

Definitions
Adaptation and Related Modalities

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This chapter aims to explore what we mean by ‘adaptation’ both in terms of recent positions claimed within adaptation studies as well as in relation to the theatre-making process. More precisely, it attempts to establish what we mean by ‘adaptation’ when discussing classic Greek tragedy in performance and to what extent terms such as translation, version, (re)writing, (re)imagining, etc. can or indeed should be distinguished from one another. Arguably, the juxtaposition of the canonical classical play with its contemporary theatrical (re)imaginings¹ can simultaneously contribute to, as well as complicate, notions of the so-called original and its adaptation(s). Here are some questions I shall be raising in this chapter: are performance and adaptation related modalities? Is the relationship between text and performance analogous to that of source text and target text?² Or are other considerations necessary when discussing contemporary theatrical revisions of Greek plays? Can a relationship which involves a considerable degree of transcoding, updating, and/or recontextualisation be legitimately described as adaptation? Or do we need to employ an alternative conceptualisation of the relationship between the classic text and the contemporary performance, and thus invoke a more specific nomenclature? In addressing some of these questions, this chapter will investigate whether notions of performance of the classics and notions of adaptation are in a constructive relationship with each other. In order to do so, the chapter will adopt a case-study approach: looking at recent theatre adaptations of

¹ I make a distinction between theatrical and dramatic (re)imaginings in that ‘theatrical’ refers to the practice of theatre-making, and ‘dramatic’ to the practice of playwriting. Thus, drama is to be understood as the play in its written, textual format, while theatre is the ephemeral performance of such a text. The focus of this chapter lies with theatrical (re)imaginings in the form of performance rather than dramatic ones.

² ‘Source text’ and ‘target text’ are terms widely used within translation studies in order to distinguish between a translation and its so-called original while avoiding the ideological bias inherent in the notion of ‘original’ and ‘originality’, in which the ‘original’ is assumed to have greater value than its translation or adaptation, which is deemed ‘secondary’.

Medea, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Hippolytus*, it will explore the relationship between performance of the classics and notions of adaptation.³

Text and Performance: Drama or Theatre

To consider the staging of a classical Greek play as an example of adaptation is to make some very clear assumptions about the relationship between written text and embodied text – namely, that the two modes are in a temporal if not a hierarchical relationship to one another. Written drama and performance are not seen as being integral to each other: one is not necessarily regarded as a trace of the other. As Michael Walton argues,

A legitimate engagement with the text as handed down, at least insofar as such engagement is possible: that is surely a responsibility of the translator. The re-creation, rooted in this original, but not wholly dependent on it, of something for a contemporary audience which takes account of the past but thrusts it firmly into the present: that is the responsibility of the director. (Walton 2006, 194–5)

Such a distinction between translation as ‘legitimate engagement with text’ and performance as ‘re-creation’ is a very specific position to take, but it is also tendentious. Importantly, such a position vis-à-vis the creative theatrical process assumes that the roles inherent in theatre-making, such as translation and directing amongst others, are easily separable: the translator as independent and clearly distinguishable from the director. It is questionable, however, to what extent such a clean and structured division of labour is possible or even desirable in the, arguably, messy and quite often unpredictable collaborative process that is theatre (see also Montgomery Griffiths, Chapter 7, this volume). The position which clearly distinguishes textual production and theatrical production, as implied by Walton, limits itself to a consideration of a very specific kind of theatre steeped in an understanding of a creative process which is based upon a (hierarchically) structured relationship; at the helm of this relationship stands either the figure of the director or the figure of the playwright, depending on the historical context,⁴ but never both.

³ All examples in this chapter of recent theatre productions of Greek plays are British ones. This is by no means a value judgement in terms of importance or quality but merely a reflection of my own personal geographical context.

⁴ Historical context may, for example, be that of twentieth-century British theatre, which very much favoured the playwright over the director, while twentieth-century German theatre was far more director-focused.

This position is very closely wedded to a historically as well as culturally specific understanding of theatre, which excludes, for example, non-Western, pre-nineteenth-century, or post-dramatic practices.

In contemporary theatre practice, there are numerous instances in which the translator/adaptor and director work very closely together. As a result, the textual production by a translator/adaptor and the theatrical (re)imagining by a director are intertwined to such an extent that it is no longer possible or even necessary to distinguish the two processes. This intertwining is, of course, further complicated as it includes the other agents who are responsible for theatrical adaptation (actors, theatre managers, set designers, etc.). This was arguably the case with the Kneehigh theatre company's *Bacchae* (2004).⁵ While the text was published in 2005, and Carl Grose and Annamaria Murphy were acknowledged as writers, the anthology of which *Bacchae* was a part, and which also includes *Tristan and Yseult*, *The Wooden Frog*, and *The Red Shoes*, is presented as being authored by Kneehigh itself. And Emma Rice, Kneehigh's artistic director, reminds us in her foreword that 'these texts are just one layer of the worlds Kneehigh creates',⁶ thus acknowledging the complexity of the relationship between text and performance.

