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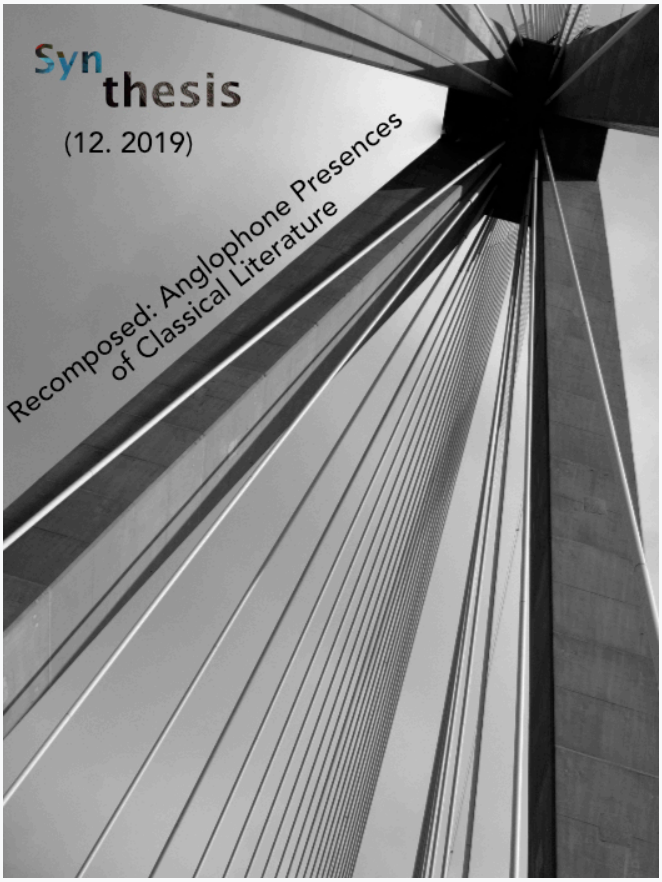
Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 12 (2019)

Recomposed: Anglophone Presences of Classical Literature



Introduction: Angloclassical?

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doi: 10.12681/syn.25255

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Introduction: Angloclassical?

Paschalis Nikolaou

Multiple takes: Between classical translation and rewriting

From William Shakespeare, variously integrating classical material in several of his plays (notably in *Troilus and Cressida*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*), or John Milton's usage of classical models for *Paradise Lost*, or the interpretative orientations of Chapman's Homer (which famously inspired a sonnet by John Keats), the English tradition has developed its relations with classical literature. More recently, English-speaking poets, novelists and dramatists have produced originals (and translations) that creatively draw on the legacies of Greek and Roman writers.

The presence of certain of these felt classical forebears is more intense: Margaret Reynolds's *The Sappho Companion* (2000) offers a comprehensive view of the pervasive influence of the poet from Lesbos in western literature in general, as well as visual art. And an anthology such as *Sappho Through English Poetry* (Jay and Lewis 1996) also exists as a prismatic understanding of an ancient sensibility coursing through Anglophone writers. Thoroughgoing academic studies of the prolific confluence of classics and the English tradition have also appeared recently, among them Stuart Gillespie's *English Translation and Classical Reception: Towards a New Literary History*, Matthew Reynolds's *The Poetry of Translation: From Chaucer and Petrarch to Homer and Logue* (both 2011) or the selection of essays *Reading Poetry, Writing Genre: English Poetry and Literary Criticism in Dialogue with Classical Scholarship* (Bär and Hauser 2018). These works further explore interrelated histories of creativity and criticism and various specific scenes (for instance, the neo-Latin poetics of Elizabethan England).

Such editions and critical works collectively pronounce fertile tensions between, or reactions of, poetic and translational endeavour; and feature the intended work of salvage, tribute or re-imagining that we attempt to describe under the, admittedly broad, banner of 'recomposed' here. This present special issue of *Synthesis* intends to survey developments in the practices and study of classical translation, which inevitably entail problematisations of the boundaries of translation, as we often veer into spaces of adaptation and rewriting. Especially the

experience of reading and translating classical authors has extensively contaminated Anglophone traditions, and keeps encountering spaces between appropriation and inspiration, and towards a wealth of 'angloclassical' textual experiments and expression. Further, this intense reading and reworking of the classics has coincided with comment on individual and social concerns at certain historical junctures, and has repeatedly illuminated the nature of the dialogue between poets, and between traditions.

Discussing "Anactoria" (1866), Algernon Charles Swinburne himself called his own attempts, a "paraphrase of the fragments the Fates and Christians left us [...] I have striven to cast my spirit into the mould of [Sappho], to express and represent not the poem but the poet" (cited in Jay and Lewis 20). 'Paraphrase' is better known through John Dryden's tripartite definition, itself appearing at the outset of his "Preface to Ovid's *Epistles*" (1680). The terms 'metaphrase,' described as "turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another," (Dryden 17), and 'imitation' are also included here, and in the latter one, as Dryden characteristically puts it:

> the translator (if now he has not lost that Name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases. (17)

Between these two, John Dryden sees a better option in paraphrase, as "translation with latitude"; where, that is, "the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered" (17). It is exactly such middle ground that is often hardest to demarcate. Constantly negotiating what was meant by paraphrasing, and how poet-translators especially sense the cut-off lines, has indeed propelled manifold re-iterations—of ancient sources, certainly. And we often collect afterimages of literary tradition(s) along the way, striations of later references and understanding as it happens in the "Sapphic Fragment" by Thomas Hardy below:

> 'Thou shalt be – Nothing.'—OMAR KHAYYÁM
> 'Tombless, with no remembrance.'—W. SHAKESPEARE
>
> Dead shalt thou lie; and nought
> Be told of thee or thought,
> For thou hast plucked not of the Muses' tree:
> And even in Hades' halls
> Amidst thy fellow-thralls
> No friendly shade thy shade shall company!
> (*Sappho Through English Poetry*, 56)

The processes through which engagement with classical literature can lead to creative paths are numerous—and often intensely personal. Fusions of classical text and modern setting, as well as fluid practices of translation that see the original poignantly recontextualised, can be found in several other

contemporary poets, such as Louise Glück, Anne Carson, Jack Mitchell and Alicia Stallings.

