Stratos E. Constantinidis, ed. The Reception of Aeschylus’ Plays through Shifting Models and Frontiers. Leiden; Boston: Brill. lccn 2016042754 (print) | lccn 2016043088 (ebook) | isbn 9789004331150 (hardback) : alk. paper) | isbn 9789004332164 (e-book)

In his insightfully helpful and informed introduction to this volume, the editor Stratos Constantinidis sets out the framework and ambition of this book as a bold attempt to delineate a new conceptual model that will facilitate fresh discussion of Aeschylean drama in reception. And indeed this is a tall order, one that aims to bridge the “philological model” with the “reception model” through the proposed “systemic model.” This is an approach that brings together aspects of reception that rarely, if ever, appear in dialogue: editing, analysing, translating, adapting, and remaking all figure more as fluid categories than fixed disciplinary boundaries. The book brings together scholars and theatre-makers from all the aforementioned fields and initiates a creative dialogue that re-invigorates, and contributes to a re-conceptualisation of the popular field of reception studies. The plays of Aeschylus have not received their due attention within this field that has in many ways helped to revitalise the classics, and this volume rectifies this by engaging with all of Aeschylus’ surviving plays and fragments and the “ways in which they are disseminated systematically rather than geographically or chronologically” (Constantinides 2). This means that the volume covers a very broad spectrum both in its scope and in its depth. However, each contribution exhibits the scholarly rigour and the passion of its author. From the detailed and complex decisions of textual editing (A. F. Garvie) to the more recent approaches informed by Cognitive Theory (Peter Meineck), Aeschylus’ texts are unfolded in creative ways. In terms of performance analysis, the book offers readings of operatic versions (addressing the somewhat belated relationship between Aeschylus and opera; Sarah Brown Ferrario and Dana L. Munteanu) and presents readings of remaking his plays in ways that appeal through familiarity and sameness (“Pop Music Adaptations of Aeschylus’ Plays: What Kind of Rock was Prometheus Fastened to?,” Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr.) but also through strangeness and otherness (“Aeschylus as Postdramatic Analogue: ‘A Thing Both Cool and Fiery’,” Paul Monaghan). This creates a very rich web of relationships between the chapters, one that the reader is called upon to weave together, in a way enacting a type of reception for themselves.

Translation, as an aspect of reception, features prominently in this volume with the work of Lawrence Venuti referenced throughout. In ‘Aeschylus and His Afterlife in the Classical Period: “My Poetry Did Not Die with Me”,’ Johanna Hanink and Anna S. Uhlig argue that the reception model has a classical as well as a post-classical history, providing ‘a very useful corrective to simplistic ancient/modern divides in typologies of reception’ (Hardwick: 280). J. Michael Walton adds to this volume his considerable experience as translator, editor and director of Aeschylus. His chapter (“Prometheus Bound in Translation: ‘The True Promethean Fire’”) examines the translation history of Prometheus Bound in English, from Dr. Thomas Morell’s Prometheus in Chains of 1773 to Edith Hamilton’s 1927/37 translation.
What transpires through his account, always attentive to translation as a vehicle for performance as well as textual rigour, is the appeal of this play for women translators from Lennox to Barrett Browning, Webster, Swanwick, Case and Hamilton. The image of Prometheus as revolutionary firebrand proves attractive for these women translators as Walton shows, drawing on the work of Yopie Prins and Lorna Hardwick. In “Aeschylus’ Seven against Thebes: War, Women, and the Hecht/Bacon Translation,” Deborah H. Roberts presents a wonderful reading of the benefits of pairing a classicist (Bacon) and a poet (Hecht) for the purposes of translation and investigates the ways this project was a “work of restoration” (129), correcting the received view of the play as more epic than dramatic, and making it available to a new audience in the 1970s. This translation was responding to the atrocities of the Vietnam war, while also highlighting the constitutive relationship between war and sexual violence. This was surely a radical translation influenced by the gender and broader politics of its time, but it also showed the possibilities offered by the uses of poetry.

