
Jocasta's Divine Head: English with a Foreign Accent

D. S. CARNE-ROSS

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IN the epilogue to his 1567 translation of Ovid's *Heroides*, George Turberville wrote:

It is a work of praise to cause
A Roman born to speak with English jawse.

That is, to bring over the foreign work into English in such a way that it reads as though it had originally been written in English. This is the dominant mode of translation, what most good translators do and no doubt what they ought to be doing. Here is Dryden, a great translator who handled the dominant mode as confidently as anyone has ever done, providing Roman Juvenal with a pair of splendidly English jaws:

In Saturn's Reign, at Nature's Early Birth,
There was that Thing call'd Chastity on Earth, . . .
Those first unpolisht Matrons, Big and Bold,
Gave Suck to Infants of Gygantick Mold;
Rough as their Savage Lords who Rang'd the Wood,
And Fat with Acorns Belcht their windy Food.

This keeps sufficiently close to the original, for an age when every educated person knew Latin, but, or perhaps I should say and, there is no trace of a foreign accent. This is English, the massive, truculent English of John Dryden.

Translation of this sort serves so many cultural and pedagogic purposes, binding up the wounds of Babel so valiantly that it is almost beyond the reach of criticism. Almost, but not quite, for is there not in this ethnocentric mode, as the French are calling it, a certain provincial arrogance? It sets over the door of the

house of translation a sign announcing, "English only spoken. No foreign tricks allowed here." It preserves the native grain of English (let "English" stand for the receiving language) but does not add to it, does not cross-fertilize English with foreign forms of expression or fresh syntactical possibilities, and where it introduces unfamiliar kinds of thought or feeling it lends them a familiar cast and hue.¹ More serious, one may argue that it misrepresents its original not only in the obvious sense of turning it into something different, which translation must always do, but by misrepresenting the directest experience one can have of a foreign work, that of someone possessing the original language and reading the work in that language. When we read Sophocles in Greek, we know that we are abroad. Ethnocentric translation naturalizes Sophocles, leaving us with the false comfort of feeling *chez nous*.

Just enough can then be said against the dominant mode to make it worth considering another, an alternative mode in which the translator makes no secret of the fact that he is taking us abroad. He accepts the foreignness of the original and lets it color his diction and syntax. What he writes will not and should not sound quite "natural." I may seem to be speaking of the literal word-for-worder, translationese, but even if the alternative mode will often be, though it need not be, literal, its literalism will be bolder than that of its plodding congener below the salt.² To put it in Turberville's terms: instead of causing a Roman born to speak with English jaws, it will seek to cause or allow a Roman born to speak English with jaws still partly Roman.

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The line that divides translation from original composition is a thin one and easily transgressed. Pope's *Iliad* is a free translation. With Horace, Pope employs that still freer, rogue form of the species which allows the writer to "run division on the groundwork as he pleases." Imitation, Dryden called it. "Sapphics" is a poem by Swinburne, a poem that conveys so much of Sappho's manner and matter that it can be claimed as yet another still freer form of the species. Seen in this light, translation provides a convenient means of introducing the real subject of this paper, which is not translation (though I shall

periodically be reverting to it), but original composition in which the writer, like the alternative translator, "takes us abroad" and submits his language to the transforming pressure of foreign idioms, constructions, and rhythms. Poets have always drawn on this resource. Chaucer's "And smalle foweles maken melodye" brings to English the liquid vovelling of Italian. Synge's "Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools when I am eaten up with misery" is very beautiful, and very alien; Irish (one assumes) has insinuated its way into English. When Horatio says that the elder Hamlet "smote the sledged Polacks on the ice," the sense is not that he smote them when they were sitting on sleds but that sledding was their habitual mode of travel. "Sledged" functions in the manner of a Greek formular epithet like "swift-footed," which can be used of Achilles when he is standing still.³ In Othello's heroic line "It is a sword of Spain, the ice brook's temper," the appositional phrase is Graeco-Roman rather than English. With Shakespeare, the command of our language is so sovereign that whatever he writes can sound native, even "the priest in surplice white / That defunctive music can" — no English we have ever heard but English as our first parents might have used it in Eden. The effect is quite different in "Lycidas" when Milton writes "the fable of Bellerus old." The genitive, a Greek genitive like "the might of Heracles" for "mighty Heracles," is meant to sound foreign, part of Milton's poem-long assertion that pastoral is not simply an English but a common European genre. The foreign accent that is so prominent in his later writing is already heard here.

It is this, English with a foreign accent, that I want to pursue, and also the appropriation of foreign metrical forms. My purpose is not simply to chronicle what has been done but to consider what could have been done and what could still be done, rather in the spirit of Pound when he asked why English poets, having taken over the sonnet from Italy, were not enterprising enough to go on and borrow or adapt the more challenging Italian canzone. (His prejudices prevented him from seeing that Milton had done so in "Lycidas.") First, though, I need to stay briefly with translation, using two examples of the dominant mode in order to contrast them with the alternative. Take these lines near the start of the sixth *Aeneid*:

at pius Aeneas arces quibus altus Apollo
 praesidet horrendaeque procul secreta Sibyllae,
 antrum immane, petit.

Here is Dryden's 1699 version, composed in the dominant, Englishing mode:

The Pious Prince ascends the sacred Hill
 Where Phoebus is ador'd; and seeks the Shade,
 Which hides from sight his venerable Maid.
 Deep in a Cave the Sibyl makes abode.

Writing in a Latin-nourished age when epic was regarded as the supreme, still living literary form (*Paradise Lost* had appeared only thirty years before), Dryden uses the high style of the day, confidently offering his *Aeneid* as part of contemporary literature, much as one might do today with a new version of *Madame Bovary*. He can be quite matter of fact about the action: an epic hero is consulting the oracle. Not of course something one did in the England of William and Mary, but the sort of thing that happens in the familiar world of classical epic. There is no sense here that an old and culturally distant work is being brought into the present. This is Virgil our contemporary.

The culture for which Robert Fitzgerald composed his 1983 version of the poem is altogether different. Most of those who read Latin at all do so with a certain difficulty, and the conventions of epic are likely to be no more than a classroom memory. Fitzgerald responds to this new situation by trying to bring off what is, in an entirely honorable sense, a kind of confidence trick. Although his verse is more consciously dignified than is usual today, it is still the language of today, and yet his translation asks our acceptance of something wholly outside the experience of today, an epic hero consulting the oracle of Apollo:

Aeneas,

In duty bound, went inland to the heights
 Where overshadowing Apollo dwells
 And nearby, in a place apart—a dark
 Enormous cave—the Sibyl feared by men.

(Note "in duty bound." Dryden can assume that his reader knows what *pius* means.)

What I mean by confidence trick should be clear if we look next at the French translation by Pierre Klossowski, published in 1964. At first and even second sight it is scarcely comprehensible, following as it does the word order of the Latin, and recalls the Oxbridge joke about those Loeb versions where one must look across to the Greek or Latin to find out what the English means. Taking full face the shock of the foreign, as a German theorist puts it, Klossowski confronts us with the alternative mode at its most uncompromising:

Mais le pieux Énée les sommets auxquels le haut
 Apollon
 préside et de l'horrificante au loin les solitudes de la
 Sibylle,
 l'antre immense, gagne.

This does not simply admit the foreignness of the original; the translator gets right down into his language, into word order and syntax, forcing into it elements of the source language that significantly contribute to the tone and total effect. Drawing on the violent dislocations of French usage and linguistic expectation practiced by avant-garde French writers from Mallarmé on, Klossowski presents us with a modern *Aeneid*, as Dryden's was in its day and as Fitzgerald's is not. Here, three centuries later, is Virgil our contemporary again, of necessity a strange and difficult Virgil. (The literary question, which does not directly concern me, is whether Klossowski writes well enough to achieve his purpose. I judge that on the whole he does not, despite some notably resourceful coups like the phrase describing Dido's pack of hunting dogs, "la flairante meute," as energetically odd as I take Virgil's *odora canum uis* [4.132] to be.)

