

irrelevant (and in need of alteration in order to connect with audiences) remains to be seen.

In many instances, plays were selected because of their propensity to be molded in the context of current political and social events generated by such issues as anti-war protests, racial tensions, gender wars, and feminist agendas. Many producers of Aeschylus' plays in the United States have chosen to adapt and alter portions of the original tragedies. In some other cases, the plays were considered "too" poetic or lyrical for the American stage and their original form was thought to be incompatible with twentieth century staging practices and audience sensibilities. By comparison, the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides have been produced in translation or adaptation in America more than the plays of Aeschylus. Issues such as the ones addressed above need to be negotiated by all translators, dramaturgs, and directors who grapple with the formal aspects of Aeschylus' plays.

Hartigan attributes the rise in popularity of Aeschylus' plays in the United States to specific contemporary political and social movements of the twentieth century. For example, she links the popularity of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to developments in Freudian psychology and modernism; Euripides' *Bacchae* to the 1960s hippie movement; Euripides' *Trojan Women* to anti-Vietnam protests; and Aeschylus' *The Persians* to American military involvement in Iraq. Does this mean that the lesser produced plays of Aeschylus, such as *Seven Against Thebes* and *Suppliants* (with the exception of Charles Mee's rewrite, *Big Love*) are simply awaiting the appropriate social and political climate in which to thrive? This viewpoint asserts that it is not the play's internal literary qualities that prevent its production, but its perceived social relevancy for an American

audience. For example, *Suppliants* is one of the most produced tragedies based on a play by Aeschylus since the 1990s. However this is only due to the rewrite, *Big Love*, by Charles Mee which completely resets the play in another culture and time. There is almost no interest in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* itself. But, as demonstrated by Mee's rewriting of the play, its perceived social relevance by the rewriter and directors gives it a new life on the American stage.

*Oresteia*'s popularity isn't due solely to its being the only extant trilogy of Aeschylus. Other plays of Aeschylus, such as *Persians*, stand alone as complete plays without the existence of the whole trilogy, although they are not as popular in performance. Single works of Sophocles (e.g., *Oedipus*) and Euripides (e.g., *Trojan Women*) have had just as much attention, despite the loss of the other plays in their original trilogies. Nonetheless, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides* are produced more as a trilogy than as individual plays. The 138 recorded productions of *Oresteia* in the United States far outnumber the ninety-six productions of *Agamemnon* or the fifty productions of *Suppliants*, the next most produced play of Aeschylus.

It may be true that modern interest in specific ancient plays is partially due to the political and social environments of modern times. However, it is also due to the play's perceived internal qualities as "read" (or interpreted) by the rewriters and stage directors. According to Mark Franko's "Actualizing Absence: The Pastness of Performance,"

Performances of the distant past, however, those precluding personal or collective memory, raise with particular urgency the issue of absence... historian's interpretation becomes the prosthesis of an imaginary performative practice, returning theory to its etymological roots in vision and speculation... it is the movement between past acts, texts, and their present-day interpreters that is central to historical performance studies (1).

The act of rewriting and producing Classical Greek plays requires the interpretations of the translator and later, the director, in order to restore or even “recreate” an absent “performative practice.” It requires creating with, what Franko terms, the imagination of a present realization of a past event—it requires a “reader” of the past to interpret the work for the “readers” of the present. Nowhere is this occurrence more valid than in the reproduction of Classical Greek tragedies on the contemporary American stage. The interpretations are always negotiated by the translator and director—except in the case of adaptations. However, the act of “interpretation” sometimes alters the original play considerably. Can the plays of Aeschylus be realized and accepted outside of their historical frame of Athens, or must the play’s messages be reinvented to express contemporary American concerns and interests? Chapter five will demonstrate, through an analysis of Stratos E. Constantinidis’ translation of *Persians* that Aeschylus does not need to be updated, adapted, or abridged to communicate effectively with modern American audiences.

