

Brit Hadden's *Iliad* and the Legend of *Timestyle*

In the heyday of Henry R. Luce's media empire (c. 1925–67), the house style of flagship publication *Time* was both widely imitated by competitors and often criticized for its pernicious influence on the propriety of American English and the level of national civic discourse (Baughman 1987 42–61). “*Timestyle*” can be ascribed, the story goes, to one man, *Time*'s first editor Britton Hadden, and to his favorite book, the *Iliad*. The story of Brit Hadden's *Iliad* and its role in the making of *Time* and Time Inc. has many of the elements of history and legend: as history, the story is firmly grounded in eyewitness testimony, textual evidence, and artifacts; as legend, it is inflected by the desire to invest *Time*, its creators, and its consumers—all suspiciously middlebrow—with the cultural capital symbolized by the *Iliad* and by its place atop hierarchies of literary and educational value.

Company historians, biographers, and academics have cherished a certain image of the early days of *Time* (c. 1923–29), when co-founders Luce and Hadden worked with a small staff in a former brewery in Manhattan to condense the week's events into a magazine for busy professionals. While Luce handled the business side, Hadden was responsible for imposing a distinctive voice on *Time*. Recollections of Hadden in this period picture him with a green eyeshade aslant across his forehead as he jabs at copy with a thick pencil, alternately cheering and jeering his writers' work like a manic baseball fan (Busch 1948 153–54). During his editorial exertions, one colleague remembers, “At all times he had by him a carefully annotated translation of the *Iliad*. In the back cover he had listed hundreds of words, especially verbs and compound adjectives, which had seemed to him fresh and forceful. The classic ring of this vocabulary, which he frequently reviewed, served him as a tuning-fork for the language that he wanted in *Time*” (quoted in Elson 1968 83). From this observation, made shortly after Hadden's untimely death in 1929, a legend was born, one adopted and embroidered by subsequent writers. The influence of Hadden's *Iliad* has often been found in the neologisms, inverted word order, and epithet-like compound adjectives characteristic of early *Time*. Recently, a young journalist was granted access to Time Inc.'s archive, where he was able to examine Hadden's *Iliad* itself, which turns out to be an 1873 edition of Theodore Alois Buckley's 1851 translation, filled with underlinings, notes, and lists (Wilner 2006 132).

Eager to impress readers with a classical pedigree, commentators have failed to note that the putative “Homeric” origins of *Timestyle* are derived from a translation that claimed no literary merit and owed its frequent republication to the large market for school commentaries and ponies in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Hadden must have used his copy of Buckley as a trot in his Greek class at Hotchkiss (Busch 1949 115). Thus Hadden's love affair with the *Iliad*, sometimes taken as a sign of highbrow aspirations, may just as easily be understood as confirmation of a damningly middlebrow want of taste, to wit, an inability to tell first-rate writing from translationese. Hadden and Luce's biographers tell us enough about their schooldays to conclude that, for Hadden, the *Iliad* was less a standard of literary style than a talisman of belonging in an exclusive group privileged with rare knowledge. At Hotchkiss, that group was his Greek class; at *Time*, the group was the fraternity of the magazine's initial target audience, which Luce and Hadden conceived of as young men with educational experiences similar to their own at Hotchkiss and Yale. Hadden's use of Buckley's *Iliad* lent *Time* magazine not a genuinely Homeric sonority but the bantering tone of schoolboys vying to display their mastery of the day's construe. Brit Hadden's effort to share this elite experience with what would

eventually become a mass audience must qualify as one of the most widely diffused (if not widely recognized) consequences of the moribund “genteel tradition” of classical education.

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