Translations of Nisus and Euryalus by Dryden and Byron

Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 24 April 2010

In this paper I propose to offer a comparison between two versions of Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus episode. The first, by Dryden, was included in *Sylvae: or, the Second Part of Miscellany Poems* in 1685 under the title 'The entire episode of Nisus and Euryalus, translated from the Fifth and Ninth Books of Virgil's *Aeneid*'.[1] The second, by Byron, was included in his juvenile miscellany of 1807 entitled *Hours of Idleness*.[2] Byron confines himself to the night adventure. Dryden is arguably still Virgil's greatest translator. A version by a poet of Byron's standing, though little known, must be of considerable interest to Virgilians. I will dwell first on Dryden.

Dryden's version of this episode was not his first Virgil translation; he had previously translated two of the Eclogues.[3] But this was his first foray into translation of Virgilian epic, and the version has pride of place at the beginning of the miscellany in which he also included translations from Lucretius, Theocritus and Horace. He has two other extracts from the *Aeneid*, the entire episode of Mezentius and Lausus and the speech of Venus to Vulcan. There is a version of the episode of Camilla by another hand, together with other translations of Horace, Catullus, Tibullus, and Ovid by various poets.

[1] Quotations in this paper are from P. Hammond (ed), *The Poems of John Dryden*, vol. 2, 2002, Harlow, 258-86. This volume in the Longman Annotated Poets series is the most useful edition of the *Sylvae*, containing as it does below the text on the same page the revised version that Dryden made for his complete edition of the translation published in 1697. Juxtaposition of the two texts shows many small stylistic changes, but no substantial change in conception of the episode in the later version. This volume also includes the preface (234-57). Texts are partially modernised in this edition. For consistency other early texts in this paper are also presented in modernised form.
[2] G. Gordon, Lord Byron, *Hours of Idleness, A Series of Poems Original and Translated,* 1807, London, 64-77. Various modern reprints are available.
[3] *The Poems of John Dryden* (n.1 above) 203-13.

There is every reason to believe that Dryden's choice of the Nisus and Euryalus episode was partly prompted by a personal and literary friendship. In December 1683, his fellow poet John Oldham, Dryden's junior by 22 years, died at the young age of 30. In his celebrated elegy "To the Memory of Mr Oldham", which was included in a memorial issue of Oldham's poems in 1684,[4] Dryden figured himself as Nisus to Oldham's Euryalus, in what is probably the most famous literary allusion to the Virgilian pair in English:

Farewell, too little and too lately known,
Whom I began to think and call my own;
For sure our souls were near allied, and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.
One common note on either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorred alike.
To the same goal did both our studies drive;
The last set out the soonest did arrive.
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place,
While his young friend performed and won the race.
O early ripe! to thy abundant store
What could advancing age have added more?
It might (what Nature never gives the young)
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue.
But satire needs not those, and wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.
A noble error, and but seldom made,
When poets are by too much force betrayed.
Thy generous fruits, though gathered ere their prime,
Still showed a quickness; and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme.
Once more, hail and farewell! farewell, thou young,
But ah too short, Marcellus of our tongue!
Thy brows with ivy and with laurels bound;
But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

[4] *Remains of Mr Oldham in Verse and Prose,* London.

Dryden here alludes to the footrace in *Aen.* 5. Given the emphasis on satire, the race in which both poets were involved is often understood to be the composition of heroic satire on national themes, since Oldham published his *Satyrs upon the Jesuits* in 1680, a year before Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*. But, particularly in view of the general Virgilian cast of the poem, Paul Hammond suggests that Dryden might also have had in mind Oldham's translations, for example, his *Horace's Art of Poetry; Imitated in English* published in 1681, three years before Dryden himself became seriously interested in translation.[5] Both the elegy and the Nisus and Euryalus episode were composed, almost certainly in that order, in 1684, which was also the year that saw the publication of Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse*, whose principles Dryden declares he was endeavouring to put into practice in his *Sylvae* translations.[6]

This may in part be a gracious compliment to a noble lord, but there is evidence that the Earl had proposed the institution of an informal academy to promote native enrichment and refinement of the language through the translation of the classics.[7] It is not entirely fanciful to see this aspiration in the choice of the epigraph from Virgil that heads the *Sylvae* preface: *Non deficit alter / aureus*; *et simili frondescit virga metallo.* (6.143-44). The primary reference must be to the Second Miscellany following on from the First, but the new growth of golden fruits can also be the translated poems, of the same mettle as those they replace, which constitute the vast body of the 494 pages of text.

