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CONTENTS

Introduction Lukas Lammers and Kirsten Sandrock	1
Shakespeare's Ancient Ephesus in Early Modern Context Philip Goldfarb Styrte.....	3
The Intertwined Reception of Homer and Shakespeare in Nicholas Rowe's <i>Ulysses</i> (1705) Divya Nair.....	14
Protean Poetics in Shakespeare and Joyce Kathrin Bethke.....	27
Shakespeare in Chile – Pablo Neruda Through the Eyes of Douglas Dunn. A Contribution to the Postcolonial Debate Around Universalism Rebeca Araya Acosta.....	45
Call for Statements Shakespeare Seminar der Shakespeare-Tage 2023	62

THE INTERTWINED RECEPTION OF HOMER AND SHAKESPEARE IN NICHOLAS ROWE'S *ULYSSES* (1705)

by

DIVYA NAIR

Nicholas Rowe's 1705 tragedy, *Ulysses*, is an interesting case study in the intertwined reception of Shakespeare and Homer in the early eighteenth century. This paper suggests that the canonization of Homeric stories, particularly the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, in the eighteenth century went hand in hand with the canonization of Shakespeare. I suggest Nicholas Rowe's *Ulysses* is a particularly useful literary artifact that encodes and memorializes this process. But Rowe's play is not merely an imitation of Homer's and Shakespeare's works; rather, it is an adaptation inflected by the complexities of Greco-Roman reception in early modern England. I suggest that Rowe reinvents the events recounted in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* for an eighteenth-century English audience, tailoring the plot to address geopolitical concerns specific to the period and rendering the plight of characters in affective and moral terms relevant to English playgoers. I'll begin with a brief synopsis of some of the theoretical questions surrounding the reception history of Shakespeare and Homer—whose names may be better understood as authorial tropes rather than singular geniuses—in early modern English literature. I'll then consider the significance of Rowe in the eighteenth-century reception of plots associated with both writers. The essay finishes with a reading of Shakespearean and Homeric elements in the play.

Of course, the reception of Homer and Shakespeare in western literature is a vast scholarly subject. Nevertheless, one cannot help but notice parallels in the questions surrounding authorship, originality, and reception in their reception history. The first Greek edition of the Homeric canon in the west was published in Florence in 1488.¹ Arthur Hall translated the first ten books of the *Iliad* in 1581 using Hugues Salel's 1555 French translation. George Chapman's translations of Homer (1598-1611) at the turn of the seventeenth century also likely created a robust demand for Homeric plots. However, it is worth noting that Shakespeare may or may not have read Chapman's Homer; scholars generally attribute the source of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* tale to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1380) and other medieval versions of what Penelope Wilson calls the "Troy story," such as Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye* (1475) and many others (Davis-Brown 15-34). As Wilson observes, "Homer before the eighteenth-century colonization of the classics was a more composite and more uncertain entity" (P. Wilson 275). In this sense, it is worth reasserting that the authorial phenomenon dubbed as Shakespeare (more on this later) may not have consulted the *Odyssey* or *Iliad* directly in the Greek or even English translation of the original but perhaps some of these more accessible 'Troy stories.' However, in an earlier

¹ I am using James Porter's chronology in Porter, James I. *Homer: The Very Idea*. University of Chicago Press, 2021.

study from the 1960s, Geoffrey Bullough had “no doubt” that Shakespeare had read Chapman’s *Seaven Bookes* and “suspect[ed] that his satiric treatment of the Greeks and his use of high-sounding language was partly to mock at the hero-worship shown by Chapman in the prefatory material to his versions” (87). Bullough speculated that Shakespeare may have read more of the *Iliad* than the *Odyssey*, which Chapman published in 1598, “perhaps in Salel’s version,” pointing to its impact on the plot of *Troilus and Cressida* (Bullough 87).

Noting the fluctuations in the reception history of Homer, James Porter has also emphasized, we may be better served in thinking of Homer as a series of malleable tropes, rather than a singular historical figure, re-interpreted century after century. As Porter puts it, “The real problem, then, is not just that Homer is an unknown object whose identity is clouded over with endless uncertainties, nor even that Homer may never have existed as an identifiable person, as is widely believed today. It is that Homer is an impossible object, an entity who only became tangibly real and actual in the very failed effort to grasp him” (2). Indeed, the source history of Shakespeare’s plays also suggests that we may think of Shakespeare in similar terms, not as singular figure but as an authorial trope. This perspective is particularly useful for reading a play like Rowe’s *Ulysses*, which is not only reinterpreting Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* but also the Shakespearean tradition. As Porter puts it, Homer’s “reception – by which we should understand his repeated reimagining – was truly bipolar, from the first preserved mentions of his name to the end of antiquity and from there into modernity, once the manuscripts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* resurfaced in Renaissance Europe” (116). These re-imaginings, in turn, are guided by unique historical purposes, their form and substance shaped by the particularities of time and space. Though many thinkers have tried to imagine a historical Homer, very little is known about the author of two of the most cherished works of Greek antiquity in the western canon, the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. As Friedrich August Wolf put it in his 1795 *Prolegomena to Homer*:

