

Hybridity of Apollonian and Dionysian Aesthetics in the Translation and Adaptation of Greek Drama: Aeschylus' Agamemnon in the 2006 Sinhala Language Production in Melbourne, Australia



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Abstract

This paper investigates how the Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetic concepts and cultural hybridity are reflected in the Sinhala translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon, drawing upon three different English translations of the play. It fundamentally relies on the interpretations associated with the translation originally presented at the MOAT Theatre Festival in Australia. This translation skillfully blends the prose with a lyrical tone, harmonizing Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics. The translator's careful syntactical choices embody Nietzsche's Apollonian realm while adapting seamlessly to the Sinhala cultural context. In the lyrical passages, particularly in the chorus and its melodic variations, Dionysian energy comes to life, characterized by eagerness and emotional uproar. This hybrid style captures the inherent tension of Greek tragedy, resulting in a culturally relevant and performative translation that connects literary texts from the original culture to the sensibilities of the receiving audience as a cross-cultural work.

Keywords

Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Apollonian and Dionysian Aesthetics, Cross-cultural Performance, Greek Tragedy, Sinhala Dramatic Translation.

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Introduction

The translation and adaptation process from one cultural text to another is not only a process of linguistic transfer but also an aesthetic negotiation of two or more cultures. It also reflects the engagement of two forces, namely, Apollonian and Dionysian², which comprise a recreational process of rationalized structures and emotional representation.

This paper argues how the Apollonian and Dionysian duality and aesthetic hybridity can inform translation and performative strategies in Sinhala adaptations of Greek tragedy. The Sinhala adaptation of *Agamemnon*, particularly the version first performed at the MOAT Theatre Festival at La Trobe University, Australia, on 17th and 18th March 2006,³ demonstrates a deliberate hybridization of these aesthetic forces. Through careful syntactical choices, lyrical reformulation, and culturally embedded metaphors, the production cultivates a dynamic interaction between Greek canonical tradition and Sri Lankan performative culture.

Objectives and Methodology

This study aims to explore the aesthetics and cross-cultural aspects of translating Greek tragedies within the cultural context of the Sinhala language. The paper primarily focuses on the translation and theatrical adaptation process of the play *Agamemnon* in Sinhala. The material discussed is based on a chapter from original performance-based research submitted for a Master of Arts by Research at La Trobe University in Australia.

The research provides a brief overview of three phases of the process, along with relevant examples. First, it examines the literal translation from English versions, specifically Philip Vellacott's (1988) *The Oresteian Trilogy*, Richmond Lattimore's (1967) translation, and the Australian theatrical adaptation of *Agamemnon* by R. Rehm (1979). Secondly, it addresses the adaptation of the text for a performance. Thirdly, it discusses the theatrical adaptation process itself.

English translations associated with the original work in Greek were selected for the practice-based research and the precedent set by Richmond Lattimore's translation (1967).

² Based on contrasting characteristics of two Greek gods.

³ Adapted writings from a performance-based thesis chapter submitted for a Master of Arts by Research at La Trobe University in Australia are presented in this paper. The author is T. C. Dandeniya (2007). The thesis is titled "Greek Ragamadalen Sinhala Wedikawata: A Cross-Cultural Interpretation of *Agamemnon* for a Sinhala-Speaking Community" (Master of Arts dissertation, La Trobe University).

Lattimore claims that, despite some alterations to the spelling of Greek names and the inclusion of lines from other translations to convey cultural meaning, his translation adheres to the traditional lines (1967). It has therefore been the recommended text for undergraduates who study Western Classics in some universities in Sri Lanka. Philip Vellacott's (1988) *The Oresteian Trilogy* supports and further establishes the precedent for the translation. While Vellacott's version is lyrical, Lattimore's *Oresteia* translation retains some cultural nuances from the original context. A theatrical version of the *Agamemnon* play, however, was necessary, and so comparisons were made for theatrical effect. For example, an Australian theatrical adaptation of *Agamemnon* by R. Rehm (1979) was referenced. The decision was taken to combine lyrical and prose styles in this theatrical adaptation. Greek myths, legends, and culture were examined for a comprehensive background on the plot, characters, and the specific meanings of words and customs in the play.

All these processes are analyzed through the theoretical framework of Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics, as proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche (1872). Additionally, the analysis of cross-cultural aesthetic hybridity incorporates concepts from Patrice Pavis (1989, 1992), Mary Louise Pratt (1991), Homi K. Bhabha (1994), Rustom Bharucha (1993, 2000), and Romy Heylen's translation theories (1993).

Conceptual Framework

The paper focuses on two conceptual frameworks: Apollonian and Dionysian hybridity, and cross-cultural aesthetic hybridity in translation. The first concept provides a framework for literary work, while the second is more cultural and political.

