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'Homer' Tackles Aeschylus: Theatrical Adaptation as Process in Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* and Robert Icke's *Oresteia*

Abstract

This article explores the limitations of Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as distinct "product" and "process" (2013), when applied to ancient theatre and its reception in twenty-first century performance. Two modern productions are used to problematise this binary: Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* (2014) and Robert Icke's *Oresteia* (2015), both of which showcase theatre's inherent status as ephemeral 'process'. This article borrows Paul Davis' notion of "culture-text" (1990) alongside terminology from Lawrence Venuti (1995) to describe the multiplicity of influence and interpretation that is so central to theatrical adaptation. Erika Fischer-Lichte's theorisation of theatre as constituted by "co-presence" (2008) is also used to distinguish live performance from other forms of creative adaptation (e.g. film, literature), as is its inherent futurity (Hall 2013, Langer 1953). Interpretation and memory, integral processes within adaptation, are considered as subjective and fragmentary, following Saidiya Hartman's perceptions on chosen inheritances (2006) and Donna Haraway's conception of "situated knowledges" (1988). Margherita Laera's non-linear temporal conception of both theatre and adaptation (2014) is explored, revealing the cyclical dialogue of temporalities particular to the theatrical adaptation process.

Keywords: Greek theatre; adaptation; translation; memory; Aeschylus; Anne Washburn; Robert Icke; *Oresteia*; *Mr Burns*; *Orestes*

1. Introduction

Greek tragedy is, in essence, mythical material adapted for the stage. These ancient plays were dependent on reworkings of well-circulated stories, which evolved into a variety of different versions through their repeated retellings. This dynamic process formed a genre whose rules and tropes were influenced and changed by each new tragedy or performance.[1] In this sense,

[1] Bakhtin on literary genres: "during the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion" (1986, 62). This is to say that literary genres are informed by non-literary types of speech (e.g. storytelling) that occur and shift within the writers' own linguis-

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classical theatrical adaptation has always been a process built upon multiple influences, and subject to varied interpretations. Whilst there may not be any 'universal' modern equivalent of ancient myth, there are analogous story-patterns which are broadly familiar to today's audiences within their specific cultures, and which Paul Davis has termed "culture-texts" (1990, 4). Davis distinguishes between 'original' texts and their lasting memory, using *A Christmas Carol* as his primary example. He compares the Dickens novel with the well-known story, the cultural importance and survival of which has been propelled by its theatrical (and later, its cinematic) adaptations (4).[2] Whilst there are marked differences between the Dickens text and its various retellings, these innovations are often more widely known, since the popularity of the story far exceeds the readership of the novel. Arguably, without such consistent refashioning, the text might not have earned its cultural status. This story has gained its lasting prominence by fracturing into multiple, different, and often ephemeral versions.

Whilst it is a common assumption that a playwright must first read a source text to adapt it, the concept of culture-text allows for adaptation to develop outside of this direct engagement.[3] This is especially the case for canonical works; as beyond their text exists "a generally circulated cultural memory" (Ellis 1982, 3), an audience can experience a work through culture-text without consulting the original. Similarly, artists need not engage directly with ancient texts for their works still to be recognised as adaptations, versions or appropriations. For the sake of consistency, I will use 'adaptation' throughout this article as an umbrella term to cover all of the creative reworkings discussed, whether they are announced or otherwise.[4] Though the term 'appropriation' may be appealing for unannounced or radical reworkings, Julie Sanders notes that the sense of "hostile takeover" the word implies is not exclusive to appropriations. Indeed as "adaptation can be oppositional, even subversive" (2016, 19), for my purposes it seems superficial to distinguish between the two.

tic culture. On reperformances in the classical period: see Csapo and Wilson (2015) on reperformances outside of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries; Braund, Hall and Wyles (2019) on theatre and performance culture around the Black Sea from the early archaic age until the Roman world.

[2] Miller notes the Victorian practice of regularly adapting novels played a key part in this process, with theatrical adaptations of novels being "the first step toward abstracting . . . a 'culture-text'" (2017, 58).

[3] E.g. Snyder takes direct engagement for granted, positing "a screenwriter must read a source text to adapt it" (2017, 105).

[4] My definition of adaptation departs here from Hutcheon: "an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (2013, 7); I might prefer Saoudi's (2017) term 'tradaptation' to deliberately include translation, but as he too concedes, 'adaptation' is more commonly used.

Both Anne Washburn's *Mr Burns* (2014) and Robert Icke's *Oresteia* (2015) had their UK debuts in consecutive summers at London's Almeida Theatre, and each received a great deal of critical attention. *Oresteia* was deemed a highlight in a season of *Greeks*, and the production received multiple awards and a West End transfer to London's Trafalgar Studios (August-November 2015).[5] *Mr Burns* was less widely celebrated, receiving mixed reviews in national newspapers. *The Guardian*'s Michael Billington noted its "cult" appeal (2014), whilst it was dubbed as "three hours of utter hell" by Tim Walker at *The Telegraph* (2014). Nevertheless, Washburn's work has continued to be programmed at the Almeida: *The Twilight Zone* (2017) and *Shipwreck* (2019) both premiered there, the former receiving a West End Transfer to London's Ambassadors Theatre (March-June 2019). Robert Icke directed both *Mr Burns* and his own *Oresteia*, and personally thanked Washburn for her influence on his Aeschylus adaptation (2015, 3).

Although in starkly different fashions, these two plays appear to stem from a common culture-text: the Orestes myth cycle as mediated through the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.[6] Icke's *Oresteia* was marketed as an adaptation of Aeschylus, even though it also interacts with Euripidean tragedy and other versions of the myth, whilst Washburn's *Mr Burns: A Post-Electric Play* only reveals its classical themes in its final act. Ostensibly, it is about the process of adaptation through performance, and follows "Cape Feare" (an acclaimed episode of the popular television cartoon *The Simpsons*)[7] into an imagined postapocalyptic future, after nuclear disaster and the total loss of electrical power. Over the course of the play, Washburn depicts the slow redevelopment of societal structure and theatrical performance, and the *Simpsons* narrative in turn becomes something more inquisitive, urgent and archaic. In the third and final act, Washburn presents a masked, poetic, choral rendition of "Cape Feare". In this distant future, the *Simpsons* episode emulates a Greek tragedy, and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in particular.[8]

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is comprised of three tragedies (*Agamemnon, Choephoroi* or "Libation Bearers", and *Eumenides* or "Kindly Ones"), and is the only extant Greek trilogy that survives from the fifth century. Although *Mr Burns* is not an announced Aeschylean adaptation, Washburn cites the Greek influence on the tripartite structure of her play (Icke and Washburn 2017), and it is telling that both Washburn's three-act play and Aeschylus'

[5] Laurence Olivier Award; Evening Standard Award; Critics' Circle Award.

