

The Rediscovery

of Shakespeare's Greater Greek

by Earl Showerman

There has been a rebirth in appreciation for the dramatic power of ancient Greek tragedy in twenty-first century American culture. Wyatt Mason's recent *Harper's Magazine* article, "You are Not Alone Across Time: Using Sophocles to Treat PTSD," reported on the use of Greek tragedy to mitigate the trauma of military combat. The Theatre of War is a five-year Pentagon-sponsored program that has staged more than 250 dramatic readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* or *Philoctetes* at military installations and veterans groups all over the world. Bryan Doerries is the creative force behind this project. Doerries studied Greek in college and translated the texts for these dramatic readings. Mason's report lends credence to the conviction that 2,500 year-old Greek drama still has cultural relevance today:

These dramas enact the rage and sorrow and fear that linger in witnesses of tragedy, connecting stored emotion with the memory of the event that brought it about. Not diminution through repetition, tragedy is deliverance through intensification. It performs a magic act – the release of seized emotion – by giving suffering a form.¹

Doerries is only the latest artist to adapt narratives and themes of Greek tragedy to contemporary theatre. The great American playwrights, Eugene O'Neill, T.S. Eliot, and Arthur Miller, were all directly inspired by the playwrights of the fifth-century Attic stage. O'Neill's tragic trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), was based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and *Desire Under the Elms* reflects many elements of Euripides's *Hippolytus*. T.S. Eliot was once elected president of the Classical Association and he wrote the introduction to a 1932 edition of Thomas Newton's 1581 *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*. Several of his dramas, including *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Cocktail Party*, were based directly on Greek models. Arthur Miller also looked to the Greeks for inspiration, once commenting, "From Orestes to Hamlet, from Medea to Macbeth the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his rightful position in his society."²

R. R. Khare's study, *Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, T.S. Eliot and the Greek Tragedy* (1998), extended the long thread of tragic narratives and themes through yet another period of cultural explosion, through the Elizabethan era and the dramas of Shakespeare. The resonances between Greek tragedy and Shakespeare has long been the subject of scholarly interest. In *Attic and Elizabethan Tragedy* (1908) Laughlan Maclean Watt

engaged the analogous dramatic flowering in a historical context that equally suits the modern era:

Perhaps in all the history of the fluctuation, conflict, and yearning of the world, there are not recorded any periods more fraught with influences, environments, and provocations of greatness than in the age in which Attic Tragedy rose and flourished, and that in which the genius of the Elizabethan era found its highest utterance on the English Tragic stage.³

Watt's detailed comparative analysis of ancient Greek and Elizabethan drama identified a number of remarkable similarities between these traditions, that the "irony of fate" was strong in both traditions, and that in Aeschylus and Shakespeare evil was overcome by good, and that Sophocles and Shakespeare shared a "pride of race, deep sympathetic insight, and knowledge of humanity unexcelled, bringing them often into contact, one with another . . . both in spirit aristocratic. . ."⁴ Watt, however, never argued that Shakespeare might have been directly inspired by Greek tragedy, nor that his plays and poems included specific textual connections to these dramas. Perhaps Watt's reluctance to make such an assertion was tempered by the prevailing scholarly opinion as expressed by his contemporary Robert Root in *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare* (1903), that Shakespeare "nowhere alludes to any characters or episodes of Greek drama, that they extended no influence whatsoever on his conception of mythology."⁵

Professor Root's century-old opinion has recently come under challenge on multiple fronts. For twenty-first century Shakespeare authorship studies, this represents a philological Achilles heel to the traditional attribution. No one has contextualized this conundrum better than Andrew Werth, whose presentation on "Shakespeare's 'Lessee Greek,'" at the 2002 Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference at Concordia University was my initiation. Werth, then an undergraduate, deftly exposed one of the great gaps in contemporary Renaissance scholarship: the near-complete absence of published studies of Shakespeare's indebtedness to Greek literature. Werth provided

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numerous examples and critical commentaries that supported the conclusion that Shakespeare drew directly from Greek epic and drama, and noted how scholars have often expressed conflicted opinions over the significance of these intriguing textual echoes. Initially published in *The Oxfordian* V (2002) and later reprinted in *Report My Cause Aright* (2007), Werth's arguments have been cited by no less an authority than Professor Stanley Wells, who praised Werth's insights during a speech to the World Shakespeare Congress in 2011.⁶

The Claim That Shakespeare Didn't Know Greek

The reluctance to recognize Shakespeare's knowledge of Greek drama has been reiterated continually over the past century. In *Shakespeare's England* (1916), John Edwin Sandys asserted that any proposed textual parallels "...have failed to carry conviction with calm and cautious critics. They have been justly regarded either as 'no more than curious accidents – proof of consanguinity of spirit, not of any indebtedness on Shakespeare's part' – or as due to the 'general literary and theatrical tradition' that had reached the Elizabethan dramatists 'through Seneca'."⁷ Seventy-five years later, critical opinion remained absolute in its skepticism. In *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity* (1990), Michelle and Charles Martindale similarly argued that the difficulty in translating Greek dramatic poetry and the absence of scholarly interest in this question has undermined the viability of any such claim:

Any Greek language Shakespeare had would not have been sufficient to allow him to read the extremely taxing poetry of the fifth century BC. Renaissance culture remained primarily Latin-based. . . . Moreover, despite all efforts, no one has succeeded in producing one single piece of evidence from the plays to make any such debt certain, or even particularly likely.⁸

This discounting of Attic dramatic influence was reinforced again a decade ago in *Shakespeare and the Classics* (2004), an essay collection edited by Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor. In "Action at a Distance: Shakespeare and the Greeks," A.D. Nuttall wrote:

That Shakespeare was cut off from Greek poetry and drama is probably a bleak truth that we should accept. A case can be made – and has been made – for Shakespeare's having some knowledge of certain Greek plays, such as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Euripides' *Orestes*, *Alcestis*, and *Hecuba*, by way of available Latin versions, but this, surely, is an area in which the faint occasional echoes mean less than the circumambient silence. When we consider how hungrily Shakespeare feeds upon Ovid, learning from him, or extending him at every turn, it becomes more evident that he cannot in any serious sense have found his way to Euripides.⁹

In the book's following essay, "Shakespeare and Greek Tragedy: Strange Relationship," Michael Silk admitted that there are numerous "unmistakable" commonalities between Shakespeare and the Greeks, but then he echoed the platitudes of accepted authority: "There is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare ever encountered any of the Greek tragedians, either in the original language or otherwise."¹⁰

Several critics have maintained that Shakespeare learned the conventions and plots of Greek drama by way of Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (1579). In *Shakespeare and the Classics* (1952), J.A.K. Thompson wrote that he was "content with throwing out the suggestion that, through the medium of North's *Plutarch*, Shakespeare divined the true spirit of Greek Tragedy."¹¹ Thompson's suggestion that Plutarch was the surrogate literary mediator for Shakespeare's adoptions from Greek drama was reinforced recently by Colin Burrow in *Shakespeare & Classical Antiquity* (2013). Burrow included extended chapters on Virgil, Ovid, Roman Comedy, Seneca, and Plutarch as sources for Shakespeare, but rejected the possibility that Shakespeare was influenced by the dramatic literature of fifth century Athens:

Shakespeare almost certainly never read Sophocles or Euripides (let alone the much more difficult Aeschylus) in Greek, and yet he managed to write tragedies which invite comparison with those authors. He did so despite the limitations of his classical knowledge, and perhaps in part because of them. He read Plutarch in North's translation rather than reading Sophocles in Greek. This means that he read a direct clear statement about the relationship between divine promptings and human actions rather than plays in which complex thoughts about the interrelationship between human and divine agency were buried implicitly within a drama. Having 'less Greek' could therefore have enabled him to appear to understand more about Greek tragedy, and its complex mingling of voluntary actions and divine promptings, than he would have done if he had actually been able to work his way through Aeschylus and Euripides in the first place.¹²

Shakespeare Actually Knew a Lot of Greek

A century-old tradition of scholarship also exists, however, which engages the question of Greek tragedy and tragicomedy and directly connects it to many Shakespeare dramas. J. Churton Collins was the first twentieth century critic to take this broader view. In *Studies in Shakespeare* (1904), he identified sixteenth century Latin translations of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides that were published on the Continent, and he asserted that it was "improbable, almost to the point of being incredible, that Shakespeare should not have had the curiosity to turn to them."¹³

