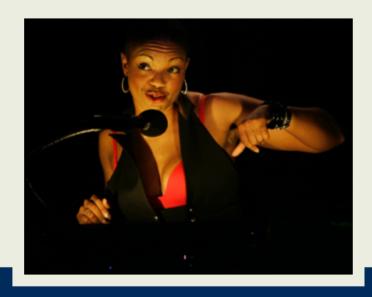# Giovanna Di Martino

Translating and Adapting Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* in the United States

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SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies

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Introduction

> BRONN That would have been a shit way to die.
> JAIME As far as I've seen, they're all shit ways to die.
> . . .
> JAIME What about you? What shit way would you choose?
> BRONN In my own keep, drinking my own wine, watching my sons grovel for my fortune.
> <div align="right">Benioff and Weiss 2015</div>

Bronn is a low-born 'sellsword' working for House Lannister; Jaime is the firstborn of Tywin Lannister and a knight of the Kingsguard in the kingdom of Westeros. Their above-quoted exchange occurs in Season 5, Episode 4, of one of the most famous TV series of all time, both in the United States and worldwide: *Game of Thrones* (Home Box Office 2011-2019), an adaptation of the cycle of novels by George R.R. Martin. After rescuing his companion Jaime from death, Bronn is asked about the way he would like to die: having grown up poor, Bronn's wish is to face death whilst enjoying a keep, wine, and a fortune so large that his sons will beg him to get hold of it. His words acquire even more significance if looked at within the context of the whole episode, whose overarching theme is tradition and generational conflicts. Without entering into greater detail, what happens is that in response to the establishment of a new and progressive order, counterrevolutionary forces gather in order to restore to the city its original way of life.

What does all this have to do with Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*? I had been thinking about this particular play around the time I watched the episode, and Bronn's words struck me as a clear allusion to the myth of the play; specifically, to Oedipus. Bronn's comments on his death bring to mind the situation of Oedipus before casting the curse upon his sons – Oedipus would have wanted his sons to allow him to drink wine in his own keep as part of their filial duties, but they both fail in these duties. Also, Bronn's sons humiliating themselves for their father's inheritance echoes the situation of Oedipus – Eteocles and Polynices are so eager to acquire Oedipus' inheritance that they will die for it. Considering the countless references to the classical world in both the novels and the TV series (Haimson Lushkov 2017), it is plausible to think that Aeschylus' play might lurk behind this scene, and perhaps the whole episode. Yet, whether Aeschylus was present in the minds of the series' creators or not is less important than what prompted me to make the connection between the two. In other words, the immediately obvious link between Bronn's words, issues of tradition, and Aeschylus' play confirmed for me the subversive meaning the *Seven Against Thebes* has acquired from at least the second half of the twentieth century: a meaning related to 'inheritance', that is, Eteocles' and Polynices' inheritance of both Oedipus' actual property (Thebes, the *polis*) as well as his legacy (the family curses and tradition, the *genos*).

0.1 Unleashing the *Seven Against Thebes*

As detailed by Deborah Roberts (2017: 109-14), translations into English of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* prior to the

second half of the twentieth century had generally read the play along the lines of how it was characterised by Aristophanes: "filled with Ares" (Ἄρεως μεστόν; Aristoph. *Ran.* 1021). Amongst those who translated it into English, Robert Potter called it a work of "martial genius" (1777: 81) and John Stuart Blackie described it as a play of "warlike action" (1850: 158); it was an epos rather than a drama (Blackie 1850: 158; Swanwick 1873: 194; Verrall 1887: 38; Campbell 1890: 74; Tucker 1908: xlvii, xlix). Attempts to dig up the political and historical circumstances that might have triggered Aeschylus' descriptions of war are numerous (Plumptre 1868: 37-8; Tucker 1908: xlviii; Morshead 1908: 13; Headlam 1909: xii; Bevan 1912: 9). The play's reception has been met with both negative and positive commentary, ranging from comments that it is "undramatic" (Grene 1973: 88) and the product of a fledgling dramatist (Blackie 1850: 158), to being judged a powerful description of the horrors of war (Murray 1935: 13; Vellacott 1961: 16), and, as stated by Grene, "theatrical", like "a ritual ceremony, a church service, or a pageant such as the coronation of an English monarch" (1973: 88). Whether praising its epic and descriptive qualities (especially with respect to the so-called 'shield scene'), or dismissing it altogether as the product of an unripe Aeschylus, this early play (467 BCE) has seldom been numbered amongst the actable Greek dramas until recently, as confirmed by its performance history.

As approximate as it may be, the productions database of the Oxford Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) lists only sixty-eight performances for the *Seven Against Thebes* in total, only two of which predate 1900. As for American productions of the play, the numbers are especially thin: before the two productions that feature

in this book (Will Power 2001-2008, Ellen Stewart 2001-2004), there appear to have been only four (Torrance 2007: 125-9) (two college productions: one at Beloit College in 1888, one at the Randolph-Macon Women's College in 1950, and two professional productions: *Tiresias* at La Bohème Club, San Francisco in 1931, and a reading in New York in 1960 by the Living Theatre Company).

The rather long choral odes and monologues, as well as the lack of action and the "ritual ceremony"-like features, seem to have deterred scholars and theatre practitioners from translating and adapting it for the stage. Even the plot line appeared to be less powerful and relevant than more famous tragedies, such as Sophocles' *Antigone* for example, whose beginning takes off from where the *Seven Against Thebes* ends. Read as an interesting account of warfare or as one of Aeschylus' epic and descriptive exploits, as indeed it was by most early translators, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* was generally placed amongst the least dramatic and entertaining Greek tragedies prior to the 1960s (Torrance 2007: 125, 2017a: 30).

It should not come as a surprise that the number of productions of the play increased at the end of the 1960s and specifically in 1968, identified as a pivotal moment in the history of theatre (Brockett 2014: 518) and in performances of Greek drama, in particular (Hall 2004). Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* (1968), a loose adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, was, as Edith Hall argues, a "landmark in the history of theatrical experimentation, and also . . . a landmark in the history of the reception of Greek drama in the twentieth century", not just in the US, but worldwide (2004: 12). The new prominence of Greek tragedy, Hall continues, was part of the "Performative Turn" in theatre (27), a paradigmatic shift which proved in-

fluential in redefining not just theatre but also the very basis of human (inter)actions more generally (Schechner 1968: 213; Schechner and Brady 2013: 1). Theatre experimentalists identified in Greek tragedy the means to uncover and unsettle the ideological outposts of the postwar period – Greek tragedy was unleashed, with its ability to subvert political, social, theatrical, and sexual norms (Hall 2004: 7).

Aeschylus' *Seven* was thus no longer seen as a simple account of warfare, but as a productive playground to address and criticise 'brotherly' (in its broader sense) conflicts and internal and civil unrest, both of which could be exploited by an external enemy. The plot line began to take on different meanings. The exiled Polynices, having gathered an army of seven warriors from Argos, has come back to Thebes to claim the kingdom that he believes Eteocles has seized unjustly. The action unfolds as Polynices and his handful of soldiers approach the gates and Eteocles is to face, as Helen H. Bacon argued in 1964, the "danger . . . inside the city" – a chorus of young women afraid lest the city be besieged, the women raped, and the whole city made to endure slavery – and the "danger outside", the army of soldiers (1964: 30). Yet, the 'inside' and the 'outside' as well as the 'insider' and the 'outsider' blur as the play develops. The war is not just between an army of 'outsiders' who want to subjugate the kingdom and an army of 'insiders' who defend it from their attack. It is a fight between kin, whose terms and motivations are not clear-cut because of the artful way in which Aeschylus crafted the play. Quoting Bacon again, the problem of the whole play becomes to discover "who really 'is' the stranger, the outsider, the enemy" (ibid.).

A 1968 production of a Cuban translation of the *Seven* (*Los siete contra Tebas*) by Antón Arrufat, a translation

that was "injected with subtle comments on 1960s Cuba", delved precisely into the question of "who really is the enemy" (Torrance 2015: 434). Arrufat was ostracised for fourteen years and his play banned because it was judged to be critical of Fidel Castro's regime and the Cuban Revolution. Indeed, Arrufat's interpretation of Aeschylus' play was meant to recall the events that occurred at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, where more than a thousand Cuban exiles invaded the beaches to incite an uprising against Castro's government. Parallel to Polynices and Eteocles, Torrance argues, are the Cuban exiles, Castro's "'brothers' inasmuch as they are his fellow Cubans"; parallel to the war between Eteocles and Polynices is the Bay of Pigs invasion, which "can be represented as a kind of fratricidal or civil war" (437). More than just a criticism of Castro's government, then, Arrufat's *Los Siete* questions both "materialism" (Polynices) and "communism" (Eteocles) whilst deploring the injuries that the invasion brought about (ibid.).

Anthony Hecht and Helen Bacon too explored the explosive political potential of Aeschylus' *Seven* to speak to a contemporary event when they made their translation in 1973, the earliest of the translations analysed in this book (Chs 1 and 2). Hecht and Bacon subtly denounced in Eteocles' and Polynices' internecine war the contemporaneous atrocities inflicted by the US army upon the Americans' Vietnamese 'brothers' (Roberts 2017: 108).

Along similar lines was Mario Martone's film *Teatro di Guerra* (*Rehearsals for War,* 1996), in which a theatre company rehearses Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* in Naples (Fusillo 2002; Michelakis 2004: 205-6; Torrance 2007: 127-8, 2017a). The play is scheduled to be performed in the besieged Sarajevo of 1994, but is ultimately cancelled because

the company's contact in Sarajevo, the Bosnian Jasmin, dies in a bombing. Through the explicit parallel with the ancient play, Martone condemned and grieved over both the fratricidal and daily wars of a particularly degraded and poor part of the city of Naples, the "quartieri Spagnoli" ("Spanish Quarters"), where the company rehearses, as well as the long, tragic and fratricidal wars that took place in the former Yugoslavia in those years.

The list of productions continued to grow up to and into the new millennium, when two African American playwrights, Will Power and Ellen Stewart, put Aeschylus' *Seven* to work for the purpose of unleashing its cultural and political potential in two successful transcultural adaptations of the ancient play, both aimed at opening up the many possible interpretations of the tensions between *genos* and *polis*, transposed into modern times (Chs 4 and 5).

Thus, beginning in the late 1960s, the multiple possible readings of the *Seven Against Thebes* were unlocked: at stake were Eteocles' and Polynices' relationships with their (past and present) *genos*, and the meaning of their claims to the *polis*, their inheritance (i.e. the meaning of Thebes as their father's land and as the land of their 'inheritance' upon their deaths – an 'inheritance' they gain only by being buried underneath it).

0.2 Inheriting the *Seven Against Thebes*

The importance of the *Seven Against Thebes*, however, lies not only in its aptness for 'translating' historical situations of power subversion or violent civil rebellion. It also functions as a working metaphor of what has been happening in the field of classical reception. It may well be significant to

point out that the increasing attention granted to a play that speaks about familial claims to inheritance and the meanings of this inheritance comes precisely at a time when classical reception discourse has increasingly questioned the position of the classics in Western societies, their inheritance/legacy as well as their 'rightful' heirs. Noting what has been happening in classical reception studies is essential not only in order to appreciate, but in order to understand fully the translations and adaptations presented in this book.

More consistently since the end of the twentieth century, postcolonial and translation studies in the field of classics have begun to explore and problematise the very nature of the classics' (multiple) pasts and their historical function in these pasts (Goff 2005; Hardwick and Gillespie 2007). This is especially true in the US, the country that produced the translators and stage directors analysed in this book and where the classics have played an important part in the country's power dynamics and identity formation (Macintosh, McConnell and Rankine 2015).

Growing attention has been paid to the relationship between the classics, power, and social class (Hall 2008: 387), and, especially in angolophone contexts, to their role in shaping the claim to a cultural superiority over cultural minorities (Greenwood 2004: 367). "Subterranean" voices have long since begun their journey to the surface and subverted (quite brutally, in some cases) the very definition of the classics (Macintosh, McConnell and Rankine 2015: 9). These voices have aimed at countering the forces that have been so long at play in the teaching/reception/appropriation of the classics by the colonisers. Part of this 'deconstructive' process has also been the dismantling of the idea that the classics possess certain "values" which cut "across national

identities and idioms", as Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko argue in their introduction to *Translation and the Classic* (2008: 17; Venuti 2008: 28-9). Translation studies in the field of classical reception have viewed the projection of a "false universality of world culture" as a "form of cultural imperialism" which undermines "specific local mores" (Lianeri and Zajko 2008: 17).

And yet, whilst these "subterranean" voices have started to emerge, they face the rising challenges of globalisation and cosmopolitanism, which have reshaped the concepts of 'society' and 'culture' (16-19; Pavis 2010: 6; Goff and Simpson 2015: 45-8). In the Americas, "globalised transnationalism" has the potential to put an end to (dangerous) nationalisms and to promote a cosmopolitan culture that will finally give voice to pluralism and multiculturalism (Goff and Simpson 2015: 46). At the same time, though, this transnational culture may also undermine and endanger certain localised communities whilst "enriching people who live in the white west and north", and thus embody another form of imperialism, one based on capital (ibid.).

In the US, then, which is thought of as the wellspring of globalisation, the place from which the (new?) cosmopolitan ideas have spread, translation as a practice takes on a special meaning. Translation, which is inherently an activity of appropriation, becomes even more so when it is the US, both a post and neocolonial empire, that is so eagerly appropriating texts from other languages. Edwin Gentzler argues that in the Americas more generally translation has not just played a role in the history of the countries therein, but has become embroidered into their very fabric: there, "Translation is not a trope, but a permanent condition" (2008: 5). But there is more, as Gentzler argues in line with the "cul-

tural turn" that translation studies veered into in the 90s: in the Americas, translation not only "takes place between cultures" but "is itself culture"; it has been part of the identity formation of the countries therein (7).

Understanding translation into English from this perspective sheds new light on another phenomenon that discloses something important about the US' relationship to the classics: the vast number of recent American translations and adaptations of Greek drama. According to the APGRD and WorldCat databases, 25.1% of adaptations of Greek drama from 2000 to 2019 took place in the US, whilst 59.46% of translations of Greek drama during this same period were into English. The percentages are even more astonishing if they are compared to the past: only 25.75% of translations of Greek drama were into English from 1700 to 1999, but the number of productions of Greek drama in the US that occurred from 2000 to 2019 constitute 22.26% of all the productions ever staged in the history of the US. In fact, the country is in the vanguard of a worldwide phenomenon, playing "a key role in the globalization of Greek tragedy that has become its hallmark since the 1960s" (Macintosh, McConnell and Rankine 2015: 3).

Indeed, the US is in the vanguard not only in the globalisation of Greek tragedy, but in the globalisation process more generally. Moreover, because of its inherently constitutive multiculturalism, it is also in the front line in the search for those "in-between" spaces that Homi Bhabha deems necessary in today's society to "initiate new signs of identity" (2004: 2). In a country (and world) of "posts", characterised by a "tenebrous sense of survival", there occurs the growing need to redefine the cultural spaces shared with the 'different', the 'other', and thereby reshape cultural identities

(1). Talking about the place of minorities in this redefinition, Bhabha argues that there exists an ongoing "negotiation" and "restaging" of the past, making "any immediate access to an originary identity or a received tradition" impossible (3).

It is, therefore, telling that at this moment of historical transformation, productions of the *Seven Against Thebes* are growing exponentially. Post-2000 adaptations of the play worldwide make up 21.4% of all the adaptations ever performed of the play, whilst post-2000 American adaptations represent 26.6% of that 21.4% (APGRD). It is also perhaps not a coincidence that two of the three American 'adapters' (Will Power: APGRD, ID: 9456; Ellen Stewart: APGRD, ID: 14408) are African American. The prevalence of African American artists in revisiting, or, as has been argued, "re-signifying" Greek tragedy (Powers 2018: 2), is not just characteristic of the *Seven* in particular, but part of a wider phenomenon that has seen this minority (along with others) take up the classical heritage as their own "at an unprecedented rate" (Macintosh, McConnell and Rankine 2015: 11-12). Power's and Stewart's productive relationships with this 're-signifying' process of Greek tragedy in particular needs to be linked with what Paul Gilroy has called the "Black Atlantic" (1993: 4), itself an 'in-between' space, essentially a home for "intermediate concepts" (6). The notion of the Black Atlantic as a hybrid and fluid cultural area spanning "Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean" (4), is particularly apt for exploring Power's and Stewart's theatre adaptations as they are both aimed at transcending national and ethnic constraints to gain "a transnational and intercultural perspective" (15).

Whilst 'performing' this transnational approach in their works (Power in choosing the hybrid means that is hip-hop

theatre: Ch. 4; Stewart in staging cosmopolitanism: Ch. 5), both Stewart and Power move away from traditional binary oppositions between countering or following the canonical performance of Greek tragedy, or that affect ethnic perspectives. Their works originate from and are part of the Black Atlantic culture because they create and promote an 'in-between' journey into an act of re- and self-definition within a shared cultural space, beyond ethnic and national distinctions, and in dialogue with the past, Greek tragedy and its legacy. Power and Stewart thus become active agents in this process of 'negotiating' and 'restaging' the past which Bhabha advocates, and the *Seven* becomes fertile material to 'relaunch' and, at the same time, 'relocate' this 'uncomfortable' past.

The fact that Greek drama has become a useful means for the enactment of this 're-signifying' process should not come as a surprise, as adaptations of Greek drama, particularly if inscribed into notions of postdramatic theatre as Power's and Stewart's are, inherently represent a subversion and reproposition of this past as they 'adapt' it. Indeed, as Han-Thies Lehmann explains (2006: 27), the adjective "postdramatic" is there to denote "a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama", which it restages with critical distance, "at a time 'after' the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre" (ibid.). The 'post' essentially represents a moving away from the Aristotelian-Hegelian concept of drama as the re-enactment of a dialectic (where 'dialogue' is the form privileged) that sees fixed and well-individualised characters follow a linear story which cannot but culminate in some sort of 'resolution' (Lehmann 2006: 40-5). The dialectic that postdramatic theatre enacts towards its 'dramatic' past encompasses as much the aesthetic structure of the

material as it does the content of the material performed.

By upsetting the structure as well as the content of traditional drama whilst at the same time being in dialogue with it, postdramatic adaptation sees "the construction and legacy of the stories and characters as content for examination" along with the stories themselves (Campbell 2010: 68). Postdramatic adaptations of Greek tragedy such as those analysed in this book become the vehicles for a rethinking not only of the dramatic structures at the core of postdramatic critique more generally, but of the legacy (and (post)colonial importance) represented by these ancient texts. In other words, within a simultaneous "enshrining" and "questioning" of the past (Hutcheon 1988: 124), postdramatic adaptations employ the formative texts of Greek tragedy to "investigate the specific legacies of theatre" and thus become (as will be shown in Chs 4 and 5) "ultimately and always metatheatrical, about the event, the creation, and the reception of theatre" (Campbell 2010: 72).

Thus, Aeschylus' play functions as a metaphor both for the process of the redefinition of the classics' role in our society as well as a vehicle for the creation of new "cultural hybridities", 'in-between' spaces to re-discuss the meaning of (any) tradition in these hybridities (Bhabha 2004: 3).

0.3 Incorporating the *Seven Against Thebes*

This activity of 'restaging' and 'relocating' the past is part of the process of "incorporation", as George Steiner calls it (1975: 296-7), that defines both the activities of translating and adapting those products that are at the heart of this book. Incorporation, Steiner argues, is the point at which both the meaning and the form of a text are incorporated, "import-

ed", into the target culture (296; see also Hardwick 2008: 345).

Again the *Seven* can be invoked as a working metaphor. There is a connection between the nuances of the interlingual process that Steiner calls incorporation and the dramatic incorporation that occurs in the plot of Aeschylus' play. Incorporation, in fact, is precisely what Eteocles and Polynices are fighting for (both on the abstract and concrete level): their 'incorporation' into the land of Thebes and their reception of Oedipus' legacy/tradition. However, Thebes' incorporation of the two brothers happens at the expense of their lives, just as linguistic incorporation has historically been considered to constitute a loss for the source language/culture especially (witness, not least, the examples of linguistic colonialism). Eteocles and Polynices are absorbed by their inherited land 'via their deaths'.

Incorporation, that is, linguistic and dramatic incorporation, is, on many different levels, more than simple appropriation, and is a defining feature of both translation and adaptation. The 'other', Eteocles and Polynices, but also the language to be 'decoded' when translating and adapting, becomes one with the 'incorporator'/'appropriator'. For Eteocles and Polynices, this 'incorporator'/'appropriator' is the land of Thebes, and for the source language, it is the target language into which the 'original' is absorbed.

Finally, incorporation, as the term is meant especially by Power and Stewart, is an invitation to appropriate a tradition (Oedipus/the curse/the classics?) that needs to be resituated and re-envisioned, relocated and "re-contextualised" in order to continue being productive (Laera 2014: 8). It represents a necessary stage that occurs when there is an inheritance at stake (Thebes) that needs to be (re)claimed to become meaningful again.

The *Seven Against Thebes* thus becomes a metaphor both for the activity of the linguistic incorporation that occurs in translation and adaptation, and, on a metatheatrical level – via Eteocles' and Polynices' war over their father's tradition – for the particular encounter between old and new that continually occurs on both a large and small scale within human interactions. As Lorna Hardwick argues, in Greek tragedy in particular, it is this polarity between old and new that generates surprises when we attempt to replace issues of "ownership" and historical "origins" and "roots", with which classical scholars are still much concerned, with issues of existential "ownership", "origins" and "roots" (Hardwick 2008: 360-2).

In other words, the nuances of this linguistic and dramatic incorporation, that is, the modes in which such an incorporation happens, rest on a new understanding of 'origins' and 'roots' (Hardwick 2008: 362). The watershed of the 1960s and, increasingly, postcolonialism and translation studies have divested, re-questioned and deconstructed the (colonial) 'roots' of Greek tragedy and simultaneously thrown it open to being "reclaimed" (Powers 2018: 2-3). In interpreting these texts, then, it is no longer as important to state whose they are (the question of 'ownership' and historical 'origins') as it is to exploit them to address who 'we' (readers and incorporators) are, what 'our' origins and roots are. The encounter between old and new is no longer a playground for a cultural and political imposition, but a dialogue used to respond to and go more deeply into existential and transnational as well as transcultural questions of 'roots' and 'origins'.

The change in the reception of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* is essentially a product of this new way of under-

standing and encountering the classics. Thus, as will be seen, the play has been read as raising the question of relationships with the past (Eteocles and Polynices' relationship with Oedipus) and the future (Eteocles and Polynices' decision to fight one another in order to 'inherit' the kingdom). The main existential question that the three translators and two theatre directors studied here all grapple with via their interpretation of Eteocles and Polynices' specific case is: Must possession/ownership of one's land (Thebes) and origins (Oedipus, the curse) always be exclusive (either Eteocles or Polynices, but not both) and violent, that is, entailing the death of one of the competitors, as in the *Seven*?

It is in these terms that the interpretations of Aeschylus' play presented in this book need to be understood – as attempts to create spaces in between the old and new, steering clear of strict binary oppositions and in dialogue with the problem of 'existential' origins and roots.

0.4 The Book

There is a sense in which, as detailed above, the creative process that is applied in both the adaptation and translation of a dramatic text can be productively understood as being one and the same. Because both involve a "transaction between texts and languages" (Hutcheon 2006: 16) and "an act of both intercultural and intertemporal communication" (Bassnett 2014: 10), the processes embedded in translation and adaptation 'are' indeed alike. This is even more the case for the translation and adaptation for theatre: both activities are necessarily "recordings into a new set of conventions as well as signs", as Linda Hutcheon argues (2006: 17). Indeed, the translation and adaptation of dramatic scripts for perfor-

mance, more than any other type of translation and adaptation, require substantial reinterpretation and re-creation. Even theoretical distinctions between adaptation and theatre translation are difficult to formulate and more often than not mislead rather than assist (Bassnett 1985: 93; Windle 2011: 159-60; Krebs 2014: 3). After all, theatre itself "is a constant process of translation" (Gostand 1980: 1) as well as being, "by definition, adaptation" (Barnette 2018: 38).

The products of theatre translation versus adaptation, however, can be very different, particularly if the former is not conceived of as a script for a specific production, but rather is published as a book, as is the case with the translations analysed here. Because they are different products, then, they require different modes of analysis. In fact, however much the translations analysed in this book are meant, ideally, for performance, and however much 'performance' as an all-encompassing concept has changed the way we think of these texts (Ch. 1), these translations stand in the realm of published literary works and add to the enormous corpus of the literary versions of Greek tragedy. Due to their "unique status and historical provenance", the texts of Greek tragedy, Simon Perris argues, "have a foot in both camps as both book and script" (2010: 186).

The history of the translation and criticism of Greek tragedy before its return to the realm of performance in the 1960s accounts for a perception of these texts as essentially "poetic", as units "to be read on the page and translated as a literary text", as Susan Bassnett observes acutely (1991: 105-6). Yet, though these texts are inherently both literary and performance texts, "script-alone" and "script-as-performed" are "*different*" (Hall 2004a: 55). This does not mean, however, that analyses of theatre translations should forget that these

are indeed dramatic texts, "something incomplete" (Bassnett 2014: 128-9) that will be fully realised or "translated" again in performance, whether that will ever happen or not (Macintosh 2013: 4). Yet, there is no doubt that a theatre text "is read" – hence analysed – "differently" from a performance text (Bassnett 2014: 128).

Thus, though acknowledging the theoretical identity of intent that moves both translators and adapters, in this book I have separated the translation and adaptation of the *Seven Against Thebes* to allow for a different mode of analysis upon each. For the discussion of translation, I have structured my investigation around the problems that the translations pose as literary texts. I examine the translators' and the series' theoretical stances towards translating in the context of translation theory (Ch. 1); I then discuss the themes of the play, comparing the translators' interpretations with previous classical scholarship (Ch. 2); and finally, I analyse the various translators' linguistic and literary choices from the perspective of linguistic and literary semiotics by comparing two passages from the play (Ch. 3, *Sept.* 631-76). In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine the two theatrical adaptations of the *Seven Against Thebes* whilst grafting them onto the wider context of postdramatic theatre and postcolonial studies.

Chapter 1

Theatre Translation and Greek Tragedy in Three American Book Series

In 1959, the literary critic Reuben A. Brower edited the book *On Translation*, a collective volume of essays on the problem of translation, a pioneering work, as he saw it, in a field that had hitherto only drawn the attention of "relatively few major writers or critics" (1966: 2). The seventeen essays in the volume touched on various kinds of translation (from the Bible and from various languages, including Russian, Chinese, German, and ancient Greek and Latin), as well as proposed some approaches, one of which was that advocated by Roman Jakobson in his famous essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (1966).

