

BROWNING'S VERSIONS:
ROBERT BROWNING, GREEK TRAGEDY
AND THE VICTORIAN TRANSLATION
DEBATE

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BETWEEN 1871 and 1877 Robert Browning (1812-89) completed translations of three ancient Greek tragedies. Two of these, *Alkestis* and *Herakles*, were designated 'transcriptions' and incorporated into original poems—*Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875) respectively. The third translation, *Agamemnon* (1877), was published as a separate work with its own explanatory preface, and in 1948 was immortalized by Terence Rattigan as *The Browning Version*. In each of the translations a distinct theory and methodology are discernible, and a different experience of Greek tragic drama made available to the reader. The main focus of my discussion of Browning's three translations will be his much-neglected version of the *Herakles*.

The composition of these works coincided with an intense scholarly debate on the method and objective which those attempting translations of Greek and Latin texts should employ. As Lorna Hardwick asserts:

The variety of approaches to translation and the broadening spectrum of authorship in the nineteenth century offer evidence of fierce debate, not only about the nature and purposes of translation and its cultural and political implications, but also about the role of translation in the lives and work of writers and in the perceptions of both the classically educated and the broader readership.¹

Crucial to this dispute, and not unfamiliar to our own era, was the question of 'faithfulness' to the original: how to define this abstraction in a way that was neither nebulous nor arbitrary, but that would provide translators with practical guidelines for their task. In order to arrive at any sort of definition, the theorist had to contend with several interrelated issues: the virtue, or otherwise, of literalism as a translational philosophy; the benefit to be gained from, and the sheer linguistic attainability of, lexical, syntactical, and conceptual accuracy; and the more ethical dilemma of whether translation should entail a process of alienation or appropriation, that is, whether the translation should communicate to the reader a sense of the remoteness, in time, culture, and language, of the original text, or render fluent and accessible what may be fractured and distancing.

Two of the chief combatants in this controversy were Francis William Newman (1805-97) and Matthew Arnold (1822-88). Newman's translation of the *Iliad* into unrhymed English metre (1856) was made according to his theory that what was difficult or strange in the original should be replicated in the translation by deliberate archaisms, in his case by the use of alliterative verse and words of Anglo-Saxon origin. Arnold heavily criticized this technique in his lectures 'On Translating Homer' (1860-61), which were intended to give practical advice to would-be translators of Homeric epic, accusing Newman of substituting his own eminent ignobility for Homer's eminent nobility.² Co-opting and paraphrasing Coleridge, Arnold proposes a contrasting theory:

It may be said of that union of the translator with his original, which alone can produce a good translation, that it takes place when the mist which stands between them—the mist of alien modes of thinking, speaking and feeling on the translator's part—'defecates to a pure transparency,' and disappears.³

The conflict in approach between Newman and Arnold led to a surge in the publication of translations and essays on the practice of translation. It was against this background that Browning published his three complete translations from the Greek tragic corpus within the space of six years. His contribution to the debate was one of practical demonstration; and the hallmark of his experimentation in the field of translation is versatility. It is Browning's ability with these three translations to traverse the expanse between Newman and Arnold that is most noteworthy. Each translation serves a unique purpose and engages a technique appropriate to, and elucidative of, that purpose.

Euripides' Alkestis (1871)

Browning's enthusiasm for the Greek tragedians was greatly inspired by that of his wife Elizabeth Barrett (1806-61). A mutual love of Attic tragedy had been at the centre of their courtship, throughout which Barrett reworked her translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, first published in 1833, in close consultation with Browning; and, in their correspondence with each other, the two poets interwove Promethean language and imagery into the context of their burgeoning relationship in a way that reflected the constraints of their respective situations. Although mid-nineteenth-century British Hellenism, largely Matthew Arnold's Hellenism, adopted Sophocles as its archetype and disdained the modernism and psychological realism of Euripides, Barrett's favourite tragedian was Euripides. In her poem 'Wine of Cyprus' (1844), written two years before her elopement with Browning, she conceived in praise of the third poet an epithet and accompanying image that would often be invoked by other writers:

Our Euripides, the human
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres. (89-92)

