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Jacob Blakesley

Tony Harrison the translator: *'Life's a performance. Either join in / lig*htheartedly, or *thole the pain'*[1]

Tony Harrison is the foremost poet-playwright of modern England. As critics have said, he is 'a titan among poets'[2], who has 'changed the entire landscape of British poetry'[3]. While Harrison's work has been studied extensively,[4] there exists no comprehensive overview of his translation practice and ideology. For too long, his translation activity has not been seen as a vital, integral part of his oeuvre. He is not simply a British poet, but a poet who has actively engaged with poets and writers from numerous literary and cultural traditions worldwide, with a geographic and chronological breadth that has not been adequately accounted for by scholars. This essay will argue for the importance of translation in his poetic career and will show how his primarily domesticating method of translation is influenced by his poetics and ideology. In order to keep the focus on his written translations, I will concentrate solely on his interlingual translations: Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides, Martial, Palladas, and Racine, not his intersemiotic translations like Prometheus.[5]

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[2] Boyd Tonkin, 'Selected Poems, By Tony Harrison', The Independent, 8 February 2013. Accessed at http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/selected-poems-by-tony-harrison-8485447.html.

[3] Don Paterson, book cover, Tony Harrison, Collected Poems (London: Penguin, 2016).

[4] Sandie Byrne, H, v., & O: the poetry of Tony Harrison (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1995); Christine Regan, The Rimbaud of Leeds: the political character of Tony Harrison's poetry (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2016); Antony Rowland, Tony Harrison and the Holocaust (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001); Luke Spencer, The Poetry of Tony Harrison (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

[5] I will also not be addressing his intralingual translations like that of the English Mysteries.

Harrison is a poet of Northern England, class-conscious, socialist, with a deep classical background both in English poetry as well as the Greek and Roman classics. Although he experiments with all types of literary genres, he is explicit about his conviction that whether he writes lyric poetry or theatrical works, translations, libretti, or television screenplays, 'Poetry is all I write'.[6] His poetic inspiration stems, as he said in an interview, from newsreel footage of concentration camps in 1945. He was unable to fathom 'how you could measure even simple pleasures against such images - when the violent events of history seem to cancel out joy and meaning'.[7] To deal with this trauma, he most often uses formal verse, whether in his translations or his original compositions. Indeed, he is emphatically not a free verse poet, and it is precisely the formal strictures of rhyme and meter that propel his poems. His poetry and drama, whether his original works or translations, are based on a symbiosis of modern content with traditional form. In Harrison's case, it is well-known that his education in Leeds and his political activism have shaped his original compositions. However, this essay will show how Harrison's political stance and his Northern English education have shaped his very approach to translation, and, in doing so, will suggest more broadly that translations need to be properly considered in evaluating the career of poets.

Before beginning to discuss his translations, it is necessary to understand Harrison's position within the panorama of modern poet-translators. Tony Harrison is obviously far from the sole English poet-translator. A whole contingent of 20th and 21st century English-language poets – and European poets in general – are distinguished literary translators, even if critics have been notoriously slow in

[6] Tony Harrison, in Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison, ed. Neil Astley (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1991) 9.
[7] Maya Jaggi, 'Beats of the heart', Guardian 31 March 2007: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison.

addressing this fact.[8] The practice of translation among English poet-translators should be clearly differentiated: some English-language poets translated only one isolated book, like T. S. Eliot, who translated St John Perse's Anabasis, while other English-language poets translated numerous works. One can think of poets like Ezra Pound, Kenneth Rexroth, W. S. Merwin, C. H. Sisson, and Charles Tomlinson, who specialised in translating poetry. Meanwhile a substantial number of poet-translators, like Harrison, translated classical theatrical works, in addition to poetry: one can think of Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Liz Lochhead, Robert Lowell, Louis MacNeice, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, and W. B. Yeats.

Likewise, as with some other European poet-translators, such as the Italian Giovanni Giudici, translation clearly sparked Harrison's own poetic career, in this case his translations of plays by Aristophanes, Molière, and Racine; and his poetry translations of Palladas and Martial. Indeed, Harrison wrote at one point to his fellow poet Jon Silkin that he was optimistic that his translation work would aid in composing original verse.[9] So, as Harrison said, 'I learnt all the metres by imitation; it gives you a structure from which to venture out, like being on a trapeze but having a wire to catch you if you fall'.[10] In what follows, rather than adopting a chronological approach in what follows, this essay will deal with Harrison's translations by genre, since his translation strategy and techniques depend on whether he is translating poetry, comedy, or tragedy.

