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MORE (THAN) ONESELF: ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT'S *PROMETHEUS* (1833) – PREFACED

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With the publication of *Prometheus Bound, with Other Poems* in 1833 Elizabeth Barrett Barrett's by then confirmed interest in the theme of building meaning in communal and historical terms acquires prominence. In the present paper I aim at examining the intelligibility of existing, the functionality of (literary) memory, as well as the significance of cognizing time as mutuality and exchange, based on an analysis of the poetess' *Preface* to her translation of Æeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* as part of the above named collection.

Key words: *selfhood, memory, cognition, interpretation, otherness, sense*

> The discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished. It is in fact an infinite process. … The temporal distance that performs the filtering process is not fixed, but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension. … Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event. … To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete. All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what … we call "substance," because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions.
>
> (Gadamer 2004: 298-299, 303)

Remembering and critically (re-)examining the (literary) past, Elizabeth Barrett perceives poetic identity to be an overcoming of boundaries – externally imposed or such as the creating self tends to build around himself/herself. In her entire work *otherness* – temporal, cultural, textual, and sexual – rises as not only a greater, but a more own, domain of being. The formative period of her poetic becoming includes *Prometheus Bound, with Other Poems* (1833) – a collection suggestive of the author's returns back in time, as she recreated her childhood and youth with a growing fascination with Greek literature and literary history in general. The prefatory quote to the present paper – from Gadamer's *Truth and Method* – aims at helping the scholar establish a hermeneutic context. In this context the matter of the historicity of knowing and being as

interpreting rises as Elizabeth Barrett's distinctive contribution to researching the cultural efficacy of temporal distance. I therefore feel motivated to bring Gadamer, Iser and Barrett together on the premise of a shared tenet: understanding ultimately signifies "constant movement" and extension of one's own knowledge as well as of the boundaries of literature. Such movement could be likened to a boat beating against a current – to and fro, into the literary past and out of it, desirous of a safe harbour yet compelled to sail away and achieve independence by way of critical re-examination of the *before*. As she arrived at the tactile nature of time through texts of monumental literary works, the poetess, simultaneously, departed from the frustrating hegemony of great men of letters. With patriarchs – literary and otherwise – looming above, she found herself dwelling within the certainty of knowledge as received inheritance, to begin with. The foundations of this attitude were set, no doubt, by Elizabeth's own exacting and domineering father. For her Greekness came to represent a portion of her own self, which gradually emerged as being thanks to otherness. Nonetheless, she appears to have remained, until the end of her conscientious professional life, immune to tautology in interpreting the great past. Meaning came to signify "a historically effected event," stemming from historical pre-givenness yet yielding most original views on creativity as selfhood:

> Most of my events, and nearly all my intense pleasures, have passed in my thoughts. […] poetry has been a distinct object with me – an object to read, think and live for. […] The Greeks were my demi-Gods, and haunted me out of Pope's Homer until I dreamed more of Agamemnon than Moses the black pony.
>
> (Elizabeth Barrett Barrett to Mr. R. H. Horne, 5 October, 1843, Barrett Browning 1897: 3)[1]

This quote, taken from one of her letters, suggests the prevalence of textual over actual reality, which is not to deny, on the other hand, the tactility of contact between text and interpreter, as Barrett Barrett implies. The poetess' interest in 18th- and 19th-century English poetry and in Greek language and literature, was sparkled during the Hope End period.[2] Away

[1] I have abstained from tracing parallels between Barrett Barrett's and other notable original/translative work on the same subject – a possibility for further exploration but one lying outside the scope of the present paper.

