

VOLTAIRE , VIRGIL

**THE FOURTH BOOK OF
VIRGIL'S AENEID AND
THE NINTH BOOK OF
VOLTAIRE'S HENRIAD**

Virgil
Вольтер
The Fourth Book of Virgil's
Aeneid and the Ninth
Book of Voltaire's Henriad

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Virgil

**The Fourth Book of Virgil's
Aeneid and the Ninth
Book of Voltaire's Henriad**

TO MONSIEUR DELILLE

SIR,

After reading with infinite pleasure your masterly translations of Virgil, I have been led into a train of reflection on the mechanism of words, and on the manners, the ideas, and pursuits of Nations in as much as they frequently give rise to the difference of character which we remark in their language. Few literary discussions would I think be more curious than an impartial comparative enquiry of this kind.

Not only have the easy elegance and courtly air of your verses displayed the French tongue in these respects worthy of your original; but have inclined me to think that they have raised it near the highest pitch of perfection of which it is at present capable, in the translation of a Latin poet. After two brilliant ages of literature the French language did not, till you appeared, possess one translation of the great masterpieces of

antiquity, which might fairly be said to have attained the rank of a classical work: while the English had been long enriched with such translations of most of them, as will like yours, in all probability share the immortality of their originals. In the cloud of critics which superior lustre necessarily attracts, many perhaps were not sufficiently aware of the peculiar difficulties of your undertaking, from the nature of the materials which you had to employ, and some not candid enough to compare the work which you have raised out of them, with what they had hitherto been made to produce.

That the English language might be so managed as to surpass the French in expression of strong sentiments, in boldness of imagery, in harmony and variety of versification I will not be sufficiently hardy to assert. The universality of the latter must be admitted as a strong presumption of its general excellency. Yet I cannot help wishing, that some pen worthy to be compared with Monsieur Delille's would give the world an opportunity of judging whether the former may not have some pretensions to superiority in the instances which I have mentioned.

Besides the length of time which has elapsed since the production of Dryden's translation, you will recollect with a sigh, as I do, his own expression: «What Virgil wrote in the vigor of age, in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate,» says Dryden, «in my declining years, struggling with want, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable to be misunderstood in all I write.—What I now offer is the wretched remainder of a

sickly age, worn out by study and oppressed by Fortune»!

It might not therefore be deemed sufficient to compare a work, produced under such disadvantages, in the seventeenth century, (notwithstanding the extraordinary powers of its author) with what is now becoming the admiration of the nineteenth. Much less, sir, will it be just or candid to suppose me capable of publishing my feeble attempt with any view of comparison as to the merit of the performance.—Should it be asked, what then could have been my inducement?—First, if I am fortunate enough to excite others more capable than myself to try again the comparative force of English language in a new translation, as you have just shown how much can be done in French, I shall have obtained the utmost bounds of my ambition.

Secondly, I am happy to acknowledge the pleasure which I felt in employing some long moments of leisure, on a subject wherein your genius had taken such delight: I have chosen the fourth book as that which I have had the good fortune of hearing in your own verses, with all the charms of your own recitation; and have pursued this occupation.

Non ita certandi cupidus, quam propter amorem
Quod te imitari aveo—

*I have the honor to be with great respect,
Your most obedient humble servant,
P. L.*

PREFACE

The motives and design of this attempt are sufficiently explained in the foregoing address, the ideas which gave rise to it have been confirmed and enlarged in its progress. As some apology for them, it may not be improper to observe here, that the English language seems to owe a great portion of that energy for which it is remarked, to the old Anglo Saxon idiom, which still forms its basis. It was enriched and softened by the introduction of the French, though some are of opinion that most of its foreign words, were adopted immediately from the Latin and not from any modern tongue: and this opinion is corroborated by the observation, that, during more than a century after the conquest, very little mixture of French is perceivable in the style of English authors. Be that as it may, it is certain that the constant attention of its earliest writers to the Greek and Latin models, though sometimes carried to excess, has added grace, variety, and extent to its construction. Sir Thomas Brown who wrote his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, or Enquiry into Vulgar Errors, about the middle of the seventeenth century, and whose style is still much commended, says in his preface to that interesting work: «I confess that the quality of the subject, will sometimes carry us into expressions beyond meer English apprehensions. And indeed if elegancy of style proceedeth, and English pens maintain that stream we have of late observed to flow from many,

