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TRANSLATING MEMORY

Dryden, Oldham, and Friendship

Greg Clingham

A book is an extension of the imagination, of memory. Books are perhaps the only thing we know about the past, of our personal past also.

—Jorge Luis Borges¹

* I *

The ancient arts of translation and of memory are clearly linked to each other, though the association is not susceptible of easy formulation. Translation theory and studies of actual translations now form an independent field of humanistic study, and “memory” variously understood is central in understanding how poems in one language and of one historical moment are transformed and re-created in other languages and moments in time. Although history and memory differ, one important strand of historiographical thinking sees

¹ *Borges at Eighty: Conversations*, ed. Willis Barnstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 67.

memory as part of the deep structure of historical experience, whether that of national identity, literary history, aesthetics, trauma, or the autobiographical self.² Aristotle and Plato both incorporate into their respective narratives of the origin of memory the idea that writing and memory are closely related to each other, and that writing performs the functions of memory. Augustine and Locke develop the engrammatological idea of memory, as a form of inscription, whether inspired or historical,³ and recent philosophical discussions of the nature of representation suggest that memory is *the* mode of historical knowledge.⁴

In this essay I wish to consider how a particular poem by Dryden—"To the Memory of Mr. Oldham"—engages some basic ideas about translation and memory, even though it is, of course, not a translation strictly speaking. The publications associated with the tercentenary of Dryden's death in 2000 confirmed Dryden's status as a major poetic translator—a sea change in perspective that has been under way for twenty years—while at the same time he has become more fully known as a writer deeply interested in metamorphosis, one whose sensibility and practice transform what he engages, whether political, social, historical, scientific, or literary.⁵ Such views, once held by Samuel Johnson and Walter Scott, have been impressively developed by the

² See, for instance, Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) and Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Dancing in Chains: Narrative and Memory in Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1997) (national identity); Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) (literary history); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) (aesthetics); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) (trauma); and James Olney, *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) (autobiographical self).

³ See, e.g., the survey and discussion of memory and writing in Olney, *Memory and Narrative*, chapter 1, "Memory and the Narrative Imperative."

⁴ See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (vol. 1) and Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (vols. 2–3) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–88).

⁵ "For too long Dryden was looked on merely as a satirist and controversialist ... but the measure of [his] greatness can only be taken if we see him as a great translator too" (Charles Tomlinson, "Why Dryden's Translations Matter," *Translation & Literature* [special issue: *John Dryden, Classicist and Translator*, ed. Stuart Gillespie] 10.1 [2001]: 19). For the transformative nature of Dryden's imagination, see Cedric D. Reverand II, *Dryden's Final Poetic Mode: The Fables* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), chapter 6, "Philosophies of Change."

Longman annotated *Poems of John Dryden* and other work by Paul Hammond, Robin Sowerby, Stuart Gillespie, David Hopkins, and others.⁶ As Paul Hammond declared in 1999, "Translation was for Dryden the inescapable condition of the world, the shifting ground on which forms of singleness and stability could fashion."⁷ In short, it is now accepted that translation is a main way Dryden engages with history, culture, and national identity, and we estimate his corpus of translations—not only the versions of Virgil and Juvenal, but also those of Lucretius, Horace, Chaucer, and Boccaccio—as high as we once did the epic and heroic genres.

The subtle engagements that characterize Dryden's translations—the "comparative movement between past and present, which enabled a sharper understanding of their difference,"⁸ in Hammond's words—also describe Dryden's commemorative poem for John Oldham. "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" has been the subject of extensive comment,⁹ and we might feel that its allusive nuances have been sufficiently unpacked. Yet, Roger Chartier notes that while common ideas about authorship could be shared in the early modern period, "the same was not true of the form in which the irreducible singularity of style and sentiment was expressed."¹⁰ By attending to Dryden's "irreducible singularity" in his poem for John Oldham, I wish to suggest that it functions like a translation, and one whose highly wrought affiliation between personal feeling, memory, biography, elegy and criticism also reflects on the nature of friendship.

⁶ See, for instance, Taylor Corse, *Dryden's Aeneid: The English Virgil* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991); Paul Hammond, *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, eds., *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); *Translation and Literature* (special issue: *John Dryden, Classicist and Translator*, ed. Stuart Gillespie) 10.1 (2001); *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English. Vol. 3: 1660–1790*, ed. Stuart Gillespie and David Hopkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Robin Sowerby, "The Freedom of Dryden's Homer," *Translation and Literature* 5 (1996): 26–50 and *The Augustan Art of Poetry: Augustan Translation of the Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006); and Greg Clingham, "Translating Difference: The Example of Dryden's *Last Parting of Hector and Andromache*," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 33.2 (2000): 45–70.

⁷ *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome*, 150.

⁸ Paul Hammond, *The Making of Restoration Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 106.

⁹ "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" is reproduced at the end of this essay. The text, from which I quote, based on the first edition and reproducing the original spelling, is taken from *The Poems of John Dryden*, 4 vols., ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

¹⁰ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 36.

