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Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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This first miscellaneous issue is dedicated to Alessandro Serpieri, cherished colleague, eminent scholar, and co-founder of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies.* Colleagues and friends will honour his memory in the forthcoming 4.1 issue (Spring 2018), which will collect academic articles and diverse pieces aimed at celebrating his contribution to Italian and international drama studies.

The present issue inaugurates a new *Special Section* including contributions of variable length, spanning interviews, artists' writings, performance and book reviews, festival reports, etc. It wishes to complement the thematic and/or miscellaneous sections by providing a locus for fresh dialogue and new perspectives on worldwide theatrical outputs and performance or creative issues.

The *Skenè. JTDS* Editorial Board

Rebecca Elizabeth McNamara*

The Ambiguous Home of Life and Death: The Symbolic Uses of the *Skene* and the Female in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*[1]

Abstract

Aeschylus' words have been dissected time and again as the key to our understanding of the notorious figure of Clytemnestra. In this article, I will survey the current literature on key scenes from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, but explore them from a perspective that studies the surviving words in tandem with the spatial dynamics of the theatre. The traditional role of the woman within the home as wife and mother is challenged both through the powerful words of Clytemnestra and through the dark opening of the *skene* onstage, which symbolizes the life-giving and death-bringing potential of the female in Greek thought. Focusing on the 'tapestry scene', I will examine how the cascading red tapestry at once transforms the house of Atreus into a devouring mouth and into a womb, the parallel orifices that inspired such male anxiety in the ancient world. The connotations of the textile woven by the women of the house, over which a war of words takes place between husband and wife, resembles Clytemnestra's deceptive and alluring tongue, which eventually proves Agamemnon's downfall. And yet, as the womb has connections with life so it does with death. The memory of the brutal slaughter committed by Agamemnon's ancestors, brought vividly to life by Cassandra in front of the palace gates, creates a nightmarish manifestation of the house of Hades before the audience's eyes. This suggestion of vertical depth, which the dark interior captures, transforms Clytemnestra into an otherworldly monster who lurks in the depths of the *skene*-underworld. Through unlocking the secrets of the interior we can truly appreciate Aeschylus' Clytemnestra: a character who defies the limitations of male expectation and gender.

Keywords: tragedy, Aeschylus, space, interior, female, Clytemnestra

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* has been a source of fascination for audiences, ancient and modern, from its first production in 458 BC. The very first play of the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, is probably one of the most studied and performed plays of the entire Greek repertoire. Yet surprisingly it is not the play's namesake – the heroic sacker of Troy and the commander of the Greek army – who has captured

[1] This article was originally submitted as part of my undergraduate thesis at King's College London. I am grateful to Emmanuela Bakola for her comments, suggestions, and support.

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the imaginations of the generations that followed, but his wife, "arguably the most transgressive woman in extant tragedy" (Hall 2010: 131): Clytemnestra. Aeschylus' alteration of the traditional story, in which Aegisthus was the mastermind executor of the plot while Clytemnestra merely assisted (Hom. *Od.* 3.258-75), seems to be his own innovation (Burnett 1998: 101-2), and it is this presentation of Clytemnestra that trickles down and seeps into later presentations of women as deceitful seductresses and, even more than that, deadly.

However, I would argue that the most drastic innovation in relation to how Aeschylus engages with the female was his use of the stage building, the *skene*, which was definitive regardless of whether it was in use before the first performance of the *Oresteia* or not.[2] Aeschylus fully exploited the wide range of semantic possibilities that the dark interior offered, and it is through its association with the female that this potentially benign space becomes laced with symbolic connotations of life and death.

Across periods and cultures of antiquity, notions of fertility and death, through mourning and funerary practices, have an established association with the category of 'female'; tragedians explored this paradox of women as life-givers and death-bringers on the Athenian stage, beginning in our surviving corpus with Aeschylus. This duality is rendered not merely through the words and gestures of the onstage Clytemnestra, who commands the audience's attention for the majority of the performance, but also through the symbolically charged offstage space.

Recently, much work has been done on exploring the symbolic connotations of the *skene* and the hidden stage it housed. On the surface, the *skene*

[2] Taplin (1977: 87, 277, 310, 452-9) states that the use of the *skene* in the *Oresteia* is so spectacularly sophisticated that it must be an innovation; Sommerstein (2010: 17-22) highlights the lack of archaeological evidence or reliable sources for reconstructing the fifth-century performance space and argues that there is no textual indication in Aeschylus' earlier plays that a stage building was in use (with the exception of *Pers.* 140-1); Raeburn and Thomas (2011: xlii, xlv) postulate that the *skene* was a "recent invention in 458 BC, designed to extend the mechanics of theatrical presentation", although they concede that Aeschylus' earlier plays "do not require a stage building". However, Bakola (2014) evaluates recent scholarship on the uses of the stage building and argues persuasively that it was in use before the *Oresteia*, providing a space from which Darius' apparition could appear from the underworld in Aeschylus' *Persians.* Her argument posits a *skene* that uses the interior to represent vertical depth, symbolic of the depths of the underworld (see § 3 below, 'Down the *Skene*'), which is utilized in later extant tragedies. For the same reason (among others), I think that the dramaturgical significance of the interior must have been established before the first production of the *Oresteia*. Nevertheless, from the textual evidence of the *Oresteia*, Sommerstein (2010: 17-18) highlights that, during its first performance, a stage building with doors was in use as there is "a clear distinction between an 'outside' area and an 'inside' area" and explicit references to doors are made by the characters.

is the infamous house of Atreus in *Agamemnon*, and certainly the *skene* often represents a palace, cave, or tent. As readers, we are trained to see the superficial exterior of the house as nothing more than this, and so scholars have focused their research on the surviving words of the plays. However, the gaping blackness of the interior conveys much more than the representational. Indeed, in a few publications, especially the works of those influenced by structuralism, an increasing amount of interest has been dedicated to unravelling the mysteries of the inside and the potential this has for enriching our understanding of these dramas.[3]

Therefore, the *skene,* in which these contradictory concepts of the female coexist, is the focus of this article. In the 'tapestry scene' especially (Aesch. *Ag*. 905-74), the *climax* of their amalgamation, the *skene* becomes the seat of life and death in the very *tableau* offered to the audience's gaze. Into the ornate tapestry, red with porphyra dye, are woven traditional ideas of female trickery, concepts of productive and reproductive labour, and blood. As Padel asserts, the offstage unseen space is an "image of the unseen interior of a human being" (1990: 358) and, in *Agamemnon*, this space seems undeniably evocative of a woman's interior. Käppel concludes that the 'tapestry scene' is only relevant for the construction of the plot insofar as it compels Agamemnon to enter the house (1998: 158), overlooking the symbolic significance of this moment.[4] For, in a mastery of Aeschylean dramaturgy, the parallelism between the mouth and the vagina, predominant in Greek imagination,[5] is staged simultaneously through the dark interior of the *skene* pouring forth its crimson, bringing to life Clytemnestra's intrinsic femaleness.

Yet that innate femininity is inexplicably linked with female affinity for death. In many parts of the play, but especially in the fourth episode (1035-330), this ominous and frightening unseen place transforms into the house of Hades through the words of Cassandra, the hitherto silent female. Her visions of the brutal history of the Atreidae – the betrayal, murder, and cannibalism – conjure up a cast of phantoms, who are forev-

[3] See authors such as Zeitlin 1985; Segal 1988 for his chapter on *Antigone* and the symbolic connotations of the underground cavern; Padel 1990; Wiles 1997; Bakola (2014 and 2016) argues against the representational interpretation of the *skene* and explores the symbolic and dramaturgical uses of the spatial depth of the *skene* in Aeschylus' *Persians* and the *Oresteia*; most recently Kampourelli (2016) demonstrates the importance of space for understanding Greek tragedy, arguing that the meaning of the interior is shaped by the dramatic action.

[4] Käppel (1998: 157) argues that the tapestry symbolizes "the network of causality of Agamemnon's guilt and fate" ("das Kausalgeflecht der Schuld und des Schicksals Agamemnons"), but does not observe the close connection between the fabric/interior and Clytemnestra.

[5] I will explore this connection found in gynaecological texts in the following section.

er bound to their home and the site of their butchering. The host of shades animated by Cassandra's words, when coupled with the recent scholarship on the versatility of horizontal and vertical depth in Greek tragedy, truly creates a house of death (Wiles 1997: 175-86; Bakola 2014: 9-10), as she herself observes (1291), the implications of which are substantial. For this presentation of the *skene* creates a female character who is the master of her sex's trickery and the monstrous abomination men feared existed in all womankind.

1. The Allure of the Female Tongue

The 'tapestry scene' (*Ag*. 905-74),[6] or 'carpet scene', is one of the most famous from the extant corpus of Greek tragedy, and the moment that we, the audience, have anticipated for some 900 lines; finally, a triumphant Agamemnon returns from Troy and is greeted by his wife, Clytemnestra, at the palace gates. It is then that Clytemnestra activates her plan and elegantly manipulates her husband into committing an act of *hybris*, which will lead to his demise: the treading of the expensive fabrics produced by his own house. Within this elaborate tapestry, traditional ideas of female duplicity bind the fabric more closely to the feminine, for the garment teases and tempts Agamemnon with its luxurious beauty, in much the same way as Clytemnestra with her manipulative tongue, seducing him to master and surmount what he knows is forbidden (921-4). I will explore this parallel between the fatally seductive tongue of Clytemnestra and the fabric, in terms of both the language and the dramaturgy of Aeschylus, and attempt to unravel the many overlapping layers of symbolism captured by this prop and the interior space. For if the fabrics are imagined as the female's seductive tongue, the *tableau* of the crimson cascading from the *skene* (908-74) suddenly becomes a mouth extending its tongue before our eyes; the house becomes a living breathing organism (cf. *Ag*. 37-8, 1310) and an extension of the duplicitous female *psyche*.

In ancient Greek imagination,[7] the orifices of women were frequently considered dangerous, and the two that men especially feared were the parallel openings of the vagina and the mouth, the "upper and lower mouths, [which] show similar or parallel responses" (Hanson 1990: 328). Both shared carnivorous appetites (the former for sex and the latter for

[6] Sommerstein (2008: 104) explains that 'tapestry scene' is a more appropriate name, given the nature of the materials, than the more widespread 'carpet scene'.

[7] Hanson (1990: 309-38) explores in detail the language used in medical texts to describe female anatomy, including the crossover between the terminologies of mouth-jar-uterus.

food) and existed beyond the realms of male control, whether it be that women talked too much or were sexually unchaste (Fulkerson 2002: 343). Thus, in male eyes, the ideal woman was silent and remained indoors, far from the temptations of the outside world (Hall 1997: 103-10), which she could not resist herself due to her insatiability. It is this notion, which was shared by many cultures, including the Greeks, that I wish to explore and apply to *Agamemnon*.

The text which seems to first bring this correlation between the mouth and the vagina to prominence is Hesiod's didactic epic, *Works and Days* (60-104), in which he relates the myth of Pandora, the first woman. The description of the jar and Pandora's notorious defining act (namely the unleashing of misery upon mankind) borrows terminology from human anatomy, in particular those used for the mouth and female genitalia in medical texts.[8] In Sissa and Zeitlin, the jar is viewed, rightly in my opinion, as a metaphor for the female body and, more specifically, for the womb, with Elpis left inside closely resembling the child which a woman has the potential to bear. In gynaecological works, the womb was often compared to an upside-down jar and the myth of Pandora must surely have been influential to this line of thinking. The nouns χεῖλος ("lip") and πῶμα ("seal") in this passage highlight the reciprocal nature of language for the literal and metaphorical jar; the use of these terms to describe the uterus-jar, vocabulary also fitting for the mouth, emphasizes the link between these orifices.[9] In the case of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the passageway of the *skene* doubly evokes the hazardous female mouth and vagina, and male anxiety finds ground in the androgynous female character of Clytemnestra, whose licentious tongue has a distinctly feminine ability to persuade and conquer her male counterpart, Agamemnon.[10]

Firstly, the tongue is characterized as a woman's "most dangerous part, her one powerful member" (McClure 1999: 70-1) for it is the weapon most readily available to her gender.[11] Deceit and manipulation are markedly feminine in nature and it is no accident that Clytemnestra dominates Agamemnon with words during the 'tapestry scene'. Pelling convincingly discusses how Clytemnestra successfully manages to deceive both the Chorus and Agamemnon without ever actually lying (2005: 95-9). Instead she manag-

[8] See the Hippocratic corpus for these ideas: the womb 'is' a jar in *Ep.* 6.5.11; cf. also *Gen.* 9.3 for analogy to jar.

[9] See Sissa (1990: 53-70) and Zeitlin (1996: 64-5) for a more detailed argument of the jar as a metaphor and its connection to the terminology of female anatomy in Classical thought.

[10] Raeburn and Thomas (2011: lviii) describe Clytemnestra as embodying Persuasion (cf. *Ag.* 385-6) in the third episode, impelling Agamemnon towards his death.

[11] Knox (1988: 277) demonstrates that Medea can only prevail by using deceit as she is a woman.

es to cloak her true intent behind a smokescreen of flattery and misdirection, in much the same way that the Muses are able to tell many lies that look like genuine things (Hes. *Th.* 27). In her speech at Agamemnon's return, Clytemnestra heaps up metaphorical expressions, calling him "the watchdog of his homestead" (896: τῶν σταθμῶν κύνα), which is truly her title as she has protected the house in Agamemnon's long absence, "forestay" (897: πρότονον), "firmly-footed pillar" (898: στῦλον ποδήρη), and "only son" (898: μονογενὲς τέκνον). These appellations cast her in the role of a subservient loving wife as she appeals to Agamemnon's masculine authority, the one on whom their house and the entire city depend.[12] Yet, while the audience, familiar with Agamemnon's fate, sees through her guile, Agamemnon is naïvely seduced by her adulation. This intense flattery and the earlier characterization of Clytemnestra as the "watchdog of the house" (607: δωμάτων κύνα) render Cassandra's metaphor all the more appropriate to the audience (*Ag.* 1228-9):

> οὐκ οἶδεν οἷα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνὸς
> λείξασα κἀκτείνασα φαιδρὸν οὖς, δάκνει.
>
> [He does not know what kind of bite comes after the fawning tongue / Of that hateful bitch and the cheerful inclination of her ear.][13]

However, this powerfully persuasive tongue of hers is not merely evident in the words Aeschylus places in her mouth, but in the visual dramaturgy: the crimson fabric seduces and tempts Agamemnon just as thoroughly as her words in order to cross the boundary of mortal propriety against his better judgement (922-4). This connection between fabric and female deception was a *topos* of ancient Greek literature centuries before Aeschylus created his tragedy;[14] you do not have to look much further than the mythological precedents of Clytemnestra, Helen, and Penelope to see this. The connection to the feminine is implicit in the tapestry itself and in its handling by "female servants" (908: δμῳαί), yet the link between Clytemnestra's alluring tongue and the tapestry itself has not yet been highlighted enough in my research.[15]

While her verbal discourse in the 'tapestry scene' aurally bewitches Agamemnon, the tapestry itself presents a visual manifestation of Clytemnestra's feminine charm. The focus on the opulence of the fabric is contin-

[12] Fraenkel (1978a: 405-6) stresses that there is a heavy emphasis on protection and preservation in these lines, as Clytemnestra wants to assure Agamemnon that "his absence would bring everything to rack and ruin".

[13] All translations are from Sommerstein 2008.

[14] McClure (1996-97) examines the depiction of the female activity of producing cloth as coercive and magical, as well as the connection between weaving and feminine wiles.

[15] Zeitlin (1985: 52-111) has asserted that a connection between the door and the mouth is present in Euripides' *Hippolytus.*

ually highlighted by the adjectives ποικίλος ("beautiful"), repeated three times within fifteen lines (923, 926, 936), ἀργυρώνητος (949: "bought with silver"), emphatically positioned after πλοῦτος ("wealth"), and ἰσάργυρος (959: "worth its weight in silver") in Clytemnestra's speech. The nouns πέτασμα (909: "wall-hanging") and εἶμα (921: "clothing") illustrate that this was not a carpet, not a ποδόψηστρον (926: "doormat") to be walked upon, but something infinitely more delicate and precious.[16] Morrell correctly asserts that it is the combination of her arguments and garments that seduces Agamemnon by appealing "to his self-perception as the dominant male in his community as measured by his success in the war against Priam, the wealth of his *oikos,* and his willingness to be an object of envy" (1996-97: 149). So this garment and Clytemnestra's words equally represent Agamemnon's achievements, as he sees it. Together they beguile Agamemnon to embrace the Eastern luxury he has just destroyed and captured as booty at Troy – and it only takes a stichomythic exchange of thirteen lines to do so. In his essay, Dover searches for the reason for the emergence of the red fabric motif in this play and, in doing so, draws a comparison between the heroic Agamemnon and his contemporary equivalent Pausanias (1987). Pausanias, like Agamemnon, fell prey to the luxurious lifestyle of the East and also met a tragic end, having been betrayed by those he trusted (cf. Fraenkel 1978a: 413 for the connection between the tapestry, the barbaric, and the Persian). Whilst Dover's essay omits the many layers of symbolic meaning attached to the crimson fabric, Fraenkel's analogy further strengthens the link between the obsequious tongue and the enchanting textile.

Moreover, this image is recalled in the Cassandra scene when she conjures up the frightening image of the "house breathing blood-dripping slaughter" (1310: φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἱματοσταγῆ); the ancestral palace of Atreus becomes a living, breathing organism and, to perform such a biological process, the mouth is often required. This image undeniably recalls the earlier *tableau* of the red fabric, which seems to only heighten this interpretation of the fabric as symbolic of Clytemnestra's tongue. Indeed, Wiles highlights this repeated personification of the *skene*, claiming that the "*skene*/house is in a sense the protagonist of *Agamemnon*" (1999: 168). The *ekkyklema* (theatrical trolley associated with interior spac-

[16] Denniston and Page (1957: 148) state that "the term 'carpets' should not be used"; see also Taplin 1977: 314-15. Morrell (1996-97) believes that the fabrics are in fact clothes, rather than carpets or tapestries (cf. 921, 960 and 963 for references to εἵματα), as they are so valuable and such a symbol of Clytemnestra's authority as a woman; Judet de la Combe (2001: 327) illustrates the difficulty in trying to determine the precise nature of the object.

es),[17] which wheels out the bloodied corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra through the door and onto the stage, silently speaks of the terrible secrets to which it bore witness. Zeitlin stresses the "homology . . . between the door and the mouth as apertures to the interior which can either be opened or closed" (1985: 74). Earlier the door remained closed, trapping Agamemnon, and then Cassandra, inside, keeping the true nature of the events within unspoken. However, Clytemnestra's supreme pleasure at defeating her husband, in a speech heavily suggestive of sexual gratification (1384-92) (Foley 2001: 204), blurs the boundaries of time and space. In triumphant glee, the doors burst open and the *ekkyklema* announces the truth to the waiting Chorus and the audience before Clytemnestra even opens her mouth.[18]

The evidence seems compelling to view this significant boundary, this liminal threshold, as a mouth, with the red tapestry, which spills out of the door-mouth, as a tongue. The importance of speech, especially in the 'tapestry scene', when coupled with Cassandra's personification, would certainly enrich our understanding of the visual of the performance. Metaphors such as "the *ekkyklema* exposes . . . the *skene* . . . as a space which swallows up life and 'disgorges' death" (Bakola 2014: 10) and "like an octopus disgorging its stomach to capture its prey, the fabric extending from inside takes its victim with it as it retracts" (Rehm 2002: 78) seem all the more visceral if the *skene* is viewed in this context. Therefore, this deadly image of the mouth reflects the innate danger of the female as perceived by the male, and is visibly brought to life through the dark opening that looms over the stage, a constant hungry presence, which lures life in and spits death out.

2. The Female Within[19]

As I have demonstrated above, the visual *tableau* of the 'tapestry scene' elicits a carnivorous mouth laying a deceptive trap for its prey in the form of its sumptuous tongue. I also observed that there is a close parallel between the cavity of the mouth and that of the womb in ancient thought.

[17] Sommerstein (2010: 23) describes the purpose of the *ekkyklema* in Greek drama.

[18] Raeburn and Thomas (2011: xlvi) suggest that "the *ekkyklema* was itself a very recent or even brand new invention", which would make the grand revelation of the bodies an even more powerful and significant action.

[19] The argument of this section draws on the recent work of Bakola (esp. 2016), and her analysis of the symbolism of textiles within *Agamemnon* and the *Oresteia* trilogy. However, my analysis focuses on the *skene* as the embodiment of Clytemnestra's interior, through which the tapestry becomes symbolic of (re)productive labour, and the repercussions this has for Agamemnon's character.

If the *skene* can be imagined as one, it can naturally be envisaged as the other.[20] And so, given the close connection between the *skene* and the female protagonist Clytemnestra – for certainly her transgressive nature dominates the audience's attention whether she is at the threshold or concealed within (Taplin 1977: 299-300, 317) – I will now focus on the interior as representative of her quintessential femaleness: her roles as a woman, that of a wife and mother, and the reproductive potential and capability that she inherently possesses. This female interior is transposed into the dramaturgy of this (in)famous scene, in which the *skene* evokes the female womb and the red tapestry suggests menstrual blood, which emerges from the inner recesses and flows to Agamemnon's feet (914).

The tapestry is redolent of blood and Aeschylus takes pains to focus the audience's attention on the colour of the dye (910, 946, 957, and 959). It is no accident that the fabric shares an epithet appropriate for blood (Goheen 1955: 115-26; Taplin 1977: 315; 1995: 81-2), for the very heart of the play underscores the blood that has been spilled and the blood still to be shed. As Goheen illustrates, the innate ambiguity of the colour of πορφύρα, which can be translated variously as crimson, purple, or something in between, is undeniably reminiscent of the darkness of blood when it has been shed and has come into contact with the dust of the earth, as is the case in the 'tapestry scene'. The noun πορφύρα, which is repeated twice in close succession (957, 959), and the neologistic adjectival compound πορφυρόστρωτος (910: "spread with crimson"), which reflects Aeschylus' innovative vision in his use of stagecraft, stress that the significance of the colour cannot be underestimated. Thus, the tapestries laid on the earth in this crucial scene are evidently evocative of blood.

Yet, it is not just that the fabric denotes spilled blood, lifeless and motionless, but rather that it is portrayed as an animate, flowing stream of blood connected to the *skene*,[21] its producer, that makes this scene so powerful. The fluidity of the fabric is conjured by κηκίς and βαφή (960), both of which create the illusion of movement and "powerfully suggest the flow of blood" (McClure 1999: 88). McClure explains the significance of κηκίς, used of a substance that oozes or spurts, and βαφή ("dye"), which is often metaphorical of blood, in presenting the fabric as liquescent. Moreover,

[20] Goheen (1955: 121) examines the sexual implications of the tapestry; Padel (1990: 99-102) highlights the connection between the interior and the generative potential of the earth, and by extension the female; Bakola (2016) asserts that the tableau of the 'tapestry scene' evokes that of the womb and menstrual blood.

[21] Raeburn and Thomas (2011: xlviii) observe that the tapestry resembles "a stream of blood", but, in failing to analyse the tapestry's connection to the interior, they do not examine the greater significance of 'blood' in this scene and its wider implications within the drama.

this liquidity creates an affinity with the feminine, which has often been noted by scholars, for it was the female body which was often considered porous and vulnerable to dissolution (Carson 1990: 143; Cawthorn 2008: 16, 54-5).

As Bakola has shown, this stream of blood, reminiscent of menstrual blood as it flows out of the interior opening, and reinforced by the (re)productive symbolism of the textiles, is suggestive of the reproductive capabilities of the female. Indeed, the destruction of the fabric closely recollects the sacrifice of Clytemnestra's daughter, Iphigenia, a near-constant presence in the background of the play, whom Agamemnon slaughtered for the progress of the Trojan expedition. The very term βαφή is used both of the tapestry (960) and Iphigenia's robes (239), which pour to the ground as she is lifted to be sacrificed.[22] Although Denniston and Page argue that her cascading robe does not signify blood (1957: 91), the repetition of this noun, and the participle χέουσα ("pouring"), seems to elicit the blood which inevitably flowed to the earth when her throat was slit, which the chorus cannot bring themselves to speak of explicitly in the *parodos* (40-257). Indeed, the colour of her flowing saffron robes (239) brings to mind the blood-red colour of diluted saffron (Bakola 2016: 125) and anticipates the violent scene that the chorus did not see and do not speak of (248). Undoubtedly, the liquidity of Iphigenia's robe is recalled in the 'tapestry scene', strengthening the connection between mother and daughter and, by extension, the symbolic representation of female reproduction in the fabric.

Furthermore, the connection between these two events is well expounded by Morrell, who notes that the sea (958) conceived in Clytemnestra's triumphant speech over Agamemnon recalls this dreaded moment, the last meeting of king and queen at Aulis (Morrell 1996-97: 157-61). For then it was the impassable waves that caused this unnatural sacrifice of a daughter by her father and, in Aeschylus' performance, a sea of bloodshed recalls this perversion and links these two degenerate crimes. In this way, Iphigenia is evoked at this crucial moment, this turning point for the father who destroyed her (Taplin 1977: 313), and her strong connection to the fabric is a reminder of Clytemnestra's justification for his murder (cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 11.22-3). Thus, Clytemnestra's reproductive power, evoked in the tapestry and in the memory of Iphigenia,[23] is the victim of Agamemnon's destruc-

[22] Lebeck (1964) examines the significance of Iphigenia's robe and the metaphor of βαφή as blood.

[23] Judet de la Combe (2001: 49) emphasizes that the purple, which originated in the sea, is symbolic of the violence carried out at Aulis. By the same author see also 2004: 131.

tive action.[24] His final word πατῶν (957: "treading") demonstrates his reckless ruin of life, past and potential future, for he is treading not just on valuable "clothing" (960: εἱμάτων) but on Clytemnestra's fundamental femaleness, her ability to be a mother (cf. the use of clothing during the 'tapestry scene' in the National Theatre's 1999 production of *The Oresteia*).[25]

However, the "sea" (958: θάλασσα) also represents the generative capability of nature in this scene, which, like the human life of Iphigenia, Agamemnon disregards and crushes underfoot for the sake of his vanity. Firstly, it is not just the bloodlike colour that bears so much symbolic significance at this moment, but also the vocabulary that the characters use; the tapestry is stained with expensive dye from murex shellfish (πορφύρα), and on three occasions Aeschylus draws attention to this aspect of the colour (910, 957, 959). That the first adjective to describe the fabric is πορφυρόστρωτος highlights that, from the very moment it is brought into view, heavy emphasis is placed upon the murex shellfish, which made this prop possible with their death. For the dye, a mucous secretion from the hypobranchial gland was collected from the shellfish once they were crushed and, as only a small amount was produced by each snail, vast quantities would have had to have been destroyed to colour such a large garment.[26] Additionally, this repetition of the origins of the dye creates a vivid bond between the fabric and the sea in *Agamemnon*. As Clytemnestra so eloquently, and portentously, comments in ll. 958-62, the sea produces a "ever-renewed" (960: παγκαίνιστος) amount of dye,[27] and the house of Atreus will never run out of wealth with which to purchase it. Yet the natural death implicit in the tapestry, made explicit by the vocabulary of the characters, further heightens the fabric's af-

[24] In the Globe Theatre's 2015 production of *The Oresteia*, directed by Adele Thomas, the 'tapestry' was a simple piece of white fabric, which stretched from the interior to Agamemnon's chariot. The moment that Agamemnon stepped onto the fabric, he deployed a container of red blood, destroying the whiteness beneath his feet. Although a powerfully suggestive action, which reminds the audience of the blood Agamemnon has shed elsewhere, it misses the symbolism that was implicit in Aeschylus' red tapestry (that of Iphigenia's sacrifice and Clytemnestra's role as a mother), which provided a visual manifestation of Clytemnestra's justification for murder.

[25] During the 'tapestry scene' of the National Theatre's 1999 production, directed by Katie Mitchell, a 'carpet' of bloodied children's dresses are laid out across the stage, symbolising Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia.

[26] See Bakola (2016) who examines the vast natural and labour resources the production of the tapestry of this scene would require. She argues that this scene reflects humanity's abuse of the earth's natural resources and, by extension, the female's generative resources, including the production of human life (as previously discussed).

[27] Judet de la Combe (2004: 364) describes the opening (of the stage building) as representative of the sea and the continuous work of nature to renew what is lost.

finity with blood; woven into the very fabric is an excess of life-potential that has been destroyed for human avarice. As Padel illustrates, "the earth, womb of world violence, is fertile with fearful as well as beneficial resources" (1992: 10). Thus, the *tableau* of the female womb and menstrual blood overlaps with the image of the *skene*-interior as the θάλασσα. The sea as a creator of natural life, carelessly destroyed for a superficial display of power and affluence, and comparable with the *skene* in the 'tapestry scene', presents the interior as a cosmic womb, which has been argued by Bakola (2016). Agamemnon's πατῶν becomes yet more symbolic and more significant an action; his calamitous destruction of human and natural life portrays the inevitability of his gruesome fate as he disappears into the female-earth womb.

Moreover, this amalgamation of the cosmic and individual womb onstage conveys the horror of the events within more dramatically than mere words ever could, no matter how powerful. The door, naturally equal to the vagina in this context, forces to the forefront of the audience's imagination the ultimate perversion of natural order and the female, for the female should create and nourish life within her womb and, at the right time, give birth to young life. However, Clytemnestra has appropriated her femininity to produce not life but death; her femininity creates an intrinsic bond with the earth in which she lives, yet, like the earth, which can be benevolent or merciless, Clytemnestra embraces the darker aspects of her gender.[28] She invites life into her in the form of Agamemnon, but rather than nourish that life, she gives birth to death when the *ekkyklema* is wheeled out onto the stage. As Taplin states, "the threshold of the ancestral palace is the line which divides life and death" and, here, Clytemnestra, the female, undeniably controls that liminal space (1995: 35). In addition, the image of Agamemnon's lacerated corpse slumped in a bathtub and wrapped in a bloodied garment (1382-3) is a terribly vulnerable one and contributes to the notion that this is the perversion of a natural birth (Hall 2002: 21). Like an unborn child, he was completely and utterly helpless at the mercy of the female.

Yet the rich reproductive symbolism of the female is further layered with figurative meaning; namely, the representation of productive labour.[29] The tapestry expresses not only the value of life but also the economic value of the house from which it protrudes. The wealth (949) of the

[28] Lebeck (1988: 80) describes the perversion of "forces which should be beautiful, benevolent and life-giving" in the imagery of the *Oresteia.*

[29] Bakola (2016) examines the connection between reproductive and productive labour in detail in the *Oresteia* trilogy, in particular in the 'tapestry scene' of *Agamemnon.*

house is very much embodied in the tapestry and both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra emphasize its monetary value: the *argyros* ('silver'; 'money') of ἀργυρωνήτους (949: "bought with silver") is picked up again ten lines later in ἰσάργυρον (959: "worth its weight in silver"). The house, like the sea, shares an endless and ever-renewing wealth of resources (960). That the wealth of the house is synonymous with the tapestry is conveyed through the rich compound δωματοφθορέω (948: "despoil the house"); destroying the fabric is equal to destroying the house. However, it is not just wealth in general that is displayed before the eyes of the audience, but also the wealth generated by the female sphere of activity. Textile making was a gender-specific pursuit, one which demonstrated the integral role the female played in the survival and preservation of the *oikos.* The presentation of the fabric is therefore a demonstration of female creative prowess and feminine authority. The destruction of these fabrics by the male in this scene thus gains even more importance. The aggressiveness of πατῶν ("trampling") demonstrates Agamemnon's hubristic and detrimental attitude towards the resources of his own house (Taplin 1977: 313) and female domestic power in the eyes of the audience and indeed the gods. As Morrell asserts, this trampling of the fabrics "signals simultaneously an appropriation and devaluation of that power" (1996-97: 149-50).

3. Down the *Skene*

That the interior of the *skene* corresponds to the female interior is evident time and again in this tragedy, layering the interior with symbolic connotations of fertility, as the dramaturgy of the 'tapestry scene' so vividly portrays. However, as Segal repeatedly demonstrates in his exploration of *Antigone,* Sophocles portrays "the womb as the underground cavern, the mysterious seat of life-and-death" by emphasizing the spatial depth which the cave captures. The connection between life and death is highlighted as existing in this "subterranean reservoir" of the *skene*, which lay under the control of the woman (1988: 171, 173). Similarly, in *Agamemnon,* the *skene* is representative of the house of Hades as it is not only life which lurks inside, but death, under Clytemnestra's control.

As Padel so elegantly explores in her chapter "Inner World, Underworld, and Gendered Images of 'Mind'", "inward flux and darkness are characteristic of innards, of Hades, and women's inwardness" (1992: 99). In this case, where the woman in question is the axe-wielding wife and mother Clytemnestra, the darkness of the *skene* is undeniably evocative of death (as much as it is of life, as we saw earlier). That the sacrifice is taking place in the very middle of the hearth (1056: ἑστίας μεσομφάλου) highlights the innate

ambiguity of the female as represented in the space. Vernant succinctly demonstrates that "Hestia's 'maternal' aspect strengthens the analogy between the circular hearth and the *omphalos*", which evokes the female abdomen and is suggestive of the umbilical cord (1983: 178-9). The hearth's position at the centre of the house, deep within the heart of the female domain, and its shape, which evokes that of the navel, reiterates my earlier discussion of the interior as evocative of the female womb. However, the hearth becomes the scene of Agamemnon's brutal slaughter[30] and reveals itself as the interior of the house of Hades in the episode that follows.

Vernant emphasizes that Hestia is the site of contact between the mortal sphere and the immortal, connecting the *oikos* to the gods above and, more frighteningly, to the gods below (1983: 194). Thus the blackness, which swallows Agamemnon as he crosses the threshold at the end of the 'tapestry scene',[31] "becomes the darkness of the underworld" (Wiles 1999: 165). It is significant then that it is the hearth, which ties the house to the realms below, that Clytemnestra announces as the *locus* of the murder and that the Chorus confirm as the site of the sacrifice (1310).

The connection between the hearth and the underworld is also seen in Euripides' *Medea*, which features another transgressive female from the tragic stage, when Medea dramatically swears by the goddess Hecate, whose home is deep in the underworld, but who "lives in the inner chamber of my house" (Eur. *Med.* 397: μυχοῖς ναίουσαν ἑστίας ἐμῆς) in this tragedy. Medea's claim that this goddess of the underworld is living in her hearth truly depicts the interior of the house, from which Medea's terrifying offstage screams poured forth just a short time before and in which the children will meet their death, as a house of death.[32] This connection to the world below highlights the ambiguity of the interior in Greek tragedy. The darkness of the *skene* represents not just horizontal depth but also vertical depth, the intersection of which is the hearth in the Greek home.

The concept of a vertical axis in the Greek theatre is noted by Wiles, who, in his chapter "The Vertical Axis", explores the potential of the verti-

[30] Seaford (1995: 370) observes that "the ambiguity of the metaphor and reality inheres in the sacrificial metaphor", as an actual sacrifice appears to be taking place at the same time as Agamemnon's metaphorical one.

[31] Lunn-Rockliffe examined the presentation of Hades as carnivorous in Roman and later Christian literature, as a personified entity which devoured life, in her lecture "Early Christian Personifications of Hell" at the *Hellish Persons* Public Talk (24 October 2014).

[32] In the National Theatre's 2014 production of *Medea,* directed by Carrie Cracknell, the stage, which depicted the interior, highlighted this connection to the underworld when a portion of the floor was lifted and, from the depths, the fatal robe, which would destroy the house of Creon and Jason, was drawn up.

cal to define the tripartite universe of immortals, mortals, and dead. However, his exploration focuses on what he calls the "most important vertical relationship . . . that of actor and audience" and dissuades us, as modern readers and audiences, from analysing the play in terms of spatial depth (1999: 168, 176-7). On the other hand, Bakola persuasively argues that there is a third axis, the transverse axis,[33] which captures spatial depth in Greek drama and allows the horizontal depth represented by the dark interior to signal that of the vertical, those spaces which exist below the earth (2014: 9-10). This interpretation of dramatic space allows us to view the inner recesses of the house of Atreus as those of Hades, especially as this association between the interior and depth is evoked during scenes of murder and death,[34] the favourite activities of members of the Atreid family.

This image of the *skene* is not merely implicit in the spatial dynamics of the unseen interior, but is also made explicit in the words of Cassandra in the scene where she discusses her fate, which is so horrifically entangled with that of the house of Atreus' fellow victims (1219-24). The house as the scene of murder, in particular that of kin-murder, is drawn attention to multiple times throughout Cassandra's exchange with the Chorus and, among them, the three following lines (*Ag.* 1090-2):

> μισόθεον μὲν οὖν, πολλὰ συνίστορα
> αὐτοφόνα κακὰ κἀρτάναι,
> ἀνδροσφαγεῖον καὶ πεδορραντήριον.

> [No, no, a house that hates the gods, one that has knowledge / Of many crimes in which kin have been slain and heads severed / A place where men are slaughtered and blood sprinkles the floor.]

As Fraenkel points out, no specific crime is mentioned (yet) (1978b: 494), and, instead, Aeschylus conjures an atmosphere of horror, which anticipates the reveal of the gruesome details. The many words for murder and death in these few lines alone highlight the tremendous slaughter that has occurred within the walls of the palace; for this is no ordinary family home as the compounds ἀνδροσφαγεῖον and πεδορραντήριον, used uniquely in this instance, demonstrate so viscerally. Padel explores this notion of kindred blood shed on the ground as "the ultimate evil", for blood is the unseen, yet vital, link between family members, and the shedding of that

[33] Bakola's use of the transverse axis takes the work of Kampourelli (2016), who analyses space in terms of axes as viewed by the spectator, as its foundation. She demonstrates that the vertical axis is provided by the stage building (2014: 30).

[34] Bakola (2014: 7-13) explores more thoroughly this association between the interior of the *skene* and spatial depth, examining its presence in various dramas of the fifth-century.

blood is a violation, making visible what ought to remain concealed (1992: 174). Throughout Cassandra's exchange with the Chorus, the image of liquescent blood recurs (1172, 1293-4, 1309), presenting a terrifying image of a hellish world within the borders of the *skene*.

Moreover, this action of blood spilling on to the floor is like that of a libation, nourishing the earth and the dead below. In Homer's *Odyssey,* Homer details the necessary rites to attract shades in the underworld, including the libation of blood, a crucial element which allowed the dead to converse with the living (*Od.* 10.503-40). This libation of blood, albeit animal blood in this instance, highlights its significance in relation to the dead. Cassandra's prophecy and her visions of the dead (1096-7, 1217-22) become all the more tangible in light of the continual stream of blood which the house of Atreus offers the earth. The ghosts of the dead children, whom Atreus butchered and fed to Thyestes, are likened to the shapes of dreams (1218: ὀνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν) and most likely would have reminded a fifth-century audience of the descriptions of the dead in the Homeric tradition; their insubstantiality, their restlessness, their appearance, frozen in the moment of their death, are all elements of the dead in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* Achilles' vision of Patroclus in the *Iliad* highlights that the dead are mere "images" (*Il.* 23.72: εἴδωλα), who live in the house of Hades but have no real substance. A similar depiction is given in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus sees his mother's ghost in the underworld. Homer presents Anticlea as "resembling a shadow or a fleeting dream" (*Od.* 11.207-8: σκιῇ εἴκελον ἢ καὶ ὀνείρῳ ἔπτατ'[ο]). So Cassandra's visions of Thyestes' dead children create a potent manifestation of the house of Hades onstage, the *climax* of which is her dramatic address to the gates which will lead to her death (*Ag.* 1291):

> Ἅιδου πύλας δὲ τάσδ' ἐγὼ προσεννέπω.
>
> [I address these gates as the gates of Hades.]

As she stands with her back to the audience, as the actor must surely have done (Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 206), the audience is invited to see the house as she does: a home of death.[35] This explicit reference to the *skene* as the domain of Hades is the culmination of Aeschylus' symbolic use of the ambiguous unseen interior and the atmosphere of death conjured in the graphic divinations of Cassandra throughout this episode (1090-2, 1096-

[35] Judet de la Combe (2004: 141-2) argues that the palace is portrayed as a place of deaths past and future, observing that, in this scene, the only deaths which Cassandra sees are those that occurred within the boundaries of the palace. Most notably, Iphigenia is never alluded to, a prominent figure in the build-up to the slaughter.

7, 1126-8, 1172, 1186-90, 1217-22, 1277-8), which directly precedes the scene of Agamemnon's brutal offstage murder (1343-7).