Similarly, the Gate Theatre's⁷ recent reworking of the Iphigenia at Aulis myth resulted in a publication of the plays *Agamemnon*, *Clytemnestra*, *Iphigenia*, and *Chorus* to accompany the production of the quartet in 2016. Yet, the writing process of all four plays was a collaborative one: all four writers took part in joint workshops as part of their creative writing process, which was considered very much part of the theatrical process and guided by the Gate's artistic director, Christopher Haydon. Furthermore, from the moment they bought their ticket and registered an e-mail address, the audience were allowed to witness some of this process, which was documented by blogs, recordings of rehearsals, discussions, etc.

Leaving such important considerations as the relationship between text and performance to one side for a moment, the investigation of Greek tragedy necessitates a decision as to which performances and/or plays should be considered adaptations, which translations, appropriations, or (sub)versions. Are all performances of classic Greek plays adaptations, or

⁵ Kneehigh is a theatre company based in Cornwall, UK, and adaptation is central to their artistic vision. See www.kneehigh.co.uk for further details.

⁶ Kneehigh (2005), n.p.

⁷ The Gate Theatre is a small theatre above a pub in Notting Hill, London. It has a maximum capacity of 75 seats and has a reputation for being a so-called teaching theatre, which supports new and upcoming theatre-makers. See www.gatetheatre.co.uk/about-us for further details.

only those which make considerable changes to a so-called original?⁸ And who decides what the nature of such a considerable change might be? Would textual changes stay within the domain of translation, while (re)localisation or (re)contextualising, for example, make it an adaptation? Does that mean that plays inspired by specific classic tragedies, such as Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996), are seen as adaptations even though their source may be manifold (Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Seneca's *Phaedra*, and Racine's *Phèdre*)? Is Kane's *Phaedra's Love* an original play, Power's *Medea* (2014), produced at the National Theatre of London, an adaptation, and Kaité O'Reilly's *The Persians* (2010), commissioned by the National Theatre of Wales, a translation, because they are presented as such in the accompanying programme notes, reviews, etc.? Or is the fact that Kane, Power, and O'Reilly had no knowledge of ancient Greek, and thus no access to the original text of Euripides' and Aeschylus' plays, the decisive factor in such a classification? Do we follow Gideon Toury's seminal definition of translation as 'any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture'⁹ and apply this to adaptation? Or does the classification of a text or rather performance as adaptation, translation, or original depend on our knowledge of the writers' linguistic abilities? One might, of course, call O'Reilly's *Persians* a so-called 'free translation' based on existing translations rather than on the ancient Greek source, but it is questionable to what extent this is at all helpful or even meaningful in relation to the theatrical event that was the performance of O'Reilly's *Persians*.¹⁰

As we can see here and as argued elsewhere,¹¹ the distinction between adaptation, translation, appropriation, version, and even original, is a complicated one. And while Walton offers a tentative series of seven different categories ranging from literal to faithful and actable, and from adapted to original play,¹² such categorisation is very often, if not always, an enunciation made through various kinds of reception following the process of (re)writing rather than preceding it, and one in which the position and expertise of the audience are key. In other words, the nomenclature depends not so much on the specific act of (re)writing but

⁸ While there may be very few performances of classic Greek plays in their original language, it is the possibility of it that needs to be acknowledged as part of an unpicking of the relationship between translation and adaptation, and text and performance.

⁹ Toury (1985), 20.

¹⁰ See Krebs (2012) for a more detailed discussion of O'Reilly's *The Persians* in a production directed by Mike Pearson for the National Theatre of Wales.

¹¹ Krebs (2014, 2012). ¹² Walton (2006), 182–3.

on the specific position of (re)reading. As Hardwick argues, 'Different constituencies of readers and spectators stand in different relationships to what has gone before, textually, theatrically, culturally and in terms of the unexpected that strikes as they watch, listen and read.'¹³ Hardwick's position responds to Toury's: it is the position the text has been assigned by its own receiving culture that is the decisive factor in the nomenclature of a text as either translation, adaptation, appropriation, version, or original. Such classifications are not an inherent characteristic of a text, inscribed into it during its specific kind of creation; rather, they are attached to a text and/or performance once it has been received. And some of the various positions of (re)reading, which Hardwick alludes to, are made visible by theatre reviews.

This is not merely to transfer the problem of classification from the level of authorial intention to that of audience reception. As we shall see in detail below, reception (and the concomitant classification of a performance as 'version', 'translation', 'adaptation', etc.) is more amenable to analysis than authorial intention insofar as one can identify some of the parameters that influence and shape it.