Harrison's sole books of poetry translation are those of the classical poets Palladas and Martial. In 1975, Harrison published his translation of Palladas, the 4th

[8] Jacob Blakesley, 'Examining Modern European Poet-Translators "Distantly"', Translation and Literature 25:1 (2016): 10-27.
[9] For copyright reasons, this cannot be quoted directly. His papers are available in the archives of the University of Leeds Brotherton Library Special Collections. Letter to Jon Silkin: 10 May 1964.
[10] Maya Jaggi, 'Beats of the heart', unpaginated.

century A.D. Greek author whom he called ‘the last poet of Paganism’, a poet who expressed ‘cosmic derision like an orchestrated death-rattle’.[11] In these epigrams, Harrison, a graduate in classics, refashions Palladas for a contemporary ear, with vulgar slang (e.g., spunk) and some Northern syntax and dialect, such as ’s for ‘is’ and dialect words like ‘thole’, as in ‘Life’s a performance. Either join in / lightheartedly, or thole the pain’, and ‘fash’, e.g., ‘Don’t fash yourself, man! Don’t complain’.[12] The following is an example of how Harrison translates Palladas’ so-called ‘Descent of Man’:

> Think of your conception, you’ll soon forget
> what Plato puffs you up with, all that
> ‘immortality’ and ‘divine life’ stuff.
>
> Man, why dost thou think of Heaven? Nay
> Consider thine origins in common clay
>
> ’s one way of putting it but not blunt enough.
>
> Think of your father, sweating, drooling, drunk,
> You, his spark of lust, his spurt of spunk.

Palladas’ original Greek reads:

> Ἂν μνήμην, ἄνθρωπε, λάβῃς, ὁ πατήρ σε τί ποιῶν
> ἔσπειρεν, παύσῃ τῆς μεγαλοφροσύνης.
> ἀλλ᾽ ὁ Πλάτων σοὶ τῦφον ὀνειρώσσων ἐνέφυσεν,
> ἀθάνατόν σε λέγων καὶ φυτὸν οὐράνιον.
> ἐκ πηλοῦ γέγονας· τί φρονεῖς μέγα; τοῦτο μὲν οὕτως
> εἶπ᾽ ἄν τις, κοσμῶν πλάσματι σεμνοτέρῳ.
> εἰ δὲ λόγον ζητεῖς τὸν ἀληθινόν, ἐξ ἀκολάστου
> λαγνείας γέγονας καὶ μιαρᾶς ῥανίδος.[13]
>
> [my gloss: If you remember, man, how your father
> engendered you, you would cease from pride.
> But dreaming Plato implanted conceit in you,
> calling you an immortal and heavenly plant.

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[11] Tony Harrison, ‘Preface to Palladas: Poems’, Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies: Tony Harrison, ed. Neil Astley (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), 134.
[12] Tony Harrison, Collected Poems (London: Penguin, 2016), 99.
[13] The Greek Anthology, Volume IV: Book 10: The Hortatory and Admonitory Epigrams, ed. and trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 24.

> You came from the earth: why do you think of greatness? This is how
> someone speaks who's embellishing a solemn fiction.
> If you seek the truth, you were born from
> licentious lust and a dirty drop.]

Palladas wrote in elegiac couplets, a long hexameter followed by a shorter pentameter. Harrison, however, adds rhyme and breaks up the structure of the poem into four parts: the resulting form is 'organic', according to James S. Holmes' translation taxonomy, insofar as it neither mimics the formal structure of the original Greek nor adopts a prestigious English form. Moreover, Harrison significantly transforms the paternal figure in the poem. As Gordon Braden has pointed out, 'the sweat, the drool, and the blood alcohol level are in the Swiftian spirit of things, and entirely plausible, but they are Harrison's contribution'.[14] The unpleasant participles, sweating and drooling come to a halt in the hard 'k' noise of drunk and spunk. Indeed, the alliteration in the final line – spark, spurt, spunk – is perhaps a conscious attempt at reflecting the assonance in the last line of the Greek text, λαγνείας γέγονας μιαρᾶς. But beyond these changes, we note most importantly Harrison adding a Christian concept (Heaven) to a pagan poem. What Harrison translates as 'Heaven' is strictly speaking absent from the Greek; Palladas refers only to τί φρονεῖς μέγα, which doesn't imply this. In the previous line, Palladas quotes Plato's Timaeus, referring to the philosopher's definition of man as a heavenly (οὐράνιον) plant, but οὐράνιον does not refer to an anachronistic Christian Heaven.[15] Yet the fact is that Palladas lived in interesting times, in 4th century AD Alexandria,[16] and was certainly aware of contemporary theological debates. Moreover, as scholars have argued, there is 'not a

[14] Gordon Braden, 'Epic Annoyance, Homer to Palladas', Ariel 24.1 (2016): 105.
[15] Gordon Braden, 'Epic Annoyance, Homer to Palladas', 105.
[16] For our purposes, it doesn't matter whether Palladas died near the end of the 4th century, as conventionally thought, or whether he died in the first half of the 4th century, as more recent scholars have maintained.

scrap of evidence to suggest even nominal adherence to the Galileans'.[17] So in spirit, again, Harrison's addition is plausible. And, not coincidentally, Palladas' worldview coheres with Harrison's own secular belief. In short, it is a domesticating translation, based on Lawrence Venuti's dichotomy, for a few reasons. The original Greek form (the unrhymed hexameter and pentameter meter) is not kept in translation, and is instead substituted by scattered rhyme and a lack of a fixed meter in English. There are crucial religious connotations in the translation not in the Greek. And then Harrison adds new imagery as well, namely the embellished paternal figure.

