

Debating with the Eumenides
*Aspects of the Reception of
Greek Tragedy in Modern Greece*

Pierides

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Pierides

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Volume VII

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Greek Tragedy in Modern Greece*

Edited by

Vayos Liapis, Maria Pavlou
and Antonis K. Petrides

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prisoners of the Greek Civil War. Her most recent book, *Stage of Emergency: Theater and Public Performance under the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967-1974* (OUP, 2015), analyses theatre life, performance, and censorship under the Greek junta. Her current book project, tentatively entitled *Adoption, Memory and Cold War Greece*, is taking her into the new, uncharted terrain of Greek adoption stories that become paradigmatic of Cold War politics and history.

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INTRODUCTION

ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

III. ΟΛΑ ΠΕΡΝΟΥΝ

Ξεχάσαμε τον ηρωικό μας αντίλογο με τις Ευμενίδες
μας πήρε ο ύπνος μας πήραν για πεθαμένους κι έφυγαν φωνάζοντας
“Γιου! Γιου! Πούουου...παξ!”
βρίζοντας τους θεούς που μας προστατεύουν.

III. EVERYTHING PASSES

We forgot our heroic debate with the Eumenides
we fell asleep, they took us for dead and they fled shouting
“Yiou! Yiou! Pououou... pax!”
cursing the gods that protect us.

GEORGE SEFERIS

Trnsl. Keeley & Sheppard, adapted
Book of Exercises, I (Athens 1940)

The Eumenides Project

Eight of the nine articles included in this volume were first presented at a conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, on December 21-22, 2014. The conference marked the culmination of a three-year research project (2012-2015) under the direction of Vayos Liapis, titled “Our Heroic Debate with the Eumenides: Greek Tragedy and the Poetics of Identity in Modern Greek Poetry and Theatre”. The Eumenides project was hosted by the Open University of Cyprus and funded by the Cyprus Research Promotion Foundation (<http://eumenides.ouc.ac.cy>). As suggested by the title, which is inspired by the short Seferis poem quoted in the epigraph above, Eumenides examined the complex reception of ancient tragic drama in Greece and Cyprus as a process of negotiating both a modern(ist) cultural poetics and a new sense of self.

Modern Greek national and cultural identities consist, largely, of clusters of cultural memory shaped by an ongoing dialogue with the

classical past. In this dialogue between modern Greece and classical antiquity, Greek tragedy takes pride of place. Having been part of the Western canon for a long time, Greek tragedy has proved exceptionally malleable as an interpretive lens through which to focus contemporary crises, ideological tensions, and political dynamics. The Eumenides project aimed to catalogue and analyse the multifarious ways in which ancient Greek tragedy and tragic myth have been adapted, reinterpreted, revised, or re-imagined in modern Greek poetry and theatre from the late 19th century to the present day. One of the project's fundamental objectives was to explore how modern Greek authors established strategies for the creation of meaning(s) by inviting audiences to respond not only to the text itself but to a network of texts invoked by it—in this case, to a network of Greek tragic texts that are filtered or encoded through their modern successors.

Reception of ancient drama and modern scholarship

The Eumenides Project aspired to be a part of a thriving field of modern scholarship on the Greek classics. The reception of ancient drama is currently among the most fertile and stimulating areas of research throughout the Western world. Work similar to the Eumenides Project has already been undertaken by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University, under the direction of Fiona Macintosh, focusing mainly on the performance reception of ancient drama and dealing with revivals and adaptations of ancient plays on stage, film and radio, and in opera and dance. Also, Lorna Hardwick at the British Open University directed a major project exploring “Classical Receptions in Late Twentieth Century Drama and Poetry in English”. The drama section of the project which included plays staged in the period c.1971-2005 ended in 2007.

Further, the modern reception of Greek and Roman drama in its various ramifications has been the subject of an increasing number of major recent publications. Primary among these is a comprehensive handbook to the reception of ancient drama edited by Van Zyl Smit (2016), which complemented the earlier books on the reception of the Classics at large by Hardwick and Stray (2008) and Fornaro et al. (2008). The contributors to Van Zyl Smit (2016) map the reception of Greek theatre far and wide, from its very beginnings in the 5th century B.C. to this day, and from Greece itself to the furthestmost parts of the modern world, east and west. Van Zyl Smit (2016) is thus the natural starting point for any aspiring student of the reception of ancient drama. As a guide to

further reading, the following paragraphs attempt to highlight the most important (book-length) recent studies in the various sectors of the field.

To begin with the overall impact of ancient classical culture on the modern world, Hardwick and S.J. Harrison (2013) discuss the role of Classics, including of course drama, in modern democratic practices and theoretical approaches to democracy (see also Stead and Hall 2015 on the use of the classics in the British struggle for social reform). Billings and Leonard (2015) focus on the contribution of ancient tragedy to the formation of modernity. In the same vein, Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley (2004) trace the connection between Greek tragedy and the cultural transformations of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. Various ideological myths involved in Western re-performances of tragedy are studied by Laera (2013). Turning to Greece, Van Steen (2000, 2011, 2015) analyses the various (mainly political) applications of Aristophanes and Greek tragedy in modern Greece, and Tziovas (2014) explores how the Greek past, and its drama, has been re-imagined as the cornerstone of Modern Greek cultural identity.