In addition to this larger motive and any occasional interest prompted by the death of his friend, Dryden in the opening of his preface tells readers that in the case of Lucretius and Virgil he "fixed upon parts of them which had most affected me in the reading".[8] The episode was evidently a personal favourite, perhaps remembered from his schooling at Westminster.

At the time of writing, the last year of the reign of Charles II, Dryden, as poet laureate, was at the height of his powers and favour. The preface advertises an enthusiasm for what he had experienced as "the hot fits"[9] of poetic translation, which had given the poet an unexpected satisfaction beyond his ordinary productions. In the lengthy exposition that follows, Dryden discusses the whole business of translation and then comments specifically on all the poets he had translated. In following Roscommon, he declares:[10]

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[5] *The Poems of John Dryden* (n.1 above), 228.
[6] *ibid.* 237.
[7] G. Clingham, 'Roscommon's "Academy", Chetwood's "Life of Roscommon" and Dryden's Translation Project', *Restoration* 26 (2001), 15-26.
[8] *The Poems of John Dryden* (n.1 above) 237.
[9] *ibid.*236.
[10] *ibid.*237.

> "Yet withal, I must acknowledge , that I have exceeded my Commission; for I have both added and omitted, and even sometimes very boldly made such expositions of my authors, as no Dutch commentator will forgive me. Perhaps, in such particular passages, I have thought that I discovered some beauty yet undiscovered by those pedants, which none but a poet could have found. Where I have taken away some of their expressions, and cut them shorter, it may possibly be on this consideration, that what was beautiful in the Greek or the Latin would not appear so shining in the English: And where I have enlarged them, I desire the false critics would not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but that either they are secretly in the poet, or may be fairly deduced from him: or at least, if both those considerations should fail, that my own is of a piece with his, and that if he were now living, and an Englishman, they are such, as he would probably have written".

So he does not see his role as translator to be that of *fidus interpres*. Moving on in his preface to characterise the distinguishing character of each of the authors he translated, he starts with Virgil, giving him pride of place in the volume. He gives a fine appreciation of Virgil's style as the classical standard, and then goes on to reflect on its difficulty for the translator:[11]

> "I looked on Virgil, as a succinct and grave majestic writer; one who weighed not only every thought, but every word and syllable; who was still aiming to crowd his sense into as narrow a compass as possibly he could; for which reason he is so very figurative, that he requires, (I may almost say) a grammar apart to construe him. His verse is every where sounding the very thing in your ears whose sense it bears: Yet the numbers are perpetually varied, to increase the delight of the Reader; so that the same sounds are never repeated twice together … He is everywhere above the conceits of epigrammatic wit, and gross hyperboles: He maintains majesty in the midst of plainness; he shines, but glares not; and is stately without ambition, which is the vice of Lucan … I drew my definition of poetical wit from my particular consideration of him … but I must confess to my shame, that I have not been able to translate any part of him so well, as to make him appear wholly like himself. For where the original is so close, no version can reach it in the same compass … To make him copious is to alter his character; and to translate him line for line is impossible; because the Latin is naturally a more succinct language than the Italian, Spanish, French or even than the English … Virgil is much the closest of any Roman Poet, and the Latin hexameter has more feet than the English heroic".

The difficulty is threefold. First and most obviously, it is a matter of the difference between languages, Latin being highly inflected. Secondly, it is a particular feature of Virgil's density of style that Dryden points to in his preface: "Virgil studying brevity, and having the command of his own language, could bring those words into a narrow compass, which

[11] *ibid.* 241-43.

a translator cannot render without circumlocutions".[12] In his later dedication to the whole translation in 1697, he well described "the sober retrenchments of his sense, which always leaves something to gratify our Imagination".[13] And thirdly, it is the difficulty presented by his choice of verse form, the English heroic or rhyming couplet.

The English heroic for Dryden and most of his age and the next, despite the recent success of *Paradise Lost*, remained the rhyming couplet. (Interesting in this connection is the choice of the heroic couplet by Byron and Wordsworth[14] in the Romantic period). In his *Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire*, Dryden spelt out an obvious difference between the classical hexameter line and the individual pentameter line of the heroic couplet: "The English verse, which we call heroic, consists of no more than ten syllables; the Latin hexameter sometimes rises to seventeen".[15] Virgil may use a periodic style, but many of his lines are self-contained, and as such often hold more than can be represented in a single pentameter line. Conversely, since the English heroic couplet is generally self-contained (enjambement between lines is allowed but not between couplets), there will be a tendency to fill out the couplet, in expansion of the Latin. In a weak poet this will result in "line-fillers"; in a strong one in the imaginative embellishment of the sense.

