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# “On Tranzlaytin Howmer”: *The Iliad* in Birmingham hexameters – domesticating foreignization in non-standard verse translation

Sam Trainor

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Oi, Goddess, sing us a song, bab: that one about Achilles,  
Peleus's mardy nipper, who got a proper cob on,  
Causing all kinds of grief for his brave Achaeon muckers.  
Shed loads of souls got sent to Hades thanks to face-ache -  
All-you-can-eat dead meat for the carrion crows and stray dogs.

Sam Trainor, “The *Iliad* in Birmingham hexameters,” I.1-5.

## Introduction: ‘Birmingham Hexameters’ and Foreignization

According to Lawrence Venuti<sup>1</sup>, Matthew Arnold’s 1861 lecture “On Translating Homer” reveals him to have been the British Empire’s great proponent of ‘domestication’, a so-called ‘transparent’ strategy of translation that appropriates the source text to the literary norms of the target culture. Meanwhile, Arnold’s main adversary, the political radical Francis Newman, is portrayed as a ‘foreignizing’ figure.

Newman, whose version of the *Iliad* deliberately employed obscure archaic vocabulary and the popular ballad form, provides Venuti with the perfect example of how his concept of *foreignization* differs from the usual idea of radical close translation (like Nida’s ‘formal equivalence’ or Ladmiral’s ‘*traduction sourcière*’), most famously propounded by Friedrich Schleiermacher. In Venuti’s *foreignization*, the ‘otherness’ of the foreign text can be marked by aspects derived purely from the *target* language culture, aspects whose marginal qualities have a defamiliarizing effect: the experimental, the non-standard, the lowbrow, the archaic, the demotic... anything that would normally be frowned upon by Arnold’s academic elite, or bowdlerized by the gatekeepers of the literary marketplace.

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1 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995). Especially Chapter 3 “Nation”, p. 99–147. For Arnold’s original 1861 lecture “On Translating Homer”, and his 1862 “last words” in response to critics, see: Matthew Arnold, *On the classical tradition*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960). Newman’s response to Arnold was published as: “Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice” (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861). An important precursor to Arnold’s English accentuated version of hexameter as a tool of poetic translation was: E. C. Hawtrey, J. C. Hare, J. F. W. Herschel, W. Whewell, *English hexameter translations from Schiller, Göthe, Homer, Callinus, and Meleager* (London: John Murray, 1847). The selections from Homer were translated by Hawtrey.

There's a problem though. Arnold had called for a translation of the *Iliad* that employed an English version of epic dactylic hexameter. Yopie Prins, in an important study of this Victorian fad, calls this verse form "an instrument of defamiliarization, and anything but transparent"<sup>2</sup>. Just how marginal it was can be seen in the poet-laureate, Tennyson's response – a scathing parody:

No, but a most **burlesque, barbarous** experiment,  
When was a harsher sound ever heard, ye Muses, in England?  
When did a frog coarser croak upon our Helicon?<sup>3</sup>

Not just 'burlesque' but 'barbarous' to boot. This double accusation of 'inauthenticity' and 'a lack of cultivation' in Victorian criticism of hexameter already had a pedigree. Thomas DeQuincey, for example, had written, twenty years earlier:

Apollo himself, to turn out of his own temple, in the very age of Sophocles, such **Birmingham hexameters** as sometimes astonished Greece, was like our English court keeping a Stephen Duck, the thresher, for the national poet-laureate, at a time when Pope was fixing an era in the literature.<sup>4</sup>

By '*Birmingham*' he means 'a debased imitation', an 'artless fake'. The temptation is to trace this usage to the contemporary status of Birmingham as the centre of the world's new electroplating industry, which was turning out cheap imitations of silverwork, but in fact it dates to the Restoration period, when the non-conformist metalworkers of the town, who had provided Parliament's forces with a good deal of their weaponry during the civil war, took to counterfeiting the King's coin as an act of rebellion. I trace my own work to this barbarous, burlesque tradition.

So, the first thing I mean by 'Birmingham Hexameters' is Matthew Arnold's stress-based version of the dactylic epic meter. He adapted it a little to natural English rhythms, favouring a more intuitive interplay of dactyls and trochees, but it remains strangely 'burlesque' as an English verse form. See Appendix 1. for a basic analysis.