In Homer, however, the oldest poet, doubts clearly exist as to whether so much weight should be given to the authority of such recent manuscripts. For none of them is even so old as the latest Latin writers. Those that date before the twelfth or eleventh century are few and far between. This doubt may carry the implication that these sources cannot enable us to restore Homer's work to the genuine, pure form which first poured from his divine lips. (45-46)

Returning to Wilson’s claim about the colonization of Homer in the eighteenth century, it seems that writers like Wolf were questioning the Homer-as-singular-poetic-genius narrative as early as the eighteenth century. Homer’s literary value in England and throughout much of Europe was canonized over time.

Similarly, the authorial identity of Shakespeare and the unity of the Shakespearean canon has also been a point of significant debate in literary studies. As Jeffrey Knapp puts it, “On the one side of the controversy are the Shakespeare lovers, the bardolatrists [...]. On the other side of the debate are the historicists who view Shakespeare’s greatness as a *post facto* construction with no substantial relevance to the historical person and his writings” (Knapp 1). Brian Cummings echoes James Porter’s argument about Homer: “Shakespeare’s life has always been a construction after the fact. The lack of substantial evidence has increased his usefulness to a mythology of Englishness. Each

new age has reinvented him according to its predilections, without any serious possibility of being contradicted by the facts” (Cummings, “Shakespeare” n.p.). Harold Bloom, a staunch “bardolatrism,” in Knapp’s terms, remarks that we tend to turn against Shakespeare much as Plato turned against Homer, remarking that “Plato’s war against Homer is weakly echoed by all our contemporary politicizings of aesthetic concerns. If there is to be an aesthetic counterattack, Shakespeare ought to be the field of battle, since Shakespeare is the largest aesthetic value that we will ever know” (Bloom 159). Moreover, for all we know, Shakespeare’s life may be a work of fiction itself. James Shapiro points out that “Shakespeare did not live, as we do, in an age of memoir [...]. Literary biography was still in its infancy; even the word ‘biography’ hadn’t yet entered the language and wouldn’t until the 1660s” (17-18). Consequently, “anyone curious about his life had to depend on unreliable and often contradictory anecdotes, most of them supplied by people who had never met him” (Shapiro 17).

One such biographical anecdote occurs in Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 edition of Shakespeare’s plays, a portable octavo edition with six volumes, complete with illustrations, modernizing the plays for an eighteenth-century readership, where Rowe includes what some scholars recognize as the first “biography” of Shakespeare. As Brian Cummings notes, Rowe’s biography may be a product of late-seventeenth century fascination with Shakespeare’s past: he argues that “Rowe’s Account” of Shakespeare’s life “is, in most essentials, the Shakespeare of Restoration criticism and especially of John Dryden and Thomas Rymer, minus the negatives” (Cummings, “Shakespeare” n.p.). Rowe’s illustrated edition of Shakespeare’s plays is relevant to our understanding of *Ulysses* (1705) because it is a good example of Homeric reception in the early eighteenth century by a writer well versed in the Greek and Latin tradition. It is also significant that Rowe later became the first Poet Laureate of Britain. Indeed, when we study Rowe’s critical biography of Shakespeare, we find that he is trying to fit Shakespeare into the Greco-Roman tradition despite his admission that the bard may have a scanty knowledge of Latin, Greek, or even other European languages.²

Rowe’s edition of Shakespeare is also interesting from a historiographic perspective because it is a British reception of the Greco-Roman past in the early eighteenth century, filtered through an early modern English text. Rowe observes in his biography of the bard that Shakespeare achieves the function of both poet and historian in his adaptation of the Greco-Roman past in plays such as *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, remarking that “For those Plays which he has taken from the *English* or *Roman* History, let any Man compare ‘em, and he will find the Character as exact in the Poet as the Historian” (Rowe, *The Works of William Shakespear* xvii). Rowe’s own reception of the Greco-Roman past in *Ulysses* and his translation work can be understood more clearly if we examine his interpretation of Shakespeare’s reception of Greco-Roman antiquity.

² For instance, Rowe notes that, “I believe we are better pleas’d with those Thoughts, altogether New and Uncommon, which his own Imagination supply’d him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful Passages out of the *Greek* and *Latin* Poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a Master of the *English* Language to deliver ‘em. Some *Latin* without question he did know, and one may see up and down in his Plays how far his Reading that way went [...]” (Rowe, N, et al. *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear: In Six Volumes; Adorn’d With Cuts*. London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, within Grays-Inn Gate, next Grays-Inn Lane, 1709, p. a2).

