
Agamemnon, My Mother, and Me: Reflections on Life and Translation¹

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for Irma Rossol Doerksen (1929–2015)

THIS TIME I really thought we'd make it through a visit without the stories. It was our last evening with my family. My sister was outside barbequing, and we were inside waiting for supper. Suddenly, my mother began to talk about the camps.

"Mom died of malaria in Kcechimöv," she says.

I interrupt. "I thought she died of dysentery."

"No. She died of malaria. *Dad* died of dysentery."

Joe, my husband, tries to get the time line straight. "Was that in '41 or '42?" I know now that it was early 1945, but it took me years to figure that out. I'd heard the stories too often, in no particular order.

She corrects him. Then she begins to talk about the camp in Warsaw where they were set to cleaning up rubble and rebuilding roads. She says, "It was heavy work. Many older people would stumble or fall. Then the guards would come and kick them and grab them by the hair and bounce their head off the road. They were maybe seventy or so. Many of them died from that."²

Her own head is white now. She is eighty-one years old. She has always been small—about five feet. Now she is smaller than that, and her back is crooked with osteoporosis. I can't stand it. I leave the house to walk around outside and untie the familiar knot in my stomach. I leave Joe to hear the rest. But most of the time, for most of my life, I have listened.

My mother, Irma Rossol (her maiden name), was born in 1929 in Rybitwy, Poland, a village near Płońsk. She lived on a farm with her parents and siblings, her grandmother, an aunt and uncle, and some cousins. They were Polish citizens of German nationality.

In her memory, there was always discrimination against the German kids—even in her grandmother’s day—but hostilities intensified as Hitler’s power grew. When Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, the Polish militia took away the pastor and elders of their church:

They were grouped together and tortured. Like, they were led on roads in dust and their heels were scraped. Some of them came back and they gave reports on what was being done to them. And some men were put between two horses and the horses were driven apart so they were all split . . . apart, in the middle, or torn apart, *ja?* And the guards, the soldiers, they always stepped on their heels—they had to walk barefooted—till the blood was running, and then they didn’t get water, they made them drink from puddles on the road. . . . And on the first day of the war in the morning we heard that these people, these men were taken away, and then we were just waiting every minute of it when they were going to take our dad and the rest of the men from our village, but they didn’t.³

They were so afraid, she recalls, that “We took all our clothes . . . into our cellar—outside we had a cellar in the ground—and we took our clothing in there and didn’t go to bed, we didn’t undress, we just slept the way we are, and Dad was keeping watch in case somebody would come and murder us.” My mother was then ten years old.

She heard terrible reports about what the invading German army found when they crossed the border into Poland. She says, “Apparently they found German families murdered, nailed to the walls, and nailed with their tongues to the tables, and stabbed their eyes out and led around on streets.” I don’t want to believe this, but my reading tells me it is not implausible.⁴ She doesn’t want to believe it either. She says, “That’s what we were told. I don’t know if it’s true or not.” But then, reflecting on her experience four years after the war had ended, she reasons that maybe those rumours were true,

because when we were taken from Poland to Germany, we were—we had to walk to the train station from the last camp where I was in. And when we were walking on the road, the roads were lined

with people, and they still were holding clubs, and threatening us with stones, rocks, they would have thrown at us—or beaten us when they were taking us to the train to go to Germany. That was in 1949. They still had such hatred towards us.

My mother was then twenty years old.

When Germany defeated Poland, the horrors continued, but now they were happening to others.

[Hitler] was gathering up the Jews, taking the Jews away. . . . That was a big shock to us. They were fleeing from towns and villages—and they came to our place too and we fed them and Dad was going to hide them, that they wouldn't find them, but they didn't stay. They wanted to [get away].

And people saw what was being done to the Jews. . . . They had very nice furniture, with mirrors and stuff in their houses, and that was all smashed to pieces. And the stores, everything was thrown over. Like, they had big barrels with sauerkrauts, and that was thrown over. And little children, babies were thrown over from third and fourth stories. Thrown out the window, on the streets. . . . That was—that hurt us all very much.

She speaks of the Polish people: “Towards the end, . . . in '44 especially, then the Polish civilians joined the partisans, the guerillas, like you would say, . . . [Hitler] took sometimes I don't know how many men, he took and hung them, so that would stop, the guerrilla warfare would stop. But somehow it worsened.”

