

In the last year of his life and three years after the publication of his acclaimed *Aeneis* (1697), Dryden published a translation of the first book of the *Iliad* as part of his *Fables Ancient and Modern*. In the Preface to that work he declares: "I have found by Trial, *Homer* a more pleasing Task than *Virgil* ... *Virgil* was of a quiet, sedate Temper; *Homer* was violent, impetuous, and full of Fire. The chief Talent of *Virgil* was propriety of Thoughts, and Ornament of Words: *Homer* was rapid in his thoughts, and took all the Liberties both of Numbers, and of Expression, which his Language, and the Age in which he liv'd allow'd him ... The *Grecian* is more according to my Genius, than the *Latin* poet ... [and], I confess, more suitable to my Temper: and therefore I have translated his First Book with greater Pleasure than any Part of *Virgil*" (Preface 140-211). As we shall see, the impetuosity, freedom in meter, and verbal flourishes in Dryden's *Ilias* exceed anything in Homer's poem and are unparalleled in Dryden's more restrained and quiet *Aeneis*.

But if Dryden felt that his temper was closer to Homer's, he regarded his Age as closer to Vergil's and in need of that Roman's restraint. The way he describes the end of the Roman Republic ("when the Old Form of Government was subverted, and a new one just Established ... [t]he Commonwealth [having] receiv'd a deadly Wound in the former Civil Wars") (*The Dedication of the Aeneis* 367-71), equally well describes his own England moving through Civil War, Cromwell's Interregnum, and the return of a Catholic-leaning king whose son James II was replaced by the Protestant William of Orange. As Dryden praises Vergil, "still of Republican Principles in his Heart" (430-31), for "maturely weigh[ing] the Condition of the Times" (454-55) and writing a poem in "the Interest of his Country ... to infuse an awful Respect into the People, towards such a Prince" (469-71), so he himself, despite the private wishes of his heart, supported the restored order of the new England. Unlike Homer, Vergil made "Piety the chief Character of his Heroe" (666), "with Augustus ... still shadow'd in the Person of *Aeneas*" (526-27). To support this reading, Dryden needs at times to tame Vergil's Aeneas. For the English poet, Vergil's style and character are of a piece, the poet to be praised as much for his "Propriety of Thought, Elegance of Words, and Harmony of Numbers ... every where Elegant, sweet and flowing in his *Hexameters* (1633-40) as for his "thoroughly Virtuous" character, "without blemish" (672-73). Dryden's Englished *Aeneis* strives for a similar harmony and smoothness: "I cannot boast that I have been thus exact in my Verses, but I have endeavour'd to follow the Example of my Master" (1646-47).

A comparison of Dryden's *Ilias* Book I, in many places more bold than Pope's much praised translation twenty years later (1720), helps bring into brighter focus that temper, propriety, and self-restraint of his *Aeneis*.