Furthermore, Cassandra's address to the "gates" (πύλαι) throws the entrance of the *skene* into sharp relief as it is not the 'house' that she addresses but the gates themselves. The threshold, which has been crucial throughout the performance, becomes the dividing line between life and death more plainly than had elsewhere in the drama. The woman who dominates this threshold, Clytemnestra,[36] then takes on a more significant role when the *skene* is viewed in the context of Hades: she becomes Cerberus, the guard dog of the underworld, who "fawns to deceive" just as she does (1228-9) (Sommerstein 2008: 148). Her characterization as "watchdog of the house" (607: δωμάτων κύνα), an idea picked up by Cassandra (1228), has ambiguous connotations, as Goldhill notes (1984: 56). The comparison to a dog links her to her adulterous sister Helen (for Helen as a dog see Hom. *Il.* 3.180, 6.344 and 6.356, *Od.* 8.319), denotes her shamelessness and, more significantly, her loyalty to the house, for she determines who can enter and who can escape. Lebeck further examines this kinship between Clytemnestra and a dog in her exploration of the hunting motif in the *Oresteia* trilogy. Lebeck observes that the robe, which bound Agamemnon in his grim fate, as Clytemnestra so triumphantly describes as she boasts over his entangled corpse (1374-83), "for Agamemnon is a net . . . Clytemnestra the dog who drives her game into the net" (1988: 78). Truly her elated declaration that "I staked out around him an endless net" (1381-2: ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον . . . περιστιχίζω), with the use of the ἀμφί- prefix and the περί-prefix, emphasizes the trap that had been set, and so Lebeck's metaphor of Clytemnestra as a hunting dog seems undeniably appropriate.[37] This depiction of Clytemnestra as a watchdog, which drives men to their death and prevents their escape, especially evokes Cerberus. And yet it is interesting that Cassandra could not similarly be herded to her death by Clytemnestra. The only other female present in *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is immune to Clytemnestra's manipulation and cannot be tricked like Agamemnon. Nonetheless, eventually she too enters Clytemnestra's hellish nightmare within. In the end, Clytemnestra allows neither man nor woman to escape from the inevitable death concealed deep within the palace.

[36] Taplin (1977: 299-300) notes Clytemnestra's control of the doorway and that she is the watchdog who allows people to cross the threshold; Rehm (2002: 86) observes that "Clytemnestra dominates the central doorway".

[37] In the Globe Theatre's 2015 production of *The Oresteia*, Clytemnestra, played by Katy Stephens, very deliberately tilts her head as she stands in the doorway of the house as she listens to the Chorus and Agamemnon, a striking action reminiscent of a guard dog.

4. Conclusion

Padel's statement that "the language of space is part of the tragedian's armoury" (1990: 342) is demonstrated time and again in *Agamemnon*. Aeschylus' symbolic use of the *skene*'s interior, the intrinsically female domestic sphere, which is so closely identified with the paradoxical aspects of life and death that the female embodies, is a language that transcends the limitations of speech. As Wiles emphasizes, "theatre is pre-eminently a spatial medium, for it can dispense with language on occasion but never with space" (1997: 3). In Aeschylus' masterpiece, that offstage place silently tells of the fatal inevitability which lives inside the house of Atreus, as well as the innate life-giving elements of Clytemnestra, which she weaponizes (907-74) and for which she suffers (1417-8, 1525-6).

Clytemnestra is a character whose femininity is often overlooked and diminished by the male attributes that she possesses (her heroic language, her authority over men, her murder weapon).[38] However, the interiority of the *skene* symbolizes her own interiority, both of her mouth and her womb, and emphasizes her undeniable femaleness in her roles as a wife and mother. Simultaneously, that darkness which dominates the stage represents the flipside of the female in the eyes of the male: the unknown, the frightening, the uncontrollable.[39] The interior, which is so emblematic of the life-giving potential of the female, simultaneously depicts death and the perpetual cycle of vengeance which lives on in the cursed household of Atreus.

Thus, Clytemnestra's propensity to possess the abilities of both sexes for violence and manipulation only serves to stress the innate contradiction of the female as she masters these two opposing poles to triumph over her male enemy, and indeed revel in his bloody demise (1371-94, 1401-6, 1438-47). As Bardel summarizes, "Clytemnestra remains unequivocally female . . . exploiting 'typical' female resourcefulness to the limit, [she] usurps and appropriates male power and prerogatives" (2002: 52). Her "anomalous personality" is her true weapon (Winnington-Ingram 1988: 87); she is neither defined, nor limited by her gender, but, like the dark deep, she is ever-changing and evolving, she is something more.

[38] Davies (1987) examines whether Clytemnestra uses the axe or the sword to kill Agamemnon, both of which are undeniably masculine.

[39] Carson (1990: 159) highlights the female alliance with the wild and raw nature, with formlessness and instability; Zeitlin (1996: 344) states that the "boundaries of women's bodies are perceived as more fluid . . . less easily controlled" and so they are unstable and a "source of disturbing power over men".

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About Information Sources in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*

Abstract

This paper investigates the topics of information and information sources in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*. The emphasis placed by the author on these issues is clearly noticeable from the beginning of the *Agamemnon* in the famous scene of the relay of beacons. A comparison with the *Odyssey* (4.514-37) suggests that communication through beacons is an Aeschylean invention, one specifically adopted in this version of the myth of Agamemnon's return. The beacon scene constitutes an initial opportunity for Aeschylus to engage in a large-scale reflection about information sources and their degree of reliability. Throughout the play, the beacon system is put in relation to news, verbal reports, ominous dreams, and rumours. The characters' assessment of the reliability of different information sources plays an important role in their characterization, notably in the cases of Clytemnestra and Cassandra. Nevertheless, many differences can be found between the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephori* concerning the treatment of this topic. A comparative reading of the two plays allows Aeschylus' reflection on the human condition emerge more vividly.

Keywords: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, *Choephori*, communication, information, news, rumour.

Introduction

This article will take issue with information sources in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*, with a view to bringing out their relevance in those plays.[1] I propose to explore Aeschylus' treatment of these sources, as well as the way in which the characters deal with them. I will first consider the *Agamemnon*, with particular regard to the debate between Clytemnestra and the chorus over the reliability of information sources in relation to the news

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about the fall of Troy. Then, after briefly commenting upon Cassandra's foreknowledge of her destiny, I will turn to the *Choephori* and focus on the (false) news of Orestes' death. Finally, I will examine Clytemnestra's changing attitude towards information sources in the two plays and I will produce a tentative explanation of why Aeschylus chose to focus on this topic.

Before engaging in this task, though, I believe that the use of the term 'information sources' in the context of Greek Archaic and Classical culture needs to be clarified. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'information' is "the imparting of knowledge in general" (*n.*, I). In Aeschylus' time, the transmission of news and messages was generally oral, while written transmission was not so widespread (Longo 1981: 59-73). Nevertheless, human *media* were not the only way of exchanging knowledge or intelligence. If we look at the poetic representation of distance communication in the Homeric poems, we may see that this phenomenon is closely linked to the divine.[2] The *spectrum* of information sources is much broader in Ancient Greece, in that it is not limited to the human scale (Detienne 1989: 137-41). The communication between gods and mortals – which is pervasive in the Homeric poems, if less so in tragedy – is a way through which mortals obtain knowledge or get an insight into the past, the present, and the future. That is why experiences such as dream and possession – two divine strategies of communication with mortals – have an informative potential. Hence, I deem it necessary to include dreams and prophecies among the information sources that I will consider here, together with signals, messengers' oral communications, and rumours.

1. The News of the Fall of Troy in the *Agamemnon*

Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* starts with an impressive image. After he has been waiting for a year, Clytemnestra's watchman finally sees the signal announcing the fall of Troy (22ff.). This is made possible by a complex communication system of beacons, that is, eight beacons stretching between Troy and Argos, on mountains or elevated sites.[3] Fire leaps from one site to the next, and the news travels with it, eventually reaching Agamemnon's palace (281-316). A messenger (or maybe Agamemnon himself)[4] has triggered the chain announcing the fall of Troy, and Clytemnestra's watchman, crouched on the roof of Agamemnon's

[2] See Larran's chapter on the divine origin of *Ossa* 'Fame' (2011: 23-30).

[3] On the functioning of the relay of fires, see Longo 1976. The text, as we have it, mentions eight sites, although Quincey (1963: 123) proposed to interpolate a ninth one, between Athos and Macistus, in the lacuna after l. 287.

[4] Aesch. *Ag.* 315-16: τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω / ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί ("This is the kind of proof and token I give you, the message of my husband from Troy to me"). Unless otherwise stated, English translations of Greek texts are taken from the editions included in the bibliography. All translations of the *Iliad* are mine.

palace, ends it.[5] This scene is a famous one and has been widely commented on.[6] I will therefore reconsider it, together with the whole of the *Agamemnon*, from the standpoint of what I believe is its import on distance communication.

1.1 Beacons and the Greater Reliability of Verbal Communication

The beacon system is a form of non-verbal communication and is presented in the play as an unusual one. As I will discuss further in detail, the chorus is very sceptical about the reliability of this system, as it is the first time its members hear about it. It is indeed most likely that such communicative arrangement was regarded as exceptional in Aeschylus' time too, and the Athenian public may have been as surprised as the chorus when presented with it. The beacon system is a combination of fire signs and communication by relay (Longo 1976: 133), and if the former was probably used in wartime to transmit simple messages, the latter was not as common.[7] As Oddone Longo points out, this type of communication would have required a large and politically homogeneous area, a specific organization, and a centralized power (1976: 134; 1981: 100), and these conditions did not apply to Greece in 458 BC. Nevertheless, the Athenians might have known of the existence of structured relay systems in the Persian Empire (see, for example, Herodotus' description of Xerxes' messengers

[5] The long-standing debate about the journey of the signal and the location of the beacon-sites is presented, together with the author's point of view, in Quincey 1963. See also Longo 1976: 124-5.

[6] Some scholars have highlighted the symbolism hiding behind the image of the relay of fires. According to Timothy Gantz (1977), the spreading of fire symbolizes the spreading of retribution from generation to generation. Andrea Blasina (2003: 77-92) stressed the link with other scenes dealing with light in the *Agamemnon* and in the whole *Oresteia*, with special regard to the end of the *Eumenides*. Other scholars have focused on the Homeric elements disseminated in this prologue (see Pace 2013); John Vaughn (1976) has studied the characterization of the watchman. Others have drawn attention to terminology and semantic fields (Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 157-62) or tried to reconstruct the scenic apparatus (Blasina 1998 and 2003: 92-9). Stephen Tracy (1986) suggested a link with the so-called *angareion*, a Persian messenger system described by Herodotus in 8.98. Oddone Longo conducted a fine semiotic analysis of the system of beacons (1976) and interestingly commented on its reliability compared to the transmission via a messenger (1981: 94).

[7] The possibility of encoding a message in fire signs is limited, the only possibilities being a binary encoding 0/1 (sign = alarm) or a triple encoding 0/1/2, if the sign moves (Longo 1976: 130-1 and 1981: 89). One significant example of fire signs can be found in *Il.* 18.207-14, where Achilles is compared to a besieged city: the fires of the siege and the rising smoke function as a signal for the neighbours. Another one is found in Theognis' *corpus* (1.549-50). The poet tells Cyrnus about a silent messenger (ἄγγελος ἄφθογγος) who, appearing (φαινόμενος) from a far-shining watch-place (ἀπὸ τηλαυγέος σκοπιῆς), stirs the battle up (πόλεμον πολύδακρυν ἐγείρει). In this passage, the silent messenger is clearly a beacon shining from a watch-site. See also Hdt. 7.182-3 and Thuc. 3.80.2, 8.102.1.

system called ἀγγαρήιον in 8.98).[8]

The beacon relay is not a mere communication-related innovation, but if one considers the most famous accounts of the myth of Agamemnon's return, it appears to be in fact a new invention in its own right. In the *Odyssey* (4.514-37), Agamemnon is shipwrecked on the shore of Argos when Aegisthus' watchman sees him.[9] This version differs from Aeschylus' one. First of all, it is Aegisthus and not Clytemnestra who has set up the watch; secondly, the watchman is expecting to see Agamemnon coming back from Troy instead of a signal announcing the fall of the city. Thirdly, the watchman of the *Odyssey* directly witnesses the comeback, while in Aeschylus' play he spots a signal from far away (τὸ σύμβολον, 8). Remarkably enough, there is no beacon relay in the *Odyssey* and, more generally, there are very few examples of non-verbal communication in the Homeric epics.[10] In the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, distance communication is mostly verbal and often involves mediators, like messengers (ἄγγελοι) and heralds (κήρυκες);[11] multiple mediation is generally avoided.[12]

[8] See also Mardonios' system in Hdt. 9.3. Xenophon in the *Cyropaedia* describes a similar system (8.6.17-18).

[9] *Od.* 4.524-7: τὸν δ' ἄρ' ἀπὸ σκοπιῆς εἶδε σκοπός, ὅν ῥα καθεῖσεν / Αἴγισθος δολόμητις ἄγων, ὑπὸ δ' ἔσχετο μισθὸν / χρυσοῦ δοιὰ τάλαντα: φύλασσε δ' ὅ γ' εἰς ἐνιαυτόν, / μή ἑ λάθοι παριών ("Now from his place of watch a watchman saw him, whom guileful Aegisthus took and set there, promising him as a reward two talents of gold; and he had been keeping guard for a year, lest Agamemnon should pass by him unseen").

[10] The only example to be found in the *Iliad* is 18.207-14.

[11] In the Homeric poems, both *angeloi* and *kerykes* perform a mediating function, even though they do not belong to different categories of mediators. Rather, as Fornielez Sánchez has shown (2015: 52-62), *angelos* is a temporary function that many characters can perform, while the *keryx* is a professional figure (see also Durán López 1999: 30). Since the heralds' tasks often involve a communicative function, these figures are particularly suited to being charged with delivering messages or news (e.g. *Il.* 3.247-58, 4.192-7, 7.354-97, 12.342-63, *Od.* 16.327-32, 468-9). In this case, they act as *angeloi*. The *keryx* is placed side by side with other professional figures, named *demioergoi*, such as seers, doctors and carpenters in *Od.* 16.383-5. Both in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, the *keryx*'s undertakings are heterogeneous; for this reason, Durán López (1999: 30) has labelled the *keryx* "the *factotum* of the Homeric world". Also, the *keryx* performs a ritual function in a religious context (Barrett 2002: 57). According to Pisano (2014: 59), he is an expert in communication tasks in a broad sense, since he takes care of the exchanges between mortals and gods by helping with the sacrifices and preparing the meals. On the *kerykes*' tasks in the Homeric poems, see Mondi 1978: 9-13; Durán López 1999: 29; Mader 1991; Pallí Bonet 1956: 346; Pisano 2014: 56-66; Oehler 1921; Thalmann 2011. In the Homeric poems, the term *keryx* only applies to mortals, but in Hesiod, Hermes is the herald of gods (θεῶν κῆρυξ in *Op.* 80 and *fr.* 170* Merkelbach-West; κῆρυξ ἀθανατῶν in *Th.* 939). On the contrary, *angelos* applies both to mortals and gods. In the *Iliad*, the heralds are called "messengers of Zeus and men" (Διὸς ἄγγελοι ἠδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν) on two occasions (*Il.* 1.334, 2.374). On the analogies between the Homeric *keryx* and the Vedic *kārú*, see Mondi 1978: 74-89 and Barrett 2002: 57. On the difference between *angeloi* and *kerykes* in Greek tragedy, see Avezzù 2015: 14-17; Campos Daroca 2014: 87-9; Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 153-80.

[12] On multiple mediation in the messenger-scenes of the *Iliad*, see Cesca 2017.

The peculiar nature of a system of communication based on signals also emerges in Aeschylus' peculiar definition of it through the voice of his characters. In the passages of the *Agamemnon* in which the beacon system is described, the lexicon related to verbal communication plays an important role. Even if fire is not a verbal *medium*, its spreading and function are illustrated through terms referring to the semantic field of the *angelos*. The fire is called εὐάγγελος ("bringer of good news", 21 and 475), ἄγγαρος ("courier", 282), ἄγγελος ("messenger", 588), and its function is designated as ἀγγέλου μέρος ("the part as messenger", 291). At l. 280, the chorus startles and asks: "what messenger could reach here with such speed?" (τίς τόδ' ἐξίκοιτ' ἂν ἀγγέλων τάχος;) to which Clytemnestra answers: "Hephaistos", thus drawing another analogy between the messenger and the fire.[13] The verbs used to refer to the information provided by beacons and sites are ἀγγέλλω ("to announce", 30) and παραγγέλλω ("to transmit a message", 289, 294, 316). Φάτις ("report", 9), βάξις ("tidings", 10 and 477), and παράγγελμα ("transmitted message", 480) designate the news of the fall of Troy and are in turn related to verbs describing speech: φημί ("to say"), βάζω ("to say", "to speak") and παραγγέλλω. The lexicon of verbal communication, which is the standard *medium* for distance communication, is employed by Aeschylus to describe a non-verbal transmission of information. On the one hand, as Raquel Fornieles Sánchez has pointed out, this state of things shows that, in Aeschylus, ἄγγελος ("messenger") and its derivatives (ἀγγέλλω, παραγγέλλω, παράγγελμα, etc.) are employed as technical terms to allude to the transmission of news. On the other hand, the vocabulary of transmission of the news closely pertains to the action of a messenger (Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 162).

Having examined the issue from a vocabulary-related point of view, let us now analyse Clytemnestra's so-called 'beacon-speech' (281-316) from the perspective of the narrative mode chosen by Aeschylus. In describing the spreading of the light from site to site, Clytemnestra heavily relies on litotes:[14]

[13] Longo 1976: 143-4. Clytemnestra's reply reminds of Herodotus's claim that Xerxes' messengers system is similar to the Greek torch-bearers' race in honour of Hephaistos (Hdt. 8.98.2).

[14] The text is corrupted, but another litotes could perhaps be found at l. 304 (see Fraenkel 1950: 162). Aesch. *Ag*. 302-4: λίμνην δ' ὑπὲρ Γοργῶπιν ἔσκηψεν φάος, ὄρος / τ' ἐπ' Αἰγίπλαγκτον ἐξικνούμενον / ὤτρυνε θεσμὸν †μὴ χαρίζεσθαι† πυρός ("Across Gorgopus' water shot the light, reached the mount of Aegiplanctus, and urged the ordinance of fire to make no delay"). Since μὴ χαρίζεσθαι does not make sense, editors have suggested other solutions: μὴ χατίζεσθαι (accepted by G. Murray, see Aeschylus 1937) and μὴ χρονίζεσθαι (which I accept, following E. Page and W. H. D. Rouse, see Aeschylus 1926, and P. Mazon, see Aeschylus 1983).

ὁ δ᾽ **οὔτι** μέλλων **οὐδ᾽** ἀφρασμόνως ὕπνῳ
νικώμενος παρῆκεν ἀγγέλου μέρος.
(*Ag*. 290-1, my emphasis)

[He, delaying not nor carelessly overcome by sleep, did not neglect his part as messenger.]

σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ᾽ **οὐδέπω** μαυρουμένη,
ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἀσωποῦ, δίκην
φαιδρᾶς σελήνης, πρὸς Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.
φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον **οὐκ** ἠναίνετο
φρουρὰ πλέον καίουσα τῶν εἰρημένων.
(*Ag*. 296-301, my emphasis)

[The flame, now gathering strength and in no way dimmed, like a radiant moon overleaped the plain of Asopus to Cithaeron's ridges, and roused another relay of missive fire. Nor did the warders there disdain the far-flung light, but made a blaze higher than their commands.]

In the Homeric poems, litotes are often used in narrative contexts where the characters are portrayed in the act of obeying orders. This happens in particular in the *Iliad*'s messenger-scenes.[15] These scenes revolve around a recurrent narrative pattern which has 'Character A' give the messenger a set of directions normally followed by a litotic negation signalling the carrying out of the received instructions. In the lines following the instruction-speech, a negative sentence expresses the transition from A's instructions to the messenger's action as in "He spoke and the goddess silver-foot Thetis did not disobey him" (ὣς ἔφατ᾽, οὐδ᾽ ἀπίθησε θεὰ Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα, *Il.* 24.120).[16] The same narrative scheme becomes apparent in Clytemnestra's speech, where fire acts as a messenger. It is worth noting that, in this speech, the transmission of news is shaped by verbal communication, even when the *medium* is not a verbal one. The above-mentioned question asked by the chorus ("what messenger could reach here with such speed?") suggests that an alternative to verbal communication is not even conceivable.

[15] To identify these scenes I refer to Irene de Jong's Appendix V (2004: 241-2), where she collects twenty-two messenger-speeches. Only some of them are included in messenger scenes, according to my use of the term; I do not consider Η 38-40 = Η 49-51, Κ 208-10 = Κ [406-8+] 409-11, Κ 308-12 = Κ 395-9, Π 454-7 = Π 671-5 as authentic messenger scenes but rather as simple cases of repeated speeches. Moreover, I am not dealing with the embassy to Achilles in Book 9, which would require a specific study (and see on this Cesca forthcoming).

[16] See also *Il.* 2.166, 4.68, 4.198, 6.102, 12.351, 24.120.

After Clytemnestra has explained how the beacon system works, the chorus, being only partially persuaded, asks her to repeat her speech. However, the queen prefers to tell of the sack of Troy, evoking the voices and feelings of the Trojans and the Greeks. Of course, she cannot but give a fictional description of it. The chorus is well-aware of that, and yet is happy with her words, taking them as "certain proofs" (πιστὰ τεκμήρια, 352). As Longo wrote:

> The chorus proves itself more inclined to trust a message presented through the traditional framework of the oral ἀγγελία (here Clytemnestra behaves as a proper ἄγγελος), even though her report is clearly unreal, as she herself acknowledges (321: οἶομαι), rather than the news conveyed by the beacons' technical innovation. (1976: 155, my translation)[17]

Albeit being fictional, Clytemnestra's account is more convincing than her previous and very meticulous report about fires.[18] As Longo has remarked, this is another piece of evidence that the chorus is more responsive to the traditional form of oral *angelia* rather than to other ways of communication. This is further confirmed by the subsequent dialogues between the chorus and Clytemnestra, in which the beacon system is often discredited. In fact, the credibility gained by Clytemnestra at ll. 320-54 will not last long. At ll. 479-82, the chorus says that only a very naïve or upset person would trust news coming through fire:

> τίς ὧδε παιδνὸς ἢ φρενῶν κεκομμένος,
> φλογὸς παραγγέλμασιν
> νέοις πυρωθέντα καρδίαν ἔπειτ'
> ἀλλαγᾷ λόγου καμεῖν;
> (*Ag.* 479-82)

> [Who is so childish or so bereft of sense, once he has let his heart be fired by sudden news of a beacon fire, to despair if the story changes?]

At ll. 590-3, after a herald has confirmed the fall of Troy, Clytemnestra recalls the accusations she has been charged with:

[17] "Il coro mostra così di prestare maggior fede ad un messaggio che gli viene recato secondo i modi tradizionali dell'ἀγγελία orale (Clitennestra ricopre qui il ruolo di vero e proprio ἄγγελος), benché si tratti di un racconto palesemente immaginario e come tale connotato dalla sua autrice (v. 321 οἶομαι), che non alla testimonianza del messaggio trasmesso per il tramite della innovatrice tecnica di segnalazione luminosa".

[18] In Betensky's opinion (1978: 14), the mention of geographical names in Clytemnestra's description aims precisely at convincing the old men of her perfect knowledge of the beacon system.

καί τίς μ᾽ ἐνίπτων εἶπε, ῾φρυκτωρῶν δία
πεισθεῖσα Τροίαν νῦν πεπορθῆσθαι δοκεῖς;
ἦ κάρτα πρὸς γυναικὸς αἴρεσθαι κέαρ.᾽
λόγοις τοιούτοις πλαγκτὸς οὖσ᾽ ἐφαινόμην.
(*Ag.* 590-3)

[Then there were some who chided me and said: "Are you so convinced by beacon-fires as to think that Troy has now been sacked? Truly, it is just like a woman to be elated in heart." By such taunts I was made to seem as if my wits were wandering.]

1.2 The Herald and the Importance of Autopsia

Despite being faster than any *angelos* could ever be, the beacon system does not have the same credibility, and indeed the chorus praises the herald's words as he appears on stage[19] assuring that, unlike the travelling flames, he will not be speechless (οὔτ᾽ ἄναυδος, 496) and will speak the truth through words (λέγων, 498) and not through smoke (καπνῷ πυρός, 497):

μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι κάσις
πηλοῦ ξύνουρος διψία κόνις τάδε,
ὡς οὔτ᾽ ἄναυδος οὔτε σοι δαίων φλόγα
ὕλης ὀρείας σημανεῖ καπνῷ πυρός,
ἀλλ᾽ ἢ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων
τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ᾽ ἀποστέργω λόγον.
(*Ag.* 494-9)

[The thirsty dust, consorting sister of the mud, assures me that neither by pantomime nor by kindling a flame of mountain wood will he signal with smoke of fire. Either in plain words he will bid us to rejoice the more, or – but I have little love for the report opposite to this!]

In other passages, Aeschylus employs the adjective ἄναυδος in connection with *angelos*. In the *Suppliant Women* (180) and *Seven against Thebes* (81-2), the epithet "voiceless messenger" (ἄναυδος ἄγγελος) is applied to the clouds dust raised by marching soldiers. Viewed as a harbinger of the approaching army, dust becomes a "voiceless, clear and reliable messenger" (ἄναυδος σαφῆς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος, *Sept.* 82, my translation). In the *Sacred Delegation* (fr. 78a.20 Radt), a τύπος ("image") is described as "messenger,

[19] The herald appears on stage at. l. 503. Brioso Sánchez points out the pre-eminence of the information transmitted through a messenger in Aeschylus' plays (2011: 171). On the question of the lapse of time between the night when the beacon-flame appears for the first time and the arrival of the herald, see Fraenkel 1950: 254-6.

voiceless herald" (ἄγγελον, κήρυκ' ἄναυδον). An analogous statement can be found in the *Choephori*, when Electra, finding a lock of hair on Agamemnon's tomb, is uncertain about its meaning, and wishes that it could take on a "kind voice" (φωνὴν ἔμφρονα), "like a messenger" (ἀγγέλλου δίκην, 195), and tell her whether Orestes has returned.

In Electra's words, as well as in the chorus' view, visual and acoustic data stand in opposition to each other, although this does not mean that the former is actually inferior to the latter. We later learn that the herald has personally witnessed the events,[20] which is precisely what makes him reliable in the chorus' eyes.[21] Indeed, not only is Clytemnestra's chosen *medium* of communication peculiar in itself, but her knowledge is the product of mediation by relay. Each step of this relay increases the distance from facts, thus generating the chorus' mistrust. Contrariwise, the herald, being an eyewitness, can be regarded as the primary source of information of the event.[22] In the *Persians*, the messenger makes this very point before starting to illustrate the facts. He declares that, since he was present during the battle, he can testify its disastrous outcome (παρών, 266) and, accordingly, he also stresses that his knowledge is not based on reports of others:

> καὶ μὴν παρών γε κοὐ λόγους ἄλλων κλύων,
> Πέρσαι, φράσαιμ' ἂν οἷ' ἐπορσύνθη κακά.
> (*Pers.* 266-7)

[20] On the chorus' demand, the herald reports that a storm dispersed the fleet on the way back from Troy (651-73). However, he refuses to report the events that he has not witnessed, such as Menelaus' alleged death. On the ambiguous status of the tragic messenger (*dramatis persona* and poetic tool), see Barrett 1995: 546-50 and 2002: 32-40.

[21] At ll. 988-9, the chorus tries to disperse a bad feeling by reporting the return of Agamemnon's army as a sure fact: "Of their coming home I learn with my own eyes and need no other witness" (πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων / νόστον αὐτόμαρτυς ὤν).

[22] On the importance of direct witness in the Greek *polis*, see Lewis 1996: 10 and 89-91; on the testimonial evidence used in trials, see Butti de Lima 1996: 42-76. The opposition between direct witness and second-hand accounts emerges also in the *Iliad.* In 2.485-6, the poet asks for the help of the Muses; unlike the mortals who can only go by hearsay (ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν, "we hear but a rumour"), knowing nothing (οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν "and we know nothing"), the Muses know everything (ἴστέ τε πάντα, "you [*scil.* Muses] know all things"). The forms ἴστε and ἴδμεν, just like the verb πάρεστε, "being present" (485), stress the importance of a kind of knowledge based on eyewitness (Kirk 1985: 167). For a comparison of this passage with the narrative practice of the tragic messenger, see Barrett 1995: 552-4 and 2002: 40-5. The claim of the messenger in Aeschylus' *Persians* (429-30): "The multitude of evils, not even if I went on for ten days, I could never recount for you in full" (trans. by J. Barrett; κακῶν δὲ πλῆθος, οὐδ'ἂν εἰ δέκ'ἤματα / στοιχηγοροίην, οὐκ ἂν ἐκπλήσαιμί σοι) closely resembles the claim of the epic poet in *Il.* 2.485-6, but "unlike the epic narrator, the messenger claims to have seen the events himself" (Barrett 2002: 44).

[Since I myself was present and did not merely hear what happened from the report of others, I can tell you exactly what kind of disaster was wrought.]

This need for *autopsia* in order to verify events, or information, which are only inferred from sub-optimal evidence, appears elsewhere in the *Oresteia*.[23] At the end of the *Agamemnon*, when the chorus hears the king's cries coming from within the palace, some of its members refuse to draw any conclusion about what may have happened before they have been given clear proof that their lord is actually dead. Although their scepticism is unjustified, their reaction illustrates their concern over autoptic examination:

ἦ γὰρ τεκμηρίοισιν ἐξ οἰμωγμάτων
μαντευσόμεσθα τἀνδρὸς ὡς ὀλωλότος; —
— σάφ' εἰδότας χρὴ τῶνδε θυμοῦσθαι πέρι:
τὸ γὰρ τοπάζειν τοῦ σάφ' εἰδέναι δίχα. —
(*Ag.* 1366-9)

[— And shall we, upon the evidence of mere groans, divine that our lord is dead? // — We should be sure of the facts before we indulge our wrath. For surmise differs from assurance.]

Going back to the fall of Troy, we should bear in mind that the report of a herald, of a messenger or of anyone who witnessed the actual events, is considered to be the most reliable source of information. However, many other sources can contribute to – or, more often, interfere with – human knowledge of the events. At l. 272 the chorus, displeased with Clytemnestra's claims, asks for further verification: "What then is the proof? Have you evidence of this?" (τὶ γὰρ τὸ πιστόν; ἐστι τῶνδέ σοι τέκμαρ;).[24] They inquire about other possible, if untrustworthy, sources of information a naïve Clytemnestra could have relied upon, such as dreams and rumours:

Χορος πότερα δ' ὀνείρων φάσματ' εὐπιθῆ σέβεις;
Κλυταιμηστρα οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός.
Χορος ἀλλ' ἦ σ' ἐπίανέν τις ἄπτερος φάτις;
Κλυταιμηστρα παιδὸς νέας ὣς κάρτ' ἐμωμήσω φρένας.
(*Ag.* 274-7)

[23] See also Electra's cautious attitude in the *Choephori* when she finds Orestes' lock and footprints, and even when her brother finally stands in front of her (164-234). Her scepticism is unjustified, but reveals her anxiety about not having the means to verify Orestes' identity.

[24] I choose here Prien's punctuation (the philological debate on this line is resumed in Fraenkel 1950: 150).

[Chorus Do you believe the persuasive visions of dreams? // Klytaemnestra I would not heed the fancies of a slumbering brain. // Chorus But can it be some pleasing rumor that has fed your hopes? // Klytaemnestra Truly you scorn my understanding as if it were a child's.]

1.3 Dreams

Aeschylus has been defined as a poet of dreams (Rousseau 1963: 103), and indeed in his plays – and in particular in the *Oresteia* – dreams and visions repeatedly appear.[25] The cases of Atossa's dream at the beginning of the *Persians* (181-200) and of Clytemnestra's one in the *Choephori* (523-39 and 928-9) show the ominous nature of this phenomenon. Dreams foresee tragic events, which eventually prove to be veridical.[26] Nevertheless, they are not always easily understandable; they are sometimes obscure (δύσκριτοι, 981) and in some cases they can even deceive the mortals. In fact, at ll. 489-92, the chorus compares the beacon's light to a dream (ὀνειράτων δίκην, "dream-like", 491), which may have come to fool their minds,[27] and asks: "Do you believe the persuasive visions of dreams?", insinuating that nocturnal visions are not to be trusted. Once more, this conception of the oneiric dimension as deceitful is close to the epic model (Catenaccio 2011: 205). In the Homeric poems, dreams are a communication tool between gods and mortals.[28] They may anticipate future events, transmit divine exhortations, or mirror reality, even though they are never free from ambiguity (Brillante 1991: 144-73). In some cases they truly need to be interpreted, while in others they are totally transparent. Nevertheless, even clear visions risk being deceptive, as we can observe in *Il.* 2.1-15, when Zeus sends a dream to fool Agamemnon into arming his troops, deluding him about

[25] On dreams in the *Oresteia*, see Rousseau 1963 and Catenaccio 2011. For a survey on dreams in Greek tragedy, see Messer 1918: 59-102 and Devereux 1976. On dreams in antiquity, see Guidorizzi 1988; Brillante 1991; Harris 2009.

[26] Not all dreams in Aeschylus are prophetical. See for example the dream of the Erinyes in *Eum.* 94-139: Clytemnestra's ghost appears in their sleep and urges them to wake up and persecute matricidal Orestes.

[27] Aesch. *Ag.* 489-92: "We shall soon know about this passing on of flaming lights and beacon signals and fires, whether they perhaps are true or whether, dream-like, this light's glad coming has beguiled our senses" (τάχ' εἰσόμεσθα λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων / φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρὸς παραλλαγάς, / εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἶτ' ὀνειράτων δίκην / τερπνὸν τόδ' ἐλθὸν φῶς ἐφήλωσεν φρένας).

[28] In the Homeric poems, dreams are divine. Cf. *Il.* 1.72 ("in fact, the dream is from Zeus", καὶ γάρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστιν,), 2.1-15 and 26 (Zeus), 10.497 (Athena), 24.677-88 (Hermes), *Od.* 4.795-803, 828-9, 6.13-24 (Athena), 20.87 (δαίμων). In *Il.* 2.5-72, Dream (Ὄνειρος) acts as a messenger of Zeus ("I am a messenger to you from Zeus", Διὸς δέ τοι ἄγγελός εἰμι, 26 and 63).

conquering Troy if he attacks immediately at full strength.[29] This treacherous dream (Ὄνειρος) is both divine and evil,[30] in that it fools not only Agamemnon, but the entire Council, which underpins the king's authority by agreeing with his decision to follow the instructions he has been given during his sleep.[31]

As we have seen, the information one can get from dreams can be either exceptionally helpful or completely deceptive. The choice between trusting or calling into doubt that information is given to men, whose skills are nevertheless inadequate to pursue the right decision (Brillante 1991: 157). In the *Odyssey*, Penelope uses the image of the two gates to describe this state of things:[32]

ξεῖν', ἦ τοι μὲν ὄνειροι ἀμήχανοι ἀκριτόμυθοι
γίγνοντ', οὐδέ τι πάντα τελείεται ἀνθρώποισι.
δοιαὶ γάρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὀνείρων:
αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχαται, αἱ δ' ἐλέφαντι:
τῶν οἳ μέν κ' ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἵ ῥ' ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε' ἀκράαντα φέροντες:
οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἵ ῥ' ἔτυμα κραίνουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδηται.
(*Od.* 19.560-7)

[Stranger, dreams verily are baffling and unclear of meaning, and in no wise do they find fulfillment in all things for men. For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfillment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true issues to pass, when any mortal sees them.]

Considering this, we can better understand the chorus' question about "persuasive visions of dreams" (ὀνείρων φάσματ' εὐπιθῆ, 274), which, in the *Agamemnon*, might have deceived Clytemnestra about the fall of Troy. Her offended reaction ("I would not heed the fancies of a slumbering brain", Οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός, 275) testifies to her awareness of the weak reliability of that source of information, and the use of the term δόξα ("opinion", "conjecture") at l. 275 strengthens the idea that dreams, which come through sleep, are both illusory and undependable.

[29] Zeus sends this dream to Agamemnon because he wants to please Thetis by harming the Greeks, who have dishonoured her son Achilles.

[30] Agamemnon's dream (ὄνειρος) is divine (θεῖος) in *Il.* 2.22 and 56, and evil (οὖλος) in 2.6 and 8.

[31] Nestor gives credit to Agamemnon's report only because he is the king, claiming that he would not have believed any other Achaean (*Il.* 2.80-2).

[32] On the symbolism in this metaphor, see Lévy 1982: 40-1.

1.4 Rumours

The other source of information that rouses the chorus' apprehension is rumour (φάτις, 276).[33] The term φάτις occurs seventeen times in the surviving *corpus* of Aeschylus' plays, and more than half of these occurrences can be found in the *Oresteia* (eight of them in the *Agamemnon*).[34] Although its primary meaning is 'voice', 'utterance', it more often designates a 'rumour'.[35] If in terms of reliability *phatis* does not bear a negative connotation *per se*,[36] it still defines verbal information that may not be traced back to a sure and clearly recognizable source.[37] For example, it is never used to define the herald's speech,[38] and at ll. 671-3, the herald himself shows scepticism about the rumours on Menelaus' fate. When the chorus asks him about "the general voice of other voyagers" (φάτις πρὸς ἄλλων ναυτίλων, 631), he explains that a storm has scattered the fleet and the sailors are dispersed. This may easily give rise to false news:

> καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων εἴ τίς ἐστιν ἐμπνέων,
> λέγουσιν ἡμᾶς ὡς ὀλωλότας, τί μή;
> ἡμεῖς τ' ἐκείνους ταὔτ' ἔχειν δοξάζομεν.
> (*Ag.* 671-3)
>
> [So now, if any of them still draw the breath of life, they speak of us as lost – and why should they not? We think the same of them.]

Δοξάζομεν (673) reminds us of Clytemnestra's mention of δόξα at l. 275. Despite being a verbal *medium* of communication, *phatis* draws on the domain of *doxa*, like dreams and signals, as it cannot offer satisfactory evidence and is therefore not the proof (τέκμαρ, 272) the chorus is seeking. Clytemnestra shows she is aware of that.

[33] On the vocabulary of rumour in Greek tragedy, see Brioso Sánchez 2011: 93.

[34] Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 9, 276, 456, 611, 631, 868, 1132, 1254, *Ch.* 736, 839, *Eum.* 380, *Pers.* 521, 227, *Suppl.* 293, *Sept.* 841, *Aetn.* fr. 6.3 Radt.

[35] For 'voice', 'utterance' see *Ag.* 456, 1254 and *Eum.* 380. This meaning can also be found in *Odyssey* 6.29, 21.323, and 23.362. No occurrences of φάτις are found in the *Iliad.* For 'rumour', see *Ag.* 9, 276, 611, 631, 868, 1132, *Ch.* 736, 839.

[36] In the *Agamemnon*, φάτις is used indifferently by the watchman (9), by Clytemnestra (868), and by the chorus (631). At l. 276, the inquiring chorus attributes a negative connotation to it by adding the indefinite pronoun τις and by employing, if metaphorically, the verb πιαίνω, 'to fatten'. On ἐπίανεν (276), see Fraenkel 1950: 152. On the interpretation of the adjective ἄπτερος in the same line, (see 152-3).

[37] The spreading of unofficial news, which could have been false or redundant, was a real problem in the Greek *polis*. Many criteria could help to test the reliability of an unofficial messenger (see on this Lewis 1996: 75-96).

[38] On the opposition between rumour and message in Greek tragedy, see Brioso Sánchez 2011: 137-40.

With regard to this, a comparison with the *Odyssey* may prove particularly apt because of the common topic of *nostos*, ("return home"). Both Odysseus and Agamemnon are on their way back from Troy, and in both cases their own people are eager for news about them. The term φάτις occurs three times in the *Odyssey* with the meaning of 'voice', while the recurrent concept of 'rumour' is expressed by ἀγγελίη ("message") and ἀκουή ("thing heard"), both rare words in Aeschylus' plays.[39] The absence of sure information about Odysseus is indeed a central theme in the poem. Penelope and Telemachus are impatiently committed to gathering news, but this does not mean that they would welcome the ἀγγελίαι uncritically.[40] Although Penelope keeps questioning foreigners,[41] she eventually refuses to believe her husband has returned even when he is sitting in front of her. As is well-known, only his mention of the secret of the marriage bed carved into an olive tree can eventually convince her and gain her trust.[42] In his turn, Telemachus (1.414) maintains that he will no longer confide in any ἀγγελίη: "No longer do I put trust in tidings, whencesoever they may come" (οὔτ' οὖν ἀγγελίῃ ἔτι πείθομαι, εἴ ποθεν ἔλθοι), and for this reason he early sets sail to Pylos and Sparta to visit his father's companions. Even the swineherd Eumaeus is very cautious about the news of Odysseus' return, as he had been tricked already by an Aetolian, who provided false information in order to gain hospitality (*Od.* 14.378-85).