Such practice owes a lot to literary modernism and to Ezra Pound more specifically.[1] His understanding of translation as an essentially appropriating practice, according to which the (poet-)translator may prioritise and amplify aspects of the original and concentrate less on others across a translation process that becomes also a form of criticism, persisted in the course of the twentieth century and all the way into the first two decades of the 21st.[2] Among other things, he repeatedly instructs against pseudo-archaism [3] and, above all, encourages experiment. The outcome of such practice should be poetry and poetry *of the present*[4] at that, constantly asking how it may be accepted by, and be accessible to, readers. Such work is far less bound by concerns of philological accuracy, focusing more on reconstituting impact and effect on audiences. Josephine Balmer, one of the contributors to this issue, has drawn on Charles Tomlinson's view of translation as more metamorphosis than metaphor (see Tomlinson 2003, partially originating in The Clark Lectures, first printed in 1983). Interviewed by Lorna Hardwick nearly a decade ago, Balmer (2010) is asked about some critics who use the word 'metaphor' in a manner that perhaps draws on the tradition of Plato, suggesting essentially that "there is a gap between the metaphor and the form of the ancient text and what is in it which can only represented imperfectly through the metaphor" (n. pag). Prompted to assert the potency of translation for her, and so many other modern(ist) poets, Balmer says:

> …in the loss there are so many gains that you can't really see it in those terms. For me, what translation does metaphorically is that it *restores* the text; it doesn't destroy it. It actually *is carrying it forward in the configuration of time and space*. You know, this is what's moving a text forward. This is what's reconstructing the fragments. *This is what's bringing back the performance to the drama*. So maybe you're just bridging it. (Balmer 2010 n. pag; my emphases)

This sense is supported by Balmer's process behind her books as a poet, starting with *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations and Transgressions* (2004) and leading all the way to her forthcoming volume, *Ghost Passage*. And in *The Word for Sorrow* (2009), the story of Ovid's exilic writings in ancient Tomis is intricately woven with accounts of the Gallipoli campaign, the contemporary poet finding her "own narrative" and "persona as translator/decoder" as she investigates soldiers's stories and intervenes "further in the text, just as Ovid's often ironic poetic voice intervenes in *Tristia*" (Balmer 2013: 214).

The overall dialogue between English literature and the classical world is both extensive and incredibly varied in terms of approach and textual manifestations. *Sappho Through English Poetry,* a volume mentioned earlier, covers nearly half a millennium and is further split down the middle into "Versions: Translations and Imitations" and "Representations: Myths, Meditations and Travesties." Yet this implied range, the 'latitude' that extends

as far back as Dryden, may also result from cases where the express purpose is not so much the continued existence of the original as a work of art, but an "ethico-political exercise," Slavoj Žižek's description of his recent formulation of "The Three Lives of Antigone" (see 2016: 29). Considering, among others, Soren Kierkegaard's fantasy of what a modern, alternative *Antigone* would have been, and the established position of the play in the Western tradition as a vehicle to comment on power relations, Žižek redesigns it by way of Brecht's three 'learning plays' (involving an impressive array of anachronisms along the way, from Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*). Thus, the question now is whether Sophocles's denouement is followed and either Antigone wins *or* the Chorus becomes an 'active agent' and intervenes in eliminating Creon. Whilst Žižek is the first to admit that his objective is not primarily a performable version of this drama, and we sense that his *Antigone* is more of a potentially impactful animation of theory, the philosopher-translator is nevertheless confident, too, that:

> the only way to keep a classical work alive is to treat it as 'open', pointing towards the future, or, to use the metaphor evoked by Walter Benjamin, to act as if the classic work is a film for which the appropriate chemical liquid to develop it was invented only later, so that it is only today that we can get the full picture. (13)

Notwithstanding Žižek's priorities here, the theatre remains perhaps the most communal contact point that we have with classical characters and worldview. There are periods of relative quiet or intensity in the staging of ancient drama, and the turn of the century certainly belonged in the latter category, as Lorna Hardwick has argued in one such examination: "Greek Tragedy at the End of the Twentieth Century" (2000).[5] What also interests Hardwick here[6] is the mechanism behind the transmissions taking place. She draws on Peter Burke's assessment of the nature and scope of the Renaissance, and discovers similar processes when it comes to Greek drama. Here, reception is understood as "a form of production or as leading to production. New work may be created even by acts of rejection as well as by appropriation, assimilation, adaptation and other forms of reaction and response" (Hardwick 2000, n. pag). Obviously, this already involves translation in the wider sense, but Hardwick tellingly concentrates further on Burke's metaphor of 'bricolage,' and on reception which includes creative adaptation for a new context through a double movement: "the first is that of de-contextualization, dislocation and appropriation; the second, that of re-contextualization, relocation, refamiliarization" (Hardwick 2000, n. pag). "Various kinds of hybridization," she realizes, may also result from these processes, especially in the context of theatrical production. Even if the text does not explicitly suggest modern circumstance, those non-verbal components of a performance (set design, costumes, music, etc.) can still point us in that direction.

