

TIGR Workshop: Performing Verse Drama in Translation

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

A. Iambic pentameter

1. Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 771-88, trans. David Grene
(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.

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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
of being bastard. I was furious
but held my temper under for that day.

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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*
still this thing rankled always, for the story
crept about widely. And I went *at last*
to Pytho, though my parents did not know.

785

—Lines highlighted in blue (different font): 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, ὄμως / δ’). How would you deliver “at last / to Pytho”?

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

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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.

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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.

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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

B. Iambic tetrameter

1. Aristophanes, *Women at the Thesmophoria* 533-43, trans. D. Arnson Svarlien (Hackett, forthcoming)

MICA:

My fellow women, by Aglaurus, you're not thinking rightly!
 Are you on drugs, or are you idiots? This woman's outrage—
 she's trying to destroy us!—you can't let it go unpunished!
 Can anyone ... well, look, it's up to us—us and our slave girls!
 Let's hold her down, and singe her pussy bald with burning ashes:
 she'll learn, since she's a woman, not to slander other women!

INLAW:

No, not my pussy, o my fellow females! If we really
 are citizens with freedom to express our honest views here,
 why must I pay the price, then, just for giving my opinion
 about Euripides, and what I think is fair? DON'T TOUCH ME!

C. Iambic senarii

Plautus, *The Braggart Soldier* 79-92, trans. Erich Segal (*Plautus: Four Comedies*. The World's Classics, OUP, 1996; first version pub. Samuel French, 1963).

PALAESTRIO.

Now folks, if you'll be kind enough to hear me out,
Then I'll be kind and tell you what our play's about.

Whoever doesn't want to listen, let him beat it
And give a seat to one of those in back who need it.

I'll tell you why we've gathered in this festive spot,
What comedy we will enact, its name and plot.

*This play is called the *Alázon* in Greek,*

A name translated 'braggart' in the tongue we speak.

This town is Ephesus; that soldier is my master

Who's just gone to the forum. What a shameless crass bombaster!

*He's so full of crap and lechery, no lies are vaster.**

He brags that all the women seek him out en masse.

The truth is, everywhere he goes they think he's just an ass.

blue = 4- and 7-beat lines.

*could be read as either 6 or 7 beats.

II. Anapests

A. Tragic anapests

1. 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!

*Oh horrible, horrible, all that I suffer,
my unhappy struggles. I wish I could die.*

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

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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
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.

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MEDEA.

Aaaah!

*The pain that I've suffered, I've suffered so much,
worth oceans of weeping. O children, accursed,
may you die—with your father! Your mother is hateful.
Go to hell, the whole household! Every last one.*

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2. Tragic delivery of anapests from Euripides' *Hecuba* (film clip):

<https://www.academia.edu/video/1wWar1>

Hecuba's entrance, performed by Elisabeth Henry as Greta in Patrick Wang's acclaimed 2018 film *A Bread Factory*.

B. Paratragic anapests

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 952-55, trans. D. Arnson Svarlien (Hackett, forthcoming)

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 anapests

1. Anapestic tetrameter.

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 549-54, trans. D. Arnson Svarlien (Hackett, forthcoming)

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN:

O most manly of grannies, most bristling of thistles, most fecund of all stinging nettles
It is time to attack—while the wind's at your back—in your fiercest and angriest fettle!

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!”

2. Anapestic septenarii.

Plautus, *The Braggart Soldier* 1011-20, trans. Erich Segal (OUP, 1996)

PALAESTRIO.

All you dreamed will appear, you can be of good cheer – there is certainly no cause for fearing,

For the person that’s speaking knows just who you’re seeking –

MILPHIDIPPA.

My goodness – who is this I’m hearing?

PAL. Of your council a sharer – and also a bearer of counsel, should you be confiding it.

MIL. Oh no, heaven forbid, what I’m hiding’s not hid!

PAL. Well, you may or may not still be hiding it.

MIL. Tell me how that can be?

PAL. It’s not hidden from me – but I’m trusty, a tacit and mum one.

MIL. Can you give me a sign that you know our design?

PAL. Let us say that a woman loves someone.

MIL. There are hundreds who do –

PAL. Ah, but ever so few send a gift given straight from their finger.

MIL. Ah, now I understand, I’ve the lay of the land now – and no more uncertainties linger.

Are there spies hereabouts?

PAL. [*Pointing to the soldier*] We're both with and without.

[*Milphidippa motions Palaestrio to one side.*]

MIL. I must see you alone, so I beckoned.

PAL. Well, for many or few words?

MIL. I only want two words.

PAL. [*To the soldier*] I'll be back with you in a second.

III. Trochaic tetrameter

A. In tragedy

1. Euripides, *Orestes* 793-801 (768-76 Greek), trans. D. Arnson Svarlien (*Ion, Helen, Orestes*, Hackett 2016)

ORESTES:

Oh, poor man, it seems my woes will cause you pain no less than me.

PYLADES:

I'm no Menelaus. Yes, it's painful, but it must be borne.

ORESTES:

Aren't you frightened? Argos wants my death. They might convict you, too.