In 1981, during a stay in the USA, Harrison translated Martial, another ancient pessimist, and Harrison aptly called his version US Martial. We can see the American tint to some of these translations very clearly in this epigram:

Tony Harrison:

> Not Afro - not crewcut
> & no way out new cut
> but something betwixt and between.
>
> Avoid looking too hippy
> Or boondocks Mississippi
> & try if you can to keep clean.
>
> Shave so close but no closer
> No eau-de-mimosa,
> Be macho, not mucho, enough.
>
> I'm a little bit wary
> of hirsute or hairy
> & your sort of chestrug's so rough—
>
> EVERYWHERE'S
> Just a jungle of hairs
> Your legs, your back, your behind,
>
> But one place nothing sprouts
> As all growth's been plucked out 's,
> Mr REDNECK, your mind!

[17] Barry Baldwin, 'Palladas of Alexandria: a poet between two worlds', L'antiquité classique 54:1 (1985): 270.

This is Martial's Latin:

> Flectere te nolim, sed nec turbare capillos;
> Splendida sit nolo, sordida nolo cutis;
> Nec tibi mitrarum nec sit tibi barba reorum:
> Nolo virum nimium, Pannyche, nolo parum.
> Nunc sunt crura pilis et sunt tibi pectora saetis
> Horrida, sed mens est, Pannyche, volsa tibi.[18]
>
> [I don't want you to curl, or disorder your hair;
> I don't want your skin to be shiny or dirty;
> Or that you wear a handband or a defendant's beard:
> I don't want too much a man, or too little.
> Now your legs are rough with hair and your chest
> With bristles, but your mind, Pannychus, is plucked.]

Harrison has expanded the 3 elegiac couplets into 6 rhyming tercets, again turning unrhymed verse into rhymed verse. Martial is here criticising his friend Pannychus for his effeminate looks. Harrison turns this to a cultural and political critique, eliminating the proper name and substituting it with the generic 'Redneck', an ignorant Southern conservative. This fits in with Harrison's own left-wing politics – and this was, after all, translated during the heyday of Reagan. It should be said, however, that quite a few translated epigrams don't refer to America at all. A typical Harrison translation is that of 2.73, addressed to a Greek prostitute. This epigram is actually quite idiosyncratic in Latin, because it is only one verse, whereas most of Martial's epigrams are at least two. The Latin runs as follows: 'Quid faciat volt scire Lyris: quod sobria: fellat'.[19] [Lyris wants to know what she is doing. She is performing oral sex.] Martial has fitted a lot of material into eight concise words. In contrast, Harrison's English translation contains more than three times as many words:

> What'mmmIdoin'? slurs Lyris, feigning shock.

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[18] Martial. Epigrams: Book two, ed. and trans. Craig Arthur Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 133-134.
[19] Martial, Epigrams, 231.

> I'll tell you what you're doing: YOU
> Are doing what you always do,
> Even when you're sober SUCKING COCK!

This translation shows Harrison having fun with mixing up capital letters, but also demonstrates how the technique of capitalization can contribute to a specific translation strategy.[20] In a technical sense, Harrison expands this single verse into four verses, slotted over two stanzas, with significant enjambment, and sonorous rhyme. Harrison's overall treatment of poetry in translation thus reflects a domesticating approach, bringing the texts closer to the English-language reader, and fitting them into a structure more easily identified as poetry, namely with the use of abundant rhyme absent from the Greek and Latin originals. Thus far, then, it is clear that Harrison's translation techniques are resolutely about bringing the text towards the reader, in Friedrich Schleiermacher's terms.

Harrison would use these same techniques in his theatrical translations, to varying degrees. However, there is one specific issue differentiating the two genres of translation: the fact that plays are staged, and therefore the question of performativity. Since plays are performed by a group of people, theatrical translation should involve more than one translator simply working alone, but different participants carrying out different roles. As Lorna Hardwick has argued,

> translation to the stage involves a further process in which the roles of the theatre practitioners—director, designer, lighting designer, actors, musicians, choreographer—are equally important alongside that of the translator.[21]

[20] The translation scholar Clive Scott has explored this in depth: see, for example, Clive Scott, Literary Translation and the rediscovery of reading (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[21] Lorna Hardwick, 'Translating Greek plays for the theatre today', Target 25:3 (2013): 322.

Indeed, Harrison would be intimately involved with the productions of his plays, unlike the vast majority of poet-translators who translate theatrical texts alone and do not collaborate on them any further.