***Medea*: (Re)Writing as Translation**

Ben Power's *Medea* was produced at the National Theatre, London, in 2014, starring Helen McCrory as Medea and Danny Sapani as Jason. Art-pop duo Will Gregory and Alison Goldfrapp wrote the music, and the production was directed by Carrie Cracknell, who had previously won critical acclaim for her 2013 Young Vic production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The production, and Helen McCrory's performance in particular, were reviewed mostly positively by all major theatre reviewers in the UK, both in print and online, and the production was also screened as part of the NT Live programme in cinemas across the UK and forty or so other countries.¹⁴

In theatre reviews, Power's *Medea* is variously classified as a translation, a version, or (re)writing, and value judgements are made in relation to the terms employed. Charles Spencer, theatre critic of the conservative broadsheet the *Telegraph*, celebrates this particular *Medea* as a translation and offers a theatrical frame of reference by locating it alongside Cracknell's

¹³ Hardwick (2013a), 338.

¹⁴ See <http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/venues> for a list of all countries and venues which screened *Medea*.

previous production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and implicitly comparing Medea to Nora: 'The director, Carrie Cracknell, is clearly fascinated by women at the end of their rope. Few who saw it will forget her stunning production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, in which the heroine, Nora, walks out on her patronising husband and children in order to discover her own identity.'¹⁵ Spencer's frame of reference is, in this case, not *Medea's* own production history or indeed textual history; instead, it is the director's earlier production of an Ibsen play, itself with its own production history. And while the performance context of *Medea* is given priority over a discussion of the relationship between dramatic source and theatrical practice, Spencer clearly identifies the play as a translation rather than as an adaptation, version, or even appropriation: 'Ben Power's translation has a stark eloquence without an ounce of fat on it.'¹⁶ Spencer's formulation may suggest that Power's translation works well as a piece of translated literature in its own right: he implies that it is svelte, eloquent, and free of the usual redundancy and stiltedness that characterise many translations. But his phrasing may also be taken, at least by some readers, to imply that, normally, translation 'adds fat' to its source, or rather layers of surplus flab that result in corpulent, unwieldy (re)writings, to stay with Spencer's metaphor. Potential members of theatre audiences who form this newspaper's readership are on the whole, arguably, concerned with conservative cultural values and notions of authenticity, as well as the safeguarding of an accepted Western dramatic canon to which classic Greek drama belongs. Thus, they may be more comfortable celebrating a faithful translation – the review of the production is on the whole very positive – of a Euripidean tragedy than what could be described as a free adaptation or indeed version. The translation label brings with it a certification of authenticity in terms of the production and a certification of cultural expertise in relation to its spectators.

That is not to say that the decision to label a text a translation, or for that matter an adaptation or version, is one that is universally applied. With regard to Greek drama, Tony Harrison may be one example: his translation of Aeschylus' trilogy *The Oresteia* (1981) is presented as a *version* rather than a translation in its published format. Used for the National Theatre's production of *The Oresteia* (1981), which was directed by Peter Hall and screened two years later on the then relatively young Channel 4, Harrison's *The Oresteia* has also been regarded a translation, as

¹⁵ Spencer (2014). ¹⁶ Spencer (2014).

well as an adaptation.¹⁷ In this instance then, the same text has been assigned three different classifications – version, translation, adaptation – depending on its context of reception, i.e. reader, theatre audience, and film audience. Such a change in nomenclature could point to a downgrading process from the more faithful relationship with the text, as exemplified by a translation, to a perceived betrayal represented by a version or adaptation. Yet, it might also indicate an acknowledgement of creative agency: Tony Harrison, the well-known poet, is no longer ‘merely’ a translator of the text but instead an authorial figure, and the published text of *The Oresteia* is inextricably linked to its production by the National Theatre. Labelling it a ‘version’ may also be another iteration of Emma Rice’s position: that the text is just one layer of many and cannot necessarily be seen as independent from its theatre production (see Kneehigh 2005).

***Medea*: (Re)Writing as Version**

A similar shift in emphasis, from translation to adaptation or even version, is apparent in reviews of Power’s *Medea*. While the *Telegraph* identifies *Medea* as a translation, Catherine Love, writing for the review section of the website *What’s on Stage*, settles for ‘version’. At the same time, she credits Power with the creative agency reserved for a playwright rather than adaptor or indeed translator.