After his wife's death and his subsequent relocation from Florence to London, Browning engaged in an intensive study of Euripides, who became his frequent companion. *Balaustion's Adventure* was written primarily in tribute to the memory of Elizabeth Barrett and her love and championship of the third tragedian, and deals with the theme of miraculous salvation. Browning's transcription of the *Alkestis*, which he skilfully incorporated into the dramatic monologue of the poem, is essentially an adaptation of the Euripidean original and has a number of features in common with a working play script. In reciting, interpreting, and revising the text before a small audience of friends, the heroine Balaustion performs the role of a dramaturge presenting a read-through of the play. Similar to the structure of *Aristophanes' Apology*, the recitation is, in fact, part of the adventure narrative in which Balaustion recalls how, making for Athens after the Sicilian disaster, she rescued herself and fellow Rhodesians from attack by the Syracusans when she recited solo Euripides' *Alkestis*. Her vivid reading of the drama is interspersed with lively descriptions of the action and characters, stage directions in verse, and explanatory digressions. Balaustion also outlines for her audience a

new moral direction for the play whereby Admetus' character is purged of much of its weakness and ignobility. Clyde de L. Ryals construes this method as 'not a criticism but a 'higher criticism' of the text. [...] Just as a modern hermeneuticist may look behind the literal accounts of the gospels to grasp the essence of the Christian message, Balaustion looks beyond the actual text to seize upon Euripides' essential meaning.⁴ Browning's *Alkestis* is a creative appropriation of Euripides, whereby an anachronistic historical consciousness is ascribed to the ancient poet, and it demonstrates, therefore, a theory of translation which is almost the reverse of that operative in his two later transcriptions.

Aeschylus' Agamemnon (1877)

The *Agamemnon* is Browning's most literal translation, but its literalism is of a very different order from that employed in his *Herakles* two years earlier, and one for which the poet was greatly castigated at the time and has rarely been commended since. It is the only one of the three translations to which Browning appended a preface. In this he says:

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language.... I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immediately famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear. ... Further, if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek. ... I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Aeschylus. ... All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were.⁵

Despite this anticipatory defence, Browning's approach was most unwelcome. The extremely demanding, and often baffling, nature of the English was met with frustration and offence. Even Browning's usual admirers exhibited perplexity and mild annoyance. Thomas Carlyle, who had previously expressed high regard for Browning's abilities as a translator and, according to Browning, commanded him to make a translation of the *Agamemnon*, deemed this latest effort 'unreadable'.⁶ F. G. Kenyon, editor of the centenary

edition of Browning's works, labelled the translation 'a perverse *tour de force*'⁷ and perceived in it an oblique attempt by Browning to show his beloved Euripides in a favourable contrastive light. William Cranston Lawton, a member of the Boston Browning Society, believed the poet failed in his version of the *Agamemnon* because he had misguidedly applied to Aeschylus the same literalist method which he had applied to the 'easier' verse of Euripides: 'When Browning attempts to render these most difficult Aeschylean choral songs in English verse, and rhymed verse, and at the same time to be niggardly, solemnly, absolutely literal, the result is too often but the *disjecta membra* of articulate speech.'⁸

In more recent times Yopie Prins has discerned a method to Browning's madness and a purpose to his alleged perversity. She argues:

The translation presents English as a foreign language that must be translated back into Greek in order to be understood. Ultimately, Browning's *Agamemnon* undoes the opposition between the two languages altogether, as it moves into an interlingual realm that John Addington Symonds criticized for being 'neither English nor Greek.' However, rather than criticizing this radical linguistic estrangement, we might ponder how Browning's translation serves as metaphor for the act of reading itself.⁹

