

ESSAY

Literary Translation as Cultural Affiliation: The Case of Victorian Poetry and Classical Verse Composition

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It is the very end of the nineteenth century and you are a boy of twelve. At school you read English poetry mainly in extracts of ten to twenty lines, but not as a subject for discussion. Instead, you must translate it into scrupulously metrical ancient Greek or Latin—for schoolwork, prizes, or exams. The Rugby schoolteacher and Hellenist W. H. D. Rouse sets as the first, simplest exercise in his 1899 textbook *Demonstrations in Greek Iambic Verse* the following “simple piece of narrative” from “The Man Born to Be King” section of William Morris’s 1868 Hellenizing fantasy *The Earthly Paradise*:

A king there was in days of old
 Who ruled wide lands, nor lackt for gold,
 Nor honour, nor much-longed-for praise;
 And his days were called happy days;
 So peaceable his kingdoms were,
 While others, wrapt in war and fear,
 Fell ever into worse and worse.
 Therefore his city was the nurse
 Of all that men then had of lore,
 And none were driven from his door
 That seemed well skilled in anything;
 So of the sages was he king;
 And from this learned man and that,
 Little by little, lore he gat,
 And many a lordless, troubled land
 Fell scarce loth to his dreaded hand. (81–82)

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Where do you start? You might assume you should begin with “A king,” which you learned earlier in your education was βασιλεύς

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(*basileus*), but you would be wrong—that word is an anapest and so will not fit easily in this meter. Rouse counsels ἀνοξ τις (*anax tis*), which has a pleasantly Homeric ring (82). Your weak command of idiom will show if you translate too literally. If you are lucky, you remember that in Greek, verbs of ruling take objects in the genitive case, and one would rule a singular “land,” not plural “lands.” (You might lose valuable time if you try to fit the word γῆν [*gēn*] into the line instead of χθονός [*chthonos*].) The specificity of Greek inflections means that word order is freer than in English. But that freedom can create as many problems as it solves: Should “wide” fit before or after “lands”? At the end of line 3, “much-longed-for praise” needs rephrasing as a subordinate clause (ideally in half a line). Rouse says to think of “much-longed-for” as “very dear,” and hence εὐφιλής (*euphilēs*) in Greek—or better yet, εὐφιλῆς βροτοῖς (*euphilēs brotois*; “dear to mortals”) (82–83).¹

Traps of cultural translation lie ahead of you. “Kingdoms,” Rouse warns, sounds too abstract to make good Greek. Better to morph them into πόλεις (*poleis*; “city-states”). “Lore” is a slippery word without a clear translation; even Rouse considers five different options: σοφία (*sophia*; “wisdom”), ὅσα ἔμαθον (*hosa emathon*; “whatever people knew”), μουσική (*mousikē*; “art”), τροφὸς διδασκαλῶν (*trophos didaskalōn*; “nurse of teachers”), and τροφὸς πασῶν τεχνῶν (*trophos pasōn techōn*; “nurse of all arts”) (85). Some of Morris’s metaphors have to be unwoven: “door” becomes “house.” When you have produced your Greek verses, your teacher may sigh, as Rouse does, “There is nothing very poetical about them, and they are perhaps dull to read; but let them suffice to prove that no one need despair of mastering the technique of Greek verse” (88). Revel in your accomplishment.

This essay offers a case study in how an entire literary milieu—that of Victorian British poetry’s most culturally prestigious precincts—built itself around this peculiar form of translation. Especially among the upper-middle class and aristocracy, generations of British schoolchildren and scholars translated vernacular English texts into ancient Greek and Latin, languages known chiefly by the

educated elite, as a ritual of entry into that elite, including as administrators of the British Empire. The centrality of translation in Victorian education imparted to those schoolchildren a set of mental procedures for affiliating modern British literature in a genealogical and linguistic continuity with that of Greece and Rome.² Verse composition provided a literary expression of the belated cultural and political *translatio imperii* from Rome to the British Empire; it positioned Victorian Britain as the Telemachus to Rome’s Ulysses. This educational practice perpetuated the belief that Britain would civilize the globe as Greek culture had civilized Rome and as Rome had once civilized Britain—as well as the hope that the future globe would confer on Britain the same debt of gratitude and identification that Britain felt toward Mediterranean antiquity. It further imported those assumptions into the writing and reading of poetry in English.

Yet verse composition defies much of the critical vocabulary currently used to describe the cultural dynamics of translation, principally because unlike most forms of translation, the practice presumes the full intelligibility of both source and target languages to its circumscribed, elite audience. In the well-known 1983 essay “Secular Criticism,” Edward Said critiqued the tendency of what he called “affiliation” to buttress and conceal traditional flows of power and authority by spuriously naturalizing them, defining the term as “a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship” (19). The strange prominence granted to the translation practice of verse composition in the nineteenth century was one such compensatory order. As a pedagogical exercise, it situated the particulars of those differences in culture and history while nevertheless buttressing a narrative of civilizational affiliation: cultural descent from and identification with ancient Greece and Rome (a story tendentious from its medieval inception and always at risk of slipping). It “domesticated” the translating culture’s own vernacular poetry into ancient languages of great prestige, but with ironic knowledge of the historical distance between antiquity and the

present. I hope that examining verse composition might bring greater attention to affiliation as an important category of the cultural work effected by literary translation, alongside the more familiar categories of constructive appropriation in theorists such as Goethe and Oswald de Andrade, exoticization in José Ortega y Gasset, and domestication versus foreignization in the work of such scholars as Antoine Berman, Lawrence Venuti, and Emily Apter.

The artifacts of poetic culture, and the techniques for reading and versifying imparted by verse composition to generations of students, also present an impressive archive through which to approach with fresh eyes some of the best-known Victorian poems and poets. British education has deployed verse composition as a pedagogical exercise continuously since the Middle Ages, and some of the most distinguished English poets of earlier centuries (including John Milton, Thomas Gray, and William Cowper) had composed poetry in excellent Greek and Latin. However, the distinction conferred by this skill increased in the Victorian period precisely because its mastery had grown rarer and more exacting.³ Advances in philological knowledge created an environment where verse composition accrued a newly distinctive prestige as proof of high scholarly attainment, deserving publication and praise.

I approach the practice of verse composition from three separate but complementary angles. In this essay's first section, I focus on the cultural lessons implicit in verse composition pedagogy, examining how norms for interpretation imparted by verse composition to Victorian students taught them not only to recognize cultural differences between Britain and Mediterranean antiquity, but also to minimize those differences by establishing continuity through traditions of equivalence. In particular, verse composition taught pupils to consider meter's relation to genre, cultural references, and what we would now call intertextual relationships between ancient and vernacular texts as strategies to establish literary continuity with Greece and Rome.