The majority of theatrical productions of Aeschylus’ tragedies in the United States are of the *Oresteia* trilogy (or one or more of its three plays). The number of productions listed in chart 1 for the *Oresteia* represent both performances of the individual plays (i.e., *Agamemnon*) and for the tragedy as a trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides* in one performance). One production of the *Oresteia* is counted as three productions, one time for each play in the trilogy; therefore, the numbers are askew in order to demonstrate the production of individual tragedies rather than the trilogy as a whole.

There are 138 productions of the entire *Oresteia* (as one event) but for each individual play only ninety-six of *Agamemnon*, ten of *Choephoroi*, and twenty-nine of *Eumenides*. Those plays with the lowest number of translations and adaptations are the least produced. *Seven Against Thebes* has had only seven productions in the United States and most of these used adaptations that border on being new works (distant relatives) of Aeschylus' play. Every single American production of *Suppliants* in English used Charles Mee's distant relative, *Big Love*, which considerably rewrites the original play. Since *Big Love* was published in the 1994, there are no recorded productions of the *Suppliants* prior to 1999 in English.

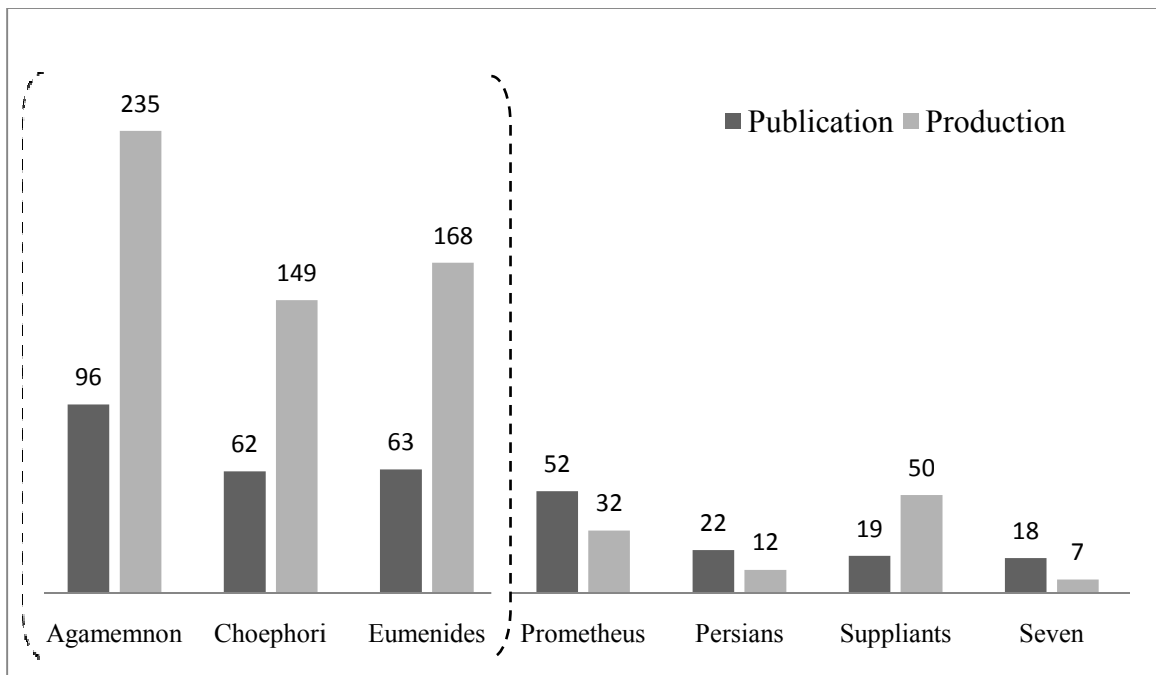


Chart 1. Publications and United States Productions of Aeschylus' Tragedies (1900-2009)

Despite the variations in textual styles and subject matter for each of Aeschylus' tragedies, *Persians* is set in a more realistic, historical frame than *Prometheus Bound*, the

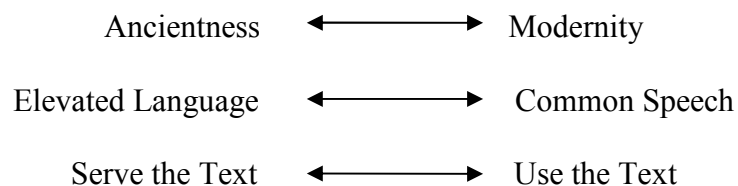
post-colonial life in South Africa. Similarly, Charles Mee's *Big Love* acts as a critique of American consumerism and popular culture.