Prins' suggestion is that 'Browning is interested in translation as a process of alienation that is also exacted in the process of reading.'¹⁰ She believes 'Aeschylus' obscurity poses certain challenges to the reader, who must interact with the text in order to reenact both its meaning and its resistance to meaning. On this model of reading, the obscure is a necessary condition for the sublime.¹¹ This idea of a purposeful obscurity appears much earlier in the Irish classicist J. P. Mahaffy's assessment of Aeschylus' 'pregnant obscurity, as contrasted with the redundant obscurity of some modern poets or the artificial obscurity of the Attic epoch'.¹² W. B. Stanford, writing half a century after Mahaffy, qualifies this by saying, 'The poets of the 1930s and 1940s are nearer Aeschylus in their obscurities and ambiguities than were the "modern" poets of Mahaffy's day, though among them Browning and Hardy show Aeschylus' direct influence.'¹³ Prins maintains that in the difficulty and obscurity of Aeschylean verse, Browning found 'a precursor for his style, which is often described in terms of a catachrestic or "grotesque" literalism.'¹⁴ Stanford uses the word 'catachresis' to categorize instances where Aeschylus deliberately alters the meanings of words to suit his needs.¹⁵ Discussing

Aeschylus' neologisms, which are, for the most part, compound words, he states, 'Aeschylus is straining language almost to the breaking point. One is reminded of the strained, distorted, almost grotesque, figures of a painting by El Greco.'¹⁶ Browning recreates a similar tension in his translation of the *Agamemnon* and, in doing so, resembles Gerard Manley Hopkins (1849-89), who broke with the conventional poetic diction of his time in reviving archaisms, appropriating dialect words, and employing coinages of his own to communicate hitherto unexpressed concepts, and produced in his verse an overall effect of strangeness or, as he called it himself, 'queerness'.¹⁷

The difficult style of Browning's *Agamemnon* has also been accounted useful and effective by the poet Tony Harrison who, surprisingly, claims that the translation had a direct influence on his own version of the *Oresteia*, which opened at the Royal National Theatre in November 1981:

It is certainly Browning's feel for the consonantal, potentially clogging, energy of Aeschylus' verse, his awareness of the oral physicality and what George Steiner calls the 'aural density' of the original language, that distinguishes Browning's *Agamemnon* translation. It may clog but it never cloys like so much inferior Victorian poetry. Somewhere though, almost more than in any other English-speaking poet who has tackled Aeschylus, I have always felt, even before I began to think of translating him myself, there were clues to the way Aeschylus might sound in English in the Browning version.¹⁸

While he is alert to the flaws in Browning's translation, Harrison believes it is neither unreadable nor, it seems, lacking in dramatic potential. He says in reply to Kenyon's charge of perversity, 'somewhere, I think, those very perversities point the way to a means of making the text massive and megalithic, doing honour to the daunting *Dunkelheit* of Aeschylus but without renouncing the intelligibility at the heart of all theatrical communication.'¹⁹

Harrison's reference to George Steiner invokes a comparison between Browning's *Agamemnon* and the literalist techniques adopted by Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) in his translations of Sophocles. Hölderlin saw a need to re-primitivize Sophocles' text for his German audience through a process of estrangement from 'natural' German. According to Steiner, by this practice, Hölderlin was 'polemicizing, obliquely, against Schiller's idealization of the harmonic universality of Greek art and against F. W. Schlegel's insis-

tence on the never-to-be-rivalled perfection of the classical.²⁰ His technique was extremely unpopular in his own lifetime, but was rediscovered and treated in a positive light in the early and mid-twentieth century, an experience analogous to that of Browning with his *Agamemnon*. The publication in 1804, and subsequent editions in 1808 and 1846, of Hölderlin's *Oedipus der Tyrann* and *Antigona* were regarded as 'the tragic indices of mental crisis and decay',²¹ a view which persisted until the rehabilitative judgements of Norbert von Hellingrath in 1911 and Karl Reinhardt in 1951.

Euripides' Herakles (1875)

Between the digressive style of the *Alkestis*, with its 'interpretative paraphrase',²² and the extreme literalism of the *Agamemnon* stands the *Herakles*, the most successful, and yet the least familiar and least studied, of Browning's three translation experiments. It is successful because, of the three, it comes closest to achieving the impossible, namely the transmission of much of the linguistic power of the original text simultaneous with the creation of a highly readable work of English poetry which is seldom strained or inelegant. The transcription has a fluency and a simplicity that are often wanting in the surrounding verse. Two judgements, read before the Boston Browning Society at the close of the nineteenth century, endorse Browning's *Herakles* as an exemplary essay in the art of translation. Philip Stafford Moxom declared, 'As a translation it leaves almost nothing to be desired in faithfulness to the original. In this respect it serves as a model for the ablest workers in the field of translation from the Greek classics.'²³ William Cranston Lawton, meanwhile, predicted, 'The *Heracles* may long remain the best single version in English of a masterly Greek drama.'²⁴