Mark van Doren was among the first to notice the synthetic nature of Dryden's composition, its engagement with many texts—"There's not an original word in the work [the Oldham poem]. It is a classical mosaic, pieces of what Dryden had had by him for a long time. It is precisely as a mosaic, as a composition, that it is triumphant"—and the invisibility of this poetic manner (transparency in T. S. Eliot's words).¹¹ We know that Dryden's poem is written out of his engagement with, and his use of the words and motifs of Virgil, Catullus, Seneca, Aulus Gellius, Shakespeare, Milton, Cowley, Sprat, Tonson, Roscommon, Oldham, and even his own. Prefixed to John Oldham's *Remains in Verse and Prose* (1684), "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" makes a scrupulous critical assessment of the poetry of Oldham (who had died in 1683), registering its strengths and weaknesses. It also develops an expansive human perspective on Oldham, feelingly measuring (through prosody, imagery, tone, rhythm, ideas, and judgment) the limits of Oldham's achievement against the pathos of his early death, and the limit of death itself when encountered by human action.

I will need to recapitulate some of the details of the composition of Dryden's poem, but I wish to suggest that the poem develops a poetics of friendship, a style that conjoins a concentrated poetic language with a strong human recollection of the mortal man. Derrida's words of lamentation for Roland Barthes are, perhaps, not unlike those by Dryden for Oldham: "These thoughts are *for him*, for Roland Barthes, meaning that I think of him and about him, not only of or about his work."¹² Yet, I shall also argue that Dryden and Oldham are separated experientially and poetically by Dryden's numbers—specifically his "harmony of numbers"—that enable Dryden to encompass, appropriate and translate Oldham's words into a new work. Indeed, a history of the composition of the poem demonstrates why Johnson described Dryden's genius as "that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates."¹³

In what follows, I first sketch out a general structure of thought for the poem in literary history. Two related sections then discuss the details

¹¹ Mark van Doren, *John Dryden: A Study of His Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 125; T. S. Eliot, *Homage to John Dryden: Three Essays on Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), 23.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35.

¹³ Samuel Johnson, "Life of Pope," in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, 4 vols., ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), IV: 65.

of Dryden's engagement with Oldham's own words as Dryden translated them into his peculiar "harmony of numbers." A final section returns to some general propositions about the translational nature of the Oldham poem and the idea of friendship that it fosters.

* II *

Dryden's poem recommends Oldham's poetry for its special qualities, and also for the extent to which it resembles Dryden's own poetry; it qualifies that praise by invoking and embodying standards against which Oldham's poetry is measured (11–14), and it then sifts Oldham's strengths and weaknesses (15–21). The last four lines praise Oldham's poetic achievement while invoking, as a general experience against which to situate itself, poetic standards as well as a moral experience of death. Of course, the manner of Dryden's poetic execution—the numbers of the native tongue—makes all the difference, and how Dryden's "numbers" bring about the translational move in this poem is the subject of this essay.

Situating Dryden's poem in the context of his development during the years 1684–85 adds depth to our understanding of the poem. During these years Dryden underwent something of an intellectual and religious sea change, which has been traced not only in his conversion to Catholicism, but also in the *Sylvae* translations, written in the second half of 1684 and published in 1685.¹⁴ The translations from Horace, Lucretius, and Virgil that comprise *Sylvae* constitute a comprehensive attempt to explore, from various intersecting perspectives, the question: how does a person live happily, with sensitivity both to the end of

¹⁴ Paul Hammond discusses Oldham's impact on Dryden's life and poetry in 1684 in "John Oldham: A Critical Study of the Origins and Developments of His Work with Special Reference to His Translations," Unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation (1978), esp. 280. For the intricate relations of *Sylvae* to Restoration poetry, see the notes to that work in *The Poems of John Dryden: Volume Two 1682–1685*, ed. Paul Hammond (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 234–385; for the relation between Dryden's conversion and his translations, see David Hopkins, *John Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 4 ("New Directions: Religion and Translations in the 1680s"), and Greg Clingham, "Another and the Same: Johnson's Dryden," in Earl Miner and Jennifer Brady, eds., *Literary Transmission and Authority: Dryden and Other Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 144–50. For a broader, fuller biographical discussion of Dryden's changes during the years 1683–88, see James Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), ch. 11.

things, and to the particulars of personal experience and daily life?¹⁵ The answer, which Dryden arrived at *via* his re-creation of (among others) “pagan” writers who would seem to resist his Christian beliefs, and in a sense comprehended in his translation of Horace’s *Epode II* that concludes the *Sylvae*, was that one should live in the present and find pleasure in temporal change.¹⁶

“To the Memory of Mr. Oldham” occupies a pivotal place in Dryden’s changing experience in the years 1684–85. The Horatian, pseudo-Epicurean sentiment that runs through *Sylvae*—“Enjoy the present smiling hour; / And put it out of Fortunes pow’r” (*Horace Odes III. 29*, ll. 50–51)¹⁷—does not easily apply to the elegy. The tone of this poem is bleaker and more chaste than the Horatian translations, even more so than the Lucretian. Yet those translations stand as markers and establish a contextual tone for the Oldham poem, whose allusiveness draws attention to its literariness and the many ways it intersects with other texts. Like Lucretius and Horace in relation to Dryden as translator, it is Oldham’s poetry *itself* that invites responsiveness, and enables Dryden to engage with the circumstances of the life and death of the young poet.¹⁸ Christopher Ricks points out how Dryden’s lifelong preoccupation with fathers, poetic lineage, and poetic authority is paralleled and animated by the nature of poetic allusion.¹⁹ In the Oldham poem these interests are variously embodied. Catullus’ “ave atque vale” (*Carmina* 101)—invoked by Dryden’s opening “Farewel” (1)—plays off the allusion to Virgil’s Marcellus (“hail and farewell;

¹⁵ For a discussion of *Sylvae* in this context, see Stuart Gillespie, “Dryden’s *Sylvae*. A Study of Dryden’s Translations from the Latin in the Second Tonson Miscellany, 1685,” Unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation (1987).