In the second section, I consider verse composition's role in the formation of the canon of English poetry before the formal introduction of

English-language literature to British university curricula. Both individual scholars and educational institutions often published exemplary verse compositions in the form of anthologies, presenting the English source text and classical translation en face. I call these instances of verse composition published as literary show pieces "epideictic anthologies." Epideictic anthologies document the process by which cultural elites expressed their affiliative genealogies within the English poetic tradition at both institutional and personal levels—including the poetry of their own times.

In the third and final section, I demonstrate how the educational context of verse composition as I have reconstructed it can illuminate our readings of Victorian poetry. I offer as linked case studies Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses" and "Tithonus," poems whose extensive use as verse composition set texts highlights their anxieties over cultural exhaustion stemming from affiliation. Tennyson knew that they might well serve as the basis of Greek and Latin translations by schoolboys and scholars. In this light, the poems' use of near translations of specific Greek phrasings take on significance not just as allusions, but as footholds deliberately placed to help potential translators. Considering the cultural context of verse composition also helps emphasize how both poems' concerns with exhaustion and exploration can be read as metapoetic commentary on Victorian classicism—themes that at least one of Tennyson's scholarly translators spotted and drew out in a masterful Greek version of the conclusion of "Tithonus," as I show in a reading. I hope this test case demonstrates the potential of verse composition to illuminate a novel context for the generation of meaning around (and within) much of the classicizing poetry of the era.

Three Affiliative Translation Norms

The Morris passage with which this essay opened illustrates how much intercultural translation even a very simple composition coached the student to perform on the source text. Rouse, with disappointment, calls the Greek translation he produces "an almost literal translation of a piece of English

verse,” but that word “almost” hides a number of linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical differences (88). By the standards set in his textbook, which are broadly representative of verse composition practices across the nineteenth century despite its late publication date, almost no translation of English poetry into a classical language could avoid the need to adapt concepts, names, figures of speech, and other zones of cultural difference.

Under the guise of language education, verse composition imparted various procedures by which students might find a range of possible cultural equivalents for the many moments in the history of British poetry (from the Elizabethan era on) that defied the lexical reach of ancient Greek and Latin vocabulary. It was crucial to classicists of the time that students learn to preserve “good usage,” which meant avoiding words not found in the corpora of authors from classical Attic Greek or Golden Age Latin. This linguistic prescriptivism had the additional effect of teaching students to affiliate the modern British literary tradition with the traditions of Athens and Rome, in an echo of Rome’s chosen affiliation with Greek culture. Three aspects of the process deserve special attention: first, translation of meter and, with it, genre; second, domestication of modern concepts and cultural references within the vocabulary of specific classical writers or periods; and third, intertextual thinking. Victorian classicism’s invocation of ancient literature in such allusions as Matthew Arnold’s “turbid ebb and flow,” such source material as Morris’s “Pygmalion,” and such formal experiments as Algernon Charles Swinburne’s and Coventry Patmore’s need to be understood in this cultural-educational context.

Meter and Genre

In ancient Greek and Latin literary theory, meter strongly implied genre. To write a poem was to write in meter, and to write in a certain meter was to write in a particular genre.⁴ Dactylic hexameter implied epic (including didactic and pastoral); iambic trimeters were used only for drama; elegiac couplets took on a range of subjects deemed “lower” than epic (epigrams, epistolary verse, and etiological

poems, inter alia); and the vast menagerie of lyric meters (asclepiads, alcaics, sapphics, hendecasyllabics, adonics, etc.) held throughout antiquity strong conventional associations with topics favored by the canonical nine lyric poets of archaic Greece. A poet could no more undertake an epic in sapphics than write a tragedy in elegiac couplets; Horace inveighs at length against the very notion of such monstrous hybrids during his taxonomy of meters in the *Ars poetica* (*Art of Poetry*; lines 73–87). A thorough education in verse composition eventually inculcated proficiency in the full range of classical meters. Schools taught children dactylic hexameters and elegiac couplets first; many students probably reached only that far. True mastery of the many different kinds of lyric meters, a technical feat achieved even in antiquity only by Horace, represented the pinnacle of achievement. (The classical scholar Richard Claverhouse Jebb was capable of composing scrupulously correct choral odes in Greek, about which I write more below.)

The meter of verse composition passages encodes interpretive decisions about the meaning and tone of the source text; metrical forms and the genres they marked taught schoolchildren and scholars alike to make interpretive judgments about the content and genre of English poems by choosing a classical meter in which to translate them. Some metrical decisions were matters of convention: sonnets, for instance, were usually rendered as seven elegiac couplets, playing on both the subgenre of the amatory elegy and the relative flexibility of topic in both sonnet and elegy. Verse drama, predominantly Shakespeare, was almost always set in iambic trimeter (though occasionally a monologue might be rendered in hexameters). English narrative poetry written in rhymed or blank iambic pentameter tended to become either hexameters or elegiacs.

Other verse composition translations evince individual discretion in choice of meter. A classical meter, when strongly associated with a certain work or poet, can affiliate an English poem with a particular part of ancient literary tradition. In other words, meter acts as an allusion that makes an interpretive suggestion. Part of the wit of the exercise lies in choosing a meter that readers will find apt. To take

two examples from the *Nova Anthologia Oxoniensis* (*New Oxford Anthology*): Robinson Ellis's translation of a passage from Ben Jonson's masque *The Vision of Delight*, "Let your shows be new as strange" (originally delivered in a dramatic context by Delight as staged action goes on), adapts English rhymed iambic tetrameter into Latin second asclepiads (couplets consisting of glyconics and lesser asclepiads in alternation) (8). This meter would have recalled particular odes of Horace to informed readers; many of Horace's odes in second asclepiads involve Venus, love, or wine.⁵ Other touchstones include, before Horace's time, Catullus's poem 30 (also a love lyric), as well as a potential allusion in English: Philip Sidney's "O sweet woods, the delight of solitarienesse," a formal experiment in English asclepiads from the *Arcadia*.⁶ In contrast, another translator, Arthur Godley, chooses elegiacs as the vehicle for a different English poem in (English) iambic tetrameter: a dramatic monologue from the perspective of Iole, in William Johnson Cory's *Ionica* (10). Iole rivaled Hercules's wife Deianira in a contest for his affections, leading to the hero's death by poisoning; Ovid wrote one of the poems in his *Heroides*, a sequence of epistolary elegies from mythological women to the men who wronged them, in the voice of Deianira. Conscious desire to allude to Ovid likely led Godley to adopt the meter he did—and the resulting poem reads more or less like an imitation of the *Heroides*.

