

# William Morris' Synthetic *Aeneids*: Virgil as Physical Object

---

Jack Mitchell

'Whether any Keats of the twenty-second century will immortalize Mr. Morris by his gratitude we cannot say', wrote the *Athenaeum* reviewer; 'but we predict that our great-great-grandchildren will consider not the least claim to remembrance possessed by the author of the *Earthly Paradise* to be that he was the translator of Vergil.'<sup>1</sup> As Virgilian prophecies go, this one has been less successful than the Sibyl's. William Morris' *The Aeneids of Virgil* (1875) does not loom large in the history of Virgil translation; indeed, his varied achievements firstly as the craftsman-founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, secondly as a Socialist, and thirdly as a poet have together eclipsed his career as a translator, and today his translations are mentioned only as examples of the dangers of archaizing romanticism. In what follows, I examine how a key theme of Morris' overall artistic creed, namely the need to make ideas concrete through their expression as physical objects, may serve both to explain the extraordinary character of his Virgil translation and to help answer a theoretical problem of translation in general: the problem of whether the historical stratification of a classic text can be captured in translation.

Few would deny today, when 'essentializing' is discouraged, that complexity and multiplicity are inherent in identity, whether of people, objects, places, or texts. An ancient tombstone becomes a doorpost, and we applaud; Baghdad has not fallen, it is merely in dialogue with the Mongols. While it is not clear where such logic ultimately leads, in practice few would dispute that identities accrete: the Dostoevsky read in old age is another author from the Dostoevsky read in youth;

<sup>1</sup> *William Morris: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Peter Faulkner (London, 1973), p. 221.

a bowler hat was one thing in the City, another at La Paz; the bathroom mirror is generally mendacious; the Roman Forum is simultaneously the Forum of the Sabine women and of Caesar's funeral, tidied by Diocletian and grazed by Dark Age cattle, the quarry of popes and the jewel of UNESCO. Neither identity contradicts the other.

As a matter of fact, archaeological stratification is a good analogy for Virgil's *Aeneid*, that Forum Romanum of Western literature. The comprehensive range of Virgil's sources is well known: a Trojan story woven into many threads of Italian and Latin history, filled with reference to Homer, to post-classical Greek epic and elegy, to Ennius, and to ancient scholarship, not to mention the political history of its own time. If anything, however, the complexity of the *Aeneid's* origins pales compared to the complexity of its afterlife:<sup>2</sup> Virgil's epic modelled the descent to the underworld and the role of tragic queen for later centuries, it taught imperial poets from Claudian to Dante to Nagonius to Dryden to celebrate new Golden Ages, it popularized the invention of national Trojan genealogies, it served as a touchstone for both the poetry of exile and the poetry of exploration – to pick just a few seminal influences. In short, the *Aeneid* has informed not just Western history and imagination but the history and imagination of Western history and imagination.

Translators of the *Aeneid* thus face a problem faced by any translator of a non-contemporary text, but one greatly magnified by the stature and centrality of the *Aeneid* across time: just which *Aeneid* is the translator supposed to translate? Is there a Platonic idea of the *Aeneid*, existing independently of its particular expression in Virgil's hexameters, that the translator aims to capture, if only in bald prose? Most lovers of Virgil would agree that to do so would be to forget the poem's *raison d'être*, in which Virgil's hexameters must figure prominently. In that case, though, assuming we aim to maximize the poem's richness in translation, ought we to allow only for its qualities as it existed at Virgil's death, overlooking the accretions its afterlife brought, or ought we to include in our translation its history, given how inextricable that history is from the *Aeneid* as we ourselves inherit it? More to the point: duty aside, is such a historically inclusive approach even feasible? In what follows, I avoid the question of a translator's duty, but I argue that a historically inclusive approach is certainly feasible, and that one solution lies in the exploitation of medium.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1997), especially pp. 38–55, 56–72, 79–90, and 91–104; Richard Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge, 2001); Philip Hardie, *The Last Trojan Hero* (London, 2014).

'I love art and I love history', Morris would write, 'but it is living art and living history that I love.'<sup>3</sup> In boyhood, as a zealous reader of Walter Scott, he would charge around on horseback; the love of Arthurian myth followed him to Oxford and formed one bond with his lifelong collaborator Edward Burne-Jones, soon the star of the second generation of Pre-Raphaelite painters. Morris' deep and scholarly interest in the Middle Ages resulted not in daydreaming but rather in his revolutionizing of Victorian taste via Morris & Co., its stained glass, wallpaper, furniture, tapestry, embroidery, silk damasks, glassware, and carpets inspired by the Middle Ages but original, much of this of Morris' own design and some even produced by his own labour.

It is this will to make the past manifest and accessible in the present that underlies much of his extensive poetic output, including his translations. His early original works (*The Defence of Guenevere* in 1857, *The Life and Death of Jason* in 1867, *The Earthly Paradise* in 1870) drew on Arthurian, classical, and northern myth, and he began a series of vignettes, some of which were published posthumously, which medievalize the Homeric epic cycle for contemporary taste. In these, Fiona MacCarthy observes, 'Morris superimposes upon the ancient sources the mediaeval versions of the stories: Caxton's *Historyes of Troye*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* ... Morris's Troy, spired, gabled, red-roofed and filled with towers, turns out to be a town like Bruges or Chartes.'<sup>4</sup> In keeping with this taste for the medieval order, he always played up the bardic side of poetry, associating it with hand-craft not merely thematically but in his actual method, famously declaring that 'If a chap can't compose an epic poem while he's weaving tapestry he had better shut up.' This was no idle boast: contemporaries reported that, with his 'trance-like mode of composition', Morris would turn from weaving to writing and back without the slightest pause.<sup>5</sup> Before he tackled Virgil, his first efforts at translation in 1869–75 focused on the Eddas; again in keeping with his basic view of art as a component of lived human experience, he travelled to Iceland and immersed himself in its culture before undertaking these.

In late 1874 Morris began translating the *Aeneid*, completing it by October 1875, and publishing it that November. Along with Morris' other translations, it has not received very detailed treatment in

<sup>3</sup> William Morris, 'The History of Pattern-Designing', in Reginald Stuart Poole *et al.*, *Lectures on Art Delivered in Support of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* (London, 1882), pp. 127–73 (p. 172).

<sup>4</sup> Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life of Our Time* (New York, 1995), pp. 190–1, latterly quoting the opinion of J. W. Mackail.