¹⁶ For Dryden’s pleasure in translating the materialist and atheist poet Lucretius, see Emrys Jones, “A ‘Perpetual Torrent’: Dryden’s Lucretian Style,” in Douglas Lane Patey and Timothy Keegan, eds., *Augustan Studies: Essays in Honor of Irvin Ehrenpreis* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 47–63; and Hopkins, *John Dryden*, 113–25. For discussion of Dryden’s *Beatus ille* ode in this context, see H. A. Mason, “Dryden’s Dream of Happiness,” *CQ* 8.1 (1978): 11–55; and “Dryden’s Dream of Happiness (II),” *CQ* 9.3 (1980): 218–71.

¹⁷ See Stuart Gillespie, “Horace’s *Ode 3.29*: Dryden’s ‘Masterpiece in English,’” in Charles Martindale and David Hopkins, eds., *Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 148–58.

¹⁸ For Walter Benjamin “translatibility” informs a text’s authority; see “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 69–82, and my application of the idea to Dryden in “Translating Difference,” 50.

¹⁹ Christopher Ricks, “The Poet as Heir,” in *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.

farewel thou young, / But ah too short, *Marcellus* of our Tongue" [ll. 22–23]), next in line after Augustus, who meets an untimely and tragic death. The allusions to the episode of Nisus and Euryalus from *Aeneid* V refer to the "race" to write the first notable English satire, since Oldham's *Satyrs upon the Jesuits* (1681) appeared a year before Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.²⁰ The race may also refer to the first substantial English poetic translations: as Hammond points out, Oldham's versions of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, *Satires* I, ix, and *Odes* I, xxxi and II, xiv appeared in *Some New Pieces* (1681), and his *Poems, and Translations* (1683) contained versions of Juvenal's *Satires* III and XIII, and of Boileau's *Satires* V and VIII, while Dryden only seriously began work as a translator in 1684.²¹

Dryden's allusiveness here, however, perhaps also includes suggestions of a race against time, which are immemorial. For instance, in his translation of Lucretius' "Against the Fear of Death," Dryden wrote:

Democritus perceiving age invade,
His Body weaken'd, and his mind decay'd,
Obey'd the summons with a chearful face;
Made hast to welcom death, and met him half the race. (255–58)²²

Cowley ("our admirable Cowley," "so excellent an author")²³ had also recently compared life to a race (in a translation of Horace's Ode III, 29):

Thus would I double my Life's fading space,
For he that runs it well, twice runs his race.²⁴

The Longman edition's notes identify numerous instances of the influence and inspiration of Montaigne's *Essais* (1580–95)—translated by Charles Cotton (1684)—in *Sylvae*. Montaigne uses the same metaphor as Dryden and Cowley do in dramatizing the relation of life to death. In

²⁰ See, e.g., *The Works of John Dryden*, 20 vols., ed. H. T. Swedenberg et al., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–), II: *Poems 1681–1684*, ed. Earl Miner, 385.

²¹ See *Poems of John Dryden*, ed. Hammond, II: 228.

²² Hammond notes the echo in ll. 7–10 of the Oldham poem; "John Oldham: A Study," 329n.

²³ Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence," *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, 2 vols., ed. George Watson (London: Everyman, 1962), I: 201, 203. This edition of Dryden's prose henceforth cited as Watson.

²⁴ Abraham Cowley, "Of My Self," *Several Discourses by way of Essays, in Verse and Prose*, in *Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 457.

the essay, "That to study Philosophy, is to learn to die," he quotes the following lines from Lucretius (*De Rerum natura*, II, ll. 75, 78):

Inter se mortales mutua vivunt,
Et quasi cursores vitae lampada tradunt.
[Mortals amongst themselves by turns do live,
And Life's bright Torch to the next Runner give.]²⁵

Both Cowley and Montaigne write in an easy essayistic style that links the personal and subjective with the universal, also linked with the images of the race with its suggestion of capacious, Epicurean attitudes to life.²⁶

Among the episodes from Virgil that Dryden translates for *Sylvae* are the stories of the death of Nisus and Euryalus from the *Aeneid*, Book XX, and of the death of Mezentius and Lausus from Book X, both examples of filial relationships and mutual sacrifices between younger and older men, which readers have understood as working to dramatize the poetic kinship that Dryden wishes to record between himself and Oldham ("Farewel, too little and too lately known, / Whom I began to think and call my own"). Hammond observes that the first three Virgil episodes published in *Sylvae* may also seek to dramatize in a broader context Dryden's sense of loss at Oldham's death.²⁷ Dustin Griffin, in turn, remarks that the poem is not "finally about friendship, or even about men in their full humanity, but rather about men as writers."²⁸ But this is perhaps to propose a misleading dichotomy between humanity and writing, and part of my intention is to draw attention to how concentration on artistic matters actually places Oldham's humanity at the center of the poem. Indeed, while the first ten lines of the poem establish

²⁵ *Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne. Made English by Charles Cotton*, 3 vols. (London, 1700), I: 114.

²⁶ For an excellent brief account of Cowley's Epicureanism, see David Hopkins, "Cowley's Horatian Mice," in *Horace Made New*, 103-26.