The Birth of the Tragedy by Friedrich Nietzsche (1872) provides a conceptual framework for analyzing the stylistic and structural choices made during the adaptation process. On the one hand, the concept of Apollonian defines order, reason, and form, which are expressed through prose. The Dionysian one, on the other hand, is based on chaos, emotion, and shared experience and is brought to life through lyrical structures, poetic songs, and the expressive chorus. This mixed style reflects the original tension in Greek tragedy, allowing for a culturally relevant performative translation that connects literary texts from the original culture to the sensibilities of the receiving culture.

In cultural and political interactions, Homi K. Bhabha suggests a "third space." According to Bhabha, the intervention of the "third space" of enunciation disrupts the

conventional structure of meaning and reference, challenging the idea of culture as a homogenizing force rooted in a singular past and preserved in national tradition (2004). Rustom Bharucha (2000) emphasizes that culture must not be reduced to a commodified spectacle for cultural tourism or global markets. Instead, he advocates for a dialogic, politically aware interculturalism where performance becomes a space of resistance, negotiation, and the reclamation of identity. Thus, for Bharucha, interculturalism is not a stylistic device but a deeply political and ethical practice that demands contextual sensitivity and critical engagement. The concept of "the in-between" or "interstitial spaces" in Erika Fischer-Lichte's work (2008) also refers to the spaces where different cultures, ideas, or performance traditions meet and interact. This space is not simply a neutral zone but a dynamic and transformative one, where new meanings and experiences are created through allowing transformation without erasure or domination (2008). This in-between space produces hybrid forms, which are not random or simple blending but new cultural formations with political, aesthetic, and epistemological replying. Mary Louise Pratt (1991) has developed concepts of "contact zone" based on linguistics. Pratt's idea of the "contact zone" suggests a place where two cultures meet each other and inform each other. This cultural political hybridity mainly emphasizes the importance of intercultural engagement without losing the unique identities of the participating parties and without dominance or singularity overshadowing them.

Cross-cultural Aesthetic Translation and Adaptation Process of Aeschylus' Agamemnon

The play *Agamemnon* was selected for Sinhala theatregoers and scholars because it is the first play of the *Oresteia* trilogy,⁴ and a production in the Sinhala language had not been presented before 2005. This study assesses the intention to reach both a Sinhala reader and a Sinhala-speaking theatre audience. It also explores various approaches and language styles in the translations of the play from English to Sinhala, highlighting modifications made to this translation and adaptation.

The Sinhala language translation was inspired by the intention of introducing a canonized literary piece to Sri Lankan readers. Thus, the translation was required to be in the "secondary position" for Sinhala readers who do not have bilingual access to the original or a translation in another language. Heylen explains:

⁴ The only surviving trilogy

(...)When translated literature occupies a secondary position, the translator's main effort will be to concentrate upon finding the best ready-made poetic models through which to represent the foreign text in the receiving literature. (1993, p.9).

Therefore, while the Sinhala translation preserves the original context, it adapts and creates a style in line with the previous Greek translation in the Sinhala language. A description of the variation in the process of transposing from one culture to another could also contribute as guidance to theatre makers in Sri Lanka in the future.

One approach to translation is based on the principle of "complete equivalence," which aims to ensure the accuracy of the translated text (Heylen, 1993). Achieving "complete equivalence" can be particularly challenging when transferring a text between vastly different cultural contexts. These conditions can arise when one culture is unfamiliar with the semiotic and symbolic expressions, as well as the professional practices of another. Additionally, such dynamics can be exacerbated by imbalances in power, time, space, values, economic factors, experiences, practices, beliefs, and knowledge between the two parties involved (Dandeniya, 2023). In such adaptations, as Bharucha (1993, 2000) points out, the fusion of form and feeling often creates a space where cultural identity is questioned, performed, and transformed. In cross-cultural performance, the Apollonian-Dionysian model not only applies to the literary work itself but also functions as a metaphor for negotiating between Western structures and non-Western traditions, often contrasting rationality with emotive ritualistic elements.

The process of translating and adapting Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* from English explores suitable possibilities for Greek plays. There were two different intentions behind the translation and the theatre adaptation for Sri Lankan readers and spectators. Two distinct approaches are necessary to cater to the comprehension levels of readers and general audiences. Additionally, special care must be taken when adapting content for monolingual or monocultural readers who may be unfamiliar with a "different culture" (Dandeniya, 2016). Without effective strategies to navigate the challenges of cultural engagement, individuals may encounter a sense of disorientation.