Aristophanes' Apology (hereafter cited in the text as *AA*) comprises 5711 lines of verse, making it the third longest of Browning's works after *The Ring and the Book* and *Sordello*, and four times the length of any extant Greek tragedy. It has a complex narrative and temporal structure of multiple layers. The subsuming narrative mode is a dramatic monologue spoken by the heroine Balaustion as she and her husband Euthukles sail to Rhodes after the destruction of Athens' long walls by the Spartans. Within the 'present' of this monologue is built a dialogue, an extended *agon* between Balaustion and the comic poet Aristophanes, recollected from one year previously when Euthukles brought Balaustion the news of Euripides'

death. Part of this dialogue is a transcription from Euripides, an uninterrupted and unedited recital of the *Herakles* which occupies 1549 lines of the complete text. The work as a whole is an extraordinary piece of literary heresy written by a maverick poet and Hellenist: not only is it a large-scale and somewhat solitary defence of the much-maligned Euripides against contemporary critical orthodoxy and the strictures of Schlegelian Romanticism,²⁵ but it also contains the singular pronouncement that the difficult and relatively obscure *Herakles* is 'the perfect piece' (line 3526) and 'the consummate tragedy' (line 3534).

The transcription, like the rest of the poem, is composed mainly in blank verse. Apart from the choral odes, which are in rhyme, Browning's use of rhyme in the translation is sporadic but striking in its recreation of the original dramatic impact of a scene. For example, in translating the lyric dialogue between Amphitryon and the chorus at lines 1042-88 of Euripides' text, Browning has employed a varied and highly effective rhyme scheme which captures the suspense and nervous movement of the original passage as well as the extraordinary tension, palpable in the characters' language, between the emotional and practical necessities imposed by the situation. Browning's version of the scene, at lines 4659-4721, begins and ends in blank verse, but the greater part of the exchange alternates between rhyme at the end of every line and rhyme at the end of every second line. This alternation reproduces the shifts between fearful urgency and calm resolution controlled by Euripides' use of agitated dochmaics interspersed with iambs. As well as retaining Euripides' combination of short, sharp imperatives and enjambement, Browning rhymes the last line of the first speaker with the first line of the second speaker, creating the effect of a fraught dialogue in which the interlocutors talk across one another:

Choros

Old man, the fate of thy son!

Amphitruon

Hush, hush! Have done!
He is turning about!
He is breaking out!
Away! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

Choros

Courage! The Night
Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

Amphitruon

See, see! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid; but if he kill
Me his own father. (AA, 4685-99)

Another striking example of Browning's manipulation of rhyme to recreate the force of the original is his rendering of lines 861-66 of Lyssa's speech in which she makes her chilling disclosure of the destruction she will visit on Herakles. Barlow remarks of the original lines, 'there is an extraordinary energy from the pent-up movement, sight and sound, impressions concentrated within a short space to parallel the explosive force with which Heracles' madness is created.'²⁶ It is this momentum and density of images that Browning has impressively reproduced:

Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans with its
waves so furiously,
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping
out heaven's labor-throe,
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into
the bosom of Herakles!
And home I scatter, and house I batter,
Having first of all made the children fall, -
And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
'Till the Madness, I am, have let him go! (AA, 4447-54)

At line 4449 the blank verse sharply breaks off, just as the imagery, which Lyssa employs, changes from the metaphorical and universal to the literal and particular. A short, concentrated passage of rhyme follows, within which Browning shifts briskly between internal rhyme in lines 4450 and 4451 and rhyme at the end of the next three lines. The overall movement of the passage is at once frenetic and unrelenting.

