

DAVID MULROY, *Aeschylus, The Oresteia, with introduction and notes*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018, 234 pp., ISBN 978-0299-31564-1.

David Mulroy's *The Oresteia* offers a very readable and engaging verse translation of Aeschylus' trilogy alongside an instructive introduction and appendix and a helpful set of notes. I can only agree with the positive responses this work has received for its accessibility for students of Classics in English and a wider, modern-day audience. The detail of the Aeschylean imagery and diction captured, the rich variance of expression and the sheer elegance and beauty of Mulroy's verses deserve the highest praise. Some of the trilogy's complexities, however, are – perhaps, to an extent, unavoidably – lost in the process. There are traces, for instance, of a syntactic simplification that cannot escape a certain monotony vis-à-vis the characteristically intricate Aeschylean language. Regrettably, Mulroy's versification contributes to this impression at times. Commendable though his aspiration to 'recreate the formalism of Greek tragedy through regular meters and some end rhyme' (p. xii) undoubtedly is, it occasionally entails a certain nursery-rhyme feel, especially in Aeschylus' long-winding and highly allusive choral odes, where it is most clearly out of place. This simplifying tendency is noticeable as well, and more problematically so, at the level of meaning: thus, the severity of the tragic choices faced by Agamemnon and Orestes and the related, crucial conflicts surrounding the concepts of αἰδώς and φιλία lack a critical focus, both in the texts' translation and the additional material. Of course, there is only so much one can ask from a single translation and the principle focus of Mulroy's work clearly lies elsewhere: in the provision of a lyrically sophisticated and yet highly accessible version of the Aeschylean masterpiece – a challenging endeavour he admirably accomplishes.

Mulroy's *Oresteia* is the expansion of an earlier verse translation of the *Agamemnon*, published with accompanying notes and introduction in 2016.¹ In many places, the author has made small changes to the translation itself as well as reworked his glossary, introduction and notes, demonstrating a commendably intense revision of his earlier work for the present publication.²

¹ D. Mulroy, *Agamemnon / Aeschylus*, Madison 2016.

² While a full comparison of both works exceeds the scope of the present review, I would like to exemplarily draw attention to two particularly helpful, structural alterations between Mulroy's *Agamemnon* and his *Oresteia*: in the latter volume, the initial glossary of proper names is shortened in favour of more frequent and more extensive footnotes. This moves explanations (especially if names occur only once and are of negligible importance elsewhere) to where they are most needed: when the reader encounters them in the text itself. Thus, Pan,

Mulroy begins his *Oresteia* with an introductory section, consisting of a preface (pp. ix-x), snapshot summaries of the plays and remarks on the author's approach to (translating) them (pp. xi-xv) as well as a pronunciation guide and glossary of the most central Greek names (pp. xvii-xix). After a brief ten pages, this section gives way to a verse translation of all three tragedies with accompanying notes (pp. 1-192), allowing the impatient reader, as Mulroy explains, to immediately proceed to the texts themselves. A set of seven brief appendices follows (pp. 193-231), serving as optional additional reading in place of a more detailed introduction. These include concise summaries of the plays, the author's notes on Aeschylus' biography, explanations of the mythical background of the *Oresteia* and its political references, an argument for renaming *Eumenides* as *The Holy Goddesses*, an overview of metrical terms and practices (in both Mulroy's translation and Aeschylus' trilogy) and, finally, an introduction to Greek staging. A select bibliography concludes the book (pp. 233-34).