This section will first address translated comedies and then translated tragedies. Harrison's first foray into translation preceded his poetry translations: it was his 1965 rendering of Aristophanes' comic play Lysistrata, written during his time in Nigeria, when he taught at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. He had moved there in 1962 to teach English, after graduating in classics from the University of Leeds. Decades later, he recalled in an interview that

> I found the drama of my own education dramatically posed in black and white: people coming from illiterate backgrounds and reading about Wordsworth's daffodils because it was set in their exam papers, when they didn't know what a fucking daffodil was. There was an almost surrealistic perversity about 'O' Level questions, which were set by a board in England for African students.[22]

Harrison saw in this a reflection of his own circumstances, with the hegemonic south of England dominating his northern city and language

> That kind of dichotomy made me think about my own education and dramatise it, and find some of the polarities through that dramatisation. Harold Acton talked about external and internal colonialism, and I found in the history of colonial Africa a very broad, dramatic portrayal of some of the things that had happened to me.[23]

His version of Aristophanes' Lysistrata, which he and his co-translator James Simmons called Aikin Mata, or women's work in the Hausa language, was, as Harrison explains, 'for a group of student actors and village musicians in northern Nigeria in collaboration with the Irish poet James Simmons. The text is

[22] Tony Harrison, cit. in J. Haffenden, 'Interview with Tony Harrison', ed. N. Astley (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1991), 236.
[23] Tony Harrison, 'Interview with Tony Harrison', 236.

unperformable outside Nigeria'.[24] It is unperformable, in Harrison's belief, both because of the specific local context of the translation as well as the unfamiliar linguistic fabric: a mixture of English with three languages spoken in Nigeria (Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, and Yoruba). A glimpse of this may be caught in the following excerpt, where Nigerian women (instead of Greek women) are discussing what they would sacrifice to get their husbands home from war:

Καλονίκη: ἔγὼ μὲν ἂν, κἂν εἴ με χρείη τοὔγκυκλον
τουτὶ καταθεῖσαν ἐκπιεῖν αὐθημερόν.
[I, if it is necessary, will pawn this dress of mine / and drink [the proceeds]] immediately.]

Μυρρίνη: ἐγὼ δέ γ᾽ ἂν, κἂν ὡσπερεὶ ψῆτταν δοκῶ
δοῦναι ἂν ἐμαυτῆς παρατεμοῦσα θἤμισυ.
[And I would cut myself in two and donate the half, / even if I would seem like a turbot.]

Λαμπιτώ: ἐγὼν δὲ καί κα ποττὸ Ταΰγετόν γ᾽ ἄνω
ἔλσοιμ᾽ ὁπᾳ μέλλοιμί γ᾽ εἰράναν ἰδῆν.
[And I would climb up to Mount Taygetus / if I could see peace.][25]

This is Tony Harrison's version:

Mariya: I'd do anything at all to help; anything. I'd even give up...[She searches for a fitting sacrifice]...burukutu.
Halimatu: Yes, anything! I'd split myself in two like giwan ruwa and give half for peace.
Iyabo: Anyting ah go do, wey go bring peace for dis country, ah go do am. Even if den say, makea run up and down dat Kuffena hill wey de yonda.[26]

In this excerpt, Mariya and Halimatu speak English, with insertions of Hausa vocabulary (burukutu, a type of beer; and giwan ruwa, which is a type of fish, Nile perch), while Iyabo speaks a form of Nigerian Pidgin. The Greek dress τοὔγκυκλον turns into burukutu, the Greek turbot ψῆτταν becomes giwan ruwa, and the Greek

[24] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Common Chorus]', in Tony Harrison: Plays 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 193.
[25] Aristophanes, Aristophanes. 3 Birds; Lysistrata; Women at the Thesmophoria, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 282 and 284.
[26] Aikin Mata: the Lysistrata of Aristophanes, translated and adapted by T. W. Harrison and James Simmons (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1966), 20.

mountain Ταΰγετόν (Taygetus) becomes Kufena hill. These different languages and the different realia – the beer, perch, the topographical reference of Kufena hill – reinforce the specificity of this version and contribute to making the translation vivid and recognisable for its intended Nigerian audience.

Three specific models of theatrical translation that Harrison would use in the future appear in this production: first, an anti-colonial ideology, against the Western exploitation of Nigeria and Africa in general; second, a tradition of collaborative translation; third, the setting of a theatrical translation in a new and specific context, not an all purpose repertory version. As Harrison says, 'I believe that versions of ancient plays have to be redone for each new production'.[27] Indeed, Harrison would re-translate Aristophanes' Lysistrata, situating it in a Cold War setting, during early 1980s, at the site of the Greenham Women's Peace Camp, where women were protesting the placing of nuclear weapons. This would form the first part of his Common Chorus, the second part being his translation of Euripides's The Trojan Women. While the first part was performed once at the University of Leeds, the second part has never been staged. Thus, as Harrison said, 'the [Common Chorus] has been marooned in its moment'.[28] In Harrison's words, the 'tension of a topical present and a tragic past had leached away into oblivion'.[29] Moreover, the text itself of the second part – the Euripides translation – 'therefore lacks all the kinds of detail and radical revision I always do in rehearsals'.[30] As Harrison notes, 'all my pieces for the theatre are fundamentally altered and defined in rehearsals and previews'.[31]

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[27] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Common Chorus]', 192.
[28] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Common Chorus]', 197.
[29] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Common Chorus]', 197.
[30] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', in Tony Harrison: Plays 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 35.
[31] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', 35.