With regard to translating poetry, Greek tragedy included, the volume encompassed two rather different attitudes. On the one hand, Vladimir Nabokov's "servile-path" theory suggested a rendering as close to the original as possible and stuffed with footnotes (1966: 9, 2012: 125); on the other, Dudley Fitts, a prolific translator of Greek drama, advocated the creation of "another poem" (1966: 34). Such a "poem", he argued, should be a "comparable experience" to the "original", the conundrum being that any reading of the "original" is as specific as it is "subjective" (ibid.). Along these lines, Richmond Lattimore, an American poet and classicist, most famous for his translations of Homer's *Iliad* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, as-

serted that "verse translation" of Greek drama should consist of "author plus translator" (1966: 49); but instead of resulting either in "the original-in-English only" (Gilbert Murray) or in the "author-helped-by-the-original" (Ezra Pound), a version for Lattimore should be a "product" and not a "sum" of author and translator (ibid.).

A couple of years after Brower's volume, *Craft and Context of Translation* appeared, originating from a symposium convened at the University of Texas at Austin in 1959 by William Arrowsmith, the American classicist, poet, translator and editor of the first translation series presented in this chapter (*Greek Tragedy in New Translations*), and Roger Shattuck, also a translator. The book, Sidney Monas recalled in 1994, was a landmark in discourse about literary translation; he still believed it to be, even after more than three decades, one of "the most eloquent and most complete expressions of the problematics" (5) that translation poses.

Craft and Context featured articles by many classicists/ translators of the classics (Peter Arnott, William Arrowsmith, Smith Palmer Bovie, Robert Corrigan, Kenneth Rexroth, and Donald S. Carne-Ross), who addressed some of the recurrent issues in translating Greek poetry, and Greek theatre in particular. Ancient literature generally, argued Carne-Ross in the opening essay, required "total recreation" (1961: 4);[1]

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[1] Carne-Ross was not the first to employ the term "re-creation" to characterise theatre translation, and this word was and is certainly not the only one employed by critics to encapsulate the "creativity" involved in translating for the theatre (Saoudi 2017: 177). There is, in fact, a long list of authors/translators who have identified the 'creative' potential of not just theatre translation, but translation in general, and the list goes as back as far as Cicero and Horace (Venuti 2012: 14). In theatre translation, however, the need for a "total recreation",

Greek drama needed such a "recreation" especially: in this case, the would-be translator should, in fact, find "equivalents for a set of conventions which are theatrical as well as literary" (5). This was Arrowsmith's take too: "literalism" in Greek drama, he argues, "fails . . . because it conflicts with a convention [i.e. the theatrical one] whose demands it cannot satisfy except by becoming less literal" (1961: 123).

Moreover, Carne-Ross continued, translation of ancient literature should be seen as a "commentary" on the text rather than a "substitute for it" and thus should be likened to a form of "criticism", which, like criticism in general, possesses an "interpretative role" (1961: 6). Bovie, too (one of the two editors of the second translation series presented in this chapter, *Penn Greek Drama*), yearned for translation to be recognised as akin to any other form of criticism. Translation eventually reveals itself in the "techniques" employed to translate: the translator thus becomes the "imitative craftsman" and "makes poetry" (1961: 50-1).

Particularly interesting (and exemplary of an approach to translation that would be adopted by the editors of the *Penn Greek Drama* series, too) is an experiment that Carne-Ross reported having conducted: he gave some 5,000 lines of Homer's *Iliad* to a dozen people to translate; these people were known more for their outstanding skills in English rather than in Greek, with which some were not well-acquainted and thus referred to earlier translations to make theirs. The resulting creations were then performed by a professional actor. The immense success of the experiment supposedly proved that preference should be given to proficiency in the

as advocated by Carne-Ross, has been perceived as essential (Bassnett 2006: 174; Windle 2011: 161-2).

target language (1961: 14-15).

Both Peter Arnott and Robert Corrigan also stressed the "performative" nature of Greek tragedy, stating that the translator should reflect this nature in her or his work (Arnott 1961: 84; Corrigan 1961: 97). Whilst Arnott distinguished between "the literary translator" and the "stage translator", both embodying legitimate yet different acts of translation of Greek tragedy, Corrigan supported incorporating the essence of performance, "the gesture", into any translation of a play tout court, harkening back to Antonin Artaud's (1958: 108) and Richard Palmer Blackmur's (1961: 6) idea of a "gestic" language in theatre.

Both *On Translation* and *Craft and Context* were the result of the US' postwar interaction with the larger world, which afforded much greater importance to translation. Both in some way re-proposed traditional oppositions: "sense-for-sense" versus "word-for-word" à la Jerome, or, with Venuti, "domestication" versus "foreignization" (1995: 20). In the case of Greek theatre, both leaned towards the former, showing the strong influence of the newly rediscovered performative aim of such texts.

As a matter of fact, the same 'Performative Turn' that would penetrate and reshape the staging of Greek drama, and tragedy in particular, was affecting (and would increasingly affect) its translation practices, too. Thus, whilst radical reworkings of Greek tragedy were being performed successfully, new translation series which claimed to be returning Greek tragedy to the theatre by providing 'actable' versions for the stage also thrived. Indeed, the number of translations of Greek tragedy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been "so vast that the period has been called a 'renaissance' in the field" (Hardwick 2008: 342). Oliver

Taplin argues that the time period ranging from the 1960s to the present represents a "transition, from an age when" classics were "primarily the preserve of scholars" and classical poetry "the preserve of the few, to our age, when it has been opened up to a wide range of creative artists", with some not even "working from the original language" (2002: 1).

In the midst of this "renaissance" of translations, there emerged the translation series analysed in this chapter: *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* (founding editor: William Arrowsmith); *Penn Greek Drama* (editors: Bovie and David Slavitt); and *Great Translations For Actors* (editors: Eric Kraus and Marisa Smith). All three series and the translators involved were influenced in their (re)framing translation practice and theory by the views of translation discussed above, either because they themselves were part of this 'rethinking' (Bovie and Arrowsmith) or because they incorporated it into their work (on Fitts' influence on Slavitt: Slavitt 2018; on Arrowsmith's and Shattuck's on Mueller: Mueller 2002: 117).

Indeed, retracing the particular history and theoretical stances of each series sheds light on the translations they offer. Interestingly, doing so also enriches the history of theatre translation theory and practice. This history not only documents and substantiates the main trends of theatre translation discourse (poet-and-translator, poet-as-translator and translator-as-dramaturg); it also does so within the relatively young subfield of theatre translation of Greek drama (Macintosh 2013: 3), already rich with case studies (Barbsy 2002; Balmer 2006; Walton 2006; Hardwick 2001, 2007, 2008, 2010), but underexplored in its theoretical implications and, most of all, insufficiently in dialogue with theatre translation theory.

1.1 *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* and Hecht and Bacon's *Seven Against Thebes*

In *Craft and Context*, in his chapter "Agenda for Translators and Publishers", Arrowsmith reviewed the most important translations of Greek tragedies under the heading "Ancient Greek" (1961a: 179-82). Whilst mentioning other translations, the American scholar focused mostly on the University of Chicago Press series *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore.[2] Although he praised the project overall, Arrowsmith judged some of the translations weak, especially those of the minor plays. Moreover, he continued, the major plays "should be available in several first-rate versions" (1961a: 179). He explained:

[2] The first three volumes of the Grene and Lattimore edition of *The Complete Greek Tragedies* came out in 1942, with the fourth and fifth volumes following in 1958. On the occasion of its 1991 second edition, which contained revisions and in some cases new translations, Michael Rogers reported that "this translation has sold over three million copies" (Rogers 1991: 116). A third edition was published in 2013, with Mark Griffith and Glenn Most as new editors alongside (the then-deceased) Grene and Lattimore. This new edition revised the second systematically and replaced some of the translations with new ones: *Medea* by Oliver Taplin, *The Children of Heracles* by Mark Griffith, *Andromache* by Deborah Roberts and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* by Anne Carson, and returned to Elizabeth Wyckoff's translation of *Antigone*, which had been replaced by Grene's in the 1991 edition. New translations of Aeschylus' fragmented plays and of Sophocles' *The Trackers* also made their appearance in this revised edition. As Alan Beale reports in *The Classical Review,* "The editors claim to have conducted the revision of the texts 'carefully and tactfully to bring them up to date'" (Beale 2014: 358).

> Particularly needed is a high-quality series of selected traged
> edies in inexpensive paperbacks, especially since students
> are first introduced to Greek drama through the cheaper
> editions. . . . The ideal solution would be a series of traged
> dies analogous to the Laurel Shakespeare: fifteen or twenty
> plays, one play to a volume, well translated into verse and
> directed at providing acting versions, equipped with full
> notes, stage-directions and perceptive introductions. (Ar
> rowsmith 1961a: 180)

In light of what happened afterwards, these words can be
read as a sort of manifesto for Arrowsmith's *Greek Tragedy in
New Translations* series, begun in 1973 and recently completed under the editorial supervision of Peter Burian and Alan
Shapiro. As the quotation shows, Arrowsmith expressed the
need for a book series which provided "acting versions" and
at the same time the necessary tools for a student or general
reader to enter into the world of Greek tragedy. Also, the
series should come out in cheap paperbacks so as to generate
mass interest in Greek plays.[3]

In his essay "The Criticism of Greek Tragedy" (1959), Arrowsmith explains what he believes has prevented translators
of Greek tragedy from being fully successful. The problem, he
argues, lies in both the approaches to Greek tragedy exhibited
in traditional scholarship (with its near-total absence of criticism: 32) and in the New Criticism (with its refusal to question
and challenge the too well-established assumptions around the
texts of Greek tragedy: 38). As did Carne-Ross and Bovie above,

[3] The cost of a single tragedy in Arrowsmith's series varies, with
the cheapest being $9.95. If compared to a common edition of Greek
tragedy, for example the *Dover Thrift Editions*, one can see that Arrowsmith's series is not cheap at all. The entire corpus of Sophocles'
Theban plays costs only $3.60 in the *Dover Thrift Edition*.

Arrowsmith argued that "good translation is exemplary and creative criticism", and that translations and criticism should "work hand in hand" to sponsor "the other's vitality" (34). Yet to date, this had rarely happened anywhere, and especially not in Greek tragedy. Criticism of Greek tragedy (old and new), together with its translations, had been a "most conspicuous failure up to now" (ibid.). Part of the failure of critics consisted in their inability to "free themselves from the immense authority of the standard interpretations", whether grappling with "Quellenforschungen" (old criticism) or "metaphor-snooping" (i.e. the New Criticism's constant search for and analysis of key metaphors in a text, capable of illuminating and exemplifying said text by themselves) (Arrowsmith 1959: 38).[4]

This undisputed reliance on older scholarship's suppositions around Greek tragedy (from the "tacit assumption that it was staged in a religious context": 37, to the content of the canon that was formed in the nineteenth century: 39) prevented critics and translators from "realizing" – and thus accounting for in their works – "turbulence" (34). As elusive as this term might be, Arrowsmith argues that "turbulence" is "the essence of Greek tragedy" and operates on both a lin-

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[4] Whilst acknowledging the beneficial influence on classical scholarship of works such as Kenneth Burke's "Form and Persecution in the *Oresteia*" (1952), Robert F. Goheen's *The Imagery of Sophocles' Antigone: A Study of Poetic Language and Structure* (1951), or H. D. F. Kitto's *Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study* (1939), all soaked in the "refinement of verbal techniques offered by New Criticism" (1959: 33), Arrowsmith warns that many of these analyses are handicapped by the authority of nineteenth-century scholarship (38). "Habit is hard to shed", he argues, and in the case of Greek tragedy "critical habit has hardened into cultural habit"; yet, he concludes, it is crucial "to any hope of a fresh and exacting criticism" that any relapse into habit be resisted (ibid.).

guistic (as an inter-linguistic activity) as well as temporal (as an inter-temporal activity) level. It is the "turbulence of experience, turbulence of morality in the process of getting made, and the turbulence of ideas under dramatic test" (ibid.) that criticism should be aiming to uncover. A translator should "get the substance of that experience . . . into language", that is, grasp "its turbulence as well as its final order" (Arrowsmith 1959: 34).

If critics fail to perceive this turbulence and build from it a new reading of Greek tragedy, there exists a "real danger of taking over almost intact the canon of Greek tragedy" (39) established in the nineteenth century. This was the basis for Arrowsmith's persistent appeal to take "risks of loyal improvisation" (Arrowsmith 1961: 123) when required:

> There are times – far more frequent than most scholars suppose – when the worst possible treachery is the simple-minded faith in 'accuracy' and literal loyalty to the original. (Arrowsmith 1961: 123)

These occasions happen frequently in Greek tragedy, as Greek plays often present specific difficulties that necessitate additions or changes to the English text, as will be shown in the comparison between the three translations in Chapter 3. Yet, too often scholarship, Arrowsmith argued, had undertaken the "full job" of translating Greek tragedy to gain "the illusion of objectivity [simple-minded faith in 'accuracy'] in fancy dress" (1959: 38).

Arrowsmith created his new book series based on the above considerations. As he spelled out in the "Editor's Foreword", the series' aim was to equip a "general reader or student" (1978: v) with critical introductions, notes, commentary, a glossary and stage directions. The real novelty of his

book series, however, was combining the work of a schol-
ar and a poet in each translation, thus promoting a form of
productive 'collaboration', or "collaborative translation", as
it has been called (Bassnett 1985: 90-1; Link 1980: 24). This
decision derived from his conviction that, although schol-
ars could compose 'useful' and 'accurate' versions, ancient
poets like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides required the
presence of new ones alongside their texts. "Our most urgent
present need is for a recreation of these plays", Arrowsmith
stated, in order to render them "as vivid as possible", in order
to see them "with fresh eyes" and "reassess" them "for our-
selves, in terms of our own needs" (1978: v).

Arrowsmith's challenge consists of rediscovering and re-
interpreting the terms used to convey the tragic meaning of
a play so that this meaning is accessible to contemporary au-
diences. Such a "recreation" (the kind argued for by Fitts and
Carne-Ross) should also inhere in the performative nature of
these texts, which is why the series includes stage directions.
Stage directions "should be spare and defensible", because an-
cient tragedy is "austere and 'distanced' by means of masks"
with none of the intimate details of today's theatre (vii).

The spelling of names follows a "mixed orthography"
(ibid.). Every translator in the series maintains most common
names "deeply rooted in our literature" (vi) in their Latinised
form, but all others are transliterated. The series' translations
also all present a double numeration of lines, one reflecting
the original with another following the English version. More
often than not, the English lines outnumber those of the orig-
inal, sometimes making it hard to find the Greek equivalent
of a line in translation. The reason for this disparity is that
the translators "adopted the free-flowing norms of modern
Anglo-American prosody" (viii), along with all the rules this

choice entails. Each translator also specifies the critical edition that is the basis for their translation in the introduction to the play. Finally, it was Arrowsmith's intention to give minor plays the same critical importance as the most famous ones, for "the *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* aims to be, in the fullest sense, new" (vi).

It seemed only natural to scholars to see *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* as an attempt to replace the University of Chicago Press series *The Complete Greek Tragedies* as the standard American edition of Greek tragedy in translation. This is not the place to compare the two, but it will suffice to say that by translating once again the complete Greek tragedies, Arrowsmith compelled readers to see his translations as 'new' and in opposition to the 'old' (Chicago) ones.

Reviews of Arrowsmith's project have been mostly favourable, yet there has been some criticism of the style adopted in some of the plays: Bushnell, whilst praising the commentaries and notes in the new series, observes that Stephen Berg's poetic style in *Oedipus Tyrannus* sometimes "sacrifices definition and intelligibility" (1984: 80). Such a consideration, as will be shown, can be extended to the translation of the *Seven Against Thebes*, in which Anthony Hecht, the poet, and Helen Bacon, the scholar, often obscure the meaning of the text or change the metaphors to pursue their interpretation of a passage (Ch. 3). Overall, it seems that the style of the series' translators moves between "colloquial American" (Bagg 1973: 12) and highly lyrical and difficult to perform language (Bushnell 1984: 81). Taplin agrees, stating in his review of the volumes issued up to 1976 that translators (save Lattimore) "hardly begin to convey the tone, the immediacy and theatricality of the originals" and indulge in "obscure imagery and sub-textual patterns" (1976: 168).

Yet, American writers such as George Paul Elliott cele-
brated Hecht and Bacon's "re-creation" (employing the same
word Arrowsmith used in the "Editor's Foreword") because
it allowed him to understand deeply "back in there with the
gods" the neglected tragedy that is the *Seven Against Thebes*
(1974: 17).[5] Through the "words and guides, sustained, eco-
nomical, unmarred" that he saw in the translation, Elliot was
able to imagine "a dramatic production" that he had "never
seen realised on stage"; he experienced "an order of power . . .
seen only a few times" (ibid.). Elliott's comments showed that
the series had brought to life and evoked the dramatic con-
text of a minor play for a "general reader", thus subverting
the 'canonical' judgment of it. Some of the reviews generally
took the position that, in contrast to Chicago Press' "clar-
ity and fidelity", which often renders its translations "nei-
ther actable nor illuminating" (Bushnell 1984: 78), the *Greek
Tragedy in New Translation* series takes risks, even though it
sometimes fails in various ways.

Certainly, this sense of daring newness that permeated
the series from the beginning is produced by the "collabo-
ration between scholars who care for contemporary poet-
ry and poets who value the classics"; and Peter Burian, one
of the two editors, hoped that this newness would increase
"interest amongst classicists in good contemporary writing"
(2000: 306). Though ultimately acknowledging the manifest
impossibility of translating a Greek play, Burian described
his gruelling, line-by-line revision of the *Oresteia* with the
poet Shapiro as a way "into the inner life of the work", pro-
voking a sense of "sheer exhilaration" (ibid.).

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[5] It is worth noting that Hecht and Bacon's translation was nomi-
nated for a national book award (see Roberts 2017: 127).

1.2 *Penn Greek Drama* and Stephen Sandy's *Seven Against Thebes*

"The idea for the series dates back to 1995" (qtd in Ghitelman 1997: 20), explained Eric Halpern, the director of Penn Press. At that time, Halpern, together with poet David Slavitt and Palmer Bovie had just completed the *Complete Roman Drama in Translation* series for Johns Hopkins University Press. The publication of the complete corpus of Greek theatre, then, seemed to be the natural sequel of this first undertaking. Indeed, Halpern's goal was "to make a publishing event" (Kinney 1998: 22). It actually turned out to be a huge one, as the *Penn Greek Drama* series produced a twelve-volume translation in inexpensive paperbacks of the whole tragic corpus in only three years from 1997 to 1999, for a cash outlay of $50,000. As Ghitelman forecast, publicity for the translations came from "rounds of various professional gatherings", for example, a meeting of the American Philological Society, and from organising "readings/discussions featuring the series' translators", including an evening at "Christie's, the New York fine arts auction house" and other meetings in Philadelphia and Boston (1997: 20).

The series is highly ambitious. The back cover of the book states that "these translations promise to become the standard for decades to come"; that is to say, as Adrian Poole puts it: "Roll over, Chicago" (1999: 58). As a matter of fact, the series' claim is to move away from "many previous translations unusable in the classroom and inaccessible to general readers": whilst not mentioning them, this obviously refers to the most popular American translations published by Chicago and Oxford University Press. Furthermore, because of

its preference for readability over literalism, the series will be "the only contemporary" one, says the blurb (Slavitt and Bovie 1999: ii). Penn Press' director confirms this:

> The difference is monumental. One is meant to be a close representation in English of the Greek, regardless of overall sense and colour. A literary version is loyal to the original, but it is making a work of art in English. (qtd in Anonymous 1998: A13)

Indeed, the recruitment of translators followed this criterion of "making a work of art": amongst the forty translators, one finds two Pulitzer Prize winners, Carolyn Kizer and Henry Taylor; famous poets such as Eleanor Wilner (also a MacArthur Foundation grant recipient), and Stephen Sandy; screenwriters of considerable fame, such as Oscar winner Frederic Raphael, Richard Elman and George Garrett; and the dramatist Daniel Mark Epstein.

But this is only part of the story. As confirmed in the above review, "In some cases, the poets commissioned by Penn do not know Greek", hence they worked "closely with classicists, including Mr. Bovie" (ibid.).[6] In an article in the

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[6] It is hard to pin down precisely who had some previous knowledge of ancient Greek and who did not; in fact, as Sarah Torrence points out in her review of the fourth volume of Euripides' translations, though "four of the five translators are primarily poets", she reckons that "all five seem to have some familiarity with the Greek text and at least some sense of Euripides' style and vocabulary" (Torrence 2000). However, comments like "I pretend to no knowledge of the Classical Greek text" (Wilner 1999: 11), or "*hubris* was a Greek word I knew" (Terranova 1998: 224), or I knew only "*hoi* and *polloi*" (Grote 2000) do stand out, especially when it was the series' intent to become the new standard for the classroom. What can be said with certainty is that, amongst all forty translators, only four are classicists

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette newspaper, David Kinney reports that some of the recruits had never even read Greek plays before. As Carne-Ross did in his experiment, the series' editors, as anticipated, gave preference to proficiency in the target language, thus inserting the project into the well-trodden 'writer/playwright-as-translator' path in theatre translation practice (Hale and Upton 2000: 10; Findlay 2006: 46; Marinetti 2013: 30). Slavitt asked the recruits to "translate 100 lines at first" and "work from earlier translations" (qtd in Kinney 1998: 22). Those who "loved it" began work (ibid.). Slavitt's invitation to the translators was to "have fun", because if they did not "no one else will have fun reading them" (qtd in Ghitelman 1997: 20).

As mentioned, Bovie was not the only classicist/linguist to have helped the translators find their way through the texts. Yet, whilst in the *Greek Tragedy in New Translations* series the classicist's role was acknowledged by being identified as a co-author of the translation, in the Penn Press series there is no consistency as to how they are credited for their contribution. Some translators mention them in their acknowledgements (Junkins 1998: 158; Nelson 1998: 73; Seydel Morgan 1998: 232; Sandy 1999: 52) and some identify them as official collaborators, though this is done in various ways. It is "Eleanor Wilner 'with' Inés Azar" for *Medea*, but "Frederic Raphael 'and' Kenneth McLeish" for *Ajax*, "Mark Rudman 'and' Katharine Washburn" for *Daughters of Troy*, and "Katharine Washburn 'and' David Curzon" for *The Madness of Her-*

(Bovie, Gail Holst-Warhaft, Kenneth McLeish and Roberts). Not surprisingly, most of the translators do not indicate which version of the Greek they referred to; it is easier to list who did (Epstein 1998: 222; Nims 1998: 74; Curzon and Washburn 1999: 157; Holst-Warhaft 1999: 110; Roberts 1999: 11-12).

acles. I suspect the reason for this differentiation lies in the comparative status of the authors: whilst Inés Azar is only the 'linguist-helper', all the rest (McLeish included) wear the poet's hat in addition to providing linguistic expertise. Some of the other translators confess to having worked from earlier cribs (Chappell 1998: 4; Nelson 1998: 72; Terranova 1998: 227; Barbarese 1999: 95).

This is not the only inconsistency in the series. The main problem highlighted by reviewers is with the translators' introductions to the plays. Following the blurb's suggestion that translators offered what "they have seen in their readings of these works" (Slavitt and Bovie 1999: ii), their overviews of the plays display rather different approaches to the text. Indeed, after Bovie's (not especially informative: Marshall 1998) introduction to the habits and customs of Greek theatre and a brief biography of the Greek dramatist chosen for the volume, contributors "are left . . . to provide the basic background [to the plays]", as Dale Grote writes in his review to *Sophocles*, I (2000). Whilst in some cases these introductions are rather informative and translators insert their readings into the wider scholarship on the particular play (Epstein 1998: 222-7; Hadas 1998: 137-44; McLeish and Raphael 1998: 3-6; Curzon and Washburn 1999: 157-64; Holst-Warhaft 1999: 105-10; Kessler 1999: 3-26; Roberts 1999: 3-12), others resort to more personal considerations and offer little information about the history of the plays or their main themes (Chapell 1998: 3-5; Elman 1998: 141; Nelson 1998: 74; Seydel Morgan 1998: 229-30; Slavitt 1998: 5-6; Wilner 1998: 5; Barbarese 1999: 95-6; Kizer 1999: 243-5), and yet others attempt an overview that relies on previous scholarship with mixed results (Nims 1998: 69-80; Schwerner 1998: 207-13; Taylor 1998: 134-8; Matthews 1999: 153-5).

Commenting on Henry Taylor's "missteps" in his introduction to Sophocles' *Electra*, Grote faults "the wide-open editorial policy of the volume and the series", which, he argues, "may in fact have been no editorial policy at all" (2000). The series' "inconsistency", which Mendelsohn identifies with the "lack of guiding principles" governing the translations as well as the introductions, calls into question its claim that it will become the "standard" for the classroom (Mendelsohn 1998: 5). The blurb, in fact, did assure readers that "teachers and students will find that this edition remains loyal to the Greek original without confining itself to . . . literalism" and that it has been the series' aim to restore the original plays "as faithfully as possible" (Slavitt and Bovie 1999: ii). "So", asks Poole provocatively in his review to the volumes published in 1999, is this "parochial America?" (1999: 61).

There is, in fact, an argument in favour of a very different view of the series, one that encompasses the translators' declared "concern with performance" (Torrence 2000). The series' main goal is to freshen up the language, to make it "speakable" and "readable", asserts T. J. Barbarese in his introduction (Barbarese 1999: 96), and "playable", according to Chappell (1998: 3) and Mark Rudman (1998: 64). Curzon and Washburn have aimed at a "performable translation that would convey something of the dramatic vision a Greek audience might have comprehended" (1999: 164). Garrett's guiding principle has been "simplicity", "a language that can at least be imagined (even nowadays) as being really spoken and heard by human beings" (1999: 106); whereas Sandy's main goal has been "to find a voice and tempo that would give the effect of the play's sacerdotal solemnity and stately ceremony" (1999: 52). Kizer begins her introduction to *Iphigenia in Tauris* by stating, "I have been thinking about how to stage

it" (1999: 244); Richard Moore muses that he sees "something downright New Age about it [*Hippolytus*]" (1998: 4); Slavitt makes reference to today's Iran in his *Persians* (1999: 5); Marilyn Nelson discusses abolitionism in her introduction to *Hecuba* (1998: 73); and Brendan Galvin parallels the events of the Cold War to those dramatised in *Women of Trachis* (1998: 75). Thus Poole, in partial answer to his own question, confirms that "Penn versions are indeed remarkably vigorous, eloquent, speakable . . . and highly performable" (1999: 61).

The actual meaning of descriptions such as "playable", "performable" and "speakable" as employed by the translators have long been the subject of debate in theatre translation theory (Aaltonen 2000: 42; Bigliazzi, Kofler and Ambrosi 2013: 7-9) and have resisted any stable, agreed-upon definition (Bassnett 1991: 102; Windle 2011: 156). The term "speakability" has been especially criticised, for applications of it in its sense of "easy pronunciation" may run the risk of "banalization" of the source text (Pavis 1989: 30). This is Mendelsohn's critique of some of the contributions in the volumes issued in 1998 (save Wilner, Raphael and McLeish, Junkins, and Epstein; Mendelsohn 1998: 5). Translators who are "intent on their superficial gussying up of these works", on making them 'speakable', sometimes "miss out on substantive issues in the texts that really are contemporary and fresh" (1998: 4), making some Penn innovations seem "merely gimmicky" (5). Kinney has talked about the "Penn Press's vulgarities" (1998: 22), that is, its trivializations, definitely not a feature one normally recognises in Greek tragedy.