Modern re-performances of ancient tragic plays, especially in the 20th century, have often been driven by visionary *auteurs*, as stressed in MacDonald (1992) and most recently Rodosthenous (2017). An expansive, yet not exhaustive, catalogue of theatrical revivals of classical drama in Europe from 1585 to 1990 can be found in Flashar (1991). On a more localised level, Smith (1988) charts the rediscovery of Greek and Roman plays in the public theatres and other less conventional venues of Renaissance and Jacobean England (1500-1700). Hall and Macintosh (2005) expand the scope to the period 1660-1914, and Wrigley (2011) scrutinises chiefly the institution of the Oxford Greek Play. MacDonald and Walton (2002) study Irish versions of Greek tragedy. Lohse and Malatrait (2006) and Dreyer (2014) deal with modern revivals of ancient drama in Germany; Humbert-Mougin (2003) in France of 1870-1920; Hartigan (1995), Andreach (2003) and Foley (2012) in the United States; and Bosher et al. (2015) more widely in the Americas. Classics (and Greek drama) in different postcolonial environments is the subject of Decreus and Mieke (2004) and Hardwick and Gillespie (2007).

Naturally, re-performances of ancient drama in Greece are of especial interest to the readers of this volume, which, nonetheless, focuses mostly on poetry and dramaturgy. Sideris (1976) investigates the re-performances of years 1817–1932 (the heyday and the collapse of *Megálē Idéa*), while Andreadis (2005) covers the period 1867-2000, and Ioannidou (2017) deals more specifically with the post-modern rewritings of the classical oeuvres that came in vogue in the period 1970-2005 (see also Chapter Six

of this book). Anatomising the foremost institution of classical reception in the country, Arvaniti (2010) presents the tragedy performances at the National Theatre of Greece. A catalogue of revivals performed by Karolos Koun's Theatro Technēs, the second pillar of ancient drama in the modern Greek world, can be found in Mavromoustakos (2008). Tsokou (2016) provides a brief overview of work done by the National Theatre of Northern Greece. Completing the picture with a peripheral yet dynamic centre of ancient theatre reception, Hadjicosti and Constantinou (2013) collect essays dealing with the reception of ancient theatre on the modern Greek – Cypriot stage. A complete inventory of professional and amateur performances of ancient drama in Cyprus can be found in Katsouris (2005), for the period 1860-1959, and in Constantinou (2007), for 1960-1974.

Single tragic plays have also come into scrutiny concerning their reception in literature and on stage. Major studies include: Bierl (1999²) on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, with Macintosh et al. (2005) on *Agamemnon*; Hall, Macintosh and Taplin (2000), Wetmore (2013) and Heavey (2015) on Euripides' *Medea*; Hall (2013) on Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*; Honig (2013) on Sophocles' *Antigone* [updating the classic work of Steiner (1984)]; Macintosh (2009) on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* [the reception of all the Oedipus tragedies had been previously analysed by Mueller (1980)]; and Fischer-Lichte (2014) on Euripides' *Bacchae*.

A detailed outline of literary approaches to Greek tragedy in European literature of the 20th and 21st centuries is sketched by Liapis (2008). Horn (2007) contributes a study of German reworkings of ancient tragic themes or, in his words, "German-speaking ancient dramas". Walton (2006) investigates modern English translations/adaptations of ancient drama. Aspects of the literary reception of Greek tragedy in English are also studied in S. J. Harrison (2009).

As far as Greek myth is concerned, its modern resignification has been intricately connected to the major ancient dramatic works that shaped it. Thus, Chassapi-Christodoulou's two-volume study on the reception of myth in Modern Greek drama (2002) deals largely with the reworking of mythic material from Greek tragedy. Goodkin (1984), Modellmog (1993), Eynat-Confino (2008) and Renger (2013) survey different modern adaptations of the Oedipus myth mostly in literature, Goff and Simpson (2007) of the Oedipus and Antigone narratives as treated by the African diaspora, whereas Komar (2003) looks at modern Clytemnestras, Bakogianni (2011) at transformations of Electra, and lastly Raizis (1983), Wutrich (1995) and Duchemin (2000) at the theme of Prometheus.

The musical and dance aspect of ancient tragedy has also been

variously received in the modern world. Good starting points are provided, for ancient heroines in the opera, by MacDonald (2001); more generally for ancient drama in music for the modern stage by Brown and Ograjenšek (2010); for dancing by Macintosh (2010); and for choruses by Fix (2009) and Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh (2013).

Finally, the reception of classical antiquity, and drama, in the cinema has been the subject of studies such as: MacDonald (1983); MacKinnon (1986); Winkler (2001), (2009)—neither exclusively focused on tragedy but both with excellent chapters thereon; Fusillo (2007); Michelakis (2013); and Nikoloutsos (2013).