The lines I quoted do not show his approach to advantage, and it is hard to distinguish them from the crudest interlinear trot. He does better in book 8 with the famous scene where Venus makes love to Mars, which prompted a notable essay of Montaigne:

Elle avait dit et, neigeux d'éclat, par-ci, la divine,
 par-là, de ces bras,

l'hésitant d'une étreinte souple échauffe.

dixerat et niueis hinc atque hinc diua lacertis
cunctantem amplexu molli fouet.

Klossowski's French enacts the situation it describes. Just as Venus's arms encircle Mars, the adjectival phrase, *neigeux d'éclat*, and its noun, *bras*, encircle the intervening words. Although Virgil's Latin does the same thing, the French claims more attention, for whereas hyperbaton of this sort is familiar in Latin, and made immediately comprehensible by the case endings, the dislocated word order is more striking in French and makes us struggle our way to the meaning. One could argue that Klossowski has minimally improved his original. Where Virgil writes *hinc atque hinc diua*, Klossowski inserts *la divine* between the two phrases describing the goddess's movements, thus defining them more exactly. While following Virgil almost word for word, he has transformed a passage of classical poetry into modern poetry. In aspiration at least, this is translation of the school of Pierre Menard.⁴

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In a contemporary writer, Latinism serves to distance and estrange. In earlier centuries, when Latin was close enough to the everyday business of life to constitute virtually a living language, almost an alternative English, Latinism served different purposes and was used in different ways. The two languages might be set side by side (the multitudinous seas incarnadine / making the green one red; vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction / enough wit to keep it sweet), or Latin might underlie English as a kind of grid. This alternative English is found not so much in translation as in original writing, for obvious enough reasons. Since the originals were in everyone's hands, there was no need for two-ply translation with the Latin showing through like a strange, alien presence, hence representative Tudor translations – Golding's *Metamorphoses*, for instance, or Marlowe's *Amores* – were written in "ordinary" English. The alternative, Latinate language was reserved for other purposes. When Jonson translates Catullus, he uses the lyric idiom of his day ("Kisse me sweet: the warie lover / Can

your favours keepe, and cover"). When he writes a poem in praise of the antiquary William Camden, his tutor at Westminster, he turns to the alternative language and puts on the decent Roman toga that hung in every educated man's wardrobe:⁵

Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe
 All that I am in arts, all that I know,
 (How nothing's that?) to whom my country owes
 The great renown, and name wherewith she goes.
 Than thee the age sees not that thing more grave,
 More high, more holy, that she would more crave.
 What name, what skill, what faith hast thou in things!
 What sight in searching the most antique springs!
 What weight, and what authority in thy speech!
 Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach.
 Pardon free truth, and let thy modesty,
 Which conquers all, be once overcome by thee.
 Many of thine this better could, than I,
 But, for their powers, accept my piety.

Decorum requires that so notable a man be praised in the high Roman fashion. Although neither Latinate syntax or diction are intrusive, the slow, weighted movement and the concision of the language ("Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach," *nihil est quod discere velis quod ille docere non possit*) bespeak their grave Roman provenance. As the notes to the useful Penguin edition show, Jonson has Latin warrant for every other sentence. The thrust of the whole poem is behind its final words, "accept my piety": Roman *pietas*, the debt a man must pay to parents and benefactors.

Most striking, though readers seem not to have found it so, is the opening address to Camden's *head*. This idiom is marginally Latin but essentially Greek and quite foreign to English. Swinburne uses it in *Atalanta in Calydon*, "O holy head of Oeneus," but where everything is so Greek the expression does not much stand out. Shelley uses it in his great elegy for Keats, "O weep for Adonais! though our tears / Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head." He eases the alien idiom into English by treating the frost as a garland round the head of the dead poet, and his source here is not Greek but Latin, Horace's poem for the death of a friend in which he asks what

measure there can be in our grief *tam cari capitis* (*Odes* 1.24). The common Latin use of genitival *caput* in legal and political usage referring to a charge endangering one's civic rights or life probably allowed a Roman reader to take the expression in his stride. I do not believe that we should take in our stride the opening line of *Antigone*, literally "O joint self-sister head of Ismene" (*Ō koinon autadelphon Ismēnēs karā*). Hölderlin certainly did not, and came up with the astonishing line *Gemeinsamschwesterliches! O Ismenes Haupt!*, which George Steiner has explored with much imaginative energy.⁶ A great Sophoclean scholar, Jebb no less, tells us that its "pathetic emphasis . . . gives the key-note of the drama," yet most translators have been content to let it go with "Oh my dear Ismene" or the like.

There is another Sophoclean head, in *Oedipus Rex*, that seems to me no less imposing, though again most translators have let it go. Announcing the death of Jocasta, the messenger declares: *tethnēke theion Iokastēs karā*, "The divine head of Jocasta is dead." Hölderlin writes:

Es ist das schnellste Wort, zu sagen und
Zu hören, tot ist es, Jokastas göttlich Haupt.

His success in making what I take to be convincing poetic speech from a literal rendering of the Greek no doubt reflects the German language's ability to absorb foreign linguistic usage.⁷ And yet in French too, notoriously impervious for most of its history to foreign turns of speech, the literal rendering can be powerful, as anyone will testify who heard Jean Cocteau deliver the running commentary to Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*: "La tête divine de Jocaste est morte" (*divum Iocastae caput mortuum* in the libretto). And in English? "Our royal lady Jocasta is dead," Jebb wrote. Yeats was briefer: "Jocasta, our Queen, is dead." Briefer still, Fitts and Fitzgerald, and Fagles: "The Queen is dead." But this Greek head strikes at the English like an African mask at a tea party.⁸ Must Sophocles' words be so reduced?

Wait, though, what we have here may be no more than a *façon de parler*, so that a literal rendering would be as misleading as representing French *mon vieux* by "my old." Yet as Dodds once remarked, even a *façon de parler* must have an origin, and a

poet's job is to keep origins alive. We should at this point try to determine what force *kara*, head, has in Greek, and here we must seek counsel of an expert. Used *pars pro toto* of a person, we are told, the word *kara* "has strong emotional colouring; the emotion is normally affection . . . or respect" (W. S. Barrett on Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 651). In Greek, that is, not necessarily in English, but since Jonson was able to make it powerful, there is no reason why a poet translator could not do so today. What of "divine," *theios*? Plato, using a noun of the same meaning, speaks of the divine head of a friend supposedly in a state of Dionysiac exaltation (*Phaedrus*, 234d). No doubt the context mocks the stately expression, yet it is stately, even in prose, and likely to be more so in verse. So "divine" had better be kept too—in the hope that some trace of the numinous still sticks to the word even in our profane world. One wonders next about the coupling of *divine* and *dead*: how can the divine die? Perhaps we may suppose that Jocasta, having taken on the dread solemnity of death and hence freed from mortality, is now in some sense a divine being. Is there, preserved in the words of this poet (whose imagination reached back to the archaic dark that bred those sweet children, the Furies) at this point of this play, some memory of the divine kingship of the older Mediterranean world? We must not cut Sophocles down to our measure.