Yet, however undeniable the flaws of some of the translations (as well as the brilliance of some others, Pole 1999: 65; Grote 2000), I believe that the series as a whole should be viewed as an interesting (perhaps extreme) example of the

're-creative' potential of theatre translation mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. It is also particularly intriguing to explore what such a radical experiment entails in the translation of Greek tragedy.

In response to Mendelsohn's attack, Slavitt observes that it is not the translator's job "to figure out academic questions" (qtd in Anonymous 1998: A13) and adds:

> Our method of working would have been different if these were translated from Bulgarian and were the only version available. If someone wants to know, Was this Carolyn Kizer or Euripides?, they can go to the Chicago edition and see what she's done with it and ask why. The answer is bound to be interesting. (qtd in Anonymous 1998: A13)

Slavitt suggests that the Chicago series will enable the reader to decipher the Penn version of Euripides and to determine the degree of 'creativity' of the Penn poet. In addition to emphasising the readability of the translations once again, Slavitt subtly discloses perhaps the most provocative and interesting aim of Penn's translators, which goes beyond the production of readable and performable language. He states that the translators have tried to root the Greek plays in the American tradition, to assimilate the Greeks, by employing American poetic voices. As part of this assimilation process, the translators have chosen what has resonated most strongly with their own sensibilities to re-create *their* own versions of the plays. They have chosen one of the "plural stereophony of echoes, citations, references" surrounding these texts, as Roland Barthes put it (1977: 160), and built their interpretations around it.

In other words, as Slavitt affirms, "The answer is bound to be interesting" because translation of classical literature has

been led to its outermost boundaries, where it collides with 'adaptation'. "My view on translation comes from my having studied under Dudley Fitts at Andover", asserts Slavitt in an interview with the author: for Fitts, translation of ancient literature entailed the creation of "another poem", a "comparable experience to the original" (Slavitt 2018). Thus, he continues, "people reading the same text have different versions of it in their heads" (the subjective take on the 'original' derived from Fitts: see above) (ibid.). By seconding their version of the source text, translators "perform", in the sense that they "share" their interpretation of it with the wider public (ibid.). "I am not hurting the original text", Slavitt concludes, "which remains untouched by me: so I don't feel like a vandal, doing what I please and sharing it" (ibid.).

Thus, the entire Penn series represents a provocative cultural move towards a new way of conceiving of these texts. By commissioning the translation of Greek plays from prize-winning poets, writers and dramatists, but very few classicists, Slavitt and Bovie posed a challenge to rival contemporary series of Greek tragedy, such as *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, *Greek Tragedy in New Translations*, *Penguin Classics*, and *Oxford World's Classics*. The series' translators, in fact, 'appropriate' and at the same time 're-launch'; they 'share' their versions of these texts so as to trigger new interpretations and new 'appropriations' of them. Readers may turn to another (perhaps more philological) translation and by means of comparing it to Penn's may discover that the poet's interpretation is only one amongst many, spurring them to construct their own. A comparison between these 'freer' translations can illuminate the potentially deeper meanings of the text in a way that rarely happens in the examination of more literal translations by themselves. Here, American poets have taken

possession of the classics in their own way by making them "relevant", as the title of Kinney's review implied (1998: 22). The attempt, with its flaws and successes, is worth studying.

1.3 *Great Translations for Actors* and Carl R. Mueller's *Seven Against Thebes*

The *Great Translations for Actors* series was launched in 1993 by Smith and Kraus Publishers with a translation of Anton Chekhov's *The Wood Demon* by Frank Dwyer and Nicholas Saunders. S&K have been devoted to publishing theatre books since their founding in 1990 and are today recognised as a leading source for books about theatre (teaching as well as acting), rich in its collections of classical as well as contemporary plays (Jaquette 2018). The translation series is a part of S&K's ambition to spread theatre books to the widest possible public, but it also takes its premises from a theoretical stance that is worth looking at.

The series' aim, in fact, recalls Eric Kraus in an interview with the author, has been to "include actable translations of all major plays by classical playwrights" (Kraus 2018). Amongst these "classical playwrights", indeed, featured the ancient Greek classics, which, according to Kraus, had been mostly offered by "language professors who knew nothing of actable play translation" (ibid.). The innovation of the series, though, was that it combined together "ancient and modern theatre in translation" (ibid.). The unifying connector between the many volumes published since 1993 was not Greek tragedy in new performance-oriented translations alone; it lay in equalising the written texts on the basis of their theatrical function. In other words, S&K's goal was not only issuing new translations of Greek tragedy: by including both an-

cient and contemporary texts, they expressed the notion that both old and new 'classical plays' are on the same cultural and linguistic level. Thus, Euripides was likened to Chekhov, Pirandello to Sophocles, Strindberg to Aeschylus: what tied them all together was their status as 'classical' plays.

The need for such an undertaking, continues Kraus, had been suggested by the "great interest in other cultures" and in the "origins of art forms" that had begun in the 1960s and has accelerated with "globalism" (ibid.). Translation of classical plays was perceived to be essential not only in response to market demand, but to equip the general public with the means to access, digest and perhaps perform these revolutionary texts. Whilst "proficiency in translation of at least one of the many languages" that features in the project was required and tested "by a prior publication", it was made clear that translators need to be conversant in the other language that these texts possessed in common: the theatre's (ibid.). Contributors, specifies Kraus, "were requested to be trained and have earned degrees in teaching acting" (ibid.).

Thus far, the profile of the S&K translator is similar in her or his 'mediating' and 'facilitating' role to that of a theatre's dramaturg (Romanska 2014: 11; Barnette 2018: 28, 91). Adam Versényi argues that "dramaturg" and "translator" act in similar ways when they are required to "dance back and forth between cultural and theatrical languages" and "bridge cultures through the medium of translation" (2014: 289). By inviting translators to provide (published) 'play-scripts' written from their perspective as theatre experts, S&K ask them to become the mediators, the cultural bridges, between the source texts and their new audience/readership.

Carl R. Mueller matched the profile perfectly. He was a professor in the Critical Studies Programme of the UCLA

Theatre Department from 1966 until his retirement in 1994. He taught theatre history and literature, dramatic criticism and playwriting. Yet, Mueller's fame mostly derives from his work as a translator. Born into a German-speaking family in the United States, he won a Fulbright scholarship to go to Berlin (West Germany) in the early 1960s, where he explored the works of Bertolt Brecht and generally kept abreast of major developments in the theatre. During his stay at Berlin's Freie Universität, he met some of Brecht's family members and secured permission to publish a series of authorised translations of his plays.

The paths of Mueller and S&K intersected in 2000. "Carl was running into difficulty finding a publisher for his outstanding early translations" from Italian, German, Swedish and also ancient Greek (Kraus 2018). To S&K, these seemed to offer "a great improvement to translations available in the marketplace" (ibid.) and so the collaboration began. S&K proceeded to publish every play Mueller had previously translated and gave him "the assurance that they would publish all that he would translate going forward" (ibid.). He devoted his remaining years (2000-2008) mostly to this effort.

Mueller started off with translations of plays by Luigi Pirandello, Heinrich von Kleist, August Strindberg, and, in collaboration with Anna Krajewska-Wieczorek, Sophocles (2000). In 2002, he completed and published versions of plays by Frank Wedekind, a second volume containing translations of Strindberg's works and the complete plays of Aeschylus. In 2004, he published a translation of Goethe's *Faust* in two volumes, and in 2005 four volumes of translations of Euripides' complete plays.

The performability of Mueller's translations has been put to test, and quite successfully so. Four of his versions of

Euripides' plays have reached the stage (*Elektra* in 1996 by the Theatre Arts Department company; *Philoktetes in Fragments* in 2008 by The Villa Theatre Lab; *Phoenician Women* in 2006 by the Natural Theatricals; and *The Women of Trachis* in 2004, also by Natural Theatricals). Brian Alprin, the director of *Phoenician Women*, talked about Mueller's translation as their "performance text" (2004), whereas Michael Hackett, the director of *Philoktetes in Fragments*, "adapted" and "abridged" it for the performance (APGRD, ID: 11145). Yet, whether employed as the actual script of a performance or as the basis for an adaptation, Mueller's 'dramatic' abilities as reflected in his translations have been widely recognised.

When he died, the chairman of the UCLA Theatre Department, William Ward, stated:

> The previous generation of translators were scholarly and literary rather than dramatic. Carl was able to distil what plays were about, the intent of authors, in language that would work for performance and play for an audience. It was the equivalent of re-creating the works from scratch. (qtd in Chute 2008)

Ward perfectly captures Mueller's purpose in translating the Greek plays, a purpose he discusses extensively in his "Note on the Translation" accompanying each volume (2002: 116-17). "What's accuracy to the translator – or the translator to accuracy?", wonders Mueller at the beginning of his 2005 "Note" to Euripides' plays, and continues:

> It is in the name of 'accuracy' that many a translator's hour (lifetime?) has been wasted, not to mention the hours wasted on his or her product by the unsuspecting reader who sets out to enjoy a Dante or a Homer or a Goethe, only to plough his or her way through sheer will and in the end wonder what all the fuss has been about. (Mueller 2005: 28)

Whilst praising the efforts of those who worked according to what he calls "translation . . . bound to the word", such as the *Loeb Classical Library*, *Aris and Phillips Classical Texts*, *Penguin Classics* and the *Oxford World's Classics*, he also maintains that these translations lack a theatrical language; that is, they abound with archaisms and literalism that make them unsuitable for the stage. "Accuracy", or 'literalism', "has destroyed the poetry" (Mueller 2005: 28).

The purpose of Mueller's translations is thus in line with that of Arrowsmith and Slavitt/Bovie and follows an understanding of the ultimate destination of these ancient texts: "theatre, at performance" (30). He quotes Arrowsmith on the translators' "simple-minded faith in 'accuracy' and literal loyalty to the original" and Roger Shattuck (see above) on the argument that "free translation is often not an indulgence but a duty" (2002: 117). Neither "faith in 'accuracy'" nor fear of "free translation" must drive a translator in his task. As Mueller reiterates at the end of his "Note", the purpose of the translator is to

> allow the original texts to breathe freely rather than to be suffocated by demands that may be proper in the classics classroom but out of place in the study of the humanities and in performance on the stage. (Mueller 2005: 32)

The translator's main purpose in addressing any dramatic text, especially one from the fifth century BCE, "must remain . . . performance"; the concern should thus be with transposing theatre language (including rhythm and music, as discussed below) and conventions (stage directions) into a dramatic translation (2005: 30).

Indeed, Choate argues, Mueller gives "prominence" to "music" and to "rhythm" in his works (2003: 119). His verse

translation is "of syllabic and rhythmic patterns", which sometimes echoes the original Greek (as will be seen in Ch. 3; see also an example in Mueller 2002a: 218-19), but at other times reproduces a limping sort of rhythm, broken off by the puzzling (visually and audibly) number of enjambments (see, for instance, 2002a: 227). A clear example of Mueller's limping rhythm is his translation of the Chorus' final lamentation in the *Seven Against Thebes* after the messenger has reported the two brothers' deaths (224):

> First Trojan Woman (*Chants.*)
>   Great Zeus and Spirits
>   that guard this
>   city,
>   the walls and towers
>   of ancient Kadmos,
>   shall I shout joyous
>   hymns
>   that Thebes has escaped
>   unscathed; or
>   weep
>   the unhappy fate
>   of our
>   warlords,
>   dead now, childless;
>   who died true to their
>   names:
>   *Man of True Glory*
>   and
>   *Bringer of Strife.*

The moment is topical and thus Mueller obsessively recurs to enjambments (most notably, "this / city"; "towers / of"; "joyous / hymns"; "fate / of"; "our / warlords"; "their / names"), internal rhymes (as "escaped / unscathed"), asso-

nances (as "unscathed" and "fate") and polyptota (as "dead" and "died") to create what Choate calls "rhythmic patterns". The choice of words aims at retracing the meanings of the Greek original closely, but the pace, syntax and sounds in which Mueller embeds the words reflect the very particular style of his limping verse.

In *Aeschylus,* II, a general introduction to Greek theatre by Hugh Denard (with whom Mueller also staged the *Bacchae* in 2000: APGRD, ID: 6812) entitled "The Tragedy of Others" (2002: ix-xiii) prefaces Mueller's own introduction. Its title invites the reader to approach these plays with an awareness of the 'otherness' that the Greeks embody, mistakenly portrayed as being so close to us in spirit. Recognising the intrinsic otherness of the forms of ancient drama is essential to a full understanding of these texts. If modern readers approach them as if they "were crude attempts at naturalistic drama", they would be "disappointed", inevitably "frustrated", and "probably bored" (2002: ix).

After Denard's preface on how to read these ancient texts, there appears Mueller's introduction to Aeschylus (2002: 1-12), and then to each play. These are lengthy (57 pages for the *Seven Against Thebes*; 2002: 39-96) and rich with quotations to other studies. Unfortunately, these quotations are not accompanied by page references (for example: 2002: 111, 75), but the quoted studies and further readings are collected in the "Selected Bibliography" at the end, in which one can also find the editions of the Greek text that have been used for the translation (2002b: 377-80). There is no numbering of lines, which is unfortunate. A "Glossary" at the end helps those unfamiliar with Greek 'otherness' to find their way through deities' names and the mythological background (367-76). Stage directions are "held to a minimum" (2005: 30).

Overall, what the reader is presented with is a translation that indeed represents an expansion of the 'original'; as obvious as this might seem, Mueller also presents and urgently informs his version with the interpretations around the play spelled out in the introduction. As a consequence, sometimes little space is left to reproduce the ambiguity of Aeschylus' language and it is hard for the reader to imagine the different readings implied in the text (see, in particular, his treatment of Eteocles' character: Chs 2 and 3).

As yet another example of 'free translation', an example that is the equal of any other play on the basis of its theatrical potential, it will be useful to analyse Mueller's translation of the *Seven* in conjunction with Hecht and Bacon's and Sandy's versions.

Chapter 2

Eteocles and Polynices Between Justice,
War and Family Curses

Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* may have not enjoyed much appreciation on the stage, but it has certainly long fascinated scholars from a philological and academic perspective, especially the two passages examined in Chapter 3.[7] These occur halfway through the play (631-52; 653-76), within the so-called shield scene (369-676). The messenger's last speech and Eteocles' response represent the turning point of the tragedy and are key to understanding Eteocles' agency in the play. The scout reports to his king about the identity of the seventh attacker, who turns out to be the king's own brother, Polynices. As Eteocles has already included himself in the seven defenders (282-6) and posted the other six by the gates (375-630), he goes to meet Polynices in single combat.

These are the facts. As will be shown, the main themes of the play emerge in these two passages: Eteocles' claim to the throne and Polynices' attack (Sommerstein 2010); the brothers' relationship to the curse and the nature of the curse itself (Cameron 1964, 1971; Thalmann 1978; Sommerstein 1989; Berman 2007); Eteocles' decision to fight his brother as a free

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[7] The Greek text of the *Seven Against Thebes* quoted throughout this chapter is from Hutchinson 1985.

choice (Kirkwood 1969; Ferrari 1970-1971; von Fritz 2007) or a predetermined one (Wolff 1958; Otis 1960; Burnett 1973; Maltomini 1976), an alternative which leads to completely different readings of Eteocles' character, as summarised by Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1988: 273-8).

Indeed, every translator of the play has to tackle these themes, whether explicitly in an introduction or implicitly in their translational choices. It is the aim of this chapter to compare the three translators' approaches to the themes of the play in the light of the relevant criticism.

2.1 A Bundle of Curses

In his introduction to the play, Stephen Sandy summarises all the possible reasons for Oedipus to curse his sons and condenses them to two: i. "Oedipus might be expressing feelings of guilt and horror at his relationship to the princes"; ii. "One of the sons gives Oedipus wine in a cup that had belonged to Laius, reminding Oedipus of his initial crime, and the other gives him an inferior cut of meat from a sacrificial animal" (1999: 49).

The mention of "wine" and "meat" refers to two different stories contained in two separate fragments of the *Thebais*. In both, Oedipus curses his sons: i. "May they not divide their father's patrimony in gentle friendship, but may there always be wars and battles between them" (ὡς οὔ οἱ πατρώϊ᾽ ἐνηέι <ἐν> φιλότητι / δάσσαιντ᾽, ἀμφοτέροισι δ᾽ ἀεὶ πόλεμοί τε μάχαι τε; *Thebais* fr. 2 Bernabé); ii. "May they go down to Hades at each other's hands" (χερσὶν ὑπ᾽ ἀλλήλων καταβήμεναι Ἄιδος εἴσω; *Thebais* fr. 3 Bernabé).[8]

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[8] Hereafter, all translations from ancient Greek are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

There is another passage (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.9)[9] that explains the curses as having been triggered by yet another example of Eteocles' and Polynices' failure to exercise their obligation to provide "old-age care" (γηροτροφία): "Oedipus was driven from Thebes after he blinded his eyes and cast curses upon his sons, who, seeing him banned from the city, did not help him" (Οἰδίπους δὲ τὰς ὄψεις τυφλώσας ἐκ Θηβῶν ἠλαύνετο, ἀρὰς τοῖς παισὶ θέμενος, οἳ τῆς πόλεως αὐτὸν ἐκβαλλόμενον θεωροῦντες οὐκ ἐπήμυναν); (Cameron 1964: 3; Sommerstein 1989: 444).

A similar story is hinted at in Aeschylus' text too, when the Chorus recount the misfortunes of Laius' offspring: "Hateful towards his sons" (τέκνοις … ἐπίκοτος; 785-6), Oedipus cast curses upon them "because of their wretched treatment of him" (ἀθλίας … τροφᾶς; 786).[10] This is the interpretation of both Mueller and Sandy, the latter even expanding on it in his translation, "Outraged to feel the pains / of thirst and hunger" (1999a: 85: 866-7), and the former translating "when those sons disowned him" (2002a: 222). Bacon and Hecht interpret the term *trophé* ("nourishment, food", but also "brood, generation"; LSJ) as denoting the incestuous begetting of Oedipus' sons, as in Sandy's first explanation (i.e. "guilt and horror at his relationship to the princes"), and translate "in wrath at twisted lineage" (2009a: 163: 1002). That the word *trophé* is unlikely to mean "origin" in the text is almost certain (Sommerstein 1989: 441-3); the translators' reason for emphasising Oedipus' incest will hopefully become clear once the

[9] Hereafter, references to chapters and sections of Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* follow James George Frazer's edition (1921).

[10] For ἀθλίας instead of ἀραίας ("accursed") or ἀρχαίας ("old"), see Hutchinson 1985: 172.

terms of the Aeschylean curse have been expounded in full (see below).

Whether hateful towards his sons because of their wretched treatment of him or because he is horrified by his own deeds, Oedipus curses them so that "they may someday divide the properties with an iron-wielding hand" (καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ δι-/ὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν / κτήματα; 788-90). These are terms and concepts Eteocles has already brought up not long before. At lines 710-11, at the end of the stichomythia between the Chorus and Eteocles, the king recognises in what is happening "the visions of dream apparitions, the dividers of my father's properties" (ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων / ὄψεις, πατρῴων χρημάτων δατήριοι). And, again, not much later, as they lament Eteocles' decision to fight his brother, the Chorus disclose the Fury's possible future actions and provide an explanation of the curse: "A stranger divides the inheritance, a Chalybian, migrant from Scythia, a bitter divider of possessions, savage-minded Iron" (ξένος δὲ κλήρους ἐπινωμᾷ, / Χάλυβος Σκυθᾶν ἄποικος,/κτεάνων χρηματοδαίτας / πικρός, ὠμόφρων Σίδαρος; 727-30).

The same terms will return later (941-2), where Aeschylus employs the image of a foreigner from Scythia dividing the property, glancing back at 727-30. He uses the same adjective (πικρὸς) to describe an "arbitrator of disputes" (λυτὴρ νεικέων; 941) and a "stranger" (ξεινὸς; 942) born of fire, coming from over the sea and identified with Ares. The activities of a "distributor" (δατητάς; 945), "mediator" (διαλλακτῆρι; 908) and "arbiter" (λυτὴρ; 941) are at play here. Connected with this iron-wielding mediator is another recurrent image in the play: the drawing of lots, present in the Argives' preparation for war, in Eteocles' choosing of the candidates and (ironically) in the apportioning of the

land to the two brothers after their death (Berman 2007: 157).

That Eteocles was able to link his "father's properties" to "iron" is confirmed by 710-11: Polynices' presence at the seventh gate and threats to mount the wall to look for his brother (636) fulfil Eteocles' visions. Bacon and Hecht argue that Eteocles apparently thinks that the curse "is confined to the prophecy that the sons of Oedipus shall divide his wealth with a sword", that is, by war (2009: 125). In other words, as Howard Donald Cameron explains, "The very fact that they are at war would fulfil the curse" (1971: 26). This would mean that in Aeschylus' text there is no prediction about the brothers' mutual slaughter in single combat (as there seemed to be in *Thebais* fr. 3 Bernabé).

The Chorus' surprise at line 808 represents another proof of the absence of fratricide in the previous formulations of the curse. Once the scout reports that the brothers have killed each other, the Chorus are surprised to realise that they have been "prophetesses" (μάντις) "of sufferings" (τῶν κακῶν). At lines 730-7, they only feared the brothers' mutual slaughter, which would result in their being allotted only enough land to be buried in. Yet, their surprise at the brothers' deaths indicates a lack of certainty about the final outcome of conflict. It would appear that their lament at 730-7 is a mere foreboding of the worst.

Some translators (and scholars), however, seem to think otherwise. For them, Eteocles' understanding of the curse is but incomplete: he "knows that death will happen in the course of the working out of the curse" and that "whatever happens he will die", Mueller argues (2002: 73, 75); there is no choice for "Eteocles but to take up the challenge", confirms Sandy (1999: 50). As will become clear, accepting one or

the other of these alternative views – that Eteocles is aware of the curse from the beginning (and that the curse involves him and his brother dying at each other's hands) or that he and Polynices are both unaware of what the curse actually implies (keeping in mind that the terms themselves of the curse do not clearly hint at the brothers killing each other) – depends on whether the translator or commentator sees Eteocles as a good leader or not, as will be seen below.

Yet, as Bacon and Hecht, Mueller, and Sandy all make clear, Oedipus' curse upon his sons is only the last of the curses cast upon the house of Laius. Indeed, the Chorus mention this curse as "new sufferings of the house that mingle with the old" (πόνοι δόμων νέοι παλαι-/οῖσι συμμιγεῖς κακοῖς; 740-1). By "old sufferings" Aeschylus refers first to the unheeded oracle of Apollo that forbade Laius to have a child if he wanted to save the city (745-9). Adopting William Thalmann's explanation of the passage (1978: 9-14), Mueller points out that this three-generation curse (*Sept.* 744) could not be the result of Laius' failure to obey the oracle (2002: 43-4); rather, it comes from Pelops' punishment for Laius' abduction and rape of his son Chrysippus (and Chrysippus' eventual death), as both Bacon and Hecht (2009: 114) and Mueller explain (2002: 44). The crime that prompted Pelops' curse, combined with Laius' defiance of Apollo's oracle and his attempt to kill his son Oedipus, were the acts of violence committed by Laius.

In Sandy's and Mueller's views, the curse's entanglement with the city's fate would only derive from Hera, the patron goddess of marriage, angry at the city for its failure to punish Laius' violence against Chrysippus, as Mueller and Sandy claim (Sandy 1999: 47; Mueller 2002: 44). The Sphinx is both Hera's punishment and the meeting point between Oedipus'

story and that of Laius and Thebes. This old outrage, which is referred to in the first half of the play, concerns both the city (because of Hera's punishment) and Eteocles as king and part of Laius' dynasty; the death of Eteocles and Polynices will thus represent the definite punishment for Laius' wrongs as well as result in the city's finally freeing itself from the Labdacids' fate (*Sept.* 800-2).

From this initial "crime", beginning with the rape of Chrysippus, Bacon and Hecht build their interpretation of the *Seven* as "not just the culmination, but the terrible re-enactment of the tragedies of Laius and Oedipus, of disobedience, parricide, and incest" (2009: 118). To begin with, "several images and figures . . . express the enigmatic quality of the female", of a "tender mother ready to kill in defence of those she cherishes" (116). According to Bacon and Hecht, the Fury/Erinyes/Curse, the moon, Hecate, Artemis, Thebes, and the Sphinx all disclose the "contradictoriness of woman" (ibid.). Not only are the Fury/Erinyes/Curse referred to by feminine terms, but both Eteocles and Polynices are portrayed as eager to negate these forces by using (male) violence upon them.

In Bacon and Hecht, references to Thebes as well as war and invasion are also connoted by feminine traits or allude to rape: may the gods spare "mothers, young brides, virgins who make this prayer" as they stand in danger of "slavery, rape and death" (Bacon and Hecht 2009a: 134: 140-5). utter the Chorus, whereas the Greek has only "slavery" (*Sept.* 111). In the first stasimon, the Chorus dread that if the city is conquered, young and old women would be "led off . . . their clothing ripped, their breasts / exposed to the conqueror's view" (Bacon and Hecht 2009a: 143: 407-9). Again, this is another expansion of the Greek with sexual connotations (see *Sept.* 326-8). The city itself is "doomed to armoured rape",

a reworking of line 338, which renders the metaphor of rape as invasion even more explicit. The list could go on, as can be seen in the passages chosen for the comparison (for a detailed analysis of some of these passages, see Roberts 2017).

By reading (and translating) Polynices' attack as a "plain, violent and sexual" assault (Bacon and Hecht 2009: 118), Eteocles' posting as a re-enactment of the riddling of Oedipus, and both brothers' desire to conquer their motherland as a metaphor for rape or penetration (of their own mother), Bacon and Hecht achieve more than just a brutal and sexually connoted account of war. As they were completing their work, Roberts reports (2017: 108), the My Lai massacre of the Vietnam War had become public knowledge to American citizens: a mass killing of hundreds of Vietnamese civilians, including men, women, children and infants. Some of the women were raped and mutilated. Their translation, Bacon and Hecht inform the reader at the end of their introduction,

> was undertaken . . . at a time that can be regarded as possibly the most shameful in our nation's history; in which we have prosecuted a war for which there can be no moral, political, or military justification. . . . It is our forlorn but continuing hope that our government may look with some charity upon the young men who thought it from the first a foolish, brutal, and dishonourable undertaking. Our commitment to the work involved in this translation has, in some measure, been coloured by these feelings. (Bacon and Hecht 2009: 126)

Bacon and Hecht's translation is a dramatic response to the Vietnam War, explicitly enhancing and amplifying cruel visions of sexual violence to women, but finally affirming the female voices present in the tragedy – at the expense, of course, of Eteocles (see below).