In his version of Euripides’ tragedy, which he [Power] describes as ‘the ultimate divorce play’, Power hopes to explore ‘how this story . . . can actually be a story about families and marriages’. Blending the classic and contemporary, he is also interested in how the play can ‘explode out of something quite located and recognisable into something timeless and epic.’ (Love 2014)

Describing *Medea* as ‘the ultimate divorce play’, the reviewer’s frame of reference, similarly to Spencer’s review above, is one of psychological realism as well as popular culture with its allusion to soap-opera story lines and one-dimensional dramatic narratives. Both are presented here as perfectly appropriate means to blend, if not replace, the classic with the contemporary. There seems to be an underlying suggestion that without adaptation, the classic play is stuck in its remote temporal location, unrecognisable and out of touch, its very canonicity doubtful. The attitude displayed in this particular context is far removed from what Christopher Balme terms the ‘idealizations of Greek theatre as an ideal-typical public

¹⁷ Translation: Cavendish (2013); adaptation: www.imdb.com/title/tt5524714/?ref_=nv_sr_2.

sphere';¹⁸ instead, we witness a celebration of a theatre which is concerned with an un-politicised private sphere. As Balme observes, 'The darkened auditorium has become to all intents and purposes a private space.'¹⁹ The journalistic context of Love's review is one that celebrates the individual. An online magazine focused on UK theatre in general and London theatre in particular, *What's on Stage* contains a 'News and Reviews' section in which reviews are presented alongside a collection of 'This Week's Top Stories' revolving around well-known individuals within the London theatre scene.²⁰ The important thing here is not canonicity so much as creative agency and individual talent as agents of cultural worth; what matters most in assessing an adaptation is not so much its relation to its Greek source as its display of personal truths in a postmodern sense.²¹ In other words, it is not necessarily the plays that are of primary interest here, but the individuals involved in the productions. Celebrated as 'making London's National more exciting',²² Ben Power's reading of *Medea* is, arguably, of more interest to the readers of *What's on Stage* than of Euripides, and the classification of *Medea* as a version, written by Power, needs to be seen in this context of reception rather than as an assessment of this version's relationship to its ancient Greek source.

***Medea*: (Re)Writing as Mistranslation**

The most detailed discussion as to whether we are to view the Ben Power production as a performance of a translation, an adaptation, or a variation on a theme can be found in the *Times Literary Supplement*. While *What's on Stage* may focus on notions of celebrity, the *TLS* defines itself, according to its tag line, as the 'leading international weekly for literary culture'. Its emphasis on literary culture is apparent in its theatre reviews, and of the various particular constituencies of readers and spectators, to employ Hardwick's terminology,²³ the *TLS* is most likely to address the position of the literary expert and, in this context, that of the classicist. Here is an excerpt from Mary Beard's *TLS* review of Power's production.

Impressive, certainly – but is it Euripides? With all due honesty, Ben Power's script is billed as a 'new version' of the play, not as a 'translation'.

¹⁸ Balme (2014), 29. ¹⁹ Balme (2014), 3.

²⁰ Alongside reviews of current productions, the reader is presented with an array of links to items and stories related mainly to individual performers and artistic directors.

²¹ For further considerations on how individual talent ultimately determines the ethics of adaptation/directing, see Sidiropoulou, Chapter 4, this volume.

²² Costa (2013). ²³ Hardwick (2013a), 338.

Though parts of it are recognizably based on Euripides' words, much of it is hard to match with anything in the original Greek. There is, of course, a long and honourable history – going back to antiquity itself – of such 'variations on the theme' of an ancient text. But the questions always are: what violence has been done to the original, was it worth it, and what has been lost? In this case, there are awkward tensions between Euripides and Power; occasionally the original text seems more of a victim of his rewriting than a willing collaborator in it. (Beard 2014)

Written by a professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge, this review emphasises the relationship between 'original text' and Power's (re) writing, and while issues of staging and performance are mentioned, they are seen as witnesses to the relationship between two literary texts – Euripides' and Power's *Medeas* respectively – rather than in terms of theatrical performance. The National Theatre's production of *Medea* is discussed not so much in terms of its theatrical context as in terms of aligning staging and performance with textual knowledge and comparison to the source:

By far the most radical change that Powers has introduced is in the very last scene of the play. In this production Medea walks off dragging the bodies of her children. It makes for a haunting and terrifying few minutes, with McCrory at her finest. But it bears no resemblance whatsoever to the climax of Euripides' original ... (Beard 2014)

While, of course, Carrie Cracknell, the director, is complicit in the creation of this specific ending, it is discussed here as an authorial rather than collaborative choice, a textual rather than theatrical one, and creative agency is ascribed to Power, the writer, rather than Cracknell, the director, or indeed to the creative team as a whole. In this case then, it is not the director, nor the performers, nor the hosting venue that is of primary importance but the text itself. While Spencer praises Power's eloquent translation, and Love celebrates the individual artist, Beard labels the production as a 'very constructive re-working of the text (or, less charitably ... wilful mistranslation)'.