Clytemnestra herself, another waiting wife, though with decidedly different feelings,[43] complains about the amount of untrustworthy news she

[39] In the *Odyssey*, ἀγγελίη is the commonest way to indicate 'rumour', 'news' (1.414, 1.408, 2.30, 2.42, 2.255, 10.245, 14.374, 15.41, 15.447, 15.314, 15.329, 16.334, 16.467, 24.48) and, more rarely, 'message' (2.92, 5.150, 7.263, 13.381, 16.355, 24.354). Ἀκουή ('thing heard', 'tidings') occurs five times to describe the attempt of Telemachus to learn about his father's whereabouts. It is always paired with the genitive πατρός ("concerning the father", 2.308, 4.701, 5.19, 14.179, 17.43). Ὄσσα ('fame') belongs to the same semantic field, and in *Od.* 1.282, 2.216 comes from Zeus (ἐκ Διός); in 24.413 fame is a "swift messenger" (ἄγγελος ὦκα), while in *Il.* 2.93 it acts as Zeus' messenger (Διὸς ἄγγελος). See also κλέος ("fame", "glory") in *Od.* 2.217, 23.137, and κληηδών ("information contained in a chance utterance") in *Od.* 4.317 (cf. Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 101-3). In Aeschylus, ἀγγελίη occurs only twice: in *Ag.* 86 as "news", and *Prom.* 1040 as "message", "order". In general, the term is uncommon in Greek tragedy (cf. Fornielez Sánchez 2015: 219-27 and 263). Ἀκουή appears only once with the meaning of 'listening', while ὄσσα is completely absent. Βάξις appears twice in the *Agamemnon* as "rumour" (10 and 477), as well as in *Prom.* 663 and *Suppl.* 976. On the semantic field of rumour in Greek Literature, see also Larran 2010 and 2011.

[40] On the characters' suspicious attitude towards news in the *Odyssey*, see Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 105-7.

[41] See *Od.* 1.415-16, 14.373-4.

[42] *Od.* 24.166-217.

[43] On the opposition between Clytemnestra and Penelope, see Moreau 1992: 165.

has received during Agamemnon's absence. She says that if all the reports (φάτις, 868) about her husband's being injured or dead were true, Agamemnon would have more holes in his body than a net, and he would have died three times at least:

καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγχανεν
ἀνὴρ ὅδ', ὡς πρὸς οἶκον ὠχετεύετο
φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέον λέγειν.
εἰ δ' ἦν τεθνηκώς, ὡς ἐπλήθυον λόγοι,
τρισώματός τἂν Γηρυὼν ὁ δεύτερος
πολλὴν ἄνωθεν, τὴν κάτω γὰρ οὐ λέγω,
χθονὸς τρίμοιρον χλαῖναν ἐξηύχει λαβεῖν,
ἅπαξ ἑκάστῳ κατθανὼν μορφώματι.
(*Ag.* 866-73)

[And as for wounds, had my husband received so many as rumour kept pouring into the house, no net would have been pierced so full of holes as he. Or if he had died as often as reports claimed, then truly he might have had three bodies, a second Geryon, and have boasted of having taken on him a triple cloak of earth ample that above, of that below I speak not, one death for each different shape.]

The sole reliable herald is the one who refuses to speak about Menelaus' death because he did not see it, since only the words of a direct witness are worthy of being trusted. As is well-known, in Greek tragedy it is precisely a herald, or a messenger, who reports about action performed off-stage.[44] The messenger acts as a mediator between scenic and extra-scenic – or retro-scenic – space (Avezzù 2015: 18; Longo 1978: 77; Bremer 1976). Like the literary messenger of the Homeric poems, "he is swift, reliable, and always tells all" (Barrett 2002: 23).[45] Just like the herald of the *Agamemnon*, he does not give an account of *phatis* but of facts, and reports exclusively what he has beheld.[46]

Before carrying on our scrutiny of information and information sources in Aeschylus plays, it is worth summarizing the main issues we have discussed so far. By opening his play with the beacon scene, an Aeschylean in-

[44] In Greek tragedy, messengers are often entrusted with the task of reporting brutal events which are too violent to be performed on stage, such as military defeats (Aesch. *Pers.* 249-514) and murders (see Avezzù 2015; Zeppezauer 2011). A listing of messenger-scenes in Greek tragedy can be found in Barrett 2002: 224; Campos Daroca 2014: 97-102; Fornieles Sánchez 2015: 197-216.

[45] Cf. also Barrett 1995: 542-5.

[46] On the tragic messenger as eyewitness, see Barrett 1995: 546-50 and 2002: 31-40, 108-31; Campos Daroca 2014: 76-7; Lewis 1996: 90; de Jong 1991: 9 (mostly on Euripides' plays); Pellegrino 2015: 34-8.

novation, the author knowingly decides to put particular emphasis on the topic of information. The standard messenger scene is delayed, and the beacon scene functions as a preparatory messenger scene. The fire stands for the *angelos* but is not considered as reliable; in the chorus' view, light cannot replace voice just as relay cannot replace eyewitness. This is the issue at the core of the debate between Clytemnestra and the chorus, which opens up a large-scale reflection about information sources (Longo 1976: 153), and I will later clarify the role of this initial argument in the play. For now, we must bear in mind that, despite the doubts of the chorus, the beacon system turns out to be a reliable *medium*. Clytemnestra rightly trusts it, even if, in principle, she cannot possess any objective guarantee of its credibility. And yet, the queen, a woman with a heart "of manly counsel" (ἀνδρόβουλος, 11), emerges victorious from the Aeschylean riddle of information sources, at least in the *Agamemnon*.

2. Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*

When we deal with the topic of information in the *Agamemnon*, we cannot ignore Cassandra, who received from Apollo the gift of prophecy but was condemned by the same god never to be believed. In fact, prophecy is a *medium* of communication between gods and mortals, which provides men with information about their future (Pisano 2012).[47] The semantic field of prescience and revelation is generously employed in the long and pathetic dialogue between Cassandra and the chorus,[48] and the word φάτις is used at l. 1132 in order to underline the link between oracles and information. After drawing a brief summary of the scene dedicated to Cassandra, which has been the object of much scholarly investigation,[49] I will focus on the aspects that are relevant to my survey, only to return to this scene in the last section of this paper.

Cassandra makes her appearance towards the end of the *Agamemnon*. As a slave to the king, she silently enters the stage on his chariot, and never speaks until Clytemnestra leaves her alone on the stage (1072).

[47] Of course, if compared to the piece of information Clytemnestra and the chorus have lengthily discussed in the first part of the play, the one Cassandra possesses is of a different type: the fall of Troy is an event that has recently taken place, while Cassandra's knowledge, which she derives from prophetic skills, concerns the future.

[48] See μαντικός ("prophetic", 1098), προφήτης ("prophet", 1099), μάντευμα ("oracle", 1105), θέσφατος ("divinely decreed", 1113, 1130, and 1132), θεσπέσια ὁδός ("the way of divination", 1154), ψευδόμαντις ("false prophet", 1195), and ἀληθόμαντις ("prophet of truth", 1241).

[49] See, among others, Doyle 2008; Harris 2012; Schein 1982, and the related sections of the commentaries cited in the final bibliography.

She then starts prophesizing about the bloody future of the house of Agamemnon, the legacy of Atreus' horrendous crimes. At first, her prophetical language is obscure and enigmatic (1072-177), but very soon Cassandra makes it clear that Clytemnestra will slay both her husband and herself (1214ff.).[50] The prophetess knows what the queen is planning, as she draws this information from Apollo himself. However, since nobody will believe her words, she cannot but wait for her divination to be fulfilled. Although at the beginning the chorus appears to trust her oracles (1213), her words are only partially taken into account. If, on the one hand, the chorus accepts the idea that she is foretelling her own death, on the other hand, it seems to pay little attention to the prediction of Agamemnon's murder. In fact, the chorus' final questions and comments exclusively regard Cassandra's death: "But if, in truth, you have knowledge of your own death" (εἰ δ'ἐτητύμως / μόρον τὸν αὑτῆς οἶσθα, 1296-7), and "Poor woman, I pity you for your death foretold" (Ὦ τλῆμον, οἰκτίρω σε θεσφάτου, 1321). Once again, as she understands, the only way to be believed is to be a direct witness of the reported events (παρών, 1240), someone who has seen them (ἐπόψεσθαι, 1246), a requirement with which of course she cannot comply:

> τὸ μέλλον ἥξει. καὶ σύ μ' ἐν τάχει παρὼν
> ἄγαν γ' ἀληθόμαντιν οἰκτίρας ἐρεῖς.
> (*Ag.* 1240-1)

> [What is to come, will come. And soon you, yourself present here, shall with great pity pronounce me all too true a prophetess.]

And again, "I say you shall look upon Agamemnon dead" (Ἀγαμέμνονός σέ φημ'ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον, *Ag.* 1246). Also, after having heard Agamemnon's cries, some members of the chorus still maintain that mere groans are not sufficient to prove the king's murder (1366-9).

As has been noted, Clytemnestra and Cassandra, two women who are doomed to confront one another as murderer and victim, have something in common as both of them know the truth, but neither can really convince their interlocutor (Moreau 1992: 162), even though the chorus' mistrust clearly bears different consequences in the two cases. As we have discussed above, Clytemnestra's assertions are discredited because of the peculiarity of the beacon system, and also because – as we will see – she is a woman dealing with male affairs. On the contrary, the fact that the chorus does not pay attention to Cas-

[50] By declaring that "a woman is murderer of a man" (θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς / ἔστιν, 1231-2; my translation), Cassandra reveals Clytemnestra's true intentions. Nevertheless, later on the chorus seems to disregard the detail of the murderer's gender, since they use the masculine participle τοῦ τελοῦντος at l. 1253: τοῦ γὰρ τελοῦντος οὐ ξυνῆκα μηχανήν ("I do not understand the scheme of him who is to do the deed").

sandra's words about Agamemnon's imminent death derives from Apollo's punishment.[51]

At this point of the *Agamemnon*, the burden Cassandra has to carry is double. Not only has she been mocked and insulted because of her gory oracles, but now realizes, thanks to those same prophetical skills, that Apollo himself has condemned her to a violent death in a foreign land:

ἰδοὺ δ᾽ Ἀπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ
χρηστηρίαν ἐσθῆτ᾽, ἐποπτεύσας δέ με
κἀν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην μέγα
φίλων ὑπ᾽ ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως, μάτην –
καλουμένη δὲ φοιτὰς ὡς ἀγύρτρια
πτωχὸς τάλαινα λιμοθνὴς ἠνεσχόμην –
καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμὲ
ἀπήγαγ᾽ ἐς τοιάσδε θανασίμους τύχας.
(*Ag*. 1269-76)

[Look, Apollo himself is stripping me of my prophetic garb – he that saw me mocked to bitter scorn, even in this bravery, by friends turned foes, with one accord, in vain – but, like some vagrant mountebank, called 'beggar', 'wretch', 'starveling', I bore it all. And now the prophet, having undone me, his prophetess, has brought me to this lethal pass.][52]

Cassandra realizes that she will die and that the god who condemned her is the same who discloses this fatal information. The prophetess is also fully aware that she cannot escape her doom. In fact, her knowledge of the future does not allow her to save her own life, but only increases her suffering and anger against Apollo.[53] To the chorus who asks her why she is determined to face her death, she answers by stating the unavoidability of her destiny: "There is no escape; no, my friends, there is none any more" (*Ag*. 1299: οὐκ ἔστ᾽ ἄλυξις, οὔ, ξένοι, χρόνον πλέω) and "The day has come; flight would profit me but little" (*Ag*. 1301: ἥκει τόδ᾽ἦμαρ: σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῇ). After Clytemnestra has defeated the mistrust of the chorus with the help of her great mastery of information sources, the death of Cassandra marks a tragic impasse, since possessing (or not) the information does not seem to be a discriminant for success or safety anymore. A more powerful force directs the outcome of mortal actions. Now that Cassandra's last words have instilled this doubt into the

[51] Cassandra tells the chorus about this at ll. 1209-12. The god punished her for refusing to comply with his desires by making her vaticinations veridical but ineffective. On the debate about the sexual relationship between Cassandra and Apollo, see Debnar 2010: 131-3.

[52] On the interpretation of ll. 1269-76, see Mazzoldi (2001), who proposes an interesting option: "And now the prophet, having undone me, his prophetess" (καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμὲ).

[53] At ll. 1264-8, Cassandra blames Apollo's insignia and gets rid of them.

audience's minds, the play can move towards its ending. However, the topic of information sources is not exhausted, and Aeschylus will further pursue it, though by means of a less systematic argumentation, in the *Choephori.*

3. The News of Orestes' Death in the *Choephori*

In the *Choephori*, Troy has been taken, Agamemnon has come back and has been killed by his wife, and the focus, in terms of information, has now shifted on the (false) news of Orestes' death. Compared to the ending of the *Agamemnon*, the position of Clytemnestra towards informative *media* is completely overthrown. In the *Agamemnon*, in front of the chorus' malicious allusions to her naivety, she had declared that she did not trust dreams, nor rumours. In the *Choephori*, she deals precisely with these two sources of information, although she fails to use them to her advantage. She is deeply impressed by a dream she had the night before Orestes' return, but its exact meaning remains unclear to her; she then trusts the false report of his death that is clearly presented as unreliable as a rumour. Paradoxically, she does not give her dream the careful consideration it deserves – as she should have done –, but relies on news that turn out to be lies.

When a stranger comes to Argos, bringing the news of Orestes' death, Clytemnestra trusts him without questioning his reliability. Should he have been a herald, or someone known to her, or at least an eyewitness, Clytemnestra's behaviour would not have been that surprising. But this is not the case. The stranger – who is Orestes himself – admits he has not seen the hero dead but – he explains – on his way to Argos, he has run into a man who asked him to report the news at court:

ἀγνὼς πρὸς ἀγνῶτ᾽ εἶπε συμβαλὼν ἀνήρ,
ἐξιστορήσας καὶ σαφηνίσας ὁδόν,
Στροφίος ὁ Φωκεύς: πεύθομαι γὰρ ἐν λόγῳ
ἐπείπερ ἄλλως, ὦ ξέν᾽, εἰς Ἄργος κίεις,
πρὸς τοὺς τεκόντας πανδίκως μεμνημένος
τεθνεῶτ᾽ Ὀρέστην εἰπέ, μηδαμῶς λάθῃ.
(*Ch.* 677-82)

[A man, a stranger to me as I to him, fell in with me, and inquired about my destination and told me his. He was Strophius, a Phocian (for as we talked I learned his name, and he said to me, "Stranger, since in any case you are bound for Argos, keep my message in mind most faithfully and tell his parents Orestes is dead, and by no means let it escape you".]

Many elements should make Clytemnestra suspicious of his words. Firstly, the news bearer is a stranger to her. Secondly, he has not witnessed the

event, but reports someone else's words. Thirdly, this someone else is himself a stranger. Orestes explicitly designates him as "a stranger to me as I to him" (677), whose name he knows only because the man himself told him.[54] Not only is his report a second-hand account, the product of transmission by relay, but the information it contains is conveyed by two strangers.[55]

If we compare this scene with the same episode in Sophocles' *Electra*, we find significant differences. In Sophocles, the news is conveyed by an old man (Orestes' Pedagogue), who claims to come on the behalf of an ally of Clytemnestra (670). Though the man is a stranger to the queen, as in the *Agamemnon*, the fact of being an acquaintance of her ally Phanotheus identifies him as a trustable and friendly messenger:[56]

τὸ ποῖον, ὦ ξέν'; εἰπέ: παρὰ φίλου γὰρ ὢν
ἀνδρός, σάφ' οἶδα, προσφιλεῖς λέξεις λόγους.
(Soph. *El.* 671-2)

[And what is it, sir? Tell me. Coming from a friend you will bring, I know, a kindly message.]

A second difference between the two strangers is that the one in the *Electra* declares he has witnessed the fact (762), and relates the circumstances of Orestes' death providing a surprising amount of details. The report of the horse race in which Orestes would have died and his subsequent cremation occupies eighty lines (681-760), and affords a full description of the beholders, the sounds, and the emotions of the dire event.[57] Besides, the presence of the messenger at the moment of Orestes' death reinforces his reliability:

[54] As Bowen (1986: 120) points out, the expression πεύθομαι γὰρ ἐν λόγῳ (679) "underlines the impression of a throwaway detail".

[55] The identity of the messenger was one of the main criteria to judge the reliability of unofficial news in the Greek *polis* (Lewis 1996: 80-5).

[56] An analogous trick, based on the principle of the source's supposed reliability, is the one that causes Aegisthus' death in Aeschylus' *Choephori*. Following the advice of the Corypheus (770-2), the Nurse adds an important detail to the message Clytemnestra has entrusted her with: she says that Aegisthus must go alone to meet the strangers (734-7). This will allow Orestes to slay him. The Nurse's message does not raise any suspicion partly because Aegisthus trusts the 'source' of the message (i.e. Clytemnestra), just as she did with Phanotheus in Sophocles' *Electra*.

[57] An amazing amount of detail, as Marshall comments: "The Pedagogue presents details in his narrative that strictly speaking go beyond the perception of a spectator in the horserace, such as mention of the horses' breath on the drivers' backs in 718-19: do such details add verisimilitude to the narrative, or are they another potential clue for the on-stage characters that the narrative is invented?" (2006: 210). On the construction of this false *angelia* on Homeric inheritance and its metatheatrical implications, see Barrett 2002: 132-67. On the reasons that might explain the choice of a chariot race as a setting for Orestes' death, see Finglass 2007: 300-4. On the relation of this passage to other literary material, see Barrett 2002: 132-67; Campos Daroca 2014: 85-6; Finglass 2007: 300-4; Marshall 2006.

τοιαῦτά σοι ταῦτ᾽ ἐστίν, ὡς μὲν ἐν λόγῳ
ἀλγεινά, τοῖς δ᾽ ἰδοῦσιν, οἵπερ εἴδομεν,
μέγιστα πάντων ὧν ὄπωπ᾽ ἐγὼ κακῶν.
(Soph. *El.* 761-3)

[Such is my story – it is grievous even to hear, but for us witnesses who looked on, it was the greatest of sorrows that these eyes have seen.]

In the *Electra*, Orestes' trickery is much better conceived than in the *Choephori*, where there are sufficient elements for unmasking the false news, although Clytemnestra simply ignores them. Comparing it with Sophocles' *Electra*, we can understand how Aeschylus openly decided to insist on the obviousness of the deception by contrasting it with Clytemnestra's inability to expose it. Her blindness is made even more striking by the contrast with the accurateness she has shown in the previous play with respect to information sources. Her mind is now "open to quick encroachment", as the chorus was insinuating in the *Agamemnon* (485-6).[58] She no longer speaks "as wisely as a prudent man" (*Ag.* 351: κατ᾽ ἄνδρα σώφρον᾽ εὐφρόνως), but she becomes credulous as a woman.

Aegisthus, on the contrary, appears to be more cautious. First of all, he defines the news he has just learnt from the newcomers as φάτις.[59] Secondly, in order to test the reliability of that φάτις, he wants to see (ἰδεῖν, *Ch.* 851) the messenger, and verify directly whether he was present at Orestes' death or is just reporting a second-hand account:

ἰδεῖν ἐλέγξαι τ᾽ αὖ θέλω τὸν ἄγγελον,
εἴτ᾽ αὐτὸς ἦν θνῄσκοντος ἐγγύθεν παρών,
εἴτ᾽ ἐξ ἀμαυρᾶς κληδόνος λέγει μαθών.
(*Ch.* 851-3)

[I wish to see the messenger and put him to the test again – whether he himself was present at the death or merely repeats from vague reports what he has heard.]

Aegisthus is sure that his "mind with eyes open" (φρένα ὠμματωμένην, 854) will not be deceived. Unfortunately he does not have the time to verify the news, since the messenger kills him right after he enters the house. As Barrett points out, "[h]is skepticism . . . serves to underscore the absence of any such skepticism on Clytemnestra's part" (2002: 153).

Another element that should have arisen suspicion about the imminence of Orestes' revenge is the dream Clytemnestra had the night before

[58] Ὁ θῆλυς ὅρος ἐπινέμεται / ταχύπορος, ("a woman's mind has boundaries open to quick encroachment").

[59] Aesch. *Ch.* 839-40: νέαν φάτιν δὲ πεύθομαι λέγειν τινὰς / ξένους μολόντας ("I heard startling news told by some strangers who have arrived").

receiving the news of her son's death. In the *Choephori* (527-39), the chorus relates that she dreamt of giving birth to a snake that later sucked a blood clot out of her breast. If Aeschylus' public is well aware of the true meaning of the queen's nightmare – the snake is of course Orestes, ready to revenge Agamemnon's death on his mother –, Clytemnestra is unable to read the signs. Although she is very upset and orders libations, she fails to understand the ominous dream's authentic message. As related by the chorus (527-31), many details suggest a link with motherhood: the queen gives birth (τεκεῖν) to a snake, she lays it (ὁρμίσαι) in swaddling clothes (ἐν σπαργάνοισι) as a baby (παιδὸς δίκην), and she herself offers her breast to it (αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαστόν), but when she hears about Orestes' death, she feels relieved, and almost forgets about it. She will gain awareness of its true meaning only a moment before being slain by her son (928-9). On the contrary, Orestes is able to interpret his mother's oneiric vision, as if he were a seer (548-51).

In the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra had haughtily rejected the chorus' idea that dreams (ὀνείρων φάσματα, 274) may be trustworthy sources of information. Here, at the beginning of the *Choephori*, upset by her dream, she shows a completely different attitude. What is paradoxical is that, despite her worries, she puts no effort into the interpretation of its real meaning. As Penelope had it in the *Odyssey* (cf. above), some dreams are deceiving, others are not. This one is trustworthy and provides useful information about future events, but Clytemnestra fails to understand it.

Aeschylus presents us a different Clytemnestra in the *Choephori*. However clear-headed she might have been in the *Agamemnon*, once she has accomplished her revenge she grows careless and almost unconcerned, and this transformation could not go unnoticed in the eyes of Aeschylus' audience.

4. The Attitude of Clytemnestra Towards Information Sources: *Agamemnon* vs *Choephori*

In the *Agamemnon*, as we have pointed out above, Aeschylus greatly emphasizes the topic and the role of information sources. In particular, the debate over their reliability serves the characterization of Clytemnestra as an ingenious, self-confident, and powerful woman, thus relating her representation on stage to the question of her royal power. Let us explore then how the play develops this dynamic relation.

As shows the debate over the reliability of the beacon system between the queen and the chorus, the reception of information may not be carried out passively, but requires intelligence and lucidity, since it involves an

examination of the sources. The capacity to distinguish between true and false information is presented as an essential attribute of power and authority. In fact, in calling Clytemnestra's discernment into question, the chorus explicitly attacks the legitimacy of her power. Right before the herald's arrival, the chorus speaks its own contempt for the queen's womanly tendency to believe too quickly:

ἐν γυναικὸς αἰχμᾷ πρέπει
πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι.
πιθανὸς ἄγαν ὁ θῆλυς ὅρος ἐπινέμεται
ταχύπορος: ἀλλὰ ταχύμορον
γυναικογήρυτον ὄλλυται κλέος.
(*Ag*. 483-7)

[It is just like a woman's eager nature to yield assent to pleasing news before yet the truth is clear. Too credulous, a woman's mind has boundaries open to quick encroachment; but quick to perish is rumor spread by a woman.] [60]

In Greek society, power and control of communication were tightly intertwined (Longo 1976: 150 and 1978: 85). The latter was a prerogative of the former and a privilege of men. Yet, in the *Agamemnon*, both are in the hands of a woman. Clytemnestra is the one who is familiar with the functioning of the beacon system; it is she who has set up the watch (10-11), and not – as happens in the *Odyssey* – Aegisthus, who makes his first appearance on stage only at l. 1577 and takes no active part in preparing Agamemnon's murder: he explains to the chorus that "to ensnare him (*scil.* Agamemnon) was clearly the woman's part" (τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς, 1636).[61] As Froma Zeitlin correctly pointed out, Clytemnestra is "portrayed as monstrous androgyne" who "demands and usurps male power and prerogatives" (1978: 150).[62] Undoubtedly, Clytemnestra's control of communication enhances the image of a queen behaving as a king, even though, according to the chorus, only a very naïve (παιδνός) or upset (φρενῶν κεκομμένος) person could have trusted a message coming from a fire (479).

[60] On the interpretation of this sentence, see Fraenkel 1950: 241-3.

[61] Aegisthus is clearly more interested in taking possession of Agamemnon's goods and power, rather than to kill him out of revenge. See Aesch. *Ag*. 1638-9: "However, with his gold I shall endeavour to control the people" (ἐκ τῶν δὲ τοῦδε χρημάτων πειράσομαι / ἄρχειν πολιτῶν).

[62] In *Ag*. 11, Clytemnestra's heart (κέαρ) is designed as "of manly counsel" (ἀνδρόβουλος). The term was probably coined by Aeschylus in order to define specifically this character (Fraenkel 1950: 10). In *Ag*. 351, the chorus congratulates Clytemnestra for speaking as wisely as a man. Scholarship has widely commented this characterization; see Longo 1976: 151 and note 91.

"Truly, it is just like a woman to be elated in heart" (ἦ κάρτα πρὸς γυναικὸς αἴρεσθαι κέαρ, 594), the chorus said. In the *Choephori*, Aegisthus makes a similar statement, as he wishes to verify whether the news of Orestes' death is true or is "merely a panic-stricken report spread by women which leaps up to die away in nothingness" (845-6),[63] since women hearts are supposed to be exposed to easy and uncontrolled enthusiasm. Dreams, rumours, and a capricious temperament are for women, while solid evidence is for men.[64] However, Clytemnestra is far from being fickle and naïve. Despite the chorus' disapproval, she kept trusting the news and making sacrifices; she also imposed on the citizens to raise "a shout of happy praise" (ὀλολυγμόν, 595), following the feminine custom (γυναικείῳ νόμῳ, 594; cf. Moreau 1992: 162).[65] She is also extremely perceptive, and knows very well how to read signs and distinguish true from false news. The chorus' calling into doubt the beacon system, which in fact works perfectly and allows the queen to set up a plan to kill her husband, adds to Clytemnestra's determination and self-confidence.[66] Likewise, the chorus' allusions to the human inability to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable sources, trustworthiness and deceit, true and false, sets off by contrast her cunning and malicious cleverness.

What happens to Clytemnestra in the *Choephori*? Once she has accomplished her revenge, her mastery of information sources no longer supports her. As I have already noted, many elements could have raised her suspicion and revealed the truth, but she failed to recognize them. This Clytemnestra has nothing in common with the heedful and clear-headed queen of the *Agamemnon*; in the *Choephori*, she is a woman unable to solve the puzzle of evidence. In the *Agamemnon*, she had been sensible and alert in defending the reliability of the beacon system against dreams and rumours, while in the *Choephori*, she is totally unable to interpret the informative potential of an ominous dream and to expose false news. Unlike her, Aeschylus' public fully understood the signs, and could easily predict what would come next; besides, in the eyes of the audience, Clytemnestra's previous cleverness strikingly enhanced the contrast between her present interpretative blindness and the plain evidence of the signs she is presented with.

[63] ἢ πρὸς γυναικῶν δειματούμενοι λόγοι / πεδάρσιοι θρῴσκουσι, θνῄσκοντες μάτην.

[64] Aesch. *Ag*. 351-3: "Lady, you speak as wisely as a prudent man. And, for my part, now that I have listened to your certain proofs, I prepare to address due prayers of thanksgiving to the gods" (γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις. / ἐγὼ δ' ἀκούσας πιστά σου τεκμήρια / θεοὺς προσειπεῖν εὖ παρασκευάζομαι).

[65] The ὀλολυγμός was a loud cry of joy in honour of the gods, mostly performed by women.

[66] See also Betensky's remarks about the beacon-speech as a mean of characterization of Clytemnestra (1978: 13-14).

Clytemnestra's earlier command of information sources was one of the elements that led her to success in the *Agamemnon* and characterized her as an ingenious, powerful woman. In the *Choephori*, her faded control of them serves another purpose, as it foreshadows her ruin, which will come not only because of Orestes' revenge but also, as Orestes himself reminds us, because of fate:

Κλυταιμηστρα	ἡ Μοῖρα τούτων, ὦ τέκνον, παραιτία.
Ορεστης	καὶ τόνδε τοίνυν Μοῖρ' ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον.
(*Ch.* 910-11)	

[Klytaemnestra Fate, my child, must share the blame for this. // Orestes And fate now brings this destiny to pass.]

By having Cassandra appear at the end of the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus had already casted a shadow on the optimistic idea that the ability of gathering or seizing the right information can suffice to avoid ruin. That is why the triumph of Clytemnestra's intelligence does not last long, and the *Choephori* realizes that suggestion. It is only by comparing the two plays with regard to the use and interpretation of information sources, then, that we may recognize how the ability to gather and seize information does not guarantee the control of the events, nor of fate.

Conclusion

Starting from the initial beacon scene and throughout the whole play, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* presents a large-scale scrutiny of information sources and their degree of reliability. The *Choephori* carries on this perusal by deepening the analysis of men's attitude towards information sources, getting to the conclusion that it is impossible for human beings, even for those who master information, to change or direct the course of their destiny.

Aeschylus' staging of the potential and limits of possessing information shows that mortals are powerless towards the unfathomable plans of destiny. Cassandra's last words in the *Agamemnon* precisely bear on the fragility of human fate: "if misfortune strikes, the dash of a wet sponge blots out the drawing" (1328-9).[67] Mortals can be shrewd or obtuse, accurate or inaccurate, they can achieve ephemeral success thanks to their skills, but they will eventually succumb to the superior and arbitrary will of the gods.[68]

[67] εἰ δὲ δυστυχῇ, / βολαῖς ὑγρώσσων σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφήν.

[68] On the arbitrary nature of divine punishment, which indeed is a central theme in Greek tragedy, see Fornaro 2009.

They share a tiny part in determining the consequences of their own actions, and may exercise little control on future events. In his attempt to portray the tragic nature of human condition, Aeschylus made use of many narrative devices. The staging of the debate about information sources in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephori* can be considered one of them, and a very effective one.

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Maria Gerolemou and Magdalena Zira*

The Architecture of Memory: The Case of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*

Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the function of memory in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* from the perspective of its original conception and also with regard to a contemporary staging. The first part of the paper draws on memory in connection to the prehistory of the Trojan War. Retelling the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Euripides discusses memory as a non stable entity, which is formed by the specific social frameworks in which it operates. At the same time, the dynamics of memory are explored in the play through the examination of medial processes, as the written and oral word, through which memories come into the public arena, thus becoming collective ones. The aim of this first part, therefore, is to provide a bridge between the social dynamics of memory and the impact of medial technologies in shaping information about the past. Euripides' dynamic understanding of memory, where individual and groups constantly reconfigure their relationship with their past, brings us to the second part of the paper. The story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia has a strong reception history, influenced by narratives of Christian martyrdom and contemporary nationalism. A new reading of the play for a contemporary revival will be discussed in order to re-examine this aspect of its reception, by foregrounding the themes of memory and historical amnesia.

Keywords: Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, memory, mnemotechnics, gender, contemporary stage, fanaticism

Prologue

This paper aims at exploring the interaction between individuals and groups in relation to the faculty of memory in Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Accordingly, we will raise questions based on the premise that memories emerge within social frameworks (Halbwachs 1950). Firstly, under what circumstances do characters incorporate or fail to incorporate information on past events into their belief systems? Are they influenced by past events? Do they recall these events through memory? In other words,

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how, why, and what do individuals, communities, and societies remember? Drawing on the history of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which had an apparent impact on Greek culture, in his play Euripides pointed out that memories do not stand still, but act socially; past events are welcomed and criticized, as well as carried across generations and connected with other memories. A further question concerns the medial processes, in this case of oral and written word, through which past events are diffused, and how they affect important conceptions of memory. The development of the *ars memoriae* during the fifth century BC played an important role in the development of theories on memory;[1] at the same time, the trauma of the Peloponnesian war produced what may be termed an *ars obliviscendi*, a 'forgetting' prescribed by the *polis* of Athens.[2]

This last comment constitutes the starting point of the second section of this paper, which draws on how theatrical reception is determined by the spectator's memory (Carlson 2001; Favorini 2008). Our interpretative stance views this play as anti-war and anti-nationalist, even though the cultural context of its reception in modern Greece has been shaped by 'patriotic' interpretations of the myth, both in the performative arts and in public education. We will therefore compare and contrast culturally influential instances of the play's reception in the twentieth century with our own reading, focusing on the role of memory within this context. We are currently involved in a contemporary revival of the play, and the observations in the second part of the paper derive from our analysis of the role of the chorus, as we are faced with the challenges of staging it. Fantastico Theatro, a Cyprus-based theatre company, is about to mount a new revival of *IA* as this article goes to print. The performances are scheduled in July and September 2017.[3] Maria Gerolemou was involved as translator and dramaturg, and Magdalena Zira is adapting and directing the piece. The performance will be presented at a location near the UN buffer zone of the divided city of Nicosia.

[1] See Yates 1966, esp. 27-49; Minchin, 2001, 100-31; Bonifazi 2008.

[2] On remembering and forgetting, see, among others, Loraux (2002) who discusses the Athenian amnesty of 403 BC, granted after the victory of the democrats against the oligarchs; its aim was to prevent vengeful action provoked by the memory of past wrongdoing.

[3] Translation/dramaturgy: Maria Gerolemou, Chrysanthi Demetriou, Maria Pavlou. Adaption/direction: Magdalena Zira. Set and costume design by Elena Katsouri. Music by Antonis Antoniou. Movement by Photis Nikolaou. The first performance is scheduled on 23 July 2017 in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Social Dynamics of Memory

The space of the theatre functions as a mechanism that recycles oral past stories.[4] In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, these stories, especially the ones concerning the motives of the Greeks for sailing to Troy and take revenge on the Trojans, are interpreted by various individuals and groups on the basis of their experience. Hence, in the play memory can be seen as:

a. personal and selective[5] (characters often choose from their memory-repertoire what is useful, and adjust it to their needs);
b. collective (collective memory can be defined as socially constructed and based on the common values and sentiments of a certain group).[6]

Both types of memory seem to be organized on the basis of two mnemonic systems:

1) oral speech, i.e. rumor, which has an uncertain provenance;
2) written word, which produces memories that leave material traces.[7]

By discussing the concept of memory, both individual and collective and in both written and oral form, the play does not obey a linear, teleological conception of time, but oscillates between the past and the future (Luschnig 1982: 104). In doing so, it detaches memory from past discourses. For instance, in order to put the future into perspective, in *Iphigenia in Aulis* Clytemnestra discusses the past, revealing Agamemnon's terrible crimes – he killed her first husband and child – in order to justify her upcoming decision to take revenge on him (Shrimpton 1997: 49); although the play does not clearly refer to her plan to slain her husband upon his return from Troy, the audience will recall her murderous scheme from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.[8] Having a strong memory constitutes one of Clytemnestra's defining features both in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the *Agamemnon*. In the latter play, her incapacity to forget her daughter's sacrifice places her in the category of those who are always 'remindful of their misery' (μνησιπήμων, 180). This basically becomes her very motive to plot against and eventually

[4] Segal (1986: 77) defines tragedy as an oral performance controlled by a written text (see also 96). On poetry as monument, see Eur. *Alc.* 962-71, *Hipp.* 1428-30, *Ion* 1143-65, *HF* 673-5, *Supp.* 429-73; Segal 1997: 318-22.

[5] On the selectivity of memory in the play, see Luschnig 1982.

[6] On social memory in antiquity, see Price 2012.

[7] On inscribed (written sources) and incorporate (oral sources) memory, see Rowlands 1993; van Dyke and Alcock 2003.

[8] The future of infant Orestes as an avenger is also implied in the play (cf. e.g. l. 1450). References to the sacrifice of Iphigenia occur in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (especially *Ag.* 218-47), in Sophocles' *Electra* (563-76), and in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (23-7). Generally, on Euripides' interaction with the accepted version of the myth in his plots, see Zeitlin 1980; Sorum 1992; Foley 1985.

murder her spouse (*Ag.* 154-5, 180, 433-6); but on Clytemnestra and how she manages her memories, we will return later in the paper.

*

Memories are filtered through each character's or group's personal ambitions and plans for the future, cognitive abilities (healthy cognitive function), gender, and age. Under these factors, both individual and collective memory prove to be a non-stable, inefficient entity in the play, as it does not help the characters to effectively communicate with each other. For example, even though one may think that he or she is retelling a widely known incident, this impression often proves to be misleading, as he or she can never be certain of how and how precisely the others remember the same episode. The different reasons given in the play for the outbreak of the Trojan war may prove a fit example of this dynamics. According to Agamemnon, the war originated from a pact between Helen's father, Tyndareus, and her suitors: Tyndareus deceitfully made Helen's suitors swear an oath that they would protect the chosen husband from any wrong in regard to his marriage. When Paris came to Sparta, Helen fell in love with him, and willingly decided to follow him to Troy (*IA*, 75-7);[9] Menelaus, mad for revenge, invoked the oath of Tyndareus by asking his wife's old suitors to help him regain her (77-83). Therefore Agamemnon, unwilling to accept the fact that Greek forces are ready to sail to Troy for Helen's sake, remembers how manipulative Tyndareus had been, and argues that he is taking part in the war only in support of his brother (84-6). On the contrary, the women of the chorus emphasize that Helen had a passive role, and claim that it was Aphrodite who made Paris seduce her (183-4); this version is in fact more in keeping with the official nationalistic discourse, in which the barbarians must be punished for raping and abducting Greek women (1264-75, 1376-82).

On his part, Menelaus' minimizes the import of Tyndareus' *dolos*, and offers other reasons for the war. First, he blames the Greek generals' political ambition, and later calls into cause the threat posed to Hellas by the barbarian Trojans (334-75). Agamemnon, however, in confronting his brother, refers to his unreasonable and excessive love for his wife as a further cause of the expedition. He claims that the Greeks had to sail to Troy because Menelaus could not protect his marriage (380-4). Agamemnon accuses Menelaus of being mad for wanting Helen back (389, 394, 407; cf. also 411), at which Menelaus responds by claiming that the true reason behind Agamemnon's change of heart – he had at first refused to sacrifice his daughter but now he is willing to carry on with it – lies in his desire to become the leader of the Greek expedition

[9] All references are taken from Diggle 1994. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Greek are ours.

to Ilium and not in his piety to obey Calchas' oracle,[10] who informed him that in order to appease Artemis, who was sending unfavourable winds, and allow his ships to set sail against Troy, he must sacrifice his eldest daughter.

In addition to personal experiences and ambitions, a particularly important element in recalling and processing an event is the possession of a healthy mind (φρήν), that allows a correct storage and retrieval of the information one comes across.[11] According to the *Dialexeis* (fr. 9.1-2), a rhetorical text which refers, among other things, to mnemotechnics,[12] memory is the product of a good mind:

> μέγιστον δὲ καὶ κάλλιστον ἐξεύρημα εὕρηται μνάμα καὶ ἐς πάντα χρήσιμον, ἐς τὰν σοφίαν τε καὶ ἐς τὸν βίον. ἐὰν προσέχῃς τὸν νοῦν, διὰ τούτων παρελθοῦσα ἁ γνώμα μᾶλλον αἰσθησεῖται
>
> [the greatest and fairest discovery has been found to be memory; it is useful for everything, for wisdom as well as for the conduct of life. This is the first step: if you focus your attention, your mind, making progress by this means, will perceive more. Trans. by Kent Sprague 2001: 292]

[10] According to Menelaus, Agamemnon's true nature and intentions are eventually revealed when his path to leadership is obstructed, beyond his control, by the unfavourable winds that prevent the expedition. The unexpected incident presents a steep challenge for Agamemnon's political conduct, which in the past had been pragmatic and premeditated. For example, when he had pursued leadership, he had initially pretended to be humble and approachable, in order to win the people's love and praise; once he had achieved his goal, he became distant and standoffish (337-42). But, as the play begins, in the midst of a standstill due to the wind, his firmness of purpose, i.e. to lead the expedition to Troy, appears to have been lost. Although he had initially consented to his daughter's sacrifice, he now changes his mind, apparently having considered the moral consequences of this action. Later in the tragedy, Agamemnon has again second thoughts about the sacrifice, this time because he fears Odysseus and Calchas (520, 522, 527, 528-37) will inform the Greek army of the seer's pronouncement. This would turn the army against his family. Thus, in order to justify further the decision to sacrifice his daughter, he adopts a rhetoric strategy that is in agreement with his brother's former patriotic discourse. Once again, without revealing his true motives, he rejects his wife's and daughter's pleas to stop the sacrifice by claiming that, although he loves Iphigenia, Hellas is now his ruler and Hellas must remain free, while the crimes of impudent foreigners who abducted the Greek wives must be punished (1269-75).