[6] Alongside other influential modern translations and adaptations: e.g. Carson 2010, *An Oresteia*; Harrison 1981, *Oresteia*; O'Neill 1931, *Mourning Becomes Electra.*

[7] *EW* (2014): "Cape Feare" placed second in their list of twenty-five best *Simpsons* episodes.

[8] Grossman notes the classical influence, describing *Mr Burns* as "a Sophoclean Simpsons event" (2015, 189).

trilogy follow the development of one singular familial narrative: the Oresteian myth of the House of Atreus and the *Simpsons* family in "Cape Feare" respectively.[9] Moreover, *Mr Burns* contains many structural and thematic similarities to Aeschylus' trilogy and the Orestes myth cycle. As Aeschylus' *Oresteia* depicts the fallout from the Trojan War, *Mr Burns* also begins in immediate posttraumatic circumstances, and features characters trying to reconcile their memories of the past with the need to reconfigure their uncertain futures.[10] Even Washburn's subtitle "post-electric" may well hint, in addition to its dystopian context, towards its Orestes/Electra roots.

Ultimately, both plays centre around a family narrative as a microcosm for societal and political processes at large. Aeschylus' trilogy shifts in focus from personal vengeance and the cyclical intrafamilial murders of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*), to Orestes' trial and eventual acquittal by a collective jury (*Eumenides*). Similarly, Washburn maps the development of the *Simpsons* "Cape Feare" episode from a fireside storytelling exercise amongst anxious companions, to a favourite number performed by a travelling band of entertainers, to, finally, a formal and public piece of theatre. As the episode develops into this dramatic performance, it begins to bear striking resemblance to the *Oresteia*. The theatrical adaptation of the *Simpsons* episode now ends in grief, as the destruction of the Simpson family isolates Bart Simpson as an Orestes-type survivor navigating his personal loss in the changing society of a postelectric America.

Both *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* also respond directly to their distinct cultural contexts. Despite its mythical narrative, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* engages with the real historical shift from oligarchic rule to democracy in sixth- and fifth-century BCE Athens, reflected in the literal change of setting from Argos (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*) to Athens (*Eumenides*). Although the extant fifth-century dramatists primarily wrote for Athenian theatrical festivals, *Eumenides* is one of the few surviving tragedies set in Athens, as tragedians generally opted for more removed Greek or non-Greek cities as locations for their narratives. As the trilogy results in divinely ordained resolution, its patriotism has been noted, and it has been described by Edith Hall as "the democratic charter myth" (2010, 287). In a similar vein, Washburn imagines the resilience of modern day capitalism and its chaotic persistence beyond the apocalypse, depicting the re-emergence of a violent and dystopian mar-

[9] The staging of trilogies, with or without the addition of a satirical drama, was a characteristic practice at the Dionysian festivals. But not all Greek tragic trilogies were continuations of the same narrative. Three connected trilogies of Aeschylus are attested in addition to the *Oresteia* (Wright 2019, 13), but none survives beyond fragments.

[10] E.g. The chorus of *Agamemnon* mourn the past and yet look forward to the future (Aesch. *Ag.* 139): αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω ("Cry sorrow, sorrow, but may good prevail!", translation Sommerstein 2009, 17).

ket economy based on the trading of remembered *Simpsons* fragments in exchange for commodities.[11] In doing so, she engages with contemporary anxieties of late-capitalism, ironically staging the famous quote "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" (attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek by Fisher 2010, 2). But in the third act of *Mr Burns*, the evolved theatrical adaptation of "Cape Feare" features a strikingly similar narrative to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and shares its optimistic tone.[12] If Aeschylus mythologises the foundation of democracy as an alternative to oligarchic violence in his *Oresteia*, Washburn draws on both "Cape Feare" and *Oresteia* as central culture-texts to imagine the "charter myth" of a postapocalyptic, postcapitalist future.

Mr Burns is evidently not a straightforward adaptation of the *Oresteia*. Rather, these similarities are left implicit as Washburn emphasises multiple and varied, contemporary and traditional influences on her work, of which Aeschylus' play is one significant culture-text. Whilst *Mr Burns* is not overtly a classical adaptation, the play is paradigmatic of Washburn's approach to adaptation as process. What is little known but key to understanding Icke's *Oresteia* is that its success as a contemporary version of the Aeschylean text owes much to Washburn's dynamic approach to adaptation. To elucidate her personal practice, this study begins with an analysis of Washburn's earlier work *Orestes: An Antic Tragedy*. This production not only reveals Washburn's interest in both Greek theatre and the adaptation process, but also uncovers the ancient culture-text which underlies *Mr Burns*, and subsequently comes to the fore in Icke's *Oresteia*.

2. Translation: Foreignisation versus Domestication

Despite not having classical Greek, Washburn's writing career began with adapting Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and her continued interest in this particular myth is evident in her later adaptations (Soloski 2015). Prior to *Mr Burns*, Washburn 'transadapted' *Orestes: An Antic Tragedy* (alternatively titled *Orestes: A Tragic Romp* 2011), a reworking of Euripides' *Orestes* – itself a tonally ambiguous tragedy whose relative unpopularity today belies its ancient renown.[13] First performed fifty years after Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Euripides' *Or-*

[11] In *Shipwreck* (2019), Washburn stages contemporary American politics including scenes featuring then-President Donald Trump, in a play that "unpicks the messy demise of democracy" (Billington 2019).

[12] See section 4.