Cultural Reading

The *Agamemnon* plot is based on the stories of the house of Atreus, the Trojan War, the death of Iphigenia, the story of Cassandra, and the double murder of Agamemnon and

Cassandra. The story is complex and heavily linked to cultural connotations. Although mostly notable in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus exemplifies an Apollonian structure through a legal and moral progression within a culture, yet Dionysian violence and strong affection underpin the emotional undercurrents of the characters (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1990). Thus, to find appropriate theatrical and cultural approaches for *Agamemnon* for contemporary Sinhala audiences, it was necessary to take into account Sri Lankan cross-cultural theatre texts, performances, folk and classical theatre styles, historical records such as *Mahawansha*, and legends. The research on Greek drama and basic understandings of Sinhalese legends synchronized stories from both cultures. One of the legends bears a resemblance to the story of Iphigenia in the Greek legends and literature, including the *Iliad* or the backstory of *Agamemnon*. Historical records of the Sinhala nation recount the tale of a virgin princess named Deavi. To avert a tsunami disaster predicted by a prophecy in the third century BCE, Deavi's father, Kalanithissa, sacrificed her to the sea gods (Sumangala and Batuwanthudawa, 1967). King Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, to the sea god to ensure favorable weather conditions for their journey to the Trojan War. Cultural resistance may lessen when stories reflect similar aspects of human nature, relationships, and widely held beliefs across societies. Such similarities may foster the creation of a mutual meeting space, a 'contact zone.'

Choices for Translation and Cultural Adaptation

Although this translation follows previous translation styles or finds an appropriate structure for synchronising a cross-cultural work, it also appraises comparative changes between the theatrical version and the direct translation in Sinhala. It is beneficial to reflect on the appropriate modifications for Sri Lankan cross-cultural performances of Greek plays by examining existing translations. However, there are no straightforward answers or models. Instead, an assessment of previous Greek play texts in Sinhala could provide valuable insights for future translations or adaptations of Greek plays into Sinhala (Dandeniya, 2016).

Greek comedies and satyr plays adapted into Sinhala have shown that they can fit well into new theatrical styles and local cultural settings. These adaptations often reflect both traditional local theatre forms and elements of transcultural theatre, aiming to move beyond specific cultural codes to express more universal human experiences. However, Greek tragedies in Sinhala have not been adapted or reimagined as effectively as the comedies (Dandeniya, 2016). In a hypothetical level, *Nadagam* would be one of a preferable theatre style because it can represent a complex story, while including a local style in cross-cultural

stories. Nadagam theatre is moderate in that it is grounded in some Indian folk drama styles related to the Sanskrit drama style (Sarachchandra, 1999). Although the Nadagam theatre style has largely disappeared in its original form in Sri Lanka, many of its key elements continue to influence contemporary theatre productions. Additionally, *Kolam*, the traditional mask folk drama of Sri Lanka, represents another theatrical style used to perform straightforward narratives. When Kolam is compared with another contemporary theatre style, it is masked entertainment, rather like medieval satire, based on the appearance, customs, and weaknesses of certain professions and officials, and it is not ritualistic (Goonetilleka, 1994). The first part of the Kolam performance features stereotypical characters, much like those found in Nadagam. Despite Kolam continuing to be performed among Sinhala communities and the elements of masks common to ancient Greek theatre, the survey of Sri Lankan cross-cultural performances of Greek tragedy did not find that Kolam folk theatre was applied to the production of Greek tragedy.

The theatre style of *Nurthi* was the foremost theatre style in Sri Lanka for the staging and adaptation of Western plays such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but it is not an indigenous theatre style of Sri Lanka. The theatre style was borrowed from a Parsi tourist theatre group and flourished in Sri Lanka for urban audiences (Sarachchandra, 1999). Although Nurthi is not currently part of the contemporary Sri Lankan stage, the interplay of prose and verse within its structure could serve as compelling theatrical elements for a Greek production.

From a cross-cultural theatre perspective, the search for a theatrical form in adaptations is discussed within post-colonial approaches. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert (2002) describe a practice that encompasses non-syncretic theatre, where local theatrical traditions gain prominence during the process of post-colonial integration. The key question is which method, a Western narrative combined with an indigenous framework (non-syncretic), will most effectively create a pathway for marginalized cultures (Dandeniya, 2015). Consequently, popular post-colonial non-syncretic options were excluded from consideration because they can overshadow or distort either of the source cultures, especially in the introductory phase of a literary work from a new culture.

Translation

As Heylen's descriptions of literary styles, when translated literature occupies a central role, the distinctions between translated and original works become blurred. In this context, the

translator's primary focus is not to seek existing models within the receiving literature; rather, they are open to introducing innovative poetic forms inspired by the original text (1993). The translation conditions certainly differ from period to period as well as from culture to culture. Heylen further explains:

A text which functions as a translation today may not be called a “translation” tomorrow and may be named a “version” instead; a translation strategy (turning verse into prose) which was valid in the past may not be seen to be the most effective strategy of reflecting the original today. (1993, 4)

The idea presented above is illustrated in the following extractions of English texts, which vary in linguistic style based on their cultural contexts and approaches. It appears that using poetic language and maintaining rhythm are key factors. For example, the opening lines of *Watchmen* are developed by consulting three different English translations to reflect the individual choices of translators. The following translations were taken from the three versions mentioned earlier.