Other twentieth-century critics who have investigated this question include the

renowned Greek translator, Gilbert Murray,¹⁴ and Shakespeare scholars Jan Kott¹⁵ and Louise Schleiner,¹⁶ who have all argued that Aeschylus' *Oresteia* influenced *Hamlet*.¹⁷ Inga Stina-Ewbank¹⁸ has proposed that Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* was a source for *Macbeth*, and others have similarly identified Greek dramatic elements in the Scottish play.¹⁹ Jonathan Bate,²⁰ Sarah Dewar-Watson,²¹ and Claire McEachern²² have all acknowledged that Euripides' tragicomedy *Alceste* influenced the final scenes of both *The Winter's Tale* and *Much Ado about Nothing*.²³ George Stevens, J.A.K. Thompson, and Emrys Jones have argued that *Titus Andronicus* was indebted to Euripides' *Hecuba* and Sophocles' *Ajax*, while A.D. Nuttall has detected evidence that Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* influenced *Timon of Athens*. However, like so many before him, Nuttall is obliged to refer to his comparative analysis as only "pressing an analogy."²⁴

Oxford Professor Laurie Maguire has contextualized the argument over Shakespeare's knowledge of Euripides in *Shakespeare's Names* (2007).

Reluctant to argue that Shakespeare's grammar-school Greek could read Euripides, critics resort to social supposition to argue their case. Charles and Michelle Martindale suggest that 'five minutes conversation with a friend could have given Shakespeare all he needed to know' as does Nuttall: "If we suppose what is simply probable, that he (Shakespeare) talked in pubs to Ben Jonson and others . . ." I agree with these suppositions, as it happens, but invoking the Mermaid tavern is not a methodology likely to convince skeptics that Shakespeare knew Greek drama.²⁵

Maguire devoted six pages to examining the availability in England of continental European editions of Latin and Italian translations of Euripides' plays. London printers evidently "lacked the expertise and experience to print Latin and Greek texts of this high quality."²⁶ Citing contemporaneous literature that alluded to or quoted Euripides in dramas, sermons, political treatises and commonplace books, Maguire concluded, "The availability of parallel-text editions with clear Latin translations and explanatory apparatus made it easy for anyone with an interest to read Euripides."²⁷ However, it should be noted that continental translations of the dramas of Aeschylus and Sophocles were quite rare and therefore difficult to establish as Shakespearean sources. In *Ancient Scripts & Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500-1700*, Bruce Smith states:

In the same period, there were, to be sure, eighteen translations of the plays of Sophocles, but they were concentrated almost exclusively on only three plays, *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Electra*. By 1600, there was not even one translation of a play by Aeschylus in Italian, French, English, German or Spanish.²⁸

This controversy has profound implications regarding the very origins of dramatic art and superimposed blinders of literary biography on philological considerations.

Like the great twentieth century playwrights, Shakespeare's mythopoetic imagination was fired by the Greek example. That he incorporated numerous plots, themes, dramaturgy, allusions, tropes, allegory, and words taken from the Greek canon is credible and worthy of detailed play-by-play investigations.

Hamlet²⁹

My inquiries into Shakespeare and the Greeks was launched while researching a paper on *Hamlet* for a class at Southern Oregon University in 2004. I was impressed by the number of classical allusions in the text and the repeated references to Hercules and Alexander the Great. The themes of royal assassination, inherited fate, ghostly visitation, intergenerational murder, tainted food and wine, violated sanctuary, and maimed burial rites woven into *Hamlet* echo the tragic narratives of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. To my great delight, the university's Hannon Library possessed a copy of Gilbert Murray's 1914 Shakespeare Lecture to the British Academy, *Hamlet and Orestes: A Study in Traditional Types*, which identified many remarkable similarities between Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Euripides' *Orestes* dramas, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

There are first the broad similarities of situation between what we may call the original sagas on both sides; that is, the general story of Orestes and Hamlet respectively. But secondly, there is something much more remarkable: when these sagas were worked up into tragedies, quite independently and on very different lines, by great dramatists of Greece and England, not only do most of the old similarities remain, but a number of new similarities are developed. That is, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Shakespeare are strikingly similar in certain points which do not occur at all in Saxo or *Ambales* or the Greek epic.³⁰

Murray was England's foremost Greek scholar during the first half of the twentieth century, and is credited with numerous translations of Attic dramas and the revival of classical Greek theatre in London. He noted "extraordinary similarities" between Hamlet and Orestes, "respectively the greatest or most famous heroes of the world's two great ages of tragedy." Murray stopped short of claiming that Shakespeare was directly influenced by Greek tragedy, repeating that "all critics" have opposed this theory. As an alternative explanation, Murray proposed there exists a set of universal principles particular to tragedy that help explain these anomalies:

Are we thrown back then, on a much broader and simpler though rather terrifying hypothesis, that the field of tragedy is by nature so limited that these similarities are inevitable? . . . I do not think that in itself it is enough to explain those close and detailed and fundamental similarities as those we are considering . . . there must be a connection somewhere.³¹

In the century since Murray published his remarkable insights, other scholars have confirmed his judgment. Another Greek specialist, H.D.F. Kitto,³² has also identified Greek dramatic elements in *Hamlet*. Twenty-five years ago the *Shakespeare Quarterly* published Professor Louise Schleiner's detailed analysis, which went farther than any other twentieth-century argument in proposing a direct influence of Aeschylus' trilogy on *Hamlet*, mediated through one of the continental Latin translations.

I am convinced that at least some passages of Euripides' *Orestes* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* ... by some means influenced *Hamlet*. The concrete theatrical similarities between the Shakespearean and Aeschylean graveyard scenes and between the roles of Horatio and Pylades ... are in my view too close to be coincidental. Furthermore, the churchyard scene of *Hamlet* does not occur in any of the play's known sources or analogues: if it was not a sheer invention ... it has some source not yet identified.³³

Schleiner proposed several possible sources of Latin translations of Aeschylus, including the Saint-Revy edition (Basel, 1555) and the Vettori Aeschylus editions published by Henri Estienne (Paris, 1557, 1567). She noted that Ben Jonson owned a copy of the Saint-Revy *Oresteia* in 1614.³⁴

... The Greek subtext of *Hamlet*, if such it is, will not only help account for the rebirth of full-fledged tragedy after 2,000 years, it will also clarify Horatio's role and correct our century's overemphasis on Oedipal qualities in *Hamlet*. For Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is much more a version – even a purposive revision – of *Orestes* than *Oedipus*. *Hamlet* is at no risk of marrying or having sex with his mother. He is at considerable risk of killing her.³⁵

Martin Mueller has recently recognized a direct connection when he says “the drama at Elsinore self-consciously engages the legacy of ancient tragedy through a process in which a web of allusive ties link this playwright to *Orestes*”³⁶ Mueller insightfully notes that Shakespeare's contemporaries left literary evidence that they thought of *Hamlet* as an *Orestes*-inspired play.

In Thomas Heywood's *The Iron Age* (1611), a dramatization of the *Orestes* myth, we find a closet scene between *Orestes* and *Clytemnestra*. And *The Tragedy of Orestes Written by Thomas Goffe, Master of Arts, and Students of Christ Church in Oxford and Acted by the Students of the Same House* in 1616, while full of Shakespearean echoes in general, reads at times like a *Hamlet* cento. It is evident that Heywood and Goffe saw *Orestes* as *Hamlet* because they had seen *Hamlet* as *Orestes*.³⁷

If Shakespeare's contemporaries appreciated his use of Greek drama in *Hamlet*, and twentieth-century Greek scholars have recognized these numerous analogues, why has this controversy never been fully addressed by editors of modern editions of

Hamlet? There is even more compelling evidence for Shakespeare's debt to Aeschylus in the other northern tragedy, *Macbeth*, and critical commentaries recognizing the importance of these connections are lacking.