The system of spelling Greek proper nouns, which Browning employs in the *Herakles*, is one he adopted in 'Artemis Prologuizes' (*Dramatic Lyrics* 1842) and adhered to in all his subsequent transcrip-

tions from classical Greek. In defiance of the more conventional Latinizations or Anglicizations, whereby *y* is substituted for *v*, *c* for *κ* and *ae* for *αι*, Browning provides very precise transliterations of Greek names. In the preface to his translation of the *Agamemnon* Browning protests the soundness and increasing currency of this practice in anticipation of its detractors:

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. [...] I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough. But there has been till lately much astonishment at *os* and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *v* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped 'Eyrripides.'²⁷

This system, however, relies on a flawed premise, as Kenyon indicates with reference to the *Agamemnon*: 'If Greek and English vowel sounds were identical, transliteration would no doubt be the correct procedure, but since they are not, transliteration is often as far from the truth as the more common Latinisation.'²⁸

In the *Herakles*, while Browning has transliterated most names and their adjectival forms according to this system (e.g. Amphitruon, Alkaios, Eurustheus, Thebai, Lukos, Kadmeian, Euboia, Minuai, Hudra, Mukenian, Kuklopiian, Olumpos), there are a few names for which he has simply given an English equivalent, for example, 'Madness' for *λύσσα*, 'Night' for *Νύξ*, and 'Heaven' for *Οὐρανός*. This is a surprising inconsistency in view of the fact that the poet's insistence on 'accuracy' extended to ordinary nouns and even exclamations of grief. At 4485 he translates the cry *ὦ δόμοι* (891),²⁹ which refers to Amphitryon's *οἶκος*, as 'O ye domes!' and at 4831 he gives 'peploi' for *πέπλοισιν* (1198). The chorus' lament *ὄτοτοτοῖ* (875) is reproduced at 4463 as 'Otototoi.'

A remarkable feature of Browning's literal rendering of the text is the way it often achieves simultaneously fidelity to the Greek phraseology and an arresting quality in the English verse. This achievement is demonstrated in his translation of Iris' instructions to Madness (834-42):

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
 Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
 Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain
 Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
 Let go the bloody cable its whole length!
 So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford
 He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
 His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know
 First, Here's anger, what it is to him,
 And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
 And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free! (AA, 4418-28)

Here Browning has maintained much of Euripides' asyndetic structure and concentration of imperatives. His literal transcriptions of the participial phrase παιδοκτόνους/ φρενῶν παραγμούς (835-36)³⁰ and the clause ὡς ἂν πορεύσας [...] / τὸν καλλίπαιδα στέφανον αὐθέντη φόνῳ (838-39) are appropriately graphic and successfully emulate Euripides' grotesque juxtapositions of the imagery of Dionysiac ritual with the stark vision of infanticide and of innocence with evil. Similarly, Browning has translated the future verbs in Lyssa's announcement at line 871, τάχα σ' ἐγὼ μᾶλλον χορεύσω καὶ καταυλήσω φόβῳ as powerful and portentous transitive verbs that communicate the direct and violent operation of Madness through Herakles:

Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe
 thee quite out of thy mind with fear!³¹ (AA, 4459)

Browning remains equally faithful to Euripidean imagery in passages where his style becomes less literal and more allusive and condensed. For example, in the *stichomythia* between Amphitruon and Herakles, in which the father acts as psychotherapist to the son, Browning has replaced the direct Bacchic metaphor used in lines 1119 and 1122 of Euripides' play with the idea of the literal and figurative intoxication associated with the worshippers of Bacchus:

Amphitruon

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell!

Herakles

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul. (AA, 4755-56)

One very notable aberration from his own methodology, however, is the poet's handling of the repeated simile of the 'little boats in tow.' At lines 628-32 Euripides uses the rare word ἐφοκίδες

to describe the manner in which Herakles' children trail after their father upon their reprieve and re-entry into the house:

ἄ.
οἶδ' οὐκ ἀφιασ'. ἀλλ' ἀνάπτονται πέπλων
τοσῶδε μᾶλλον· ὦδ' ἔβητ' ἐπὶ ξυροῦ
ἄξω λαβῶν γε τοῦσδ' ἐφορκίδας χεροῖν,
ναυς δ' ὡς ἐφέλξω.