[2] Hope End was the family estate eventually sold by Elizabeth's father in 1832. There Elizabeth spent the initial twenty years of her life, and got the inspiration to write,

from the prominence of Oxonian academia, she perused some exemplary authors – they revealed themselves as that otherness which led to the discovery of her own poetic voice. The process was mediated by her acquisition of Greek, largely through self-tutoring. (Dis-)empowerment and making difference – two chief features of Barrett Barrett's poetics – acquire historical significance in view of the unfolding of her poetic talent as responsibility, at first through translation. The *Prometheus Bound* poetic collection is evidence of a young scholar's duty to her tutors (actual and literary-textual), a woman's duty to the male literary cannon, and a human being's duty to the creative value of historical alterity.[3]

While the letter quoted above indicates the value of poetry and literary studies as a physically viable habitat, it suggests isolation from a distinctly cultured, or academic milieu, as well as within the family, where, upon her mother's demise in 1828, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett may often have found in literature not only inspiration but consolation, given the formidable masculine rule over her home. The uniformity of quotidian existence appears to have been countered by the variety and inexhaustibility of Greek culture in which she immersed herself willingly, though not unproblematically or unequivocally. With none of the poems in this volume republished in the poetess' own lifetime, her translation of Æeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* has been treated as a contextual center, not least because of Barrett Browning's revised version of it in 1850, which, expert opinion consulted, differs from her 1833 production significantly. The extension of franchise beyond propertied classes in 1832 and the Emancipation Act of 1833, which abolished slavery in British colonies (Cf. Drummond 2010, 4: 178), are two events which precede and in fact partake of the democratic poetics of *Prometheus Bound*. Barrett Barrett advocated at once liberty of interpretation and faithfulness to original composition, backing both spiritual license and obligation to tradition – in her *Preface*:

> It is the nature of the human mind to communicate its own character to whatever substance it conveys, whether it convey metaphysical impressions from itself to another mind, or literary compositions from one to another language. It is therefore desirable that the same composition

later, poems such as *Hector in the Garden*, *The Lost Bower*, and *The Deserted Garden* (Cf. Kenyon 1897: 3, 10).

[3] On responsibility in the evolution of feminine talent consult also Helsinger, Sheets & Veeder 1983: 5, 12. By way of historical comparison, the authors refer to two other eminent Victorians – G. H. Lewes and Elizabeth Gaskell – to uncover different, gendered, attitudes to the intelligibility of literary talent as domain of existence.

> should be conveyed by different minds, that the character of the medium may not be necessarily associated with the thing conveyed. All men, since Aesop's **time** and before it, have worn **various-coloured spectacles**. They cannot part with **their colour, which is their individuality**; but they may **correct the effects** of that individuality by itself.
>
> (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 179, emphasis added)

Lack of mastery of Greek forbids me to compare the two different versions of her translation of Æeschylus' drama or to evaluate the quality of each separate translation. In my case, this complicates the distance between text and interpreter. Instead, I aim at exploring the poetess' perception of the nature of translation as an ontological domain of negotiation between different minds and talents in, and in view of, time. My knowledge may only be therefore preliminary (rather than consequential). In the collection of 1833, the translation of *Prometheus Bound* is a topical work in a whole whereby sense is defended as continuation of, and transposition within, historical alterity. The "various-coloured spectacles" disclose the dependent nature of interpretation, as well as the postpositional nature of the original which may only survive as content interpreted in time: after its own self as response to some need in the author's environment and thanks to the effort of another individual. A hermeneutical inter-validation of original and interpreter we also discover in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: "one partner, in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, speaks only through the other partner, the interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back into meaning" (Gadamer 2004: 389). And since the sense of time in literature comes as tradition, and tradition is in essence verbal (Cf. Gadamer 2004: 391), a given other event/thing precedes each next instance and stage of poetic becoming.