Domestication of Concepts and Cultural References

Theorists of translation vary in their terms for describing the replacement of a source text's concepts and cultural references (names, places, objects such as instruments) with different signifiers drawn from the culture of the target language. One especially common term, popularized by Lawrence Venuti, is "domestication," referring broadly to the tendency of many translators to make culturally or linguistically unfamiliar elements of a text more familiar, less "foreign" (see 18–30). Domestication encompasses a range of decisions: omission or simplification of source-text words without clear lexical equivalents in the target language, sanding down

the rough edges of unconveyable grammar, substituting one idiom for another. Venuti makes the case that excessively domesticating translations are usually to be avoided, for the reason that they efface cultural differences that ought to be foregrounded and affirmed.

In the special case presented by Victorian verse composition, however, Venuti's model of domestication oversimplifies the dynamics of Victorian classicism. Verse composition may efface the cultural particulars of the source text, but on the assumption that readers of the finished composition can simultaneously read the source text. The translation limits its own intelligibility to a club of readers who share through education the same access to ancient languages. Domestication functions here as an occasion for a highly prestigious form of cultural play, an opportunity to produce a verbal fantasy where moments in the history of British literature distant from ancient Greek and Roman culture (*Henry IV*, for instance) appear in words that pretend the former were rewritten in the latter: an Athenian Shelley, a Roman Shakespeare. The "domestications" highlight rather than efface cultural difference, but with the goal of thereby reinforcing among an elite coterie a (tendentious) historical narrative of heritage and succession. These cultural translations offer both a form of intellectual play in the hands of a mature scholar and an example to students of mature linguistic and historical knowledge.

Such educational practice both followed from and reinforced the affiliative belief that Britain had inherited and occupied the legacy and prerogatives of the late Roman republic and early empire. For instance, the translation of the full "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by the Lucretius scholar H. A. J. Munro (in his posthumously published 1884 epideictic anthology) replaces Thomas Gray's sequence of British historical figures with Roman "equivalents," encouraging the reader to pause and consider whether the counterparts chosen seem right or wrong:

Some village Hambden [sic] that with dauntless
breast
the little tyrant of his fields withstood,
some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood. (38)

In Munro's Latin:

forsitan hic, olim intrepido qui pectore ruris
restiterat parvo Graccus agrestis ero,
vel mutus sine honore Maro, vel Iulius alter,
immunis patrii sanguinis ille, cubet. (39)⁷

Munro is, probably unwittingly, reclassifying the section of the poem that Gray deliberately unclassified: in the Eton manuscript of Gray's "Elegy," the original names were all Roman—Cato, Tully [Cicero], and Caesar—as Herbert Starr notes in his edition of Gray's poems (Gray 39). John Guillory notes in his reading of the poem that Gray, by "translating" the names, "locates 'Ambition' in *literary* culture" (111); this particular translation repoliticizes the poem, though it is important to note that within the more expansive Victorian definition of "literature," all three figures are certainly still literary. In contrast, a different translation of the "Elegy" in the *Arundines Cami* uses Brutus, Ovid, and Caesar as its historical exempla, changing the potential meaning of "Ambition" yet again: the assassin Brutus (himself doomed), the poet Ovid (exiled by Augustus), and Caesar (if Julius, assassinated) (Drury 171). Such translations embed historical and cultural interpretation: the translator needs, using Plutarch-like reasoning, to know enough history to assess the characters of John Hampden, Milton, and Oliver Cromwell and come up with arguably similar ancient figures. Roman history becomes a *figura* for early modern British history.

Intertextual Thinking

Verse composition pedagogy also taught students to analyze English poetry for resemblances to specific classical predecessors, then take that predecessor's word choice, rhetorical figures, and tone as inspiration for a translation. In the case of some textual pairings, this thinking meant identifying allusions latent in the English poem. However, in the absence of such allusions, these comparisons became instances of more truly intertextual thinking: translators positioned English poems in relation to classical poems that show how to interpret and clarify the English poems' meaning. Such intertextual

thinking is also interlinguistic—and through this process, too, schools and scholars reinforced the idea (still the basis of a powerful mythology to this day) that English-language literature forms a tradition continuous with antiquity, and Britain stands as the cultural heir of Athens and Rome.

The most striking record I have encountered of the intertextual thinking underlying verse composition education takes the form of John Edwin Nixon and E. H. C. Smith's 1893 textbook *Parallel Verse Extracts: For Translation into English and Latin*, which groups extracts from Latin and English poetry on the basis of their resemblance to one another in subject and rhetorical posture. For instance, the authors pair the death of Camilla at *Aeneid* 9.816 with Sohrab's death in Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, and set the description of the golden age in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* next to Shelley's description of the new heaven in *Queen Mab* (126–27, 134–35). Nixon and Smith emphasize that this approach imparts skill at both Latin and English, writing that their textbook aims "to encourage, by constant handling of alternative equivalents, an accurate discrimination of thoughts and a sound appreciation of English as well as of Latin poetry" (vi). They want to help students and teachers avoid mechanical versification built off mere memorization of metrically suitable stock phrases. Instead, they nudge, "In two languages so different, e.g. as Latin and English, ideas expressed in one must be melted, as it were in a crucible, before they can be recoined anew in the other." Verse composition can help students recognize "poetic equivalents" for ideas across the two languages, and from that realization identify what is special about poetic register in each language.

As an example of how such thinking worked as a mode of interpreting English poetry, consider Nixon and Smith's pairing number 54: the long speech of Pythagoras starting at Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 15.262 with canto 122 of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

Ovid:

Vidi ego, quod fuerat quondam solidissima tellus,
Esse fretum; vidi factas ex aequore terras:

Et procul a pelago conchae iacuerе marinae;
 Et vetus inventa est in montibus ancora summis.
 Quodque fuit campus, vallem decursus aquarum
 Fecit; et eluvie mons est deductus in aequor,
 Eque paludosa siccis humus aret harenis;
 Quaeque sitim tulerant, stagnata paludibus ument.
 (54)⁸

Tennyson:

There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
 O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
 There where the long street roars, hath been
 The stillness of the central sea.