2.2 Eteocles' Character: An Ideal Ruler?

Eteocles is the "first clearly studied individual character in dramatic literature", argues Murray (1940: 143), "the first man of the European stage"; and the *Seven* is "our earliest tragedy of character", says Humphrey D. F. Kitto (qtd in Mueller 2002: 49). Eteocles represents "the most strongly individualized of all Aeschylus' characters", von Fritz concurs (2007: 141). Some translators (Mueller and Sandy, amongst others) even have him as "everything the *areté* hero can possibly be", a man who unjustly suffers a punishment that not only does he not deserve, but did not even do anything to cause (Mueller 2002: 52, 67). That Eteocles may have broken the brothers' deal to rule alternately is not relevant to Aeschylus' play, as Sandy explains:

> The Eteocles of Aeschylus is no deceitful, power-mad brother, jealous of Polynices' rightful place; rather he is portrayed throughout as the virtuous and commendable commander of Thebes, giving himself wholly to the preservation of the *polis* he guards. (Sandy 1999: 49)

Eteocles' horrific, immoral decision to fight his brother, which signals a "symbolic boundary" in his character, to use Vidal-Naquet's words (1988: 278), is either proof of a change in his character after the scout's last speech brought about by the Erinys possessing him (Solmsen 1937), or the result of Eteocles' full awareness that the curse has been fulfilled, resulting in his acceptance of death, as an ideal ruler would, in order to save his city (the *Opfertod* theory, Thalmann 1978: 180). Eteocles gives himself to the "preservation of the *polis*": his "sole concern is his people and not himself", Mueller maintains (2002: 55).

The "gain"/"profit" (κέρδος; 684, 697) in going to fight his brother, which Eteocles refers to in his responses to the Chorus, is nothing less than an act of "honour", of "*aretê*", Mueller concludes (2002: 74; see also Hubbard 1992: 306). Honour translates into sacrificing himself for his people, for Thebes, as a virtuous hero would do. Not only does Oedipus' curse mean from the beginning that the two brothers would kill each other, but Eteocles knows that "this is his last day, and that it will end with his own and his brother's death at each other's hands", as does the "whole city" (Mueller 2002: 56). Eteocles' "*aretê*" triggers and grounds his extreme act of self-sacrifice of meeting his brother in single combat (56-7). And Mueller and Sandy are, thus, in line with a reading that has long enjoyed widespread support amongst scholars (Otis 1960: 159, 166; von Fritz 2007: 163-6, 171-3).

Yet, Bacon and Hecht (amongst others) seem to think otherwise: despite the many warnings "against blindness and impiety" (2009: 119), Eteocles takes up the role of seer and posts himself at the seventh gate, aware that this might end in kin-killing. Eteocles is just as eager to cling to his kingship and to the "motherland" as Polynices is to get hold of both. In his prayer at the beginning of the play (*Sept.* 69-77), Eteocles seems to think that if Dike is on anyone's side, it should be on his: he has forgotten the "earlier crimes performed jointly with his brother" which brought about Oedipus' curse, as well as the fact "that his exiled brother has as much right as he to be king in Thebes" (Bacon and Hecht 2009: 117).

That Polynices has some right to the kingship is revealed by Amphiarus' words "what justice" (τίς . . . δίκη; *Sept.* 584), which discloses that "although Polynices is going too far in attacking his own *polis*, he does have a claim to justice" (Torrance 2007: 36). Interestingly, "Justice", or at least "she says

to be" (649), also represents Polynices' device on his shield (646-9), with which portrait the hero fully identifies. As Froma Zeitlin argues, there exists an "exact doubling of man and image" in the case of Polynices, which in fact leads Eteocles to make no distinction between the two in his reply to the messenger (2009: 95). And lines 637-8, where the scout reports how Polynices explicitly used the term "exile" (φυγῇ, 638; see also ἐκ φυγᾶς, "by his [Polynices'] banishment; 979) in describing his situation, suggest once again that Eteocles has unlawfully pushed his brother away from the kingdom (Vidal-Naquet 1988: 294-5). It would in fact make no sense for Polynices to use the term "exile" in reference to Eteocles' action, if his dwelling in another land had been accepted and agreed upon by the both of them as a way to avoid their father's curse.

But there is more: there exist some hints in the play that seem to indicate that Polynices is older than Eteocles and that this seniority entitles him to the kingship of Thebes. Both brothers are "childless" (†ἀτέκνους†, 828), but Polynices is married; Eteocles mentions his brother's beard (666), whereas the Chorus address him as a "child" (τέκνον, 686) (Sommerstein 2010: 85). Aeschylus, then, seems to have set the following situation: Eteocles somehow gained the throne and banished his brother, who was the rightful king. Polynices then decided to attack his fatherland, an action that is in itself wrong despite the justice of his claim, and which puts Eteocles in a position of strength as the defender of the *polis*.

But, again, there is more. As Bacon and Hecht highlight, the surrounding atmosphere that opens the play is extremely dark and "noisy": the "noise of battle and noise of lamentation, that is, of strife and weeping" permeate Thebes and encircle Eteocles as he first speaks to his subjects (2009: 118;

see also von Fritz 2007: 161). Not only is Eteocles lonely and surrounded by an atmosphere of darkness – he is also incapable of trusting his subjects and they him. The consistent occurrences of the root φοβ-, especially those in the Chorus' speeches (78, 121, 132, 214, 240, 259, 287, 866 and 1060), suggest that neither the Chorus nor the messenger are confident of Eteocles' ability to defend the city. The messenger sometimes even commands his ruler as though he were his peer, perhaps another hint at Eteocles' youth. Just before the messenger's exit after the prologue (62-3), for example, he bids Eteocles to be a good captain of the ship and block the Argives' attack before it is too late, employing the imperative mood (φάρξαι, 63; see also πέμπε, 435 and 470), as if he were giving orders to his king. In the shield scene (649-52), he uses the imperative mood again and says: "You know yourself how to captain your fatherland" (σὺ δ᾽ αὐτὸς γνῶθι ναυκληρεῖν πάτραν; 652), stressing Eteocles' duty as a king.

Eteocles' complicated relationship with the Chorus is further evidence of the antagonism between him and his subjects. Isabelle Torrance, commenting on lines 181-202, highlights Aeschylus' emphasis on "Eteocles' outright rejection of womankind" and calls it "unnatural and excessive" (Torrance 2007: 97). What to Mueller appears as a perfectly plausible reaction of a "pragmatic warrior" to women's "treason" (2002: 61) is proof to Bacon and Hecht of an unhinged Eteocles, whose wrath is directed at women who supposedly endanger "manly courage" (2009: 118).

The peak of this aggressive behaviour, which makes Eteocles resemble a tyrant, an early version of other tragic young aristocrats such as Hippolytus and Pentheus, appears at lines 196-202, where he states that if any of his subjects do not obey his command, "a vote of death shall be decreed for them

nor shall there be a way to escape death by stoning at the people's hands" (ψῆφος κατ' αὐτῶν ὀλεθρία βουλεύσεται, / λευστῆρα δήμου δ' οὔτι μὴ φύγῃ μόρον; 198-9). Eteocles awkwardly employs terms proper to democracy (ψῆφος, βουλεῦσεται, δήμου) within an authoritarian context; these terms are inappropriate for kings giving orders to their subjects. If anything, Aeschylus is subtly suggesting some dubious qualities in Eteocles' leadership.

2.3 Eteocles' Decision to Fight His Brother

As shown, whether Eteocles is seen as an ideal ruler or not informs and affects the way Oedipus' curse is interpreted and how Eteocles' and Polynices' claims to justice are read. Most importantly, however, this question is intimately related to the reasons that lead Eteocles to fight his own brother. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, critics have long discussed whether Eteocles' decision to fight his brother represents an act of free choice or is predetermined.

The controversy stems from lines 282-4: since Eteocles declares that he "will post" (τάξω; 284) seven defenders, "including himself as the seventh" (ἐμοὶ σὺν ἑβδόμῳ; 282), to combat the enemies at the seven gates, the question that arises is whether he has chosen 'and' posted all the defenders before the scout's entrance (375) or during the shield scene. Things become even more complicated with the tenses Eteocles employs throughout the shield scene, which are of no help in determining whether he is doing the posting on the spot or has done some or all of it already.[11] At any rate, even

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[11] Eteocles employs two futures, two perfects, one aorist and two presents (ἀντιτάξω; τέτακται; πέπεμπται; ᾑρέθη; ἔστιν; ἀντιτάξομεν;

if Eteocles was granted full freedom in managing the posting,
and at hearing Polynices' name decided that he was going to
face his brother, was his decision free from any compulsion?

Surveying the drama as a whole, it is possible to find, in
Albin Lesky's words, a "rationally indissoluble fusion of ne-
cessity and personal will" (1966: 81) that characterises most
of Aeschylus' works. In other words, Eteocles goes to fight
his brother because he wants to 'and' because he must. When
the Chorus speak of the two brothers after their deaths (*Sept.*
831), they declare that "they have destroyed each other"
(ὤλοντ') "with sacrilegious purpose" (ἀσεβεῖ διανοίᾳ), that
is, consciously and deliberately, which leaves no doubt about
Aeschylus' attribution of free will to Eteocles' action; how-
ever, the tragedian tightly intertwines this free will with the
fate 'decided' for him. Polynices knows that attacking his fa-
therland is against divine and human laws, and yet he attacks.
Eteocles is aware of the evil that might result from killing his
brother, but completes the act anyway. Both brothers have
the ability to act otherwise: an alternative course of action
is available to them, which marks their choices as 'free'. At
the same time though, they 'are drawn to' their fates. Bacon
and Hecht argue that Oedipus' curse is in fact finally fulfilled.
Indeeed, Eteocles and Polynices do divide their inheritance
(Thebes, its land) amongst themselves with a sword and each
is granted his own share of it: "Just enough of that land to be

εἶμι; 408, 448, 473, 505, 553, 621, 672). These all become present or fu-
ture in the translations of Bacon and Hecht, Sandy and Mueller. For
the discussion around the meaning of the verb τάσσειν ("to post")
as used at line 284, see Johnson 1992: 193-7; for further scholarship
on the tenses of the verbs Eteocles employs throughout the post-
ing scene, see Hutchinson 1985: 104-5; Wiles 1993: 186-7; Sommerstein
1996: 103-7; and Taplin 1997: 153.

buried in" (2009: 125). Justice has been paid for: the Fury has exacted what was hers and re-established Dike; well, for now, at least, but Bacon and Hecht warn the reader that the magistrates of Thebes are about to reopen the Dike-Fury conflict by refusing burial to Polynices, which is, ironically, his "just share of the inheritance" (116).

Chapter 3

The *Seven Against Thebes* in Translation

3.1 The Messenger's Speech: A Multifaceted Polynices and a Frightened Eteocles (631-52)

The Greek Text and its Translations

ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ τὸν ἕβδομον δὴ τόνδ' ἐφ' ἑβδόμαις πύλαις
    λέξω, τὸν αὐτοῦ σου κασίγνητον, πόλει
    οἵας ἀρᾶται καὶ κατεύχεται τύχας·
    πύργοις ἐπεμβὰς κἀπικηρυχθεὶς χθονί,
    ἁλώσιμον παιῶν' ἐπεξιακχάσας,   635
    σοὶ ξυμφέρεσθαι καὶ κτανὼν θανεῖν πέλας,
    ἢ ζῶντ', ἀτιμαστῆρα τὼς ἀνδρηλάτην,
    φυγῇ τὸν αὐτὸν τόνδε τείσασθαι τρόπον.
    τοιαῦτ' αὐτεῖ καὶ θεοὺς γενεθλίους
    καλεῖ πατρῴας γῆς ἐποπτῆρας λιτῶν   640
    τῶν ὧν γενέσθαι πάγχυ Πολυνείκους βία.
    ἔχει δὲ καινοπηγὲς εὔκυκλον σάκος
    διπλοῦν τε σῆμα προσμεμηχανημένον.
    χρυσήλατον γὰρ ἄνδρα τευχηστὴν ἰδεῖν
    ἄγει γυνή τις σωφρόνως ἡγουμένη.   645
    Δίκη δ' ἄρ' εἶναί φησιν, ὡς τὰ γράμματα
    λέγει· "Κατάξω δ' ἄνδρα τόνδε καὶ πόλιν
    ἕξει πατρῴαν δωμάτων τ' ἐπιστροφάς."
    τοιαῦτ' ἐκείνων ἐστὶ τἀξευρήματα.
    σὺ δ' αὐτὸς ἤδη γνῶθι τίνα πέμπειν δοκεῖ·   650
    ὡς οὔποτ' ἀνδρὶ τῷδε κηρυκευμάτων

μέμψῃ – σὺ δ᾽ αὐτὸς γνῶθι ναυκληρεῖν πόλιν.[12]

Bacon and Hecht (2009a: 155-6):

> Scout The seventh man at the seventh gate – I name him now:
>   your own brother. And you shall know what Curses
>   he calls down upon the city
>   and what fate he vows for it.
>   He declares he will scale and bestride the walls,
>   proclaimed lord and subjugator of the land.
>   Yelling his full-lunged victory song
>   over the trapped and the beaten,
>   he will fight you hand to hand;
>   and either, in killing you, lie dead beside you,
>   or else drive you into dishonored exile
>   just as you forced such banishment on him.
>   This is what he bellows,
>   and calls on the gods of our mother land,
>   wife to his father, begging them to
>   be wardens of his fortunes –
>   this mighty Polynices.
>   He has a newly forged, perfect-circled shield,
>   and clamped on it a twofold device.
>   A stately woman guides forward a warrior
>   in full armor who is hammered out in gold.
>   She says she is Dike – goddess of all orders,
>   human and divine –

[12] Whilst Bacon and Hecht mention that their translation is based on Murray's edition of the text (Murray 1955), neither Mueller nor Sandy specify the edition they used; yet, from how they read some words contained in the passages under enquiry here (see κἀπικηρυχθεὶς, 635; πόλιν, 652; and, only in Mueller, πέτρων, 676), it is possible to infer that they probably also referred to the Murray edition. Thus, the Greek text reported here and in Chapter 3.2 is from Murray 1955: 180-2.

and inscribed there are these words:
"I shall bring this man to his harbor
and he shall enjoy his father's city,
shall tumble and make free with his house."
Such are the engines of the enemy.
Now you alone can decide whom it is best to send.
If there's a fault to be found
in the situation, it is not with my report.
Now you alone can decide how best to pilot this vessel.
(Exit left.)

Sandy (1999a: 78-9):

SCOUT Now I will tell you of the seventh, him
assigned to the seventh gate, what he desires
at the hands of the gods, what curses he calls down
upon the city.
And this is your blood brother!
He announces that either he will mount our wall
shouting the victory-cry at our submission
and be proclaimed our lord, meeting you there
and cutting you down; or die himself beside you;
or, if both survive, to be revenged
by banishing you, who banished him, making
you pay with exile: as you have made him pay!
Great Polynices clamors with these threats
and prays to the gods of his hearth to make them good.
He bears a brand-new shield, it gleams as he moves
and sports a double image, apt for this
venture. A ladylike woman leads a man
in arms, and both in beaten gold. She claims
to be Justice, and her motto reads, "I lead
this man back to his city, where he shall rule
and dwell in the house of his fathers."
Such are his
slogans and devices! Now you decide

who goes. Pray, don't blame me for the news I bring:
you are Thebes' guide and pilot in this storm.
(Exit Scout.)

Mueller (2002a: 214-5):

Scout Now for the seventh man at the seventh gate,
   the final champion,
   your brother.
   I'll tell you of the curses and the
   fate he calls down on the city.
   He declares that once he stands
   mounted on our walls,
   once he is proclaimed victor and conqueror of Thebes,
   he will shout his wild cry of conquest,
   his war-whoop at the city's fall,
   at its desolation and over its vanquished corpses.
   And then, hand to hand, he will
   fight and kill you, and, in killing you,
   lie beside you in death;
   or, if you live,
   he will banish you to dishonorable exile
   as you once banished him.
   Bellowing,
   he calls to witness the gods of your
   race and the gods of your fatherland,
   Polyneikês,
   violent warrior Polyneikês.

   His shield,
   newly-fashioned and a perfect round,
   has emblazoned on it in beaten gold
   a twofold device.
   A man in full armor led on modestly
   by a woman.
   Her motto says in gold letters:

> "I am Justice. And I will restore this man
> to his city and to the home of his fathers,
> rightfully his own."
>
> So.
> Now you know all the devices of the enemy.
> It's for you, helmsman,
> to choose and send the warrior to answer him.
> You will find no fault in my report.
> Yes,
> it's for you to determine the city's
> course.
> *(Exit the Scout)*

The Attacker's Identity (631-3): A "Blood Brother"

"I name him now": so Bacon and Hecht translate the Greek verb for speaking, emphasising the immediateness of the action.[13] The expression is left at the end of the line in anacoluthon to fix the gravity of the moment and to respect the "unusual" rhythm of line 631 (Hutchinson 1985: 144), with the second article (τὸν) in pronominal position. With the addition of "you shall know" in the next line, Bacon and Hecht remind the reader of the messenger's role of "overseer" (κατόπτης, 41; see also κατοπτῆρας, 36).[14] Also note-

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[13] The English verb 'to name' has been used to translate the future tense of λέγω at 458 too (Bacon and Hecht 2009a: 153: 701).

[14] The messenger is an "overseer" (κατόπτης; 41), one who has seen, hence knows (εἰδὼς εὖ, 375) of what he is reporting/narrating back to Eteocles (400, 451, 458, 480, 489, and 526). Only Bacon and Hecht retain this idea of "seeing therefore knowing" of the Greek participle at line 375 (εἰδὼς): "I speak, with knowledge, of matters outside" (2009a: 145: 457), as they do now by adding "you shall know" in

worthy is the fragmentation of the long sentence in the Greek into two sentences in the English, which has the effect of accelerating the speed of the speech. Its rhythm conveys the anxiety present in the messenger's words. After the suspense created by the syntax comes the revelation: "Your own brother" (τὸν αὐτοῦ σου κασίγνητον), emphasised by its position within the line and by the addition of the adverb "now", which Sandy adds also.

As he has done for the other warriors, the messenger now proceeds with the attacker's 'identikit'. Aeschylus employs two verbs that are similar in meaning to describe the attacker's attitude: Polynices "prays for", but also, in its more common sense, "imprecates/curses one" (ἀρᾶται; LSJ) and "prays earnestly", but also "prays against" (κατεύχεται; LSJ), with the dative "city" (πόλει) as the addressee of both verbs and the accusative "what fates" (οἵας . . . τύχας) as their common object. The overlapping of the different semantic meanings ("praying for" and "against") is just another instance of Polynices' ambiguity as a character, which also marks his actions as both just and unjust, as shown in the previous chapter (Hutchinson 1985: 144). As opposed to other impious attackers (Tydeus, Capaneus, Eteoclus, Hippomedon and Parthenopaeus), Polynices prays (Stehle 2005: 118). "What Curses / he calls down upon the city / and what fate he vows for it" is Bacon and Hecht's translation: one that, whilst omitting the positive meaning of the two verbs, rather well expresses the negative ones. Again, the preference to break up into two sentences what in Aeschylus was one should be noted.

Sandy's rendering of the two verbs for prayer is rather interesting too, aiming at renewing Polynices' ambigui-

their translation of line 631.

ty, as are the word choices and positions used in revealing the identity of the enemy. "What he desires / at the hands of the gods" is how Sandy renders the first verb, using a verb which is mostly positive, but he translates the second verb with an expression similar to Bacon and Hecht's: "What curses he calls down / upon the city".

As for the revelation of the enemy's identity, Sandy relegates it to the last line, in the (quite theatrical) form of an exclamation: "And this is your blood brother!", which translates the Greek aside with an interesting choice of words. The *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (DELG) explains that, although *kasígnetos* "has become the poetic equivalent of ἀδελφός", its etymology "reflects in some ways the conception of a patriarchal family", and that the second root within the word (-γνητος) "relates to a legitimate and recognised filiation" (1980: 503; my translation). By using the term "blood", Sandy enhances the fraternal relation connecting Eteocles and Polynices with Oedipus. It is quite effective for Sandy to remind us that "family" (γένος) (together with *polis*) is one of the two focuses in the play by his use of "blood brother", a term linking the brothers' kinship to the whole family clan (Winnington-Ingram 1985: 52).

Mueller's syntax flows differently from the other two: the first sentence lacks a verb and is constructed with a series of asides, the final one unveiling the attacker's identity. Although this expedient expresses well the messenger's grief in revealing the identity of the seventh attacker by maintaining the sequence of asides in the Greek, it fails to provide an equally expressive rendering for the broken nature of line 631 and the repetition of the pronominal article. As for the two verbs of prayer, Mueller, instead of expressing the ambiguous nature of Polynices' character in

the translation of the two verbs, offers a double translation of "what fates" (οἵας . . . τύχας): "The curses and the / fate he calls down on the city", where "fate" has a more neutral (if not positive) meaning. The nominal phrase employed at the beginning, along with the flowing syntax, aims at conveying the message within a theatrical language; though, at the same time, misses out on the many expressive nuances of the speech, which the scout seems to have cried out with the same unifying tone.

Polynices' Attitude (634-41): Prayers and Threats

"Scale", "bestride", "lord", "subjugator", as well as "full-lunged" can all be read in light of Bacon and Hecht's interpretation of Polynices' attack as a re-enactment of Oedipus' incest. "He will scale and bestride the walls" (πύργοις ἐπεμβὰς) is the first of Polynices' "plain, violent, and sexual" claims (as shown in Ch. 2). The Greek verb employed (ἐπεμβαίνω), with the dative and alone, contains both the idea of movement ("scale") and conquest ("bestride"; LSJ); as much as the participle at line 634 (κἀπικηρυχθεὶς; ἐπικηρύσσω: "to proclaim [king]"; LSJ) underlines Polynices' self-consciousness in pursuing his cause, for he is sure he will be "proclaimed" king. Yet, Bacon and Hecht expand on and enlarge both meanings later, in lines 635-41. "Full-lunged" refers to the "victory song" (παιῶν[α]), a song for the city's capture (Hutchinson 1985: 144), which is another potentially sex-evoking addition; "over the trapped and the beaten" enriches the Greek (ἁλώσιμον; ἁλώσιμος: "belonging to capture"; LSJ) with an addition that serves to complete Polynices' violent claims. And if their interpretation was not clear enough, Bacon and Hecht make it even stronger later on at lines 639-41. The "gods that belong to

the fatherland" (θεοὺς γενεθλίους . . . πατρῴας γῆς), whom Polynices calls upon, become the "gods of our mother land, / wife to his father". Whereas the Greek heightens Polynices' relationship with his *genos* and his land, Thebes (a relationship Aeschylus often makes explicit throughout the text: 582, 640, 648, 668, 1018), Bacon and Hecht heighten Polynices' relationship with his mother only as the fruitful soil that has given life to him and his brother by incest ("wife to his father"), somewhat echoing Eteocles' words on the land's "motherly" connotations at the beginning of the play (16-20). Yet, even for Eteocles, Thebes is now "fatherly" (πατρῴας; 668), as he utters in his answer to the messenger, because the land has become fatally possessed by the paternal curse (πατρὸς . . . ἀραὶ; 655) and "Oedipus' *genos*" (Οἰδίπου γένος; 654). Thus, Bacon and Hecht's choice of words appears as a powerful deconstruction of the original meaning, which corroborates their interpretation of Polynices' attack as a re-enactment of Laius' and Oedipus' tragedies. Not only is the land, Polynices' object of conquest, a mother to him, alluding to Laius' rape, but it is also "wife" to his "father", clearly hinting at Oedipus' incest. Ironically, it is his mother's gods whom he would have as "wardens" of "his fortunes", as he will have by re-enacting Oedipus' curse (see Ch. 2).

"He will fight you hand to hand" (σοὶ ξυμφέρεσθαι), Bacon and Hecht continue, and "either, in killing you (κτανὼν), lie dead beside you, / or else drive you into dishonored exile / just as you forced such banishment on him". There exist only two possibilities to be inflicted upon Eteocles: murder or exile, emphasising not just the "interdependence of their [Eteocles' and Polynices'] existence" (Torrance 2007: 31), but the "progressive loss of difference" between the two

brothers (Zeitlin 2009: 95), which will eventually lead to their "identical end" (13). Yet, it is also true that, as Hutchinson argues (1985: 145), Polynices factors in Eteocles' survival and subsequent banishment as a possibility too, hence admitting that he might not kill his brother and might lead a normal life thereafter, a possibility that is denied to Eteocles instead (Cameron 1971: 40-2).[15] It is this scenario that occupies a fair amount of space in Bacon and Hecht's translation, in line with their interpretation of Polynices having just as much right to rule as Eteocles. Both the idea of "banishment" (ἀνδρηλάτης: "he that drives one from his home": LSJ) and "dishonour" (ἀτιμαστήρ: "dishonourer"; LSJ) are expressed.[16]

"Mount" (ἐπεμβὰς) appears in both Mueller and Sandy, and both, Mueller especially, emphasise Polynices' impiety. According to Mueller, the messenger is reporting that Polynices is "a blustering, loudmouthed, irreverent invader, intent on destroying not only his brother, . . . but all of Thebes and its people" (2002: 63). Mueller switches from hypotaxis to parataxis so as to grant the words more importance; the participles all become explicit subordinates, and the expression "a paean for victory" (ἀλώσιμον παιῶν[α]) is accorded two full lines. There is a "wild cry of conquest", a "war-whoop at

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[15] Furthermore, Cameron also underlines the fact that in this passage Polynices does not seem to mention any duel; hence, the reader "has no way of knowing that he will meet his brother at the seventh gate, and this fight which he proposes is to take place after the battle", that is, after he has gained the city and the palace (Cameron 1971: 40).

[16] Bacon and Hecht (and, as will be seen, Sandy and Mueller too) seem to read ἀνδρηλατῶν (as in Page 1972: 69) instead of ἀνδρηλάτην, since it is made to refer to Polynices, but it is hard to tell whether this was not done on purpose to make the translation more understandable.

the city's fall". This cry is followed by an expansion of the Greek (ἀλώσιμον) in line with Bacon and Hecht's translation: "desolation" and "vanquished corpses"; Polynices' lust for power is ready to reach this point. A boastful Polynices calls upon "the gods of your / race" (γενεθλίους) "and the gods of your fatherland" (πατρῴας), and the rather ambiguous "your" should be read as plural, referring to both Polynices and Eteocles, about the latter of whom the messenger reports what the former has said directly. Mueller thus concludes the rendering of Polynices' apostrophe at line 641 (Πολυνείκους βία) with him hubristically "call[ing]" the gods "to witness" – more of a threat than a prayer.

