) and *peproménos*, namely, “*it has or had been (is or was) fated [...] destined to a thing*” (*ibid.*, p. 1452; italics in original), even though this translation seems to be at odds with his intent to downgrade Poseidon. However, by adding a reference to slavery, which is completely absent in the original poem (Nelson, 2008a, p. 238, n. 275), and making Poseidon say it with reference to himself, Hobbes once again seizes his chance to stress the supremacy of Zeus.

The detachment between sovereign and subjects. The *Odyssey*

When considering the *Odyssey*, one of the more significant examples of the dichotomy between sovereign and subjects is related to an important topic in political theory: the problem of the forms of government. Hobbes’s position is well-known; the Homeric poems certainly share the same appreciation for monocratic regimes, but, from a Hobbesian perspective, their support for the clear-cut demarcation between the ruler and the ruled is not enough. The problematic situation in the Achaean army is clear evidence of this, providing us with elements that show the care taken by the philosopher in handling this problem: forms of mixed monarchy—namely, those monarchies where the king’s power is not clearly absolute and indisputable—are unacceptable.

However, the *Odyssey* describes a land—the Phaeacians’ island—where political power appears to be shared; a land where there is a king whose authority is not as absolute as Hobbes would like, but the description of which was too famous, too pivotal in the poem’s plot to be removed or radically modified in translation. Here political power is exerted in a way more akin to a *primus inter pares* regime than an absolute monarchy.

During a discussion with Odysseus, Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, describes this political system as follows: “*dódeka gàr kata démon ariprepées basiléas/archoi kratnousi, triskaidékatos d’egò autos*” [“There are twelve peers of the realm who rule our land,/ thirteen, counting myself”] (Homer, 1963, VIII, 390-391 and 1996, VIII, 435-436). The use of the term *basiléus* in its plural form—related to the numeral adjective *dódeka* (twelve)—leaves no room for doubt: power is shared among a plurality of “kings.” Obviously, this

is unacceptable for Hobbes, but also, as we have noted, the text was too well-known to be altered.

Hobbes thus chooses to be drastic using a less visible, although equally effective, means. He translates: “Twelve Princes in *Phaeacia* there be,/And I the thirteenth am” (Homer, 2008b, VIII, 368-369).²⁷ Initially, this line seems to reduce the rank of Alcinous by calling him “prince,” thus making him appear equal to the other Phaeacian kings. If, however, we consider Hobbes’s modifications of this theme as a whole, we must take into account the other sections of the *Odyssey* that describe the Phaeacians’ political regime. These reveal that this is the only instance where the philosopher calls Alcinous “prince” and the other Phaeacian *basiléis* are never called “kings” (Catanzaro, 2019, p. 108). Accordingly, whereas they seem to be on the same level in this passage, there are many others where the detachment is stressed more strongly by Hobbes than in the original *Odyssey*.

If we return to the excerpts quoted above from both *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* concerning the creation by the sovereign of all the positions and roles within the *corpus* of subjects, it appears clear enough that, by accepting this one isolated and temporary downgrading of Alcinous’s rank, Hobbes emphasizes once more his associates’ *status* of “prince,” namely, a subordinate condition to a man who, unlike them, is otherwise always called “king” in the English version.

Further evidence of this, albeit indirect, can be found in book VII of the *Odyssey*, particularly in a passage describing the thrones in Alcinous’s palace. We read about them in the Greek text: “*éntha dè Phaiékton egétores edriónto*” [“Here the Phaeacian lords would sit enthroned”] (Homer, 1963, VII, 98 and 1996, VII, p. 114). The Greek noun *egétor*, here used in its plural form, is usually employed in the Homeric poems to identify the “leader” of a group (Liddell *et al.*, 1996, p. 764). Once again, the image conveyed by this line depicts a regime where the holders of power are numerous and share the authority over the community. It obviously clashes with both the Hobbesian idea of the unicity of sovereignty and his resulting aversion to any form of mixed monarchy. Therefore, Hobbes opts to translate this line in a particularly significant way: “There us’d to eat/the King and Lords” (Homer, 2008b, VII, 86-87). By taking into

