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1. Live Classics: Or 'What's the use of Aeschylus in Darfur?'

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Fram, Trackers and classics

Tony Harrison's play, *Fram*, brought the Arctic icecap to the British stage in 2008. It traces the career of Fridtjof Nansen from polar explorer ('*Fram*' was the name of his ship) to philanthropist, campaigner and Nobel Laureate for his efforts in relieving the Russian famine of 1922. Quirky as well as brilliant, written in rhyming couplets, the play is partly the resurrection of a forgotten hero: for Nansen's polar exploits were soon surpassed by Roald Amundsen's, and his beloved League of Nations was quickly sidelined by the events of the 1930s. It is also a play of big questions and ideas: on the nature of heroism, the fragility of human survival and the power of language to change the world. In one memorable scene, a group of well-meaning but ineffectual do-gooders, who are debating the relative merits of colour and black-and-white photography to open the eyes of the world to the suffering of Russia, are upstaged, literally, by the character of Sybil Thorndike, who in a mesmerizing speech demonstrates the power of words alone to evoke the horrors of starvation (Nemser 2008: 149–56).

Yet there is another set of questions to which Harrison repeatedly returns in *Fram*. In what ways does the classical world still make a difference our own? What is the point of Greek tragedy now? How can its study be justified? Or, as one of the play's first reviewers put it, 'What's the use of Aeschylus in Darfur?' (Nightingale 2008) At first sight these questions make an incongruous pairing with the story of polar exploration and interwar famine relief. But the play has a second hero, in the character of Gilbert Murray, Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford between 1908 and 1936. Like Nansen, Murray had several strings to his bow. He was a prolific and immensely successful translator of Greek tragedy, and almost single-handedly responsible for bringing ancient drama to a wide popular audience in Britain. His research was instrumental in changing forever our assumptions about ancient Greek culture and religion: Murray and his friends showed that underneath its calm, intellectual, apparently rational exterior, Greek culture retained a primitive, bloody and irrational side. He was also, like Nansen, a driving force behind the League of Nations and other liberal causes. His translation of Euripides' *Medea* was performed at women's suffrage meetings, as the tale of a woman provoked to the most terrible acts of infanticide by her powerlessness in a man's world; and his translation of *Trojan Women*, a tragedy about the terrible consequences that war wreaks on non-combatants, was famously

staged in thirty-one locations through the American Mid-West in 1915 as part of the Women's Peace Movement. In *Fram*, Tony Harrison gives Murray an unlikely new role: emerging from his tomb in Westminster Abbey, on the fiftieth anniversary of his death and with Dame Sybil in tow, he is to write a play – a play within a play – on the life of Fridtjof Nansen.

Murray's part in *Fram* prompts all kinds of questions about the value of research in classics; and about what counts as worthwhile discovery and exploration, from the polar wastelands to the world of the ancient Greeks. 'Tragedy was my *Fram*', as Murray remarks at one point (Harrison 2008: 78). In characteristic fashion, Tony Harrison's answers are simultaneously trenchant, visionary and ambivalent. For although Murray in the end smashes to the floor the Greek tragic mask that has been his classical symbol and totem throughout the play, there are many occasions earlier where his engagement with the ancient world has proved not only eye-opening, but central to the political and humanitarian goals the drama espouses. In fact, Sybil Thorndike's brilliantly persuasive soliloquy on the horrors of famine derives directly from the conventions of Greek tragedy, which always chose words over images when it came to conveying agony, violence and brutality. Murray is our guide in trying to understand quite how, and why, those words could be so powerful – and why they cannot be written off, to quote one of the boorish bit-part players, who has no truck with culture of any sort, as 'ancient tragic shit' (Harrison 2008: 41).