The poetess' view of the interdependence between translation, selfhood and time also shows in the *Notes* she provided to this translation of 1833 – notes postpositional but defensive of her idea that, eventually "poetry decides," as she implied, most likely, the primacy of talent and personal vision but also of poetry over the sciences and other fields of knowledge. Seen more critically, prefacing and annotating are manipulative practices: the original text no longer fully corresponds to itself but to the interpreter's frame of mind which works as preparatory ground for further interpretations. Such paratextual interventions are crucial in a literary work's historical existence, particularly with foreign audiences which may need more explanations to get the gist. It appears, however, that, at the time, Barrett Barrett was trying to ascertain, above all

else, the literary-historical merit of *Prometheus* as well as her own efficaciousness as translator. In her endeavour to convey adequately into English this original Greek work, she left some conundrums in the *Preface*: her equal devotion to the foreign and the native cultural cause; the contingency and flexibility of prevalence of original over copy; a translator's skilled professionalism v/s uncontained passion and imaginativeness; the necessity of recognizing Christianity and paganism alike in discussing literary tradition; personal ambition v/s communal gain; self-denial v/s self-acclaim; metrical and stylistic regularity v/s irregularity in faithfully conveying a text from one language into another; patriarchal conventionality v/s feminine innovativeness in literature etc. She would and would not "walk upon a *pavé*" with "long genealogies" (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 179). The poetess struggles against herself, noting the impossibility of cutting the umbilical chord between the individual and his/her own time. The depth and range of her ideas in *The Preface* could not be easily compressed or selected from. *The Preface* is also symptomatic of the poetess' perception of her own, native literature. Still, the scholar's attempt to view her contributions in the light of the above suggested critical reflections, and from a bird's eye perspective, may make one indulge in a more detailed perusal of some excerpts (emphasis added throughout the four examples quoted hereby):

> **(1.) I do not ask, I would not obtain, that our age should be servilely imitative of any former age. Surely it may think its own thoughts and speak its own words, yet turn not away from those who *have* thought and spoken well. The contemplation of excellence produces excellence, if not similar yet parallel.** We do not turn from green hills and waving forests, because we build and inhabit palaces; nor do we turn towards them, that we may model them in painted wax. We make them subjects of contemplation, in order to abstract from them those ideas of beauty, afterwards embodied in our own productions; and, above all, in order to consider their and **our Creator** under every manifestation of his goodness and his power. All beauties, whether in nature or art, whether in physics or morals, whether in composition or abstract reasoning, are multiplied reflections, visible in different distances and under different positions, of **one archetypal** beauty. … The ancients, especially the ancient Greeks, felt, and thought, and **wrote antecedently to rules**: they **felt passionately**, and **thought daringly**; and **wrote because they felt and thought**. Shakespeare is a more classical writer than Racine. … **and of all the works of Æeschylus, no one stands more forward to support it, than his work of the Prometheus Bound**. He is a **fearless and impetuous, <u>not a cautious and accomplished poet</u>**. His excellences

> could not be acquired by art, nor could his defects exist separately from his genius. … **His excellences consist chiefly in a vehement imaginativeness, a strong but repressed sensibility, a high tone of morality, a fervency of devotion, and a rolling energetic diction: and as sometimes his fancy rushes in, where his judgement fears to tread, and language, even the most copious and powerful of languages, writhes beneath its impetuosity**; …
>
> (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 180)

This first example precludes blind reproduction: understanding does not mean parroting; meaning is far from equaling established convention. Yet it argues that the nature of learning involves sensible adoption of proven excellence, traceable, in an archetypal mode, to a common creator – the ultimate divine source. The balance seems to be tipped in favour of imaginative spontaneity, self-reliance, linguistic innovativeness and immoderate fancy extending the boundaries of lived experience.