Phaedra: (Re)Writing as Radical Updating

What these examples demonstrate is that the classification of a play as adaptation, translation, version, or any other related modality is first and foremost a culturally specific act of reception. While the act of (re)writing asserts the validity of an established dramatic text and promises a sometimes radical reinvestigation of its premises, as is certainly the case with

Kane's *Phaedra's Love* and to a lesser extent with Power's *Medea*, it is the act of reception and the relationship the audience has 'to what has gone before, textually, theatrically, culturally'²⁴ that is the deciding factor in terms of the classification of (re)writing as adaptation, translation, or so-called original. The act of reception is, of course, not confined to the general public as theatre audiences but it includes theatre-makers, reviewers, publishers, and the like, all of whom play their part in the nomenclature of (re)writing. And while it may be the relationship to what has gone before that is crucial, it is also the framework within which these classifications are made that is of importance: a publisher of the dramatic text will assign a classification for reasons to do with marketing and the business of selling books; a reviewer of a production will assign a classification in terms of their own ideological positioning and in relation to their assumed readership; a writer and theatre-maker will assign a classification in relation to their artistic and dramaturgical position; an expert may assign a classification in terms of their own understanding of the source; and so on. While we may want to be able to define adaptation and related modalities in an absolute manner, these categories will always be relative to their context of reception.

In Sarah Kane's case 'what has gone before', to use again Hardwick's formulation, includes not only Racine, Seneca, and Euripides, but also her other authored plays as well as her own figure as a tragic *enfant terrible* of 1990s British theatre. The contemporary spectator first and foremost sees *Phaedra's Love* in the context of *Blasted*, *Cleansed*, *4.48 Psychosis*, and possibly Kane's rise to Royal Court fame, and related tabloid outrage.

"I [Sarah Kane] think a lot of people won't see beyond the fact that there was a lot of nasty stuff in *Blasted* and there's even more in this." I [David Benedict] point out that this time, the suicide, lust, hatred and murder are in the original. "Yeah," she agrees grinning, "it's not a tea party. Blame it on the Greeks." (Benedict 1996)

As her 'Blame it on the Greeks' demonstrates, Kane clearly sees her play as an adaptation. Yet, in terms of Walton's classification, Kane's play is an original work inspired by specific classical tragedies – in this case, by Racine's *Phèdre*, which was inspired by Seneca's *Phaedra*, which in turn was a (re)writing of Euripides' *Hippolytus*.²⁵ To a large extent, Kane's *Phaedra* is a 'mythical appropriation' as a 'means for contemporary authors

²⁴ Hardwick (2013a), 338.

²⁵ The chain of (re)writings doesn't end there, as Euripides' *Hippolytus* itself is a (re)writing of his earlier, now lost, *Hippolytos Kalyptomēnos* as well as of the Hippolytus myth.

to carry out self-conscious investigations into the artistic process'.²⁶ The reception of the play tends to relate it first and foremost to Kane's *oeuvre* rather than assess it in terms of its palimpsestic relationship with the Greek, Roman, and/or French versions of the same myth. When the Greek, Roman, and/or French versions are mentioned, it is in order to celebrate Kane's apparent superiority to classic playwrights. Lyn Gardner, for example, writing for the *Guardian*, claims that the 'Greeks offer nothing quite so mercilessly tragic, quite so mercilessly honest'²⁷ as Kane does, while Aleks Sierz, known for coining the phrase 'In-Yer-Face Theatre' during the early 1990s, states:

the play is a radical updating of Seneca's *Phaedra* play. Kane's version is not a translation, but a completely new version . . . Now, of course, what strikes me more is the pared-down crispness of much of her writing, and the subversiveness of her attitude to ancient Greek tragedy: instead of keeping the wildness off stage, she brings it on stage right in front of our eyes. (Sierz 2011)

Such celebration of (re)writing, (re)imagining, updating, or whatever terminology is employed in order to foreground artistic agency, is not necessarily a modern phenomenon, as similar creative strategies were also employed by the Greek playwrights. As Hardwick argues, Greek playwrights themselves were 'playing with and adapting stories', and their adaptive dramaturgical choices brought together 'the mythical and the contemporary'. The specifics of such bringing together, according to Hardwick, trigger 'the ways in which the spectators related the theatrical occasion to their own sense of . . . identity'.²⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood discusses this coming together of the mythical and the contemporary as being achieved by the employment of zooming and distancing devices found in Greek tragedy. She argues that

the double perspective in the relationship between the world of the audience and the world of the play . . . was clearly fundamental in allowing tragedy both to explore problems and issues at a distance, and to relate them directly to the audiences' experiences, with the distances manipulated through distancing and zooming devices. (Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 23)

And just as Sophocles melds together the mythical and the contemporary, or, in Sourvinou-Inwood's words, employs distancing and zooming devices, arguably so do Kane and Power respectively, whether *Medea* is turned into a divorce play or *Phaedra's Love* becomes a critique of the royal

²⁶ Sanders (2006), 65.

²⁷ Gardner (2005).