In studying Rowe's intertwined reception of Homer and Shakespeare, then, we are better placed to understand the civilizational significance of Greco-Roman antiquity – a time and place rather remote from eighteenth-century Britain – to eighteenth-century Britons, who increasingly began to idealize the ancient Mediterranean. It is also worth remembering that the ancient Mediterranean was closer to Africa and Asia, by way of the Mediterranean, than Northern Europe. And yet, we also find that the British Empire engaged in commercial war, enslavement, and territorial conquest in these parts of the world during the eighteenth century. The historiographic dissonance created by these layered histories allows us to think comparatively about past and present in new and innovative ways.

Ulysses was performed four years prior to the printing of Rowe's illustrated edition of *The works of Mr. William Shakespear*. I have chosen to focus on it here because *Ulysses* is often overlooked in articles and books about Rowe's dramatic oeuvre.³ It may be useful to study it in light of Rowe's 1709 edition because it reveals the ways in which Shakespearean and Homeric plots may have influenced Rowe's creative process. It is also a good example of Rowe's reception of Homer's *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* both independently and perhaps through Shakespeare. I want to suggest that Rowe is an especially important figure to consider in the reception of Shakespeare and what we might call Homeric stories in the eighteenth century. *Ulysses* is unique because Rowe, given his level of education, may have very likely encountered and consulted both direct translations of Homer as well as the receptions of Homeric stories in Shakespeare's plays. As a translator and poet, he may have seen himself in the shadow of the "idea of Homer," recalling Porter. In Rowe's translation of *Pharsalia*, Lucan notes that "while Homer's verses shall be thought worthy of Praise, they that shall live after us shall read his and mine together" (Rowe *Pharsalia* xix). At the same time, as a dramatist, Rowe may have seen himself in the shadow of Shakespeare. I draw attention to this "anxiety of influence" because redeeming the function of poetry and the arts, more generally, in the British interest was important to Rowe as well as many other Augustan writers. As he notes in his preface to *Ulysses*, "Poetry, which was so venerable to former Ages, as in many Places to make a Part of their Religious Worship, and every where to be had in the highest Honour and Esteem, has miserably languish'd and been despis'd, for want of that Favour and Protection which it found in the famous Augustan Age" (Rowe *Ulysses*). At the same time, *Ulysses* offers an excellent example of Rowe's efforts to innovate English drama to better situate its significance in relation to the Greco-Roman past inherited by Britons over the course of the first millennium.

It is worth noting, however, that many critics were unfavorable to Rowe's adaptation of Homer. An anonymous reviewer trashed the play in his *Remarks on Mr. Rowe's last play, call'd Ulysses, a tragedy, etc* (1706).⁴ The reviewer felt that Rowe had detracted from the heroism of Ulysses, as depicted in Homer: "I cannot believe he could have such a malicious Design in his Head, as to Burlesque Homer, who had a more sublime

³ Michael Caines draws attention to this critical lacuna in his "Introduction to *The Biter, Ulysses, and The Royal Convert*," noting that *Ulysses* has received "relatively little critical attention besides earlier and later counterparts in Rowe's oeuvre" (2).

⁴ See Anonymous "Remarks on Mr. Rowe's last play, call'd Ulysses, a tragedy, etc." The British Library, 1706.

Opinion of his Grecian Heroes, and their Cause, than our Tragick Author, who thus ridicules it; I had almost said, prophanes it" (Anonymous 7). In his biography of Rowe in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, Samuel Johnson wrote of *Ulysses* that "We have been too early acquainted with the poetical heroes to expect any pleasure from their revival; to shew them as they already been shewn, is to disgust by repetition, to give them new qualities or new adventures, is to offend by violating received notions" (200).

The influence of the plays attributed to William Shakespeare on Rowe's oeuvre has a concrete link. In 1709, Rowe produced the first illustrated edition featuring images of characters garbed in eighteenth century apparel, act and scene divisions, as well as dramatis personae and stage directions (Rowe *The Works of William Shakespeare*). For this reason, many scholars look upon Rowe as the first "modern" editor of Shakespeare's works.⁵ We may think of the First Folio editors, John Heminge and Henry Condell, as collators or compilers rather than editors, in the professional sense, dividing Shakespeare's plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories, and overseeing their printing.⁶ Despite the persuasive claims of scholars who regard the