As it is deployed by Dryden and Pope, the heroic couplet itself is a clarifying medium with its own expressive and emphatic dynamic.

Waller was smooth; but Dryden taught to join
The varying verse, the full-resounding Line,
The long majestic march, and energy divine.

(Pope, *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated,* 267-69).16

Dryden was the first great exponent of the heroic couplet, which he made a vehicle for what Pope calls here his "energy divine", and indeed those who appreciate Dryden frequently commend his muscular energy. Virgil's stately style has been regarded as the defining expression of Roman gravity and power; the "ocean roll of rhythm" that sounded

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[12] *ibid.* 243-44.
[13] W. Frost & V. A. Dearing (eds), *The Works of Virgil in English, 1697,* 1987, Berkeley CA, 326 (vol. 5 of E. N. Hooker & H. T. Swedenberg (eds), *The Works of John Dryden,* 1956-2000).
[14] Wordsworth's Virgil translations are available in B. E. Graver (ed), *Translations of Chaucer and Virgil by William Wordsworth*, 1998, Ithaca NY.
[15] A. B. Chambers & W. Frost (eds), *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1693-1696*, Berkeley CA, 88 (vol. 4 of Hooker & Swedenberg, n.13 above).
[16] J. Butt (ed), *Imitations of Horace*, 1939, London 274 (vol. 4 in J. Butt (gen. ed), *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, 1939-67).

forever of imperial Rome, in Tennyson's tribute.[17] There is overlap but not correspondence in the styles of these two strong poets.[18]

Contemplating the difficulty he identified, Dryden made a virtue out of necessity. His method was consciously to fill out Virgil's meaning, deliberately to make the implicit explicit.

He only proves he understands a text,
Whose exposition leaves it unperplexed.

(Earl of Roscommon, *An Essay on Translated Verse*).[19]

We can link this to the attitude to language in the era of the Enlightenment:

But true expression, like th' unchanging sun
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon;
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.

(Pope, *An Essay on Criticism,* 315-17).[20]

Translation for Dryden, like poetry and translation for Pope, is a kind of enlightening process. The unperplexing that Roscommon demands is partly an aesthetic desideratum, but also a philological or even a philosophical one. This was not an age which saw any great virtue in difficulty, ambiguity or the undecidable. One of Dryden's great strengths as a translator is the clarity with which he renders his originals. Few object when he irons out the obscurities and strained expressions of Persius (probably because Persius has few readers anyway, or few readers with any stake in his poems). But Virgil matters more and his readers, still numerous, care greatly. What, some have asked, if ambiguity and ambivalence are basic to Virgilian artistry?[21] Be that as it may, as he probes the density of the Latin text and opens it up and draws it out, Dryden's judgements tends to be firmer, his rhetoric more highly charged and his pictures fuller than Virgil's own. Similarly Dr

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[17] 'To Virgil', 16-17 in C. Ricks (ed), *The Poems of Tennyson,* vol. 3, 1987, Harlow, 99-100.
[18] For discussion of possible affinities between the classical hexameter and the English heroic couplet, see R. Sowerby, *The Augustan Art of Poetry: Augustan Translation of the Classics,* 2006, Oxford, 141.
[19] Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, *An Essay on Translat*ed Verse, in J. E. Spingarn (ed), Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 1957, Oxford, vol. 2, 297-309 (303).
[20] E. Audra & A. Williams (eds), *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, 1961, London, 217 (vol. 4 of *The Twickenham Edition*, n. 16 above).
[21] Dryden has been accused of erasing ambiguity in pursuit of strong Augustan readings. See R. F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception,* 2001, Cambridge. For a defence of Dryden, see R. Sowerby, 'The Augustan *Aeneis*: Virgil Enlightened?', *Translation & Literature* 11 (2002), 237-69.

Johnson remarked of Pope's Homer that as translator he "colours the images and points the sentiments".[22]

An example of the colouring of the images picked fairly at random from the version is the following description by Nisus of the route he envisages taking through terrain occupied by their enemy.

For, hunting in the vale, we both have seen
***The rising turrets**, with the stream between,*
***And know its winding course, with ev'ry ford**.*

(207-09)

The expressions in bold are glosses and additions that in their cumulative effect make the translation concretely visualised with additional particularities. Virgil simply has *urbem* (244) and *amnis* (245).