The hills are shadows, and they flow
 From form to form, and nothing stands;
 They melt like mist, the solid lands,
 Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

But in my spirit will I dwell,
 And dream my dream, and hold it true,
 For tho' my lips may breathe adieu,
 I cannot think the thing farewell. (55)

An alert learner might take from this pairing any of a number of lessons: Tennyson may be consciously alluding to Ovid; Tennyson is using an old poetic topos, of which the Ovid passage is one instance; the topos of land covered by sea is a suitable figure with which to illustrate the depth of time and the transience of humanity; what is special or interesting about the Tennyson canto, as seen through the influence of the Ovid passage, is that Tennyson sets up the permanence of his bond with Hallam as a foil to the depth of time; or when given a passage that talks about the rolling deep, for instance, one might draw on a range of appropriate Latin (*fretum, aequor, pelagus, decursus aquarum*), as well as verbs and phrases for violent motions (*iacere, deduci*) and remote points in time (*quod fuerat quondam, quodque fuit*)—and an especially clever student might even know how to work those phrases into dactylic hexameter in oblique cases.

The conception of poetry espoused by Nixon and Smith seems characteristically Victorian, by which I mean that it is clearly not Romantic and definitely not modernist. They look skeptically on the idea that special genius or sensitivity is required

to become a good poet, emphasizing instead hard work, careful study, and aesthetic cultivation. At the same time, they believe poetry is “the representation in *pleasing or striking language* (more or less rhythmical) of facts or ideas likely in themselves or in their mode of expression to arouse sensuous or emotional interest” (xiii). They adore ornament and believe that ornamental language and distinctively poetic diction simply *are* what makes poetry recognizable as poetry.

Nixon and Smith's *Parallel Extracts* stands out as late-Victorian in character for another reason: it codifies, at the end of the century, practices that would have been common sense to previous generations. The period from 1890 to 1910 saw a burst of new textbooks for classical verse composition, perhaps because the skill was growing rarer. Some critics might speculate that the ongoing institutionalization of English literature in schools and universities probably influenced Nixon and Smith's book. However, educators earlier in the century generally understood such exercises as simultaneous instruction in Latin composition and English literature. The headmaster's preface to the 1868 *Flosculi Cheltonienses (Cheltenham Blossoms)*, an epideictic anthology of prizewinning compositions by pupils at Cheltenham College, opines that “the mental process involved in the rendering of a passage of English Poetry into Latin or Greek Verse. . . requires that a boy shall be able to distinguish between the ideas of the original, which must be preserved, and the peculiarities of language and colouring, which must be altered” (xiv–xv). The rhetorical point of the exercise was to isolate something akin to what Walter Benjamin, decades later, would famously later call *reine Sprache* (“pure language”), unbound from the limits of any single language.⁹ Verse composition required clear understanding of the underlying ideas in English poetry, and it rewarded quick mapping of vocabulary from similar classical passages onto those ideas.

Epideictic Anthologies and English Canon Formation

British culture derided verse composition early and often, with the venom reserved in every age for

especially abstruse-looking aspects of elite education. To take just one example, a memorable passage in chapter 13 of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* describes Richard Carstone's education as consisting of verse composition and nothing else: "He had been adapted to the Verses, and had learnt the art of making them to such perfection, that if he had remained at school until he was of age, I suppose he could only have gone on making them over and over again, unless he had enlarged his education by forgetting how to do it" (118). Nevertheless, the ability to compose Latin and Greek verses that could pass the scrutiny of critics and scholars did confer broad cultural capital, especially among members of the elite who accorded status to classical education—and the educational practice of verse composition necessarily set certain poets into the hands of students rather than others. By setting Shakespeare, Jonson, Gray, and Tennyson, for instance, schools ratified informal canons of English poets well before the formal establishment of English literature as a degree course in universities. The epideictic anthologies produced by the culture supporting verse composition attest to this early locus for canon formation, and they also provide insights into individual variation and displays of personal taste.

Most published volumes of verse compositions took the form of epideictic anthologies featuring English source texts at verso and the Greek or Latin translation at recto. Some were the work of individuals; others were published by schools or universities eager to show off their scholars' attainments. These anthologies perform an affiliative function, advocating for particular modern poets as the successors of the ancient poets in imitation of whose styles and subjects the compositions have been set. Indeed, the very term *anthology* casts poets included therein as heirs of the very first Greek anthology, or "flower book": the *Stephanos*, or "garland," of the Greek poet Meleager. In direct allusion to this work, most of these collections invoke flowers or crowns in their titles (*Sabrinae Corolla* [*The Crownlet of the Severn*], for instance). Epideictic anthologies show off not just the linguistic competence but also the taste of the scholar or

institution in question—especially their taste in contemporary (that is, Victorian) English-language poetry.¹⁰ During most of this period, the position of English literature in schools and universities was contested; these anthologies provide a rare example of institutional legitimation for clearly articulated corpora of contemporary English poetry before the emergence of the English degree. Analyzing changes in such anthologies' makeup over time (here, roughly 1840 to 1910) provides a surprisingly rich, largely overlooked resource for understanding how tastes in contemporary poetry were entrenched or revised.

Comparing the 1841 *Arundines Cami* (*Reeds of the Cam*) published by Cambridge (conventionally, the less classics-oriented of the two ancient universities) with the 1850 *Sabrinae Corolla* published by the Shrewsbury School yields several observations. The first is that the Romantic canon was not yet fixed in its modern form. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley all enjoyed translators' time and attention, as did Walter Scott; no Keats, no Blake, however. This leads to the second point: women poets, while not numerous, do figure in these anthologies. Students and scholars spent time turning poems by Felicia Hemans, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Caroline Norton into Latin.¹¹ (By the end of the century, this was far rarer—only one instance, for example, in the 1899 *Nova Anthologia Oxoniensis*.) The third noteworthy point is that Tennyson is, in both of these anthologies, the only poet after 1830 who appears with any regularity—and he dominates them. His popularity continued until the final decline of verse composition in the early and mid-twentieth century. (I return to Tennyson in the next section.)

By century's end, the range of Victorian poets set for verse composition had expanded slightly. Three data points do not define an age, but judging from the 1899 *Nova Anthologia Oxoniensis*, Tennyson's only rival for the title of set-text king was Arnold, with two poems in particular: *Sohrab and Rustum* and "The Scholar-Gipsy." Robert Browning and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow both appear three or four times. One, sometimes two, excerpts each go to a gaggle of other Victorians,

only some of whose reputations survived the age: Alfred Austin; Barbauld; Mary Matilda Betham; Arthur Hugh Clough; Cory; Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.; Andrew Lang; John Leyden (a horrifically racist and misogynist entry); Lewis Morris; William Morris; Robert Louis Stevenson; Swinburne; William Watson; and Philip Stanhope Worsley.