<sup>5</sup> George Wardle, quoted by MacCarthy, p. 262.

modern scholarship; when mentioned as more than a biographical detail, it is usually cited as a prime example of translatorly anachronism.<sup>6</sup> As I argue below, the question of archaism is indeed key to understanding Morris' purpose as a translator of Virgil, so I begin by noting the sharp difference of opinion on this key question between contemporary Victorian reviewers and twentieth-century assessments.

In English, hostility to archaism in the translation of classical authors was most famously expressed by Arnold in *On Translating Homer* (1861). Extolling Arnold's rejection of folkish vocabulary and ballad metre for the translation of Homer, an essay on the translation of Virgil in *The Quarterly Review* of 1889 had suggested that Morris' 'chief gift' of throwing 'round his theme a kind of archaic halo, an old epic atmosphere' was 'entirely unsuitable to Virgil, who, in dealing with language, is abreast of his age, or even in front of it'. The effect of Morris' work, he complained, was 'a sense of incongruity inspired by such Wardour-Street English as *eyen* and *clepe*'.<sup>7</sup> Even before that, in 1882 Andrew Lang, as part of a larger attack on Morris' literary aesthetic, had condemned in his *Aeneid* 'phrases [that] would almost seem uncouth in a rendering of Ennius', 'willful ruggedness and even obscurity, than which what can be less like Virgil?' In 1905 he noted 'archaistic peculiarities, which to some extent mar our pleasure in Mr. Morris's translations', blaming the influence of Morris' philological interest in Old English and Icelandic.<sup>8</sup> Riddennough in 1937 amplified this criticism, castigating especially 'spill' to mean 'slay', 'lift' to mean 'sky', 'borrow' to mean 'sponsor', 'world' for 'great mass' ('this world of horse'), and – Riddennough blames Sir Walter Scott – 'rock' for 'distaff'.<sup>9</sup> He dislikes Morris' original kennings (e.g. 'acre-bidders' for *agricolae*, or the re-Homerizing 'such word from tooth-hedge sent' for *sic ore locutus*), which give 'a barbaric note to the whole work'. He dislikes

<sup>6</sup> The only scholarly article devoted to this translation in isolation is Geoffrey B. Riddennough, 'William Morris's Translation of the "Aeneid"', *JEGP*, 36 (1937), 338–46. Morris' biographers, who have much to cover, generally mention it not at all, though MacCarthy does quote and assess it briefly at pp. 361–3. J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 vols (London, 1899), I, 319–23, is the exception, providing four pages of positive assessment that irritated Riddennough. Morris' *Aeneid* is discussed in the chapters of *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Vol. 4, cited below. The *Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, edited by Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1997), features on its cover an illumination from the *Aeneid* manuscript made by Morris, but offers no discussion of the manuscript itself.

<sup>7</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 169 (1889), p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Lang, 'The Poetry of William Morris', *Contemporary Review* 42 (1882), p. 216; *Adventures Among Books* (New York, 1905), pp. 116–17.

<sup>9</sup> These examples and those following are from Riddennough, pp. 343–6. Earlier, the author does concede that 'Some of Virgil's archaisms are reproduced with good effect' (p. 341). For the Latin *Aeneid* text I use throughout the edition of J. B. Greenough (Boston, MA, 1900); Morris' *Aeneid* is *The Aeneids of Virgil, Done into English Verse* (London, 1876).

*vana superstitio* (8.187) as ‘idle task of witch-work’, a rendering that ‘might fitly come from a savage with just enough mental development to be incredulous’. Worse than the Beowulfian diction for Riddenough is its juxtaposition with ‘the use of medieval phraseology for ideas that are not medieval’: ‘dux’ as ‘duke’, *Iovis* ‘coniunx’ as ‘the very Highest’s bride’, ‘draco’ as ‘worm’, or ‘ruit alto a culmine Troia’ (2.290) as ‘Troy is down from topmost spire’, since ‘the resulting picture is that of the Troy Town of medieval tapestry’. In sum, ‘the work is too strongly colored by the translator’s own temperament and tendencies to be of much assistance to anyone who wishes to arrive at a better understanding of Virgil’,<sup>10</sup> such being apparently the object for both translator and critic. In our own day, Riddenough’s view is echoed, albeit with slightly less ferocity, by Matthew Reynolds and John Talbot.<sup>11</sup>

If archaizing diction and medievalist imagery are the reason for twentieth- and twenty-first-century rejection of Morris’ translation, however, it is all the more interesting to find the initial readers of 1875 either applauding them or apparently insensitive to them. Newspaper reviews (all by reviewers with a real knowledge of Virgil’s Latin) of the translation as a whole were enthusiastic. The *Athenaeum* (quoted at the beginning of this essay) compared it favourably to Chapman’s Elizabethan translation of Homer (‘in order to see the advance in mere technical skill made by the last 280 years, it is sufficient to read aloud first a page of Chapman, and then a page of the Victorian Poet’)<sup>12</sup> and pronounced it the best ever in English; another softened this to best since Dryden;<sup>13</sup> a third admitted Dryden’s superior splendour but insisted that Morris’ only modern (i.e. accurate) rival was Professor Conington;<sup>14</sup> a fourth noted how fitting it was for Morris to translate Virgil since ‘Mr. Morris has been to Chaucer in so many ways what Virgil was to Homer.’<sup>15</sup> With regard to archaism, the *Athenaeum* reviewer defended words such as ‘twiyoke’ (i.e. ‘double-yoked’) as ‘at least as defensible as Vergil’s own “faxo,” “aulai,” or “olli”’; the *Academy* reviewer rejoiced that ‘the breath of poetry informs the whole work’,

<sup>10</sup> Riddenough, p. 346.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Reynolds, ‘Principles and Norms’, in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation*, Volume 4: 1790–1900, edited by Peter France and Kenneth Haynes (Oxford, 2006), endorses the ‘Wardour Street early English’ label (p. 70). In the same volume, John Talbot in his contribution on ‘Latin Poetry’ attacks the ‘gangly fourteeners’ and Morris’ ‘reliance on archaisms and line-padding tautologies’ (p. 192).

<sup>12</sup> Faulkner (n. 1), p. 218.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Since Dryden, no Englishman has translated Virgil with such insight and sympathy’ (Faulkner, p. 223).