Browning accurately translates these lines as:

Ah,—
No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them -
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. (AA, 4226-4231)

Echoing this passage, Euripides uses ἐφορκίδες at the end of the play, but this time the word applies to Herakles and his newly formed dependence on his friend Theseus:

ἡμεῖς δ' ἀναλώσαντες αἰσχύναις δόμον
Θησεῖ πανώλεις ἐψόμεσθ' ἐφορκίδες. (1423-24)

The repetition is pronounced. In her translation of lines 1423-24, Barlow's choice of words preserves the parallel with the earlier simile in order to highlight the tragic irony of the final scene and the important role reversal experienced by the hero:

I who have destroyed my house
with shame and am utterly destroyed, shall follow
Theseus like a small boat in tow.

By contrast, Browning's translation of the same lines diverges from the original in both linguistic and thematic terms:

Myself,—who with these shames
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way. (AA, 50776-78)

What Browning has given us in these lines is a portrait of grand and noble wreckage ('a ruined hulk'), a tragic fall certainly, but significantly not, as Euripides purposed, to the vulnerable condition of a 'child-changed father'.³² Herakles is still the ship, while Theseus is the boat in tow.

Two further general features of Browning's method of transcription, which are characteristic of his attempt to retrieve for the English reader something of the experience of reading ancient Greek

poetry, are his respect for the original word order and its dependent emphases and his imitation of certain Greek idioms. Browning has not slavishly reproduced the word order of the Greek text at the expense of good sense and sound verse, but, within the constraints of an uninflected and less economical language, he has as far as possible adhered to it. A clue to Browning's thinking on the subject of word order is found in his manuscript (housed in Balliol College Library) where his translation of lines 631-32 appears thus:

³ Take/ ² up/ these small craft/ ¹ with my hands/ and tow
 Just as a ship would.

In the first version he made of these lines, Browning has maintained almost exactly the Greek word order. In the second version, which is indicated by his numbering, he has worked out an order that produces a more poetic line in English. By his careful positioning of words Browning has also ensured that his translation, where it cannot or does not reflect the original word order, at least retains the emphasis intended by Euripides. This is best illustrated by his translation of the line $\acute{\omicron} \delta' \text{ οὐκέθ' αὐτὸς ἦν}$ (931) which powerfully signals the immediate and very physical invasion of Herakles by Madness. Browning translates this phrase literally ('But he was himself/ no longer') and, in order to achieve in English an effect comparable to the Greek, he places the most important words emphatically at the end and beginning of the lines.

In an essay addressed to the Boston Browning Society two decades after the publication of *Aristophanes' Apology*, William Cranston Lawton, commenting on 'The Classical Element in Browning's Poetry', remarked of the transcription, 'The little detail he has added is rarely modern or in any way un-Hellenic. Indeed, the minute faithfulness and self-suppression of this task must have been most irksome to a nature so alert and self-moved.'³³ An example of the Hellenic detail evident in Browning's style is the way he imitates the rhetorical doubling between verb and object favoured in Greek. Thus, in his rendering of line 1093, $\piνοῶς \Thetaερμῶς \piνέω$ as 'breathings hot I breathe,' he keeps the original word order and doubling. He employs this idiom even where it does not occur in Euripides' text, translating Herakles' exhortation at 1390 to the people of Thebes, $\sigmaυμ\pi\epsilonυθῆσατ'$, as 'lament one wide lament'.

Browning's versions of Euripides' *Alkestis* and *Herakles*, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* together provide a unique and invaluable

insight into the Victorian translation debate. Each work is the practical demonstration of a radically different school of thought, and in each case the method of translation Browning employs is intimately connected to his broader poetic purpose. Of the poet's three experiments in translation, it is the *Herakles* that successfully serves the greatest purpose. In contrast to his *Alkestis* Browning avoids interposing comment, either explicatory or re-interpretative. In contrast to his *Agamemnon*, his literalism here is regulated and not a deliberate cause of estrangement. In most respects, by allowing Euripides' own voice to be heard, Browning's translation restored to the *Herakles* its dramatic and moral essence, something which had been removed from the majority of translations and adaptations of the text since Seneca, and which has been largely absent from modern versions in which the writers' personal agenda are given precedence. Without denying or diminishing the individual character of his translation, it may be argued that Browning's agenda in his version of the *Herakles* was, in a sense, precisely to eschew any ideological intrusion of an overtly private or contemporary nature, and was, therefore, a reaffirmation of Euripidean thinking. If we understand the process involved in the translation of classical literature as a dialogue between the ancient writer and his modern interpreter, the Browning version of *Herakles* is a remarkably empathetic and immediate exchange with the tragic poet.

