

Furthermore, tests on contemporary audiences have demonstrated that word repetitions in a stage performance of the *Persians* were considered less disturbing than might have been anticipated, as a result of which Constantinidis argues that modern translations of Aeschylus' dramas should not erase but, rather, imitate this feature.

It is virtually impossible to rate the overall quality of a collected volume that is constituted by as many as 25 chapters on a range of topics that covers a period of almost 2500 years. As stated above, a more comprehensive introduction and an index of passages cited would have been beneficial – as would a bit more copy-editing of some contributions. However, these quibbles do not dampen the many merits of the volume, and the majority of the contributions are of solid quality both in form and content. Therefore, the volume clearly has the potential to become a standard reference work. It will – and should – be read and consulted not only by those interested in the reception of the oldest of the three major Attic tragedians, but by anyone who wants to know more about the aftermath of Greek drama in post-ancient cultures and media more generally.

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## VERSIONS OF EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

PERRIS (S.) *The Gentle, Jealous God. Reading Euripides' Bacchae in English*. Pp. xii + 237. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-4725-1353-3.

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Halfway through Donna Tartt's novel *The Secret History*, a new Classics professor arrives at Hampden College. He tells his students, 'Agathon. Do you know how I remember that word? "Agatha Christie writes good mysteries."' The students are appalled. Not only are they prodigious Classicists, but they have performed a secretive bacchanal ritual, which has resulted in death. Yet despite their prowess as scholars, and their experience of Dionysian frenzy, one imagines that the students' contemplation of *to agathon* will evermore be haunted by 'Agatha Christie writes good mysteries'. The legacy of reception interferes with the exploration of ancient culture. Tartt's bacchantes have turned back time by their revival of the *thiasos*, but it is clear that they have watched *Dead Poets Society* too.

Inevitably, Classical culture acquires such baggage. P. situates his fine monograph on versions of Euripides' *Bacchae* amidst 'stronger' and 'weaker' theses on reception. P. finds that this tragedy is fertile material, 'predisposed to creative translation' (p. 170). Hence *Bacchae* provokes responses so diverse as Gilbert Murray's 'mystery play' (p. 63), H.D.'s 'incantatory, secular mysticism' (p. 93), Derek Mahon's 'anti-political' irreverence (p. 96), and Colin Teevan's deadpan 'translationese' (p. 120). While P. offers no substantial commentary on Brian de Palma and Wole Soyinka, whose versions of *Bacchae* have received much critical attention elsewhere, his book covers an impressive expanse. Each translation is considered amidst the efforts of its author's contemporaries, and we are given an exhaustive list of adaptations of the play. P. takes a strong line on the versions we should avoid: 'the less said about *Dionysus in New York* (2008), by retired

New York State Supreme Court Justice Nicholas Clemente, the better'; Richard Edwin Day's 1909 epic is 'insufferable' (p. 47). Contemplation of Dionysus' manifestations even begets allusions to Spinal Tap, Jimi Hendrix and Queens of the Stone Age.

'Translations', 'versions', 'adaptations'; proximity to the original language versus fidelity to the spirit of the play: P.'s introduction summons shades that will be familiar to hardened receptionists. Students will find it useful that these debates are compressed here as a preamble. P. negotiates an argument that *Bacchae* is both a neglected tragedy and a centrally important one. Its appeal, he notes, ranges from the esoteric interest of ancient cults to universal themes of family and xenophobia. There were no known stage productions between the age of Nero and 1908, although *Bacchae* became 'the master-text of counter-culture' in the twentieth century (p. 54). Depressingly, a play that culminates in dismemberment gained relevance as humanity accustomed itself to horrific violence on an international scale.

It befits the vicissitudes in *Bacchae*'s reception that a terrible version revived its fortunes. As P. observes, Gilbert Murray's *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1902) has not aged well, although dated at the time for its rhyming couplets. P.'s chapter on Murray typifies the best parts of this monograph, as he moves gracefully between close reading, theatre history and literary context. Ultimately Murray's play failed because *Bacchae* would not bend to his ideas: he wanted to use a Christianised Dionysus as a vehicle for secular humanism. However, Murray's attempt prompted writers such as George Bernard Shaw and T.S. Eliot to take interest in Euripides. Comparably, there is a satisfying movement to the chapter on H.D.'s 'Choros Translations from *The Bacchae*' (1931). P. finds evidence in H.D.'s uncharacteristically 'flat' and verbose verse, and her incoherent essay on the tragedy, that she is 'thrown off balance' by *Bacchae* (p. 88). He argues that this corresponds to a wider Modernist difficulty with the play, complicated by the obscuration of Euripides' Dionysus by Nietzsche's.