Sandy's translation of the two possibilities is long and convoluted: a dense five-line recounting of Polynices' words, which, again, ends with an exclamation: "As you have made him pay!". Interesting in this rapid succession of words without a full stop is the expression "meeting you there" (σοὶ ξυμφέρεσθαι), which adds an aura of predetermination to the passage. With the addition of the adverb "there", Sandy implies Polynices' foreknowledge of Eteocles' decision to meet him at the gate. In the introduction, in the course of commenting on the so-called shield scene, Sandy explains that once the devices on the shields are "described in words, the challenger is known": so, when the messenger describes Polynices' device, he argues, "there is no choice for Eteocles but to take up the challenge, a duel fated to . . . fulfil the words of the curse placed on the brothers by their father" (1999: 50). Necessity and inevitability are enmeshed in Sandy's expression "meeting you there", which has already identified the seventh gate as the designated location for the brothers' fatal duel. As for the last part of this passage, the poet translates with "great Polynices" in emphat-

ic position, who "clamours" (ἀυτεῖ) his "threats" (τοιαῦτ[α]), and "prays to the gods of his hearth to make them good". No mention of "fatherland" or "wardens"; only a simple and plain "make them good", which simplifies the Greek.

Polynices' Shield (642-8): A Matter of Justice

Polynices' shield is "newly forged" (Bacon and Hecht) or "newly-fashioned" (Mueller), and "perfect-circled" (Bacon and Hecht), "perfect round" (Mueller), whilst Sandy only has the simple "brand-new" for both adjectives present in the Greek (καινοπηγὲς; εὔκυκλον). It was specially designed and "apt for this venture", expands Sandy (Torrance 2007: 81), and possesses a "twofold device" (thus Bacon and Hecht and Mueller; διπλοῦν . . . σῆμα).

But what is this twofold device about? Bacon and Hecht say that it is "a stately woman" (γυνή τις), the "goddess of all orders, human and divine", placed between dashes. "Dike", in transliteration, is "stately" – which rather diverges from the Greek "modestly" (as in Mueller; σωφρόνως) –; she brings order. The additions with regard to Dike mark her presence as of paramount importance: Dike and its related compounds appear prevalently in the shield scene for a reason (Chaston 2010: 114; *Sept.* 171, 405, 415, 418, 444, 584, 598, 605, 607, 610, 626, 646, 662, 667, 670, 671, 673, 866, 1071, 1073). As mentioned already, to Bacon and Hecht Dike is "the personification of the fundamental principle of right and order" (Bacon and Hecht 2009: 115), which has been violated by the chain of outrages begun by Laius. Her duty is to punish both brothers who are equally guilty, as her impartiality demands, and to re-establish order. "I shall bring this man to his harbor", says Bacon and Hecht's Dike (*Sept.* 647), where "harbor" is chosen for the Greek verb *katágein*, which means

both "to lead down into Hades" and "to bring to shore", Bacon and Hecht explain (2009a: 187). The irony, they continue in their note to this line, is that "the shore that both brothers ultimately reach is in fact the shore of Hades" (ibid.). The verb used here (κατάγω) recalls the second passage of the *Thebais* quoted in Chapter 2, where we find another verb expressing downward movement (καταβαίνω); there, the term refers to the curse cast upon the two brothers, which will make them die at each other's hands. If Aeschylus had these lines in mind when thinking about this passage about Dike, he certainly wanted it to acquire a hint of tragic irony. Polynices "shall tumble and make free with his house", a free adaptation of line 648. Instead of "dwelling in his father's house", as the Greek has it, Bacon and Hecht insert another line soaked in tragic irony: Polynices will indeed "make free with his house" (read: with Eteocles, and, in Bacon and Hecht's interpretation, with Oedipus' curse) only upon his and Eteocles' death.

Sandy's "ladylike Justice", this time translated and not transliterated, recites her "motto" (a quite colloquial, perhaps also inappropriate, word choice): "He shall rule / and dwell in the house of his fathers". Despite Sandy's more faithful and synthetic translation, he seems to have missed the tragic irony subtended by the repetition of *patró(i)an* (omitted in his translation of line 640), more concerned with providing an understandable flowing syntax.

Mueller's choices of "modestly" and "rightfully" for Dike only heighten once again the disproportion between Justice herself and Polynices (Hutchinson 1985: 147). She "will restore this man / to his city . . . / rightfully his own", the messenger concludes. Mueller's dwelling on the righteousness and integrity of the goddess in guiding Polynices marks the

passage with even more irony, as she is helping the boastful and impious Polynices. The whole scene ridicules the notion that a reader/spectator could even think of "Justice" as being on Polynices' side.

The Ship Imagery (649-52): A Conscious Ruler?

Such are the "engines" (Bacon and Hecht), "slogans" (Sandy) or "devices" (Sandy and Mueller) on Polynices' shield (τοιαῦτ᾽ ἐκείνων ἐστὶ τἀξευρήματα). And the messenger concludes his speech with an unusual repetition: "You know yourself who is convenient to send" (σὺ δ᾽ αὐτὸς ἤδη γνῶθι τίνα πέμπειν δοκεῖ), and again: "You know yourself how to pilot the ship". This is a repetition (on which, see Hutchinson 1985: 147) that Mueller eagerly exploits to further his own interpretation of the play.

The same repetition, Mueller argues, was at line 57 in the "two juxtaposed phrases" about assigning the "best men" (ἀρίστους ἄνδρας), and the "city's finest at our seven gates" (ἐκκρίτους πόλεως) (2002: 65). As at line 57, here the messenger's words are two juxtaposed phrases. He suggests sending someone: "It's for you / to choose and send the warrior to answer him"; and he mentions Eteocles' responsibility for the city: "It's for you to determine the city's / course". Together with the returning metaphor of Eteocles as a "helmsman" (*Sept.* 62), the repetition is triggered by the same conviction the messenger was granted in his first speech: the knowledge that Eteocles will post himself at the seventh gate. Thus, the messenger's repeated words represent "an emotional moment" devised to reassert "the city's love for its ruler" and the "honor of Eteocles' *areté* status", as well as to give "credence to Eteocles' evaluation of Polyneikês in the speech to come" (ibid.). The knowledge

of Eteocles' decision to save the city by meeting his broth-
er in single combat "moves" the messenger so much so that
he "repeats himself in order to hide his embarrassment at
his visible or invisible emotional response" (ibid.). Where
Aeschylus has the messenger clarify that his duty is over
and he is not accountable for any of his words (*Sept.* 651),
Mueller portrays an understanding messenger who seems
too emotionally involved in feeling for Eteocles, his helms-
man, to even think of implying any fault in him ("You will
find no fault in my report").

As expected, Bacon and Hecht's translation is quite dif-
ferent, insisting on Eteocles' loneliness as a ruler: "Now you
alone can decide". The city's fate depends on Eteocles' ac-
tions only, for "if there's a fault to be found / in the situa-
tion, it is not with my report", says the messenger, assigning
all responsibility to Eteocles alone. "Pray, don't blame me
for the news I bring" is Sandy's concise and direct transla-
tion of line 651. "Pray", the messenger almost commands his
ruler as if nothing else would work: be a "guide" and "pilot
in this storm". The expression gives full voice to a recurrent
metaphor in the play, that of the state-ship, the enemy-wave
and Eteocles-helmsman (Cameron 1971: 57-73; *Sept.* 1-3, 30-4,
62-4, 114, 208-10, 689-91, 758-61, 795-8, 853-60).

3.2 Eteocles' Response: A Man Possessed by the Fury (653-76)

The Greek and its Translations

> ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ ὦ θεομανές τε καὶ θεῶν μέγα στύγος,
>   ὦ πανδάκρυτον ἁμὸν Οἰδίπου γένος·
>   ὤμοι, πατρὸς δὴ νῦν ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι.   655

ἀλλ’ οὔτε κλαίειν οὔτ’ ὀδύρεσθαι πρέπει,
μὴ καὶ τεκνωθῇ δυσφορώτερος γόος.
ἐπωνύμῳ δὲ κάρτα, Πολυνείκη λέγω,
τάχ’ εἰσόμεσθα τοὐπίσημ’ ὅποι τελεῖ,
εἴ νιν κατάξει χρυσότευκτα γράμματα   660
ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος φλύοντα σὺν φοίτῳ φρενῶν.
εἰ δ’ ἡ Διὸς παῖς παρθένος Δίκη παρῆν
ἔργοις ἐκείνου καὶ φρεσίν, τάχ’ ἂν τόδ’ ἦν·
ἀλλ’ οὔτε νιν φυγόντα μητρόθεν σκότον,
οὔτ’ ἐν τροφαῖσιν, οὔτ’ ἐφηβήσαντά πω,   665
οὔτ’ ἐν γενείου ξυλλογῇ τριχώματος,
Δίκη προσεῖδε καὶ κατηξιώσατο·
οὐδ’ ἐν πατρῴας μὴν χθονὸς κακουχίᾳ
οἶμαί νιν αὐτῷ νῦν παραστατεῖν πέλας.
ἦ δῆτ’ ἂν εἴη πανδίκως ψευδώνυμος   670
Δίκη, ξυνοῦσα φωτὶ παντόλμῳ φρένας.
τούτοις πεποιθὼς εἶμι καὶ ξυστήσομαι
αὐτός· τίς ἄλλος μᾶλλον ἐνδικώτερος;
ἄρχοντί τ’ ἄρχων καὶ κασιγνήτῳ κάσις,
ἐχθρὸς σὺν ἐχθρῷ στήσομαι. φέρ’ ὡς τάχος   675
κνημῖδας, αἰχμῆς καὶ πέτρων προβλήματα.

Bacon and Hecht (2009a: 156-7):

Eteokles God-hated, hateful, beaten and trapped,
    O god-maddened, O race of Oedipus,
    ringed round with hate my patrimony, full of tears;
    the Curses of my father once again
    bring forth a sickening fruit.
    But no weeping now; no lamentation.
    They could engender a greater and wider grief.
    Polynices, full of strife, much striven over,
    you are well named. Soon we will know
    how his blazon and device will do its work –
    whether in fact the gold-incised letters on the shield
    will bring the babbling, aberrated brother to his harbor.

> If Dike, maiden daughter of Zeus,
> had been present in the deeds and heart of this man,
> perhaps it might come about.
> But neither when he fled from the darkness of his mother,
> nor at the breast, not as a boy,
> nor when his first beard began
> did Dike ever look upon him, or find him
> worthy of her company.
> Then she is not likely to be at his side
> or help him in this violence,
> this crime against the parent land.
> If she did she would be, quite justly,
> falsely named Justice; linked with a man
> who would dare anything.
> Trusting in this, I shall go;
>
> (*He steps forward alone into the place where the other champions stood.*)
>
> I shall stand against him myself.
> Who has a juster claim than I?
> Ruler against ruler, brother against brother,
> hater against hater, I must take my rightful place.
> Quickly, bring my armor,
>
> (*One of the remaining soldiers steps up to the door of the palace, opens it, and makes a summoning gesture to those within.*)
>
> the masking metal riddle to ward off stones and spears.

Sandy (1999a: 79-80):

> ETEOCLES O family, godforsaken, still god-hated,
>   cursed line of Oedipus!
>   I thought in my case
>   Apollo would relent. But no! The curse
>   of my father comes to fix me, skewer my heart!
>   Yet this is not the hour to wail; my tears

may generate a greater grief. Now –
as for Polynices – soon enough events
will show how true the emblem on his shield
turns out to be, and if those gilded words,
swollen with rash drivel and mad delusion,
shall bring him what he wants. If Justice, pure
daughter of Zeus, had moved him in his thoughts
and deeds, this outcome might have come to pass.
But never in his life, from the shade of infancy,
to the green vigor of boyhood, until the beard
of manhood began to gather on his chin
did Justice deem him fit or show him favor.
Nor is it likely she will now support him
when he would fall upon his fatherland.
Indeed, Justice would not be just if she
allied herself with that demented mind.
Secure in this knowledge, I will take him on;
who more fitting than I? Foe with foe,
captain confronting captain, brother against
brother, I go to meet him. Bring my greaves,
my armor, gear to fend off spears and arrows.[17]

Mueller (2002: 215-6):

Eteoclês O god-hated house of Oedipus,
  house cursed by the gods,
  house maddened by gods,
  house of tears,
  now the curse of Oedipus is fulfilled!

  But no time for tears or wailing now,
  giving birth to even worse suffering!

---

[17] Sandy seems to read πτερῶν ("arrows"; Hutchinson 1985: 24) instead of πέτρων ("stones"); for further discussion on this, see Hutchinson 1985: 153.

As for him,
Polyneikês,
so well named,
strife-bringer, we will
see if his sign is fulfilled; whether golden
letters on a shield will do what they say;
or are they the babble of a demented
mind?
If Justice, virgin daughter of
Zeus, had ever been with him in
thought or deed, his boasting might have come
true.
But never, never once, never – not when he
fled the dark cavern of his mother's
womb, not in childhood or adolescence, not when the
hair of manhood grew on his chin,
did Justice ever, even once,
turn her eye on him or ever acknowledge him!
Nor does she now,
now as he rapes his city, his parent
land, in this violent, criminal assault!
For if she did, if Justice looked
kindly on him, she would be justly misnamed
for championing one who brings death on his city!

Believing this,
I stand against him myself.
Who has a better right?
Prince against prince,
brother against brother,
enemy against enemy!

Bring my armor –
to ward off arrows and stones.

(*During the following, six SOLDIERS enter with articles of armor.*)
(*Music.*)

A Triple Cry (653-7): Eteocles' Surprise?

Eteocles' speech is at the heart of Aeschylus' tragedy: after he has selected himself as one of the seven defenders and already posted the first six, Eteocles realises that he is to fight his own brother. Not surprisingly, the adjectives referring to the "race of Oedipus" (as in Bacon and Hecht) are expanded upon in Bacon and Hecht's translation: "God-hated, hateful, beaten and trapped" (θεῶν μέγα στύγος; literally: "object of great hatred from the gods"), and, again, another addition, "Ringed round with hate my patrimony", which are accompanied by "god-maddened" (θεομανές) and "full of tears" (πανδάκρυτον), literal translations from the Greek. "Patrimony" refers as much to Eteocles' actual inheritance from his father (the land, Thebes) as it does to Oedipus' legacy, the old and new "Curses" bringing forth "a sickening fruit" (τελεσφόροι). Ironically, Bacon and Hecht explain, it is their father's wealth/inheritance "for which the brothers are prepared to fight to the death", yet it will be their inheritance of Oedipus' family legacy that they will actually die for (2009: 125). The "Curses" (plural as in the original: ἀραὶ) are, Bacon and Hecht argue, the (apparently endless: "once again") series of wrongs described in the stories of Laius and Oedipus that are haunting Eteocles and will be re-enacted in his possession of the motherland and in the killing of his brother. Eteocles' lamentation is cut off by a return to himself (lines 656-7), which Bacon and Hecht translate very effectively with a nominal phrase: "But no weeping now; no lamentation".

In Sandy, a sequence of exclamations in asides ("godforsaken, still god-hated, cursed line of Oedipus") translate the adjectives referring to Eteocles' "family". The (added) ad-

verb "still" recalls the family's crimes, after which Eteocles bursts out: "I thought in my case / Apollo would relent"; and yet, the curse of his father "comes to fix" him and "skewer" his heart. It is as if Sandy's Eteocles thought that by giving himself "wholly to the preservation of the *polis* he guards" (Sandy 1999: 49), his life would be spared. But why Apollo? Although the familiar, everyday language helps the reader/ spectator enter the storyline, a mention of Apollo at such a pivotal moment does not add any (clarifying) meaning to the passage and might even create confusion: neither does the translation anywhere suggest what Eteocles thought about the curse nor clarify Apollo's involvement with it. With the lines "yet this is not the hour to wail; my tears / may generate a greater grief", Sandy renders quite faithfully Eteocles' determination not to indulge in tears and sorrows.

Mueller translates the Greek triple lamentation by means of repeating the word "house" (γένος) four times, an expedient which captures the idea of a refrain cried out by a desperate man. "Now the curse of Oedipus is fulfilled" acquires a whole new meaning when read in light of Mueller's introduction: the messenger's words were just a confirmation of something Eteocles already knew. He knows that "whatever happens he will die" (2002: 75); still, he cries out because now he needs to demonstrate his virtue, his "*aretê*" (ibid.). Mueller's translation of line 656 is concise: "No time for tears of wailing now" that would give "birth to even worse suffering"; again, another quite faithful translation of line 657, as in Sandy.

Polynices' Etymology (658-61): "Full of Strife"

Both Bacon and Hecht and Mueller disentangle the etymology of Polynices' name for their (reading) audience in or-

der to make sense of the Greek "well named" at line 658 (ἐπωνύμῳ δὲ κάρτα) – "Polynices, full of strife, much striven over" (Bacon and Hecht) and "strife-bringer" (Mueller) – whilst Sandy ignores the issue altogether and jumps to the following line. As he has done for all the other opponents save Amphiaraus, Eteocles should now interpret Polynices' shield device and create a "counter-metaphor" that would enable him to find the right opponent for his brother (Cameron 1970: 107-8; Chaston 2010: 70). Yet, Bacon and Hecht argue, just as Polynices will also be "truly bewept" – a possible etymology for Eteocles' name – so Eteocles reveals himself "full of strife" and, as in Bacon and Hecht's second interpretation of Polynices' name, "much striven over", as he decides to meet his brother (2009: 123-4; Vidal-Naquet 1988: 295). What would seem to be a failure on Eteocles' part to turn the omen against the attacker is in fact the unfolding and fulfilment of their names, which become "interchangeable" and make Eteocles the perfect opponent for his brother (Bacon and Hecht 2009: 124; Zeitlin 2009: 21-2).

Whether Polynices' "blazon and device" (Bacon and Hecht), or "emblem" (Sandy) (both drawing attention to the shield imagery), or "sign" (Mueller, a faithful translation of the original, τοὐπίσημ[α]) and "gold-incised letters" (Bacon and Hecht), "gold letters" (Mueller), or "gilded words" (Sandy) will do their work, we shall see. Bacon and Hecht are the only ones who dwell on the double meaning of the verb "I go down" (κατάγω) as in line 647: these golden letters will in fact bring Polynices "to his harbor"; that is, down to Hades. As before, Bacon and Hecht play on it; Justice "will bring him what he wants" (thus Sandy, omitted in Muller): but only underground. Sandy and Mueller retain the sarcastic formulation of the original: "Events / will show how true

the emblem on his shield / turns out to be" (Sandy) and "we will / see if his sign is fulfilled" (Mueller).

Sandy's translation of the terms related to the golden words is rather expressive: "Swollen with rash drivel and mad delusion" (φλύοντα: "babbling"; and σὺν φοίτῳ φρενῶν: "with a wandering mind"), which retains the hypallage of the Greek and reinforces Eteocles' conviction that Polynices cannot succeed in his venture.

The Counter-Metaphor of Justice (662-71): Eteocles' Failure

Who then has the right to rule Thebes? Justice is on Polynices' shield and Eteocles is at the peak of his metaphor-making process, which should lead to his creation of Justice's counter-metaphor (Golden 1964: 84). If "Dike, maiden" (Bacon and Hecht), or the "pure / daughter of Zeus" (Sandy), with the implication of the sense of moral integrity of the Greek term (παρθένος), or the (quite literal) "virgin daughter of / Zeus" (Mueller), "had been present in the deeds and heart of this man, / perhaps it might come about" (Bacon and Hecht). Bacon and Hecht's apodosis maintains (and enhances) the air of "reasonable concession" in the original (Hutchinson 1985: 151): 'we shall see if Justice sided with Polynices from what will happen', Eteocles seems to suggest in their translation. Not surprisingly, Sandy and Mueller omit this air of concession in their translations, both using a (non-mixed) third-type conditional: it is impossible for Justice to be on Polynices' side, for it "might have come / true" already (Mueller), or "come to pass" (Sandy), if she were. Eteocles is protecting his city: Justice cannot but be on 'his' side, as argued by both in the introductions to their translations (see Ch. 2).

Sandy's word choice for the main verb in the prota-

sis (παρῆν) is quite revealing: "If she had moved him in his thoughts / and deeds". Where the Greek has "if Justice was present in his deeds and thoughts" or, as Mueller puts it, quite drastically, if she "had ever been with him in / thought or deed", Sandy has Justice "moving" Polynices, as if Polynices was left without any freedom. The expression "come to pass" in the apodosis corroborates this sense of predetermination and solemnity which has haunted Sandy's translation from the beginning (see Ch. 2).

Bacon and Hecht, Sandy, and Mueller all have Justice's name appear after the negative subordinate clauses and followed by the two principal verbs (reproducing the syntax of the Greek). In Bacon and Hecht, Dike did not "look upon him [Polynices]" (προσεῖδε) nor "find him / worthy of her company" (κατηξιώσατο), a language marked with irony and sarcasm. Particularly noteworthy is the translation of "in his childhood" (τροφαῖσιν) with "at the breast": a delicate expression which evokes Eteocles' (Oedipal?) attachment to his mother/motherland. The position of words and syntax that places the subject at the end, as in the Greek, makes Eteocles' "delight in the scurrilous and the satirical" (Hutchinson 1985: 147) emerge rather well.

The goddess "is not likely to be at his side" (νιν αὐτῷ νῦν παραστατεῖν πέλας), Bacon and Hecht's Eteocles concludes. She will not "help him in this violence", the translators add, in "this crime against the parent land" (ἐν πατρῴας μὴν χθονὸς κακουχίᾳ). If she did, she would be "quite justly, / falsely named Justice" – her name translated for the first time to make sense of the wordplay in Greek. Apart from the confusing and abrupt shift from Dike to Justice (especially for a non-classicist), Bacon and Hecht's translation of the wordplay, from which it follows that Justice would nev-

er be "linked with a man / who would dare anything" (*Sept.* 671), is rather effective.

In the end, it seems that Eteocles has failed to turn the omen against his brother: as Cameron observes, he seems to be simply denying that Polynices' device is truth-telling and only affirms that Justice would be "untrue to her name" if she supported him (1970: 107). This is proof of Eteocles' failure, apparent in Bacon and Hecht's translation of the apposition to Eteocles' shield at line 676 (προβλήματα; "hindrance", "obstacle"; LSJ): his "masking metal riddle"; that is, his armour as a whole and his shield will ward off spears and stones. Yet, in Bacon and Hecht's translation, Eteocles' shield device will turn out to be the Fury (2009a: 159: 894), who, ironically enough, has appeared as the result of his (Oedipus-like) riddling process ("masking metal riddle"), of his interpretation of Polynices' shield device.

Harsher are the adverbial additions employed by both Sandy and Mueller to begin their translations of Eteocles' invective against his brother: "Never in his life" (Sandy) and "never, never once, never" (Mueller). Sandy employs three nominal phrases containing a rather poetic description of Polynices' different stages of life: "Shade of infancy", "green vigor of boyhood" and "the beard / of manhood". Mueller is more concise (and literal): "Childhood", "adolescence" and "hair of manhood". He lingers on line 664: "When he / fled the dark cavern of his mother's / womb". Mueller himself explains that "darkness" (σκότος) enhances "the polar opposition that these two brothers represent" (2002: 67). If the two brothers are twins, he argues, and Polynices was born in the "darkness", that is to say in "evil", then Eteocles was born in the "light", in the "good".

Never did Justice, Sandy continues, "deem him fit" or

"show him favor". Both word choices can be read as a translation of the second verb (καταξιόω; "I hold in honour"; LSJ) with the Greek sense of "honour" heightened: Polynices' life was never conducted in such a way as to be rewarded with dignity, "favor", "honour". Justice would "not be just" if she "allied herself with that demented mind". Where the Greek has a word which refers more to Polynices' recklessness (πάντολμος; "all-daring"; LSJ), Sandy's Eteocles insists on Polynices' madness, as if – once again: with an air of predetermination – Polynices, taken by folly, could not but attack his fatherland.

Mueller's translation dares even more: not "ever", not "even once", he adds, did Justice "turn her eye on him or ever acknowledge him!". Justice never even acknowledged Polynices' existence. Nor would she "now as he rapes his city, his parent / land, in this violent, criminal assault!". In a climactic series of asides, Mueller provides a translation of Polynices' attack surprisingly in tune with Bacon and Hecht's: his attack acquires sexual implications ("rape" for "bad treatment of the fatherland"; ἐν πατρῴας μὴν χθονὸς κακουχίᾳ), and is a "violent, criminal assault" as much as it is a "violent crime" in Bacon and Hecht. It is to "crime" that Mueller returns in translating line 671: instead of a "demented man" or one "who would dare anything", he expands on the wordplay on Justice and concludes that she could never be on Polynices' side, not now that he is bringing "death on his city!". The emphasis is on Polynices' impiety in attacking his own city, and hence on Eteocles' virtue in dying to defend it.

Polynices' Opponent (672-4): A Proper Match?

"Trusting" (Bacon and Hecht), "believing" (Mueller), "secure in this knowledge" (Sandy), Eteocles concludes his speech

and recaps what he thinks has been proved by his invective – that he is Polynices' match: "I shall go" (Bacon and Hecht), "I will take him on" (Sandy), "I stand against him myself" (Mueller; εἶμι). "Eteocles steps forward alone", Bacon and Hecht write in the stage directions, and then continue: "I shall stand against him myself" (ξυστήσομαι).[18] Eteocles seems to have worked out from the messenger's description and his interpretation of it that he is the attacker's perfect counterpart, and yet "spends surprisingly little time defending himself as an appropriate match" (Torrance 2007: 83). A rhetorical question follows, implying the self-evidence of the answer: both Bacon and Hecht and Mueller shift their emphasis from Eteocles (ἐνδικώτερος) to his "just" or "right" claim to be Polynices' opponent: "Who has a juster claim than I?" (Bacon and Hecht), "Who has a better right?" (Mueller): Eteocles is the hero justice needs. "Who more fitting than I?" (Sandy), which insists more on the intrinsic qualities that Eteocles is about to mention that make the two a perfect match. For they are both "rulers" (Bacon and Hecht)/"captains" (Sandy)/"princes" (Mueller) (ἄρχοντί τ' ἄρχων); "brothers" (Bacon and Hecht, Sandy, Mueller; κασιγνήτῳ κάσις); and "haters" (Bacon and Hecht)/

[18] The Greek verb used here (συνίστημι) appears twice before, both times in its future tense: at line 435, where the messenger uses it when he tries to suggest to Eteocles whom to send against Capaneus, but stops speaking as if he could not find anyone capable of standing against such brutality; and at line 509, by Eteocles, when he describes how Hyperbius is a good match for Hippomedon. Here, Eteocles also states that the warrior he has chosen will stand against the attacker as an "enemy man" (ἐχθρὸς . . . ἀνήρ), which is exactly how he describes himself in the passage under discussion (ἐχθρὸς . . . στήσομαι).

"foes" (Sandy)/"enemies" (Mueller) (ἐχθρὸς σὺν ἐχθρῷ).

In a style that is deliberately emphatic and full of polyptota, reproduced as "rhythmic patterns" in Mueller's translation (Ch. 2), the first pair that, in Eteocles' mind, would make them good opponents in battle is their status as rulers. With "foe with foe" coming first in Sandy's translation, the principal verb ("I go to meet him"; στήσομαι) at the end in emphatic position and "brother against / brother" in enjambment, Sandy draws attention to the "unnaturalness" of the last pair, "brother against brother" (Hutchinson 1985: 152).

