

BOOK REVIEW

Adapting Greek Tragedy: Contemporary Contexts for Ancient Texts. Edited by VAYOS LIAPIS AND AVRA SIDIROPOULOU. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 436. Hardcover, \$120.00; eBook, \$96.00. ISBN: 9781107155701.

Adapting Greek Tragedy, edited by Vayos Liapis and Avra Sidiropoulou, provides an overview of the state of adaptation studies. The essays offer excellent insights about their subjects, while the collection itself aims to give a sense of where the discipline stands, rather than making a specific critical intervention. The book's structure is basically divided between theory and practice, with the opening essays focused on debates about what constitutes adaptation and how we should understand fidelity discourse. The latter chapters examine particular authorial and/or dramaturgical approaches to adaptation, illustrating both the opportunities and challenges offered by adaptation as both process (i.e., creating adaptations) and product (i.e., the texts and performances that re-work Greek dramatic material for contemporary audiences). See the Table of Contents at the end of this review for more.

Liapis' "Prelude" provides a concise but strong historical overview of major adaptations of Greek tragedy from the time of the ancient Greeks themselves to the present. While it has a decidedly Eurocentric and US focus, the summary gives a good sense of changes and continuities in reception of Greek tragedy through different historical eras.

Part I consists of four essays on the foundations, definitions and practices of adaptation as such. Katja Krebs' chapter foregoes clear delineations between terms like *adaptation*, *appropriation*, *translation* and *version*, instead arguing that such classification "is first and foremost a culturally specific act of reception" (67). By examining how several (re)written versions were discussed by reviewers, theatre companies, authors, scholars etc., Krebs shows that the choice of how to label a specific theatrical performance depends on how the labeler is disposed toward the performance and the classical source material. In the next essay, Peter Meineck shows the problems with applying "fidelity" as a criterion for modern

adaptations of Greek drama; he points out that we have qualified access at best to the original performance forms and texts, and instead argues for adaptation as a survival mechanism for stories. Subsequently, Lorna Hardwick traces interconnections between textual translation, adaptive shifts, performance choices and critical/audience reception to show that the lines between translation and adaptation are especially blurry when staging Greek drama, drawing on several case studies to illustrate the overlaps. To close the first section, Sidiropoulou argues that adaptation is a generative dialectic; rather than an attack on a source text, it is instead a passionate love affair that generates new work(s), thereby preserving the cultural power of the adapted material.

Part II focuses on specific applications for staging and critically receiving either rewritten texts or adaptive performances. This section opens with an “Interlude,” consisting of three interviews by Sidiropoulou with internationally renowned adapters of Greek tragedy: playwright Charles Mee and directors Ivo van Hove and Suzuki Tadashi explore their dramaturgical approaches to presenting Greek drama effectively and meaningfully for modern audiences.

After the Interlude, Adam Lecznar analyzes the tension between remembering and forgetting when using performance archives. While archives provide additional details about ephemeral performances to supplement scripts, archival materials also privilege certain types of resources, often eliding things like the subjective experiences of participants. Next, drawing on Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre production of her *Antigone*, Jane Montgomery Griffiths argues that adaptive choices—often forced by necessity, rather than freely chosen by authors or directors—open spaces for challenging traditional conceptions of Greek drama. The Malthouse production couldn’t find an actor to play Creon, so the part was rewritten for Montgomery Griffiths herself to play the role, and this change divided critics along gender lines, with male critics attacking the infidelity of the choice. In the following essay, Peter A. Campbell examines the tensions within contemporary Greek tragedy productions that use audio/visual technology: tensions between ancient performance and modern technology and tensions between live theater and video as media. Next, Simon Perris argues that while Greek tragedy rarely stages violence (as opposed to narrating it or showing a tableau of bodies), adaptation regularly utilizes both violent language and violent depictions, which ultimately moves contemporary plays away from the techniques of Greek tragedy by making violence an end in itself or by normalizing it as part of everyday life. Following this, Erika Fischer-Lichte takes on the Herculean task of surveying non-Western performances and adaptations of Greek tragedy, illustrating

through a few case studies how each individual culture that adapts the Greeks does so in their own distinct style, with their own distinct purpose and to respond to their own distinct context/concerns. Taking both a theoretically and geographically narrower lens, Elke Steinmeyer then examines African and African diasporic adaptations of Greek tragedies as post-colonial examples of writing back to the imperial center to contest European cultural and literary hegemony. In the next essay, Anastasia Bakogianni examines four 21st-century productions by the National Theatre of Greece, which reflect tensions between traditional and contemporary performance approaches—tensions always inherent in adaptation, but especially so for the National Theatre, with its unique role representing the Greek nation. Finally, Liapis takes Anne Carson's *Antigonick* as a case study for the re-invigorating possibilities and challenges of a *transtextual palimpsest* (Liapis' coinage), or a text that bursts traditional generic, medial and stylistic boundaries to present a multi-faceted experiment with the Greek material.

The chapters of *Adapting Greek Tragedy* are diverse and fascinating, drawing together scholarship from some of the biggest names in adaptation studies to show the current state of the field. For that reason, the book will be extremely useful for adaptation and reception studies scholars, as well as performance studies and drama scholars, classicists and literary scholars. As with any edited collection, the chapters vary in the difficulty of their writing style and how heavily they depend on readers to know literary, performance and cultural theory; but across the board the book is accessible and comprehensible, making it a useful resource even for undergraduate courses. One potential challenge is that there is one overall bibliography, rather than individual chapter bibliographies, which would make it slightly more difficult to, for instance, assign a single chapter for students. However, the individual chapters are well worth reading and the book as a whole is a useful volume.

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