Harrison had explored some of these themes before. His 1988 *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* brought to life a play by the Athenian tragedian Sophocles, which had been rediscovered in 1907 by a couple of British classicists digging in the buried piles of wastepaper in a small town of Roman Egypt. *Trackers* is not itself a tragedy, but a burlesque in which the god Apollo, with the help of some grossly phallic 'satyrs', tries to track down his herd of cows, stolen by a prankster junior deity, the baby Hermes. It is a rare survival of the bawdy, subversive comedies conventionally performed for light relief, after the original fifth-century audience had sat through several hours of wrenching tragic drama. For Harrison, *Trackers* was an opportunity to explore this lusty populist side of classical culture. His production, first at Delphi and then at London's National Theatre, was almost the first time the play had been performed in over 2,000 years.²

The 'Trackers' of the title has two senses, for Harrison frames the performance of the ancient comedy with the story of its two young discoverers, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, who are also in the business of 'tracking': not stolen cattle, but the material from the classical world that we have lost. They are searching in the rubbish dumps of Roman Egypt for the precious fragments of Greek and Roman writing. Here too, in the different priorities of Grenfell and Hunt, Harrison focuses on the question of why we want to study the classical world. What are we doing it *for*? Both men are keen to recover the rich scraps from the Roman wastepaper baskets, but they are

after scraps of a different sort: the down-to-earth Hunt is entranced by the documents of real life in the ancient world (the desperate petitions of the Roman homeless, for example); the donnish and slightly dotty Grenfell has eyes only for the remains of ancient poetry. What, Harrison is asking, is the study of the ancient world all about? Is it a history of politics, power, deprivation, slavery and misogyny? Or of creative literature that can still engage and inspire? (Parsons 2007)

Greek drama now

Harrison himself has done much to prove the extraordinary power that Greek drama can still have over a modern audience – from his prize-winning translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, directed by Peter Hall in 1981, to his version of Euripides' *Hecuba* for the Royal Shakespeare Company almost three decades later, which played in London, the USA and Greece, with Vanessa Redgrave in the title role. But Harrison is only one voice – uniquely privileged though he is, as both dramatist and classicist by training – in an extraordinary flowering of ancient drama on the contemporary British stage. Greek plays are now performed more often than they have been at any time since the second century AD. In Britain, more than anywhere else, a series of notable productions over the last thirty years has had enormous cultural and political impact, as well as critical and commercial success. They have played both in London and the regions (*Trackers* itself moved to Saltaire in Yorkshire after the National), both in mainstream and experimental theatre. For example, Punchdrunk, a radical theatre company singled out by one Labour minister of culture for its commitment to 'access' combined with 'excellence', reconfigured *The House of Oedipus* as a live action installation within a vast garden at Poltimore House in Devon in 2000.³ Several of these productions have turned into distinguished British cultural exports, from Bombay (Liz Lochhead's *Medea*) to Broadway (both Jonathan Kent's and Deborah Warner's *Medea*, as well as Harrison's *Hecuba*).

The best of them have prompted admiration, reflection and debate, going beyond the array of prizes that they have won. True, Diana Rigg's role as Medea (in Kent's production) brought her a Tony Award in New York; Fiona Shaw and Deborah Warner both won Evening Standard Awards in 2001 as actor and director, for their *Medea*; and an Olivier Award went to Clare Higgins for her part in Jonathan Kent's *Hecuba* in 2004 (one of three *Hecubas* playing on the London stage in the space of a year). But even more impressive has been the powerful cultural resonance of these performances. In addition to the trio of *Hecubas*, with their stark focus on the human cost of war, director Katie Mitchell's productions for the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company have memorably linked Euripides' war tragedies (*The Phoenician Women*, *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Women of Troy*) to new areas and methods of military conflict, from the Balkans to Iraq. Even closer to home, in the spring of 1992 the

Royal Shakespeare Company's *Electra* was performed to nightly standing ovations in a sports stadium in Londonderry. A terrifying analysis of revenge, passed down from generation to generation, corrupting human feelings, values and aspirations, the play coincided with one of the bloodiest weeks of sectarian violence in the province. The audience got the point.