Survivals, metamorphoses, relays: Some recent examples and dispositions

A survival, or relevance to the present day, is often almost anxiously considered, especially when we are confronted with a poet's translation. Emily Wilson—a name we will return to later—has reminded us of Robert Kennedy quoting Aeschylus following Martin Luther King's death, in what is otherwise a detailed review of Anne Carson's *An Oresteia* (a book published in 2009).[7] In the closing sentences, Wilson further reflects that:

> [i]t is hard to imagine President Obama citing Carson's *Oresteia* in a speech any time soon. But the movement of Carson's trilogy, away from the clear ideology of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* toward the much more complex, ambiguous world of Euripides' *Orestes*, seems pertinent to the current political climate. The characters are saved only by divine intervention, and Euripides mocks the notion that law or politics, or any pre-existing system, could prevent catastrophe. (Wilson 2009)

Carson's more recent work on Euripides' *Bakkhai* is also reviewed in the present issue, and somewhat affirms what Lucy Jackson identifies as the poet-translator's reluctance to make claims to be "breaking any moulds or to be speaking directly to contemporary politics" (107). Given Euripides's theme as well, this particular version rather "aims at an ostensibly ahistorical discussion of what it is to be alive and human" (105). But far more often these days, even imagery will point readers to the hauntings of the past into the present: the cover of Stanley Lombardo's translation of the *Odyssey* (2000), features one of the striking 'Earthrise' shots taken by the crew of the Apollo 11 mission to the moon. In terms of designing new editions of classical literature, there are certainly many more examples in this vein.

It is important to note that Lombardo, in whose published translations such visual analogies are often encountered, is a classicist with no further—known—activity as a poet, even if he does consistently insist on an 'oral design' and immediacy for his translations. On the other hand, and dependent as they may be on cribs and literals prepared by others (the practice is widespread), 'proper' translations for the stage or the page done by poets—be it Ted Hughes's *Seneca's Oedipus* (1983) or Paul Muldoon adapting Aristophanes's *The Birds* (1999)—are nevertheless tasked with commenting on the present whilst reflecting back on the poet's own thematic concerns. We observe this attitude also in peritextual material, in blurbs and endorsements across the back covers of books, where publishers assign import and call out to a modern readership. To consider just one name: "Ted Hughes's version goes beyond translation to an inspired rethinking of the story in terms of his own vision of human suffering." This is what greets us on the back cover of *Alcestis* by Euripides (1999). If we detect such dynamics there, then cases when classical source and poetic-translational process further link up within a body of work should be, at least, of equal interest. For instance, the warrior maiden Camilla, as a mythological heroine found in Virgil's *Aeneid*, also defines a recent volume by Rachel Hadas,

where Camilla is likened to the poet's grandchild (the very first page actually reads, "Camilla Williams, born January 17, 2017"). Hadas's poetry often turns into a commentary for these times, with epigraphs from the *Aeneid* constantly framing the verse. Latin words bring together the ancient world and the early 21st century—with all its sociopolitical turbulence:

> […]
> Crouching in his tower, he pouts and glowers,
> Angry and happy, happy to be angry,
> And keeps on putting forth a froth of words
> True and false mixed – but falsehood trumps the truth.
> Virgil's *Fama* is female. Not this time.
> ("Painted Full of Tongues" *Poems for Camilla*, 44)

If the reference to the current occupant of the White House was not apparent enough in the above lines, Hadas's introduction to her verse translations of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*—a volume published only two months prior and reviewed by Lucy Jackson for this issue—proceeds to describe how present analogies also emerge in the *teaching* of classical literature, as well as in students' output. We read about them "mesmerized by the darkly compelling, ironic, and ambiguous story about the ambitious, ruthless father and the nubile daughter, the family whose struggle loomed larger than life" (2018: xviii). Several of these students—"all women" Hadas notes—chose for their final projects "to write imaginative pieces based on, or spinning off, or adding to the Iphigenia story" (2018: xviii). Thus classical references often allow capable ventriloquisms of personal and communal concerns. To briefly cross into a different medium, simply consider the ingenious approach of Spike Lee's *Lysistrata*—channeling meditation on gun violence, race and gender relations, or *Chi-Raq*, a film released in 2015.

Another Irish-born poet, Seamus Heaney, consistently engaged classical literature in the later period of his work especially.[8] Ancient voices are jostling and weaving through the verses of *Electric Light* (2004), *District and Circle* (2007) and *Human Chain* (2010). To take just one example, "The Riverbank Field," from the latter book, begins as a meditation on onsets of creativity as they are found between exegesis and reminiscence:

> Ask me to translate what Loeb gives as
> 'In a retired vale … a sequestered grove'
> And I'll confound the Lethe in Moyola
>
> By coming through Back Park down from Grove Hill
> Across Long Rigs on to the riverbank –
> Which way, by happy chance, will take me past
>
> The domos placidas, 'those peaceful homes'
> Of Upper Broagh. […] (2010: 46f)

In the remainder of the poem, more Latin words provoke reflection.[9] Indeed, it is crucial to note here that poems like "The Riverbank Field" now serve as preambles to Heaney's attempted translation of the entirety of Book VI, where Aeneas

descends into the Underworld, eventually speaking to his father who presents to him a prophetic vision of Rome. Published posthumously, in 2017, this was a long-standing project of personal significance: the translation largely began after the death of Heaney's own father in 1986. This is the same poet who translated Euripides's *Philoctetes* and *Antigone* for the Abbey Theatre, in both cases turning in work that reviewers connected to the turmoil of their time: on the occasion of the publication of the second play text, in 2004, as *The Burial at Thebes*, Heaney himself commented that following 9/11, there was "the general worldwide problem where considerations of state security posed serious threats to individual freedom and human rights. Then there was the obvious parallel between George W. Bush and Creon" (in Battersby 2004, n. pag.).