Macbeth³⁸

In 2009, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival produced a chillingly supernatural *Macbeth* at the same time that I was in a seminar on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The many parallels between these tragedies were obvious, but the *Oresteia*, as a direct source for *Macbeth*, had never received the critical attention bestowed on *Hamlet*. Remarkably, one early scholar recognized that of the entire canon, "*Macbeth* most resembles a Greek tragedy,"³⁹ and J.A.K. Thompson even noted this close association in *Shakespeare and the Classics*:

Macbeth is in many respects the most classical of all Shakespeare's plays. It employs more powerfully and overtly than any other, the method of tragic irony, which gets its effects by working on the foreknowledge of the audience – here communicated by the Witches – And the killing of Duncan is, in the Greek manner, done off stage.⁴⁰

In his detailed commentaries on the sources of *Macbeth*, however, Thompson ignored the Greek tragedies, and focused primarily on Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as more likely to have been Shakespeare sources.

Thompson is not the only scholar to identify analogues to Greek tragedy in *Macbeth* and then drop further investigation. In *Shakespeare Survey 19 Macbeth* (1966), Kenneth Muir writes that "*Macbeth* has long been considered one of Shakespeare's 'most sublime' plays, if only because of the analogues between it and Greek tragedies -"⁴¹. Muir's essay collection included commentaries by Arthur McGhee on "*Macbeth* and the Furies."

Among the early critical opinions linking *Macbeth* to the *Oresteia* that are cited in Horace Howard Furness' *Variorum* edition (1901) was expressed by Lord Campbell, author of *Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Reconsidered* (1859). Campbell determined that *Macbeth* reminded him of Aeschylus primarily because both playwrights employed conceptions too bold for easy representation:

In the grandeur of tragedy, *Macbeth* has no parallel, until we go back to *The Prometheus* and *The Furies* of the Attic stage. I could produce . . . innumerable instances of striking similarity between the metaphorical mintage of Shakespeare's and Aeschylus's style – a similarity, both in beauty and in the fault of excess, that, unless the contrary had been proved, would lead me to suspect our great dramatist to have been a studious Greek scholar. But their resemblance arose only from the consanguinity of nature.⁴²

Of all the twentieth-century Shakespeare scholars, J. Churton Collins provided the most detailed consideration of a direct link between *Macbeth* and Aeschylus' trilogy. Citing a number of potential inter-textual echoes to Greek tragedy, Collins noted these similarities in characterization:

Clytemnestra in *The Agamemnon* might well be the archetype of Lady Macbeth. Both possessed by one idea are, till its achievement, the incarnations of a murderous purpose. In both, the motive impulses are from the sexual affections. Both, without pity and without scruple, have nerves of steel and wills of iron before which their husband and paramour cower in admiring awe, and yet in both beats the women's heart, and the fine touches which Aeschylus brings this out may well have arrested Shakespeare's attention. The profound hypocrisy of the one in her speech to Agamemnon answers to that of the other in her speeches to Duncan.⁴³

Collins described how the build-up to Duncan's murder and the murder itself, with Lady Macbeth waiting in suspense outside the King's chamber, have a "strong generic resemblance to the catastrophes of the *Choephoroe* (*Libation Bearers*), the *Electra* (of Sophocles), and the *Orestes* (of Euripides)."⁴⁴

Collins was aware that the works of Aeschylus had never been published in England, and finally simply accepted that for his later plays "we must assume that *instinct* led Shakespeare to the Greek conception of the scope and functions of tragedy and that by a certain natural affinity he caught also the accent and tone as well as some of the most striking characteristics of Greek tragedy."⁴⁵ Despite the intriguing possibilities proposed by Collins, only a handful of Shakespeare scholars have continued to explore various dramatic elements that link the Scottish play to Greek tragedy.

In *Ethical Aspects of Tragedy* (1953), Laura Jepsen compared *Macbeth* and the *Oresteia* and focused the principle of "poetic justice" and the tension between individual responsibility and hereditary guilt as defining the heroic struggle. "Like Aristotle, the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare generally conceive of a universe in which standards of morality are absolute."⁴⁶ Jepsen argued that the guilty conscience assailing Macbeth was akin to Nemesis, which furiously pursued Clytemnestra, and she notes that both characters never showed a sign of repentance. Macbeth is at "the end, deceived by the witch's prophecies, but like Clytemnestra calling for the battle-axe, he dies defiantly presenting his shield."⁴⁷ While Jepsen presented a detailed comparative analysis of the plots, characters, and ethics of these two tragedies, she never contended that Aeschylus directly influenced Shakespeare.

In *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (1987), Professor Adrian Poole noted that Aeschylean tragedy is uniquely rich in the "power to represent fear, its symptoms, sources, objects and consequences. *Macbeth* is in this sense Shakespeare's most Aeschylean tragedy."⁴⁸ Poole accurately portrayed the restless confusion and insomnia

from painful memories that possessed the characters of both the *Oresteia* and *Macbeth*, giving rise to a “vertiginous apprehension.” Poole noted that Lady Macbeth, like Clytemnestra, “exhibits an astonishing self-control, a violent seizure of language through which she seeks to control herself and others.”⁴⁹

Poole’s analysis even included a recognition of the similarities of the dramatic situations of the avenging sons, Orestes and Malcolm, and he goes so far as to suggest that the English Siwards in *Macbeth* serve as the equivalent of Aeschylus’ Pylades, as “guarantors of a justice whose source lies elsewhere, beyond the confines of natural corruption.”⁵⁰ However, Professor Poole stopped short of ever making the radical proposal that Shakespeare drew directly from Aeschylus.

Despite these obvious parallels in plot, dramaturgy, characterization, and supernatural terror, no current edition of *Macbeth* includes Aeschylus as a possible source. The images, allusions and thematic parallels that connect these tragedies are summarized in my article, “Shakespeare’s Greater Greek: *Macbeth* and Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*” (*Brief Chronicles 3*, 2011). The arguments therein concern parallels related to the fatal “trammel net,” the dramaturgy of bloody knives, ghostly visitation, night terrors, the “damned spot,” poisoned breast imagery, avian augury, and the Weird Sisters as latter day Furies. These all represent new textual and thematic evidence which draws Shakespeare ever closer to Aeschylus than previously recognized, and establishes *Macbeth* as Shakespeare’s closest representation of Attic tragedy.

Finally, in a recent report, “Striking Too Short at Greeks: The Transmission of *Agamemnon* to the English Renaissance Stage” (2005), Professor Inga-Stina Ewbank remarked on the “eclecticism of Shakespeare’s inter-textualizing” included her “growing sense that Shakespeare learned from the Aeschylean chorus, with its intimate (and totally un-Senecan) connection with the house and the city.”⁵¹ Ewbank’s commentaries traced the history of neoclassical representations of Aeschylus’ characters. According to Ewbank, the Saint-Revy translation “appears to have been the version of Aeschylus commonly read by humanists on the Continent and in England.” Importantly, the Saint-Revy edition was based on an incomplete manuscript which compressed the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation Bearers* into one play in which *Agamemnon* never appears as a character.⁵²

Professor Ewbank also recognized that Thomas Goffe’s *The Tragedie of Orestes* (1616) reveals another recognizable connection between Shakespeare and Aeschylus. She noted that in Goffe’s drama, “Aegisthus and Clitemnestra become like the Macbeths: he invokes the ‘sable wings’ of Night and Clitemnestra ‘unsexes’ herself, and together they stab *Agamemnon* in his bed Orestes, meditating on his father’s skull, Hamlet-fashion, finds assurance in a Macbeth-like visit to an Enchantress and three witches who produce, to the accompaniment of ‘*Infernall Musique*’, a dumb show of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra ‘with their bloody daggers’ killing *Agamemnon*.”⁵³

Ewbank failed to satisfactorily answer the question of how, in 1616, Goffe incorporated dramatic elements later found in *Macbeth*, which was not published until seven years later in the *First Folio*. Nonetheless, her conclusion sounded a positive note: “We need to know more about the part played by Greek texts in Elizabethan and Jacobean literary culture, but evidence seems to mount up that some form of first-hand contact with Aeschylus has left traces in Shakespeare’s dramatic imagination.”⁵⁴

Timon of Athens⁵⁵

Compared to other Shakespeare plays, *Timon of Athens* is an austere and static drama, almost completely lacking in action. In his annotated bibliography, John Ruszkiewicz noted the generically mixed qualities of *Timon*, “a play conceived as tragedy, but incorporating elements of morality, comedy, farce, satire, masque and pageant.”⁵⁶ Opinion has been mostly critical of *Timon*, although G. Wilson Knight praised this drama as being tremendous, “of universal tragic significance.”⁵⁷ That we have a text at all is remarkable as some editors have concluded it was never intended for publication, being mysteriously inserted in the place of *Troilus and Cressida* in the *First Folio*. That there were no designations for acts or scenes in the *Folio* text also suggests we should view *Timon* as unique.