²⁷ Paul Hammond, *John Oldham and the Renewal of Classical Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 214.

²⁸ Dustin Griffin, "Dryden's 'Oldham' and the Perils of Writing," *Modern Language Quarterly* 37 (1977): 141. Thomas H. Fugimura proposes a similar dichotomy between the "biographical background" and Dryden's art in order to account for his manifestly personal presence in the poetry of his last fifteen years; "The Personal Element in Dryden's Poetry," *PMLA* 89.5 (1974): 1007-23. These critical positions might reflect the idea of poetic impersonality current in the New Criticism of the 1970s.

a literary parallel between the two writers, the artistic association cannot be divested of its more human content and implications of friendship, which become stronger as the poem unfolds. They become stronger by virtue—not in spite—of the poetic complexity of Dryden's own poem. Yet what Dryden actually feels in the poem is *not* the full presence of Oldham, or even something akin to Keats' "feel of not to feel it,"²⁹ he feels Oldham's absence, the *absence* of a presence that Oldham's language proposes yet fails to make available. How Dryden handles that absence is key to the power and the presence of his own poem.

* III *

The effortless transition from the first ten lines to the second part of the Oldham poem conveys both personal and literary concerns, a transition that might also reflect Dryden's imaginative appropriation of Montaigne's thought on the proper "philosophical" approach to death. David Hopkins argues that Montaigne is a pivotal transformative figure for Dryden in 1684–85.³⁰ Dryden's lines 11–21 thus attempt to accept and understand the limitations and the strengths of Oldham's poetry—to see it for what it is without rivalry or even without the overt affection we might imagine him feeling for a friend—but they simultaneously raise the idea of Oldham's death, and move toward an intuition about the nature of human effort in relation to its end. There is nothing unusual in Dryden merging literary and human concerns into one metaphor or narrative: we see him doing it beautifully in the architectural structure of "To My Dear Friend Mr. Congreve."³¹ But the intuition to make literary form and life vehicles for each other, as they are in the Oldham poem, are perhaps suggested to Dryden again by

²⁹ The line is from Keats' poem "In a drear-nighted December;" see John Jones, "Keats and 'The Feel of Not to Feel It,'" in D. W. Jefferson, ed., *The Morality of Art* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), 185–94.

³⁰ Hopkins, *John Dryden*, 120, 129, 186–87.

³¹ When Dryden flatters his patron, the Baron of Chudleigh, in the Preface to his translation of Virgil's *Pastorals*, he conveys both literary and human values at the same time in the same metaphor: "he soon dismissed himself from State affairs, yet in the short time of his administration he shone so powerfully upon me that, like the heat of a Russian summer, he ripened the fruits of poetry in a cold climate; and gave me wherewithal to subsist at least in the long winter which succeeded" (Watson, II: 217).

Montaigne's essay "That to study Philosophy, is to learn to die," in which we find the following passage just preceding the Lucretian quotation above:

Nature compels us to it; Go out of this World, says she, as you enter'd into it; the same Pass you made from Death to Life, without Passion or Fear, the same, after the same manner, repeat from Life to Death. Your Death is a part of the Order of the Universe, 'tis a part of the Life of the World. (I: 113)

In the Oldham poem—as the emotional restraint of lines 11–21 is magnified by their clear concentration on particulars—Dryden finds a *general* significance in the relations between Oldham's art and his prematurely ended life. The "numbers of thy native tongue" are crucial here. When Dryden writes:

But Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line (15–16)

and

Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime
Still shew'd a quickness; and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of Rhime (19–21)

he exercises a conscious wit as his verse embodies the qualities he finds to be *absent* in Oldham's poems. "Numbers" is Dryden's metrical proficiency and his command of rhythm and meter; it is also what gives form and body to the deep, pleasurable grasp and rendition of human experience and of temporal change embodied in his translations and that informs the Oldham poem. For instance, of his version of Virgil's *Aeneis*, Dryden notes: "I have endeavoured to follow the example of my master, and am the first Englishman, perhaps, who made it his design to copy him in his numbers, his choice of words, and his placing them for the sweetness of the sound" (Watson, II: 234). These were among the qualities that prompted Johnson to say of the pleasure of reading Dryden's Virgil that "Works of imagination excel by their allurements and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention" ("Life of Dryden," *Lives*, II: 147).

Johnson, too, knows that these large experiential effects are dependent on the technical art of poetry, for Dryden knows, "how to chuse the flowing and the sonorous words; to vary the pauses, and adjust the accents; to diversify the cadence, and yet preserve the smoothness of his metre" (II: 153). These skills make for the pleasure and the harmony Dryden identifies as essential in adapting his style and methods of composition when recreating the "character" or "genius" of the poets he translates.³² These arts persuade Johnson to affirm: "To him [Dryden] we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and much of the correctness of our sentiments" (II: 155).³³ Technical perfection is clearly no nugatory achievement or merely auditory music. For Geoffrey Hill it brings into being a harmony that embraces the Oldham poem's extremities of affirmation and despondency: "the technical perfecting of a poem is an act of atonement, in the radical etymological sense—an act of at-one-ment, a setting at one, bringing into concord, a reconciling, a uniting in harmony."³⁴

Still, how does Dryden's technical ability lend itself to his overall narrative vision of Oldham? My proposition is that Dryden imagines Oldham's poems as frozen in a perpetual state of incompleteness—the difference and the gap between their two "souls" represented by the "numbers of thy native Tongue." "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" thus creates a new entity from Oldham's fragments, and generates a harmony (Hill's atonement) when engaging the circumstances of Oldham's poetic incompleteness, which are also the circumstances of Oldham's life and death.³⁵ We might therefore recognize the advent of deeply inflected, hybrid term—"harmony of numbers"—that, as Dryden deploys it, mediates between himself and Oldham, creating the memory for Oldham that Oldham is unable to create for himself. In doing so, I propose, the Oldham poem is no different from Dryden's general practice in creating new poems and cultural memories in his translations

³² See, for instance, Preface to *Sylvae*, Watson, II: 20–21.