The same traits can be identified in other comedies that Harrison translated, such as Victor Hugo's Le Roi *s'amuse* and Molière's Misanthrope. Harrison transplanted both of them into foreign contexts: he set Le Roi *s'amuse*, with the new title of *The Prince's Play*, in 1880s England, 'in a more familiar period...a little nearer home'.[32] The Misanthrope he set in 1960s Paris. He debuted with the play at the Old Vic in 1973, to much critical acclaim'.[33] Not only did he transplant the action to 1960s Paris, but he translated the play into couplets: as he says, whimsically, 'Couplets keep the cat on the hot tin roof'. They provided a 'metronome', as it were, for the comic play. Harrison describes it as having 'an almost Chekhovian tension between farce and anguish'. To deal with this 'vertiginous effect', he argues that verse (and rhymed verse) is indispensable. Neither blank verse nor prose will do'.[34] As he would continue to do, Harrison composed this translation collaboratively, incorporating many lines, phrases, and couplets that the director and actors suggested.[35] The rehearsals and workshops before the performance – the so-called 'protoperformance'[36] – are fundamental to Harrison's method of stage translation. His Molière, in the words of a critic, 'convey[s] the full linguistic range—from slick, demotic to highfalutin cultural references—of a 1960s Parisian intellectual socialite, without blunting any of Molière's comic cutting edge',[37] and the poet-translator did

[32] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to *The Prince's Play*]', in Tony Harrison: Plays 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 225-226.
[33] As Hallie Marshall says, it was such a success that 'Laurence Olivier urged him to revel in the experience, as he was unlikely to experience such ubiquitous acclaim again in his career'. Hallie Marshall, 'Tony Harrison and Jocelyn Herbert: A Theatrical Love Affair', Arion 15:2 (2007): 117.
[34] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Misanthrope]', in Tony Harrison: Plays 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 5.
[35] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Misanthrope]', 19.
[36] Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: an introduction (London: Routledge, 2013), 225.
[37] Luke Spencer, The poetry of Tony Harrison (London: Wheatsheaf, 1994), 48.

not hesitate to insert new material, such as 'marvelous new jokes unknown to Molière but perfectly in keeping with his comedy'.[38] In this translation, Harrison aimed to

> maintain the illusion of "Frenchness" by making use of French words, not necessarily in the original, which were common currency in English, often as rhyme words to stress their presence, phrases like au fait, bon mots, mon cher, entrée, ordinaire, enchanté...[39]

Harrison's choice of adapting comedies to entirely different contexts fits with what the translation scholar Gunilla Anderman notes:

> Adaptations which take the form of 'creative rewrites' (Billington 1984) are most likely to be successful in the case of more robust comedies, less so with plays concerned with social criticism, and least of all with psychological drama.[40]

In short, Harrison resituates his versions of comedies in dramatically new locales – whether shifting the setting from ancient Greece to 20th century Nigeria or late 20th century Cold War England; or moving The Misanthrope from 17th century aristocratic society to 20th century Paris; or transplanting *Le Roi s'amuse*, which was originally set in the 1530s, three and a half centuries later to Victorian Britain. Such a reframing of plays is decidedly a domesticating strategy, since the new settings are more familiar to the intended audiences, either in chronological terms (antiquity to the 20th century, for example) or geographical ones (Greece to England, for instance). Harrison's translation of Aristophanes is a case in point. His first translation was aimed at a Nigerian audience, and therefore the Greek play was set in contemporary Nigeria. When he translated the play again, for a British readership, he set it in contemporary England.

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[38] Cit. in Nöel A. Peacock, 'Translating Molière for the English Stage', Nottingham French Studies 33:1 (1994): 87.
[39] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Misanthrope]', 24.
[40] Gunilla Anderson, 'Drama translation', in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, ed. Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009), 94.

This essay so far has focused on Harrison's versions of poetry and comedies; however, classical tragedy is one of the mainsprings of his work. Not only did he translate Aeschylus' Oresteia and Euripides' Hecuba and The Trojan Women, but he composed original plays partly based on previous Greek drama: his The Labourers of Herakles drew upon the fragments of the Greek tragedian Phrynichus, and his play The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus on the remains of Sophocles' satyr play, *Ἰχνευταί*.

According to Hardwick, 'the ultimate challenge for translators of Greek tragedy is to create a translation that in performance can meet both poetic and staging criteria, which in neither case can achieve exact reproduction or "authenticity"'.[41] But Harrison's dream was to 'emulate' the Greeks, eschewing, for instance, what he called the 'anorexic' drama of T. S. Eliot, 'who ruined verse theatre by taking it into the drawing room'.[42] Indeed, as Harrison goes on, 'Greek tragedy begins where Munch's Scream leaves off—staring dumbly into atrocity'.[43] Yet the proper reply, according to Harrison, is not Adorno's dictum of no poetry after Auschwitz: instead, as he writes, 'After atrocity, poetry is the only adequate response'.[44] Indeed, the very characteristic of Greek tragedy – the mask – became Harrison's favorite metaphor for the role of the poet: 'The eyes of the tragic mask are always open to witness even the worst and the mouth is always open to make poetry from it. Neither ever close[s]'.[45]

His 1981 version of Aeschylus' Oresteia, which premiered at the National Theatre, was based on two fundamental aspects, 'alliterative metrics' and 'compound