The contents of this volume

This volume is divided into three parts. The introductory, methodological chapter by Lorna Hardwick expounds on the multifaceted workings of intertextuality in the process(es) of reception. There follow four chapters on the transformation of ancient drama in modern Greek poetry focusing on George Seferis, Yannis Ritsos and Kyriakos Charalambides (Paschalis, Demetriou, Pavlou, Petrides). The volume closes with another four chapters delving into the interplay between modern Greek theatre and the tragic drama of the classical past (Grammatas and Dimaki-Zora, Van Steen, Konstantakos, Liapis).

In Chapter 1 (“**Can ‘Transmission’ and ‘Transformation’ be Reconciled?**”), **Hardwick** insists that no single theoretical framework can suffice as a general explanation of the processes of reception. Instead, linear models which privilege the ante-text (“influence”) or the new text (“appropriation”, “rewriting”) may need to be complemented by more dynamic ones that recognise a “dialogue” between the ancient and the modern texts, initiated either by the author/poet or by the reader. Crucially, this dialogue is by necessity punctuated by an indefinite number of other mediating texts—wider contextualities, one might say, which do away with the fallacy of unidirectional receptions. Hardwick finds an example of explicit multi-directionality in the reception of Homer through Cavafy in the work of Irish poets Derek Mahon and Michael Longley.

Another instance of such an unequivocally “triangular” dialogue, relevant to the reception of ancient drama, is provided by **Antonis Petrides** in Chapter 5 of this book (“**Dialogising Aeschylus in the Poetry of Kyriakos Charalambides**”): Petrides analyses two poems by the Greek-Cypriot poet Kyriakos Charalambides, which look at Aeschylus (both at his work and at his fictionalised persona) through Cavafy and Seferis. In the example of Charalambides, reception is understood

agonistically as competition either with an ancient authority, whose axiomatic positions on a matter need to be refuted, and/or with modern, mainstream constructions of this authority, which require, in the manner of Seferis, an ηρωικός αντίλογος: such a “heroic debate” Charalambides undertakes with Aeschylus and simultaneously with two modern authoritative voices that condition his reception in modern literature, Cavafy and Seferis.

Apart from Petrides, three other chapters discuss modern poetic conversations with ancient Greek drama. **Michael Paschalis** (Chapter 2, **“George Seferis and Euripides’ *Bacchae*”**) exposes the relationship between Seferis’ work on translating Euripides’ *Bacchae* (a translation he never completed) and the conception of his emblematic short poem “Pentheus”. Seferis’ notes and surviving drafts of the translation, for the study of which Paschalis retrieved material from the poet’s archive in Vikelaia Library in Heraklion, Crete, afford the rare opportunity to look at a modern poem *in statu nascendi*, through the poet’s creative engagement not only with the ante-text itself, but also with seminal works of scholarship on it, such as Winnington-Ingram’s book *Euripides and Dionysus*—a decisive mediating influence. Seferis, Paschalis shows, converses with the modern scholar as much as with the ancient playwright.

Demetra Demetriou (Chapter 3, **“Myth, the Mask, and the “Masquerade” of Femininity: Performing Gender in Yannis Ritsos’ “Ismene”**) and **Maria Pavlou** (Chapter 4, **“The Brightness of Philoctetes’ Weapons in Yannis Ritsos’ “Philoctetes”**) turn their attentions to Yannis Ritsos and his *Fourth Dimension* (1972), an epochal collection of dramatic monologues mostly on mythological, indeed dramatic, themes. Demetriou’s focus is the performance of gender in the monologue “Ismene”, which glances mainly at Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Pavlou looks at “Philoctetes”, which is based on Sophocles’ homonymous tragedy.

In “Ismene”, Demetriou argues, Ritsos transforms the Sophoclean myth by centring on a now-aged Ismene and her rivalry with her sister. This rivalry is articulated on two radically opposed versions of femininity represented by each sister respectively, the gender-conformist Ismene and the gender-transgressive Antigone. Using, as he is wont to do, the ancient heroines as poetic masks, Ritsos broaches the question of (female) subjectivity in the *hic et nunc*, that is, under the double oppression of the Greek military junta and Soviet totalitarianism. Notably, Demetriou adds, Ritsos’ revision of Sophocles in “Ismene” is dialogised by the interposition of Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone*, which had made a splash on the Greek stage in 1947.

In her own Ritsos-themed chapter, Maria Pavlou attempts to supersede the modern fixation on reading the dialogues of the *Fourth Dimension* as autobiographical, political or historical allegories, and revisits Ritsos' work as a recasting of the myth of Philoctetes in an existentialist mould. Underlining Ritsos' interchange with the European movement of existentialism had been one of the highlights of the Eumenides Project. "Philoctetes", Pavlou argues, like other dramatic dialogues in the *Fourth Dimension*, pivots on the most fundamental themes of existentialism: "bad faith", anguish, authenticity, and freedom. First and foremost, she argues, without excluding other readings, Ritsos' "Philoctetes" is a dramatic monologue about human existence.