As this overview indicates and Mulroy's introduction makes explicit (p. xiv), the translations of the three tragedies, *Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers* and *The Holy Goddesses*, clearly constitute the very core of his volume. Appropriately so, they are its greatest strength. From a wealth of possible examples, I have chosen two, one from a choral passage and one from a character's speech, to illustrate the outstanding aesthetic quality and sophistication of the translation. The first example is taken from the chorus' first ode in *Libation Bearers* (66-70): 'Revenge congeals when bloodshed blends / with fertile soil. Then ruin rends / the guilty man. It never ends.' These three lines intriguingly capture the Aeschylean verses.³ Faithful to the original thought, the translation takes up the tragedian's image of vengeful murder (τίτας φόνος) as solidifying, irresolvably (οὐ διαρρῦδαν), into a lasting and destructive ruin (αἰανῆς ἄτα διαφέρει), just like the blood, once spilt, congeals (πέπηγεν) within the ground. At the same time, it brilliantly mirrors the notions of merging and coagulating in the assonant, at times alliterative, repetition of the consonants *r*, *n* and *l* (ruin rends; then ruin rends, never ends; fertile soil), alongside the consonant clusters *ng* and *bl* (revenge congeals; bloodshed blends), and the frequent re-occurrence of *ι*, *ε* and *ə* sounds (revenge, bloodshed, blends, fertile, then, rends, the, never, ends)

Zephyr, Geryon and Orpheus, for instance, receive individual footnotes in the *Oresteia*, rather than a glossary entry. In addition, in the later volume, bibliographical details are moved from the footnotes to a designated bibliography section. While brief (see my comments below), this bibliography allows the interested reader to gain a concise overview of (at least some of) the relevant literature in one place.

³ Here and subsequently, my assessment presupposes the Greek text as set out in Alan H. Sommerstein's edition of the *Oresteia* (Cambridge MA-London 2008) on which Mulroy's translation centrally relies (p. x). Here, the present lines read as follows: δι' αἵματ' ἐκποθένθ' ὑπὸ Χθονὸς τροφῶ | τίτας φόμος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρῦδαν | αἰανῆς ἄτα διαφέρει τὸν αἴτιον | καὶ παναρκέτας νόσος (*Ch.* 66-70).

across different words. Finally, there is a compelling play with tensions and oppositions, at the levels of word meaning, formal structure and syntactic flow. While ‘revenge congeals’ and ‘bloodshed blends’ and thus describe processes of merging and solidification, ‘ruin’ does the very opposite: it ‘rends’ and tears apart. And yet, all three phrases are aligned by end rhyme, syntactical parallelism and the (alliterative) assonance just described. Similarly, there is a forceful tension between the syntactically more complex and enjambed first two lines, reflecting, on a structural plane, the continuous cycle of revenge and ruin they describe, and the brief, three-word clause that caps the third line: ‘It never ends.’ Even while negating conclusion, the clause concludes both the line and the third strophe of the ode. Here, we find intriguingly recast a persistent conflict at the trilogy’s core – the struggle between the doom of unending destruction and the possibility of a final resolution.

My second example is taken from a speech by Apollo in Mulroy’s *The Holy Goddesses*. In lines 186–90, the god expels the Furies from his temple with the following words: ‘Depart to where beheadings are, where eyes / are gouged and gullets slit, where little boys / are gelded, others stoned and maimed or moan / and cry for mercy, mercy! dying impaled / on iron spikes...’ Following my discussion in the preceding paragraph, we may immediately note Mulroy’s sophisticated use of assonance and alliteration (gouged, gullets, gelded; gullets, slit, little, stoned; slit, stoned, spikes; maimed, moan, mercy; impaled, spikes), especially in conjunction with the onomatopoeic quality of the harsh stops and fricatives in words denoting acts of physical violence, such as ‘slit’, ‘stoned’ or ‘impaled’. In addition, the lines at hand reveal another particular strength of the present translation: it provides an English reading of the Greek text that is both committed to the original phrasing and dares to take the liberties that allow it to be lucid and engaging in its own right. A case in point is Mulroy’s translation of the Greek $\mu\acute{\upsilon}\zeta\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\nu\ \omicron\iota\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\nu\ \pi\omicron\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\nu$ in line 189 as ‘[others] moan for mercy, mercy!’ While we might translate the original phrase, quite literally, along the lines of ‘they cry $\mu\grave{\upsilon}\ \mu\tilde{\upsilon}$ in many a pitiful lament’,⁴ Mulroy intriguingly conveys the repetitive $\mu\grave{\upsilon}\ \mu\tilde{\upsilon}$ suggested by the imitative verb in the *m*-alliteration of ‘moan’ and ‘mercy’ and the doubling of the word ‘mercy’ itself. This doubling does double duty: it also conveys the sense of frequency expressed by the Greek adjective $\pi\omicron\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$, while transposing the $\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ it refers to in the original to a cry for pity in direct speech: ‘mercy, mercy!’ As a result, the intensity of the torturous suffering implied is all the more vividly expressed.