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2 Yopie Prins, "Metrical Translation: Nineteenth-Century Homers and the Hexameter Mania", in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (eds.), *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton: PUP, 2008), p. 234.

3 Alfred Lord Tennyson, "On Translations of Homer. Hexameters and Pentameters," (*Cornhill Magazine* 1863), in Christopher Ricks (ed.), *The Poems of Tennyson* (Essex: Longman, 1987), vol. 2, p. 654. (My emphasis). Despite this broadside, Tennyson later made extensive use of a version of Arnold's hexameter in his own Lincolnshire dialect poetry. I am indebted to Sue Edney for introducing these fascinating poems to me.

4 Thomas De Quincey, "The Development of Prose" in *Essays on style, rhetoric, and language*, Fred Newton Scott (ed.) (Boston: Allyn, 1893), p. 47. Originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1840. (My emphasis).

The second thing I mean by ‘Birmingham hexameters’ is verse in demotic Brummie English. Like Venuti, I take inspiration from Newman’s identification of (and taste for) the strangeness of Homer’s diction:

Every sentence of Homer was more or less antiquated to Sophocles, who could no more help feeling at every instant the foreign and antiquated character of the poetry, than an Englishman can help feeling the same in reading Burns’s poems.<sup>5</sup>

The reference to Burns is telling. Newman’s analogy is not primarily to an archaic poetic language (such as Simon Armitage’s evocative description of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as “like reading English through frosted glass”) but to his culture’s most salient example of what is loosely called ‘dialect poetry’. It is not so much a question of diachronic difference, as of diatopic and diastratic variation. Being far too ignorant of ancient Greek to engage in any discussion of the merits of the analogy, I would simply contend that from my inexpert point of view, the non-standard lexis and grammar of my own barbarous dialect<sup>6</sup>, when used as a language of translation, seems to echo some of the mystery of Homeric Greek, while the ‘sing-song’ accent, with its swooping diphthongs, somehow complements its distant tonalities.

This I call ‘Birminghamization’... a burlesque, barbarous experiment in contrapuntal translation that revels in its diastratic transgression. The remainder of this ‘creative critical’ paper consists of three examples taken from my ongoing Birminghamization of the *Iliad* chosen to demonstrate how a variety of diverse settings, dramatic situations and characters’ voices respond to this kind of ‘foreignizing’ vernacular translation. These are interspersed with some very brief personal commentaries which seek to do no more than offer a little insight into an individual poet’s relationship with the vernacular language of childhood used as a poetic idiom, specifically, in this case, as a (domestic) medium for (foreignizing) Homeric translation.

(Appendix 2. provides a brief selective glossary of non-standard lexis used in the examples. This I call ‘Brummie English’ but with two typical caveats. Firstly, like all diatopic variations, it contains items that are more or less genuinely ‘local’; some have an even narrower scope and some a much broader distribution than ‘Birmingham’. Secondly, being the version of English I remember being used in my native city up until I left, around 1991, it is somewhat outdated.)

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5 F. W. Newman, “Homeric Translation in Theory and Practice” (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), p. 35–36.

6 Of course, it’s not really a discrete dialect, if any such thing can be understood to exist. The term is generally deprecated by contemporary linguists. ‘Vernacular’, perhaps, or ‘demotic language’ might be better suited...

## 1. Book 1, li. 493-530. Thetis weedles a favour out of Zeus.

The first example is a conversation between two gods. In Book 1 of the epic, the sea nymph Thetis, mother to Achilles, visits Zeus on Olympus to plead for his intervention in her son's squabble with Agamemnon. It's an oddly down-to-earth conversation, given the setting, and this inherent comic juxtaposition tends to be emphasised by the use of a basilect form, inverting the ideologically established hierarchy of language varieties, especially for the voice of the henpecked king of the gods:

Twelve nights had passed since the barney, and just as morning was breaking,  
All the immortals wended their way back to Olympus,  
Zeus at the head of the crew. Thetis had not forgotten  
What she had promised her son. So up from the sea she floated,  
Rising to heaven at dawn, and climbed to the top of Olympus.  
There she found beady-eyed Zeus, son of Kronos, sitting,  
All on his tod, on one of the mountain's highest ridges.

