C E N S U R A E L I B R O R U M

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David Stuttard (ed.), *Looking at Antigone*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 247 pp., ISBN 978-1-3500-1711-5, £85.00*.

"Humane and sensitive translation with a stellar cast of insightful minds" (Michael Scott), "speakable translation" (Niall W. Slater), "a rich resource for both readers and performers" (Pat Easterling), "an accessible and informative resource" (Mary Lefkowitz). These are observations that any reader can find on the blurb of the volume. Generally speaking, it is hard not to agree with them.

The first thing that came to my mind while reading this volume was its admirable concept of combining a translation of Sophocles's *Antigone* with a collection of essays written by leading academic scholars that deal with a variety of issues concerning this play, which is one of the most popular, "influential and thought-provoking" ancient Greek tragedies (as is rightly written in the blurb and reinforced in the volume itself) and the most frequently performed worldwide. However, I do not fully agree with Michael Scott's opinion that this volume offers "new and exciting journeys into the rich texture of the play". Definitely they are "exciting", as *Antigone* is such a multi-layered piece of tragedy, and the texture of the play is rich and influential indeed, but I am not entirely certain that what the contributors propose is "new" (especially in the "fresh; not previously experienced or encountered; novel or unfamiliar; different from the former or the old" meaning of the word; at least for me, but I have to admit that this is one of my favourite ancient plays and the one that I once thoroughly studied while writing my PhD thesis), except perhaps for some ideas on incest, ecology and the environment, Ismene and the worldwide reception of *Antigone* that I was unfamiliar with. I would rather agree with Mary Lefkowitz's opinion that the volume is "informative", as it brings together the most popular and most commonly discussed themes of *Antigone*: the clashing natures of the leading characters, their relations with other minor characters in the play, the problem of religion and law, and the role of the gods. The fact that a brand new volume (again) on *Antigone* has been produced proves that these are still "thought-provoking" and disturbing issues.

There are twelve papers in the volume, preceded by the introduction and followed by the translation, both given by David Stuttard. In the introduction, Stuttard raises issues concerning the background of the drama, among which he recalls the Athenians' memories of monarchs and tyrants as those who should be resisted. He also discusses the possible date of the first performance, opting for Sophocles' experience as a general on Samos being the catalyst for writing the tragedy and thus for *Antigone* being a reflection of the political debate being held at that time in Athens. This connection may be incomprehensible for the modern (common) readers or audience, but the fact remains, as later in the volume Helen Foley puts it when discussing modern performances, that "the performance [or, we may add, any other adaptation, re-imagination or re-writing] of an apolitical *Antigone* seems virtually impossible". At the same time, however, Stuttard (like other contributors to this volume) rightly draws the reader's attention to the fact that some of the original issues no longer resonate with the modern public, while at the same time other that were considered controversial for the 5th century Athenian audience do speak to its modern counterpart, as for example the question of status, position and the role of a woman in society. This is undoubtedly one of the values of the book – to clearly distinguish historical and modern perspectives on issues raised by the play, to draw the reader's attention to the "culturally determined" (as Alex Garvie

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rightly put it in his paper) interpretations of *Antigone* and the assumed different reactions of the Athenian public to the play.

It has to be noted, however, that issues raised by the contributors sometimes overlap. Taking into consideration the deeply interwoven structure of *Antigone*, it is probably necessarily the case, as it is hard to distinctively separate issues raised by Sophocles. But it is also due to the idea of the book, about which David Stuttard writes in the preface: "As with other volumes in this series, I have allowed authors great freedom to choose those aspects of the play on which they wished to write, and most were relatively unaware of the content of each others' chapters. Inevitably, there is the occasional small overlap between some chapters, with which I have not interfered...". That is why I prefer reading the contributions as complementing each other and I suggest doing so (in fact, some of them should be read in pairs), especially as different chapters raise and emphasise various issues, acknowledged by some scholars and not seen or not regarded as that important by others. Looking from that perspective we get an interesting academic dialogue on *Antigone*, proving how much there is still to discuss and from how many angles this play can be analysed and interpreted.

Therefore, Alex Garvie (in a response to Christine Sourvinou-Inwood's paper on *Antigone*[1]) discusses episodes in the play in order to give some hints to the question posed in the title "Antigone: Right or Wrong?", but concludes, rightly in my opinion, that Sophocles rather wanted to raise relevant questions than to give precise answers. This paper definitely should be read together (a wish in fact expressed by the editor in a footnote) with the next chapter in the volume entitled "Antigone as Others See Her" by Alan H. Sommerstein, as they both discuss Antigone's deed and reach similar conclusions.