The excellent balance thus struck between a faithfulness to Aeschylean meaning and wording, on the one hand, and lively English speech, on the other, is a pervasive pattern in Mulroy’s work. Throughout his *Oresteia*, he

⁴ See *LSJ online* s.v. $\mu\acute{\upsilon}\zeta\omicron$ (accessed on 30th September 2018): ‘make the sound $\mu\grave{\upsilon}\ \mu\tilde{\upsilon}$, mutter, moan’ and, specifically in the present passage, ‘make a piteous moaning.’

pursues a very good compromise between what translation theorists might call a ‘foreignising’ translation that emphasizes the tragedies’ origin in a very different cultural setting and a ‘domesticating’ translation that caters primarily to the interest and understanding of a modern-day audience.⁵ On the one hand, he thus goes to considerable lengths in order to recreate Aeschylus’ imagery and expression. Accordingly, we hear – to name but a very brief selection – of ‘the memory of pain’ that ‘drips around the restless heart a never-ending rain’ (*Ag.* 179–80) and of ‘fools plucking blossoms from their useless tongues’ (*Ag.* 1662), of the house’s ‘murky veil’ (*Ch.* 811) and ‘blood-soaked burden’ (*Ch.* 842), of the ‘crushing weight’ of Furies’ presence (*Eu.* 720) and their eventual prayer that civil strife may never ‘thunder’ at Athens (*Eu.* 978).⁶ Perhaps little surprisingly in light of the preceding examples, Mulroy is one of very few translators who maintain the shout ‘Ah Linus, Linus!’ in the refrain of the chorus’ first ode of the *Agamemnon* (lines 121, 138, 159: αἴλινον αἴλινον).⁷ On the other hand, Mulroy’s translation is distinctly modern. From the Watchman’s ‘Perhaps you catch my drift.’⁸ early in the *Agamemnon* (38–39) to Clytaemestra’s ‘We’ll either win or lose. So let’s find out!’ in *Libation Bearers* (890) to Apollo’s ironic exhortation ‘Go chase him, then. Enjoy the extra work.’ in *The Holy Goddesses* (226), Mulroy’s characters speak in fluid, often engagingly colloquial, contemporary English. In addition, they avoid the more traditional modal-verb constructions⁹ and show a clear preference for concise, yet lively and

⁵ These terms were originally coined by Lawrence Venuti, who uses them to argue for the importance of ‘foreignization’ as an ethical tool in translation (*The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation*, New York 2008 (= 1995²)). Here, I am employing the terms merely to distinguish two strategies in the translator’s repertoire, without applying the value judgments that Venuti confers.

⁶ For the Greek passages in question, see: στάζει δ’ ἀνθ’ ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας | μνησιπήμων πόνος (*Ag.* 179–80), ἀλλὰ τοῦσδ’ ἐμοὶ ματαίαν γλώσσαν ᾧδ’ ἴαπανθίσαι† (*Ag.* 1662), [δόμον] ... ἰδεῖν φιλίοις | ὄμμασιν ἐκ δνοφεράς καλύπτρας (*Ch.* 810–11), ἄχθος αἱματοσταγές (*Ch.* 842), βαρεῖα χάρα τῆδ’ ὀμιλήσω πάλιν (*Eu.* 720), μήποτ’ ἐν πόλει στάσιν | τὰδ’ ἐπεύχομαι βρέμειν (*Eu.* 977–78).

⁷ Contrary to Sommerstein’s 2008 translation (‘Cry sorrow, sorrow’), Fagles’ translation for the Penguin Classics series (‘Cry, cry for death’), or Tony Harrison’s translation (‘Batter, batter the doom-drum’), Mulroy transliterates the Greek exclamation with a footnote explaining its etymology (p. 8, n. 18). Here, I am referring to: R. Fagles, *The Oresteia / Aeschylus*, Harmondsworth 1997, T. Harrison, *The Oresteia / Aeschylus*, London 1983.