Risk it, then, why not? Let English take the shock of the foreign and go all out with Hölderlin: *tot ist es, Jokastas göttlich Haupt*. The English translator still has the awkward head/dead rhyme to deal with, but this need not be too troubling if the rhyming words can be kept apart: "The queen is dead, Jocasta, that divine head gone." I can't do it, but a poet should be able to.⁹

Perhaps I have dwelt too long on a single expression—without convincing the reader that it carries the weight I have claimed for it. And yet this single expression may serve to open the way to a question of larger scope, one that ought to matter to those who continue to value Greek poetry. Have we made ourselves too much at home in the remote world from which it addresses us? Do we, by our usual ways of translating, and understanding, filter out much that is strange and disturbing, even frightening, there? Take, almost at random, these words near the start of *Odyssey* 13: *toisi de boun hierous' hieron menos Alkinooio /*

Zēni kelainephei Kronidēi. Fitzgerald translates: "As the god's annointed, / Alkinoos made offering on their behalf—an ox / to Zeus beyond the stormcloud." This does not ruffle our composure. Leconte de Lisle, who sought to give the French a ruder, more Homeric Homer than they had had before, offered a different reading: "Au milieu d'eux la Force sacrée d'Alkinoos égorgea un boeuf pour Zeus Kronide qui amasse les nuées." Most people would say that to render *hieron menos* in this literal fashion grossly overtranslates an expression that in the original hardly makes itself felt. (It is used of Alkinoos six times in the *Odyssey*, once with another proper name occupying the same position in the line.) Milman Parry would certainly have said so. The novice, he tells us, finds much poetic excitement and meaning in the formulaic elements of Homeric diction to which the practiced reader learns to become indifferent. He "passes over them, scarcely heeding their meaning."¹⁰ If so, heaven help the practiced reader, and heaven help the rest of us who put our trust in him.

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Milton created a new language, Samuel Johnson claimed. "Through all his greater works there prevails an uniform peculiarity of *diction*, a mode and cast of expression which bears little resemblance to that of any former writer." A new or third language poised confidently between English and Latin. Call it Miltonic. "He was master of his language in its full extent," Johnson added. Milton speaks Miltonic like a native.

We see him practicing this language in the more Latinate sonnets, "essays . . . in the 'magnificent' style," F. T. Prince calls them.¹¹ Sometimes, it is true, the Latinisms sound clumsy. "Lawrence of vertuous Father vertuous Son" might be a school-boy's construe. The clumsiness here is, I think, deliberate, a polemical announcement that he is writing not in the lax Elizabethan but in the severe Italian manner created a century before by poets like Bembo and Giovanni della Casa, who treated the sonnet as the high vernacular equivalent of the Horatian epistle or ode.¹² The announcement once made, all trace of clumsiness vanishes. The language of the sestet is poised, urbane, on civil terms with English and yet keeping its fastidious distance. This is not the friendly cohabitation of Pope's "easy Ciceronian

Style/So Latin, yet so English all the while." The movement, the fingering, are subtly foreign:

What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,
 Of Attick tast, with Wine, whence we may rise
 To hear the Lute well toucht, or artfull voice
 Warble immortal Notes and Tuskan Ayre?
 He who of those delights can judge, and spare
 To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

The Latinisms of *Paradise Lost* are too pervasive, and too familiar a theme, to allow or need discussion here. It is, though, perhaps worth remarking, since Latinate diction is often thought of as contributing primarily severity or elevation, how well it serves for the stylized social comedy of book 9 as "domestick" Adam tries to warn Eve of the danger of going off alone. She of course will have none of it:

To whom the Virgin Majestie of Eve,
 As one who loves, and some unkindness meets,
 With sweet austeer composure thus reply'd.

It is a stroke of exquisite wit to use the grand Homeric periphrasis "the Virgin Majestie of Eve" (compare, e.g., "the sacred force of Telemachus") to introduce a family dispute. Eve, in the manner of any clever woman who is not going to be put down, turns Adam's case against him, arguing that his flattering concern for her safety in fact reveals his doubts about her ability to deal with Satan ("His fraud is then thy fear, which plain inferrs/Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love/Can by his fraud be shak'n or seduc't"). She ends with a stately, defiant flourish, the word-order delicately intricately:

Thoughts, which how found they harbour in thy brest,
 Adam, misstought of her to thee so dear?

She goes on her way, and as she sets out to the fatal encounter with Satan, Milton changes his notes to tragic.

It is hard to imagine at what other level of style or diction this scene could have been presented if it were not to be altogether out of place in its heroic setting. Shakespeare in a comedy

could have done it directly, in “English,” a novelist more directly still in prose. Mozart does it in *Figaro*, but there the music of itself creates the necessary distance from the workaday world. This is a husband and wife on the verge of a serious quarrel, but a husband and wife quarreling in Eden: Eden just before but still before the fall. Miltonic provides the right medium, distancing the action while showing itself fully capable of striking the note of high comedy.

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Up to this point it is the relation of English to Latin that has occupied us, the relation to Greek, far less known and culturally more remote, only marginally. Knowledge of the language increased steadily in England from the mid-seventeenth century on and was widespread in the eighteenth—how deep it went is another matter.¹³ Yet clear evidence of Greek influence is hard to pin down; the language is too quicksilver and inconstant. “There is a want of salient points to seize, . . . which makes imitation impossible” (to use Arnold’s words of Homer), except in the case of direct adoption of a Greek poetic usage like Milton’s “flowry-kirtl’d Naiades” in *Comus*, which beautifully re-creates the decorative Greek compound epithet, or his use now and then of a Greek construction. When Eve plucked the forbidden fruit, she “knew not eating Death,” where “eating” is a Greek participle (she did not know that she was eating death) and an English adjective (she did not know the devouring power of death).

As one might expect, it is in *Samson Agonistes* that Greek influence makes itself most fully felt in the language. An indication of its presence there is noted by one of Milton’s most acute verbal critics, Christopher Ricks, unwittingly, since he takes it to be the *absence* of something which he believes ought to be there, namely, the use of metaphorical, figurative language that is so abundant in Shakespeare. On the assumption that when he turned to drama Milton tried to adopt “the Shakespearian type of metaphor,” Ricks finds that he fails, fails by introducing a metaphor and then, instead of developing it in the Shakespearian manner, either lets it drop or, worse, combines it with another metaphor with which it doesn’t mesh.¹⁴ Look, with Ricks, at a passage like this (189ff.):

How counterfeit a coin they are who friends
 Bear in their Superscription (of the most
 I would be understood) in prosperous days
 They swarm, but in adverse withdraw their head . . .

Friends are *counterfeit*, like bad coins, and they *swarm*, like flies presumably, then *withdraw their head*, which flies, so far as we know, don't do and coins can't do. Shakespeare would not have written like this. But is Milton trying to write like Shakespeare? He describes his play as "coming forth after the antient manner, much different from what among us passes for best. . . . In the modelling . . . of this Poem, with good reason, the Antients and Italians are rather follow'd, as of much more authority and fame." His model is Greek; he has his eye not on Shakespeare but on Greek tragedy, primarily I believe on Sophocles, and of Sophocles a classical scholar remarks that when he "employs metaphors in dialogue — as of course he often does — he rarely works them for all they are worth. They do not interest him so much that he feels impelled to draw them out for their own sake. Their purpose served, he readily lets them go."¹⁵ Some lines from *Oedipus Rex*, describing the state of Thebes devastated by the plague, illustrate the critic's point:

polis gar, hōsper kaūtos eisorais, agan
 ēdē saleuei, k̄anakouphisai kara
 buthōn et' oukh hoia te phoiniou salou,
 phthinousa men kaluxin engkarpois khthonos,
 phthinousa d' agelais bounomois tokoisi te
 agonois gunaikōn.

Fagles's translation of the first three lines renders the Greek quite closely, except that where Sophocles speaks simply of the city, he first writes "our city," then shifts to "our ship":

Our city —
 look around you, see with your own eyes —
 our ship pitches wildly, cannot lift her head
 from the depths . . .