For the most part, the United States production history demonstrates a reliance on both American and non-American English rewrites. This is not to say that, for example, British texts do not frequently differ from American rewrites in word choice and spelling, but these differences do not always negotiate the formation of a major trend in translation. The issue of whether an American translation would be better understood and received by an American audience in performance is addressed in chapter four, but the production history of the twentieth century reveals an equal number of foreign and domestic rewrites used for production in the United States. Very few translators of Aeschylus' plays address the issue of nationality (and its ties to language) in their translator's notes. In general, it is the language and tone of the adaptations and distant relatives that betray nationality more than the translations.

Hartigan links the popularity of translating, adapting, and producing the Classical Greek tragedies to changes in the social, cultural, and political atmosphere of the United States. While focusing on productions on the commercial stage, she demonstrates the relationship of the production of Classical Greek plays (such as the *Trojan Women* and *Bacchae*) with specific events in U.S. history (such as protests against the Vietnam War and the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001). However, her focus on the productions of Aeschylus' plays neglects to connect those productions to the translation and adaptation practices imposed on those Classical Greek plays. This is perhaps because of the strong influence on the American stage of the stage director, his/her agenda in producing a "Classical" play, and the agenda/mission of the producer and/or patron of the

event. The rise in the director's strength has, in many ways, come at the expense and decline of Aeschylus'. Because of the theatre's appropriation and rewriting of the Classical Greek plays, many of the "performance oriented" rewrites of the twentieth century reflect issues and agendas foreign to those of the original play (seen mostly in the adaptations and distant relatives).

There is, therefore, a gradual move away from the use of translations of Aeschylus' plays on the American stage towards using adaptations and translations of translations. Despite this, most rewrites (whether translations or adaptations) exhibit one or more of the following interpretations:



Although sometimes the interpretation qualities have to do with the relationship of the translator with Aeschylus' play, many times it has more to do with the translator/adaptor's relationship with previous rewrites and his/her own agenda and purpose for rewriting the text. It is not uncommon in the revival of older plays for directors to use the play to address current issues rather than those native to the work. However, it is less common for the text to be altered in the original play to meet the director's concept. Only in the rewrites of the Classical Greek tragedies is this practice prolific.

Not all alterations in Aeschylus' plays are for specific director's concepts even though this certainly is the case in director translated rewrites such as Peter Meinick's *Agamemnon*. Aeschylus' plays offer ample opportunity for the creative juices of modern

are made human by Valency's psychological depiction of their less-than-noble motivations.

Charles Mee's *Big Love* resets *Suppliants* as a serio-comedy located in Italy. However, it reflects the American culture of the late twentieth century more than that of Italy. Fifty brides have escaped an unwanted marriage by sailing into exile on a yacht and landing at an Italian villa. Pursued by the fifty grooms who are also their cousins, Mee's play is ripe with disturbingly serious moments, pop cultural references and sprinkles of comedic passages. *Big Love* ultimately explores the institution of marriage. Mee's website, the *(re)making project*, summarizes that "unable to escape their forced marriages, 49 of the brides murder 49 of the grooms-and one bride falls in love. About the same odds as today." Rather than seeking the sanctuary of the gods at Argos and the protection of the city as suppliants, these brides luxuriate along the coast of Italy. Danaus is not a character in this rewrite. Entering the stage to Mozart's wedding procession from *The Marriage of Figaro*, the first bride casts off her white wedding gown and bathes before the audience in the villa's bathtub. The hosts of the villa are in the midst of a dinner party. The villa's owners mistake the girls, at first, as party guests. After being briefed by three of the brides, Lydia, Olympia, and Thyona, he allow the women to stay as guests. These three women are the first of the 50 girls to appear and represent their sisters. When the grooms appear from a helicopter to reclaim their lost brides, a wedding is arranged at the villa where all but one of the women murders her groom.