As Harrison suggests in *Fram* and *Trackers*, the success of ancient drama on the modern stage depends on a dynamic collaboration between the theatre and the academy, a symbiosis of stage professionals and academic research. Brilliant as the ancient plays are, they are not transparent timeless creations, waiting to be rediscovered by an enterprising director and a talented company of actors. They are difficult texts. In many cases the Greek is very difficult to understand, and the underlying sense of the words is often elusive. It takes years of learning to begin to make sense of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in Greek. The texts are also culturally very dense. For, although tackling issues that are as close to universal as we could imagine (passion, incest, jealousy, betrayal, cruelty...), these plays are also deeply embedded in the society, politics, myth and religion of the ancient Greeks. They are simultaneously familiar to us and very foreign indeed. It requires knowledge, expertise and hard work to see how their significance can best be represented for a wide modern audience. Greek drama does not simply speak for itself.

One aspect of that symbiosis is the practical collaboration between theatre professionals and academic researchers. Oliver Taplin (University of Oxford), for example, has worked side by side with Harrison and Mitchell; Edith Hall (Royal Holloway, University of London) has collaborated with Colin Teevan, who translated Euripides' *Bacchae* for the National Theatre, and with Peter Hall (no relation); Ian Ruffell (University of Glasgow) worked with John Tiffany and David Greig on a National Theatre of Scotland production of the *Bacchae*; Vanessa Redgrave read and talked to Simon Goldhill (University of Cambridge) in preparing the part of Hecuba. This is not merely to cast the academic in the role of pronunciation adviser and fact-checker, though I am sure they sometimes do both. Nor is it simply a question of commissioning a likely 'expert' to write the programme notes, though such experts have been responsible for excellent, accessible essays to accompany many a production. In the most fruitful of these collaborations, it is the interaction and dialogue between the scholar and the director, translator or actor that lies at the very heart of the production and its interpretation of the dramatic text.

However, at a deeper level than that, the freshness and innovation of these productions depends on their engagement with up-to-date British research in ancient Greek literature more generally. One of the clearest examples of this lies in the whole area of theatrical technique and staging. How Greek tragedies were performed in antiquity itself, and in what kind of space, has exercised classical research for generations. In fact, it was precisely this issue that first stimulated the revival of wider interest in stage performances of Greek drama at the end of the nineteenth century. The

most influential productions of that period were devised not by dramatists, but by archaeologists attempting to solve what they called the 'Greek theatre question': namely, did Greek actors originally perform on a raised platform? The answer proved to be a definite 'no', and that once bitterly fought controversy has long been forgotten. But these practical archaeological simulations of the Greek theatre turned out to be successful in theatrical terms and kick-started the modern tradition of Greek drama in performance. It is a nice example of the serendipity and unpredictable consequences of so much research. A narrowly archaeological puzzle opened the way for more than a century of creative theatrical productions.

More recently academic concerns have focused on the problems of *masking* in Greek drama: not whether the actors were originally masked (they were), but rather what difference the masks must have made to the articulation and scripting of the play, to the characterization of the actors and to the effect of the performance on the audience. This strand of research was developed by Peter Hall, both in his production of Harrison's *Oresteia* and in his later *Oedipus Plays* at the National Theatre, where the actors were all masked. This was not merely an experiment in archaeological authenticity. Hall has come to see masks as essential to the performance of Greek tragic drama and, in particular, to the effective recreation of a Greek chorus. 'I think the plays were telling us to go back to masks,' Hall has said (Hall 1996). Not all would agree, but this stress on masking has been taken up, very differently, by Punchdrunk. Their radical redefinition of the theatre as an all-encompassing artform (which at the same time liberates the audience from the prison of their seats) owes much to questions about theatrical space raised in academic work on ancient drama. Although its repertoire extends a long way beyond the classical, the company's slogan is a quotation from Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* ('These things are mysteries not to be explained. But you will understand when you get there alone') and one of its devices is to put masks not the actors, but on the audience. There is a direct, if nicely subversive, link here between the development of artistic form and research in the ancient world (Smith 2009: 166–8).