The remaining four chapters of the volume deal with Modern and ancient Greek theatre. **Theodore Grammatas** and **Maria Dimaki-Zora** (Chapter 6, "**Memories of Heroines in Memories of Spectators: Mythic, Dramatic and Theatrical Time from the Ancient Drama to the Modern Greek Theatre**") write about mythic, dramatic and theatrical time by problematising the concept of memory. Analysing transformations of Clytemnestra, Andromache and Medea in several late-20th and 21st-century plays, the authors examine different ways in which mythic time appears as a memory, an echo or a recollection, and how the spectators' own memories, brought to bear on the reception of the modern performance, open new interpretive possibilities for ancient drama.

In Chapter 7 ("**How to Do (in) Kings with Words: Radically Rewriting the Myth of the Atreids in Athens, 1964**"), **Gonda Van Steen** focuses on a major moment of Modern Greek theatre, namely Vangelis Katsanis' *Όταν οι Ατρείδες* (*When the Atreids* or *The Successors*). This play offers a radical rewriting of the Atreid myth, full of cruel violence and power-hungry monarchs posing as revolutionaries while enjoying their institutional prerogatives and lusting for more. Van Steen offers a close reading of the play and foregrounds its powerful reverberation, as a script on the stage infinitely more than as a prize-winning text in a drama competition, through the turbulent political climate of Greece in 1964. Van Steen chronicles the livid reaction of the political establishment, arguably influenced by the all-powerful Queen Mother Frederica herself, to the production of a play perceived as a direct attack on the institution of the monarchy, in a time when "antiroyal" practically equalled "communist".

Chapter 8 ("**Very Tragical Mirth: Myth and the Tragic in Pavlos Matessis' *Towards Eleusis***") by **Ioannis Konstantakos** anatomises Pavlos Matessis' play *Προς Ελευσίνα* (*Towards Eleusis*, 1992), which refashions the underlying myth of Eleusinian mysteries, that is, the

tribulations of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone, into a genuine form of modern tragedy for the contemporary stage. Matessis' play does not engage directly with any particular ancient drama or playwright. Instead, adopting an eclectic approach, it weaves together a plethora of themes and motifs from Greek religion and literature into an original plot, which is in fact loosely based on William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*. *Towards Eleusis* relates the journey of an ordinary peasant family to their home village, where they intend to lay to rest their deceased matriarch. This at first sight mundane occasion is elevated into a parable on life, death and rebirth. In Matessis' eyes, after all, the story of Demeter and Kore, although hardly ever the subject matter of ancient tragedies, is the tragic myth *par excellence*, the deeper structure of the essential tragic experience.

Finally, **Vayos Liapis'** Chapter 9 ("**Cassandra and the Centaur: Greek (Tragic) Myth in Marios Pontikas' Play *Neighing***") throws light on the most recent developments on the Modern Greek stage in relation to the reception of ancient drama, as he zooms in on Marios Pontikas' "stage triptych" *Neighing* (*Χλιμίντρισμα*, 2011). Exploiting the aesthetics of post-dramatic theatre, Pontikas' play gives new shape to the myth of Cassandra (who now finds herself in conversation with the Centaur Chiron and the Erinyes) to express a pessimist, almost nihilistic vision: humanity has tragically failed as the "crown of creation"; so has Greek antiquity as the ultimate source of legitimisation. Naturally, Pontikas' play is replete with echoes especially of the *Oresteia*, but here the inarticulate speech that made Aeschylus' Cassandra so memorable stands for the collapse of both *logos* and logocentrism.

CHAPTER ONE

CAN TRANSMISSION AND TRANSFORMATION BE RECONCILED?

LORNA HARDWICK

“Homer was wrong . . . Homer was right though”
Derek Mahon (2005) “Calypso”

“Homer’s ghost came whispering to my mind”
Patrick Kavanagh (1951) “Epic”¹

Can “transmission” and “transformation” be reconciled?

This essay discusses some aspects of the aesthetic and cultural interfaces between ancient and modern Greek uses of myth and narrative in the Homeric epics. The poetry of C.P. Cavafy provides a distinctive nexus between Homer’s epic poetry and its multi-dimensional reception in modern Anglophone poetics, providing insights not only into intertextuality but also into other and more distant poetic relationships such as association, echoing and “glancing”.² Significantly, Peter Mackridge chose

* I would like to thank the volume editors for their initiative in devising the theme of the conference which generated this publication and for their helpful and penetrating critical comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of the Eumenides Project (<http://eumenides.ouc.ac.cy>) which is taking on such an important role in researching and publishing data on ancient texts and their use of mythological figures. It is this kind of collaborative and publicly orientated research that enables scholars and their students to work together on an international scale. The generous and freely available dissemination via its website of the work done by the project also enables interested members of the wider public to access information and ideas that promote understanding of ancient and modern Greek culture in its deepest and broadest sense.

¹ Kavanagh’s central role in modern Irish poetry and its responses to classical texts is discussed in Hardwick (2011).