[13] Wright notes that Euripides' *Orestes* used to be "one of the author's most admired and well-known tragedies" (2008, 15-16), repeatedly re-performed from the fourth-century BCE onwards and parodied in multiple comedic sources (e.g. Aristophanes' *Frogs*

estes depicts events following Clytemnestra's murder (*Choephoroi*) but prior to Orestes' trial and pardon (*Eumenides*).[14] It portrays an Orestes plagued by Furies, facing capital punishment at the hands of the citizens of Argos and desperately plotting a retaliative murder of Helen with his accomplices, Electra and Pylades. 'Resolution' only comes with the arrival of Apollo *ex machina*, who sets the myth back onto its traditional course by sending Orestes to Athens for trial, instating Helen among the gods and arranging the marriages of the young characters.[15] Orestes, most incongruously, is instructed to marry Helen's daughter Hermione, at whose throat he brandishes a knife.[16] The tragedy's tonal irony is not lost on Washburn, who plays with language and concepts of genre even in her *Orestes* subtitles, "Antic" particularly hinting at the ludic quality of the classical source and equally suggesting its 'antique' and 'Attic' roots. The alternative "Tragic Romp" also undeniably markets the work as simultaneously tragic and comic, and as such Washburn emphasises the porous nature of the ancient theatrical genres, particularly in this late Euripidean example.[17]

This spectrum of tone is complemented by Washburn's multifaceted "transadaptation" approach, which combines translation and adaptation processes in her reworking of *Orestes*, and evokes the similar term "tradaptation" (reportedly coined by director Michel Garneau; Laliberté 1995, 524).[18] Bechir Saoudi makes a compelling case for the use of 'tradaptation'

303-4). Conversely, Macintosh confirms that *Orestes* was not performed professionally in the UK until the 1990s, but was staged in the US at Berkeley in the 1960s (1997, 320 on Lawrence Boswell's *Agamemnon's Children*, Gate Theatre, March 1995; 2011 on Jan Kott's *Orestes*, Durham Theatre, February 1968).

[14] Wright describes *Orestes*' tone as "peculiarly self-conscious, ironical and even playful", and Euripides as "deliberately exploiting the fact that the mythical tradition was full of inconsistencies and alternatives" (2008, 20-4), since none of the onstage events of *Orestes* are found in any other extant version of the myth. Hall also notes that *Orestes*' debut on the *Oresteia*'s fiftieth anniversary is "probably no coincidence" (2010, 285).

[15] 'Resolution' is certainly a matter of interpretation, as Holmes notes: "A tragedy like the *Orestes* seems to mock the very convention of the *deus ex machina* capable of restoring order and meaning" (2010, 232).

[16] Burnett observes the commonalities between the threat posed by Orestes to Hermione's life and Clytemnestra's killing of Cassandra in *Agamemnon* (1971, 210). In these final moments before Apollo's divine intervention, Euripides depicts the potential for the cycle of vengeance to continue unchecked.

[17] Euripides certainly made an impact on Old Comedy, as he was explicitly caricatured in three extant Aristophanic comedies (*Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs*). The extent of Euripides' relationship with humour and the 'comic' is contested. See Gregory 1999-2000; Seidensticker 1982; 1978 for comic readings of select scenes.

[18] Washburn also "transadapted" Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in 2015, another tragedy based on the Atreidic myth cycle.

to encompass the translation and adaptation of texts for theatre and beyond, observing "the apparent act of translation could not be other than an act of adaptation and vice versa" (2017, 185). In support of this fusion, Saoudi cites Georges L. Bastin's emphasis upon the shared characteristics of the two approaches (1993, 476): namely the acts of apprehension, conceptualisation (or deverbalisation) and expression, and Susan Bassnett's reflection that distinguishing between a 'version' and 'adaptation' of a text seems "a complete red herring" (1985, 93). In a later article, Bassnett further emphasises the complexity of the theatrical translation process, where a playtext or script is "a priori incomplete in its source language", whilst containing a "concealed gestic text" that also requires translating and reencoding into the target language and culture of the translation (1991, 100, 110). Just as there are multiple and varied approaches to reading a theatre text (1991, 107), so too must there be allowances for a multiplicitous translation-adaptation process.

In actively acknowledging and presenting her process as hybrid, Washburn draws attention to the multiple layers of translation and adaptation inherent in all theatrical productions, particularly as they draw on culture-text(s). The language of translation theory helps to analyse these multiple processes, particularly Lawrence Venuti's concepts of "domestication" and "foreignization" (1995, 17-39). In Washburn's *Orestes*, anachronisms serve to situate the tragedy in the present day. For example, the cultural anxiety surrounding the figure of Helen is translated into modern terms, and she is given the 'domesticating' epithet "radioactive packet" (2011, 18).[19] Yet a simultaneous 'foreignising' method is evident when Electra suddenly begins to quote the transmitted Greek. The lines Washburn selects to incorporate from the ancient language are in a high emotional register, as the chorus and Electra lament the city's decision to put her to death alongside her brother. In Euripides, Electra addresses her ancestor Tantalus in lyric, from which Washburn includes transliterated excerpts in her script. The Greek, for which Washburn provides a translation in the playscript's appendix, begins:

> hin en threenoisin
> anaboaso
> geranti pateri
> Tantaloi
> (2011, 43; transliteration of Eur. *Or.* 984-5)

> ["My most sorrowful cries boil upwards
> To the most aged father Tantalus"
> (2011, 67; translation by Alan Katz)]

[19] Radiation, incidentally, becomes the key anxiety of *Mr Burns*.

Although the use of the ancient language is undoubtedly alienating for her twenty-first century Anglophone audience, Washburn and her collaborators Alan Katz and James Sugg (2011, 67) select only a limited number of lines from the Euripides and they also adapt the text.[20] The transliterated Greek corresponds to lines of Electra and the chorus (spanning Eur. *Or.* 968-89), but Washburn, Katz and Sugg rearrange the order of the Euripidean phrases, omit certain words and adjust some grammar.[21]

The accuracy of the Greek here is not as important for this study as the decision to adapt rather than simply quote the ancient source. Instead of using the transmitted Euripidean wording, it appears that Washburn deliberately bookends the excerpt with phrases that maintain resonance in English. Her Electra discusses the myth of Tantalus at length in the play's prologue (2011, 9-11), and in the lines directly preceding the Greek (2011, 42), and so Washburn's audience are likely to recognise the sense of 'Tantaloi'. Similarly, Washburn ends the excerpt on the repetition of "Hellas, Hellas, Hellas", an adjustment of Euripides' Ἑλλάδος "of Greece" (Eur. *Or.* 970). Her alteration from the noun's genitive form to its nominative 'Hellas' both evokes the Middle English lament 'alas', capturing the character's grief in more familiar traditional Anglophone terms, and etymologically hints towards the play's next narrative focus: the plot to murder Helen. Thus, even in the most linguistically alien section of her *Orestes*, Washburn still domesticates aspects of the Greek language, liberally adapting the Aeschylus to provide modern resonances.