[11] Cf. further on the good quality of φρένες as prerequisite of memory, e.g. Od. 24.194-5, "how sane was the flawless Penelope, the daughter of Icarius, and how well she remembered Odysseus" (ὡς ἀγαθαὶ φρένες ἦσαν ἀμύμονι Πηνελοπείῃ κούρῃ Ἰκαρίου· ὡς εὖ μέμνητ' Ὀδυσῆος); see Bakker 2008: 73. Cf. also Aristoph. *Eccl.* 1162, where the chorus asks the audience not to be like courtesans, who can never remember anyone but their last lover.

[12] Cf. generally on mnemotechnics Yeats 1966, 1-49; Blum 1969: 49-50 on the *Dialexeis*.

In *IA*, Agamemnon describes Menelaus' desire to win back an unfaithful woman (386, 389, cf. also 401, 407), Tyndareus' oath (391), and the country's eagerness to wage war because of the same woman (411) as madness.[13] As far as Agamemnon is concerned, passion, both in terms of eros and bellicose desire, forces Menelaus, the suitors, and the people of Greece to remember only one aspect of the background of the Trojan war, namely the abduction of Helen by the barbarians. In fact, their willingness to go to war corresponds to pointless fanaticism which does not permit any development or changes, be they political or religious. According to Agamemnon, the passionate and blind love of Menelaus for his wife, which prevents him from forgetting her despite her infidelity, is the main cause of the expedition against Troy – which the king of Argos is nevertheless willing to pursue (378-411). While madness can, at times, force the persistence of memory, it can also erase memory completely. Let us consider the example of the mad Agaue, who is overwhelmed by *mania* and loses her consciousness as well as memory (*Ba.* 1263-95; see also *HF* 1111-45, 1410-11 and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 878). She manages to come back to her senses and remember what happened on the Cithaeron by following her father Cadmus' instructions. First, Cadmus makes her aware of the natural environment by asking her to look at the sky (*Ba.* 1264-6); then he forces her to remember her marital and maternal role (1273-6), until she finally recognizes what she thought to be a the head of a lion, which she believes she has killed in her frenzy, as her son's (1279-4).[14]

Importantly, the perception of memory depends on gender too, as women in the *IA* (the chorus, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia) are generally prone to evoking emotional memories (e.g. Jocasta in Soph. *OT* 1246, Creusa in Eur. *Ion*, 250).[15] This becomes relevant with regard to the intensity of the emotions which are caused by an event and affect the way in which that same event is mentally recorded. That is, if an event sparks strong emotions, it will also have measurable effects on memory. For instance, Clytemnestra points to Helen as the cause of her misfortune (1168-70) and, like Menelaus, implies that the real reason behind the Greek expedition to Troy is Agamemnon's wish to become a general (1146-208). Her argument is supported by her recollection of Agamemnon's past crimes: he had killed her first husband, then forced her into marriage, and finally tore her infant child (from her first marriage) out of her arms and killed it (1148-52). Nevertheless – she

[13] Later on, in 1259-68, Agamemnon will refer again to the impassionate crazy wits of the army, arguing that if he does not proceed with the sacrifice of his daughter the army will destroy him and his family (see esp. 1264-6).

[14] On Agaue's recollection of her duties, see Favorini 2008: 16-7. See also Segal 1997: 97, 210. On failing to recognize relatives and friends when one is seized by ἀθυμία, see Thuc. 2.49.8.

[15] Cf. Canli, Desmond, Zhao, Gabrieli, 2002; Nora 1989.

recalls –, despite Agamemnon's violence and duress towards her, she had made peace with him, and worked for the prosperity of his *oikos* as an exemplary wife would do (1157-65, 1202-3). However, the memory of his past crimes makes her generally suspicious towards the activities of her husband; therefore, she warns him that he should not proceed with the sacrifice of their daughter without proposing an alternative plan to the army, and she indirectly threatens him that he should fear for his life, if Iphigenia would suffer any harm (1180-4; cf. 1453-55; see also Synodinou 1985). Similarly, when Iphigenia begs for her life, she resorts to the evocation of past memories in order to persuade her father not to kill her; these memories include scenes where father and daughter are hugging and talking to each other, as well as making mutual promises of a happy future (1220-7). Thus, she wishes to inspire sympathy and affection, and urges him to look at her (βλέψον, 1238) and kiss her, i.e. to recognize her as his child, as part of his φίλοι, his family. Seemingly, Iphigenia's gender and young age are responsible for her narrow repertoire of memories, which includes family memories only. Unable to understand the importance of the expedition, she had previously wished that her father could stay with her and that Menelaus' weapons were destroyed (658); she does not even know where Troy is or where the Phrygians dwell, and naively asks her father (662). Later in the play, when she is informed of the decision of her father to sacrifice her for the benefit of Greece, since she does not know nor possess information that she could use as an argument against her father's decision, she vaguely refers to Helen and Paris. She names them as the culprits of her misery (1279-335) and narrates the story of the judgment of Paris, probably as she remembers it from the tradition. When she eventually expresses her wish to die gloriously by referring to the price that must be paid for the abduction of Helen, in order for the barbarians to stop ravishing the Greek women (1379-83, 1387-90; cf. 1265-6), she in fact merely repeats what her father and Menelaus had said earlier in the play (370-2, 1255-75; see also Rabinowitz 1993: 45-54). The fight against the barbarians, then, becomes the main reason and motive of the war, while Helen's adultery starts fading in the memory of the Greeks.

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Lack of experience and a limited repertoire of memories, as in the case of Iphigenia, could, however, be surpassed with cultivation and training. For instance, Agamemnon's letter to his wife, in which he tells her that he has changed his mind about the sacrifice and which he keeps rewriting, is carried by an old servant, a person of a lower intellectual capacity and with few chances of learning something beyond everyday knowledge either from eye-witnessing or reading. As a result, in order to recall memories of events to which he was not exposed, that is, to reconstruct past information which is not part of his

experience, the servant would need to resort to *verbatim* memorization (Thomas 1992: 153-4). More precisely, according to Rosenmeyer, "unlike Pylades [sc. in *Iphigenia in Tauris*], who can imagine, in the event of a shipwreck, delivering his message without the original script, the old man is very worried about getting the message right word-for-word (*IA* 115-16) and keeping the letter object with him as proof of authenticity" (2013: 55-6). Unskilled illiterates, who cannot remember clearly and accurately the written text they carry in case it gets lost and are unable improve their memory through training, are parodied by Aristophanes in *Nubes.* At ll. 478-80, Socrates asks Strepsiades to enlighten him about the ways of his intellect, for instance, if he has a good memory or if he has a natural gift for speaking, in order to see if parts of his mind need to be substituted or upgraded; being a prerequisite of wisdom (σοφία), memory (τὸ μνημονικόν) is the first that needs to be mended (414).

While memory based on extended external sources, such as writing, is a privilege of the few, conventional memories based on personal experience and rumour belong to the public; they are shared and conveyed by, the many (οἱ πολλοί), whose identity in the *IA* remains unknown (λέγουσιν, 662; cf. 430, 815). On the one hand, Agamemnon remembers Helen's and Menelaus' marriage, and her suitors' oath to help Menelaus if someone entered her *oikos* and abducted her (49-114) as facts he personally witnessed. On the other, the rest of the story – of how Paris got to Sparta, of how Helen fell in love with him, deserted her husband and child and sailed with him to Troy – is given as a rumour by the Argives (72). Similarly, the chorus of the Chalcidean wives who approach the Greek camp have never seen the the famous heroes of the Greek army, and may just rely on what they have heard from their husbands (176-7). Their recollections are therefore constructed by miscellaneous oral information, as commonly happens with uneducated women (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 276-7, 483-4). More precisely, informed by their husbands about Helen's fate, the women of the chorus left their homeland Chalcis in order to see the Greek heroes (θέλουσα ἰδέσθαι, "in eagerness to see", 189-91), who are waiting at Aulis with their ships ready to sail to Troy in order to bring back Menelaus' wife (171-3). Surprisingly enough, Euripides 'allows' the women of the chorus to leave their homes and travel without having a justified reason to do so, let us say for religious matters, and without being condemned for such an audacious action as is usually the case in Greek tragedy (Foley 1981; Gerolemou 2011: esp. 26-74).[16] No rule in Greek traditional society would have allowed their unaccompanied presence in a military camp. Indeed, Euripides could have presented the women from Chalchis travelling to the Artemision in order to perform rituals, but, instead, their explanation for being in Aulis is primarily that they wish to see

[16] Cf. e.g. Macaria in Eur. *Her.* 474-83, where the maiden needs to explain her presence outside the *oikos.*

the assembled young warriors and the extraordinary sight of the ships that will take them to Troy (171). From the very beginning, the women argue that they have come to Aulis to see with their own eyes the Greek heroes and thus enrich their existing knowledge regarding how they look like; this is emphasized through sight-related language (192, 209, 254, 299). But what they see and describe is in fact an idealized picture of the Greek heroes, merged with their own past knowledge, based on hearsay only. For instance, in their description of the army as a peacefully crowd, the desperation and rage for waiting in Aulis, which is extensively described in the play (801-18, 1264-7), is nowhere to be found. In contrast, their description alludes to a heroic-athletic painted scene, which common people were regularly exposed to, since such scenes were depicted on vases and on monuments in all the Greek cities (Zeitlin 1994: 162-64; Zeitlin 1995). According to the chorus, the two Ajaxes are sitting together, Protesilaus and Palamedes are playing dice, Diomedes is throwing the disc, while hansdome Odysseus sits next to Meriones. They see Achilles running in his armour, trying to outpace a chariot driven by Eumelus. Furthermore, they are particularly struck by the vision of the wondrous Greek fleet (231-95). The sight they are describing appears to be tremendously influenced from what they already knew and, as a consequence, their descriptions have neither a critical function, nor do they count as supplementary material for the chorus to contribute to the construction of a memory of the Greek army and the corresponding events in Aulis. Their impression of the Greek army and fleet can be more easily perceived as an attestation of an already established memory regarding the Achaean heroes (Scodel 1997: 87-91, esp. 88ff.). At the end of the *parodos*, the chorus tell of the army they saw at Aulis and also recall what they have heard about it at home, reassuring everyone that whoever tries to attack them will be defeated (296-302). The manner in which they express their vision is indicative of the quality of knowledge on which it is actually based, that is, on rumour. The chorus, consisting of illiterate wives who cannot rely on written data or review the tradition referring to their documented, eye-witness experience and knowledge, arrange their narrative in the form of a list, a well-known customary method of oral poetry, which – as Minchin has justly foregrounded (2001: 79, 81, 88) – aims at circulating information that people have heard before and know well.

Contrariwise, memory mediated through the written word is not legitimized in the play as the most reliable source. The oral character of the information provided by the anonymous οἱ πολλοί ("the many"), notably through rumour, had less power and validity than memory built on personal experience or attested by the assumed reliability of a written tablet (cf. Thuc. 7.8; Price 2012: 18). This, however, does not occur in the case of eye-witness testimonies, as we have seen with the aforementioned example of the chorus; their eye-witness account of the Achaean heroes does

not have the power to overcome, correct or supplement the existing knowledge of past events which comes from rumour. Similarly, the written word, which needs to be memorized in order to be spread, does not always operate successfully with regard to the enrichment of memory.[17] In the play, the writing-tablet (δέλτος) and, in general terms, the written word itself, represents a medium for memory that is meant to improve physical memory (35, 98, 109, 112, 116, 155, 307, 322, 891, 894). However, both physical and artificial memory are reflective of the fact that in the play "choices are frequently not irrevocable; characters do have second thoughts" (Sorum 1992: 528). Hence, both written and oral word, as medial processes through which memories come into the public arena and become collective, are influenced by alterations and manipulations which depend on the recipients' mood, that is, their emotional state at the time of retrieving past information (cf. Lewis and Critchley 2003). This is proven by the example of Agamemnon writing his letter over and over again, since he constantly changes his mind with regard to his daughter's sacrifice; he is divided between his duty as a leader and as a father (1255-75, 396-8, 454-68).

In this respect, memory preserved in writing could contain, just like oral memory, an abundance of lies and uncertainties. At ll. 795-800, the chorus accuse the words of the poets, carried through the written tablets, of being idle and devoid of any true meaning. This non-acceptance of the written word as the best medium for safeguarding memory is set against Palamedes' boasting of having invented the alphabet as a remedy for forgetfulness, and as a tool to prevent the circulation of untruthful stories (Eur. *Palam.* fr. 578 Kannicht; on the reliability of writing see also Aristoph. *Vesp.* 538). Finally, the materiality of memory inscribed in tablets constitutes a further problem, mainly due to the fact that the written word can be both violated and distorted. Menelaus, for instance, enters the scene and intercepts Agamemnon's second letter to Clytemnestra that the old man carries on behalf of his master (307). Therefore, changes, modifications, or accidents which are likely to occur in oral transmission, are treated as similar to those which could occur to written documents. "Memorative truth"[18] is measured not by the accuracy of the story conveyed through the writing process, but by the way past information is being used in the present. A diachronic quality is attributed to events not because of the resistance of the material which preserves them, but because of their ability to adapt to the present reality of the characters and convey a feeling of communality across space and time.

[17] On *fama* ('rumour') as the "repository of cultural memory", see Hardie 2012: 3, 8.

[18] This definition comes from Shrimpton 1997: 52.

A Contemporary Revival

Euripides' re-telling of the Iphigenia myth is the basis of the above mentioned contemporary revival by Fantastico Theatro, which will be discussed in this section, with emphasis on its cultural context in particular. This revival takes into account the Greek-speaking audience's expectations, influenced by its contemporary reception and cultural implications, both in the performing arts and in education, and hopes to challenge those expectations. The starting point of this staging of the *IA* is the fact that – as we have noted above – the dramatization conflict on whether the sacrifice should take place is an opportunity to expose the real motivations behind the war and, therefore, reveal its moral invalidity. Focusing on the behaviour of the chorus, in the following paragraphs we will present the main ideological framework of this contemporary revival, foregrounding the theme of the construction of collective memory in service of a prevailing ideology. In the process, we will refer to aspects of the play's contemporary reception in Greek-speaking productions, which form an important part of the context of the Fantastico Theatro productions.

A renewed interest in this play, especially on the part of practitioners who want to stress its aspects of potential criticism of current politics and its anti-war message is in keeping with recent scholarship interpreting the play as an indictment of war and chauvinism.[19] In this hermeneutic context, which also takes into account the historical moment when the *IA* was originally produced,[20] Iphigenia's famous volte-face at lines 1368-401 is seen as highly ironic and chauvinist. In her words, the barbarians are considered as mere slaves, while the Greeks are civilized freemen; besides, the value of a woman's life is nothing compared to a man's, and Troy, of which she knew nothing before coming to Aulis (662), must be conquered at all costs. Furthermore, as Christina Sorum notes, "in the dramatic fiction nothing substantiates her argument – and nothing in the mythological future accords with her intentions" (1992: 54). On her part, Edith Hall has identified the argument for the validity of the war and Iphigenia's sacrifice as an example of spin-doctoring (2005: 21-2), a word that has entered contemporary politics

[19] For the play's performance history, see Hall 2005. On disagreements among scholars on the its meaning and message, see Sorum 1992 and Markantonatos 2012.

[20] On the anti-war message and the historical context, see Blume (2012), who argues that this drama foreshadows the author's accusation against the inept Athenian political leadership in view of the catastrophic developments in the Peloponnesian war. Sorum (1992: 541) defines Iphigenia's reiteration of the patriotic narrative that justifies the sacrifice as a "fantasy". Siegel (1980: 311) sees in the IA a deconstruction of the idea of heroism, and reads Iphigenia's eventual volte-face as the product of a youthful mind crushed by an overwhelming pressure. Blume (2012: 183) views her speech as "chauvinistic".

in recent years only, around the time of the second invasion of Iraq. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a 'spin-doctor' is "a person (such as a political aide) whose job involves trying to control the way something (such as an important event) is described to the public in order to influence what people think about it".[21] In her patriotic speech, Iphigenia, unbeknownst to herself, puts the ultimate spin on the truth. Spin-doctoring shapes popular opinion through distortion of the truth, essentially through the manipulation of memory. Historical memory is erased and new collective memory is constructed, in keeping with the established ideology. As our analysis has shown, a favourite Euripidean theme, that is, the challenge to canonized tradition, is closely interwoven in this play with the theme of personal and collective memory. As we will discuss, going into rehearsals for our modern Greek language revival of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, we have detected a parallelism between our own rejection of the twentieth-century didactic, nationalistic interpretation of the play in modern Greece and Cyprus, and Euripides' reaction against the mainstream idea that a girl's sacrifice and the ensuing war campaign are to be praised as examples of bravery and patriotism.

In contemporary Greece and Cyprus, connotations of patriotic sacrifice have had a lasting impact on the reception of the Iphigenia myth by the audience. The play is part of the Greek and Cypriot high school *curricula*,[22] presumably for its morally edifying content, as this excerpt from a synopsis of the play, taken from a high-school e-book of History of Ancient Greek Literature published by the Greek Ministry of Education may show:

> Iphigenia, who realizes that the Greek campaign is not a personal matter but an issue of the common good, gives a heroic solution: she goes willingly and fearlessly to her death for the salvation of Greece.[23]

This passage emphasizes Iphigenia's heroism for the common good and this school-book interpretation, which has probably been highly influential in the play's modern reception of the majority of Greek and Cypriot audience members, may be seen as a contemporary counterpart to Euripides' δέλτος (a word which alludes to an instrument of civic ideology and propaganda that is repeatedly brought under scrutiny in the play). In the same vein, culturally influential revivals of the play, such as the National Theatre of Greece's 1957 production directed by Costis Michaelides with Anna Synod-

[21] See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spin%20doctor (last access 25 June 2017). Also, according to the Oxford English Dictionary's definition, 'spin doctor', *n. Polit. colloq.* (orig. *U.S.*) is a political press agent or publicist employed to promote a favourable interpretation of events to journalists.

[22] For the play in high school *curricula*, see IEP Book Collection.

[23] See Στέφος.

inou in the title role, which also toured abroad,[24] had connotations of patriotic duty (Fig. 1). This happened at a time when conservative patriotism dominated the political sphere in modern Greece, and Greek tragedy revivals were exploited as one of the establishment's main instruments of propaganda.[25]

Fig. 1 Anna Synodinou as Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 15 June 1957. Photo: Harissiadis, D.A. National Theatre of Greece Archive.[26]

In modern Greece, this performance became part of the national collective memory, which was further cultivated thanks to the circulation of images taken from it, such as this famous photograph of Anna Synodinou (see Fig. 1 above), frequently reproduced and by now an iconic element in the mosaic of Greek contemporary reception of the Iphigenia myth.[27] In this picture, the outstretched arms allude to Jesus on the cross, the light shining behind her head almost forms a halo, and her expression is one of bravery

[24] The production was presented at the 1958 international theatre festival Théâtre des Nations at the Sarah-Bernhardt Theatre (now Théâtre de la Ville) in Paris.

[25] For the connection between modern Greek conservative nationalism and the revivals of Greek drama in the twentieth century, see van Steen 2000; Ioannidou 2010.

[26] Copyright: National Theatre of Greece.

[27] The reviews of the time, both in Greece and abroad, focused on Synodinou's performance and on Iphigenia's heroism, bravery and patriotism. See, for example, Perseus 1958; Lemarchand 1958. Synodinou is widely considered one of the great twentieth-century Greek tragic actresses; she was the leading lady in the company of the National Theatre of Greece from the mid-Fifties to the mid-Sixties, and again from 1974 until at least the mid-Nineties. Roles such as Iphigenia (1957) and Antigone (1959) launched her illustrious career, and she later played all major tragic heroines, mostly at Epidaurus.

and nobility, even ecstasy, as she offers her body to Greece (*IA* 1397). She is not a victim brutalized by an oppressive regime, but a saint, a symbol of patriotic duty, who appears to be endowed with almost super-human powers that will grant victory to her fatherland.

Although it broke with contemporary patriotic and militaristic tradition, since it contained a clear anti-war message, Michael Cacoyannis' well-known 1977 film was nonetheless marketed in a way consistent with the 'patriotic' interpretation of the Iphigenia myth.[28] As the caption on the video cassette cover art anticipates with reference to Agamemnon, "To save the lives of thousands, he must sacrifice the most precious of all". Aesthetic choices, such as the costuming, e.g. the wreath on Iphigenia's head, which evoked Christ's crown of thorns and more broadly alluded to Christian martyrdom, influenced the audience's reception and cast Iphigenia's as a myth of fervently unselfish sacrifice.

The aim of the new revival by Fantastico Theatro, currently in rehearsal in Nicosia, is to challenge the patriotic discourse that dominated the play's reception for decades, as exemplified by the two influential versions we briefly mentioned above. In this, we have been inspired by Euripides' own response to the established myth. In the *IA*, the plyawright refined and complicated the moral dimension of the story of Iphigenia, and consequently, of the Trojan campaign, by revealing the leaders' self-serving motivations. Relying on this original richness, we hope that our revival will match Avra Sidiropoulou's definition of a successful contemporary reading, that is, one that "heightens the correspondence between the tensions and imperatives of the Greek dramatists and the anxieties and needs of the modern spectator" (2014: 15). The identity and agency of the chorus is of key-importance in this reading. Accordingly, we will now turn to the analysis of their motives and thought processes, with special regard to their relationship to the assembled army and its leaders. This has both eased and inspired our directorial choices that have concentrated on the chorus' behaviour as part of a larger political crisis under way in *IA*. In this way, the chorus' on-stage action and presence becomes dramaturgically significant.

In terms of their dramatic identity, as well as of their involvement in the plot and relationship to the place and the characters, the young women of the chorus are, as discussed above, an enigma. At first glance, the dramatized events do not seem to affect them in any way; they do not just 'survive' the events, as is the case with many choruses, but rather it seems that they were not invested in the outcome of the tragedy, since their lives will not be affected by the sacrifice, nor the campaign against Troy. They have

[28] On Cacoyannis' film, see McDonald 1991; Gamel 2015. On its historical and political context, see especially Michelakis 2013: 143-4 and Bakogianni 2013.

neither blood ties, nor political affiliations with the protagonists, nor are they socially dependent on them. Agamemnon addresses the chorus as "foreign women" (ξέναι, 542) and, earlier on in the play, their being foreigners, at least to the Argive royal family, is pointed at as the reason for their emotional distance from what is happening. Indeed, even though they know about Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter, they do not reveal his plans to Clytemnestra, nor to Iphigenia (604-6). It would then seem appropriate that they appear as increasingly marginalized; after their third *stasimon* (1036-97), and until the short choral passage at the end (1510-31), choral songs disappear, and choral interventions are reduced to a minimum.[29] Their opinions are often lukewarm and even inconsistent: for example, although they do not agree with the sacrifice, as the events reach their *climax* and Iphigenia is about to be led away, they sing a celebratory paean. Are we then to view them as an a-political chorus, similar to the chorus of the *Phoenissae* or *Ion*, who visit Delphi for reasons of religious *theoria*?

It has been noted that the chorus does not necessarily follow the rules of psychological realism and naturalistic engagement with the action, and thus choral behaviour may seem inconsistent from one ode to the following one, a phenomenon Simon Goldhill defined as "the shifting voice" (2007: 78). Nonetheless, within a story-line such as the one of the *IA*, which focuses sharply on human relationships, human decisions, and human motivation, the trajectory of the choral collective in live performance is in fact most likely to be interpreted by the audience through the prism of human psychology. This is why, in our current revival, we should attempt to find a logical through-line in their behaviour which may provide some wider dramaturgical significance.[30]

In the first *stasimon* (543-89), sung after a vicious fight between Menelaus and Agamemnon that includes mutual accusations of bad leadership (350-76) and erotic weakness (382), the women reflect on the destructive power of lust and on the necessity of virtue, modesty and wisdom, in both men and women (see especially 558-72). This is not surprising, given

[29] The common belief that this marginalization is merely a phase of the general decline of the choral form and function, especially in late Euripidean tragedies, owes a lot to Aristotle's remarks in *Poet.* 1456a25-31. For an argument against this generalization, see Foley 2003 and Weiss (2014: 120), who notes that "[c]horal song takes up 20 percent of the total number of lines of the *IA* (21 percent including recitative) and 24 percent of the *Bacchae*, but averages 13 percent for Euripides' surviving earlier tragedies".

[30] In this respect we agree with Hall (2005: 13-14), who pointed out that, during the performance, the audience, rather than taking into consideration complicated literary or other theories for the analysis of a particular play, are more likely to identify psychologically with actors on stage, through the process of substitution.

the shocking tone of the confrontation between the two leaders, who drag each other through the mud, raising serious doubts about their suitability as military leaders, not only in the eyes of the young Chalkidean wives, but also in the eyes of the audience. The women's initial jubilation in the *parodos* is therefore replaced by a fearful mood in the first *stasimon*. Yet the most striking change in their psychology is perhaps the shift from the sensual quality of the *parodos* to the rejection of *eros* altogether. If in the *parodos* they confess that "my cheeks blushed with girlish modesty at my eagerness to see the wall of shields and the tents of the iron-clad Danaid soldiers and the multitude of horses" (188-90),[31] and that the sight of the fleet fills them with "sweet delight", in the first *stasimon*, they begin by praising self-restraint in love (545) and then they beg Aphrodite, goddess of erotic passion, to stay away from their beds (555). It is in the second *stasimon*, however, that the chorus voice the most memorable and direct challenges to tradition, the established myth, and the *status quo*. Their inner conflict between what they have been taught and what they are witnessing becomes sharper, while their fundamental disagreement, not only with the impending sacrifice but also with the campaign itself, begins to take clearer form. This is effected by the exploration of the themes of how history is told, as well as of the theme of memory itself. At ll. 783-92, the women start realizing that the heroes they had admired and eroticized in the *parodos* are gearing up to commit terrible atrocities at Troy, even against women like themselves. These ten-line passage, in which they visualize the fate of the Trojan women, is much more than a passing comment, and contemporary *mises-en-scène* should take this opportunity to emphasize a remarkable moment in which the chorus transcends time and place and powerfully evokes two passages from Euripides' *Trojan Women* (187-90) and *Hecuba* (923-32). Even though the Chalkidean wives have so far carefully avoided to identify themselves with the fate of the Argive 'foreign women', in this ode they strongly identify with the chorus of the Trojan female prisoners. The three plays share great similarities in language and themes, such as the emphasis on the women's hair (*IA* 790, *Hec.* 923), on being dragged away by soldiers (*IA* 791, *Tro.* 189) and on the question of who (τίς) among the Greek warriors will lead them into slavery (*IA* 790, *Tro.* 189.) Consequently, the impact of the *IA*'s second *stasimon* on the contemporaries must have been significantly enhanced by the memory of the other two plays. Thus, the narrative of a heroic campaign put forth by the protagonists could be easily dismantled by 'bringing back' the memories of earlier dramatizations of the future developments of the same plot, i.e. the Trojan campaign's af-

[31] 'φοινίσσουσα παρῇδ' ἐμὰν αἰσχύνᾳ νεοθαλεῖ, ἀσπίδος ἔρυμα καὶ κλισίας ὁπλοφόρους Δαναῶν θέλουσ' ἵππων τ' ὄχλον ἰδέσθαι.'

termath. By transcending a linear conception of time, the chorus reveal the cracks in the established nationalist narrative: instead of a story of glory and self-sacrifice for the common good, theirs suddenly becomes a story of atrocities committed at war. According to some scholars, this play, by evoking the Trojan War, may have also (painfully) brought to mind the Peloponnesian war, especially since an Athenian defeat was by then a very concrete possibility (Blume 2012: 182). This choral ode concludes with an explicit challenge to traditional collective knowledge that is passed down through the generations in order to support the civic ideology: at ll. 794-800, the chorus wonder whether the myths they have been taught concerning Helen's parentage are true, as they may as well be fables (μῦθοι) "handed down to humans and changed over time" (τάδ᾽ ἐς ἀνθρώπους ἤνεγκαν παρὰ καιρὸν ἄλλως, 799-800). Euripides is here once more again questioning inherited wisdom, by raising cognitive issues. Knowledge, understanding, and the reliability of memory come under scrutiny and, at the same time, the theme of deception resurfaces through the use of the word δέλτος, the same word used in the prologue with regard to Agamemnon's first deceptive letter with which he lured his daughter into Aulis by telling her that Achilles was willing to marry her.

In the third *stasimon*, the deconstruction of mainstream ideology goes a step further by questioning religion itself, as well as man's relationship with divine authority. The ode begins by juxtaposing Peleus' wedding and Iphigenia's horrific fate, thus presenting the human sacrifice as a sort of perverted nuptials.[32] After the chorus has described the terrible event which is about to take place, the very relationship between gods and humans is brought into question (1090-7):[33] the following lines reveal how the young women are extremely pessimistic about finding justice in human law, but at the same time rebellious against the oppression of the gods:

> Ἀνομία δὲ νόμων κρατεῖ,
> καὶ μὴ κοινὸς ἀγὼν βροτοῖς
> μή τις θεῶν φθόνος ἔλθῃ;
> (1095-7)

> [Lawlessness is more powerful than the law. / And among mortals is there no common struggle / Against the malice of the gods?]

This poignant third *stasimon*, which undermines major pillars of ancient Athenian society, such as the justice system and religious faith, is followed by a long absence of choral lyric in the play. This may be considered as the

[32] On the ritual identification between marriage and sacrifice see, for example, Loreaux 1991: 37-8; Foley 1982.

[33] On the undermining of the divine element in the play, see also Blume 2012: 186.

result of a series of disillusionments and losses in terms of the chorus' allegiance and beliefs. Thus, the silencing of the female chorus seems to go hand in hand with the loss or undermining of collective memory of the reasons of the war, and with the collapse of the traditional bonds that connect society, such as faith in divine justice and in loyalty among humans.

It is indeed only 400 lines later that the chorus sing their final song (1510-31), which comes after a long choral silence and right after two lyric passages sung by Iphigenia.[34] These lines, whose authenticity has been contested, may provide further room for the exploration of the chorus' relationship with the female protagonists and the political situation as a whole. While at this point of the tragedy one would typically expect a lament, the chorus, at Iphigenia's bidding, sing a battle paean. As Naomi Weiss has argued, we have here a dynamic return of *choreia* after a long silence, rather than a final marginalization of these women (2014: x). If we agree with scholars who support this passage's authenticity, and especially with Weiss, who suggested that the monody and the choral passage are thematically, emotionally, and musically interconnected, and therefore belonged to the first performance, this chorus voice an unprecedented display of solidarity towards Iphigenia. This passage therefore marks a great change in the chorus' attitude; they initially did not show much sympathy for the female protagonists, while now the focus, interest, and emotional investment of their words have clearly shifted from the assembled army, to Iphigenia's character. Nonetheless, although in our directorial concept we have tried to find a moral and emotional justification for their behaviour and consistency in their motivation, this battle paean, which comes after the illustration of the horrors of the war in the previous odes, could still be problematic. In fact, it is possible that they merely wish to support Iphigenia and inspire her with courage, in order to lift her spirit and to ease her final exit, by vocally celebrating her bravery. They obey her bidding to sing a paean, instead of a lament, in order to give her a celebratory farewell, but this does not mean that they believe in the militaristic tone and patriotic content of her words as happened earlier in the play, when they had welcomed Clytemnestra and Iphigenia (599-607) to Aulis, thus displaying their ability to conceal important facts as well as their true emotions. In fact, in line 1403 their reaction to her final speech reveals how they deem the princess' sacrifice as morally unacceptable: "the goddess's whim is sick" (τὸ τῆς θεοῦ νοσεῖ). Yet, apart from their desire to comply with Iphigenia's wish, another possible interpretation of the paean is that it is the result of fear. After they have realized how violence dominates the play's final scenario,

[34] On the problem of authenticity of the final sequence of the *IA*, see, for example, Weiss 2014 and Kovacs 2003.

in which "lawlessness is more powerful than the law" (ἀνομία δὲ νόμων κρατεῖ, 1095), they pretend to endorse militarism and civic ideology. Fear or disillusionment have silenced their criticism, and their dynamism has been curbed too (cf. Scodel 1997: 89ff.). A third possibility would be Euripides' will to illustrate how historical amnesia may guide the people's actions and beliefs. By having the the chorus behave like this, the playwright may have wished to show us how quickly in the course of the play the people can accept that a criminal act, initially censured as morally dubious, may be eventually read as the ultimate symbol of patriotism. Rather than changing their behaviour, in the *exodos* the chorus resumes the superficiality, frivolity, and lack of memory they had displayed in the *parodos*. In any case, the women's battle paean, which transforms the horror of Iphigenia's slaughter into the traditional, canonized narrative of necessity and bravery must be imbued with irony, which accomplishes and rounds off the the finale of what may be defined as an 'anti-war play':

> ἴδεσθε τὰν Ἰλίου
> καὶ Φρυγῶν ἑλέπτολιν
> στείχουσαν, ἐπὶ κάρα στέφη
> βαλουμέναν χερνίβων τε παγάς,
> βωμόν γε δαίμονος θεᾶς
> ῥανίσιν αἱματορρύτοις
> χρανοῦσαν εὐφυῆ τε σώματος δέρην
> σφαγεῖσαν. εὔδροσοι παγαὶ
> πατρῷαι μένουσι χέρνιβές τέ σε
> στρατός τ' Ἀχαιῶν θέλων
> Ἰλίου πόλιν μολεῖν.
> ἀλλὰ τὰν Διὸς κόραν
> κλῄσωμεν Ἄρτεμιν,
> θεῶν ἄνασσαν, ὡς ἐπ' εὐτυχεῖ πότμῳ.
> ὦ πότνια, πότνια, θύμασιν βροτησίοις
> χαρεῖσα, πέμψον ἐς Φρυγῶν
> γαῖαν Ἑλλάνων στρατὸν
> † καὶ δολόεντα Τροίας ἕδη,
> Ἀγαμέμνονά τε λόγχαις
> Ἑλλάδι κλεινότατον στέφανον
> δὸς ἀμφὶ κάρα ἑὸν †
> κλέος ἀείμνηστον ἀμφιθεῖναι.
> (*IA* 1510-31)

[Behold her as she goes on her way, the destroyer of Ilium and of the Phrygians, her head crowned with garlands and sprinkled with drops of purifying water, she goes to pour her blood on the goddesses' altar and on her own beautiful neck. For you your father will pour streams of lustral water,

for you the army of the Achaeans is waiting eagerly, longing to leave for Troy. But let us praise Artemis, the goddess of Zeus, the queen of the gods, as if this were a happy occasion. Venerable goddess, who delights in sacrifice, send the Greek army to the land of the Trojans, to the treacherous Trojan homes, and grant Agamemnon's spear a wreath of victory and undying glory for Greece.]

In our production we decided to emphasize the idea of coercion at this point in the play. The chorus is forced to recite, instead of this paean, an excerpt of Iphigenia's speech at ll. 1368ff., in the style of a patriotic anthem. They do this in the presence of the army, who gradually surround Iphigenia to take her off to be sacrificed, and their dominant emotion is fear for their own lives.

Epilogue

In his investigation of the construction of memory, Euripides exposed its mechanisms in order to suggest the possibility of a conscious shaping of memory. This led him to challenge canonized tradition, transmitted by the poets in writing, by means of a supposedly everlasting medium, that is the writing tablet (δέλτος). His challenge to the tradition provides us with a fundamental element for the understanding of this play as a whole. Euripides re-told the famous Iphigenia myth appealing to his contemporaries' memory of it, while discussing the limits of *techne* and the authority it exerts on the human mind. What happens when memories are mendaciously manipulated? This is the question the play repeatedly raises and answers by creating an intricate and complex world of uncertainty, duplicity, political corruption, moral ambiguity, and constantly shifting opinions; it is a world in which an act of institutionalized violence quickly goes from being seen as a terrible crime, to being presented to – and accepted by – that same majority who condemned it as a patriotic sacrifice for a noble cause.

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Mandy Lowell Albert*

The *Play about Common Trade* and *Play about Empty Purse*: Cornelis Everaert's Prequels to *Elckerlijc*/*Everyman*?

Abstract

This paper proposes a possible link between *Elckerlijc*, the Dutch-language allegorical play that provided the basis for the well-known English translation *Everyman*, and two plays by Cornelis Everaert, a sixteenth-century playwright from Bruges writing from within the amateur literary society Chambers of Rhetoric (*rederijkerskamers*). The two plays are *The Play about Common Trade* (*Spil van Ghemeene Neerrynghe*), a serious play, and *The Comedy about Empty Purse* (*Esbattement van Aerm in de Buerse*), a lighter comic play. The primary basis for this link is the presence in these two plays of a secondary character named Elckerlijc, the only two known examples of this character name besides the eponymous play that were roughly contemporary with *Elckerlijc*. There are, however, more than surface-level similarities built into the three incarnations of this character, which have their roots in his status as a mercantile character who has forgotten how to live according to God's command. In both *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse*, Elckerlijc is portrayed as a thoughtless, excessively prudent hoarder of wealth whose lack of virtue and charity in specifically commercial behaviour harms less fortunate tradesmen and labourers by driving them out of the workforce; Everaert blames this unvirtuous behaviour to the continuing dire economic situation that faced sixteenth-century Bruges. The paper draws on Deirdre McCloskey's theory of "bourgeois virtues" to show how Everaert uses the Elckerlijc character as a foil to participants in a healthy, functioning, and virtuous marketplace. *Everyman* has been experiencing a resurgence in popularity; directors (and, even more importantly, translators) drawn to that play may also wish to look at *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* as different takes on the character of Elckerlijc, one from a playwright whose work has been too long overlooked.

Keywords: Low Countries, Chambers of Rhetoric, Cornelis Everaert, *Elckerlijc*, economic ethics

The eponymous main character of *Everyman*, one of the most famous and best-regarded English dramas of the later Middle Ages, is by now generally agreed to have his origins in two interlocking places: the earlier Flemish play *Elckerlijc*, of which *Everyman* is a nearly line-for-line translation, and the burgeoning merchant and business classes of northern Europe in the later Middle Ages, of which he is apparently a well-to-do member. The

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Elckerlijc/Everyman story is known to have enjoyed popularity in print through several sixteenth-century translations, including *Everyman* itself, Ischyrius's Latin *Homulus*, and Macropedius's *Hekastus*. What is less well-known is how *Elckerlijc* was received, and to what end, within the theatrical traditions of its home region in the southern Low Countries. We have limited information at our disposal with which to answer the question of the reception of *Elckerlijc* on its own terms, but we may be able to shed some light on the subject in matters of adaptation and appropriation of *Elckerlijc*.

This paper will argue that *Elckerlijc* was a spiritual forbearer, and possibly a direct inspiration, to a pair of plays that emerged from Flanders (specifically, from Bruges) during the tumultuous reign of Charles V which directly link the kind of virtuous behaviour promoted in *Elckerlijc* with robust commercial activity. The two plays, both from around 1529 or 1530, both also feature a prominent morally deficient character named 'Elckerlijc'. Both are from the same author, the Bruges-based cloth dyer and very prolific playwright Cornelis Everaert. Both plays are also products of the economic devastation that wreaked havoc on Bruges throughout the latter half of the fifteenth century, and which was there to stay by the turn of the sixteenth. Elckerlijc has long been acknowledged as an implicitly merchant-class character rather than a truly universal representation; in Roger A. Ladd's words, "Everyman does not actually represent Every Man, as a reader might so naturally assume, but rather Every Merchant" (2007: 58). Furthermore, Elsa Strietman has previously noted the gentle pro-mercantile bent to the original *Elckerlijc*, that his sin is not merely participation but *excessive* participation in material accumulation and pleasures (1996: 107). However, if Cornelis Everaert's two Elckerlijcs are supposed to be other incarnations of the eponymous Elckerlijc, we can add a new dimension to his character as well: Elckerlijc's hoarding and immoderation are sinful not only because they are excessive, but because they are corrupting to others; they keep others from participating in honest and productive commerce, and thus make trade itself unvirtuous. This appropriation of Elckerlijc shows a new development in the understanding of the sort of behaviour that members of a community owe to one another: charitable giving, as Elckerlijc learns to do in the eponymous play, is well and good, but it is also good to help your neighbours to earn their own money, as Elckerlijc fails to do in Everaert's two plays.