This habit of colouring of the images has got Dryden into trouble, particularly in relation to battle scenes and fighting, where it has zled to the charge that he revels in gratuitous violence. A brief example from this episode might be the killing of Rhemus amidst his retinue of men and horses:

Full on his neck he aims the fatal sword:
*The **gasping** head flies off; a purple flood*
*Flows from the trunk, **that wallows in the blood**,*
*Which, **by the spurning heels dispers'd around**,*
The bed besprinkles and bedews the ground.

(330-04)

The highlighted phrases are small expansions that intensify the physicality of this moment of violent death. The intensification is visual but almost audible in the additional "gasping". When the trunk "wallows" as it veers from side to side and the heels are "spurning", as the nervous system reacts to the sudden blow, there is added movement of a repulsive kind. The primary effect of these two words is to add physical realism, but both also have contrasting figurative suggestions, which, if they register at all, must add another layer, or at least, a dislocating undercurrent. There is indeed a sense in which the translator is revelling in the potentialities of the text as he responds to its imagery, or wallowing in blood, to use an expression derived from this passage, but the additions are not gratuitous. They spring from an imaginative engagement with the horrible physical reality suggested by Virgil's text.

[22] R. Lonsdale (ed), *Samuel Johnson: Lives of the Poets*, 2006, Oxford, vol. 4, 74.

As to pointing the sentiments, this is apparent in the rhetoric and argument of any speech:

O let not me the ***widow's*** *tears renew!*
Nor let a mother's curse my name pursue*:*
Thy pious parent*, who, for love to thee,*
Left the ***fair*** *coast of* ***fruitful*** *Sicily,*
Her age committing to the seas and wind*,*
When ev'ry ***weary*** *matron stay'd behind.*

(165-69)

neu matri miserae tanti sim causa doloris
quae te sola, puer, multis e matribus ausa
persequitur, magni nec moenia curat Acestae.[23]

(9.216-18)

Three lines in Virgil have become six in the translation. In this rhetorical heightening, Euryalus' mother becomes an aged widow who might curse Nisus. The emphatic pathos here may serve as an example to counter a second major charge against Dryden's version: that it is lacking in pathos. It is certainly true that in celebrated moments such as *lacrimae rerum* (1.466)**,** the reader consulting Dryden will be disappointed. But the version of 1685 and the full translation as a whole are full of feeling. A notable example might be the lament of Euryalus' mother composed for the completed version of 1697 (not included in the *Sylvae* version, which concludes with the apostrophe at 9.446-49).

In a third example, the additional detail both colours the image and points the rhetoric. When Euryalus asks Ascanius to look after his mother in the event of his death, in the Latin he tells him that *inque salutatam linquo* ("I leave without saying farewell", 288).[24] In the translation there is a considerable filling out for pathetic effect:

neither parting kiss,
Nor pious blessing taken, her I leave,
And in this only act of all my life deceive.

(268-70)

Three words in the Latin have been expanded to two and a half lines in the English.

[23] A very useful edition of Virgil's text is P. R. Hardie, *Virgil: Aeneid Book IX*, 1994, Cambridge.
[24] Where there are prose translations of the Latin they are by the author.

In the light of these three examples, Dryden's own account of his translation in his preface will seem surprising: "I own that, endeavouring to turn his *Nisus and Euryalus* as close as I was able, I have performed that episode too literally".

If we look at the detail of Dryden's version in the wider context of his interpretation of the episode as a whole, an obvious starting point must be his version of the famous question asked by Nisus at the beginning of the episode.

Dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt,
Euryale, an sua cuique deus sit dira cupido?

(9.184-85)

Or do the gods this warlike warmth inspire
Or makes each man a God of his desire?

(117-18)

What we miss here is any rendering of the word *dira*: "dread desire". The phrase is glossed in the prose *interpretatio* which accompanied the text in the Delphin edition of Ruaeus (Charles de la Rue),[25] used by Dryden, as "sua cupido ardens", meliorating the effect of *dira*. The phrase also occurs when Aeneas gazes at the souls of the dead in the underworld and asks *quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido*? ("Why have these wretches such a dread desire of the light?" 6.721), where it is glosse d by de la Rue as "quodnam est miseris tam insanum vitae desiderium", ("why do these wretches have such a mad longing for life?"), translated by Dryden in 1697 as:

O father, can it be, that ***souls sublime***
Return, to visit our terrestrial clime;
And that the generous mind, released by death*,*
Can covet lazy limbs and mortal breath*?*

(6.974-77)

Apart from the fact that the economy is quite gone, the tone is moderated with the omission of both *dira* and *miseris***.** In the Latin, this is the sort of moment that gave rise to Arnold's evocation of "an ineffable melancholy"[26] pervading the poem, or more famously to the line "Thou majestic in thy sadness at the doubtful doom of humankind" in Tennyson's

[25] *P. Virgilii Maronis Opera interpretatione et notis illustravit Carolus Ruaeus … ad usum serenissimi Delphini*, 1675, Paris, reprinted many times thereafter. The paraphrase is printed in the margin and notes are appended below the text.