Jebb, always sensitive to Sophocles' style, evidently judging that the ship-of-state metaphor is hardly felt, translates "is sorely

vexed" rather than "pitches wildly," although he keeps the Greek "lift her head." Does "head" stand for prow, one may wonder, or is Kamerbeek right in supposing that "the image shifts from a sinking ship to a drowning man"? However this may be, Sophocles now abandons his figure and turns to what may seem figurative to us but in Greek is almost direct statement, given the archaic sense of the unity of being that binds the life of man and nature within an enfolding whole. The city is "dying in the buds and fruits of the earth, dying in the herds at pasture and in the barren pangs of women."

Any competent reader of Greek verse would I think agree that this is powerful dramatic speech. Ricks, were he to subject it to the Shakespearian standard he applies to *Samson*, would have to censure the way Sophocles briefly introduces the jaded ship-of-state metaphor (possibly blending it with another figure) and lets it go when it has served its limited purpose. This is Milton's practice in this play, and it is illicit to fault it by comparing it with a different practice. There is no rule about how long a metaphor should be sustained, and to create one from Shakespeare's highly individual style is provincial. The critic's task here is descriptive, not prescriptive: let him for our instruction observe that Shakespeare almost always, Aeschylus often, keeps a figure going, whereas Sophocles usually does not, nor does Milton—in *Samson*, that is. In *Paradise Lost*, as Ricks himself brilliantly demonstrates, Milton can sustain and develop a figure with the best of them.

The language of this play is not, like that of *Paradise Lost*, a new or third language; in no sense is it a "Babylonish dialect . . . formed . . . by a perverse and pedantic principle." This is English, often as sinewy an English as one could wish ("God, when he gave me strength, to show withal / How slight the gift was, hung it in my Hair"). Here, in his final work, Milton gives us something we have all too little of, great English poetry that is quite uninfluenced by Shakespeare and sparing in its use of metaphor:

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
 Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
 Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
 And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

Beside these unadorned words, the last line and a half above all, the gorgeous flourishes that mark the Shakespearian hero's closure can sound a little gaudy.

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It is in the nineteenth century that Greece really comes into its own, penetrating deeply into English life. "We are all Greeks," Shelley said; "we are now pensioners upon the Greeks only," Ruskin said, and John Stuart Mill could claim that the battle of Marathon, "even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings."¹⁶ All the major poets except Keats knew Greek, most of them very well. It is at this period, then, that we would expect Greek influence to be most richly present. In one sense, it is; the poets draw abundantly on Greek myth and heroic saga—think only of *Prometheus Unbound*, *Endymion*, Tennyson's idylls, *Atalanta in Calydon*. Yet in the sense that concerns us here, the Greek language actively at work in the diction and texture of English verse—in anything like the degree to which it is found in the later Hölderlin:¹⁷ this we do not find. Arnold comes closest in *Sohrab and Rustum*, a fine poem in its way and his most successful attempt to disguise his troubled mid-Victorian self in robes borrowed from Greek antiquity. Inevitably, he wears them too self-consciously, dutifully imitating Homeric parataxis, for instance, in the series of lines beginning with "and" in Rustum's speech to his dying son, in the too frequent Homeric allusions, and the often rather pointless epic similes. All this makes the poem not so much Homeric as a pupil's exercise in the manner of his master, like the unrhymed "terza rima" sequence in *Little Gidding*. It takes a mightier hand than Uncle Matthew's to purloin the club of Hercules.

And there is Browning's version of *Agamemnon*, written "in as Greek a fashion as English will bear." Indeed there is. Many hard words have been said of this work, most of them deserved, though Steiner's attentive reading discovers occasional virtues that others have missed.¹⁸ Browning tried, he tells us, "for the very turn of each Greek phrase," but in so doing he violates English while only occasionally managing to sound Greek. For Aeschylus' compendiary expression describing the storm that wrecked the Greek fleet, *duskumanta . . . kaka*, he writes "bad-

wave-outbreak evils.” “Bad,” particularly feeble with “evils,” misses the idea of something unlucky or ill-omened that the prefix *dus-* probably suggests here. To render *kum-* by “wave” unpacks Aeschylus’ Greek too quickly. A *kuma* is indeed a wave, but literally and first of all it is anything swelling or swollen, so that these *duskumanta kaka* are both like waves, swelling in a way that bodes disaster, and are waves. “Outbreak,” energetically gathering the verb (“arose”) into the phrase, would be one strike for Browning if he hadn’t already provided the sentence with a verb (“began”). He does no better with Aeschylus’ syntax. The poet describes Agamemnon and Menelaus, hearing the seer Calchas hint at the terrible sacrifice required to still the waves that stop them sailing for Troy, as, literally, the “earth-with-their-staffs-striking Atreidai” (*khthona baktrois epikrousantas Atreidas*). Hopkins, possibly with these very words in mind, writes “his riding / Of the rolling level underneath him steady air,” showing that it is possible to reproduce loaded word-groups of this kind in strange but powerful English. All Browning can come up with is

So that the Atreidai striking staffs on earth . . .

In the fragmented, appalled vision of Agamemnon, just back from the war, murdered by Clytemnestra as she bathes him, Cassandra sees or seems to see a cow tangling a bull in cloths and striking it/him down with her horns, or is it a two-bladed axe? To find adequate words for this inversion of every known norm and usage, Aeschylus (to the distress of grammarians) disruptively forces the participial phrase into the main clause:

en peploisin
melangkerōi labousa mēkhanēmati
tuptei.

Browning writes:

In the vesture she catching him, strikes him now
With the black-horned trick.

Useless. What is needed is a poet willing to take this sort of risk, and bring it off:

In the cloths
with a blackhorned CAUGHT HIM thing she
strikes!

• • •

Poetic form. English is so different from Greek and Latin that exact formal imitations are seldom possible, but I know from experience how stimulating a study their forms can be in suggesting forms which might suit English, but which one would not have thought of had one not studied Greek and Latin prosody.

—W. H. Auden¹⁹

If one is looking at the ways whereby a foreign born can be brought to speak English with foreign jaws, at the ways in which our native speech may be taught to move to strange, new musics, then metre can hardly be left out of account. It may be not so much in diction or syntax as in metre that the influence of Greek in nineteenth-century poetry can best be studied. The endeavor by poets of this period to accommodate classical metres to English—that is, usually, by employing what John Hollander calls the stress-analogue principle, replacing classical quantity with English stress accent: this has received less attention than the sixteenth-century experiments in classical form, which from a literary point of view are less rewarding. Unskillful attempts to impose quantity on English too often led good poets to write less well than they otherwise would. Sidney's poems in native measures are notably superior to those in classical metres, and of these even the best, like "O sweet woods the delight of solitarines," are most attractive when they evade the alien encasement he sought to impose upon them. The movement yielded work of the first quality only in *Campion*, "the seraphic doctor of English prosody," C. S. Lewis calls him, who opened up a range of formal possibilities, few of which were to be developed. With his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* of 1602, and Daniel's reply, or rebuttal as it is commonly taken to be, *A Defence of Ryme*, the following year, the struggle was largely abandoned (I am omitting the odes of *Samson Agonistes*, which are far too complex for a passing reference) and not taken up until the nineteenth century when

cal analysis of the poem would be laboriously unprofitable, and it is best to say simply that we have here a new, ingenious prosodic invention, this or that effect suggested no doubt by Meredith's classical reading, but no more than that. The lilting, rather sing-song rhythm is charming, sometimes beautiful ("Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping / Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star"), but it easily grows monotonous, even though it is checked, not often enough, by syncopation, the suppression of short syllables: "Large and smoky red the sun's cold disk drops," a shorter trochaic hemistich, /·/·/, followed by ·////, then once again in the following line trochaic and iambic units are combined. "Love in the Valley," it seems to me, is the kind of poem that a poetry workshop might usefully study, taking it to pieces and seeing how its metrical components could be reassembled and improved.²¹

