Sound and Sense in the Adaptation of the Classics on the Anglophone Stage: Bolt's *Cyrano,* Ives's *Liar* and Kane's *Phaedra*, Three Radically Different Poetics

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Abstract: On the English stage, since the 1980s and even more strongly at the turn of the twenty-first century, the adaptations of French classic drama have flowed. Now as faithful translations of the original text, following the same plot, now as rewritings, these variations modernise the characters' names and include a contemporary vocabulary. But they are nonetheless poetic, keeping the rhyme and the regularity of the decasyllable. In this study, I am focusing on three extracts taken from the contemporary Anglophone theatrical repertoire: *Cyrano de Bergerac* in a version by Ranjit Bolt (1995), *The Liar* "translaptated" by David Ives (2010) and *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane (1996). I am trying to assess the aesthetic shifts in meaning between the source and its rewriting as well as the dramaturgic stakes that these works trigger. I hope to demonstrate how these three poetic revisions of our classics reaffirm the importance of verse drama on the contemporary stage beyond our borders.

Résumé : Sur la scène anglophone, depuis les années 80 et de manière accrue au tournant du millénaire, les adaptations de classiques français ont fleuri. Tantôt sous forme de traductions fidèles au texte-source en suivant un même schéma actantiel, tantôt sous la forme de réécritures, ces variations modernisent le nom des personnages et contiennent un lexique contemporain. Elles n'en demeurent pas moins poétiques, conservant souvent la rime et la rigueur du rythme décasyllabique. Dans le cadre de cette étude, je propose de partir de trois extraits choisis au sein du répertoire théâtral anglophone contemporain : *Cyrano de Bergerac* dans une version de Ranjit Bolt (1995), *The Liar* adapté par David Ives (2010) et *Phaedra's Love* de Sarah Kane (1996). J'y évalue les glissements esthétiques entre le texte-source et sa réécriture, ainsi que les enjeux dramaturgiques que suggèrent ces nouveaux écrits. J'espère ainsi démontrer la façon dont ces trois réécritures poétiques

réaffirment l'importance du théâtre en vers sur la scène contemporaine étrangère.

Keywords: Ranjit Bolt, David Ives, Sarah Kane, adaptation, translation, rewriting, *Cyrano de Bergerac, The Liar, Phaedra's Love,* verse drama

Mots-clés : Ranjit Bolt, David Ives, Sarah Kane, adaptation, traduction, réécriture, *Cyrano de Bergerac, Le Menteur, Phèdre,* théâtre en vers.

"Verse has been most injurious to the art of drama. A true artist of the stage, whose repertoire is the contemporary drama, should not be willing to let a single verse cross her lips", Ibsen wrote on 25 May 1883 (quoted in Hinchcliffe 5), which sounds all the more ironical since Ibsen had a facility for writing verse, especially rhymed verse. It is however true that modern verse has been out of favour for a while until recently, on the Anglophone stage, where a renewed taste for poetic drama is accounting for the efficiency of this mode of expression. Poetry is a way for the playwrights to convey the plotline in an often emotionally dense vividness, but it is also a literary device whereby they can adapt a classic work of art on the contemporary stage.

When we consider the popularity of English classic drama – and more particularly of Shakespeare's theatre – on the French contemporary stage, we are irremediably led to question the interest French classic theatre conversely arouses across the Channel and more widely on the Anglophone stage. How are Molière and Hugo, Racine, and Corneille, who all wrote in verse, translated in English? Are these authors still popular abroad today? As we read and look for recent performances of their plays, we become aware of the numerous ones that have fuelled part of the English current repertoire. Authors like David Ives, Ranjit Bolt, Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane, Patrick Marber, Tony Harrison, David Bryer among others have been inspired by the

classics and have proposed new versions of *Le Misanthrope, Tartuffe, Don Juan, Phèdre, Le Cid*. The list is not exhaustive.

In so doing they have tackled important issues about the relationship between verse and drama. For instance, are the latter still compatible in contemporary theatre? Are translators of verse drama to be considered – deservedly so – poets themselves? From a theoretical point of view, how are we supposed to consider their works: as recreations or reinventions? As transpositions or *translaptations*?[1] Or as rewritings and revisions of an earlier text? From an artistic angle, do we attend Molière's, Racine's or Corneille's plays when we go to the theatre or rather Bolt's, Ives's, Crimp's, and Kane's own creations? Finally what do these new versions bring to the stage and to the art of play-writing?