we shall, in a few years, be fain to learn Latin to understand English, and a work will prove of equal facility in either». Milton, both in his verse and prose, has carried this affectation to such a degree, as not only to be frequently beyond a meer English apprehension, but even beyond that of an ordinary proficient in the learned languages. Yet, so far were these innovations from being considered as prejudicial, that one of the most admired writers of our days, Dr. Johnson, did not scruple to confess, that he formed his style upon the model of Sir Thomas Brown. The great number of excellent translations which were constantly appearing through all its progressive stages of improvement, must naturally have given the language a classical turn. It is scarcely possible that a work so extensive, and so universally read, as Pope's admirable translation of Homer, should not leave some gloss of grecism upon the idiom into which so many of its greatest beauties had been transfused. At the same time the early and proud independence of the middle orders of people in England, prevented them from conforming their language, their manners, or their sentiments to the model of a court. Whereby if their expression did not acquire politeness from that quarter, it did not loose any of its strength. While the energy which their language is allowed to possess is the old inheritance of their Anglo Saxon ancestors, whatever elegance it may have acquired, is derived rather from Athens and Rome than from St. James's.—The varied and extended occupations of a maritime and commercial people have increased the fund from which

imagery in discourse is drawn, and as all occupations in such a nation are deemed honorable, no metaphor is rejected as ignoble that is apt and expressive.

A number of ideas conveyed by monosyllables gives great force and conciseness, but leaves the poet frequently to struggle with the harshness of sound; nevertheless those who are conversant with English poetry will have perceived that this difficulty is not always insuperable. The different accentuation of the old Anglo Saxon words, with those adopted from other tongues, affords uncommon variety and emphasis to the numbers of English verse. The measure commonly used in poetry of a higher style is of ten syllables, as that in French is of twelve. Three English verses of ten syllables generally contain nearly the same number of syllables as two Latin or Greek hexameters, but are in most instances capable of conveying more ideas, especially in translating from Greek which abounds so much in what seem to us expletive particles. The *cæsura*, or pause is not invariably fixed on the same syllable of the verse, as in French; in the choice and variety of its position, consists the chief art of appropriate harmony. Accentuation of syllables, which seems, to answer the idea of long and short syllables in the dead languages, is the foundation of English, metre.—Tripple rhymes used with judgment have been admitted by the best English poets, and now and then the introduction of an Alexandrine, or verse of six feet.

Though blank verse has still many admirers, the English ear is grown remarkably delicate as to the consonance of rhymes;

Dryden and Pope have used many, which would not now be received. Masculine and feminine rhymes are unknown in English. As the character of a language appears to be the result of all the affections of the people who speak it, it did not seem foreign to this design to compare the manner in which two such great genius's as Virgil and Voltaire, have treated the same subject, and to place the loves of Henry and Gabrielle in comparison with those of Æneas and Dido. The elegance, the delicacies, the nicest touches of refined gallantry come admirably forward with the brilliant colouring, the light and graceful pencil of Voltaire. The verse seems to flow from his pen without effort into its natural channel, and some of his descriptions would not loose by a comparison; but perhaps he has let it be seen, that it would not be so easy a task to convey in the same language the exquisite and deep strokes of passion, which the Roman master has left to the admiration of the universe. To which of these styles the English and the French languages are most fitted, and how far they may be made to succeed in both, is one of the objects of an inquiry which this undertaking was intended to promote.