⁸ Enrico Medda (Review of D. Mulroy, *Agamemnon, Aeschylus (a verse translation with introduction and notes)*, Madison 2016, *ExClass* 21, 2017, 262) rightly notes that such an audience address, as a potential break of the dramatic illusion, falls outside conventional Greek tragic practice, but nonetheless captures the play on the audience’s pre-existing knowledge notably present in *Ag.* 39: μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κού μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

⁹ This is particularly apparent in the translation of Greek subjunctives and optatives: see, for example, ‘but let us not permit the anger of divinities to stain the armoured bit’ (*Ag.* 131–32: μή τις ἄγα θεόθεν κνεφά- | ση ... στόμιον μέγα Τροίας), ‘Success attended me. I hope it stays’ (*Ag.* 854: νίκη δ’, ἐπέιπερ ἔσπετ’, ἐμπέδως μένοι), ‘I only pray that Justice, Force, and Zeus /

direct utterances. Thus, Agamemnon's famous concession to his wife in lines 944-45 of the *Agamemnon*, ἀλλ' εἰ δοκεῖ σοι ταῦθ', ὑπαί τις ἀρβύλας | λυοὶ τάχος, becomes a series of brisk, elliptical commands: 'If that's your pleasure. Someone! Quick! Undo / my shoes ...' Once seduced, there is no halting to Agamemnon's self-propelled destruction.

Perhaps the most intriguing expression of the translation's balancing act between ancient and modern, Aeschylean tragic diction and 21st-century English, is its versification - a matter at the very heart of the translator's endeavour: as he observes in the introduction, '[m]y approach to translation is distinguished by the lengths I go to in order to recreate the formalism of Greek tragedy through regular metres and some end rhyme' (p. xii). Accordingly, Mulroy's characters speak in iambic (and, very rarely, trochaic) lines throughout, while his choral odes are short rhymed stanzas, following the complex strophic patterns of the original. Appendix 6 (pp. 224-28) sets out the details of this remarkable scholarly accomplishment and makes explicit the admirable depth of knowledge and diligence it betrays. One of the most compelling effects of this undertaking is the intelligibility, both audibly as well as visually, of a central and characteristic feature of Greek tragic language, even for the most lay audience. Consider, for instance, the final scenes of *The Holy Goddesses* (778-891): in Mulroy's translation, a reader will hear and see the difference between the excited state of the Furies' alternately-rhymed (and helpfully italicized) strophes and Athena's calm and regular iambs, without realizing that the former are composed of dochmiacs in the Greek or ever having heard of iambs, for that matter. As Mulroy rightly observes in his 2016 introduction to the *Agamemnon*, '[i]f I have done my job, my readers will not need any knowledge of metrics.'¹⁰ Yet, his agenda is more ambitious still: by demarcating Greek lyric song with end rhymes in particular, Mulroy hopes to convey to his readers the 'undercurrent of aesthetic pleasure' that would have permeated the choral song and 'made imitations of suffering palatable.'¹¹ My very first example above provides a detailed illustration of just how successfully his rhymed verses may meet this aspiration. Thus, here we find one of the translation's most successful diachronic compromises yet: by using a poetic tool unknown to Greek tragedy, Mulroy achieves an effect that may not be perfect (and I will consider a few problematic aspects below), but still provide us with the closest approximation there may be to a key function of Greek tragic form, in a manner accessible for a modern-day readership - 'the only appropriate means in [his] [...] repertoire.'¹²

the third and greatest, stand beside you' (*Ch.* 244: <μόνον> Κράτος τε καὶ Δίκη σὺν τῷ τρίτῳ | πάντων μεγίστῳ Ζηνὶ συγγένοιτό σοι).

¹⁰ Mulroy, *Agamemnon*, xi, n. 1.

¹¹ Mulroy, *Agamemnon*, x.

¹² Mulroy, *Agamemnon*, x.