A classical model has been claimed for Meredith's poem, unsuccessfully, one may think. For my next exhibit, Shelley's "Hymn of Pan," no such provenance has to my knowledge ever been proposed, yet I hope to show that it is directly patterned on a classical, Greek, form. The third stanza best illustrates my point:

I sang of the dancing stars,
 I sang of the daedal Earth,
 And of Heaven—and the giant wars,
 And Love, and Death, and Birth,—
 And then I changed my pipings,—
 Singing how down the vale of Maenalus
 I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed:
 Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
 It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:
 All wept, as I think both ye now would,
 If envy or age had not frozen your blood
 At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

Rather than scan these verses, I note simply the way the stanza falls into a number of metrically distinct units, with much variation of rhythm and pace: a rhyming quatrain composed of seven- or eight-syllable lines, a single line, another rhyming quatrain composed of ten-syllable lines, a rhyming couplet, the first line fast-moving, staccato, to my ear, then a single line

ending with the same word as line five. This way of articulating a stanza is, in a more sharply defined form, found in the odes of Greek choral poetry, which often combine lines or passages composed in different, clearly distinguishable metres. (Readers not at home in this territory may want to turn to the appendix.) The possibility that Shelley patterned his stanza after the Greek model is strengthened when we notice that he starts off with three lines that can be analyzed in terms of Greek lyric metre. Lines one and two are accentual telesilleans (/./././ = quantitative ~~~~~), line three is a Lesbian form of the glyconic (././././ = ~~~~~), and several other lines suggest classical analogues. Shelley's interest in the Greek choric ode is shown elsewhere in his writing, in the "Ode to Naples," for instance, with its strophes, antistrophes, and epodes, or the odes of his translation of the *Cyclops*. The claim I wish to make, then, is that in this seemingly modest form we have an English equivalent of the jewel of Greece's metrical crown, the choric ode of Attic tragedy.

The fact that so little of this sort has been attempted in English is no proof that it cannot be done. It shows rather that our poets, so bold in other respects, have been relatively unadventurous in extending the formal, metrical range of our poetry. English has many resources that remain to be explored. In its primarily accentual way, our speech can pattern sound almost as well as Greek, but whereas Greek poets developed the rhythmical potentialities offered by their language very fully, English poets have done so far less. Take Swinburne's line from the famous ode in *Atalanta*, "Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid" (/././././). If "fleet-foot" can pass as a spondee, the sound pattern is identical to that of Aeschylus' *krimnamenān nephelān orthoi* (~~~~~), *Septem contra Thebas*, 229). The difference is not that one line is accentual, the other quantitative, but rather that Swinburne's is a one-timer, something he came up with on a particular occasion and did not, so far as I have been able to notice, use again, whereas in Greece when the line was popularized by the sixth-century lyric poet Ibycus (metrists called it an ibycean), it became a common poetic property for other poets to employ. Hence it was that when, in the fifth century, the Athenian dramatists drew on the metrical inventions bequeathed them by the earlier lyricists, and proceeded to combine them in ways that had never been done

before, they created that poetic marvel, the choric ode. We look on their achievement, rightly, with wonder and delight, and say, quite wrongly, that alas nothing of the sort can be done in English. In point of fact, it *has* been done, very occasionally. There is, incomparably as always, Milton, with the odes of *Samson*. There is Campion, of whose poem "Author of Light" C. S. Lewis remarks that it "really has to be learned as we learn a strophe and antistrophe of Pindar" (not of course that Campion had Pindar in mind).²² We have to compare "each metrical phrase with its fellow . . . before its full beauty is apparent." And there is Hopkins, who told Robert Bridges that the rhythm of the long lines in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" is "like the rhythm of Greek tragic choruses or of Pindar." Compared with the strident novelty of a poem like this, Shelley's "Hymn" seems a slight affair, and his intentions have not (I believe) been understood. It is nonetheless a pioneer attempt to bring to our poetry a beauty it possesses very little. Much that could have been done has not been done. Perhaps the trouble lies with the disjunction, since the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, of poetry and music. The Greek ode was set to music, and music can define and clarify the sound patterns of poetry in a way that words alone do only with great difficulty. (It was also danced; this was a poetry that "moves to the cadence of consenting feet," to borrow a curiously good expression of Herbert Read.) Have we left it to music to satisfy our desire for musical, rhythmical delight, and allowed too much of our poetry to plod along in iambics?

(This is too brisk, of course, and leaves a lot out of account. One of the reasons why English has availed itself so seldom of the metrical resources offered by Greek is that it has had increasingly to meet a challenge that Greek poetry was spared. "During the eighteenth century," John Hollander writes, "all poetry save the sung lyric begins to have to confront the growth of prose as an authentic vehicle of imaginative expression."²³ Poetry was drawn into the sphere of prose, more and more into the recesses of the solitary mind, and away from music, in the process gaining new powers and losing old ones.)

We would expect to find Swinburne, the most passionate and, with Hopkins, most scholarly of nineteenth-century Hellenizing poets, and one of our finest metrists, developing the formal

possibilities of Shelley's pioneering venture in his *Atalanta in Calydon*. The odes exhibit great rhythmical variety and inventiveness, but what we do not find in this flamboyantly Greek play is the specifically Greek structure or articulation of Shelley's "Hymn," a single stanza composed of rhythmically distinct units. Swinburne is nonetheless the poet who most successfully adopted Greek metres in English, and although he produced no theoretical account of his principles, in the introductory note to his magnificent translation of the anapestic parabasis from Aristophanes' *Birds*, he usefully distinguished the metres that English will accept from those it will not, as Campion had done in his *Observations*. "All variations and combinations of anapestic, iambic or trochaic metre," Swinburne wrote, "are as natural and pliable as all dactylic and spondaic forms of verse are unnatural and abhorrent." (So much for Arnold's belief that the dactylic hexameter is the best medium into which to translate Homer.)

Nowhere is Swinburne's metrical skill shown more fully than in his choriambic poem very properly called "Choriamb," since that is what, indeed all, it is about. The four-syllable phrase /-/- that we may call a choriamb has long provided a rhythmical variant in otherwise iambic lines (Milton's "Into a Gulf shot under ground, till part," for example). Occasional use of the choriamb is one thing; using it as the basis of a whole poem is far more difficult. Both Sidney in his "O sweet woods the delight of solitarines" and Campion in his "Canto Secundo" tried their hand at the classical lesser Asclepiad (- - - - - - - - - -), Horace's *ergo Quintilium perpetuus sopor*). Of the two, Campion is intermittently the more successful. He manages one choriamb well enough ("What faire pomp have I spide of glittering Ladies"), now and then two ("On their yvorie browes, trackt to the daintie thies"), but the metre does not come readily to him, and the best course is to let the poem move to its own delicate, wayward music without bothering much about the classical model. Swinburne, with no apparent strain, handles the three central choriambic feet of the more difficult greater Asclepiad, used by Sappho and by Horace (*O crudelis adhuc et Veneris muneribus potens*). To manage this line successfully, the poet must be able to counterpoint the natural speech phrases against the metrical pattern, as Sappho does:

 esset' oude potha^eis usteron· ou gar pedekhēs brodōn²⁴

Swinburne follows her. Having first established the pattern ("What sweet visions of sleep lured thee away, down from the light above"), he is then free to introduce lines like "Colder surely than past kisses that love poured for thy lips as wine," in which, if we let the words establish their natural rhythm, the pattern almost vanishes. The metre is, however, too difficult, and too artificial, to be of any general use in English verse, although perhaps an isolated Asclepiadic line could provide an interesting variant in otherwise metred verses. Technically, "Choriamb" is a triumph, but it is a virtuoso exercise rather than a poem, written after the fire in him had burnt out and he was consigned to the tutelage of Theodore Watts-Dunton at The Pines, 2 Putney Hill.