The distancing effect created by this juxtaposition of ancient and modern language is similarly adopted by Icke in his *Oresteia*, and he also chooses a highly emotional moment to revert to the Greek text of Aeschylus. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is onstage for 300 lines without speaking, arguably providing Greek tragedy's "most interesting surviving silence" (Taplin 1972, 77). Heavy with anticipation, her exchange with the chorus undeniably becomes the climax of the play, with her exit signalling a key turning point in the narrative: the murders she foresees, of both herself and Agamemnon.[22] Notably, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra doubts whether Cassandra is able to understand or speak Greek at all (Aesch. *Ag.* 1050-61), but this is disproved when she erupts into lyric and, shortly after, speaks in verse.[23] Cassandra recounts her pun-

[20] Washburn: "arranged from Ode 3" (2011, 67).

[21] Washburn's transliteration roughly corresponds to Euripides, as follows: 984-9; 994; 968-9; 976-7; 970.

[22] Mason posits Cassandra's vision of her own death as an Aeschylean invention (1959, 86).

[23] See Pillinger for a concise account of scholars' various interpretations of Cassandra's shift from lyric to verse (2019, 58n73). Each identifies an important change in Cassandra's cognition, identity or role in the narrative, indicating that Aeschylus' Cassan-

ishment from the god Apollo, namely that she sees the future but that others do not understand her pronouncements. Her exchange with the chorus depicts her curse in real time, as they understand her words but do not grasp their implications regarding the impending horrors of their near future. Using Venuti's terms, Emily Pillinger notes that Aeschylus avoids domesticating Cassandra entirely for his Athenian audience through his incorporation of familiar and non-familiar elements of Greek speech (2019, 45). But for a Greek audience versed in myth, her meaning is clear, and Aeschylus' spectators are the only witnesses of Cassandra's words who can appreciate their dramatic irony.

In Icke's adaptation, Cassandra's communication begins: "(*Cassandra suddenly speaks in Ancient Greek from the original Aeschylus – passionate, furious, tearful. It's terrifying to listen to*)" (2015, 77). Whilst this stage direction captures the emotion of her Aeschylean lyric outburst, introducing classical Greek for Cassandra's speech has the opposite effect of the ancient text, as Icke's Cassandra is immediately linguistically and temporally 'foreignised' by her language. Not only does Icke intend for his audience to fear her "*terrifying*" monologue, but his use of classical Greek also renders his Cassandra incomprehensible to his English-speaking characters and (at least the vast majority of) his Almeida audience. Her internal audience is not *Agamemnon*'s chorus of sympathetic Argive elders, but Icke's Orestes and Electra, who repeatedly express their inability to understand her words at all (2015, 77-8). When she switches to English, her speech is fractured and confused:

> Cassandra: catched in a trap. same story. it's same story
> doesn't stop doesn't cease it's same same
> story my story is your story is –
> (78)

As in the *Agamemnon*, she alludes to the house's curse, the Furies, and the death of the eponymous king (2015, 78-9), but there is no mention of Apollo or explanation of her prophetic abilities. As opposed to the Aeschylus, in which Cassandra's vision of her murder forms a central scene, Icke's adaptation uses her death as a foil for Agamemnon's, which he stages simultaneously with her speech.[24] Finally, rather than defiantly casting aside her prophetic insignia and entering the house to face death,[25] Icke's Cassandra

dra is by no means a simple or one-dimensional character.

[24] On the Aeschylean treatment of the deaths of Cassandra and Agamemnon, Wohl notes "in the poetics of this play, her death is given more space and more emotional elaboration . . . in terms of dramatic effect, hers replaces his" (1998, 24n41).

[25] Doyle considers the Aeschylean Cassandra's undressing as a reclamation of autonomy and protest towards Apollo, as she "spurns him as both master of her prophecies and of her body" (2008, 64).

mysteriously perishes: "Orestes: The girl is dead. I don't – remember how she / died" (2015, 80).

On *Agamemnon*, Oliver Taplin observes: "The mysterious foreign woman who remained so long silent turns out to be the one who tells most and who is least confusing" (1978, 104). However, in Icke's adaptation, Clytemnestra's xenophobic assumptions about Cassandra's language proficiency are confirmed, as the Trojan princess is ironically 'foreignised' by her fluency in ancient Greek. The irony and miscommunication of the Aeschylean scene are maintained, but this comes at the cost of the audience's connection to Cassandra and their comprehension of her personal story. The Aeschylean Cassandra, whose exceptional circumstances as both cursed prophet and enslaved Trojan princess inform her insight and set her apart from the House of Atreus, becomes another female casualty subsumed by Icke's adaptation of the narrative: "Cassandra: everywhere dead girls, dead / girls" (2015, 79).[26] Venuti argues that foreignising methods of translation into English "can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism" whilst domesticating approaches to translation can reproduce "cultural elitism" (1995, 20-2), as they assimilate texts to their receiving cultures, overwriting the source text and its difference. Yet this Icke example indicates that Venuti's distinction may be a fallacy: by limiting Cassandra's speech in service to the familial narrative and forgoing the genuinely external perspective Aeschylus has her give as both isolated individual and cultural outsider, Icke's overt linguistic 'foreignisation' serves politically and ideologically to 'domesticate' this character.

The tone and effect of the third act of Washburn's *Mr Burns* rely on similar translational principles, only Washburn replaces the juxtaposition of ancient and modern references with modern and invented future ones. Instead of the inclusion of classical Greek language, the audience are presented with contemporary American references, intermingled with ancient echoes, adapted for a distant and distinct future audience. For example: "Chorus: Moe passed around pitchers of Chablis" (2014, 75). This confusion of ancient (*oinochoe*) and modern (Moe the *Simpsons* bartender, Chablis wine) cultural referents presents an unfamiliar image, particularly as it is spoken by a chorus, a feature that is central to Greek tragedy but largely absent from the *Simpsons*. Evidently present culture is just as dislocated from this imagined future as modernity is from fifth-century Athens, and so Washburn alienates her audience from their own contemporary context by presenting its

[26] Mitchell-Boyask 2006 and Doyle 2008 compare the Cassandra scene with the sacrifice of Iphigenia as narrated by Aeschylus' chorus (Aesch. *Ag.* 205-54). It is important to note these resonances, whilst also appreciating the multiple factors that set Cassandra apart as an individual.

(mis)translation. In her *Orestes*, Washburn draws attention to the inevitable amalgamation of cultural influences inherent in the act of translation and adaptation; and here in *Mr Burns*, she similarly oscillates between 'domesticating' and 'foreignising' processes, evoking Greek theatre through modern references and presenting a simultaneously futuristic yet ancient evolved form of a *Simpsons* episode. The result is uncanny, and as Washburn presents the future evolution of contemporary American culture, she invites her audience to reflect upon the way in which they interact with texts of the past.