Bacon and Hecht's translation heightens their last pair: "Hater against hater", an energetic choice emphasising "the perversion of Eteocles' mind" (ibid.). Such perversion is stressed even more in the next line. Instead of translating the main verb with a simple "stand against" (στήσομαι), Bacon and Hecht accentuate the irony of the whole scene: "I must take my rightful place", Eteocles utters, and his "rightful" place he will obtain; he will "go to his harbour" just as much as Polynices will.

On Stage Directions: (675-6)

In all three translations, Eteocles receives and wears the armour before his exit. In Bacon and Hecht, when Eteocles utters "quickly, bring my armor" (κνημῖδας; "greaves"; LSJ), one of the soldiers in the scene orders it to be brought on stage. Six slave girls enter, each carrying a piece of armour right after the Chorus have pronounced line 680 (Bacon and Hecht 2009a: 158: 857). Each slave girl will help Eteocles put on one of these six articles of armour (greaves, breastplate, sword, helmet, shield, and spear) as Eteocles and the Chorus speak to one another. Sandy too has Eteocles put on his

armour (which should be assumed to have always been on stage) after line 685 (1999a: 80: 751). In Mueller, six soldiers "enter with articles of armour" and after some speeches by Eteocles and the Chorus, each soldier helps Eteocles put on one of the six articles of armour, as in Bacon and Hecht.

Relying on Eduard Fraenkel's and Ulrich von Wilamow-itz-Moellendorff's authority for which actions are always accompanied by words in Greek tragedy, Taplin (and others) find it impossible to believe that Eteocles is to arm himself whilst he speaks to the Chorus (Taplin 1977: 159). Yet, David Wiles argues, if we are to free the text from Aristotelian ter-minology, which distinguishes between scenes of *opsis* and *praxis*, and "come to the text with the notion firmly fixed in our minds that in theatre *opsis* = *praxis*, then our judgement of what is 'implicit in the words' will undergo a shift" (1993: 180). In other words, if we allow the *Seven Against Thebes* to "communicate its meanings visually", then Eteocles' arm-ing himself is precisely what is implied and needs to be un-derstood as happening in this scene. Throughout the six rit-ualised stages that Schadewaldt believes there to be in the dressing of a warrior (1961: 105-16), those for which both Ba-con and Hecht and Mueller supply stage directions, Eteocles "changes his identity, . . . and becomes the image of Ares, his warrior ancestor" (Wiles 1993: 188). "The ritual arm-ing", then, is in no way a "destruction competing against the words", Wiles continues: in fact, it represents "an eloquent response to the feminine pleadings of the chorus" (ibid.).

Thus, by supplying actions to the play through stage di-rections, Bacon and Hecht, Sandy, and Mueller not on-ly adapt their translations to the conventions of contempo-rary theatre, where actions would much less likely be ac-companied by any on-stage dialogue, they also make sense

of the "implicit" in this scene, "of the text as we have it", and of "Aeschylus' decision to use the medium of theatre", Wiles concludes (1993: 193).

Chapter 4

Hip-Hop Theatre and Greek Tragedy
in Will Power's *The Seven*

Will Power's *The Seven* premiered in August 2001 at the Thick House in San Francisco and had a run at the Hip-Hop Theatre Festival in San Francisco one year later; it was originally conceived in a workshop production at the suggestion of Tony Kelly, co-founder and director of the Thick Description Theatre Company (Hurwitt 2001 and De la Viña 2001). In 2006, Power and Jo Billings adapted it for a new audience, that of the New York Theatre Workshop (NYTW), which hosted it from January to March (Bolus 2006, Cooper 2006, Dunning 2006, Feingold 2006, Isherwood 2006, Meineck 2006, Sagolla 2006, and Spencer 2006). *The Seven* was staged one last time at the La Jolla Playhouse (LJP) from February to March 2008, with the music updated and remixed again in accordance with then-current hip-hop sounds (McNulty 2008 and Ng 2008).[19]

Starting off as a workshop, *The Seven* in some sense maintained its primal work-in-progress nature as it underwent multiple changes in moving from San Francisco to

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[19] Exact run dates for all three productions were 23 August–16 September, 2001; 18 January–12 March, 2006; and 12 February–16 March, 2008.

New York and then back again to the West Coast for its last staging. The gestation of the NYTW production was long and posed several challenges. After Power and Will Hammond had composed the music, they started looking for a hip-hop producer, as "the music was good, but the production was not" (Power 2009: 554). Their search was not simple, as their producer had to be conversant with both hip-hop and theatre. Eventually, they found Justin Ellington from Atlanta, experienced both in composing for theatre and producing hip-hop music.

The other challenge was to find a DJ who could coordinate and present the entire play as storyteller. The difficulty consisted, again, in finding someone who was both actor and turntablist. The role was eventually filled by Amber Efé, a woman, as Power had wanted. "There's something about feminine energy as opposed to the masculine energy of the old, the conqueror" (555), Power explained.

The musical score was a mix of calypso, doo-wop, jazz, blues, 70s R&B, rap, hip-hop and show tune. Justin Ellington collaborated with Power and Billings to transform the score into a commercial production for an Off-Broadway stage, whilst Hammond "[pulled] the several musical styles into a cohesive whole" (Meineck 2006: 153). Choreography by Tony-winning Bill T. Jones coloured the production with ritualised hip-hop dance and compositional devices. As Lisa Sagolla reported, Jones created "artful, stylized gesture" in order to accompany the "snappy satiric ditties" in rhymed verse (Sagolla 2006).

Significant changes between the three productions included a change in the director, Tony Kelly in 2001, but Jo Bonney, who had worked with Danny Hoch and Universes, in 2006 and 2008; in the number of actors, only six in

2001 because of budget constraints, but expanded to seven and more in later productions; in the choreographer, Robert Henry Johnson in 2001, but Jones in 2006 and 2008; and in the recruitment of Ellington in 2004 for the 2006 and 2008 productions. With its cast of polished actors, enlarged since the play's debut in 2001, *The Seven* boasted an exceptional number of positive reviews, especially considering that it was an adaptation of an almost-forgotten Greek play.

4.1 Hip-hop Double Transculturation

In his chapter on Power's *The Seven*, Kevin J. Wetmore lingers on a thorough description of the audiences Power ended up appealing to in the three productions in La Jolla, San Francisco, and New York: he reports that the audience of the wealthy San Diego suburb of La Jolla who attended the 2008 production was comprised of the highest percentage of European Americans; a "mixed-race" audience, though the majority was European American, attended the New York production; another "mixed-raced" but "predominantly African-American" audience was present at the play's premiere in 2001 in San Francisco (Wetmore 2017: 241). The diverse and rather "hybrid" nature of the audiences who attended Power's play reflects the equally "hybrid" nature of hip-hop as a genre and of his adaptation, which interrogates and challenges other African American adaptations of Greek tragedy (Wetmore 2015: 547; 2017: 241).

Because of its hybrid nature, Power's *The Seven* functions on different levels: whilst in the US it operates as a transculturation of Aeschylus from a European American into an African American context, outside of the US it grounds Aeschylus in the American culture tout court, the transcul-

turation occurring from a European to a generally 'American' context. These two transculturations intersect at various levels when considered from both an American and a non-American perspective, but it is important to note how the adaptation's 'double transculturation' process is permitted, even encouraged, by the hip-hop genre Power chose for his play. In other words, not only the choice of hip-hop music, but also the introduction of the world of hip-hop, a "diasporic" (due to its Caribbean origins: Gilroy 1993: 33; Banks 2011: 7-8) as well as largely African American cultural form, with its own internal references and history, gives life to the peculiar (postdramatic: see Intro.) double-coding Power's play presented to his audiences (Wetmore 2015: 550).

Wetmore reminds us that "pop music-mediated productions" in general have this power of incorporating into ancient plays a totally new "series of referents", which in this case effects a complete Americanisation of the source material (2017: 236). But hip-hop is not just about "appropriating" and "recombining" the source material into this new series of referents; to use Gilroy's terminology (1993: 103): because it is as much a theatrical as a cultural form, hip-hop also represents a "space to . . . re-imagine racial, social, and cultural identifications" and is thus both theatrical 'and' metatheatrical (Persley 2015: 86). This feature of hip-hop needs to be linked to Power's own conceptualisation of Greek tragedy as itself already a place of "recombination" and "appropriation" of myths, which, he explains, existed "actually before the Greeks" (qtd in Wetmore 2015: 564). These myths, then, represent the site for a recombination, as legitimate an operation now as it was when the Greeks did it. Yet, because this appropriation occurs through the medium of hip-hop, which is inherently both a theatrical and metatheat-

rical form of art, Power's grafting of the myth in the *Seven Against Thebes* onto African American culture is more than simple relocation: as a postdramatic theatrical adaptation, it represents as much a "comment on Greek tragedy and its production and reception" as a cultural form "as . . . [an] adaptation of Greek tragedy" (Wetmore 2015: 552).

But why would Power, a pioneer in hip-hop theatre, especially successful in his previous hit *Flow*, turn to Greek tragedy, and in particular to a rarely performed play by Aeschylus, the *Seven Against Thebes*? Many reasons contributed to Power's decision. In a conversation with the playwright Charles Mee, who is himself an avid adapter of Greek drama, Power attributed to the "guy [Tony Kelly] who had a small theatre" in California the suggestion to "check out this play" (Mee and Power 2005). Power reported that:

> Once I got onto it, I couldn't get it out of my head. Then Jim [Nicola, the artistic director of the NYTW] got hold of it and said, "Would you expand this and do a lot of work on it?" And I was like, "Yeah, I love doing that kind of stuff. (Ibid.)

Power grew up as William Wylie in the Fillmore district of San Francisco in the 1980s and 1990s, in the "gang-infested African American culture of the Bay Area" (Foley 2012: 105), where he acquired the nickname Will Power. As Power recalled, in those days of his childhood "there was some mad drama going on . . . people were dying, getting shot all the time" (Power 2009: 555). Starting with break dancing, at the age of fourteen, Power, like many young people in his community, began to explain their lives through storytelling. It was during this period that hip-hop reached the West Coast and that youngsters received hip-hop theatre as a new way of "telling stories" (ibid.), as a means of

re-enacting the violence they experienced every day. A lot of hip-hop theatre pioneers, Power explained, found a "response to . . . the chaos that was going around us" (555-6) in this new form of art.

Theatre represents Power's expressive "outlet" (Mee and Power 2005), as he put it. In response to Mee asking him what he thought was exciting about theatre, Power said that for him theatre "comes down to storytelling . . . It's really about people in a room, performer-artists engaging live" (ibid.). Power's inclination towards myth and storytelling originated in the "community theatre/activist/science-fiction type world" (Power 2009: 555) he inhabited as a young person. The form of presentational theatre that nurtured Power from his childhood was always about stretching the imagination; it was a theatre "inspired by Egyptian, Babylonian, and African imagery of artists like Sun Ra" (Meineck 2006: 148). Myth was the foundation for the life of his community. Power recalled stories about 'gangstas' he heard in childhood – even though they were based on facts, they had often been exaggerated by a kind of storytelling, precisely the kind that allowed Power to find similarities between his oral, mythical culture and that of Homer. "Hip hop" is this kind of "storytelling", one that "is inherently theatrical", as Nicole Hodges Persley argues (2015: 85).

In this sense, (hip-hop) storytelling has much in common with the way Greek tragedy "appropriated" myth, to put it with Barthes (1993: 119). In other words, myth and the stories Power heard in his childhood can be understood as being tethered to the same practice of 'relocating' that produced Greek tragedy. "What is a myth?" Power asked Mee. "It is part fiction, part fact", and the purpose of its re-elaboration is to "keep people's history alive, to keep people's

culture alive" by means of proposing an old message in new terms (Power 2009: 553).

Thus, it was indeed Power's understanding of Greek tragedy as being ultimately connected to hip-hop storytelling that attracted him to the ancient genre; but it was the content of the stories he had heard as a child that directed him towards the *Seven Against Thebes* in particular. In other words, it was Power's interpretation of his own African American experience that drove him to re-elaborate this particular myth. When Power returned to his neighbourhood years later, he sadly reported that the same violence he had grown up with was still present, a fact that chimed particularly well with the brotherly violence in Aeschylus' play. Power, in fact, saw in *The Seven* the opportunity to send a message, to pose a question to his community (and the rest of the world): "Are we destined to repeat the mistakes of our forefathers and mothers?", as Eteocles and Polynices seem to be (Power 2009: 553). His aim, he argued, was to put the audience in front of this supreme act of violence dramatised in Aeschylus' play (a fratricide) and challenge them with the question: "Do you have a choice?" (ibid.). How Power guided them through this question and what the question is really about will be at the heart of this chapter.

4.2 Hip-hop Flipping: Aeschylus Remixed

The DJ spins her tables and raps the following lines right at the start of the play (fig. 1):

> DJ Friends, Romans, countrymen,
>   And all my people from around the way
>   Let me welcome you all to

This Hip Hop Greek tragedy[20]

The DJ, the storyteller, the one who will blend the records, employs a (rather 'classical') Shakespearean line to address and 'mix' her audiences: if, on the one hand, she is conflating the high tones of Shakespearean language with the play's classical theme that she is about to 'mix', she is also broadening the usual meaning of Mark Antony's words so as to reach beyond the 'classical' audiences of a 'classical' play, because, as she specifies at the end, this is a "Hip Hop Greek tragedy", a jarring couplet which sets the ('mixed') tone for the rest of the play.

> DJ Let me tell ya who I be
>   See I'm the one who make -
>   Shakespeare jam with James Brown
>   Put Snoopy and Snoop in the same dog pound
>
>   I can transform a scratch
>   Into more than an itch
>   There are no two worlds
>   That I can't mix
>
>   I am
>   The DJ
>
>   And every record that exists
>   I play
>   I picked this one up yesterday, check it out.

The DJ's task throughout the play, it seems, is to blend two

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[20] I quote herein Power's latest version of the script, which he kindly emailed to the author three years ago. I have not included page numbers for this unpublished script because they are not particularly relevant for the reader.

Fig. 1 – Will Power's *The Seven* at the New York Theatre Workshop (2006).
Amber Efé/The DJ (Photo by Carol Rosegg)

worlds together, worlds that would not normally meet: the "James Brown"/"dog pound" rhyming couplet is as jarring as the coupling of Shakespeare and James Brown, and to audiences both sound just as immiscible as hip-hop and Greek tragedy.

In this world of surprising juxtapositions the DJ is creating there is the character of Aeschylus himself, who speaks next, pronouncing an adaptation of lines 654-6 of Philip Vellacott's 1961 *Penguin Classics* translation of the *Seven Against Thebes*, originally part of Eteocles' final response to the messenger:

> AESCHYLUS O house of endless tears
>   O hopeless end
>   It is the curse of your father, that bears fruit in you
>   And the harvest is no blessing.

As a sort of test of her abilities to blend such distant worlds together, the DJ 'samples' Aeschylus (Vellacott 1961: 107). Throughout the play, Power inserts many quotations such as the above from Vellacott's translation of Aeschylus' text: most of them are either (minimally) tweaked as the afore-mentioned one, or they are patched together from lines located in different places in the translation. For example, at the end of the play, Power has Aeschylus repeat, "O hope-less end", yet follows this with, "When God sends destruc-tion there is no escape", which is adapted from Eteocles' lines to the Chorus, appearing later in Vellacott's translation (1961: 109). As said, the DJ 'samples' them, which, in hip-hop terminology, means to create a musical piece or sound from small segments of a song or, more generally, segments of sound (Wetmore 2015: 544). 'Sampling', or 'flipping', as Pow-er calls it, is to "take something and keep the essence and the quality and the feel of it, but you make it something dif-ferent" (2009: 551; Pihel 1996: 251, 255, 261). In New York in the 70s, many African Americans could not afford musical equipment, so they would take 'turntables' (record players) and 'flip' them, that is, transform them into musical instru-ments. For Power, hip-hop is all about 'flipping'. It is a form which is able to give "a nod to your elders and your ances-tors. It's incorporating something old and adding something – like a DJ" (2009: 552).

As Power explained, the real challenge throughout the script was to "rhyme in character", using the original text and then 'sampling' it with the new mix. "Hip-hop is thick with language" (553) asserted Power when asked if he was going to "bastardize" the high language of the Greeks. In some ways, he continued, the language of hip-hop shares similarities with the Greek of Greek tragedy, similarities

that can be seen in the freestyle of "improvisational rap" and its careful attention to language, rhythm, and scatting (ibid.). Peter Meineck argues that the script is impressive in its use of "rhyming couplets zinged across the metallic stage, blending the Greek terms with contemporary allusions and finding the pop cultural reference points that exist in between" (2006: 152).

Aeschylus' words represent one of the ways by which Power intends to fuse these two worlds. As quoted above, Aeschylus describes the house of Oedipus as one of "endless tears" because of the curse Oedipus cast upon his sons. "Yo, he kinda pessimistic right?" is the DJ's reaction, which underlines the distance between the two worlds. "But his voice sound tight! / Kind a' like Freddy Krueger, if he went to Harvard or somethin'", the DJ continues, grappling with the distance by assimilating Aeschylus into the DJ's known world. And throughout the first act, in the explanation of the curse, and in Oedipus' entrance and background story, Aeschylus' and the DJ's words are juxtaposed to create a continuous narrative, employing two rather different narrators to spell out the plot. An example:

> DJ Everybody was kinda grossed out, you know?
>   So–
> AESCH. His sons grudged him his place at home!
> DJ They took they Daddy, locked that fool up in a Caddy
> AESCH. Then in fury
>   And with bitter tongue, alas!
> DJ Oedipus put a curse on they ass!

Aeschylus' words, interpolated into the DJ's narration, are an adaptation of Vellacott's translation of lines 785-91 (1961: 111), and represent the old sound that Power weaves together with hip-hop threads in an "intertextual dialogue" (Wet-

more 2015: 544). The DJ substitutes references to the hip-hop world for Aeschylus' words – Oedipus "locked" in a Caddy, a car often driven by pimps (a term later used to describe Oedipus, see below), translates Eteocles' and Polynices' wretched treatment of their father as described by the Chorus, treatment that triggers Oedipus' curse on them. "The story is being told by these old-school, classic-voice ties on the record, but then she [Efé] interprets it", explains Power (Power 2009: 552). Aeschylus' interpolations become embedded within the narrative itself and are interpreted by the DJ. In a sort of prologue to Oedipus' entrance, Efé has remixed the Chorus' recapitulation right before the messenger reports the outcome of the battle.

With the entrance of the characters, the juxtapositions are increasingly blended, jarringly presented as belonging to both the contemporary and the classical worlds. Oedipus is reconceived as a 1970s-style pimp, who offers a shocking presentation of himself (fig. 2):

Fig. 2 – Edwin Lee Gibson/Oedipus and Laius (Photo by Carol Rosegg).

Oedipus Niggas!
. . .
Do yall know who yall fuckin' with?
I'm the Original gangsta!

Oedipus the "gangsta", the original "mothafucka" – and tragically so – masters the stage with a cane and a pair of yellow sunglasses. He is a 'flipping' character – Oedipus is no longer the innocent tragic hero who did what he did without actually intending to, the character that is so powerfully engraved into the American and European cultures, but a funky bearded figure who shocks the audience with his evil spitefulness and his "gangsta" vocabulary. Often accompanied by the Funky Fates, a sort of Chorus carrying out various duties throughout the play, Oedipus casts the curse upon his sons, who, after learning of Oedipus' history, turned their backs on him, "Enemies! / Not family / Haters of each other / . . . Brother to kill brother" – echoing Eteocles' words in Aeschylus' play (*Sept.* 674). Oedipus, who is a leading actor on stage for a considerable portion of act 1, is retelling his story disguised as Laius, "a man with the style and mannerisms of a 1930s blues man from the Missisipi Delta", as reported in the script, when he flashes back to the homicidal moment: "That man was me. Me! / Yo' Daddy Laius nigga!". Oedipus is a violent man, who reminds Power of the "gangstas" he saw growing up in his hometown. Full of vindictiveness, Oedipus plans his revenge against his sons and convinces both of them separately that the other is incapable of ruling, thus turning the love the two brothers have for each other into hate.

Oedipus is not the only 'flipping' character in the production. According to Meineck, Power's characterisations of the seven heroes "are all versions of the street refracted through

a hip-hop prism" (2006: 155) (fig. 3). Capaneus is a West Coast gangsta who sings "I'm so bad, had Medusa up in my bed /

Fig. 3 – Jamyl Dobson/Polynices, Flaco Navaja/Tydeus, Postell Pringle/ Capaneous, Manuel Herrera/Eteoclus, Pearl Sun/Parthenopaeus, Shawtane Monrow Brown/Hippomedon and Uzo Aduba/Amphiarus (Photo by Carol Rosegg).

And I'm grabbin' on her dreads, and she called me a beast / Then I jacked up Jason for the Golden Fleece / I-took-out-the minotaur one minute flat / I booed Apollo at the Apollo 'cause his shit was wack / I'm a bad mothafucka' and on top of all that / In Hades, I once sold the devil some crack". Here, the blending is almost complete: the classical references (Medusa, Jason, the Golden Fleece, Apollo, Hades) are explained in a vivid contemporary vocabulary that balances tragic and comic styles.

Eteoclus introduces himself as a cruel mercenary whose only request is "pay me well / And I'll put whoever you

choose through hell". Parthenopeus, entering the stage performing a martial arts routine, is a female diva, presenting her origins in a mixed combination of references to the real and mythic world: her "Ma-ma" taught her "karate and Judah" and "sailed with the Argonauts". Hippomedon appears as a huge, terrifying, and potentially sociopathic figure. Finally, Amphiaraus is a female freak prophetess who "just knew, Michael Jackson, was gonna' lose his nose", yet works out the etymology of Polynices' name, calling him "a seeker of strife" (as in *Sept.* 576-9).

'Flipping' Eteocles and Polynices deserve a more extended discourse: they enter right after Oedipus has cursed them – Eteocles, the "first born" and Polynices, "the second born" come onstage one after the other, promising never to fight each other (figs 4 and 5):

Fig. 4 – Jamyl Dobson/Polynices and Benton Greene/Eteocles
(Photo by Carol Rosegg).

Fig. 5 – Jamyl Dobson/Polynices, Benton Greene/Eteocles
and Edwin Lee Gibson/Oedipus (Photo by Carol Rosegg).

> ETEOCLES and POLYNICES Bust it!
> ET. Until Atlantis sinks into the sea
> POL. Until my tendon, right here, is called Achilles — yo
> ET. Until the Drachma turns to dough
> POL. Until Homer is a dad on a cartoon show
> ET. Until a Trojan rides rolled up next to my nuts
> POL. Until they do a new dance, and call it the King Tut

They will "bust" or "kill the curse", as they promise right after the above passage; and they will do so by ruling Thebes in alternate years. Particularly interesting is the line "bust it!", which works on different levels: on a narrative one, it refers to the curse – they will "bust it" ("kill the curse") by means of a peaceful agreement – but in hip-hop terminology, "bust it" is also what the singer yells when the song is about to go into a breakdown or enter a faster part, which is exactly what is happening here with this hip-hop Greek stichomythia between the two characters. What Eteocles and Polynices are actually saying with the classical and contemporary references in their speech is that there will be bad consequences ("it will be trouble") if a full blending of the two worlds, hip-hop and Greek, does not occur: if the "Drachma" does not turn into "dough" and "Homer" into a "dad on a cartoon show", these couplets will remain mere juxtapositions, and it will be impossible to do away with the curse. So, whilst Power suggests that a blending 'is' possible on a meta-hip-hop level, morphing hip-hop into Greek tragedy and vice versa, he also implies that on a dramatic level, this blending does not and will not happen.

In agreeing to rule Thebes in alternate years, Eteocles and Polynices seem only to have avoided, not destroyed, the curse. Eteocles is the first to assume power: he is "gon-

na / bring change like Obama", whilst Polynices, a hippie peace-lover who "feel[s] for the people cause they pay hella' tax", retires to the forest with his partner Tydeus.

Eteocles acquaints himself with the kingship and at first his resolutions seem promising: "No more war! / No more death!" he utters. Yet, the contradiction is already there, as he declares that he will secure peace by getting "those evil Phoenician-middle eastern terrorists!". Ironically, Eteocles represents as much a potentially effective solution to chaos as Obama seemed to in 2008 when this text was last tweaked for the LJP performance. He is so "versatile / flipping' styles like a politician", and flips not only on a meta-hip-hop level, 'sampling' Aeschylus' Eteocles, but also on a narrative one, incarnating the most naturally 'flipping' figure of all: the politician.

Indeed, Eteocles would have kept his promise to leave the kingship after one year, if "Sir Swollen feet" Oedipus, whose words are supported by the middle-aged white man Right Hand (fig. 6), Eteocles' advisor, did not attempt to manipulate him. "It's up to you Born First", Oedipus declares, because Polynices "can't handle this curse" – and when Eteocles appeals to peace, which would end if he did not stick to the agreement, Oedipus bursts into: "Nigga' peace don't make you free / it's time to be who you supposed to be". This narrative 'flipping' seems to be inevitable, because "ya can't run from destiny", as Oedipus tells Polynices, attempting to convince him that Eteocles is "makin' everything wrong". Needless to say, Oedipus succeeds in sowing discord, and both Eteocles and Polynices succumb to his deceiving words.

Fig. 6 – Tom Nelis/Right Hand (Photo by Carol Rosegg).

4.3 Aeschylus, Will Power, and the (Western) Curse

Within this 'flipping' remake of Aeschylus' play, which per-meates the characters as well as the overall plot, there is an

ongoing meta-discourse about Greek tragedy itself that is worth examining to determine what this ancient genre really means to Power. Particularly interesting in this respect is a dream Eteocles has right after Polynices' resolution to attack his brother. In reporting his nightmare to Right Hand, Eteocles narrates how he found himself in the middle of a strangling chain; Oedipus was trying to choke him, yet:

> Eteocles 'Cause he got some hands squeezing his neck too
> His Daddy Laius makin' my Daddy face turn blue
> And Laius gettin' choked by his Daddy, and he by his Daddy
> And all the Mack Daddys back to the beginning of time
> Choking each other on the family line.

In a marvellous chanted scene from the dream, crowded with actors performing both descendants and ancestors, Eteocles explains to Right Hand how Oedipus then asked for his help to break free from his own father's hands, though Eteocles did not know how to help, as he was "just one king amongst all a' you":

> Et. But then I realize
> I'm not stranglin' a son
> I'm not squeezin' no one
>
> So I try and run
>
> But
> My Daddy won't let me go, Daddy let me go!

Eteocles realised that he was not repeating his ancestors' mistakes, that is, he was not strangling his son, and he tried to get away; yet, as soon as Eteocles tried, Oedipus held him back, begging him to free him too. When Eteocles understood that he was too weak to set them both free, he raised his hands towards his own son's throat and started choking

him. "I must accept my destiny" are the words with which Eteocles abruptly concludes his narration of the dream to Right Hand. The dream can be read as a reconstruction of what the curse, hence Aeschylus' play, means to Power.