What I have endeavoured to do in this essay is to focus on three plays from the French classic canon: *Cyrano de Bergerac, Le Menteur* and *Phèdre.* All three of them have been the source of several new scripts composed by Anglophone playwrights and poets, but I have chosen to concentrate on Bolt's, Ives's and Kane's versions to compare the way in which these three generations of authors have adapted the original text, formally and semantically. Sound and sense have often been reshuffled in a daring way, which the French pun "sens dessus dessous" might coin precisely. This essay also tackles the effects produced on stage by these transformations so as to highlight the strong revival verse drama is experiencing abroad thanks to English-speaking playwrights and artists.

Theatrical poetry or poetical theatre?

Over the past decades contemporary British theatre has increasingly resorted to the ancient and classic repertoires to tackle societal issues, to challenge stylistic forms, and to shape new entertainments. When confronting the contemporary playwrights' works, a question immediately arises: how have they revived plays from a remote time? What are the alterations these new versions have encountered? What are the tools their authors have used to manipulate the original material? And, in the end, what aim is their art serving?

In the analysis of a range of plays, including various versions of *Le Misanthrope, Tartuffe, Le Menteur (The Liar)* and *Phèdre (Phaedra),* my attention has been caught by Ranjit Bolt's prolific work that combines theatre and poetry.

Bolt comes from a literary family (his uncle and father were both involved in play-writing and criticism while his mother was a teacher). After graduating from the University of Oxford, he soon turned to the artistic field. His publications include numerous translations (and adaptations) of classic plays but also original works. He translated Euripides, Aristophanes, Seneca, Shakespeare, Goldoni, Chekhov, Molière, Corneille, Feydeau, Rostand, La Fontaine, Beaumarchais, Marivaux, Anouilh, and wrote a novel, *Losing it.*

In this rather substantial list, the references to French authors prevail, which necessarily calls for a closer scrutiny. Since they are translations of plays that were originally successful in France, their relevance should principally lie in their adaptability to the contemporary stage. In other words, how can the text suit today's actors' oratorical art as well as the spectators' understanding? However, since Bolt rarely translated as a result of a commission from a given company, we should also consider his translations as poetic compositions *per se*, that are meant for a readership not for an audience.

Comparing a majority of Bolt's adaptations with his contemporaries', we should reach a first conclusion. Bolt favours a regular rhythmic and rhyming scheme. Let us consider the example of the balcony scene in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Act three in Bolt's version; Act III, scene 7 in Rostand's. Note that cuts have been made below for concision purposes.)

CYRANO

A stone!

CYRANO picks up a few stones and throws them at the balcony window.

ROXANE *(Appearing on the balcony.)*
Who's there?

CHRISTIAN

Me! Christian!

Roxane *(With audible disappointment.)*
Hugh. I might have known. *(And makes to go back in.)*

Christian
I must speak!

She stops, hesitant.

Cyrano *(In a whisper to Christian)*
That's the ticket. Deeper, though.
Your voice. Much deeper. […]

Christian
My heart's … in twice the pain it was before!
The agony is… more than I can stand…

Roxane
That's better. Well, at least it rhymed and scanned. (2007: 103-105)

This example seems appropriate to highlight the way poetic language – that used to be seen as the quintessence of fair love in 19th century theatre – proves here to be the means to achieve a successful communication, and consequently, the emblem of an efficient language.

Bolt is using here the pentameter, and to regulate the lines, as Rostand does with the alexandrine, resorts to numerous enjambments so that, for instance, Cyrano's "A stone!" continues with Roxane's "Who's there?", then with Christian's answer, and finally ends rhyming with Roxane's "known", two lines further down. The line has been shared by the three characters, which creates both a visual and an oral dynamic.

From a typological angle, the flights of poetry are not visible on the page since the lines are not numbered in Bolt. In addition, the scene is much shorter than in Rostand's play. The rhyming scheme is predominantly AABB ("speak / week"; "peak / beak"; "stand / scanned") with a few exceptions though: "bore / more / more / before") and unrhymed couplets ("vain / again"; "strong" is left alone). But the irregularity is also meaningful since Christian, the faltering lover, does not handle language well at first and his hesitations may be reflected in this defective poetry despite Cyrano's support.