In this sense, whilst *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* initially appear to be very different adaptations, they both contain fusions of classical and contemporary influences. *Mr Burns* appears modern, but its future is as distant as the ancient past; and Icke's *Oresteia* is structured as an ancient text unfolding in present-time. Both are hybrids of varied times, tones and influences; and both demonstrate that Venuti's 'domestication' and 'foreignisation' are not mutually exclusive translational preferences but are often co-existent and coterminous forces within adapted texts.

3. Adaptation: Process versus Product

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation as both a "process" and a "product" (2013, 7-8, 15-32). Time is the distinguishing feature of the former: adaptation as a process acknowledges change and fluidity. It is simultaneously an act of interpretation and creation.[27] 'Product' is fixed: the resultant text is the final result of the adaptation process. Yet the description of theatrical adaptation as 'product' is problematic, as it assumes a fixity of the work that is impossible in live performance. Theatre, as an ephemeral art form, is arguably always concerned with time.[28] It exists in performance, which Erika Fischer-Lichte has theorised as relying on a constantly fluctuating "feedback loop" between actors and observers that is enabled by their "bodily co-presence" within a distinct physical and temporal space in the present (2008, 38-43). The liveness of theatre also gives the sense that the performance's future is still potential, non-determined, and suggests "the immanent power of the collective to alter that future" (Hall 2013, 25).

As such, theatrical performance is constructed upon a relationship in flux, simultaneously between co-present actors and spectators, and present and future temporalities. Susanne Langer has similarly posited this distinct tem-

[27] Hutcheon's "the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" implies a linearity in this process that is not always the case (2013, 8).

[28] Following Peggy Phelan who posits: "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance" (1993, 146).

porality distinguishes drama from narrative literature; they are concerned with the "virtual future" and "virtual past" respectively (1953, 307). Indeed, the plots of Greek tragedy rely on forward-driven narratives, concerned primarily with what will happen next.[29] This sense of futurity exposes the limitations of the term 'product', and both *Oresteia* and *Mr Burns* are illustrative of theatre's status as a dynamic process, especially through their depiction of time and memory. By revealing the multiple and different influences and interpretations that the memory process enables, they offer useful approaches for deconstructing the binary 'product' and 'process' model of adaptation theory.

The 'source text' of *Mr Burns* is itself a complex parody. "Cape Feare" is a *Simpsons* episode based upon the Scorsese remake (1991) of the film *Cape Fear* (1962). This film in turn is an adaptation of *The Executioners* (1957), itself a novel by John D. MacDonald. Washburn emphasises the intensely interwoven intertextuality. For example, the characters of the first act establish that the tattoos of *Simpsons*' villain Sideshow Bob are influenced by American cinema – specifically a trope from the film *Do The Right Thing* (1989), which itself is "stealing from" (2014, 17) *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). The intertextuality even comes full circle as the group discuss the casting of the character in question from *The Night of the Hunter*: "Matt: Who's also Robert Mitchum…who plays De Niro's character in the original *Cape Fear*" (2014, 17). Yet since Washburn's characters ultimately prioritise remembering and re-enacting the *Simpsons* episode, these sources of parody and their specific interconnections are soon eclipsed by their *Simpsons* culture-text. By the second act, which is set "7 years after" the first (2014, 7), many famous cultural references have been subsumed into the *Simpsons* narratives. Notably, the legacy of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* endures through the punning title of another famous *Simpsons* episode: 'Much Apu About Nothing' (2014, 64), and this drastic inversion of the literary canon gestures towards the subjectivity and fallibility of cultural memory.

In his review of the Almeida production, established theatre critic Michael Billington (2014) comments: "I find it a melancholy thought that art, architecture and literature may perish in the collective memory but a popular TV show will be the last relic of western civilisation." What Billington fails to observe is that this same sense of loss is genuinely experienced by many individuals and communities today: namely queer, trans, disabled, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) persons whose histories and cultures have been devastated or actively marginalised by colonialist,

[29] Whether deciphering events that have already happened (e.g. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), or unexpected reversals (e.g. Euripides' *Helen*).

fascist and capitalist forces, often too in the name of "western civilisation".[30] The theorists who research these obscured or buried histories offer important critical approaches to memory, history and tradition, and an example from writer and academic Saidiya Hartman may help to elucidate the process that Washburn projects and Billington finds melancholy. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman recounts her travels along a historical slave route in Ghana, reckoning with the route itself as "both an existent territory with objective coordinates and the figurative realm of an imagined past" (2006, 9).

Describing her physical experiences of the geography and architecture entwined with slavery, Hartman asserts: "Every generation confronts the task of choosing its past. Inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on. The past depends less on 'what happened then' than on the desires and discontents of the present. Strivings and failures shape the stories we tell" (2006, 100). As Washburn's characters 'choose' their inheritances, favouring a 'low' art form from popular culture in the process, she depicts a future culture that is uncomfortable for those that laud the traditional literary canon today. In *Mr Burns*, Washburn acknowledges that the full intertextual resonances of works will always be lost, and what remains will depend on the text's present emotional, social and political relevance for individuals and groups. By emphasising the loss inevitable in the process of adaptation, *Mr Burns* questions the authority of inherited canons and 'source texts', instead demonstrating the importance of culture-text in present time for a work's endurance and survival. Through depicting this future displacement of Shakespeare's currently canonical play by the popular *Simpsons* cartoon, Washburn appears to echo Hutcheon's dehierarchising approach to adaptation, demonstrating that indeed "multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically" (2013, xv). As, ultimately, it is changing social and political contexts that shape cultural values, Washburn stresses that classical and canonical 'source-texts' are no more valuable than their corresponding culture-texts.