³³ For a discussion of this aspect of Johnson's reading of Dryden, see Greg Clingham, "Another and the Same: Johnson's Dryden," in Earl Miner and Jennifer Brady, eds., *Literary Transmission and Authority: Dryden and Other Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121–59.

³⁴ Geoffrey Hill, *Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 2.

³⁵ See Geoffrey Hill, *The Enemy's Country: Words, Contexture, and Other Circumstances of Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 74–80.

of Horace, Lucretius, Virgil, Homer, and Chaucer, of whom he says in the "Preface to *Fables*": "I have often omitted what I judged unnecessary...and added somewhat of my own where I thought my author was deficient...I have translated some parts of his works only that I might perpetuate his memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my countrymen" (Watson, II: 287, 289).

* IV *

"Harmony of numbers" includes both the "song" and the "suffering" to which, as Seamus Heaney writes, the poet of witness needs to be equally true and responsive.³⁶ How does the Virgilian allusion in the last lines of Dryden's poem promote that end? The young Marcellus may be victorious, but his deeds and the record of his "tragic" death live on only in Virgil's verse. If Oldham is a "young Marcellus" to Dryden's "great Marcellus" the poem maintains a double edge. In *Aeneid* VI Anchises describes the "Godlike Youth" as "How like the former, and *almost* the same" (Dryden's version, VI, 1195; my emphasis). For Ricks, this thought "sum[s] up in one line both a true lineage and the true poetic lineage manifested in the art of allusion,"³⁷ yet its calibration, the similarity within difference also clearly measures the distance between the living and the dead, and between the present and the past—

But hov'ring Mists around his Brows are spread,
And Night, with sable Shades, involves his Head
(*Aeneid*, VI, ll. 1198-99)

—just as its echo does at the end of the Oldham poem:

Thy Brows with Ivy, and with Laurels bound;
But Fate and gloomy Night encompass thee around. (24-25)

The irony hardly confirms the transcendence of human or poetic effort when facing death. Yet neither is the poem as bleak as Griffin would

³⁶ Seamus Heaney, "The Interesting Case of Nero, Checkhov's Cognac and a Knocker," in *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), xii.

³⁷ "The Poet as Heir," 12.

have it. What accounts for its peculiar poetic harmony is to be sought in Dryden's particular "numbers."

Dryden's poem incorporates an unusually large number of Oldham's own words. Its harmony is a direct effect of *how* Dryden translates those words from one poem into another. Indeed, some of Dryden's most effective transitions and turns use Oldham's own verse. For example, Dryden's pivotal allusion—

But Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line (15–16)

—appropriates Oldham's lines as Dryden pays Oldham a compliment by repeating his words, while quite transforming his thought. In *Horace His Art of Poetry* (1681) Oldham had written:

Some, who would have us think they meant to treat
At first on Arguments of greatest weight,
Are proud, when here and there a glittering line
Does through the mass of their coarse rubbish shine. (22–25)³⁸

To this thought Dryden seems imaginatively to have associated an image in Oldham's poem on Jonson, one of the "Gyant Race, before the Flood" (one of Dryden and Oldham's poetic touchstones)—Jonson, "the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing" (Watson, I: 70).³⁹

With rigour thou arraign'dst each guilty line,
And didst of each offending word define,
And spar'dst no criminal Sence, because 'twas thine.
(*Upon the Works of Ben. Jonson* [1678], 201–3)

These lines, in turn, seemed to bring to Dryden's mind a further image and a cadence in the same poem:

³⁸ *The Poems of John Oldham*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, with the collaboration of Raman Selden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 91. This edition cited parenthetically for all quotations from Oldham's poems.

³⁹ For Dryden's use of Jonson as he discusses ideas of poetic succession in *Mac Flecknoe*, see Hammond, *The Making of Restoration Poetry*, 168–73.

Rich in thy self, to whose unbounded store
Exhausted Nature could vouchsafe no more. (171-72)⁴⁰

Oldham's admiration for Jonson's richness clearly forms the context for Dryden's question posed to the abundant but not yet "numbered" Oldham:

to thy abundant store
What could advancing Age have added more? (ll. 11-12)

The answer and the qualification (13-16) create the context for the discriminative irony by which Oldham is made to measure himself against Jonson ("how like the former, and *almost* the same"), and, as I am arguing, also provides a standard for the "numbers of thy native tongue."

