

Addison's Classical Criticism and the Origins of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics

Joseph Addison's fame as a critic—like his literary reputation in general—rests on The Spectator.¹ In particular, his series of Spectator papers on 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (June–July 1712) is widely recognised as marking the epochal transition from the author-centred neoclassical poetics of England's 'Augustan age' to the new reader-centred, psychological mode of eighteenth-century aesthetics. But long before he became Mr. Spectator, during the first phase of his literary career as a scholar-poet at Oxford in the 1690s, Addison produced two substantial critical works about classical poets: 'An Essay on the Georgics', prefixed to the translation of the poem in John Dryden's complete Works of Virgil (1697); and what I'll refer to as his 'Notes on Ovid', notes Addison appended to his translations from Books II and III of the Metamorphoses published in the fifth instalment of Jacob Tonson's Poetical Miscellanies (1704). These works were much admired in Addison's lifetime and for generations afterwards: Samuel Johnson found in the Ovid notes 'specimens of criticism sufficiently refined and subtle',² while the 'Essay' 'set the terms for discussion of georgic poetry for over a century'.³ Today, though, they are little known, even to specialists in the period. What scholarly discussion they have received has sought to establish how far they anticipate Addison's later aesthetic principles. However, all these existing accounts are marred to a greater or lesser extent by mistakes and misconceptions about Addison's early career carried over from nineteenth-century sources. The first half of this article corrects these errors, particularly regarding the composition dates of the two works and the order in which they were written. The date usually given for the 'Essay' is 1693 and for the 'Notes' 1697. Drawing on a wealth of hitherto unreported evidence, I show that these dates are back to front: in fact, Addison wrote the 'Notes on Ovid' in 1693-4 and the 'Essay on the Georgics' in 1696-7.

In the second half of the article, I use that revised chronology to offer a new account of the place of Addison's classical criticism in his personal development as a critic and the history of criticism more generally around the turn of the eighteenth century. The five years from 1693 to 1697, often dismissed as the 'juvenile' or 'student' stage of Addison's career by commentators for whom everything he wrote before The Spectator is mere prelude, were in fact a richly productive and pivotal period in Addison's writing life, his heyday as a classical scholar-poet. Before 1693, he was indeed a novice writer, with only a couple of neo-Latin panegyrics to his name; but by 1697 he had produced all but one of his major classical translations, which won the respect of Dryden, and the set of eight boldly innovative neo-Latin imitations of Virgil and Horace which made his name in learned circles across Europe. Situating Addison's classical criticism correctly within this period of rapid creative growth is vital. Backdating the 'Notes on Ovid' to 1693-4 does not make them 'juvenile' works; on the contrary, as I suggest in a brief discussion, the earlier dating serves to reveal the full extent of their originality. But correcting the date of the 'Essay on the Georgics' from 1693 to 1696-7 has more far-reaching implications, explored at length here. The mid-1690s were especially fertile years for critical thinking about Virgil in England, spurred by the great project of Dryden's Virgil. Addison capitalised on this boom in his 'Essay', drawing in particular on two works translated into English in 1694 and 1695 which offered advanced variants of neoclassical ideas about the Aeneid. In the final section of the article, by tracing Addison's debts to these works, and pinpointing where he went beyond them, I read the 'Essay on the Georgics' as a watershed in his evolution as a critic and in the wider transition from neoclassicism to the psychological aesthetics of the coming age. I explain how it was that Addison effectively invented eighteenth-century aesthetics not in The Spectator but fifteen years earlier—and in an essay on Virgil's Georgics, the most Augustan poet's most Augustan poem.

Notes on Ovid

Two dates for the composition of Addison's 'Notes on Ovid' are current in modern scholarship: 1697 and 1704. The first is certainly wrong, stemming from a combination of errors on points of fact; and the second, an assumption based on the appearance of the notes in Tonson's fifth miscellany, is contradicted by a heavy weight of evidence. The 1697 dating can be disposed of quickly. It owes its present currency to an article by William Youngren, published in 1982 but still widely cited: 'Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics'. In that article, Youngren contrasted Addison's (supposedly) earlier and conventionally neoclassical 'Essay on the Georgics' with the forward-looking Lockean 'Ovid notes of 1697'.⁴ In the first instance, he got the date from Bonamy Dobrée: he cites Dobrée's reference in English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century (1959) to 'the notes in Ovid's Metamorphoses of 1697' (Y 270). That mixes up Addison's notes with the first volume of Nahum Tate's abortive Ovid's Metamorphosis, Translated by Several Hands (1697); apparently recognising as much, Youngren tracked down Dobrée's source for the 1697 date, the biography of Addison published in 1884 by the Victorian critic and editor W. J. Courthope.⁵ He quoted Courthope's claim that the Ovid notes show 'the foundations of [Addison's] critical method were laid at this period (1697).' (Y 271); but that claim itself rested on Courthope's mistaken belief that Addison's version of 'the second book of the Metamorphoses ... was first printed in the volume of Miscellanies that appeared in 1697'.⁶ No volume with that exact title was published in 1697; there were two collections of Miscellany Poems—one by John Dennis and one co-published by William Rogers in London and Francis Hicks in Cambridge—but of course neither contained Addison's Ovid translations or their accompanying notes.

The case against the 1704 dating is more complicated. Commentators who give this date are referring to the publication of the notes in the fifth part of Tonson's Poetical Miscellanies (which actually came out in December 1703) whilst applying it, more or less explicitly, to their composition too. Thus, in an article from 2001 on 'Addison's Aesthetics of Novelty', Scott Black, suggested:

between the essay on the *Georgics* (1697) and the "Pleasures" (1712), Addison adjusts his account of the middle style in terms of Ovid, the exemplar of novelty. In the "Notes on Ovid", appended to his translations from the Metamorphoses (1704), Addison repeats his complaint of the lack of critical appreciation of the middle style.⁷

Plainly, that argument depends on Addison's notes having been composed shortly before they were published. But all the available evidence indicates that the opposite was the case—that Addison wrote them about a decade before they appeared in Tonson's 1704 miscellany. The key to realising this is the fact that Addison's Ovid translations were originally intended to form part of the complete multi-author version of the Metamorphoses that Dryden and Tonson began putting together in the winter of 1692-3.⁸ Dryden's rendering of 'The First Book of Ovid's Metamorphoses', published in July 1693 in Tonson's third miscellany Examen Poeticum, was a pilot for the scheme, intended to whet the appetite of potential subscribers. Then Addison, Dryden's new young classicist friend,⁹ 'carried Ovid's poem forward from the point where Dryden had stopped' with his versions of Books II and III.¹⁰ However, the Metamorphoses project was abandoned shortly afterwards, when Dryden and Tonson decided to undertake the complete Virgil instead. This happened towards the end of 1693: although the contract for the Virgil was not signed until 15 June 1694, Dryden told William Walsh in a letter on 12 December 1693 that he had 'undertaken to translate all

Virgil', and then John Evelyn in January 1694 that he was 'intent upon the translation of Virgil'.¹¹

He presumably let Addison know at around the same time, while holding court one afternoon in Will's Coffee-House perhaps. We can get some idea of how Addison felt on receiving the news from a letter he sent Tonson from Oxford on 12 February 1695 in which he reported his friend and fellow collegian Thomas Yalden's response to hearing that the Virgil had put paid to the translation of the Ars Amatoria he and Dryden were supposed to be working on together:

I was walking this morning with Mr. Yalden and askt him when we might expect to see Ovid de Arte Amandi in English, he told me that he thought you had dropt the Design since Mr. Dridans Translation of Virgil had been Undertaken, but that he had done his part almost a Year ago and had it Laying by him &c.¹²

That '&c.' draws a veil over Yalden's grumbles, but Addison must have known how he felt: he too had been left with his translations from the Metamorphoses 'laying by him'. In his next surviving letter to Tonson, on 28 May 1695, he tried to interest the publisher in bringing out his version of Book II separately, greasing the wheels with a liberal application of flattery:

Your discourse with me about translating Ovid, made such an impression on me at my first coming down from London, that I ventured on the 2nd Book, which I turnd at my leisure hours, and will give you a sight of, if you will give yourself the trouble of reading it.¹³

Apparently, he no longer expected the Metamorphoses project to be revived. His hope now was that Tonson would publish his intended contributions to it as free-standing extracts in the 1695 instalment of his miscellanies. In the event, though, Tonson was too busy with Dryden's Virgil to keep up the yearly sequence,¹⁴ and it would be another eight years before Addison's translations from the *Metamorphoses* saw the light of day in Poetical Miscellanies: the Fifth Part.

