WILLIAM MORRIS'S TRANSLATION
OF HOMER'S *ILIAD* I.1-214

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Thanking Morris for his new translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1875), Algernon Swinburne urged him to tackle Homer: "I wish you would give us a Homer, or at least an Odyssey: I am certain no poet ever was born who could do his country that service better or so well" (3:85). Morris published the *Odyssey* in 1887, and while working on it suggested that he might well follow it with the *Iliad*, though the scrupulous editor of the *Letters* comments: "He never did translate the *Iliad*" (2:526). Rumours that he did translate part of the *Iliad* have surfaced occasionally: Morris's most recent biographer claims that he "had toyed with translating Homer's *Iliad*. But on balance he had decided to begin with *The Odyssey*, imagining he might yet return to do *The Iliad* in future. In fact he never did" (MacCarthy 562). Even Morris's wife seemed uncertain, commenting to their daughter that "As to the Iliad fragment ... he may have started those few leaves and thrown it up" (British Library Add. MS. 45320, f. 1). "Those few leaves" in fact are the fair copy of his translation of the first third of Book I, now in the British Library (Add. MSS. 45320), a translation that Morris never published and that now can be brought to light along with his rough draft. The manuscripts demonstrate how scrupulous Morris was, not only in his line-for-line accuracy in translating Homer but also in his practice of thorough revision for metre, diction, and alliteration.

Although praised at the time of publication, his translation of the *Odyssey* was also roundly criticized for being too archaic. Morris's own comments show that his archaism deliberately situates his translation in a literary and political context, and is part of the widespread debates on the "Homeric Question" raised by F.A. Wolf in his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795). Wolf proposed a multiple authorship for the poems about a mythic past, suggested that they were originally collections of folk lays, and that they were written in an archaic language, encoding an honour-code ethical system. Such views, widespread in