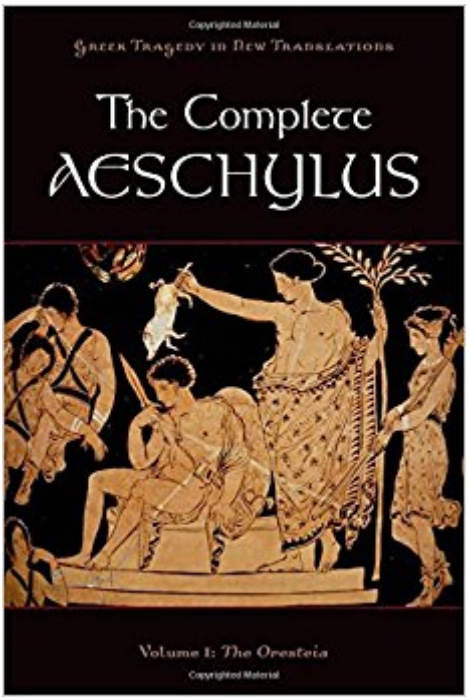
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The Complete Aeschylus: Volume I: The Oresteia (Greek Tragedy In New Translations)



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Synopsis

Based on the conviction that only translators who write poetry themselves can properly re-create the celebrated and timeless tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the Greek Tragedy in New Translations series offers new translations that go beyond the literal meaning of the Greek in order to evoke the poetry of the originals.Aeschylus' Oresteia, the only ancient tragic trilogy to survive, is one of the great foundational texts of Western culture. It begins with Agamemnon, which describes Agamemnon's return from the Trojan War and his murder at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra, continues with her murder by their son Orestes in Libation Bearers, and concludes with Orestes' acquittal at a court founded by Athena in Eumenides. The trilogy thus traces the evolution of justice in human society from blood vengeance to the rule of law, Aeschylus' contribution to a Greek legend steeped in murder, adultery, human sacrifice, cannibalism, and endless intrigue. This new translation is faithful to the strangeness of the original Greek and to its enduring human truth, expressed in language remarkable for poetic intensity, rich metaphorical texture, and a verbal density that modulates at times into powerful simplicity. The translation's precise but complicated rhythms honor the music of the Greek, bringing into unforgettable English the Aeschylean vision of a world fraught with spiritual and political tensions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Peter Burian is Professor of Classical and Comparative Literatures and Theater Studies at Duke University.Alan Shapiro is Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill. A winner of the prestigious Lila Wallace Reader's Digest award 1992-95, he is the author of several poetry collections, including Tantalus in Love, Song and Dance, and The Dead Alive Busy.

This is the best translation I've read of The Oresteia. It's very readable. There is an excellent Introduction that recounts the background of the story, the Translator's discussion of how he dealt with the issues of turning classical Greek into modern English and Notes at the end that give detailed explanations of various passages. All in all, this is excellent.

The purpose of this translation is to make the book more relevant to the modern reader. This is the only translation I've yet read. I bought this one because I loved the Sophocles translation in the same series. This is by different translators and I didn't find it quite as engaging, but still enjoyed it.

Superb translation that conveys the drama of the original in accomplished English that is not stilted or contrived.

Read these, do good things.

These plays are among the founding documents of Western Civilization, dramatizing the movement from bloody tribal revenge to a community of justice based on law. A good translation is essential to understanding them, and these translations are good.Compare the first lines of the Agamemnon from the older Lattimore version published by the University of Chicago:"I ask the gods some respite from the weariness of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake elbowed upon the Atriedaes' roof dogwise to mark the grand processionals of all the stars of night burdened with winter and again with heat for men. dynasties in their shining blazoned on the air, these stars, upon their wane and when the rest arise."with the same lines from that of Alan Shapiro in this Oxford University Press volume:"I beg the gods to deliver me at last from this hard watch I've kept now for a year upon the palace roof of the Atreidae, dog-like, snout to paws, night after long night, studying the congress of the stars, the unignorable bright potentates that bring down through the night sky to us here below, the summer now, and now the winter, eternal even as they wane and rise."I don't know which version is more faithful to the original, although I understand that Ancient Athenian Greek is so different from Modern English that any attempt at translation is highly problematic, some would even say impossible. Still, most of us aren't going to learn Ancient Greek, so if we are to read these

plays at all we need translations, approximate as they may be. The best a translator may be able do is to render the original into a version that is understandable and can be enjoyed by the educated reader. Shapiro's Oxford version is quite clear and understandable Modern English poetry, and I have enjoyed reading it, which was definitely NOT the case with Lattimore's.The copious end notes in this edition are also quite helpful.epops