Brad Levett ("Assessing the Character of Creon") presents the idea of how the same principle or value can come into a conflict when regarded by different people. He mainly concentrates on the ambiguity of Creon's character, whose "stubborn nature and an inability to carefully disentangle ethical obligations" are "central to Creon's downfall".

Ruth Scodel ("Antigone's Change of Heart") discusses the once fairly controversial lines of the fourth epeisodion (which today are no longer considered spurious) and attributes the change of Antigone's standpoint by the end of the play, when she appeares for the last time, to the changed situation (meaning, as Antigone understands it, that the fame she was expected to gain after her death is uncertain) and a desire to defend her rationality.

Hanna M. Roisman ("The Two Sisters") thouroughly discusses the role and input of a minor character, Ismene, to the understanding of Antigone's character. She claims that Antigone's clash with her sister "reveals the intricacies" of the major figure. This interest in Ismene, expressed not only by Roisman, but also by Alex Garvie and Robert Garland, seems to be a good thing, as it attracts the readers's attention to the often neglected, minor characters of the play, their role in the play's structure and meanings, and their tragedy as well..

In the paper "Images and Effect of Incest in Sophocles' *Antigone*", Sophie Mills argues that both Creon and Antigone destroy their families because they confuse "categories through flawed perception", which is part of their closer (in the case of Antigone) and broader (in Creon's case) heritage of Oedipus' family bonds. Thus, Creon confuses "the rights and wrongs of leaving a corpse unburied", people with animals, and the dead with the living (which disrupts the natural order Rush Rehm discusses in his paper). Antigone, for her part, confuses the nature of love, as she seems to love Polyneices, her dead brother, more than Ismene and Haemon, and the nature of motherhood, as her reaction towards her dead brother shows.

The previously-mentioned Rush Rehm in his interesting paper ("*Antigone* and the Rights of the Earth") discusses what we might call the ecological aspect of the play. He writes: "Time and again, Greek tragedy evokes the interdependance of human and civic wellbeing and the health of the

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[1] *Sophocles' Antigone as a "Bad Woman"*, in: F. Dieteren, E. Klock (eds.), *Writing Women in History*, Amsterdam, 1990, pp. 11–38.

grain-bearing soil". He poses an interesting (even controversial) question: "It may seem obvious that tragedy acknowledges the earth and calls attention to its importance. But does this awareness translate into the idea that the earth possesses 'rights'?". He reminds that: "Although fifth-century Athenians did not conceive of the natural world *per se* sacred, they did recognize that their lives depend on that world and worked towards placating and harnessing its power". Thus, he discusses the role of sacred, undefiled places (which escape Creon's control) that "evoke divine presence and power" as well as the role of Hades. All of them are much more powerful than Creon's decree and in fact the power of nature (the earth) takes its revenge as Creon abuses his position.

The next paper, written by Stephen Esposito and entitled "Revealing Divinity in Sophocles' *Antigone*" should be read together with Rehm's chapter. Esposito discusses the role and intervention of "higher natural and cosmic powers" in the play, with which Antigone's deed is somehow related. In his opinion, this intervention is obvious enough although not overwhelming, and is seen for the audience rather than for the actors on stage. In a way, this one should also be read together with the above-mentioned paper by Ruth Scodel, as it presents a different perspective of reading the fourth epeisodion of the play.

Robert Garland's chapter, "Religion in *Antigone*", enters into a dialogue not only with Esposito's paper, but also with other in the volume. He argues that the play is about "religious obligations and the interpretation of religious law" by human beings and thus the crucial cause of the tragedy is human error, without any evidence of the gods "working behind the scenes".

Ioanna Karamanou ("Euripides' Reception of Sophocles' *Antigone*") discusses Euripides' dialogue with Sophocles' *Antigone*, in the *Phoenissae* and extant fragments of his own *Antigone*, and the way he re-uses and re-figures the older play. She argues that Euripides' treatment of the story is deeply imbued with Sophoclean elements.