Rather than on Elckerlijc's redemption at his death, these two plays focus instead on Elckerlijc's sin-riddled life, and his pursuit of his own pleasures and desires at the expense of his neighbours. The first, *The Play about Common Trade* (*Spil van Ghemeene Neerrhynge*, henceforth *Common Trade*), is a serious allegorical play, the kind we might think of as a rough analogue to the English morality play, though this is not an entirely accurate

comparison.[1] It is a deeply bitter play, caustic in its depictions of the crippling poverty present in Bruges when it was written. The second, *A Comedy about Empty Purse* (*Esbatement van Aerm in de Buerse*, henceforth *Empty Purse*) is a lighter, shorter comic play. Both focus on relationships between participants in a specialized trade economy who have fallen on difficult times. Both also use their Elckerlijc characters for similar dramatic functions: Elckerlijc, who is not the protagonist but a side character, engages in sinful behaviour, which he refuses to change by the end of the play, guaranteeing that the protagonists' poverty and suffering will continue for the foreseeable future. Both condemn him for such behaviour, though *Common Trade* does so in far more explicit terms, in a way that echoes the condemnations of Elckerlijc's behaviour in the eponymous play. And finally, both contain a significant twist from the original *Elckerlijc* in that they depict Elckerlijc's refusal to engage in *commerce*, rather than *charity*, with poor workers as a fundamental aspect of his sin.

The core story of *Everyman* and *Elckerlijc* is simple and well-known: at the behest of God, who laments the sorry state of a humanity that has learned to put worldly pleasures before their love of him, Death confronts a man, Everyman, informing him that he will soon be asked to present God with the account book of his life – which, according to death, contains "many badde dedes and good but a fewe" (*Ev.* l. 108). Burdened with sins on his soul and woefully unprepared to meet his maker, Elckerlijc begins a quest to find companions to aid him in his journey. Rejected by his fair-weather friends Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods, Everyman learns the only friend he can depend on to the end is Good Deeds – or, in the original Dutch version, Virtue (*Duecht*) – whom he has neglected and allowed to weaken throughout his life. In order to settle his accounts properly, he must conduct a sincere and public repentance onstage to achieve salvation and die with a clean reckoning and a clean soul. He dies peacefully alongside Good Deeds or Virtue, promising to give half his accumulated wealth to the poor, and an epilogue implores the audience to check that their own accounts be "hole" and "sounde" before their deaths (*Ev.* l. 916). It is a simple, elegant play with few demands for staging, props, and costumes, and one that leaves itself open, intentionally or not, to a variety of embellishments and a great deal of experimentation with form and gen-

[1] References to *Everyman* and *Elckerlijc* are taken from Davidson et al. 2007. References for *The Play about Common Trade* and *The Play about Empty Purse*, unless otherwise indicated, are from Hüsken vols 1 and 2 (2005). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated; I thank and acknowledge Mrs Elsa Strietman for her assistance with the translations for *Common Trade*. For clarity's sake, I have left the name 'Elckerlijc' untranslated when referring to any Dutch play in which the character appears; he is Everyman only in the English play of that name.

re. This potential for experimentation is exemplified by Carol Ann Duffy's well-received 2015 modernization, performed at London's National Theatre and starring Chiwetel Ejiofor in the lead role, which emphasized the character's materialist tendencies: Ejiofor's Everyman is a modern-day hedonistic playboy who opens the play by celebrating his birthday with a lavish cocaine-fuelled dance party (Billington 2015).

What is curious about this, however, is that the very text of the English *Everyman* pigeonholes itself in terms of genre in a way that *Elckerlijc* does not. *Everyman*, in its introduction, calls itself "a treatyse . . . in the manner of a morall playe", but *Elckerlijc* introduces itself as "a lovely little book made in the manner of a play or entertainment" ("een schoon boecxken, ghemaect in den maniere van eenen speele ofte esbatemente", prior to l. 1). That it is first a "little book" (or a "treatyse") indicates that one may simply read, rather than watch a performance, though whether nothing is lost by removing the plays from their own theatricality is certainly a matter for debate (see Garner 1987: 277, 283-4). If it is to be a play, it may be a "klucht" or an "esbatemente", a designator usually associated with comedy or lighter amusement. The *Everyman* translator seems to have, by his own assertion, opted for one of these, but the *Elckerlijc* playwright all but invites us to adapt the play as circumstances may require. As 2015 London audiences responded well to an Everyman that renounced the glamour of upper-class materialism and "indifference to the future of our planet" (Billington 2015), Cornelis Everaert may have discerned that his audience did not need to see Elckerlijc dying well as much as they needed to see him living poorly.

What does Elckerlijc's poor living look like? We know a few broad details from the eponymous play: we know that he has lived "without concern" ("buyten sorghen", l. 19) and "without fear [of God], ignorant" ("uut vresen, onbekent", l. 3, trans. by Davidson et al. 2007). We also know that he has accumulated a rather large amount of hoarded wealth, as evidenced by the scene between Elckerlijc and Goods (*Tgoet*), to whom Elckerlijc notes that he has "given great love" ("ic heb . . . geleyt grote minne", l. 344). We also know, from Goods's repudiation, that Elckerlijc has treated the poor unkindly, not having shared his wealth with them. These indications of Elckerlijc's sinful lifestyle also apply to the Elckerlijc characters present in both *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse*, though they are given more specificity and the immediate consequences of his actions are made clear. His sins here are indicative of general bad behaviour in an upper-class person; in Everaert's plays, his behaviour is on display in explicitly commercial contexts, and sullies everything it touches.

We must, of course, place Everaert and the plays within their proper literary and historical context, the Chambers of Rhetoric (*rederijkerskam-*

ers) that peppered the Low Countries between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (Hummelen 1989: 170). The Chambers of Rhetoric were amateur literary societies which drew their membership mainly from the artisanal and business classes. They shared many similarities with guilds and confraternities; Elsa Strietman notes that "the element of mutual social and economic aid, so strong in the religious and craft guilds, can be perceived in the Chambers as well" (1992: 237). The Chambers originated from lay devotional brotherhoods, whose members served as assistants to and liaisons to local clergy and assisted with processionals and festivals (ibid.). Their primary function, however, was the instruction of their members in the literary arts and the writing, production, and performance of poetry and drama. Bruges hosted two Chambers, the Holy Ghost (*Helichs Gheest*) and the Three Lady Saints (*Drie Santinnen*), both of which counted Everaert as a member, though there is no evidence that he ever served as factor (master poet) of either.

The drama of the Chambers' poets, who called themselves *rederijkers* or 'Rhetoricians', endured several decades of scorn from critics who felt that it paled in comparison to the literature of the Golden Age that followed it, that it was stiflingly didactic and devoid of real dramatic action, and that its heavily stylized verse mostly masked that the Rhetoricians did not have anything real to say; they were simply "'imitations produced by a threadbare imagination'" (Pleij 1994: 63). So formidable a scholar as Robert Potter believed, as late as 1975, that *Everyman* predated *Elckerlijc* because the former was clearly the superior play from a literary standpoint, freed from the overly stylized trappings that characterize Rhetoricians' drama: "If *Everyman* is not the original work, it is that literary miracle of poetry, the translation that transcends the original" (Potter 1975: 173-4). However, the Rhetoricians have begun to see a revival from scholars who have argued strongly for the literary and theatrical merit of at least some of their works.[2] They are still, however, relatively unknown in the English-speaking theatre world.

Rhetoricians' plays were performed at all sorts of occasions, ranging from religious processions to royal banquets to competitions organized jointly by host cities and by the Chambers themselves, called *landjuwelen*. The plays themselves can be roughly grouped into three sometimes overlapping genres: the *tafelspel* or 'table play', a piece written for a banquet or private celebration; the *esbattement* or *klucht*, a comedy or farce; and the *spel van zinne*, the 'play of the mind', the genre most associated with the Rhetoricians, a serious play that attempted to answer a ques-

[2] Particularly worth reading on this matter are van Bruaene 2008 and Mareel 2010. Van Bruaene's work in particular explores the middle-class origins of the Chambers' membership and its influences on their literature.

tion or address a moral, social, philosophical, or religious issue. As in English morality plays, the characters are usually allegorical, personified qualities or concepts, and common practice was to identify them with paper nametags attached to the sleeves of actors' costumes (Hüsken 2002: 170) so that an audience could identify a character even before he was introduced in a text. This would have been especially helpful for plays like *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse*, in which the author does not explain the meaning of the allegory and the audience must extrapolate from the specific scene on the stage to the general implied by the characters' names. The fact that Everaert does not aid the audience in allegorical exegesis for these plays, though he does in several of his others, is another indication that he would have expected the audience to be able to recognize a character named 'Elckerlijc' and piece together who he was and why he was there.

Common Trade is both a *spel van zinne* and a *tafelspel*, as it seems to have been written for an event hosted by Everaert's two Chambers, and tries to offer a solution to a problem that was surely on the minds of much of its original audience: who was at fault for the continued crippling poverty in Bruges? The word *nering*, as Jan Dumolyn explains, "carries the strong connotation of being a breadwinner or making a livelihood, crucial in an economic system where small guild-masters, journeymen, and apprentices often barely made enough money to satisfy basic needs . . . during times of economic disarray and high prices" (2010: 379). Who, then, had caused *nering* to abandon Bruges?

The circumstances surrounding the composition of *Empty Purse* are less complex; Everaert wrote it for a smaller Chamber in the neighbouring town of Veurne to be performed at an outdoor contest in Ypres, and based its main character's name on the Chamber's motto, "poor in the purse and young in the spirit" ("Aerm in de beurs en van zinnen jong", De Potter and Borre 1870: 69). But to understand Everaert's motivations for writing *Common Trade* especially, we must first understand the situation that his hometown of Bruges was facing in the early sixteenth century, for *nering* had indeed abandoned it. James M. Murray has proposed that Bruges's economy in the period from roughly 1280 to 1390 was dependent on "cradle capitalism", an apparently competitive market nevertheless dependent on "foreign and internal tranquillity" for stability (Murray 2005: 21). The system served the city well for decades, during which Bruges was a powerhouse in the Hanse and a key player in the Flemish cloth industry. By the late fifteenth century, however, the cradle had fallen: a series of floods and famines had hurt the city's economy badly, and the two Flemish revolts staged against Maximilian of Austria, the Count of Flanders (and later Holy Roman Emperor), had been catastrophic; after the failure of the second uprising in 1492, a German military blockade supporting Maximilian effectively

shut down Bruges's trade networks (Schiller 1847: 34-5; Nicholas 2013: 390). In the meantime, the city was forced to spend massive amounts of money dredging the Zwin channel, a valuable connexion to the sea for otherwise inland Bruges, as revenue from tolls decreased. The channel had begun to silt in the late thirteenth century, and by the turn of the sixteenth century, it had become unnavigable and had cut off Bruges's connexion to the sea. By the 1540s, over a quarter of the city's population was receiving poor relief (Parker 2002[2]: 25).

In Brabant, just north of Flanders, the city of Antwerp benefited considerably from Bruges's losses: it had supported Maximilian during the revolts, and Maximilian had begun encouraging foreign merchants to go there in return. Furthermore, its advantageous location and year-round market fairs attracted more participants than Bruges (Nicholas 2013: 390-1). The exact factors that led to Bruges's sharp decline and Antwerp's corresponding rise are complex and beyond the scope of this paper, it is certain that, in the words of J.H. Munro, "in the later fifteenth century, Bruges decisively lost to Antwerp the commercial hegemony of the Low Countries that it had so long enjoyed without serious challenge" (1966: 1137). Also certain are that Bruges was an impoverished and debt-ridden city by the early sixteenth century, and that it would not truly begin its recovery until nearly four hundred years later (Nicholas 2013: 391).

This economically shattered Bruges of the sixteenth century was the one that Cornelis Everaert had known all his life. His father had been a draper before him (Hüsken 2005: 17), and Cornelis the younger spent his youth and his career entrenched in the struggling textile industry. Born in 1480, he would have come of age during the revolts against Maximilian, and watched first-hand as Bruges "decisively lost" its prosperity to Antwerp. Additionally, Flanders, as a territory of Charles V's Holy Roman Empire, had been involved in war (also one of Everaert's favourite subjects) for Everaert's entire adult life, and he would have seen taxes continually raised and coinage debased to pay for Habsburg military campaigns (Waite 2000: 107). He himself was likely in a place of relative financial stability: he received a small salary from the city as the clerk of the Archer's Guild, and his positions in that guild and as a member of two Chambers indicate that he was part of the city's elite. However, his status as a Rhetorician would have put him in a prime position to help his fellow middle-class citizens, many of whom were facing lives as paupers, find answers to their questions and an understanding of how their situation had come to be. One might expect him, given the history, to have pointed the finger of blame at Maximilian, or at the ongoing wars between Charles V and Francis I, as he did in his earlier prizewinning *Play about the High Wind and Sweet Rain (Tspel van de Hooghen Wynt ende Zoeten Reyn*, henceforth *High Wind and*

Sweet Rain) and several other plays, two of which were banned for their anti-authority sentiments. In *Common Trade*, however, he points the finger of blame squarely at Elckerlijc, the representative of wealthy merchants, clerics, and minor nobles – or, in the character's own self-introductory words, "[e]very man who has money" ("Elckerlyc die ghelt heift", l. 101).

In a study of Everaert's depictions of social networks in his many plays about the effects of foreign wars, Samuel Mareel argues that Everaert's plays may have helped his audiences process a constant, confusing and contradictory stream of information on the events of the day, often in an outright propagandistic way: "The *spel van zinne* of the rhetoricians was a highly didactic genre . . . the political-propagandistic possibilities of which seem to have been gradually discovered and developed by rhetoricians and city authorities in the course of the fifteenth century" (Mareel 2011: 46). Sometimes Everaert went for more outright political propaganda, as in *High Wind and Sweet Rain*, written to celebrate the victory of Charles V over the French king Francis I at the Battle of Pavia and awarded first prize at a competition held to celebrate the occasion (Hüsken 2005: 225).[3] Even Everaert's first modern editor, J.W. Müller, who did not always think highly of the artistic quality of Everaert's plays, considered them an invaluable resource for understanding the socio-political environment of his time, a "mirror of the feelings of a significant part of the Flemish on the issues of a 'troubled' and 'volatile' society, church, and state" (Müller 1907: 440). It is with these responsibilities in mind, that Everaert likely wrote *Common Trade*.

As for the connexions to Elckerlijc, there are enough parallels and strong coincidences between the incarnations of the character to suggest that Everaert may have been familiar with, and even inspired by, the original *Elckerlijc*, though such motivations would be impossible to prove. First, there is the obvious matter of the shared names: possibly part of a larger trend in rhetoricians' plays at the time, but too strong of a similarity to be mere coincidence. No other surviving rhetoricians' plays use the name, though many contain universal-type characters in the 'Mankind' tradition with names like 'Many People' or 'Most People'. However, even if other Elckerlijc plays once existed and have been lost, Everaert's choice of name for these characters paired with a higher social class is distinct within his own oeuvre. His plays also contain two *Menichte van Volcke*, one *Menich Leeck*, and one *Meest Elc*, (Hummelen 1968: 15-28), all of whom are less

[3] For a thorough treatment of the *Play of the High Wind and the Sweet Rain*, see Mareel 2006. In this play, written considerably earlier in his career than *Common Trade*, Everaert suggests that the Charles V's eventual victory in the Italian Wars is the key to solving the economic woes in Bruges. Needless to say, he seems to have altered his official stance on the matter somewhat by the time he wrote *Common Trade*.

moneyed than the Elckerlijcs in *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse*. At the very least, Everaert's Elckerlijc in both *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* shares a social stratum with the Elckerlijc of the eponymous play rather than with Everaert's other 'universal' types. The many printings and adaptations of *Elckerlijc* also show that it was popular enough throughout the Low Countries and elsewhere at the turn of the sixteenth century that the idea that Everaert knew it, and consciously decided to co-opt its most recognizable character for use in his own plays, is not outlandish.

The date of *Elckerlijc*'s composition is an undecided matter; estimates have ranged from R. Vos's proposed dating in the early fifteenth century, considerably prior to its first printed copies, to as late as between 1475 and 1496 (Vos 1965-66: 108; Davidson et al. 2007: 3). However, regardless of its original date, it certainly experienced a surge of popularity throughout northern Europe in the early and mid-sixteenth century, resulting in several prints and translations that spanned a few decades.[4] The title page of Ischyrius's *Homulus* even claims that *Elckerlijc* was a rhetorician's play and that it won a prize at a public theatre festival in Brabant (Roersch 1903: XLIII, inscription), though his note is the only evidence for this claim. In any case, it is quite reasonable to suspect that Everaert was exposed to *Elckerlijc* through some medium or another while it was becoming popular and widespread, and that he may have expected the audience for these two plays to have at least a passing familiarity with the work and its messages, since it would have been comprised largely of other Chamber members (Waite 2000: 112).

Let us proceed now to the two plays; since they are not well-known, a brief summary of each is warranted. The character Common Trade (*Ghemeene Neerrynghe*) is a woman cloth seller who runs a portable stall in a town – never labelled as such, but clearly meant to stand in for Bruges – where commerce has stagnated. Though the play bears her name, her poor labourer, A Humble Man (*Sulc Scaemel*), is actually its main character. A Humble Man is in dire straits: he is desperately poor and he has accumulated loads of debt (ll. 5-18). She points out that she has no money to pay him, because she has lost all her customers: "Every man, who once bought everything from me, no longer wants my wool, linen, or weaving" ("Elckerlyc, die alle dync an my versochte / En begheert nu wullen, lynen noch douck", ll. 29-30). When they try to do business with Elckerlijc, he feigns interest in Common Trade's wares, but quickly reveals that they cannot satisfy his taste for the fashionable clothing he can buy in other, financial-

[4] A full adaptational history of *Elckerlijc* is available from the Circulation of Dutch Literature (CODL) project database at database.codl.nl. Multiple editions from Delft and Antwerp were printed between 1493 and 1525.

ly healthy towns. Common Trade leaves, saying she will "go elsewhere, where [she is] drawn by every man" ("So speillic scuvage dan / Elders, daer ic van elckerlyc worde ghetrocken", ll. 227-8), leaving A Humble Man alone and without prospects. Trying to help, Elckerlijc suggests that A Humble Man go seek out someone called Profit (*Oorboor*) with the help of someone else called Provision (*Provysie*), who can be found with Justice (*Justicie*). Provision, however, is fast asleep and cannot be woken up; Justice tells A Humble Man that Elckerlijc is to blame, and that Common Trade will only return to him if Elckerlijc improves himself (ll. 357-73).

Empty Purse is less directly connected to the situation in Bruges, but it is clear from the play's opening that it also takes place against a background of financial distress. A Common Man (*Sulc Ghemeene Man*), lamenting that he has fallen on hard times and that "profit must be sick, or altogether dead" ("winnynghe moet sieck ofte teeneghaer doot zyn", l. 2) decides to lay off his servant, Empty Purse (*Aerm in de Buerse*), whose presence has made it considerably harder for him to prosper; he suggests that Empty Purse should seek out new employment with Elckerlijc, for "Empty Purse should be in Elckerlijc's service" ("Aerm in de Buerse moet Elckerlyc te dienste staen", l. 38). Empty Purse finds Elckerlijc, depicted in this play as a high-living dandy who enjoys spending time in taverns, gaming halls, and bathhouses. At first, Elckerlijc seems amenable to taking on a new servant, until he learns that his prospect's name is 'Empty Purse'; receiving this information, he rashly dismisses Empty Purse, saying that "an Empty Purse brings one little benefit" ("Aerm in de Buerse lettel voordeel doet", l. 150). Again, trying to help, he suggests that Empty Purse marry the lady Copious Consumption (*Couver Ghebruuckynghe*), but she too rejects him when she learns his name, suggesting that he change it to Growth ("Wasdom", ll. 405-6) if he wants to find acceptance. As the play ends, Empty Purse decides to go back to A Common Man, reasoning "A Common Man everywhere must take up this burden" ("Sulc Ghemeene Man moet allomme den bot scutten", l. 431), though he expresses hope that A Common Man's time of hardship will be shortened by the arrival of the arrival of "peace and commerce" ("pays ende neerrynghe", l. 433).

Aside from a shared use of the Elckerlijc character, *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* have a few other key similarities that make a comparison of their functions fruitful, despite their nominal belonging to different genres of rhetoricians' plays. There is, first of all, the matter of their primary character relationships being entirely commercial: that is, they focus on the relationships between employer and employee and between customer and supplier. His other economic plays have important interactions between businesspeople – for example, the bond between seafaring merchant Any (*Eenich*) and craftsman Many (*Menich*) over their business activities' shared

wartime distress during the Italian Wars in the earlier *Play about the High Wind and Sweet Rain* (*Tspel van de Hooghen Wynt ende Zoeten Reyn*) – but in both *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* the relationships themselves are commercial ones. Even the failed courtship in *Empty Purse* is approached in commercial terms; it is structured much in the same way as Empty Purse's failed job interview with Elckerlijc earlier in the play, with Copious Consumption laying out the terms of their prospective marriage just as Elckerlijc lays out the terms of Empty Purse's prospective employment.

However, the main employer-employee relationships in both plays, those between Common Trade and A Humble Man and between A Common Man and Empty Purse, are engaging precisely because they are *not* mere business relationships: the employers clearly care for the well-being of the employees. At the beginning of *Common Trade*, the title character plans to let her beleaguered employee go, because she can no longer afford him due to the loss of her customers. However, she makes the wildly imprudent decision to keep A Humble Man in her employ, after he begs to be allowed to keep working for her even if she can only pay him in her unsold wares (ll. 57-60): "Out of compassion, I'll do the best I can for you. It pains me, that I don't know how to push you away for your benefit" ("Uut compassye sallic noch te beste doen. / My deert, dat ic om proffyt hu en weet waer jaeghen", ll. 61-2). A Common Man is much more eager to be rid of Empty Purse, but he expresses a desire to let his soon-to-be-former servant down in a way that allows him to retain his dignity: "For this reason he must leave, but one should tackle this with prudence. So I want to call him as a proud servant" ("Dies hy nu verpercken moet / maer by zinnen men alle dynck wercken moet / Dus willic hem reopen al seen vulleester fier", ll. 6-8). He also takes a moment to offer Empty Purse advice on where he should go to look for new work, "in the friendship spirit".

The values embodied in this sort of compassionate employer-employee relationship are explored at length from an economic history perspective in Deirdre N. McCloskey's conception of "bourgeois virtues". Being a form of art practiced primarily by the middle class, the poetry and drama of the Chambers often serves as an affirmation of what Herman Pleij describes as "middle class virtues . . . which revolved around the key concepts of practicality and utilitarianism" (1994: 63). But while Common Trade and A Common Man are immensely prudent characters in general, "practicality and utilitarianism" do not quite sum up the nature of their relationships with their poorer employees. McCloskey's framework is far more appropriate: an unwritten ethical foundation that developed alongside the emergence of the business class – essentially, the traditional seven heavenly virtues (hope, faith, courage, temperance, justice, prudence, and love) as applied to behaviour in commercial settings like sales, contracts, and other business trans-

actions (2007: 63-7 in particular). Additionally, she argues that the key to the flourishing of the middle class and of its commercial version of virtue is a change in the rhetoric surrounding business and bourgeois professions, an elevation of the business class into a position of respect and esteem that they did not enjoy throughout most of history. That "most of history" includes the Middle Ages and most of the sixteenth century in the Netherlands, but McCloskey still sees evidence of the coming shift in some later medieval literature, including *Elckerlijc* and *Everyman* (2016: 449). It would seem that *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* show a more decisive beginning in the rhetorical shift, earlier than McCloskey herself pinpoints it. The two employers demonstrate charity, faith, and even love towards their employees even to the extent that it hampers their utilitarian business sensibilities, and this is presented as the way commerce can and ought to be conducted. To see 'Common Trade' and 'A Common Man' represented as the seats of such virtue in the concepts they embody would send an audience comprised largely of common traders a powerful message to that effect.

In this way, Common Trade and A Common Man stand in stark contrast to Elckerlijc, who *is* a relentlessly prudent, coldly practical character in both plays. His thinking is emblematic of what McCloskey describes as "greed-is-good" or "Prudence Only" (2016: 186) behaviour – the pursuit of one's own self-interest at the expense of all other considerations. When he enters the stage in *Common Trade*, his ridiculous costume – "a long cloak adorned with a belt, a priest's cap perched on his head, his right leg booted and spurred and his left leg clothed in a sailor's pants" ("een keerle met eenen pordeix gheghort, up thooft eenen priesters capproen gherolt, zyn rechter been gheleerst ende ghespoort ende an zyn luchter been een schippersbochs an", ll. 100-1) – marks him as a conglomeration of several moneyed classes. His opening monologue as he heads towards Common Trade's stall introduces his cold, overly prudent way of thinking about business:

ELCKERLYC Elckerlyc die ghelt heift nu proffyt doen.
Alle dync crycht he te zynder begheerrynghe
Want sulc scaemel, van dyveersscher neerrynghe,
Hevet nu sober naer myn ghevoel,
Mids da thy met alle dync my up den stoel
Allomme achtervolcht, hier ende daer,
Daer ic selve plochte te reysene naer
In alle feesten, wyt ende zyt
. . .
Machghicker an winnen groot en grof,
Ic en maecker gheen consciencie of
Wient scaet of hinder, updat ict hebbe.
(ll. 101-8, 114-16)

> [ELCKERLYC Every man who has money can now make a profit / He can get all kinds of things he desires / because the humble man, in various trades / is, in my opinion, in a sorry state / for, with all his things, and no helping hand / he follows me everywhere, here and there / as I travel to all the festivals / and show myself in all corners / . . . / If I'm to make big, fat profits / I cannot feel any remorse about / whom it harms or hinders, if it helps me.]

Elckerlijc is thrilled to have found himself in such a strong buyer's market, pursued by "the humble man, in various trades" desperate for his business. He shows no inclination to be faithful or compassionate or to heed any other virtue towards those with whom he has previously conducted trade, admitting that he will act for his own benefit even if it means hurting them. The lack of any feeling other than an excess of prudence recalls a line from God's opening monologue in the original Elckerlijc: "The Seven Virtues, which were powerful, are all driven out and chased away" ("Dye .vij. Duechden, dye machtich waren / Sijn alle verdreven ende verjaecht,", ll. 16-17, trans. by Davidson et al. 2007). In this play, Common Trade herself, who also embodies these virtues, is about to be driven out and chased away from town.

In *Empty Purse*, no identifying costume for Elckerlijc is described, but he displays the same general disregard for everyone who is not him. Here, his calculating prudence is emphasized less than his love of lavish living, and it harms both Empty Purse and A Common Man. When Empty Purse asks Elckerlijc for work after A Common Man lays him off, Elckerlijc quickly rattles off a list of his traits and preferred activities: he is of a constantly changing temperament, and can often be lazy, though he can be of service sometimes if he is needed (ll. 65-8); that he enjoys drinking well in the tavern (ll. 71-6); that he enjoys playing and gambling on all sorts of dice, board, and card games (ll. 79-84); and that he often goes to the bathhouse for the company of women (ll. 89-92). Empty Purse responds to these lines in a series of asides wherein he promises that his influence will cure Elckerlijc of these unseemly tendencies, but Elckerlijc does not notice until he learns Empty Purse's name, at which point he immediately orders Empty Purse to leave. His refusal to temper his own copious consumption is a large part of why, as the title character observes at the end of the play, the working-class Common Man will always be the one who is saddled with Empty Purse.

At the same time, Elckerlijc has the potential to behave virtuously. Unlike the explicitly negative *sinnekens* in many later rhetorician's plays whose main function is to "the dual task of providing entertainment and moral instruction" with their unvirtuous traits and conduct (Steenbrugge 2014: 86), Elckerlijc is not an entirely wicked character. In both plays, when the protagonist hits a nadir in his presence, Elckerlijc tries to help him. In *Common Trade*, this moment occurs after Common Trade has left and A Humble Man has begun to despair of ever finding work again; in

Empty Purse, it occurs after Elckerlijc has denied him employment. The *Common Trade* Elckerlijc is ironically the one who suggests that A Humble Man speak with Justice, for she will treat him and his situation fairly without regard to his social standing (ll. 271-81). Furthermore, she will be accompanied by Provision, who will in turn help A Humble Man find profit once again. What or who exactly Provision is, Everaert does not make entirely clear; the Hieronymous Bosch specialist Eric De Bruyn suggests that it may have referred to protectionist government policy designed to keep competition out of domestic markets (2001: 235), but the dialogue remains ambiguous about the matter, and Everaert's condemnations of dependency in his other economic-themed plays suggest that he would not have considered this a sustainable solution to the problem.[5] The word he uses for profit, *Oorboor*, also has many connotations: it can refer to material profit, but it can also refer to something's utility, to some intangible benefit, or to the concept of common good, as in the phrase *ghemeene oorboor*, a Dutch translation of the Latin *bonum commune*, 'general welfare' or 'common good'. Müller translates it as "weer nuttige", 'regained usefulness' (Müller 1907: 469). In either case, Elckerlijc clearly has some interest in helping A Humble Man to get back on his feet, possibly through a charitable intervention, though it never occurs to him that perhaps the intervention ought to come from him.

Similarly, in *Empty Purse*, Elckerlijc is the one who suggests the ultimately unsuccessful plan that Empty Purse take Copious Consumption as his wife, even implying that he would be willing to reconsider his rejection of Empty Purse's service if he paired up with Copious Consumption (ll. 272-3). In both plays, Everaert makes it very clear that Elckerlijc is redeemable, though whether he is going to take the steps necessary for his own redemption is left open at the end of the play (a question for which a possible answer, in the positive, may be found in *Elckerlijc*).

But how is Elckerlijc supposed to redeem himself? *Elckerlijc* is largely devoted to his redemption through public repentance, culminating in his agreement to give half his hoarded goods to the poor. In *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse*, Everaert seems to have a more immediate redemption in mind: Elckerlijc can redeem himself by engaging with A Humble Man through Common Trade, and by taking Empty Purse off A Common

[5] See, for example, Everaert's *Play about the Humble Community and Tribulation (Tspel van Scaemel Ghemeente ende van Trybulacie)* (Hüsken 2005: 300-20), or the opening dialogue between the characters Any (*Eenich*) and Many (*Menich*) in the *Play of the High Wind and the Sweet Rain*. In both plays, the suffering citizens are advised to patiently endure their burdens while they wait for matters to improve, and that those burdens must be shared by all members of society, but particularly by the middle class, who support both those above and below them.

Man's shoulders for at least a little while. A characteristic key to both A Humble Man and Empty Purse is that they do not want alms or handouts; they want to work. A Humble Man's desire to keep working and participating is a recurring theme throughout the play. He does not want charity, but simply wants the ability to sustain himself, to obtain the livelihood that is promised by the presence of *nering*: "[S]o long as the humble man cannot trade, he will remain poor and afflicted with grief" ("want moet sulc scaemel langhe neerrynghe missen / So blyft hy in aermoede met drucke duerviert", ll. 299-300). His depression and desperation are inextricable from the fact that he is no longer self-sufficient, and the fact that his last actions in the play involve begging for help poignantly shows how far he has fallen. His portrayal echoes the words of the Italian architect and writer Leon Battista Alberti, writing about a century prior in his dialogues on the family: "[I]t is, perhaps, a kind of slavery to be forced to plead and beg with other men in order to satisfy our necessity. That is why we do not scorn riches, but learn to govern ourselves . . . while we live free and happy in the midst of affluence and abundance" (trans. by Neu-Watkins 2004: 164).

Empty Purse's desire to work, meanwhile, is the source of much of the play's comedy. He works as a servant (*dienaar*), and his service is to live up to his name by forcing his employer to live thriftily. As he points out while trying to convince A Common Man to keep him on, if not for his influence, A Common Man might be tempted to spend his money on women. Later, as Elckerlijc lists his favoured pastimes of regular drinking, gaming, and visits to the brothel, Empty Purse, a fool speaking the truth, excitedly promises that he could cure Elckerlijc of these sinful (and costly) impulses:

ELCKERLYC	Ghy zout ooc naer my, by tyden, moeten Wachten ende zyen alssic by drunken date Hyeuwers in Bacus speloncken zate, Want den drank doet de zinnen cranc besetten.
AERM IN DE BUERSE	Dat zoudic hu wel eerland beletten. Ic zoude hu doen vermyden tmout, Dat ghy by tdryncken niet lichte verblyden zout Mocht ghy my by hu cleenen tyt ghezien. (ll. 99-106)

[ELCKERLYC Sometimes, for me, you should also / Wait and see if I'm in a drunken state / Anywhere in the caves of Bacchus, / For drink does weaken one's good sense. EMPTY PURSE I would stop you from that before long. / I would have you shunning the malt / So that you would not rejoice in drinking / If you saw me at your side in a short time.]

But a cruel sort of irony exists in the idea that a character called Elckerlijc might willingly take on the burden of an empty purse: the original Elckerlijc is a famous hoarder. When Elckerlijc goes to ask Goods to accompany him on his death journey, Goods describes how Elckerlijc's miserliness has resulted in his being immobile: "I lie here locked up, neglected, mouldy, as you see me, heaped up, filthy; I cannot move, pressed as I am together" ("Ick legghe hier in muten / Versockelt, vermost, als ghi mi siet, / Vertast, vervuylt. Ic en kan mi niet / Verporren, also ic ben tsamen gesmoert", ll. 350-3; trans. by Davidson et al. 2007). The most beloved of Elckerlijc's friends (ll. 343-6), he is also the bluntest and cruellest when faced with Elckerlijc's request for companionship, explaining that immodest love for him has severely damaged Elckerlijc's reckoning with God: "[L]ove for me is contrary to heaven. But if you had loved me in moderation, and shared me with the poor, then you would not need to whine now . . . Many more are lost because of me than are saved, be sure of that" ("Mijn minne es contrarye des Hemels staten. / Maer haddi mi gemint bi maten / Ende van mi ghedeylt den armen, / So en dorfstu nu niet Karmen . . . Die menighe blijft bi mi verloren / Meer dan behouden, weet dat te voren", ll. 389-92, 399-400).

By contrast, while Goods in *Elckerlijc* speaks of his power to damn, Empty Purse attempts to convince Elckerlijc of his own power to save, if Elckerlijc will employ him. An empty purse, he insists, forces one to live frugally and avoid temptations like brothels and barrooms, and may even profit the soul of "he who goes through the world wastefully because of wealth" ("die by rycdom hem ghuf up sweerels baerm scryven", l. 218), as the original Elckerlijc did. The *Empty Purse* Elckerlijc, on the other hand, offers an interesting counter-argument – an empty purse *deprives* people of their virtue, he says, because it disinclines people towards charitable acts:

ELCKERLYC	Wat zoude Elckerlyc met hu maken cunnen? Waer ghy hu, Aerm in de Buerse, parende zyt, Elckerlycx herte dat ghy bezwaerende zyt. Gheen duecht en es in hu gheblecken hiet.
AERM IN DE BUERSE	Hoezoo?
ELCKERLYC	Duer ghebreken, ziet, Doet Aerm in de Buerse tmagher int vette hooppen, Sueren, lueren, daghelicx te wette looppen. Sulc die ter miltheyt hebben verwec, desen Moeten by Aerm in de Buerse vinnich ende vrec wesen. Tworden corliaens die te zyne liberael plaghen. Dies de aerme lieden princepael claghen, Dat elckerlyc van hemlieden behindert leift.

Aerm in de Buerse aelmoessene vermindert heift.
Sy en mueghen niet leven als de proffytrommers.
(ll. 155-68)

[Elckerlyc What could Everyman do with you? / Empty Purse, where you show yourself, / The heart of every man grows heavy. / No trace of virtue exists in you. // Empty Purse How so? // Elckerlyc Through lacking, you see, / does Empty Purse turn fat to skimpy, / Cheating, tampering, and cutting corners. / People who previously tended towards charity / Are made stingy and cruel by an Empty Purse. / They become beggars who accept liberally. / And thus, the poor people mainly cry / That every man among them is hindered, / For Empty Purse reduces almsgiving, / And they can't live like profit-makers.]

Though Empty Purse retorts that those who behave dishonourably when poor do not suddenly become honourable when rich, moments of dialogue in *Common Trade* suggest that Everaert is not unsympathetic to Elckerlijc's argument. Common Trade and A Humble Man are forced to cut corners and use substandard materials in their clothing if they are to have any hope of making profits (ll. 86-90), something the *Common Trade* Elckerlijc is quick to point out while investigating their stall. What neither the *Common Trade* Elckerlijc nor the *Empty Purse* Elckerlijc realizes, however, is that they are responsible for the situation due to their stinginess and refusal to relax prudence in order to do business with their poor neighbours (instead of, in the case of Common Trade, their better-off counterparts in Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom). The sharing of his accumulated wealth that they desire from him is the charity of neighbourly commerce, which he denies them. Goods's comment that "many more are lost (*verloren*) because of me than are saved" is echoed in Common Trade's plaintive lament to her former customer when he first shows up at her stall: "Elckerlijc, you've let me be lost" ("Elckerlyc, ghy laet my ghaen verloren", l. 121). This is the great failing of "Prudence Only" commercial conduct, to not recognize the necessity "to care for employees and partners and colleagues and customers and fellow citizens" (McCloskey 2007: 508).

The possibility of Empty Purse as a foil to Goods is *Empty Purse*'s clearest connection with *Elckerlijc*. The area in which *Common Trade* veers the closest to the original play is at the end in its condemnation of Elckerlijc. In *Elckerlijc*, the condemnation comes directly from God, and opens the play; in *Common Trade*, the judgment is passed by Justice, and closes the play. As we have previously discussed, A Humble Man goes to see Justice because he is looking for Provision, whom Elckerlijc has told him will help him find Profit once again. Provision, however, is fast asleep, and A Humble Man cannot wake her. Justice tells him that she cannot wake Provision

either, and that only "divine inspiration" ("de goddelicke inspiratie", l. 354) can bring her back. When A Humble Man asks her why, she gives him the following verdict:

Justicie By Elckerlycx scult,
Die daghelicx in grooten sonden leift,
Die cleen liefde tallen student heift,
Tot zynen Heere, tot zynen Godt,
Ende tot zyn hevenmeinsche, naer tgoddelic ghebodt,
Maer leven daghelicx in sulcken ghebaere
Alsoffer noch Godt, noch wet en waere.
Hierby moet alle dynchen verdrayt ghaen.
. . .
Tenzy dat Gods gramscepe ghestoorlic
By Elckerlyc met leedscip ende bedynghe
Weder gebrocht wort tot payseghe vredynghe,
Provysie – Sulc Scaemel, pynt hier up te rouckene –
En zal niet risen om Oorboor te zouckene.
Aldus, Sulc Scaemel, ten baet rechten niet crommen,
Elckerlyc moest hem beteren, zoude neerrynghe commen.
(ll. 357-64, 366-73)

[Justice Because of Elckerlijc's fault, / He who daily lives in great sin, / Who has little love at any time / For his Lord, for his God, / And for his fellow men, as God commands, / But lives daily in such a manner / As if there were no God, nor law. / Because of this, all kinds of things go bad / . . . / Unless God's most troubling wrath / Is replaced with peaceful harmony by / Everyman's contrition and prayer, / Provision – Humble Man, pay attention here – / Will not wake up to seek out Value. / And thus, Humble Man, there is no other way: / Everyman must better himself if trade is to return.]

Justice's condemnation recalls the sentiments from God's opening monologue; God laments that he "see[s] the people so blinded by sin that they don't recognize me as God" ("oec sie ic tvolc also verblent / In sonden, si en kennen mi niet voer God", *Elc.* ll. 4-5; trans. by Davidson et al. 2007). He first mentions Elckerlijc by name, either as a character or as a concept, when he protests Elckerlijc's living "without concern". Death, God's messenger, even greets Elckerlijc with a similar line, after noting – in a moment that may have been particularly striking to struggling Bruges textile workers of A Humble Man's ilk – Elckerlijc's fancy clothes: "Have you entirely forgotten God?" ("Hebdi al Gods vergeten?", l. 71). In both cases, the only available solution to the problem is Elckerlijc's contrition, which God intends to bring forth in *Elckerlijc* by calling him to his final reckoning; Everaert simply adds the extra dimension of Elckerlijc's failure to show

proper love to his neighbours and former commercial partners. He must repent his behaviour, and strengthen his Virtue once again, to help both his neighbours and himself. The play closes with an entreaty from A Humble Man directly to the audience, asking them to spread the message they have just heard – perhaps in the hopes that the message would reach those whom Elckerlijc was supposed to represent.