More than virtuosity went to the creation of "Sapphics," which belongs to the first series of "Poems and Ballads" written in Swinburne's heyday. This famous metre has for century after century been used by poets in every Western country for the widest variety of themes, from the Day of Judgment to the return of Benjamin Franklin to Philadelphia.²⁵ Most of those who practiced it, having no direct access to Sappho, took as their model not the Sapphic hendecasyllable but the Horatian, with its caesura after the fifth syllable (*Persicos odi / puer adparatus*), less often after the sixth. Sappho's line, which until recently has not been well understood,²⁶ is built around a choriamb (~~~~) preceded by ~~~~ and followed by ~~~. There may be a caesura in this or that place, but often the line moves along its eleven syllables at a single unbroken breath:

poikilothron' athanat' Aphrodita

where the poet's cry is lifted up to the goddess by the thrust of the choriamb. Listen now to Swinburne:

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,
 Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled
 Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;
 Saw the reluctant
 Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew her . . .

One may fault the diction (the third line is rather picture-postcardy), yet here for once is a line that moves and feels like Sappho's, not simply because Swinburne has discarded the Horatian caesura, but much more because in his line almost as in her Greek line we hear the length of the syllables. This is *English quantitative verse*, composed in the way that is proper to English. Quantity (to use the familiar if strictly incorrect term),²⁷ has been consistently, indignantly denied largely because when it was first attempted by the classicizing poets and theorists of the later sixteenth century they went the wrong way about it, above all in the absurd pedantry of imposing on English the classical rule of length by position that led even a poet with so good an ear as Sidney's to scan a word like *violence* as quantitative ~~~. Swinburne made no such elementary blunder. He *heard* Greek poetry, found what he heard beautiful, and, without troubling to come up with a formal defense, set about creating a comparable beauty in English. He never makes an unstressed syllable stand in the place of a classical long syllable, and, as Champion had done before him, he usually lets stress and quantity coincide.²⁸ *Lets* is the key word here. In Greek and Latin verse, some syllables are long by established convention and (more clearly in Greek than in Latin?) by the nature of the language, hence quantity, the pattern of long and short, can serve as the basic metrical principle. This is not possible in English since a great many syllables are common (contrast "and what's more" with "And, what is more": the first *and* is unstressed and could be treated as short, the second stressed, hence long), and very few syllables are necessarily long, irrespective of speech emphasis. (No one, though, could take Milton's *clomb* to be short: "So clomb this first grand Thief into Gods Fold.") Syllabic length is, however, a potential reality in English: *saw* usually takes longer to say than *sat*, *white* than *wit*. Let a poet deeply at home in classical verse take advantage of this phonetic fact; let him ensure that stress and length coincide and be careful to base quantity on accent, then you have something that can properly be called *English quantitative verse*.

There is of course no way of "proving" that quantity can play an occasional role in English verse, and convincing those who insist that "saw the white" is simply accentual (/-/). One can only say, with Pound, "LISTEN to the sound it makes,"

and appeal to the instructed ear of the classically trained reader who can *also* hear ~ ~ there. The appeal to this privileged organ need not be dismissed as special pleading by those who are familiar with the uninstructed ear of the average student and have heard a line of formal verse turned into flat prose.

Is it worth arguing the case for English quantity, given the vehemence with which it is usually denied? Yes. When a poet, without doing a mischief to our native speech rhythms, is able to let what an English reader hears as quantity play its part alongside stress accent, as Swinburne has done here, he has brought English verse an additional resource, a new beauty. A learned beauty, no doubt, but why should a poet not be *doctus*, learned in his art? "Sapphics" is learned poetry where learning, not pedantry, offers us the chance of hearing Greek-born Sappho speak with almost English jaws. To be driven by our prejudices to refuse the gift seems churlish.²⁹

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What of the present century? Have there been, are there going to be, experiments of the kind we have been looking at? Out of classical Latin, Milton created what almost amounts to a new language. Has Pound (who hated Milton and resembles him in so many ways) created something similar from classical Chinese? Will other languages, as they come within our widening ken, offer further possibilities of this sort? Our poets, with little if any Latin and no Greek, have been unable to follow (and have shown few signs of wanting to follow) the lead of their nineteenth-century predecessors and devise new metrical forms by experimenting with classical metres, even though they may admire the prosodic skill of Auden who would not have been the brilliant metrist he was had he not known Latin. Experiments of all kinds there have nonetheless been: that they are going to result in the creation of stable forms for poets to use is still far from certain. Those who believe that verse must always possess or suggest form, and that when it moves away from forms that seem exhausted it is to move toward fresh ones, must hope so.

Our century can, however, claim one quite new, fully fledged prosodic invention, although it has not been recognized. It is to be found in the last of the great modernists, David Jones, and

emerges clearly in his major work *The Anathemata*. Jones's unit is not the line but the metrical phrase or colon, very deliberately accented, the movement sometimes almost that of prose:

Six centuries
 and the second Spring
 and a new wonder under heaven:
 man-limb stirs
 in the god-stones
 and the kouroi
 are gay and stepping it
 but stanced solemn.

The metrical phrases are usually paired, half-lines balanced against each other on the principle of parallelism. Jones's prosodic model, it has been convincingly argued, is the "antiphonal structure . . . of versicles and responses in the Catholic liturgy and the antiphonal singing of Psalms."³⁰

There is a further formal development in his last book, *The Sleeping Lord*, notably in the magnificent final poem bearing the same title. We find the same combination of paired phrases or half-lines, mostly of two, three, or four stresses, with or without weak or unstressed syllables. (Jones learned from Hopkins, of course, but the movement of his verse is quite different.) Phrases with the same number of stresses are often very deliberately balanced against each other, giving effects as formal as

Is the túmp by Hónddu
 his lífted bólster?
 does a grítstóne óútróp
 ?
 incommóde him?

Within this regularity there is, however, room for much variety, since falling rhythm can be balanced against rising, phrases very strongly accented may be combined with others whose movement is that of ordinary speech, and units as different as "they shóvelled asíde the sháreds & bréccia" and "of wárm-félléd greát faúna" are metrically equivalent.

David Jones's verse carries too unmistakably his own very personal signature for there to be any question of other poets taking over his principle of verse composition. Yet they might

surely learn from it, above all how to move toward forms that provide the recurring satisfaction of rhythmical expectation checked and kept pleasurably alert by perpetual slight variety. Hopkins's manner is often even more idiosyncratic than that of Jones, and yet his formal innovations have proved influential. The lessons offered by Jones might prove no less so, once he achieves the recognition that is unquestionably his due.

Is there something of the same sort in Pound? I once argued, too hastily, that, clearly revealed first in *Homage* and then with ever-increasing subtlety throughout the lyrical sections of the *Cantos*, there is a principle of composition, distantly analogous to that of Greek choral lyric, in which we find recurrent, clearly defined rhythmical phrases linked by groups of syllables that are "free" and play no analyzable part in the metrical structure.³¹ I still believe there is something to this, but to make it good would require demonstration of a kind clearly out of place at this late stage of an already lengthy paper. Instead, I propose to return to my point of origin, translation, to the alternative mode in which the translator makes no secret of the fact that he is taking us abroad, deliberately letting the foreignness of his original show through. Here is Pound "le grant traducteur" at work on a passage from the Chinese *Book of Rites*:

Know then:

Toward summer the sun is in Hyades
Sovran is Lord of the Fire
to this month are birds,
with bitter smell and with the odour of burning
To the hearth god, lungs of the victim
The green frog lifts up his voice
and the white latex is in flower
In red car with jewels incarnadine
to welcome the summer . . .

