

Chapters which explore perspectives on *nostos* from characters other than those who have Odysseus or Penelope as their model prove to be some of the most dynamic of the volume, as it is here that the most novel arguments are made. Here home is a consistently ambivalent place: Purves's chapter on Sebald's *The Emigrants* offers an insightful and meaningfully balanced reading of the inability of characters in both the Homeric poem and Sebald's case, as displaced persons), or in the absence of others (such as Laertes' refusal to sleep in the house in *Od.* 11.187–96). The acknowledgement of the instability of home as a concept also runs throughout Dougherty's chapter on Marilynne Robinson's *Homecoming*, which presents a third kind of person who is both Odyssean and Penelopean – who both goes and stays, in the full awareness of both the limitations of each form of living. Dougherty and Pache offer the only two contributions which consider return from the perspective of Telemachean characters – in the case of *Homecoming*, the two sisters who respond to the models provided by the older generation, and in Gibson's play, a daughter whose maturation offers a possible break from the cycle of ambivalence or regret experienced in other chapters by other returnees and those to whom they return.

The volume is ideally situated in a series entitled *Classical Memories/Modern Identities*, which aims to explore how the classical past has been moulded and appropriated to create 'a usable past and a livable present'. Whilst it is aimed at both classicists and students of modern culture, the majority of contributors are classicists (ten out of fourteen chapters). Still, the chapters are, on the whole, clearly written and appropriate for both readerships. Only Guo's chapter on returns in the Chinese story of Mulan might have benefited from some more explicit exposition of its relevance to thinking about the *Odyssey*, for the benefit of the intended readership. The variations of the Mulan legend, which involve her death, or total rejection of her male alter ego, illustrate the impossibility of return for a woman, who ought never have left in the first place. The editors justify the inclusion of the chapter, but readers who are using chapters in isolation may miss the point. Similarly, one contributor refers to translation page numbers, instead of line references, which would be more user-friendly.

The most notable achievement of this volume is that it makes a strong case for exploring what might only appear to be tangential receptions of the *Odyssey*: students will benefit greatly from being encouraged to read distant texts in parallel, and using each as a lens for the other. The familiar aspects of the Homeric poem are easy to recognise in broad strokes in a variety of media, but it is often difficult to articulate why our inclination to read these loose connections as Odyssean is significant. At its most successful, the volume provides some lucid examples of how reading the *Odyssey* through modern works can enable this articulation.

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RECEPTION OF MEDEA

WETMORE (K. J.) JR. *Black Medea. Adaptations for Modern Plays.* Pp. xii + 343. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2013. Cased, US\$119.99. ISBN: 978-1-60497-865-0.
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The fascination with adaptations of classical dramas tends to ebb and flow with theatre artists and scholars as they look for new ways to establish a contemporary relevance to

the Classics for new (and old) theatrical and educational audiences. In this vein, W.'s anthology falls squarely into the contemporary interest in adaptations that speak to the Black experience. W.'s approach to this anthology is simple, making it extremely useful to either a scholar or practitioner looking for re-envisionings of the Medea myth through various African Diaspora lenses.

W. begins with an introduction to Euripides' version of Medea's story that smoothly transitions into a discussion of how some reports of Medea's cultural and historical background (and its possible interpretation as Colchian), coupled with a story that identifies her as an 'outsider' in her surroundings, makes her story an ideal candidate for reinterpretation – especially through the lens of the people and cultures of the African Diaspora. W. then sets up the importance of this anthology for critical scholarship, illustrating how Medea is amongst the 'top three Greek tragedies read in college classrooms', and in theatres (using a 2002 article from *American Theatre* as his source for theatrical productions) (p. 4). From there, W. discusses the history of adaptations of Medea as a woman of colour and then leads into how the plays in his anthology 'reflect recurring themes and approaches to adapting Medea to Modern contexts' (p. 7).

The plays included are: *African Medea* by Jim Magnuson; *Black Medea* by Ernest Ferlita, SJ; *Pecong* by Steve Carter; *There Are Women Waiting: the Tragedy of Medea Jackson* by Edris Cooper; *American Medea* by Silas Jones; and *Medea, Queen of Colchester* by Marianne McDonald. W. frames each of these plays with an introductory chapter that gives important information about the playwright, the genesis of each project, a production history, the play's previous publication history (if there is one) and a short summary of the play. W. also gives some attention (as promised in the introduction) to providing a context of how the upcoming play in the anthology is similar and/or dissimilar (in terms of theme or its updating) to the previous play. Where possible, W. gives some space to interviews with the playwrights. The only play that does not have an interview is *There Are Women Waiting: the Tragedy of Medea Jackson*, which I assume is a result of the unique circumstances surrounding the creation/devising of this play (it was part of the Medea Project, in which they worked with imprisoned women at the San Francisco Country Jail to create the script).