> (2.) … **the Satan of Milton and the Prometheus of Æeschylus stand upon ground as unequal, as do the sublime of sin and the sublime of virtue.** Satan suffered from his ambition; Prometheus from his humanity: Satan for himself; Prometheus for mankind: Satan dared perils which he had not weighed; Prometheus devoted himself to sorrows which he had foreknown. 'Better to rule in hell,' said Satan; 'Better to serve this rock,' said Prometheus. **But in his hell, Satan yearned to associate [with] man; while Prometheus preferred a solitary agony**: nay, he even permitted his zeal and tenderness for the peace of others, to abstract him from that agony's intenseness.
>
> (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 181)

> (3.) We see [Prometheus] daring and unflinching beneath the torturing and dishonoring hand, yet keenly alive to the torture and dishonour; for himself fearless and rash, yet for others considerate and wary; himself unpitied, yet to others pitiful.
>
> (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 182)

Excerpts (2) and (3) are emphatic proof of the poetess being able to distinguish between human virtues in literary terms. Her concern for the ultimate representability of good and evil bears the overtones of a devout, analytically minded Anglican, and a classical scholar blessed by a well informed historical consciousness. Yet she too, as does Milton and Blake, seems fascinated by a resourceful Satan – able to relate to man and so

suggestive of the dialogic element of the controversy of evil, or of ultimate and perilous otherness, for that matter.

> (4.) I have rendered the iambics into blank verse, their nearest parallel; and the choral odes and other lyric intermixtures, into English lyrics, irregular and rhymed. **Irregularity I imagined to be indispensable to the conveyance of any part of the effect of the original measure, of which little seems to be understood by modern critics, than that it is irregular**. To the literal sense I have endeavoured to bend myself as closely as was poetically possible: but if, after all, – and it is too surely the case, – 'quantum mutatus!' must be applied; may the reader say so rather sorrowfully than severely, and **forgive my English for not being Greek, and myself for not being** Æeschylus.
>
> (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 183)

Finally, as seen from example (4), she offers an apology for imaginativeness, creativity and uniqueness of personality in defending the rights of a translator whose ambitions render her capable of assessing the intellectual difference between two languages (English and Greek). Knowledge of metrics imparts invaluable technical competence to her scholarly work on Aeschylus as a cultural phenomenon. The lines bold-typed in all four passages quoted hint at a feeling of obligation to an absolute, universal source – a sine-qua-non spatiotemporal basis vindicating the poetess' talent and rights. Wishing to differ from the past, she stresses on those of its qualities that she would imitate and adopt (excerpt 1). Above all, this suggests identity resting on pre-given literary excellence and uniqueness, self-respect in view of knowledge of the cultural past, the far-off, the foreign, the other. In the rest of the poems in this volume the above considerations relate to the poetess' striving to overcome the confines of one's own givenness in terms of gender, culture, linguistic skill, religion and history. Examples could be found in *The Picture Gallery at Penshurst, To a Poet's Child, To the Memory of Sir Uvedale Price,* and *The Image of God* – the subject of another, more detailed thematic study of the whole 1833 collection of which the present paper is part.

Prometheus' deed can be seen as an act of translation, enlightenment, and self-education. The appealing element in his character must have been his ability to reach beyond physical and mental boundaries – by transfer of lore from the possession of one group (privileged Gods) to another (common mortal human beings, including poets), with the perception of the hierarchical conceptualization of existence as knowledge in ancient Greek culture. The parallel with Elizabeth Barrett's own development

seems obvious, as scholarly research on the matter has discovered. Supplying her translation of *Prometheus Bound* with notes, she indicates her especial interest in the matter of original composition as well as interpretation, as she comments in note (a) (Cf. Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 215), in revealing the differences between Æeschylus' and Hesiod's accounts of the same story, quoting particular lines from the original and from other previous translations. In addition, she demonstrates awareness of other playwrights, such as Sophocles and Euripides. The poetess "thieved" the story of Prometheus twice and bound it twice (Stone, Taylor, Donaldson 2010, 1: 119-121; Donaldson 2010, 4: 178). The first version being a spontaneous act of self-discovery, the second was a mature, self-revisionist attempt to redefine the range of one's interests, the breadth of one's linguistic capacities, and the actuality of one's own achievements and contribution to literature as a field of being. To accomplish her first version, she applied the effort of perusing the whole of Æeschylus, reading this precise work somewhere between March 1827 and March 1828, and then producing a first translation within a fortnight by around mid-February 1832 (Cf. Stone, Taylor, Donaldson 2010, 1: 119). The second version is perceived as revealing a freer translator-conveyor of ideas and of feeling, rather than a legislator of a metrical document of times past. In her notes to the initial version she trusts that translation "is a poetical, not a grammatical question; and I cannot help thinking that poetry decides as my translation has done" (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 220, note (y)). In discussing some major features of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* in the context of the development of the female sonnet in the period 1787-1895, Marianne Van Remoortel insists that Barrett Browning's poetics involves a constancy of a thinking self's "voluntary imprisonment," manifest in the oscillation between mastery and slavery, self-aggrandizement and self-denial (Van Remoortel 2011: 91, 104). Yet this very inbetweenness, which informs Barrett Browning's early original composition where translation and poetic interpretation have a leading role, contributes to her becoming humanist and writer.