The terms of the Aeschylean curse have been spelled out in a formulaic refrain via Aeschylus' character and the DJ from the beginning: *Sept.* 785-91 prepared the ground for Oedipus' entrance and brutal imposition of the curse, whose terms are then repeated throughout the script. Yet, the question the curse arouses in its victims is not whether mortals can escape the wrath of gods, as in Aeschylus' text, but whether a son is fated to be like his father, whether the past is bound to repeat itself. In other words, Oedipus 'is' the curse: not only is he the artificer of the spell upon his sons, but he also stands as a necessary and unavoidable figure whom Eteocles and Polynices are compelled to confront so as to (re)appropriate their real selves. In Meineck's words, Oedipus is "the past that refuses to go away" (2006: 154).

There is more. Eteocles' dream unveils how he might potentially refrain from repeating his ancestors' mistakes, that is, 'strangling his own son', yet, when he understands that he is incapable of setting his father and himself free, he succumbs to the curse and gives in to what he believes to be his destiny. As Meineck has noted (152), the "fraternal connection" between Eteocles and Polynices, which in Aeschylus' text fulfills a different function with respect to the curse, takes on a prominent role – the word "brother" is repeated sixty-four times throughout the script, and the empathy that brotherhood draws out is insisted on as the key to understanding Eteocles' and Polynices' naivety in believing that they could "bust" and "kill" the curse.

Perhaps most true to Aeschylus' tragedy, it is really the

familial bonds that Power puts at the centre of his play but with one major difference: with the gods being relegated to the background, family (read: Oedipus, as *pater familias*) becomes the epicentre from which actions originate. Following Meineck again, Oedipus is "an imposing patriarchal force, albeit a dysfunctional one", as he reinforces "the notion that one's relationship to one's father, positive or negative, known or unknown, forms an enormous part of anyone's sense of identity" (2006: 156-7). Oedipus is "a badass", Power explained, "but he stands there and opens up the tradition for all to see" (qtd in ibid.).

Yet, if the gods are not active in the play, then the curse exists only insofar as Eteocles and Polynices believe it exists. "Drawing parallels to hip-hop and African-American culture", Power commented, "the curse is the belief in inevitable fate. Once you believe in that, it's a constant pull" (Power 2009: 552). Eteocles and Polynices succumb to the belief that there is no way out of the curse: so their father taught them. It is because of "lack of faith in themselves, symbolized by lack of faith in each other" that eventually the curse is fulfilled (ibid.).

But Oedipus/the past is not just the "dysfunctional patriarchal force" we are all called to deal with in some way: on a metatheatrical level, Oedipus represents a tradition that 'we' (both spectators and performers, belonging to various cultural spaces) need to bring to light in order to (re)appropriate our true selves. Throughout the tragedy, multiple metatheatrical comments hint at this: "That's not our story", says Eteocles, casting a glance at the audience; "We kill the curse", he repeats to his brother; "Ya can't run from destiny", Oedipus offers as a challenge to Polynices; and "Must Thebes and her line of kings / all be overwhelmed togeth-

er?" is the nagging question Eteocles poses immediately after explaining his dream to Right Hand. Or, Eteocles continues, "Is destiny mine to shape?". These questions are actually posed to the tradition of Greek tragedy itself. After Polynices tells Tydeus that "we need Seven" as they are deciding whether to attack Thebes, Tydeus asks Polynices why there must be seven warriors, and Polynices, as though he were following a pre-set script, responds that they need seven "because Thebes has Seven gates". They need to post seven warriors because the Greek tale Power is adapting had seven warriors.

The metatheatrical references to the structure and plot of the ancient play become even clearer when, as provided for in the script's stage directions, the "Seven" start a "polyrhythmic clap in the Stomp/Black fraternity tradition", making their way towards Thebes (with Tydeus leading and Polynices in the rear) through 'steppin' (a term describing the Black Fraternity Dance, which involves chanting and rhythmic stomping). "We are the Seven Against Thebes", they chant repeatedly whilst 'steppin'. So, when Eteocles, gathering the people of Thebes, bursts out with "We can beat The Seven Against Thebes", a subtle ambiguity which has flowed underneath the entire play is revealed: "We can beat The Seven Against Thebes" is as much Power's hope for his people and everyone else to (re)appropriate the tradition they received (with re- in parentheses to indicate a general assumption that the tradition has always been someone's) as it is for Eteocles to go off script, get out of his character. "What if I just walk away?" Eteocles wonders as he progresses towards the gates. "But they couldn't change it, this is a Greek tragedy", the DJ comments, now open about cross-referencing the Greek tradition.

It is impossible to "cheat history", the DJ seems to suggest, and perhaps it is impossible precisely because we think within the *Seven Against Thebes* framework, as though history was some kind of curse cast upon us, or whose interpretation (and consequences) we cast upon ourselves. In other words, more generally the Aeschylean curse might also refer to what Aeschylus, Greek tragedy, and the 'Western tradition' represent, a weighty legacy: until Aeschylus, Greek tragedy, and its legacy are reconceived in juxtaposition (as in fact they are in this play), and not considered outside their boxes, re-ordered, re-appropriated, Eteocles will always end up by killing his brother; that is, it will be impossible for his character (and anyone else in the audience) to go off script so as to create a different present.

Power seems to warn his audiences that unless a (re)appropriation of this past, a full blending of present and past together, occurs in them as well, in their own stories, that is, in their lives, "there will be trouble", to go back to Eteocles' and Polynices' dialogue, there will be consequences. And it should be noted that the meaning of this warning Power addresses to his audiences varies from spectator to spectator, according to each person's own traditions and backgrounds; the very meaning of tradition changes from person to person. It is through this multifaceted message, launched via a multilayered stratification of meanings as well as means (hip-hop included) to a multicultural audience, that Power eschews the "simple ethnic-binary" (European vs. African) perspective of some Afrosporic interpretations of Greek tragedy (Wetmore 2015: 545, 552). By exhorting his audiences to "kill the curse" cast upon them (or which they cast upon themselves) and to (re)appropriate 'their' tradition, Power is also attempting to flush out the tradition of the Greeks

and Greek tragedy from its hiding place in order to root it in a "shared cultural space", as Wetmore called it (553; see also Intro.), or in an African European context, as others argue (ibid.). However we characterise it, what is interesting is that Power is questioning the tradition's belonging to any one group tout court, hence the call for a (re)appropriation.

The fact that Aeschylus' story is at the centre of Power's creative process allows him to avoid any tendency towards either "arty deconstruction" or "ritual nouveau"; by freeing himself from this old-fashioned alternative, he is able to "flip the records", to sample Aeschylus in a hip-hop mashup (Meineck 2006: 149):

> DJ When are we gonna flip the record?
> Remix it
> Turn a problem to an opportunity
> Paint ugly 'till we see beauty
> All you MC's rhyming on the corner
> Tellin' stories that's epic like Homer
> Tell this one to a friend
> This was their end

These are the DJ's last words, and the last of Power's 'flippings': the MC/Homeric telling of the story of *The Seven* is over, but not Power's hopes for liberation from multiple constraints: not least from the tragedy of being yoked to a self-imposed curse (whether literary or historical). "Are we destined to repeat the mistakes of the forefathers and mothers?" and "Do we have choice?" have now both acquired a whole new level of significance, and the multiple meanings and functions of the Aeschylean curse have been fully disclosed. Will Eteocles still be destined to kill his brother?

Chapter 5

Visual Language and Global Theatre in Stewart's *Seven Against Thebes*

Aeschylus' rarely performed *Seven Against Thebes* ran at La MaMa's Annex theatre from 4 April to 13 May, 2001. Ellen Stewart, the founder of La MaMa, was the director, whilst Elizabeth Swados, Genji Ito (who, unfortunately, died during the rehearsal period) and Michael Sirotta composed the music, and David Adams and Jun Maeda designed sets and props. Federico Restrepo, a Columbian choreographer, designed and created the puppets, a feature typical of Stewart's plays. The performers belonged to the Great Jones Repertory Company. Stewart thought of the play as a sequel to her *Mythos Oedipus*, which premiered in 1985 in Delphi and had its last performance in 1996, and a prequel to *Antigone*, which premiered in 2004 and ran in repertory with six other 'Greek' plays, including the *Seven Against Thebes*, at La MaMa (see further below).

Part of Stewart's passion for Greek drama was instilled in her by the numerous, widely appreciated works of Swados and Andrei Serban, previously created for La MaMa. But Greek drama had always occupied a special place in Stewart's vision and idea of theatre, and to understand her *Seven Against Thebes*, one needs to look back not only at the ways in which Serban and Swados adapted Greek tragedy, but al-

so at the history and development of La MaMa as a theatre.

Arriving in New York in 1950 as an aspiring fashion de-signer, Stewart started working at Saks Fifth Avenue as a de-signer, but after a while had the inspiration to open a place that could serve as a boutique for her and a no-cost theat-rical space for her foster brother Fred Lights and her friend Paul Foster (Rosenthal 2017: 5). In 1961, she paid the first in-stalment of rent on a tiny basement at 321 Ninth Street in New York, which was later named 'Café La MaMa' and for-mally transformed into a coffeehouse, for which a license was easier to obtain than for a theatre.[21] Barbara Lee Horn notes that the name stood "in frank emulation of the Caffe Cino" (Horn 1993: 15), another theatrical space founded by Joe Cino in 1958, which, together with La MaMa, would have a strong impact on that part of the American stage known as 'Off-Off Broadway' (OOB) theatre (Rosenthal 2017: 24).

At first a small space which could be used free of charge, Café La MaMa quickly became a beacon for all those who wanted to do theatre, yet whom society had rejected as 'dif-ferent' or 'borderline'. It welcomed "young experimental American theatre artists, such as Lee Breuer, Tom Eyen, Tom O'Horgan, Sam Shepard, Megan Terry and Lanford Wilson" (Miller 2015: 54). Thus, in the early years of the 1960s, in the midst of the important political and cultural changes the US was witnessing, Stewart begat something that would become a famous and fascinating experimental theatre, the only one of its kind that has survived to the present day.

Stewart's idea was to allow new playwrights and new

[21] For a history of the financial upheavals Off-Off Broadway café theatres and Café La MaMa in particular were forced to confront in the 1950s and 60s, see Miller 2015: 53-4 and Rosenthal 2017: 5-8.

forms of theatre to emerge and grow in a country that had often mistrusted and actively concealed the work of minorities and foreigners (Bigsby 1985: 11; Gagnon 1987: 103). The multicultural range of companies that have performed at La MaMa has always been impressive and, as will be shown, essential to its very survival and eventual institutionalisation. For example, the cast of the *Seven Against Thebes* included actors from the US, Turkey, Latin America, Italy, Japan, Korea, Romania, Israel, Barbados, China, Vietnam and Uganda. Stewart welcomed anyone interested in doing theatre, regardless of their religion or ethnic background. As Stewart once stated: "Certainly America has a lot to give, but it also has a lot to learn" (qtd in Horn 1993: 31). "Theatre can go beyond language", she continued, and it is in the presence of "many different nationalities on stage at once" that one can find "a special energy" (ibid.), an energy which she saw as the basis for her new theatre (see further below). It has always been the collective intent of performers and directors at La MaMa to resurrect the subconscious human desires of the audience; in addition, each company performing at La MaMa, especially in its early days, was heavily influenced by the cultural, historical and theatrical changes which had taken place (and were still taking place) in the 60s.

Every night, Stewart would open the performance with a warm invitation to see her afterwards, should anyone be in need of a space to put on a play. Her inclusive and contagious passion for people and for new forms of theatre allowed her to build a strong network of relationships in many places. It was precisely Stewart's dedication to her artists and commitment to her idea of theatre as one built upon "universal performance languages", as Hillary Miller

puts it, that prevented Café La MaMa from suffering the fate of all the other OOB café theatres (Miller 2015: 56). As will be seen, it is precisely this 'theatrical language' that would enable and ground Stewart's *Seven Against Thebes*.

Particularly interesting in this regard is Stewart's move from the first theatre space in the tiny basement at 321 Ninth Street to a second location, the 74A East Fourth Street building. This building had been purchased through money from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, a fact that some OOB theatres criticised as a betrayal of Stewart's "underground roots" (56). Yet, Stewart's roots were not just attached to some countercultural radicalism, but much more deeply to "her artists and her neighbourhood, in spite of conflicts with authorities" (54). Stewart's experimental theatre moved from place to place (six locations in total before the 1974 purchase of today's space at 66 East Fourth Street), following her "big-set aesthetic", dictated by the idea of an "intercultural theatre" (54).

A major role in La MaMa developing into this 'intercultural theatre' was played by Andrei Serban, a Romanian-born American theatre director, who was invited to join the La MaMa world in 1970 and soon took over as resident director of the Great Jones Repertory Company, at that time the main performing company at La MaMa. One of Serban's first projects focused on a new interpretation of *Medea*, which premiered in 1972. His intent, in Ed Menta's words, was to "continue Brook's investigations in his own ways" (1995: 14). Using the vocal exercises that he had learned from Peter Brook's teachings about Greek mythology, Serban combined various physical disciplines derived from Noh, Kabuki, and the Indian Kathakali, "in order for them [the ac-

tors of his company] to develop a new consciousness of integrating voice and body in a fashion that is more spiritual than the Western tradition of actor training" (17).

Introduced by Stewart to the two artists Serban would work with for the rest of his career at La MaMa, Priscilla Smith, an original member of Richard Schechner's The Performance Group, and Swados (who would work on the *Seven Against Thebes*, too), he toured with *Medea* in the outdoor locations of European theatre festivals, including the ancient ruins of Baalbeck in Lebanon. As Pauline Gagnon observes, Serban's idea was "to take *Medea* back to its roots" (1987: 138). Rediscovering *Medea*'s roots entailed a somewhat physical and visceral approach. This is why he would choose sections from ancient Greek or Latin texts and have the actors recite them in the original, another feature that Stewart would retain in her re-imaginings of Greek tragedy (see further below). Serban's primary concern was to create a 'non-verbal' event in order to rediscover, or discover for the first time, the physicality of the meanings behind the sounds of words, treating language as existing outside the intellect (Menta 1995: 29). In this sense, Serban's use of ancient Greek in spoken form was designed to "really examine what is hidden in those sounds" (29-30); for him, the word is written in order "to be experienced at the moment it is spoken, in an immediate relationship with sound" (30). What fascinated Serban was the "vibration" that happens when words are spoken, and he invited actors during language training "to make it [the word] vibrate inside us" (30).

As Menta explains, the primary objective of his work with *Medea* was "for the actors to inhabit their bodies with sounds" (16). Swados' compositions (then and later) would enhance the rituality of the performance, introducing the

spectator to the depth of 'non-verbal' communication, which was one of the most important pillars of Brook's preaching. Such an inner psycho-physical training was an expression of "the concrete language of the stage" theorised by Artaud (1958: 89-100, 122-132; 1988: 231), whose *The Theatre and Its Double* (*Le Théâtre et son double*; 1938) proved profoundly influential for Serban's and the works of many other American experimentalists.

In 1973, after a sojourn in France, where he conceived *Electra*, Serban travelled to Bali and Japan for three months. These places intrigued Serban, as they had intrigued Artaud, Brook and many other theatrical artists who had experienced them. The "cultural rituals" of such places were most fascinating to these artists as they were constitutive of local forms of theatre. The rituality found in these countries inflamed in Serban the desire to "evolve a theatre that cuts across barriers to communicate in a truly global fashion" (Menta 1995: 21). Ritualised gestures would become the 'words' spoken by the actors.

In 1974, Serban and his company travelled to Brazil and took part in the São Paulo Festival, where they began to work on *Trojan Women*. Serban incorporated the Brazilian experience of an "incredible sense of energy of a disorganised city, of political turmoil in the streets" into his performance (23). The tragedy contained passages in Mayan, Aztec, Nahuatl, Inahien, and, of course, ancient Greek. The musical score was expanded to include trombone, flute and percussion, and offered an astonishing variety of instruments that would enrich Stewart's later productions, too.

When the company reunited again in New York, they all realised that they needed a new space, different from the tiny basement that had originally served as their performance

space at La MaMa, but also different from the other locations they occupied in the following years. Thus, in 1974, La MaMa moved into the expanded space of 66 East Fourth Street, and was renamed La MaMa Annex. The purchase was made possible by "a dollar-a-month renewable lease", with which the city provided Stewart this 'new' space consisting of an "1871 building with a leaking roof, buckled floor and vandalized plumbing" (Miller 2015: 57). This lease, Miller explains, allowed "a shift from the prior decade, when officials regularly acquainted Stewart with the Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village for offering entertainments without a license" (ibid.). This signalled an important step in the history of La MaMa on its path towards institutionalisation and was a symbol of the social and cultural role it did and would play in the future of New York.

Just as all of New York's neighbourhoods were registering a distressing population decline, and immigration was leading the way towards a reconfiguration of the city's demographic picture, La MaMa, with its new residence located in an area of Manhattan that was notoriously depressed in the 70s, counteracted the dual tendencies of OOB theatres to fetishise countercultural and antibourgeois values and to channel all their energies into reaching out to a well-defined (and small) portion of the city's population in their neighbourhoods. La MaMa's success in eschewing both tendencies was made possible, Miller explains, because Stewart "redoubled her commitment to international tours and guests" (Miller 2015: 60). In other words, Stewart saved her theatre precisely because she embraced the true "intercultural" nature of New York "into her theatre seats and on her stages" (ibid.). By doing so, she also set an example for other theatres in the same area (the Lower East Side). Her varied

programming and the theatre space modelled upon this idea of a continuous 'intercultural' dialogue not only allowed the survival of her theatre but expanded "definitions of both New York performance and local space" (Miller 2015: 60).

It is in this new (conceptual and physical) space that Serban's *Medea* ran again, with the addition of *Electra* and *The Trojan Women*, in a repertory performance entitled *Fragments of a Trilogy* (1974). The idea of performing in repertory would return in 2004, when to Serban's 'Greek' *Trilogy* Stewart would add her own, the *Oedipus Saga*, in which the *Seven Against Thebes* is the middle piece (see further below).

The new theatre offered larger spaces and made possible more colossal scenes. As Stewart described it, the new theatre had been

> formerly used for filming. A 28 x 20 room is at the far end of the space. Each of the lengthwise walls has two walkways, which are used for both spectators and performing. One of these walkways is at near ground level, the other approximately eight feet above. The musicians are on ground level to the left of the proscenium. A steep ramp leads to an acting space above and to the left of the entrance. (Qtd in Gagnon 1987: 138)

The new La MaMa space was 100 feet long, 38 feet wide, and 40 feet high: an enormous theatre equipped with multiple platforms on the stage, offering the audience two or three different scenes at a time. When Serban directed his *Trilogy* in the new theatre, performers invited the audience to walk through the space with them. The theatre structure itself prompted the creation of a global theatre because of its flexible adaptability to all kinds of theatrical companies with different needs and practices.

If one compares Serban's engagement with Greek trag-

edy with other such engagements that were happening at
the same time in the US, what is notable is how small a role
the political context played in his performances. One of the
reasons for this is that neither Serban nor the man who was
his primary influence, Brook, was American. Serban and his
company explored the possibilities of American avant-gar-
de theatre in a less strictly political fashion and from a more
"global" perspective (Menta 1995: 21). The setting was more
international, as has been the style of La MaMa from its in-
ception. Although political references were present, they
did not refer to specific events: "Audiences intuitively [rec-
ognised] the atmosphere of a society torn apart by war and
political upheaval in the streets" (29) with *Trojan Wom-
en* or *Medea* as performed in Brazil or New York; they al-
so grasped the timeliness of performing fratricidal and gory
conflicts in 2004, in the midst of the Iraq war, when the cy-
cle *Seven* (which included the *Seven Against Thebes*; see fur-
ther below) ran in repertory. "They [our plays] are very po-
litical, I think, but being political is not our intent", Stew-
art glossed on the *Seven* a few years later (Schillinger and
Stewart 2006). Somehow the intimate atmosphere of La Ma-
Ma conjured up a universal experience which linked the an-
cients with the audience and the audience with the rest of
the world.

As has been noted, Serban's insistence on physicality, a
rigorous sense of discipline, use of physical and vocal tech-
niques, and a continuous search for the 'ritual' in the theat-
rical act were attempts at putting into practice Artaud's "de-
mand for the actor to return to his original function as sha-
man in a spiritual ceremony" (Menta 1995: 31). What was
especially new and daring, however, was Serban's use of
Greek tragedy to meet Artaud's demand, and such an exper-

imental mixture of Greek tragedy with an Artaudian ritual-physical quest would continue in Stewart's further engagements with the ancients.

Indeed, when Serban became increasingly involved with the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Public Theatre at Lincoln Center, and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, Stewart took over as artistic director of the Great Jones Repertory Company. In line with La MaMa's "style", that is, its strenuous commitment to internationalism, hence to the polishing of a "universally communicative exchange", of a "visually-centered" semantic (Ostroska and Stewart 1991: 99-100), Stewart continued to explore the possibilities of theatrical language through Greek tragedy. "I like very much the kind of work that Andrei and Elizabeth started and I try to keep it going", she stated in an interview with Ben Ostroska in 1989 (1991: 103); this "tradition" heavily contributed to form La MaMa's aesthetics, she added some decades later (Shillinger and Stewart 2006).

Since her first directorial role, her adaptation of *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*Mythos Oedipus*, 1985), Stewart has thus privileged Greek tragedy as a means of continuing Serban's experiments whilst innovating and creating her own style. Though she would indeed "utilize all that she had learned from Serban", as Ozzie Rodriguez, the archives director at La MaMa, recalls, "her presentation of Greek myths was very different" (Rodriguez 2014). "In creating her plotlines and librettos", Cindy Rosenthal argues, Stewart would research various materials in addition to the plays in translation, including "books and artworks (sculpture, vases, bas-reliefs) provided by translator Marina Kotzamani and research assistant Charles Allcroft, among many others" (2017: 154).

Stewart's approach to Greek drama is wholly post-dramatic (see Intro.): the plot of the play under examination is dismembered and re-assembled by means of conglobing narrative strands coming from different versions of the same myth. The "cross-pollination" which characterises Stewart's theatre not only encompasses its commitment to a two-way cultural and theatrical exchange with the rest of the world, which has de facto created and implemented La MaMa's style (Ostroska and Stewart 1991: 100); on a conceptual level, this "cross-pollination" also invests Stewart's "playmaking", a term which she interestingly prefers to "playwriting" in reference to her productions (101).

Stewart's plays are original re-visitations of the myths:

> We do not show Euripides's version, or Aeschylus's, or Seneca's. We search out all the different versions of the myth as they exist in the library of Greece. Euripides makes a story, Aeschylus makes a story, and WE make a story. (Shillinger and Stewart 2006)

Greek tragedy is already a re-envisioning of the myths, the raw source material that needs to be 'adapted'. "Why aren't my interpretations as valid as Sophocles and Euripides?", she asked provocatively (qtd in Rosenthal 2006: 37); Stewart's overturning of plots, tweaking of characters, and mingling of myths together represent the means by which she constructed her own 'version' of the story. Just as Power did with regard to his 'own' creation, her claim to "playmaking" with the ancient myths appealed to the way Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides dealt with their own tradition: even they freely adapted those stories, always begetting new interpretations and meanings out of them (Jefferson 2004).

The way Stewart would tell her own story was different from Serban's, particularly in the spectacular glamour that pervaded her plays. Serban's approach, Rodriguez explains, was "very ritualistic, highly stylised: it was an artistic homage to the ancients"; Stewart's, on the other hand, was full of light, colourful, loud and contained "a little bit of Hollywood imagery" (ibid.). She would make the most of her skills as a fashion designer to occupy every inch of the Annex space with her spectacular productions. The enormous size of the puppets, attached to the actors' feet, was only conceivable in a theatre space like the new La MaMa. When Stewart refurbished the theatre, artists at La MaMa started thinking much bigger than they had ever done before. The *Seven Against Thebes* is amongst the most impressive of Stewart's productions, and it is interesting that it came after a fifteen-year break from her first engagements with Greek tragedy (which resulted in various adaptations, including *Mythos Oedipus*, 1985; *Another Phaedra Via Hercules*, 1988; and *Dionysus Filius Dei*, 1989).

5.1 "Playmaking": Between Ancient Myths and Hollywood

In Stewart's *Seven Against Thebes*, as reported by the synopsis of the play (an A5 booklet which contains the main events of the production divided by scene), "portions of the text [are] inspired by the writings of Aeschylus", but the myths told therein stretch well beyond Aeschylus' play. The 2001 production opens with a non-verbal prologue which replays the initial part of *Mythos Oedipus*. The oracle of Delphi is enacted in two brutal scenes that show Jocasta hanging herself and Oedipus blinding himself. Af-

ter his self-blinding, Theseus comes to lead Oedipus away.

The actual play begins (scene 1, as described in the synopsis) with a situation that seems to retrace Euripides' *Phoenissae* (see lines 69-74): the two brothers fight for the kingdom until, via Creon's intercession, an agreement is reached by which they are to rule in alternate years. Yet, it is "lot" that decides who will rule first, rather than a compact between Eteocles and Polynices (as in Eur. *Pho.* 71). Though the drawing of lots is indeed a recurrent image in Aeschylus' play (Ch. 2), it does not make the choice; it does, however, in two other versions of the myth: one is to be found in the Lille 'Stesichorus' (κλαροπαληδὸν, 223; for which see Parsons 1977: 16), in which the fraternal agreement involves one brother taking Oedipus' gold and possessions and living in exile whilst the other retains the kingdom, and the other in Statius' *Thebais* (1.164, 2.309, and 428), in which the kin's agreement seems to be the same as in Stewart's play.

Yet, the interesting part is how Stewart translates this 'lot' visually on stage: as David Finkle recalls, a "giant papier-mâché hand . . . does the designating" (Finkle 2001) and chooses Eteocles as the king for one year, a moment that is ritualistically encapsulated by the sound of a gong and cymbal swells (figs 7, 8). The giant hand represents one of the Hollywood-like choices Stewart has employed in her adaptations of Greek tragedy. Frinkle agrees: Restrepo's huge puppets "can rival Disney for spectacle" (ibid.). "Puppets like the ones used to stage the *Seven Against Thebes*", Rodriguez explained, "were specifically created for a theater space as monumental as ours" (Rodriguez 2014). The La MaMa stage allows and, in a sense, requires, such spatial and visual props.

Then the storyline (scenes 2-4) follows the whereabouts

Fig. 7 – Ellen Stewart's *Seven Against Thebes* at La MaMa Theatre with the
Great Jones Repertory Company (2001). Federico Restrepo in the back-
ground maneuvering the 'Hand of the Gods'; Billy Clark/Polynices in the
forefront (Photo by Jonathan Slaff – Courtesy of the La MaMa Archive/
Ellen Stewart Private Collection).

