

BOOK REVIEW

Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus. Brill's Companions to Classical Reception 11. Edited by REBECCA FUTO KENNEDY. Leiden NL, Boston, MA: Brill, 2017. Pp. xix, 634. \$222.00. E-Book ISBN: 978-90-04-34882-0. Hardback ISBN: 978-90-04-24932-5.

This valuable contribution to the burgeoning library on the receptions of Greek literature is the second Brill collection on the afterlife of Aeschylus, providing both a useful adjunct to that book¹ and an interesting take on the current state of reception studies in the English-speaking world (where all but four of its twenty-eight contributors teach). Its range is vast. The first third of the book is (laudably) devoted to pre-modern receptions; modern receptions include survey chapters on Aeschylus in Germany, Latin America and South Africa as well as in opera, but the bulk of the volume is dedicated to specific receptions of individual works in a great variety of media: novels (including speculative fiction), theater, film, television and contemporary political thought in America.

Thinking about what is missing in this plenitude, one might note that textual matters are largely limited to comments about the work of Byzantine scholars in a chapter on "Aeschylus in Byzantium" (Christos Simelidis). A traditional reception subject, the reappearance in Western Europe and subsequent editing and emending of a notoriously troubled text, is absent. And although the editor promises discussion of translation, there is very little that directly engages that important subject (the exception being Jacques Bromberg's treatment of the importance of early translations to the diffusion of Aeschylus in Latin America). Constantinidis's book provides useful supplements in these areas.

Although I am not able to comment in depth on the twenty-five chapters of this volume, I hope my response will give a sense of the scope and quality of the whole.

The "Pre-Modern Receptions" chapters are all useful and accomplished. The first chapter (by David G. Smith) rightly treats "Aeschylus in Sicily" as a "matter for and of reception" and goes through the ancient evidence with scrupulous care and

¹ Stratos E. Constantinidis, ed. *The Reception of Aeschylus' Plays through Shifting Models and Frontiers* (*Metaforms* Vol. 7) Leiden/Boston: Brill 2016.

openness to both maximal and minimal readings of its probative value for Aeschylus's presence on the island. "The Comedians' Aeschylus" (David Rosenbloom) uses the contrast of Aeschylus's *δεξιότης* and Euripides *σοφία* in *Frogs* to point up an essential difference between the two tragedians, and makes a strong case in support of the play's preference for Aeschylus. Dana LaCourse Munteanu writes about Aristotle's reception of Aeschylus and Sebastiana Nervegna on Aeschylus in the Hellenistic period, including early Roman tragedy. The chapter on "Aeschylus in the Roman Empire" (George W.M. Harrison) is a full and admirable treatment of Aeschylus's reputation in Roman times, credibly establishing that Plutarch and Athenaeus had access to play-texts and pointing out among much else that Aeschylus's high reputation as a writer of satyr drama is confirmed by his heavy presence in quotations and papyrus fragments.

Turning to "Modern Receptions," what I have called the survey chapters contain much valuable information. Ambitious and exemplary is Jacques A. Bromberg's essay on Aeschylus in Latin America, which gives an overview of influential translations and the many adaptations of Aeschylus's dramas throughout the region. "Aeschylus in Germany," as one would expect from its author (Theodore Ziolkowski), is comprehensive, tracing the relatively late arrival of Aeschylus as a major influence to the *Sturm und Drang* period of the late 18th century, and tracing his rise through the 19th century to the present day. Michael Ewens' survey of Aeschylus in opera is less comprehensive. Adaptation of Aeschylean drama for the operatic stage begins a century later than those of Euripides, a favorite from the mid-17th century. Ewens's discussion of specific works begins with Metastasio's repeatedly set 1744 libretto *Ipermestra*, based on the (lost) final tragedy of Aeschylus *Danaid* tetralogy. Salieri's quite remarkable *Les Danaïdes* gets detailed treatment as do Taneyev's *Oresteia* and the Fauré and Orff Prometheus operas. Unfortunately, he mentions Milhaud only in a footnote, citing his *Choéphores*, but not making clear that the composer also made settings of the other plays in the trilogy.

The centerpiece is not surprisingly Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, whose connections to the *Oresteia* has been often explored, including by Ewens himself in a 1982 book on the subject. Wagner's tetralogy is also the central subject of Richard Seaford's more searching and original treatment of the thematics of money in the *Ring*, in effect reviving and usefully extending George Bernard Shaw's pioneering work. Ziolkowski offers a reminder of Wagner's dependence on Droysen's translation and its notes for his understanding of Aeschylus.