On April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy stopped in Indianapolis during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. That day, Martin Luther King, Jr. had been murdered, and Kennedy broke the news to the crowd. He quoted a passage by Aeschylus:"Even in our sleep pain which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart,until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."I heard this in a documentary about Kennedy. Evidently, Jackie had recommended Aeschylus as a way to make sense of the tragedy that had befallen their family in November, 1963. This piqued my own interest in Aeschylus. Via Google, I eventually discovered that the passage is from Agamemnon. But which translation to read?Kennedy recited a slightly modified version of a prose translation by Edith Hamilton. Her rendering is nicely lyrical, but I wondered about the accuracy. Aeschylus presumably didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t really speak of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the awful grace of God,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• as he was obviously not a Christian. I decided to check some of the other translations, using that passage as my metric.Hamilton herself translated the passage more than once. The version Kennedy used appears to come from Hamilton's bookÃ Â The Greek Way, where she excerpts that passage by itself (as prose rather than verse). In contrast, here is the verse version from her complete translation of Agamemnon inÃ Â Three Greek Plays: Prometheus Bound / Agamemnon / The Trojan Women:"Drop, dropÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •in our sleep, upon the heartsorrow falls, memoryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s pain,and to us, though against our very will,even in our own despite,comes wisdomby the awful grace of God."I kind of prefer ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“pain which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m not sure if the contrast is due to the different demands of prose instead of verse, but to my ear the prose version flows better, without the syntactical inversion. Both versions end with the powerful (if not literally accurate) ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“comes wisdom by [or through] the awful grace of God.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• So, high marks for Hamilton in both versions.Next, I looked atÃ Â The Oresteia: Agamemnon; The Libation Bearers; The EumenidesÃ Â from PenguinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •always a safe place to start. Here is how their man, Robert Fagles, translated the passage:"We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heartthe pain of pain remembered comes again,and we resist, but ripeness comes as well.From the gods enthroned

on the awesome rowing-benchthere comes a violent love."I kind of like ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the pain of pain remembered,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• but otherwise this translation seems inferior to HamiltonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“We cannot sleepÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• connotes something quite different than ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“in our sleepÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•; I canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t read the Greek, but, as we will see, the other translations seem to suggest that HamiltonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s reading is closer to the mark. As for the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“gods enthroned on the awesome rowing-bench,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• that might be more literally accurate, but it certainly doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t have the emotional weight of Hamilton's version, although ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“violent loveÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• is interesting in place of "grace."Next, I tried Richmond LattimoreÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢sÃ Â Aeschylus II: The Oresteia (The Complete Greek Tragedies)Ã Â from the U of Chicago Press:"Still there drips in sleep against the heartgrief of memory; againstour pleasure we are temperate.From the gods who sit in grandeurgrace comes somehow violent."IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m with him for the first two lines, but ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“against our pleasure we are temperateÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• seems to obscure the meaning, which kills the whole passage; the ending doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t work if the middle is unclear. But the rhythm is pleasing.Next up is this version, Alan ShapiroÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢sÃ Â The Complete Aeschylus: Volume I: The Oresteia: 1 (Greek Tragedy in New Translations)Ã Â from Oxford UP:"Even in sleep pain dripsdown from the heart as fear,all night, as memory.We learn unwillingly.From the high bench of the godsby violence, it seems, grace comes."That one has a nice directness, especially the short ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“We learn unwillinglyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• after the more complex syntax of the previous three lines. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“From the high bench of the godsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• seems a good middle-ground between the very specific ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“awesome rowing benchÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and the more abstract ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“grandeur.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•Next isÃ Â The Oresteia: Agamemnon, Choephoroe, EumenidesÃ Â by George Thomson, from Everyman's Library:"When deep slumber falls, remembered sinsChafe the sore heart with fresh pain, and noWelcome wisdom meets within.Harsh the grace dispensed by powers immortalOn the awful grace enthroned."That one takes far too many liberties for my taste, and its syntax is tortured and awkward. Although the translation is evidently from 1938, it sounds more like it was written in 1838. In contrast, Peter MeineckÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢sÃ Â Oresteia (Hackett Classics)Ã Â is perhaps too contemporary and flat:"Not even sleep can relieve the painful memoriesthat fall upon the heart, drop by drop,discretion comes even to the unwilling.This grace is forced upon usby sacred spirits who reign above."That one seems to capture the meaning without any of the music, and ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“sacred spiritsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• sounds a bit too New-Agey. This seems like it might

be a good version for students who have trouble understanding the more poetic versions. On that note, my last two samples also go in the direction of contemporary ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“accessibility.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• HereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Anne CarsonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢sÃ Â An Oresteia: Agamemnon by Aiskhylos; Elektra by Sophokles; Orestes by Euripides:"Yet there drips in sleep before my hearta griefremembering pain.Good sense comes the hard way.And the grace of the gods(IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m pretty sure)is a grace that comes by violence."I kind of like ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“griefremembering pain,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• but otherwise that passage seems more miss than hit. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Good senseÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• sounds too folksy, as well as simply a very different meaning than ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“wisdom.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• And while some may find asides such as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m pretty sureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• to be daringly contemporary, I just find that grating and tonally misleading. The last line strikes a good balance between clear meaning and rhythmic punch, though.Finally, here is what Ted Hughes did with the passage inÃ Â The Oresteia of Aeschylus: A New Translation by Ted Hughes:"Nothing speaks the truth,Nothing tells us how things really are,Nothing forces us to knowWhat we do not want to knowExcept pain.And this is how the gods declare their love.Truth comes with pain."That can charitably be called a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“looseÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• translation. Evidently killing Sylvia Plath wasnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t enough for him, so he had to kill Aeschylus, too. (Just kidding.) (Sort of.) Hughes was actually a very good poet, so I donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t know what happened here. If youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re in the mood for Hughesian versions of classical poetry, stick with hisÃ Â Tales from Ovid: 24 Passages from the Metamorphoses.So, where does this leave us? To quote another poet (T.S. Eliot), ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• I must admit that I still like HamiltonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s prose version best, and her verse version second-best. Unfortunately, her full Agamemnon is not available in e-book format. I suppose my next choice, for reading on the Kindle, would be ShapiroÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s.Of course, one passage does not a translation make; this is not enough to make a truly fair comparison between translations of Agamemnon alone, much less the other plays. Still, I offer these comparisons in the hope that they will provide some small help to others who are trying to decide between translations.

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