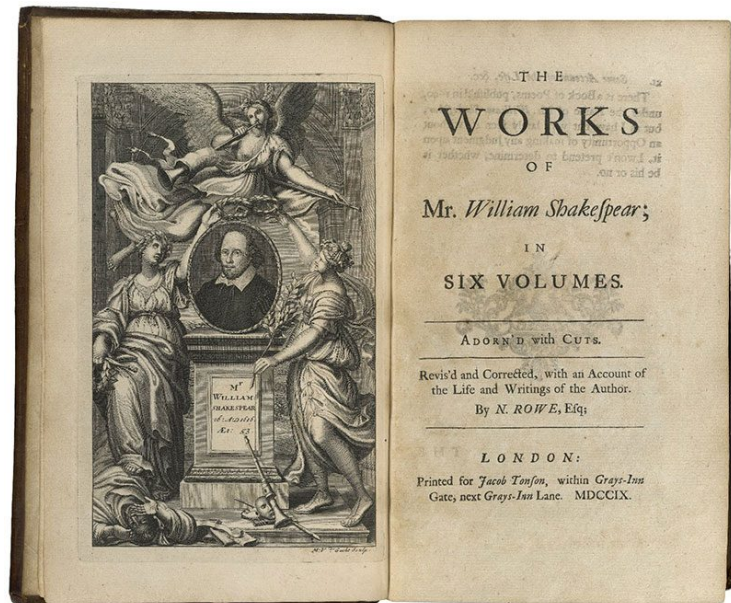


Figure 1. 1709 edition of Shakespeare's works, edited by Nicholas Rowe. Folger PR2752 1709a copy 2 v.1 Sh.Col., frontispiece and title page

text of the Second, Third, and Fourth Folios as "equivalent to the work of an editor" (Holland 25), Peter Holland observes that "it is Rowe whose work transforms the appearance of Shakespeare's printed language into a form we can comfortably recognize as modern" (25). Holland finds that "Rowe's habits are not radically dissimilar from those now practiced by editors" (25). Most significantly, Rowe's edition includes a set

⁵ As Douglas Canfield has noted, "Nicholas Rowe is an important literary figure simply because he was the first biographer and editor of Shakespeare's works" (1).

⁶ "Rowe makes many corrections and improvements to the text of his predecessors: he attempts to normalize spelling, punctuation, and grammar; he clarifies many of the plays' act and scene divisions; he adds robust stage directions, marking localities as well as characters' entrances and exits; he includes a list dramatis personae for each of the plays; and he translates the folio's Latin headings to English" (Hamm 179-180). Additionally, it "includes plates depicting scenes from the plays, making it the first illustrated Shakespeare edition" (Hamm 180), employing a new layout that "resets the folio's cramped, double-columned text" (Hamm, 180). Moreover, "it dispenses with the large folio volume, instead, portioning out the forty-three plays included in the 1685 edition over six octavo volumes or 3324 pages" (Hamm 180).

of plates illustrating key scenes from Shakespeare's plays, making it the first illustrated edition of Shakespeare.

Recalling the arguments of Knapp, Shapiro, and Cummings about the historical evolution of Shakespeare's canonical authority, it is worth noting that Jacob Tonson, who financed the edition, most likely did not consider Shakespeare a "major literary property." As Robert B. Hamm argues, while the compensation awarded to Rowe for his translation was substantial, it was a bargain when compared to the compensation offered by the Tonsons for other publications, suggesting that the Tonson publishing house did not consider Shakespeare to be "a major literary property" during Rowe's time (Hamm 191). Nicholas Rowe enjoyed a sustained business relationship with Tonson whose publishing house printed most of his plays, including *Ulysses* (Hamm 191). As Hamm points out, it is important to contextualize Rowe's reception of Shakespeare within Tonson's broader efforts to recover Greco-Roman classical tradition by reprinting a selection of key works, which Tonson began to complement with a recovery of canonical works in the English tradition.⁷ While there is "nothing exceptional" about Rowe's edition of Shakespeare's works within Tonson's broader effort to reintroduce English authors from previous centuries, "perhaps there was something exceptional occurring to Shakespeare's reputation during this period" (Hamm 190); appropriations of Shakespeare, including Rowe's, "show a mounting interest in, and perhaps reverence for, his works," Hamm writes, understanding the appearance of Rowe's Shakespeare in 1709 as a "response to the increasing presence of Shakespeare's works, or plays inspired by them, on the public stage" (193).