Fig. 8 – The 'Hand of the Gods' choosing Emanuele Ancorini/Eteocles as king (Photo by Jonathan Slaff – Courtesy of the La MaMa Archive/Ellen Stewart Private Collection).

of Tydeus, a most prominent character in the play, sent into exile after he kills his uncle and King Alcathous, who has allegedly betrayed the kingdom: the scene is enacted with the two characters jumping like gymnasts in a circle at the centre of the stage (scene 2). The events are only loosely based on ancient myth, where Alcathous is indeed Tydeus' uncle, but not a king, and whilst he does attempt to betray the kingdom, it is by plotting against the actual king of Calydon, his brother and Tydeus' father, Oeneus (a story only hinted at in *Sept.* 572, in a scholium to Eur. *Pho.* 417, for which see Schwartz 1966: 298, and in Eur. *Suppl.* 148; told in

full in Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.5). The motif is weaved into another curious re-elaboration of a strand of ancient myth in which Tydeus kills Ismene. Yet, instead of being instrumental to Athena's wrath at Ismene's lustful liaison with Periclymenus (see Mimn. fr. 21 West, and Allen 1993: 133-4), it seems that Tydeus has in fact had an affair with her (scene 2), and, after catching her with a lover, strikes her with his sword out of jealousy (scene 4).

As some versions of the myth recount, the formidable hero then meets Polynices in the kingdom of Argos, which has a luxurious appearance (scene 3): he, too, is an exile now, because Eteocles has banished him from the kingdom, dishonouring their agreement (as in Eur. *Pho.* 74-80). Polynices and Tydeus confront each other, but King Adrastus halts their fighting as he recognises in it the fulfilment of an oracle by which he should marry his daughters to a lion and a boar, the images of which Polynices and Tydeus, respectively, carry on their shields (see, amongst others, Eur. *Pho.* 408-11; *Suppl.* 132-40; and Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1). The shields are studiously elaborate, with the images of the animals shining in gold.

Tydeus travels to Thebes to request the throne back and is rejected and challenged by some of Eteocles' soldiers, whom he fights and wins over (scene 4) (see, amongst others, Hom. *Il.* 4.382-98, 5.802-08; and Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.5). Before the actual fighting begins, Stewart inserts a startled Tiresias, attached to one of the scariest puppets, ordering Menoeceus' death so that the city may be saved (as in Eur. *Pho.* 911-14; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7); from this well-known myth, Stewart then wanders off to re-elaborating the story rather differently: instead of sacrificing himself for the city's sake (see Eur. *Pho.* 996-1018; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7), Creon's son

travels to Argos in an attempt to kill King Adrastus and win the war single-handedly and heroically: he drops down from the ceiling to enter the kingdom, but is captured and killed by Alcmaeon, Amphiaraus' son (scene 5). More adherent to ancient myth is scene 6, where Stewart has Eriphyle bribing her husband Amphiaraus with Harmonia's necklace to get him to join the fight against Thebes (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.2).

The fighting at the seven gates is where Stewart most heavily draws on Aeschylus' play, grafting the stories onto a (ritualised) Hollywoodian stage. A wooden arch is brought on stage to resemble a Theban Gate, which a servant removes after each champion's defeat. The soldiers wearing short skirts of gold and silver dance gracefully, whilst at the same time engaging in "deadly serious, even breath-taking" acrobatic combat (Loney 2001).

The order of appearance of the fourteen warriors is the same as in Aeschylus. In Tydeus' combat with Melanippus (scene 7), Stewart enhances the hero's "lust" for battle (μάχης λελιμμένος: *Sept.* 380) by inserting the well-known motif of Tydeus devouring his opponent's head. The hero is thus refused immortality, the "elixir of life", as reported in the synopsis, which Athena was intending to offer him but pours on the ground instead after the cruel spectacle (see, amongst others, Pind. *Nem.* 10.7.12; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.8; and Stat. *Theb.* 717-67). The "giant" (as reported in the synopsis; see *Sept.* 424) Capaneus is struck by Zeus' thunderbolt as a repayment for his boastful claims (*Sept.* 427-9) (scene 8), whilst climbing up an enormous ladder that reaches to the theatre's ceiling (see, amongst others, Soph. *Ant.* 131-3; Eur. *Pho.* 1172-81). Eteoclus and Megareus enter the stage on "horses" (as reported in the synopsis; see *Sept.* 461-2) (scene 9); Hyperbius is joined in battle and protected by

Fig. 9 – Christopher Zorker/Actor's and Scott Patton/Parthenopaeus' fight (Photo by Jonathan Slaff – Courtesy of the La MaMa Archive/Ellen Stewart Private Collection).

Athena (as Eteocles wished for in *Sept.* 501-3) and defeats a Hippomedon who is shooting fire from his fingers (alluding to *Sept.* 493-4) (scene 10); Actor and Parthenopaeus fight by jumping on and off a nine-foot-high wheel which eventually crushes the latter, at the sound of low brass (scene 11; fig. 9); Amphiaraus is swallowed into an enormous mountain-like prop at the gong's beat before Lasthenes can kill him (see Soph. *El.* 837-41; Eur. *Suppl.* 925-6; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.8, amongst others) (scene 12). At the end of the fighting scene, Adrastus, who has been supervising the events, makes an escape on a "flying" horse: an almost full-sized effigy of a horse is hung from rollers so that Adrastus can 'fly' off, high above everyone else. The motif retraces a version of the myth which sees Adrastus escape on his flying horse

Areion (*Thebais* fr. 7 Bernabé; also in Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.8).

Finally, the turn of Oedipus' sons arrives. The giant hand of God controls the final combat from behind them. Eteocles and Polynices both whirl a pair of lead balls whilst engaged in a rhythmic dance. As D.J.R. Bruckner recalls, the other performers, now posing as a sort of Chorus (see below), are involved in "a hair-raising dance of whizzing death that ends with each strangling the other" (2001). The moment is poignant. The music warns the audience and predicts the catastrophe. After a ritualised dance in which the two brothers engage in acrobatic moves, jumps, twists and cabrioles, they throw their ropes in the air. The ropes curl around each brother's neck, and the two bodies fall down on the floor: both the dance and the music dissolve into a complete and tragic silence. The play ends with the same sequence that will open the following production, *Antigone*: Creon orders his citizens not to bury Polynices' body, which Antigone does anyway and is thus "entombed" (as reported in the synopsis: scene 13).

5.2 "A Seeing Place": The Performing Arts in Stewart's "Dance-Opera"

Stewart's idea of theatre, as she explained in 1989, was based on the Greek etymology of *théatron*, which she translated with "a seeing place", wherein "drama (meaning action)" was employed (1991: 102). "We have not deserted the word", she continued, but theatre is about seeing "what is happening rather than having to just listen to what's happening" (101-2). Stewart's *Seven Against Thebes* was, in fact, a 'seeing' play, in which all the performing arts were interweaved,

forming what has been rightly called a "dance-opera" (Backalenick 2001).

The music was combined and conceived with choreographic movements and vice versa, and it was continuous throughout the whole performance: "The sound world could accompany rhythmically at times or provide ambiance as well as specific cue sounds", explains Sirotta in an interview with the author (2019). The score incorporated features of Asian, African, Middle Eastern and American cultures: influences from Oriental music (and theatre), Asian in particular, were meant to heighten the ritualistic physicality of the play. The orchestra (four players) was live, but the production at times incorporated tracks that were layered onto it (such as for Tydeus' and Polynices' weddings). In keeping with a tradition Ito began in 1985 with *Mythos Oedipus*, when electronics had first been integrated into theatrical scores, most of the sounds in the performance were reproduced through digital instruments and 'effects' processed by means of a computer. For the 2001 production, Ito also bought a 'Roland HandSonic': "a drum machine with segmented rubber pads on which the performers could use hands and fingers", as Sirotta describes it, equipped with an "impressive bank of sounds and sound-processing modules that offered an enormous library of otherworldly sound effects" (Sirotta 2019).

Only a very few words were chanted in accompaniment to the music, which was mostly electronically synthesised, with heavy reliance on percussion instruments. As Sirotta explains, Stewart's plays were generally presented "with occasional focused minimal text, lyrics really, that were sung or chanted"; as was La MaMa's tradition, more often than not the language of the script was not English. The case

of the *Seven Against Thebes* is rather interesting in this respect, as, in some places, the script contained passages from Aeschylus' play which Stewart had asked Georgina Petrousi to translate in modern Greek: in these places, however, her translation was not from the original ancient Greek, but from an early (1908) and highly lyrical English version of the play by Edmund Doidge Anderson Morshead, which had just been re-issued in 2000 in inexpensive paperback ($1.50) within *Dover Thrift Editions* (see n3, Ch. 1).

The script was then given to Swados who composed vocal music for it. "Instrumental accompaniments were developed from there": Swados would suggest some, Sirotta others, "with orchestrational contributions by other musicians in the ensemble" (Sirotta 2019). During the performance, a Chorus, consisting of the principal actors not involved in a particular scene, gathered on stage for brief moments and chanted the script's lyrics; at other times, the music was sung offstage whilst the actors were dealing with props, or making backstage and/or costume changes; often, the actors sang whilst performing. In line with Serban's idea of inviting the actors to "inhabit their bodies with sounds" (Menta 1995: 16), Swados and Stewart employed text in a way that would arouse "visceral responses" from the audience: in this sense, Sirotta comments, "the role of words and syllables was more to take part in the sound fabric rather than convey meaning" (Sirotta 2019).

In the *Seven Against Thebes* production, lyrics sometimes explicitly referred to the action on stage, as in the case of Capaneus' scene. Whilst he climbs up the wall, two Choruses powerfully respond to one another in unison chanting Stewart's reworking of Sept. 427-9, translated into modern Greek by Petrousi, in which it is stated that the Argive warrior will

climb up the wall even if Zeus tries to stop him. Other examples are Petrousi's translations of lines 378-9 in Morshead's translation, which accompany scene 6, where Amphiaraus prevents the warriors from crossing the river Ismenus until the sacrifices bid so; and of lines 481-5 and 563-7 (both represent the Chorus' prayers that the Theban warriors may prevail after Eteocles' third and fifth posting decisions), which are sung during the Megareus-Eteoclus and Hyperbius-Hippomedon fights, respectively.

The play's "vocals", Sirotta recalls, were "plugged in"; that is, combined with choreography and stagings. For some of the vocal and instrumental music, he continues, "the process sometimes entailed bringing in some studio-rendered, pre-recorded tracks as a basis for live music layering"; at other times, "we musicians would improvise rhythms and sounds as the actors went through their storytelling or choreographic movement". "Improvisation" did indeed play an important part in rehearsal as well as in the actual instrumental performance: "We were performing 'theatrical jazz' as it were". Though "there may have been variations in the score's presentation performance to performance" to accommodate changes "in movements' and stagings' timings", "a 'soundtrack' emerged" eventually and "the show 'coagulated'" (Sirotta 2019).

Such a "coagulation" is most visible in some crucial moments of the production. Some scenes especially enhance the ritual. An example is scene 10, the dance-fight between Hippomedon and Hyperbius. As reported in the synopsis, just before they begin their single combat, Dirce (in Greek myth, the wife of Lycus, regent of Thebes) performs a "water ceremony", a ritualistic propitiation to win Athena's help. The studio-generated accompanying piece presents

some instrumental samples, including a string orchestra, mallet percussion and "some kind of cordophone either plucked or struck with hammers", explains Sirotta (2019), to reproduce a frantic run. Gong rhythms underscore the immediately following fight between the two heroes and give rhythm to the ritualistic war dance that the other actors perform on stage to the (made-up) words: "Aksa Ko Zah". The cry grows louder when the fire shooting commences, erupting in a frantic repetition of syllables accompanied by foot stamping and body slapping.

Another highly physical-ritualistic moment is when war is declared upon Thebes and a wall is raised to protect its people (scene 5). Three actors hold the 'wall'; that is, a huge golden net, and drag it whilst climbing up the stairs of the kingdom backwards; Creon is waiting at the top. The net is then affixed to the ceiling. Another disquieting piece of music plays on the electric keyboard whilst the wall goes up: high-pitched mallet sound effects chase each other, producing a disturbing, horror-inducing, sequence that prepares the audience for the catastrophe. The track plays under one of the passages Petrousi translated from Morshead's version of the play (*Sept.* 174-80; see Morshead 2000: 6). The excerpt is taken from the last part of the *parodos*, where a frightened Chorus appeal to the gods of Thebes so that they will protect them from the enemy, the 'outsider' (see Intro.). The chant starts off with a female voice and a multi-voice Chorus responding to one another by rhythmically repeating the first few words of line 174, translated into modern Greek by Petrousi; the Chorus then continue with chanting the rest of the passage and by the time the wall is up, the voices have intersected and multiplied and the pace rarefied, emblematising the "increasing terror" of the frantic and wor-

ried female voices comprising Aeschylus' Chorus (Hutchinson 1985: 55).

As in the above example, lyrics are generally meant to reflect and comment on the events happening on stage and to liberate the energy that these 'sounds' unleash when 'inhabited' by the performers. Another example is in the last scene, when Eteocles and Polynices fight. Whilst the brothers' ropes rotate in the air, Stewart has some of the performers pose as a Chorus and chant lines 692-4 (one of the Chorus' answers to Eteocles after his decision to meet his brother in single combat) and 766-71 (one of the last strophes comprising the choral ode that follows Eteocles' last exit) from Petrousi's version of Morshead's translation. "All is lost" (Morshead 2000: 29), in Petrousi's modern Greek translation, underscores the very end of the kin's fight.

On the one hand, by means of translating (and layering onto a third interpretative lens: ancient Greek-English-modern Greek) the (already translated) Chorus' tragic suffering into modern Greek, Stewart conveys the (im)possibility of expressing such grief before the kindred bloodshed with 'words'; on the other hand, however, she 'shows' on stage the possibility of not just performing, but of 'ritualising' and thus 'immortalising' brutal death and (the Chorus', but also anyone's) (im)possible suffering by means of her visual and global language. The kin's bloodshed is thus 'translated' into the incomprehensible (modern Greek) only to be (re)translated into the comprehensible (performance).

5.3 Staging 'Cosmopolitanism': the Topicality of Aeschylus' Story

The Hollywood-like giant papier-mâché hand directing char-

acters from above as well as the other monumental props are clear attempts at symbolising the social and cultural entrapments in which Stewart believed people in her society are inevitably embroiled, leaving no space for action. Thus, Stewart's retention of Serban's return to the 'ritual' should not be read as an atemporal construction aimed at escaping from the present; rather, with the *Seven Against Thebes*, Stewart is attempting to spur the audience to reconnect with the 'primal', international language of theatre and myth, allowing them to properly inhabit their lives and bodies so that they can rediscover themselves. In other words, the Eteocles-Polynices combat over kin(g)ship is a means for Stewart to explore and uncover her own and the audience's roots via this visual and ritualistic language of the body, which represents the exact opposite of how the globalised, capitalistic world around us communicates; that is, by employing external stimuli to trigger immediate reactions.

Eteocles and Polynices' combat may always end in catastrophe, but the liberating energy (the same energy on which she built her new theatre: see above) that springs from the story is waiting to be utilised to change our own stories. Indeed, it is the energy prompted by Stewart's unique 'language' that allows an understanding of the story from different perspectives, whilst pulling away from the binary option between countering or following the canonical performance of Greek tragedy. Such a language entails the ritualistic yet grand gestures and actions on stage as well as the culturally connoted (i.e. historicised) costumes and props; but even more, the language of the play calls out for La MaMa's multicultural approach and cast, which trigger the audience's social identification with the myth as told.

Thus, Stewart's play is equally accessible to various kinds of audiences and at different levels, because it is not so much an offhand critique of mainstream culture as it is a deeper recognition of social and cultural realities, brought to life by Stewart's and La MaMa's performance practice: "The performance of a re-defined cosmopolitanism" (Miller 2015: 60).

This cosmopolitanism is eloquently embodied by the award-winning Great Jones Repertory, which had been in existence for twenty-nine years when the *Seven Against Thebes* ran. There were twenty-two performers, and the number of nationalities represented amongst them was impressive. The ensemble have been reciting in ancient and foreign languages on the stage since their inception and have always captivated audiences with their acrobatic moves and dancing. It was not just their multiculturalism that added a special energy to the ensemble, but even more it was the all-encompassing 'language' they spoke that contributed to re-shaping the myth.

The rhythmic dance, accompanied by "timbres, . . . blending acoustic and electric strings, Japanese and Western flutes, and percussion instruments from every continent" (Jefferson: 2004), coloured the performance with an exciting energy which permeated the theatre and the audience's experience of Greek tragedy as revisited by Stewart.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the *Seven Against Thebes* ran a second time in 2004 in repertory. The show, named *Seven*, consisted of seven different plays assembled in two trilogies. La MaMa's month-long festival began with the world-premiere production of Great Jones Repertory's *Antigone*, directed by Stewart with music by Swados, and then proceeded with revivals of six productions previously presented at La MaMa: Serban's *Me-*

dea, *Electra* and *Trojan Women*, and Stewart's *Oedipus Saga – Mythos Oedipus*, *Seven Against Thebes* and *Dionysus: Filius Dei* (Rosenthal 2017: 148, 154). Not only was this an unprecedented theatrical undertaking in the history of La MaMa, it also represented a rather unusual product in the history of American theatre tout court. "There's nobody really doing repertory in America, to speak of", declared Stewart in an interview, "and to do this is like a dream to me" (qtd in the La MaMa archives 2004: 1).

Together with the launch of a completely new play, *Antigone*, Stewart's project was to resurrect plays that, in some cases, were more than thirty years old. *Medea* premiered in 1972 and had last been revived in 1999; *Electra* in 1973 and last revived in 1999; *Trojan Women* in 1974 and last revived in 1996; *Dionysus: Filius Dei* in 1989 and last revived in 2002; *Seven Against Thebes* in 2001. Although Serban's plays, as has been argued, were not 'American' at all, and, in this sense, were more long-lasting than other highly politicised productions staged in the New York of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, they still were a product of their time, a timely, relatively ahistorical response to the politicisation of theatre during that period. The risk that their revival would result in 'archaeological' reconstructions rather than living performances was possible, especially since Serban was not going to direct them. In other words, reviving a thirty-year-old play was as much an (im)possible venture as it was with one that went back more than two thousand years: Serban's plays had to be as much reconceived in the 2004 festival at La MaMa as did Aeschylus', Sophocles', and Euripides'. Such was David Kilpatrick's concern when he attended a Great Jones rehearsal of *Medea* in April and learned that Serban had withdrawn from the project (2004: 1). Yet – and

this is where the whole undertaking becomes conceptually interesting – witnessing the company's engagement with the material, Kilpatrick reports how "it was clear that this is not an attempt so much to recreate the past, as it is a return to certain energies that the work brought forth and will not dissipate" (2). In other words, it is Stewart's reconceiving of Serban's theatrical pieces as a whole (again, Stewart's historicisation of them), encompassed in a new project, that granted the festival its energy.

Bringing Greek tragedy back to ritual in a society that seems to represent the opposite occupies the same shared cultural space seen in Power's play, one that is characterised by those "energies" Kilpatrick speaks of and represents the result of (post?) "postcolonial counter-discursive strategies", to employ Helen Tiffin's terminology (1987: 22). The sense of a communal space inhabited together, albeit perceived in different ways, all equally possible and legitimate, is produced by the cosmopolitan nature of Stewart's project, which, whilst being strongly rooted in the New York of the new millennium, is yet capable of being extended across national, regional and ethnic boundaries. In reaction to the myth-less capital of capitalism, and to the bloodshed of the Iraq war, there exists the rituality of a historicised myth, which cannot but end as we know it to, and yet, will change the receiver because of how it will be told. It is this 'how' that has made its entry into La MaMa's as well as into the American and worldwide repertory, and will remain in the repertory so long as it is revived with the purpose of retelling a new, yet old, tale. And the repertory itself will survive as long as the shared cultural space it occupies continues to afford connections.

Afterword

In his deeply incisive autobiographical account of his relationship with the French language, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin (Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou, La prothèse d'origine*; 1966), Jacques Derrida asserts that any monolingual culture hides an "impossible-forbidden" type of translation (1998: 9-10). Whilst this (violently) imposed monolingualism ravages cultures worldwide, there hides a covert and partially "mad" process of translation, a translation understood in its broader sense of 'translating oneself', 'communicating' (60-1). This hidden and "mad" translation is a vital "necessity", and will continue to thrive as a 'subterranean' voice from underneath to give voice to the (uncomfortable) 'other' (9-10; see Intro.). Derrida's conceptualization of an impossible-forbidden type of translation catching on in any (imposed) monolingual culture can be equally applied to our (economically and culturally) globalised society and explain the ever-growing number of translations and adaptations as well as the increasing interest in a play that is inherently about the relationship with the 'other'.

Indeed, on a conceptual level, both the 'adaptation' and 'translation' processes can be described as 'mad' and frenzied ways of engaging with, restaging, and giving voice to the 'other'. Especially in recent times, the rate of both activities has exploded globally, so much so that it is hard to keep track of, as well as become the hosts of new (global) mediatic and 'virtual' venues (Hutcheon 2006: xi). Their 'recre-

ating' potential is at the heart of the very formation of culture itself (Gentzler 2008: 2), which is constantly being re-shaped by a 'replication' of the same stories, albeit "replication without repetition" (Hutcheon 2006: 7); as argued (Intro. and Ch. 1), it is especially interesting to examine how both these activities are applied in a multicultural place like the US, where the 'subterranean' voices are multiple and thriving and translation and adaptation are thus a highly contested ground.

Particularly powerful is their 'recreating' potential on the theatrical stage; as argued (Intro.), because theatre itself is "a constant process of translation" (Gostand 1980: 1) as well as being, "by definition, adaptation" (Barnette 2018: 38), it not only allows but requires that the engagement with the 'other' be 'mad'; that is, permanently *in fieri* and 'adaptive'. The chapters in this volume have analysed the different approaches that translators/adapters employed in their theatre translations/adaptations of an ancient Greek classic, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*.

Because it is a classic, belonging to the corpus of the Greek and Roman classics, which have long been used, or rather misused, as representatives of the foundation of Western literature and theatre, and to support the West's claims to cultural superiority, the *Seven* is not just any 'other' with which translators/adapters have grappled, but represents someone's/anyone's past/legacy and calls for a re-definition and re-discussion of the meaning(s) of such legacy (Intro. and Ch. 1). One of the recurrent themes that has guided the analysis of the play's translation and adaptation products has regarded the result of this restaging or, to use another familiar term, 'incorporation' of the past: What happens to Aeschylus' play when it is 'incorporated'/'absorbed'

into the target language/theatre/culture? In other words, the chapters of this book have examined the means by which the *Seven* has become a "new utterance" (Sanders 2006: 17), a new creation, which, though maintaining its ties with its 'past', is recast into a new series of references, that is, re-contextualised.

Bacon and Hecht within Arrowsmith's proposed 'collaborative' approach, Sandy within Slavitt's idea of the 'poet-as-translator', as well as Mueller, who, whilst indeed also preoccupied with keeping a distance from this 'other'/ tradition (see his use of rhetorical figures in Ch. 1), wore, as asked, the 'dramaturg's hat', all aimed at rooting their translations of the Greek play onto the American tradition by employing their American poetic/literary voices. The same can be said about Power and Stewart, who 'translated' the play, too: Power juxtaposed the old 'script' with the 'new' and framed them into hip-hop theatre culture (Ch. 4); Stewart triple-layered her interpretative lens by means of a 'mad' re-translation of the old script and staged it on a Hollywoodian-ritualistic American stage (Ch. 5).

The processes of translation and adaptation are both involved in a continuous and necessary engagement with the 'past' not only because the *Seven* is a Greek classic and as such triggers a substantial re-thinking of the past/legacy it originates from and stands for (see above); the play itself, that is, its plotline, also requires this engagement, as shown throughout the book, because it 'is' inherently about this 'restaging' or 'incorporating' activity of which translation and adaptation are conceptual exemplifications.

Indeed, Eteocles and Polynices are both the 'outsider' and the 'insider', the 'enemy' and the 'ally', the 'other' and the 'same' as they deal with the (Derridean) 'impossible-for-

bidden' inheritance, a legacy that can only be effectively re-deemed via their deaths. In this picture, Oedipus represents both the sons' heritage (the 'insider', the 'same' – he is their brother 'and' father) as well as the impediment prevent-ing them from taking hold of it (the 'outsider', the 'enemy' – the 'monolingual-forbidding culture'). In this sense, Eteo-cles' and Polynices' fight is also 'with' Oedipus and affirms their difference: one or the other but not both will get ac-cess to his legacy. Their rebellion is against the imposing, vi-olent, yet 'necessary' father/legacy as much as it is a strug-gle with each other for primacy and authority. And both translators and adapters play on the air of predetermination that can be read into Eteocles' and Polynices' tragic end, whilst grovelling for their father's fortune (Intro.): are the two brothers destined (always: see Power in Ch. 4) to kill each other? That is the question that runs through Chapters 2 and 3 in the translators' different treatments of Eteocles as a character, and in Chapters 4 and 5 in the adapters' take on what Eteocles and Polynices and their 'inheritance' actual-ly represent.

Thus, as we have seen throughout the chapters, it can be easily understood why an almost forgotten play has to-day become a timely response to the delicate cultural pow-er dynamics at work in a place like the US, where the fight for (ethnic, cultural, economic, linguistic, etc.) recognition is a daily reality. The *Seven* is indeed an apt response to the ur-gent need for a self-(re)definition, whilst also, because of its metatheatrical potential, representing a fertile playground in which to grapple both with legacy and tradition as well as the processes of translation and adaptation. Instead of proffering "fidelity criticism" or "normative and source-ori-ented approaches" (Hutcheon 2006: 6, 17), the translations

and adaptations under discussion here have been shown to unearth not simply 'a' meaning of Aeschylus' *Seven*; each one has become itself 'the' meaning of the play, its new 'utterance', the basis of its very "survival", to use Walter Benjamin's words (2000: 17). Indeed, in the continuum model of adaptations and translations of Aeschylus' drama, each version stands "laterally" (and not "vertically") to it (Hutcheon 2006: xiii), as they create the "new cultural and aesthetic possibilities" of the ancient play in their explorations of it (Sanders 2006: 41). To employ Julie Sanders' terminology, these new cultural and aesthetic possibilities have indeed "enriched" rather than "robbed" Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (ibid.).

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Figures

After centuries of neglect, Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* has gained increasing prominence worldwide and in the United States in particular, where a hip-hop production caught the public imagination in the new millennium. This study analyses three translations of Aeschylus' tragedy (by Helen H. Bacon and Anthony Hecht, 1973; Stephen Sandy, 1999; and Carl R. Mueller, 2002) and two adaptations (by Will Power, 2001-2008; and Ellen Stewart, 2001-2004). Beginning in the late 1960s, the *Seven Against Thebes* has received multiple new readings: at stake are Eteocles' and Polynices' relationships with the (past and present) Labdacid dynasty; the brothers' claims to the Theban *polis* and to their inheritance; and the metatheatrical implications of their relationship to Oedipus' legacy. This previously forgotten play provides a timely response to the power dynamics at work in the contemporary US, where the fight for ethnic, cultural, economic, and linguistic recognition is a daily reality and always involves dialogue with the individual's own past and tradition.

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Cover:
Will Power's *The Seven* at the New
York Theatre Workshop (2006):
Amber Efé/The DJ
(Photo by Carol Rosegg).