In addition to the Virgilian allusions that contextualize Dryden's familial poetic impulses, the imagined bond of kinship in the Oldham poem owes something to Oldham's own exploration of similar literary relationships. Oldham's lines about the friendship of David and Jonathan (I Samuel chapter 20) were particularly poignant for Dryden:⁴¹

Both excellent they were, both equally alli'd
On Nature, and on Valour's side: (ll. 119-120)

Together they did both the paths to Glory trace,
Together hunted in the noble Chace,
Together finish'd their united Race: (ll. 127-29)

Oh, dearer than my Soul! If I can call it mine,
For sure we had the same, 'twas very thine,
(*David's Lamentation For the Death of Saul and Jonathan* [1677],
204-5)

These verbal and rhythmic echoes of Oldham in Dryden's lines—"For sure our Souls were near ally'd; and thine / Cast in the same Poetick mould with mine" (3-4)—maintain the sense of personal closeness

⁴⁰ This echo noted by Hammond, "John Oldham: A Study," 279.

⁴¹ This echo noted in the Longman edition to the line (230), and by Hammond, "John Oldham: A Study," 279.

between the two men. If we admit a reference to coinage in "Cast in the same Poetick mould with mine" (4), and a play on "alloy" in "near ally'd" (3), then the personal connection between the two men acquires its wider association in literary history. Imagery linking poetry with gold, diamonds, and coins was commonplace in late seventeenth-century French and English literature, and the discussion of true wit in the Restoration.⁴² Dominique Bouhours's description of wit as a "brillant solide," William Atterbury's account of how Waller transformed English poetry,⁴³ and Dryden's well known association of such imagery with translation and poetic creativity in, *inter alia*, the Preface to *Fables*, when he refers to Chaucer as a "rough diamond, and must first be polished ere he shines" (Watson, II: 286), these are all expressions of a similar critical sensibility and preoccupation that Dryden brings to bear on Oldham's poems.

When Dryden wrote "Wit will shine / Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line" he was also, again, appropriating the thoughts and words of Oldham on Ben Jonson, Oldham's "brillant solide":

Thine was no empty vapour, rais'd beneath,
And form'd of common breath,
The false and foolish fire, that's whisk'd about
By popular Air, and glares awhile, and then go's out:
But 'twas a solid, whole and perfect globe of light,
That shone all over, was all over bright...

(*Upon the Works of Ben. Johnson*, ll. 266–71)

These lines by Oldham on Jonson suggest what Samuel Johnson will later, in the "Life of Cowley," call a "noble and adequate" form of

⁴² For example, in the Preface to the *Aeneis* Dryden discusses his own verse in terms that associate wit, gold coinage, prosody, numbers, and translation: "I have endeavoured to follow the example of my master, and am the first Englishman, perhaps, who made it his design to copy him in his numbers, his choice of words, and his placing of them for the sweetness of the sound ... Such difference there is in tongues, that the same figure which roughens one gives majesty to another: and that was it [the caesura] which Virgil studied in his verses ... The Italians are forced upon it once or twice in every line, because they have a redundancy of vowels in their language. Their metal is too soft that it will not coin without alloy to harden it" (Watson, II: 234–35).

⁴³ Dominique Bouhours, "Le Bel Esprit," *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* (1671) (Paris: Bonsard, 1920); Thomas Atterbury, Preface to the Second Part of Edmund Waller, *Works* (London, 1690): "The Tongue came into his hands, like a rough Diamond; he polished it first, and to that degree that..."

wit, a poetic artifice that feels “at once natural and new,” as distinguished from the conceit or “false wit” identified with Donne’s metaphysical style (*Lives*, I: 200).⁴⁴ For both Oldham and Dryden, Jonson’s poetry brings words and things together uniformly and completely so that its truth shines forth (“a solid, whole and perfect globe of light, / That shone all over”), and Dryden recalls this image, and its association, when he distinguishes between the strength and weakness of Oldham’s wit.

Bearing in mind Dryden’s metaphoric link between “numbers,” “sweetness” and coinage we can now see Dryden also appropriating Oldham’s words in *David’s Lamentation For the Death of Saul and Jonathan* when forming his complex intuition and judgment about Oldham’s verse and fusing it with his sense of absence and finality at the death of the young poet:

Ah, worthy Prince! would I for thee had dyed!
 Ah, would I had thy fatal place supplied!
 I’d then repaid a Life, which to thy gift I owe,
 Repaid a Crown, which Friendship taught thee to forgo;
 Both Debts, I ne’er can cancel now:
 Oh, dearer than my Soul! If I can call it mine,
 For sure we had the same, ’twas very thine,
 Dearer than Light, or Life, or Fame,
 Or Crowns, or any thing, that I can wish, or think, or name:
 (199–207)

In drawing on Oldham’s lines, in both the poem on Ben Jonson and *David’s Lamentation*, Dryden remembers the poetic experience and the particular metaphors deployed by Oldham when he talks about Oldham’s wit shining through lines that are dissonant (“harsh”) in comparison to Jonson’s, and also in comparison to Dryden’s own in this very poem to the memory of Oldham. Dryden’s impersonality (“For sure our Souls were near ally’d; and thine / Cast in the same Poetick mould with mine”) is part of a natural process indifferent to human

⁴⁴ Samuel Johnson, “Life of Cowley,” *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, 4 vols., ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), I: 200. For a fuller discussion of Johnson on the wit of Donne and Jonson, see Greg Clingham, *Johnson, Writing and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43–52.