Kneeling in front of him, cuddling his knees with her left hand,  
Stroking his chin with her right, Thetis prayed to great Zeus:  
"Godfather, I've always done you proud with the other immortals;  
I think the time has come, mighty Zeus, to return the favour:  
Offer my son your help, the one who's doomed to die young.  
King Agamemnon has robbed him, disrespected the poor boy,  
Taken his trophy girlfriend like a bit of plunder.  
Now only Zeus can help him, the wisest of the Olympians:  
Throw all your weight behind the Trojans till the Argives  
Show him a bit of respect and pay him his compensation."

Thetis held out for an answer but Zeus wasn't saying nothing.  
Head in the clouds as he sat there, playing his face, he kept schtum.  
Thetis squeezed even tighter, trying again to cajole him:  
"Give me your solemn promise, or nod your head or something,  
Tell me to get lost. What do you care if Thetis finds out  
Zeus could not give a monkey's about some lowly sea-nymph?"

Glowering Zeus looked miffed; he raised his voice and grumbled:  
"You're gunna get me in bother with her indoors, you know that?  
Hera gets one whiff of this, I'm in for a tongue-lashing.  
Every day she slags me off in front of the others,  
Saying I'm helping the Trojans win this blinkin battle.  
You'd better hop it sharpish, in case she gets wind you were here.  
Give me some time to mull it over; I'll get it dealt with.  
Tell you what, I'll nod me head to show you I mean it.  
Everyone knows a nod from me is a binding contract:  
Never has Zeus gone back on his word if he's given the nod."  
Kronos's youngest furrowed his brow and lowered his forehead,  
Swaying his natty dreadlocks, and all Olympus quivered.

## 2. Book 13, li. 794-837. Hector stick Ajax, the rematch.

The second example is a battle scene from the middle of the epic. The subtitle is itself in Birmingham English. 'Stick' just means 'versus'. The Trojans are attacking the Achaean ships. While the disguised god Poseidon is rallying the Greeks on the left flank, Hector finds Paris on the right and renews his attack. But he runs up against Ajax. The irresistible force meets the immovable object.

Translating these kinds of passages is sometimes disturbing because of the relative ease with which my childhood language is capable of producing hostility and macho posturing. This is directly linked to the inherent violence of the linguistic culture being tapped into: that of a post-industrial midlands city in Thatcherite Britain. Like many people from similar backgrounds, the desire to leave behind that dangerous street culture, and the internal voice of the scared young boy, was an important attraction of foreign languages for me. So, when I go back and dredge this somewhat historical demotic idiom out of myself, especially to voice aggression, there's an inner conflict, to match the outer conflict, with that old demon of linguistic self-hatred.

Zeus was still egging them on, and in they steamed like gales  
Battering down on the Earth beneath the Big Guy's thunder,  
Whistling and whipping the seawater into a right palaver:  
Towering breakers churning up the foaming ocean,  
Hurtling headlong to shore, wave after frothy wave -  
That's how the Trojans stormed on, wave after wave of bronze:  
Gleaming warriors piling in - the posse and backup.

First up was Hector, Priam's kid, as hard as Ares,  
Butcher of mortal men. He held out his big round shield -  
Multi-layered leather, covered in rigid bronze-plate -  
Over his temples a helmet, glinting as it shuddered,  
Striding all over the shop, his shield up as he drove on,  
Probing the line for a bit of give, or a point of weakness,  
Failing to put the frighteners on the tough Achaeans.

Out stepped big Ajax, squaring up to him, and gave it,  
"Hector, just do one will you. What do you think you're playin at,  
Trying to put the collywobblers up us Argives?  
This int our first time round the block, you pranny.  
Only old Zeus has kept us back from battering you.  
Banjaxing Greece's ships is what you've set your heart on;  
Take it from me though mate, we'll hold you off all day long.  
Maybe you think you're hard, but we're tooled up and mob-handed.  
Likelihood is, we come round your yard and we trash it.