Compared to Rostand's script, Bolt's proves quite close to both lexical and metaphorical networks used by his predecessor even if they are not ordered similarly. For instance the reference to Hercules comes earlier in Rostand's scene:

> Roxane (*s'avançant sur le balcon.)*
> C'est mieux ! – Mais, puisqu'il est cruel, vous fûtes sot
> De ne pas, cet amour, l'étouffer au berceau !
>
> Christian, *même jeu*.
> Aussi l'ai-je tenté, mais… tentative nulle.
> Ce… nouveau-né, Madame, est un petit… Hercule.
>
> ROXANE. C'est mieux !
>
> CHRISTIAN, *même jeu.*
> De sorte qu'il… strangula comme rien…
> Les deux serpents… Orgueil et… Doute. (205)

In Bolt's play, Hercules is mentioned four lines after the extract quoted above while he should have been referred to in Christian's cue. Instead we hear: "And though a chick, it's strong." Such a change enables Bolt to develop a new metaphor in Cyrano's aside as well as a pun on the word "beak", thereby alluding to the character's prominent nose: "If I'm a chick, thank god, I only speak – / Imagine to kiss her with *this* beak!" Such an allusion serves the humorous trend of the play, which probably answers the expectations of today's public as we will discuss further down.

Bolt also adds a line which may work as a reflexive tool to provide the meaning and purpose of his rhyming translation. When Roxane says, "That's better. Well, at least it rhymed and scanned", the second half of the line is totally new. It is absent from Rostand's scene where we only read "Tiens ! mais c'est mieux !" which corresponds to Bolt's "That's better." Such a line strengthens the value of poetry: it implies that speaking in verse elevates language, makes it more meaningful and more powerful. It is a reflexive line in so far as Roxane loves Christian only when he speaks good poetry. Such a line also sounds metafictional: isn't Bolt there telling us that verse drama is the best way to convey linguistic meaning and power?

In *The Art of Translation,* Bolt underlined the creative process involved in translation. His choice has always been to maintain the rhymes in his adaptations. A translator, he wrote in the preface, is not a mere "flat, invisible *renderer* of meaning" (unpaginated), especially when he translates a literary text. As there are cultural references that he cannot transpose (for instance the allusion to the "barcelonnette" (a cradle that used to be suspended to be easily rocked) he proposes equivalent images (there the "blackbird's nest"). Significantly he entitled his essay "The *Art* of Translation" (my emphasis) to express his belief that translating verse drama is a genre, and as such, an artistic one.

However, he rather names his "translations" new "versions of" the original works because of the alterations he feels constrained to impose on the text. In *Cyrano de Bergerac,* the original stage directions partly vanish.[2] Such factual loss modifies the potential dynamic of the script, whether it is read or performed. The absence of directions deprives the reader – and the stage-director – of key indications enabling each of them to shape the movement of the words in context. Conversely, when trying to keep as close as possible to the original lexicon, the effect may be different. Thus the reference to "Hercule" in Rostand's play sounds smarter than in Bolt's where it appears parodic:

> CHRISTIAN
> It's like…It's like… the infant Hercules…
> Strangling the serpents… Pride and Drought… Doubt!

This reflects a key feature of the theatrical text which is a living and unstable entity. It also highlights the malleability of the language that, despite its poetic verve, transcends time and can speak to the contemporary ear. Bolt's versified *Cyrano* is far from being inadequate, incongruous and obscure as was implied in the reviews when the play was performed on stage:

> What you expect from Edmond Rostand's story (…) are some heart-warming moments linked together with gags about his hooter. Simon Reade's exuberant, engaging production […] highlights the tale's moments of poetry and grace. […] It's thanks to Ranjit Bolt's cracking new verse trans-

> lation that such moments don't feel forced or indulgent. This rendition of *Cyrano* is thrilling to listen to, line by line, word by word, and there is no resisting its pace, humour and charm. […] It is also unafraid of sniffing out more jokes on the central theme. […] A new translation alone couldn't make this into the cheering and genuinely moving entertainment that it is." (Mahoney)

Another review read that Jamie Lloyd's production was "a buoyant, eye-filling delight, benefitting from vigorous staging and a highly playable translation […]" (Cote).

Although it is too early at this point of analysis to state that all of Bolt's poetic translations can successfully apply to the contemporary stage – if only because not all of them have been produced – they seem to share this similar capacity to bridge the gap between centuries through a language that sounds both classic and contemporary, sensible and emotional, colourful and practical. Thus verse drama, under Bolt's pen at least, stands as the language of the heart *par excellence* as well as of the mind, which is also the metafictional reflection of Roxane's belief and hope.