Whatever can be said by way of comment on the fourth book of the Æneid has been so often repeated, and is so easily to be met with, that it was thought needless to add any notes to this new translation. The few instances in which there may appear some difference in the interpretation of the original are scarce worth noticing. One perhaps may appear to require some apology; most

of the translators of Virgil have represented Dido under the most violent impression of rage in her first speech to Æneas. Whereas it would seem that the situation of her mind is meant to be described before she addresses him, rather as wild and frantic with doubt and fear, than actuated by rage. Whatever anger she may feel, is yet so much tempered by love and hope, that she breaks out, not into the language of rage, but of the most tender expostulation, the most lively interest in his own welfare, the most pathetic painting of her feelings and situation. It is a beautiful appeal to love, to honor, and to pity. Not till after his cold answer, does she burst into all the violence of rage, of contempt, and of despair. This gradation has often been remarked as a principal beauty. As some excuse for the coldness of Æneas which takes away so much of the interest of the poem, Virgil is careful to recoil continually to our attention, that he is acting under the impulse of the divinity. Such has been the constant practice of the ancients to prevent our disgust, for the action which they represent. In Orestes and Phœdra it is the excuse of the violence of passion, in Æneas of that coldness which we find it so difficult to forgive, but which in this point of view we shall be inclined to pity.

While these sheets were in the press MONSIEUR DELILLE has given the world another proof of the powers of his mind, and displayed the French language to vast advantage, in a more arduous strain of poetry than it had yet attempted. The perspicuity for which it has always been remarked, and to which it owes

its charms in conversation as perhaps also the difficulty with which it is adapted to works of poetical imagination, is strongly exemplified in his translation of *Paradise Lost*. If he has not always been able to make the french idiom bear him through the ætherial regions in which the daring wing of Milton's muse soars with so sublime a flight, he has descended not without dignity to the sphere of human understanding. And I believe it may be safely advanced, that it will be easier for ordinary capacities, even among English readers, to understand the work of Milton, in this translation than in the original.

* * * * *

ARGUMENT

Æneas, after escaping from the destruction of Troy and a long series of adventures by sea and land, is driven by a storm raised by the hatred of Juno on the coast of Affrica, where he is received by Dido, in the new town of Carthage, which she was building, after her flight from the cruelty of her brother in law Pigmalion, who had murdered her husband Sicheus.—Venus dreading for her son Æneas, the influence of Juno upon the mind of Dido, makes Cupid assume the forme of his child Julus or Ascanius, and raise in the bosom of the Queen the most ungovernable passion for Æneas. The fourth book begins by Dido's confessing her weakness to her sister Anna, who gives her many plausible reasons for indulging it, and advices her to make her peace with heaven and marry her lover. Juno, finding herself outwitted by Venus and her favourite Dido irrecoverably in love, accosts Venus first in a sarcastic tone but afterwards in very persuasive language, endeavours in her turn to deceive her, by obtaining her content to the marriage, by which means to frustrate the fates which promised the empire of the world to the descendants of Æneas in Italy. Venus, aware of the deceit, appears in a very complimentary style to give into it, and consents to her projects. While the Tyrian princess and the Trojan are hunting in a forest Juno sends down a violent storm, and the Queen and Æneas take shelter alone in a dark cavern.—There

Juno performed the nuptial rite and the passion of Dido was reconciled to her conscience.—Fame soon spreads the report of this alliance.—Iarba, one of Dido's suitors, hears of it and addresses an angry prayer to Jupiter Ammon from whom he was descended. Jove sends down Mercury to order Æneas to leave Carthage. Dido endeavours to make him alter this terrible resolution, falls into the most violent paroxysm of rage at his cold refusal, again melts into tenderness, employs her sister to prevail upon Æneas, at least, to wait till the wintry storms were past. All is in vain, and Dido resolved to die, deceives her sister with an idea of magic rites to get rid of her passion—and persuades her to raise a funeral pyle in her palace, Æneas a second time admonished by Mercury sets sail; when Dido, at the break of day, beholds his vessels out of reach she again bursts into a violent fit of passion, but soon sinks into despair.—Accuses her sister's fatal kindness, upbraids herself with her infidelity to the memory of Sicheus, vents the most dreadful imprecations against Æneas and the Romans, who were to be his ascendants, bequeaths all her hatred to her subjects, than relaxes into a momentary tenderness at the sight of the nuptial bed, the cloaths and pictures of Æneas which she had placed on the funeral pyre, and at last puts an end to her life with the sword of her faithless lover.