In August 1944, as the eastern front drew nearer, word came to evacuate to Germany. But then the order was withdrawn as the German army pushed the Russians back. The order came again in January 1945. My mother says,

Shortly after Christmas, people started to evacuate. My mom's sister and brother came to our place with a big transport, . . . and they stayed overnight at our place. And in the morning they all left, and we wanted to go too, and somehow, nobody from our village moved. . . . And then around lunch-time, finally, when we decided to go, to

evacuate, it was too late. The bridge, the bridge was . . . blown up . . . and we couldn't cross the river anymore. Then we came back, and that night the Russians came through our village already.⁵

In early February, 1945, the Polish militia took my mother, her older sister Else, and their mother, Maria. Their father Krystjan had already been taken. The three younger children and their grandmother were left behind. Their grandmother would die within two months or so, starving herself to keep the children alive, but it would be nearly four years before my mother learned this. It would be ten years before she saw her little sisters again, sixteen before their baby brother would join them all in Canada.

So my mother was *not* part of *die Flucht*, the great flight of Germans westward. She and her sister and parents were four of the roughly 200,000 Germans held prisoner in forced labor camps in Poland. Many people died in these camps as a direct result of beatings, thirst, starvation, and disease.⁶ My mother attests to all these conditions. She recalls camps with poor food where people were dying “left and right,” as she says. Her parents died in the first camp, around Easter time, 1945. She also tells of a camp where the food was very fatty, and people ate too much and became ill because they had been so starved in the previous camp. She and Else fell ill, too, but kept working, taking it in turns to lie down and rest, and to keep watch for approaching guards. They did not want to end up in the sick room, where people lay in their own vomit and excrement, delirious and dying.

I could fill the pages of a book with her stories, but writing them down would not convey her voice—the changes in tone and cadence. Nor can this essay convey the fragmented, compulsive nature of her story-telling. The examples I have recounted here come from a series of interviews we recorded over twenty-five years ago: her memories were, to some extent, organized by my questions. Normally, they force themselves to the surface in no particular order and at no predictable moment. Like the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge's poem, she is condemned to keep telling, and I, like the Wed-

ding Guest, cannot choose but hear. I have been hearing these stories for as long as I can remember. They are the narratives of my childhood, and they are never far from my mind.

I understand now that this intrusive, compulsive re-telling is a symptom of trauma. But what is the listener to do with the stories? What am *I* to do with them? And, the reader may well ask, what does any of this have to do with Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*?

I was not thinking of my mother when I decided to translate Aeschylus' tragedy. I was thinking about the poetry—the long choral odes, the striking metaphors, the jagged expression, the magnificent hatred of Clytemnestra. All these I remembered (rather vaguely, it turned out) from my fourth year undergraduate Greek course long ago. Several years ago, having recently survived a near-fatal illness myself only to lose my father to cancer very shortly after, I found myself incapable of academic writing. Instinctively, I returned to the ancient languages I had studied early in my scholarly life. Specifically, I turned to the *Agamemnon*. I wanted to attempt a translation that would suggest the poetic power I found in Aeschylus' play—a translation not only for the stage, but also for the page. As I worked through the Greek, mental translation machinery groaning from long disuse, I seemed to be translating from a space between the Greek and the English—inarticulate, emotive, aural, and image-laden. At least that's how it felt.

That this approach made translation a very personal process, open to memory and association, becomes evident with the opening speech of the play. The nightwatchman is on the roof of the palace in Argos, watching for the beacon that will announce Greek victory at Troy and the imminent return of his king, Agamemnon. The Greek forces have been away for ten years. This watchman has been on the roof at night for one year. Translating the opening lines of Aeschylus, I set down these words:

Another night out here.
I wish the gods would end it.
A year of keeping watch is long enough,

too long a time to spend alone
 stretched out like a dog on the rooftop.
 Alone I've watched the gatherings of the stars.
 I've learned to know when they mean winter
 or promise summer for us
 short-lived creatures here below.
 Bright potentates they are, all right,
 and look it too—
 shining out against the deep black
 sky, like a glittering king
 among his dowdy people.

Stars,
 I know your risings and your settings.
 I know time does not stand still
 though I'm still standing here,
 waiting for that signal fire
 to flash good news of far-off Troy,
 the tidings of her capture.