Should we then brand Bolt's work "theatrical poetry" rather than "poetical theatre"? The transposition of the French language into an English "playable" tool (Cote) appears to serve both ends: to show that verse is not anachronistic, although it is elaborate and formal, and that theatre is not to be always reduced to vernacular speech.

"Translaptating" the classic form

In order to draw a distinction between the two media – i.e. verse and drama – and the two functions – i.e. the poet and the playwright – some writers have coined new words to describe their works. So has David Ives when he named his own adaptations of classic drama "translaptations", a compound noun made of the words "translation" and "adaptation." Such a coinage seems to fit the nature of most of his compositions although Ives has had a very eclectic career so far. A Chicago-born writer, he indeed admits not to have any career plan. He started working on short plays like *All in the Timing* (of an absurdist

and comic style) and then wrote longer compositions like *Polish Joke*. He has also adapted musicals and written narrative fiction. In the field of theatre, he has translated Feydeau, Corneille, Molière, Régnard, all meant for a specific venue. For instance, *A Flea in Her Ear* (Feydeau) was produced at Chicago Shakespeare in 2006, and won the Joseph Jefferson Award for best "new adaptation." *The Liar* (Corneille) was adapted for the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. in 2011; it opened at the Classic Stage Company in New York in 2017. His version of Molière's *The Misanthrope* premiered Off-Broadway at the Classic Stage Company under the title *The School For Lies.* Also in 2011 his adaptation of Jean-Francois Régnard's *Le Légataire universel* premiered at the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. under the title *The Heir Apparent*. The same play opened Off-Broadway in March 2014 at the Classic Stage Company, and ran through May 2014.

Undoubtedly, Ives's theatrical involvement is deeply connected to the practice of Shakespeare companies: he has worked with the STC, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Prague Shakespeare Company, also during various Shakespeare festivals (in Utah; the Great River and the Santa Cruz). His translations also include references to Shakespeare's plays and their poetic style proves to be strongly influenced by their Elizabethan model.

In the present essay, if we focus on *The Liar* to account for a few characteristic features of Ives's rendering of the French classic language, it is also because such a play – like *Cyrano de Bergerac* – invites the new readers and audiences of verse drama to reflect precisely upon theatre-making, story-telling and play-writing.

The Liar based on Corneille's *Le Menteur* (1643) tells the story of Dorante who meets two women in the Tuileries in Paris. They are named Clarice and Lucrece. He impresses them with lies, claiming that he has returned from the wars in Germany where he played a crucial role. Once alone, he decides to court Clarice, mistakenly thinking her name to be that of her friend, Lucrece. Then Géronte, Dorante's father, announces to his son that he has found a girl for him

to marry (Clarice). Dorante, wrongly believing that the girl that he likes is Lucrece, lies again and says that he is already married and that his wife is pregnant. The play ends happily as the truth is revealed and Dorante is able to marry the one he loves.

The Liar. Act one. Scene one.

(The actor playing Cliton *appears before the curtain.)*

Cliton actor

Ladies and gentlemen! Mesdames, messieurs!
All cell phones off? All cellophane secure?
Finish your texting now, not during my scene.
"I'm in some theatre. But, like, where's the screen?"
[…] my announcement may be even worse:
Tonight our actors will be speaking verse!
In case you hadn't noticed that small fact.
We'll speak PENTAMETER, to be exact.
And what the blank's pentameter, you say?
It's what I'm speaking now! On with the play!

(He picks up a sign that says: "RENT ME! CLITON. SERVANT FOR HIRE." He raps the staff on stage three times and our scene is revealed.)

The Paris gardens of Les Tuileries –
A fine spring day in 1643. (1)

This introductory monologue directly hints at Shakespeare's theatre: Cliton "actor" echoes the chorus or the prologue in plays like *Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew* or *Henry V* to name but a few examples. Directly addressing the audience, he sets the decor and gives the rules. He ends the scene picking up a sign by way of transition and in order to lead the audience towards the very performance of the play (i.e. *The Liar*). Unlike Shakespeare's prologues however, Cliton does not extendedly situate the plot or mention the name of the main protagonist except through an allusion ("a lying genius"). Here he stands as the stage-director or as the playwright who prepares the audience to an unusual kind of theatre. And what is indeed unusual in his play? As Cliton says, it will be "in verse."