Moreover, the construction of culture-text is a complex and idiosyncratic process. Indeed the group's initial recollection of the "Cape Feare" episode depicts a seemingly accidental form of remembrance. Gibson, a new arrival, remembers a joke from the episode but admits that he has never seen *The Simpsons*: "Gibson: That bit comes from an ex-girlfriend…she used to have this little thing this little routine" (2014, 37). Gibson has engaged with

[30] Appiah 2016, historicises and critiques the construct of 'western civilisation'. See Phillips 2017, on the alternative temporalities and futures offered by radical liberation movements; Love 2007, on the politics of engaging with queer history; Gabriel 2018; 2020, on the harmful approach to transgender identities as 'metaphor' in classical tragic scholarship and reception; Silverblank and Ward 2020, on how the critical methodologies of disability studies may inform classical reception; Hanink 2017, for a history of European idealisations of classical Greece and their political resonances today.

the source exclusively in adaptation, through an isolated performance or 'routine' recalled from his past relationship. It is his fragment of memory that spurs on the group's task, ultimately leading to the episode's performance and survival, and yet it is entirely coincidental. This part of the episode has survived solely through its culture-text, already twice removed from its *Simpsons* source. The significance of Gibson's subjective, emotional memory reflects the importance of a text's resonance for its transmission, its interaction with personal and social "desires and discontents" (Hartman 2006, 100). As the context of reception changes, so too does the relationship between a source text and its receiving culture.[31] Memory, on an individual and cultural basis, creates a dialogue between texts of the past and present lived experiences. Similarly, theatrical adaptation, always happening in the now, and always looking to the future, is a process that reconciles stories of the past with present contexts.

Like Washburn, Icke draws on the classical culture-text around Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, incorporating other ancient versions of the myth. Unlike Aeschylus, he chooses to dramatise Iphigenia's death, and in doing so presents a narrative reminiscent of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. He stages the royal family arguing over their dinner, in a subtle parody of the debated end of Euripides' tragedy: Iphigenia's replacement on the altar by a deer (Eur. *IA* 1475-532; see Weiss 2014, 119). In this modern *Oresteia*, Icke's Iphigenia protests about eating venison, inadvertently hinting at her own fate: "Iphigenia: It's a *sacrifice*" (2015, 29). By drawing attention to a specifically contested piece of Euripides, Icke reveals the complexity and intangibility of his classical sources. Even extant scripts are not uncontested fixed or final 'products': differences and ambiguities in transmission are commonplace in classical works, thus making adaptation's sources flexible and open to interpretation.[32]

Much like Washburn, Icke presents the myth reassembled from a variety of fragmented sources, drawing attention to his adaptation's dynamic mediation of past myths for a contemporary audience. He engages with Euripides' *Electra* too, specifically in the tragedian's parody of Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. Whilst Aeschylus' recognition scene pivots on Electra's recognition of Orestes' hair and footprints, identical to her own, Euripides' Electra openly questions the likelihood of these shared characteristics (Aesch. *Ch.* 212-34; Eur. *El.* 524-45). In Icke's production, Orestes' recollections reach a climax at

[31] Hence Martindale: "*Meaning*, could we say, *is always realized at the point of reception*" (1993, 3).

[32] Indeed, the beginning of *Choephoroi* was not preserved in manuscripts, but has been largely restored by its identification in Aristophanic scholia and quotation in *Frogs*; see Brown 2015 and West 1990, 228-33.

the death of Clytemnestra, where his memory becomes increasingly fragmented. The existence of Electra is even questioned: "Doctor: I think we have to consider the possibility that those were *your* footprints, that that was *your* hair" (2015, 102). Here Icke turns a source of parody into a plot-twist, engaging with an almost comically ironic ancient culture-text and reworking the common motifs into his psychological thriller.[33]

This confusion of influence and innovation encourages the audience to interpret and reinterpret the events of the play, presenting a range of possible narratives and realities. Orestes appeals to the court: "Orestes: as I say *this* now, in each of your minds you create your own versions, different lenses pointing at the same thing at the same time and *seeing that thing differently*" (2015, 110). Orestes' memories have been the basis of the entire production, but have been proven to be unreliable, confused and open to interpretation. Here in the final play of the trilogy he calls upon the court, and implicitly the modern audience, to consider their own biases when approaching texts. As Donna Haraway has theorised, each individual has "limited location and situated knowledge" (1988, 583), that naturally informs their perspective and therefore their interpretive experience.[34] Orestes' memory has thus far served as a microcosm of the individual interpretive experience, and here he acknowledges the impossibility of fixed objectivity from his jury and his observers.

Indeed, adaptation, much like memory, is a process of assembling fragments of the past in a manner that fits the present. Just as the legacy of performance exists only in memory, here past trauma affects individual memory, as with Icke's Orestes, or collective traditions, as in Washburn's *Mr Burns*. Not only is memory fallible, but its ephemeral products are emotional, subjective and fragmentary. In simple cognitive terms, "remembering is always re-remembering" (Fernyhough 2012), and therefore memory is also always a creative process which changes and develops with every new experience. These two adaptations embrace this process, acknowledging themselves as processes of remembrance and recreation: any attempt to conceptualise them as fixed and isolated 'products' is insufficient.

[33] Although outside the scope of this study, Robert Icke openly cites the American television drama *Sopranos* as inspiration for his *Oresteia*, and it should be considered a formative culture-text for the production (see Clapp 2015b).

[34] Haraway advocates for feminist objectivity, which "makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world" (1988, 594).

4. Processes of Memory: Temporalities in Dialogue

Mr Burns and *Oresteia* illustrate the problem of defining theatrical adaptations as products, as they simultaneously depict processes of memory and function as microcosms of that process in action. Whilst theatre has a distinct relationship with the future (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Hall 2013; Langer 1953), Margherita Laera notes that it also "repeats, and incessantly so" (2014, 1). As past and future temporalities are brought into dialogue in the present, she posits that theatre's temporality is non-linear, a feature it shares with adaptation (2014, 3). This common temporality is especially evident in theatrical adaptations, which, despite being future-oriented, are also littered with repeated resonances from the past. The result is a simultaneous sense of change and cyclicity, evolution and repetition. *Mr Burns* and *Oresteia* particularly demonstrate this temporal process distinct to theatrical adaptation; these plays use theatre as a process to create non-linear and indeed cyclical temporal dialogues between distinct time scales: present and mythological. The former exists in the present-time experience of the audience, whilst the latter is the portrayed past of *Oresteia*, and projected future(s) of *Mr Burns*.