In contrast with institutional anthologies, individual scholars' epideictic anthologies tend to include longer, more technically impressive works, and the source texts reflect a greater degree of personal connoisseurship. Paratextual matter makes clear that authors meant these exercises to express both their taste and their personalities—playful, thoughtful, eclectic, lapidary. The Cambridge Latinist J. D. Duff writes in his preface to the 1906 reprint of (his fellow Cambridge Latinist) Munro's *Translations into Latin and Greek Verses* that Cory "remonstrated with [Munro] for 'printing that doggerel of Shelley's', the doggerel being the extracts from the Ode to a Skylark; while L. Friedlaender . . . chose out for praise the rendering of 'Bannocks o' bear-meal!'" (iii). (Both Duff and Munro were Scottish.) In his *Verselets Latin and English*, John Hoskyns-Abrahall, Jr., wrote a preface "To the Reader" in vaunting, breezy English pentameter couplets, which he then translated into Latin prose. In contrast, the American scholar J. M. Merrick deprecated his 1874 volume of Latin poems in the very title as *Nugae Inutiles*, or "useless trifles."

The form of the single-scholar anthology could also vouch for the standing of translators excluded from institutions that would have ratified their abilities. In 1870, almost a decade before Jane Harrison wrote the classical Tripos (the examination taken by male students to qualify for an undergraduate degree) at Cambridge, a ten-year-old girl in Dorset named Emma Monk Hunt published *Prolusiones Puellares (Girlhood Games)*, a pamphlet offering translations of a range of poems, including Milton's *Lycidas*. Hunt's father, Joseph, was a vicar and former fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, who sympathized strongly with the movement for women's education then under way. He wrote by way of preface to his daughter's work, "The following trifles are given to the Public, partly with a view

of proving that a girl of ten, of fair abilities, under an unskilled teacher, can, at all events in one branch of knowledge—Latin Versification—be brought up to as high a standard as most boys, if not of any boy of the same age, and of like abilities" (3). The preface concludes from this that any "little lady" so inclined should be just as free to pursue a classical education as any little man, in the hope of securing the same delights as a long list of British worthies: "Milton, Addison, Johnson, Pitt, Canning," and so on (3).¹²

Perhaps the most impressive of the single-scholar epideictic anthologies, Jebb's 1873 *Translations into Greek and Latin Verse* compiles fifty-three entries, many very long; few of the writers would have seemed excessively recherché to his contemporaries, but the passages have been chosen with great care, and whenever possible Jebb completes the whole poem. Both the Latin and the Greek are exquisite throughout, impressive given the scale of the formal challenges Jebb sets for himself. For instance, he translates all of Leopardi's *Sopra il Monumento di Dante* into the notoriously difficult lyric meter of a Pindaric choral ode. Indeed, the range of meters Jebb tackles (Keats's "In drear-nighted December" in sapphics; Tennyson's *In Memoriam* canto 44 in alcaics; Milton's "Genius of the Wood" speech from his *Arcades* as Horatian epodes, and more) and the historical correctness of usage he maintains throughout are so demanding—and his execution so precise—that his book might be one of the most technically impressive single collections of poetry in Greek or Latin ever written after the work of Horace himself.

Jebb's best translations serve as both interpretive diary and critical appraisal. Some of his more peculiar choices vouch for the standing of works that even in their own time found little or moderate success. Their inclusion in his anthology offers arguments for the dramatic and ethical interest of his personal favorites, by affiliating them with the style of particular ancient writers. For instance, he excerpts a passage from George Eliot's dramatic poem "The Spanish Gypsy" that ends with these six lines:

Zarca. Nay, never falter: no great deed is done
By falterers who wish for certainty.

No good is certain, but the steadfast mind,
 The undivided will to seek the good:
 The greatest gift the hero leaves his race,
 Is to have been a hero. (Jebb 44)

Jebb uses Sophoclean Greek to convey this moment, and his interpretation of Eliot's English sharpens the almost philosophical edge of her words, pressing them to yield the full range of their meaning as if in dialogue with Eliot's poem:

Ξ. μή νυν ὀκνήσης μηδέν· ὡς ὅσοι σαφή
 ποθοῦντες ὀκνοῦσ' οὐδὲν αἶρονται μέγα.
 σαφές γὰρ ἀγαθὸν φρήν ἀκίνητος μόνον,
 σπουδή τ' ἀκραιφνῆς τὰγάθ' ἐξιχνοσκοπεῖν.
 λείπει δ' ὁ δρῶσας λαμπρὰ τοῖς ἐμφυλίοις
 τοῦτ' αὐτὸ λῶστον, λαμπρὰ καὶ δεδρακέναι. (45)

He translates "falter" with ὀκνέω (*okneō*), a verb the Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek lexicon (hereafter LSJ) defines as "shrink back" or "hesitate," with connotations of moral shame or fear ("Okneō"). Sophocles is fond of this word; in *Electra*, the chorus says Orestes has done it and Electra has not. In Jebb's Loeb edition prose translation:

CHORUS. True, a man will *hesitate* on the verge of a great undertaking.
 ELECTRA. And yet I saved him with no *hesitation*.
 (lines 320–21; my emphasis)

In Eliot's poem, Zarca, the biological father of the poem's protagonist, Fedalma, is counseling her to take up her birthright as leader of a nation. Jebb's choice of verbs emphasizes the ethical stakes in the dilemma: now is not the time to do the wrong thing out of fear.

Jebb then draws an extra metaphor on top of Eliot's language in describing the "undivided" will (σπουδή; *spoudē*) as ἀκραιφνῆς (*akraiphnēs*), a peculiar word; the LSJ traces it to a compound of ἀκέραιος (*akeraios*; "unmixed, pure") with -φάνης (*-phanēs*; "appearing, seeming" ["*Akraiphnēs*"]). The word *akraiphnēs* shows up at a very particular moment in the Sophoclean corpus Jebb knew so well—in *Oedipus at Colonus*, just before Theseus tells Oedipus that his son Polynices has come to seek protection: δεικνυμι δ': ὦν γὰρ ὄμοσ' οὐκ

ἐψευσάμην / οὐδὲν σε, πρέσβυ: τάσδε γὰρ
 πάρεμι' ἄγων / ζώσας, ἀκραιφνεῖς τῶν
 κατηπειλημένων ("You have this proof: I have cheated you in none of my sworn promises, old man. Here am I, with the maidens living, *uninjured* by those threats"; lines 1145–47; my emphasis). A will that is pure and committed straightforwardly to good action, that is not divided against itself by competing desires—such a will can experience no injury, no harm, Zarca's (Greek) words suggest. Yet Jebb keeps the poem's tragic ending in mind as he chooses this word: Fedalma does experience great pain, in the end, because even the wills of the good are vulnerable to injury. By reading this epideictic translation carefully, we can reconstruct how this scholar of Greek interpreted this minor Eliot work, recovering a serious contemporary critical response to a text that, even in its own time, elicited at best a mixed reaction from its audience.