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[41] Lorna Hardwick, 'Translating Greek plays for the theatre today', Target 25:3 (2013): 323.
[42] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', 4.
[43] Cit. in Herbert Golder, 'Man enough', Ariel 15:2 (2007): 76.
[44] Cit. in Herbert Golder, 'Man enough', 76.
[45] Tony Harrison, 'The poetic gaze', 24 October 2009. Accessed at http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/oct/24/tony-harrison-speech-pen-pinter.

words'.[46] In this version, unlike his rendering of Palladas' poetry, Harrison abandoned the use of rhyme, and this reflects more truthfully the nature of the unrhymed Greek text. Without a doubt, his language here is influenced by his earlier translation of the medieval English Mysteries, which were written not in standard English but in different Northern English dialects. Again, for Harrison, this translation needed to be a version for the stage, not something to be read: if it doesn't succeed in being put on, in his words it is simply not 'a translation of Aeschylus at all'.[47] In the Oresteia, the 'four-pulse beat' of Harrison's translation 'forc[es] the reader or audience to be spellbound'.[48] Harrison here used Old English compounds as compensation: as he says, 'I tried to use it [compounding] not necessarily to match an Aeschylean compound exactly, but wherever I could as a means of also dramatising the tensions and antagonisms of the drama'.

In the following passage, Cassandra inveighs against her future killer Clytemnestra: first in Harrison's version, followed by the original Greek and a gloss translation:

> Blood-sucker basilisk two-headed shark-hag,
> Rock-trog skulking for sailors to wreck them,
> Hell-dam fire-breathing war war at her husband,
> Boundless in brazenness, hear her hosannas
> Like battle-cries raised when the victory seems certain.
> But how well she dissembles that so wifely welcome.[49]

> ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ
> οἰκοῦσαν ἐν πέτραισι, ναυτίλων βλάβην,
> θυίουσαν Ἅιδου μητέρ᾽ ἄσπονδόν τ᾽ Ἄρη
> φίλοις πνέουσαν; ὡς δ᾽ ἐπωλολύξατο
> ἡ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχης τροπῇ·
> δοκεῖ δὲ χαίρειν νοστίμῳ σωτηρίᾳ.[50]

[46] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', 8.
[47] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', 19.
[48] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Oresteia]', 13.
[49] Tony Harrison, 'The Oresteia', in Tony Harrison: Plays 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 80.

> [A snake, or some Scylla
> living in the rocks, the bane of sailors,
> a raging destructive mother breathing out implacable
> war to her friends. How she, shameless,
> cried out in triumph, as if winning a battle,
> even as she seems to cheer at his safe return.]

In Harrison's version, we can see the profusion of compound words – blood-sucker, two-headed shark-hag, rock-trog, hell-dam, fire-breathing, battle-cries – which form the backbone of this verse. The alliteration draws us on as well – the 'b' in the blood-sucker / basilisk / boundless in brazenness, the 'h' in hag / hell-dam / husband / hear her hosannas, the 'w' in war / well / wifely / welcome. However, here he has lost the notion of a mythological monster Scylla, since rock-trog doesn't have any mythological resonance. The style of his version of the Oresteia has been effectively described as follows: 'The diction is craggy with consonants, unabashed alliteration, and thudding compounds'.[51] This use of Old English poetics makes his translation not a domesticating version, like all his other translations, but rather a foreignising version. Contemporary English readers, used to rhyme and iambic pentameter, are not accustomed to such poetic techniques. And its success may be understood both by the awarding of the European translation prize as well as the fact that it was the first English production of Aeschylus invited to be performed in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus.

However, when Harrison translated classical French tragedy, namely Racine's Phèdre, he resumed a domesticating approach. Because he thought that the French play had become unmoored from its social background, he decided upon placing it under the 19th century British Raj, calling his version Phaedra Britannica. As Susan

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[50] Aeschylus 2: Agamemnon, Libation-bearers, Eumenides, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 148.
[51] A. D. P. Briggs, 'Aeschylus', in The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 359.

Bassnett notes, 'Harrison has moved away...from the whole universe of myth out of which Phèdre originated, and has substituted colonial India'.[52] We note here that Racine's poetics was highly centered on the use of the rhymed Alexandrine verse, providing Harrison with an incentive to return to rhyming translation. In the French, the Athenian princess Aricie laments about the war. In Harrison's version, Aricie becomes the Indian princess Lilamani, who mourns:

> I, last of Ranjit's noble household, forced
> To watch my brother face the holocaust.
> My father bayoneted! The redcoat guns
> Killed my six brothers. All my father's sons.
> The eldest, proud and strong, a bloody mess
> Blown from a cannon into nothingness.
> Smoking smithereens! India's red mud
> Churned even redder with her children's blood.[53]

The French original was quite different, both in terms of the specific cultural and geographical contexts:

> Reste du sang d'un roi, noble fils de la terre,
> Je suis seule échappée aux fureurs de la guerre.
> J'ai perdu dans la fleur de leur jeune saison,
> Six frères, quel espoir d'une illustre maison!
> Le fer moissonna tout, et la terre humectée
> But à regret le sang des neveux d'Erechthée.[54]
>
> [The last of a king's blood, noble son of the earth,
> I alone escaped the furies of the war.
> In the prime of their youthful age, I lost
> Six brothers, that hope of an illustrious house!
> The iron reaped everything, and the moistened earth
> Reluctantly drank the blood of Erechtheus' nephews.]