(lines 1-10)⁷

As I translated into free verse, I heard the voice of the watchman as lonely. Not every translator does. Ted Hughes, for instance, emphasizes his anger and exasperation:

You Gods in heaven—

 It is time to release me.
 I've stared long enough into this darkness
 For what never emerges.
 I'm tired of the constellations—
 That glittering parade of lofty rulers
 Night after night a little bit earlier
 Withholding the thing I wait for—
 Slow as torture.
 And the moon, coming and going—
 Wearisome, like watching the sea
 From a deathbed. Like watching the tide
 in its prison yard, with its two turns
 In out in out.
 I'm sick of the heavens, sick of the darkness.⁸

My watchman regards the stars wistfully; Hughes' watchman is sick of them. Hughes introduces a number of particulars which are not present in the text, implicitly or otherwise: "the moon, coming and going," the sea, the tide, the prison-yard. In contrast, my translation, though longer than the original, remains "parallel" to the Greek text. If pressed, I could justify every apparent interpolation.⁹ For instance, as we read on, we learn that the watchman is anxious about the goings-on in the royal house in the king's absence. He longs for the return of his king whom he tenderly loves and whose "well-beloved hand" he wishes to clasp in his own (34–35). Aeschylus' metaphors in the first ten lines, then, are not merely vivid; they carry emotional content. The watchman compares himself to a dog because he feels banished; he personifies the stars as an assembly because they are his only company; he personifies them as potentates because he is longing for his king; he feels helpless, having no more influence over the actions and machinations of his rulers than he does over the movements of the stars; he is mortal, which in Greek literature is to be short-lived; he is spending his short life waiting and hoping.

But justifications aside, I know there are other voices that caused me to hear the night watchman as I did.

When I was a kid, we had a German record—*Lolita's Greatest German Hits*. One song on the album was "Seemann, Deine Heimat Ist Das Meer" (Sailor, Your Home is the Sea). I thought our family was unique in knowing this song, but many people must have known it. *Wikipedia* tells me that it climbed to #5 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in the U.S. in 1960. When I began this essay, I found it on YouTube and heard it again for the first time in about twenty-five years. In the song, a woman speaks to her absent lover, a sailor who is continually called away from her by the wind and waves and his longing for far off places. She says, "your home is the sea, your friends are the stars . . . and only to them are you true."¹⁰

This song was profoundly moving to me—and to my mother. While the sailor's *Sehnsucht* is for *die Ferne*, hers of course was for her *Heimat*, her homeland—but then, her home had become a far off place. In fact, it existed only in memory.¹¹ She would sing along with Lolita, her voice full of yearning. For me, that song awoke a deep, inarticulate longing. As a teenager in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, I would kneel on my bed at night and look out my window at the moon and stars shining on the lake and would feel intensely restless and lonely. When I later read "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," I sympathized with the writer of the gloss, Coleridge's old antiquarian commentator, who says of the solitary Mariner,

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.¹²

Translating the *Agamemnon* was for me nothing if not synthetic. The watchman's speech hooked into this nexus of associations. He is himself, but he is also my mother, Seemann, the writer of Coleridge's gloss, and me. The next thing I know, he is speaking to the stars as if they were his friends.

Sometimes, however, the links between my mother's experience and my translation were more direct, less impressionistic. For instance, in the first ode, the chorus of the *Agamemnon* recall an important omen that encouraged the Greek assault on Troy. Two eagles of different colors "brought down a pregnant hare / in her last run, and settled in to feed / on the mother and her unborn young" (119–20). The army's prophet, Calchas, took the eagles to represent Agamemnon and his brother, Menelaus:

He spoke out then, did Calchas,
and made the symbols plain:

“In time this force,” he said,
“will seize King Priam’s city.
Trapped inside their walls
they’ll watch you kill
their rich abandoned herds,
watch their destiny unfold.”