Verse Composition and the Classicizing Dramatic Monologue: "Ulysses" and "Tithonus"

As noted above, no Victorian poet was more frequently translated in these epideictic anthologies than Tennyson. Excerpts from Tennyson appear eight times in the *Arundines Cami*. That total may not seem very high, until one notices that Shakespeare appears only five times, and Milton, six. One might attribute Tennyson's popularity to his status as a Cambridge alumnus, but nine Tennyson passages appear in the longer *Sabrinæ Corolla*; the only other nineteenth-century poet to beat him is Byron, with ten. No other poet who flourished after 1830 comes close. Scholars and students took up Tennyson right away as the poet of the times who simply *had* to be turned into Greek or Latin, and they translated a wide range of his poetry: not just the poems on classical themes, but often the early lyric poems; passages from *In Memoriam*, *The Princess*, and *Morte d'Arthur*; and, on one memorable occasion, the dialect poem "Northern Farmer, New Style" (*Nova Anthologia Oxoniensis* 148). Still, the classicizing poems draw particular interest, both for their relative popularity as set texts and for the density of Tennyson's classical allusions.

Seen in the context of verse composition, these poems create an affiliative feedback loop: Tennyson's translators reclassitize his references to classical literature, giving latent allusions manifest forms in the translated text. The same model applies to other classicizing poets and their work: Arnold and Swinburne among contemporaries, but also Milton, John Dryden, and any number of commonly cited eighteenth-century poets. The exercise instills a strong sense of culture as a self-regenerating classicism—the translating student, too, might someday use their classical education to write a great poem on ancient themes and become like Tennyson. The cost, however, of Britain's genealogical identification with ancient Greece and Rome is that like Tithonus himself, the old material cannot die, even as the dread of cultural exhaustion looms.

The educational culture described throughout this essay produced Tennyson himself. Tennyson's father, George, taught his sons at home, with idiosyncratic practices; Hallam Tennyson (the poet's son) reports in his memoir, "My father said that he himself received a good but not a regular classical education. At any rate he became an accurate scholar, the author 'thoroughly drummed' into him being Horace; whom he disliked in proportion" (16). Though he inclined far more toward writing verse in English than in Latin or Greek, he was good enough at verse composition to attempt writing original poetry in the classical languages: "Before he had left Somersby for Cambridge, he had written in Greek hexameters an Homeric book on the Seven against Thebes, and an Ovidian poem about the death of a young girl who had died for love of the Apollo Belvedere" (40n). Alfred's eldest brother, Frederick, did well enough at verse composition as a Cambridge undergraduate to win the university's competition for original Greek verse with an ode on the pyramids (32).

The techniques for reading imparted by the culture of verse composition encouraged and trained readers to identify and appreciate the intertextual networks (both conscious allusion and unintentional evocation) that classicizing poetry created. Tennyson was fully aware of the pedagogical uses to which an English poem on classical themes

might be put in schools and universities; indeed, for members of Tennyson's social class, such uses may have been among the only reasons they would encounter English poetry in the classroom. Such a fate was never the *raison d'être* of poetry, but it was a natural part of success: if Shakespeare and Milton were staples of verse composition, translation conferred a compliment on everyone else, too. (However, according to Hallam Tennyson, later in life his father regretted that he had become for modern schoolchildren what Horace was to him: "They use me as a lesson-book at schools, and they will call me 'that horrible Tennyson'" [16].)

Toward the end of the century, a year before Tennyson's death, John Churton Collins (an advocate of English in universities whom one scholar describes as having "irritated all parties" in the debate [Sisam 230]) published *Illustrations of Tennyson*, which notes, "The poetry of Lord Tennyson has become classical, and is therefore becoming, and will become more and more, a subject of serious study wherever the English language is spoken" (v). He proposes to catalog and comment on "the imitations, the analogies, the adaptations, the simple transferences in which his poems notoriously abound" (v–vi), in comparison with their "originals" (v), both classical and English. Tennyson apparently disliked the project, but Churton Collins merely made explicit what any teacher or pupil in a grammar school would have discussed for the previous half century.

In fact, Churton Collins's brief readings of "Ulysses" and "Tithonus" barely scratch the surface of apparently deliberate allusions in the poems, which he calls "too obvious to need specifying," to say nothing of the wider range of intertexts a translator might draw on for understanding and inspiration (59). "Ulysses" famously begins by declaring that a quietly dignified senescence "little profits" (line 1). Metapoetics lie not far beneath the surface: "I am a part of all that I have met," Ulysses says (line 18); the bounds around the figure of the poet dissolve in fulfilling a need to learn more and articulate more. If death is "eternal silence," life is speech, or song (line 27). Legacies must be handed to heirs, like Telemachus, "discerning to fulfil / This labour" of organizing the chaos of language into the order of

verse, a hereditary empire of language (lines 35–36): “through soft degrees / Subdue them to the useful and the good” (lines 37–38). Telemachus is, in other words, an image of the sort of boy whose classical education “qualifies” him for imperial service, though the civil service exam was not instituted until over a decade after this poem’s publication. The specific words “fulfil” and “labour” seem to allude to Athena’s description of Odysseus to Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, οἷος κεῖνος ἔην τελέσαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε (“he was the kind of man who fulfilled both labor and word”; Homer, bk. 2, line 273; my trans.). With resignation, Ulysses concludes, “though / We are not now that strength which in old days / Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are” (lines 65–67). He invites the poem’s audience to join his voyage and face the task of creating literature from a position of belatedness.

