Landesbibliothek Oldenburg

Digitalisierung von Drucken

Original Poems And Translations, By John Dryden, Esq; Now First Collected and Publish'd together, In Two Volumes

Containing Translations, Epistles, Prologues, Epilogues, Elegies, Epitaphs, And Songs

Dryden, John

London, 1743

Preface.

urn:nbn:de:gbv:45:1-1733

Visual Library

PREFACE

Concerning OVID's Epistles *.

THE Life of *Ovid* being already written in our Language before the Translation of his *Metamorphoses*, I will not presume so far upon my self, to think I can add any thing to Mr. *Sandys* his Undertaking. The *English* Reader may there be satisfied, that he flourished in the Reign of *Augustus Cæsar*; that he was extracted from an ancient Family of *Roman* Knights; that he was born to the Inheritance of a Splendid Fortune; that he was design'd to the Study of the Law, and had made considerable Progress in it, before he quitted that Profession, for this of *Poetry*, to which he was more naturally form'd. The Cause of his Banishment is unknown; because he was himself unwilling further to provoke the Emperor, by ascribing it to any other Reason,

* *Prefix'd to* Ovid's Epistles, *&c. translated into English Verse, by the most eminent Hands.*

than

than what was pretended by *Augustus*; which was, the Lasciviousness of his *Elegies*, and his *Art of Love*. 'Tis true, they are not to be excus'd in the Severity of Manners, as being able to corrupt a larger Empire, if there were any, than that of *Rome*: Yet this may be said in behalf of *Ovid*, that no Man has ever treated the Passion of Love with so much Delicacy of Thought, and of Expression, or search'd into the Nature of it more Philosophically than he. And the Emperor, who condemn'd him, had as little Reason as another Man to punish that Fault with so much Severity, if at least he were the Author of a certain *Epigram*, which is ascrib'd to him, relating to the Cause of the first Civil War betwixt himself and *Marc Antony* the Triumvir, which is more fulsom than any Passage I have met with in our Poet. To pass by the naked Familiarity of his Expressions to *Horace*, which are cited in that Author's Life, I need only mention one notorious Act of his, in taking *Livia* to his Bed, when she was not only married, but with Child by her Husband then living. But Deeds, it seems, may be justified by Arbitrary Power, when Words are question'd in a Poet. There is another Guess of the *Grammarians*, as far from Truth as the first from Reason: They will have him banish'd for some Favours, which, they say, he receiv'd from *Julia* the Daughter of *Augustus*, whom they think he celebrates under the Name of *Corinna* in his *Elegies*: But he, who will observe the Verses, which are made to that Mistress, may gather from the whole Contexture of them, that *Corinna* was not a Woman of the highest Quality. If *Julia* were then married to *Agrippa*, why should our Poet make his Petition to *Isis*, for

her

her ſafe Delivery, and afterwards condole her Miſcarriage ; which, for ought he knew, might be by her own Husband ? Or, indeed, how durſt he be ſo Bold to make the leaſt Diſcovery of ſuch a Crime, which was no leſs than Capital, eſpecially committed againſt a Perſon of *Agrippa*'s Rank ? Or, if it were before her Marriage, he would ſure have been more diſcreet, than to have publiſh'd an Accident, which muſt have been fatal to them both. But what moſt confirms me againſt this Opinion, is, that *Ovid* himſelf complains, that the true Perſon of *Corinna* was found out by the Fame of his Verſes to her : Which if it had been *Julia*, he durſt not have own'd ; and, beſides, an immediate Puniſhment muſt have follow'd. He ſeems himſelf more truly to have touch'd at the Cauſe of his Exile in thoſe obſcure Verſes ;

Cur aliquid vidi, cur noxia Lumina feci ? &c.

Namely, that he had either ſeen, or was conſcious to ſomewhat, which had procur'd him his Diſgrace. But neither am I ſatisfied, that this was the Inceſt of the Emperor with his own Daughter : For *Auguſtus* was of a Nature too Vindicative, to have contented himſelf with ſo ſmall a Revenge, or ſo unſafe to himſelf, as that of ſimple Baniſhment ; but would certainly have ſecur'd his Crimes from publick Notice, by the Death of him who was Witneſs to them. Neither have Hiſtories given us any Sight into ſuch an Action of this Emperor : Nor would he (the greateſt Politician of his Time) in all probability, have manag'd his Crimes with ſo little Secrecy, as not to ſhun the Obſervation of any Man. It ſeems more probable, that *Ovid* was either the Confident of ſome other Paſſion, or that he had ſtumbled by