² English versions of Cavafy’s poems are quoted in the translations by Evangelos

as the sub-title for his Introduction to the *Oxford World's Classics* edition of Cavafy's poems, "*Cavafy's 'slight angle to the universe'*".³ The heuristic use of such metaphorical terms opens up multi-directional relationships, some of which take their energy from the author's poetic techniques while some bring to the text insights initiated by the reader's response, a response that may in practice be, consciously or unconsciously, a response to mediating texts that relate both to the ante-text and to the new text.⁴ There are a number of models that have been used to categorise and explain the relationship between ancient texts and their subsequent translations, adaptations and creative rewritings. The traditional emphasis on linear and chronological "influences" has been largely superseded by two-way models, such as "dialogue" and "conversation", that attribute on-going agency both to the ante-text and to the new text and thus locate power in both the ancient and the modern, rather than in *either* the ancient *or* the modern. However, unidirectional models still persist and these usually either take the ancient text as the yardstick for assessing "influence" or they emphasise the agency of later activists in—for example—appropriation or rewriting. I suggest, however, that it is also necessary to find ways of mapping other features, such as creative deviations, repressions and un-signalled or free migrations that are not directly linear. Indeed, no single theoretical framework is satisfactory on its own as a source of general explanation.

As a contribution to the on-going discussion about the generation of multidirectional energy, I take as central to this dynamic C. P. Cavafy's Homer-related poems, of which "Ithaca" is probably the best known.⁵ The importance of Cavafy's Homeric poems for my topic is due—at least in part—to their spatial as well as temporal interactions with other receptions of ancient material, which themselves focus on key tropes such as *nostos*,

Sachperoglou (Cavafy, 2007) with the exception of "Priam's Night Journey", which is quoted in the translation by Seth Schein (2016) 138-139.

³ Cavafy (2007) xi.

⁴ For instance, "associations" may be generated by the sensibility of the poet or of the reader but the latter are not necessarily confined to material within the poem or the poet's oeuvre. Associations may change over time as the result of cultural shifts and with readerly experience. "Glancing" is a productively ambivalent term that embraces not only the quick allusion or side glance but also the way in which poetic practices can touch and then be deflected away from each other, within and between poems. The cricketing term "leg glance" conveys a similar impression of lightness and elegance in (the batsman's) technique.

⁵ Cavafy (2007) 28-75.

nekyia, katabasis, anagnōrisis.⁶ Those interactions take up resonances that may be explicit or implicit in the ancient material and in the texts through which the ideas have been mediated.

Texts and myths have often been discussed in terms of approaches to translational and creative practice that distinguish between “transmission” (of an accepted text and/or interpretation) and “transformation”. Transformation is a concept that covers a range of possibilities that may include:

(i) The re-imagination of the text and its narrative and figures, and the way in which its new audiences and readers imagine their own world and that of the ancient text.

(ii) The transformative agency of the work of the writers, story-tellers, and theatre practitioners who engage with the ancient material. This engagement sometimes points to a crisis point or watershed in their own aesthetic practices. The term also applies to the poets and dramatists in antiquity who created new work in response to previous works and myths. Thus “transmission” may involve a series of “transformations”.

(iii) In addition, there is an increasing degree of overlap between the dynamics associated with “transmission” and “transformation” in the present day, as public perceptions of antiquity in the wider community become distanced from knowledge of ancient texts and contexts. Public perceptions increasingly rely on the way that translations, adaptations and new creative work present antiquity to contemporary sensibilities (both aesthetic and socio-political). This is paralleled by scholars’ awareness that the relationships between ante-text, mediating text and “new” texts are not invariably overt or linear, and that creative practices not only yield new readings of particular texts, old and new, but also suggest different frameworks of explanation of the relationships between them.

Practice, Theory and Scholarship (I)

There are both ancient and modern models for considering how the relationship between the cultural artefact and its antecedents is framed, interpreted and used, and how modern responses to ancient material and to

⁶ These concepts can be roughly translated as: “homeward journey”; “calling up and questioning of the ghosts of the dead”; “descent to the underworld”; “recognition (of another and/or of oneself)”. The importance of these as tropes lies in the poetic nuances through which they are explored and their repetition with differences, both within a particular text and in the texts with which it is in dialogue; see further Hardwick (2016) with bibliography.

intervening and contemporary works are enmeshed. Such enmeshing results in questioning and disrupting simple unidirectional transmission and prompts the use of metaphorical images such as “web”, “network” or “palimpsest” to describe them. In this increasingly iterative network of allusions and re-imaginings, the response of modern Greek writing to ancient antecedents is distinctive and sometimes pivotal, but by no means unproblematic. Studies of the sometimes contested relationship between antiquity, modernity and contemporary energies have revealed the richness of this infrastructure for European and world literature as well as for Modern Greek cultural politics. A recent example is the collection of essays edited by Dimitris Tziovas, *Re-Imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*. That collection is especially valuable because of the way it demonstrates how the reception of antiquity cannot be seen in isolation from the reception of other historical periods in Greek culture and politics, including the Byzantine and Ottoman. The reception of the past is in its turn a feature of those periods and contexts. Tziovas’ Introduction starts with a bold statement: “A nation or country can be judged by the way it engages with its past and its memories”.⁷ His discussion continues with a focus on the relationship between continuity and diversity:

The debate about the past in Greece involves a clash of two competing temporalities: one promoting the notions of succession, continuity and conservation of the past, and the other based on a hybrid fusion. . . Relying as they do on linearity and the conservation of ethnic and aesthetic autonomy, earlier notions of the past are now challenged by a postmodern (and pre-modern) emphasis on the materiality of antiquity and its changing or syncretic daily uses.⁸

I want to acknowledge the importance of this overarching conceptual framework and then to focus this short discussion on one aspect that may contribute to an investigation of the larger issues identified by Tziovas and in particular extend the topic beyond issues of national cultures. My focus will be on the literary imagination and the way in which the confluence of ancient Greek, modern Greek and modern European insights disrupt secure models of linear transmission.⁹ This is not only part of a modern

⁷ Tziovas (2014), “Introduction” 1.

⁸ Tziovas (2014), “Introduction” 5-6.

⁹ The essay by Petrides in this volume discusses similar issues through close analysis of the interaction between ancient and modern Greek literary texts, demonstrating how the modern text can be “doubly transformative of both the ante-text itself and, potentially, of modern dialogues with it” (p. 103).

transformative aesthetic but also acknowledges the pliability and diversity of the ancient imagination and the insights it injects into the future. The role of Cavafy's poetry itself signals a poetic voice that is displaced from a national cultural centre and speaks with special force to other writers who experience similar tensions. The topic also helps bridge artificial polarities between, on the one hand, romanticised notions of creativity as primarily offering the "new" and, on the other, the emphasis in much postmodern scholarship on fragmentation and "recycling".¹⁰

Intertextualities: Mahon and Cavafy

My first example of how the "Homeric ghost" is transmitted and transformed by Cavafy, and so permeates subsequent literatures, is from the work of the modern Irish poet, Derek Mahon. Mahon was born in 1941 in Belfast in the north of Ireland. The Six Counties in the north of Ireland are still part of the United Kingdom but have been afflicted by historic and persisting religious and political divisions. Mahon has worked as a teacher in America, Canada, Ireland and London, and his poetry often reflects his struggles to find a community to which he can easily belong. This search is set against verbal images of desolate landscapes and scenes of cosmic isolation and flux. His classical education and knowledge provide some settings and also underlie his poetic engagement with themes of longing.

The opening line of Mahon's 2005 poem "Calypso" surprises and intrigues the reader.¹¹ "Homer was wrong, she never 'ceased to please'". There is a quotation within a quotation. The phrase "ceased to please" is taken from the popular translation of *Odyssey* 5.153 by E. V. Rieu (p. 92). Rieu's translation, published in 1946 by Penguin, has sold many millions of copies and has provided an intertext which Irish poets (including those such as Mahon and Michael Longley, both of whom can also read Homer in the original) have used as a springboard for the exploration of Homeric themes that shed light on the relationship between Greek and Irish landscapes and politics.¹² There is a rich 20th-century Irish tradition of rewriting Homer that starts with James Joyce and W. B. Yeats and

¹⁰ For formulations of this dichotomy in classical receptions, see Hardwick (2008) and for its expression in high-modernist and postmodernist perspectives, see Eagleton (2003) 182.

¹¹ This is the second and more developed version of the poem, published in his collection *Harbour Lights* (2005).

¹² One of Patrick Kavanagh's Homer-related poems was titled "On Looking into E. V. Rieu's Homer" (1951), resonating both with Rieu's translations and aligning himself with Keats "On first looking into Chapman's Homer" (1817).

continues via Patrick Kavanagh, Michael Longley and Mahon himself. Although there are other echoes of Rieu's phrasing, Mahon's poem moves away from the image of Odysseus weeping on the shore for his lost home because "the Nymph had long since ceased to please". Calypso is presented not as a siren distracting him from the journey home but as a wild girl (the Sapphic resonances of which have been suggested by Haughton).¹³ The poem is full of contemporary allusions and is in some sense an anti-epic. However, the problematic ending postpones closure. It echoes Cavafy and leaves open both the final sequence of the Homeric narrative and the role of poetry in the human psyche:

Homer was wrong, he never made it back; or,
if he did, spent many a curious night hour
still questioning that strange oracular face.

Mahon has reflected on poetry itself: "No doubt poetry, good or bad, is a waste of time, but waste, drift, contingency are the better part of wisdom".¹⁴

The iterations from Mahon's sometimes ironic poem are multi-directional. I want to mention just two of these movements—a lateral relationship with Michael Longley and a temporal relationship in which Mahon's poetics engage with Cavafy. Mahon's poem "Ithaca" is the opening poem to his collection *An Autumn Wind*.¹⁵ Although the poem mainly presents a focalised narrative that follows closely on Homer, *Odyssey* 13.187-365, its tone is largely ironic, even comic in its side-glances at devastating human problems. It is permeated with the language of the uncertainty of the displaced person whose anxiety prevents him from recognising his own past home:

Will they be primitive and barbarian
Or civilised people who will take me in?
Those damn swindlers offered a clear run
To Ithaca, and instead they've set me down
In a strange place I never saw before.