Ulysses premiered on 23 November 1705 at the Queen's Theatre, Haymarket. Thomas Betterton played the leading role of Ulysses and Elizabeth Barry played Penelope, while Barton Booth emulated Telemachus with Anne Bracegirdle starring as Semanthe. It is worth remembering that *Ulysses*, which focused on Greco-Roman antiquity, was staged at the height of the so-called Battle of the Books between the Ancients and the Moderns, when the English intelligentsia was debating the supremacy of modern knowledge over and against that of ancient learning.⁸ It may be worthwhile to read *Ulysses* as an effort to bridge the ancient and the modern. The coincidence of Homeric and Shakespearean reception in *Ulysses* reveals the ways in which the idea of Homer in the early eighteenth-century English imagination coincides with the emerging idea of Shakespeare as "vernacular classic" (Hamm 184). Moreover, when contextualized in terms of the political climate of the times, the theme of Ulysses' restoration to Ithaca may be read as a confirmation of the proposed Act of Union between England and Scotland, which became law in 1707, with the 'Pretenders' to the Queen's hand recalling the Stuart Pretenders to the British throne. The sexual threat posed by the suitors to Penelope echoes Whig fears about a Tory takeover: "The apparent precariousness of the Protestant succession pushed Whig writers to confront a crisis that would put the whole nation at risk; they frequently responded by depicting that risk as

⁷ This legacy coincides with Rowe's extensive education in the classics. Likewise, his edition of Shakespeare falls in line with these twin editorial efforts undertaken by Tonson.

⁸ Jonathan Swift hilariously reported this social phenomenon in *The Battle of the Books* (1704), appended to his satire, *Tale of the Tub* (1704). See Swift, Jonathan. *Battle of the Books*. Ed. Jack Lynch. *Eighteenth-Century Resources*. <https://jacklynch.net/Texts/battle.html>.

sexed or sexual,” writes Brett Wilson (823). A rape of a woman, particularly one of the higher class, signified an assault on the integrity and honour of the country. And yet, we may also read in the restoration of Ulysses and the hope of the hereditary transmission of power from father to son an inkling of the patriarchal ideology, founded on the divine right of kings.

Rowe reworks the Troilus and Cressida Homeric story for an early eighteenth-century English audience. Additionally, he adds a new plot to the Telemachy, adding fresh significance to the *nostos* of *Ulysses*. Telemachus in Rowe's *Ulysses* first disobeys his father in his pursuit of Semanthe, the rival king's daughter; in the end, Telemachus ends his affair with Semanthe. Semanthe is a new character created by Rowe, who is not identical to Cressida though it is possible to read her as Cressida-like. Moreover, like *Troilus and Cressida*, frequently labeled a “problem play” (Greenblatt 1835), *Ulysses* is not entirely a tragedy. Though it has tragic elements, *Ulysses* has a comic ending, culminating in the restoration of Ulysses to Ithaca, the rescue of Penelope from the clutches of Eurymachus, and the restoration of filial piety, with the return of Telemachus to his father, in spite of the tragic annulment of his clandestine union with Semanthe. Semanthe's father, Eurymachus, is a threat to the plot's comic resolution because he vies for Penelope's hand in Odysseus' absence. As such, though he draws on Shakespearean and Homeric frameworks, Rowe's reception is unique in that he works in original twists. Indeed, we find that the plots of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* acquire new interpretive dimensions.

Ulysses also keys into some of the national and global tensions of the day. For instance, the war between the Trojans and the Greeks in Homer's works can be compared to the struggle between the House of Hanover and the Stuart dynasty for political hegemony during the succession crisis.⁹ It can also be interpreted as a veiled reference to the war of Spanish succession (1701-1715), which drew the French and the British into a struggle for control of Catholic Spain's assets, flanked by their respective alliances with various European powers. Indeed, this latter conflict infused domestic rivalries between the Catholic Stuarts, who sought refuge in France, and the rival Protestant Hanoverians, who followed on the heels of the Glorious Revolution.

And yet, though *Ulysses* appears to draw on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, it also adapts the plot of the *Odyssey*. Ulysses returns from the Trojan War to Ithaca, only to find that his kingdom, his queen, Penelope, and son, Telemachus, are threatened by the whims of unscrupulous rivals. The play opens with a rumination by Telemachus about the state of Ithaca in the absence of his father. It has been ten years since the end of the Trojan War and Ulysses is still missing in action:

By turns have chang'd the Seasons since it fell,
And yet we mourn my Godlike Father's Absence,
As if the Graecian Arms had ne'er prevail'd,
But Jove and Hector still maintain'd the War. (12)¹⁰

⁹ For an account of the upheavals of the Stuart dynasty in the seventeenth century, see Kishlansky.

¹⁰ There is no modern edition of Rowe's *Ulysses* to my knowledge. I have used the 1733 edition printed by Jacob Tonson (Rowe, *Ulysses*, 1733).

