

Lecture 11

Practical Translation 5

Translating Poetry

(Translating Poetry)

English metre is syllable-and-stress metre. The line is defined in terms of feet. A foot is a conventional group of stressed and/or unstressed syllables in a particular order. A line of traditional verse consists of a fixed number of particular feet. For example:

The *curfew* tolls/ the *knell*/ of *par*/ting *day*/

This line has five feet; that is, it is a pentameter. In this particular case, the feet have one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable. This is known as an *iamb*, or iambic foot. A line consisting of five iambs is an iambic pentameter. It is the most common English line, found in the work of great playwrights and poets. The commonest other feet are:

trochee (adj. *trochaic*):

dactyl (adj. *dactylic*):

anapest (adj. *anapestic*):

When the/ *pie* was/ opened/

Merrily/ *chatting* and/ *clattering*/

And made *ci*/der *inside*/ her *inside*/

Most poems do not have a regular beat throughout. This would be intolerably dreary. Even limericks are very rarely exclusively anapestic. The opening lines of Keats's 'To Autumn' (§ 7.1.1) are examples of typical variations on the basic iambic pentameter. These lines still count as iambic pentameters, because they do have five feet, they are predominantly iambic, and the rest of the poem has these qualities.

One other sort of English metre is worth mentioning, strong-stress metre. This is different from syllable-and-stress metre, in that only the stresses count in describing the line, the number of weak syllables being variable. Much modern verse uses this metre, often in combination with syllable-and-stress metre.

Like the English metrical line, the line in Arabic is defined in terms of feet. However, while English metre involves both syllable and stress, Arabic metre is based entirely around syllable-type. The basic distinction is between short syllables (consonant + short vowel) and long syllables (consonant + long vowel, *or* consonant + short vowel + consonant). All Arabic syllables are treated as beginning with a consonant. Accordingly, there is no ambiguity about where one syllable ends and another begins. Thus in the word دم, the first syllable is *da* and the second syllable is *mun*. Vowels at the end of the hemistich or line are always scanned long, irrespective of their quantity in prose.

Feet consist of varying numbers of syllables (most commonly three or four syllables), combinations of these feet making up a particular metre. A large number of metres are recognized in classical Arabic poetry. Compositions are normally in a single metre. However, the fact that metres permit a degree of variation in the syllable types used to constitute their feet means that there is normally a degree of rhythmic variation within an individual composition. In some metres, double short syllables within one line typically alternate with one long syllable in other line, while in others a long syllable in one line alternates with a short syllable in another.

Most classical poems are of the قصيدة form, a قصيدة having a variable number of lines (بيت, pl. أبيات), normally not more than one hundred. Lines can have up to thirty syllables divided into two hemistichs (مصرع or شطر). The first half of the line is called the صدر 'chest' (also الشطر الاول 'the first half'), and the second the عجز 'rump' (also الشطر الثاني 'the second half'). These are separated by a gap in the text which is somewhat longer than that which standardly occurs between words. The number of syllables per line is variable in some metres and fixed in others. A single rhyme, sometimes termed a monorhyme, occurs at the end of every line. First lines (مطلع, pl. مطالع) often have rhyming hemistichs.

دَعِ الْأَيَّامَ تَفْعَلْ مَا تَشَاءُ وَطِيبْ نَفْسًا إِذَا حَكَمَ الْقَضَاءُ
وَلَا تَجْزَعْ لِحَادِثَةِ اللَّيَالِي فَمَا لِحَوَاثِدِ الدُّنْيَا بَقَاءُ
وَكَُنْ رَجُلًا عَلَى الْأَهْوَالِ جَلْدًا وَشِيَمَتِكَ السَّمَاحَةُ وَالْوَفَاءُ
وَإِنْ كَثُرَتْ عُيُوبُكَ فِي الْبَرَائِيَا وَسَرُّكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهَا غِطَاءُ
تَسْتَرُ بِالسَّخَاءِ فَكُلُّ عَيْبٍ يَغْطِيهِ كَمَا قِيلَ السَّخَاءُ
وَلَا تُرِ لِلْأَعْيَادِي قَطُّ ذُلًا فَإِنْ شَمَاتَةَ الْأَعْدَاءُ بَلَاءُ
وَلَا تَرْجُ السَّمَاحَةَ مِنْ بَخِيلٍ فَمَا فِي النَّارِ لِلظُّمَانِ مَاءُ
وَرِزْقُكَ لَيْسَ يُنْقِصُهُ التَّائِي وَلَيْسَ يَزِيدُ فِي الرِّزْقِ الْعَنَاءُ
وَلَا حُزْنٌ يَدُومُ وَلَا سُرُورٌ وَلَا بُؤْسٌ عَلَيْكَ وَلَا رَخَاءُ
إِذَا مَا كُنْتَ ذَا قَلْبٍ قَنُوعٍ فَأَنْتَ وَمَالُكَ الدُّنْيَا سَوَاءُ

