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TIGR Workshop: Performing Verse Drama in Translation

1. Try to read this line in a way that effaces the meter:

“The sun did not shine. It was too wet to play.” (11 syllables)

Compare:

“What is your problem? Is there an issue here?” (11 syllables)

I. Iambic pentameter

A. David Grene, trans.

Sophocles, Oedipus the King 771-88

(Univ. of Chicago Press, 1942; line numbering corresponds to the Greek text)

OEDIPUS: (addressing Jocasta)

It shall not be kept from you, since my mind

has gone so far with its forebodings. Whom

should I confide in rather than you, who is there

of more importance to me who have passed

through such a fortune?

Polybus was my father, king of Corinth,

and Merope, the Dorian, my mother. 775

I was held greatest of the citizens

in Corinth till a curious chance befell me

as I shall tell you—curious, indeed,

but hardly worth the store I set upon it.

There was a dinner and at it a man,

a drunken man, accused me in his drink 780

of being bastard. I was furious

but held my temper under for that day.

Next day I went and taxed my parents with it;

they took the insult very ill from him,

the drunken fellow who had uttered it.

So I was comforted for their part, but 785

still this thing rankled always, for the story

crept about widely. And I went at last

to Pytho, though my parents did not know.

—Lines highlighted in blue: different attacks are possible, including ones that do not come out as iambic pentameter.

—Contrast the enjambments “whom / should” and “passed / through” with the strong pause that “but” invites in 785 (in the Greek, ὅμως / δ’). How would you deliver “at last / to Pytho”?

B. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 958-72, trans. Sarah Ruden

(Lefkowitz & Romm, edd., *The Greek Plays*, Modern Library 2016)

CLYTEMNESTRA:

There is a sea—who’ll scorch it dry?—that feeds

a giant ooze of dye, renewed forever,

for purple clothing worth its weight in silver.

By the gods’ grace, this is on hand, my lord.

Our household isn’t trained in poverty.

I would have vowed to trample endless clothing

if orders came from any oracle’s seat,

and I could pay for this lost life’s return.

If the root lives, the house will come to leaf,

a shadow stretch to shield us from the Dog Star.

Back to the hearthside of your residence

you’ve come; your coming signals warmth in winter;

and Zeus is crafting wine from bitter grapes,

the halls already have grown cool whenever

the man of consequence walks through his home.

*(Agamemnon reaches the end of the purple walkway and exits into the palace.)*

Zeus, Zeus, Fulfiller, come fulfill my prayers,

look after all these things you mean to do.

C. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 958-72, trans. Louis MacNeice (1936)

CLYT.

There is the sea and who shall drain it dry? It breeds

Its wealth in silver of plenty of purple gushing

And ever-renewed, the dyeings of our garments.

The house has its store of these by God’s grace, King.

This house is ignorant of poverty

And I would have vowed a pavement of many garments

Had the palace oracle enjoined that vow

Thereby to contrive a ransom for his life.

For while there is root, foliage comes to the house

Spreading a tent of shade against the Dog Star.

So now that you have reached your hearth and home

You prove a miracle — advent of warmth in winter;

And further this — even in the time of heat

When God is fermenting wine from the bitter grape,

Even then it is cool in the house if only

Its master walk at home, a grown man, ripe.

O Zeus the Ripener, ripen these my prayers;

Your part it is to make the ripe fruit fall.

—note that the first line is a 6-beat iambic line.

D. Euripides, *Ion* 344-365 (333-54 Greek), trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien

(*Ion, Helen, Orestes*, Hackett 2016)

ion:

What do you need? My lady, I will help you.

creusa:

To hear a secret oracle from Phoebus. 345

ion:

Tell me; I’ll be your representative.

creusa:

All right. But—reverence makes me hesitate …

ion:

Reverence won’t help you. She’s a lazy goddess.

creusa:

My friend told me—that she had sex with Phoebus.

ion:

With Phoebus? Never. Stranger, take it back. 350

creusa:

And she bore the god’s child, without her father knowing.

ion:

No! She’s ashamed; some man did this injustice.

creusa:

That’s not what she says. She has been through hell.

ion:

How’s that, if she had congress with Apollo?

creusa:

The child she bore—she had to put him out. 355

ion:

She exposed him? Did he live? Where is he now?

creusa:

No one knows. I came to ask the god.

ion:

If he no longer lives, then what destroyed him?

creusa:

She thinks it must have been wild beasts. Poor boy.

ion:

Why did she think that? Was there some clear sign? 360

creusa:

She went to where she left him. He was gone.

ion:

But—was there any blood there on the ground?

creusa:

She says there wasn’t. And she looked and looked.

ion:

How long has it been since he was done away with?

creusa:

If he were living, he would be your age. 365

II. Anapests

A. Tragic

Euripides, Medea 104-120 (96-114 Greek), trans. Diane Arnson Svarlien

(*Alcestis, Medea, Hippolytus*, Hackett 2007; *Medea*, Hackett 2008)

Medea is singing (lyric anapests) and the Nurse is speaking/chanting.

Medea.

(from within the house, crying out in rage)

*Aaaah! 105*

*Oh horrible, horrible, all that I suffer,*

*my unhappy struggles. I wish I could die.*

nurse.

You see, this is it. Dear children, your mother

has stirred up her heart, she has stirred up her rage.

Hurry up now and get yourselves inside the house— 110

but don’t get too close to her, don’t let her see you:

her ways are too wild, her nature is hateful,

her mind is too willful.

Go in, hurry up!

Exit the Tutor and children into the house.

It’s clear now, it’s starting: a thunderhead rising,

swollen with groaning, and soon it will flash 115

as her spirit ignites it—then what will she do?

Her heart is so proud, there is no way to stop her;

her soul has been pierced by these sorrows.

Medea.

*Aaaah!*

*The pain that I’ve suffered, I’ve suffered so much,*

*worth oceans of weeping. O children, accursed,* 120

*may you die—with your father! Your mother is hateful.*

*Go to hell, the whole household! Every last one.*

B. Paratragic

2. Lysistrata 972ff AS 952-55 Greek

cinesias:

Ah, my wife has destroyed me! I’m shredded to pieces.

She skinned my poor cock and then hurried away.

Alas, what will happen? Whom now can I fuck?

I’ve been cheated and robbed of the fairest of all.

C. Comic

1. Lysistrata 559-65 AS (549-54 Greek) : anapestic tetrameter.

chorus of old women:

O most manly of grannies, most bristling of thistles, most fecund of all stinging nettles! 560

It is time to attack—while the wind’s at your back—in your fiercest and angriest fettles!

lysistrata:

If the soft sighs of Eros, whose spirit is sweet, and the breath of divine Aphrodite

will pour down their charms on our breasts and our thighs, and cast a deep spell of desire

on our men, and thus make them delightfully hard, with their rods and their staffs standing upright,

I believe that all Hellas will hail us as “Lysimaches: The Dissolvers of Battles!” 565

2. Anapestic septenarii in Plautus:

Miles Gloriosus 1011ff

III. trochaic tetrameter

A. In tragedy

1. Cassandra at Troades 466ff AS

2. Orestes ~~795-823 AS~~, or Orestes & the Phrygian p. 259ff

B. In comedy

1. Aristophanes

2. Plautus, trochaic septenarii

IV. Aristophanes’ iambic and anapestic tetrameters and dimeters

Menaechmi 373ff

V. Choral responsion