[Before the palace of Agamemnon in Argos;
the Watchman appears on the roof]

Watchman:

Gods! I ask for an end to it-
a year's watch: night after night
on the roof of the house, my head
drooping on my arms like an old watchdog.
I know all about the stars
how they gather at sunset,
which bring us summer and which winter
when they rise and fall-
the whole story.
and surrounded by these kingly fires
I have to look for a torch,
a single gleam of light that tells us
Troy has fallen... the command.
of a woman who thinks like a man.
(Rehm, 1979, p. 9)

Lattimore translates the same lines with more stage directions.

Scene: Argos, before the palace of King Agamemnon. The Watchman, who speaks the opening lines, is posted on the roof of the palace. Clytemnestra's entrances are made from the door in the centre of the stage; all others, from the wings. (The Watchman alone.)

"I ask to the gods some respite from the weariness
of the watchtime measured by years, I lie awake
elbowed upon the Atreidae's roof dogwise to mark
the grand processions of all stars of the night
burdened with winter and again with heat for men,
dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air,
these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise.

I wait; to read the meaning in that beacon light,
a blaze of fire to carry out of Troy the rumour
and outcry of its capture; to such end a lady's
male strength of heart in its confidence ordains.

(Lattimore 1967, p. 5 - *Agamemnon* line 1-11).

While Vellacott's translation is closer to Rehm's, it is not as simple as Rehm's theatre adaptation.

"It is a night, a little before sunrise. On the roof of Atreus's palace, a watchman stands, or rises from a small mattress placed on the hewn stone. In front of the palace are statues of Zeus, Apollo, and Hermes, each with an altar before it.

Watchman:

O gods! grant me a release from this long, weary watch.
Release, O gods! Twelve full months now, night after night
dog-like I lie here, keeping guard from this high roof
on Atreus' palace. The nightly conference of stars,
resplendent rulers, bringing heat and cold in turn,
studying the sky with beauty-, I know them all, and watch
them
setting and rising; but the one light I long to see
Is a new star, a promised sign, the beacon-flare
to speak from Troy and utter one word, 'Victory !'-

great news for Clytemnestra, in whose woman's heart
a man's will nurse hope.
(Vellacott, 1988, p.41 - *Agamemnon* 1-11).

The theatre version in Sinhala was adapted simply and lyrically. It provides precedents for the translation presented here, and the beginning of the translation follows a combination of Rehm's theatre version and Vellacott's translations, which is somehow linguistically Apollonian and lyrically Dionysian.

හිරු උදාවට මොහොතකට පෙර ඇගමෙමිනන්ගේ මාළිගාවේ වහලය මත මුරකරුවෙක්
නැගී සිටියි ඉදිරිපස සියුස් ඇපලෝ සහ හර්මිස්ගේ ප්‍රථිමා ද ඒවා එකිනෙක උදෙසා
අල්තාර ද ඉදිරියෙන් ඇත ක්ලයිටමිනෙස්ට්‍රාගේ පැමිණීම මධ්‍යයෙහි වූ දෙරෙන් සිදුවන
අතර අනෙකුත් පිරිස් දෙපසින් පැමිණෙති

මුරකරු

දෙවියනි මා අසනවා මෙය අවසන් කරන්නේ කවදා ද කියා
දොළස්මසක් පුරා රැයක් හැර රැයක්
මේ නිවසේ උස් පියස්ස මත
රැක සිටිනවා මා බල්ලෙක් විලස ලගිමින්

දනිමි මා සියලු තරු ගැන
සවස් කළ අහස් කුස රැස්වන
කුමක් රැගෙනේද උණුසුම
කුමක් රැගෙනේද සිසිලස

මේ සියලු ගිනි මැද
දිගු කලක් මා බලා ඉන්නා එක් එළියක්
නව තරුවක්
බලාපොරොත්තුවේ ලකුණක්
නිමකරන්නට කතකගේ පිරිමි හදක අධිඨන
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විජයග්‍රහනය

The lyrical adaptation, though commendable, presents a linguistic style that can be contrasted with the poetic structures evident in certain translations. For example, consider the opening lines from Walter Marasinghe's introductory paragraph in his translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, which is designed for a general Sinhala audience and demonstrates a more poetic quality.