Prometheus Bound was never a project entirely independent of ties with other people in the poetess' life, least of all between herself and her future husband in their correspondence. The letters between the two poets serve as sufficient evidence of their awareness of matters hermeneutic, such as temporal distance, external appreciation of genius, alterity as cultural uniqueness, and the inevitability of the existence of physical matter as a primary outsideness to the reflecting mind. To refer to Wolfgang Iser's orientation towards the openness and viability of a literary work, we ought to

admit that Barrett Barrett saw literature, and poetry written by others, as "living event;" by interpreting texts by way of translation and critical commentary, resulting also in poetic production of her own, she achieved a high volume of dynamic "lifelikeness" in her own work (Iser 1972: 280, 295-296). Prometheus's contagious spontaneity and humanitarianism proved a magnet for this young poetic mind – in 1833, and once more, in 1850 – with an effect in her research of Greek Antiquity. What we have is a creative and contributive re-examination of the story, which involved partially ignoring the original metrical scheme – a major point of disagreement with other scholars at the time. The poetess sped up the process of bringing *Prometheus Bound* into existence yet again, despite, after, or thanks to, other, previous translations. She remained, nonetheless, within the hazy domain of the virtual convergence of text and reader. As seen from the detailed excerpts from *The Preface* already discussed in this paper, she endorses both "irregularity" and "contemplation of excellence". She shuns "servile imitation," yet she admits to the impossibility of conveying Æeschylus' ideas in a language other than their original. In other words, comprehension is suggested to be far more capacious as an event experienced, as a process, than as a "complete" product to be had. So that, what is other is more than oneself and promises more chances for (self-)comprehension than the comprehending individual taken in isolation. Yet the variability of the inherent potential of the text can only be revealed as an act of reading and therefore an act of interpretation. Barrett Barrett regarded *Prometheus Bound* as a dynamic work to be done, rather than as a text to be possessed. It appears she obeyed the experiential nature of Æeschylus' work (itself based on a story), whereby individual input was perceived as derivative from an "archetypal" beauty. Iser and Barrett emphasize the metaphoricity of comprehension, seen as simultaneous expansion of original composition and of interpretation, both dependent, ultimately, on temporal distance (see also Iser 1972: 286). Both warn of the hazardousness of one claiming definite boundaries in perceiving a literary work and its sense. Iser notes the relationship between text and interpreter, as he stresses the dormant possibilities for the realization of ideas – available only across temporal-cultural distance:

> […] the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be

> precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.
>
> (Iser 1972: 279)

> […] the configurative meaning [formed while reading] can be nothing but a *pars pro toto* fulfillment of the text, and yet this fulfillment gives rise to the very richness which it seeks to restrict […].
>
> (Iser 1972: 290)

The 1845 courtship correspondence between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett offers some illustrious examples of similarity in the two poets' perception of the foundational significance of heredity in literary composition, seen, actually, as genetic exchange, sharing and development. Robert Browning phrased this thus: "so into me has it gone, and part of me has it become, this great living poetry of yours, not a flower of which but took root and grew" (Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, [Post-mark – January 10, 1845.], Browning 2009: 7). Convinced in the living basis of art, she responded: "I will say that I am your debtor, […] I must be a devout admirer and student of yours" (Elizabeth Barrett Barrett to Robert Browning, January 11, 1845; Barrett Browning 2009: 11).[4] The Brownings and Iser hint at literature as "living," as event, as a greater otherness in need of comprehension through dialogue in time.