All of which leaves open two possible dates for the composition of the Ovid notes. Either Addison wrote them at the same time as his Metamorphoses translations themselves—that is, between the summer of 1693 and the early months of 1694—or else he added them in 1703, specifically to stand alongside the translations in Tonson's fifth miscellany. Conclusive proof is not available either way, and the later date cannot be ruled out entirely. Although Addison was still travelling in Europe in 1703, he spent much of the spring and summer of that year in Amsterdam, the centre of the European book-trade, which would have afforded him access to the necessary scholarly materials.¹⁵ When he and Tonson met there in May we might imagine that Tonson encouraged him to finalize the Remarks on Several Parts of Italy and any items of verse he had to contribute to the long-delayed but now forthcoming miscellany. We know from a letter Addison's friend the diplomat-poet George Stepney sent Tonson in March of that year that the bookseller was pressing him for material.¹⁶ In principle, then, Addison could have written the Ovid notes in Holland in 1703, but this is a purely theoretical possibility. At most, we might suppose that Addison gave the notes a final once-over before their appearance in Tonson's miscellany (assuming he had taken the manuscript drafts with him to Europe) but any such revisions cannot have been more than cosmetic; they have left no trace. Meanwhile, a contrary weight of evidence, both external and internal, strongly

suggests Addison wrote the 'Notes on Ovid' concurrently with his Metamorphoses translations in 1693-4.

The key piece of external evidence concerns the general practice regarding the provision of notes in translations of classical verse overseen by Dryden and published by Tonson. In all their large-scale translation projects notes were provided. The multi-author venture which immediately preceded the abortive Metamorphoses—the Satires of Juvenal and Persius (published in December 1692)—featured end-notes, and the contract for the Virgil stipulated that it too would include 'notes and observations'. It's reasonable to assume the same model obtained for the projected Metamorphoses, with Addison's notes perhaps intended as a template for future contributors to the project, their concentration on poetic 'beauties' a salutary contrast to the turgid erudition of the notes John Dennis had added to his recent translation of Ovid's story of The Passion of Byblis (1692). Conversely, when translating mere extracts rather than whole works, it was never Dryden's practice to add notes, and in this he was followed by other contributors to Tonson's miscellanies. Of all the translated extracts of classical verse in the four instalments of Tonson's miscellanies up to 1704 only one came with notes: the Earl of Roscommon's version in the first Miscellany Poems (1684) of Virgil's Sixth Eclogue, a notoriously recondite piece. This lack of notes was an integral part of the social coding of the miscellanies, helping to identify their target audience as urbane men- and women-about-town. For Addison to have written notes specially to accompany his versions of stories from the Metamorphoses in Tonson's 1704 miscellany would have represented a challenge to that polite styling. That the notes were included at all is surprising enough, even allowing for Addison's irritation at the thought of all the work he had done on them going to waste. Tonson may have agreed to include them as a way of maximising Addison's presence in the volume: with Dryden now dead Addison was the

obvious person to succeed him as the figurehead of Tonson's relaunched miscellany franchise.

Internal evidence within the notes further corroborates the view that they were written in 1693-4. The notes contain few dateable references: Addison's determination to present himself as a poetry-lover rather than scholar entailed a refusal to flaunt authorities in the manner of Dennis and the nit-picking 'Dutch commentator[s]' Dryden had taught Addison to deride.¹⁷ But those texts Addison does mention by name, or which can be identified from circumstantial details in his allusions to them, all date from between 1689 and 1692. The best known case involves Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690); as critics from Youngren onwards have pointed out, Addison quotes Locke's definitions of true and false wit verbatim in one of his notes on the story of Narcissus from Metamorphoses III. But of course Locke's Essay was one of the literary monuments of the age; Addison went on referring to it throughout his career. By contrast, the other texts from the around the turn of the 1690s referred to in the Ovid notes are occasional or ephemeral productions which it seems unlikely Addison would have brought readily to mind more than a decade after they were published. There are three cases, all from the notes on 'The Third Book'. First, while discussing ecphrasis in a long note on the Cadmus episode, Addison quotes a couplet from Charles Montagu's Epistle to Dorset (1690):

I shall conclude this tedious Reflection with an excellent Stroke of this nature, out of Mr. Montague's Poem to the King; where he tells us how the King of France would have been celebrated by his Subjects, if he had ever gain'd such an honourable Wound as King William's at the Fight of the Boyn:

His Bleeding Arm had furnish'd all their Rooms,

And Run for ever Purple in the Looms.¹⁸

The Epistle to Dorset was highly regarded in its time: Abigail Williams has called it an ‘ars poetica for a generation of writers in the post-Revolution period’.¹⁹ Addison gave the poem pride of place in his ‘Account of the Greatest English Poets’; but that was in 1694 and the Epistle’s vogue was over well before 1703. Of course, Montagu was also Addison’s patron, so we might perhaps imagine Addison recalling the Epistle after so many years as a particular compliment; but if so he would surely not have referred to its author as ‘Mr. Montague’ but Lord Halifax, the title conferred on him in 1700.

The two other cases are still more telling. One comes further on in the note containing the quotation from Locke, when Addison is discussing puns as a type of ‘false wit’. Noting that ‘most Languages have hit on the Word, which properly signifies Fire, to express Love by’, he gives some examples of ‘witty Poets’ exploiting that lexical coincidence, including ‘the Greek Epigrammatist [who] fell in Love with one that flung a Snow-Ball at him, and therefore takes occasion to admire how Fire could thus be conceal’d in Snow’.²⁰ The reference here is to an epigram variously attributed to Petronius, Afranius, and assorted other Latin poets of the Christian era, that was widely translated and imitated across Europe in the Renaissance. Thomas Fuller included an English translation of it supposedly by the medieval scholar William Grocyn in the entry on Grocyn in his Worthies of England (1662):

A snow-ball white at me did Julia throw;

Who would suppose it? Fire was in that snow.

Julia alone can quench my hot desire,

But not with snow, or ice, but equal fire.²¹

Other seventeenth-century English versions included imitations by Thomas Stanley and Alexander Brome and a translation by Thomas Forde in his Virtus Rediviva (1660). But the precise detail of Addison's reference suggests he was remembering a rather more recent version of the epigram by a poet he almost certainly knew personally. The author of the epigram, according to Addison, 'takes occasion to admire how Fire could thus be conceal'd in Snow', but in fact this particular paradox is not pointed out in the Latin original (or any of the seventeenth-century English versions I've just mentioned). However, it does feature in the loose imitation of the epigram—'The Snow-Ball. A Translation'—in Charles Goodall's Poems and Translations (1689) which includes the couplet 'If Snow it self a hidden Fire contains, / She only, she can ease my pains'.²² Goodall was an immediate contemporary of Addison's at Oxford, one year older and another classical scholar-poet. The two may well have known each other; at any rate, Addison surely read Goodall's Poems and Translations which came out in October 1689 following his premature death in May (it's tempting to see the relationship between Goodall and Addison as somewhat akin to that between Edward King and Milton). If it was Goodall's version of the snow-ball epigram that Addison was remembering that would also explain his error in assigning it to a Greek poet—because Goodall specialised in translating Greek epigrams by such recondite poets as Meleager, Synesius, and Alphaeus Mitylenaeus. In the running-order of his Poems and Translations, 'The Snow-Ball' comes immediately after a translation of an anonymous 'Greek Epigram to Hemiera'.

The third text from the period 1689-92 that can be closely connected with the Ovid notes involves one of Addison's own works. In his final note on the Narcissus episode, deploring Narcissus's protracted speech of complaint over his unrequited love as 'too witty and too tedious', Addison observes that Ovid 'never thinks he can draw Tears enough from his

Reader, by which means our Grief is either diverted or spent before we come to his Conclusion'. Then he quotes 'a great Critick [who] has admirably well observ'd':

Lamentationes debent esse breves & concisæ, nam Lachrymæ subito
excrescit, & difficile est Auditorem vel Lectorem in summo animi
affectu diu tenere.²³

[Expressions of grief should be short and concise, for tears dry suddenly, and it is difficult to keep the listener or reader at the highest pitch of emotion for a long time.]