Of course, as with even the most well-negotiated compromise, with Mulroy's translation as well, there are areas in which one side appears unduly favoured and the other unduly neglected – if only from the onlooker's subjective perspective. In my impression of Mulroy's translation, there is thus a slight over-emphasis on catering to a contemporary target language and audience, at the expense of a certain degree of Aeschylean complexity, solemnity and depth. Thus, the very same concision that lends dramatic effect to Agamemnon's commands above borders, at times, on syntactic over-simplification. The chorus' lines in *Agamemnon* 456-60 are a case in point: 'The people's voice is angry now. / Their leaders stand accurst. / The night hides something in its cloak. / I don't know what but fear the worst.' Here, the asyndetic succession of four main clauses, each beginning with a parallel nominal phrase and concluded with a full stop, cannot but appear monotonous and slightly schematic in comparison to the rich syntactic integration of the Aeschylean choral passage.¹³ Similarly, the modernizing tendency of Mulroy's language at times crosses, in my opinion, the very fine boundary between lively contemporary diction and a break of register. In lines 621-22 of *Libation Bearers*, for instance, the tone and everyday idiom used ('safe and sound', 'next thing he knew', 'came around') introduces a note of triviality to Scylla's bitterly reproached betrayal of her father: 'She did it while he slept, all safe and sound. / Next thing he knew, lord Hermes came around.' In a similar fashion, the register shifts in Mulroy's rendering of the chorus' vision of Helen in *Agamemnon* 407-10: 'See her gaily tripping through / the city gates on tip of toe, / to dare what she's no right to do. / The household prophets cry, "Eeoo!"' Yet again, the language suggests an easy playfulness that, in my reading at least, is absent from the Aeschylean tragedy: βεβάκει ῥίμφα διὰ | πυλᾶν (407-08) no doubt implies Helen's light and unchallenged arrival at Troy, but a 'tripping through ... on tip of toe', followed by prophets crying their rhyming echo, all but satirizes the scene.

Each of the three examples in the preceding paragraph indicates, I propose, a certain lack of profundity, which appears to me underlined, and very regrettably so, by the end rhymes in each instance. They underscore the syntactic repetition and regular parsing in *Agamemnon* 456-60¹⁴ and put additional stress on the casualness of expression in *Libation Bearers* 621-22. In the Helen passage of *Agamemnon* 407-10 in particular, they seem to evoke a nursery-rhyme jingle or, perhaps even more accurately, a little girl's skipping game. Subjective as they may be, these impressions draw

¹³ See *Ag.* 456-60: βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις σὺν κότῳ, | δημοκράντου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος; | μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαί τι μου | μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές.

¹⁴ Here, I am not simply joining the ranks of those who utter, as Mulroy observes (p. xii), the 'inevitabl[e] [...] criticism that such an approach [i.e. the use of end rhymes] necessarily sounds repetitive and monotonous', but I am suggesting that, in the particular context of the lines at hand, end rhymes may have such an effect.

our attention to an important observation: there is a wide, and potentially personal, spectrum of associations that a rhyme may prompt in a particular line conveying a particular content in a particular context. Indeed, rhyme is not unlike Greek metre in this sense – but this is not to say, of course, that their connotational scopes necessarily align, especially not in each instance. In fact, they may considerably diverge, as I believe they do in the latter two examples above. On the one hand, this may cast some doubt on the straightforward mapping that Mulroy suggests between both ancient Greek metre and modern-day English rhyme and an aesthetically pleasing and alleviating function alone. On the other hand, it explains why end rhymes may be perceived to convey the sense of the *Oresteia* so differently well in different choral passages of the trilogy. The very playful note, for instance, that seems to me so trivializing in the Helen scene in *Agamemnon* becomes eerily appropriate and ominously incantatory in the Furies' binding song in the final play of the trilogy. As they close in on Orestes, their prey, they chant: 'Mad distractions, sorceries, / parching ills, cacophonies, / mind-en-slaving melodies, / these are the hymns Erinyes / sing at their sacrifice!' (*The Holy Goddesses* 328-33).¹⁵