The italics on the page and the humour of the tone make it obvious that the author is aware of a kind of unease his verse drama will produce on the audience even though, when attending an adaptation of Corneille's play, the latter probably expects to be confronted to this device. Yet, Ives immediately has his actor providing the frame of his composition that, despite its poetry, will use the "pentameter", a more comfortable and better-known rhythmic pattern for an American audience.

However, Ives's poetical rhythm, made of regular decasyllables, distances itself from the original blank verse, precisely because of the rhyming couplets. Cliton refers to his blend of English verse as "blank pentameter." Such a fusion mirrors the union between two approaches of play-writing: Ives indeed places his comedy in the same historical context as Corneille's 17th-century Paris gardens of Les Tuileries, and hardly modifies the plot. But he adds cultural references to his own time ("cell phones"; "cellophane"; (cinema) "screen"; "cab" and "dinner tab"). If the characters are supposed to be dressed and to be acting as their classic homologues, their language however bears the marks of their own time. Fillers abound ("Huh", "uh", "um", "Ahhem", "Yeah") as well as truncated syllables ("prob'bly", "C'mon") for rhythmic purposes. Later in the play, French words ("Allez!", "à la mode", "mademoiselle", "monsieur", "gazette" rhyming with "buzzette", "Chanel perfume", etc.) and references to precise *loci* ("Louvre" spelt with no 's' however, "Poitiers", "Cannes", "Tuileries" (sometimes anglicised as "Twillery") are also recurrent. Because of shorter lines, the rhythm sounds faster. Dialogues efficiently translate the contrasted nature of the characters and the way they are swiftly dragged into imbroglios, which is also a founding feature of theatre-making. Thus like Corneille's *Le Menteur* and Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac,* Ives's *Liar* explicitly and plainly reveals the devices necessary to build a plot, for instance when Cliton later announces "the exposition scene" (2). The poetic language also serves the illusion, drawing the characters into believing that they are part of a refined society in which good morals prevail: lying is immoral and should be absent from this society and yet, as it is the foundation of theatre, immorality lies everywhere in

filigree of the script. In a different way, Ives's "translaptation" is also lying to us, the audience, because it is not an accurate word-for-word translation. Not surprisingly then, the introduction to the play uses advice from Dorante's lying lesson, later taught in Act Two, Scene one:

> Dorante
> Lying is so simple
> First: natural gestures. Keep your gravity low,
> And centered […]
> Most vital is the optic nerve. […]
> An easy tone, but with some verve.
> Etc. […]. (81- 82)

In Act One, conviction and eye contact are required ("You, lady with the bean burrito", "This guy looks nervous"). Elsewhere in the play, irrelevant details are key ("It was the tenth of May at six-oh-three…" (82)); so is the poetical pattern ("Let truth be told, but let your lies be sung" (82)). The *mise en abyme* of theatre ("But getting back to plot / On with the play!" (1)), of Shakespeare's theatre precisely ("All the world's a lie, and all the men and women / merely liars" (79)), completes the picture in which words (when they are translated, i.e. transformed into another language)[3] and acting are manipulating tools to cheat the ear.

A similar method has been used in *The School for Lies* and *The Heir Apparent* (originally 17th- and early 18th-century plays) where Ives went a step further in the manipulation of drama and poetry. Ives could have written a new play vaguely based on a classic; he could also have built his own play in verse and chosen a contemporary topic independently from any renowned reference. Yet what he did was to fuse both classic and contemporary forms. It led to protean compositions to answer the demands of some new audiences who were eager to be entertained as well as to find resonances of their own concerns. Such compositions put forward the efficiency and relevance of poetic speech that is still able to provide meaning, to delight and to move on today's stage.

Like Bolt, Ives also questions the purpose of verse drama and its role. Not surprisingly he has just adapted – or rather "translaptated" – another French classic, a play by Jean Piron, an 18th-century poet and cabaret artist (named "*goguettier*" in French). Under Ives's pen, *Métromanie* has become *Metromaniacs.* It was performed at The Duke, from April till May 2018, and was directed by Michael Kahn. In this new version, the confrontation between poetry and theatre is even more flagrant as the plot revolves around poetry crazes and verse-mania. It leads to verbal acrobatics together with mistaken identities (a recurrent Shakespearean and 'Molierean' theatrical motif) as well as twists and turns. As Ives intends to show, rhyming poetry does not deprive the stage of its farcical role and if there is a gap in time, it favours witty dialogues and elaborate lexicon (what *Time Out New York* calls "verbal glitter").