The Latin is a bit garbled: 'Lachrymae ... excrescit' (literally, 'tears grows') should read 'Lachryma exarescit' ('a tear dries'), as per the main source of the quotation, Cicero's De partitionibus oratoriae (17.57). But the quotation doesn't come directly from that work; rather, it appears to be a composite summary of Cicero's advice in several of his writings on rhetoric and oratory about arousing pity in an audience.²⁴ The same summary is quoted in the preface to Francis Quarles's translations from Jeremiah, Sion's Elegies (1624), reprinted as recently as 1680, although this is unlikely to have been Addison's source for the quotation. Presumably, he and Quarles were drawing on a common source—most likely, a rhetoric manual or some other pedagogical text which was serially reissued throughout the seventeenth century—but in this case where Addison took the quotation from matters less than the fact that he also used it in another work: his 'Dissertatio de Insignioribus Romanorum Poetis' ('Dissertation on the most Celebrated Roman Poets'). In both its form and content, the 'Dissertatio' gives every appearance of being an undergraduate oration (as I'll show in more detail in the next section when I consider its treatment of the *Georgics*); there is no reason to doubt the report in the biography of Addison in Theophilus Cibber and

Robert Shiels's Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland that it was 'written about 1692'.²⁵ That Addison cannibalised the 'Dissertatio' in his 'Notes on Ovid' provides final confirmation that they were in all probability written shortly after it, a year or two later when at Dryden's instigation he set to work on his translations of Books II and III of the Metamorphoses.

However, that does not make the 'Notes' juvenile productions—quite the opposite in fact. Johnson's view of them as 'refined and subtle' has been endorsed by modern commentators from Youngren who emphasised that 'they already show the influence of Locke' (Y 272) to Marcus Walsh who has suggested in a recent essay that Addison's note on ecphrasis in the Cadmus story anticipates 'one of the most distinctively formulated critical ideas' in the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' papers: the doubling of aesthetic pleasure when objects in nature are compared with representations of them in art.²⁶ In at least one sense, back-dating the 'Notes on Ovid' to 1693-4 should further increase our regard for them. At issue here is Addison's relationship with Dryden. Much of their critical outlook on Ovid was shared. Both deplored aspects of Ovid's style—his indecorousness, his liking for puns, his prolixity—but both admired him despite those failings, indeed to some extent because of them. Both, that is, modelled the 'deep ambivalence, amounting almost to ... doublethink' which later became the norm in eighteenth-century responses to Ovid.²⁷ So who influenced whom? We might naturally suppose Dryden took the lead, and had Addison not written his Ovid notes until 1697 or 1703 that would be hard to deny; by then all or most of Dryden's critical accounts of Ovid were in print. But if Addison wrote the notes in 1693-4 that means they coincided with Dryden's key discussion of the Metamorphoses in the preface to Examen Poeticum (1693) and preceded his final remarks on the poem in the preface to Fables (1700). In other words, the earlier dating allows us to credit Addison as a more equal partner with Dryden in

formulating the new attitudes towards Ovid that defined his reception in the eighteenth century.

An Essay on the Georgics

Whereas the Ovid notes have been taken for later works than they (almost certainly) are, the 'Essay on the Georgics' has been ranked as one of Addison's very earliest works when in fact he wrote it towards the end of the first phase of his career. Here the error is more widespread (only a few commentators are aware of the 1697 dating for the Ovid notes) but the truth can also be more firmly established. The root of the problem lies in Samuel Johnson's 'Life' of Addison. Following Thomas Tickell in the preface to his edition of Addison's Works (1721), Johnson linked the 'Essay' with Addison's praise poem 'To Mr. Dryden' (1693) and his partial translation of Book IV of Virgil's Georgics in Tonson's fourth miscellany (1694). But whereas Tickell connected the works simply as illustrations of Addison's developing friendship with Dryden, Johnson went further, suggesting they were all written around the same date:

In his twenty-second year he first shewed his power of English poetry, by some verses addressed to Dryden; and soon afterwards published a translation of the greater part of the Fourth Georgick upon Bees; after which, says Dryden, my latter swarm is hardly worth the hiving.

About the same time he composed the arguments prefixed to several books of Dryden's Virgil; and produced an Essay on the Georgicks, juvenile, superficial, and uninstructive, without much either of the scholar's learning or the critick's penetration.²⁸

That implies the ‘Essay’ was written in 1693-4, an implication consolidated shortly afterwards by Addison’s first editor, the ‘pre-romantic’ critic Richard Hurd. Hurd didn’t share Johnson’s dismissive estimate of the ‘Essay’; he thought it a mature piece, at least where its style was concerned. Yet in seeking to emphasise its precocious achievement he assigned the ‘Essay’ to the earlier of the two dates implied in Johnson’s account—1693 (when Addison wrote ‘To Mr. Dryden’) rather than 1694 (when his partial translation of Georgics IV was published). ‘It is to be observed, that this agreeable essay was written so early as 1693’, wrote Hurd in his headnote on it; ‘that is, when the author at most was but in his one-and-twentieth year; yet the style is so exact, that it wants but little of being absolutely faultless.’²⁹

Hurd’s edition of Addison’s poems and translations remained unfinished at his death in 1808. But his draft annotations were subsequently incorporated into the Victorian edition of The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison (1854-6) in H. G. Bohn’s Library series, which remains to this day the only annotated edition of Addison’s works other than his periodicals, and is now more accessible than ever via Google Books. A. C. Guthkelch’s two-volume Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison (1914) has no notes; Guthkelch died before he could complete the third volume which was to have contained them. Dryden’s Virgil, where Addison’s ‘Essay’ first appeared, has been edited recently, in volumes V and VI of the California edition of Dryden’s complete Works, and the ‘Essay’ is reprinted there, but again without annotation. Hence, Hurd’s dating of it has never been challenged. When Youngren reported in ‘Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics’ that ‘The date of this essay is uncertain, 1693 being most often given’, Hurd was in fact his sole authority (Y 269). The date stuck but not the uncertainty. Youngren had no incentive to emphasise it: 1693 suited his purposes. In his teleological plot of Addison’s critical development, the ‘Essay’

embodies Addison's initial commitment to the author-centred, rules-based system of Restoration neoclassicism, by contrast with his later discovery of the eighteenth-century mode of psychological criticism focused on the reader in the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' papers. But even recent critics more appreciative of the 'Essay' than Youngren remain shackled to the 1693 date. No-one has done more to uncover the subtleties of the 'Essay' than Kevis Goodman in a fine discussion in her book Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism (2004). Yet she too takes Youngren's (Hurd's) word for it that it was written 'as early as 1693'.³⁰

It wasn't. The mere fact that the 'Essay' formed part of the critical apparatus of Dryden's complete Virgil should tell us that much—because Dryden didn't begin work on the Virgil, as we've seen, until the early months of 1694, and it wasn't completed until the summer of 1697. The only way to square this fact with the 1693 date would be to suppose that the 'Essay' wasn't written specially for the Virgil but rather that it was a pre-existing piece Addison already had to hand and simply passed on to Dryden. Commentators loth to break with Johnson's view of the 'Essay' as 'juvenile', from the Victorian age to the present, have often resorted to some version of this hypothetical narrative. Lucy Aikin in her 1843 biography of Addison described the 'Essay' as an unsolicited 'present ... which Dryden printed as a preface to his own translations',³¹ and Courthope followed her lead when he spoke of how Dryden, 'highly gratified' by Addison's praise in 'To Mr. Dryden', 'returned Addison's compliment by ... printing, as a preface to his own translation, a discourse written by Addison on the Georgics.'³² The invented scenario remains current to this day. In his 2013 edition of John Armstrong's 'medico-georgic' poem The Art of Preserving Health (1744), Adam Budd reprinted Addison's 'Essay' in a section of 'Contextual Documents', adding some light annotation. Unfortunately, Budd in his headnote not only adopts the 1693 date but

fleshes it out with a fully explicit version of the Aikin-Courthope narrative in which the 'Essay' becomes a 'student' assignment that Addison 'submitted' to Dryden as if to his tutor at Magdalen.³³