(125–30)

In their commentary on the Greek text, editors John Dewar Denniston and Denys Page deliberate over these lines. The use of the word “herds” in the Greek text, they say, presents “some very unwelcome features”:

In the portent, the eagles devour the hare with (unborn) young inside it; how could this portend the destruction of cattle outside Troy? And what is the point of referring to the destruction of cattle outside Troy, when the destruction of humans inside Troy is a much more serious matter? Who can believe that Aeschylus wrote anything so disappointing as this, ‘Troy will fall—and all the cattle outside its walls will be destroyed’?¹³

But listen to what my mother says. When her family were preparing to evacuate, they butchered a pig and some geese and canned the meat. “Our wagons were all loaded to go,” she says. “But when the Russians came in they stole everything away. They pulled off the chickens’ heads and threw them on the truck and took them away. And they took the horses away. Every family lost their horses. I don’t know, was it only the German ones or Polish too? That I don’t know. And the cows were taken.” Then she speaks of the people who were taken:

From our neighbors there was one lady and her daughter with us. They were taken. And their father was taken to a different camp. And from other neighbors again the son and mother was taken. And the father was taken to a different place, and their young daughter—I think she was eleven years old—she stayed behind. I don’t know what happened to her. And sheep—when the Russians came in—the neighbours had sheep—the sheep were slaughtered right on the yard and roasted on the fire right in the yard. And the soldiers were eating the sheep.

Evidently, Aeschylus knew what he was talking about: helplessness and terror. On the strength of my mother's testimony, I decided against Denniston and Page.

And that is how it went. Aeschylus' play searched my memory for analogues. And because the effort to fathom the emotional content of the *Agamemnon* often called up painful memories, translation became a vehicle of expression—and of transformation. Poet-translator Josephine Balmer says, “just as classical writers rewrote and translated ancient myth in order to express dangerous emotions—passion, fear, dissent—so classical translation can provide us with other voices, a new currency with which to say the unsayable, to give shape to horrors we might otherwise be unable to outline, describe fears we might not ever had have the courage to confront.”¹⁴ Translating the voices of the *Agamemnon* enabled me to break away from narrative to lyric, from repetition to insight. The demands of the original, the demands of free verse, the demands of metaphor all required painstaking work—patient, contemplative process—and in return they offered relief from bombardment. Fragments were synthesized into something new. Mostly simply, I suppose, I felt some measure of control over the stories that had so long dominated me.

But that's not all. Through the voices of the *Agamemnon*, I heard what Wordsworth might call the “still, sad music of humanity,”¹⁵ and it put my mother's experience into a larger context. So many people have suffered—in Aeschylus' time, in our time, throughout time. This awareness does not diminish my mother's suffering. It does not diminish my empathy, but it takes some of the desperation out of it, makes it less personal. She is not the only one, and I cannot rescue them all. I cannot even rescue her.

As I translated the *Agamemnon*, I felt I was telling Aeschylus my mother's story and my own, and that he was telling his. A veteran of the Persian wars, he fought at the ferocious battle of Marathon (490 BC) and was wounded there. His brother was killed. Perhaps this play is as much about war as it is about concepts of justice, the standard interpretation.¹⁶

Anyway, I felt the comfort of profound compassion. This compassionate Aeschylus may be my own creation, just as my free verse translation is, but his play is full of striking feats of sympathetic imagination. He presents sorrow from so many perspectives: the loneliness of the nightwatchman, his distrust of the Queen, his longing for his king; the forebodings of the chorus, their traumatic memory of the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon to appease the goddess Artemis, their contradictory relief and affection for Agamemnon when he at last returns, their empathetic grief for Menelaus when Helen abandoned him, their poignant (and conflicting) grief for the Greek lives lost at Troy and for the widows at home:

That was then:
his grief, his hearth, his house.
Now, the grief of the land surpasses his.
Everywhere, in every house of every man who left with him,
a woman mourns in hardening grief.
It touches the heart to see them so.
They know the men they sent away,
but instead of them,
urns and ashes come back home.

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At home, women wail over faceless jars—
this man was brilliant in battle, they say,
this one fell bravely,
slaughtered for the wife of some other man.
They keen and mutter reproaches.
Resentment grows against the Champions of Right
and slowly chokes out sorrow.

And the many men so beautiful,
who lie in graves of Trojan earth
around the Trojan wall,
they'll occupy forever
the land they came to take,
the land that hides them now.

We also witness Clytemnestra's monstrous hatred; we hear it in her unrepentant speeches after she has murdered her husband, Agamemnon, and his Trojan captive, Cassandra. But Aeschylus never lets us forget her reasons. When the chorus pronounce judgement on her, she replies:

Now you sentence *me*:
 I will be cast off,
 exiled from the city,
 hated by the people,
 cursed.
 But then,
 then you offered
 this man no resistance—
 this man who weighed her death
 as no more than an animal's—
 just one sheep
 from the teeming fleecy flock.
 He sacrificed his child,
 dearest child of my travail,
 to soothe the winds of Thrace.