Aspects of language and translation feature prominently whenever we negotiate the realities of conquest, conflict, colonization and the wide cultural dissemination and transformation that follow them; and English, especially, has both united and divided vast populations. Hence, elements of (re)appropriation are complexly housed within, and emerge from what we may initially call 'Anglophone.' Creativity and re-articulation often join forces towards 'writing back'—a characteristic example of this is Walcott's *Omeros* (1991; published one year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize) where Homeric names metabolize into fishermen from the island of St Lucia, fighting over a local Helen, and where the descendants of the colonized must reconcile themselves to a history of invasion. Beyond the poignant repurposing of key characters, this many-threaded, time-jumping, re-imagining of epic poetry visibly involves the poet himself: there are autobiographical lines that record the creation of these fictional characters, and Walcott's collating of, and commenting on historical references. There are glimpses of the poet as he experiences life away from his native island.

Several literary works can be included in this category[10] since Walcott's book, notable among them, *In the City of Paradise* (1998), Mark Fleishman's post-Apartheid adaptation of *Electra*. Other authors working within the English tradition, such as Salman Rushdie, are found interrogating classical origins: whether it is Ovid's *Metamorphoses* pulsating through *The Satanic Verses* (1988) or, again, the extended variation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice that is Rushdie's novel *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999). English-speaking poets, novelists and dramatists have produced originals (and translations) that creatively draw on the legacies of Greek and Roman writers. More recently, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), which poignantly reimagines *Antigone* via a family of British Muslims, some of its members involved with ISIS and the recent conflict in Syrian territory. Through the unfolding story of Aneeka and Parvaiz and their older sister Isma (the names obviously echoing the characters of Sophocles's play), the novelist also explores the tensions involved in maintaining both a unique cultural identity and loyalty to the British state.

Beyond post-colonial re-readings, issues pertaining to gender are prevalent enough in our engagement with the classics at present to merit at least one chapter

on reference works on classical reception (see Zajko 2007).[11] On the more obviously creative end of this spectrum, the perceived silencing of the female subject across history impels some fascinating projects of prose fiction, such as the twisting of the tale of "the quintessential faithful wife" of Odysseus that is Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005). Atwood's attempt to restore agency to Penelope and her story not only reminds us of concerns this author explored at least as far back as *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985),[12] but also of how fertile such rewriting can be under an encouraging publisher and/or series editor.[13]

Presaged by works like the one studied closely in this issue by Emily Hauser, *Sappho's Leap* (2003), several recent retellings find women authors exhibiting more urgency in subverting and rethinking original material than their male counterparts.[14] Among them, Madeline Miller's empowered and humanized *Circe* (2017) turns the inventor of witchcraft into a feminist parable, or, at the very least, suggests reasons behind her actions which were, so far, exclusively read from a male-dominated perspective. Similarly, Miller's earlier work, in the form of a very successful 2012 novel, *The Song of Achilles*, manages to locate and amplify the love story inside the war story. Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2017) retells and re-centers the *Iliad*, from the wrath of Achilles to the plight of Briseis and women like her (Barker also draws from Euripides and *Trojan Women*). Emily Hauser's own books also intend a rebalancing of gender questions within our common understanding of myth. In her second novel, *For the Winner* (2017), a dramatising of the myth of Jason of Atalanta, we also become witnesses to a highly effective dialogue between male and female conceptions of leadership and good governance.

Among earlier examples in this century, we find Elizabeth Cook's short, but structurally ambitious *Achilles*. Published the same year as Jong's book, it rearranges essential voices from the *Iliad* and the cycle of stories around it into elliptical and affecting poetic prose. Cook's narrative becomes even more experimental when a third section, aptly titled "Relay" (93–107) jump-cuts to the time of John Keats, and references, among others, Shakespeare, Hazlitt, Milton and Chapman's Homer ("in it appear angels; whales", 106), intimately observing those thoughts of a creative consciousness as it engages with the inheritance of the classical past. The English poet, essentially, contemplates towards the end of *Achilles* a core of creative endeavour, how essential literature is to the preservation of consciousness and to the transmission of culture. The conclusion of Cook's book finds Keats shearing some of his hair off in honour of the ancient hero, holding the auburn hair, "same colour as Achilles' hair and, though the hand which holds it may be smaller than that of the large Achilles, it is made the same way, the same number of small bones…" (107).