This is all fantasy. Addison's 'Essay' wasn't a 'present' he gave Dryden, or an undergraduate exercise he found conveniently lying around among his lecture notes in his rooms at Magdalen. In fact, Addison wasn't even a student in 1693, having received his master's degree on 14 February and graduated as bachelor of arts back in May 1691—unless, that is, by 'student' we just mean that he was still at Oxford, in which case he remained a student until he left on his European travels in 1699, at the age of twenty-seven. A cursory reading of the 'Essay' is enough to show that it was not the work of a student, even one as precociously learned as Addison. But we can also compare it with his treatment of the *Georgics* in what was unmistakably a university exercise, the 'Dissertatio de Insignioribus Romanorum Poetis' (1692). Addison devoted a lot of space to the Georgics in the 'Dissertatio', most of the first paragraph, an early indication of his special affinity with the poem. But his comments on it were wholly conventional and transparently derivative, limited to a single topic—Virgil's elevation of his rural subject matter by means of 'Poetick Diction', especially in his quasi-heroic description of the bees in Book IV—which was the staple theme in early-modern commentary on the poem. Pretty obviously, Addison was writing with two texts which offered quotable treatments of the topic near at hand: Scaliger's Poetices Libri Septem (1561), and Dryden's preface to Annus Mirabilis (1667). There is simply no comparison between the narrow, callow discussion of the Georgics in the 'Dissertatio' and the wide-ranging, exhaustively researched and yet highly original account Addison would give of Virgil's poem in the 'Essay'. He proudly advertised the originality of the 'Essay' at the outset, noting that 'the Georgics are a Subject which none of the Criticks have sufficiently

taken into their Consideration' (DW 5: 145); as I'll show in the second half of this article, that was no idle boast.

Having disposed of the canard that the 'Essay' was a student exercise, we can return to its involvement in Dryden's *Virgil*, the key to establishing when Addison wrote it. In theory, he could have begun writing the 'Essay' any time after the spring of 1694, once the *Virgil* was fully underway, but in reality he can't have started work on it before the spring of 1696, and he probably didn't finish it until the early months of 1697. In the dedication of the 'Aeneis', Dryden described the circumstances which led him to ask Addison to write the 'Essay' and another young scholarly friend Knightly Chetwood to supply a similar introduction for the *Eclogues*:

Two other worthy Friends of mine, who desire to have their Names conceal'd, seeing me straitned in my time, took Pity on me, and gave me the Life of Virgil, the two Prefaces to the Pastorals, and the Georgiques, and all the Arguments to the whole Translation.

(DW 5: 337)

As the modern editors of Dryden's *Virgil* explain, this refers to the period in November or December 1696 when Dryden finished the 'Aeneis'. All the poems were now done, but the scholarly apparatus remained largely unwritten. With the volumes already in production and subscribers hounding Tonson for their copies, Dryden 'realizing he no longer had time to write lengthy introductions to the Pastorals and the Georgics ... reduced his labor by accepting prefaces from Chetwood and Addison' (DW 6: 847). Possibly, he arrived at this realization a bit earlier, as he limped towards the finishing line of the 'Aeneis'. In which case,

he might have asked Addison to write the ‘Essay’ in the autumn or even the summer of 1696. But he can’t have done it before the spring—at that point Dryden was still intending to write the ‘learned’ prefaces to all three of Virgil’s poems himself, as he told William Walsh in a letter (DW 6: 845 n. 12). Addison must have finished the ‘Essay’ by March 1697, when Dryden wrote the dedication of his Georgics to the Earl of Chesterfield (DW 6: 846), since as I’ll show at the conclusion of this article, in the dedication Dryden engaged with Addison’s arguments in the ‘Essay’. In all likelihood, then, Addison wrote the ‘Essay on the *Georgics*’ between December 1696 and March 1697.

II

The notion of juvenility is generally inappropriate when considering Addison’s classical criticism; the shape of his career challenges the crude assumption that writers progress from the classical to the modern, from translation to original work. Addison wrote both the ‘Notes on Ovid’ and the ‘Essay on the Georgics’ in the five-year period between 1693 and 1697 which should be seen not as his literary apprenticeship but rather as the first of his three major phases of literary creativity (the second being 1699-1704 when he wrote the group of works in prose and verse that grew out of his European travels—in particular ‘A Letter from Italy’, the Remarks on Italy and Dialogues on Ancient Medals—and the third 1709-12, the years of The Tatler and The Spectator). During this period, galvanised by his intimacy with Dryden, Addison produced, aside from the Ovid translations themselves, many of his richest and most substantial poems both in English and Latin, including the ‘Account of the Greatest English Poets’ which pioneered critical historiography of the English verse tradition,³⁴ A Poem to His Majesty (1695), a sophisticated response to the problems of modern heroic verse,³⁵ and ‘A Translation of all Virgil’s 4th Georgick, Except the Story of Aristeus’ which led Dryden to remark that ‘After [Addison’s] Bees, my latter Swarm is scarcely worth the

hiving' (DW 6: 810). But Addison's achievements as a neo-Latin poet need special emphasis since it is particularly ignorance of this dimension of his work which gives credence to the idea that he was a novice writer in the 1690s. All Addison's most accomplished and adventurous Latin poems were written between 1693 and 1697, notably his version of the pseudo-Homeric 'Battle of the Pigmies and Cranes', which Samuel Johnson translated, the trio of ersatz Virgilian pieces 'Barometri Descriptio', 'Machinae Gesticulantes', and 'Sphaeristerium' in which Addison demonstrated his mastery of mock-heroic two decades before The Rape of the Lock, and 'Pax Gulielmi Auspiciis Europae reddita', praised by one contemporary reader as 'the best Latin poem since the Aeneid'.³⁶ In the judgment of Estelle Haan, the foremost modern authority on them, Addison's Latin poems 'set him apart from other seventeenth-century neo-Latin writers, perhaps even Milton included.'³⁷

Recognising that the 'Essay on the Georgics' was written towards the end of this period allows us to see it as the culmination of the first flowering of Addison's genius. It was the final fruit of his deep and sustained engagement with the Georgics, begun in the 'Dissertatio' and continued in his translation from Book IV and the plethora of witty and inventive allusions to the poem across his Latin verse.³⁸ It also marked the end of his period of close collaboration with Dryden: first on the Metamorphoses project, then as effective co-editors of Tonson's 1694 miscellany, and latterly on the Virgil. Between the publication of the Virgil in the summer of 1697 and Addison's departure for Europe two years later, Dryden spent long periods in the country visiting relatives, while Addison was beginning to move in Whig government circles in the metropolis. The two drifted apart, a separation foretold in the 'Essay' and Dryden's response to it, as I'll suggest in my conclusion. But if the 'Essay' was a culmination, it was also a breakthrough—for Addison personally, and with regard to the history of English literary criticism more broadly. His sense of its bold originality seems to

have been what prevented him from putting his name to the ‘Essay’ in Dryden’s Virgil. We might naturally assume the opposite; that the essay’s anonymity proves it was apprentice-work: as Lucy Aikin observed, ‘to write a preface for Dryden ... was an undertaking too hazardous to be avowed by any literary novice’.³⁹ But a hitherto overlooked account of the matter in the biography of Addison in Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland (1753) turns that assumption on its head. According to this account, Addison ‘chose to withhold his name’ from the ‘Essay’ because ‘it contained an untried strain of criticism, which bore hard upon the old professors of that art, and therefore was not so fit for a young man to take upon himself’.⁴⁰ In the remainder of this article I’ll define that ‘untried strain of criticism’ and show how in developing it Addison broke with ‘the old professors’ of criticism—notably Dryden—thereby, in effect, bringing about the ‘birth of eighteenth-century aesthetics’.