Rush Rehm in “Aeschylus in the Balance: Weighing Corpses and the Problem of Translation” addresses a similar issue from a different perspective. How can a contemporary translator convey the significance of a metaphor that is at once seeped in its own historical reality, but has little or no significance for a contemporary reader / audience? This he claims is not so much a linguistic / poetic problem but a cultural one (134). He reads this through a close reading of the idea a balance and scales, so potent a metaphor in Aeschylus, especially when invoking the dead bodies of war, and asks “how does one convey the idea of balance in a digital world, which has abandoned comparative weighing [...] and find [s] the idea of dying and death repellent and either make[s] it a graphically intriguing event or strives [s] to keep it out of sight” (133). He states that this might be a particularly north American problem where death is less tactile and visible. While every reader is bound to their own historical context, perhaps these plays and tragedy more generally also help us to transcend it. For, the Aegean Sea is still “flowering with corpses” (Aeschylus 659) of refugees and victims of wars that we may not have direct experience of but are implicated in. Towards the end of his chapter, Rehm refers to the possibilities offered by the theatre itself as a kind of emotional education that addresses the untranslatability issue. Peter Meineck proceeds to also address this through recourse to Cognitive Theory (“Cognitive Theory and Aeschylus: Translating beyond the Lexicon”) and the ways it can “help us comprehend more and it can orientate translators to consider the effect of their words in live time and space, and the environment within which these plays were created” (175). Drawing on the work of philosopher Andy Clark and on the recent interest in the role of affect and the emotions in the reception of Greek tragedy, Meineck presents a nuanced re-reading and translation of the Watchman’s speech to exemplify this approach (through the categories of “Multisensory Language,” “Visual Cognition,” “Spatial Cognition,” “The Surrogacy of the Skene” and “The Mask”).

Trauma is, of course, one of the chief emotions that tragedy negotiates (both personal and collective) and the term is highlighted throughout this book, as theme but also as part of the experience of translation itself. Lorna Hardwick, one of the major scholars in the field of reception studies, presents a chapter entitled “Voices of Trauma: Remaking Aeschylus’ Agamemnon in the Twentieth Century,” where she focuses on Louise MacNeice’s 1936 translation of Agamemnon and on Seamus Heaney’s poem “Mycenae Lookout” (1996), which reworks part of the same play. Hardwick brings together many of the concerns of this
book in the ways it shifts between disciplines and boundaries and underlines the fact that “remaking” is endemic to tragic form from its very conception. In meticulously controlled close readings of her chosen examples (the Watchman and Cassandra) and with the use of rich and ‘thick’ reception theory she traces the affective communication of violence and almost counterintuitively stresses the aspects of Aeschylean poetics that persist despite shifting cultural contexts. Indicatively, Hardwick presents an inspired reading of lice as a *topos* (or a *gestus* in the Brechtian sense) that brings together all the above texts “underpinning a shared experience of trauma” (290).

The issue of trauma is also addressed by Paul Monaghan in “Aeschylus as Postdramatic Analogue: ‘A Thing Both Cool and Fiery’,,” another important contribution to this collection that proposes Hans-Thies Lehmann’s notion of postdramatic theatre as a way of addressing difference and strangeness in Greek tragedy. This chapter merits more critical engagement than is permitted here, but as Monaghan suggests “while these strategies undoubtedly involve some loss in respect to Aeschylus’ wonderful texts… they also offer a significant gain in respect to experiencing the “poetic inner dream” of those texts in performance” (268). It is also significant perhaps that Lehmann’s most recent book is on tragedy. The centrality of translation for both the colonial and the postcolonial project is addressed by Vijaya Guttal in “The Oresteia in Kannada: The Indian Context,” charting the history of Aeschylus in Kannada translations from BMSri’s early twentieth century versions to her own award-winning translation of *The Oresteia*, also analysing the sometimes vexed question of whether tragedy is exclusively a European genre. In “Two Centuries, Two Oresteias, Two Remakes,” Helen E. Moritz compares Eugene O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) and Katherine’s Noon’s *Home Siege Home* (2009), in terms of literary adaptation and dramatic conventions, contrasting the primarily naturalist O’Neill version with the postmodernist Noon one, while also stressing their respective contexts.

It may be too much to ask of an already very rich offering, but given the scope of this book, a chapter on the impact of Aeschylus on legal, political and philosophical thought would have been welcome (and possibly a conclusion that reiterates the points raised in the introduction). Still, this is a formidable volume, one that offers an inter/transdisciplinary approach that will significantly add to our appreciation of Aeschylus while also expanding our understanding of reception.