²⁸ Hardwick (2013a), 327.

family: ‘With hindsight – and the death of [Princess] Diana – it [i.e. *Phaedra’s Love*] seems starkly satirical and strangely prescient about our own dysfunctional royal family.’²⁹

Iphigenia: Collaborative (Re)Writing

Another example which elucidates the difficulty of establishing boundaries between original writing and adaptation is the Gate Theatre’s *Iphigenia Quartet* (2016). As discussed above, the genesis of the *Iphigenia Quartet* problematises notions of singular authorship and illustrates the collaborative nature of contemporary theatre-writing as well as theatre-making. Furthermore, its presentation and reception make a classification of the text as either original writing, adaptation, or any other related modality very difficult indeed. The production of the *Quartet* was accompanied by a print version of all four plays: *Agamemnon*, *Iphigenia*, *Clytemnestra*, and *Chorus*. A single author was also attributed to each play: Caroline Bird is credited for *Agamemnon*, Suhayla El-Bushra for *Iphigenia*, Lulu Raczka for *Clytemnestra*, and Chris Thorpe for *Chorus*. As became clear during a podium discussion³⁰ which accompanied the production of the *Quartet* in 2016, the playwrights themselves did not necessarily pay much attention to the difference between authorship, adaptation, or indeed translation during their creative processes. Yet the reviews of the productions emphasise the adaptive nature of all four plays and by extension of the *Iphigenia Quartet* as a whole. Tim Bano, writing for *The Stage*, identifies all four plays as ‘adaptations’ in his review of the productions at the Gate Theatre, and Claire Allfree of the *Telegraph* labels the *Quartet* a ‘re-telling’ and ‘re-imagination’ of Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*.³¹ The *Guardian* settles for ‘response’ and ‘retelling’, while the *Times* prefers ‘reinvention’.³² The theatre itself may have decided upon a nomenclature which protects Bird’s, El-Bushra’s, Raczka’s, and Thorpe’s position vis-à-vis copyright, artistic agency, and ownership by identifying all four as authors in the published text, yet the reviews decided to view all four as (re)writers, if not adaptors, rather than as authors.

The act of (re)writing asserts the validity of an established dramatic text; it confirms that a text belongs to the category of classic drama. At the same time, it promises an often radical (re)investigation of its premises. In a

²⁹ Gardner (2005). ³⁰ See Brodie and Cole (2018).

³¹ See, respectively, Bano (2016); Allfree (2016).

³² See, respectively, Gardner (2016); Maxwell (2016).

number of these cases we witness a rather radical shift from Greek theatre to our contemporary preoccupation with psychology and naturalism, or what Laera identifies as ‘the bizarre but very popular adaptation strategy that attempts to humanize what is ultimately a set of mythological (not psychological) characters’.³³ The zooming devices identified by Sourvinou-Inwood as being (together with distancing ones) central to Greek tragedies become the overriding technique in contemporary (re)writes, versions, or indeed adaptations. This is echoed by Caroline Bird’s description of her process of (re)writing as ‘zooming in on mainly what I thought about Agamemnon and his experience’.³⁴ Relating an adaptation to the present and to contemporary audiences’ concerns through a focus on characters as individual human beings becomes the dominant mode of contemporary adaptations of Greek drama.³⁵ ‘[T]he double perspective in the relationship between the world of the audience and the world of the play’, which Sourvinou-Inwood argues ‘was very important in Greek tragedy’,³⁶ takes a back seat in favour of the single perspective of the psychological character. This shift, then, provides us with an insight into contemporary concerns rather than into the Greek sources. It is not an indication of misunderstanding or disrespecting the source, but instead it is symptomatic of a current malaise of, and preoccupation with, the individual self. Adaptation and related modalities, then, become an important witness to cultural shifts and allow us to identify contemporaneous affairs and anxieties, rather than necessarily elucidate their source.

Thus, the distinction between so-called original, adaptation, and related activities or modalities such as translation, appropriation, and so forth, is not down to an a priori difference between these modes of (re)writing; the positing of such boundaries is necessarily embodied, in different ways, by the text and/or the performance itself. Importantly, they are enacted also by the expert witness, the creative agents of the process, and crucially by spectators. Of course, this does not mean we must give up trying to classify (re)writings we encounter or indeed give up trying to define the boundaries between adaptation, appropriation, version, etc. But we need to recognise that such attempts to position boundaries may say more about our own context of reception than about the examples of (re)writing under discussion. In other words, we as spectators in the shape of reviewers,

³³ Laera (2015). ³⁴ Plastow (2018).

³⁵ This can often lead to overly psychologising mythical (i.e. bigger than ourselves) figures. For more on this, see Sidiropoulou, Chapter 4, this volume.