“Tithonus,” too, can be read with verse composition in mind as a metapoetic statement, as an address from a poet embracing mortality to an immortal, ever-renewing figure for poetry itself. In the poem, Eos (Dawn) can confer a limited, half-poisoned immortality. However, without the possibility of renewal, that immortality grows stale and hateful. Even “that strange song I heard Apollo sing” grows dim in Tithonus’s memory (line 52)—and that need for the renewal of new songs by new singers is not, the poem suggests, unwelcome. The ancient intertexts of these dramatic monologues highlight their particular historical moment within a regenerative cycle of writings, rewritings, translations, and allusions. Herbert Tucker observes that in Tennyson’s and Browning’s dramatic monologues (and the genre more generally), “[t]he charmed circle of lyric finds itself included by the kind of historical particularity that lyric genres exclude by design, and in the process readers find themselves unsettlingly historicized and contextualized as well” (228). Alert readers feel the distance between the poets of the past and the present yet also see that distance collapse as Tennyson works on ancient themes. At the same time, dense allusion provides a sense of the scale, weight, or bulk of the literary tradition the poems draw on to constitute themselves. A genre founded on the

form of an individual subject speaking highlights paradoxically the fact that selves have few boundaries when understood in the course of history.

Francis St. John Thackeray (an Eton master, cousin of the novelist) noticed and emphasized these aspects of “Tithonus” in a Greek translation of the poem’s conclusion published in the *Nova Anthologia Oxoniensis* (22–25). Thackeray sets the text in iambic trimeter, allying the poem with drama (as compared with Jebb’s version in dactylic hexameter):

Ah! keep me not for ever in the East:
How can my nature longer mix with thine?
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet
Upon these glimmering thresholds, when the steam
Floats up from those still fields that dream below.
Release me! so restore me to the ground;
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:
Thou wilt renew thy beauty with the morn;
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

Μηδ’ οὖν κατάσχης εἰσαεὶ πρὸς ἀντολαῖς·
καὶ πῶς φύσει σὴ νῦν ἔθ’ ὠδ’ ἐντήξομαι;
τὸ σὸν γὰρ ἤδη ψυχὸς ἀμφιβάλλεται
φοινικόβαπτον σῶμ’ ὑπόσκιον τόδε,
ψυχραὶ δ’ ὄσαι λάμπουσιν ἀκτίνες φάους,
ψυχρῶς δ’ ὑπείσι φωσφόροι ῥυσοῖς ποσὶ
πυλῶνες, ἀτμὸς ἡνίκ’ ἂν μετάρσιος
ἀγρῶν ἀμαυρῶν ὀλβίων θ’ ἔδρας βροτῶν
οἷς κατθανεῖν ἔξεστι, ποιηρῶν τ’ ἄπο
τύμβων ἀνέρπη τῶν ἔτ’ ὀλβιωτέραν
τύχην λαχόντων, τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω.
ἀπόδος, ἰκνοῦμαι, γῆ μ’, ἀπάλλαξον μόρου.
ὄψει πανόπτῃς οὐσα Τιθωνοῦ τάφον.
ἀειθαλῆς σοὶ καλλονῆ καθ’ ἡμέραν
ἔσται· κόνις δὲ συμπεφυρμένος κόνει
τέως ἔγωγε τῆς ἄνωθ’ ἐρημίας
ἀμνημονήσω τῆσδε, καὶ σέθεν, θεά,
διαυλον ἀργυροῖσι καμπτούσης τροχοῖς.

In the first half of the stanza, Thackeray intensifies the sense of dissolution latent in Tennyson’s English. Bowing to Greek’s strong preference for connective particles, he begins the stanza with μηδ’ οὖν (*mēd’ oun*; “So [or thus or therefore], do

not”), making this the concluding stage of an attempt at persuasion. For “thine East,” he uses ἀντολαῖς (*antolais*), a noun formed from the verb ἀνατέλλω (*anatellō*; “rise”): “So don’t keep me forever in your risings,” emphasizing by slight difference the meaning of Tennyson’s metaphor (to be kept in the East means one may never set). He translates “mix with” as the especially vivid verb ἐντήξομαι (*entēxomai*), which carries the sense of molten metal being poured in a mold, or something dissolved in water; Thackeray’s choice of words implies that Tithonus risks losing not just his mortality (in the full range of that word’s senses) but also his personal identity. The next lines expand somewhat, using striking compound words drawn from Aeschylus: φοινικόβαπτος (*phoinikobaptos*; “red washed,” “purple dyed”)¹³ and ὑπόσκιος (*hyposkios*; “under a shadow, shadowy”).¹⁴ Because the subject, ψύχος (*psykhos*; “chill, cold”), and direct object, σῶμα (*sōma*; “body”), are both neuter in gender, it is hard to tell, given the loose word order of Greek, which adjective modifies which noun: the translation’s grammar is reinforcing its semantic sense.

As the translation progresses, Thackeray’s interpretive choices stress Tithonus’s lack of individual willpower and subjection to fate, then finally resolve into a fantasy of dissolution. Thackeray introduces a number of expressions for fate in order to capture Tithonus’s wish to be able to die. Tennyson’s “that have the power to die” becomes οἷς καταθανεῖν ἔξεστι (*hois katthanein exesti*; “who can die”), reducing the sense of agency over death; “the happier dead” swell into τῶν ἔτ’ ὀλβιωτέραν / τύχην λαχόντων, τοὺς τεθνηκότας (*tōn et’ olbiōteran / tychēn lachontōn, tous tethnēkotas*; “those who got the happier fate, those who have died”). “Release me, and restore me to the ground” is elaborated into ἀπόδος, ἱκνούμαι, γῆ μ’, ἀπάλλαξον μόρου (*apodos, hiknoumai, gēi m’, apallaxon morou*; “give me back, I beg, to the earth, set me free from my lot”). (*Moros* connotes one’s share, portion, or allotment.) Thackeray’s Tithonus refers to his own grave in the third person (partly for metrical reasons, but also with rhetorical edge): ὄψει

πανόπτης οὔσα Τιθωνοῦ τάφον (*opsei panoptēs ousa Tithōnou taphon*; “You, being all-seeing, shall see Tithonus’s grave”). More than Tennyson’s “earth in earth,” κόνις (*konis*) suggests the biblical “dust to dust”; the devoutly wished breakdown of Tithonus’s body takes the verb συμφύρω (*symphyrō*; “fuse together”), contrasting sharply with the inappropriate fusion of divine and mortal at the beginning of the stanza. Finally, the translation closes, as does Tennyson’s poem, with the image of the wheels on the chariot of the dawn goddess spinning inexorably, as time goes on without Tithonus, who has finally been released from time by death. In the English, the speaker “forget[s]” the image of Dawn’s chariot, in the present indicative; in Thackeray’s Greek, with one last deft touch, he says ἀμνημονήσω (*amnēmonēsō*; “I will unremember,” or “not remember”), using the future tense, as if by way of promise: there will be others to take up the work of remembering when Tithonus has gone.