Virgilian Modernity

My argument turns on a single passage in the ‘Essay’, from its fourth paragraph, rightly identified by modern commentators as the most striking part of Addison’s discussion. The first paragraph of the ‘Essay’ is introductory, and the run of short paragraphs which bring it to a close are largely conventional, enumerating high points in Virgil’s poem previously singled out for praise by critics from Scaliger to Dryden. But the four longest paragraphs of the ‘Essay’— the second, third, fourth, and fifth—amounting to almost half its total length, address what is for Addison the central question about the Georgics: how does Virgil make didactic verse palatable, indeed appealing, to the reader when ‘Precepts of Morality, besides the Natural Corruption of our Tempers, which makes us averse to them, are so abstracted from Ideas of Sense, that they seldom give an opportunity for those Beautiful Descriptions and Images which are the Spirit and Life of Poetry’ (DW 5: 146)? Addison’s answer is that Virgil employs oblique methods of instruction, and in the fourth paragraph his description of

those techniques issues in a remarkable account of the effect they have on the reader. ‘Virgil’, Addison says, ‘loves to suggest a Truth indirectly, and without giving us a full and open view of it’:

To let us see just so much as will naturally lead the Imagination into all the parts that lie conceal’d. This is wonderfully diverting to the Understanding, thus to receive a Precept, that enters as it were through a By-way, and to apprehend an Idea that draws a whole train after it: For here the Mind, which is always delighted with its own Discoveries, only takes the hint from the Poet, and seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties.

(DW 5: 147-8)

Every recent commentator on the ‘Essay’ has been particularly struck by this passage, beginning with Youngren himself who spent longer discussing it than he did all the (supposedly more advanced) Ovid notes. Contrary to his view of the ‘Essay’ as a drab tissue of neoclassical orthodoxy, the ‘old terminology of precept and example (or image) ... a static vocabulary founded on the ancient analogy between poems and pictures’, Youngren found in this passage ‘a clear hint of what Addison’s later criticism was to be like’: in particular, ‘the germ of associationism ... the notion that one idea in the reader’s mind can, quite independently of what is happening in the poem, draw “a whole train after it”’ (Y 271, 272, 273). Later scholars including Goodman and more recently Scott Black and Michelle Syba, have glossed the passage in similar terms, as a revolutionary charter for the ‘activation of the reader’s imagination’, the liberating idea that ‘texts merely sow the seeds, so that readers are pleased to reap the ideas’.⁴¹ What these accounts of the passage have in common is that they

all read it forwards into the future, aligning it with the ‘Pleasures’ papers, above all the famous opening sentence of Spectator 417: ‘We may observe, that any single Circumstance of what we have formerly seen often raises up a whole Scene of Imagery, and awakens numberless Ideas that before slept in the Imagination; ... Our Imagination takes the Hint, and leads us unexpectedly into Cities or Theatres, Plains or Meadows’.⁴² That leaves open the question of where the passage came from—how it could be that Addison pre-empted one of the most innovative critical tendencies of his ‘Pleasures’ papers in an essay published a decade and a half earlier. To answer that question, we must begin by tracing the sources and origins of the passage.

One possible source can be ruled out straightaway—namely, Locke—since, as Youngren noted, the famous chapter on the association of ideas in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding was not included until the fourth edition of 1700 (Y 273).⁴³ This is significant, given the current debate about the extent of Locke’s influence over Addison’s development as a critic. The assumption common to much of the foundational scholarship on Addison’s criticism that he took his most advanced critical ideas from Locke has been challenged in a number of recent studies.⁴⁴ Of course, Addison regularly deferred to Locke in the critical papers in The Spectator—and indeed, as we’ve seen, in the ‘Notes on Ovid’—on topics including wit and sense-perception; and in Spectator 291 he asserted the fundamental importance of Locke’s ‘Essay’ for the critic.⁴⁵ But recently commentators have begun to argue that some ostensibly Lockean tendencies in Addison’s criticism in fact derive from other sources—ancient rather than modern ones, elements of his deep classical formation.⁴⁶ So it proves with the remarkable fourth paragraph of the ‘Essay on the Georgics’. Here Locke isn’t the key—Virgil is. That may seem counter-intuitive: Virgil, the arch-Augustan, darling of the neoclassical theorists, makes an unlikely parent for modern aesthetics—especially in

the Georgics, the archetypal rule-giving poem; if any classical poet could be imagined as hastening the death of neoclassicism, it would surely be Ovid, the serial rule-breaker banished from Rome by Augustus for trashing the idea of the poet as moral instructor in his mock-didactic Ars Amatoria. But the fact is that it was Virgil—and Virgil specifically as a didactic poet—who enabled Addison’s critical breakthrough in the fourth paragraph of the ‘Essay’. The paragraph is about Virgil’s techniques of poetic instruction, and in devoting close attention to this topic Addison was already breaking new ground. Previous critics didn’t think of the Georgics as didactic at all, accepting Seneca’s view that Virgil had no real intention of teaching farmers in the poem (‘Vergilius ... nec agricolas docere voluit’). Seneca meant that as a criticism of Virgil, but early-modern commentators saw it as praise. Scaliger refused to sully the Georgics by comparing it with its Greek didactic predecessor, Hesiod’s Works and Days,⁴⁷ reserving his attention for Virgil’s most elegant digressions and descriptive set-pieces; later neoclassical critics, up to and including Dryden, followed his lead.

That way of reading the Georgics is brought to an end in the fourth paragraph of the ‘Essay’. Where previous commentators had dismissed the poem’s didactic pretensions as nugatory, merely a cover for Virgil’s real concern with poetic beauty, Addison construed its beautiful digressions or descriptive passages as places where Virgil, far from abandoning his ambition to instruct the reader, pursues that ambition by indirect means and all the more effectively as a result: it is ‘wonderfully diverting’ for the reader, as he said, ‘to receive a Precept, that enters ... through a By-way’. But while this was a new departure where criticism of the Georgics was concerned, it was consistent with the wider neoclassical reception of Virgil; Addison was extending to the Georgics some ideas that had started to emerge in commentary on the Aeneid in the late seventeenth century. Of course, it had been a truism since antiquity

that epic poets had a duty to instruct their readers, but recently neoclassical critics had begun to suggest that Virgil fulfilled this duty in the Aeneid in indirect, oblique, not to say devious, ways. Two works that made this claim particularly lie behind Addison's fourth paragraph. Both were originally written in French and first published in the 1670s, but both appeared in English translations in 1694-5—a significant fact, since Addison couldn't read French at this point (indeed, he never fully mastered the language despite spending almost a year there during his European travels).⁴⁸ First, there was René Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Poetics, reprinted in Thomas Rymer's translation in 1694. There Addison's eye lit on a passage describing how Virgil goes about praising Augustus as a morally exemplary figure: 'Praise has always something gross in it, if it lie too open, and go in a direct Line', Rapin notes; but 'never was Man prais'd so delicately as Augustus by Virgil; it is not but, as it were, by covert paths that he conducts him to glory.'⁴⁹ That phrase 'as it were, by covert paths' seeded Addison's image of Virgilian precepts entering the reader's mind 'as it were through a By-way'.

But the major source for Addison's idea in the fourth paragraph of the 'Essay' that 'Virgil ... loves to suggest a Truth indirectly' was René Le Bossu's Traité du Poème Epique. Originally published in 1675, this became accessible for the first time in an English translation shortly before Addison began work on the 'Essay'—Monsieur Bossu's Treatise of the Epick Poem by the still-untraced 'W. J.' which came out in 1695. In later years, Le Bossu became the whipping-boy for eighteenth-century English critics keen to dissociate themselves from their rule-bound French counterparts, and Addison joined in with the sport in The Tatler and The Spectator.⁵⁰ But Le Bossu's Treatise is not just a clearing-house for neoclassical pedantries; in amongst its heaps of formulaic terms and prescriptive classifications, there are authentic critical gems to be found. None richer than the chapter on 'Disguis'd Sentences' (i.e. moral

precepts) in Book VI, as Addison evidently recognised. The chapter starts from the premise that it offends narrative verisimilitude if characters in an epic poem are made ‘to speak Sententiously’.⁵¹ The first way Virgil avoids this, according to Le Bossu, is through the ‘Art of inserting sentences’, explained by Petronius in a remark which Le Bossu cites in a marginal note: ‘Curandum est, ne Sententiae emineant extra corpus orationis expressae, sed intexto vestibus colore niteant.’ (‘Care should be taken that precepts do not stand out from the body of the speech, but rather that their shining colours are woven into its dress.’).⁵² Addison was paying attention; that note provided the basis for his conceit in the third paragraph of the ‘Essay’:

Precepts ... shou’d all be so finely wrought together into the same Piece, that no course Seam may discover where they joyn; as in a Curious Brede of Needle-Work, one Colour falls away by such just degrees, and another rises so insensibly, that we see the variety, without being able to distinguish the total vanishing of the one from the first appearance of the other.