The rushing forward to the unknown (often meaning the untranslatable), the aiming at the ultimately other, or the distantly familiar, the poetess suggests to be a natural tendency for a developing poetic mind which would instinctively search for affiliation, for a ground to be appreciated against, for a story to be part of – one which she would simultaneously continue and contradict. She canonizes both individual talent and tradition as an inseparable entity. In note (z) to *Prometheus Bound*, for instance, she compares this drama of Aeschylus' and another, *Agamemnon*, as she discusses the representation of a lightning. She reflects on the matter of the derivativeness of striking poetic imagery (Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 220). It is not only in her translations, but also in her original work, that we see that perspectives and intentions arise from recollections and from inherited knowledge, itself a category dependent on

[4] When praising her husband-to-be, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett praised the great poet's ability to be "both subjective and objective," insisting, also, that the production of an artist necessarily "partake[s] of his real nature" (Barrett Barrett to Robert Browning, January 15 and February 3, 1845, Barrett Browning 2009: 18, 25).

the historicity of a writer's mentality. Correlative problems and themes between Greek Antiquity and Barrett Browning's own time, such as freedom, empathy, sacrifice, self-perception, and self-expression, pertain to Prometheus and to the poetess' own artistic becoming alike, as they open particular horizons for investigating the fluid bounds of literature as constant transfer of meaning between subject and object as cultural whole.

Based on Elizabeth Barrett's diary between June 1831 and April 1832, Dorothy Mermin confirms that by January 1832 the poetess had read all the plays of Æeschylus, adding that by the beginning of April she had read all Euripides, too (Mermin 1989: 48-49). Understanding *Prometheus Bound* and the *Preface* to it is a preamble to understanding the theme of otherness in an individual's becoming – a theme pivotal in this collection as well as in Barrett Browning's entire work. The poetess' plunge into Æeschylus aimed at producing a translation to be read: publication and public recognition could be taken as part of the plan. She thus exposed herself to a largely masculine world of literary criticism and Classical scholarship[5], refusing to be decorous, and to follow conventional patriarchal order, which she always managed to cleverly and creatively circumvent yet dutifully acknowledge. By defending her rights as translator, she defended her rights as woman and as human being, also defending the character of Prometheus as conveyor of skill and knowledge (Cf. Avery 2014: 6). The fact that a second, different, translation was accomplished in 1850 means that to her this work of Aeschylus' was, somehow, a kind of reality that, in Gadamer's words, surpassed her as spectator This allows for a basis for comparison between her early poems (up to the 1838 collection – *The Seraphim and Other Poems*) and the later ones. It is imitation with "cognitive import," to be shared: not an act of mere repetition, but a "bringing forth" of common significant meaning –

[5] Jeni Williams stresses that in the 19th century, female education may only have bounded on Classical scholarship by desire but was otherwise tamed to enjoy literature originally produced in English, or translated into English. For women, accessible education differed from desirable and desired education, or the sort of education a woman would be potentially capable of managing in terms of the volume and range of knowledge involved. The same feature distinguished less well-off men from the well-off (Cf. Williams 1997: 164). So, a woman's decision to master a Classical language signified a will not only to broaden her intellectual and spiritual horizon, but also to expand the limits of her gender and class definition. Women's access to education in general, as well as the specificities of female education in classical languages, have been explored competently by Jennifer Wallace, in her gender-oriented study of feminine creativity in 19th-century England (see esp. Wallace 2015: 243-244).