ſome

ſome Inadvertency upon the Privacies of *Livia*, and ſeen her in a Bath: For the Words

Sine veſte Dianam

agree better with *Livia*, who had the Fame of Chaſtity, than with either of the *Julia*'s, who were both noted of Incontinency. The firſt Verſes, which were made by him in his Youth, and recited publickly, according to the Cuſtom, were, as he himſelf aſſures us, to *Corinna*: His Baniſhment happen'd not till the Age of Fifty: From which it may be deduc'd, with Probability enough, that the Love of *Corinna* did not occaſion it: Nay, he tells us plainly, that his Offence was that of Error only, not of Wickedneſs; and in the ſame Paper of Verſes alſo, that the Cauſe was notoriouſly known at *Rome*, though it be left ſo obſcure to After-Ages.

But to leave Conjectures on a Subject ſo uncertain, and to write ſomewhat more Authentick of this Poet: That he frequented the Court of *Auguſtus*, and was well received in it, is moſt undoubted: All his Poems bear the Character of a Court, and appear to be written, as the *French* call it, *Cavalierement*: Add to this, that the Titles of many of his Elegies, and more of his Letters in his Baniſhment, are addreſs'd to Perſons well known to us, even at this Diſtance, to have been conſiderable in that Court.

Nor was his Acquaintance leſs with the famous Poets of his Age, than with the Noble Men and Ladies. He tells you himſelf, in a particular Account of his own Life, that *Macer*, *Horace*, *Tibullus*, *Propertius*, and many others of them, were his Familiar Friends, and that ſome

of

of them communicated their Writings to him; but that he had only seen *Virgil*.

If the Imitation of Nature be the Business of a Poet, I know no Author, who can justly be compared with ours, especially in the Description of the Passions. And, to prove this, I shall need no other Judges than the generality of his Readers: For all Passions being inborn with us, we are almost equally Judges, when we are concern'd in the Representation of them. Now I will appeal to any Man, who has read this Poet, whether he finds not the natural Emotion of the same Passion in himself, which the Poet describes in his feign'd Persons? His Thoughts, which are the Pictures and Results of those Passions, are generally such as naturally arise from those disorderly Motions of our Spirits. Yet, not to speak too partially in his behalf, I will confess, that the Copiousness of his Wit was such, that he often writ too pointedly for his Subject, and made his Persons speak more eloquently, than the Violence of their Passion would admit: So that he is frequently witty out of Season; leaving the Imitation of Nature, and the cooler Dictates of his Judgment, for the false Applause of Fancy. Yet he seems to have found out this Imperfection in his riper Age: For why else should he complain, that his *Metamorphoses* was left unfinish'd? Nothing sure can be added to the Wit of that Poem, or of the rest: But many Things ought to have been retrenched; which, I suppose, would have been the Business of his Age, if his Misfortunes had not come too fast upon him. But take him uncorrected, as he is transmitted to us, and it must be acknowledged, in spite of his *Dutch* Friends, the Commentators, even of *Julius Scaliger* himself,

himſelf, that *Seneca*'s Cenſure will ſtand good against him;

Neſcivit quod bene ceſſit relinquere;

he never knew how to give over, when he had done well, but continually varying the ſame Sense an hundred ways, and taking up in another Place, what he had more than enough inculcated before, he ſometimes cloys his Readers inſtead of ſatisfying them; and gives occaſion to his Tranſlators, who dare not cover him, to bluſh at the Nakedneſs of their Father. This then is the Allay of *Ovid*'s Writings, which is ſufficiently recompens'd by his other Excellencies: Nay, this very Fault is not without its Beauties; for the moſt ſevere Cenſor cannot but be pleas'd with the Prodigality of his Wit, tho' at the ſame time he could have wiſh'd, that the Maſter of it had been a better Manager. Every thing, which he does, becomes him; and, if ſometimes he appears too gay, yet there is a ſecret Gracefulneſs of Youth, which accompanies his Writings, though the Staidneſs and Sobriety of Age be wanting. In the moſt material Part, which is the Conduct, 'tis certain that he ſeldom has miſcarried: For if his *Elegies* be compar'd with thoſe of *Tibullus* and *Propertius*, his Contemporaries, it will be found, that thoſe Poets ſeldom deſign'd before they writ: And though the Language of *Tibullus* be more poliſh'd, and the Learning of *Propertius*, eſpecially in his Fourth Book, more ſet out to Oſtentation; yet their common Practice was, to look no further before them than the next Line; whence it will inevitably follow, that they can drive to no certain Point, but ramble from one Subject to another, and conclude with

ſome-

ſomewhat, which is not of a piece with their Beginning:

Purpureus latè qui ſplendeat unus & alter
Aſſuitur pannus,

as *Horace* ſays: Though the Verſes are Golden, they are but patch'd into the Garment. But our Poet has always the Goal in his Eye, which directs him in his Race; ſome Beautiful Deſign, which he firſt eſtabliſhes, and then contrives the Means, which will naturally conduct him to his End. This will be evident to judicious Readers in his *Epiſtles*, of which ſomewhat, at leaſt in general, will be expected.

