

INEDITO NEOGRECO

di Wolfgang David Cirilo de Melo

William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*
(Act 3, Scene 3)

Translation into
Sophoclean trimeters

(The outwardly austere Duke Angelo has condemned Claudio to death, but then offers to spare him if his sister Isabella becomes the Duke's mistress.)

Isabella:

Dost thou think, Claudio,
If I would yield him my virginity,
Thou mightst be freed.

Claudio:

O heavens, it cannot be!

Isabella:

Yes, he would give't thee, from this rank offence,
So to offend him still. This night's the time
That I should do what I abhor to name;
Or else thou diest tomorrow.

Claudio:

Thou shalt not do't.

Isabella:

O, were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.

Claudio:

Thanks, dear Isabel.

Isabella:

Be ready, Claudio, for thy death tomorrow.

Claudio:

Yes. – Has he affections in him,
That thus can make him bite the law by th' nose
When he would force it? – Sure, it is no sin;
Or of the deadly seven it is the least.

Isabella:

Which is the least?

Claudio:

If it were damnable, he being so wise,
Why would he for the momentary trick
Be perdurably fin'd? – O Isabel!

Isabella:

What says my brother?

Claudio:

Death is a fearful thing.

ΙΣ.

ἄρ' οὐκ ἄπιστόν¹ ἔστι τοῦτ', ἀδελφέ μου;
εἰ τῷδ' ἔλυον φωτὶ νῦν ἄγνευμ' ἐγώ,²
ἐλεύθερον σὺ θάσσον ἡμαρ εἶχες ἄν.

ΚΛ.

οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτο, πρὸς θεῶν, ἀνασχετόν.

ΙΣ.

ἀντ' οὖν ἐκείνης δυσχεροῦς ἀμαρτίας
παρείχεν ἄν νιν, ὡς ἀμαρτάνης πλέον.³
ἔμοι δὲ νυκτὶ τῆδε δραστέον κακὸν
ἀνωνόμαστον, ἢ σὺ γ' αὔριον θανῆ.

ΚΛ.

μὴ δῆτ', ἀδελφή, πρᾶγος ἐργάση τόδε.

ΙΣ.

εἰ δ' οὗτος ἀγὼν ἦν μόνον ζωῆς πέρι,
ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαχθεῖς⁴ ἐμῆς ἐκουσίως
τὴν σὴν ἄν ἐξέσωζον ἄρχοντος χερός.⁵

ΚΛ.

ὦ σπέρμ' ὄμαιμον,⁶ οἶδά σοι πολλὴν χάριν.

ΙΣ.

ἴσθ' οὖν ἔτοιμος αὔριον θανεῖν, κάσι.

ΚΛ.

ἔτοιμός εἰμι. μὼν ἔχει κείνον πόθος⁷
τοσοῦτος ὡς τὰ θέσμι' οὐδαμοῦ λέγειν,⁸
ὦν προστάτης πέφυκεν; ἀμπλάκημα δὲ
οὐκ ἔστιν, ἢ τῶν ἐπτά δυσσεβεστάτων
βροτοῖσι τοῦτο ῥᾶστα συγγινώσκειται.

ΙΣ.

τί δ' ἔστι συγγνωστόν σφιν ἀμπλακημάτων;⁹

ΚΛ.

εἰ γὰρ πονηρόν, ὦ κασίγνητον κᾶρα,¹⁰
ἦν χρήμα τοῖον, ἄρα μή,¹¹ σοφός περ ὢν,¹²
ἐφημέραισιν ἡδοναῖς ἐψευσμένος
πρόχειρος ἦν ἄν εἰς ἀεὶ τίνειν δίκην;

ΙΣ.

τί φῆς, ἀδελφέ; ποῖ προβήσεται λόγος;¹³

ΚΛ.

ἦ δεινόν ἔστι καὶ λυγρὸν τὸ κατθανεῖν.

Isabella:

And shamed life a hateful.

Claudio:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bath in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown in restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling, – ‘tis too horrible.
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

ΙΣ.

θεοστυγῆς¹⁴ δὲ καὶ πικρὸν τὸ ζῆν κακῶς.
ΚΛ.