The potential co-authorship of *Timon* with Thomas Middleton has been embraced by a number of scholars, although there is still considerable uncertainty over the date of composition based on performance records or allusions to a dramatic production. While there were a number of English literary allusions to *Timon* during the later sixteenth century, none specifically refer to a Timon-drama except one: William Warner’s reference to the Athenian misanthrope in *Syrinx or A Sevenfold History* (1584).

And yet, let his coy prophetess presage hard events in her cell, let the Athenian *misanthropos* [printed in Greek] or man-hater bite on the stage, or the Sinopian cynic bark with the stationer; yet, in *Pan his Syrinx*, will I pipe at the least to myself.⁵⁸

Warner’s coy prophetess is most likely an allusion to Cassandra, the seer who rejected Apollo and became Agamemnon’s ill-fated slave at the end of the Trojan War. Further, this is quite possibly a reference to a character in the lost drama, *History of Agamemnon and Ulysses*, performed at court in December 1584 by the Earl of Oxford’s Boys. In *English Dramatic Companies, 1558-1642* (1910), J. T. Murray speculated that this play “may have been written by the Earl of Oxford himself, for he was reckoned by Puttenham and Meres among ‘the best for comedy’ of his time.”⁵⁹ The Sinopian cynic is clearly a reference to the fifth century Greek cynic philosopher, Diogenes, a character in John Lyly’s *Campaspe*, which was also staged by Oxford’s Boys during the same court revels in 1584. *Campaspe* was published later that same year, thus the allusion to the stationer. The Athenian *misanthropos* biting on the stage is almost certainly

an allusion to a contemporary presentation of a Timon drama. Warner's letter opens the door to the possibility of topical and allegorical interpretations of Shakespeare's *Timon* that relate to the events in the Earl of Oxford's life in the early 1580's.

A significant dispute exists over the acknowledged sources of *Timon*. Scholars readily accept Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* and Lucian's dialogue, *Timon The Misanthrope*, as primary sources, but controversy continues over the part played by an unpublished, anonymous manuscript of a satire, *MS Timon*, possibly written for the Inns of Court or a university audience. *MS Timon* was published for the first time in 1842 by Alexander Dyce. H. J. Oliver has effectively argued that it is hard to understand how Shakespeare could have known this unpublished academic comedy, and Muriel Bradbrook has interpreted it to be more likely a derivative parody of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Oxford editor John Jowett noted that neither Plutarch nor Lucian embodied the bleak cynicism found in Shakespeare's tragedy, and that Timon's pessimism seems to belong to a "more complex textual field," one that depicts, he notes, the economic ruin of the nobility. Shakespeare radically recast Timon in the mold of a classical tragic hero, and did so by adapting the dramatic structure, poetics, dramaturgy, and allegory inherent to Greek tragedy. A.D. Nuttall, author of *Shakespeare the Thinker* (2007), noted that in *Timon*, Shakespeare dramatized inhumanity in such a way as to reflect the stiff archaic formalism of Greek tragedy and employed expressions that "are a classic expression of irony, running at full Sophoclean strength."⁶⁰

Shakespeare's *Timon* possesses a three-part structure that parallels a traditional Greek tragic trilogy. Rolf Soellner has insightfully suggested that *Timon* "follows the tripartite design offered by Renaissance humanists: *protasis, epitasis, catastrophe*." The Folio text of *Timon* does not include act or scene divisions, but the play explores three distinct, progressively darker dramatic moods, all approximately of equal length. I have labeled these divisions: Prodigal Timon (Act 1 plus the Masque of the Amazons), Timon's Misfortune (Acts 2, 3, & 4, Scenes 1 & 2), and Timon's Fury (Act 4, Scene 3 & Act 5). A.D. Nuttall seems to agree as regards Act 4 of *Timon*, noting that the structure and character of the scene are "astonishingly Greek."

We have the pattern of the humiliated hero, apart from society, in a wild place. To him come, in succession, various figures to upbraid him or (more importantly) to solicit his aid. It is a pattern of great power in Sophocles, strong in Aeschylus, less strong in Euripides. In *Oedipus at Colonus* the protagonist, blind, filthy, and ragged is visited in turn by Theseus, Creon, and Polynices. . . . Oedipus, for all his strange aura of sanctity, is more like Timon than one expects. He embraces his own wretchedness and curses those who have wronged him.⁶¹

Nuttall identified three plays with a structure similar to the final part of *Timon of Athens*:

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Philoctetes*, and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. In each of these three Greek tragedies, a betrayed and wounded hero survives in a desolate wilderness, but is pursued by needy visitors. Of *Timon's* succession of supplicants, Nuttall wrote, "We seem to have traveled back to the earliest period of Greek drama, in which the 'second actor' has not yet been invented and where . . . the same speaker came forward to address the audience in a succession of different masks."⁶²

Many critics, including Nuttall, Maurice Charney, G. Wilson Knight, H.J. Oliver, and James Bulman have noted this tragedy's unprecedented use of Greek-like choric passages. The term "gods" also appears more often in this play than any other Shakespeare work.⁶³ Shakespeare's *Timon* begins in the Greek fashion with an oracle, which as Adrian Poole has noted, creates an "apprehension of temporal convergence at once fearful and hopeful," and is "characteristically Sophoclean." Further, Timon dies off-stage and his death is reported by a messenger, also fitting the classical model. Timon's excess of bitter emotion to the point of madness is a theme that is often incorporated in Attic tragedy. James Bulman and Frank Kermode have both argued that, of all the plays of Shakespeare, *Timon* most closely adheres to an Aristotelian moral scheme. Critics have also commented on how *Timon* employs Greek versification, especially stichomythia, and cannibalistic imagery, another characteristic of the Attic tragedy.

Timon of Athens presents a matrix of Greek dramatic elements that imbue the tragedy's plot, characterization, poetics, ethics, imagery, and dramaturgy with a classical aura. Nuttall's deductions about the similarities between Shakespeare's *Timon* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* are particularly important, though Nuttall is obliged to disclaim Shakespeare's knowledge of this untranslated tragedy. Shakespeare's *Timon* is the playwright's most Sophoclean creation, both in the hubris of his prodigality and the cynicism of his misanthropy. Timon's fury-driven death in the wilderness comes without the benefit of self-reflection. A Renaissance adaptation of Greek tragedy, *Timon* is a self-consciously literate creation, one which adapts a mosaic of Greek sources that would most likely have been appreciated only by a well-educated audience.

Oxfordian biographers have strongly suggested that *Timon* is a political allegory, one specifically reflecting Edward de Vere's financial and social misfortunes in the early 1580's, when the Timon-drama was performed.^{63a} That de Vere was the archetypal bankrupt patrician who wasted a fortune to end up as a Queen's pensioner reinforces the claim that *Timon* is ultimately about the economic ruin of the author and that Timon's dramatic flaws may well reflect Oxford's emotional condition at a very low point in his life. E.K. Chambers believed that Shakespeare wrote *Timon* under conditions of mental and perhaps physical stress, and that he had a breakdown.

How closely *Timon* fits the mold of the Earl of Oxford during this period is

remarkable. Timon's patronage of the Poet and Painter reflects Oxford's support of many writers. Having received a dozen literary dedications by 1580, Oxford sat for at least two paintings, the Welbeck and Ashbourne portraits. Like Oxford, Timon supported performance art in the Masque of the Amazons, a device that may mirror the *Masque of Amazons* performed before Queen Elizabeth and the French ambassador in 1578. Timon even claims the troupe 'Entertain'd me with my own device' (1.2.146). At this time, Oxford supported two theatre groups, Oxford's Men and Oxford's Boys, and he was also known to have written interludes and performed before the queen himself.

