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Memory and Performance.
Classical Reception in Early Modern Festivals

Edited by Francesca Bortoletti, Giovanna Di Martino,
and Eugenio Refini

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Abstract

This is a review of *Translating Ancient Greek Drama in Early Modern Europe: Theory and Practice (15th-16th Centuries)*, a collection of essays edited by Malika Bastin-Hammou, Giovanna Di Martino, Cécile Dudouyt, and Lucy C. M. M. Jackson. The collection importantly covers Aristophanes as well as Greek tragedy, and considers a range of translations into neo-Latin and vernacular languages. Its theoretical as well as practical focus is particularly helpful, and it should provide a significant resource for further work in this area.

Keywords: Greek drama; translation; neo-Latin; tragedy; comedy; vernacular languages; Renaissance

This collection brings together thirteen chapters by scholars working on ancient Greek comedy and tragedy in the early modern period, along with a foreword by Cécile Dudouyt, introduction by Giovanna Di Martino and Cécile Dudouyt, and afterword by Stuart Gillespie. The first three chapters, constituting the first section ("Translating Comedy"), focus on Aristophanes, while the rest of the volume is devoted to Greek tragedy (mostly Sophocles and Euripides; the less popular Aeschylus is not a main feature of any individual chapter, but crops up here and there); this weighting is justified by the greater attention paid to the two younger Greek tragedians both in the Renaissance itself and by modern scholarship on Renaissance reception. The geographical spread is also rather heavily weighted towards Italy, with almost half of the contributions focusing on the Italian context. Again, this is undoubtedly in part a reflection of the precedence and significance of Italian scholarly and literary activity in this area, but since all three of the chapters

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on comedy are Italy-oriented, the 'European' dimension does seem slightly lacking there. Within the wider remit of the tragedy section greater range has been possible, with contributions addressing the French, English, German, and Portuguese contexts.

The volume's promised attention to the "theory and practice" of translation is extremely fruitful, with contributors throughout thinking in interesting ways both with early modern translation theories (the choice of the plural is discussed in the introduction, 6) and with recent developments in the field of translation studies. Dudouyt's foreword opens the volume with an inspiring reading of the printer's emblem in Jean de Lapéruse's *Médée* (1556), supporting an interpretation of translation practice in this period being "as much about prolonging the life of the translated author as it is about giving a new one to the modern translator", in a characteristic "imitative-emulative relationship" (x). Negotiating the difficulties of defining "translation proper" and "not quite translation" or "adaptation" (3), Di Martino and Dudouyt set up in their introduction an alternative vocabulary of activities of "translation" and "translating", in which the former "usually features as the production of a full-length target text, often (but not necessarily) the work of a scholar", while the latter "represents the intertextual reworking" of one or more sources "in a dynamic and creative way", and is "typically, though not exclusively, by a playwright or poet" (4). This has the advantage of presenting "translation" and "translating" as more of a continuum of possible activities, underlined by the fact that (particularly in the realm of neo-Latin) the "scholar" and the "playwright or poet" might be one and the same.

As noted in the introduction, a significant contribution made by this collection is its inclusion of the section dedicated to Greek comedy, "a strand of translation that is often forgotten and overlooked, even though it is essential for gaining a full understanding of the literary, dramatic, and scholarly picture" (1). In her contribution to this section, Malika Bastin-Hammou draws attention to the fact that the Aldine press issued nine of Aristophanes' comedies in Greek in 1498, before Sophocles (1502), Euripides (1503), or Aeschylus (1518). Clearly, there was an interest in Aristophanes among the scholarly (though on the matter of priority it is also worth noting that an edition of four of Euripides' tragedies had been printed in 1495), and Latin translations opened up his readership beyond those proficient in Greek (38). But more than this: Aristophanes' *Plutus* was used as a text for teaching classical Greek to students, and it is in this didactic context that Micol Muttini places Lodovico da Poppi's interlinear Latin translation in the first chapter of the section.

Although Muttini is confident that "it was natural that the Greek playwright Aristophanes should figure prominently" in the "general rebirth of interest in all things classical" during the early modern period (19),

one notable feature of Aristophanes springs to mind which might make us surprised to find him cropping up as a sixteenth-century student text: namely, his obscenity, including scatological humour and explicit sexual and homosexual references. And indeed, Muttini shows that translators such as Leonardo Bruni (who produced the earliest translation of *Plutus* c.1440) and Coriolano Martirano (whose translation was printed in 1556) went so far as to cut entire passages from the play (25). However, it is striking that the principal translators discussed in the three chapters on Aristophanes do not, in fact, go in for such censorship, and seem surprisingly comfortable with this characteristic of Old Comedy. Muttini demonstrates that da Poppi translates literally, among other things, the word σκατοφάγον as *stercum comedentem* (26; "shit-eater"); Alciato, Bastin-Hammou tells us, "straightforwardly translates the scene of the farting mosquito" in *Clouds* (36); and the Rostini brothers translate the Greek ψωλός (*Knights* 964) with "senza capella" (Simone Beta helpfully explains that the "Italian word 'cappella' is a slang expression for indicating a hard penis with the prepuce drawn back", 61). This serves as an important reminder that in many respects Renaissance sensibilities might be more robust than those of some subsequent periods.