As for you lot, pretty soon you're gunna peg it,  
Praying to Zeus to make your horses, with their fancy manes,  
Bomb back across the plain to Troy as fast as falcons;  
Going like the clappers, trailing plumes of dust behind you."

Over to Ajax's right, there was a soaring eagle  
Gliding above as he spoke, and all the arrayed Achaeans -  
Chuffed to have seen the omen - cheered, but up piped Hector:  
"Ajax, you div, you ent half got a bob on yourself.  
You're talking out the back of your bleedin neck.  
What I wouldn't give to be only half as certain  
Hera was my mom, and mighty Zeus my old man,  
Everyone thinking the sun shone out my arse, like Apollo,  
Just like Athena, as I am that all you Argives  
Cannot avoid the shitkicking you'll get today;  
And you unall, you prick, if you take on my big spear,  
My hefty shaft'll rip right through your lilly-white flesh.  
Ilion's dogs and birds will scoff your brawn and chittlins;  
Ajax'll serve up a feast by them ships when he kicks the bucket."

Hector took up the charge, his backup roaring behind him,  
All the Achaeans yelled back, not giving an inch to the Trojans,  
Standing their ground against Ilion's hardest hitting fighters.  
The total pandemonium the scrap created  
Drifted right up to heaven, and to dazzling Zeus.

### 3. Book 24, li. 718-775. The Trojan women mourn Hector.

The last example stands in stark contrast to the second. Where the previous extract was all macho aggression, this one is characterised by pathos and femininity. At the very end of the epic, Achilles has finally surrendered Hector's body to Priam, who brings it back to Troy for the funeral. Hector's widow, Andromache, his mother, Hecuba, and his sister-in-law, Helen all deliver eulogies that apostrophize the dead Trojan hero.

The difficulty of translating this passage derives from the challenge involved in aspiring to produce a 'feminine voice' in my 'mother tongue' – *ma langue maternelle* – which is made all the harder by the accentuated gender variation that tends to exist in basilects. On a purely personal level, my inability to access the literal 'language of my mother' (because my mom died a few years ago) has left me in a state of linguistic bereavement, which obviously mirrors the theme of this passage, especially when Hecuba mourns her son. There is, of course, a direct link between this sense of loss and the desire to rediscover a childhood language as a poetic idiom.

Fortunately, I do still have a Brummie sister, who is a campaigner for women's rights. Perhaps it is her influence that makes me sensitive to the uncannily contemporary resonances in the portrayal of these women who conclude the *Iliad*, with their fears and experiences of conflict, slavery, sex-trafficking, separation from their children and refugee status.

Everyone stood aside for the hearse, like Priam had told them.  
After they'd brung in the body, they laid it down on a bedstead.  
All the musicians sat round, playing a funeral number;  
Women were crying along, sobbing in time to the music.  
First of the mourners to speak was Andromache, Hector's widow.  
Cradling his head and blarting, she spoke to her fallen husband:  
"Love, you've died far too young, you've left me at home, deserted,  
And with our kid still a babby, jinxed by his folks from day one.  
There isn't much chance he'll grow up, not with the armies coming.  
Troy will be burnt to the ground before he reaches manhood,  
Now that you're dead - our protector of women and kids, our last hope.  
We'll all be dragged away on Achaean ships as captives.  
I'm no exception; and you, my son, they'll take you with me,  
Force you to work as a slave, or worse still, one of them Argives  
Takes his revenge on your dad by lobbing you off the town walls  
(Horrible way to go), because Hector killed his father,  
Brother, or son. Hundreds have bitten the dust; let's face it,  
Hector's a stone-cold killer on the battlefield.  
Everyone's mourning him now, across the entire city,  
Hector, you've caused your parents untold grief; and me too:  
What've you left me? I'm destitute. I'm broken hearted.  
You could've held your arms out to me on your deathbed,  
Muttered some dying words, at least, that I could ponder,  
Crying myself to sleep at night, or waking up sobbing."