The Winter's Tale⁶⁴

In the fall of 2005, the Classical Greek Theatre of Oregon produced *The Alcestis*, Euripides' tragicomedy, originally performed in 438 BCE as a satyr play following a tragic trilogy. One review of the performance suggested that the final scene of the play bore a remarkable resemblance to the statue scene of *The Winter's Tale*. As I would soon discover, a full century had passed since the last Shakespeare scholar had written coherently about the evidence which supported the reviewer's intuitive observation.

Critics have long recognized that the plot of *The Winter's Tale* was derived primarily from Robert Greene's 1588 romance, *Pandosto, The Triumph of Time*. While there are many verbal echoes from *Pandosto* in Shakespeare, the differences and similarities between Greene's tragic prose novella and Shakespeare's romance are striking. Shakespeare seems to have (again) structured his drama as classic Greek trilogy. First, it is a tragedy set in Sicily, marked by Leontes' escalating murderous jealousy, climaxing with the death of Mamillius and the disappearance of Hermione; second it includes a Bohemian romantic pastoral ending with the elopement of Florizel and Perdita; and third, the scenes of reconciliation in Sicily conclude with the reanimation of Hermione. G. Wilson Knight has reverentially referred to the statue scene as "the most strikingly conceived and profoundly penetrating moment in English literature."

The classical names of the characters, largely adopted from Plutarch's *Lives*, the preeminence of Apollo, the themes of extreme jealousy, attempted regicide and infanticide, and the mysterious resurrection of the queen after sixteen years absence, all point to sources from the classics. Nineteenth century Shakespeare scholars including W.W. Lloyd (1856), Israel Gollancz (1894), A.E. Haigh (1896), and H.R.D. Anders (1904) all recognized Euripides' *Alcestis* as the primary source for the statue scene, but during the twentieth century acknowledgment of this connection essentially disappeared. Of recent editions, only the 1963 Arden includes a brief footnote. Most scholars now would consider Ovid's Pygmalion story from *The Metamorphoses* as the primary source of the reanimation of the statue of Hermione.

What is noteworthy, but overlooked by most critics, is the preeminence of Apollo in both *The Alcestis* and *The Winter's Tale*. The few references to Apollo in Greene's *Pandosto* are traditional appeals to the god, unlike *The Winter's Tale* where there are an overabundance of allusions to him or his oracle. In Euripides' *Alcestis* Apollo delivers the prologue, then argues with Death over the fate of Queen Alcestis and prophesizes the possibility of her rescue. Apollo is also featured through two songs of the *Alcestis* chorus.

Although Apollo does not appear on stage, the extent to which Shakespeare has invested his play with manifold aspects of the god is detailed by David Bergeron in his article "The Apollo Mission in *The Winter's Tale*" (1995). "Of the twenty nine references to Apollo in his canon, thirteen come in *The Winter's Tale*. . . . Only in [this] romance does Shakespeare refer to Apollo's power as an oracle."⁶⁵ Shakespeare includes a detailed description of the sacred temple at Delphos and the oracle itself is presented formally during the Queen's trial with great pomp. In the scene of Hermione's resurrection, Paulina's mastery as a priestess of Apollo is consummate. The mystical tone of her speeches, combined with the effects of the music and the "many singularities" of art, epitomizes the spirit of Apollo, according to Bergeron.

We recall that traditions link Apollo to the Nine Muses, to music and art. Paulina creates a complete Apollonian moment at her house where music, art, and theatre interconnect at a propitious time. Like Romano and like Apollo, Paulina sculpts his experience to produce mystery, wonder, faith, and eventually catharsis.⁶⁶

Doubt that Shakespeare would have had access to Greek or Latin editions of *The Alcestis* made twentieth-century scholars reluctant to claim that Shakespeare knew Euripides' drama. Over a century ago however, a handful of classically-trained scholars took notice of the remarkable similarities between the statue scene and the final scene of *Alcestis*. Greek scholar A.E. Haigh's comparative analysis, *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (1896), detailed many parallels between *Alcestis* and *The Winter's Tale*.

Every critic has admired the pathos and dramatic effect of the final scene, in which Alcestis is brought back disguised as a stranger, and received at first with reluctance, until she is gradually recognized. Two points in the scene deserve notice. The first is the curious resemblance to the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*, where Leontes is taken to see, as he imagines, the statue of his dead wife and finds instead the living Hermione. Second is the silence of Alcestis after her return from the grave. The silence is due, not to theatrical exigencies and the absence of a third actor, as some critics have supposed, but to the deliberate choice of the poet. For one who has just been restored from the darkness of the tomb, no form of words could be as appropriate as the mute and half-dazed torpor in which she stands.⁶⁷

A century later however, in *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, Michelle and Charles

Martindale dismiss these similarities to as merely “fortuitous.” The dramaturgic elements in *Alceste* that bear a resemblance to Shakespeare’s romance, however, go well beyond the parallels of a mysterious return of a presumed dead queen and her restoration to a grieving husband. Music and prayerful thanks conclude both dramas. In both plays the queens are described with the same idealized language (“sacred lady,” “blessed spirit,” “peerless,” “the best and dearest”). Both are honored by tombs that are described in their respective dramas as sacred shrines, monuments that bear evidence of their husbands’ shame.

Although *Alceste* does not return to Admetus in the form of a statue, Euripides’ King promises to have a lifelike statue made of her: “Your image, carved by the skilled hands of artists, shall be laid in our marriage-bed; I shall clasp it, and my hands shall cling to it and I shall speak your name and so, not having you, shall think I have my dear wife in my arms – a cold delight, I know, but it will lighten the burden of my days” (326-47). *Alceste* was the ancient model of wifely goodness. Depicted in Plato’s *Symposium* as the ultimate example of altruism, she was also the subject of Chaucer’s lengthy prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, where, married to the God of Love, she counsels the poet to write of the great women of antiquity. Shakespeare seems to have picked up where Chaucer left off. Standing on the shoulders of Euripides, Plato, and Chaucer, he brings to modern life this ancient figure of feminine goodness. So compelling is the emotional effect of the statue scene that during the nineteenth century, it was known to have been performed quite frequently as a stand-alone scene, often as a prelude to other dramas.

Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* is a paean to Apollo, populated by a dramatis personae named symbolically for famous fourth and fifth century Greek heroes, which concludes with a miraculous restoration of an *Alceste*-like figure of loving goodness. What many nineteenth century scholars understood about Shakespeare’s knowledge of Euripides’ drama has been disregarded too long. Sarah Dewar-Watson, in her 2009 Shakespeare Quarterly article, “The *Alceste* and the Statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale*,” offered a renewed acknowledgement of what earlier scholars recognized as Shakespeare’s inspiration for the most revered scene in the entire canon.

Much Ado About Nothing⁶⁸

While there were a number of early scholars who recognized Shakespeare’s debt to *Alceste* for the statue scene, no critic argued for the possibility that the concluding scenes of *Much Ado About Nothing* were similarly influenced by Euripides’ tragicomedy. Two Shakespeare editors, however, have recently published works that recognized the distinctly Euripidean dramaturgy in the last act of *Much Ado*. Jonathan Bate and Claire McEachern have both suggested that *Much Ado*’s final scene is also likely based on Euripides’ tragicomedy. McEachern’s introductory commentaries in the 2006 Arden edition noted that Shakespeare’s dramaturgy in the marriage scene is much

closer to Euripides' depiction in *Alcestis* than to Bandello's story, which is the primary source of the Hero-Claudio plot:

Unlike Sir Timbreo, but like Admetus, Claudio must accept his second bride without seeing her face . . . and [this] forces him to have faith where once he lacked it. Hero's mock funeral, in turn, recalls and prefigures other of Shakespeare's mock deaths, such as Juliet's or Helena's or Hermione's, in which heroines undergo a trial passage to the underworld. Euripides' *Alcestis* is also structurally similar to *Much Ado* in its use of comic scenes (those of Hercules' drunken festivities during the heroine's funeral) to counterpoint the apparent tragedy and hint at the comic ending to come.⁶⁹

Jonathan Bate has also said that *Alcestis* was a possible Shakespeare source in his essay, "Dying to Live in *Much Ado about Nothing*" (1994).⁷⁰ Though he neglected to cite or quote any of the older scholarship on *The Winter's Tale*, he was the first modern Shakespeare scholar to make this claim for *Much Ado*.