The last two papers in the volume deal with the modern reception of Sophocles' play. They prove how influential a play *Antigone* still is. Helen Foley ("The Voices of Antigone") presents how the "clashing voices" of Antigone and Creon resonate in different performances, adaptations and new versions of the play prepared in different situations in various places around the world. She discusses examples from South America and Africa in which the leading themes are deaths, disappearances and losses under regimes or dictatorships; from Mexico with leading themes concerning missing sisters and daughters; from Japan and Italy dealing with the difficult past of the countries; and from Istanbul raising the question of human rights. Betine van Zyl Smit, for her part ("Antigone Enters the Modern World"), discusses how the myth of Antigone is re-shaped and re-imagined by modern creative artists and how Antigone became a "fearless champion of traditional piety and family loyalty, a bold rebel, defying tyrannical rule". Because of the huge number of performances based on Sophocles' play and hence the impossibility of presenting a thorough overview in one paper, after an overall review of re-interpretations of *Antigone* over the centuries, emphasising the first performance in Potsdam in 1841 and Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* in 1944, she narrows her chapter mainly to two: *The Island*, created by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, which deals with the question of resistance against an oppressive state (this part of the paper may be considered a continuation of Helen Foley's one) and *Antigone in Molenbeek* by Stefan Hertmans, which "responds to the contemporary crisis of cultural and religious conflict in Europe and the modern world", presenting one of the most pressing problems, that of families involved in religious conflicts in multi-cultural Europe.

Recalling the "new" question from the beginning of my review, I found it interesting and relevant as well that, disturbing a person as she is (and the contributors do not oversimplify her character, which I have to admit is of great benefit to the volume), no one claims that Antigone is wrong and that Creon's decree not to bury Polyneices is right. Underlining the ambiguity of Antigone's nature, behaviour and deeds, and the even less attractive features of her character that may incite divergent responses, a reader gets a character that is greatly deepened and enriched and definitely much more interesting. At the same time, however, I found it surprising that so few words in the volume are said about Antigone's σωφροσύνη. Instead, what seems to be underscored is her intuitiveness and emotionality. The contributors also seem to agree that the principle of "cardinal importance" of the play is

the fact that any dead deserve burial and thus the main issue that triggers the tragedy is the question of the inflexibility and the headstrong nature of the two main individuals, who are "clashing voices", as Helen Foley puts it, that cannot communicate with one another and cannot back down.

The translation by David Stuttard is considered "humane and sensitive", "speakable", "performer-friendly, accurate and easily accessible" (adjectives from the blurb). As with others concerning the volume, it is hard not to agree with that, although I think many would say that it is too easy and too speakable.

David Stuttard himself is the founder of the theatre company Actors of Dionysos and has so far edited three *Looking at* volumes for Bloomsbury: *Lysistrata* (2010), *Medea* (2014) and *Bacchae* (2016). In the "Introduction: *Antigone*, A Play for Today?" he clearly exposes his ideas on translation, especially, I think, from the perspective of a theatre director who is aware of the performative dimension of any stage play (and there is no doubt that Greek dramas were devised to be performed on stage) as well as its need to be immediately comprehensible for and communicative with the audience. This is an idea with which many modern translation studies' scholars would agree[2]. He writes, to quote it in full:

> From what has gone before, it can be seen that there is much about Greek tragedy and the culture that created it, that is alien to the modern world. To appreciate its dramatic impact requires active translation – not just the translation of the text for those who do not read classical Greek, but the translation of ideas and values rooted in fifth-century BC Athens to the context of the modern world. Inevitably these acts of translation involve both compromises and, in some instances, changes to the original meaning. Sometimes these can be nuanced, sometimes whole scale, but every translator must to a greater or a lesser extent impose their own interpretation.

It goes without saying that every translation is an interpretation conditioned by its own time and many circumstances that create the "horizon of a translator" as Antoine Berman once put it[3]. Also, that any drama from the past, in one way or the other, needs to be adapted, re-imagined and re-fashioned for the modern world[4]. Translation of an ancient drama is a tricky business: this is a play from the past which we (and I do not mean classical scholars) probably have no key to anymore; this is a poetry of lines we do not have in modern languages; this is a piece of theatre that is usually considered to be literature meant to be read (and not staged in the first place; in fact any translator has to respond to this now commonly accepted twofold nature of drama)[5]. Therefore, to use the quotation from J.M. Walton, the "real issue in translating [...] plays from ancient Greek, is of restraint and

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[2] In fact J. Michael Walton claims that "for the most part, the 'better' translators are those who were aware of the nature of a dramatic script, and the manner in which it accommodated visual image, dramatic rhythm and performance potential, in addition to their having a solid knowledge of the source language" (*Translating Classical Plays. Collected Papers*, New York 2016, p. 22).