endeavor, and captured by the artistic perfection of his poem's surface. Perhaps Eliot had this effect in mind when he said that Dryden's words "state immensely, but their suggestiveness is almost nothing."⁴⁵ But it is difficult to see how Eliot could have deduced from the "satisfying completeness of the statement" that Dryden "lacked insight, he lacked profundity" (23). For the impersonal movement of nature implicit in the fruit imagery ("thy generous fruits") recalls the long tradition of similar metaphorical usage by Shakespeare, Cowley, and Milton to place human beings within the beautiful yet indifferent process of unfolding time.⁴⁶ The temporal impersonality of Dryden's Oldham poem, as it bears on human action and powerlessness, resonates with Dryden's embrace of these themes in his translations of Horace and Lucretius in *Sylvae*. And Montaigne, once again, illuminates the tone and perspective with which Dryden approaches these issues in the Oldham poem. Montaigne's essay "To Study Philosophy, is to Learn to Die," informs the perspective with which the Oldham poem embraces those temporal realities:

Where-ever your Life ends it is all there; neither does the Utility of living consist not in the length of days, but in the well husbanding and improving of Time, and such an one may have been who has longer continued in the World than the ordinary Age of Man; that has yet liv'd but a little while. Make use of Time while it is present with you. It depends upon your Will, and not upon the number of Days, to have a sufficient length of Life. Is it possible you can imagine ever to arrive at the Place towards which you are continually going? and yet there is no Journey but hath its end....Every Day travels

⁴⁵ *Homage to John Dryden*, 22.

⁴⁶ Milton had given the angel Michael some classic lines about how to live happily in the world that turn time and age into the experience of physical beauty and spiritual significance:

... if thou well observe
The rule of not too much, by temp'rance taught,
In what thou eat'st and drink'st, seeking from thence
Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight,
Till many years over thy head return:
So may'st thou live, till like ripe fruit thou drop
Into thy mother's lap, or be with ease
Gather'd, not harshly pluck'd, for death mature:
This is old age. (*Paradise Lost*, XI: 530-38)

towards Death, the last only arrives at it. These are the good Lessons our Mother Nature teaches. (*Essays*, I: 118, 120-21)

* V *

Far from lacking in suggestiveness, the peculiar power of "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" arises *from excess* of its stated meaning, though that signification is inseparable from the stated meaning. This tonal polarity is unique to Dryden, and this poem brings into focus the special coincidence of life and art which confronted him by Oldham's situation, as that resonated with Dryden's intellectual preoccupations in 1684-85. These associations prompt a biographical speculation. When Dryden came to write a poem for Oldham's *Remains*, he probably reread Oldham's works with awareness and sympathy for the facts of the young man's life and death,⁴⁷ and also with a keen eye for the beauties and blemishes of the poems. Dryden recognized and was willing to acknowledge his indebtedness to Oldham. I conjecture his being struck and moved by certain things in Oldham's poems, yet also convinced that Oldham was *not* a writer whose poems and whose name were likely to last, unlike his sense on first looking into *Paradise Lost*. Dryden felt the absence in Oldham of some qualities to do with what he calls "numbers" and with the pathos of the young man's untimely death. Dryden's way of acknowledging what he had seen when pondering the life and writings of John Oldham in relation to each other, was to imagine Oldham as he would have been had he lived, a risen and redeemed Oldham, as it were, such as he imagines when commemorating the lesser poet Anne Killigrew. The form this fantasy takes in "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" is a poem of the quality Oldham himself *might* have written had he lived and matured. Therein Dryden assimilates and transforms Oldham's own words into a new poem that acknowledges the nature of the originals while going beyond them:

Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.

⁴⁷ See James Zigerell, *John Oldham* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), ch. 1.

The irony of the allusiveness by which Dryden uses Oldham's own words to create the harmony of numbers he does not actually find in Oldham, is an audacious act of translation. Pondering the question posed by David Ferry—

Could the music restore
Blood to the veins of the empty shade of one
Who has died? ("Ode i. 24, To Virgil," ll. 16–17)⁴⁸

—Dryden sees the mortal man in the course of nature sink into the grave. But he gathers together the remains, Oldham's words, into a new poem in order to transmit his memory to posterity in his *Remains*.⁴⁹ Time is thus reconfigured through the art of the commemorating poet as translator, and not as a favor of the gods. In the words of David Ferry, once more:

The discovering is an ordering in time
Such that one seems to chance upon one's own
Birth name strangely engraved upon a stone
In consequence of the completion of the rhyme.
(“Of Rhyme,” ll. 9–12)⁵⁰

Having felt the absoluteness of the division between himself and Oldham in death (“Fate and gloomy Night encompass thee around”), and having felt the inability of Oldham's words to cross that dark river without the assistance of the ferryman, Dryden actively creates a memory of Oldham, and a memory *for* him. This entails bringing Oldham into the public and historical world, into the consciousness of his contemporaries, in a way he would not otherwise have been. In

⁴⁸ David Ferry, *Of No Country I Know: New and Selected Poems and Translations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 256.

⁴⁹ Zigerell opens his book on Oldham with an eloquent reflection along these lines: “The spirits of some poets are doomed to haunt the edges of the shades wherein dwell the ghosts of their more fortunate brothers whose literary reputations have outlived their own age. Later generations of readers either ignore these unlucky ones or, if they remember them at all, are unsure as to the lasting worth of their achievement. The dealers in literary reputations—the academic critics and literary historians—differ among themselves as to whether these unhappy spirits deserve standing as poets in themselves or are fit only to be regarded as figures foreshadowing or reflecting the qualities of their greater contemporaries. So it is with [John Oldham]” (1).