<sup>14</sup> Anon., ‘Mr. Morris’s “Aeneid”’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 December 1875, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> No less than Edmund Gosse, ‘Mr. Morris’s Aeneid’, *The Examiner*, 20 November 1875, p. 1304.

the *Examiner* that 'there is very little affectation of archaism . . . some ancient forms [being] used, but mainly for their inherent value';<sup>16</sup> the *Pall Mall Gazette* applauded the kennings and 'the pure, simple English [which] clings to every turn of the Latin in its terseness or amplitude more closely than any of our later Latinized fashions can do'. In other words, what struck Lang (in 1905) and Riddennough (in 1937) as unacceptably archaizing diction struck the ears of 1875 as true to Virgil and true to the English language, overall.

With regard to archaism, then, Morris' sensibility was evidently aligned with that of his first readers, if opposed by later taste. But this archaism is a particular archaism. How did readers of 1875 perceive such an infusion of Beowulfian and medieval elements? The key point, I believe, is that in Morris' *Aeneid* both of these anachronistic ingredients are filtered through a third historical timeframe, that of the Renaissance. Unfortunately we have nothing from Morris himself about his aims, but it is obvious that his model was that monument of Elizabethan translation, George Chapman's Homer (1598–1616): this is flagged in the title (*Aeneids* like Chapman's *Iliads*) and is structurally fundamental in the choice of metre (fourteeners). Nevertheless, though Chapman's text is not free from medieval terminology, Chapman's overall effect is not anachronistic. The contrast between a text that references prior eras and a text that references contemporary institutions is plainer if we juxtapose Morris not with Chapman but with the Elizabethan translator of the *Aeneid*, Thomas Phaer, whose *Aeneid* appeared in 1558. Here are Venus and Aeneas approaching Carthage in construction (1.418-26):

Corripuere viam interea, qua semita monstrat.  
Iamque ascendebant collem, qui plurimus urbi  
imminet, adversasque adspectat desuper arces.  
Miratur molem Aeneas, magalia quondam,  
miratur portas strepitumque et strata viarum.  
Instant ardentem Tyrii pars ducere muros,  
molirique arcem et manibus subvolvere saxa,  
pars optare locum tecto et concludere sulco.  
Iura magistratusque legunt sanctumque senatum.

Here is Thomas Phaer's version:

They in that while went on their way wherto the path them led.  
And now come up they were the hill that nere the citie lies,

<sup>16</sup> Gosse in *The Examiner*, like others who mention archaism, cites some 'eccentricities' of language which are exceptions to the overall success. Where Riddennough's catalogue of lexical items is meant to imply infinite idiosyncrasy, however, here Gosse implies that these jarring choices are atypical.

From whence the towres and castels all bin subject to their eyes.  
Aeneas wondred at the worke where sometime sheepe were fed,  
And on the gates hee wondred eke, and noise in streetes yspred.  
The *Moores* with courage went to worke, some under burdens grones,  
Some at the wals & towres with hand were tumbling vp the stones.  
Some measurd out a place to build their mansion house within,  
Some lawes and officers to make a parlament did begin.<sup>17</sup>

And here is Morris':

But therewithal they speed their way as led the road along;  
And now they scale a spreading hill that o'er the town is hung,  
And looking downward thereupon hath all the burg in face.  
Aeneas marvels how that world was once a peasants' place,  
He marvels at the gates, the roar and rattle of the ways.  
Hot-heart the Tyrians speed the work, and some the ramparts raise,  
Some pile the burg high, some with hand roll stones up o'er the ground;  
Some choose a place for dwelling-house and draw a trench around;  
Some choose the laws, and lords of doom, the holy senate choose.<sup>18</sup>

Various characteristics of Morris' translation stand out here. First, it is more inclusive: Phaer omits 'plurimus' as an epithet of the hill, Morris nicely chooses 'spreading'; Phaer embroiders 'magalia' to 'where sometime sheepe were fed', Morris sticks to 'once a peasants' place'; Phaer adds 'some under burdens grones'. Morris' compound epithet 'heart-hot' for 'ardentes' is more literal than Phaer's 'with courage'. In terminology, too, Phaer's references are less Roman: 'arces' becomes 'towres and castels' and 'wals and towres', the Tyrians are 'Moores', the 'magistratus' are 'officers' and the 'sanctus senatus' is 'a parlament'. Phaer permits fewer natural inversions: 'qua semita monstrat' is 'whereto the path them led' (admittedly 'as led the road along' in Morris is also convoluted), 'iamque ascendebant collem' is 'and now come up they were the hill' (*vs* Morris' natural 'and now they scale a spreading hill'); Phaer's last line here, though euphonious, is syntactically somewhat opaque. Thus far the critics of 1875 are vindicated: Morris makes far fewer adjustments, and takes fewer liberties with English word order, than his Elizabethan predecessor. Nonetheless, we do find the effect that bothered Lang and Riddough, an effect which is neither a direct transposition to a medieval (or sixteenth-century) setting nor a strict adherence to the Roman setting: 'burg' is quite a good literal equivalent of 'arx', but

<sup>17</sup> Text from *The Aeneid of Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne: A Critical Edition introducing Renaissance Metrical Typography*, edited by Steven Lally (New York, 1987), p. 18 (i/j and u/v normalized).

<sup>18</sup> Morris, *Aeneids* (n. 9), p. 17.

Morris evidently relishes its medieval associations; the 'magistratus' for him are 'lords of doom', which again is literally correct in that officials are empowered ('lords') to give judgement ('doom'), but the phrase imposes Beowulf or the Eddas on an ordinary Latin term.<sup>19</sup> So too the 'sanctus senatus' becomes a literal 'holy senate', a choice of adjective which exploits the broad range of 'sanctus' in Latin ('holy', 'sacred', 'venerable', 'august', 'immutable', etc) to imbue the culmination of the city's construction with the most Arthurian tone available. Finally, plain old 'interea' is 'in that while' for Phaer but the archaic 'therewithal' for Morris, not untypically of his transitional adverbs.

Overall, then, we find in these nine lines of Morris', which are by no means uncharacteristic, a layering of historical eras and associations: the Beowulfian 'lords of doom', the 'burg' of Froissart, the Arthurian 'holy senate', all within the Renaissance fourteeners (themselves at once a definitive Renaissance metre and the continuation of medieval ballad measure), while the Roman poet's Trojan subject-matter remains. Chronologically this yields Trojan, Roman, Dark Age, medieval, and Elizabethan material all present simultaneously. But was the goal a postmodern hodge-podge *avant la lettre*, intentionally discordant and thus either delightfully variegated or intensely irritating? Or was the layering, on the other hand, meant to result in an artistic unity?