Currently this play is the most popular rewrite of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* in the twentieth century. Mee's play reinvisions not only Aeschylus' *Suppliants* but the entire lost trilogy. It relocates portions of *Suppliants* into a twentieth century, Western culture.

Where Aeschylus' chorus of the daughters of Danaus humble themselves before the King of Argos and plead for mercy, Mee's "Danaiads" ask for shampoo and modern conveniences.

OLYMPIA:

You know, we've been travelling,  
and when you've been travelling  
you hope at the end of the journey that you might find  
some, like,

Oil of Olay Moisturizing Body Wash  
or like

John Freda Sheer Blond Shampoo and Conditioner for Highlighted Blonds

LYDIA

Olympia....

OLYMPIA

I know this is not a hotel, so you wouldn't have everything,  
but maybe some Estee Lauder 24 Karat Color Golden Body Creme with  
Sunbloc,  
or Fetish Go Glitter Body Art in Soiree.

*Big Love* plays upon the dominance of American pop culture and commercial images.

Unlike Mee's *Agamemnon*, which follows the plot structure of the original tragedy, *Big Love* completely retells the myth for contemporary audiences, going beyond the tragedy by Aeschylus. According to Rehm's *Radical Theatre: Greek Tragedy and the Modern World*,

The stakes of *Big Love* never rise to the tragic dilemma of the original. Whatever transformation Mee's asylum-seekers undergo, it has less to do with fear than with an elite sense of outrage that things won't go exactly as they want. This releases wonderful comic energy and theatrical fun, but none of the emotional depth of Aeschylus' original. (51)

There is a clear difference in tone and character between the two works. Where Aeschylus concludes his *Suppliants* with the women being temporarily saved from marriage and taking refuge in the King of Argos's city, Mee completes the trilogy and has all but one bride kill their grooms. Lydia alone protects Nikos and, together, conclude the play with their marriage,



Lydia and Nikos, the bride and groom,  
exit up the center aisle to the music.  
Nikos's clothing is disheveled,  
and he looks sheepish and uncertain,  
even frightened, maybe even filled with foreboding--  
in fact, they both look shellshocked and devastated--  
as Nikos exits up the aisle with Lydia.

In many respects, Mee has to imagine the remainder of the trilogy because the second and third plays, *Egyptians* and *Danaids* is missing. It is not certain if *Big Love* concludes with a "happy" or "tragic" ending, or, in the post-modern tendency that denies the contrived closure found in the grand narratives of the early twentieth century, simply an ending.

David Foley *The Murders at Argos* (2003) re-examines the original tragedies of *Oresteia* in light of the school shootings at Columbine. By modernizing and relocating the play to the United States in the late twentieth century, Foley explores the psychology of Aeschylus' characters and the unraveling that leads children to kill their parents and guardians. He uses ancient myths to help explain modern events and human behaviour. In this work, there are no kings and queens, no gods or higher orders of fate. Foley presents a dysfunctional, lower-middle class family rife with abuse and psychosis as a means of exploring the "rise" in family and childhood violence. There is no ceremony or formality in *The Murders of Argos*. For instance, Foley's adaptation completely reduces the ceremony of Agamemnon's homecoming and murder by Clytemnestra. Aeschylus' tragedy depicts Clytemnestra and her attendants formally greeting Agamemnon to Argos by placing a scarlet/purple tapestry at his feet. After Agamemnon enters the palace, Clytemnestra ritualistically kills him. However, in Foley's rewrite, Agamemnon is met only by Clytemnestra and her daughters. This play does not mention war or a heroic homecoming. After casual discourse between Agamemnon and the devoted Electra,

The opening lines by the Chorus in Aeschylus' play does not describe Persia as a beach wiped clean from the pounding of a great wave. This image belongs completely to McLaughlin.