There are certainly many more such titles; but, impossible as it might be to even hint at the range of classical appropriations within this introduction, we may visit one more anthology, *Ovid Metamorphosed* (2000)[15] which includes short stories by authors such as Joyce Carol Oates, Gabriel Josipovici, Michèle Roberts and—again—Margaret Atwood, variously riffing on Ovid's work, more often than

not the *Metamorphoses*, but also, *Tristia* and *Ars Amatoria*. Editor Philip Terry quickly realises how stimulating such a project can be for literary creativity. The story contributed by A.S. Byatt, for instance, weaves together elements of autobiography, essay, art history, becomes a "tapestry of interconnected tales [that] include the story of Velasquez's painting and of Ovid's Arachne…[Byatt's "Arachne"] no more resembles the tired shape of the traditional story than a spider's web does a piece of 'transfer' embroidery" (3). The very title of the last contribution to this volume, Catherine Axelrad's "Report on the Eradication and Resurgence of Metamorphic Illness in the West, 1880-1998" (237–243), is revealing of the variety of modes and genres featured in *Ovid Metamorphosed*. One of the books reviewed in this issue of *Synthesis*, Fiona Cox's *Ovid's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing: Strange Monsters* (2018) can be considered almost an academic companion volume, though it explicitly focuses on female authorship. Earlier research works, such as Marina Warner's *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (2004; originating in her 2001 Clarendon Lectures) also engage the powerful sway of Ovid in the imagination of later authors. That Warner is also the author of a novel very much indebted to the Roman poet, *The Leto Bundle* (2001), reconfirms the inspiration and ideas resulting from dialogues—as I argue, especially intense when it comes to the classics—of scholarship and literary creativity. In a sense, practicing the theory that comes later, *The Leto Bundle* is itself preceded by one pre-published chapter, titled "Leto's Flight"—and where does it appear? In Philip Terry's *Ovid Metamorphosed*.

At the other end of the spectrum, we return to the work of translation—where we also come across increased awareness of female perspectives, not least in Emily Wilson's recent rendering of the *Odyssey* (2017). The gender of the one who translates is indeed noted by most reviews of this publication, and before that, it is significant for Wilson herself: "The gendered metaphor of the 'faithful' translation, whose worth is always secondary to that of a male authored original, acquires a particular edge in the context of a translation by a woman of *The Odyssey*, a poem that is deeply invested in female fidelity and male dominance" (86f). Before Wilson, Homer has certainly provided a most fertile ground for textual experiment and recontextualisation to English poets: I have elsewhere discussed myself the poet's 'lifework' (Nikolaou 2017: 17–40), those varied condensations and displacements, imaginative editing and modernist re-energising of the Homeric original that started from a BBC commission for a radio version in 1959 and gradually assumed the overall title of *War Music*. Until 2005 the British poet continued installing pieces into the whole, sometimes just one or two rhapsodies contained in slim volumes, abstracting from, and seeking the core of, the Greek text. This retelling which remained unfinished at Logue's death in 2008 fused, with cinematic flair, ancient morality with scenes of modern society and warring across history; all the while (classical) translation, both as process and product, was constantly rethought, renamed. In the introduction to 1991's *Kings*, Logue already spoke of a work "dependent on" the *Iliad* (ix), one which would go on to feature lines, such as: "Each

army saw the other's china face, and cried: / *'O please!'* / (As California when tremors rise)" (2015: 126). *The Husbands* (1994) is, similarly to *Kings*, 'an account' of Books 3 and 4 (featuring a Middle Eastern fighter bearing rocket-propelled grenades on the cover), and the next-to-last volume, published in 2003, is subtitled "the first battles scenes of Homer's *Iliad* rewritten." The conclusive form of 'Logue's Homer,' including as yet unpublished fragments was later edited by Christopher Reid, and his friend relates the ambition, eventually unrealised, of a projected final volume that would poignantly visit the fashioning of Achilles's new shield and armour: according to Logue's notes, "the new shield's face is covered with designs that show the world as Homer knew it. This passage will be extended. The pictures on the shield will reflect our world" (Reid in Logue 2015: 299; my emphasis). It is somehow apt that this most iconic moment is entirely missing from *War Music*: because the rest of what the British poet delivered to us does, in many respects, also exist as a wholly contemporary, recomposed shield of Achilles.

Analogies were always being variously proposed, and long before Logue's time. To take one example: a special issue of *Classical Receptions Journal* ("Classics and Classicists in World War One," 10.4, 2018), surveys a wealth of poetic allusion along with classicist texts appearing between 1914–18. They, collectively, suggest how the classical past "at once both unfamiliar and familiar through tradition" (Pender 338) was sought out by many in the midst of the alienation, confusion, and trauma of that period. Such joint investigations are preceded and influenced by publications such as Elizabeth Vandiver's study *Stand in the Trench, Achilles* (2010), which too consider the resonance of classical literature in the poetry of the Great War –but also later, in forms of commemoration and remembrance. Indeed, criticism quite often returned to the question of a Homer applicable to our condition, especially during a turbulent twentieth century. The dialogue of two essays written by Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff with the ancient epic[16] serves to accent some of the ways in which the past haunts and interrogates the present. Composed as Bespaloff was escaping Vichy France for the United States, "On the Iliad" (1942), which was "[her] method of facing the war" (2005: xvii), contains a number of insights that have guided researchers (*and poets*) ever since. And her essay already owes much to Simone Weil's "The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force," written in French, in 1940, by a committed pacifist in response to the early days of World War II. Weil does misread Homer in several ways, yet, interestingly, links themes of violence and the similes prevalent in the epic, "which liken the warriors either to fire, flood, wind, wild beasts, or God knows what blind cause or disaster, or else to frightened animals, trees, water, sand, to anything in nature that is set into motion by the violence of external forces" (26). "The art of war," Weil continues, "is simply the art of producing such transformations…" (27).