පියාණෙනි යැයි අයදීමින් ඇය සැල කඳුලින් පලෙක නොම විය
ඇගේ පිවිතුරු යොවුන දැක වත් එ රුදු සිත් විය නොම හුණු
ගනින් මැලැවුණු බියෙන් ළඳැරිය සිටිය සඳ' ඔහු වතෙහි එල්ලී
තදින් අල්ලා නොවා වේදිය මතෙහි එට පොව්වකු ගෙ විලසින්
ඉඩක් නොතබා හැවිලි හවනට වසන ලෙස මුව ඔබා කඩමලු
දනිය අණ නැතියකු සෙ සිත්පින් දෙවිදු යදීමින් සිටිය පියතු
මෙසේ සිතුවම ඇදි රුවක් මෙන් නිසොල්මන් වී සිටින මොහොතක්
බිමට හෙළමින් තමන් ඇදි වත කෙපයෙන් අසරණ කුමාරිය
යුමු බියපත් නෙත් ඔවුන් දෙස යාග වේදිය වටා සිටගත්
නොයෙක් වර සිය නිවස උත්සව සිරින් ඇළලී ගිය දවස්වල
පියා වත් කළ සදෙහි මදිරා තුන්යලක් දෙවියන් පුදන්නට
නොසිහි හු සැටි ඇගේ සුමිහිරි ගීත රස විදි අයුරු උත්හට
(Marasinghe 1998, pp. 73-74)

In the chorus, the lines reflect on Iphigenia's sacrifice, and Marasinghe's translation employs an old-fashioned literary style akin to Siri Ediriweera's translation of Oedipus, which is often observed in modern Sinhala literature. Marasinghe's book, however, quoted several lines from Greek plays and was written twenty years before the first publication date in 1995 (Marasinghe, 1998). Thus, it is not surprising that Marasinghe has used an old literary language in contrast to the Sinhala translators after 1995 in Sri Lanka.

The syntactic structure of translation reflects the Apollonian order. A translation from English to Sinhala needs to consider the language structures of both languages. The syntactic structure of the Sinhala language is subject, object, and verb (SOV), which contrasts with the syntactic structure of English, which is subject, verb, and object (SVO) (Balagalla, 1995).

The Sinhala language exhibits a distinct diglossia between spoken and written forms, which can be viewed as having an Apollonian structure of formality alongside a Dionysian emotional expressiveness. In Sinhala, changing the order of words can alter the verbal meaning, influenced by the language's rhythmic qualities. The arrangement of words in a sequence can lead to different interpretations of the translation and affect how the characters are perceived in dialogue. In many cases, the grammatical word order in the Sinhala language is not the most effective choice for general expressions. Most contemporary translators of Greek plays from English have utilized poetic word order and spoken language to enhance the performative aspects of the text (Dandeniya, 2007 & 2016). Thus, "in-betweenness" of written and spoken language structure was the key factor that was applied in the *Agamemnon* translations. For

example, the chorus lines have been changed through different syntactic structures: verb, object, and subject (VOS), or object, verb, and subject (OVS), or subject, verb, and object (SOV). *Agamemnon* was able to utilize a mixture of written and spoken language styles, as well as poetic and formal language for the translation, reflecting the Apollonian-Dionysian duality by alternating between emotional expressions and rationality. For example, below each line in the translation, the meaning is retained, but it does not correspond to the order of the written Sinhala language structure (SOV);

හැර දැමුවා ඇය ඇයගේ ජනයා
අමතක කර දැමුවා ගැටෙනා හෙළි පළිහ හඬ
නැව් නැග්ගා ඇය
ගෙන යන්නට ට්‍රේසි වෙතට
ඇයගේ දැවැද්ද මරණය
(Dandeniya, 2007)

The concept of balancing the Apollonian and Dionysian extremes reflects Lawrence Venuti's (1995) assertion that translators and interpreters should aim to communicate not just linguistic meaning but also the aesthetic duality of the text. Furthermore, excessive modernization may eliminate the Apollonian logic and structural clarity, while overly literal translations risk dulling the chaotic, instinctual Dionysian energy present in the performance dynamics (1995).

Dramatic Adaptation for Theatre

When a translated text is further developed for theatrical production, there is a risk of achieving a balance between Apollonian and Dionysian elements. According to Lefevere's (1992) concept of rewriting, effective adaptation must address both cultural and performative aspects, focusing on rhythm, mood, and symbolic meanings. Hence, the prospective audience must be taken into consideration. Patrice Pavis (1989, 1992) also supports the idea that translation in the theatre is not mere verbal but performative. The “performance text” incorporates voice, body, space, and cultural elements, through which hybridity can be embodied rather than explained.