We can see how Harrison, always the anti-colonialist, effectively portrays the horror of the Indian princess – what she has lost. He increases the tragic emphasis by translating 'fureurs de la guerre' with the loaded term 'holocaust'. The rendering of

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[52] Susan Bassnett, Translation Studies (London: Routledge, 2013), 134.
[53] Tony Harrison, 'Phaedra Britannica', in Tony Harrison: Plays 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 160-161.
[54] Jean Racine, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

terre humectée and neveux d'Erechthée as ‘India’s red mud’ and ‘her children’s blood’, in losing the Greek reference, stresses the rootedness of the play within India, and the suffering of its people. Harrison no longer focuses on compound words, as in his translation of Aeschylus, but rather on rhymes. But he also increases the philosophical potency of the image: the eldest is blown ‘into nothingness’; yet the following line says ‘Smoking smithereens’. Nothingness could mean either nothingness of the body or of the soul. But since there is the phrase ‘smoking smithereens’, this means that there is a body, in fragments, and that the ‘nothingness’ is to be interpreted in a metaphysical sense. There is no after-life of his soul, but simply fragments of flesh. We can note the three repetitions of ‘red’ here in the translation, whereas the original has no mention of colours at all. It is an apt color for the scene. The domesticating strategy pursued by Harrison is in evidence here, most noticeably in the entirely different setting, but also in the shift from French alexandrines to English iambic pentameter.

There is one final translation to be discussed. In 2005, Harrison came out with one of his most powerful works: his version of Euripides’ Hecuba. His moving reflections on the figure of Hecuba explain his motivations behind translating it, and, in fact, go beyond this to the very purpose of artistic creation:

> In my notebooks, where I glue pictures among the drafts of translations from the Greek tragedies I’ve done, I have a recurring image of an old woman appealing to the camera that has captured her agony or the heavens that ignore it, in front of the utter devastation that had been her home, or before her murdered dead. They are all different women from many places on earth with the same gesture of disbelief, despair, and denunciation. They are in Sarajevo, Kosovo, Grozny, Gaza, Ramallah, Tblisi, Baghdad, Falluja: women in robes and men in hard metal helmets, as in the Trojan War. Under them all, over the years, I have scribbled Hecuba. My notebooks are bursting with Hecubas. Hecuba walks out of Euripides from two thousand five hundred years ago straight onto our daily front pages and into our nightly newscasts. She is never out of the news. To our shame she is news that stays news.[55]

[55] Euripides, Hecuba, tr. Tony Harrison (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), viii-ix.

Indeed, we can see Harrison's left-wing political view clearly, when he goes on, during the height of the US war in Iraq in 2005:

> We may still be weeping for Hecuba, but we allow our politicians to flood the streets of Iraq with more and more Hecubas in the name of freedom and democracy. The audience may weep for Hecuba in Washington when the tragedy plays there, but will they squirm with regret for Iraq, or the re-election of George Bush, or pause a moment before going for the gullet of Iran?[56]

In line with this, Harrison chose the front cover of the edition of his version to be a photo of a woman held at Abu Ghraib prison. It is this forthright political discourse, speaking truth to power, that is surely one of the reasons Harrison has not been lauded as much as he merits.

In the following passage from Harrison's translation, Hecuba reacts to the body of her son Polydorus:

> Beyond belief, beyond belief,
> grief piled on the top of grief.
> There'll never be a day
> I don't shed tears,
> there'll never be a day
> I don't heave sighs.
> Every day I'll ever know
> will have its hours crammed with woe.[57]

The Greek is

> ἄπιστ᾽ ἄπιστα, καινὰ καινὰ δέρκομαι.
> ἕτερα δ᾽ ἀφ᾽ ἑτέρων κακὰ κακῶν κυρεῖ:
> οὐδέ ποτ᾽ ἀστένακτος ἀδάκρυτος ἀ-
> μέρα μ᾽ ἐπισχήσει.
>
> [The things I see are unbelievable, unbelievable; strange, strange.
> evil things follow evil things:
> never will a day pass by
> without tears, without groans.]

Harrison expands the four unrhymed Greek verses into eight rhymed English verses. These English lines are mostly stitched together in iambs, and the last line's

[56] Euripides, Hecuba, x.
[57] Euripides, Hecuba, 25.

'crammed' stands out even more because it breaks up the metre. Harrison has arguably strengthened this passage in translation, by removing the second part of the first verse, by repeating 'beyond belief'. He makes the generic κακὰ more subjective (grief), and introduces two new images: grief 'piling upon' grief, and days 'crammed' with woe. All of these aspects – the addition of rhyme, the use of a prestigious English metre unrelated to the Greek meter, the insertion of new imagery – confirm that this is a domesticating translation.