Northern Ireland proves tricky terrain. P. establishes Derek Mahon's *The Bacchae: after Euripides* (1991) as a response to Seamus Heaney's sombre adaptations of Greek tragedy. Rightly so: Mahon has a great deal of fun with Hiberno-English colloquialisms. Consequently, it is difficult to evaluate the political connotations in Mahon's script. P. picks out examples such as 'blown to bits' and 'pipe and drum'. He quotes from an interview in which Mahon describes the tension between the Dionysian and rationalism as 'a form of sectarianism'. Mahon's *Bacchae* offers a bleak world view' (p. 110), P. concludes, but this is difficult to reconcile with Mahon's statement that he wanted to 'put the fun back into Greek tragedy'. Perhaps the political context is one in which solemnity is inevitable. Does Mahon question 'whether mere politics can contain Greek tragedy' (p. 109)? It appears, contrarily, that the Irishness overpowers and redirects the play. P. might go further in his discussion of how local culture forces reconsideration of that culture in light of *Bacchae*. For example, he glosses the Irish term *cráic*, unsatisfactorily, as 'conversation'. The word refers more conventionally to merriment or revelry, and so has further Dionysian implications than P. explores. Moreover, this uniquely Irish concept of excess has an ersatz quality. 'Crack' entered parlance only in the late-twentieth century and was bestowed thereafter with transliteration as *Gaeilge*. Thus, Mahon's *Bacchae* interrogates Irish identity.

On the surface, Teevan's dour post 9/11 treatment is more straightforward as a political text. P. identifies crucial tensions surrounding Teevan's *Euripides: Bacchae*. The 2002 production recreated aspects of ancient stage conditions, yet Teevan's leaden language shackles Dionysus. Teevan thinks that lessons in *Bacchae* might reconcile East and West, but omits those lines in which Euripides suggests that an exogenous force might legitimately be considered a threat. As such, Teevan's text fascinates by its 'nominal

authenticity' (p. 129). Actor Peter Hall said in 2002 that '*Bacchai* is about freedom'. That the political message of Teevan's play requires contentious departures from Euripides' text illuminates the cant that surrounded the debate of 'freedom' in the early years of this millennium.

P.'s final chapter focuses on David Greig's *Euripides: The Bacchae* (2007), written in Glaswegian vernacular. Like his predecessors, Greig struggles to harness Euripides' play to his purpose, and is perhaps clever rather than wise. His injection of local humour problematises the tonal shift required at the conclusion to *Bacchae*. Greig's *Bacchae* is simultaneously camp and clunkily meta-theatrical. His 'self-proclaimed "version"' of Euripides' play (p. 133) is based on a specially-commissioned Anglophone crib, and his text is divided by imposing headings such as THE FIRST STASIMON and EXODUS which, as P. notes, 'probably did not have these technical meanings in Euripides' day' (p. 136). Yet here, as elsewhere in the monograph, the presumed audience for translation is elusive. Greig uses the aforementioned quasi-academic apparatus, and Greek rather than Latin spellings for characters' names, but would the viewer notice if she/he did not purchase a typescript?

Early in the book, P. ventures his own definition of translation as 'a text which repeats or gives an impression of repeating a text in another language' (p. 11). This I find problematic for its implication of self-conscious re-enactment, which would forbid the suspension of disbelief: hardly the desired effect on a newcomer to Euripides' play watching a staged translation. P. claims that Gilbert Murray's interpretation of *Bacchae* comprises his critical writing alongside his adaptation, but who knows whether viewers of the ill-fated stage production read the scholarly essays, or whether later readers of the criticism rushed out to find Murray's playscript? One of the debates to which P. calibrates his study is the one over whether the discipline of Classics is revitalised or threatened by translations. Certainly, modern-language versions make Euripides speak to Greekless students, but also to theatre audiences of non-academics. This issue is worth attention, and the lacuna is salient because P. makes so many useful observations about stage production (the subtitled 'reading' in this light presumably meaning 'interpreting'). P. leaves more to be said, but his book is admirable in the coherence it achieves while sustaining a diversity of approach.

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## EMPEDOCLES THE LOVE POET

GHEERBRANT (X.) *Empédocle, une poétique philosophique*. (Kaïnon, Anthropologie de la pensée ancienne 6.) Pp. 931. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017. Paper, €98 (Cased, €135). ISBN: 978-2-406-05713-0 (978-2-406-05714-7 hbk).

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Why did Empedocles choose to write in hexameter verse, when the prose treatise was already an established option? That is the question that this large, learned, sometimes sprawling study undertakes to answer. In fact, despite its official focus on poetics, by Part 3 this work becomes a general treatment of Empedocles' art and thought. That,