

**VERSE TRANSLATIONS
FROM
CLASSIC AUTHORS**

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Verse Translations from Classic Authors by Cyril E. F. Starkey

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CYRIL E. F. STARKEY

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BY
Edgar Frodsham
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PREFACE

It is an instructive fact that the French word 'traduire,' 'to translate,' is derived from 'traducere,' a word which has as a secondary meaning 'to ridicule' or 'misrepresent,' while the English form, 'traduce,' has a still uglier signification. To translate must always be to traduce to a greater or less degree ; either spirit or letter must be more or less lost in the process, even in the most perfect translation. Every language possesses its own metaphors, idioms, turns of expression, and modes of thought ; every language has its own constructions, syntax, metrical system ; and the successful transference of a thought from one language to another depends on the skill of the translator in deciding whether he may employ the same metaphor, metre, or what not, or must cast about for a corresponding or similar one which shall produce the same effect.

Perhaps these remarks may best be illustrated by mentioning a perfect example of what a translation ought not to be. Nothing will suit our purpose better than Milton's famous 'traduction' of Horace's Ode to Pyrrha. Here we have a metre uncongenial to English ears, an absence of rhyme, without which no lyrical effect is producible to us, a literal rendering, and a close adherence to the Latin order of sentence, which our want of inflection makes ambiguous and absurd and which is entirely alien to our 'structureless comminution.' It is perfectly bewildering to realise that this has been handed down to us as a model of translation. However, it serves a purpose. We may learn from it that 'the letter killeth,' though this may not ensure our preserving 'the spirit that maketh alive.' In fact, the number of successes in translation is sadly out of proportion to the total attempts, for such a success depends on a combination of mental qualities which is exceedingly rare. For one, however, *εὐλαβομένη πεποιθὴν*, who is content to set up a humbler standard, the task is full of pleasure and profit to himself, and need not be absolutely devoid of either to his readers. We may see how even Milton's effort can afford us both—pleasure because we can criticise, and profit because we can avoid.

The translator's main difficulty, especially when he is

dealing with Latin or Greek verse, lies in the fact that he has to steer his course between the Scylla of pedantic accuracy and the Charybdis of unscholarly freedom. Both extremes are to be deprecated, but, for the purposes of the present work, I have deliberately inclined towards the latter, to the extent, that is, of ignoring minute critical points, not, I trust, of actually contravening the great canons of classical literature. The translator must pour old wine into new bottles ; something must be lost in the process of decanting, and it is worth spilling a little of the fluid if the sparkling freshness of the remainder be preserved from evaporation.

These translations have been made from time to time during the last ten years for the use of my more advanced pupils, and I have found them of very great assistance in producing that effect of life and reality which is often so 'sadly to seek' in the translation of the schoolboy or undergraduate. I have observed on many occasions that a free verse translation has been far more serviceable in helping a form or an individual to catch the inner meaning of a classic poet, than the most accurate word-for-word version ; though the latter, of course, has its very useful and proper place, which it is in no danger of losing in these days of revision and re-revision of texts, collating and estimating manuscripts, and revolutionising our

established notions in ancient history, literature, and art by a stroke of the spade.

Browning's grammarian worthily employed his last moments in 'properly basing οὐδ', but he would have been the last to assert that we were ever meant to let 'God's gift hang on grammar,' and the first to acknowledge that such pedestrian scholarship is but the foundation of the great edifice of true classical taste. It is sometimes higher to sympathise than to analyse.

The cultivation of the boy, then, was my primary object in this work, but I trust this confession will not alienate the sympathies of older readers, of whom there must be many who can appreciate Sophocles without being able to repeat the paradigms of λύω, and who can enjoy hearing even the faintest and most distorted echo from the summit of Parnassus. To some again the classics are but a dim bugbear of the past, and the only line that has made any lasting impression on them is 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.' It will be no slight reward if only one member of this numerous class be converted, and brought to feel that the Greeks need not always be feared, and that their gifts are sometimes harmless and even pregnant with truth and beauty.

EDINBURGH: *January 1895.*

CONTENTS

AESCHYLUS

	PAGE
<i>Agamemnon</i> , 390-415. <i>Ὀϊστὶς καὶ Πάρις ἐλθόν</i>	1

SOPHOCLES

<i>Oedipus Coloneus</i> , 668-719. <i>Εὐρίππου, ξένη, τῆσδε χώρας</i>	3
„ 1211-48. <i>Ὅστις τοῦ πλάτους μέρους κ.τ.λ.</i>	5
<i>Antigone</i> , 781-800. <i>Ἔπος ἀνίκαιε μάχων</i>	7

CATULLUS

V. <i>Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus</i>	9
LXII. <i>Vesper adest, juvenes, consurgite; Vesper Olympo</i>	10
LXIV. <i>Peliaco quondam prognatae vertice pinus</i>	16
LXXVI. <i>Si qua recordanti benefacta priora voluptas</i>	37
LXXXIV. <i>Commoda dicebat, si quando commoda vellet</i>	39

LUCRETIUS

I. 1-21. <i>Aeneadem genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas</i>	40
I. 81-102. <i>Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis</i>	42
II. 1-13. <i>Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis</i>	44
II. 323-334. <i>Praeterea, magnae legiones cum loca cursu</i>	45

HORACE : <i>Odes</i>		PAGE
I. 1.	Maecenas atavis edite regibus	46
I. 2.	Jam satis terris nivis atque dirae	49
I. 3.	Sic te diva potens Cypri	53
I. 4.	Solvitur acris hiems grata vice veris et Favoni	55
I. 5.	Quis multa gracilis te puer in rosa	57
I. 7.	Laudabant alii clavam Rhodon aut Mytilenen	58
I. 8.	Lydia, dic, per omnes,	60
I. 9.	Vides ut alta stet nive candidum	62
I. 10.	Mercuri facunde nepos Atlantis	64
I. 12.	Quem virum aut herosa lyra vel acri	66
I. 14.	O navis, referent in mare te novi	69
I. 16.	O matre pulchra filia pulchrior	71
I. 22.	Integer vitae scelerisque purus	73
I. 23.	Vitas hinnuleo me similis, Chloë	75
I. 24.	Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus	76
I. 27.	Natis in usum laetitiae scyphis	78
I. 31.	Quid dedicatum poscit Apollinem	80
I. 34.	Parcus decorum cultor et infrequens	82
I. 35.	O Diva, gratum quae regis Antium	83
I. 37.	Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero	86
I. 38.	Persicos odi, puer, apparatus	89
II. 3.	Aequam memento rebus in arduis	90
II. 4.	Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori	92
II. 8.	Ulla si juris tibi pejerati	94
II. 13.	Ille et nefasto te posuit die	96
II. 14.	Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume	99
II. 16.	Otium divos rogat in patente	101
II. 17.	Cur me querelis exanimas tuis ?	104
III. 1.	Odi profanum vulgus et arceo	106
III. 3.	Justum et tenacem propositi virum	109
III. 4.	Descende caelo et dic age tibia	113
III. 5.	Caelo tonantem credidimus Jovem	117