Let me discuss the simplifying tendency that I detected in Mulroy's translation above in two further regards: as it relates to verbal iterations and cross-references in the Greek text, on the one hand, and to a selection of key tragic terms and conflicts, on the other. The former takes its cue from the observation that Mulroy's translation appears to avoid lexical repetitions in the original. This is most visible, perhaps, in the lamentation scenes, where iterative exclamations of wailing are, as a rule, absent from his work. Thus, the choral ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ, | πῶς σε δακρυσῶ; in lines 1489-90 and 1513-14 of the *Agamemnon* becomes 'My king, teach me how to lament' and their ὦμοι μοι in lines 1494 and 1518 is omitted altogether.¹⁶ With a modern-day audience in mind, there are certainly good reasons for such an approach: however typical of Greek tragic expression they are, characters' groans and cries may sound awkward, and ridiculous at worst, in a contemporary rendering. At other places, however, the translation's avoidance of repetition is more problematic. Mulroy's rendering of the Aeschylean ἄχαριν χάριν and χάριν ἀχάριτον, at *Agamemnon* 1545 and *Libation Bearers* 44 respectively, may illustrate this point. In both cases, he omits the doubling inherent in the *figurae etymologicae* and describes Clytaemestra's acts of mourning for Agamemnon as 'a service / in thanks ... / but it would not be pleasing' in the

¹⁵ Here, Mulroy's rhymed verses vividly – and, I believe, fittingly – associate poetic forms like the witches' horrifying rhymes in Hamlet's *Macbeth*.

¹⁶ For related examples in the other tragedies, see, for instance, the recasting of iterative (i) ὦ in *Libation Bearers* 466-70 or the missing φεῦ in *The Holy Goddesses* 837, 839, 841 (= 870, 872, 874). Interestingly, Mulroy's 2016 translation of *Agamemnon*, 1489-90 still mirrors the Greek repetitive wailing and reads 'O king, O my king! / How shall I lament?'

Agamemnon and ‘courtesies that aren’t sincere’ in *Libation Bearers*. This not only obscures the lexical cross-reference between the first and second tragedy of the trilogy, but it downplays the severity of the transgression at stake. Far more than ‘insincere courtesies’, Clytaemestra’s funerary rites for her husband pervert some of the most sacred rights and obligations between Greek kin. As such, they play a significant role in the wider pattern of ritual inversion that Froma Zeitlin has so seminaly explored for the *Oresteia*.¹⁷ This significance lacks the attention it deserves in Mulroy’s translation.

Another case of untranslated lexical repetition may serve to highlight a related problem of even greater consequence. In his version of *Agamemnon* 206-7, Mulroy translates, ‘To disregard / an oracle is grievous, but / to kill my child is hard.’ Thus, he fails to acknowledge that Aeschylus uses the same word, βαρεῖα, to describe both actions, κήρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι as well as εἰ τέκνον δαίξω. What is more, both instances of βαρεῖα are placed in emphatic, verse-initial position and immediately juxtaposed by μέν ... δέ. The result is an intense parallelism of their grievousness: both options are equally terrible. This moral equality loses clarity if two different terms, such as Mulroy’s ‘grievous’ and ‘hard’, are used instead. By extension, Agamemnon’s tragic dilemma, relying as it does precisely on the moral indistinguishability of the two possible ways of action, remains slightly underdefined. This lack of definition persists in Mulroy’s rendering of the dilemma itself. ‘Can either choice be right?’ does not fully capture the force of Aeschylus’ τί τῶνδ’ ἄνευ κακῶν; ‘Which choice is without evil?’ (Ag. 211). It is the equal horror of killing his child and disobeying the oracle and army, not their shared failure to be (completely) right, that presents Agamemnon with what Simon Goldhill has described as ‘the *locus classicus* of tragic choice.’¹⁸ Introduction, notes and appendices do not elucidate the gravity of this double bind any further.¹⁹

Regrettably, we find an even more severe dilution of a key tragic dilemma in the translation (and accompanying material) of *Libation Bearers*. Here, it is Agamemnon’s son Orestes who faces the most central moral choice. In Aeschylus’ version, Orestes’ dilemma culminates in two desperate questions to his friend Pylades: Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ’ αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν; (899).