It is, however, in changing interpretations of the ancient texts that research in classics has had most to contribute to Greek drama on stage, and to its power to affect and attract modern and diverse audiences. Research in the classical world is neither a narrowly antiquarian pursuit, nor is it a desperate search for cheap contemporary relevance. At its best, it sets up a dialogue between our own concerns and those of the ancients, prompting new understandings of the ancient world as our concerns change – and vice versa. In these terms, research into any aspect of the classical world can never be finished. Each generation finds something new, and often mind-changing, in material that has for the most part (notwithstanding notable discoveries among the wastepaper of ancient Egypt) been known and studied for centuries.

Translation is a good case in point. Why bother with further expensive work on Greek texts when we have sometime hundreds of translations of the major plays? Harrison answers this question in *Fram*. Returning to London after fifty years in the grave, Murray is aware that his translations would now sound ridiculous. 'All translations date', he says, defensively, 'I don't for a minute imagine that I dare aspire / to a National Theatre revival of my *Oresteia*' (Harrison 2008: 80) – Harrison's rhyming couplets here echoing some of the worse of Murray's verse.⁴ It would take no more than a minute's glance at Murray's translations to see that, hugely successful though they once were, they would never attract an audience now, still less earn a transfer to Broadway. So why do they not work for us? T.S. Eliot's view was entirely aesthetic: they were in his view bad poetry (Eliot 1920).⁵ But that hardly explains their influence and wide popularity. The answer must be that, in the continuing dialogue with the past, Murray's concerns and Murray's Greek tragedy are not ours. For all our admiration for Murray, our Greek drama is not the same as his.

We can see that difference, and the effect of new research, in some of the most successful productions of the last thirty years. Hall's production of Harrison's *Oresteia* did not merely exploit recent work on masks, it reflected other lines of research on Aeschylus' trilogy. One case in point was the highly ritualized style of the performance, which would have been impossible without a renewed scholarly interest in the ritual element of tragedy. (For all Murray's concern with religion and the irrational, his theatrical versions were frankly rather polite and stately.) Several critics saw that the National Theatre production had turned the tragedy back into a ritual event, in which the audience was encourage to share – and almost believe in (Wiles 2000). Another important aspect was language and, in particular, the sonorous emphasis on the gender markers of the original Greek: 'he-god', 'she-god', 'man-child'. Disliked by some reviewers, this feature reflected much new research on these plays, which sees highly gendered language underlining the trilogy's role as a charter myth for the subordination of women.⁶ The National Theatre of Scotland's *Bacchae* similarly exploited new academic approaches to the play: Ian Ruffell writes of exploring with the director and translator 'many of the key themes in recent research into Greek tragedy ... questions of identity (particularly gender identity), of the self-reflexivity, playfulness and humour of (in particular) Euripidean tragedy'. The result challenged the old familiar play about madness and possession, to suggest a story of the collapse of identities, especially sexual ones – in an extraordinarily powerful, disconcertingly modern, as well as authentically ancient, production.

The message is very clear: that this internationally acclaimed tradition of British theatre is unthinkable without a thriving tradition of classical research. It is through the contemporary re-readings of these plays within the academy – time-consuming, intensive scholarly work – that they retain a

capacity to speak to audiences today. Or, as Alan Davey, the Head of the Arts Council, puts it: 'a dynamic research base into classical culture is important for the effective presentation and understanding of classical drama on the stage and elsewhere, and is essential for the development of theatrical form'.⁷

Classical research: discovery, rediscovery and distinction

Classical research, of course, extends far beyond Greek drama to all aspects of Greek and Roman culture, from the unsavoury remains of Pompeian latrines to the origin of law in early Greece, from the relationship between Greco-Roman and Chinese science to the religious conflicts of the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, research in drama and its successful public dissemination offers a useful paradigm for work in the subject more broadly.