I believe it may be argued that the latter was Morris' intention, not only because he was always in earnest but because the Virgil translation itself was only one component of a multi-media Virgil project stretching over several years, the scale and effort of which almost makes the ten-month whirlwind translation seem sedate. Specifically, I suggest that the chronological layering of Morris' translation should be understood with reference to his work on illuminated manuscripts in general and in particular to his collaboration with his friend Edward Burne-Jones on an ultra-deluxe illuminated manuscript of the *Aeneid* in 1873–5.<sup>20</sup>

A passion for illuminated manuscripts had been characteristic of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the 1850s. Morris embarked upon serious calligraphy with the same vigour as he brought to tapestry, dyeing, stained glass, and numerous other arts, studying the earliest

<sup>19</sup> Colin Burrow, 'Virgil in English Translation', in Martindale (n. 6), pp. 21–37, notes a line 'deliberately reminiscent of alliterative English heroic narrative' (p. 34), but I think he simplifies the stratigraphy of Morris' approach in characterizing the whole as a 'omni-purpose Germanic style'.

<sup>20</sup> Parallels between Morris' manuscript work and his translations are noted by Stephen Prickett and Peter France as 'part of a coherent strategy of artistic production, based on a thoroughgoing critique of contemporary culture', also as 'a refuge from, and a challenge to, the values of the machine age and commercial publishing' (France and Haynes (n. 11), p. 114). As will be seen below, I believe the parallels are not only ideological but also aesthetic.

printed writing manuals from Renaissance Italy and also learning the art of gilding. 'He threw himself into the hunt for vellum' (MacCarthy, p. 266), urging his illuminator, Charles Fairfax Murray, to procure some in Rome of the authentically medieval smoothness and hardness. From 1870 to 1875 'he worked on eighteen manuscript books and many trial fragments, a total of over 1500 pages of laborious handwriting combined with a mass of decorative detail' (MacCarthy, p. 264). The *Aeneid* was Morris' crowning achievement in this field, planned on a much more ambitious scale than his other manuscripts. Morris wrote out the text and was responsible for the overall design, including non-figurative capitals and decoration; he and Burne-Jones discussed the figurative illuminations during their Sunday meetings, and Burne-Jones' drawings were then turned over to Murray for completion in the manuscript pages. (Murray would later buy the uncompleted manuscript from Morris, finish the illuminations himself, and hire a calligrapher-disciple of Morris', Graily Hewitt, to complete the lettering of Books 7–12.) Morris had by 1870 abandoned the Gothic script of his earliest efforts and adopted a formal bookhand; 'the roman minuscule of the *Aeneid* represents the culmination of his research and practice'.<sup>21</sup> He blended Renaissance letters with medieval page layout, however: 'With capitals of gold and blue sprinkling the text, and large illuminated initials in the left margin, the completed manuscript would have had much more the appearance of a medieval prose work ... He had entirely turned his back on the restraint of Renaissance examples'<sup>22</sup> (Figure 1). Morris himself wrote out the six books; Burne-Jones drew one grand illumination per book, adopting a more 'Florentine' manner in parallel to Morris' humanistic bookhand.<sup>23</sup>

Of the project, Burne-Jones remarked that 'it is to be a wonderful thing and put an end to printing',<sup>24</sup> but this was only half a joke: the integration of linguistically beautiful text with tangibly beautiful object was at the very heart of Morris' understanding of his role as artist. He had earlier collaborated with Burne-Jones on a vast sequence of woodcuts to illustrate *The Earthly Paradise*. To Morris the illustrations were integral; even while he was writing *The Earthly Paradise* 'he saw the episodes as pictures and noted in his margins hints for the wood

<sup>21</sup> Here and immediately following I draw upon the Christie's sale catalogue for the Morris *Aeneids* manuscript (London, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Christie's catalogue, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> The humanistic script of the fifteenth century was of course a conscious attempt to revive the Carolingian script, which the humanists considered more classical than the Gothic.

<sup>24</sup> G[eorgiana] B[urne]-J[ones], *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols (London, 1904), II, 56.