Like Aeschylus' tragedy, Mee's adaptation relies upon spoken language to illustrate the events of the play. He does not perform the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra on the stage. On stage action is a convention very appropriate to contemporary practices of staging and is seen in Howard Rubenstein's *Agamemnon* when the chorus pantomimes to narration the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Like Aeschylus, Mee includes a revealing of the bodies with the opening of the palace doors. It is interesting that Mee's play follows the plot structure and speech orders of the original so closely when his text is so firmly rooted in Mee's own culture. He substitutes passages from newspapers, songs, and popular literature that have similar messages as Aeschylus' original speeches. Where Mee's *Big Love* retells the myth of the Danaids more than Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, Mee's *Agamemnon* holds to Aeschylus' tragedy.

The basic plot structure and characters, with the altered chorus, are the same in Mee's play as in that of Aeschylus. However, the characters are more psychologically complex in Mee's rewriting than the original. Here we see Clytemnestra's various attempts to convince Agamemnon to walk the tapestry into the palace. The stage directions state, "She will try anything: seduction, flirtation, playfulness, humor." Directions of this type deal with character motivation and action and are typical for a performance workshop or rehearsal. They are less usual in the published rewrites of Aeschylus. The directions also intimate a great degree of flexibility of interpretation for the scene they describe. Rather than allowing the lines to speak to the readers/actors

themselves, Mee has purposefully dictated the direction the actor playing Clytemenstra should take in gaining Agamemnon's trust. This is not only seen in the occasional stage directions, but also in the language of the text of Mee's play. Since all stage directions in the rewrites of *Agamemnon*, or any Greek tragedy, are complete creations/imaginings of the rewriter, the type and nature of the directions given often reveals the adaptor's agenda. In general, stage directions for the Greek plays attempt to either (1) recreate the original production situation (i.e., state when characters, in the original Greek production, might have entered or exited), (2) create a production situation appropriate for a current production (using the stage conventions of the twenty-first century), or (3) blend the first and second interpretations. There is no attempt, in Mee's play, to keep his own ideology invisible.

Although Mee has exchanged the chorus of elders of Argos for a chorus composed of Hesiod, Herodotus, Thucydides, and Homer, he never has the characters addressed by these names. Only production elements, such as design and acting, can reveal these traits. They do not read in unison, a convention that is foreign to our contemporary stage, but speak as individuals conversing in dialogue. There is no leader of the chorus. McLaughlin's *Persians* adopts a similar treatment. The chorus of Persian elders in McLaughlin's rewrite is composed of men designated as General, State, Religion, Treasury, Justice, Chairman, and Admiral. They, like Mee's chorus, only occasionally speak in unison as a group. For most of the play the chorus' lines are divided amongst the various cabinet members (i.e., General, State, and Religion). Like in Mee's play, the production elements are the primary means by which the playwright communicates his/her altered chorus (not the text). The musical qualities of the original

choral segments are briefly echoed in Mee's stage directions, but it is done in a manner extremely different from that of Aeschylus' play. "They [chorus] pull an old victrola from the detritus around them and play a section of Arvo Part's *Te Deum*. As the music plays, they sit or stand silently and listen." The music exists outside of the language of the text (as opposed to Tony Harrison's chanting choruses) and reflects less the practices of an ancient chorus and more that of the musicians accompanying that chorus. Rather than "dance," Mee's chorus member Hesiod periodically shakes and falls into an epileptic-type fit. This is hardly an attempt at equivalence, but a critical re-interpretation of the story.

To familiarize audiences with the mythic background of the tragedy, Rubenstein added a prologue and epilogue not present in Aeschylus' original. The prologue very briefly mentions the historical setting of the play and its playwright, the story of Thyestes and Atreus, Helen's flight to Troy, Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, and the Trojan War. Another alteration in the rewrite is the character of the chorus. In this version, the chorus includes three prominent characters with speeches: the narrator, the leader, and the prophet. These speeches are rearranged portions of Aeschylus' original choral segments. For instance, Rubenstein's chorus tell of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter and the prophet speaks the sections pertaining to Calchas,

PROPHET: I am a master  
At chanting prophecies  
Of wondrous journeys and victories  
Coming to kings.  
And, old as I am,  
By God's grace,  
I can do it still.  
The power of prophecy  
Surges within me. (38)

in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century in the “reverence” shown classical plays. They are seen as “useful” tools for modern expressions, but not sources of unquestionable authority. They rarely remain unchanged or altered on the stage. Modern experience has replaced Classical “authority.” This is seen in Yael Farber’s appropriation of the *Oresteia* in *Molora* and the manner in which she refocuses that house of Atreus myth through the lens of contemporary South African violence and political unrest.