ἀλλ’ εἰς ἄδηλον¹⁵ βαίνομεν τεθνηκότες.
δέμας δέ, πρόσθεν θερμόν, ἄλκιμον, σθένον,
ναρκᾶ τε καὶ σέσηπε χῶδε γίγνεται
βῶλος δυσειδῆς. πρὶν μὲν ἦν ψυχὴ μάκαρ,¹⁶
νῦν δ’ ἐν φλεγούσῃ βάπτεται πλημυρίδι,
ἢ τοῖς τόποις ψυχροῖσι κρυστάλλου πυκνοῦ
μεστοῖς ἔνεστιν, ἢ πνοῶν τῶν ἀσκόπων
δεσμῶτις οὕσα γῆν μεταρσίαν πέρι
λάβρωσ ἐς αἰὲν ἔλκεται καὶ ρίπτεται,
ἢ – τοῦτο δ’ ἔστι πῆμα πῆματος πλέον¹⁷
τοῖς δυσμόροις ξύνεστιν,¹⁸ οὐς βρυχωμένους
αἰνικτὰ φράζει¹⁹ κάσαφῆ²⁰ θεσπίσματα.
ταράσσομαι δὴ σφόδρα, κεῖν’ αἰδῶν, φρένας.²¹
ζωὴ γάρ, εἰ στυγνὴν σφε²² καὶ παναθλίαν
ποιούσι δεσμοί, γῆρας, ἀλγηδῶν, σπάνις,
ὅμως δὲ προσφιλῆς τε καὶ τερπνὴ κυρεῖ
ἐχθροῦ πρὸς Ἄιδου δύσφορον τιμωρίαν.²³

NOTE

¹ For ἄπιστος = ‘unbelievable’ cf. ἄπιστον ... μῦθον in E. *IT* 1293.

² Cf. ἔλυσας ... ἄγνευμα σόν (E. *Tr*: 501), ‘you brought your chastity to an end.’

³ For this special kind of final clause, which presents an unintended event as the purpose of the action in the main clause, cf. R. Nisbet, *Voluntas Fati* in Latin Syntax, *American Journal of Philology*, 44, 1923, 27-43, which contains some Greek examples as well.

⁴ ψυχῆς ἀπαλλαχθεῖσα = E. *Hipp*. 726.

⁵ Cf. E. *El*. 28: ἐξέσωσεν Αἰγίσθου χερρός.

⁶ ὦ σπέρμ’ ὄμαιμον = S. *OC* 330.

⁷ Cf. E. *Ion* 572: κάμ’ ἔχει πόθος.

⁸ Cf. S. *Ant*. 183: τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω.

⁹ Isabel says that, since all sins lead to damnation, they cannot be graded into more and less serious ones.

¹⁰ ὦ κασίγνητον κάρα = E. *IT* 983.

¹¹ ἄρα μή occurs only twice in Sophocles.

¹² Cf. E. *Andr*. 763: πρέσβυς περ ὦν.

¹³ ποῖ προβήσεται λόγος; = E. *Hipp*. 342.

¹⁴ For θεοστυγῆς cf. E. *Tr*: 1213.

¹⁵ Cf. S. *Fr*. 871.5: ἐξ ἀδήλου ... ἔρχεται (sc. the moon).

¹⁶ Following Abbott, *A Shakespearian Grammar*, 1919, §375, I interpret ‘delighted’ as ‘that once took its delight in this world.’ For μάκαρ in the feminine gender cf. E. *Hel*. 375.

¹⁷ I regard ‘worse than worst’ as parenthetical. πῆμα πῆματος πλέον = E. *Hec*. 1168.

¹⁸ For ζύνειμι = ‘live with’ cf. S. *El*. 264.

¹⁹ For φράζω with accusative and participle cf. E. *Alc*. 1012: οὐκ ἔφραζες ... προκειμένον νέκυν.

²⁰ αἰνικτὰ κάσαφῆ = S. *OT* 439.

²¹ ταράσσομαι φρένας = S. *Ant*. 1095.

²² For σφε as feminine accusative singular cf. S. *Ant*. 772.

²³ ‘What we fear of death’ refers to the punishment for sins.