The approaches to the Medea story that W. has assembled are intriguing and exciting from a scholarly, pedagogical and production-oriented perspective. The first play, Magnuson's *African Medea* (1968), places the story in a Portuguese colonial city in nineteenth-century Angola. Medea is an African Princess whose marriage to Jason, a slave trader, is annulled by the colony's governor. The colonial backdrop of this play adds an additional layer, as Jason seeks to raise his status in society by disassociating himself from Medea's 'African-ness'.

The second play, Ferlita's *Black Medea* (1976), is set in New Orleans in 1810 after the Haitian slave revolution. Jason is now Jerome, a former French military officer and Medea is now Madeleine, a voodoo priestess. The difference of culture and religion play heavily into this reimagining of the Medea story, as Croydon (Creon) easily dismisses Jerome and Madeleine's marriage since it was performed in Haiti (and therefore not a valid, Christian marriage). Madeleine's association with Voodoo becomes her main perceived threat by those who oppose her and her weapon of choice in exacting her revenge.

The third play, Carter's *Pecong* (1990), continues with the idea of Mediyah (Medea) as a voodoo priestess but with the setting moved to Carnival in the Caribbean. Jason Allcock (Jason) is now a self-professed champion of pecong, a contest of wit and insult. Mediyah also changes, becoming an instrument of revenge against Creon Pandit's (Creon's) whole line via her Grandmother (Granny Root) who dies and then uses her influence (beyond the grave) to direct Mediyah's actions. Mediyah's brother now plays a heavy hand in his

adaptation since it is his title of 'Mighty, Royal, Most Perfect, Grand King Calabash' that Mediyah helps Jason steal during the pecong competition. In addition, this play brings to light the issue of 'light vs dark' prejudice within the Black community, since Jason is seen as superior to Mediyah because of his lighter skin tone. Yet again, Mediyah's supernatural powers, amplified by her grandmother's spiritual connection and a newfound hatred of men, become the magnificent force behind her revenge against Jason.

The fourth play, Cooper's *There Are Women Waiting: the Tragedy of Medea Jackson* (1989), as stated earlier, was part of the Medea Project and numerous updates were made to make the play more relevant to the U.S. in the 1980s. Medea Jackson (Medea) now lives in poverty in Oakland, California and faces more contemporary concerns, such as drugs, which become her weapon of choice in order to destroy her adversaries (e.g. she laces Creon and his daughter's underwear with a combination of drugs that includes meth and PCP and sacrifices her children with 'Jim Jones Kool-Aid'). This version strays from Euripides' version in that Medea Jackson dies at the end of the play, leaving a stark reminder of the lack of anything resembling a *deus ex machina* in contemporary African American lives.

The fifth play, Jones' *American Medea* (1995), retells Medea's story not from Euripides' version, but rather, the playwright goes back to Euripides' source material in order to create this version, essentially creating a new work from an 'Afrocentric perspective' (p. 241). As stated in W.'s introduction to the play, this play, set in the late 1700s, 'indicts a nation whose very ideals were completely undermined by its behavior towards Africans from the beginning' (p. 242). Medea is of African descent; Jason is Greek and 'a California Golden Boy' (p. 245). Their children are heavily featured in this play as well, characterised as the 'White Son' (Alexander) and the 'black son' (Imhotep); therefore, race and cultural identity become issues at the heart of this play. Similar to Jones's play, Medea does not live at the end of the play, and instead becomes a victim of Jason and one of her children.

The last play is McDonald's *Medea, Queen of Colchester* (2003). Medea is a mixed race South African drag queen who brings his White boyfriend James (and the boyfriend's two sons) with him to Las Vegas. James leaves Medea for a casino owner's daughter, sparking Medea's need for revenge. Some of the more interesting changes McDonald makes for this adaptation is that Medea kills her rival with a poisoned dress and his *step-children* with a knife, and brings more contemporary family issues, such as gay marriage, to the forefront of this story.

W.'s anthology is highly useful to those studying (or with an interest in) adaptations of Greek classics, for those teaching classes on the subjects of race and gender who prefer to use theatre as an entry point for the discussion and for those who are looking for contemporary plays that focus on a cast of people of colour. The introductory articles and supplementary interviews have tremendous dramaturgical insight and usefulness. There are some issues with typos throughout the book. In addition, in a few scripts it seems that a line of dialogue has been inadvertently omitted. Last but not least, not all the plays have the same dramaturgical and aesthetic level of quality. However, that difference is also what makes this volume an interesting read for people of all levels of educational or theatrical backgrounds.

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