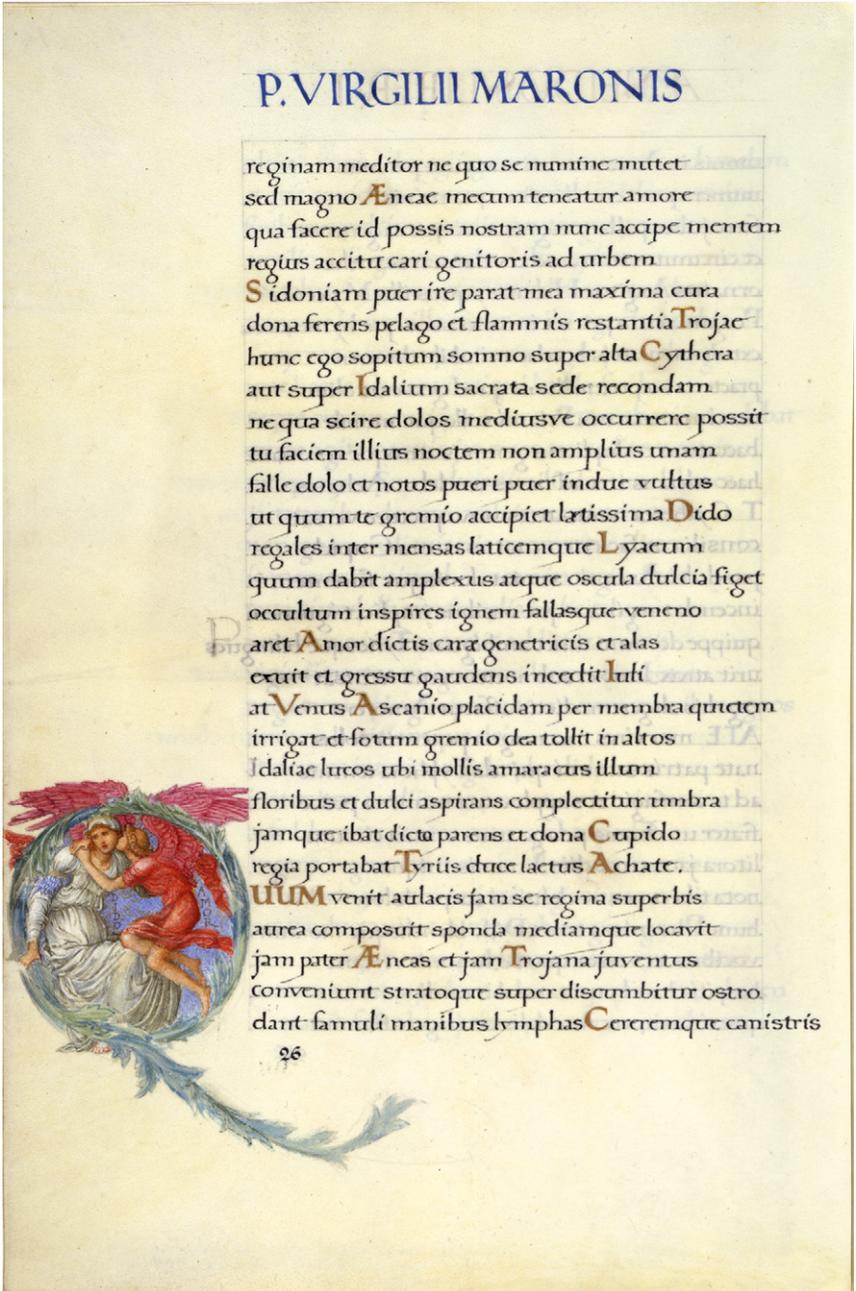


Figure 1. Morris, *Aeneids* manuscript, p. 26 (*Aeneid* 1.674-701). Private collection/Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.

cuts that Burne-Jones and he were to make for the beautifying of his poems'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Fiona MacCarthy stresses, Morris the craftsman, founder of Morris & Co., revolutionary of the decorative arts, was inseparable from Morris the writer:

Morris once asked the rhetorical question, the question from a fairytale, of what he considered the most important production of Art 'and the thing most to be longed for.' His immediate reply was 'A beautiful House.' He continued, 'and if I were further asked to name the production next in importance and the thing next to be longed for, I should answer, A beautiful Book.'<sup>26</sup>

There are good general reasons, therefore, for reading the English-language *Aeneid* translation, which began not long before work stopped on the illuminated Latin-language *Aeneid* manuscript, in the light of the project with Burne-Jones; but there are also particular reasons to associate them. In spite of Morris' carelessness about proofreading, consciousness of the text as physical object was not absent from his work on the translation. In addition to the ordinary copies, there was a limited run on folio-sized handmade paper, one copy of which he promised to Murray, writing to him in March to report that he was shifting from the manuscript to the translation.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Morris began to work at illuminating the Virgil manuscript even in the midst of translation. In fact, his daughter May explicitly tells that the translation 'was the outcome of the manuscript he was making of the original'.<sup>28</sup> In sum, given Morris' pride in his ability to compose verse while engaged in other artistry, the overlap between the two projects through the end of 1874 and first half of 1875, and Morris' general association of verbal and physical art, it is reasonable to read the translation as meant for illumination, a sort of substitute text for Virgil's Latin that he had been copying out so beautifully, in a version that would be infinitely more accessible to the general public. 'He wanted to turn the *Aeneid* into a story everyone could read', MacCarthy writes (p. 362).

In this regard, we note that the effect of historical multiplicity encountered in the translation is also present in the illuminations that Burne-Jones drafted in dialogue with Morris.<sup>29</sup> Botticelli, Mantegna,

<sup>25</sup> May Morris, *William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1936), I, 402.

<sup>26</sup> MacCarthy (n. 4), p. 267.

<sup>27</sup> *Collected Letters of William Morris*, edited by Norman Kelvin, 4 vols (Princeton, NJ, 1984), I, 246 (to Charles Fairfax Murray, 11 March 1875).

<sup>28</sup> May Morris, p. 309.

<sup>29</sup> Literally in dialogue: 'Every Sunday morning you may think of Morris and me together – he reads a book to me and I make drawings for a big Virgil he is writing' (Georgiana Burne-Jones, II, 56).

and Michelangelo were now Burne-Jones' chosen masters, and we may usefully juxtapose his *Aeneid* illuminations with his Renaissance and medieval inspirations. As a first example, the depiction of the Book 9 encounter between Iris and Turnus (Figure 2) seems of a piece, but in fact it layers material from very different eras and styles. The background of abstract blue hills is typical of late medieval painting, somewhat vaguer than the detailed hills in the *Très Riches Heures* (Figure 3). Iris, who floats on one foot, hair flowing in a breeze and elbow bent, is plainly straight out of Botticelli. Turnus, with his jousting shield, initially seems to be medieval or fifteenth century (like the knight in Figure 4), but in fact his burgonet helmet is typical of the mid-sixteenth century (Figure 5). This is not in imitation of Renaissance ideas of ancient armour, since Renaissance artists did quite well in portraying that realistically (Figure 6). In this illumination, then, we have an early-Renaissance goddess, a sixteenth-century warrior, and a late medieval landscape.

Burne-Jones reserves authentically classical material for a different effect (Figure 7). In Book 10, as he kills Mezentius, Aeneas has a hoplite shield (its shape of course dictated by the story), more or less historically conceived, though like Turnus he wears a sixteenth-century burgonet helmet with dragon-like spikes. (It would be hard to say if this last detail is a medievalism on Burne-Jones' part, since nothing could be more fancifully medievalistic than sixteenth-century armourers' designs.) More importantly than costume, the composition communicates violence, as the upturned and unbalanced horse – a motif associated with Delacroix (Figure 8), but going back to Leonardo's lost *Battle of Anghiari* – freezes the savage action<sup>30</sup> and the hunched and intertwined figures produce a horizontal movement wholly alien to medieval art, reminiscent of Michelangelo and his followers (Figure 9). In Murray's illumination of this design, the killing takes place in the same scenery of plain green grass, plain blue landscape, and baby blue sky that we have already encountered.

For a last example, I return to the passage first examined in comparison with Phaer's Elizabethan version, namely Venus and Aeneas outside Carthage (1.418-26), and seek to imagine how Morris' English text would have been affected by the physical setting he chose for Virgil's Latin. In the depiction of Venus and Aeneas at Carthage

<sup>30</sup> Anna Cox Brinton, *A Pre-Raphaelite Aeneid of Virgil in the Collection of Mrs. Edward Lawrence Doheny of Los Angeles, Being an Essay in Honor of the William Morris Centenary 1934* (Los Angeles, CA, 1934), notes the 'power and rage of battle in the scene' (p. 33). It much amplifies the violence of the source text, in which Mezentius calmly accepts ('accipit') the killing sword rather than being overpowered and stabbed (*Aeneid* 10.907-8).