One way of putting it would be to say that *The Winter's Tale*, with its hinged tragicomic structure, is the logical conclusion of Shakespeare's work. That play is certainly the fully matured reworking of *Much Ado*. . . . The ultimate "source" for the Hero plot of *Much Ado* is a Greek myth, that of Alcestis.⁷¹

Bate refers to this moment as the very heart of the play. To him, Hero's apparent death and silence are reminiscent of the myth of Hero and Leander, where Hero drowns herself rather than live without her beloved. According to Bate, Hero was probably named as a representative of Ovid's *Heroides*, the catalogue of the worthy women of antiquity who were betrayed and abandoned by their husbands and lovers.

The Hero and the other heroines of the *Heroides* are essentially tragic figures; in that Ovidian text there are no second chances. *Much Ado* is more in a romance mold, and this suggests a generic link with Euripides' *Alcestis*. The latter was a kind of transcended tragedy; it was performed in the position usually held by the comic satyr-play, as fourth in a group of dramas, following and in some senses defusing or providing relief from three tragedies. It is a potential tragedy but with last-minute relief. Life is heightened because of the process of going through death: the pattern is that of many works in the romance tradition and of several of Shakespeare's later comedies – *Much Ado*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Pericles*, and *The Winter's Tale*.⁷²

Bate asserts that *Alcestis* may not be the primary source of the Hero plot, but Euripides' heroine nonetheless serves as a "powerful, mythic prototype" for women who are silenced by a temporary consignment to the grave.

As in *All's Well that Ends Well* and *The Winter's Tale*, the actual death of the

myth is replaced by a self-conscious stage trick. Theophanies like that of Apollo and super-human interventions like that of Herakles are replaced by domesticated divine agents: the Friar's scheme, Helena's self-contrived devices, Paulina's priestess-like art. Silence is not given a mythico-religious cause but becomes a psychological and social reality.⁷³

In Ovid's *Heroides*, the heroines often refer to their tombs and several of them inscribe their own epitaph. Bate notes that "the epitaph and tomb scene makes Hero recognizable as one of the *Heroides*. Her name makes this link: it sets up a prototype that can be recognized by the audience."⁷⁴ Bate's argument on the symbolic significance of Hero's name is relevant, but he fails to note the distinct parallels between the Chorus near the conclusion of *Alcestis* and the tomb rites in Act 5 of *Much Ado*. In Euripides' drama, the Chorus sings its lamentation that neither knowledge of "Orphic symbols" nor "the herbs given by Phoebus to the children of Asclepius" avails against man's mortality, that Fate's "fierce will knows not gentleness." The last stanza of this Chorus serves as a paean to Alcestis, the "blessed spirit," and includes expressions suggestive of Shakespeare's epitaph and song dedicated to Hero:

Ah!
 Let the grave of your spouse
 Be no more counted as a tomb,
 But revered as the Gods,
 And greeted by all who pass by!
 The wanderer shall turn from his path,
 Saying: 'She died for her lord:
 A blessed spirit she is now.
 Hail, O sacred lady, be our friend!
 Thus shall men speak of her.
 (*Alcestis*, 986-1005)⁷⁵

The tomb scene in *Much Ado* is very short, only 33 lines long, and half the lines comprise the epitaph and dirge. This very solemn scene concludes with Don Pedro's description of dawn in an allusion to Apollo, "the wheels of Phoebus" (5.3.26), who is preeminent in *Alcestis* and *The Winter's Tale*. Hero's epitaph, remarkably, sounds very much like the *Alcestis* Chorus in that both proclaim the particular sacrifices of the deceased women, which merits their fame:

Done to death by slanderous tongues
 Was the Hero that here lies:
 Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
 Gives her fame which never dies:
 So the life that died with shame,
 Lives in death with glorious fame.
 (*Ado*, 5.3.3-8)

As soon as the epitaph is hung, Claudio calls for music and this “solemn hymn.”

Pardon, goddess of the night,
 Those that slew thy virgin knight,
 For the which with songs of woe
 Round about her tomb we go.
 Midnight, assist our moan,
 Help us sigh and groan,
 Heavily, heavily.
 Graves yawn and yield your dead,
 Till death be uttered
 Heavily, heavily.

(*Ado*, 5.3.12-21)

If Claudio is modeled after Euripides' Admetus, whose contrition and shame is well developed, then his vow of an annual visit to Hero's monument must be serious. The “goddess of the night” here is an allusion to Diana, goddess of the moon and of chastity. Greek choruses danced when they sang, often circling in unison and alternating directions with each stanza. The *First Folio* edition of *Much Ado* substituted the words, “Heavenly, heavenly” for line 21, which could certainly be an allusion to the possibility of resurrection. Both the tomb scene in *Much Ado* and the Chorus in *Alcestis* reflect a sober, melancholic pathos. Both are immediately followed by joyful reunions with mysteriously veiled women returned from the grave.

Neither Bate nor McEachern commented on another potential Euripidean element in Shakespeare's comedy, the four allusions to Hercules. In Euripides' *Alcestis*, Hercules is first made ridiculous through a drunken burlesque, and then redeems himself by performing the role of *deus ex machina*. The allusions to Hercules in *Much Ado* suggest that Shakespeare was not only familiar with Euripides's treatment of Hercules, but also with other untranslated, non-dramatic sources including Homer's *Iliad* and the satirist Lucian.

In *Much Ado*, the first allusion to Hercules identifies him as a matchmaker. Don Pedro swears to “undertake one of Hercules' labors, which is to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th'one to th'other” (2.1). Don Pedro's allusion very likely references Euripides' drama, where Hercules grapples with Death to save Queen Alcestis and return her to the living, like Hero, veiled to conceal her identity. Importantly, this episode is the only one among Hercules' many labors, adventures, and romances in which he performs such a matchmaking duty.

Hercules is portrayed quite satirically in *Alcestis*. Following a series of pathetic scenes centered on death and grief, Hercules staggers drunkenly on stage, raving about the blessings of wine and perfections of Aphrodite, unwittingly offending the horrified servants of the grieving household. In this regard, Euripides' Hercules is similar to

Shakespeare's Benedick, who is made a literal fool for love by Don Pedro's campaign. Later Benedick will be dispatched by Beatrice, who invokes Hercules to get him to agree to risk death and challenge Claudio in order to restore Hero's honor.

Shakespeare alludes to Hercules 35 times in his dramas, far more often than any other classic hero. In this, he followed the example of many classical poets. These Herculean narratives, depicting a hero in his struggle against supernatural forces, inspired many Renaissance writers. As an archetypal tragic hero, Hercules provided the personal template for doomed characters found in Marlowe, Chapman, and Shakespeare. In *The Herculean Hero* (1962), Eugene Waith made a compelling case for interpreting Coriolanus and Mark Antony as tragic heroes closely identified with Hercules. Waith focused exclusively on the tragic Hercules as a Renaissance model. Likewise, Euripides' Hercules provides a template for the comic excesses exhibited by Shakespeare's hero, Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Shakespeare's Greater Greek and the Authorship Challenge

In *Attic and Elizabethan Tragedy*, (1908) Laughlin Mclean Watt proclaimed that there has been no period of history more conducive to "provocations of greatness" than the ages of Attic and Elizabethan tragedy. That the "grandeur, depth, and breadth" of the literary production of both of these eras "took up the most momentous questions – life, death, God, man, judgment, and all the huge ethical shadows that, on the skirts of these, haunt men's being and conduct."⁷⁶ Watt's assertions underline the cultural significance of recognizing the profound imprint Greek dramatic literature had on Shakespeare's creative imagination. The mythopoetic narratives of the Greek playwrights have endured over 2,500 years, inspiring Shakespearean adaptation and modern translation through twentieth-century tragedies.