[3] A. Berman, *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, Paris 1995, pp. 64–83; cf. J. Brzozowski, *Stanąć po stronie tłumacza. Zarys poetyki opisowej przekładu*, Kraków 2011; L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, London – New York 1995.

[4] Cf. J. Ziomek, *Projekt wykonawcy w dziele literackim a problemy genologiczne*, in: idem, *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice*, Warszawa 1980, p. 117; J. Balmer, *What Comes Next? Reconstructing the Classics*, in: S. Bassnett, P. Bush (eds.), *The Translator as Writer*, New York 2006, pp. 184–195; Walton, *op. cit*. (n. 2), p. 11.

[5] Scholars agree that it belongs both to the realm of literature (as it apparently has an established verbal form and undeniable intrinsic worth) and to the realm of theatre (as there is the whole dimension of performance to be added and potential meanings which are created, established and re-established during the performance).

licence, or, if you prefer, faithfulness to or freedom from the original"[6]. Every translator of a work from the past finds himself/herself in a difficult position and thus the decision whether (s)he should foreignise or domesticate the translation. Stuttard's priorities[7], in my opinion, are put on words that should be spoken by an actor and listened to by the audience rather than read by a reader, in my opinion. Therefore, he refrains from rendering ancient metric verses and all the peculiarites of the Greek language into English (the translation is in prose, but the parts written in other than iambic trimeter verses are given in a changed layout and lowercase lettering) as well as sometimes from Sophocles' grandeur in order to save the clarity of meanings and directness of the play's dialogues and poetry. At the same time, however, he does not conceal or soften the disturbing features either of Antigone or of Creon that make this tragedy.

For example, the famous opening lines of the play are rendered as follows:

> Ismene! Sister! Blood of my blood! Has Zeus – wait! Tell me! Can you think of any punishment that Zeus is not inflicting on us two, the last survivors, for the sins of Oedipus? Pain, torment, shame, dishonour – we've experienced them all. And now? Now?
> Have you heard of this new edict that they're saying the General's just broadcast to the city and the people? Do you know anything about it?...
> Don't you know that sanctions more appropriate for enemies are being imposed on our own family?

Clearly the dominant feature[8] of his translation is the comprehensibility and accessibility for the modern public[9]. I can easily imagine that some of his choices may be disputable or controversial, but on the other hand, any drama has its "right to revision of emphasis in a new time and under different sensibilities and preoccupations"[10]. In any case, translations are volatile, so for those who do not think this translation is good enough, all that remains is to wait for a new one.

To conclude, this volume is worth much attention and should be highly esteemed. Sophocles' *Antigone* is still a challenge, still raises relevant questions, still resonates with us and our modern world, even if we have different experiences and we read and understand this piece through different lenses than the Athenians from the 5th century BC. I do believe that this play together with its complexity and multi-dimensionality will provoke further questions and new versions in future years as well[11]. So probably (and hopefully) this is not the last volume dedicated to this beautiful and excellent tragedy, as it is still thought-provoking and influential a play.

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[6] Walton, *op. cit*. (n. 2), p. 139.

[7] Cf. P. Woodruff, *Justice in Translation: Rendering Ancient Greek Tragedy*, in: J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Malden–Oxford 2005, pp. 490–504.

[8] Cf. A. Bednarczyk, *W poszukiwaniu dominanty translatorskiej*, Warszawa 2008; S. Barańczak, *Ocalone w tłumaczeniu. Szkice o warsztacie tłumacza poezji z dołączeniem małej antologii przekładów*, Poznań 1992.

[9] Scholars of culture-oriented approaches to translation studies claim that adapting to the current norms and conventions guarantees acceptability in the receiving culture, cf. G. Toury, *The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation*, in: idem, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1995, pp. 53–69; T. Hermans, *Translation and Normativity*, in: Ch. Schäffner (ed.), *Translations and Norms*, Clevedon 1999, pp. 50–71.

[10] J.M. Walton, *Found in Translation: Greek Drama in English*, Cambridge 2009, p. 193.

[11] As every "reading of a play will vary from age to age, from culture to culture, from reader to reader, and from performance to performance", S. Aaltonen, *Time-Sharing on Stage*, Clevedon 2000, p. 37.