(DW 5: 146)

But it was when Le Bossu got on to Virgil’s ‘ways of disguising Sentences’ that Addison really pricked up his ears. Virgil’s ‘main Method’, according to Le Bossu, ‘is, not to declare the Moral Instruction in Universal Terms, but to make an Application of it to the Action on foot’.⁵³ Or as he put it a bit later: Virgil ‘conceals his Sentences under Figures and particular Applications’.⁵⁴ Addison spliced those two passages together to make his pivotal claim in the fourth paragraph of the ‘Essay’ that Virgil in the Georgics ‘often conceals the Precept in a

description, and represents his Country-Man performing the Action in which he wou'd instruct the Reader' (DW 5: 147).

Recognising Addison's debt to Le Bossu's chapter on 'Disguis'd Sentences' in the 'Essay' is an important step forward. We might wonder about the chapter's significance for Addison in the longer term too, given his expertise in the art of 'disguising sentences' in The Spectator where, as Samuel Johnson observed, 'Truth is shewn sometimes as the phantom of a vision, sometimes appears half-veiled in an allegory; [and] sometimes attracts regard in the robes of fancy.'⁵⁵ But the chapter only takes us so far in understanding the fourth paragraph of the 'Essay'—in particular, it can't account for the paragraph's most radical innovation: its strongly activist conception of the reader. Logically, Le Bossu's argument does entail some involvement on the part of Virgil's readers in the creation of meaning; but the nearest he comes to saying so is at the end of the chapter in some remarks about Virgil's use of grammatical ellipsis:

Here you have an instance of this Ellipsis. The Trojans reduc'd to their last shifts by Turnus, see Aeneas advancing to succour them. The Poet says, Spes addita suscitatur iras. This Expression signifies equally, either in particular, that the Hope They receiv'd rally'd and increas'd their Courage; or in general, that the Hope of approaching and certain Succour raises mens Courage, and arms them with new vigour. If the Poet had but added one Word, and said Illis spes addita suscitatur iras; The first sence would have been clearly expressed, and it would not have been a pure Sentence, but the Application of a Sentence. The leaving out of this Word makes it a perfect Sentence. But this leaving

out the word being so natural, that we can easily understand it; reduces the Sentence into the body of the Discourse.⁵⁶

That's a richly suggestive passage in itself, and Addison surely learned from it: in the 'Essay' too, we might say, Virgil is a poet of ellipsis who leaves things out for the reader to understand. But for Le Bossu, the reader's active engagement takes place within narrowly circumscribed limits: we only 'understand' the grammatical material Virgil intends us to, which is 'easily' done. This is not by any stretch of the imagination reader-centred criticism; the author remains firmly in charge. It's a big leap from there to the full-blown associationism of Addison's fourth paragraph where the reader's pleasurable role as a producer of meaning is clearly to the fore in the discussion, and the meanings that readers take such pleasure in imagining might potentially include ones unforeseen by the author, ones that arise, as Youngren notes, 'quite independently of what is happening in the poem' (Y 273). So did Addison take that giant critical leap alone? Not entirely—he had some assistance from Dryden, although it helped him only part of the way, and Dryden gave it rather in spite of himself.

Dryden shared Le Bossu's neoclassical view of Virgil as a poet whose main distinguishing characteristics were modesty and self-restraint, one extremely 'frugal of his words and sense' (DW 6: 823), but he went much further than Le Bossu (or indeed any other seventeenth-century critic) in elaborating the implications of that view for the reader of Virgil's poems. What made Dryden do this was his experience of translating Virgil. As he explained in the preface to Sylvae (1685), the miscellany which contained his first translated extracts from the Aeneid, Virgil was 'much the closest of the Roman poets'—the most concise or elliptical in his expression—and hence uniquely difficult to translate into English or any other vernacular:

Virgil ... being so very sparing of his words, and leaving so much to be imagin'd by the Reader, can never be translated as he ought, in any modern Tongue. To make him Copious is to alter his Character; and to Translate him Line for Line is impossible; because the *Latin* is naturally a more succinct Language than either the Italian, Spanish, French, or even than the English, (which by reason of its Monosyllables is far the most compendious of them) ...

(DW 3: 7-8)

Inevitably, then, Dryden had to amplify or supplement Virgil's original text where it was necessary to clarify the meaning. And in seeking to justify this approach, pre-empting the objections of pedantic 'Dutch commentators', he in effect created a model of the Virgilian reader as an active, participatory figure. In cases where he had 'enlarged' on the original text, he said, 'I desire the false Criticks wou'd not always think that those thoughts are wholly mine, but that either they are secretly in the Poet, or may be fairly deduc'd from him' (DW 3: 4). Or, as he put it in his great final essay on Virgil, the dedication to his 'Aeneis', the 'Additions ... are easily deduc'd from Virgil's Sense. They will seem (at least I have the Vanity to think so) not stuck into him, but growing out of him' (DW 5: 329). These remarks imply a reader whose involvement in producing meaning extends some way beyond the simple acts of grammatical understanding envisaged by Le Bossu. Those were purely rational acts, whereas Dryden now speaks of what is 'imagined by the reader'; deciphering thoughts 'secretly in the poet' is not at all the same as supplying an absent pronoun. 'Deduced' is more cautious, showing that Dryden harboured some unease over the audacity of his claims: the relevant sense in Johnson's Dictionary is 'To form a regular chain of consequential

propositions'. Still, though, the reader extrapolates, albeit rationally. Most delicately poised is Dryden's final image of the reader's meanings 'growing out of' Virgil. The organic metaphor argues for the naturalness of the translator's additions, while the verbal gerund 'growing' implies that meaning ramifies over time in the mind of the reader, a temporal understanding of textuality generally seen as characteristic of eighteenth-century aesthetics by contrast with the static, spatial conception of text in neoclassical poetics.⁵⁷

The significance of these passages and other related discussions in Dryden's translation prefaces has not been fully recognised in histories of English literary criticism. To be sure, such passages take centre stage in accounts of translation theory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But their pivotal role in the wider development of criticism at this period, the transition from the author-centred neoclassical poetics of the Restoration to the reader-centred aesthetics of the early eighteenth century, has not been appreciated. Dryden's serial self-presentations as a creative translator, actively co-operating in the discovery of meaning, represent the missing link in that transition (it's odd that modern critics have failed to see this, given how axiomatic the idea that 'All reading is translation' has become in modern criticism).⁵⁸ But the point was certainly not lost on Addison; Dryden's arguments about his 'additions' to Virgil are the final enabling factor behind the fourth paragraph of the 'Essay'. The clearest point of connection is Dryden's crucial phrase in the *Sylvae* preface about Virgil 'leaving so much to be imagined by the reader', which underwrites Addison's claim that 'Virgil ... let[s] us see just so much as will naturally lead the Imagination into all the parts that lie conceal'd.' A less obvious but ultimately more revealing case concerns Dryden's reference to his additions in the 'Aeneis' as 'not stuck into' Virgil but 'growing out of him'. That's a georgic image, alluding to the horticultural practice of grafting: the original text is the native plant or 'stock'; the translator's additions are the 'slips' or grafts from the

foreign plant inserted into it. Dryden recognises and seeks to obviate potential concerns about the extraneousness of his additions to Virgil by emphasising the organic outcome of grafting ('growing out of') over and above the invasive means by which it is achieved ('stuck into'). He presumably had somewhere in mind the famous passage about grafting in the Georgics, early in Book II, and it's that passage which Addison quotes as the introduction to the fourth paragraph of the 'Essay'. But if Addison followed Dryden in associating the practice of grafting with reading, as we'll see in a moment he saw that association rather differently.