The Title of them in our late Editions is *Epiſtolæ Heroidum*, The *Letters* of the *Heroines*. But *Heinſius* has judg'd more truly, that the *Inſcription* of our Author was barely, *Epiſtles*; which he concludes from his cited Verſes, where *Ovid* aſſerts this Work as his own Invention, and not borrow'd from the *Greeks*, whom (as the Maſters of their Learning) the *Romans* uſually did imitate. But it appears not from their Writings, that any of the *Grecians* ever touch'd upon this Way, which our Poet therefore juſtly has vindicated to himſelf. I quarrel not at the Word *Heroidum*, becauſe 'tis us'd by *Ovid* in his Art of ove:

Jupiter ad veteres ſupplex Heroidas *ibat*.

But, ſure, he cou'd not be guilty of ſuch an Overſight, to call his Work by the Name of *Heroines*, when there are divers Men, or *Heroes*, as, namely, *Paris*, *Leander*, and *Acontius*, join'd in it. Except *Sabinus*, who writ ſome Anſwers to *Ovid*'s Letters,

(*Quam*

(*Quam celer è toto rediit meus orbe Sabinus*)

I remember not any of the *Romans*, who have treated on this Subject, ſave only *Propertius*, and that but once, in his Epiſtle of *Arethuſa* to *Lycotas*, which is written ſo near the Style of *Ovid*, that it ſeems to be but an Imitation, and therefore ought not to defraud our Poet of the Glory of his Invention.

Concerning the *Epiſtles*, I ſhall content my ſelf to obſerve theſe few Particulars: Firſt, that they are generally granted to be the moſt perfect Piece of *Ovid*, and that the Style of them is tenderly Paſſionate and Courtly; two Properties well agreeing with the Perſons, which were *Heroines*, and *Lovers*. Yet, where the Characters were lower, as in *OEnone*, and *Hero*, he has kept cloſe to Nature, in drawing his Images after a Country Life, though, perhaps, he has *Romaniz'd* his *Grecian* Dames too much, and made them ſpeak, ſometimes, as if they had been born in the City of *Rome*, and under the Empire of *Auguſtus*. There ſeems to be no great Variety in the particular Subjects, which he has choſen; moſt of the Epiſtles being written from Ladies, who were forſaken by their Lovers: Which is the Reaſon that many of the ſame Thoughts come back upon us in divers Letters: But of the general Character of Women, which is Modeſty, he has taken a moſt becoming Care: for his amorous Expreſſions go no further than Virtue may allow, and therefore may be read, as he intended them, by Matrons without a Bluſh.

Thus much concerning the Poet: It remains that I ſhould ſay ſomewhat of Poetical Tranſlations in general, and give my Opinion (with Submiſ-

ſion

ſion to better Judgments) which way of Verſion ſeems to me moſt proper.

All Tranſlation, I ſuppoſe, may be reduced to theſe three Heads.

Firſt, That of *Metaphraſe*, or turning an Author Word by Word, and Line by Line, from one Language into another. Thus, or near this manner, was *Horace* his *Art of Poetry* tranſlated by *Ben Johnſon*. The ſecond Way is that of *Paraphraſe*, or Tranſlation with Latitude, where the Author is kept in View by the Tranſlator, ſo as never to be loſt, but his Words are not ſo ſtrictly follow'd as his Senſe, and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not alter'd. Such is Mr. *Waller*'s Tranſlation of *Virgil*'s Fourth *Æneid*. The third Way is that of *Imitation*, where the Tranſlator (if now he has not loſt that Name) aſſumes the Liberty, not only to vary from the Words and Senſe, but to forſake them both as he ſees Occaſion; and, taking only ſome general Hints from the Original, to run Diviſion on the Ground-work, as he pleaſes. Such is Mr. *Cowley*'s Practice in turning two Odes of *Pindar*, and one of *Horace*, into *Engliſh*.