Hecuba spoke up next, in among the wailing mourners,  
"Hector, my gorgeous boy, you'll always be my favourite,  
Back when you were alive, the gods all doted on you;  
Now that you're dead, it's not like they've hung you out to dry.  
All of my other sons, who Achilles thrashed in battle,  
Got themselves sent abroad; he sold them overseas  
To Samos, or to Imbros, or that rathole Lemnos.  
This time, as soon as his blade had cut away your last breath,  
Over and over again, he dragged you all round the wrekin:  
Driving in circles around the grave of his buddy, Patroclus -  
Not that it could bring him back to life, for godsakes -  
Still, you look as fine as morning dew: fresh-faced,  
Peaceful, like Apollo had shot you with his soft darts."

Rivers of tears she shed as she spoke, then went back to sobbing.  
Helen was next to speak up, last but not least of the mourners:  
"Hector, if I had to choose an in-law, I'd choose you.  
Paris - your god-like brother - dragged me here to Troy.



God, how I wish I'd died before he ever did that.  
Twenty-odd years have passed since I left my old home;  
Never in all that time have you made a snidey comment  
Or took the piss out of me, leastways, I never heard you.  
Everyone else slagged me off: your brothers and sisters, your brothers'  
Uppity wives, all kippers and curtains, just like your mother,  
(Priam was usually nice to me though, like a surrogate father);  
You used to bollock them, no matter who, then you'd say something sweet.  
Now I'm in pieces, not just for you, but because I'm abandoned,  
No-one in Troy has a single kind word for Helen these days.  
Everyone sneers when they see me, everyone defs me out,  
Everyone crosses the street when I walk through the city."

## Conclusion: Vernacular Poetry and Contrapuntal Translation

As a concluding remark, I would contend that this kind of 'birninghamizing' translation highlights an inherent problem in Venuti's take on the concepts of the 'domestic' and the 'foreign'. The version of Homer given here is undeniably 'foreignizing', according to Venuti's paradigm. It is not at all like the myriad canonical or scholarly translations that still proliferate to this day<sup>7</sup>, though most of those who claim to offer 'hexameters' do seem to produce lines directly in the tradition of Matthew Arnold. However, for the poet/translator – as my brief and perhaps unusually personal introductory comments are chosen to suggest – the experience could hardly be less 'domestic'.

Like many translation theories, Venuti's appears to suffer from the 'stand-in assumption' – the notion that a translation necessarily replaces or acts in lieu of the original text in the target culture. To apply his own terms, I would go as far as to say that this assumption is an inherently 'domesticating' concept, being based upon an ideological assumption of the source text's total reliance on its translation as a means of being read or 'heard'. The original is rendered functionally subordinate, like a foreign visitor who requires a local sponsor to acquire a visa. If one argues that only a foreignizing 'stand-in' is capable of doing the source text justice, then one is acquiescing to what is an inherently domesticating conception of the role of literary translation itself.

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<sup>7</sup> More than a dozen new English translations of the *Iliad* have been published since the beginning of the century. The two most recent I know of are Peter Green's version (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015) and Caroline Alexander's (London: Vintage, 2015).

The contrapuntal approach to poetic translation, on the other hand, understands the translation to enter into a polyphonic relationship with the original poem – not merely allowing the original to be heard in the spaces between its rhythmic, semantic and cultural differences, but actually bringing out its unsynthesized resonances. Within this approach, the shift or ‘veering’<sup>8</sup> provided by the use of a vernacular language – distanced both from the language of the original and (in Venuti’s terms) from the ideologically established normative idiom of the target culture – is intended as a musical counterpoint. Were it offered as a synthesized mimesis, it would appear to be something like a situationist *détournement*, but in fact it seeks to enhance all the resonances of the original poem with its cheeky descant.

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8 This use of ‘veering’ I take from Nicholas Royle, *Veering: a Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2011).