The previous analysis leads to some final observations. The well-known classics scholar D. S. Carne-Ross advanced the claim that 'Ancient literature must always be re-created. There is no middle way between poetic re-creation and a crib'.[58] This is too simplistic an assertion, however. Harrison does not strive for a utopic crystal clear reproduction of the original, which is in any case an impossibility, as translation scholars have repeatedly maintained. Rather, he aims, whether in his poetry or theatrical translations, for a living text. Harrison generally practices a decidedly domesticating approach to translation, bringing it close to the reader by setting it in more recognisable contexts, and using contemporary slang and familiar rhyme schemes. He rhymes unrhymed poetry (Martial, Palladas); he translates Greek meter into English iambic pentameter; and he often adapts theatrical settings millennia later (Aristophanes) or in different continents (Phaedra Britannica). This domestication strategy is sometimes evident in Harrison's own paratexts: The *Prince's Play* is an 'adaptation', the The Misanthrope is an 'English version', and his rendition of Racine's play is 'after' [Phèdre], all terms which express distance from the original text, and a reframing of the work for a new readership and/or audience.

[58] D. S. Carne-Ross, 'Translation and transposition', in The craft and context of translation, ed. William Arrowsmith and Roger Shattuck (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 5.

The sole examplar of foreignization occurs, as has been seen, with his Oresteia. There, his recourse to intense alliteration and word compounds is aimed at creating an unfamiliar effect for the contemporary English reader. His overall use of assorted Northern English dialect words and syntax, to different degrees in his translations, localise – and domesticate - his translations even more for the ideal reader from his hometown, Leeds.

In general, then, Harrison's approach to translating drama is different to the majority of poet-translators. Sirkku Aaltonen has concisely formulated the issue: 'All theatre practitioners are involved, to some degree, in the rewriting of a text for a particular production. What varies is not the extent to which they are involved, but the power they exercise during the process'[59]. This applies directly to Harrison: he works collaboratively with directors (even directing Prometheus himself), readily and willingly incorporates suggestions from actors, translates directly from the source languages, and brings a forceful ideological poetics and language of his own to bear upon the text. As a critic has noted, 'Harrison is relatively unusual among theatrical adaptors in possessing expert knowledge of the source language from which he translates'.[60] Normally, in fact, those who domesticate texts in translation do so precisely because they do not have knowledge of the source text – one famous example being the Homeric translations by Christopher Logue. Lastly, Harrison realises that a translation for the stage is not an immutable translation, something to be set down in stone. Rather, as he argues, 'the best way of creating a fresh text of a classic is to tie it to a specific production rather than aim, from the study, at a general

[59] Sirkku Aaltonen, 'Theatre translation as performance', Target 25:3 (2013): 385.
[60] Geraldine Brodie, 'Translation in Performance: Theatrical Shift and the Transmission of Meaning in Tony Harrison's Translation of Euripides' Hecuba', Contemporary Theatre Review 24:1 (2014): 54.

all-purpose repertory version'.[61] Indeed, Harrison takes a certain amount of pride in the fact that his staged translations are not immortal: 'I like that theatre should perish. Just as mortality is the seasoning of our relish for life, so ephemerality is a stimulus to seize the experience of the moment'.[62] This also explains why Harrison so frequently domesticates the text: because he strives to render the original play pertinent and understandable to the specific audience viewing it on stage in a particular locale (whether the Old Vic, let us say, or in Nigeria).

With a firm poetic metre, steeped in classical erudition and political conviction, Harrison has become one of the leading poets of our era, working in a variety of poetic forms – original poetry, verse drama, and translations. It is fitting to sum up Harrison's work as described by the director Richard Eyre, who collaborated with him on various productions. In Eyre's words, Harrison wants you 'to be able to feel the language, to taste it, to conscript the whole body as well as the mind and the mouth to savour it'.[63] This is of course a zero-sum game, since the 'savour[ing]' of language occurs only while, in Harrison's words, 'time is counting down to our ends'[64]. Indeed, Harrison comments that 'committing to metre is to emphasis the time that ticks away as our lives get shorter'.[65] And the poet-translator concludes, quoting Joseph Brodsky, that 'prosody absorbs death'.[66] Harrison's supreme achievement, as a poet-translator, has been allowing his readers to savour his own use of language, while also causing them to reflect on the unpalatable truths within it:

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[61] Tony Harrison, 'Introduction [to The Misanthrope]', in Tony Harrison: Plays 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 10.
[62] Maya Jaggi, 'Beats of the heart', Guardian 31 March 2007: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/31/poetry.tonyharrison.
[63] Tony Harrison, in Bloodaxe Critical Anthologies 1: Tony Harrison, ed. Neil Astley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), 364.
[64] Tony Harrison, 'Flicks and this fleeting life', in Tony Harrison, Collected Film Poetry (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), xxix-xxx.
[65] Tony Harrison, 'Flicks and this fleeting life', xxix.
[66] Tony Harrison, 'Flicks and this fleeting life', xxx.

> Then it's the kumquat fruit expresses best
> how days have darkness behind them like a rind,
> life has a skin of death that keeps its zest.[67]

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[67] Tony Harrison, Collected poems (London: Viking, 2007), 221.

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