¹⁷ See F. I. Zeitlin, ‘The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*’, *TAPhA* 96, 1965, 463-508. A similar argument might be made for Mulroy’s failure to specify the ritual character of the προτέλεια in Ag. 65, 227 and 720 or otherwise indicate a lexical correspondence between the three passages. An example of a missing repetition in a non-ritual context is the lack of iterative acknowledgment of the verb πειθεῖν in *The Holy Goddesses* 794 and 829. This omits an important conceptual preparation for Athena’s evocation of personified Peitho in lines 885 and 970.

¹⁸ S. Goldhill, *Aeschylus. The Oresteia*, Cambridge 2004 (= 1992²), 25.

¹⁹ In the synopsis of *Agamemnon*, we read, ‘When Agamemnon was setting sail for Troy, he sacrificed his and Clytaemestra’s daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis to get fair winds for the voyage’ (p. 193). Appendix 3 (‘The *Oresteia* and Myth’) adds, ‘His priest informed him that before his army could conquer Troy, he would have to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, on Artemis’ altar to pay for his boastfulness. Agamemnon complied’ (p. 208).

Like Agamemnon's τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν; above, Orestes' τί δράσω;, 'What shall I do?', has often been treated as a quintessential expression of the tragic condition that fundamentally underpins both the genre at large and the present play.²⁰ And yet, in Mulroy's translation, the question remains untranslated. Instead, it fuses with Orestes' second question and yields the following line: 'Well, should I spare her? Answer, Pylades!' This line omits another crucially important element of the Aeschylean source text: the object μητέρ', 'mother', is rendered a simple 'her'. This eliminates from the translation the very first explicit acknowledgment of Clytaemestra's maternal relationship to Orestes by Orestes himself in the play. This point can hardly be overstated: it is precisely by this very bond that Clytaemestra appealed to her son's pity just moments ago, in an exceedingly rare theatrical feat, by bearing her motherly breast to him on stage. Rather than a mere instance of Aeschylus' 'highly questionable taste', as Mulroy maintains in the introduction (p. xiii), Clytaemestra's breast-centred appeal has tangible effects for the tragedy at hand: it triggers the singular moment of doubt that Orestes presently experiences as well as the very acknowledgment of Clytaemestra's maternity that Mulroy's translation omits. And yet, that it is Orestes' mother who he is about to kill is, of course, the most central part of his dilemma. As Simon Goldhill has importantly demonstrated, this centrality is indebted to the ties and obligations inherent in two Greek concepts in particular: the αἰδώς, loosely translatable as 'respect' or 'reverence', owed to those with whom one shares a relationship of φιλία.²¹ In the *Oresteia*, a trilogy that explores the perpetual transgression of both, these terms occur with great frequency and significance. And so they do, explicitly and implicitly, in the present line. As Orestes asks μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν, he asks in essence, 'Should reverence, αἰδώς, prevent me from killing my mother?', with the unspoken implication that a mother is precisely one of the φίλοι one owes αἰδώς to. I have difficulty detecting any substantial trace of this fundamentally charged meaning in Mulroy's 'Well, should I spare her?'

Of course, one might rightfully argue that it is a near-impossible task to convey the full complexity of a Greek term like αἰδώς in a single English work or even the brevity of a single English line, let alone the intricate ties between maternity and φιλία at stake in the *Oresteia* – all the more so, if one has a large (and largely non-Classicist) modern-day audience in mind. In this light, I fully appreciate, for instance, the compelling economy of translating φίλος (despite full knowledge of its complexity) as 'friend', 'lover' or 'dear' and φιλία as 'love' or 'fondness', as Mulroy does in numerous cases.²² At the same

²⁰ For a recent treatment (referencing other relevant scholarship), see, for instance, C. W. Marshall, *Aeschylus. Libation bearers*, London 2017, 124.

²¹ See S. Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*, Cambridge 1984, 180.