Almost all the other essays in this volume deal with the reception and adaptation of individual works in particular contexts. Even Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.'s chapter,

entitled "The Reception of Plays of Aeschylus in South Africa," deals almost exclusively with the *Oresteia*. The other chapter featuring Africa (by Tom Hawkins) focuses on two works: the Italian Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Appunti per un'Orestide Africana* and Abderrehamane Sissako's *Bamako*. The importance of the *Oresteia* for Pasolini's project requires no argument, but the case of *Bamako* is different and involves a problem that occurs elsewhere in this volume: going in, the author is compelled to note that "the reception of Aeschylus may be a matter of my understanding of the film" rather than direct evidence of "any reliance on Aeschylus." These two films nevertheless make for a fruitful contrast between two responses to the possible course of post-colonial Africa. Hawkins shows the Eurocentric mentality behind Pasolini's optimistic recasting of the *Oresteia* as a simple transformation of barbarity into civilization. *Bamako*, whether influenced by Aeschylus or not, makes for an interesting comparison, particularly, *per negationem*, through its trial scene.²

A few of the works treated in the remaining chapters are familiar and would be expected, e.g., the two Shelleys, (Fabien Dresser on P.B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Ana G.-R. Fernández on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*—but in that instance Marianne McDonald, after a good account of the psychological, and even autobiographical, dimensions of that trilogy, surprises us with a more original and very interesting analysis of the Oresteian thematics of *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done* (2009), a film by Werner Herzog with a screenplay by the classicist Herbert Golder.

Another surprise is Gerda Van Steen's "Inglorious Barbarians," an essay on an 1807 adaptation of *Persians* by Stephanos (or Epiphanius) Demetriades, which has largely been ignored or misrepresented, and which she reveals as a complex adaptation of Aeschylus with elements from Herodotus and Plutarch in the service of resurgent Greek self-consciousness buttressed by orientalist discourse. The only chapter to deal in detail with the staging of a particular dramatic adaptation is Patrick J. Murphy and Fredrick Porcheddu's "Eumenides and Newmenides," an intriguing and amusing account of the 1906 Cambridge Greek Play *Eumenides* and two parodies it spawned in the hothouse environment of Cambridge colleges, taking on, however, not only curricular politics but also politics in the larger world (women's suffrage).

² There is an unfortunate mistranslation in this chapter that might lead to confusion: on p. 461 "prime elezioni" twice appears as "first lessons," but the phrase means "first elections."

Stratos E. Constantinidis' "The Broadhead Hypothesis" deals at last with a textual/editorial issue and with translation, although from a strictly limited perspective. He concludes that verbal repetitions in *Persians* do not constitute, as writers from Aristophanes to H. D. Broadhead in his 1960 edition asserted, a weakness, but are intentional and effective, and that translators have reduced them unnecessarily: the results of a survey taken at staged readings of a translation honoring every Greek repetition revealed that for their American audiences, at least, repetition posed little or no difficulty or displeasure.

A pair of chapters discusses (perhaps surprisingly, at least from an American perspective) Aeschylus on television. Amanda Wrigley gives us an engaging account of the presence of the *Oresteia* on British TV: in 1961, as part of an eight-part series (*The Angry Gods*) for school pupils aged thirteen and up; in 1979, a television adaptation of the Raphael-McLeish translation (*The Serpent Son*) with a notable cast and even more notable sets and costumes, which reminded people of science fiction more than ancient Mycenae; and in 1983, a televised version of the famous National Theatre production directed by Peter Hall. Gabriel Sevilla writes compellingly of the conjunction of the political and theatrical dimensions interwoven in an "opera-oratorio" version of *Persians* by Jen Prat and Jean Prodromides, broadcast in 1961 on all national radio stations and the sole television network. De Gaulle had recently returned to power and the Algerian War was not yet over, so that the complex relations of Greeks and Persians spill over into those at least as complex between the French and the indigenous Muslim majority.

Two chapters examine the presence of Aeschylus in American film (Geoffrey Bakewell's comparative analysis of *Agamemnon* and Kubrick's *The Shining*) and speculative fiction (Brett M. Rogers on the *Oresteia* and Frank Herbert's *Dune*) offer very different methodologies. Rogers, who is more or less the godfather of the flourishing sub-field of classical receptions in science fiction and fantasy, begins by demonstrating that *Dune* has generic and thematic features that link it to the tradition of heroic fiction, involves intergenerational violence and is cast in tragic style. Only after that does he weigh the question of whether it might prove to be influenced specifically by the *Oresteia*, which he argues it does, pointing to specific linguistic features and leading ideas, e.g., names and the thematic of knowledge gained through suffering. Bakewell, on the other hand, makes the case for significant affinities, e.g., the idea of excessive wealth as a source of evil, but does not insist on direct influence of the *Oresteia* on *The Shining*. Both chapters, however,

effectively show ways in which the connections are (in Bakewell's phrase) "mutually illuminating."

Lastly, two chapters deal with Aeschylus and contemporary American political thought. Arlene Saxonhouse notes the "curious absence of Aeschylus in modern political thought" and, as if in answer, Larissa Atkinson and Ryan K. Balot contribute an essay on "Political Theory in Aeschylean Drama," which takes note of recent interdisciplinary work (including such figures as the late J. Peter Euben, Josiah Ober and Saxonhouse herself) in order to map out important trends in the theoretical use of Aeschylean ideas and suggest the ways in which these may show the role of Athens in contemporary thinking about democracy.

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