27. See Nelson (2008b, pp. 105-106): “Hobbes frequently eliminates references to multiple kings in any single territory.”

account what Hobbes has theorized with reference to the relation between king and lords, it is clear that his translation creates a division where none exists. He adds a hierarchy absent from the original text, a sovereign-subjects dichotomy where the *Odyssey* describes a completely different political regime.

By simply appending the words “king” and “lords” as replacements of the Greek *egétores*, Hobbes is able to neutralise the danger of this line and force it within the boundaries of his political theory. While it might appear as a marginal element, it acquires great value if we consider these translations as “a continuation of *Leviathan* by other means” (Nelson, 2008a, p. XXII).

On the question of the exclusively human genesis of political power, given its relevance to the discussion here, I find it appropriate to briefly mention a finding of literature concerning the alteration of the adjectives and expressions—used in different ways in the Greek text—sometimes describing men who are in power as being linked to the deities. For example, if we consider the adjectives *diotrephés* (fostered by Zeus), *dioghenés* (sprung by Zeus), *theudés* (akin to God), *theoprópos* (prophetic), *isótheos* (godlike), *theoeidés* (godlike), *antítheos* (godlike), *theios* (divine), *theoikelos* (godlike), *dios* (divine) and the expression *Dii phílos* (dear to Zeus), we can see that Hobbes carefully handles these elements with a view to removing any possible connection to the holders of political power (Catanzaro, 2017, pp. 44–61; 2019, pp. 147–180). Kinch Hoekstra provides us with an effective theoretical framework for this overarching pillar of Hobbes’s political theory, which appears relevant when considering how the divine lexicon is dealt with in his translations of the Homeric poems:

Hobbes bitterly condemns religious imposture because it is generally undertaken by subjects encroaching on civil power. When a subject pretends divinity or privileged access to divinity, he gains unauthorized leverage with the people, at the expense of sovereign control [...]. What is more, it has gone unremarked that there is arguably a kind of enthusiastic imposture that Hobbes *commends*, at least, in its historical context. This is when the pretender uses imposture to set up a sovereign order where there was none, or to reinforce it where he is already sovereign. In this case, the pretender is not compromising sovereign authority, but bolstering it. (2004, pp. 126–127; italics in original)

Because of its potential to connect some men who are in power with the Olympian gods, this kind of Homeric lexicon needs to be softened, modified or erased by Hobbes in accordance with the specific contexts in which it is used. This allows him to remove any possible ambiguities concerning both the human nature of political power and, more specifically, the identity and singularity of the real holder of sovereignty, that is, the only man—or group of men²⁸—who must be obeyed in order to achieve the target of a peaceful life. This second element appears fully consistent with my considerations regarding the dichotomy between sovereign and subjects, which is why it is worth mentioning, albeit briefly.

Conclusion

Although I have discussed only a few examples to illustrate one of the categories presented, namely, the dichotomy between sovereign and subjects, followed by a very brief mention of an aspect related to the second dichotomy, the human genesis of political power, the comparative analysis of the text as a whole reveals Hobbes's intention to use the translations of Homer's poems in the same manner as he used those of Thucydides's *Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre*. The philosopher saw this later work of translation from Greek into English as an alternative means for spreading his political thought to the one he had adopted in his famous political works. In this way, he highlighted once more the cornerstones of his political theory, determined to allow his ideas to continue to influence contemporary debate in spite of censorship and create conditions for a long-lasting situation of peace and safety. Since “[t]ranslations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 11), we can conclude by arguing that probably Hobbes felt that his translations of the Homeric poems could work in *his* culture and *that* time.

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28. See Hobbes (1996 [1651], p. 114).

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