Now, finally, having identified the main sources and precursors of the paragraph, we are in a position to isolate its revolutionary component, the 'untried strain of criticism' it contains. A good way of doing this is to imagine what Dryden thought of the paragraph when he read it, some time during the early months of 1697. As the most advanced critical thinker of the age and Addison's mentor, he would have seen at once if his acolyte was branching out in new directions. It has sometimes been suggested that Addison never in fact outgrew Dryden's influence, not even in the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' papers; that the imaginative and 'psychological' emphases of those papers were already present in Dryden's criticism, in his most Longinian essays such as 'Of Heroique Playes' (1672) and 'The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry; and Poetique Licence' (1677).⁵⁹ According to Clarence De Witt Thorpe, 'Dryden ... contributed so much in the way of lively forward-looking discussion of basic critical problems ... that there was little in Addison's theory that had not been at least intimated in his great essays'.⁶⁰ C. H. Salter was more trenchant: 'it was Dryden, and not Addison, who broke with the canons of neo-classical criticism [and] laid the foundations of Romantic aesthetics': Addison's apparent innovations as a critic are the result of 'his concealment of his sources and attempts to disagree with them, if necessary by misrepresenting them'.⁶¹ But of course it is often through 'misrepresenting' sources that

significant changes come about in the history of ideas; ‘rethinking’ or ‘revising’ would be more constructive ways of putting it. This is what happens in the fourth paragraph of the ‘Essay’. Addison made his breakthrough by re-casting Dryden’s ideas about Virgil and the Virgilian reader in a way that might have felt to Dryden like misrepresentation. In a sense, that was only appropriate: Addison’s new move involved shifting the balance of power away from the author and towards the reader; in the process of articulating that idea he also embodied it.

Addison’s first break with Dryden comes at the start of the paragraph, in his treatment of Virgil’s lines about grafting. As we’ve seen, Dryden himself had invoked the practice as a way of mitigating his audacity in presuming to add material to Virgil. It was a wise choice since in early-modern horticultural theory grafting was held to blur the divide between the native and the foreign, the indigenous and the extraneous, nature and artifice—as Polixenes says in The Winter’s Tale, ‘the art itself is nature’.⁶² Addison, though, saw grafting rather differently; far from emphasising the natural aspects of the process, he revelled in it as an exotic phenomenon, praising Virgil for concentrating on the most bizarre hybrids farmers could produce: ‘the Poet consider’d all the Effects of this Union between Trees of different kinds, and took notice of that Effect which had the most surprize, and by consequence the most delight in it’ (DW 5: 147). If Dryden took that as a hint that the two of them no longer saw eye to eye about reading Virgil—or that Addison was growing apart from him more generally—his suspicions would have been confirmed when he came to the end of the paragraph, and read that ‘the Mind ... only takes the hint from the Poet, and seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties.’ Here Dryden’s metaphor of secrecy in the Sylvae preface has been replaced by one of hinting—a highly consequential change. When Dryden said there were secret meanings within the Aeneid he was drawing on the medieval

idea of Virgil as a prophet;⁶³ in claiming to have deciphered those secrets in the act of translation, he paired himself with Virgil as a poet vested with numinous powers. This meant he could face down the ‘Dutch commentators’ with splendid disdain: whenever he ‘enlarged’ on Virgil he had ‘discovered some beauty yet undiscovered by those pedants, which none but a poet could have found’ (DW 3: 4). But Dryden’s was an essentially conservative stance, restricting access to Virgil’s secrets to the exclusive subset of his readers who are great poets. By switching the metaphor, Addison swept that limitation away. If discovering hidden meaning in a line of Virgil is like taking a hint it’s something anyone with experience of socialising in London’s coffee-houses and clubs might hope to do. It was a classic Spectatorial move on Addison’s part, some fourteen years before he declared his ambition as Mr. Spectator to remove élite knowledge ‘out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies’.⁶⁴ In effect, he had extended Dryden’s hieratic privilege as an interpreter of Virgil to the general reader.

Dryden gave his response to that ‘untried strain of criticism’ in the dedication of the Georgics, written just after he received the ‘Essay’ from Addison. He was praising Chesterfield for his reserve in conversation: ‘No Man has complain’d, or ever can’, he told the Earl, ‘that you have discours’d too long on any Subject’. Then he drew a parallel with Virgil:

I must confess the Criticks make it one of *Virgil’s* Beauties, that having said what he thought convenient, he always left somewhat for the imagination of his Readers to supply: That they might gratifie their fancies, by finding more, in what he had written, than at first they cou’d; and think they had added to his thought, when it was all there before-hand, and he only sav’d himself the expence of words.

That represents a sardonic riposte to the final sentence of Addison's fourth paragraph. Of course, Dryden doesn't bite the hand that had fed him the 'Essay' outright. In fact, the primary target of the satire is Dryden himself: he was the first among English 'Criticks' to talk (in the *Sylvae* preface) of himself as a reader who had added something to Virgil; now, chastened by the experience of translating all Virgil's works, he recants that self-aggrandizing claim. But Dryden was also taking aim at Addison who in the 'Essay' had exploited his rash assertion. Dryden's wry observation that Virgil's readers 'gratify their fancies' by finding new meanings in his work parodies Addison's image of the mind as 'always delighted with its own Discoveries', mining its unintentional comedy of vanity and egotism. Addison himself had conceded that the reader's power might be in some sense illusory by adding a slight disclaimer: what he said was not that the reader's mind, having 'taken the hint' from Virgil, certainly does 'work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties', but only that it 'seems' to do this.⁶⁵ But that was not much more than a polite gesture. Addison and Dryden were on different paths, bound in opposite directions. Coming to the end of his life of writing, Dryden finally submitted to his master Virgil. Addison, with his whole career ahead of him, sided with the insurgent reader. Dryden had brought Addison to the threshold of critical modernity; now he turned back, while his former pupil went on into the future.

¹ Thanks to Professor Marcus Walsh, Professor Henry Power, and the anonymous reviewer for this journal for their careful attention to earlier drafts of this article.

² Samuel Johnson, 'Life of Addison', in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford, 2006), 2: 37.

³ David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104.

⁴ William Youngren, 'Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics', *Modern Philology* 79 (1982), 272. Hereafter, this article is cited parenthetically by page number, using the abbreviation Y.

⁵ In fact, Youngren cites Courthope's *Addison* as published in 1903, but that was the second edition; the 1697 date is already proposed in the first edition of the biography which appeared in 1884.

⁶ W. J. Courthope, *Addison* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 32.

⁷ Scott Black, 'Addison's Aesthetics of Novelty', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 30 (2001): 280.

⁸ The circumstances of this abortive project are reconstructed in David Hopkins's classic article 'Dryden and the Garth-Tonson *Metamorphoses*', *Review of English Studies* 39 (1988): 64-74.

⁹ It has always been assumed, reasonably enough, that Addison's friendship with Dryden followed closely on the publication of his praise-poem 'To Mr. Dryden', dated from Oxford on 2 June 1693, in *Examen Poeticum*.

¹⁰ David Hopkins, 'Addison as Translator', in *Joseph Addison: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Paul Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 19-20.

¹¹ Dryden, *Works*, vi. 843-4.

¹² 'Letter 17', in *The Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, ed. Stephen Bernard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 107.

¹³ 'Letter 20', *Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, 115.

¹⁴ In a letter to Tonson of 30 September 1696, another young Oxford scholar-translator Basil Kennett noted: 'Your fift Miscellany ha's long been a Debt to the World' ('Letter 30', *Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, 125).

¹⁵ This obscure period in Addison's European travels is reconstructed in Amélie Junqua's intriguing essay 'A moment in Amsterdam—Joseph Addison and Jacob Tonson in 1703', in *Addison and Europe*, ed. Claire Boulard-Jouslin and Klaus-Dieter Ertler (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020), 37-48 (I quote 43); however, Junqua's suggestion that 'In 1703 ... Addison was preparing another translation from Ovid for [Tonson]' (38) overlooks Addison's role in the abortive *Metamorphoses* project of 1692-4.

¹⁶ 'Letter 38', *Literary Correspondences of the Tonsons*, 133.

¹⁷ Dryden's attack on the 'Dutch commentator[s]' came in the Preface to *Sylvae* (1685); in *The Works of Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg and others, 20 vols (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1956-2000), 3: 4. All subsequent quotations from Dryden's works—and also Addison's 'Essay on the *Georgics*', originally

included in Dryden's Virgil—refer to the text of this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically by volume and page number within the text, using the abbreviation DW.

¹⁸ The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison, ed. A. C. Guthkelch, 2 vols (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1914), 1: 142.

¹⁹ Abigail Williams, Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture, 1681-1714 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

²⁰ Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison, ed. Guthkelch, 1: 144.

²¹ Quoted in Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, The Epigram in the English Renaissance (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 23.

²² Charles Goodall, Poems and Translations (1689), 24.

²³ Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison, ed. Guthkelch, 1: 146.