Alice Oswald's *Memorial* (2011) produces its art partly through concentrating on those similes that convey manifold transformations in the natural world and seeking a delivery that is analogous to the oral tradition the *Iliad* sprang from. It forces us to truly pay attention as these alternate with capitalized names

and brief biographies of soldiers located inside the original, justifying thereby the subtitle of its UK edition, "an excavation of the *Iliad*." Yet, as one reviewer has pointed out, within this set-up, and disregarding more than seven eighths of Homer's poem– *Memorial* 'reinvents' the *Iliad*, by opening with what Oswald calls an "oral cemetery," recalling monuments such as the Vietnam Memorial's wall of names (Rosenthal 2012). Rarer perhaps is an actual translation of a creative translation: *Μνημείο Πεσόντων. Μια Ανασκαφή της Ιλιάδας* (2018) is a Greek rendering that treats Oswald's work as an original poem a*nd* serves to reintroduce a Greek audience to an *Iliad* that is so drastically reconfigured from the one they are accustomed to.[17] Including also a translation of Oswald's prefatory note, Myrsini Ghana's edition sets up a game of mirrors for the Greek reader, whereby what has been familiar, a literary tradition's own possession, is now presented as, simultaneously, a drastic interpretation and the essential core, of the ancient epic. Nor does it escape the translator herself how embedded memorializing has been, throughout human history and civilization. A prime reason behind literary creation, consoling individuals and binding societies together, the newspaper *Le Monde*—Ghana notes in her own introduction—created a very similar memorial, following the terrorist attack at the Bataclan theatre on November 13, 2015. It comprises pictures of each of the 130 victims and a brief note about their life and who they left behind to mourn them (see Ghana 8).

This paradoxical return, in which a radical version cycles back to the language of the original, allows a parting image of classical retelling as this necessary 'carrying forward' and affecting testimony of diachronies.

The essays

The essays featured in "Recomposed: Anglophone Presences of Classical Literature" circle back to and also expand on, several issues and settings reflected through the translational reappearances and reconfigurations of classical sources discussed in the examples above. Key among them: the dialogues of translational and literary activity inside a body of work, typologies of rewriting and adaptation prevalent with respect to engagement with classical material, dynamics observed between literary traditions, aspects of appropriation or contextualization when it comes to classical literature, whether versioned or retold—with particular scenes and figures from the classical world deployed to suggest diachronies in human behavior, or cultural change when it comes, for instance, to issues of gender.

Indeed, considerations of gender and classical themes as they resound in a poet's output occupy Elena Theodorakopoulos's essay, where she conscientiously addresses positions of classically-inspired poetry in Laura Riding's work, later known as Laura (Riding) Jackson. Robert Graves's partner of ten years and close associate in a number of publications, Riding was assigned by scholars a role she vehemently rejected, as they linked her with descriptions in *The White Goddess* (1948), a book that was assumed to reflect back on the dynamics of her relationship with Graves. The image gained there[18] is arguably why even re-evaluations of

modernism acknowledging the influence of women as editors and writers are still not as generous, Theodorakopoulos argues, to Riding as they are to a number of her contemporaries, such as Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, or H.D. Theodorakopoulos's essay further yields valuable insight into the ambivalence that Riding exhibited towards the category of 'women's writing.' What is more, her *Selected Poems* of 1970 includes almost none of the poems engaging with antiquity. Despite their significance in establishing Riding's presence with respect to classical reception in the 20th century, Riding herself did not appear to consider these to be key pieces when she was establishing her canon. The author is actually better known for *A Trojan Ending* (1937), a novelistic account of what occurs in the *Iliad*, through the point of view of Helen. Theodorakopoulos briefly discusses the value of that publication in reversing stereotypical representations of women, supported in her argument by the lesser-known poems that she argues should be read alongside *A Trojan Ending*. The book is also a very early example of what, these days, is more often encountered as a literary mode, repositioning through conventions of modern fiction, characters and consciousness originating in classical literature. A wider audience is brought closer to a lived-in perspective. The novel, as we also realise in the course of Emily Hauser's essay on Erica Jong (but also her own work), can especially (re-)activate a dramatic grasp of these stories that we are perhaps less able to experience via just translation/description of their original sources.

Harish Trivedi's essay is the one most thoroughly pursuing the presence of the classics beyond the Anglophone centre in the West. The case of India is, however, a special one—in that Greek and Latin were *not* forced into the education of colonial subjects. At first sight, the reason is a recognition by British rulers of a civilization with its own foundational classics, a tradition equaling that of ancient Greece and the Roman world. At the same time, Sanskrit, as Trivedi quoted from a lecture by Sir William Jones, delivered to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1786, also appeared to have a stronger affinity to both Greek and Latin "than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from a common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists" (43). There are unseen presences, moreover, partly owing to the fact of previous encounters. Trivedi reminds us about Alexander and Heliodorus, and also examines several individual and institutional points of contact, including the Murty Classical Library of India, as well as the creation of Sahitya, Sangit, and Lalit Kala 'Akademis' within this more intricate mingling of Greek, Latin and Hindu culture during the initial experience of uneven power relations as the subcontinent stayed under the auspices of the British Empire, as well as after independence was gained.

The possible metabolisms of ancient source into modern textualities largely concern the two essays that follow. In the first, Emily Hauser closely engages Erica Jong's *Sappho's Leap* (2003). As Mary Beard (2004 n. pag) noted in a review around the time of first publication, the story has long appealed to dominant Western cultures but here the tale of Sappho takes a "predictably subversive"

direction: "[Jong's] Sappho is not suffering from unrequited passion: it has been requited more than enough. She is not particularly besotted with Phaon. The man who provokes the leap is her fellow poet Alcaeus, father of her daughter" (2004 n. pag). Beyond her position as lecturer in Classics at the University of Exeter, Hauser is the author of three works of prose fiction (since 2016), most recently *For the Immortal* (2018), a retelling of the connected stories of Admete, daughter of king Eurystheus, Hercules, and Hippolyta, the Amazon queen. What the essay persuasively considers is how women authors, like Jong, may engage with the literature of the past, complicating existing models, gradually shifting our focus away from prescriptive assumptions of the relationship between gender and authorship. A book like *Sappho's Leap* attempts, according to Hauser, a redefinition of authorship, but crucially "in a way that is not confined by gender, but constructed in passion" (70).