PYLADES:

Argos has no jurisdiction over me. The Phocians do.

ORESTES:

Mobs are dangerous, when evil speakers lead the people on.

PYLADES:

Yes, but when a decent man persuades them, they'll act decently.

ORESTES:

Well, then. We must talk through this together.

PYLADES:

Yes. We are compelled.

ORESTES:

If I go and tell the people ...

PYLADES:

... you had justice on your side ...

ORESTES:

... I avenged my father; who could fault me?

PYLADES:

They might not be thrilled.

2. *Orestes* 1613-20 (1518-25 Greek), trans. DAS (Hackett, 2016)

ORESTES:

(Holding his sword closer to the Phrygian's face.)

Does every Phrygian fear the sword so much? Was it like this in Troy?

PHRYGIAN:

Take your blade away! Up close, its gleam is frightening. I see death!

ORESTES:

What, like seeing a Gorgon? You're afraid of turning into stone? 1615

PHRYGIAN:

Gorgon? No—what's that? I'm just afraid of turning into *dead*.

ORESTES:

You're a slave, and you fear Hades? Death would bring release from pain.

PHRYGIAN:

Slave or free, it doesn't matter; all men love to be alive.

ORESTES:

Well said. I will spare you, for your intellect. Go on inside.

PHRYGIAN:

You won't kill me?

ORESTES:

No; you're spared.

PHRYGIAN:

Well said; I like the sound of that.

B. Trochaic tetrameter in comedy

1. Aristophanes, *Wasps*, second parabasis, 1284-90, trans. Douglas M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens*, p. 176 (OUP, 1995).

Thére are sóme men whó assérted thát I'd máde my peáce with hím.
That was at the time when Kleon charged at me and hárrased me
And abused me and provoked me. Then, when I was being flayed,
People not involved looked on and laughed to see me yelling out.
They cared not a scrap for me, though. All they wanted was to know
Whether I, when Kleon squeezed me, would emit some little joke.
I could see the situation; so I played the ape a bit.

2. Plautus, trochaic septenarii
The Brothers Menaechmus 414ff, trans. Erich Segal (*Plautus: Four Comedies. The World's Classics*, OUP, 1996).

MESSINIO.

If she's not from Syracuse, how does she know the facts so well?

MENAECHMUS II. [getting excited.]

Hercules, I shouldn't keep refusing her.

MESS.

Oh, don't you dare!

Go inside that door and you're a goner, sir.

MENAECH.

Now you shut up!

Things are going well. Whatever she suggests—I'll just agree.

Why not get a little ... hospitality? [to Erotium] Dear lady, please—

I was impolite a while ago. I was a bit afraid that [indicating Messinio]

He might go and tell my wife ... about the dress ... about the dinner.

Now, when you would like, we'll go inside.

EROTIUM.

But where's the parasite?

Men.

I don't give a damn. Why should we wait for him? Now if he comes,

Don't let him inside at all.

EROTIUM.

By Castor, I'll be happy not to.

Yet [playfully] there's something I would like from you.

MEN.

Your wish is my command.

EROT. Bring the dress you gave me to the Phrygian embroiderer.

Have him redesign it, add some other frills I'd like him to.

IV. Choral respension

1. Euripides, *Suppliant Women* 966-81 (955-70 Greek), trans. John Frederick Nims (*Euripides*, 2. Penn Greek Drama Series, edd. Slavitt & Bovie, 1998).

[STROPHE]

Nevermore to be blessed with sons!	(glyconic)
Nevermore to enjoy with those	(gly.)
Argive women the pride of motherhood.	
No more will Artemis come,	
goddess of childbirth, to those left.	
My life's no more a life;	
like a drifting cloud I am tossed	(gly.)
this way, that, as by winds of winter.	(hipponactean)

[ANTISTROPHE]

Seven mothers; and seven sons—
 how distinguished all Argos knows
 we gave birth to, we mothers bound for grief.
 No son remains to us now.
 I grow old in misery here,
 no more reckoning among
 those alive or the dreary dead,
 as I hover betwixt, between them.

Choral Responsion, cont.

2. Euripides, *Hecuba* 462-81 (444-65 Greek), trans. D. Arnson Svarlien
(*Andromache, Hecuba, Trojan Women*, Hackett 2012)

[STROPHE]

Breeze, ocean breeze,
 you spirit the ocean-going barks away
 far over the deep sea waves;
 now where will you lead unhappy me? 465
 Whose house will I belong to
 as slave and possession?
 Will I arrive at a harbor in Dorian country
 or come to the land of Phthia
 where father Apidanus, so they say, 470
 enriches the plain with the loveliest of streams?

[ANTISTROPHE]

Salt-sweeping oar,
 Will you send me to an island, where I'll spend
 a pitiful life indoors?
 Perhaps I'll reside where Leto grasped 475
 the saplings of the date palm—
 the first in the world—and
 bay laurel, cherished memento and sacred emblem
 of birth pangs for Zeus' children.
 Will I sing with the Delian girls in praise 480
 of Artemis' bow and her diadem of gold?