Concerning the firſt of theſe Methods, our Maſter *Horace* has given us this Caution:

Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus
Interpres ———

Nor Word for Word too faithfully Tranſlate,

as the Earl of *Roſcommon* has excellently render'd it. Too faithfully is, indeed, pedantically: 'Tis a Faith like that, which proceeds from Superſtition, Blind and Zealous. Take it in the Expreſſion of Sir *John Denham*

Denham to Sir *Rich. Fanshaw*, on his Version of the *Pastor Fido*.

That servile Path thou nobly dost decline,
Of tracing Word by Word, and Line by Line.
A new and nobler Way thou dost pursue,
To make Translations and Translators too:
They but preserve the Ashes, thou the Flame,
True to his Sense, but truer to his Fame.

'Tis almost impossible to translate verbally, and well, at the same time: for the *Latin* (a most Severe and Compendious Language) often expresses that in one Word, which either the Barbarity, or the Narrowness, of Modern Tongues cannot supply in more. 'Tis frequent also that the Conceit is couch'd in some Expression, which will be lost in *English*.

Atque iidem venti vela fidemque ferent.

What Poet of our Nation is so happy as to express this Thought literally in *English*, and to strike Wit, or almost Sense, out of it?

In short, the Verbal Copier is incumber'd with so many Difficulties at once, that he can never disintangle himself from all. He is to consider, at the same time, the Thought of his Author, and his Words, and to find out the Counterpart to each in another Language: And, besides this, he is to confine himself to the Compass of Numbers, and the Slavery of Rhyme. 'Tis much like dancing on Ropes with fetter'd Legs: A Man can shun a Fall by using Caution; but the Gracefulness of Motion is not to be expected: And when we have said the best of it, 'tis but a foolish Task: for no sober

Man

Man would put himself into a Danger for the Applause of escaping without breaking his Neck. We see *Ben Johnson* could not avoid Obscurity in his literal Translation of *Horace*, attempted in the same Compass of Lines: Nay *Horace* himself could scarce have done it to a *Greek* Poet:

Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio:

either Perspicuity or Gracefulness will frequently be wanting. *Horace* has, indeed, avoided both these Rocks in his Translation of the three first Lines of *Homer*'s *Odyssey*, which he has contracted into two.

Dic mihi, Musa, Virum, captæ post tempora Trojæ,
Qui mores hominum multorum vidit & urbes.

Muse, speak the Man, who, since the Siege of Troy,
So many Towns, such Change of Manners saw.
ROSCOMMON.

But then the Sufferings of *Ulysses*, which are a considerable part of that Sentence, are omitted:

[Ὃς μάλα πολλὰ πλάγχθη:]

The Consideration of these Difficulties, in a servile, literal, Translation, not long since made two of our Famous Wits, Sir *John Denham*, and Mr. *Cowley*, to contrive another Way of turning Authors into our Tongue, call'd, by the latter of them, *Imitation*. As they were Friends, I suppose they communicated their Thoughts on this Subject to each other; and, therefore, their Reasons for it are little different. Though the Practice of one is much more Moderate. I take Imitation of an Author, in their Sense, to be an Endeavour of a later Poet to write like one, who has written before him, on the same Subject: That is, not to translate his Words, or to be

be confin'd to his Sense, but only to set him as a Pattern, and to write, as he supposes that Author would have done, had he liv'd in our Age, and in our Country. Yet I dare not say that either of them have carried this *libertine* way of rendering Authors (as Mr. *Cowley* calls it) so far as my Definition reaches. For in the *Pindarick Odes*, the Customs and Ceremonies of ancient *Greece* are still preserved. But I know not what Mischief may arise hereafter from the Example of such an Innovation, when Writers of unequal Parts to him shall imitate so bold an Undertaking. To add and to diminish what we please, which is the Way avow'd by him, ought only to be granted to Mr. *Cowley*, and that too only in his Translation of *Pindar*, because he alone was able to make him amends, by giving him better of his own, whenever he refus'd his Author's Thoughts. *Pindar* is generally known to be a dark Writer, to want Connexion, (I mean as to our Understanding) to soar out of Sight, and leave his Reader at a Gaze. So wild and ungovernable a Poet cannot be translated literally; his Genius is too strong to bear a Chain, and *Samson*-like he shakes it off. A Genius so elevated and unconfin'd as Mr. *Cowley*'s was but necessary to make *Pindar* speak *English*, and that was to be perform'd by no other way than Imitation. But if *Virgil*, or *Ovid*, or any regular intelligible Authors, be thus us'd, 'tis no longer to be call'd their Work, when neither the Thoughts nor Words are drawn from the Original: but instead of them there is something new produc'd, which is almost the Creation of another Hand. By this way, 'tis true, somewhat that is Excellent may be invented, perhaps more Excellent than the first Design; though *Virgil* must be still excepted, when that *perhaps* takes Place. Yet he,