Notes

- 1 Lorna Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2000), p. 24. See also Daniel Weissbort's general synopsis of nineteenth-century verse translation theories in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 91-92, and A. D. P. Briggs's discussion of how these theories were applied to the Greek tragedians in France, pp. 356-66.
- 2 Matthew Arnold in R. H. Super, ed., *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold: On the Classical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 103. See contra, Francis William Newman, 'Homeric translation in theory and practice, a reply to Matthew Arnold Esq.' (London, 1861).
- 3 Reprinted in Super, p. 103.
- 4 Clyde de L. Ryals, *The Life of Robert Browning: A Critical Biography* (1993. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 177-78.
- 5 Robert Browning in *The Works of Robert Browning*, Vol.8, ed. F. G. Kenyon

- (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1912), pp. 293-94.
- 6 See Carlyle's comments on Browning's *Agamemnon*, recorded in *Browning: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Boyd Litzyger and Donald Smalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp.432-33.
 - 7 Kenyon, p. xi.
 - 8 William Cranston Lawton, 'The Classical Element in Browning's Poetry' in *The Boston Browning Society Papers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 384.
 - 9 Yopie Prins, "'Violence bridling speech": Browning's Translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*', *Victorian Poetry* 27 (1989), p. 152.
 - 10 Prins, p. 152.
 - 11 Prins, p. 156.
 - 12 John Pentland Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, Vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green, 1880), p. 275.
 - 13 W. B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in His Style: A Study in Language and Personality* (Dublin: The University Press, 1942), p. 128.
 - 14 Prins, p. 157.
 - 15 Stanford, p. 64.
 - 16 Stanford, pp. 65-66.
 - 17 According to W. H. Gardner in *Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889): A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, Vol. 1 (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1948), 2nd ed., rev., p. 112, 'Taken altogether, his [Gerard Manley Hopkins's] lexical and syntactical neologisms, like his innovations in rhythm, produce an air of strangeness more marked than in any other English poet. [...] The aim of poetry being to move, to excite, the 'foreign air' or strongly idiosyncratic flavour of his verse is a powerful emotive factor.'
 - 18 Tony Harrison, *Plays Four* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), Introduction; p. 9.
 - 19 Harrison, p. 12.
 - 20 George Steiner, *Antigones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 67.
 - 21 Steiner, p. 66.
 - 22 Philip Stafford Moxom, 'Balaustion's Opinion of Euripides' in *The Boston Browning Society Papers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 413.
 - 23 Moxom, p. 413. Moxom delivered this address to the Society on 25 February 1896.
 - 24 Lawton, p. 386. Lawton delivered this address to the Society on 31 December 1895.
 - 25 In Vienna in 1808 August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1843) delivered his *Lec-*

- tures on *Dramatic Art and Literature* (*Ueber dramatische Kunst und Literatur*). The eighth lecture was entitled 'Euripides: his merits and defects—Decline of tragic poetry through him.' Schlegel's estimation of Euripides was the most influential and durable of the nineteenth century.
- 26 Shirley A. Barlow, *Euripides' Heracles* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 1996), p. 162.
- 27 Browning in Kenyon, pp. 295-96.
- 28 Kenyon, p. xii.
- 29 This and all subsequent numbers in parentheses (unless marked *AA*) refer to the line numbers in Euripides' text.
- 30 Cf. Barlow's translation of the adjective παιδοκτόνου as a final clause ('so that he kills his children'), which tends to weaken its dramatic impact.
- 31 Cf. Barlow's translation of 871, which invests χορεύσω with a causal rather than a transitive force: 'I shall soon make you dance more wildly and I shall play upon you a pipe of terror.'
- 32 *King Lear*, Act IV, sc. vii, 17.
- 33 Lawton, p. 382.