Radical poetical theatre

If verse on the 20th-century Anglophone stage seems to have been partly influenced by the French classics over the recent decades, we however find very iconoclastic approaches such as those of Sarah Kane, Martin Crimp or Patrick Marber. Their adaptations of *Phèdre, Le Misanthrope* or *Don Juan* deviate from both the form and the content of their sources. Rhymes may not be maintained (Marber's *Don Juan in Soho*), the rhythmic pattern may be irregular (Crimp's *Misanthrope*), the language may not sound refined and polished, which inevitably alters the genre of the classics (see Kane's vision of *Phaedra* as a comedy). In addition, the *dramatis personae*, the names, the context of the praxis and even the relationship between characters have often little in common with the originals (for example, apart from Alceste, all the characters' names of Crimp's *Misanthrope* have been changed). And if we can include in this study Sarah Kane's version of *Phèdre,* it is probably because her poetic gesture stands as the most radical one within this field.

In 1995 Kane was commissioned by the Gate Theatre to write a play based on a classic and she chose Seneca's adaptation of Euripides's *Phaedra,* also later adapted by Racine. Kane directed the first production, which opened on 15 May 1996. She said she had chosen *Phaedra* because "The world of […] Seneca's tragedies seems one in which to be human is to suffer, to be alive is to be entrapped in evil, to exist to be located in the midst of a universe conspicuous for its apparent perversity […] for its dissection of the human spirit, even for its malice" (A. J. Boyle, quoted in Saunders 72).

Phaedra's Love was the second play she wrote (apart from the monologues she produced when she was still a student at Bristol) and, just like the preceding one, *Blasted* (1995), the themes that are developed are far from sounding poetic. In her version of *Phaedra's Love*, she does not focus – as the title suggests – on Phaedra but on Hippolytus, Phaedra's step-son and her object of desire. The story is updated to the world of a contemporary royal family. Hippolytus is no chaste virgin, but an obese and sex-obsessed young man. We see him eat hamburgers, masturbate, watch violent TV programmes and be violent himself. He sees no value in the world and feels that everyone lies. Phaedra who loves him would like to help him but the doctor (who appears in Act one) feels powerless, which makes Phaedra "burn" even more for the young man. Phaedra eventually consummates her desire performing oral sex before Hippolytus informs her that he has gonorrhoea, a venereal disease involving inflammatory discharge from the vagina that will literally burn her. As a consequence, Phaedra commits suicide.

The play ends on the slaughter of Hippolytus whose genitals are barbecued, his body disembowelled and soon coveted by the vultures, which Hippolytus rejoices in since, at last, suffering gives meaning to his life.

The violent themes of rape, torture (both moral and physical), sex and orgy, chaos, even cannibalism (also in *Blasted*) are common to Kane's theatre and yet, in the satirical and deeply appalling picture

they draw of the world, they are not deprived of poetry, though an informal one, nor of some kind of humour.

Despite its crude language, the dialogue in scene three (below) between Phaedra and her daughter Strophe (a character Kane has added) proves rigorously rhythmical, sometimes even echoing blank verse.

Scene Three

Strophe *is working*

Phaedra *enters.*

Strophe Mother.

Phaedra Go away fuck off don't touch me don't talk to me stay with me.

Strophe What's wrong?

Phaedra Nothing. Nothing at all.

Strophe I can tell.

Phaedra Have you ever thought, thought your heart would break?

Strophe No.

Phaedra Wished you could cut open your chest tear it out to stop the pain?

Strophe That would kill you.

Phaedra This is killing me. (7)

The line "Have you ever thought, thought your heart would break?" is a pentameter. The repetition of the word "thought" in the middle of the line is an epizeuxis (or an anadiplosis if we consider the comma as a sign of fragmentation between the two clauses). In this scene, as well as in the whole script, the figures of repetition work as leitmotivs: for instance, anaphora (usually with personal pronouns like "He / I" but also with "no"), epiphora ("him" or "Hippolytus" / "it"), anadiplosis ("Nothing. Nothing at all"); polyptoton ("kill / killing"). They strengthen key words and create a kind of music (or refrain) that may, rather paradoxically, also reverberate the obsessional nature of the characters (as for example in Act one, the doctor: "Does he have

sex with you?" or "Does he have friends" repeated three times (4-5)). Monosyllabic lines like "A spear in my side, burning" (7) may serve as metaphorical anticipations of Phaedra's doom (since contracting gonorrhoea out of oral sex – "spear" being a phallic device – with Hippolytus will indeed "burn" her "inside").