وَمَنْ نَزَلَتْ بِسَاحَتِهِ الْمَنِيَا فَلَا أَرْضُ تَقِيهِ وَلَا سَمَاءُ
وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَأَسِيعَةٌ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا نَزَلَ الْقَضَا ضَاقَ الْقَضَاءُ
دَعِ الْأَيَّامَ تَفْعَلْ كُلَّ حِينٍ فَمَا يُغْنِي عَنِ الْمَوْتِ الدَّوَاءُ

(ii) Complete version of TT 1

Let the days do what they will, and be of good cheer when fate utters its decree.
Nor be troubled by the night's event; the events of this world have no permanence.
Be steadfast in the face of terrors; let your mark be generosity and trust.
And if your faults be many in the eyes of men, and you wish to have a cover for yourself,
Wrap yourself in magnanimity, which covers every fault, as men have said.
Do not abase yourself before your enemies, for the gloating of one's enemies is a scourge.
Nor hope for generosity from a miser: there is no water for the thirsty in the Fire.
Your daily bread will not be lessened if you wait; nor will it be increased by anxious care.
Neither sadness endures long, nor pleasure, nor misfortune, nor a state of ease,
But if you have a contented heart you are the equal of the owner of the world.
He whose abode is visited by destiny finds no shield on earth or in the heavens.
God's earth is vast, but when fate falls the vastness of space can offer no escape.
Let the days betray throughout all time: there is no cure can avail against death.

دَعِ الْأَيَّامَ تَفْعَلْ مَا تَشَاءُ وَطَبِّ نَفْسًا إِذَا حَكَمَ الْقَضَاءُ
وَلَا تَجْزَعْ لِحَادِثَةِ اللَّيَالِي فَمَا لِحَوَادِثِ الدُّنْيَا بَقَاءُ
وَكُنْ رَجُلًا عَلَى الْأَهْوَالِ جَلْدًا وَشِيمَتِكَ السَّمَاحَةُ وَالْوَفَاءُ

(iii) Complete version of TT 2

Let the days do what they will,
And with good cheer face fate's decree.
Let night's events cause no concern;
The world's events will cease to be.

Brave all dreads with firm decision –
Loyal and generous of disposition.

وَأِنْ كَثُرَتْ عُيُوبُكَ فِي الْبَرَآيَا وَسَرَّكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهَا غِطَاءُ
تَسْتَرُّ بِالسَّخَاءِ فَكُلُّ عَيْبٍ يُغْطِيهِ كَمَا قِيلَ السَّخَاءُ

If your faults be many in men's eyes
And you want a wrap to overlay,
Wrap up in magnanimity,
It hides all faults, or so they say.

وَلَا تُرِ لِلْأَعْيَادِي قَطُّ ذُلًّا فَإِنَّ شِمَاتَةَ الْأَعْدَاءِ بَلَاءُ
وَلَا تُرْجُ السَّمَاحَةَ مِنْ بَخِيلٍ فَمَا فِي النَّارِ لِلظُّمَأَنْ مَاءُ

Do not bow down before your foes;
Their gloating is a torment dire.
The mean cannot be generous –
No thirst was ever quenched by Fire.

وَرِزْقُكَ لَيْسَ يَنْقِصُهُ التَّأَنِّي وَلَيْسَ يَزِيدُ فِي الرِّزْقِ الْعَنَاءُ
وَلَا حُزْنٌ يَدُومٌ وَلَا سُرُورٌ وَلَا بُؤْسٌ عَلَيْكَ وَلَا رَخَاءٌ
إِذَا مَا كُنْتَ ذَا قَلْبٍ قَنُوعٍ فَأَنْتَ وَمَالِكَ الدُّنْيَا سَوَاءٌ

To wait will not reduce your daily bread;
Nor is there increase found through anxious dread.

Sadness and joy do not endure,
And neither ease, nor times of dearth,
But he whose soul may rest content
Is as the owner of the earth.

وَمَنْ نَزَلَتْ بِسَاحَتِهِ الْمَنَايَا فَلَا أَرْضٌ تَقِيهِ وَلَا سَمَاءٌ
وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَأَسِيعَةٌ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا نَزَلَ الْقَضَا ضَاقَ الْفَضَاءُ
دَعِ الْأَيَّامَ تَغْدِرُ كُلُّ حِينٍ فَمَا يُغْنِي عَنِ الْمَوْتِ الدُّوَاءُ

He whose house is touched by doom,
Heaven and earth will not relieve.
God's earth is vast, but at fate's fall
The whole of space gives no reprieve.

Then let the days betray at every breath;
There is no cure can cure man of death.