In sum: in his life, Cornelis Everaert had barely known a time when Flanders and Bruges were not embroiled in war. During his young adulthood, he had seen the bottoming out of the cloth industry and grand markets in Bruges, and would never see its return. The disillusionment with authority figures and the institutions they represented that comes through in his plays should come as no surprise. As Charlotte Steenbrugge has written, theatre in the late medieval and early modern Low Countries was intended to function as a mirror (*spiegel*, as in *Den Spyeghel der Salicheyt* van *Elckerlijc*, the full title of *Elckerlijc*) that reflected, but was distinct from, physical reality, which audience members could observe and learn from (Steenbrugge 2014: 220-5). To help explain to his fellow citizens (and quite possibly to himself) what had happened and what, if anything, could be done about it, Everaert borrowed a well-recognized character from a well-regarded play, a character whose action-driving flaw is a callous neglect of virtue, and used him to hold up a mirror to Bruges's dead markets, reflecting how Elckerlijc's lack of non-utilitarian concern for other participants had irreparably damaged them. That he presents no real solution to the problem, but suggests that they will simply have to endure in want of God's grace, is in keeping with J.J. Mak's description of Everaert as a playwright who "starts as a revolutionary, a social rebel, and ends as a penitence preacher in all his plays" (Mak 1944: 109, qtd in Dumolyn and Haemers 2013: 184).

Returning at last to *Elckerlijc* and *Everyman*: whether Everaert knew or consciously chose to emulate the original *Elckerlijc* is a question that must unfortunately remain within the realm of speculation. If he did not intend these to be read as the same character, his use of a 'universal' human character, rather than a negative personification, to teach lessons about proper commercial behaviour is worth exploring on its own. But if Everaert did indeed borrow the character from the original play, the borrowing speaks to several dimensions which he perceived as being potentially present within the original character. Elckerlijc's stinginess with Common Trade and A Humble Man and his general cluelessness about the destitution of his neighbours are in keeping with the characterization in the original play as a sinner so blinded by his own misdirection that he is not even capable of recognizing it. However, his brief, misguided attempts to help A Humble Man and Empty Purse imply that he *is* still capable of behaving virtuously,

and that he is not totally without concern for his former trade partner, but that he will not and cannot recognize himself as part of the problem. Given that the plays were performed for audiences of Bruges and Veurne-based bourgeoisie, Everaert may have intended the same thing that Roger Ladd suggested was intended in *Everyman*: that the audience look to the character as a mirror, a cautionary tale about what happens if they are overly utilitarian and ungenerous towards each other. In this sense, *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* are as much spiritual successors to *Elckerlijc* as *Everyman* itself is.

Alongside the recent increased interest in *Everyman*, an enterprising director may find it a rewarding project to bring translations and adaptations of the original *Elckerlijc*, *Common Trade* and *Empty Purse* to our stages as well; the latter two are the work of a playwright who deserves to be better known. They judge Elckerlijc guilty not only of sheer miserliness, but of a host of other commercial sins, the impacts of which Cornelis Everaert explored skilfully in his own dramatic telling of the downfall of Bruges. His story, for a contemporary audience in an economically depressed town, would have reinforced the necessity of behaving virtuously, temperately, and even lovingly within the bounds of life as a profit-maker. This understanding was no contradiction: Elckerlijc's sin is not that he dares to accumulate material wealth, but that he does so without paying due consideration to Virtue (in the original play), and that he strips commerce of the dignity and potential to elevate (especially in the case of poor labourers like A Humble Man and Empty Purse) that should, in the best-case scenario, be built into the act. In his relationship to his weakened, starved, paralysed Virtue, we uncover for ourselves the tragedy that Cornelis Everaert saw embedded in the character, and that he chose to explore in more concrete detail in his own two Elckerlijc plays: that without forsaking his comfortable mercantile existence, Elckerlijc had the capacity to be so much better than he chose to be.

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Robert William Haynes*

Hymnological Dramaturgy as Escape from Ideology in Horton Foote

Abstract

In the 1960s in the United States, ideas often became formulas or slogans, and, as such stripped down ideas tend to do, some of these abstracted ideas, simplified by abbreviation, took on not only the convenience of brevity but also the fatal charm of oversimplification, as though complex issues could be divested of some of their essential internal contradictoriness or the requirement that they be considered properly not only from the basis of selective logic but also from that of experience. In Horton Foote's plays, screenplays, and teleplays, a central characteristic is the writer's aversion to such kinds of simplification. Foote's own background gave him a more philosophic attitude than is compatible with mere intellectual convenience. His rejection of easy rationalization and ill-grounded aesthetic speculation sprang from his impulse to dissociate art from empty abstractions, an impulse particularly manifested in Foote's frequent invocation of hymns, the simple songs of ordinary people whose spiritual need for comfort is at the heart of this music and its unsophisticated honesty. This article makes a case for the significance of what can be called 'hymnological dramaturgy' in Foote's work. The influence of composer Charles Ives and that of dancer Martha Graham helped shape this author's artistic purpose, but so, undeniably, did his involvement in the church music of the Texas cotton town in which blacks and whites found common ground in an art quite alien to slogans and superficial cleverness.

Keywords: Horton Foote, hymn, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Tender Mercies*, ideology, dramaturgy, spirituality

Equality, I spoke the word,
As if a wedding vow,
Ah, but I was so much older then;
I'm younger than that now.
Bob Dylan, *My Back Pages*

Horton Foote grew up in Wharton, a small Texas town devoted to cotton farming. His great-great-grandfather had been a major plantation owner in *ante-bellum* Texas, a man whose adventurous career had taken him from his Georgia birthplace through an interval in Alabama political life to en-

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gagement in Texas's military struggle with Mexico. An owner of extensive acreage of land and of many slaves at the beginning of the Civil War, Albert Clinton Horton lost most of his assets before dying in 1865.[1] Though some of his descendants retained only the memory of Mr Horton's reputation, that was a significant factor for them, as they thus had a notable connection to the state's first elected lieutenant governor and a commander of a frontier cavalry troop. As a figure from Texas' legendary past, A.C. Horton cast a long shadow. His great-great-grandson Horton Foote's lifelong interest in the sometimes-bloody but nearly always contentious history of Texas and of his family shaped Foote's dramaturgic career and led to his finest artistic achievements.

In order to appreciate this writer's perspective, it helps to consider certain specific facts of his background. Aside from his extensive family connections in southeastern Texas, a region in which the defeat of the Confederacy was still a bitter memory in the early twentieth century, one must keep in mind that Foote left home at seventeen to attend drama school at the Pasadena Playhouse in California, and, though he would often return to Wharton, he actually made New York City the centre of his creative life, even as he drew on small-town Texas for his characters and plots. Unlike his fellow Southerners William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, he found creative sustenance in a region with highly developed artistic institutions, and, from the time of his five-year period as struggling actor to his first stage play in 1940, on through the war years and his four years of teaching drama in Washington, to his return to New York as television writer for the decade of the 1950s, and onward through productive decades to 2009 and the end of his life that year in Hartford, Connecticut, his residence in Texas was imaginative rather than physical much of the time.

As Foote's long career developed, significant social changes occurred in the United States, particularly in the South. When he left Texas for California in 1933, the nation was afflicted by the Depression, and life was economically difficult almost everywhere. Little or no attention was paid to civil rights in his home region, though Foote himself was briefly radicalized when he arrived in New York in 1935 and was thrilled by revolutionary hopes of the kind embodied in Clifford Odets's play *Waiting for Lefty*. Though his views moderated fairly soon, his experience in the culturally diverse environment of the city gave him a valuable perspective on the place of his origin and enabled him to recognize the socially debilitating effects of prejudice. As he came to know the theatre of Odets and that of Paul Green, who sought to incorporate the culture of poor African Americans

[1] For a discussion of A.C. Horton's career, see Ellenberger 1985 and, for his conduct as slave-owner, Mattison 1861: 30-5.

in his dramatic art, he developed an understanding of where the theatre stands, actually or potentially, in relation to pressing social issues. In one much-needed acting job he secured in 1936, Foote played a non-speaking part in a kind of stage extravaganza, director Max Reinhardt's *The Eternal Road* (1937), with script by Franz Werfel and music by Kurt Weill. This show was, as Marion Castleberry notes, "a response to Adolf Hitler's persecution of the Jews in Europe" (2014: 78). In this drama, Foote not only earned several months of regular pay but also developed diversity in his onstage skills. As Castleberry explains: "He, along with the rest of the ensemble, was cast in more than one scene; sometimes he played an Egyptian, and at other times a Hebrew" (ibid.). One incidental result of this role was that it gave Foote a chance to adjust to life in the city and to take advantage of opportunities to build connections and explore new possibilities for his acting career. As an actor, no doubt he had mixed emotions about the non-speaking aspect of his part, but he must also have been pleased with the opportunity to participate in a project associated with distinguished figures in the theatre, especially one which sought to celebrate spirituality as a response to political cruelty.

Foote was also studying when possible with the Russian teachers at Madame Daykarhanova's School for the Stage, developing acting techniques grounded in the teaching of Constantin Stanislavski. At this point it would seem that he had left his Texas background far behind; however, in late 1939 or early 1940, when it was suggested to him that he try his hand at writing a play, he quickly prepared a script based upon his own experience as high school party-goer in Texas. His friends in a theatrical group, the American Actors Company, liked the piece, and the play was staged in April 1940, marking the first of some eighty (at least) plays by Horton Foote. This short drama drew on memory and established a pattern that remained essential through nearly seventy years of playwriting focused on Wharton, Texas, a town the author would soon be including in his works as 'Harrison'. Foote would often face the issue of how to deal with bias, especially the kind of prejudice that resists reason and cordiality, generates intolerance, and shapes a dehumanizing, abstract ideology. As a small-town Texan, he recognized that many residents of Wharton held resentments against 'Yankees', blacks, Jews, and Catholics. As a New York playwright, he knew that Northern urbanites often viewed rural Southerners with disdain, an attitude not always opposed even by Southern writers, as shown by Erskine Caldwell's very successful work *Tobacco Road* (novel 1932, dramatic version by Jack Kirkland 1933). Such forms of bias, both the Southern and the Northern varieties, follow the pattern which led in the nineteenth century to the Civil War, but there are other patterns of prejudice which have little to do with geography, notably the attitudes characterized by the respective sides

in the permanent struggle between haves and have-nots. In all such ideological alignments of prejudice, a simplistic formula tends to usurp the role of rational fairness, and hostility thrives and is perpetuated by such perspectives, which are often no more than self-serving rationalizations.

In Horton Foote's plays, screenplays, and teleplays, a fundamental characteristic is the writer's aversion to such kinds of simplification. His own background, first as small-town Texas schoolboy and then as New York playwright and Academy Award winning screenwriter (*To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1962, and *Tender Mercies*, 1983), ensured that he developed a more comprehensive philosophic attitude than is compatible with the shake-and-bake mentality the main motive of which is convenience. The impulse to dissociate art from such a mentality, particularly as it is expressed in simplistic slogans, pseudo-laconic boasts, and polemical sophistry, is manifested in Foote's frequent invocation of hymns, the simple songs of ordinary people whose spiritual need for comfort is at the heart of this music and its unsophisticated honesty. When a stage version of Foote's play *The Trip to Bountiful*, featuring African Americans in the main roles, was presented in 2015 in New York City, some critics were surprised when audience members joined in with the leading character Mrs Watts as she sang the hymn that gave her comfort in her grave anxiety (Grimes 2013: A1). I do not think that Mr Foote would have been surprised. He often explained that his work was neither formulaic nor didactic, yet his distaste for specious assessments of the great human problems remains clear. Though he went through a radical phase in his own early life in 1930s New York, he had both conservative and liberal friends and tended to keep his own counsel in political matters rather than to endeavour to impose his perspective on others. Foote remained a committed Democrat as his father had been, but in the United States before the 1960s that affiliation in itself meant little, as many key Democrats were, by twenty-first century standards, very conservative. There were also in those days, *mirabile dictu*, liberal Republicans in public life. Foote was an FDR (liberal) Democrat.

Here I will make a case for the significance of what I am calling 'hymnological dramaturgy' in Horton Foote's work. The influence of composer Charles Ives and that of dancer Martha Graham helped shape this author's artistic purpose, but so, undeniably, did his involvement in the church music of the Texas cotton town in which blacks and whites found common ground in an art quite alien to ideological slogans and superficial cleverness.[2] In his "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King concluded his oration with a quota-

[2] Though Rebekah Clinkscale (2009) discusses the role of popular songs in Foote's nine-play *Orphans' Home Cycle*, her analysis does not consider the playwright's affinity for the hymn.

tion from the patriotic standard hymn *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, followed by words from a different song, the chorus of the spiritual *Free at Last*, a song originating in poverty and oppression which celebrates the hope of release from both. King's invocation of a song from each of two cultures expresses his conviction that his fellow citizens could and would be brought to agreement on the need for compassionate correction of an unfair political system, and the tremendous effect of his sermonic address still resonates. King sought to persuade those he addressed that the ideology of racial segregation and discrimination should give way before reason and understanding sympathy. Horton Foote had received his Academy Award for the screenplay of *To Kill a Mockingbird* earlier in this same year, and, despite the fearful climate of opposition to civil rights, other gifted writers at that time were continuing to produce works sympathetic to the movement led by King.

In 1963, ten years had passed since Foote's teleplay *The Trip to Bountiful* had shown executives in the young industry of television the theatrical power the new medium could exert (Krampner 1997: 61). In that play, Lillian Gish had developed the character of Carrie Watts, an aging Southern lady whose role would be revisited notably in later years by actresses Geraldine Page, Lois Smith, and Cicely Tyson, among others.[3] Mrs Watts, whose life as rural outsider in the confusing urban world of mid-century Houston has become intolerable, escapes the virtual imprisonment of her son's apartment and embarks upon a bucolic odyssey to her old home in the ghost town of Bountiful. Confronted by external obstacles and weakened by a heart condition, Mrs Watts finds strength in singing hymns. She is neither Puritan nor Philistine, but she feels intimately connected to a nature which is alienated in the city, and her spiritual being yearns always for a comfort promised by the traditional music that has resonated through her life. Her daughter-in-law Jessie Mae, a selfish and vindictive woman who loves beauty shops and movie magazines, makes her miserable, demanding, among other annoying habits, that Mrs Watts not sing hymns in her presence. Jessie Mae feels threatened by spirituality and by the comfort her mother-in-law derives from singing old songs. It is as though the world invoked by hymns reproaches her superficiality and pettiness, and, of course, it does.

In the original teleplay of 1953, the hymn Mrs Watts would sing from time to time was one titled *No, Not One*, less formally known by a line from its chorus: "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus" (Oatman 1953: 220).

[3] Page won an Academy Award as Mrs Watts in the 1985 film *The Trip to Bountiful*, and Smith's role in the stage play earned an Obie along with other awards. Tyson won a Tony for her stage performance and was nominated for several awards for the television movie version.

This rather homely and unpretentious song focuses upon the isolation of the individual and the consequent importance of divine love in life's numerous struggles. Its message is less evangelical than a reminder that loneliness and human betrayal need not afflict those who depend upon the friendship of Jesus for consolation and comfort. It bears some resemblance to the classical Stoic attitude, and, in fact, Mrs Watts soon confesses to a young woman she meets that she has lived with heartbreak for many years since her father intervened between her and the man she loved. Yet despite all the grief and deprivation and labour she has known, she remains a loving, sympathetic, and, when allowed to be so, a cheerful person.

Foote's character Carrie Watts has become familiar on the American stage as well as in film and on television, and her honest simplicity still does much to remind audiences of those who suffer in silence, those whose decent strength and honesty empower those around them, and those for whom abstract ethical complexities have no significance whatever. Her resort to the music of the hymn is an intellectual engagement with a world of harmony in which selfless love is paradigmatic, and the kinetic energy of the musical flow is both spiritual refreshment and devout self-correction, a form of thought that is at its essence philosophical. In his creation of this kind, diligent, and unselfish countrywoman, Foote invoked human gifts which should be honoured, one sign of which is Mrs Watts' reverence for her own deepest belief in a providence she praises in song. Surely Martin Luther King's decision to conclude his tremendous speech with invocations of two hymns, one from the dominant national culture and one from a tradition originating in slavery, drew upon a similar inspiration, speaking to shared faith and the better nature of all who recognize their common humanity.

The Western literary tradition holds a long conversation with the author of the biblical Psalms, whose works – if we accept them as they were historically understood – often embody devotion and praise. The courageous shepherd David, slayer of the tyrannical bully Goliath as well as of various beasts threatening his sheep, was in his youth an admirable example of the inspired poet, and if in his later days he stumbled grievously, that has not cancelled the literary power of his compositions or the freshness of his vision. A shepherd noble by nature, he left a paradigm that would be conflated with Greek pastoral poetry and subsequent Roman pastorals so as to intrigue Edmund Spenser and his contemporaries with the poetic possibilities of this combination of inspired innocence and rhapsodic love of wisdom. Translations and imitations of the Psalms still offer opportunities to combine devotion with inspiration, as, in more recent American literature, the Psalms continue to exert their power. Though the manifestations of that association are notably different from those of four centuries ago, David's

psalmic pleasures and setbacks retain their immediacy. Horton Foote drew on that tradition in his 1983 film *Tender Mercies.*

The departures in this film from the character and situation of the Old Testament singer are evident enough to make the connection between the film and its biblical antecedent at first glance obscure, but some reflection will suffice to clarify it. The story of David is itself a kind of reversal of the ordinary scheme of life. One tends to expect an individual to sow wild oats in youth and then, as appetites flame out and vigour diminishes, the rakish inclinations succumb to duller tastes, and eventually, in middle age or late life, the individual achieves virtue by default. As William Blake rather insensitively points out, "Prudence is a rich, ugly, old maid courted by Incapacity" (1790). But, for David, the situation is the opposite. In youth he is brave, honourable, and otherwise virtuous. It is when he becomes king that he cannot subdue his lust for Bathsheba, and his scurrilous murder of her husband is the worst deed he ever commits.

In Horton Foote's film, the pattern returns to something like normal. Mac Sledge, the country singer whose life and career have hit bottom in rural Texas, has drunk himself into near mindlessness as he wakes up in a cheap motel by the highway. Unlike the rhapsodic young David, Mac is an aging veteran of two failed marriages. He was once famous, but drunkenness and violence have ruined his career, and, as he offers to pay his motel bill by working on the place, his modest skills of repair and maintenance seem to be his only gifts. The attractive young widow who owns the motel deals patiently with him, and soon one feels that Mac belongs in this place. His abilities are needed, and his quiet respect and admiration for his employer is reinforced by the growing affection between Mac and her young son. As Mac sobers up and routines establish themselves around him, we witness what must be one of the least dramatic marriage proposals on film, and soon Mac is incorporated fully into the little society headquartered at the Mariposa Motel. He will face grave crises yet, as consequences of his past life catch up with him, there seems to be peace gathering about him as he gradually develops his new role as husband and father and begins to recover the inspiration that once had brought him fame as singer and song-writer.

Mac's recovery from personal chaos embodies the "tender mercies" of the film's title, and in his recovery he brings strength and resources to his new wife and her son. It is characteristic of Horton Foote that the title's Scriptural phrase is indirectly linked to the film's narrative, and this link is likely to be missed by those who do not examine the script. When, after one wrenching crisis, Rosa Lee, Mac's wife, fears he has gone off to resume his drunken life, she waits quietly for him and then goes to bed alone. She says her prayers, and the words she speaks are from Psalms 25:4-5. Her prayer is interrupted by the sound of Mac's truck arriving, and she and her

husband begin a conversation as he enters. If she had continued with the Psalm, which she does not, she would have said: "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old".[4] The moment of Mac's return is an anxious one, as he has been driving furiously and has bought a bottle of whiskey, so it seems likely that he will be intoxicated, but there is a special instance of tender mercy here for Rosa Lee when Mac announces that he is sober and has poured out the whiskey he bought.

Mac has been attending the local church with Rosa Lee and Sonny, singing the hymns with the congregation while his wife sings in the choir. During the first scene in the church, the hymn sung is the vigorous *Jesus Saves* (Foote 1989: 93). Later, after Mac's near-return to drinking, the congregation sings *Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me* (133) as Sonny and Mac are baptized. As time passes, Mac regains confidence in his ability to write songs and begins teaching Sonny how to play the guitar. Sought out by a group of young musicians in a country band, Mac begins performing and the band cuts a record of one of his songs. As his situation improves, however, he receives news that his daughter, who has recently paid him a visit, has died in a car accident. During her visit, she had asked her father to sing a song she remembered, a song titled *The Wings of a Dove*, and Mac had told her he did not remember the song. As soon as his daughter left, however, he softly sang the song to himself. After learning of her death, he sings the song again. This song is an actual country hit which, though a gospel song, reached number one in popularity on the country charts in 1960 (it also reached number twelve on the pop music charts). It relates Christ's baptism and the signs of hope provided to persons of faith. Mac's refusal to acknowledge to his daughter that he knows the song shows his desire to reject his former drunken self, but the news of her death brings bitter regret for his not having granted her wish to hear him sing it. As the film draws to a close, Mac sings the song again. Since he sang it earlier, he has himself been baptized and has lost his daughter, and his formerly terse and world-weary attitude, once seemingly indicative of spiritual fatigue and accustomed disappointment, has taken on, in Robert Duvall's interpretation of the dramatic part, a new character. Mac, though battered by adversity, has developed a kind of magnitude of spirit. He has returned to the garden, and, when Sonny runs out with the new football Mac has bought him, Mac joins the boy in throwing the ball, as Rosa Lee, an enigmatic, meditative expression on her face, watches Mac and Sonny at play.

This film is full of music, and in fact Robert Duvall wrote some of the song lyrics himself, yet there is an engagement here with spirituality that

[4] For more discussion of this moment in the film, see Haynes 2016: 229.

echoes Mrs Watts' devotion to hymns which can reconcile her to the sometimes fearsome obstacles life offers her. Mac Sledge has been through a whole range of human experience, from abject drunken prostration to fame and wealth as a singer and songwriter, yet he has found no steadying force in his life until the quiet and dignified woman who owns the Mariposa Motel gently directs his abilities and enables him to recognize that the life of the spirit is redemptive and that the homely tasks of familial life are privileges which constitute "tender mercies". Just as the David of the Old Testament betrayed his own conscience and was punished by the loss of his favourite son, so Mac's waste of his talent and his violent, irrational behaviour, which included an effort to kill his second wife, suggests a parallel as he faces the loss of a daughter who has eloped with a drunken musician much resembling his former self. But Mac's personal trajectory is not tragic, and he will return to his guitar and to the garden he works with Rosa Lee, and he will, one believes, be a good father to the child into whose life he has stumbled.

The power of Horton Foote's plays and screenplays has often been described by critics as mysterious. A classic formulation is that articulated by Reynolds Price in his introduction to Foote's *Courtship, Valentine's Day, 1918: Three Plays from The Orphans' Home Cycle* (1987). Often quoted in discussions of Foote, it should for convenience be cited here as well. Price begins, "simplicity of means and lucidity of results may not be the universal aims of art throughout the world, but they're very nearly so" (ix). He goes on, noting the difficulties critics face in dealing with works characterized by such lucidity and simplicity, "yet how to describe, or discuss, any such masterpiece? . . . It's a famous and lamentable limitation of modern aesthetic criticism . . . that it has proved generally helpless in the presence of apparent 'simplicity,' the illusory purity of means and ends toward universally comprehensible results" (ix-x). He concludes that "the mechanistic methods of modern critics require complexity of means before their intricate gears can begin to grind" (x), and turns to a consideration of Foote: "Were you as deeply moved as I was by his *Tender Mercies* (1983)? Then can you tell me why? Explain to me how actors – even as perfect as those he found, even so resourceful a director – could employ so few and such rhetorically uncomplicated speeches toward the flawless achievement of such a calmly profound and memorable face-to-face contemplation of human degradation and regeneration" (x-xi). Price's words are often mentioned in criticism of this author because they describe a dilemma familiar to those who practice academic criticism and find that Foote poses a special problem. One recalls that Foote himself was always diffident about pitching his work to others. As a rising star in early 1950s television writing, Foote, reluctant to elaborate, told his boss Fred Coe that he had an idea for a teleplay "about

an old woman who wanted to get back to her hometown" (qtd in Castleberry 2014: 158). Coe's intuition was that Foote had something substantial in mind, and he approved the project, which of course turned out to be *The Trip to Bountiful*, a dramatic work still vigorously alive in expanded or adapted versions well into the twenty-first century.

Alas, the critic cannot survive in the academic piranha tank by describing literary works in such sparse language, even if his words partake of oracular qualities, but Horton Foote's drama does not call for gush or sophistry, the clever insinuation of political bias, or supercilious posturing. Nor does it on the other hand deserve reduction to the equivocal realm of religious fundamentalism or to the province of knee-jerk reaction, although certain politically-oriented parties have briefly tried to conscript this Texas writer before realizing that he is neither a Baptist, nor an agrarian fugitive. Foote was indeed a dear friend of the brilliant drama critic and *I'll Take My Stand* contributor Stark Young, but his favourite Presidents were Franklin D. Roosevelt and Bill Clinton. He was a Christian, but no one was more aware of the shortcomings and at least occasional hypocrisy of much Southern fundamentalism than he. So the dilemma of how to write about Foote's plays, teleplays, and screenplays requires judicious mental adjustment on the critic's part. Reynolds Price's insight gives us a first step, and the critical contributions of Gerald C. Wood, who argues convincingly for Foote's "personal theater of intimacy" (1999: 8), and of Crystal Brian, whose article "Horton Foote: Mystic of the American Theatre" (2002) maintains that Foote's drama is transcendental art, exemplify approaches which direct themselves toward understanding rather than toward the often sophistical objectives of academic writing.

In the works of Flannery O'Connor, a writer highly regarded by Foote, the connection of the author's theological perspective has often lent critics a mechanism for management. In a passage which suggests a parallel between this Georgia writer and Foote, Robert Fitzgerald comments:

> She was a girl who started with a gift for cartooning and satire, and found in herself a far greater gift, unique in her time and place, a marvel. She kept going deeper (this is a phrase she used) until making up stories became, for her, a way of testing and defining and conveying that superior knowledge that must be called religious. It must be called religious but with no false note in our voices, because her writing will make any false note that is applied to it very clear indeed. (1965: vii)

Fitzgerald's words constitute something of an instruction for critics, and if it has sometimes fallen upon deaf ears surely O'Connor would not have been surprised by that. Fitzgerald adds:

> We had better let our awareness of the knowledge in her stories grow quietly without forcing it, for nothing could be worse than to treat them straight off as problems for exegesis or texts to preach on. (viii)

O'Connor, who lived the rural Southern life familiar to Foote, was unable herself to omit hymns or gospel music from her representation of this society, even though her perspective offers much less sympathy than that explicit in *Tender Mercies*. O'Connor's gospel singers, or ex-gospel singers, include The Misfit, the diabolical murderer from *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* and Tom T. Shiftlet, if that is his name, from *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* (1983b). Both of these stories are collected in her volume titled *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1983a). In *Revelation*, a story from O'Connor's collection *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), the main character Ruby Turpin listens with complacent pleasure to a radio performance of *When I looked up and He looked down*, and inwardly sings along with the refrain "And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown" (194).[5] Since the next line of the story reads, "Without appearing to, Mrs. Turpin always noticed people's feet" (ibid.), it does not appear that Ruby looks up as often as she may think she does. These instances show that hypocrisy is often to be associated with such music and with the commercial activity that produces it, and certainly Horton Foote was quite aware that in his own home state with its rich musical heritage there were examples of almost everything imaginable, including the exploitation of religious faith.

Unlike O'Connor, however, Foote led a creative life that was collaborative. He had been an actor himself before turning in his mid-twenties to writing, and all of his significant achievements as writer developed from the world of theatre and of television and of cinema. His modest efforts to write fiction, which were encouraged by others, were unsuccessful, and even his two valuable volumes of autobiography are mainly records of the collaborative life characteristic of a man of the theatre. His early dream of being an actor involved the commercial aspect of being paid to perform onstage, to gain a living by pleasing an audience, and in fact that consideration accompanied his entire career, as can be appreciated from a review of the extensive financial negotiations and other documents preserved by his faithful agent Lucy Kroll. If Mac Sledge resumes writing songs to seek a better life for his new family, he is preceded in this necessity by a whole tradition of entertainers of whom Homer and Shakespeare are conspicuous examples, and certainly Horton Foote's writing was given urgency by the financial challenges he faced as husband and father.

[5] This song was written by Albert E. Brumley, Sr (1905-77), one of the leading gospel songwriters and author of such much-recorded songs as *I'll Fly Away* and *Jesus, Hold My Hand.*

Mac Sledge's audience is no highbrow crowd, but the matter his songs deal with is itself essential to most people's lives: emotional connections, the pains, pleasures and hopes of everyday life, and the inescapable value of honesty. As a reformed drinker and brawler, he is in his lucid moments burdened in conscience, but if one reflects upon the conscience of the pressured but never improper Carrie Watts one also sees a similar burden as she constantly weighs the significance of her failed love and of her marriage to a man she did not love. Surely bitter experience is a threat to peace of mind, and its poisonous effects are not easily neutralized by rationalization or by glib applications of convenient ethical formulas. In the crisis of chaos in which Mac Sledge appears, as well as in the intolerable nastiness of the claustrophobic apartment in which Carrie Watts has found herself, the urgent necessity of spiritual liberation is the moving force of the drama, and the representative medium of that force is music, not the music whose mode engages the dance but that which lifts the understanding to an acceptance of a state of being defined by mortality and shaped between anxieties of pain and confusion, on the one hand, and a tranquil activity of comprehension on the other. In the Southern society Foote knew, that music was practically everywhere, for churches were and are everywhere in the American South, and each church had and has its musicians and its singers.

The nineteenth century had also been a period of nearly universal Christian worship in the United States, and a strong connection between church hymns and the anti-slavery movement was particularly influential before the Civil War. Horton Foote's distant relative Harriet Beecher Stowe made hymns essential to the message of her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), in which the novel's hero responds to the brutality of Simon Legree by singing *Amazing Grace* and dies quoting another hymn as well as a scriptural passage. Stowe was herself, incidentally, a writer of hymns. Emily Dickinson, of course, shaped her poetry on the metrical patterns of familiar church hymns. It was the hymn which gave harmony to the often troubled lives of generations preceding the developments of modern life, and hymns still retain great importance in many lives, especially in their ability to empower a commonality of feeling which has a moderating or healing effect upon the anxiety generated by both normal and extraordinary challenges. The moment in which one sings or reflects upon a hymn is an engagement with tradition and with one's companions in the common journey through life. Even when Carrie Watts sings the hymn which maintains that human friendship is much less significant than that of Jesus, she is connecting to friends, known or unknown, who sing the same song with devoted attention to breath, pitch, and meaning. In the film version of *Bountiful*, in which this hymn is replaced first by another titled *Softly and*

Tenderly and later by *Blessed Assurance*, Mrs Watts' love of hymns conveys her desire to connect with others, a desire sorely frustrated by her daughter-in-law Jessie Mae's rude efforts to silence her. Mrs Watts recruits Thelma, the kind-hearted young woman she gets to know on the bus to Harrison, to join her in singing, thus emphasizing by contrast Jessie Mae's selfish attitude and rejection of anything spiritual.

For Mac Sledge, the return to church, where he seems to know the songs already, accords with his return to sane life. Despite his years of destructive behaviour, he somehow finds a way to regain dignity and self-respect as he learns to appreciate the kindness, wisdom, and strength of Rosa Lee. As he realizes as well that he can contribute to her and her son's happiness, his sense of the priority of his own values as solitary individual diminishes, and those values evolve accordingly. As Rosa Lee and Sonny's happiness becomes essential to Mac, he is both humbled and strengthened. Rejoining sane society is not completely pleasant, but just as he finds in moments of singing together with others a joy and comfort that restores his spirit and refreshes his inspiration so he also finds in the simple pleasures of life as husband and father a bewildered satisfaction that has lifted him above his previous life of pointless struggle. He tells Rosa Lee that he does not trust happiness, but in the moment he does so he has located himself in a place where he belongs and where he can share his strength with persons who appreciate it. In Wallace Stevens's poem *Le Monocle de Mon Oncle*, where we read the lines "The honey of heaven may or may not come, / But that of earth both comes and goes at once" (1923: 15), a similar view is suggested, though in Mac's case a conviction that his life is governed by a power he cannot altogether understand constitutes a reinforcement of the hard-won, unpretentious wisdom that has come to him at last.

Thus Horton Foote's drama, like the communally-experienced music of the hymn, extends its artistic power with plainness and without empty sophistication. Just as one of Foote's heroes Samuel Clemens once referred to his novel *Tom Sawyer* as a hymn, so might this writer claim that in his unique dramatic works such as *Bountiful*, *Tender Mercies*, *The Orphans' Home Cycle*, and many others he draws upon the communal force that empowers the hymn and illuminates both individual and family and the conflicts and reconciliations that occupy our time. In the Bob Dylan quotation used as epigraph for this paper, the speaker confesses that his former wisdom has turned out sadly mistaken, a recognition that in Socratic terms would be the possible beginning of wisdom, and which bears a kind of resemblance to the opening lines of what may be the most famous of English hymns: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, / That saved a wretch like me. / I once was lost but now am found / Was blind but now I see". Foote's dramatic insight is grounded in a humility that respects his characters and

the predicaments they face, and this respect is one of the reasons he never intrudes into the realm of the sensational. Just as he was known to avoid staging plays based on the lives of living people who might be offended or hurt by the publication of private information, so he turns his creative attention to those whose stories might never otherwise attract attention. I suggest that this dramaturgy, motivated by respect for the spirit and the hopes of both characters onstage and members of the audience, gravitates toward the effects of hymnology and thus gives us reason to see in Foote's drama a teleology that is both musical and technically distinct from that of other American playwrights.

The success of his plays in the years since his death in 2009 certainly suggests that these works' unique character is of increasing interest on all levels of the American theatre, and as more of his archived work is brought to public attention the artistic contribution of this major dramatic writer will be more widely recognized. For actors, those artists who deliver drama to audiences onstage or in film, Foote's scripts are known to enable their work and to open new avenues of achievement. A former actor himself, the playwright had walked the Depression streets of New York City seeking desperately for parts; he had been paralysed with stage fright during a tryout for a play; he had worked weeks in a spectacular programme in a silent part; he had had a local success in a lead role played in blackface; and he had almost accidentally become a playwright while working to develop his acting skills. His love of actors and their profession, a love that many actors have recognized, was deeply set in his being, and it was shown in Foote's habit of encouraging them to make his characters their own onstage.

Notable testimony about Foote's special relationship to actors is that of Robert Duvall, whose admiration for his friend has often been acknowledged, and that of Geraldine Page, whose tribute to Foote at the time of her receiving an Oscar for *Bountiful* is on *YouTube*. A 2011 volume *Farewell: Remembering Horton Foote 1916-2009* includes appreciations of the writer by actors Elizabeth Ashley, Betty Buckley, Ellen Burstyn, Frank Girardeau, Carol Goodheart, David Margulies, Roberta Maxwell, Matthew Modine, Joyce O'Connor, Rochelle Oliver, Wendy Phillips, Lois Smith, Jean Stapleton, Cameron Watson, Margot White, and Harris Yulin, in all of whose statements one is reminded that Foote's work as artist was intimately connected to his own generosity of character and his respect for the acting profession. His sense of the theatre as community reflected a larger sense of human community, and his objective of excellence in the theatre was a natural manifestation of a devotion to the quest for excellence in life. If Foote's dramaturgy is hymnological, that accords well with what we know of the origins of the theatre, for in the Athenian theatre the best seat in the house was that of the priest of Dionysus, and a due reverence for inspira-

tion gave life then to the development of this medium of artistic revelation as it must continue to do.

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Arne Romanowski*

Voices at the Margins of Victimhood: Jorge Díaz's *Náufragos de la memoria*

Abstract

After decades of political and ideological persecution, the process of Chilean national reconciliation requires the careful examination of a problematic dialectic: on the one hand, forgiving and forgetting, on the other, bringing the guilty to justice. However, decades after Chile's transition from dictatorship to democracy, the boundaries between forgiveness and condemnation remain porous. This is partially due to the fact that some of the survivors have not been able to express their personal injuries. In the eyes of the famous Chilean playwright Jorge Díaz – whose last collection of plays *Náufragos de la memoria* [*Castaways of Memory*] (2007) is the subject of this article – this social dynamic of silence imposed on the defeated converts society into one more link in the chain of guilt. This article seeks to shed light on the diverse intimate experiences of victimhood as represented theatrically in Díaz's pieces, from the perspective of survivors who are dwelling at the periphery of post-dictatorship society. Following Ana Longoni's proposal of the marginalization of this particular group through their classification as "traitors", I will argue that through the dynamic employment of silences, irony, and of physical space(s), these plays blur the categories of victim and perpetrator. This breaking of rigid classifications reveals Díaz's main criticism about his country's controversial attitude and debatable strategies of reconciliation, and opens up the possibility of a dialogue about traumatic memory – including those most intimately touched by this memory.

Keywords: post-dictatorship, Chile, trauma, memory, theatre, Jorge Díaz, victim, perpetrator

Post-dictatorship theatrical productions in Latin America's Southern Cone – among them those written by the illustrious Chilean playwright Jorge Díaz – may help address several important questions and issues regarding this region's transitional political period. By uncovering the transformation and reconciliation processes that emerge from society's entrance into a new era of democracy, these texts provide a "significant commentary on major social or political problems" (Foster 2004: 38). Among such persistent issues is the complicated notion of defining victimhood, particularly as it relates to survivors of authoritarian regimes. This article seeks to address

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this topic by analysing the characters in Jorge Díaz's last three plays, published in a collection titled *Náufragos de la memoria* [*Castaways of Memory*][1] (2007). The protagonists of these plays survived and were directly affected by Pinochet's regime[2] in their own right, yet none of them fit a socially accepted definition of an innocent victim. In other words, these plays dramatize the experience of a particular group of people who cannot be categorized as victims nor as perpetrators, but rather inhabit a sort of 'grey area' at the margins of society merely due to the fact that they survived the dictatorship.

In the epilogue of his renowned play *Death and the Maiden* (1992), the Chilean writer and critic Ariel Dorfman voiced his expectations for the Rettig Commission[3] and praised its important role in the reconciliation process of post-dictatorship Chile. Writing at a time of transition between dictatorship and democracy, he predicted that the Commission would provide the means by which society was to gain a more consolidated picture of the atrocities that occurred under the Pinochet regime, which in turn would result in wider public recognition of the fact that these things truly happened. Accordingly, the findings of the Rettig Commission would lay the groundwork for unanimous reconciliation. However, the Commission's reach was rather limited: "[President] Aylwin was steering a prudent but valiant course between those who wanted past terror totally buried and those who wanted it totally revealed" (Dorfman 1992: 72). As a result, no one was brought to trial and – as the commission only dealt with the cases of those who were murdered by the regime – none of the many survivors got the chance to address their own painful experience in a public venue.

Jorge Díaz – without a doubt the most prominent Chilean playwright of the last century – and his theatrical work profoundly engage in social criticism, and often reveal an intrinsic human quality in the characters portrayed on stage. According to Díaz, there exists a prevailing social dynamic of silence imposed on the defeated – the survivors directly affected by the dictatorship – that converts society into one more link in the chain of guilt. He addresses this issue in the three plays he wrote immediately before his

[1] All translations from Spanish are mine.

[2] Augusto Pinochet's tenure as President of Chile – often referred to as a dictatorial reign – spanned from 1973 until 1990. He lost a national plebiscite in October 1988, yet remained in office until free elections were held in March 1990.

[3] The *Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación* (National Commission For Truth and Reconciliation, also called The Rettig Commission) operated from May 1990 to February 1991, and "was mandated to document human rights abuses resulting in death or disappearance during the years of military rule, from September 11, 1973 to March 11, 1990. Significantly, torture and other abuses that did not result in death were outside the scope of the commission's mandate" ("Truth Commission: Chile 90").

death,[4] in a collection entitled *Náufragos de la memoria*, which has not received extensive critical attention since its publication in 2007.[5] These pieces seek to represent different types of people affected by the Pinochet dictatorship, exposing their shared language of trauma, memory, and their experience of political change. The protagonists of these plays do not, however, represent a straightforward and socially accepted image of 'victims', one that includes only those who were passively abducted, tortured, and possibly disappeared by the authorities. Rather, the characters in Díaz's play occupy an ambiguous place between victimhood and perpetration. In the first play, entitled *Los pájaros en la tormenta* [*Birds in the Storm*], the protagonist is a man who, while reliving his experience in the torture chambers, cannot remember whether he was the torturer or the tortured. In *La mano inocente* [*The Innocent Hand*], the play's main character, who was forced to collaborate in his own father's murder during the Pinochet dictatorship, wishes to wash away his guilt by confronting one of the individuals who forced him to commit such a heinous crime, and thus redeem his own existence. In the third play, titled *Exit,* two former theatre students meet again after returning from exile, and are unable to (re)construct their lives and their sense of being. As Díaz himself observes, many of his characters move about with a sense of ambiguity about their identity, marked by an inner fear to face who they really are. The same dread that consumes their experience creates the conflict that makes theatre possible, and which is represented on stage (Díaz 1996: 23).