Agamemnon's employees utilize various linguistic strategies such as omitting, adding, rephrasing, simplifying, and rewriting theatrical text to enhance audience reception. To fulfil the intentions of the production, firstly, the dialogue and chorus sections were abridged from the full translation. Some lines that provide extra information from the story were removed,

and some parts of the long choral odes that do not largely serve the plot were omitted. For instance, the long chorus parts in Lattimore's English version, such as lines 85-250, 680-780, and 975-1035 (1967), were selectively edited in the theatre adaptation. Secondly, some parts were recreated with lyrics or prose by using the main idea of the lines. For example, lines between the exit of the Messenger and the entrances of *Agamemnon* in the translation, when the chorus speaks about Helen and her marriage to Paris, were edited.

In some parts of the theatre adaptation, verses replaced songs. In many instances, the songs incorporated a blend of blank verse and traditional folk melodies from Sri Lanka. Additionally, to make the theatrical presentation more accessible to the audience, a concise and rhythmic language was employed. The following lyrics illustrate how the chorus lines 475-495, before the Herald's entry, were modified.

From the beacon's bright message 475
the fleet rumor runs
through the city. If this be real
who knows? Perhaps the gods have sent some lie to us.

Who of us is so childish or so reft of wit
that by the beacon's messages 480
his heart flamed must despond again
when the tale changes in the end?

It is like a woman indeed
to take the rapture before the fact has shown for true.

They believe too easily, are too quick to shift 485
from ground to ground; and swift indeed
the rumor voiced by a woman dies again.

Now we shall understand these torches and their shining,
the beacons, and the interchange of flame and flame. 490
They may be real; yet bright and dreamwise ecstasy
in light's appearance might have charmed our hearts awry.
(Lattimore, 1967, p.19)

කෙරෙහි

ගිනිගත් එළියක් ඇවිදින්
තැනකින් තැනකට - පනිමින්
මුද මතින් - කඳු අතරින්
අහසෙහි ගිනි එළි - මවමින්

කුණාටුවක් සේ පියඹා යනවා
නගරය හරහා සැනකින කළඹා
කට කතා කටකතා කටකතා
කව්දෝ දන්නේ ඇත්තක් යැයි මෙය
කව්දෝ දන්නේ බොරුවක් යැයි මෙය
සොද හැටි අප හැම රවටාලන්නට
දෙවියෙක්වත් එව්වා දෝ මෙය
නැත්තං
වටහා ගැන්මට බැරිදෝ මෙආරුක්
බාල බොළඳ වුනිදෝ අප සැම සිත්
(Dandeniya, 2007)

(Chorus:

A blazing flame arrives,
Leaping from place to place,
Soaring over seas,
Threading through the hills,
Igniting fire in the sky.

Like a storm, it sweeps the city,
Stirring all in a sudden rush—
Whispers, whispers, whispers.

Who can say what's true?
Who can say it's false?
Has a god sent this to deceive us?
Or is it simply
That we no longer understand?
Have our minds become
Naïve, like children?
(Retranslation by the author)

In the theatre adaptation, further modifications were made in consultation with these three precedents, aiming to provide a clear and accessible exposition for the theatre audience, as illustrated in the example above. The production version was taken with a combination of literary and spoken Sinhala language styles. As a strategy, the text was tested with participants through a workshop once the adaptation and rehearsal process had been conducted.

To preserve its relevance for both present and future audiences, the *Agamemnon* translation and adaptation adopted a simplified style, incorporating modern Sinhala while deliberately reducing the use of traditional literary phrases. Moreover, some interpretations that would alienate the community require a meaningful replacement with alternative Sinhala words. The names of the gods and characters followed the style of the three aforementioned English translations. Some names in the *Agamemnon* project were selected from the common practice of translations. For instance, ‘Atreidae’ was replaced with ‘Atreuse’, and ‘Hellas’ was replaced with ‘Greek’ because it is widely used in those translations. As another modification for the theatre adaptation, additional words were added, providing extra information. Those described and simplified the background story of *Agamemnon*, the plot, and the characters’ relationships. For example, Apollo was not adapted simply, and he is referred to with the word, God as *Apollo Devi* (God Apollo). Interestingly, in a contemporary Chinese adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*, Folly (1998) states that all gods are referred to as ‘Apollo’ because it is easier for the Chinese to remember. They are aware of the use of the name from the NASA space programme, *Apollo*. In Sri Lankan popular belief, many of the gods are worshipped like ancient Greeks, and therefore, the names of the Greek gods, who are described in the text, remain the same for the audience.

The simplification in Sinhala theatrical adaptation functions on different levels rather than merely focusing on syntactic adjustments. Rewriting and omitting culturally deep-rooted narratives, such as legendary and mythological references in spoken lines or extended choral stanzas, enables the maintenance of performative translation as Pavis (1992) suggested.