[26] M. Arnold, 'On the Modern Element in Literature', in R. H Super (ed), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold. Vol 1: On the classical tradition,* 1973, Ann Arbor MI, 35.

tribute.[27] In the Nisus episode here, the omission of *dira* eliminates a possible complicating subtext. If we go on to consider the rest of this speech, we can see that Dryden has quite re-ordered its emphasis:

> *Or do the gods this warlike warmth inspire*
> *Or makes each man a god of his desire?*
> *A noble ardour boils within my breast,*
> *Eager of action, enemy of rest:*
> *This urges me to fight, or undertake*
> *Some deed that may my fame immortal make.*
>
> (117-22)

The last two couplets here translate two lines of Virgil.

> *aut pugnam aut aliquid iamdudum invadere magnum*
> *mens agitat mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est.*
>
> (9.186-87)

("Long has my heart been astir to dare battle or some great deed, and it is not content with peaceful quiet").

Dryden ends with immortal fame; Virgil with restlessness. Dryden may have been looking towards the ending, and to the apostrophe in which Virgil immortalises the pair, with which he ends the translation. Looking at the narrative as a whole, it is easy to suppose that Virgil, too, in his framing of Nisus' introductory speech here is looking to the end when Nisus finally finds rest, for there is surely an echoing link with *placidaque ibi demum morte quievit* ("and there at length in the peace of death found rest", 445) as he dies on the body of Euryalus. But Dryden's translation of the final line strikes a different note, emphasising the satisfaction of revenge.

> *Then quietly on his dear breast he fell*
> *Content in death to be revenged so well.*
>
> (483-84)

This puts a positive interpretation on the ending and typifies something about the translation of the episode as a whole and perhaps more largely about Dryden's Virgil. If readers, interpreters and translators can be divided roughly (and perhaps a little crudely) into two camps, the optimists and pessimists, then it is certainly the case the Dryden (and later Byron who follows him) inclines towards the optimistic camp.

[27] *'To Virgil' (n.17 above)*, 13-14.

What is the deed that gives Nisus his immortal fame? Clearly the self-sacrifice he makes in exacting revenge for the death of his friend. Dryden's own description of the episode in his headnote is quite straightforward.

> "The Trojans in it are reduced to great extremities, which gives the poet the occasion of continuing this admirable episode, wherein he describes the friendship, the generosity, the adventures, and the death of Nisus and Euryalus".

Friendship and generosity in the context of adventure and a tragic outcome are what Dryden honours and celebrates in his rendering of the episode. When Nisus slips in the footrace,

Nor mindless then Euryalus of thee,
Nor of the sacred bonds of amity,
He strove th'immediate rival to oppose.

(61-63)

The "sacred bonds of amity" translates *non ille oblitus amorum* (5.334) and is one of many emphatic renderings of the bond between the two men in the narrative of both the footrace and the night attack. Virgil's word here is *amor*, which becomes friendship in the translation, but Dryden is not bashful elsewhere in using the word "love" and calling Nisus the "lover" of Euryalus on more than one occasion (455, 482). And the warm glow of friendship infiltrates the reactions of Ascanius to Euryalus in Dryden's version; the Longman editor[28] brings out the parallels, highlighted in bold here, with the elegy to Oldham:

But thou, whose years are more to mine ***allied*** *-*
No fate my vow'd affection shall divide
From thee, O wondrous youth! be ever ***mine****;*
Take full possession; all my ***soul*** *is* ***thine****.*
One faith, one fame, one fate, shall both attend;
My life's companion, and my bosom friend:
My peace shall be committed to thy care,
And to thy conduct my concerns in war.

(249-56)

That it is this relationship of loving friendship that he warmed to in the episode is confirmed in Dryden's rendering of the apostrophe with which he concludes:

[28] *The Works of John Dryden* (n.1 above), 273.

O happy pair, for if my verse can give
Eternity, your fame shall ever live.