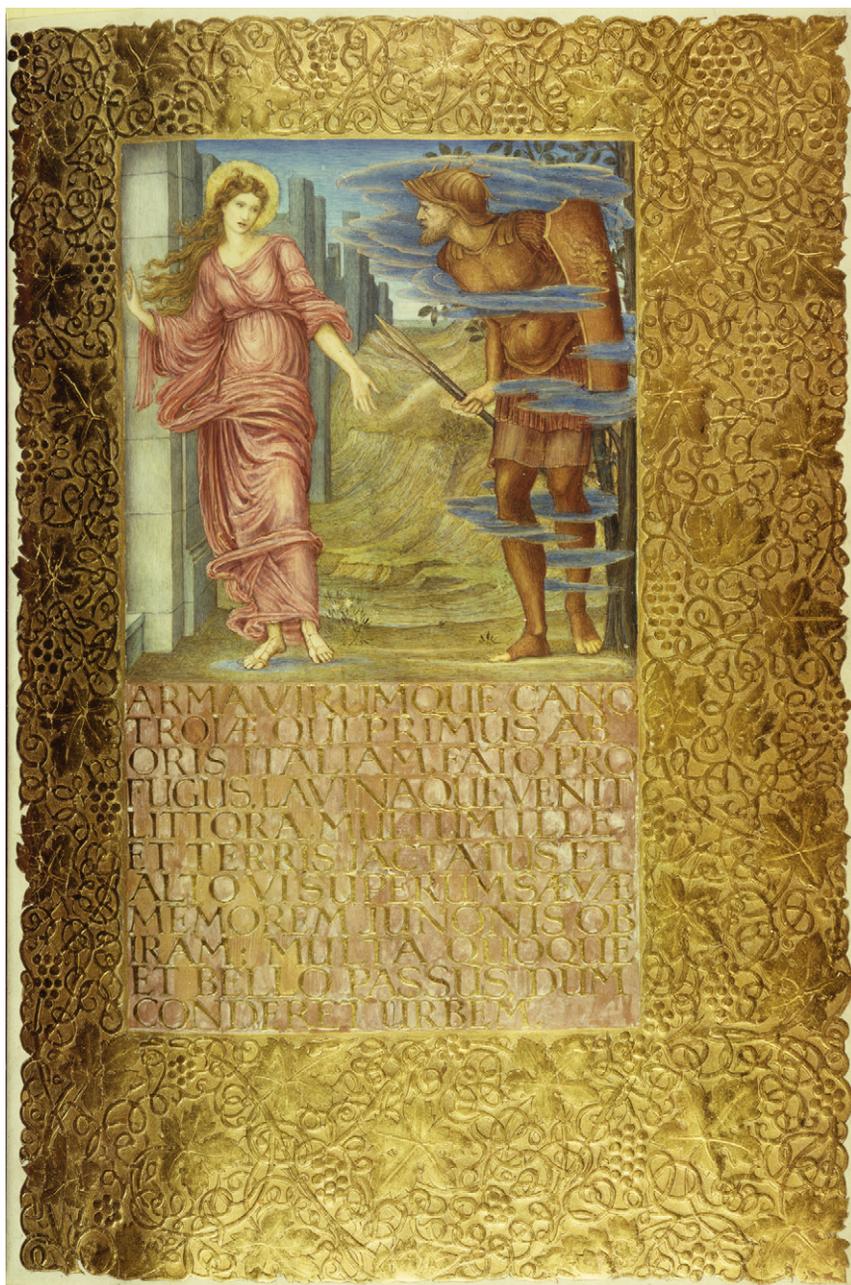
**Figure 2.** Morris, *Aeneids* manuscript, p. 238 (*Aeneid* 9.1-5). Lettering and ornament by Morris, illustration (Iris appearing before Turnus) by Murray from a drawing by Burne-Jones. Private Collection/Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.



**Figures 3–6.** (clockwise from top left). Figure 3: detail from the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, 1412–16, fol. 133<sup>v</sup> (Musée Condé); Figure 4: detail from *The Triumph of Fame* by Scheggia, c. 1449 (Metropolitan Museum of Art); Figure 5: Burgonet helmet, prob. Milan, c. 1535–45 (Metropolitan Museum of Art); Figure 6: detail from *The Conversion of the Centurion* by the Master of the Die, c. 1530–60 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).



**Figures 7–9.** (clockwise from top left). Figure 7: *Aeneas slaying Mezentius* by Edward Burne-Jones, 1873 (Fitzwilliam Museum/Bridgeman Images); Figure 8: *The Abduction of Rebecca* by Eugène Delacroix, 1846 (Metropolitan Museum of Art); Figure 9: *Hector Fighting the Greeks* by Heinrich Aldegrever, 1532 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).



**Figure 10.** Morris, *Aeneids* manuscript, p. 1 (*Aeneid* 1.1-5), lettering and ornament by Morris, illustration (Iris visiting Turnus) by Murray from a drawing by Burne-Jones. Private Collection/Photo © Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images.



**Figure 11.** Detail from the *Riches Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, 1405–9 (Metropolitan Museum of Art).

(Figure 10), Venus' drapery, hair, and floating pose indicate that she is drawn from Botticelli (though the pose is not that of the goddess herself in *The Birth of Venus*); Aeneas (bearded from travel) wears his burgonet helmet, though we have a good view of his authentically classical muscle cuirass and *pteruges*; the background of vanishing city walls is reminiscent of the same device in medieval work like the *Riches Heures* (Figure 11), though in the nineteenth-century illumination the walls themselves are curiously block-like; Brinton compares the gold-tinged blue cloud that envelops Aeneas to Titian.<sup>31</sup> So far, so layered, but one detail stands for everything: the pagan goddess' nimbus. Radiant crowns and divine light are not of course foreign to either the heroic or the classical world, but here plainly the most characteristic device of medieval religious painting has been boldly placed upon a pagan character and pagan figure. (Needless to say, none of Botticelli's goddesses of Spring, the models for this Venus, get a nimbus.) More than any other detail in the twelve illuminations, this nimbus, appearing on the very first page of the manuscript, signals to the reader that ancient, medieval, and contemporary timeframes have been layered together.