In these verses from Canto 52, Charles Tomlinson writes, "one hears English being drawn into a dialogue" with very ancient Chinese. Pound "gives us in magnificent processional rhythms something English and something irreducibly foreign and distant."³² The last stanza of his version of one of the odes traditionally attributed to Confucius stands at a still greater distance. The lines deserve to be set beside Jonson's noble poem for

Camden:

High destiny's not borne without its weight
 (equity lives not save by constant probe)
 Be not thy crash as Yin's from skies, foreseen.
 The working of Heaven hath neither sound nor smell,
 Be thy cut form of justice as Wen's was, shall rise
 ten thousand states, thine, and with candour in all.

The writing is no less masterly, there is a comparable weight and authority, a comparable and even greater concision in the diction ("Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach," "Be thy cut form of justice as Wen's was, shall rise . . ."). The difference is no less striking. In Jonson's poem, we feel the controlling presence, like a kind of grid on which the English words are laid, of our classical Western language, Latin. In Pound's stanza we feel or guess the controlling presence of another classical language, Chinese, and what we take to be a Chinese cast of thought. Pound has done something astonishing here. He writes from or within a tradition that does not exist and which he himself has invented, a tradition to which Chinese has stood in the same close family relation that Latin stood for so long in our real tradition. Tomlinson's belief that translation can provide English verse with alternative rhetorics is here realized.³³

And alternative, new, metrical forms? Yes, sometimes (Pound's early Provençal translations, for instance, even if these are largely exercises); so too can original composition, particularly in a poem like Swinburne's "Sapphics," which brings Sappho across to us in a way that allows us to call it a translation of Sappho, perhaps the best we have. I used this poem to advance my case for quantity as a possible element in English verse. I would have hesitated so to oppose received opinion had I been trusting simply to my own ear. I was not; my trust was in Pound's. "As to quantity," he wrote in 1913, "it is foolish to suppose that we are incapable of distinguishing a long vowel from a short one." Four years later we find him writing: "I think the desire for vers libre is due to the sense of quantity reasserting itself after years of starvation." This applies to Pound's own vers libre but not, I think, to anyone else's. Exactly what relation he saw between vers libre and quantity he never

explains. Whatever the explanation, the effect in performance is that the lines move more slowly, the stressed syllables weighted and prolonged in the way that we hear from Pound's reading of his verse.³⁴ Still on the same tack, he asks Marianne Moore: "I want to know . . . whether you are working in Greek quantitative measures," presumably hearing or hoping that he heard quantity in her syllabics.

In Pound's own writing, quantity makes its first notable appearance in "The Return," which Eliot called "an important study in verse which is really quantitative."³⁵ He quoted the opening lines:

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
Movements, and the slow feet,
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
Wavering!

The tentatively moving feet we are called on to see are those of the ancient gods, returning to us after their long absence. On the poem's secondary level we are invited to *hear* the feet of the ancient poems that celebrated their presence, the Greek poems composed in the quantitative measures now returning to assume new forms in English verse. Donald Davie described this poem as "the etiolation of the Sapphic stanza."³⁶ What we have here, I submit, is rather its reconstitution, the reassembling of its component parts, tentatively at first, but with more confidence as the poem proceeds. "These were the 'Wing'd-with-Awe,'" a Poundian rhythm but not a metrical element of Sappho's stanza — one syllable too short. Three times he tries again:

Gods of the winged shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air!

No, still not quite right. Then he gets it, a complete Sapphic hendecasyllable (if we lean a little on "harry"), even though set out as two lines:

Haie! Haie!
These were the swift to harry
Pōikilōthrōn'
āthānāt' Āphrōdītā

In the next line, "these the keen-scented," he has a shot at the adonius that concludes the Sapphic stanza (*pōtniā, thūmōn*). Again, not yet quite right, but the final line does it: "pallid the leash-men!"

A few years later, in *Homage*, quantity asserts its presence with full confidence:

Flame burns, rain sinks into the cracks
 And they all go to rack ruin beneath the thud of
 the years.
 Stands genius a deathless adornment,
 a name not to be worn out with the years.

If we hear in these lines, as we do so often in the *Cantos*, English moving to a music not heard elsewhere in our poetry, it is because quantity is one (*one* – I am claiming no more) of the elements that have gone to their making.

• • •

What there might be for other poets to draw on in these Poundian bequests, the alternative rhetorics and metrical forms he has provided, is not for a critic to say. In the matter of translation, though, here perhaps the critic can put in a word. Whether or not this has been a great age of translation, as some have claimed, a great deal has certainly been published. The ecumenical spread of our interests has led us far afield, so that there is now the odd situation whereby students unfamiliar with many of the classics of their own language can write knowledgeably about the *Gilgamesh Epic* – read of course in translation. The forced public of the classroom consumes translation in large quantities, much of it inevitably journeyman stuff, and even the work of finer quality has been inhibited by the dogma that translation, from whatever period and whatever the stylistic level of the original, must speak the language of today – a levelling veto (no high talk allowed here!) that ought to be questioned. What room is there, in our diminished speech, for the larger utterance, the lexical daring, the ebullience and sheer outrageousness, of the major classics of the past? It is like trying to put a mad giant into a dwarf's straitjacket, as Christopher Middleton has brilliantly observed.

What should be done? No one wants to return to the methinkses and yea verilies of Victorian translationese. (The once admired authors of a late nineteenth-century version of the *Iliad*, having to describe Odysseus' treatment of that unfortunate prole Thersites, wrote "him he drave with his sceptre and chode him with loud words.") There is another course, opened up once again by Pound, who dug down to older, still valid linguistic strata and came up with diction and syntax unfamiliar enough to sound startlingly new, confronting us with ancient texts that we know could only have been written in this century. The archaisms, the thees and thous and so forth, of his earlier writing often strike one as tiresomely affected, yet as the *Cantos* proceeded he was able to make them sound quite natural. The solemn couplet that brings the *Pisans* to a close ("If the hoar frost grip thy tent / Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent") could not without grave loss be rewritten with *your* and *you*.

Pound had to learn to write like this; it took time. Others, poet translators, should surely be able to do so too, and in so doing might not only liberate some of the great work of past ages from the drab it is forced to wear today — Greek tragedy, for instance (not, however, an area where Pound provides sure guidance). Who knows what splendors they might reveal? Jocasta might even recover her divine head. Faced with new formal challenges, poets might also devise responses, new or alternative rhetorics and metrical resources, that would not otherwise have occurred to them — inappropriate, very likely, to their original work today, but which might serve them or their successors tomorrow. There is no such thing as progress in literature, but if there were, this is one of the forms it would take.

APPENDIX

A Note on the Greek Choric Stanza

tis hontin' ha thespiepei-	---- ----
a Delphis eipe petra	---- ---
arrēt' arrētōn telesan-	---- ----
ta phoiniaisi khersin?	---- ---
hōra nin aelladōn	-----
hippōn sthenarōteron	-----
phugai poda nōmān.	-----
enoplos gar ep' auton epenthroskei	--- --- --- --
puri kai steropais ho Dios genetas,	--- --- --- ---
deinai d' ham' hepontai	-----
Kēres anaplakētoi.	-----

(Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 463–472)

Who is the man that Delphi's oracular rock said has performed horrors beyond all horror with murderous hands? It is time he set his foot to flight swifter than storm-footed horses. For armed with fire and lightning the son of Zeus leaps upon him, and close behind follow the death spirits who do not miss their mark.