maintained continuously through acts of denying uniqueness in the lack of external appreciation (Gadamer 2004: 109, 113-114, 129). Thus, knowledge stands out as a phenomenon transferrable, conceivable, itemizable – oral into written form – amassable temporally, historicizable. I would therefore be tempted to disagree with Mary Sanders Pollock, who suggests that "typically, in Barrett's early work, the scholar/translator is separated from the lyric poet" (Pollock 2016: 20). Yet I would support Linda Lewis' observation that with time, a more solid dose of penitential Christian humility settled down in the poetess, ousting the earlier Promethean rebelliousness and impatience (Cf. Lewis 1998: 27), replacing it with philosophical pensiveness and artistic self-respect.

Victorian women of letters dramatized their concern for issues such as liberty, obligation, moral integrity and individuality, so that one might conceive of this *Preface* to the translation of *Prometheus Bound* as almost more conspicuous than the actual poetic work – translated or taken for itself in the original (Cf. Hardwick 2000: 183-184). *The Preface* and the *Notes* are Barrett Barrett's scholarly effort to locate *Prometheus Bound* within the whole of Æschylus' work, as well as, overall, within English literature as both original and derivative. Her *Preface* stretches back and forth continuously: as far as *Hamlet* (in note (s), for instance), Euripides, Pindar etc. (see notes (g), (i) and (n), Barrett Browning 2010, 4: 216-218). Dealing with the subject of Prometheus, the poetess seems to have abstained from cultural insularity, otherwise regularly identified as typical attribute of Victorian mentality. Translating *Prometheus Bound*, she at once abandoned and re-acquired herself: more enlightened within a cultural-linguistic otherness. The fact that her translation of Æschylus' work is both prefaced and annotated, illustrates, in my opinion, this transition between intention and result, or between prejudice and understanding, as overcoming "self-alienation" through reading. In this process, Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us, the element of sharing is greater than the element of repeating "something past" (Gadamer 2004: 392, 394). By learning Greek and by translating, she increased the extent of what she could learn at all, whereby the text translated gained "the truly ontological character of an event" – insofar as it presented another world, a world of self-sacrifice and intentional mediation between two (Gadamer 2004: 421, 439-440).

Seeking to express her intellectual zeal and spiritual fervour, Elizabeth Barrett Browning showed that learning to read Greek, and

incorporating Greek ideals[6] into her own composition of verse, she performed "a rite of passage" to authorship, as Yopie Prins assures us in her seminal study of alternative, gendered, practices of studying Greek culture in 19th-century female writing in England (Prins 2017: 5, 7). This meant travelling historically, in time and in space, between Englishness and Greekness – an obvious Romantic alternative. Yopie Prins insightfully suggests a possible route for a comparative examination of Io (whose story, we are assured, was Æschylus' innovative introduction) and of a female writer's abandonment to composition as simultaneous embodiment and externalization of letters, stories, and knowledge (Prins 2017: 58) – the self emerging as otherness in liberation from tyrannical male authority. Defiantly, Barrett invested her knowledge of Classical texts into her own composition, thus demonstrating what Prins calls "dramatization of literacy" at a time when Æschylus' *Prometheus Bound* was more often enacted as textual work, rather than as an actual performance on stage (Prins 2017: 59). As textual work, it became the subject not only of Barrett's efforts to establish, for herself, a comprehensible relationship between Classical literature and Christianity. It also emerged to be a kernel element of the unfolding of the relationship between herself and her future husband, Robert Browning, as their correspondence proves – a matter already explored by Yopie Prins, most notably, and Isobel Hurst (Cf. Hurst 2015: 461, 463).