The first act of *Mr Burns* is set in "the very near future" (2014, 7), and characters are dressed "in normal clothes" (9). Initially these characters visually resemble their contemporary audience, and Washburn's use of "largely verbatim" (8) speech makes for a highly naturalistic and 'domesticating' effect. Yet the introduction of a severe and immediate existential threat fractures the play's context from the audience's reality. It quickly becomes apparent that the characters are navigating a postapocalyptic world in which they face a constant and unpredictable threat of nuclear radiation. Understanding of its scope and longevity is only speculative: "Matt: I heard fifty miles but only for a few months. I heard a hundred, for a hundred million years" (31). The theatre audience's present has already become an increasingly removed past for Washburn's characters, who engage with their memories of it to escape their dystopian reality. Simultaneously, this imagined future is mythical to Washburn's audience, who witness the mythologising of their own present culture. For these two temporalities, the *Simpsons* text (and culture-text) becomes a shared history, acting as a touchstone between the audience and characters. In the near present-time yet dystopian setting of the first act, Washburn creates a reciprocal dialogue between present and mythological times.

In marked contrast to the first act, the performers of *Mr Burns*' third act are costumed like *Simpsons* characters in pieces that "don't look quite right to our eyes" (2014, 9), and masks (Grossman 2015, 209). It is eighty-two years after the recollection in act one, and the episode has narratively, aesthetically

and formally developed into (a twenty-first century conception of) a Greek tragedy. Like a Greek chorus, the performers' lines are now set to music, and they sing and dance as a collective unit in a chorus line (Fig. 1). Their

masks and robed costumes give them visually ancient silhouettes, but the plastic and metallic materials that form their costumes are distinctly modern (Fig. 2). The act is a melting-pot of temporalities, performance traditions and

Fig. 1-2: Dress rehearsal for Act 3 of *Mr Burns*, London Almeida production (2014). Photographs by Manuel Harlan.

culture-texts. Although ostensibly still an adaptation of the *Simpsons*, multiple and varied culture-texts inform this performance: catchphrases from *Scooby-Doo* are mixed with visuals of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and echoes of modern pop-music (Britney Spears, Eminem) mingle with operatic Gilbert and Sullivan (2014, 82-4). The palimpsestic style is familiar from parody yet the tone is sincere, and this stark juxtaposition indicates that the *Simpsons* episode has amalgamated new meanings and resonances for this future production's imagined audience.[35]

This is the only act within *Mr Burns* where Washburn's performers acknowledge that they are performing to an audience. Due to the naturalism of the verbatim first act and colloquial second, the actors do not address or directly face their audience before this point, but here, the performers play front-on to their spectators in the manner of a tragic chorus (*Figures 1-2*). However, since this is where the play's time is most removed from the present, it is implied that the intended spectators are not the Almeida theatregoers, but the imagined apocalypse survivors' first generation of descendants. It is a play-within-the-play, outside of which nothing about the future society and culture is revealed. All Washburn's audience may experience is the text in performance, a relic from a future age that is simultaneously familiar and alien. *The Simpsons* survives in this society much like a classical text in the modern world, and here Washburn presents her audience with a performance model for conceptualising texts of the past as 'process'. In depicting modern culture as mythology, Washburn emphasises the wide potential meanings and contexts of extant ancient texts, which have undoubtedly been similarly (mis)remembered and (re)constructed over time.

The projected mythological future of *Mr Burns* is at once most removed from the audience's present and is most recognisably classical, as the distant future appears so culturally ancient. At this great temporal remove, the relationship between the contemporary modern present and classical mythological past is made most overt, as Washburn engages most clearly with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Much like Orestes, Bart Simpson is presented as an adolescent survivor of a family tragedy and faces an uncertain posttraumatic future. The play's antagonist has morphed from Sideshow Bob (as in "Cape Feare") into Mr Burns, the owner of the nuclear power plant in *The Simpsons*. The human vendetta of Sideshow Bob has developed into the threat of a force of nature, just as in the Oresteian myth cycle, where Clytemn-

[35] Cavaliero posits that parody need not be necessarily comedic, though it relies on a discrepancy between what it shows and what it tells (2000, 23-4). The incongruity theory of laughter relies on a similar principle, which might explain parody's popularity as a comedic trope. See Carrol for succinct descriptions of the most popular competing humour theories, including incongruity (2014, 4-53).

estra's unlawful killing of her husband is eclipsed by Orestes' vengeance, a *miasma*-inducing matricide.[36] Mr Burns is depicted as the embodiment of radiation, personifying the invisible but ever-present fear of the play's first act. Fittingly, Washburn now removes his humanising title, emphasising that this *Simpsons* character is punningly named after one of radiation's harmful effects on the human body: burns.

The development of the antagonist Sideshow Bob/Mr Burns character parallels the role of the *Oresteia*'s Furies, who are evoked throughout Aeschylus' trilogy but do not appear as characters until the third play.[37] Burns promises to hound Bart as relentlessly as Orestes' Furies:

> Burns: I don't go away I'm here for
> a hundred years I'm here for a thousand
> years a hundred thousand a *million* I
> will be here Bart Simpson for Forever
> (93)

Burns cannot disappear but he can be rehabilitated, just as Aeschylus' Furies are contained and instituted within the city as Eumenides or "Kindly Ones". The show closes with the once-nuclear Burns physically "(*powering a treadmill*)", providing a hopeful "(*blaze of light*)" (2014, 95) that visually evokes the end of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: the torchlit procession that escorts the reconfigured Furies/Eumenides to their new shrine at the Athenian Acropolis.[38] The play-within-the-play and *Mr Burns* end here, at their most ancient and futuristic, and at their most Aeschylean. The accumulation of these classical resonances acts as a strong reminder that just as *The Simpsons* is a cultural touchstone of the twenty-first century, *Oresteia* too existed in the real contemporary context of fifth-century Athens and interacted with the anxieties of its present. In both cases, ancient and modern, theatre is the process by which these texts can adapt and survive through time, taking on new meanings and significance in changing cultural conditions.

Icke also establishes multiple temporal settings in his *Oresteia*, creating a dialogue between present and mythological temporalities. Icke situates his text in the present, his notes stating: "Double square brackets [[like this]] indicate text which should be updated to reflect the precise date and time of the events in each performance" (2015, 8). These brackets do not appear until

[36] Burnett observes that *miasma* pursues Orestes in both the Aeschylean and Euripidean tellings of the myth (1971, 217).

[37] Padel notes that by presenting a chorus of Furies in *Eumenides*, Aeschylus confirms that the 'mad' visions of Cassandra (*Agamemnon*) and Orestes (*Choephoroi*) were real (1995, 80).