(1412-18)

And very near the end of the play when the chorus, bewailing the death of their king, ask Clytemnestra who will perform the ritual honors of burial, she replies with sharp and bitter irony:

Those questions are none of your business.
 We cut him down,
 we killed him,
 and we will cover him with dirt,
 without the caterwauling
 of the household.
 But Iphigenia, his daughter,
 will be happy to meet him,
 as is only right,
 at the crossing place
 where the river of sorrows runs swift,
 and she will throw her arms around him;

she will greet him with a kiss.

(1551-59)

But the passage that speaks most tellingly to me of Aeschylus' compassion belongs to Cassandra, the captive Trojan princess and prophetess brought back by Agamemnon as his concubine. She is about to die at the hands of Clytemnestra, and she knows it. During her long exchange with the sympathetic chorus, she cries out,

Oh, the marriage, the marriage of Paris!
It destroyed our family, destroyed our friends.
Oh, Scamander, river of my homeland!
Once around your shores, poor girl,
I was cared for, I grew up.
But soon, it seems, I'll sing my song
beside Cocytus' stream,
chant my grieving prophecies
on Acheron's dark shore below.

(1156-61)

In a few short lines, Cassandra recalls her life as a daughter, a princess, at play on the shores of her beloved river, singing the songs of childhood unmolested. That life appears idyllic now. Nothing communicates the rupture more effectively than her memory of herself as someone else when she calls herself "poor girl."

*

MY MOTHER has never returned to the farm that was once her home. But several years ago, she translated into English a cheerful little nature song she learned from her mother. I give both the German, as she wrote it down from memory, and her translation:

WIE SCHÖN IST DAS LÄNDLICHE LEBEN

Wie schön ist das ländliche Leben
Mein Haus steht auf grünenden Flur
Mit Blumen und Bäumen umgeben

Mir laechelt die schöne Natur.

Im Schatten der grünenden Eiche
dort sitz ich so gerne allein
Es wiegen mich goldene Träume
Der schönen Vergangenheit ein.

Die Wachtel schlägt in dem Getreide
Die Nachtigal dort in der Hoeh,
Die Lerche auf grünender Weide
Sie zwichert ihr Morgen Gebet.

Was nuetzen dem Fürsten die Schlösser?
Dem König die Krone, das Land?
Sie haben der Sorgen viel grösser
Und wünschen sich oft meinen Stand.

My mother's translation:

I love to live in the country
My house stands on the green floor
The flowers and green trees surround it
I smile at the beautiful scene.

In the shade of the tall and green oak tree
I like to sit there alone
The golden dreams of my childhood
They are lulling me gently to sleep.

The quail she sings in the grain fields
The nightingale high in the sky
The lark she sings in the meadow
She's singing her praises to God.

What good are the castles to his lordship?
The crown and land to the king?
Their worries are that much greater
They're wishing they were one like me.

My mother is proud of her translation, not only because it is an accomplishment for someone of very little education, and

none in English, but also because through her translation (I believe) she is able to express something that her compulsive retelling of her war stories has never done. Her childhood was not idyllic by our standards, but there was running barefoot in the fields in summer and twirling until you fell down ill. There was cooking syrup and marmalade from sugar beets in the fall. There were nights of music, when the aunts and uncles would get out their balalaikas and mandolins and guitars and play and sing. There were Easter eggs on Easter morning. She was someone's daughter; she was cared for.

That life is preserved in the song, and so is her mother's memory, I think. She has no precious possessions that were her mother's, no heirlooms. This song is her inheritance. And through her translation of it, she has, in effect, written her own poem, expressed her own golden dreams of her childhood. And she has doubled the inheritance that she passes along to me and my siblings: she gives us her mother's song and her own.

The song bridges the rupture in another way as well. She identifies it with her present life on my brother's ranch in the backwoods of British Columbia. Life there is anything but easy, but she chooses to stay. She feels nearer to God in "the country," as she calls it. She wants to be where she can see wild flowers blooming and hear the loons calling to each other on the lake nearby. "This is my home," she has told me plainly, and she asserts its validity by translating the first line of the song as "I love to live in the country" rather than "how fine/beautiful is life in the country."