In this article, then, I will seek to shed light on the varied intimate experiences of victimhood as they are represented theatrically in Díaz's pieces, from the perspective of these survivors dwelling at the periphery of post-dictatorship society. The analysis will follow Ana Longoni's proposal in *Traiciones* (2007), where she suggests that the individuals who survived detainment during the dictatorship are – upon reentering society – necessarily viewed with suspicion, and often marked as traitors. This is based on the assumption that in order to survive torture and punishment, they had no choice but to collaborate with their oppressors in some form. Because of such assumed betrayal, these survivors are rejected from the community and automatically marginalized. I will discuss how through the dynam-

[4] *Los Pájaros en la tormenta,* the first play of the collection, was adapted and directed by Pablo Krögh and his company El Lunar. It was first performed during the 2007 Festival Santiago a Mil, shortly before Jorge Díaz's death. Within the next year, Krögh and his company also performed the other two plays of the collection, *La mano inocente* and *Exit* (see Robles Poveda 2015: 438).

[5] One of the rare examples of scholarship on these plays is their inclusion in the doctoral dissertation written by María Magdalena Robles Poveda at the University of Salamanca (2015).

ic employment of silences, of irony, and of physical space(s), Díaz's plays blur the categories of victim and perpetrator, giving way to the possibility of a more inclusive perception of and dialogue about such traumatic memory, one that is not restricted by a traditionally rigid binary categorization.

In the case of Chile, this is particularly significant if we consider the negative reactions to the most recent version of the Valech Report, reopened in 2011.[6] The report sparked intense criticism – as evidenced by local news reports – because of the inclusion of individuals such as Luz Arce and Miguel Estay, who were deemed to be victims-turned-collaborators by society at large ("Información"; "AFDD demanda" 2011). Two of the protagonists of Díaz's plays – the nameless "He" in *Los pájaros en la tormenta*, and "Frog" in *La mano inocente* – closely portray precisely this dilemma, and their personal experience of exclusion from society because of such an 'in between' position.[7]

Dominick LaCapra's work certainly adds to such a discussion about categorizing victims, perpetrators, and roles in between. Focusing on Nazi Germany, the scholar points out that in defining victims and perpetrators, it is necessary to avoid simplifications as well as generalizations, as they are an impediment to any useful investigation and analysis (LaCapra 2014: 114-40). Of particular interest here is LaCapra's insistence on the fact that, besides the Jews – who made up the greatest and therefore most obvious group of targets – there were various other communities of people who can be considered to be the victims and sufferers of Nazi ideology and violence.

[6] The Valech Report (issued in 2005) officially known as the *Informe Valech de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura* [National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report] was the product of the commission which initially opened from 2003 to 2004. The report seeks to address survivors of the dictatorship and grants those who are deemed victims financial support and health care (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos; "Commission of Inquiry: Chile 03"). It was not received without criticism directed at the exclusion of many victims who were detained and tortured outside of the official detention centres, at the austere and symbolic nature of the reparations it offered, and the clause that would keep the data that was collected secret for fifty years (see Portales 2015).

[7] It is imperative to mention that, as Steve Stern ably demonstrates, it is already inherently difficult to explain the experiences of those who can be considered victims in the socially accepted sense, in other words, those who did not switch sides. However, when perpetrator and victim get blurred together, analysis is even more challenging. In a forum on Luz Arce's experience that was held in Santiago in 2008, and included Mrs Arce herself, it came to light how "problematic the term 'collaboration' can be. The discussants – one of whom suffered the loss of her husband because of Luz Arce – differ greatly in their treatment of Arce, and come to no agreement about how to determine where the line can be drawn between victim and active participant" (Weeks 2013: 143). For a detailed account of the controversy about Luz Arce, see Lazzara 2011.

It is unclear whether the Nazi behaviour with which these communities were confronted, and the effects that Nazi policy had on them, were similar or different from that directed at the Jews. These processes of victimization and their underlying ideology, as LaCapra argues, require a more informed study before any simplistic and universal conclusions can be drawn (128-9). While his research specifically concentrates on events and groups of individuals during World War II, his findings may be applied to a larger variety of war-like scenarios where collective trauma was induced on a great part of the general population, as was the case in Chile.

Where, then, lies the connection between the representation of trauma on stage, and unresolved trauma within society, or the public sphere? Prior to entering into a detailed analysis of Díaz's plays, let me consider the key role that theatre plays with reference to representations of trauma. In her insightful work *Trauma and Recovery,* Judith Herman asserts that, for an individual who has experienced terror, one of the most important steps towards recovery is to reconstruct and recount the trauma story in a safe setting, allowing for the transformation of a repetitious, frightening, static threat into a normal memory (1997: 175). This process creates testimony, the telling of truth, which several specialists describe as a "ritual of healing" (181). As a privileged space for the expression of social ills, art may then present an environment that could function as a substitute for direct and individual testimony, a place for acknowledging and expressing the shared languages of trauma and memory.

To follow this train of thought, I once more turn to LaCapra, as he evokes the term "post-traumatic narrative":

> Writing trauma would be one of those telling aftereffects in what I termed traumatic and post-traumatic writing . . . It involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and 'giving voice' to the past – processes of coming to terms with traumatic 'experience,' limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combination and hybridized forms. (2014: 186)

Building upon this notion, Ana Patricia Rodríguez has remarked that "such narratives replay and perform collective experiences of post-traumatic stress disorders deeply embedded in the cultural and affective psyche of a people who have endured persecution, violence, genocide" (2009: 104). The function that theatre may then assume in relation to trauma and post-traumatic recovery work lies precisely in its ability to replay and perform the unresolved material, and hence to serve as a vehicle through which to articulate it in the public sphere. Jorge Díaz himself says that "society needs theatre to free nightmares, to ease the pressure of the cauldron of repression, to pick up the shards of a broken mirror and piece togeth-

er an image and see itself for the first time".[8] Performance, then, creates a privileged space for the acknowledgement and understanding of trauma and for the formation of collective memory, precisely through its function as a mirror and as a safe area for re-living the traumatic moment (Taylor 1997: 123). Let me now move on to discussing the three plays included in *Náufragos de la memoria* in detail, as a case in point of the representation of Chilean trauma and its contradictions on stage.

1. *Los pájaros en la tormenta*: Silence

All three plays included in *Náufragos de la memoria* are one act plays with two characters. All of the protagonists, each in their own particular way, represent a group of victims that have been unable to find a way to reenter society as fully participating members; rather, they are dwelling at the periphery of communal existence.

The first play, titled *Los pájaros en la tormenta,* is a conversation – or rather a monologue – between He (Él), a character that is struggling to find his own identity, and the Mute Woman (La Muda). The stage directions are limited to a few instructions about the emotional state of the protagonist. He recounts memories of his maternal grandmother and her house, of the only room she actually occupies within that house, the rest of the house consisting of a long hallway with innumerable closed chambers. From behind these closed doors, music is emanating; music that – regardless of how inordinately loudly it is played – does not drown out the screams of pain and horror, nor the howling or the blood. At the end of the performance, He asks the Mute Woman who was torturing whom. He claims that if he himself were the victim, he would surely have scars. He finally asks the woman to tell him whether such scars have marked his body, but his question goes unanswered. The actual essence of the experience – did He torture or was He tortured – which holds the key to the trauma itself, is muted; it remains unspoken. The spectator, as I will demonstrate, has to read 'between the lines', and understand what is being expressed through voids and silences.[9]

[8] "La sociedad necesita el teatro para liberar pesadillas, para aflojar la presión de la caldera de represiones, para recoger los pedazos de un espejo roto y armar una imagen y verse por primera vez", qtd in Rojo 2004: 63.

[9] Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración Artificial*, published in 1980, one of the first Latin American novels to address the problematic of the latest dictatorships and disappearances of opponents of the system in the Southern Cone, used a similar technique; its essential and most profound meanings were to be found in its silences and in the void that these silences created. For more information, see, for example, Balderston 1988.

The main character of *Los pájaros en la tormenta* is facing a wall of silence as he is searching for the identity he seems to have lost and forgotten, a type of amnesia induced by the trauma he has lived through during the dictatorship. He continuously attempts to articulate this loss hoping to recover some sense of who he is, hoping to encounter a voice to guide him out of the chaos of painful memories constantly haunting him. Nonetheless, he does not know whether the images in his head – of his grandmother's house of horror – are real or if they are the product of his tormented mind, or a mixture of both. In the play, this character is only referred to as "He", indicating a complete lack of identity. About his name he says, "I don't remember mine" ("yo no recuerdo el mío", Díaz 2008: 23).

Why is he not able to remember? He answers this question directly: "I am afraid to remember" ("Tengo miedo de recordar", ibid.). His memories, regardless of whether or not they are imaginary, are haunting him to a point where they are paralyzing his whole being, compromising all of his senses. He is lost in a world that is indifferent to him (represented by his *deaf* grandmother), and at the same time unresponsive to his trauma (represented on stage by his *mute* interlocutor): it is a world of complete silence. This reduces him to an existence lost in darkness, without orientation (he refers to himself as *blind*): "I am like a blind man, waiting for the eyes I ordered through the mail" ("Estoy como un ciego, esperando los ojos que encargué por correo", 29). He is a castaway, unable to find his direction, drifting in unknown waters scattered with pieces of dark memories, clinging to anything that may have the appearance of being familiar, of belonging: "I don't know why I anchor myself to the memory of that grandmother, like a castaway" ("No sé por qué me aferro al recuerdo de esa abuela como un náufrago", 24). This imaginary island of comfort turns out to be an illusion. His grandmother, who represents the part of society that refuses to hear – even as incredible atrocities are being committed in its midst – destroys any hope he may have had to find himself. He remembers how she told him that there is no avail to his state of being, that he will always be a broken individual:

> Eres como un pájaro en la tormenta. Los vientos te arrastran hacia el suelo. Es inútil que trates de remontar el vuelo. Terminarás siempre herido, quebrantado, arrastrado como un pájaro ciego . . . (25)

> [You are like a bird in the storm. The winds drag you to the ground. It is useless to try to take flight. You will always end up wounded, broken, and dragged along like a blind bird . . .]

This, then, represents the vision society has of the protagonist, relegating him to its margins; he is seen as a lost case. As a survivor, he will not be able

to recover from his experiences as a torturer or a tortured being; he is spent, disabled, useless. The place at the periphery of human existence, to which he and other traumatized individuals are assigned, is the madhouse, "el loquero," where therapy consists of the administration of a variety of drugs:

> *(Sarcástico)*
> . . .
> Los hay peores que yo. Viven dentro de cajas de pastillas. Se arrastran de consultorio en consultorio, como un cojo transporta su pierna ortopédica de santo en santo, buscando un milagro imposible. (29)
>
> [*(Sarcastic)* . . . There are people worse off than I am. They live inside pill boxes. They are dragged from clinic to clinic, much like a cripple transports his prosthetic leg from saint to saint, looking for an impossible miracle.]

The protagonist's sarcastic remark on miracle-seekers clarifies how he has realized that drowning out traumatic experiences and memory through drugs does not work. Medicating the pain solely constitutes a patient's impossible dream of finding comfort by forgetting, and provides society with an easy way out. The protagonist mentions how one of the doctors in this hopeless environment points to the only real solution: "'Speak, speak!', the shrink says to me. 'Words will fix everything'" ("'¡Hable, hable!', me dice el loquero. 'Todo se arreglará con el verbo'", ibid.).

The only key to recovery lies in communication, in the dialogue with someone who may help him recuperate his identity, which is precisely what society is negating him. "You know everything I've forgotten . . . And now it seems that you are torturing me with your silence" ("¡Todo lo que yo he olvidado lo sabes tú! . . . Y ahora parece que tú me estás torturando con tu silencio", 31). "You" in this case is the Mute Woman, who represents a society that is incapable to respond to his repeated cry for help. Any attempt the protagonist makes to break through the wall, to connect with the world outside, fails and consequently leads to an inevitable descent into despair; He is trapped in a state of desolation, of complete loneliness. His monologue is an uncontested collection of racing thoughts, rhetorical questions, snippets of past or imagined conversations, and pleas for help, for someone to talk to him. As in other plays written by Jorge Díaz, we witness an impossibility of communication, which questions the very function of language (Burgos 1986: 133). This showcases the dilemma that is brought before the audience, particularly if we consider that traumatic recovery, in Judith Herman's terms, is based upon *communication*. She stresses that a traumatized person needs helpful interaction with a therapist and, at later stages, with the community in order to recreate the traumatic experience so that it ceases to be a chaotic, constant replay of the traumatizing event.

Where can He find such a forum? Is the play pointing out that the only victims not met with silence are the ones who are already dead?

Another possible interpretation is based on the question of whether He is actually considered a proper victim, someone in need of therapy. The protagonist himself is in doubt: was he at the giving or at the receiving end of the torture administered at what he remembers to be his grandmother's house? The confused and helpless state in which He is represented on stage clearly suggests that his witnessing of and participation in (either as victim, or perpetrator, or both) the systematic human rights abuses that took place under the Pinochet dictatorship affected and traumatized him. This clearly shows that this type of individual needs to communicate his traumatic experiences, needs to engage in a dialogue with the community about what happened. His amnesia and the relegation to the margins of society, one could argue, make him a victim of the circumstances, if he was not already a victim of the atrocities.

Accordingly, Jorge Díaz is giving him a voice through the mere act of putting him on stage, and of letting him speak. The juxtaposition of his monologue with the Mute Woman's silence underscores the absence of an active interlocutor to his expression of trauma. The woman functions as an onstage audience, and may represent the part of society that pretends not to hear the victims' cry for help. She is, however, mute, and therefore cannot speak even if she wished to. In other words, she does not have the means to engage in verbal dialogue.

To take this analogy a bit further, I contend that the Mute Woman may function at the same time as a mirror to the audience itself. Her lack of reaction and interlocution as He is retelling the bits and pieces of his trauma may help the audience become conscious of its own role in the play: those who watch, just like the Mute Woman on stage, are mute spectators to the character's dilemma. Through this parallel, Díaz demands that the audience self-reflect on the effect of a lack of response to traumatic memory, and that the spectators question whether a merely passive participation in the addressing of post-traumatic memory – such as listening without interaction – can be sufficiently therapeutic to heal. At the end of the play, the members of the audience, confined to their role of passive observers and listeners, may actually experience that without dialogue it is impossible to answer questions about whether the traumatized survivor on stage collaborated, why he would have done so, and how he could escape his memories in order to go on living a normal life. Such a parallel experience as mute spectators may motivate the audience to think about what has gone wrong in Chilean society, about the way that it has not addressed the trauma of survivors, and about the lack of tools to support working through traumatic memory, such as an environment conducive to creating dialogue and interaction necessary for healing.

Finally, after discussing the characters' and the audience's roles, I would like to introduce an additional element: space. Traditionally, Jorge Díaz is known for the way in which he uses space to underline the nature of his characters, and their predicaments. He breaks with the concept of the neutrality of space; he does not treat it as the encasing of the action but rather as an element that announces the conflicts presented on stage and helps fabricate as well as manifest the sense of the drama (Oyarzún 2004: 102). Díaz prefers spaces that are messy and/or abandoned; including closed spaces, rickety houses, and shabby rooms. These spaces function as a reflection of existence in and of itself (Oyarzún 1999: 8). The specific environment or space that surrounds us completes us in what we are; it makes up a crucial part of a person's world, and shapes this world. Dwelling in a space, rather than just being in it spatially, implies that such a space provides a sense of continuity, belonging, community, and 'at-homeness', all forming an essential part of one's being.[10] Díaz's choice of ill-defined, ruined, decrepit, and generally unwelcoming spaces do not invite dwelling in the Heideggerian sense. Rather, these spaces mirror the characters' broken interiority, and their lack of having a familiar place in society. In other words, by means of negating his characters a welcoming space; thus, denying them a dwelling, Díaz successfully stages the way they experience a denial of belonging (Oyarzún 2004: 93).

Náufragos de la memoria falls within the tradition established by its author, and reflects the denial of belonging that society as a whole may inflict upon the different victims portrayed in these plays. *Los pájaros en la tormenta* is full of imaginary spaces that fit the categories mentioned above. One example is the grandmother's house, which represents both the place and the memory that is tormenting and victimizing the protagonist. It is a private residence whose spatial limits are ill-defined, and which is reminiscent of a horror movie in the sense that it evokes the image of a long hallway with a number of doors. From behind these doors emanate the cries and laments of people being tortured. Space, here, becomes a tool used in order to underscore the protagonist's suffering, to make it impossible for him to escape his victimhood, as he is encapsulated, even spatially, by his nightmare. He cannot leave this house, this space of horror, there is no escaping it: the doors lead to torture chambers.

There is also the imaginary space of the polyclinic where he receives injections to cure his amnesia, and where he tells the audience about his confrontations with others who suffer from similar troubles. He recounts an experience when he is leaving after his treatment; where he witnesses a pa-

[10] This notion is based on Heidegger's concept of the dwelling as the fundamental trait of being, elaborated in his essay "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken" (1954).

tient who is masturbating frenetically while standing outside on the patio. His conclusion is that this individual is "another one who is deciphering the mystery of his identity" ("otro que está descifrando el misterio de su identidad", Díaz 2008: 25). The man engaging in this rather obscene and normally private activity in public is trying to make his internal obsession and torment visible. The use of a public space here emphasizes the difficulty of confronting traumatic experiences and memories in an environment that is not receptive to them. The displacement of an activity generally deemed private (such as masturbation or trauma) into the public space calls attention, and may cause those engaging in this activity to be alienated. The public space then becomes a space of not belonging, a space where the brokenness of social outcasts (the mentally ill, the traumatized, etc.) is underscored and confirmed.

2. *La mano inocente*: Traitors

La mano inocente, the second play in this sequence, consists of a monologue that the character of the Frog "el Rana" – a cocaine addict, former torturer and informant – delivers in front of another man, who is silenced by a hood and has his hands and feet tied to a chair. Frog believes this character to be the Coronel who initially introduced him to the horror of drug addiction and the torture chamber. Stage directions are more frequent than in *Los pájaros en la tormenta,* and help underscore the protagonist's augmenting inebriation and the general sense of anxiety and restlessness surrounding him. After witnessing the assassination of his father under the Pinochet regime, Frog has become a third-class assistant to the murderers of his progenitor. He looks to the Coronel as a replacement of his lost father, but rather than protecting Frog, the Coronel introduces him to the world of cocaine and uses drugs to maintain control of his subordinate. Frog is denigrated to cleaning the excrements, blood, and vomit of the victims of torture. After the end of the dictatorship, the Coronel rejects him and asks him to disappear, but Frog cannot live without his substitute 'father'. As a consequence, Frog decides to kidnap him, in order to either obtain his recognition, or – by killing him – finally escape his own dark and hopeless past. At the end of the play, the protagonist crumbles, and the Coronel-'father' does not avow the truth, nor is he assassinated, and thereby corrupts any possible resolution of the problem. This lack of closure may be considered analogous to the presence of unresolved trauma in Chilean society following the Pinochet dictatorship.

From the outset, the play creates a negative set of expectations about the protagonist through his name: el Rana. In the Latin American cultur-

al realm, 'rana' or 'sapo' [frog] stands for 'snitch' or for 'traitor', similar to the English term 'rat'. This brands the protagonist as a lowly individual undeserving of respect, as a criminal in terms of social norms, and as an untrustworthy individual. In the end he does what is expected of him: by telling his story he 'snitches' on his former superior, and at the same time on the society that has forced him to dwell at its very margins. Doing so, however, does not relieve him from the burden of his past or from his bad reputation. His categorization as a 'rana' underscores his representation as a coward, and as a weak individual unworthy of deference. He is incapable of successfully functioning on his own; because of his weakness he will predictably cave, as he does at the end of the play when he does not accomplish his revenge, but rather protects the man he thought to have been the Coronel and cries for him not to die. Through this negative connotation of the protagonist's name, the play evokes the same type of reaction from the audience that society has towards individuals like Frog, if we accept Ana Longoni's thesis (2007) that those individuals who survive detainment during the dictatorship are necessarily viewed as traitors upon reentering society, and therefore are rejected by the community. Thus, Díaz's play confronts the spectators with their own judgmental vision about this specific type of survivors of atrocities, while in a parallel fashion showcasing what the audience's participation in the process of such marginalization may look like.

Particularly interesting in this context is that in *La mano inocente,* Jorge Díaz also revisits the dialectic of victim and perpetrator, although in a different light from what happened in *Los pájaros en la tormenta.* Frog, the protagonist, could be categorized as both. He is first of all a victim, as he has witnessed his father's assassination after having been tortured at the hands of the Pinochet regime. Later on, in order to survive, he is threatened to keep silent and forced to collaborate with the assassins, turning into a torturer himself. The Coronel, who is responsible for the Frog's father's death, gives the protagonist the following 'options':

> Tienes dieciocho años pendejo, si quieres que no te dejemos hueso sano, vai y contaí el cuento de tu viejo. Pero si quieres prosperar, tener buen billete y fornicarte a las mejores minas, te vienes con nosotros. Necesitamos un informante. (Díaz 2008: 36)

> [You are eighteen years old, jackass, if you want us to leave you without a single bone intact, go and tell the story of your old man. But if you want to prosper, walk around with a little money in your pocket, fuck the best chicks, you'll come with us. We need an informant.]

Finding himself fatherless and without many alternatives for survival, Frog makes a choice that will mark him socially and psychologically for a long time. He becomes an informant and torture assistant to the Coronel. Although in the case of Frog there is no question that he had turned into a collaborator, what is important to this analysis is Longoni's notion that it is sufficient to be *perceived* as a traitor for society to marginalize a person immediately (2007: 30-1). As was the case with the real-life survivor-turned-collaborator Luz Arce (see note 7 above) – the protagonist of a highly controversial debate in post-Pinochet Chile – society in general has no tolerance for people who, in their eyes, betrayed their fellow citizens, no matter what the reason may have been. For Luz Arce, as for the main character in Jorge Díaz's play, initially the best chance for survival was to actively participate in the system.[11] In the case of perpetrator-victims, as shown in *La mano inocente*, the larger community denies that these individuals were victims, and rejects them outright on the basis of their transgressions. They are hence doubly relegated to the periphery of society: first of all, naturally, in their role as perpetrators of crimes, and secondly through the disavowal of their victimhood. No forgiving option is ever taken into consideration.

In *La mano inocente*, the protagonist attempts to free himself from the perpetrator-victim role in order to recover the ability to live a normal life within society. As Miguel Ángel Giella points out, victimizers define themselves ontologically through their connection to the victims, thus their existence is tied to that of the subject of their own crime. Lorenzo and Ignacio, the protagonists of the Argentinian playwright Griselda Gambaro's play *Los siameses* [*The Siamese Twins*], published in 1967, exemplify this interdependent relationship and the necessity of the perpetrator to destroy the victim in order to liberate him/herself (1994: 137). This same dynamic is one of the undercurrents of *La mano inocente*. The Coronel, now hooded and handcuffed on stage, had initially subjugated the Frog by killing his father, and later transformed him into a third-class perpetrator who would take care of the dirty work, literally and metaphorically speaking, as he has to clean the excrements, blood, and vomit of the victims of torture. At the same time, the exploitation and humiliation he experiences during this work make Frog a victim, yet his identity as a perpetrator, even as one subjected by force to commit atrocities, prevent post-Pinochet society from seeing him as such.

At the time of the transition to democracy, the Coronel no longer has any use for his victim. In order to be able to go on living a normal life, the Coronel has to shed the role of being a perpetrator of crimes commit-

[11] For a detailed testimony of her story, see Arce 2004 (Luz Arce's *El Infierno*, originally published in 1993 by Planeta in Santiago, Chile).

ted during the dictatorship. Consequentially, he attempts to get rid of Frog, who is clearly aware of the Coronel's intentions:

> y me apuntó con la pistola y me dijo: ¡Desaparece de mi vista, hocicón! Yo no te conozco. Tú que sabes hacer desaparecer a las personas, ahora desaparece tú. ¡Hazte humo! . . . Comprendí que mi Coronel me quería sacar de en medio, es decir, aplastar como una cucaracha. (Díaz 2008: 37-8)

> [And you pointed your gun at me and told me: disappear from my sight, blabbermouth! I don't know you. Since you know so well how to make people disappear, make yourself disappear. Turn yourself into smoke! . . . I understood that the Coronel wanted to get me out of the way, that is, smash me like a cockroach.]

On stage, Frog reverses the former roles and turns into the victimizer of the Coronel, who now holds the position of the victim. This gives Frog the chance to destroy the element that marks him as a perpetrator: the Coronel. On the one hand, the Coronel was the one who forced Frog to participate in the torture of others, and on the other hand, the Coronel is now also the victim that allows Frog to literally abuse his own position of control over someone else's life. If Frog does not get rid of this victim – if he falters as he does at the end of the play – he will not be able to shed the identity of a victimizer, which is precisely what is preventing him from living a normal life, as he is seen as a perpetrator by society. Frog does not act in the same manner as those who willingly participated in the system, torturing and abusing human rights on a daily basis. At the time of transition to democracy, these types of perpetrators successfully disconnected themselves from their victims, and went on living untouched thanks to the impunity granted to them. Sarcastically, Frog states various examples of such turncoats and their ability to effortlessly rejoin society after end of he dictatorship:

> Luego del maldito plebiscito que ganaron con trampa (44)

> se convirtieron los especialistas…¿le gusta que lo llame así?… en jefes de seguridad del Palacio de Gobierno, encargados municipales de seguridad o agregados militares en embajadas.
> . . .
> *Nos reconciliamos*, de manera que hay peguita para todo el mundo
> . . .
> De la Villa Grimaldi a guardaespaldas del Alcalde, asesor en la lucha antiterrorista y socio de dos empresas de seguridad. (37, my emphasis)

> [After the damned plebiscite which they won with tricks . . . the specialists…do you like it that I call you that?… turned into chiefs of security of the

> Governor's Palace, commissioners of security or secondary soldiers in embassies. . . . *We were reconciled* so that everyone could have a piece of the pie . . . From Villa Grimaldi to the mayor's bodyguard, advisor in the anti-terrorist fight and associate of two security firms.][12]

Frog's preceding quote employs sharp irony and sarcasm, for example through interjections such as asking the hooded Coronel a rhetorical question: "do you like it that I call you that?" and also through the creation of direct connections between torture centres such as the Villa Grimaldi and post-dictatorship government offices. This element of irony is repeatedly employed throughout *La mano inocente*. As in *Los pájaros en la tormenta*, where the stage directions instruct the protagonist to be "sarcastic" in his description of medicated trauma victims, the text employs irony to let Frog express his disapproval. In *La mano inocente*, as we have seen in the quote above, this criticism is directed at the amnesty[13] given to high profile perpetrators, and their seamless reintegration into society, while many victims awaited in vain for justice to be done. In the prologue to the 2008 edition of Díaz's plays, Carla Jara Drago argues that for the protagonist, irony voices "his personal disgust in the face of this game of double appearance; a type of ideological and political transvestism . . . is observed in the irony, by the implicit tragedy".[14] The inherent irony in Frog's own tragedy of being incapable to reintegrate into society, she adds, lies in the fact that, differently from other perpetrators, he is incapable of forgetting, overcoming, and moving on from his trauma and his position as a dual victim and victimizer.

While Frog is venting his rage and frustration in a tirade apparently directed towards his victim, it becomes obvious that his general social cri-

[12] This is a reference to the plebiscite of October 5, 1988, which essentially ousted Pinochet as the leader of the country. Please see "The Chilean Plebiscite: A First Step to Redemocratization" for a detailed description of the process and its results. Villa Grimaldi, situated in the outskirts of Santiago de Chile, is the most famous among the numerous detention centres used during the Pinochet years. Those who worked there were notorious for brutally holding and torturing their prisoners, in some cases to death. The play alludes to this place, which immediately invokes images of torture and lack of humanity, and connects it to its former employees-turned-respectable civilians in order to point out a clear contradiction: the true perpetrators of brutal crimes during the dictatorship could easily shed their guilt and reenter society during the redemocratization process, while a perpetrator-victim like Frog is forced to remain at its margins.

[13] "The Amnesty Decree Law, passed in 1978, excludes all individuals who committed human rights violations between 11 September 1973 and 10 March 1978 from criminal responsibility". See Amnesty International (2013) for more detail.

[14] "evidencia su asco personal frente al juego de la doble apariencia, una suerte de travestismo ideológico y politico . . . se observa la ironía, por la tragedia implícita" (Jara Drago 2008: 10).

tique is intended for the larger audience, particularly for those who have tried to whitewash the dictatorship's major crimes: "There were cherries from the democratic pie for everyone, except for me, the useable idiot who did the dirty work" ("Hubo guindas de la torta democrática para todos, menos para mí, el tonto útil que hacía el trabajo sucio", Díaz 2008: 37).

At the same time, the ironic tone conveys some of the bitterness that the protagonist feels about his personal situation and the situation in general, a bitterness that allows him to express his frustration yet appear comical:

> Busca trabajo, me dijeron los hijos de perra. Brillante idea. Mañana colocaré en el diario un aviso destacado: "Se ofrece soplón de tercera a torturadores de primera. Estoy usado, pero soy reciclable". (47)
>
> [Get a job, those sons of bitches told me. Brilliant idea. Tomorrow I'll publish a distinguished ad in the paper saying: "Third-class stoolie for first-class torturers available. I'm used, but recyclable".]

In Jorge Díaz' earlier plays, pain and helplessness were hidden behind what, on the surface, appeared to be funny. Humour, as the author himself suggests, supposes the acknowledgement of pain and helplessness (Díaz 1996: 23). In *La mano inocente*, humour is definitely bitter, conveyed by a sharp sarcastic tone that reveals the character's agony and vulnerability. The double victimization that Frog experiences – once under the dictatorship and then again in a re-democratized Chile – is underscored by the droll yet pitiful image we have of him as a poor and lost soul, stuck in a situation without avail.

This desperate image of Frog is further underscored through the use of space in this play. The surroundings are completely in ruins; there are constant references to drops falling into a chamber pot, hinting at a broken roof. The protagonist himself starts out by making an allusion to an old house in Valparaíso that is about to be torn down, and that serves as the setting for the plot. This decrepit house represents what is left of Frog, a broken and useless individual, dwelling at the margins. Just as the house is nothing but a worn-out shell ready for disposal, an unusable structure, Frog – as we have seen in the quotes above — is a pathetic shadow of a person, and the space in which he operates reflects this sense of a lost existence, of his broken interior. It is certainly not a space for a person to dwell – in the Heideggerian sense – as it does not foster a sense of belonging or familiarity.

Several references in the play are made to spaces that are associated with the horrors committed under the dictatorship that Frog had to witness during his tenure as an 'associate' to the perpetrators of the abuse of political prisoners. This includes the Palacio del Gobierno, from where the tor-

ture was mandated, and the Villa Grimaldi, one of the most infamous detention centres during the Pinochet era. These allusions call attention to the protagonist's dark and horrifying past existence, one that continues to dominate his life in the present. There are no references at all to any pleasant spaces, to a possible place of retreat, or of hope. Everything is dark, sinister, and haunted by the terrors of the Frog's experience, he has no possible escape. Díaz uses space – as in the previous play – to underscore the entrapment of the protagonist in his situation, in his past, and in his status as a victim of the exploitation of those violently prolonging the persistence of the dictatorship regime.

Not only does the play point to the pain and sad existence that the protagonist and – by extension – others like him face, but also reveals the potential danger that lies in not giving voice and attention to this type of victims: will they try to do their own justice? Herman points out that many victims, especially before they have successfully recovered from their traumatic experiences, live with a fantasy of revenge against their tormentor.

> The revenge fantasy is often a mirror image of the traumatic memory, in which the roles of perpetrator and victim are reversed . . . Though the traumatized person imagines that revenge will bring relief, repetitive revenge fantasies actually increase her torment, [and] exacerbate the victim's feeling of horror and degrade her image of herself. (1997: 189)

La mano inocente, then, could be qualified as a showcase revenge fantasy, which makes Frog feel that he will finally escape his trauma by confronting his nemesis, yet leads him to completely fall apart in the end. It becomes clear that revenge does not work as a therapy. Yet, as the real therapy is denied, it may, in the eyes of the victim, be the only option to obtain justice. In the play, this notion is repeatedly articulated by the idea that the Coronel's own son, born from a prisoner whom he raped, will settle accounts with him:

> ¿Y sabe quién le va cortar los huevos y se los va a hacer comer uno a uno? ¡Su ahijado, el Luchito! Yo mismo le conté que usted había violado a su madre. (Díaz 2008: 45)

> [Do you know who is going to cut your balls and make you eat them one by one? Your protégé, Luchito! I myself told him that you raped his mother.]

Should this be the only means through which victims may address their trauma and break the silence that surrounds it, there is a great risk that the unresolved violence of the past will continue to cause violence in the present and into the future. Consequently, as Herman foregrounds, overcom-

ing the revenge fantasy, which she aptly defines as "helpless fury" (1997: 189), is part of the recovery process. And in order to be successful, this process needs to be one based on communication and (re)integration into the community.

3. *Exit:* Gaining a Voice through Death

The final play of the collection, entitled *Exit,* relies on a more traditional dialogic form, and includes abundant stage directions. Its protagonists, César and Diego, have returned from exile only to find themselves at the margins of society, in a situation without avail. Finding no other means to sustain themselves, they turn to shoplifting in supermarkets. Diego, doubly exiled because he has left his children and their mother behind in Germany, is attempting to make a documentary centred on the refusal of the Chilean people to recognize themselves, what they are, and what their nation has become. Soon he realizes that he himself has taken part in that masquerade, and has betrayed his own identity. As a result, he commits suicide in front of the camera. César functions as a mirror image of what Diego has become, a 'transvestite' who tries to profit from the transition to democracy and who, in the end, only finds himself excluded from society's advancement. With a final touch of irony, he steals all the credits to his friend's documentary by appropriating his work.

Diego represents the third type of survivor Díaz deals with in this collection, and also the one whose predicament the playwright may personally have felt closest to, as Díaz himself was exiled in Spain during the Pinochet era. It is through this character, then, that the most direct critique of Chilean society is articulated. Diego was forced to leave the country during his days as a theatre student, because of his participation in staging a politically oriented stage production using scenes by the Marxist writer Bertolt Brecht. Upon his return, he is disillusioned about the country Chile has become after the end of the dictatorship. Instead of coming to terms with its past, things are simply covered up; there is a pretense that everything is fine and resolved, when, in reality, not much has been done in terms of reconciliation work. As Diego's roommate César puts it in the play, "it's better to draw a dense veil over the past. It is better to forget than to remember" ("Es mejor echar un tupido velo sobre el pasado. Olvidarse es mejor que recordar", Díaz 2008: 71). Significantly enough, César is a transvestite who conceals his real identity and his 'flaws' with a lot of make-up. This character embodies a society that focuses on appearances, on glamour, on outward perfection, sporting a stunning but false beauty that covers up and suppresses internal trauma and with it traumatic memory, and thus negates

the possibility of a dialogue, which would prove essential to start off a healing process. Diego realizes this and decides to dedicate himself to the project of making a documentary about his companion César, and in extension about a society that is caught up in constant denial and masquerades.

Not only does César embody a past that wants to be forgotten, but also some of the current traits of a society that leads individuals like Diego, who have suffered for an attempted but unsuccessful change, into disillusion. César, for example, has fathered a number of children whom he does not take care of, although he brags about his virility, unfaithfulness, and irresponsibility, and suggests to Diego that these are the qualities that one needs to have in order to be successful:

> CÉSAR ¿Sabes? Los hombres fieles como tú, son los que terminan solos. Los irresponsables como yo nunca acabamos en un asilo, aunque la gente cree lo contrario.
> Tú fuiste siempre demasiado fiel a las mujeres, a tus ideas políticas . . .
> (Díaz 2008: 68-9)

> [CÉSAR You know what? Loyal men like you are the ones who end up alone. The irresponsible ones like me never end up in an institution, though people think the opposite. / You were always way too faithful to women, and to your political ideas . . .]

Diego is loyal and politically committed. Loyalty, according to the way society is represented in these plays, will not be rewarded by a community that outwardly pretends to embrace morals and truthfulness, yet is actually satisfied as long as it preserves a façade that showcases such values. César's statement above is attuned with Frog's ironic observation about torturers from Villa Grimaldi becoming civil security agents after the transition to democracy. In a broader sense, César's criticism is another allusion to the way in which many of those who supported the totalitarian regime and participated in the system have been, after its demise, seamlessly reintegrated into the democratic apparatus, without any public display of their crimes or any attempt to bring them to justice.

César is also extremely materialistic; he seems incapable of real affection, and seeks to use any situation to his advantage. When he talks about getting married to his new agent, an older woman, it quickly becomes clear that the motive of their union is money: "In one week, I can get more out of her than I can out of you in ten years" ("En una semana puedo sacarle a ella más que a ti en diez añós", 64).

Even when he recounts romantic relationships from his youth, there is no sign of passion. César never shows love nor human affection, as all that

matters to him is material wealth. For Diego, who in his youth held ideals greatly differing from César's, the world seems to have become more and more unbearable. He wants to escape, he threatens to leave the apartment he shares with César (his world), but he does not have anywhere to turn.

The space of César's apartment is described by explicit stage directions at the outset of *Exit*, alluding to the modesty and disorder that surround the life of the two protagonists: "*A modest room. A table, two chairs and a sleep sofa. A television. In a corner there are boxes and video equipment. Great disorder*" ("*Una habitación modesta. Una mesa, dos sillas y un sofá-cama. Un televisor. En un rincón hay cajas y aparatos de video. Gran desorden*", 55). From the beginning, a sense of their existence at the bottom of the social strata is established, and throughout the play it becomes clear that Diego is only staying in this already hopeless environment thanks to his companion César's generosity, meaning that in reality, he does not have any place to live, to exist.

Space is also a symbol of the lack of substance that occupies so much of the protagonists' internal reality. When Diego is preparing a cup of tea and asks César for the sugar, the latter responds by saying that the sugar is in the same place where they always keep it, only to add that it could be anywhere. It is finally revealed that there is no sugar, that any place is really no place, that everywhere means nowhere. The characters' existence is unfulfilled, it is – like the apartment they inhabit – just a messy space without anything substantially meaningful in it, cluttered by useless objects but lacking the basic necessities for survival. Space, then, reflects the wretched internal world of victims such as Diego, who have left their substance behind and are desperately trying to fill the void caused by their traumatic experience, without being able to do so in their current situation.

The function of the suggested and real space on stage, then, is to reflect society's denial to acknowledge survivors, like those portrayed in the plays, as victims, as beings affected by the country's recent history. As they have not been able to properly address their trauma and the memory of it, the protagonists move about in a space that does not offer them a place to dwell, a place of comfort, of continuity, of belonging, a space in which they can properly exist. Rather, the space in which they operate reflects their existence at the margins of post-dictatorial society, or in other words, their quasi non-existence within society.

In *Exit*, the anxiety and desperation that go hand in hand with such marginalization culminate in the most tragic denouement. The dialogue between the two characters concludes when Diego, in the end, cannot bear the masquerade, the silence, or the inability to change anything, especially when he realizes that he himself has become part of an entity that he despises. There is no escape as he cannot live within, nor at the margins, of a self-delusional community that is constantly lying to itself, that does not

allow for the past to be worked through, that does not provide any space for survivors like himself or like those portrayed in the previous two plays. Filming his own suicide (which he commits by overdosing on pills), Diego desperately attempts to make himself heard, as this appears to be the only way for him to break the silence. In the country's dealings with the past, specifically with the victims of the dictatorship, death was the only way to obtain the right to testimony, as is demonstrated by the proceedings of the Rettig Commission.[15] It is emblematic, then, that Diego vindicates his victimhood and voices his criticism through an act of public death. Paradoxically, it is only through silence and death, through the destruction of his own ability to speak, that he sees the possibility of being heard, the possibility to share his traumatic memory. In the end, however, even this is denied to him. César – who longs to promote himself – takes away Diego's declaration expressed in his final statement by stealing the documentary and claiming it as his own. Thus, by appropriating his friend's story and experience, César denies Diego his final act of voice.