Telemachus mourns his father's absence and wonders what Ulysses would think of the state of affairs if he were to return to find "his State o'er-run, Devour'd and parcell'd out by Slaves so vile" (12). Rowe heightens the dramatic irony of the opening scene by introducing Ulysses, who masquerades as the stranger, Aethon, moving through the island and interacting with his subjects, family members, and enemies in disguise, to recover his rightful seat, trusting the "Secret of [his] Soul" (13) to no one: his seventy years have taught him "Thus only, to be safe in such a World as this is" (13). This part of the play closely parallels the return of Ulysses to Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey*, where Odysseus disguises himself in beggar's rags upon landing on the shores of Ithaca. Rowe's Ulysses wonders if Penelope would be able to recognize her husband: "Cou'd she forget / The Difference 'twixt Ulysses and his Slave?" (15) he asks Mentor, Telemachus' tutor and a family friend, foreshadowing his meeting with Penelope later on, who does not, in fact, recognize her missing husband. It is worth noting that in the *Odyssey*, Pallas or Athena appears in disguise as Mentor, a point that is significant. Athena is Ulysses' patron goddess, protecting him through his trials and tribulations. In Rowe's play, Pallas appears later, at a crucial juncture in the plot, reversing the misfortunes of Penelope and answering her prayers for Ulysses' restoration.

Ulysses faces two immediate external threats, "the silken Minions of the Samian court" and Antinous, who pretends to be a friend to Telemachus only to reveal his true colors in the end as a rival of Ulysses (27). However, Antinous also considers the King of Samos a rival. Ulysses' restoration is also threatened by Telemachus' affair with Semanthe, the daughter of Eurymachus, King of Samos. Both Antinous and Eurymachus are rival suitors to Penelope's hand. Remarking on Telemachus' dangerous attachment, Cleon, a friend of Antinous, quips that "the Love-sick Youth dotes ev'n to Death / Upon the Samian Princess" (29) Semanthe. Antinous commands that they "Let it go on": "'tis a convenient Dotage," he remarks, "And sutes my Purpose well" (29). With Telemachus distracted by Semanthe, Antinous stands to gain the hand of the defenseless queen. Antinous acknowledges Telemachus' noble character, noting that "The Youth by Nature / Is active, fiery, bold, and great of Soul" (29); however, he ascertains that Telemachus' liaison with Semanthe inspired in the impressionable youth "lazy Wishes, Sighs and Languishings, / Unactive dreaming Sloth, and womanish Softness" (29).

Both Antinous and Eurymachus appear as characters in Homer's *Odyssey*; however, Semanthe is Rowe's unique creation. Semanthe resembles Cressida in a number of ways. The character of Cressida is itself unique to the medieval period. A woman named Chryseis appears in the *Iliad*. She is taken as a prize to Agamemnon during the sack of Thebe and her father Chryses seeks her return (Rabel 473). Like Cressida and Chryseis, Semanthe belongs to the enemy camp; the other characters in the play view her as temptress, and yet, in Rowe's unique adaptation, she is a virgin sworn to Diana. There is a tragic element in her love for Telemachus, not unlike Cressida's love for Troilus; however, whereas Shakespeare depicts Cressida engaging in amorous activities with other men in *Troilus and Cressida*, Semanthe remains loyal to Telemachus throughout *Ulysses*.

In Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus belongs to the Trojan camp and Cressida is a Trojan woman. The morning following Cressida and Troilus' union, Cressida is exchanged for a Trojan prisoner and taken to the camp of the Greek warrior,

Diomedes, where she becomes a plaything of the Greek soldiers, to Troilus' humiliation. Ulysses also appears as a character in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*; when Cressida arrives in the Greek camp, he kisses her in a show of conquest. In Shakespeare's adaptation, Ulysses describes Cressida as wanton, noting that "her wanton spirits look out / At every joint and motive of her body" (4.5.56-57). Similarly, in the second act of Rowe's *Ulysses*, Ulysses (Aethon) refers to Semanthe as a "wanton" (34), disapproving the evolving relationship between Telemachus and Semanthe. In a soliloquy, he remarks that "This Samian King is Happy in his Arts; / His Daughter, vow'd a Virgin to Diana, / Is brought to play the Wanton here at Ithaca" (34).

From a political standpoint, if we read the rival "Pretenders to the Queen's hand" as the Stuart Pretenders and Penelope as Queen Anne, who was rumoured to hold Tory sympathies, then Semanthe may be read as a spy or security threat, of sorts, distracting the rightful king's first heir-in-line from his duties. She may also be read as a pawn of war, like Cressida. If we read, Semanthe as Cressida, then we may also interpret Telemachus as a kind of Troilus figure. However, unlike in *Troilus and Cressida*, it is not Telemachus/Troilus, but Ulysses who is compelled to witness Penelope's humiliation in Rowe's adaptation. The returned king disguised as Aethon witnesses first-hand the threats of Eurymachus, Semanthe's father, to kill Telemachus, Semanthe's lover, unless she yield to the Samian king's nefarious advances. Such details shed light on Rowe's creative adaptation of both Homer and Shakespeare in *Ulysses*. Like the legends of Homer, we see how the plays historically attributed to Shakespeare are adapted to fit the priorities of eighteenth-century English theatre. Similar to the "Troy stories" of the medieval age, the reception of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century spawned a series of "Shakespeare stories," as it were. Rowe's *Ulysses* may be read as both a Homeric story as well as a Shakespeare story.