Theatrical Adaptation

Directorial work involves more than just following textual suggestions; it also includes interpreting the content as a form of cultural diplomacy. This requires balancing the original cultural meaning and the author’s premise while considering how the target audience will

receive the work through the adaptation, aligning with the director's perspective. The play was interpreted for the production as expressing the suffering brought by a war.

The dramaturgical task was to interpret a historical play with a specific meaning and bring it to life for a contemporary audience in a different socio-cultural setting. Though it is common practice for original Greek manuscripts of drama not to include theatrical directions, the Sinhala translation incorporates a combination of directions from English translations. The director's role was to identify elements in the play that could be moving or amusing. This interpretation was intended to resonate with Sinhala-speaking audiences in Melbourne, many of whom have experienced a long civil war in their country of origin. A significant enhancement in the presentation was the inclusion of introductory stanzas at the beginning and end, which depict the suffering caused by the tragedy of war. This addition serves to emphasize the director's central theme. The director's interpretation of the text sought to uphold this theme throughout the performance.



Figure 1: Agamemnon's return: photographed by Waruna Savinda

The director aimed to combine naturalistic and stylized theatre styles in the production of *Agamemnon*. While maintaining a realistic approach for the characters and certain parts of the chorus, stylized dialogue patterns and gestures were introduced in other sections. Most

chorus songs were crafted in a stylized Dionysian manner, incorporating dance, rhythmic movements, and singing. Additionally, key parts, such as those of Cassandra and other characters, were directed to emphasize the rhythm of the text and the situation. Harrop and Epstein (2000) identified three forms of vocal delivery in Greek drama: normal speech, differentiated by meter; recitative; and singing. For instance, Clytemnestra's powerful interpretation of the fire message from Ida and Cassandra's prophecy was presented using a recitative style accompanied by musical chords.

Chorus lines were divided into four main parts: the chorus leader's lines, group lines, individual members' lines, and songs, although the chorus stands as one character in the original Greek tragedies. Those modifications were applied for numerous reasons. It was assumed that delivery of the dialogue would be a problem for twelve members of the chorus. Basically, clarity of the delivery was achieved through those separations into four parts. These presumptions are supported when the chorus responds to the off-stage death crises of the king. The second main reason was to emphasize the key ideas of the lines. Therefore, most of the single lines and long choral passages were allocated to the leader of the chorus. The third reason for the separation was to allow individuals in the chorus to develop characters based on their lines. Fourthly, the chorus lyrics were expected to be sung by the entire chorus group together.



Figure 2: Chorus: Photographed by Waruna Savinda

The *Agamemnon* production was staged in two distinct performance spaces: an open-air area and a proscenium arch theatre. It symbolically represents a balance between Apollonian and Dionysian tensions, as well as linking ancient Greek performance contexts with modern theatre settings. The initial two public performances took place on 15-16 March 2006 at the MOAT Open Theatre at La Trobe University. The third and fourth performances were held at the Kel Watson Theatre in Burwood, Victoria, on 26 March 2006. Working across these two theatrical contexts—open stage and proscenium—challenged performers and the production team to adapt ‘time’ and ‘space’. This posed a particular challenge for the director, who had to prepare and direct for both modes of performance before either could begin. In the open-air theatre, the cast rehearsed for an audience seated at approximately a 30-40 degree rising angle, surrounded on three sides. Conversely, in the proscenium arch theatre, the cast practised to perform for an audience seated at roughly a 30-degree downward angle, necessitating changes in actors’ gestures and movements. Without thorough preparation for both formats, the director and cast risked confusion due to the unfamiliar theatre configurations. Consequently, *Agamemnon* was choreographed and rehearsed to accommodate both performance settings.

Designing and implementing various sonographic theatrical elements, such as sets, costumes, and lighting, required a blend of Apollonian logic and Dionysian creativity, united with fluidity. Make-up design played a crucial role in this production. In ancient Greek drama, masks were used by male actors to facilitate character changes among a limited number of performers on stage. This practice is similar to the Kolam mask drama in Sri Lanka, performed by a small group of male professionals, both of which incorporate masks that reflect the social gestures of specific characters. However, modern practices necessitate that those actors convey their inner emotions through facial expressions. Therefore, distinctive make-up was applied in *Agamemnon* instead of full or half masks.

In ancient Greece, theatrical costumes were designed to differ from everyday clothing to create a ritualistic impression, and traditional costumes were used for the production of *Agamemnon*. Nonetheless, these designs were modified to align with contemporary theatrical practices. Hodge notes that the same applies to archaeological clothing in theater, which is most effective when adapted and artistically conceived (Hodge, 2000). The costume design was intended to resonate with the audience while accurately representing the play’s reality. Additionally, the costumes were designed to contrast with the set colours of black and white. This approach is reminiscent of the costuming practices in the Hebei Bangazi adaptation of Greek dramas for a Chinese audience. Chinese producers have noted that bright and light

costumes for characters and the chorus create a stark contrast with the gloomy, heavy, and menacing scenic background (Tian, 2006). In *Agamemnon*, the costumes were colourful yet dark to convey the theme of tragic suffering.