## Appendix 1. The *Burlesque*: Birmingham Hexameters

Epic dactylic hexameter is quantitative (based on syllable length), e.g. :

μῆνιν ἄεϊδε θεῖα Πηληϊάδεω Ἄχιλλῆος

To get the rhythm, it helps (me at least) to sing this to the principal theme of Sousa's 'The Stars and Stripes Forever' ('Here we go, here we go', if you're British). But this is unnatural in English. It only works in the synthetic example below because the stress-pattern corresponds exactly:

Birmingham | forges are | cold, | and its | workers've | turned to the | dole queue

So Arnold proposed a stress-based version of dactylic hexameter, regardless of syllable length, with a smattering of trochees to avoid the rhythm becoming too mechanical, and a certain tolerance for syncope (as demonstrated in the very first foot below). This is what I have used:

Oi, Goddess, | sing us a | song, bab: | that one a | bout A | chilles,  
 Peleus's | mardy | nipper, | who | got a | proper | cob on,  
 Sparkin | all kinds of | grief | for his | brave A | chaean | muckers.  
 Shed loads of | souls got | sent to | Hades | thanks to | face-ache -  
 All-you-can | -eat dead | meat | for the | carrion | crows and | stray dogs:  
 Everythin | Zeus had | wanted came | good, | from the | minute A | chilles  
 Dissed Aga | memnon, | King of the | Greeks, | and | kicked up a | shit storm.

So the above translation is a rather 'jazzed up' counterpoint to the (more *ostinato*) Greek:

μῆνιν ἄεϊδε θεῖα Πηληϊάδεω Ἄχιλλῆος  
 οὐλομένην, ἥ μύρι' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,  
 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν  
 ἠρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἔλωρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν  
 οἷω νοῖσίν τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἔτελεϊετο βουλή,  
 ἔξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διὰστίτην ἔρίσαντε  
 Ἄτρεϊδης τε ἄναξ ἄνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

**Key:** | = foot boundary    || = caesura (midline pause) [within foot]    ||| = false/half caesura [at foot boundary]    — = long syllable    ˘ = short syllable    ˘˘ = synzeasis (vowel elision)  
 / = stressed syllable    x = unstressed syllable

## Appendix 2. The *Barbarous*: Brummie English (of the Thatcher period)

### Selective glossary of non-standard terms, in order of appearance

- mardy**, *adj.* : sulky, bad-tempered [*maussade, renfrogné, bougon*]
- nipper**, *n.* : kid (usually a boy), son [*marmot, gamin*] (abbr. **nip** : younger brother, 'our kid')
- proper**, *adj.* : absolute, complete [*véritable*], see also **right**, *adj.*
- to get a cob on**, *phrase* : to sulk, to go off in a huff, to act **mardy** [*faire la gueule*]
- mucker**, *n.* : male friend, workmate, one who 'mucks in' with physical work [*pote, camarade*]
- shed loads**, *adj.* : very many, euphemism for 'shit loads', [*des tonnes*]
- face-ache**, *n.*, : teasing epithet for someone sulking or **playing their face** [*M. Je-fais-la-tronche ?*]
- diss**, *v., trans.*, : to insult, abbreviation of 'disrespect' [*déblatérer, injurier*]
- shit storm**, *n.* : mayhem [*pagaille*]
- barney**, *n.* : quarrel [*engueulade, prise de bec*]
- beady-eyed**, *adj.* : keen-eyed [*à l'œil vif*]
- all on one's tod**, *adv.* : completely alone [*tout seul*]
- to play one's face**, *phrase* : to act glum in a childish, unconvincing way [*faire du boudin*]
- to keep schtum**, *phrase* : to be silent and uncommunicative (from Yiddish) [*ne pas piper mot, ne pas desserrer les dents*]
- miffed**, *adj.* : annoyed, offended [*vexé, froissé*]
- tongue-lashing**, *n.* : severe scolding [*savon*]
- to slag off**, *v., trans.* : to denigrate [*débiner, faire sa langue de pute*]
- blinkin**, *adj.* : euphemistic intensifier, used instead of 'bleeding' or 'bloody' [*fichu*]
- to hop it**, *v., intr.* : to go away [*se casser, se barrer*]
- sharpish**, *adv.* : immediately, straight away [*illico*]
- to egg on**, *v., trans.* : to spur on to do something implicitly risky or transgressive [*inciter*]
- to steam in**, *v., intr.* : to charge aggressively into the fray [*se lancer dans la mêlée*]
- right**, *adj.* : absolute, complete [*véritable*], see also **proper**, *adj.*
- palaver**, *n.* : turmoil, uproar [*tumulte*]
- to pile in**, *v. intr.* : just like **to steam in**, but in large numbers [*foncer (en foule) sur l'ennemi*]
- posse**, *n.* : group of fearsome but somewhat disreputable streetfighters [*bande*]
- backup**, *n.* : literally, reserve fighters [*renforts*]; figuratively, the sum total of one's 'support' and 'connections', most importantly to local gangsters (in this context, plausibly, the gods)
- all over the shop**, *adv.* : everywhere [*dans tous les coins*], haphazardly [*à la va-comme-je-te-pousse ?*]
- to put the frighteners on**, *phrasal verb* : to intimidate, to hector (self-referentially) [*intimider*]
- do one**, *interj.* : get lost, go away [*va te faire voir*]