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[6] Among those ideals we find: rebelliousness, martyrdom, national heroism, prophetic verve, intellectual humanism, antimonarchism etc. – in unison with a woman writer's desire to identify with the unfamiliar, the strange, the cultural other, as an alternative to conventional, disciplinary, and male, scholarship of Greek at the time (Cf. Prins 2017: 7, 57). Significant literary contributions to the reception of this particular Greek play in English until the end of the 19th century include: Charlotte Lennox's 1759 rendition of a French miscellany (Jesuit Père Pierre Brumoy's critical-translative collection *Le Thèâtre des Grecs*, 1730), 1773 *Prometheus in Chains* by Dr. Thomas Morell (translation) 1777 a volume of Æschylus' tragedies, translated by Robert Potter, 1816 *Prometheus* by Byron, 1818 *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley, 1818-19 *Prometheus Unbound* by Pery Busshe Shelley, 1822 *Prometheus* – an anonymous work in prose, then Elizabeth Barrett Browning's work of 1833, (with a second version in 1850), followed, respectively, by the translations of Augusta Webster, 1866, and Anna Swanwick, 1873. This route has been drafted well enough by J. Michael Walton, who singles Barrett Browning out as a translator with an eye – for the first time – for "the universal advances for the whole human race claimed by Æschylus' *Prometheus*" which "become highly personal" (Walton 2016: 89; Cf. pp. 81, 82, 92) .

In the context of the nineteenth-century "revival and enrichment of schooling in England," knowledge of old languages was apparently dominated by interest in Old Greek – a tendency also facilitated by "the emergence of Romantic Hellenism" as a cultural "elite superstructure" on a poet's road to "artistic and social freedom," as Christopher Stray informs us in his critical overview of education and reading, noting that Greek was also widely perceived as "the patron saint of vernaculars" (Stray 2015: 79-81). *Prometheus* hereby regarded as a preface to the whole collection of 1833, the rest of poems conceptualize, variously, life, death, memory, nature, art, parenthood, history and faith. They suggest the author's almost equal intellectual and spiritual investment in religion and secularism, in Christian scholarship and paganism. A significant number of poems are themselves prefaced by quotes from sources in Latin, or such that illustrate Barrett Browning's mastery of other languages and/or cultural contexts: the Bible, and some other works originally non-English. This may serve as evidence of the poetess' desire to affiliate herself with something other – linguistically, temporally, and in terms of gender: there is not a single epigraph that does not come from a work composed by a male author. Prefaced thus, her own poems may only superficially appear imitative, or derivative, unless we see derivation as the self's condensed identification with an aimed, external, cultural referee, and so a case of ex-centric expansion of the limits of the poet's own creative potential. Examples may be seen in: *The Tempest. A Fragment, A Sea-Side Meditation, Minstrelsy, The Death-Bed of Teresa Del Riego, The Image of God,* and *Hymn*. This would also suggest a kind of post-modern vision of writing, of narrating, and of communicating, expressed by F. Elizabeth Gray in her study, entitled *Christian and Lyric Tradition in Victorian Women's Poetry* (Gray 2010: 41), as: "a hermeneutics of indeterminacy by offering multiple readings of particular texts". This "indeterminacy" clearly, in my opinion, signals a dependence on previousness, and, in ethical terms, a kind of self-perception. It has to do with the breadth of feminine thought which dwells amidst multiple possibilities, recognizes meta-narratives, suggests, vexed with itself, secondariness, and negotiates between opportunities within an ontological range of othernesses in interpretation. Gray indicates convincingly enough how this tendency thwarts linearity of presentation of a subject matter (ibid.); this may be another way to appreciate the spiral structure of the unfolding of Elizabeth Barrett poetical thought, too. She could start from a before, with, say, an epigraph, to return, later on, in a poem, or through a second translation of the same thing, to that before to revise it, re-examining also her own intellectual potential. At a time when

it may have been deemed regular and safe for a woman writer to appear under a male name, Elizabeth Barrett declared and defined herself, signing her publications with her own name, but, I believe, also by aiming, even in her most intimately lyric pieces, at a certain level of objectivity through establishing a referential, oftentimes narratorial, textual past. This is evidenced by her prefaces, epigraphs, and annotation practice.

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