(485-86)

O happy friends! for, if my verse can give
Immortal life, your fame shall ever live.

(9.597-98)

His rendering of *Fortunati ambo*! in the apostrophe first as "O happy pair" in 1685 and then as "O happy friends" in 1697 makes explicit the bond of friendship that is to give Nisus and Euryalus their immortal fame by courtesy of the poet. In the episode of Mezentius and Lausus also included in *Sylvae*, Dryden is even more open-hearted in his apostrophe to Lausus, honouring his display of selfless piety in seeking to save his father:

And here, O wondrous youth, 'tis here I must
To thy immortal memory be just,
And sing an act so noble and so new
Posterity shall scarce believe it true.

(10.54-57)

This remained unchanged in 1697.

The tone and temper suggested by these two apostrophes probably puts Dryden against modern trends in Virgilian studies. G. J Fitzgerald's article entitled 'Nisus and Euryalus: A Paradigm of Futile Behaviour and the Tragedy of Youth'[29] is rather obviously in the pessimistic camp. In a more recent substantial article, Sergio Casali puts Fitzgerald in the pessimistic camp, and quotes two "Augustan" readings of the poem, "countering Fitzgerald", which highlight courage and military glory. He then argues that the contradiction between optimists and pessimists in the reception of this episode reflects a contradiction actually contained in the text itself and created "by the intertextual nexus which the *Aeneid* establishes with Homer, Lucretius and other literary texts".[30] Both these articles contain much of interest, but what they have in common is a strange neglect of friendship, of which there is scarcely a mention. In fact, a reader of the articles who had no knowledge of the original (admittedly a highly improbable eventuality) would never guess that Nisus and Euryalus were any closer than Odysseus and Diomedes in the *Iliad*. For Dryden, however, in the elegy to Oldham as in the translation itself, friendship (and

[29] in J. R. C. Martyn (ed), *Cicero and Virgil. Studies in honour of H. Hunt*, 1972, Amsterdam, 114-37.
[30] S. Casali, 'Nisus and Euryalus: Exploiting the Contradictions in Virgil's Doloneia', *HSPh* 102 (2004), 319-54 (321).

not actually military glory) is the chief subject for poetic celebration. His translation is an antidote or corrective to interpretations of the episode that overemphasise subversive subtextual hints and ironies; a subtext will modify a text but does not necessarily obliterate the apparent surface meaning.

In the phrase "the sacred bonds of amity" is expressed the chief idealism of the narrative for the translator. At the same time, if he is explicit about the positive aspects of their story, he is equally explicit about the excesses of the pair in their imprudent and unnecessary slaughter of the sleeping Rutulians.

Now, where Messapus quarter'd, they arrive.
The fires were fainting there, and just alive;
The warrior-horses, tied in order, fed.
*Nisus **the discipline observ'd**, and said:*
'Our eagerness of blood may both betray;
Behold the doubtful glimmerings of the day,
*Foe to these nocturnal **thefts**. No more, my friend;*
*Here let our **glutted execution** end.*
A lane thro' slaughter'd bodies we have made'.
The bold Euryalus, tho' loth, obey'd.
Rich arms and arras which they scattered find
And plate, a precious load they leave behind.
*Yet, **fond of gaudy spoils**, **the boy** would stay*
To make the proud caparisons his prey,
Which on the steed of conquer'd Rhamnes lay.
Nor did his eyes less longingly behold
The girdle studied o'er with nails of gold.

(356-72)

As Euryalus presses on, Nisus recognises that they were being carried away by an excessive desire for slaughter (*sensit enim nimia caede atque cupidine ferri*, 353). This is clearly marked in Dryden by the highlighted contrast between the discipline that Nisus observes and the "glutted execution" he now acknowledges. In his recognition here, his word *cupidine* recalls the *dira cupido* that had prompted his question at the outset of the episode, and is well represented by Dryden in the boyish desire of Euryalus for spoils, which Dryden's Nisus calls "thefts". There is a moral perspective here upon the slaughter; this aspect of the night adventure is not heroic. It would be wrong to say that Dryden is wholeheartedly or

unconsciously celebrating the military prowess of the protagonists in this night attack. In the final analysis what drives the narrative is the bond of friendship openly translated as love in Dryden's version.