who

who is inquisitive to know an Author's Thoughts, will be disappointed in his Expectation. And 'tis not always that a Man will be contented to have a Present made him, when he expects the Payment of a Debt. To state it fairly; Imitation of an Author is the most advantageous way for a Translator to shew himself, but the greatest Wrong which can be done to the Memory and Reputation of the Dead. Sir *John Denham* (who advis'd more Liberty than he took himself) gives his Reason for his Innovation, in his admirable Preface before the Translation of the second *Æneid*. *Poetry is of so subtle a Spirit, that, in pouring out of one Language into another, it will all evaporate; and, if a new Spirit be not added in the Transfusion, there will remain nothing but a* Caput Mortuum. I confess this Argument holds good against a literal Translation; but who defends it? Imitation and verbal Version are in my Opinion the two Extremes, which ought to be avoided: And therefore, when I have propos'd the Mean betwixt them, it will be seen how far his Argument will reach.

No Man is capable of translating Poetry, who, besides a Genius to that Art, is not a Master both of his Author's Language, and of his own: Nor must we understand the Language only of the Poet, but his particular Turn of Thoughts, and Expression, which are the Characters that distinguish, and as it were individuate him from all other Writers. When we are come thus far, 'tis time to look into our selves, to conform our Genius to his, to give his Thought either the same Turn, if our Tongue will bear it, or, if not, to vary but the Dress, not to alter or destroy the Substance. The like Care must be taken of the more outward Ornaments, the Words. When they appear (which is but seldom) literally graceful,

it

it were an Injury to the Author that they ſhould be chang'd: But ſince every Language is ſo full of its own Proprieties, that what is Beautiful in one, is often Barbarous, nay ſometimes Nonſenſe in another, it would be unreaſonable to limit a Tranſlator to the narrow Compaſs of his Author's Words: Tis enough if he chooſe out ſome Expreſſion which does not vitiate the Senſe. I ſuppoſe he may ſtretch his Chain to ſuch a Latitude; but, by Innovation of Thought, methinks, he breaks it. By this means the Spirit of an Author may be transfus'd, and yet not loſt: And thus 'tis plain, that the Reaſon alledged by Sir *John Denham* has no farther Force than to Expreſſion: For Thought, if it be tranſlated truly, cannot be loſt in another Language; but the Words that convey it to our Apprehenſion (which are the Image and Ornament of that Thought) may be ſo ill choſen, as to make it appear in an unhandſom Dreſs, and rob it of its native Luſtre. There is, therefore, a Liberty to be allow'd for the Expreſſion; neither is it neceſſary that Words and Lines ſhould be confin'd to the Meaſure of their Original. The Senſe of an Author, generally ſpeaking, is to be Sacred and Inviolable. If the Fancy of *Ovid* be luxuriant, 'tis his Character to be ſo; and, if I retrench it, he is no longer *Ovid*. It will be reply'd, that he receives Advantage by this lopping of his ſuperfluous Branches; but I rejoin, that a Tranſlator has no ſuch Right. When a *Painter* copies from the Life, I ſuppoſe he has no Privilege to alter Features, and Lineaments, under Pretence that his Picture will look better: perhaps, the Face, which he has drawn, would be more exact, if the Eyes or Noſe were alter'd; but 'tis his Buſineſs to make it reſemble the Original. In two Caſes only there may a ſeeming Difficulty ariſe; that is, if the Thought be notorioſly

riouſly trivial, or diſhoneſt; But the ſame Anſwer will ſerve for both, that then they ought not to be tranſlated:

——— *Et quæ*
Deſperes tractata nitescere poſſe, relinquas.

Thus I have ventur'd to give my Opinion on this Subject againſt the Authority of two great Men, but I hope without Offence to either of their Memories; for I both lov'd them living, and reverence them now they are dead. But, if, after what I have urg'd, it be thought by better Judges, that the Praiſe of a Tranſlation conſiſts in adding new Beauties to the Piece, thereby to recompenſe the Loſs, which it ſuſtains by change of Language, I ſhall be willing to be taught better, and to recant. In the mean time, it ſeems to me, that the true Reaſon, why we have ſo few Verſions which are tolerable, is not from the too cloſe purſuing of the Author's Senſe, but becauſe there are ſo few, who have all the Talents, which are requiſite for Tranſlation, and that there is ſo little Praiſe, and ſo ſmall Encouragement, for ſo conſiderable a Part of Learning.

Landesbibliothek Oldenburg