

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

- *by John Keats*

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

*** Introduction:** This sonnet is one of the earliest poetic composition of the young Keats and his imagination was fired by the story of Homer's *Iliad* as translated with great power by the Elizabethan poet and dramatist , Chapman (1559 - 1634). The sonnet is the expression of the ecstatic

joy and wonder at the opening out of a new , rich world of beauty and poetic experience to him on reading Chapman's translation of Homer's epic.

Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad and Odyssey* , are among the front-rank masterpieces of world literature . The impact they made on the youthful mind of Keats was powerful. The sonnet is a tribute to Chapman's genius in having rendered the Greek epics into English with conspicuous success; but more than that , it is a tribute to Homer's poetic genius.