The strophe is composed of several clearly distinguishable metrical units. By following the pattern of long and short syllables, one quickly makes out the different steps to which they move. The first quatrain is built from two metrical phrases, the iambic metron $\sim\sim\sim$ (lines two and four ending with the syncopated form $\sim\sim\sim$) and the choriamb $\sim\sim\sim$ (another form of which is $\sim\sim\sim$). Next, a three-line unit again employing the choriamb; lines five and six are the quantitative equivalent of the accentual couplet with which Shelley's "Hymn of Pan" starts. Lines eight and nine shift unexpectedly to a swift and in context menacing anapestic step ($\sim\sim\sim$). Line ten returns to the metre of seven, and the strophe ends with a resolved trochaic phrase (the unresolved form would be $\sim\sim\sim\sim$).

The various classes of metre out of which this strophe is composed are all familiar and readily perceptible to the ear: shaped phrases cut out of sound. What is new and unfamiliar here, as in every Greek choric ode, is the way the poet, who is

both poet and musician, combines them and builds, by means in themselves simple, a poetic, musical structure often of considerable complexity and great formal beauty.

NOTES

1. Charles Tomlinson finds a larger achievement in Dryden's translations: "An Anglican Christian and later a Catholic, [he] is entering into a serious dialogue with paganism via his translation of Lucretius and Ovid." "A View of English Poetry," *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field* (Boston, 1989, ed. Rosanna Warren), 269. This may well be right. I am referring primarily to *diction*.

2. Benjamin's famous essay "The Task of the Translator," which ends with the claim that "the interlinear version of the Scriptures is the archetype and ideal of all translation," has won for the radically literal rendering a new theoretical status. I have in mind here the humble trot.

3. See Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York and Oxford, 1971), 279.

4. I have drawn here on Antoine Berman's paper, "L'Énéide de Klossowski," *Les Tours de Babel: Essais sur la Traduction* (Mauvezin, 1985), 127-50.

5. Compare the famous letter where Machiavelli, out of office and favor and rusticating in his small property a few miles from Florence, describes how he passes the time dicing and gossiping at the local tavern until evening comes. Then, returning home, he takes off his sluttish everyday clothes: "et mi metto panni reali et curiali, et rivestito condecientemente entro nelle antique corti degli antiqui huomini."

6. *Antigones* (New York and Oxford, 1984), 208ff.

7. Did Hölderlin's Lutheran upbringing play a part too? John Hollander draws my attention to these verses from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*: "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden / voll schmerz und voller Hohn! / O Haupt, zu Spott gebunden / mit einer Dornenkron! / O Haupt, sonst schön gezieret / mich Hochster Ehr' und Zier, jetzt aber hoch schimpfret: gegrüset seist du mir!"

8. I borrow this no doubt too excited sentence from an early attempt to grapple with Sophocles' words. "Scenario for a New Year," *Arion* 8.2, Spring 1969, 215.

9. A thank-you here to friend Christopher Middleton, one of our most resourceful poet-translators. He writes: "I see no reason (except a whole labyrinth of 'proprieties') why one couldn't recompose English to reach out and touch Sophocles—but where would the aura go?"

10. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford, 1971, ed. Adam Parry), 305.

11. *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (Oxford, 1954), 103.

12. The note of Roman gravity is consummately sounded in the sestet of Bembo's sonnet to the humanist Francesco Molza: "Che detta il mio collega, il qual n'ha mostro / col suo dir grave e pien d'antica usanza / sì come a quel d'Arpin si pò gir presso? / Che scrivi tu, del cui purgato inchiostro / già l'uno e l'altro stil molto s'avanza? / Star neghittoso a te non è concesso."

13. See James William Johnson, *The Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought* (Princeton, 1967), ch. 3, "Greece."
14. *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford, 1963), 49ff.
15. F. J. H. Letters, *The Life and Work of Sophocles* (London and New York, 1953), 70.
16. I take these quotations from Robert Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 15.
17. "There are instances . . . when Hölderlin's words only take on their full texture when read in the light of Greek. His frequent usage of the adverb *nämlich* ('namely') and the conjunction *aber* ('but') throughout the late hymns reflects the elusive nuances of the Greek particles *gar*, *men*, and *de* . . ." Richard Sieburth, *Hymns and Fragments by Friedrich Hölderlin* (Princeton, 1984), 29.
18. *After Babel* (Oxford, 1975), 312–15. Richard Stoneman, in his anthology of verse translation of classical poetry *Daphne into Laurel* (London, 1982), 284, makes the dubious claim that Browning's work "represents a serious attempt to come to terms with the strangeness of Aeschylus, and sometimes conveys more of a sense of Aeschylean power than any other version."
19. *Arion* III.4, Winter 1964, 9.
20. The metre is discussed by John von B. Rodenbeck in the opening pages of his article "The Classicism of Meredith's 'Love in the Valley,'" *Victorian Poetry* 11, 1 (Spring 1973), 27–37.
21. I understand that Derek Walcott carried out this exercise in one of his poetry classes at Boston University.
22. *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), 551ff.
23. *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New Haven and London, 2d. ed., 1985), p. ?. (This sentence undoubtedly occurs somewhere in Hollander's book, but to my regret I cannot run it down.)
24. The line is corrupt. I print the emendation that best illustrates the point.
25. The curious may find this composition, by Giovanni Fantoni, in *I Lirici del Seicento e dell'Arcadia* (Milan and Rome, 1936, ed. C. Calcaterra), 853ff.
26. George Saintsbury, in his *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (London, 1910), 123, informs us that "the proper run of the Sapphic line is—tumti-tumtum-tumtity-tumti-tum(-ti/-tum." Up to a point, Lord Copper.
27. Professor Hollander, who knows a great deal more about these matters than I do, warns me against using the term *quantity*. He writes: "Quantitative really only means a metrical system in which vowel quantity is phonemic, and upon whose phonology a system of long and short syllables can be used to generate rhythmical patterns. The absolute duration of syllables—in articulatory phonetics—is *not* a phonological matter, and is often tricky. An apparent 'long-vowelled' syllable like 'high' will show up on a sound spectrogram as taking less time to enunciate than one with a short vowel like 'twitch.' The duration periods of consonantal white noise is crucial in these matters."
28. Champion "bases quantity on accent . . . , so that his quantitative verse follows, in the main, the normal auditory patterns of English speech." Walter R. Davis, *The Works of Thomas Campion* (New York, 1970), 289.
29. I rest my case for Swinburne's use of quantity on this one poem, an act of formal homage to "the supreme head of song," although it could, I believe, be found elsewhere in his work. Further investigation is needed.

30. David Blamires, *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (Manchester, 1971), 137.
31. "Pound in Texas: 2. New Tunes for Old," *Arion* VI.2, 1967, 207-32.
32. *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation* (Oxford, 1980), xiii.
33. Art. and op. cit., note 1, 263.
34. "There is an artificial elongation of long syllables, which often makes his verse sound quantitative." George Fraser, *Ezra Pound* (New York, 1960), 31. The elongation is *deliberate*, rather than "artificial." Pound nowhere does what Sidney does when he treats the last syllable on "violence" as long. The three passages from Pound occur in *Literary Essays* (London, 1954), 92, 12, and in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (New York, 1950, ed. D. D. Paige), 142.
35. "Ezra Pound: His Metric and His Poetry" (1917), reprinted in *To Criticize the Critic* (New York, 1965), 174.
36. *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (New York, 1964), 34.