²⁴ For details of Cicero's other uses of the proverbial idea that 'tears dry quickly', and an account of the complex prehistory of that idea, see George Dwight Kellogg, 'Study of a Proverb Attributed to the Rhetor Apollonius', The American Journal of Philology 28 (1907): 301-10.

²⁵ [Theophilus Cibber and Robert Shiels], Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, 5 vols (1753), 3: 318.

²⁶ Marcus Walsh, 'Addison as Critic and Critical Theorist', in Joseph Addison: Tercentenary Essays, ed. Davis, 108-9.

²⁷ James M. Horowitz, 'Ovid in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England', in A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid, ed. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Oxford: Blackwells, 2014), 356.

²⁸ Samuel Johnson, The Lives of the Poets, ed. Lonsdale, 3: 3.

²⁹ The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison, with Notes by Richard Hurd D.D., 5 vols (London: H. G. Bohn, 1854-6), 1: 154 n.

³⁰ Kevis Goodman, Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29 n.; Goodman's endorsement of the 1693 dating has in turn been cited by other commentators who share her high regard for the 'Essay', throwing a spanner in the works of their arguments. Thus, Nicholas Grindle in an article which excavates mercantilist sub-texts in the 'Essay', is forced to add a disclaimer in his final paragraph: 'It is nevertheless difficult to argue that An Essay on Virgil's Georgics implicates gentry in a programme of cultural reform along lines suggested by commerce, and in particular by the development of a financial credit system in the 1690s, not least because it is far from clear that Addison wrote his essay on Virgil after the founding of the Bank of England in 1694' ('Virgil's Prospects: The

Gentry and the Representation of Landscape in Addison's Theory of the Imagination', Oxford Art Journal 29 (2006): 193).

³¹ Lucy Aikin, The Life of Joseph Addison, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1843), 1: 30.

³² Courthope, Addison, 31.

³³ Adam Budd, John Armstrong's The Art of Preserving Health: Eighteenth-Century Sensibility in Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 173.

³⁴ Richard Terry, Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 50-1.

³⁵ Paul Davis, 'Was Addison a Poet?', in Joseph Addison: Tercentenary Essays, 69-71.

³⁶ Quoted in Estelle Haan, Vergilius Redivivus: Studies in Joseph Addison's Latin Poetry (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2005), 3 (the reader was the classical scholar and playwright Edmund Smith).

³⁷ Haan, Vergilius Redivivus, 2.

³⁸ See Haan, Vergilius Redivivus, 43-9 ('Barometri Descriptio'), 80-7 ('Machinae Gesticulantes'), 92-9 ('Sphaeristerium').

³⁹ Aikin, Life of Addison, 30.

⁴⁰ Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, 3: 306.

⁴¹ Scott Black, 'Addison's Aesthetics of Novelty', 279-80; Kevis Goodman, Georgic Modernity, 31-3; Michelle Syba, 'After Design: Joseph Addison Discovers Beauties', Studies in English Literature 49 (2009): 623-5. In a recent essay, Marcus Walsh offers a different account of the passage, emphasising that for Addison here (and indeed in Spectator 417) the reader's 'train or association of ideas is not a process of wild, undisciplined, or deluded fancy' but rather a function of "'Memory" ... a recognitive mode of mental activity' ('Addison as Critic and Critical Theorist', Joseph Addison: Tercentenary Essays, 102).

⁴² The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols (Oxford, 1965), 3: 562; the parallel is noted by Youngren (273), and Marcus Walsh (102).

⁴³ See also Walsh, 'Addison as Critic and Critical Theorist', 102-3.

⁴⁴ In addition to Youngren's essay, see, for instance, Clarence De Witt Thorpe, 'Addison's Contribution to Criticism', in The Seventeenth Century: Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1951), 322-3. Youngren himself, having acknowledged that Locke cannot have influenced Addison's associationism in the fourth paragraph of the 'Essay', observes in his next sentence that Addison's 'statement' in the paragraph that 'the mind "only takes the hint from the poet, and

seems to work out the rest by the strength of her own faculties” surely reminds us of the very Lockean opening of *Spectator* Number 417’ (Y 273)!

⁴⁵ *Spectator* 62 (wit); *Spectator* 411 (sense-perception).

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Laura Baudot, ‘Joseph Addison’s Lucretian Imagination’, *ELH* 84 (2017): 892: ‘While Lucretius has been overlooked in accounts of Addison’s aesthetics, the same certainly cannot be claimed of Locke. Addison is the first to inform readers that he draws key terms and concepts for describing the pleasures of the imagination from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). But less readily acknowledged by Addison and many of his readers is the extent to which he alters Locke’s empiricism in his aesthetic papers. Recovering the Lucretian subtext of Addison’s theory of the imagination reveals the nature and function of those changes: to elevate the imagination to the role of primary cognitive faculty and to defend Locke’s liberal subject against literary and philosophical commonplaces about death, including, particularly, those presented in *De Rerum Natura*.’ Most recently, Marcus Walsh has argued that Addison’s understanding of ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’, and his thinking about the association of ideas—two areas of his aesthetics conventionally described as Lockean—in fact remain fundamentally Aristotelian and as such contrary to Locke’s positions (‘Addison as Critic and Critical Theorist’, 101-4). The classic discussion of the sources of Addison’s associationist ideas in *The Spectator*—by Martin Kallich, in his essay ‘The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory: Hobbes, Locke, and Addison’, *ELH* 12 (1945): 290-315—characterizes them as ‘composite’, influenced primarily by Locke’s chapter in the 1700 edition of the *Essay* but also by earlier discussions by Hobbes, in *Leviathan* and elsewhere.

⁴⁷ Scaliger, *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561), 577.

⁴⁸ For an account of Addison’s struggles to learn the language during the French leg of his European travels in 1699, see Peter Smithers, *The Life of Joseph Addison*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 46-9.

⁴⁹ *Monsieur Rapin’s Reflections on Aristotle’s Treatise of Poesie* (1694), 99.

⁵⁰ See Leopold Damrosch Jr., ‘The Significance of Addison’s Criticism’, *Studies in English Literature* 19 (1979): 422-3.

⁵¹ *Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise of the Epick Poem* (1695), 249.

⁵² *Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise*, 250; the quotation is from Petronius, *Satyricon* 118.

⁵³ *Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise*, 251.

⁵⁴ *Monsieur Bossu’s Treatise*, 253.

⁵⁵ *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. Lonsdale, 3: 38.

⁵⁶ Monsieur Bossu's Treatise, 252-3.

⁵⁷ This distinction is central to Youngren's argument in 'Addison and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics': the 'Essay on the Georgics' typifies the attitude of 'Restoration critics ... that poems become as much like pictures as possible in order to gain a static clarity of moral presentation' (Y 272), whereas in his Spectator papers on Paradise Lost and the 'Pleasures of the Imagination' Addison 'repeatedly attempts to recreate the impression that the temporal progression of the verse makes on the reader's mind' (Y 276).

⁵⁸ For the origins of this axiom in nineteenth-century hermeneutics, see Willis Barnstone, The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1993), 7-8.

⁵⁹ A recent study emphasising this Longinian vein in Dryden's criticism is John West, Dryden & Enthusiasm: Literature, Religion, and Politics in Restoration England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) which includes extends discussions of both 'Of Heroique Plays' (35-44) and 'The Author's Apology' (45-53).

⁶⁰ Thorpe, 'Addison's Contribution to Criticism', 319.

⁶¹ C. H. Salter, 'Dryden and Addison', Modern Language Review 69 (1974): 38-9.

⁶² The Winter's Tale, IV. iv. 97 (citing the text in the 1996 Oxford edition by Stephen Orgel).

⁶³ For a suggestive account of Dryden's handling of ideas of prophecy, secrecy and insight in his rendering of the *Aeneid*, see Matthew Reynolds, The Poetry of Translation: From Chaucer & Petrarch to Homer & Logue (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 12: 'Dryden's Aeneis: 'a thousand secret beauties' (101-18).

⁶⁴ The Spectator, ed. Bond, 1: 39.

⁶⁵ Michelle Syba discusses Addison's use of the word 'seems' here, saying it 'leaves ambiguous the division of labor between reader and author', but noting also that 'in Addison's relentlessly empirical account of the world, what seems [to be the case] offers a pretty functional model for understanding what is the case' ('After Design: Addison Discovers Beauties', 623-4).