As already mentioned, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* was set in an Egyptian rubbish dump, with an odd pair of Oxford classicists on the hunt for lost evidence of the ancient world: poetry, drama, petitions, laundry-lists and tax receipts. Classics remain a discipline of discovery. The scraps of paper which Grenfell and Hunt unearthed early last century are still, even now, being deciphered – a highly skilled task – in Oxford. There are, in fact, 50,000 pieces that remain not yet fully studied; these will take 40 more volumes over 40 years to put into the public domain (Parsons 2007: 25–30). Grenfell and Hunt differed, as we saw, on exactly what it was they hoped to track down. Grenfell's passion for the lost poetry of antiquity would not have been wholly disappointed. Some 95 per cent of Greek literature did not make it through the Middle Ages. Most of it did not appeal to the tastes of the medieval monks on whose choices in preservation our own libraries now largely depend. The sands of Egypt, and the wastepaper stuffing used in mummies, have produced several 'new' works of literature. These include substantial parts of the Athenian comic dramatist Menander, and of the poetry of Sappho, the most famous female writer of the classical world and not a favourite in the monasteries.⁸ Recently, in Grenfell and Hunt's scraps, more than twenty lines of a new poem by the sixth-century BC poet Archilochus has been deciphered (Gonis *et al.* 2005). But it is the more sober Hunt who would probably have been most pleased with the results of their wastepaper finds. Thanks to the everyday, throw-away documents that have now been decoded – contracts, letters, tax-demands and so on – a vivid picture of life in an Egyptian town from the ancient world to the early Middle Ages can be reconstructed. Here we find inflation and famine, the grassroots effects of Roman imperialism, the rough-edges of multiculturalism, the beginnings of Christianity and, towards the end, the growth of Islam. A hundred years of hard research has opened an entirely new window on to the day-to-day life of an ancient town. And it is brilliantly captured for a non-specialist, as well as a specialist, audience in Peter Parsons' best-seller: *City of the Sharp Nosed Fish* (which is what the word 'Oxyrhynchus' actually means).

There are discoveries of this kind on our own doorstep, too. On a BBC television programme broadcast to a huge audience on New Year's Day 2003, a 'panel of experts' judged the Roman writing tablets found at the Roman fort of Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall to be Number One of the British Museum's 'Top Ten Treasures'. More than 400 of these tablets have been excavated at Vindolanda since the early 1970s, and – in addition to all kinds of new evidence about the Roman army – they include such evocative vignettes of ancient life as a birthday party invitation from one Roman soldier's wife to another and a note enclosed with a gift of socks and pants to a soldier. It is these, along with hundreds of so-called 'curse tablets' ('May whoever it was who stole my cloak suffer agonies', etc.) found in and near Bath, that have given Britain a surprising claim to fame (Tomlin 1988; Woodward and Leach 1993). Over the last twenty years or so, more 'new' Latin has been unearthed here (as distinct from the Greek texts from Egypt) than anywhere else in the world.

The discovery of the Vindolanda tablets had a powerful effect on the popular imagination, as the BBC accolade suggests. On Hadrian's Wall itself, it launched a series of wide-ranging heritage and cultural events, notably from 2001 to 2006 an Arts UK creative writing project called 'Writing on the Wall'. This not only showcased the tablets and the archaeology of the surrounding area; it involved the local community, museums and schools in workshops and events which explored the multicultural character of the Roman Empire (and modern Britain) by bringing to the region writers from all the countries that had garrisoned the Wall in the Roman Empire, from Iraq to Morocco, Bulgaria to Wales. Hugely successful, it was a direct consequence of the charismatic discovery – and would have been impossible to imagine if the tablets had remained illegible (Chettle 2006).

The reading of these documents is, in fact, even more difficult than that of the *Oxyrhynchus papyri*. They were originally written on wax smeared over a wooden board. The wax has long since disappeared, and the writing survives only as the stylus' scratches on the wood beneath. Two things were needed to make any sense of these. The first was the most advanced technology of 'imaging', simply to reveal what was there, though invisible to the naked eye. This was achieved in Oxford by collaboration with those in the forefront of medical imaging. And, in fact, in one of those unexpected research spin-offs (such as those prompted by the 'Greek Theatre Question'), some of the techniques developed for the tablets turned out to have applications in clinical medicine. But, even then, the words would have remained undecipherable without the highest level of skill in Latin, historical linguistics and palaeography (that is, the reading of the handwritten language), nurtured and honed in British research centres for centuries. This kind of expertise cannot simply be re-learned when you just happen to decide you need it again. The ability to exploit key discoveries depends on continuity and long-term investment in these highly technical research skills.