Thackeray’s translation of “Tithonus” is just one among many in ancient Greek or Latin from its time, out of dozens published and thousands that must have been drafted—few as perceptive or rewarding as his, but all of which were part of an extensive system of schooling in how to interpret and produce poetry that placed translation at its center. Countless school verse compositions have been discarded like the homework they were. But the very best verse compositions aspired to the level of art, and in their multilingual textual complexity, they crystallize into aesthetic form the ideology of Victorian British affiliation with Greek and Roman antiquity.

I have attempted here to show that the centrality of translation in elite Victorian education taught generations of elite schoolchildren not only how to draw an affiliation from ancient Greek and Roman literature to that of modern Britain, but also the imperative that they ought to do so. Verse composition sheds light on the meaning and place of classicism—and with it, translation—in Victorian culture. That classicism was not merely an echo of

eighteenth-century preoccupations, but a cultural self-image continually reinforced through language pedagogy and poetic practice. Those pedagogies used translation into ancient languages as the principal training ground for its poets, and though many Victorian poets of great value were not trained through them (on account of gender, class, or other reasons), they nevertheless sustained the critical milieu in which such poets' work was received and read. Such writers included not just the early, obvious instances of Tennyson and Swinburne, but also later poets as various as Oscar Wilde, A. E. Housman, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. The influence of a classical education with verse composition at its center extended in attenuated form as late as W. H. Auden and his circle, including the memorable description of verse composition in Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal*. To write poetry of note, poetry of influence that would merit enshrinement and imitation—this meant to write poetry that would someday be set for pupils to translate.

"Affiliation sometimes reproduces filiation, sometimes makes its own forms," wrote Said (24). Verse composition provides an instance of both, specifically because a translation can at once claim lineal descent yet also be predicated on linguistic and historical difference. Students of translation often worry about translators arrogating power from their source language to their target language, a mirror image of imperial conquest. However, the case of Victorian verse composition is a case where translation, through genealogical fiction, enacts the reverse, claiming the prestige of the classical target language for the source vernacular. A skillfully turned Greek or Latin version of an English poem wove a myth of cultural continuity—but also made room for as much frustration as flattery, as in Thackeray's "Tithonus." Reading verse compositions as art (and their creators intended them as such) rather than as curiosities helps recover an important context in which to place the English-language poetry of the era from which they came, as well as a body of Victorian commentary on the English canon that lies hiding in plain sight.

NOTES

1. "Very dear" is Rouse's own gloss; "dear to mortals," my own. In general, where no published translations exist for the material I discuss, I have provided translations. For works that have published translations, unless otherwise noted I have provided those translations in the text from the editions in the works-cited list.

2. For documentation and analysis of materials used in such settings, see Butterfield; Porter; Stray, *Classics Transformed* 58–59, 68–74 and *Classics in Britain* 286–98.

3. "Between the 1870s and the 1920s, the relaxed amateur scholarship of Anglican gentlemen gave way to the specialized, methodic activity of a community of professional scholars" (Stray, *Classics Transformed* 2).

4. See, for instance, the summary discussion in Feeney.

5. Seven out of twelve are love lyrics, and two more involve wine: 1.3 (to Venus), 1.13 (love of Lydia and Telephus), 1.19 (about Venus), 1.36 (on Numida and his lovers), 3.9 (amoeborean poem between speaker and Lydia), 3.15 (women's love different at two different ages), 3.19 (symposiastic poem about antiquarianism), 3.24 (on ambition), 3.25 (to Bacchus), 3.28 (drinking song); 4.1 (to Venus), and 4.3 (to the muse Melpomene).

6. With gratitude to Anne Coldiron for pointing out these two further allusions.

7. My translation, preserving Gray's wording when Munro's is similar enough to warrant it: "Perhaps here lies one who long ago stood with dauntless breast, a rural Gracchus, as a little master over his estate, or a mute inglorious Maro [Vergil], or a second Julius [Caesar], guiltless of his ancestral blood." The quotation from Gray's "Elegy" reproduces the one in Munro's text (including the variant spelling of "Hampden").

8. The Latin text is reprinted as it appears in Nixon and Smith, including punctuation and capitalization. The Loeb edition's translation reads, "I have myself seen what once was solid land changed into sea; and again I have seen land made from the sea. Sea-shells have been seen lying far from the ocean, and an ancient anchor has been found on a mountain-top. What once was a level plain, down-flowing waters have made into a valley; and hills by the force of floods have been washed into the sea. What was once marsh is now a parched stretch of dry sand, and what once was dry and thirsty now is a marshy pool" (Ovid 383).

9. "To regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. . . . It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (Benjamin 80).

10. Sometimes, however, British scholars did translate from other European vernaculars into Latin or Greek. Poems in Scots (by Robert Burns in particular) or other provincial dialects of Britain were also popular as verse composition exercises: see, e.g., Drury 100, 136, 226; Munro, esp. 25.

11. See Norton's "The Blind Man's Bride" (Drury 16), Barbauld's "The Marks of Love" (Drury 46), Hemans's "The

First Grief" (Drury 186), and Hemans's "Far o'er the Sea" (*Sabrinae Corolla* 36).

12. For further discussion of classical educational practices, including verse composition, among young Victorian women, see Hurst 11–51.

13. The LSJ cites only Athena's command to the Athenians at *Eumenides* line 1028: φοινικοβάπτοις ἐνδυτοῖς ἐσθήμασι / τιμάτε ("Honor them [the Furies] with clothing dyed deep purple"). See "Phoinikobaptos."

14. The chorus of Danaids rejoicing at *Suppliants* lines 656–58: τοιγὰρ ὑποσκίων / ἐκ στομάτων ποτά- / σθω φιλότιμος εὐχά ("let there fly forth from our overshadowed lips a prayer of gratitude").

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Abstract: The ability to translate English poetry into ancient Greek and Latin sat at the pinnacle of a Victorian classical education, but we rarely read the resulting Greek and Latin poetry as serious literature. Yet this corpus documents an important, culturally prestigious poetic practice that entrenched a narrative of cultural descent from Greece and Rome, affiliating modern British poetry with classical antecedents. Moreover, it taught generations of schoolboys (and some noteworthy schoolgirls) interpretive methods for understanding English poetry, thereby providing an arena in which the canon of English poets coalesced before the institutionalization of English literature in universities. I re-create the interpretive moves and cultural affiliations enacted through verse composition in the Victorian period, and I analyze particular verse compositions that shed new light on the classicizing context informing contemporary poetic creation.