Although there has not been a decline in the validity and usefulness attributed to Classical Greek plays, there has been a considerable attempt to “de-mystify” them (e.g., Charles Mee’s *Big Love*). According to Hardwick, “The issue of canonicity now tends to be associated with flexibility and transferability of language, situation, and meaning rather than implying exact reproduction of an ancient text or performance” (211). This is seen in the radical remaking and recycling of many of these ancient plays (especially through textual adaptations).

Green attributes the move away from “authenticity” and traditionalism in producing the classics to three factors: the rise in the dominance of the director, suspicion of the “text” in the late twentieth century, and the cultural dominance of United States pop culture on a global scale (8-10). Because of this “move” away from traditional concepts of authorship, it is often difficult to determine the “author” of any one stage adaptation. Is it Aeschylus, the translator, the adaptor, or the director? It is equally difficult to determine a “standard” from which to judge these productions. Are they to be treated as new plays or ancient plays, are they judged by new or ancient standards, or can a “touchstone” production act as an aesthetic meter for future productions? What is the

moment in the staging of a Classical Greek tragedy in which the play breaks with the “classical” and becomes a completely new play?

For instance, the most produced rewrite of any Aeschylean tragedy is Charles Mee’s *Big Love*. In production programs it is credited as, “*Big Love* by Charles Mee, based on *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus.” Although it is a distant relative, its relationship to Aeschylus’ play demonstrates what Helene Foley observes about American playwrights in “The Millenium Project: Agamemnon in the United States”: “Americans seem to want to rewrite the play(s) [of Aeschylus] themselves, even while they also view performance of the original as a highly significant theatrical challenge” (339). It is not only the distant relatives and the adaptations that “demystify” the Classical Greek tragedies by bringing them closer to the target culture. There are also traces of the “demystifying” in many of the supposed translations. Peter Meineck in the *Classical Reception in Drama and Poetry in English from c. 1970 to the Present, Electronic Seminar Series Archive*, articulates this move away from the “sacredness” of the Classical Greek plays to accessible rewrites,

I am interested in ways we can further develop performance studies in Greek drama to a practical end, not a self serving one that aims to keep the base of knowledge circulating among a select group of specialized scholars but seeks to disseminate the often exciting research and reach firstly, directors, designers and actors and then in turn audiences.

Although the rise in the publication of rewrites has been erratic, the productions of such rewrites have steadily increased along with the role of the director on the American and British stages. This is due to the very limited number of published translations and adaptations being used as performance scripts in America. Of those “limited” rewrites, commonalities in interpretation can certainly be detected. In most instances, these “commonalities” are due to the nature and language of the rewrite and

the powerful influence of high-profile productions on future directors. However, there are always deviations in production that exemplify the strength of the director and his/her use of Aeschylus' play. Because the American academic theatre produces the greatest number of Aeschylus' plays in the United States (and often maintains excellent records of such productions), it is a prime source for studying the relationship between translations, adaptations, and the American stage.

### Academic Theatre

Plugge reports that the first production of a Classical Greek play at an American university occurred at Harvard in 1881. This production, according to Plugge, was directed by Franklin Sargent and later toured New York and Boston in English translation (Goodwin). The majority of productions (from 1880 to 1915) were hosted by departments of classics rather than by departments of speech and theatre. This is not due to an issue of "domain" (who controls the production of these works), but simply to the late development of departments of theatre and speech in the American university system. After the establishment at most universities of departments of theatre and speech, these departments in most universities became the main producers of Classical Greek plays in English while departments of Greek or Classics continued to produce Classical Greek drama sometimes in Greek. Today, there are approximately 951 undergraduate programs of theatre and about forty-eight doctoral programs in the American university system.

There have been several important studies on the production of Classical Greek dramas in the commercial and non-academic theatres of Great Britain and the United