> *Too late alas, he speaks:*
> *The sword, which unrelenting fury guides,*
> *Driven with full force, had pierced his tender sides.*
> *Down fell the beauteous youth: the gaping wound*
> *Gushed out a purple stream, and stained the ground.*
> *His nodding neck reclines on his white breast,*
> *Like a fair flower in furrowed fields oppressed,*
> *By the keen share, or poppy on the plain,*
> *Whose heavy head is overcharged with rain.*
> *Disdain, despair, and deadly vengeance vowed,*
> *Drove Nisus headlong on the hostile crowd;*
> *Volscens he seeks; on him alone he bends:*
> *Borne back and pushed by his surrounding friends,*
> *He still pressed on, and kept him still in sight;*
> *Then whirled aloft his sword with all his might:*
> *Th' unerring steel flew, and winged with death,*
> *Entered his gaping mouth, and stopped his breath.*
> *Dying, he slew; and, staggering on the plain,*
> *Sought for the body of his lover slain;*
> *Then quietly on his dear breast he fell,*
> *Content, in death, to be revenged so well.*
> *O happy pair! For, if my verse can give*
> *Eternity, your fame shall ever live,*
> *Fixed as the Capitol's foundation lies,*
> *And spread, where'er the Roman eagle flies!*
>
> (464-88)

Virgil's *exanimum ... amicum* (444) becomes "the body of his lover slain" as Dryden seeks to do justice to the unspoken emotion that drives Nisus and justifies the celebration of the pair in the apostrophe.

In his version, which he called a paraphrase, Byron confined himself to book 9, and finished, like Dryden in 1685, with the apostrophe. Byron was only 19 at the time,

and the version is certainly imbued with the heady exuberance of youth and a certain swashbuckling glamour. The opening couplet sets the tone:

Nisus the guardian of the portal stood,
Eager to gild his arms with hostile blood.

There is an undisguised thirst for blood at the outset. Nisus' opening question is slightly less questioning than in Virgil or Dryden:

What god, exclaimed the first, instils this fire?
Or in itself a God, what great desire?
My labouring soul, with anxious thoughts oppressed
Abhors this station of inglorious rest;
The love of fame with this can ill accord,
Be't mine to seek for glory with my sword.

(19-24)

Euryalus full-heartedly responds to this call to blood, fame and glory. When Nisus tries to deflect him:

In vain you damp the ardour of my soul,
Replied Euryalus, it scorns control.

(79-80)

Euryalus and the young translator are at one here and throughout. How controlled Dryden seems by contrast. In fact, it would be possible to do an old-fashioned classical and romantic comparison, Dryden representing classical restraint, while Byron is all romantic excess. Emotions are very much to the fore. Here, for example are the patriotic feelings of the old Trojan Alethes, who is quite overcome by the gallantry he sees before him:

Mature in years, for sober wisdom famed,
Moved by the speech, Alethes here exclaimed,
'Ye parent gods! who rule the fate of Troy.
Still dwells the Dardan spirit in the boy;
When minds like these in striplings thus ye raise
Yours is the godlike act, be yours the praise;
In gallant youth, my fainting hopes revive,
And Ilion's wonted glories still survive'.
Then in his warm embrace the boys he pressed
And, quivering, strained them to his aged breast;

With tears the burning cheek of each bedewed,
And, sobbing, thus his first discourse renewed …

(119-30)

There is little in what follows to offer any alternative perspective on this. The episode as rendered by Byron primarily celebrates glory through the sword. The moral element that comes through in Dryden is more or less absent. It is significant that when recognition comes that the carnage has to stop, it is somewhat muted, and the carnage is then associated primarily with Euryalus :

Brave Nisus here arrests his comrade's arm;
Too flushed with carnage, and with conquest warm.

(279-80)

The pair are unlucky; victims simply of chance or fate rather than also of their own excess. Dryden's rendering, surely representing the original, does not play down this excess. Byron's version is decidedly less nuanced.

Nevertheless though he turns up the heat, and is often overheated, Byron writes with assurance throughout. In a letter of 1808, he told his correspondent that the version was "the best in point of versification I have ever written".[31] Besides its great energy, his version also has delicate touches, as when he responds to the famous simile at the end of the episode, with its sweet sounds and gentle cadences, and adds an additional line that causes the reader to linger over its beauty. Here is the final section in Byron's version, beginning with the death of Euryalus:

He pray'd in vain; the dark ***assassin's*** *sword*
Pierced the fair side, the snowy bosom gored
Lowly to earth inclines his plume-clad crest,
And ***sanguine torrents*** *mantle o'er his breast:*
As some young rose, whose blossom scents the air,
Languid in death, expires beneath the share;
Or crimson poppy, sinking with the shower,
Declining gently, falls a fading flower;
Thus, sweetly drooping, bends his lovely head,
And lingering beauty hovers round the dead.