Ulysses, still disguised as Aethon, is privy to the overtures made by Eurymachus on his wife. Penelope is yet to recognize Aethon as her long-lost husband, thinking him a loyal friend, but commends his loyalty to her husband. Eurymachus trusts Aethon enough to include him in the same room during his pursuit of the queen. Aethon then begins to test Penelope's loyalty, encouraging her to accept Eurymachus' proposal. Penelope is insulted. "Oh Aethon!" she cries, "art thou too—become my Enemy!" (24). She dubs him a traitor and accuses that "Gold has prevail'd upon thee to betray me, / And bargain for my Honour with this Prince" (24). Eurymachus threatens to kill Telemachus, responding to Penelope's repeated queries about her son's safety "That Royal Youth, that best lov'd Son is safe, / Nor dies, unless his Mother urge his Fate" (28). Eurymachus declares that "a Priest, by faithful Aethon's Care / in private shall attend" the queen's apartments in the evening, where "The Gods of Marriage and of Love invoking," he pledges to "renew [his] Vows, and at thy Feet / Devote ev'n all [his] Pow'rs to [her] Command" (28). The scene concludes with Eurymachus commanding Ulysses to fetch a "faithful" priest and Ulysses agrees to bring his "Friend of ancient Date [...] now in Ithaca," "try'd in these pious Secrets" (30).

Holding his tongue still, Ulysses says, "I ask no other Bliss nor fond Delight, / Nor envy Thee, O King, thy Bridal Night," and takes Eurymachus' leave (43). However, though seemingly unaffected, in the following act, Ulysses confides in his friends

Mentor and Eumaeus¹¹ that “These Eyes beheld her yielding—Cursed Object! Beheld her in the Samian King’s Embrace” (44). The tragic element in the play is compounded by Ulysses himself inquiring “what auspicious Hour, Your Royal Bridegroom and the Priest shou’d wait” (45). Penelope admits to him that she has her “Sex’s Weakness” (45): “I have a Mother’s Fondness in my Eyes / And all tender Passions in my Heart” (45). She nevertheless thinks of Aethon as traitor, magnifying the dramatic irony of the scene, and vows to curse him “Till Hell shall tremble at my Imprecations” (46). Embarrassed by his guile, Ulysses instructs his friends, Eumaeus and Mentor to “Guard her upon [their] Lives [...] from ev’ry Instrument of Death” till his return (46).

The central plot device of the play, on which the drama is catapulted, is the humiliation of Penelope, which signifies the degradation of Ulysses’ honor; her fidelity to Odysseus is constantly questioned by characters in the play, prompting the audience to also engage in this interrogation of her chastity. Not unlike the *Odyssey*, Penelope’s conjugal cross-examination is fraught with anxieties about preserving the honor of the Ithacan kingdom, and in the case of Rowe’s *Ulysses*, the integrity of the English throne, over which Queen Anne presided. As the daughter of James II, Anne was the last reigning monarch of the Stuart dynasty. Scholars have speculated at length about her potential Jacobite leanings. *Ulysses* was staged under her reign. Anne was very much a transitional figure in the shift from seventeenth-century mercantilism to eighteenth-century global capitalism. In her mannerism, she was rather Catholic, upholding a observance of ritual.¹² Bucholz understands Queen Anne to be “charting a middle course between the opposing shoals of the Whig and Tory parties, in an attempt to preserve freedom of maneuver for the postrevolutionary monarchy” (288). Thus, in Ulysses’ skepticism about Penelope’s fealty, we see elements of suspicions about Anne’s loyalties. Hanoverians questioned her fidelity to the Protestant succession. Paulina Kewes writes that

there is no evidence that the queen [...] harbored pro-Jacobite feelings. On the contrary, she strove assiduously to dispel any doubts about her commitment to the Hanoverian succession. Yet her refusal to allow any member of the Hanoverian family to reside in Britain during her lifetime fueled suspicions that she might countenance the pretensions of her half-brother James Francis Edward Stuart. (286)

Likewise, the vilification of Semanthe by characters’ in the play continues on this suspicion of women’s intentions. At the same time, the focus on these two female characters in the play also sheds light on their power as decisive actors in the broader social play of political succession. It would be easy enough to read Penelope as a victim and Semanthe as a pawn, and equally easy to read Penelope as a calculating politician and Semanthe as a wily seductress. However, the answer may be somewhere in the middle, anchored in contemporary perceptions and ideals of womanhood, mixed with

¹¹ In the *Odyssey*, Eumaeus is Odysseus’ faithful servant and Ulysses recognizes him for fulfilling the Greek tradition of providing shelter and sustenance to strangers, the custom of honoring strangers as guests.