¹³ Haughton (2007) 355-359. Mahon also subverts both his statement and Rieu's translation when he picks up the trope later in the poem and says that "Homer was right" about the redemptive power of women. Irony is intensified in post-Cavafy responses to the idea of *nostos* (see below 21-22 for Longley's translation of Cavafy).

¹⁴ Quoted in Haughton (2007) 357.

¹⁵ Mahon (2010) 13-14.

The possibility of the traveller's inaction derives from a combination of ennui with paralysis in the face of the aural, psychological and even physical menace of the snake-like tide ("musing, lost and bored but still alive | He gathered up his gear and made his way | Along the cold edge of the hissing sea"). It is challenged by Athene in the practical words that close the poem (one might also characterise them as advice to the displaced and the immigrant and those who help them). The future is to be created not imposed:

"Our first task", said Athene, "is to stow
Your gold and bronzes in the sacred cave
And then decide on where we go from there".

We know from Mahon's extensive reading in European literature and from his other poetry that engagement with Cavafy was part of his poetic sensibility. This is sometimes directly acknowledged. For example, Mahon's collection *Adaptations* (2006) contains a sequence entitled "Alexandria" that is subtitled "*from the Greek of Constantine (C.P.) Cavafy, 1863-1933*". This ruminates on aspirations to encounter new countries and new experiences, and juxtaposes this with the deadening effect of a life confined.¹⁶

Cavafy's *topoi* and the poetics of reception

Cavafy was both a transmitter and transformer of perceptions of Homer and a poet with whom subsequent readers and writers are in dialogue—or, to put it metaphorically, through whom they "glance" at Homer.¹⁷ The nature of Cavafy's relationship with Homer and the types of "glance" that he inspired have been the subject of much debate. An important strand of interpretation emphasises that Cavafy's life experiences put him "on the borders" in several cultural contexts. Not only was he an Alexandrian Greek but he also spent much of his early life living and being educated in

¹⁶ Compare for example, Cavafy's poem "Walls" (1910): "Without consideration, without pity, without shame, | they built around me great and towering walls ... Imperceptibly, they shut me off from the world outside". Another of Cavafy's poems from the same period, "The City", explores the frustrations of trying to escape; "Any new lands you will not find: you'll find no other seas. | The city will be following you ... Always in the same city you'll arrive", Cavafy (2007) 12-13, 28-29.

¹⁷ Compare Prince (2005) which, following Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum, identifies four levels of relationship based on the actual or illusory presence of the ancient text or on its absence.

England.¹⁸ The Alexandrian context meant that “he wrote as part of a minority European community in a city—though once one of the centres of the world—that had become a minor North African backwater”.¹⁹ This lies behind Cavafy’s cultural itinerancy and especially his capacity to capture settings in which culture is fluid, language can be a patois, and the sea a medium of continual intermingling.²⁰ Out of this landscape and seascape comes a change in what Ithaca is and represents, with the result that it can no longer be a fixed or terminal destination.²¹ This transformation embraces both the contexts of Cavafy’s own lived experience and his conflicted relationship with Homer, problematised in his unpublished ms. “Second Odyssey” (1894) and his essay “The Last Days of Odysseus”, published in 1894 and accompanied by epigraphs from Dante and Tennyson.²²

The English context meant that Cavafy was steeped in Anglophone literature. The Library Catalogue from the Cavafy Archive, which is organised to follow Cavafy’s own categories, includes novels by Henry Fielding, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and E. M. Forster as well as works by Oscar Wilde and Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Volumes of poetry in Cavafy’s possession included not only the works of Byron, Thomson, Tennyson and Wordsworth but also translations into English of Homer’s *Iliad* [by T. A. Buckley in the Bohn’s Classical Library Series (1896)] and the *Odyssey* [in the influential version by J. M. Mackail (1903, 1905 and 1910)]. This personal library of books in English also included Longfellow’s English translation of Dante and Arnold and Newman’s nineteenth-century essays on translating Homer.²³ Although the coverage of literature in English is not comprehensive, it is sufficiently extensive to provide evidence of a deep immersion in English prose and poetic idiom and indicates exposure and sensitivity to English literary traditions in epic, lyric and narrative as well as to the practices and literary devices found in English translations of

¹⁸ Liddell (2000²).

¹⁹ Leontis et al. (2002) 17.

²⁰ There are affinities in this respect with the work of Derek Walcott, especially *Omeros* (1990).

²¹ Zerba (2015).

²² Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses” was published in 1842 (in *English Idylls and Other Poems*) and drew on Dante’s treatment of Odysseus’ last voyage (*Inferno* Canto xxvi). It was preceded in 1833 by “The Lotos-Eaters”, based on the episode in *Odyssey* 9, and its companion poem “Choric Song” (in *The Lady of Shallott and other Poems*).