²² See, for instance, *Agamemnon* 1156, 1429, 1654, *Libation Bearers* 89-90, 109-10, 219, 705, 893-94, 906-7, 992, *The Holy Goddesses* 216, 999. Especially *Libation Bearers* 89-90,

time, however, I wonder if a solution like his rendering of *Libation Bearers* 899 is truly the best possible option there is. At the very least, a footnote could have alerted the reader to the underlying complexities, especially if they are so importantly tied to the tragic conflict at hand as in the present instance. More desirably so, there would be some further elaboration of the key problems underpinning Orestes' most central tragic dilemma in the additional material. As with Agamemnon's tragic choice, however, neither the introduction nor the notes or appendices provide further mention or discussion in this regard.²³ A more fully-fledged bibliography, pointing the interested reader to a wider field of additional literature and critical discussion (for instance, the currently absent scholarship of Zeitlin and Goldhill), could have been very helpful in this regard, as either an alternative or complement to a more detailed analysis alongside the translation itself. As it stands, Mulroy's volume provides a critical reading of the *Oresteia* only in a few brief paragraphs of the introduction. And, perhaps by necessity, they leave certain questions unanswered. How does the 'transgressive character' of the *Oresteia* (p. xiii), which Mulroy immediately links to a transgressive Aeschylean authorial persona (pp. xiii-xiv), find expression in and relate to the transgressiveness of its characters? How is the trilogy's final endorsement of 'rational discourse' over the 'blind loyalties' of 'blood ties' that he observes (p. xii) complicated by the much-discussed ambiguities of its concluding tragedy? As C. W. Marshall writes, '[t]he moral complexity and richness of the *Oresteia* emerges because there is no certain answer to the questions posed. There is only the problem, and a recognition that human institutions struggle with it.'²⁴ And, finally, how straightforwardly can we say, as Mulroy does in a very brief comment, that 'the modern equivalents of blood ties are race and ethnicity' (p. xii), and still avoid the pitfalls of anachronistic assessment? All of these matters would have benefitted greatly from further elucidation.

David Mulroy's *Oresteia* rises to a considerable challenge: it endeavours to bridge the gap between Aeschylus' much-acclaimed fifth-century drama and a 21st-century audience in a highly sophisticated verse translation, deeply committed to the original work, down to its formal and metrical patterns, as well as a lucid and engaging contemporary language. Such an ambitious endeavour cannot escape all criticism. As I have suggested, there is the occasional note of over-simplification in syntax and register and a certain critical depth, in both translation and additional material, is left to be desired.

109-10, 893-94 and 906-7, however, where terms of *φιλία* proliferate, would have benefited from a more elaborate treatment in the translation and/or notes.

²³ See pp. 195f. (Appendix 1, 'Synopsis'): 'Orestes arrives first with sword drawn and orders her to go inside the palace so that he can kill her beside her lover. She pleads for her life, even baring her breast to win her son's sympathy, but to no avail. She meekly enters the palace.'

²⁴ Marshall, *Libation bearers*, 13.

To an admirable extent, however, Mulroy meets the challenge he pursues. He inventively captures the richness of Aeschylean imagery and diction, his lyrical verses are a tribute to his scholarly erudition and poetic skill alike and his dialogues are a pleasure to read in their idiomatic liveliness of expression. As such, Mulroy's translation brilliantly succeeds, in particular, in making the Aeschylean trilogy accessible to a broad, modern-day audience and promises to captivate a vast array of readers to come.

CORRECTIONS

- Contrary to page 93, note 5 of *Libation Bearers*, in Euripides' *Electra* 513-46, it is not the 'elderly servant' who 'points out the absurdity of assuming that brother and sister would have identical locks of hair, to say nothing of identical footprints, or that Orestes would still be wearing a cloak that Electra wove for him as a child', but Electra herself.

- In *The Holy Goddesses*, the beginning of line 595 must read 'This prophet', rather than 'His prophet'.

- In Appendix 5 ('Renaming *Eumenides*'), page 221, 'time' needs to be pluralized ('the goddesses chasing Orestes are called "Eumenides" four time and "Erinyes" three').

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