¹² R.O. Bucholz writes that “[i]t is well known that Anne was, like her father and grandfather before her, a stickler for ceremony. Her nearly obsessive interest in, and extensive knowledge of, courtly ritual and custom were much commented on by observers” (292).

the lived experiences of women. As such, these Shakespearean and Homeric female characters are adapted to eighteenth-century English contexts.

Similarly, while it is possible to read *Ulysses* as a Whig merchant-hero, it is also possible to read him as a Stuart “native son.” Perhaps Rowe was constructing a character capable of appealing to both Whig and Tory factions in Queen Anne’s court, aiming to mend a divided country. Similarly, though critics have tended to align Rowe with Whig tendencies, such a cut-and-dry political alignment misses the complexities of political alignments and disavowals of the time. In her biography of Rowe, Annibel Jenkins observes that “Rowe knew all the major writers of the age of Queen Anne [...] dining with them, writing to them, and discussing, no doubt, the chief interests they all shared in politics and letters” (26), including Jonathan Swift and Richard Steele. Jenkins describes Rowe as “an ardent Whig” (26). She reads *Ulysses* as a “play of patriotism” (73), though specifically, as a Whig allegory. And yet, while this has remained the traditional viewpoint, given that *Ulysses* is a *returning* king – not a foreign dynasty like the Hanoverians – I’d like to suggest that Rowe could also be likening him to Charles II, a Stuart monarch restored after being exiled. In this way, the conflicts of ancient Greece and Elizabethan England are reenergized to interpret the conflicts plaguing Augustan Britain in the early eighteenth century.

Nicholas Rowe’s *Ulysses* is a complex blend of Homeric and Shakespearean plots finished with Rowe’s unique touches. In framing the Trojan War in terms of contemporary domestic and geopolitical concerns, Rowe makes Greek antiquity relevant to a divided Britain in the early eighteenth century in a new way. In sustaining a parallel between Penelope and Queen Anne and Ithaca and Britain, Rowe refashions the Greek ideal of virtue for eighteenth-century Britons. The plight of Penelope, harassed by various political rivals while awaiting her husband’s return, resembles the plight of Queen Anne’s court, divided between two warring political factions. Much as Shakespeare uses the Troilus and Cressida story to underscore the political perils posed by “wanton” women in wars, and their enervating effects on manhood, Rowe uses the Telemachus-Semanthe storyline to underscore the folly of youthful dalliances in the fulfillment of royal duty. Semanthe is Cressida-like, though only nominally; Rowe also emphasizes her fallen virtue, subtly indicating, in the end, her capacity for redemption, much as Telemachus is redeemed by returning to his father, Ulysses. We may observe that the classical outlook of the play here merges with an eighteenth-century British Christian eschatology.¹³

Poised on the verge of modernity, *Ulysses* foreshadows the 1707 Act of Union, which created modern Britain. The ‘restoration’ of Ulysses, a ‘true-born’ Ithacan reinforces contemporary desires for a ‘true-born’ patriarch, on the one hand; however, the rivals to his throne are also referred to as ‘Pretenders,’ a term reserved for Jacobite usurpers; as such, Rowe may have refashioned Ulysses to satisfy both Whig and Tory appetites. Thus, recalling James Porter, in Nicholas Rowe’s *Ulysses*, we see the rebirth of the idea of Homer in a distinctively eighteenth-century British way, though its ancient Greek sources are nevertheless undeniable. At the same time, by embedding the Telemachus-Semanthe plot within the story of the *Odyssey*, he may be reiving the literary reputation

¹³ For more on Rowe’s Christianity, see Canfield’s *Nicholas Rowe and Christian Tragedy*.

of Shakespeare in the early eighteenth century and authenticating the Shakespearean canon as a ‘vernacular classic.’

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Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel untersucht Verbindungen in der Rezeption und Kanonisierung von Homer und Shakespeare im 18. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Nicholas Rowes Drama *Ulysses* (1705). Rowes Drama wird insbesondere im Kontext seiner Arbeit an der ersten illustrierten Ausgabe von Shakespeares Werken und seinem großen altphilologischen Interesse gelesen. Im weiteren Verlauf zeigt der Artikel, wie Rowe in seinem Drama durch die Bearbeitung homerischer wie auch Shakespearescher Elemente zeitgenössische politische und geopolitische Konflikte verhandelt, die nicht zuletzt Rückschlüsse auf Shakespeares Rezeption als kanonischer Autor ziehen lassen.