**to put the collywobbles up**, *phrasal verb* : to scare [*flanquer la trouille à*]

**int / ent**, *v., conjugation, irreg.* : the verb 'to be' in the negative singular is conjugated as follows:  
I *aint*, you *ent*, he/she/it *int*. The auxiliary verb 'to have' in the negative is always *ent*.

**not my/our first time round the block**, *phrase* : I / we have plenty of experience [*je ne suis pas né d'hier*]

**pranny**, *n.* : idiot, mild and slightly childish insult [*andouille*]

**to banjax**, *v., trans.* : to ruin, to wreck, to incapacitate [*saborder, bousiller*]; also to baffle

**tooled up**, *adj.* : well armed [*armé(s) jusqu'aux dents*]

**mob-handed**, *adj.* : possessed of a large fighting force [*très nombreux*]

**yard**, *n.* : one's home, territorial local area or home town [*chez soi*]

**to peg it (out of it)**, *v., intr.* : to run away very quickly, flee, leg it [*mettre les bouts*]

**to bomb**, *v., intr.* : to move fast, to fly [*filer, tracer*]

**like the clappers**, *adv.* : very quickly [*à fond la caisse, comme un dératé, comme un bolide, etc.*]

**chuffed**, *adj.* : very pleased [*ravi(s)*]

**to pipe up**, *v., intr.* : to speak up [*prendre la parole, l'ouvrir*]

**div**, *n.* : idiot, jerk [*con*]

**to have a bob on oneself**, *phrase* : to be self-important, self-satisfied [*péter plus haut que son cul*]

**to talk out of the back of one's neck**, *phrase* : to talk rubbish [*raconter des conneries*]

**unall**, *adv.* : also, too; literally 'and all' [*aussi*]

**to scoff**, *v. trans.* : to eat [*bouffer*]

**chittlins**, *n., inv. pl.* : guts, intestines [*tripes*]

**to kick the bucket**, *phrasal verb, intr.* : to die [*casser sa pipe (/laisser sa barbaque ?)*]

**brung**, *v., past part., irreg.* : 'to bring' is conjugated like 'to ring' in Brummie English.

**to blart**, *v., intr.* : to cry / weep [*chialer*]

**to lob**, *v., trans.* : to throw, chuck; unlike the standard usage, this is just as vague as 'throw' [*lancer*]

**to hang out to dry**, *v., phrase, transitive* : to abandon, to withdraw support at a crucial time  
[*abandonner à son sort, (/donner en pâture aux lions ?)*]

**all round the wrekin**, *adv., phrase* : via a long and circuitous detour; the Wrekin is a hill in East Shropshire, the heart of the Industrial Revolution... a kind of Black Country Olympus.  
[*par le chemin des écoliers ?*]

**leastways**, *adv.* : in any case [*en tous cas, de toute façon*]

**uppity**, *adj.* : snobbish, pretentious, smug [*suffisant(es)*]

**all kippers and curtains**, *adj., phrase* : said usually of a woman who is better off than her neighbours and acts superior; like 'hoity-toity', but more ironic [*snobinard(es) ?, prout-prout*]

**to bollock**, *v., trans.* : to reprimand, upbraid, tell off [*engueuler*]

**to def out**, *v., trans.* : to snub, to ignore, to exclude [*laisser pour compte, snober*]

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