The four main reasons scholars have avoided establishing philological connections between the Greeks and Shakespeare are:

- the enduring legacy of Jonson's ironic reference to Shakespeare's "lesse Greek"
- the limitations imposed by Shakespearean biography
- the deficiencies of a sixteenth-century English grammar school education in the Greek classics, and
- the dearth of editions of Greek dramas or Latin translations in England.

The enduring assumption has been that England's Renaissance culture was Latin-based and that Attic tragedy had not influenced the English stage. However, evidence of intertextual connections of structure, plot, imagery, theme, allegory, dramaturgy, and topicality presented here directly challenges this. To have overlooked the

myriad connections between Shakespeare and the Greeks is to have missed a critical link in understanding Shakespeare's literary foundations.

The controversy over Shakespeare's use of Greek sources is heating up. In July, 2014, the Center for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies at the University of York sponsored a day-long colloquium on "Greek Texts and the Early Modern Stage," which explored the impact of the Greek canon on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The colloquium website noted: "Greek provokes strong associations for a number of reasons: its controversial associations with Erasmus, Protestantism, and heresy; the specter of democratic governance; the rebirth of interest in Galenic medicine; the pervasive influence of Greek culture on Latin literature; and the identification of Greece with the origins of theatre."

In the abstract of her paper, "Hamlet and the Ghost of Sophocles," Sarah Dewar-Watson argued that the verbal echoes of Sophocles' *Antigone* in *Hamlet* suggested Shakespeare was also familiar with the anthology of seven Greek plays, *Tragediae selectae Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripidis*, published in Paris in 1567 by Henri Estienne. The edition included Latin translations of *Antigone*, *Hecuba*, *Alcestis*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*.⁷⁷ Still, Oxford University's Colin Burrow is set on Plutarch as Shakespeare's primary source for understanding the conventions of Greek theatre, while Jonathan Bate has expressed similar feelings that Ovid, not Plutarch, mediated Shakespeare's Greek: "...it cannot be proved that Shakespeare knew any of the plays of Euripides. But there is no doubt that he derived a Euripidean spirit from Ovid. Euripides taught Ovid what Ovid taught Shakespeare: the art of tragicomedy"⁷⁸

There is much work yet to be done on this subject. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's one Athenian comedy, reflects numerous elements that are recognizably based on Greek Old Comedy and was directly influenced by Aristophanes' masterpiece, *The Birds*.⁷⁹ *Troilus and Cressida* incorporates imagery that references a number of untranslated passages from Homer's *Iliad*. Other scholars have reported that *Troilus and Cressida* echoes passages from Sophocles' *Ajax* as well as Euripides' *Phoenissiae*. Richard Grant White (1886) and J. Churton Collins (1904) made a compelling case for the Ulysses' eye metaphor speech in 3.3 to have been based on another untranslated Greek work, the *First Alcibiades* of Plato, which James Hanford called "the closest parallel between Plato and Shakespeare ever brought forward." *Cymbeline* and *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* arguably incorporate elements adapted from Euripides' tragicomedies, *Ion* and *Iphigenia at Taurus*.

The only published works that have systematically examined the Greek canon for elements incorporated by Shakespeare are by R.R. Khare (1998) and Myron Stagman (2011). In *Shakespeare's Greek Drama Secret*, Stagman argued that there are many unmediated textual correspondences between Greek dramas and the plays of Shakespeare, and that Shakespeare's achievement was unique precisely because of his mastery of Attic

drama. Stagman cataloged many potential textual connections between Shakespeare and the Greeks, and he speculated that the poet's education must have included readings from Homer, Lucian, Pindar, and the Athenian playwrights.

The long-held reticence to fully address the question of Greek dramatic sources, may be at least partly related to the Shakespeare authorship challenge and the candidacy of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford as the primary alternative. Oxford arguably had an outstanding classical education and would have had access to the texts of Attic tragedies during his youth through his tutor, Cambridge University Greek scholar, Sir Thomas Smith.⁸⁰ Smith was clearly familiar with the conventions and texts of the classical theatre as he helped produce Aristophanes' plays *Plutus* (in 1536) and *Peace* (in 1546) at Cambridge.⁸¹

Oxford had access to continental editions of Greek texts for nearly a decade while he lived at Cecil House where he was in close contact with England's leading translators: Arthur Golding (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 1567), George Gascoigne (Euripides' *Phoenissiae*, 1572), and Arthur Hall (the first ten books of Homer's *Iliad*, 1581). Smith and Cecil possessed Greek editions of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Plato in their personal libraries. Mildred Cecil was an accomplished Greek translator. John Strype (quoting Roger Ascham) said, "Mildred Cecil spoke and understood Greek as easily as she spoke English."⁸² The inventory of her Greek editions makes clear that Edward de Vere had ready access to the Attic tragedians.

The Earl of Oxford attended the Greek Church in Venice during his Italian travels in 1575 and was accompanied there by Nathaniel Baxter, Sir Phillip Sidney's Greek tutor. Thus, throughout his early life Oxford was surrounded by scholars versed in the Greek canon. Whether Oxford actually travelled to Greece during this sojourn is not relevant to this inquiry, but there is irony in the possibility that Oxford's claim to the attribution may have adversely influenced the intellectual vigor of Shakespeare studies simply because he represents a far superior candidate as regards the creation of dramas based on Greek sources.

Finally, I have learned that interpreting Greek drama in translation has pitfalls with respect to establishing specific intertextual analogues with Shakespeare. Twentieth-century translations of Aeschylus show wide variations in text, and there appears to be a distinct possibility that translators unconsciously employ language and imagery that are closely associated with Shakespeare.⁸³ Nonetheless, the collective evidence presented here would confirm that Shakespeare belongs within the lineage of dramatists that stretches directly from Aeschylus to O'Neill.

Notes

- 1 Wyatt Mason, "You Are Not Alone: Using Sophocles to treat PTSD," *Harp-er's* 329:1973 (2014), 65.
- 2 Rachel Galvin, National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lecture, 2001.
- 3 Laughlin Maclean Watt, *Attic and Elizabethan Tragedy* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1908, 1968), 2.
- 4 Watt, 345.
- 5 Robert Kilburn Root, *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare* (New York: Gordion Press, Inc. 1965-1903), 6.
- 6 Stanley Wells cited "Shakespeare's 'Lesse Greek'" in a presentation to the World Shakespeare Congress in Prague in July, 2011. Werth's identification of the untranslated *Greek Anthology* as the source for *Sonnets 153* and *154* impressed Wells, who commented that Werth should not be condemned for being an Oxfordian. A report on Wells' comments is available at Stephanie Hughes' blog, politicworm.com.
- 7 John Edwin Sandys, "Education" in *Shakespeare England Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916), 265.
- 8 Michelle and Charles Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 41.
- 9 A.D. Nuttall, "Action At a Distance: Shakespeare and the Greeks" in *Shakespeare and the Classics*. ed. Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor, (2004), 210.
- 10 Michael Silk, "Shakespeare and Greek Tragedy: Strange Relationship" in Martindale and Taylor, 241.
- 11 J.A.K. Thompson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (London: George Allen, 1952), 250.
- 12 Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare & Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 247.

- 13 J. Churton Collins, *Studies in Shakespeare* (Westminster: Archibald, Constable & Co. Ltd., 1904), 41. Although Collins mentions the existence of Latin editions of Aristophanes, he states that he found “no trace in Shakespeare of any acquaintance with Aristophanes.”
- 14 Gilbert Murray, *Hamlet and Orestes: A Study in Traditional Types*, Proceedings of the British Academy, (June, 1914), 1-24.
- 15 Jan Kott (trans. Boleslaw Taborski), “Hamlet and Orestes,” *PMLA* 82:5 (1967), 303-313.
- 16 Louise Schleiner, “Latinized Greek Drama in Shakespeare’s Writing of *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41:1 (1990).
- 17 Earl Showerman, “Orestes to Hamlet: Myth to Masterpiece,” *The Oxfordian VII* (2004).
- 18 Inga Stina-Ewbank, “Striking Too Short at Greeks: The Transmission of *Agamemnon* to the English Renaissance Stage,” in *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to 2004*, ed. Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin (Oxford University Press, 2005), 51.
- 19 Earl Showerman, “Shakespeare’s Greater Greek: *Macbeth* and the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus,” *Brief Chronicles* Vol. 3 (2011), 37-70.
- 20 Jonathan Bate. “Dying to Live in *Much Ado about Nothing*.” In *Surprised by Scenes: Essays in Honor of Professor Yasunai Takahashi*, edited by Yasunari Takada, 69-85. (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1994).
- 21 Sarah Dewar-Watson, “The *Alcestis* and the Statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60 (2009), 73-80.
- 22 Claire McEachern ed. *Much Ado about Nothing*. (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2006).
- 23 Earl Showerman, “Shakespeare’s Many *Much Ado*’s: *Alcestis*, Hercules and *Love’s Labour’s Wonne*,” originally published in *Brief Chronicles* Vol. 1 (2009), 109-140. Reprinted in *Shakespeare Criticism Vol. 141*, Gale, Cengage Learning, 2012.
- 24 A.D. Nuttall, *Timon of Athens*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989).

