describes the "needs of the audience to feel 'in,' up-to-date, aware of the latest facts, and current in the intellectual, cultural, and social trends of the moment."

The more things change, the more they remain the same? Perhaps. Hunter's depiction of the newly enfranchised 18th-century audiences would not make a bad description of the novelty-mad, tradition-ignoring, postmodern television mutants whom Kernan *et al.* regard as the pallbearers of "humanism's long dream of learning." It is ironic that Hunter, by far the more donnish of the two critics, should be the one to remind us that the barbarians at the gates are really only our children.

Hunter concludes that "the novel does not exist for the novel's sake but human culture is for human culture's sake, and the rest is implication and detail." He thus indicts those who mourn the "death of literature" because they have first constructed a mandarin and nostalgic idea of Literature that not only excludes all the vitality of film, TV, comic book art, and rock and roll, but also ignores the fact that fiction sells better now than ever before. And if contemporary mandarins denounce the low quality of that popular fiction, they only echo the Tories who in the 1700s snorted at books that are now part of our revered canon. "The Kids Are All Right," sang Pete Townshend, the leading genius of The Who, two decades ago. A serious look at the cantankerousness and generosity of our real literary tradition helps us see how all right—and how true to the humanist tradition—the "kids" and their entertainments have always been.

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NEW TITLES

Arts & Letters

THE ILIAD. *By Homer. Trans. by Robert Fagles, with introduction and notes by Bernard Knox. Viking. 683 pp. $35*

Homer's *Iliad* seems as permanent as Western culture. Composed around the seventh century B.C., the poem circulated only in hand-copied form until 1488, when the first printed version appeared in Florence. Since then, the tale of war between invading Greeks and the defenders of the city of Troy has informed our notions of heroism and tragedy. Its adaptation into blank-verse couplets by the poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744) is only one early, famous attempt to make *The Iliad* not only a Greek but an English poem as well. Our century has seen two notable translations, Richmond Lattimore's in 1951 and Robert Fitzgerald's in 1974. Now Fagles, a poet and classicist (like his most recent predecessors), attempts to make the poem's ancient formulas and archaic magic accessible to this generation of readers.

The Iliad's plot revolves around the rage of Achilles, the Greek champion who is so skilled at war as to be almost godlike. Slighted by Agamemnon, his king, Achilles refuses to take part in any fighting. His absence brings disaster for the Greeks, as Hector, the Trojan champion, drives the invaders back to their ships. Only when Hector slays Achilles's friend Patroclus does Achilles's rage change from injured pride to murderous vengeance.

As Bernard Knox suggests in his introduction, Achilles's wrathful return to battle also

marks the Greek rejection of Troy's "civilized ways of warfare." For nine years the Greeks had accepted ransom in exchange for Trojan warriors, an arrangement that led to the long stalemate between the armies that exists at the start of the poem. Now, however, Achilles refuses the ransom by Lycaon, one of Hector's brothers: *"Fool/don't talk to me of ransom. No more speeches./Before Patroclus met his day of destiny, true, it warmed my heart to spare some Trojans . . . ./But now not a single Trojan flees his death . . . ./Come, friend, you too must die."* Perhaps nowhere else in literature are there more vivid descriptions of hand-to-hand combat than those related here: Armies advance on each other like two lines of reapers in a grain field; a man is caught up on a spear like a fish on a gaff. To Knox, these descriptions balance "the celebration of war's tragic, heroic values and those creative values of civilized life that war destroys."

The only person standing between Achilles and Troy's destruction is Hector, and Fagles's translation of this important scene shows how he differs from Lattimore and Fitzgerald. Lattimore is a traditionalist; his word-for-word approach retains the nobility of Homer's Greek but sacrifices some of the poem's emotion:

[Hector] balanced the spear far shadowed, and threw it,
and struck the middle of Peleïdes' [Achilles's] shield, nor missed it,
but the spear was driven far back from the shield, and Hektor was angered
because his swift weapon had been loosed from his hand in a vain cast.

Fitzgerald, whose translation of Homer's *Odyssey* is considered unsurpassed, strives for a freer verse form:

He twirled his long spear shaft and cast it,
hitting his enemy mid-shield, but off
and away the spear rebounded. Furious
that he had lost it, made his throw for nothing,
Hektor stood bemused.

Of the three, Fagles tries hardest to match the language with the sense; in this battle scene he favors short, chopped words and excited interjections to achieve the sense of calamity on the field:

Shaft poised, he hurled and his spear's long shadow flew
and it struck Achilles's shield—a dead-center hit—
but off and away it glanced and Hector seethed,
his hurtling spear, his whole arm's power poured
in a wasted shot.

No doubt Fagles's translation will itself receive a few spears from those classicists raised on Lattimore. A modern reader, however, particularly a nonspecialist, will welcome Fagles's explanatory digressions. But deciding which translation is best is a bit like arguing whether "Homer" was a single poet composing alone or a composite of generations of oral bards. Knox reminds us that, since Homer recited the poem from memory, each performance was of necessity an improvisation. Knox's analysis could explain why each generation spawns a new translation: *The Iliad* "is new every time it is performed."

VLADIMIR NABOKOV: The Russian Years.
By Brian Boyd. Princeton. 607 pp. $25

"I probably had the happiest childhood imaginable," remembered Vladimir Nabokov in 1972. Boyd, an English professor at the University of Auckland, makes us feel the luxurious comfort of winter in the Nabokovs' great house in prerevolutionary Russia and of the sunny, lilac-scented summers on the family's country estate. But at age 18 Nabokov had to flee from