⁵⁰ Ferry, *Of No Country I Know*, 186.

doing this, Dryden's textual, personal relation to Oldham is somewhat like his relation to his Horatian and Lucretian originals in *Sylvae*:

I have both added and omitted, and even sometimes very boldly made expositions of my authors, as no Dutch commentator will forgive me. Perhaps, in such particular passages, I have thought that I discovered some beauty yet undiscovered by those pedants, which none but a poet could have found....I have translated some parts of his works only that I might perpetuate his memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my countrymen. (Preface to *Sylvae*, Watson, II: 19)

Like Dryden's general posture in his translations of the Classics and of the modern poets Chaucer and Boccaccio, his poem on Oldham enacts a kind of secular redemption, making bold expositions that recover and re-imagine the identity of the original in order to "perpetuate his memory" among Dryden's contemporaries. Dryden's poem is among those works that, in Umberto Eco's words, "splendidly enrich the target language and that, in cases that many consider to be felicitous, manage to say more (in other words, are richer in suggestion) than the originals."⁵¹ For Eco, such a poem "might be an excellent piece of work in itself, but it is not a good translation" (45). Yet in an instance in which practice conspicuously counteracts theory, the textual and biographical circumstances of Dryden's poem confirm a translational power. It is especially poignant because it canonizes Oldham, and thus gives him a name, one that exists in literary history as a sign of the author of *Satyrs upon the Jesuits* (1681), *Some New Pieces* (1681), and *Poems, and Translations* (1683), all of which were published anonymously.⁵²

Poetic anonymity was common in seventeenth-century England. Paul Hammond notes: "for Oldham anonymity was his way of fashioning a freedom from the loss of personal and professional integrity which he saw as characteristic of the Restoration literary world."⁵³ Only with the posthumous publication of *Remains* (1684) does Oldham's name appear on the title page of his book. The creation of the

⁵¹ Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, trans. Alastair McEwan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 45.

⁵² See Paul Hammond, *Making of Restoration Poetry*, 56–57.

⁵³ Hammond, *Making of Restoration Poetry*, 60–61.

author we know as John Oldham is thus part of the history of the book in the seventeenth century. It is also partly a product of Dryden's poetic intervention, as it is of others whose poems preface *Remains in Verse and Prose*.⁵⁴ Indeed, Jacques Derrida identifies friendship with the invention of the "proper name" in philosophy.⁵⁵ Dryden would have understood the challenges facing Oldham and the need for privacy, and appreciated Oldham's Horatian fantasy of a quiet country life:

There, free from Noise, and all ambitious ends, Enjoy a few
choice Books, and fewer Friends, Lord of my self, account-
able to none, But to my Conscience, and my God alone:
There live unthought of, and unheard of, die, And grudge
Mankind my very memory. ("A Satyr Address'd to a Friend,"
ll. 119–24)

Yet Dryden perhaps saw this literary conceit as having an ironically deleterious application to Oldham's poetic afterlife—his "very memory"—that would be counterproductive. Like Borges, in the epigraph to this essay, Dryden's rewriting of Oldham in "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" seems to understand that "A book is an extension of the imagination, of memory. Books are perhaps the only thing we know about the past, of our personal past also."

Dryden's discussions of the history and the practice of poetic translation indicate that he did not share Benjamin's ideal of a universal language, and none of his actual translations suggest that he believed in or attempted to realize such a thing. Recognizing as much, Hammond remarks: "To translate is, literally, to carry over, but the impossibility of translation is a commonplace. Nothing can be carried over, but something new can be built on a similar ground-plan."⁵⁶ But this in its

⁵⁴ Besides Dryden those prefatory poets include Thomas Flatman, N.T., Thomas Durfey, Thomas Andrews, T. Wood, and Robert Gould. Three of the prefatory poems are unsigned. Brooks and Selden print Dryden's poem as an epigraph to their Oxford edition of the poems.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York and London: Verso, 1997), 251.

⁵⁶ *Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome*, 21.

turn may be to apply an inverse and unreal idea of purity. Dryden stands somewhere in between, in the hybrid realm of memory. For in the mythic world of the translator Charon does not ferry the original poet over the Styx in only one direction, towards death! The translator is really like Charon's unsung brother, who returns the dead to life. In friendship and in poetic truthfulness, Dryden ferries Oldham back over the river into new engagements and relationships, and into the current of English literary history.

✱ Appendix "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham" ✱

Farewel, too little and too lately known,	1
Whom I began to think and call my own;	2
For sure our Souls were near ally'd; and thine	3
Cast in the same Poetick mould with mine.	4
One common Note on either Lyre did strike,	5
And Knaves and Fools we both abhorr'd alike:	6
To the same Goal did both our Studies drive,	7
The last set out the soonest did arrive.	8
Thus <i>Nisus</i> fell upon the slippery place,	9
While his young Friend perform'd and won the Race.	10
O early ripe! to thy abundant store	11
What could advancing Age have added more?	12
It might (what Nature never gives the young)	13
Have taught the numbers of thy native Tongue.	14
But Satyr needs not those, and Wit will shine	15
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.	16
A noble Error, and but seldom made,	17
When Poets are by too much force betray'd.	18
Thy generous fruits, though gather'd ere their prime	19
Still shew'd a quickness; and maturing time	20
But mellow what we write to the dull sweets of Rime.	21
Once more, hail and farewell; farewell thou young,	22
But ah too short, <i>Marcellus</i> of our Tongue;	23
Thy Brows with Ivy, and with Laurels bound;	24
But Fate and gloomy Night encompass thee around.	25