Whilst Hauser's investigation of Jong re-reading Sappho pays close attention to the possibilities of expressing and transcending areas of gender, Josephine Balmer's essay for this issue of *Synthesis* explores the productive tension between scholarship and creativity. A continuation of her book-length critical undertaking: *Piecing Together the Fragments: Translating Classical Verse, Creating Contemporary Poetry* (2013), this study owes much to an internal understanding of poetry and of how this may manifest, often unexpectedly, through positions of translation. Similar to what occurs throughout her monograph, Balmer now systematically reflects on the conception of her 2017 collection, *The Paths of Survival*; and especially the ways in which both research and a classical source (in this particular case, what remains of it) fire the imagination—and may transform into new poetry. Balmer's volume threads together moments in history, scenes of cultural upheaval and obscure philological episodes. In the process, it turns editors, translators and scribes into less than marginal characters, while the fate of Aeschylus' lost play *Myrmidons* is tracked through time and geography. *The Paths of Survival* stands as an argument in favor of the narrative possibilities for modern poetry. Balmer seeks effects attained only in literary space, rather than critical discourse: "where scholarship deals in establishing the known, the deductive, poetry seeks to re-enact the complexity, the fluidity of moral systems and beliefs. In addition, where scholarship looks to convince, poetry prefers to stand on moving ground, undermining its own arguments, transgressing its own truths" (77).

Susan Bassnett contributes a reflective essay, "On Re-reading Homer's *Iliad* in the Twenty-first Century," which poignantly follows annotations and various inscriptions on a copy of the *Iliad* owned by Sylvia Plath. What interests Bassnett in this piece—and elsewhere—are proximities between translator and reader, the processing of (classical) originals that may lead to further art, as she discusses examples such as Michael Longley's deployment of ancient material in "Ceasefire" (a poem that recalls Priam's pleading stance towards Achilles, published only days after the provisional IRA announced a truce in 1994. It stands among several examples where anxieties and hopes for the situation in Northern Ireland align with

scenes from the classical past[19]) or, in the final paragraphs of her essay, the effect of Christopher Logue's decades-long recasting of the *Iliad*. Throughout, and as this refracted reading of Homer proceeds, with Bassnett identifies with or wonders about Plath's annotations and is reminded of scenes from her own childhood and education. There is reflection on how our reading of the same content will change over the course of time: for instance, Bassnett previously tended

> to skip over these violent descriptive passages and to focus more on the emotional parts of the poem, but this time, perhaps because I live in an age when there seems to be endless, brutal war on the television news every night, the sheer callousness of Bronze Age warfare struck me as unbearably contemporary. We may have electricity, the internet and rockets that can land men on the moon, but human beings are as cruel and callous in war as Homer described them in the eighth century BC. (99)

Two review essays round up the contents of the present issue of *Synthesis*. These are concerned with recent academic works and translations the range of which confirms why this has been such a vibrant area of research these past few years. In the first of these pieces, titled "Greek Tragedy and Trauma Retold in Three New Translations," Lucy Jackson soon realizes that "just as histories of trauma are narrated by characters in the tragedies themselves, so these translators encourage us to address our very present fears and give them [quoting Rachel Hadas] "meaning by casting them into language." Jackson commends an English version of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women* by David Greig (working from a literal treatment by Isabel Ruffell) for producing a text and tone that "balances ancient and modern beautifully" (104) and retaining a directness even though it is elevated from the speech of everyday. Verbal and non-verbal "deliberate moves" seem to foreground the European migrant crisis post-2010, despite Greig's and (director of the play) Ramin Gray's protestations that there was no need to further suggest the play's relevance. A theme already permeating one of the world's oldest plays, becomes enhanced on the cover of the Faber edition: through the now very familiar image of an inflatable boat filled with refugees. For Jackson, a translation of *Bakkhai* by Anne Carson is even more recognisably a poetic endeavour, including one's known biases and aesthetic concerns (also with respect to choices in layout), and a "typical Carson deadpan tone at precise moments of acute tragedy" (106). At no point, Jackson finds, do we "feel any strain or tension between language and thought." And with respect to the translations housed together as *The Iphigenia Plays*, Rachel Hadas excels in discovering approaches to translate choral odes. A poet herself, Hadas moves away from "taking a more front-footed and creative role in rendering the verse, yet [summons] emotions and meaning that do justice to cultural specifics of the ancient Greek world" (108).

In "New Voices on Anglophone Antiquity: Contemporary Women's Writing and Modernist Translation," Laura Jansen attends to two studies, Fiona Cox's *Ovid's Presence in Contemporary Women's Writing: Strange Monsters* (2018) and a volume edited by Miranda Hickman and Lynn Kozak, *The Classics in Modernist Translation* (2019), since both feature "some of the less explored histories of Anglo-

American classicisms, especially those of women writers" (110). In the first book, this includes authors like Marina Warner and Jo Shapcott among others that proceed to "politicise and problematise Ovidian poetics" to reflect contemporary concerns (111). Jansen indeed counts "a careful alignment of the Ovidian themes of fluid change and isolation of the self with the main tenets of third-wave feminism" (111) as among the strengths of Cox's argument. But earlier in the twentieth century as well, as amply evidenced by *The Classics in Modernist Translation*, someone like H.D. practices translation (and an entire section of the book is dedicated to her) as "an acute and radical interpreter of Euripides, who…crucially challenge[s] the dominant narratives of the classical tradition by male writers of her own literary generation" (112). In several ways, both volumes suggest, according to Jansen, how antiquity "continues to offer a platform for … a creative form of literary activism focused on questions of gendered reading and writing, politics, domesticity, the environment, immigration, illness, war and conflict, and the virtual world" (110).