Still, despite her song, the stories continue. The trauma has not healed. But in some small way, she has found her translation empowering and freeing. I know this by her voice when she sings it. The song is hers. And in something like the same way, perhaps, the *Agamemnon* is now mine.

NOTES:

1. I remain grateful to Anne Malena who made a space for the original

(and briefer) version of this paper at the eighth annual St. Jerome's Day Celebration of Translation at the University of Alberta in 2010. The theme of the conference that year was Author-Translator-Author, focusing on creative process. And I remain ever grateful to my mother for her courage and her loving spirit, for her songs and for her story.

2. This exchange is taken from a conversation of August 2010, recorded in my journal. The spelling of *Kcechimöv* is my mother's best guess. I have not found it on any map. The camp was near the eastern border of Poland, in the area of Lublin.

3. This and all subsequent quotations of my mother's story are transcribed from a series of taped interviews I conducted with her in 1984.

4. See, for instance, Alfred-Maurice de Zayas' *A Terrible Revenge: the Ethnic Cleansing of the Eastern European Germans* (1986 [German]; 1994 [English]; New York 2006 [rpt]). De Zayas reports that "more than 5,000 German civilians were murdered in the first days of the war" (27). He provides sworn testimony of ethnic Germans who found the bodies of family members with multiple stab wounds, eyes stabbed out, abdomens slashed, and of Germans who saw family members shot, even though these people were Polish citizens and, in some cases, had served in the Polish military. Also, testimonies concerning the flight and expulsion of ethnic Germans from Eastern and Central Europe beginning in the autumn of 1944 frequently include accounts of people, usually women stripped naked, being nailed to barn doors: "This one particular atrocity features prominently in many eyewitness reports" (47). The violence, of course, was not one-sided. At the time of invasion in September 1939, Hitler's advancing forces visited horrifying brutality on the Poles, executing thousands arbitrarily and deporting 1 million to annexed territory for forced labour (33). Lonnie R. Johnson points out that during the occupation, as many Poles lost their lives as Polish Jews—3 million each (*Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends*, 3rd ed. [Oxford 2011], 209). But the scale of Nazi atrocity against the Poles does not cancel out the suffering of ethnic Germans. Norman M. Naimark writes that during the expulsions "it made no difference to the Poles whether the Germans they attacked had been antifascists or not" (*Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* [Cambridge, MA 2001], 127). Many of them were simple farmers—like my mother's family. At least one of her uncles was a soldier in the Polish army. My paper focuses on the violence and fear that were the very air she breathed as a child and that live on in her memories. I am very aware, as she is herself, that others, and people of other "nationalities," suffered as much as she did, and more.

5. Orders to evacuate often came too late. Timothy Snyder, in his book *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* ([New York 2010], 319), attributes the Nazi failure to organize evacuations to Hitler's nationalism: "He saw armed conflict as a test of the German race: 'Germany will either be a world power, or there will be no Germany.' . . . For Hitler, any suffering that Germans might endure was a consequence of their own weakness: 'If the German people are not prepared to stand up for their own preservation, fine. Let them perish.'"

6. Estimates vary. Snyder suggests that roughly thirty thousand died in 1945/1946 (322). He notes, however, that the estimates of other historians range from about twenty-eight thousand to sixty thousand deaths in the forced labour camps (499, note 23).

7. All references to my translation are cited by line numbers in the Greek text (*Aeschylus: Agamemnon*, John Dewar Denniston and Denys Page, eds. [Oxford 1957]).

8. Ted Hughes, trans. *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* (New York 1999), 5.

9. Of course Hughes would be able to defend his choices too, but likely on very different grounds. As far as we know, he worked not from the Greek text but from literal, non-poetic translations. Lorna Hardwick, in her essay “Can (Modern) Poets Do Classical Drama? The Case of Ted Hughes” (*Ted Hughes and the Classics*, Roger Rees, ed. [Oxford 2009], 60), explains that Hughes did not aim to produce a “parallel equivalent” but to “engage with the primitive”—that is, with the myth at the core of the play. For this reason, she suggests, Hughes’ “diction and metrical composition are by comparison with [Tony] Harrison’s ‘homogeneous throughout, whatever the dynamic of the original’” (Hardwick 60, quoting Oliver Taplin). Harrison, in contrast to Hughes, translated from the Greek text but employed a quasi Anglo-Saxon idiom that many readers, as Hardwick says, find off-putting and ill-suited to Greek tragedy and to spoken performance (45). Here are three lines from the same passage in Harrison’s translation (*Aeschylus: The Oresteia* [London 1981], 3):

I’ve been so long staring I know the stars backwards,
the chiefs of the star-clans, king-stars, controllers,
those that dispense us the coldsnaps and dogdays.