[31] *Byron's Letters and Journals. 1798-1810: In My Hot Youth,* 1973, Harvard, 118 (vol. 1 of L. A. Marchand (ed), *Byron's Letters and Journals,* 1973-82).

But fiery Nisus ***stems the battle's tide****,*
Revenge his leader, and despair his guide*;*
Volscens he seeks amidst the gathering host,
Volscens must soon appease his comrade's ghost;
Steel, flashing, ***pours on steel, foe crowds on foe****;*
Rage nerves his arm, fate gleams in every blow*;*
In vain beneath ***unnumber'd wounds*** *he bleeds*
Nor wounds, nor death, distracted Nisus heeds;
In viewless circles wheel'd*, his falchion flies,*
Nor quits the hero's grasp till Volscens dies;
Deep in his throat its end the weapon found,
The ***tyrant's*** *soul fled groaning through the wound.*
Thus Nisus all his fond affection proved –
Dying, revenged the fate of him he loved;
Then on his bosom sought his ***wonted*** *place*
And death was heavenly in his friend's embrace*!*

Celestial *pair! if aught; my verse can claim*
Wafted on Time's broad pinion, yours is fame!
Ages on ages *shall your fate admire,*
No future day shall see your names expire,
While stands the Capitol, immortal dome!
And ***vanquished millions*** *hail their empress, Rome!*

(375- 406)

The words and phrases highlighted in bold are the obvious hyperboles in this passage. Dryden in his characterisation of Virgil's style remarks that he is above gross hyperboles. In the light of Ogilby's version and many other wretched offerings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would be impertinent to call Byron's hyperboles gross. But there is an obvious inflation throughout. He makes Volscens an assassin and a tyrant. Euryalus's blood flows in "sanguine torrents". Dryden had introduced abstracts to express the immediate emotion of Nisus after the death of his friend:

Disdain, despair, and deadly vengeance vowed
Drove Nisus headlong on the hostile crowd

(473-74)

Byron follows him and goes one further in personifying revenge, despair, rage and fate. Paradoxically the personification detracts from the immediacy of the physical action. When it comes to the action itself, Byron's Nisus, unlike Virgil's or Dryden's, receives "unnumbered wounds", an infelicitous heightening. Similarly infelicitous is the hyperbole when Nisus' sword is whirled about so quickly that the eye cannot comprehend the "viewless circles" it is said to make. Nisus dies in Dryden "content in death to be revenged so well". In Byron, as he finds his wonted place on Euryalus's bosom (he has been there before, evidently) his death is heavenly in his friend's embrace. The final line with its vanquished millions hailing their empress leaves us with an inflated image of complacent Roman power that does not seem to be ironic. So, if on examination Dryden's method in colouring the images and pointing the sentiments puts him in danger of seeming to outdo his original, comparison with Byron might serve as a corrective that invites us to appreciate his control and restraint.

To conclude with a verdict in Dryden's favour, here is the judgement of Walter Scott in his edition of Dryden's works, published in 1808. Given this date, it is unlikely that Scott had read Byron's version when he wrote his summing up of Dryden's poetic achievement, perhaps some time before the date of publication. Though he came to be a great admirer of Byron's poetry, it is equally unlikely that a reading of Byron's Nisus and Euryalus would have caused him to modify his verdict on Dryden as a translator of Virgil.

> He who sits down to Dryden's translation of Virgil, with the original text spread before him, will be at no loss to point out many passages that are faulty, many indifferently understood, many imperfectly translated, some in which dignity is lost, others in which bombast is substituted in its stead. But the unabated vigour and spirit of the version more than overbalances these and other deficiencies. A sedulous scholar might often approach more nearly to the dead letter of Virgil, and give an exact, distinct, sober-minded idea of the meaning and scope of particular passages. Trapp, Pitt, and others have done so. But the essential spirit of poetry is so volatile, that it escapes during such an operation, like the life of the poor criminal, whom the ancient anatomist is said to have dissected alive, in order to ascertain the seat of the soul. The carcase indeed is presented to the English reader, but the animating vigour is no more. It is in this art, of communicating the ancient poet's ideas with force and energy equal to his own, that Dryden has so completely exceeded all who have gone before, and all who have succeeded him.[32]

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[32] W. Scott (ed), *The Works of John Dryden*, in 18 vols, 1808, London, vol. 1, 515-16.