[38] See Pestell 2017 on how Aeschylus combines mythical and political thought in his staging of the Furies' shift to Eumenides.

the end of his first act, then are used with increasing regularity throughout, reminding the audience that the action is happening live, in present time, rather than being entirely predetermined. Similarly, the intervals of the Almeida production were signalled by a countdown on an LED ticker, indicating when the action would continue (Tripney 2015). The increasing frequency but shortening length of these intervals helps to assimilate the stage action with the audience's own experience of time passing, contributing to the production's "terrifying immediacy" (Clapp 2015a). Indeed Edith Hall describes a sense of "chronometric pressure" on the audience, whose breaks from the narrative are dictated so visibly (2015, 17). This synchronicity emphasises to Icke's audience that the play is a process, existing in present time, and with genuine effects on its spectators.

This immediacy is complemented by the simultaneity of action: the three plays are presented laterally rather than in linear order. The trial of *Eumenides* shapes the structure of Icke's adaptation, as Orestes relates the murders of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* in order. His memories build a partial linear narrative, punctuated by scenes of Orestes' recollection of events to a doctor figure. Crucially, however, Icke does not reveal that Orestes is on trial until after his account of Clytemnestra's killing. The structure allows for this temporal ambiguity: the narrative reliance on Orestes' memory stresses that everything has already happened, but the use of present-time recall draws attention to the immediacy of the action before the audience. As the stage develops into "(*a dream-like version of a court*)" (2015, 104), the audience are made aware of the present-time trial that has always been the purpose of Orestes' recollection. Icke has presented Orestes' memories as increasingly changeable, but here they break down further as they are scrutinised in the binary 'true/false' trial process.

This is manifested literally in the breaking down of the staging, as now "(*the room itself is crumbling*)" (2015, 106). The memories, and process of recollection, are exposed as increasingly unstable foundations. Ambiguity and subjectivity abound in this surreal setting, which is where Icke actively encourages his audience to implicate themselves in the court's decision on Orestes' fate: "Calchas: Think clearly of one word and hold it in your mind – either 'innocent' or 'guilty'" (125). The augur asks the audience to judge Orestes based on unclear and insubstantial evidence, making a choice between binary alternatives.[39] Just as neither option is nuanced enough to fully capture Orestes' culpability, nor is a model of adaptation as separate 'prod-

[39] An ironic request from the diviner whose own interpretation resulted in Iphigenia's sacrifice, beginning the cycle of familial vengeance. This is likely not lost on Icke's audience, who have witnessed Calchas' involvement in Iphigenia's death at the beginning of this *Oresteia*.

uct' and 'process' sufficient. The process of the trial may appear to rest on facts, but these apparent 'products' of Orestes' memory are evidently fallible and subject to change. Glenn Jellenik posits that by announcing its source, a text invites you to think about where is has come from, rather than where it is going (2017, 49). Yet despite being an adaptation of an ancient play, Icke's emphasis on memory as a process in present time stresses that theatre is indeed always concerned with the "virtual future" (Langer 1953, 307), because this dialogue with a past text is happening in present time.

The multiple time scales set up an interesting paradox: the audience are aware that the events presented are Orestes' memories, but they are also actions depicted in the theatre's present. Repeated lines from characters remind the audience of this temporal duality, such as: "Klytemnestra: She's been dead since the beginning" (2015, 56; also at 102, 114). Double determination is a key feature of Greek tragedy; events occur both because they are willed by the gods and because they derive from human autonomy (see, for example, Swift 2016, 58). Here Icke creates another layer of determination: that of mythological time, and fidelity to the Aeschylean text. The characters are unable to escape their fates precisely because the events have already happened, preserved both in the memory of Icke's Orestes and in Aeschylus' tragedies. This text-defined temporality becomes an almost divine force in Icke's *Oresteia*, as the source text dictates the content of the adaptation. Yet however 'determined' Icke's adaptation may be, it is also open to interpretation and innovation. Ironically, Clytemnestra's comment also draws attention to Icke's aforementioned departure from Aeschylus by choosing to depict Iphigenia alive, before her sacrifice. For his audience, she has not been dead since the beginning. Thus Icke simultaneously emphasises the fate-like force of mythological time in his play, and his decision to innovate around the ancient text for his present-day audience.

Just like *Mr Burns,* Icke's *Oresteia* is a living process which mediates between present and distant times. Venuti's language is helpful here: Icke's use of time is increasingly 'domesticating', as the focus switches from Orestes' memories to the present-time trial and the audience are increasingly implicated in the action. In contrast, Washburn's approach is undoubtedly a 'foreignising' one, as her narrative becomes increasingly stylistically and temporally distant from the present. Both, however, reveal the paradoxical effect of adaptation in performance: its ability to assimilate both present and mythological times within the one work, creating a reciprocal and non-linear dialogue between temporalities. With a haunting similarity to the three ghosts of *A Christmas Carol*, past, present and future are all at play in theatrical adaptations.

5. Conclusion

This article has considered some of the limitations in applying Hutcheon's adaptation theory to theatre. While both theatrical examples draw on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as a key culture-text, Washburn's *Mr Burns* adopts a theoretical approach, whereas Icke's *Oresteia* is a self-defined instance of classical adaptation. Venuti's terminology, though problematic as a binary, helps to provide a more flexible language to account for the hybridity of theatrical adaptation as process. Both playwrights' engagement with culture-texts uncover memory's ability to create numerous possibilities of influences and receptions: Washburn exposes the multiplicity of influence, and Icke emphasises the multiplicity of interpretation. The binary of 'product' and 'process' that pervades adaptation theory has been revealed as inadequate for a discussion of performance. Theatrical adaptation, much like memory, is instead always a process. It is ephemeral, an amalgamation of fragments, and a dialogue between multiple temporalities that always exists in the present.

Both Washburn's *Mr Burns* and Icke's *Oresteia*, though distinct, need to be understood in conjunction with each other. As theatrical adaptations, they each create a cyclical and non-linear dialogue between present and mythological times. In *Mr Burns*, the play's time is fractured from that of the audience, as the action becomes increasingly surreal and temporally distant; Icke's *Oresteia* uses a trial format to create a temporal immediacy, contrasting urgent present time with the recollections of his Orestes. Along with temporal fracturing, Washburn alienates her audience from contemporary American cultural references by presenting their unfamiliar future adapted forms; the 'products' of Icke's Orestes' memory are fluid and dependent on the dynamic process of remembering, highlighting the inherent subjectivity of knowledge and interpretation. Both playwrights depict the effect of the memory process on seemingly 'fixed' works, whether the American literary and cultural canon(s) or classical Greek tragedy. These theatrical adaptations are paradigmatic: as they mediate between past and present, present and future, and as they unfold in performance, they are ever fluid and never fixed products.

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