The three essays on comedy contain in microcosm the themes of the subsequent sections in the main body of the volume: Muttini's chapter focuses on translation into Latin, corresponding to 2.1 "Scholarly Networks: Translation Models and Functions"; Beta's concern with vernacular translation is reflected in 2.2: "Proto-National Dynamics and Vernacular Translating"; and Bastin-Hammou's attention to Alciato's Latin comedy *Philargyrus* anticipates Part 3, "Beyond Translation". Part 2.1 devotes considerable and deserved attention to Erasmus, whose translations of Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* were undeniably foundational to the theory and practice of translating Greek tragedy in the sixteenth century. Alexia Dedieu, in fact, situates them as a point of "origin'" using Antoine Berman's definition; not necessarily in the sense of being the *first*, but drawing "a *before* and an *after*" in the history of translation (76).

Underlining Dedieu's point, Erasmus also features in the contributions of Angelica Vedelago and Thomas Baier, focusing on English and German translators respectively. Dedieu restricts herself to examining what the translators she studies have to say about their own theory and practice in their prefatory materials, which are interesting in themselves and certainly understudied in Anglophone criticism, though it would be interesting to be given more of a flavour of the translations as well. This does, however, come across in Vedelago's chapter with respect to Thomas Watson's *Antigone* (1581), and in Baier's for the translations of Sophocles by Winsheim, Camerarius, and Naeogeorgus. Vedelago's consideration of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of what she calls "eristic" translation – competition

"with the source author", and "with other translators of the same text" (98) speaks interestingly to the vertical and horizontal axes examined by Dudouyt in the foreword. Baier's analysis, meanwhile, represents the primacy of the pedagogical motivations of his translators (analogous to Dudouyt's "transgenerational transmission", viii), apparently precluding eristic dimensions.

In 2.2, contributions from two of the editors take a wider view of translating Greek tragedy in the contexts of sixteenth-century Italy (Di Martino) and France (Dudouyt) respectively. These frame two chapters which focus on specific translations, Claudia Cuzzotti on Buonarotti's Italian *Hecuba*(s) – Buonarotti's multiple acts of translating the same source text offer an interesting case-study – and Maria Luísa Resende on Aires Vitória's Portuguese version of Sophocles' *Electra* (via Pérez de Oliva's Spanish *La venganza de Agamenón*). The only representative of the Portuguese (or Spanish) traditions in the volume, Resende explains that Vitória's "is the only translation of a Greek tragedy produced in Portugal during the 16th century"; interestingly, though, she attributes this not so much to lack of interest, as to "easy access to editions and translations" imported from elsewhere in Europe (175), an explanation which might apply to other national contexts too. The chapters by Di Martino and Dudouyt offer opportunities to begin to compare the Italian and French contexts, and both pay close attention to conceptions of "imitation" in poetic treatises and prefaces, and to the evolving terminology of translation (including "volgarizzamento" and "traduction" respectively). It is these chapters, too, in which consideration of "proto-national dynamics" becomes more explicit.

Turning to Part 3, the rewards of the theoretical groundwork that has been laid in thinking about "translation" and "translating" are evident, and not only in facilitating the inclusion of discussions of Grimald's *Archipropheta* (Lucy Jackson) and Anguillara's *Edippo* (Giulia Fiore), neither of which would be described as 'translations' in the strictest sense. In some ways Fiore's chapter on *hamartia* in translations and interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and in *Oedipus* plays has more in common with earlier sections in its interests. Its analysis culminates in an interesting overview of the shifting relationship between the reception of the *Poetics* and the reception of Greek drama, as well as evolving dramatic practice (250-2). Jackson, meanwhile, combines the idea of "translating" with Carlson's notion of "haunting" – a metaphor that has been very fruitful in recent thinking about classical reception in this period (for instance, Pollard 2017). In doing so, she moves us beyond a model of reception which relies on "lexical equivalence, verbal echoes, paraphrase, or even explicit allusion" (209). Perhaps the most striking insight comes from Jackson's close attention to metre and character in the presentation of the messenger speech by a Syrian *ancilla* in Grimald, which aligns it with

the unusual "sung messenger speech in Euripides' *Orestes*, delivered by an enslaved Phrygian attendant" (218).