³⁶ Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 23–4.

theatre practitioners, expert witnesses, and so forth, enact the boundaries between these categories. And such an enactment of boundaries depends very much on the specific access a spectator has to the 'dialectical relation'³⁷ between source and adaptation: a spectator with knowledge of the source will enter the dialectical relationship at a different point from a spectator who has no knowledge of the source. The expert witness may very well have a different perspective and entry point from other members of the audience as well as the creative agents. As such, local concepts of adaptation may vary according to the ideological and cultural positioning of the numerous cultural agents involved. While this is not meant to lead to a devaluing of the position of the expert, it may help to explain the popularity of adaptation: adaptation exists in the eye of all spectators, creative agents, and expert witnesses, and is thus a democratic process of shared ownership.

This applies to all adaptations and is not specific to the canon of classic Greek drama. Also, there are numerous kinds of access to the dialectical relation between source and adaptation which Bruhn, as we saw, talks about. Julie Sanders argues that if 'assessing the similarities and differences between texts, ... which we have elsewhere argued is fundamental to the ... experience of adaptation, is to be possible it requires prior knowledge of the text(s) being assimilated ... by the adaptive process'.³⁸ Yet, the knowledge of the text(s) can be multifarious and, especially in the case of canonical works such as those under discussion in this volume, can relate entirely to 'a generally circulated cultural memory',³⁹ to other (re)writings of the same source text, and only sometimes, because of the specialist knowledge necessary, to what we regard as the source. In my case, my knowledge of the source texts is limited to their contemporary theatrical (re)presentations; I have no access to the original texts but relate to the various examples as part of a specific theatrical memory as well as 'a generally circulated cultural memory'.⁴⁰ As Linda Hutcheon observes, 'If the adapted work is a canonical one, we may not actually have direct

³⁷ Bruhn (2013), 86.

³⁸ Sanders (2006), 65; cf. Sanders (2016), 152: 'The pleasure of assessing the similarities and differences between texts, and of judging the levels of conformity and dissent in their approaches, requires prior knowledge of the work(s) being assimilated, absorbed, reworked and refashioned.'

³⁹ Ellis (1982), 3, as cited in Hutcheon (2006), 122.

⁴⁰ This lack of access to the original is very much specific to my own position as a theatre historian and adaptation scholar without a classicist background. It echoes my reluctance to discuss dramatic adaptations alongside theatrical ones as, arguably, the comparative element necessary for such textual analysis demands a textual expertise with regard to the source which I don't have.

experience of it . . . we tend to experience the adaptation through the lenses of the adapted work, as a kind of palimpsest'.⁴¹

The Persians: Faithful (Re)Writing

In some cases, it is not only the spectator who experiences the adapted work as a kind of palimpsest. In the programme notes accompanying the National Theatre of Wales' production of *The Persians*, directed in 2010 by Mike Pearson, Kaite O'Reilly, credited with (re)writing this version of Aeschylus' play, is at pains to establish her trustworthiness as translator despite not having knowledge of ancient Greek: 'Although I'm not a linguist and therefore unable to read the text in Ancient Greek, through my close reading of 23 translations, made across three centuries, I like to think I have caught a sense of the bass line.'⁴²

In this case, then, O'Reilly's version of *The Persians* is in itself an act and product of reception, where the experience of multilayered palimpsests is at the heart of the creative process that is the (re)writing of a canonical text. She distances herself from the process of adaptation and instead authenticates her creative process by employing terminology which implies that her translation in general, and her (re)writing in particular, are trustworthy: 'I chose not to reinvent. I chose to be as faithful, as far as I could perceive it, to that "initial" voice and trust that the extraordinary location in which the performance takes place would create a context with more resonance than anything I could ever fabricate.'⁴³

O'Reilly's description of her process demonstrates the agency of the translator/adaptor: faithfulness becomes a choice rather than a compulsion, impulse, or even necessity. It also demonstrates the intricate relationship between (re)writing and the performance itself. Text and performance are not autonomous elements of production, and they are not in a hierarchical or temporal relationship to each other: rather, they are symbiotic. Just as source and adaptation are in a symbiotic relationship, as each of them exists in terms of the other, so are text and performance. And while an emphasis on text rather than performance, as apparent, for example, in the *Times Literary Supplement* review of *Medea*, may be able to prioritise text over elements of the production, such elements of production are of the

⁴¹ Hutcheon (2006), 122. ⁴² O'Reilly (2010), n. p.