The play *Agamemnon*'s plot showcases six distinct times and spaces within its narrative. However, the theatrical set is designed to represent a single location, with three major features sought in the set design: simplicity, symbolism, and portability. The lighting for *Agamemnon* combines realistic and symbolic effects. Realistic lighting is based on a source of illumination that authentically conveys the environment of the play. Performances of ancient Greek drama were typically held during the daytime in open-air theatres, so they did not require artificial lighting. In contrast, *Agamemnon* was performed at the Moat Theatre (open-air) at night, following the conventions of the Sri Lankan folk theatre and the modern theatre, which necessitated the use of illumination. As in Sri Lankan folk theatres, fire torches serve as the primary lighting technique, creating dynamic visual effects of light and shade with minimal modern lighting equipment for the open-air theatre. In contrast, in contemporary theatre practice, lighting is an essential aesthetic element that enhances the performance, highlighting moods and movements. Thus, two distinct lighting designs were created for this production.

It was challenging to find suitable music for *Agamemnon*, particularly to create a backdrop with the score. The biggest difficulty was sourcing slow, appropriate music for a tragedy. The composer, Rohan Nethsinghe, who has experience creating music for cross-cultural theatre, composed contemporary music that draws on Mediterranean folk traditions, Sri Lankan folk music, and contemporary Western styles. Spoken sounds and an improvised melody based on the main theme were utilized to enhance the tragic moments and ensure a smooth flow throughout the performance. A key musical theme was developed to represent the tragedy of war victims. This theme was incorporated into significant moments throughout the production, including at the beginning and the end. It was particularly emphasized when the chorus abandoned Cassandra, conveying feelings of tragedy, pity, and fear during this pivotal moment.

Adaptation strategies involve more than simple changes; they create a textual fluidity that transforms the narrative for both readers and audiences in a new cultural context. This shift acknowledges the differences in time, space, values, experiences, practices, beliefs, knowledge, and power from the original setting. By simplifying and modifying content, adaptations enhance both the logical and emotional dimensions of characters, effectively

mirroring their roles in various performance scenarios. This process also ensures that the work is more accessible to a monocultural audience, blending written, poetic, and spoken language with an exploration of background and narrative logic. It emphasizes the development of characters and their emotional journeys, balancing Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics within a transformed framework. Ultimately, these adaptations breathe new life into literary-performative works, embracing their complex, intangible nature.

From this perspective, omissions, additions, rephrasing, simplifications, and rewritings sustain the overarching hybrid aesthetic, making the tragedy of a different context more culturally resonant, emotionally engaging, and dramatically effective for a contemporary Sinhala audience.

Conclusion

Agamemnon, translated from English to Sinhala, has adhered to previous precedents in translating Greek drama and its theatrical presentation. It produced two distinct versions: a literal translation and a production script, to meet the differing expectations of Sri Lankan theatre audiences and scholars. Most modifications involved language style and editing of the play. The translation predominantly uses prose with a lyrical tone, where the Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics are interwoven. When rational discourse, explanation, and narrative clarity are required in the interaction, the prose helps convey the main plot, enabling audiences, particularly readers and contemporary Sinhala theatre-goers unfamiliar with Greek poetics, to understand the characters' psychological motivations through its structured form. The concept of Apollonian discipline is emphasised through the syntactic rearrangement of Sinhala, which adopts a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, compared to the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure of English. The translator's intentional syntactical choices, reflecting Nietzsche's Apollonian realm, preserve the narrative sequence while adapting it to the cultural logic of the Sinhala language. The lyrical sections, especially the chorus and its adaptations into melodies and poetic lines, embody Dionysian energy: exuberant, emotional, chaotic, and communal. The emotional impact on stage is heightened by transforming lengthy choral odes into folk-inspired songs, expressive Sinhala idioms, and rhythmically lively verses. These artistic alterations, which showcase the Dionysian embrace of transformation, myth, and passionate intensity, focus on intuitive understanding and cultural immersion rather than strict literal fidelity. Beyond its linguistic purpose, a cross-cultural socio-political perspective was also considered through creative hybridity. Cultural dominance was largely avoided, instead celebrating the

identities of each source culture to create a “contact zone” where cultural nuances can be encountered and negotiated.⁵

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⁵ The author would like to acknowledge the use of Grammarly for clarity and spelling checks in some sections of this writing.

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