A further turn intriguingly suggests that Grimald might also have been familiar with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, in the abridged version that was available in the first half of the sixteenth century. As Jackson acknowledges, *Orestes* was far better-known in the period, but she points out that Grimald could certainly have accessed the Aeschylean tragedies in Oxford and Cambridge, suggesting "the possibility of independent discovery and absorption of Aeschylean texts, along with his Euripides" (221). That sixteenth-century readers might be led from an interest in Euripidean texts to discover related works by Aeschylus appears to be a plausible trajectory; a cluster of editions of *Seven Against Thebes* in Latin and/or Greek between 1581 and 1585, for instance, comes after an increased concentration of interest in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, which deals with the same events. In 1990, Louise Schleiner argued for the possible influence of both Euripides' *Orestes* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Jackson's chapter points the way to a new and perhaps more nuanced re-evaluation of Orestes' hauntings in subsequent English drama. Importantly, she proposes an "anti-chronological mode of reception and translation" (211), by which neo-Latin drama, which was shaped in significant ways by Greek tragedy, in turn helped to shape subsequent receptions of Greek tragedy itself.

The "Coda" to the volume, on 'Dramaturgy and Translation', is co-authored by Di Martino and Estelle Baudou. Here, they offer a model for investigating the "inner dramaturgy" that translations of Greek drama inherently possess (257), and in the process offer a helpful approach for thinking about 'closet' drama, which moves beyond questions of actual or intended performance. Their methodology certainly provides insights into the Iphigenia plays in question (by Sébillet, Lumley, and Dolce), but it is perhaps the theoretical framing and the insistence on the "third language" of dramatic translation which may prove transferable – or, to use the authors' own term, "contaminating" (in a Derridean sense) – to further scholarship.

At this point I would like to respond briefly to a footnote in Di Martino and Baudou's chapter, which I quote in full: "Apparently Hans Sachs wrote a *Mordopffer der göttin Diane, mit der jungkfraw Ephigenie* ('Death sacrifice to the goddess Diana, with the virgin Iphigenia'), which was mounted in 1555 in Nuremberg, on which cf. Gamel 2015, 18, and Miola 2020, 15; we could not track down the production's script and thus the relationship between this play and the ancient source is unknown to us" (262n28). Their caution is warranted: Sachs' work of that title is not, in fact, one of his tragedies, of which he wrote fifty-eight, including a number on themes from classical mythology (see Skrine 1995, 83-104). Instead, it is a song, which can be found in Adelbert von Keller's edition of Sachs' works, where it is labelled "Historia",

and dated 2nd November 1555 (von Keller, 72-4).[2] Sachs' source, as he states in the first line, is Johann Herolt (specifically his 1554 *Hendenweldt*, according to Karl Breul, 1899, lviii). I believe this is worth mentioning here, since not only does it clear up the issue of the phantom German Iphigenia play, but it also represents an excellent illustration of one of the challenges of pan-European translation history, and the need to build up accurate databases of early modern translations, as articulated by Stuart Gillespie in his "Afterword" to the volume.

As Gillespie observes, while on the one hand we might have a transnational humanist culture of scholarship operating in the *lingua franca* of neo-Latin, vernacular translation is tied to particular cultural, social, and regional contexts. Due to current "[d]isciplinary boundaries and the structures of scholarly knowledge" (294) – not aided by the decline in language learning provision in both schools and universities in the UK[3] – scholars tend to have specialisms which rarely cross a significant number of national boundaries. The present review is a case in point: inevitably, I have responded to some chapters in the volume in greater depth than others, dictated in part by my particular areas of knowledge. One of the great advantages of this collection is that it brings together scholarship rooted in several European traditions of translating, offering, for an Anglophone reader, entry points into much early modern material which remains untranslated or inaccessible. Gillespie, indeed, suggests that such edited collections might be the way forward in this area, and there is much to be said for this. One thing that I find striking about this volume is that the sections contributed by the editors themselves speak particularly strongly to each other, especially in terms of their theoretical engagement. Perhaps another possibility for the area of pan-European translation history could be collaborative authorship, which might foreground the strength of such shared approaches, while preserving the benefits of multiple perspectives and areas of expertise. In any case, this volume should certainly be an important resource for future work in this area.

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[2] See further Linton 2008, esp. 44 and 55n8.

[3] On the recent modern languages crisis at the University of Aberdeen, see Williams 2023.

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