The typography which sometimes presents only monosyllabic lines, as well as the absence of punctuation (e.g. "Wished you could cut open your chest tear it out to stop the pain?") complete the poetic structure. These short lines give space to breathe while highlighting the longer lines that may suddenly jut out on the almost blank page: "Can feel him through the walls. Sense him. Feel his heartbeat from a mile" (8). Impressions of rhymes like "him / in" (8) and alliterations like "obsessed / obvious" (7) or "can't / crush / crack" (9) reinforce the poetic momentum of the whole piece.

Of course, although these various examples (the list is not exhaustive) do highlight the poetic background and structural pattern of *Phaedra's Love*, the play cannot be considered as a conventional sample of verse drama. Kane based her narrative on Seneca's version, for reasons of perspective, to involve the themes of violence, cruelty and suffering. Euripides's and Racine's plays, respectively earlier and later versions, were not considered effective enough in this case. It is true that there is apparently neither a canonical nor a regular rhythmic pattern, and that rhyme is scarce in Kane's adaptation. Yet, the young and provocative author referred to *Phaedra's Love* as poetical "comedy"– which is at least one reason why her play is included in this essay – since, according to her, *Phaedra* focuses on the body and its grotesque truths.[4] So much so that, back in the 1990s, Kane invited her audience to rethink the language of drama. Kane's adaptation of a classic proved to what extent contemporary drama did not require rhymes only, nor a regular scansion to be poetical indeed, but rather "sound and sense" which codified the sentence differently, with another kind of rhythm. As a forerunner of the in-yer-face movement, Kane engendered a new way of apprehending classic plays and offered the contemporary stage a more radical understanding of their meaning.

Conclusion

Violence on stage as much as lexical violence *violate* formal devices, thereby questioning the meaning of our classics. Verse drama seems and sounds dislocated (just as classic drama is), at least in the case of Kane's rewriting of *Phaedra.* The classics are turned upside down ("sens dessus dessous"), which is another way to engender new inspirations, and to explore the relationship between theatre and poetry further.

Authors like Kane, Ives and Bolt have adapted famous classic plays to invite their readership and audiences to re-interpret the essence of myths. To begin with, for these authors, the purpose may have been aesthetic: they have manipulated a foreign language through translation, have reinvented its music, resorting to a more contemporary language and a different versification. Yet, they have also aimed at highlighting a new meaning that would enhance them as authors, not merely rewriters. Just as revising mythology, adapting the classics gets the writers to "be taken seriously (…), get something very deep in [themselves]", and "release an imprisoned meaning", as Alicia Ostriker wrote (*in* Kritzer: 172). More often than not, such revisions of the classics appear to be radical ones insofar as they depart from the formalism of their sources while claiming to owe allegiance to them. Such a phenomenon partly explains the plurality of labels used to identify the authors' purpose: "new versions" (Bolt), "translaptations" (Ives), "rewritings" (Kane). The gap between the source and its avatar is such that we are often inclined to consider the latter as an independent piece of work, and yet, their title invites us to think that they remain a new reading of classic drama, poetical and challenging, intrinsically linked to an older version, as Crimp acknowledges in his preface:

> if, three hundred years later, reflecting the contemporary world has meant taking certain 'liberties' with the text, this is only in the belief that – at this distance in time – reinvention, rewriting of one writer's work by another, is 'fidelity' of the truest and most passionate kind. (vi)

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1 The term "translaptation" is used by Ives to define his own adaptations.

2 For example, the lines "*CHRISTIAN, à qui Cyrano souffle ses mots / ROXANE, qui allait refermer sa fenêtre, s'arrêtant. / CHRISTIAN, même jeu"* (referring to "à qui Cyrano souffle ses mots") have no equivalent in Bolt's version.

[3] Let us remember that the word "translate" meaning "to move from one place or condition to another" clearly referred to the metamorphosis of the face and body in Shakespeare's theatre: "Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated" (321).

[4] "In the world of this royal family, Hippolytus's corporeality points out society's hypocrisy", Kane said (Middeke 310).