- 25 Laurie Maguire, *Shakespeare's Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 98.
- 26 Maguire, 100.
- 27 Maguire, 103-4.
- 28 Bruce Smith, *Ancient Scripts & Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 203.
- 29 Earl Showerman, "Orestes to Hamlet: Myth to Masterpiece," *The Oxfordian VII* (2004).
- 30 Gilbert Murray, "Hamlet and Orestes: A Study in Traditional Types." *Proceedings of the British Academy*, June, 1914, 14.
- 31 Murray, 15.
- 32 H.D.F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama: A Study of Six Greek plays and Hamlet* (London: Methuen, 1956).
- 33 Louise Schleiner, "Latinized Greek Drama in Shakespeare's Writing of *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41:1 (1990), 30.
- 34 Schleiner, 32.
- 35 Schleiner, 36-37.
- 36 Martin Mueller, "Hamlet and the World of Ancient Tragedy," *Arion* (1997), 22-45.
- 37 Mueller, 27.
- 38 Earl Showerman, "Shakespeare's Greater Greek: *Macbeth* and the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus," *Brief Chronicles* Vol. 3 (2011), 37-70.
- 39 Thomas Wheeler, *Macbeth: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 442. T. Francis Glasson published "Did Shakespeare Read Aeschylus?" in the *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 173 (1948), 57-66. Text of Wheeler's abstract: "Glasson points to eight examples of *Macbeth* and Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. Some are verbal, some based on similar situations (e.g., Orestes' knocking on the door of Aegisthus' house

and the delayed response of the servant). Having surveyed the scholarship and evidence for and against Shakespeare's knowledge Greek – Aeschylus had not been translated into English, and the Latin translation does not resemble *Macbeth* as much as the Greek original – Glasson concludes that the question posed by his title cannot be answered definitively. But he points out that, of all Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* most resembles a Greek tragedy."

- 40 J.A.K. Thompson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952), 119.
- 41 Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare Survey 19 Macbeth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 5.
- 42 Lord Campbell, *Legal Acquirements of Shakespeare* (1859) in *Variorum Macbeth*, 480.
- 43 J. Churton Collins, *Studies in Shakespeare* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1904), 72-3.
- 44 Collins, 73.
- 45 Collins, 87.
- 46 Laura Jepsen, "Poetic Justice: The *Oresteia* and *Macbeth*," 8-31, in *Ethical Aspects of Tragedy: A Comparison of Certain Tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca and Shakespeare* (New York: AMS Press, 1971, reprint of 1953 edition), 6.
- 47 Jepsen, 31.
- 48 Adrian Poole, *Tragedy, Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 15. Chapter 2, "The Initiate Fear: Aeschylus, Shakespeare" (15-53) includes an extended discussion of the similarities in the representation of prophesy, fear and the inevitability of suffering in the *Oresteia* and *Macbeth*. Poole also co-edited *The Oxford Book of Classical Verse in Translation*.
- 49 Poole, 19.
- 50 Poole, 49.
- 51 Inga-Stina Ewbank, " 'Striking Too Short at Greeks': The Transmission of

- Agamemnon* to the English Renaissance Stage,” in *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to 2004*, ed. Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin (Oxford University Press, 2005), 51.
- 52 Ewbank, 39. Lines 311-1066 and 1160-1673 are missing from Aeschylus’ original text of the *Agamemnon* in the Saint-Revy edition.
- 53 Ewbank, 49.
- 54 Ewbank, 52.
- 55 Showerman, “*Timon of Athens*: Shakespeare’s Sophoclean Tragedy,” *The Oxfordian* XI (2009), 207-234.
- 56 John Ruskiewicz, *Timon of Athens: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1986), xviii.
- 57 G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London & New York: Methune, 1930, 1983), 207.
- 58 William Warner, *Syrinx or A Sevenfold History*, ed. Wallace A. Bacon. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1950).
- 59 John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies, 1558-1642* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963, original printing 1910). 345.
- 60 A. D. Nuttall, *Twayne’s New Critical Introduction to Shakespeare: Timon of Athens* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 42.
- 61 Nuttall, 107.
- 62 Nuttall, 89.
- 63 In *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare*, Robert K. Root writes, “Eleven mythological allusions are, with two exceptions, to Divinities and personify either the powers of nature or the moral influences in the life of man.” These allusions include: Neptune, Plutus, Hyperion, Jove, Moon, Amazons, Mars, Diana, Cupid, Hymen, and Phoenix. The allegorical figure of Fortune seems to reign over *Timon*, as the word fortune occurs 30 times in the play.
- 63a Mark Anderson, *Shakespeare By Another Name*, (New York: Gotham, 2005), 184.

“Exile and banishment also figure prominently in a second Shakespeare play that comments on the events of 1582. *Timon of Athens* charts the downward spiral of a man who cannot manage power, money, or responsibility.”

- 64 Showerman, “‘Look Down and See What Death is Doing’: Gods and Greeks in *The Winter’s Tale*.” *The Oxfordian* X (2007), 55-74.
- 65 David M. Bergeron, “The Apollo Mission in *The Winter’s Tale*.” In *The Winter’s Tale: Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Hunt (New York: Garfield, 1995), 362.
- 66 Bergeron, 377.
- 67 A.E. Haigh, *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 285.
- 68 Showerman, “Shakespeare’s Many Much Ado’s: *Alcestis*, Hercules and *Love’s Labour’s Won*ne” *Brief Chronicles* Vol. 1 (2009), 109-140.
- 69 Claire McEachern, ed. *Much Ado about Nothing* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 21-2.
- 70 Jonathan Bate, “Dying to Live in Much Ado about Nothing” *Surprised by Scenes: Essays in Honor of Professor Yasunai Takahashi*, edited by Yasunari Takada (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1994), 69-85.
- 71 Bate, 79.
- 72 Bate, 83.
- 73 Bate, 81.
- 74 Bate, 82.
- 75 Euripides, *Alcestis*. Trans. Richard Aldington in *The Complete Greek Drama*. ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O’Neill. (New York: Random House, 1938), 709-710. Subsequent quotations from *Alcestis* included.
- 76 Watt, 2.
- 77 Sarah Dewar-Watson, “Hamlet and the Ghost of Sophocles” (Presentation at the University of York, 2014).

“There is growing recognition of Hamlet’s particular engagement with Greek tragic sources (e.g. Schleiner, 1990). Most recently, Tanya Pollard has highlighted the significance of Watson’s *Antigone* (1581) for our reading of the play. This paper argues for further intertextual relationships between *Hamlet* and Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

- 78 Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), 239.
- 79 Earl Showerman, “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Shakespeare’s Aristophanic Comedy” *Brief Chronicles* Vol 6 (2015), 107.
- 80 Stephanie Hopkins Hughes, “Shakespeare’s Tutor: Sir Thomas Smith,” *The Oxfordian* 3 (2000), 20.
- 81 Katherine Lever, “Greek Comedy on the Sixteenth-Century English Stage,” *The Classical Journal* 42:3 (1946), 169.
- 82 Caroline Bowden, “The Library of Mildred Cooke Cecil, Lady Burghley.” *Library*, ser.7,6 (2005), 6.
- 83 Showerman, Letter to the Editor, *Brief Chronicles IV*, p.137-141: regarding Lady Macbeth’s “damned spot.”