Overall, then, the strategy of layering heroic, classical, Dark Ages, medieval, and Renaissance material in Morris' *Aeneid* translation is closely paralleled in the layering of the history of visual art in the physical *Aeneid* manuscript. I have suggested that the English-language translation may be regarded as a counterpart to the illuminated Latin-language manuscript. In reality, of course, the English-language text and the illuminations were never combined, but if we view the two projects as parallel works of translation – the one on the level of language, the other on the level of medium – with similar aesthetic

<sup>31</sup> Brinton, p. 28. She also suggests that this Aeneas is a self-portrait.

aims, it may help to explain the peculiarities of each if we read the two together. Let us revisit Morris' English-language version of the meeting of Venus and Aeneas in light of the illumination, with its goddess' nimbus and Botticelli pose, its Titianesque cloud, its blue medieval horizon and city walls, and its classical and sixteenth-century armour.

We have already noted (in the passage quoted above, p. 7) lexical choices by turns medieval ('burg'), Beowulfian ('lords of doom'), and Arthurian ('holy senate'), but the layers featuring Trojan or Roman or Renaissance material are all structural: the subject is the Trojans in Carthage, and the metre is that of Chapman and Phaer. To put it another way, in the text the medieval/Beowulfian/Arthurian layers are in the foreground, each detail a distinct artistic choice, while the classical/Renaissance layers are in the background. This contrasts with the image, in which the classical shield and clothing and Renaissance pose, cloud, and helmet are distinct and in the foreground, while the medieval horizon and city walls, along with the elaborate medieval gold-leaf border to the page, are literally in the background.

Such a reversal of historical emphasis in the text as compared to the illuminated manuscript is likewise to be found in the text describing the killing of Mezentius, for which Burne-Jones supplied a design (Figure 7) later illuminated by Murray. Here is Morris' version of *Aeneid* 10.896-908, in which Mezentius asks Aeneas to kill him:

“O bitter foe, why chidest thou? why slayest thou with words?  
Slay me and do no wrong! death-safe I came not mid the swords;  
And no such covenant of war for us my Lausus bought:  
One thing I pray, if vanquished men of grace may gain them aught,  
Let the earth hide me! well I know how bitter and how nigh  
My people's wrath draws in on me: put thou their fury by,  
And in the tomb beside my son I pray thee let me lie.”  
He saith, and open-eyed receives the sword-point in his throat,  
And o'er his arms in waves of blood his life and soul doth float.

As always, this is remarkably literal, as the fourteener's length allows Morris both to include the Latin meaning and to reproduce it line by line:

“Hostis amare, quid increpitas mortemque minaris?  
Nullum in caede nefas, nec sic ad proelia veni,  
nec tecum meus haec pepigit mihi foedera Lausus.  
Unum hoc per siqua est victis venia hostibus oro:  
corpus humo patiare tegi. Scio acerba meorum  
circumstare odia: hunc, oro, defende furorem

et me consortem nati concede sepulchro.”  
Haec loquitur iuguloque haud inscius accipit ensem  
undantique animam diffundit in arma cruore.

Some of Morris' choices here are striking. The rendering of 'haec pepigit ... foedera' (literally 'concluded these pacts') as 'such covenant of war ... bought' is in itself literally accurate (albeit featuring a figurative use of 'buy'), but here again, as above with the rendering of 'sanctus senatus' as 'holy senate', Morris relishes the Arthurian option, since 'covenant' inevitably has Christian resonance. So too with the 'siqua est ... venia' as 'of grace ... aught': *venia* is mercy, forgiveness, and does indeed often feature in Roman prayers to gods, but is just as often used in the human sphere to signify a favour or act of kindness; Morris' choice of 'grace' evokes rather Arthurian piety than Homeric horse-trading. Besides these medievalisms, we find a Beowulfian kenning in 'death-safe'. This makes explicit the thought in 'nec sic ad proelia veni', but the word itself is Morris' addition, and it is notable that his decision to clarify Mezentius' thought here becomes the occasion for a coinage redolent of the Dark Ages. Again, in a text characterized by overall literalness, such departures serve to foreground medieval and Beowulfian material, while the ancient matter and Renaissance metre form the background; by contrast, in the image of Figure 7 (Aeneas and Mezentius), the swirling, dynamic figures and upturned horse (Renaissance features) and the classical shield and burgonet helmet were placed in the foreground, leaving (in Murray's illumination) the medieval grass and sky to the background.

In the second illumination we examined, Figure 2 above, Iris visits Turnus. Here are the Latin lines:

Atque ea diversa penitus dum parte geruntur,  
Irim de caelo misit Saturnia Iuno  
audacem ad Turnum. Luco tum forte parentis  
Pilumni Turnus sacrata valle sedebat.  
Ad quem sic roseo Thaumantias ore locuta est:

Here is Morris' version:

Now while a long way off therefrom do these and those such deed,  
Saturnian Juno Iris sends from heaven aloft to speed  
To Turnus of the hardy heart, abiding, as doth hap,  
Within his sire Pilumnus' grove in shady valley's lap;  
Whom Thumas' child from rosy mouth in suchwise doth bespeak:

In the illumination I noted Turnus' jousting shield and sixteenth-century burgonet helmet, also Iris' Botticellian pose and tresses, all foregrounded against the background of medieval hills and medieval border of holly. By contrast, against a background of Trojan material and Renaissance fourteener, the text here is marked by the preservation of difficult proper names (Thaumantias, Pilumnus) and especially by the Beowulfian epithet 'of the hardy heart' for 'audax'; I call it Beowulfian because, though Morris deploys 'of the hardy heart' and related phrases so frequently in his *Aeneid* translation as to seem almost to be crafting his own oral-poetic system of formulae,<sup>32</sup> he uses it even more frequently in his *Beowulf* of 1895 and also in the Icelandic translations that bracketed his *Aeneid* translation. Thus, once again, the historical emphasis is reversed as between text (with its medieval and Beowulfian foreground, classical and Renaissance background) and image (with its classical and Renaissance foreground, medieval background).