10. For information on “Seemann,” go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor_%28song%29>.

To hear the recording, go to <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2m8MjverT64>>.

11. I have asked myself what exactly I mean by this statement. What I mean is this: the family farm was now in the hands of a Polish family. Poland itself was no longer the same country: the Jews were murdered, Germans expelled, borders redrawn, government replaced. Many Poles had been “relocated” and then repatriated; three million were killed during the Nazi occupation. According to Piotr Wróbel (*The Devil’s Playground: Poland in World War II* [Montreal 2000], 13), Poland’s mixed population before the war was 35 million; after the war it was 23 million. And it was no longer mixed. Lonnie R. Johnson writes, “If a German and Jewish as well as a German-Jewish presence was one of the distinctive characteristics of Central European culture, and multicultural symbiosis was the source of its dynamism, this culture ceased to exist during and after World War II. . . . The combined results of Nazi and Allied policies—genocide for the Jews and population transfers for the Germans—were an ‘ethnic cleansing’ of states that historically had been multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and religiously heterodox. For the first time in its history, Poland was almost exclusively ethnic Polish and Roman Catholic” (221). Sylvia Brown, a personal friend, has com-

mented on the same permanent displacement in her father's life. In her essay "Voices from the Borderlands: the Problem of 'Home' in the Oral Histories of German Expellees in Canada" (*Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture*, Heinz Antor, Sylvia Brown, John Considine, and Klaus Stierstorfer, eds, [Berlin and New York 2003], 36), she says of her father, a German from East Prussia, "'home' exists as story and memory, endlessly rehearsed. It is painfully and permanently absent."

12. From the marginal gloss at lines 263 ff. in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *Poetical Works*, Ernest Hartley Coleridge, ed. (1912; Oxford 1969).

13. Denniston and Page, 80 (note to lines 127ff).

14. Josephine Balmer, Preface, *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations & Transgressions* (Tarsset, UK 2004), 9. My thanks to Lynn Penrod, at the University of Alberta, for pointing out the the similarity between Balmer's experience of translation and my own.

15. William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," *Selected Poems and Prefaces*, Jack Stillinger, ed. (Boston 1965), line 91.

16. The *Oresteia*, the trilogy in which the *Agamemnon* is the first play, tells the story of the house of Atreus, a story of vengeance enacted over and over again, murder for murder. In the final play, *Orestes*, the vendetta is brought to a close in a court of law. Simon Goldhill, in *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* ([Cambridge 1992], 32) explains that this narrative arc and its "articulation in the language of *dikê*" (the very rough equivalent of "justice") have produced a standard interpretation of the trilogy as celebrating an evolutionary movement from "the bloody repetition of vendetta to the ordered world of the *polis* and its institutions." Even feminists and Marxists who challenge the ideology of this interpretation accept its basic premise: the transition from retribution to law (33). Goldhill himself complicates this reading, but Peter Burian, writing more than ten years later, re-iterates (though with considerable insight and nuance) the "standard reading," saying that in the *Oresteia* Aeschylus provides an "aetiological myth about the replacement of retributive clan violence with the judicial deliberation of the *polis*" (Introduction, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia*, Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian, trans. [Oxford 2003], 20). Robert Emmet Meagher, on the other hand, argues in his Interpretive Essay on Euripides' *Herakles* that "the vast majority" of tragic plots in Greek drama are war stories, and that "the entire *Oresteia* is a war story" (*Herakles Gone Mad: Rethinking Heroism in an Age of Endless War* [Northampton, MA 2006], 21). Drawing extensively on the work of classical scholar and psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, and on psychiatrist Judith Herman's seminal *Trauma and Recovery*, Meagher reads Greek tragedies generally—and the *Herakles* specifically—as works of ritual therapy or catharsis whose function in their time was to communalize traumatic experiences of war and enable recovery.

17. These lines were published in *Arion* 17.1 (Spring/Summer 2009), 57–58.