²³ www.cavafy.com/archive/library.

canonical works in Greek and Italian. Critics have suggested that because English was the language in which Cavafy was educated, his poems and diction resonate particularly well in English translation. There is evidence from Cavafy's drafts, notes, literary commentaries and translations that he was equally comfortable in Greek and English.²⁴ It was even rumoured that he spoke Greek with a slight English accent.²⁵ David Ricks has taken this Anglophone appropriation to its fullest extent and argued that the influence of Homer on Cavafy's poetic development did not come directly from the Greek text but was mediated by Pope's *Iliad*.²⁶ Ricks does, however, recognise that some words from Homer were repeated verbatim in Cavafy's poem "Priam's Night Journey".²⁷ Ricks' argument has been partially countered by Seth Schein who identifies evidence of Cavafy's careful reading of Homer in the original as well as echoes of intermediary translations.²⁸ Schein writes from the perspective of a classicist who is predominantly interested in the significance of Cavafy's deviations from Homer and the interpretive light that can be thrown on corresponding passages in the *Iliad*. This trajectory is just one part of the two-way energy of Cavafy's Homeric interventions.

The most significant of Cavafy's poems on ancient Greek themes are (poems which are variants on Homer are marked *): "Priam's Night Journey"* (composed 1893 but not published in print until 1968);²⁹ "Oedipus" (1895); "The Horses of Achilles"* (1896-1897); "The funeral of Sarpedon"* (renounced version 1896-1898, published version 1905), "When the Watchman Saw the Light" (1900); "Interruption" (1900); "Trojans"* (1900-1905); "Disbelief" (1903); "Ionic" (1905-1911); "Ithaca"* (1910-1911). Thus, "Ithaca", arguably the most famous and influential of Cavafy's poems, can be seen as the culmination of a process of conversations with Homer that is initiated by a cluster of poems related to the *Iliad* (1893-1896) and moves towards the explorations of place,

²⁴ The effect seems to have been reciprocal. Peter Mackridge's Introduction to the 2000 edition of Robert Liddell's biography opens with the statement that "Cavafy is the only modern Greek poet who is so well known that his work has practically become part of English literature" [Liddell (2000²) 7].

²⁵ Leontis et al. (2002) 27, 30.

²⁶ Ricks (1989) 86-87.

²⁷ Ricks (1989) 90 n. 21.

²⁸ Schein (2016). Schein's essay is a revision of material first published in 1994 and includes extensive discussion of Maronitis (1986) as well as of Ricks' monograph (1989).

²⁹ For Cavafy's non-standard ways of publishing or withholding his poems, see Schein (2016) 139 n. 1.

associations and *nostos* drawn from the *Odyssey*. The Iliadic cluster is significant both because of the concentration of theme and because the proportion of Cavafy's work that is derived from Homer is a relatively small part of his published oeuvre (154 poems). There is a further contrast between "early" and "late" variations on Homer in that the Iliadic poems make closer use of episodes in Homer, albeit as a basis for focalising the thought of the characters, whereas "Ithaca" uses Homer as a springboard for the poet's introspection, by implication contesting settled perspectives on the image of Ithaca in the canonical work.³⁰ "Ithaca" uses near-repetition of refrains that are carefully positioned so that they appear to echo each other and then diverge (e.g. lines 4-12). In this way, the poem prompts multi-directional literary encounters (see also Petrides in this volume). These encounters can equally be between the poet and the future reader or between the readers and the "dead" poet, Homer, as found in Cavafy.

Cavafy himself compared his poetry to a vessel that can contain different experiences or—more prosaically—to a "well-tailored suit that can fit different (though not all) people".³¹ More apposite, perhaps, is the comment by Nicholas Samaras, who likened Cavafy's tone in his poems to that of a "whispering friend".³² The "whispering friend" supplies the information that the listener needs: sensitivity to language and form are more important than the reader's prior knowledge of the mythical narratives. Indeed, Seferis once commented that among modern Greek poets Cavafy was "not strong enough" to support Anglophone poets to engage with classical material.³³ The material discussed in this essay suggests the contrary; it is rather that a *different* poetics of engagement is created, a poetics that eschews the limitation of myth to a diachronic, and sometimes oppositional, relationship between past and present and instead opens up the possibility of future reflections.³⁴

Cavafy's use of episodes from the *Iliad* provides an illuminating prelude to the fluidity of the relationship with Homer that emerges in developed form in "Ithaca". The Iliadic poems are focused on iconic scenes in Homer but these are reimagined with some details omitted or

³⁰ Zerba (2015) 248f.

³¹ Quoted in Leontis et al. (2002) 9.

³² Leontis et al. (2002) 81.

³³ Fowler (2014) 320.

³⁴ Pourgouris [(2014) 287-288] on Seferis. Fowler [(2014) 318f.] discusses the relationship between Seferis and Seamus Heaney in linking moral insights and concrete locality. The point about Cavafy's "localities" is that they resist the specific and material correlations.