The essays comprising this special issue of *Synthesis*, whether they examine reception through translation proper, including those institutions that help transmit our understanding of the classical past; or through varied practices resulting in re-contextualisation; or by considering afresh our longstanding, meaningful relationships with ancient texts (Susan Bassnett's return to the *Iliad* also occurs through the reading copy of another); or in studying closely those more visibly ambitious reanimations, dramatisations of characters and writings from the classical past, as happens with Jong's Sappho; or in the various encounters that Josephine Balmer stages with that lost manuscript of *Myrmidons*, they all take stock of a rapidly evolving and outward-looking field. In the pages that follow, classical presences appear to be always increasing, while moments of recognition, nonetheless, simultaneously find us at variance, and in constant dialogue with our cultural, moral and psychological selves. Which is, of course, a most vital process.

[1] Pound was not alone in this of course—T.S. Eliot also considered the vitalizing effect of (re)translation at various points, notably in "Euripides and Professor Murray" (1918).
[2] A recent survey, *The Classics in Modernist Translation,* reviewed by Laura Jansen in this issue, affords an entire section on Pound's engagement with translation.
[3] Pound laments in places "Wardour Street English" or, as he puts it in an essay on translating the philosophical poems of thirteenth-century Florentine poet Guido Cavalcanti, "the crust of dead English" (see 2000: 28).
[4] This sense echoes in later commentary also, for instance Reuben Brower's 1947 essay, "Seven Agamemnons," where he argues that "[w]hen a writer sets out to translate—say, the *Agamemnon*—what happens? Much, naturally, that we can never hope to analyze. But what we can see quite clearly is that he makes the poetry of the past into the poetry of his particular present. Translations are the most obvious examples of works which, in Valéry's words, are 'as it were created by their public'" (383).
[5] For a recent extensive discussion see also Hardwick 2008.
[6] This is also the preamble to later key publications in the field from Hardwick, and not least the emergence, since 2005 of the *Oxford Studies in Classical Receptions: Classical Presences* series, where she acts as general editor along with James I. Porter. The series counts of more than 100 edited volumes and monographs published in the past fifteen years.

[7] The indefinite article of the title is key; since Carson's volume brings together her translations of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Sophocles's *Electra* and Euripides's *Orestes*, rather than Aeschylus' original trilogy of dramas.
[8] Of great interest as a wide exploration of classical influences in Heaney's work is an edited volume published nearly simultaneously with this issue of *Synthesis* (see Harrison, Macintosh and Eastman 2019).
[9] Particular sections that inspired Heaney are listed at the end: "after *Aeneid VI*, 704–15, 748–51.
[10] Edited by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie, *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (2007) collects several case studies which observe quite effectively the dynamics of imperialism or subversion developing between traditions.
[11] Of particular interest is the research work featured in two editorial collaborations between Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos, the first being a guest-edited *Classical Receptions Journal* in 2012 on the theme of "Translation, Transgression, Transformation: Contemporary Women Authors and Classical Reception" and, very recently, the co-edited volume *Homer's Daughters*: *Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (2019). There exist earlier, and more programmatic statements on classical myth and feminist of course (see e.g. Zajko and Leonard 2006).
[12] In addition, in the introduction to her 2005 novella, Atwood claims she always was haunted by the story of the hanged maids in the *Odyssey* (xv).
[13] In this case, Jamie Byng at Canongate. The 'Myths' series also featured among others, classical retellings by Jeanette Winterson in *Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles* (also published in 2005) and Michel Faber's *The Fire Gospel*, appearing three years later in 2008. The latter is a drastic reconfiguration of the myth of Prometheus.
[14] These titles would include works of intricacy and ambition, such as Barry Unsworth's novelistic retelling of *Iphigenia* in *The Song of Kings* (2002), Zachary Mason's *Lost Books of the Odyssey* (2007) and his more recent *Metamorphica* (2018), David Malouf's partial reimagination (Books 22–24) of the *Iliad* in *Ransom* (2009), or Colm Tóibín's scenes from the downfall of the family of Atreus in *House of Names* (2017).
[15] It is worth noting that four years prior, a similar volume was also published (Hofmann and Lasdun 1996), this time containing poetic versions of Ovid (by, among others, Ted Hughes, J.D. McClatchy, Tom Paulin, Eavan Boland, Robin Robertson, Thom Gunn and Craig Raine). It further shows the immense hold of Ovid's texts on contemporary writers.
[16] And with each other: especially in how they are housed in an edition published by the *New York Review of Books* (2005).
[17] And this is, more often than not, an *Iliad* in intralingual translation, ancient into modern Greek.
[18] In her "Notes" to *The Penelopiad* for instance, Atwood credits Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* as the source of stories about Penelope's infidelity, and the perception of her "as a possible female-goddess cult leader" (197).
[19] Bassnett also draws on Longley's key practitioner statement, "Lapsed Classicist" (in Harrison 2009: 97–113).

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