The success of Greek drama in the contemporary theatre is not, however, based on new finds. *Trackers* aside, we are watching plays that have been part of Western culture for millennia. What is new is what we make of them, and the changing interpretations and associations that allow them to speak afresh to us. Likewise classical research more generally is revolutionary in its capacity to reinterpret, and to see new things and new areas of study in what we thought we understood. Every area of the subject can produce notable examples of this. Ancient historians are now looking much more directly at the cultural and religious identities that marked the diverse communities of the Roman Empire. In what sense, for example, was the Roman world racist? And, if not, why not? They are using new demographic techniques to examine the movements of populations in antiquity, and thinking again about the patterns of migration and asylum. Ancient philosophers have started to reassess the many works of philosophy that followed the period of Plato (still probably the most read and best-selling philosopher in the world) and Aristotle. Partly stimulated by the recent decipherment of the philosophical papyri discovered at Herculaneum (on the Bay of Naples) in the eighteenth century, this new work has focused particularly on the school of Epicurus. This was not the hedonism that the term 'Epicurean' was often taken to mean, but a rigorous school of thought, hugely influential on Jeremy Bentham, British Utilitarianism and, ironically, the cost-benefit philosophy that now underlies much public policymaking.

But perhaps the most striking rediscovery of the last twenty years has been the literature and culture of Greece under the Roman Empire, in the first and second centuries AD. This was once written off as decidedly second rate compared with that of the fifth and fourth century BC (the great tragedians, Herodotus and Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle) – the work of fawning provincials under an oppressive empire, rather than free citizens of a democracy. Re-read in a 'post-colonial' world, this imperial literature can now be seen as a clever, careful and sometimes very witty response to a new world order and imperial domination. It has prompted some of the most innovative literary and cultural studies of ancient texts, some of which have not seriously been thought about for centuries – Lucian, Plutarch's *Essays*, Dio Chrysostom. At the same time it has turned attention to the Roman emperors of the second century AD, in particular Hadrian, whose sponsorship of Greek architecture, whose self-presentation as a Greek philosopher and whose attachment to a young Greek boy, Antinous, are all part of the same cultural phenomenon – albeit from the Roman side.

The influence of this work in the public sphere has been particularly impressive. An exhibition on *Antinous: the face of the Antique* was staged at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds in 2006. Co-curated by a young Cambridge classicist, it featured some of the exquisite statues that the grieving Hadrian erected to the boy after his tragic and mysterious death in the Nile. The catalogue accompanying this show won the inaugural Art Book

Award, and was particularly praised for making 'the art of antiquity relevant to twenty-first-century viewers' (Vout *et al.* 2006). In 2008 a major exhibition on Hadrian himself opened in the British Museum, taking the place recently vacated by the terracotta warriors. The museum's summer blockbuster, devised in collaboration with university academics, it made accessible to hundreds of thousands of visitors some of the fruits of this important new strand of research (Oppen 2008).

In the end, there is the issue of distinction. One major reason for the international renown of British 'classical' theatre is simply quality. These productions are innovative, challenging, accessible – world leading. The same is true of classical research overall. Classics is an international community, a subject shared through old and new Europe, as well as the USA, Australia and further afield (the subject flourishes in Japan, China, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa – even Zimbabwe and Congo). In this context, British classical research is world-leading, punching well above its weight. British books of classical scholarship (as well as newer electronic forms of dissemination) are sold and translated throughout the world. British classical scholars continue to win far more than their fair share of the international marks of esteem. Of the last twenty-five annual Sather Professors at Berkeley (invited to deliver what are generally acknowledged to be the most prestigious lectures in the field) ten either teach or were educated in Britain. Of the four 'ancient' prize-winners of the International Balzan Prize, since its foundation in 1961, two have been based in the United Kingdom.