⁴³ O'Reilly (2010), n. p. The 'extraordinary location' O'Reilly refers to here is the site in the Welsh Brecon Beacons in which the performance took place. Normally not accessible to the public, the site consists of a mock German village which was constructed at the height of the Cold War and is still used as a training site for battlefield scenarios by the British Military.

utmost consequence in the context of *The Persians*. Performed as a National Theatre of Wales production on a military training site in the Brecon Beacons, a mountain range and National Park in South Wales, O'Reilly's *The Persians* is not discussed or reviewed as a text separate from the performance, or from its location for that matter, but always as part of it; so much so that the (re)writing itself – be it translation or adaptation – is considered as intrinsically and unequivocally linked to the performance. And while Power is very much assigned an authorial position in most reviews of *Medea*, and the text exists independently from the production, O'Reilly's *The Persians* is discussed and acknowledged by herself as a playtext independent from the performance only when discussing her own process of (re)writing in the programme notes accompanying the production.

Just like *Medea* and *Phaedra's Love*, this production of *The Persians* is witness to the complexities of the relationship between adaptation, related modalities, and performance. Yet where does that leave our understanding of adaptation in terms of contemporary revisions of the classic Greek play? Is any given adaptation of Greek drama simply a variation on a theme, an inevitable violence done against its source text, whereby the source becomes the victim of the adapted text, which is perceived as a flabby layer around a lean core, or a radical, timeless (re)imagining, essential to the canonicity of the Greek play, as some of the reviews cited above indicate? What happens to our understanding of classic Greek tragedy if we embrace the notion of the fluid text, the reciprocal relationship between source and adaptation, text and performance? Regina Schober alerts us to the 'multiple contextual entanglements of adaptations',⁴⁴ and adaptations of classic Greek plays in performance seem to proliferate such entanglements exponentially. As we have seen above, each review and assessment of the adaptations under discussion here are governed by these contextual entanglements, whether these are the contextual engagement with Sarah Kane's other plays, or the context of the populist assessment of West End stars in *What's on Stage's* review of Ben Power's *Medea*. Such contextual entanglements do not stop here, of course, but go further and include the performance as well as translation and adaptation histories, the context of venue, spectators, as well as the theatre-makers and (re)writers themselves, and so forth. The current volume may indeed unravel some of these contexts but also, in its own way, contribute to the entanglement.

⁴⁴ Schober (2013), 110.

Conclusion: (Re)Connecting Adaptation and Its Related Modalities

As we have seen in this chapter, we talk about adaptation as translation, version, and mistranslation, and can consider the adaptive process as one of radical updating, collaborative (re)writing, or faithful adaptation. And while this is not an exclusive list of the modalities of adaptation, what becomes clear is that there is no presumptive and inferred notion of adaptation common to all. Instead, what all these (re)writings have in common is the fluidity and variability of notions of adaptation, translation, version, etc. A similar variability and fluidity also governs the reception process. The examples discussed above bear witness to adaptation 'as a process of forming connections'⁴⁵, which may be seen as acts of violence, or of radical updating, or anything in-between or beyond.⁴⁶ Importantly, however, all such forming of connections needs to be understood as enacted by the spectator, at the point of reception, as much as (if not more so than) by the adaptor/translator/(re)writer. Thus, the connections are anything but stable entities fixed in time and place. As a result, *Medea*, *Iphigenia*, or *The Persians* can no longer be understood as singular literary entities but, instead, they become ever-shifting, unstable, dialogic events. Just as Power's *Medea* drags the bodies of her children in full view of an audience, and is thus physically and metaphorically forever linked to the event of their deaths as well as to the existence of their bodies, adaptations, translations, versions, and all modes of (re)writing are forever linked to their sources; they are witnesses to, as much as modifiers of, their sources and in turn responsible for their death as well as their eternal existence.

Arguably, such a reciprocal relationship as the one that Schober identifies is already inherent in all text-based theatre, where the production history of a play is in a dynamic relationship with a contemporary production as well as with our current understanding of the play as written text. Adaptation, then, is a necessarily dramaturgical act, which is not better for not having an 'ounce of fat on it', *pace* Spencer (2014). On the contrary, adaptation is itself flabby as well as adding flab to its source. It stands in a messy, multifarious, collaborative and, importantly, reciprocal relationship with the source play. In other words, the source does not imply one single performance or reading; the source exists and is envisaged as a constellation of infinite adaptations, or rather (re)writings, which cross-pollinate each other like the palimpsest Hutcheon evokes (2006).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Schober (2013), 91. ⁴⁶ Violence: Beard (2014); updating: Sierz (2011).

⁴⁷ See also Sidiropoulou, this volume.

Arguably, the agenda of adaptation and related modalities is ‘to reposition the originating text in a new cultural context’.⁴⁸ Yet, the originating text is not necessarily a singular, textual entity, but in itself a plurality of texts and, in the case of Greek tragedy, a plurality of performances. And if this does not lead us to a straightforward and self-sufficient analysis of the process, product, and reception that is adaptation, or indeed to an a priori categorisation of the difference between adaptation, version, and (re)writing, blame it on the Greeks, as they started it by ‘playing with and adapting stories’.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bryant (2013), 54. ⁴⁹ Hardwick (2013a), 327.