

Subjectivity and Ambiguity in Two Verse Translations of the *Aeneid*

© Melanie Fitton-Hayward (University of Nottingham)

ABSTRACT

The complex narrative of the *Aeneid* is comprised of Virgil's narrator, who is often subjective and ambiguous, and multiple focalisers. Translation further complicates this narrative web, by adding to the voices and narrators present within the text. Due to the inherent subjectivity and ambiguity within the original, even the most minor of translator's modifications become significant. Translators may make such changes subconsciously, or intentionally, in order to appropriate their own agenda in translating, to reflect a particular interpretation of the text, to appeal to a particular audience or adhere to a particular type of translation.

In this paper, I compare translations of the *Aeneid* by John Dryden (1697) and Frederick Ahl (2007). Whilst their intentions are similar (to create a version which balances literalness and fluency), their backgrounds and historical contexts contrast significantly, resulting in drastic textual variation. The American professor Frederick Ahl writes his translation partly for an educational context, expecting students to use it for reference while studying the Latin. Dryden, a creative writer at the end of a glorious poetic career which has seen the political turmoil and civil unrest of Restoration England, seeks to find a way for Virgil's text to interact with his culture, exploring its similarities and differences with the foundation of Augustan Rome.

Using two passages from the *Aeneid* which highlight Virgil's subjective and ambiguous narrator, I explore how the differences in these translator's contexts and backgrounds are manifested in their interpretations of Virgil's narrative. My paper asks what it means for these translators to give Virgil to their audience, and how this changing role of the translator becomes apparent in their creation of their own narrative.