The truth is that classics is a subject at which the British do very well indeed. Classical researchers here are working on a subject that is radical and innovatory, at the same time as it is a traditional and indispensable part of Western culture. Within and beyond the universities, it has an enduring value and significance.

You could want no better proof of that – to take one final example from Europe – than the events of summer 2008 in the town of Braunschweig in Saxony, Germany. In the Second World War Braunschweig was the major base to the SS and the home garrison of many of the German soldiers who died at Stalingrad. With Claudia Bosse as director and Edith Hall (of Royal Holloway) as advisor, the town recently hosted a performance of Aeschylus' *Persians*, the earliest Greek tragedy to survive, telling the story of the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks in the early fifth century BC – from the Persian point of view. Following a similar experiment by Bosse, on a slightly smaller scale, in Geneva the year before, 500 of the 'ordinary' citizens of Braunschweig played the part of the chorus (of defeated Persians). This was not only an attempt – in the style of Punchdrunk's audience masking – to subvert the hierarchy of actor and audience; there was a more directly political point, too. For Bosse (as for Harrison), Greek tragedy forces the modern world to confront its demons (Müller-Schöll 2004: 51–3).

Notes

- 1 I owe thanks for helpful conversations and correspondence on 'Live Classics' to many, especially Alan Bowman, Alan Davey, Simon Goldhill, Edith Hall, Charlotte Higgins, Ian Ruffell, Peter Stothard, Oliver Taplin and Peter Parsons.
- 2 There is a complex textual history to this play, and significantly different versions. Tony Harrison, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (Harrison, 1990) publishes the version of the play first played at Delphi in 1988; the second published edition, in 1991, includes both the version played at Delphi and at the National Theatre 'revival' in 1990. The play is acutely discussed by Oliver Taplin (Taplin 1991). The Oxford Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk) references five earlier performances of Sophocles' satyr play since its rediscovery – in Germany (1913), Czechoslovakia (1921), Italy (1927), UK (1959), USA (1988).
- 3 The praise was from James Purnell in a speech at the National Portrait Gallery, London, on 6 July 2007 (www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/minister_speeches/2058.aspx/, accessed 10 July 2010).
- 4 Some of the more hostile critics of *Fram* and its rhymes failed to see that Murray's own verse (or, rather, how it now sounds to us) was being parodied. See, for example, Michael Coveney (Coveney 2008): 'the tone hovers between trite pantomime couplet and a joltingly overcrowded metrical system'.
- 5 Harrison's Murray on several occasions fights back, attacking 'rhymeless poetry like you-know-who's' (Harrison 2008: 14).
- 6 Benedict Nightingale (Nightingale 1981) was not the only critic to find this turning of language irritating: 'sounding like a collaboration between the author of "Beowulf" and some street-café poetaster in jeans [it] gives unnatural and sometimes specious to the trilogy's concerns with matters sexual and cosmosexual'. Yet important classical work on the conflicts of gender within the trilogy, such as that by Froma Zeitlin (Zeitlin 1978), was surely influential on Harrison. As Ruth Padel later observed (Padel 1996: 216): 'New interpretative work by classicists does eventually filter through to the outside world. You could hear Froma Zeitlin in Tony Harrison's *Oresteia*, Richard Seaford [University of Exeter] in *Trackers*'.
- 7 Ian Ruffell and Alan Davey: personal communications.
- 8 Almost all that survives from Menander's plays is owed to papyrus discoveries of the last 100 years or so – the most substantial being the more or less complete *Dyskolos* (or 'Bad-tempered Man'), edited by E.W. Handley (Handley 1965). A 'new' poem of Sappho was reconstructed as recently as 2004, by combining part of a poem found at Oxyrhynchus with another part on a papyrus now in Cologne (Gronewald and Daniel 2004).

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