It will be seen, therefore, that Latin-language *Aeneid* manuscript and English-language *Aeneid* translation complement one another.<sup>33</sup> Since the former results from the vision of Morris the craftsman and the latter from the vision of Morris the bard, it is biographically interesting that the emphasis should fall on different periods in the different media, even as Morris' powerful will to assimilate and revivify historical styles was applied to each equally. In the sphere of aesthetics, however, such a juxtaposition may help us confront the question of anachronism, a charge that, as we have seen above, critics after the 1870s were wont to level at Morris' verse. An anachronistic work is nauseating because it perpetually jolts and dislocates the reader from one time-frame to another. Morris' 'sackless', for instance, for Virgil's *insons*, corresponds neither to the modern word for guiltlessness nor to the translation of *insons* to which we are accustomed ('innocent'). It therefore seems to belong neither to the Roman poet nor to us, and the feeling of being unable to pin down the context for a word is an unpleasant one. When a historical context for such unusual words *is* provided, however, the sense of helplessness is much diminished, even for words normally lying outside our contemporary frame of reference: if they are contextualized, we can read them as we read

<sup>32</sup> It is not usual for Morris' epithets to ride roughshod over the literal sense, and indeed he is often at pains to unpack the Latin meaning with a new coinage. It is all the most striking to find 'hardy-hearted', etc., frequently translating the core idea of 'courageous' but without reference to the exact meaning of the original.

<sup>33</sup> The complementarity is not total: there is no equivalent on the side of visual art for Morris' Beowulfian phraseology, perhaps because, before Sutton Hoo, Dark Age art was little known.

a familiar foreign language. In the case of Morris' *Aeneids*, I suggest, the presence of a complementary illuminated manuscript would satisfy precisely this need for a historical context: situated on a medievalistic vellum page, handwritten in humanistic script, nestled beneath an illumination reminiscent of the Renaissance, an archaic turn of phrase feels quite at home, whether it directly echoes the historical period represented physically on that page or whether it simply joins the perpetual historical motion overall; indeed, in such a context, more jarring by far would be the introduction of a prose translation in natural contemporary English. As for the translation on the level of language, so for the translation on the level of medium. Seen in isolation, Morris' *Aeneid* manuscript may well be classed, as MacCarthy writes, with that 'series of manuscripts [that] shows Morris at his most mid-Victorian'. These, she continues, 'have a certain formality, almost a sententiousness. They are also deeply personal, free-flowing, and bizarre', being 'at once beautiful and decorous yet fraught and slightly manic', resulting in 'a blurring of feeling and a layering of memory [that] is really much closer to French Surrealism and the haunting picture poems of Karel Teige and the Czech avant-garde' (MacCarthy, pp. 267–8). If this is the effect of the *Aeneid* manuscript today, I suggest that if it were viewed together with its creator's translation of its text, its artistic anachronism – an effect we have learned, in our postmodern age, to relish as opposed to condemn, as we do archaism in language – would likewise be greatly diminished, as Renaissance armour is historically echoed in the text's Renaissance metre, as medieval religious symbols like Venus' nimbus are echoed in the Arthurian diction of a 'holy senate' and a 'covenant of war'.

So I speculate. As things stand, we must experience Morris' manuscript and Morris' translation separately, but a single attitude to history and impulse to art gave birth to each of these two closely related acts of translation, the one layering language and the other layering artistic, decorative, and calligraphic styles of different periods. Neither recreates any particular *Aeneid* – not the manuscript that fell from Virgil's dying hand, not that of his ancient commentators, not Dante's, not Thomas Phaer's – but, in keeping with Morris' peculiar choice of title, each offers instead a joyful attempt to maximize historical complexity, one that weaves from many an *Aeneid* a final *Aeneids*. This effort of Morris' is only one translator's answer to the challenge of translating historicity, but it raises in turn the question of the general relationship between a translation's physicality and its attitude towards its source text's history. Perhaps there is something inherently essentializing in the creation of a physically neat, clean,

new text, whether in hardcover or in paperback or in digital form, with a single title, a single original author, and a single translator's name on the cover page, all in familiar contemporary fonts, no matter how much the translator may strive for historical multiplicity on the linguistic level of the text (as Morris did, I suggest, in 1874–5), the implication always being, 'My new *Aeneid* here is Virgil's.' So be it. But if we do feel an impulse to stretch the bounds of translation beyond the purely textual to include the historical, then the physical medium of the translation, as Morris shows, may well serve as the warp to textual history's woof. Perhaps today, when a text's physical presentation is more easily manipulable than in Morris' time, digital editions provide new opportunities to weave textual history into the reader's or viewer's experience of a translated classic; the results might not impose themselves like a freshly illuminated manuscript of the *Aeneid*, a discrete and tangible object the very weight and richness of which earns it a place in the tradition of its classic text, but they might, in keeping with Morris' own vision as I understand it, achieve something of the same effect more democratically.

*Dalhousie University*

Your short guide to the EUP Journals  
Blog <http://euppublishingblog.com/>

*A forum for discussions relating to  
[Edinburgh University Press Journals](#)*



EDINBURGH  
University Press

## 1. The primary goal of the EUP Journals Blog

To aid discovery of authors, articles, research, multimedia and reviews published in Journals, and as a consequence contribute to increasing traffic, usage and citations of journal content.

## 2. Audience

Blog posts are written for an educated, popular and academic audience within EUP Journals' publishing fields.

## 3. Content criteria - your ideas for posts

We prioritize posts that will feature highly in search rankings, that are shareable and that will drive readers to your article on the EUP site.

## 4. Word count, style, and formatting

- Flexible length, however typical posts range 70-600 words.
- Related images and media files are encouraged.
- No heavy restrictions to the style or format of the post, but it should best reflect the content and topic discussed.

## 5. Linking policy

- Links to external blogs and websites that are related to the author, subject matter and to EUP publishing fields are encouraged, e.g. to related blog posts

## 6. Submit your post

Submit to [ruth.allison@eup.ed.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.allison@eup.ed.ac.uk)

If you'd like to be a regular contributor, then we can set you up as an author so you can create, edit, publish, and delete your *own* posts, as well as upload files and images.

## 7. Republishing/repurposing

Posts may be re-used and re-purposed on other websites and blogs, but a minimum 2 week waiting period is suggested, and an acknowledgement and link to the original post on the EUP blog is requested.

## 8. Items to accompany post

- A short biography (ideally 25 words or less, but up to 40 words)
- A photo/headshot image of the author(s) if possible.
- Any relevant, thematic images or accompanying media (podcasts, video, graphics and photographs), provided copyright and permission to republish has been obtained.
- Files should be high resolution and a maximum of 1GB
- Permitted file types: *jpg, jpeg, png, gif, pdf, doc, ppt, odt, pptx, docx, pps, ppsx, xls, xlsx, key, mp3, m4a, wav, ogg, zip, ogv, mp4, m4v, mov, wmv, avi, mpg, 3gp, 3g2.*