THE FOURTH BOOK OF VIRGIL'S ÆNEID, TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

While Dido, now with rising cares oppress,
Indulg'd the pain; the flame within her breast
In silence prey'd, and burn'd in every vein.
Fix'd in her heart, his voice, his form remain;
Still would her thought the Hero's fame retrace,
Her fancy feed upon his heav'nly race:
Care to her wearied frame gives no repose,
Her anxious night no balmy slumber knows;
And scarce the morn, in purple beams array'd,
Chas'd from the humid pole the ling'ring shade,
Her sister, fond companion of her thought,
Thus in the anguish of her soul she sought.
Dear Anna, tell me, why this broken rest?
What mean these boding thoughts? who is this guest,
This lovely stranger that adorns our court?
How great his mein! and what a godlike port!
It must be true, no idle voice of Fame,
From heav'n, I'm sure, such forms, such virtue came.
} Degenerate spirits are by fear betray'd,
} His soul, alas, what fortunes have essay'd;
} What feats of war!—and in what words convey'd!

Were it not fix'd, determin'd in my mind,
That me no more the nuptial tye shall bind,
Since Death deceiv'd the first fond flame I knew:
Were Hymen's rites less odious to my view,
To this one fault perhaps I might give way;
For must I own it? Anna since the day
Sicheus fell, (that day a brother's guilt,
A brother's blood upon our altars spilt);
He, none but he, my feelings could awake,
Or with one doubt my wav'ring bosom shake.
Yes! these are symptoms of my former flame;
But sooner thro' her very inmost frame,
May gaping Earth my sinking feet betray;
Jove's light'ning blast me from this vital ray
To Hell's pale shade, and Night's eternal reign,
Ere, sacred Honor, I thy rite profane.
Oh, no! to whom my virgin faith I gave,
"Twas his, and his remains within the grave".

She ceas'd—but down her bosom gush'd her tears.
"O dearer than the genial ray that cheers",
Her sister cry'd, shall lonely grief consume,
Lost to the joys of love your beauties bloom,
Lost to the joys, maternal feelings share?
Do shades for this, do buried ashes care?
That new in grief no lover should succeed,
Tyrians in vain, in vain Iarba plead;
That every chief of Afric's wide domain,
In triumphs proud, should learn to sue in vain;

'Twas well; but why a mutual flame withstand?
Can you forget who owns this hostile land?
Unconquer'd Getulans your walls surround,
The Syri untam'd, the wild Numidian bound.
Thro' the wide desert fierce Barceans roam:
Why need I mention from our former home,
The deadly war, a brother's threats prepare?
For me, I think, that Juno's fost'ring care,
Some god auspicious, rais'd the winds that bore
Those Phrygian vessels to our Lybian shore.
Their godlike chief should happy Dido wed,
How would her walls ascend, her empire spread?
Join'd by the arms of Troy, with such allies,
Think to what height will Punic glory rise.
Win but the gods, their sacred off'rings pay;
Detain your guest; invent some fond delay.
See low'ring tempests o'er the ocean ply,
The shatter'd vessels, the inclement sky».

Each word that dropt inflam'd her burning mind,
And all her wav'ring soul to love inclin'd;
New gleams of hope in Dido's bosom play,
And Honor's bright idea fades away.

Fain would the sisters now, by gift and pray'r,
With heav'n seduc'd, the conscious error share.
At ev'ry shrine, the fav'ring gods to gain,
In order due are proper victims slain;
To Ceres, Bacchus, and the God of Light,

And Juno most, who tends the nuptial rite.

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