4. Conclusion

Dori Laub, in her article "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle", states that "the condition of possibility for so-called re-democratization was the erasure and forgetting of the experience of the victims" (1995: 63). This same phenomenon could be seen as being one of the underlying currents of the three plays discussed in this article, as one of the main issues that the protagonists struggle against. Is their experience to be forgotten and silenced forever? Why are they represented as being so eager to share their story? As we have pointed out, many, especially those individuals who were directly implicated with the regime, were perfectly capable of burying the past and starting afresh (as, for example, those collaborators that Frog mentions and who, as he claims, now lead perfectly ordinary lives). This is not the case with the protagonists in Diaz's plays. These characters seem to be stuck, trapped in the past, which makes them unable to cope with the present. Almost a century ago, Sigmund Freud said that the way to cure patients from trauma is to make them understand that their feelings are a repetition of something that happened earlier on in their lives, and is not associated with the present situation, so that "we oblige [. . . them] to transform a repetition into a memory" (qtd in Avelar 1999: 269). This transformation is exactly what Díaz's protagonists cannot achieve.

[15] As I have explained above (see note 3 above), the Rettig Commission only dealt with those victims who were murdered, and not with survivors. Death, in that sense, was the only way to have one's case brought before the public eye.

According to Idelber Avelar, the cause for an individual's entrapment in a traumatized state – a type of purgatory without escape – is the impossibility of mourning what has been lost. In the case of Díaz's plays, all of the protagonists share a common object of loss: their innocence, and their connection to, and place within their homeland. Freud describes the act of mourning precisely as a process in which the subject is able to separate him/herself from the loss, meaning that the traumatizing experience may have a profound impact upon him or her, yet in the end it becomes comprehensible as the loss of something outside of the self. Not being able to go through this process often leaves a traumatized person in a melancholic state, meaning that the experience engulfs the mourner to the point that the very separation between the subject and the object of loss disappears (232). In other words, if a person cannot separate him or herself from the traumatic occurrence, he or she will also be incapable of going through the process of distancing him or herself from the traumatic event and let it become part of the past. Rather, that person may continuously feel as if he or she was living in the past, or may continue to dwell in a situation where that past becomes a constant companion in the present. The result is a state of suspension between past and present and it may be said that all four characters in Díaz's plays find themselves affected by such melancholy.

As we have seen, what is presented in Díaz's plays, is a personal, intimate experience of the melancholic aftereffects of trauma that calls for a space in which to be addressed and resolved. The effect this may have or have had on the greater community is not to be underestimated, because when personal experiences are lost and suppressed, and with them the memory they would have created, it also affects the collective memory. These two kinds of memory are not opposites, but rather have a symbiotic relationship. An experience shared by many is, naturally, made up of many individual impressions of the event at stake, which usually have in common a certain kind of underlying emotion or reaction related to the shared occurrence. Without these personal connections to the experience, it is difficult for anyone in the community to relate to or be involved in social remembrance. Individual memories are finally what sustain the collective one, so their creation is of utmost importance. Jorge Díaz's work in trying to bring to light individual fictionalized traumas, and in showing the importance of mourning and recovery, contribute to the process of building such a collective consciousness. The stage is, first of all, a social outlet needed for the healing process (as Herman argues), and, secondly, provides a number of individual experiences that could serve as a starting point for the creation of a collective memory. More recently, directors such as Lola Arias have written and directed plays such as *El año en que nací* [*The Year I*

was Born];[16] a piece that deals with (authentic) personal traumas and identities of the generation that grew up under Pinochet's dictatorship. It "allowed the audience to have access to the intimate details of the performer's and their parents' lives, some of them victims and some of them perpetrators" (Contreras López 2015: 290). While we should avoid thinking of theatre as a *universal* response to traumatic experiences – as these require culturally and generationally specific modes of mourning – plays such as *El año en que nací* illustrate that theatre can serve to create a sense of a collective identity and work as an act of memory and healing (ibid).

The types of trauma addressed in Díaz's plays do not necessarily correspond with the kind of tragedy of a disappeared, tortured or murdered individual or loved one that generally comes to mind when thinking about the dictatorships in the Southern Cone. The characters portrayed in these dramas do not neatly fit such an established category of victim. Especially in the case of He and of Frog, the boundaries are blurred: the first one does not remember whether he tortured, was tortured, or witnessed torturing, and the second, in his position as a victim, was forced to collaborate with the torturers. How do these characters define themselves? Once one is classified as a victim, does one always remain a victim? Does it depend on whether one is a victim or victimizer first? Can society come to terms with the idea of the coexistence of those two characteristics in one single person? The plays do not offer answers to these intriguing questions, but rather implicitly force the audience to face up to and evaluate their own stance *vis-à-vis* these issues.

As I have shown in this analysis, *Náufragos de la memoria* reveal that the reconciliation process in Chilean society during the first decade of the new millennium continued to be very much incomplete, even twenty years after the end of the dictatorial era. Through theatre, "[which] simplifies, makes visible/invisible, concentrates, issues and communicates while it organizes and situates spectators" (Taylor 1997: 227), the audience – as a representative of society – is confronted with some of these matters, as they become articulated and part of public conversation.[17] Through the employment of silences, spaces, and the (re)definition of victimhood, Jorge Díaz strives to

[16] This play grew out of a workshop at the 2011 *Santiago a Mil International Festival.* It was first performed a year later at the same festival, and has received overwhelmingly positive reviews nationally and internationally. *El año en que nací* uses bio-drama to reconstruct the youth of the parents of eleven performers born during the dictatorship, crossing the boundaries between truth and fiction, between two generations, and between private and the country's history. See *Fundación Santiago a Mil* and Contreras López 2015 for more details.

[17] The most recent ruling regarding the Valech Records ensures that the testimonies given by the victims remain secret for at least fifty years, preventing them from becoming public and known (Castillo 2016).

give voice to some of the living survivors of the Pinochet era, particularly to those who do not fit in with the socially accepted definition of an innocent victim. Many of them, finding themselves left without the means to resolve their trauma, may still be dwelling at the margins of a society that continues to struggle to overcome a traumatic memory, a condition "full of prosthesis, with a layer of make-up covering the scars" ("llen[os] de prostesis, con una capa de maquillaje para tapar las cicatrices", Díaz 2008: 77).

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Sophie J.V. Mills*

Collaborating with Aeschylus (and Sophocles and Euripides and a Director and Cast)

Abstract

In Terence Rattigan's *The Browning Version* the crusty old Classics master disdainfully describes interest in elegant translation as mere "collaborating with Aeschylus". Yet translators must surely collaborate with the author, to create equivalent words that will resonate with their audience as the Greek dramatists' words resonated with theirs. An added dimension in translating Greek drama is that, unless the translation's purpose is only to elucidate the Greek, the collaborative net must encompass directors, designers, actors, and audience. Since the translator(s) have agonized over the *mot juste* or over transforming or removing a Greek expression for greater accessibility, they can view their final version not only as an end product, but also as the best version. In effect, their translation stands almost on the level of the original, at least in the relationship they hope that it will have with an audience. From the perspective of the director and actors, who have probably not been privy to the translators' discussions, the words are only the beginning. Nothing, even the stage directions that some translators insert in hopes of preserving their vision, is sacrosanct. One of the translators' goals is probably retention of a clear connection to their original text, if not exactly fidelity to it. But for some directors, the much-performed genre of Greek drama by definition needs a dose of originality to confound audience expectations of 'the Classics' with actors in bed-sheets. For them, the translators' product is far from fixed and can be manipulated or even undermined by the director's vision. Translators and directors can learn much from one another, and since 2012, I have worked with undergraduates and a director colleague to create and perform translations of Greek tragedy. This paper will discuss our process and products, and especially the multiple relationships possible between translators' and director's visions.

Keywords: translation, pedagogy, critical thinking, performance, Greek tragedy

Introduction

This article primarily concerns the author's experiences in working with groups of undergraduate translators to create contemporary translations of Greek tragedies for performance. While it refers to some aspects of translation theory, it mainly explores the practicalities of translating and performing tragedy within the framework of a university class setting, in the hope that our experiences will encourage others in similar endeavours. The end of this paper will address the pedagogical advantages and disadvantages of my approach as compared with more traditional classes in translating Greek drama.[1]

[1] Warmest thanks are due to the anonymous reader whose unvarnished but highly constructive criticism greatly improved the clarity of my thinking. Any remaining problems are, of course, due to my own obstinacy.

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In Terence Rattigan's play *The Browning Version*, Andrew Crocker-Harris, the crusty old Classics master, is displeased when his student shows interest in translation as an art, rather than as a mere classroom exercise in understanding Greek grammar, admonishing him, "I feel I must remind you that you are supposed to be construing Greek, not collaborating with Aeschylus" (Rattigan 1955: 230). As teachers of ancient languages, we do not always think clearly about this distinction. Indeed, given the constraints on us of semester and syllabus, we cannot always give the question the attention it deserves, but "construing Greek" is certainly very different from translation. Construing Greek in the classroom is at most a kind of triangle, consisting of the text, the person attempting to decipher and pin down that text's meaning, and a third person (usually an instructor) judging the accuracy of the construer's attempts. It is an essentially private process, of most benefit to the construer, and probably has little use to anyone outside the triangle. By contrast, translators stand at the centre of a web of connections moving outwards from the text, and look both back at the text and forward to the audience with whom they hope to communicate (Walton 2006: 2-25). As the link between text and audience, the translator's job is collaboration with the author for whose words and thoughts she or he is in effect now responsible,[2] to get not only into the author's mind but also the minds of the audience, by creating language that will attempt to approach the elusive, but attractive goal of conveying to a new audience some elements of the original words of an author distant from them in time, cultural background, and language.[3] A dimension particular to translating Greek drama is that the net of collaboration becomes potentially much wider if the translation is destined for performance.[4] The collaborative web will now encompass directors, designers, actors, and perhaps musicians or dancers, as well as the audience.

Collaboration does not imply simple agreement between the collaborators on the form or content of the text or production because different collaborators have different perspectives. Translators agonize over the *mot juste* or over transforming or removing a Greek expression for greater accessibility or liveliness for the audiences that they envision and for whom they are trying to convey as much as they can of what is in the original text.[5] Although the 'perfect' translation cannot exist, at some point, translators will have to agree that a particular version of their translation renders the Greek as a complete text and is their final product (Rabassa 1989: 7-8). That said, for some translators, especially the less experienced undergraduates with whom I have worked, the act of having created a finished product can sometimes become the belief that they have in fact created the best version, at least for

[2] Rutherford (2006: 77), a translator of *Don Quixote*, even goes so far as to describe himself as a "co-author" with Cervantes; cf. Farrell 1996: 46; Laskowski 1996: 198.

[3] Schwartz and de Lange 2006: 16-17; Bell (2006) and Josek (2006) discuss this problem as it affects translation from other contemporary modern languages into English.

[4] Walton 2006: 52-61. On the relationship between drama and translation, see also Bassnett 1985 and 1998b and, for an illuminating account of the practical relationship between translation and performance, see especially Ewans 1989.

[5] Even that simple phrase conceals significant complexity: what elements of the original text will predominate in translation? The 'general sense' of what the original author meant as one translator sees it? The literary style of the poetry of the drama? Its metre and sound?

the particular performance envisaged, because they have given the details of their work so much attention, often relating to minor issues whose importance is only accessible to the 'initiated'. Those to whom the translators will be handing their finished product have not put so many hours into it. Those are yet to come, and if the translators feel possessive about their efforts, some tension between translators and performers may enter into the collaboration. The translators have experienced their own collaboration with an ancient playwright, in which they have attempted to get as close as possible to their original source to convey something of its essence to a modern audience: because so much is inevitably lost in even the most acclaimed translation, translators can only hope to capture some essence of the original, whatever that elusive concept is deemed to be in individual cases. But to have created a piece which is (in its creators' minds) imbued with that essence of, say, Aeschylus, is to have created a piece which must stand almost on the level of the original, the closest thing to Aeschylus without actually being Aeschylus.[6] Translators may feel quite protective towards their creation, and collaboration with directors and actors with a different relationship to the text may generate a degree of discomfort when they first begin to work with each other.[7]

If the director and actors have not been privy to the translators' vacillations between words, additions or deletions, the text is simply their starting point,[8] and nothing, even the stage directions that some translators insert in hope of controlling what they want to happen on stage[9] is sacrosanct. One of the translators' goals is likely to have been retention of significantly clear connections to their original text, whatever compromises they have made to make it meaningful to a contemporary audience. But for some directors, the much-performed genre of Greek drama by definition needs a dose of originality to confound audience expectations of 'the Classics' with actors in tunics and sandals. For them, the translators' product is far from fixed and can be manipulated, enhanced, or even (in the translators' eyes) subverted or undermined by the form of the production. Both translators and directors should be aware of their different perspectives if their collaborations are going to achieve the most success.

[6] Bassnett 1998a: 25; Ahl 1989: 173-5. While my experience in translating for performance has exclusively been with undergraduate translators, some of their experiences are similar to those of professionals. Compare the claim of Rutherford (2006: 79): "Now that I am being immodest, I will add that some of my jokes and poems are better than those of Cervantes".

[7] Hence the anxious words of one undergraduate translator of the *Bacchae* (2016) writing after our translation was complete but before the production had got under way: "it will probably be a bit challenging to watch them take our script and bring it to life because they have no connection to the Greek or to Euripides and don't necessarily feel the same pull to 'keep it Greek'". Several others used metaphors of parenthood to describe their role in the translation process. One expressed some concern about watching "our baby being ripped apart" (noting, however, that such an act of violence was appropriate in light of Pentheus' fate), while another in an account of a rehearsal just before the production was about to go public, wrote: "The play was already in high school, almost ready for graduation".

[8] Walton 2006: 16. Although, as Biguenet and Schulte (1989: x) state, in the act of literary translation itself, "the words of the original are only the starting point; a [literary] translator must do more than convey the information".

[9] For criticism of this practice, see Walton 2016: 10, 54, 158; Bassnett 1991: 104-5.

Since 2012, I have worked with undergraduate translators and a director colleague at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, a small public liberal arts college in Western North Carolina, to create and perform translations of Greek tragedy to undergraduate and community audiences,[10] and these introductory remarks originate from my experiences and increasing understanding, with each production, of the processes of creating a translation for performance.[11] Each production had a slightly different process and resulted in different types of productions, some more successful than others in various dimensions, but certain elements were common to all three. The undergraduate status of the translators significantly influenced our process. Up to this point in their studies, they had typically been construing in the Crocker-Harris sense rather than translating, so that early work on each of the three translations was devoted to discussing the goals of our translation and how it might differ from what they had considered translation in previous classes. From more conventional classes, students were used to making their primary aim their own comprehension of the Greek while keeping as closely as possible to the original language. In these classes, however, they were encouraged to focus on how to determine, and then convey what they considered the essence of a text to a primarily non-specialist audience. Not without some resistance, they had to be encouraged to consider the necessity of balancing comprehension, accuracy and a communicative focus, and to understand that the relative roles of these three desiderata are not fixed, since different moments of the play may demand a focus on one over another. Instead of considering familiar questions such as "What is this form? Why is this verb in the aorist here?", translators addressed questions such as, "What do I need to convey here in the bigger context of the play? How are the audience likely to understand this language? Do I need to simplify names, or add glosses, or boil every 'Achaean' or 'Dardanian' down to 'Greek' or 'Trojan'?"[12] The rest of this paper will discuss our process and productions, paying particular attention to the collaborative relationships between translators, audience, and director.[13]

[10] To the best of my knowledge, while undergraduate productions of Greek tragedy are relatively common, undergraduate translations are not. Bosher (2007) discusses the process of teaching Greek tragedy to Theatre Studies majors, which has some similarity to our process, but Bosher and her students used published translations rather than creating their own, and focused on ancient techniques of staging.

[11] When I first started these productions, I knew little about the techniques involved in translating for performance, but have learned from each of our productions. Now that I am also more familiar with the field of translation studies and theory, I am struck by how closely the knowledge gained from my practical experience with undergraduates aligns with that of professional translators and translation theorists, some of whose works are cited throughout this article.

[12] Rudkin (1996) discusses such problems in the context of translating Euripides' *Heracles*.

[13] My thanks are due to Nicholas Stemkowski and Mary Ewing (translators, *Oresteia*, 2012); Daniel Hammack, Alyssa Horrocks, Joe Kellum, Courtney Miller, Kinsey Steere, Maria Welch, Weston Woodard (translators, *Philoctetes*, 2014); Elizabeth Hunt, Patrick Lebo, Giacomo Riva, Alden Roberts, Caleb Taylor (translators, *Bacchae*, 2016); all the actors in the 2016 *Bacchae*, but especially Justin Day, Ryan Miller, and Ginny Shafer; and above all, Professor Robert Berls, a brilliantly creative director, general collaborator and valued friend.

1. Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

Our first production was Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (2012), and this ambitious beginning created a template for our subsequent productions in many ways. Our audiences, like the translators, have been primarily undergraduates, and their presumed expertise and expectations have significantly influenced the types of translation possible for us, creating texts which emphasize clarity and correspondingly focus less on replicating in English the high poetic style of tragedy, especially in the choruses.[14] The *Oresteia* is an extremely complex text, some 3000 lines long, and any full production of the trilogy lasts at least five hours, a theatrical baptism by fire for an audience relatively ignorant of the language and conventions of Greek tragedy, and so, from the beginning we were aware that we would have to shorten and simplify the original text for our envisaged audience.[15]

Since our translation had to be completed in eight weeks so that it could be performed at the end of the semester, and since the production itself could not last the full five hours that a complete version of the trilogy would take, we used a common domain translation of the trilogy and cut it down to what we decided were the parts of the text that were essential for conveying the dramatic arc of the trilogy. We then returned to the Greek text to create our own translation of those parts. Our eventual *Agamemnon* was just 711 lines long, down from 1673, while the *Choephori* comprised only 469 lines, mostly through the expedient of omitting the *kommos*. *Eumenides* proved harder to cut and was allowed 709 lines. The combination of our envisaged audience and the time constraints on our translators made for a very particular version of the play, geared to its performance conditions, that could be called an 'all-action *Oresteia*', since our cuts were strongly determined by the action of the play. Passages that did not seem to us to contribute to the progress of the story tended to be cut in favour of those that propelled it.

Such an exercise also enabled a different sort of collaboration with Aeschylus, in that it helped us consider the process of turning a mythological narrative into a play – what is included, what is omitted, what is emphasized or minimized from an existing story. Any mythological narrative suitable for moulding into a comprehensible story with a clear plot is composed of a series of actions, each causally dependent on the last, and the author makes his (or her) mark on the dramatic tradition in establishing how the action gets from A to B. Any abridgement of the *Agamemnon* needs a Clytemnestra who shows that she is in command while her husband is away, the return of Agamemnon, some exchange between the two, his murder, and Clytemnestra lording it over the bodies. Such a bare-bones version contains everything strictly necessary for a comprehensible play, but in such

[14] Bassnett (1998b: 93-4) posits a sliding scale in dramatic translation: "one extreme, where no attempt is made to acculturate the source text that may result in the text being perceived as 'exotic' or 'bizarre', through a middle stage of negotiation and compromise, and finally to the opposite pole of complete acculturation". Our texts have all tended towards the latter of these poles; see also Venuti 2008: 13-19 on the complexities, political and other, of this kind of 'domesticated' translation.

[15] Goldhill (2007: 158) considers this "one coherent response to translating Greek tragedy: reduce, control, streamline".

a compressed form that it damages the grandeur, slowness and menace that are so essential to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.* Because it is a trilogy of connected plays, the action of the *Oresteia* takes place over a longer time (both in terms of the lives of Agamemnon and his family and of actual time spent in a theatre) than an individual play could, and the *Agamemnon* in particular is notable for containing long choral sections which bring the audience to reflect over time on the fall of Troy, Agamemnon's actions, and the justice of Zeus at work in the universe. A major deficiency of our abbreviated version was that it de-emphasized the impression that Aeschylus gives us through his leisurely pacing of the action, that an unseen but all-powerful Zeus lies behind the action of the play and works human fate out on a divine, rather than a human, time-scale.[16] In our production there was never a very long wait for the next action and much of the play's complex imagery was sacrificed. Even so, we did retain largely intact elements such as the carpet scene and Cassandra's scene: they might not be strictly essential in their entirety to a purely plot-driven *Agamemnon*, but their absence vastly diminishes the play because of the visual and dramatic power for the audience of watching Agamemnon walk down the red carpet to his doom, or of experiencing Cassandra's unsettling power to know the past of the house of Atreus and predict its future.

Although we simplified syntax and vocabulary in pursuit of our goal of clarity, a point of diminishing returns became increasingly clear. Aeschylus' Greek is notoriously complex, as even his contemporary Aristophanes complained (e.g. *Frogs* 1254-77),[17] but we soon learned that simplifying his language in the interests of clarity for a contemporary audience could lead to over-simplification, creating a horribly banal, or even comic, text from which we swiftly retreated.[18] So our initial emphasis on clarity and simplification was modified as we realized the importance of trying to convey something of Aeschylus' formal and uncolloquial Greek through our words.[19] Though for Aristotle (*Po.* 1450a38-39) the action of a tragedy is its most important element, and at first we focused quite narrowly on the action of the *Oresteia*, it became clear that language and individual images or scenes that strictly speaking do not advance the plot are significant elements in creating a compelling translation for performance.

Our production omitted the role of the watchman and the translation began with the *parodos*, cutting its original 217 lines to 147, by omissions such as Aeschylus' speculations on the nature of Zeus (159-83). Such an omission obviously changes the theological framework of the play and was a loss. However, the conscious focus on narrative details enabled the death of Iphigeneia to be left intact, because its imagery and descriptive detail are horrific, effective and easy for an audience of non-specialists to grasp. As a result of these decisions, which were large-

[16] See, for example, the chorus' words at Aesch. *Ag.* 367-75, part of a very long *stasimon* (355-488).

[17] The famous parody of Aeschylus by A.E. Housman (1901) in his "Fragment of a Greek Tragedy" also captures something essential of the difficulties of working with these texts.

[18] Cf. Goldhill 2007: 158-9, 169; Edney (1996: 230-1) discusses a similar process in translating Molière.

[19] Green (1960: 207) effectively summarizes the difficulties inherent in Aeschylus: "violent metaphors . . . compound adjectives . . . the pattern of his plays is stiff and ritualistic".

ly driven by our perceptions of the needs of the audience, our *Agamemnon* began with this version of the *parodos* (40-67): "Ten years since the great enemies of Priam, the lords Agamemnon and Menelaus, who were sent from Zeus to sit upon two thrones, each with a scepter and bound in everlasting honor, journeyed away from this land with a thousand ships of the Argives, to aid their cause in battle. They uttered a loud war-cry from their hearts, just as when eagles scream in lonely grief for their lost chicks. Any of the higher powers, Apollo, or Pan, or Zeus who hear the shrill screaming clamor of the eagles which travel in their realm, sends the Furies who bring retribution late. Thus, mighty Zeus sends the sons of Atreus against Paris, for the sake of promiscuous Helen, into many wrestling matches that make Trojan and Greek limbs sore". Our translation then omitted lines 67-109, in which the chorus lament their age and question Clytemnestra about what has happened – a logical outcome of having omitted the watchman's part. The translation picked Aeschylus' words up at l. 109, joining it to l. 67 with "And so, the mighty two-throned Achaeans, with like minds, command the youth of Greece, sent with avenging hand and spear against Troy, by birds of omen, appearing to the king of the ships". Calchas' prophecy was retained mostly completely all the way to l. 155, but repeated revisions led us also to omit ll. 160-84. This was a loss, given that ll. 176-84 contain Aeschylus' programmatic statement that learning comes through suffering thanks to the "rough grace" (χάρις βίαιος) of the gods (182), but once the previous strophe and antistrophe had been excised, so had all the context for this strophe, rendering it suddenly out of place.

Our other major excision was that of the entire *kommos* of the *Choephori*. Here, we elided ll. 291-8, "The oracle says that the guilty must not take part in libation offerings or sacrifices on the altars; no one will invite them into their homes or sleep under the same roof as them. Shrivelled up, dishonoured and friendless, they die. How can I not trust oracles such as these? Even if I don't, the deed must be done", with l. 514: "But we are not far off course by asking why my mother sent this offering here, and why she finally decided to offer atonement after so long". Again, this cut was drastic but logical within the framework of our focus on balancing respect for the dramatic arc of the trilogy with the needs of audience and translators for a more streamlined *Oresteia*. This cut also had ramifications for the trilogy as a whole since its effect – whatever one thinks the purpose of the *kommos* in Aeschylus is – was to make a much more decisive Orestes who had essentially made up his mind to kill his mother and Aegisthus as soon as he met Electra.

Throughout the process, it took time for students to leave the mode of translation that had become second nature to them in classes where accuracy and grammar were all, and also for me to begin to view the text as potentially malleable rather than an unassailable whole. Through the process of conscious adaptation and abridgement, I came to see the hitherto sacrosanct text more as a director would do, as a flexible entity rather than the fixed ideal born of a strictly philological training, and to broaden my own sense of what translation might mean.[20]

As the examples from our text show, the linguistic register we used for our *Oresteia* retained quite a formal quality, to reflect the difficulty of Aeschylus' lan-

[20] Boswell (1996: 149-50) discusses some similar experiences with directors and translators.

guage and avoid the dangers of banality that we discovered while moving towards too colloquial a tone. This language was reflected in the visual aspects of the production: actors were dressed in generic Greek costume of tunics and sandals and the set consisted of a Greek temple-like structure. Although there was little contact between translators and director and performers after the text was handed over to them, there was no particular conflict between how each side imagined the performance. The relationship between language, translation and performance is evident here. It is hard to imagine a version of this trilogy whose language is consistently colloquial,[21] so that its length and linguistic complexity may therefore have an unusually strong influence on the types of production that it is likely to attract. Length and a more formal linguistic register will influence production issues such as setting, costume and so on by director and designer.[22]

2. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (2014)

Many of the constraints on the translators and practices resulting from them in 2012's production shaped our 2014 offering, but different tragedies generate different difficulties both in collaboration and translation. *Philoctetes* poses particular problems for translators because of its multiple and varied expressions of pain, which are relatively lacking in English.[23] All too soon, translations become thick with 'alas!', 'wretched', 'woe is me' and similar 'translatorese', more or less acceptable in construing, but not in translating.[24] Our central goal was once more accessibility to a non-specialist audience, and this translation as a whole was more colloquial than our rendition of Aeschylus. Although Sophocles' language is undeniably poetic, Sophocles himself, according to Plutarch (*Mor.* 79b), came in time to reject Aeschylus' "heaviness" and "harshness and artificiality" of style, and this difference in style between the two may be the reason why, even at the start of our process, we had less trouble balancing a close relationship to the text with rendering it relatively idiomatically in English. However, as we revised and polished our translation, we became bolder about moving its language further from that of the original text as we came to consider translation as more than a purely linguistic exercise.

In particular, the translators explored some relationships between text and stage action to see how some words of lamentation, which never sounded entirely natural in English, could be better rendered by stage directions. For example, at l. 364, Sophocles' Greek reads: οἱ δ' εἶπον, οἴμοι, τλημονέστατον λόγον. Having ban-

[21] Burian (2000) and Brouwer (1974) discuss some translations of the trilogy, all of which tend to a more formal style, a tendency questioned by Ewans (1989: 120).

[22] Compare the remarks of Ewans (1989: 134) on the Peter Hall version of the *Oresteia* on the "mutual interaction" between Tony Harrison's "neo-Beowulf" text, Harrison Birtwhistle's music and the "stylized hieratic" acting which worked together to create a "remote, massive, and primitive" Aeschylus.

[23] On the non-verbal common sounds in tragedy, to denote grief and other emotions such as surprise see Walton 2006: 79-84; cf. Walton 2016: 151-3.

[24] Bartlett (1996: 69) discusses similar difficulties with translating Racine.

ished 'alas' from their vocabulary, the translators started out with, "They said *(gut wrenching wail of pain)*, most arrogant speech". On review, they decided that this made Neoptolemus' reaction too violent, and decided instead to render οἴμοι simply through action on stage. Their final text read: "They said (*Neoptolemus kicks angrily at a rock*) most arrogant words".[25]

In this production, another collaboration emerged that had been absent from the *Oresteia*, as our translators engaged with the scholarly commentary on the play by Seth Schein (2013), which offers helpful material on the multiple Homeric resonances in *Philoctetes.*[26] Schein's material inspired the translators to try to render some of these in slightly more archaic language. While none of these made their way into the final production because we decided that our audience would find them jarring and not understand their purpose, the process generated some important discussions about audience collaboration: to what degree and when should audience expectations be accommodated, and in what ways can translators – the middle term between text and audience – fulfill their duties to both sides?[27]

The multiple versions of the play that we created moved gradually from renditions that retained a close connection to the syntax of the Greek text to those that took on a life of their own. A few examples will show the process. First, in ll. 26-39, our first pass at the Greek is not totally unidiomatic, but certainly seems in some places, such as l. 30's "lest", slightly stilted and to bear the marks of the syntax of its original language.

Νεοπτολεμος	ἄναξ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τοὔργον οὐ μακρὰν λέγεις:	
	δοκῶ γὰρ οἷον εἶπας ἄντρον εἰσορᾶν.	
Οδυσσευς	ἄνωθεν ἢ κάτωθεν; οὐ γὰρ ἐννοῶ.	
Νεοπτολεμος	τὸδ' ἐξύπερθε: καὶ στίβου γ' οὐδεὶς κτύπος.	
Οδυσσευς	ὅρα καθ' ὕπνον μὴ καταυλισθεὶς κυρεῖ	30
Νεοπτολεμος	ὁρῶ κενὴν οἴκησιν ἀνθρώπων δίχα.	
Οδυσσευς	οὐδ' ἔνδον οἰκοποιός ἐστί τις τροφή;	
Νεοπτολεμος	στιπτή γε φυλλὰς ὡς ἐναυλίζοντί τῳ.	
Οδυσσευς	τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἔρημα, κοὐδέν ἐσθ' ὑπόστεγον;	
Νεοπτολεμος	αὐτόξυλόν γ' ἔκπωμα, φλαυρουργοῦ τινος	35
	τεχνήματ' ἀνδρός, καὶ πυρεῖ' ὁμοῦ τάδε.	
Οδυσσευς	κείνου τὸ θησαύρισμα σημαίνεις τόδε.	
Νεοπτολεμος	ἰοὺ ἰού: καὶ ταῦτά γ' ἄλλα θάλπεται ῥάκη,	
	βαρείας του νοσηλείας πλέα.	

[Neoptolemus Lord Odysseus, your plan won't have to wait long. I think I see the sort of cave you spoke of. // Odysseus From above or from below? For I can't see. // Neoptolemus From above, and I don't hear him hobbling about. // Odysseus Be

[25] Schwartz and de Lange (2006: 12) discuss a case in which an English translation has to use physical action to express an idea that the original text of a modern French novel expresses linguistically.

[26] A reversed process, in which a translation for production generates a commentary, is also possible: see Ewans 1989: 127-9.

[27] On the possible relationships between translators and audiences, see also the discussions of Walton 2016: 11-12, 53, 88; Apfelthaler 2014; Brunette 2000: 177-9; Nord 1997.

careful entering the cave, lest he is asleep. // Neoptolemus I see a dwelling place that is completely empty of any human beings. // Odysseus Are there some supplies therein that make a comfortable home? // Neoptolemus Yes – I see a bed of trodden down leaves as if someone were sleeping here. // Odysseus Is the rest empty, and is there no one inside? // Neoptolemus There's a wooden cup, the work of a shoddy craftsman, and this firewood of the same material all together. // Odysseus You show me this treasure store of that man. // Neoptolemus Hey – these other rags are being dried, drenched with heavy pus.]

Here is our final version, with an inside joke at line 39 for those who know the Greek ("Eww" for "ἰοὺ ἰού"):

Neoptolemus	Commander Odysseus, it's not far off. I think that I see the cave you spoke about.
Odysseus	From above or from below? I can't see it.
Neoptolemus	From above, and there's no sound of footsteps.
Odysseus	Be careful – he may be asleep in there!
Neoptolemus	The cave's empty as far as I can see.
Odysseus	Are there any supplies in it to make a comfortable home?
Neoptolemus	Well, yes, I see a hard bed of leaves as if something lives here.
Odysseus	Is the rest empty, and is there no one inside?
Neoptolemus	There's a poorly-crafted wooden cup, and some firewood.
Odysseus	That's quite a treasure trove he's got!
Neoptolemus	Eww – here are some pus-drenched rags drying out!

A demarcation between translation, direction and performance seemed absolutely fixed to us at the beginning of our process, but our translation over time began to transcend the process of rendering words and phrases from one language into another as felicitously as possible and to take on a life of its own in the translators' imaginations beyond the page and on the stage. Stage directions, and directions for how the speeches should be delivered, began to come to them, and so lines 1397-405 read very differently in their final incarnation from earlier versions, both syntactically and in the translators' determination to impose their own vision on the text. In particular, they began increasingly to use gesture and action either to supplement words or heighten for dramatic effect what is at most implicit in the Greek text: at ll. 1402-3, they envisaged Philoctetes falling and being supported physically by Neoptolemus, while at l. 1405, they imagined Philoctetes speaking in a reassuring, fatherly tone:

Φιλοκτητης	ἔα με πάσχειν ταῦθ'ἅπερ παθεῖν με δεῖ: ἃ δ' ᾔνεσάς μοι δεξιᾶς ἐμῆς θιγών, πέμπειν πρὸς οἴκους, ταῦτά μοι πρᾶξον, τέκνον, καὶ μὴ βράδυνε μηδ' ἐπιμνησθῇς ἔτι Τροίας. ἅλις γάρ μοι τεθρήνηται γόοις.
Νεοπτολεμος	εἰ δοκεῖ, στείχωμεν.
Φιλοκτητης	ὦ γενναῖον εἰρηκὼς ἔπος.

ΝΕΟΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΣ	ἀντέρειδε νῦν βάσιν σήν.
ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗΣ	εἰς ὅσον γ᾽ ἐγὼ σθένω.
ΝΕΟΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΣ	αἰτίαν δὲ πῶς Ἀχαιῶν φεύξομαι;
ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗΣ	μὴ φροντίσῃς.
ΝΕΟΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΣ	τί γάρ, ἐὰν πορθῶσι χώραν τὴν ἐμήν;
ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗΣ	ἐγὼ παρὼν . . .

[PHILOCTETES Let me suffer what I must suffer! What you promised me, when you took my right hand… *(trails off, reflecting on his decision and the events that have just come to pass, then pauses in thought, but finally picks up speaking again by exclaiming in anger, drastically changing his tone)* But – send me home! Do this for me, my boy! Do not delay, and do not make any more mention of Troy! *(After his sudden outburst, his tone becomes solemn)* I've had enough of singing dirges and wailing for myself. // NEOPTOLEMUS (*in resignation*): If it seems best, then let us go! // PHILOCTETES How nobly you have spoken! *(Philoctetes begins moving toward Neoptolemus and stumbles*). // NEOPTOLEMUS (*Holding out arm to Philoctetes*) Support yourself against me now as you walk. // PHILOCTETES (*Leaning against Neoptolemus*) As long as I have strength to. // NEOPTOLEMUS (*Troubled, as if something terrible just occurred to him*) How will I avoid the anger of the Greeks? // PHILOCTETES Just do not worry. // NEOPTOLEMUS What if they ravage my homeland? // PHILOCTETES *(Speaking in a reassuring tone)* I will be there.]

But what translators attempt to fix on paper is not necessarily what they will get in performance. The value of collaboration between translators and directors became very clear to us in the next phase of the production. As with the *Oresteia*, we completed our text, finalized as it was in every way in our opinion, and handed it over to the director and cast, never to see it again until its performance. This had worked well with the *Oresteia*, but less well for *Philoctetes*. This was in some important ways the fault of the translators themselves. We had not spent enough time reading our whole translation aloud, so that sentences that sounded perfectly fine on the page proved stilted in performance. More seriously, the goal of accessibility to our audience through a relatively colloquial rendition of the text, along with our deliberate detachment from the practical part of the production backfired. The director and cast chose to emphasize what they saw as comic elements in their text, notably in the treatment of Philoctetes' howls of pain: the audience actually laughed at some of these, causing some pain to my translators at what they saw as a violation of their work. After their initial shock, they were persuaded to see the value of learning the limits of their control over their own words, but in discussing with them how the experience could have been improved, we agreed that having relatively little contact between translators and performers had been a mistake.

3. Euripides' *Bacchae* (2016)

The mistakes that we felt that we had made in 2014 strongly informed the production of Euripides' *Bacchae* (April 2016), in which we fostered a much closer collaboration between translators, director and cast, and also our Drama department. Both the *Oresteia* and *Philoctetes* had been performed without the full resources of the Drama de-

partment or other major funding, and in our director's elusive spare time. The production of the *Bacchae* was the department's final mainstage production of the academic year. More money was available for the production, our director was able to devote ample time to its details, and more performances were offered to the public. The increased resources enabled increased attention to material aspects of the play such as costumes and lighting. These had been decidedly basic for our first two productions, but the addition of money and time brought greater sophistication to the production and influenced its appearance and action. Most notably, Pentheus was clad in a sleek, highly masculine and authoritative costume of black leather armour, and wielded an impressive sword all the way until his initial seduction by Dionysus, when his outer garments were removed to reveal a flowing black dress underneath and his sword was confiscated.

For the translators, it was an extraordinary privilege to see what they had created come to life on stage, in the process of rehearsals, as the production gradually gained momentum, and then for the four public performances. The translators were engaged with the director and cast throughout the creation of the production. I attended rehearsals regularly and was available to help with pronunciations, and occasional interpretative matters. My student translators were also required to attend at least two rehearsals and to write several reflective pieces: first, a reflection on our process after we had completed the translation, then a short piece on the rehearsal process, and finally a post-performance reflection. These discussions offered me significant food for thought and I have quoted from them throughout this paper.

Two of the translators auditioned for parts in the play and became part of the chorus. They were always on hand to explain, and sometimes change the text in cases where what had seemed entirely clear to us in class proved not to be so to the 'uninitiated' of the cast. A comment from one translator/actor offers a very clear explanation of the benefits of this sort of collaboration: ". . . we were standing up in our . . . formation and trying to recite the 'happy is he . . . to reach the other side' section of one of the last choral odes (902-6). We were having a lot of trouble . . . because nobody could remember the words. When [the director] prompted them as to why this particular paragraph was so much more troublesome than the others they responded that . . . it didn't make any sense". Once the translators had explained that "reaching the other side" meant death, "suddenly the whole chorus had a much easier time remembering . . . and within ten minutes it was fine".

Our translation again prioritized our assumed audience's need for clarity. The long dialogue scenes between Pentheus and Dionysus (e.g. 461-508, 802-46) contain multiple extended sets of questions and answers. Such passages are mostly rendered in *stichomythia*, whose Greek is relatively unadorned with compound adjectives or complex imagery, so that they lent themselves particularly well to conversational, colloquial renditions. Moreover, the humorous elements in parts of the *Bacchae* have long been noted, for example by Seidensticker (1978), and our translators enjoyed bringing these out, ably assisted by our Pentheus, who got a laugh every night for his drawling response to Dionysus' demand that he put on women's clothing: "You want me to do *what*?!" While we chose to write our dialogue in a fairly naturalistic manner, simplifying the text, often by stripping it of many

proper nouns,[28] we used a different technique for the choral poetry, translating it in a basic metre of four beats per line, and keeping the dreamlike, associative quality of its words by retaining many proper nouns and references to mythology with which our audience was not necessarily familiar, and did not need to be.

As with our *Oresteia*, translators' linguistic choices and the choices of the director and designers influenced one another. The costumes and set combined contemporary and ancient elements, so that the chorus were dressed in tunics and at certain points in the story wore half-masks, but the show was also enhanced by multi-media projections and other contemporary technology, such as a fog machine to signify Dionysus' presence as a divinity. In an analogous mixture of contemporary and more formal, the translators' dialogue was relatively colloquial in register but retained a higher linguistic register for the poetry of the choruses.

One notorious problem in the *Bacchae* is the end of the text, where lines are clearly missing, especially in the apparent gap between the one line that Agave speaks in the transmitted text (1329) and l. 1330, which evidently comes towards the end of a speech by Dionysus as *deus ex machina*. The text as it is transmitted makes the end of the play incoherent, and different translators have coped with the problem in various ways. Our solution was a kind of collaboration with Euripides based on the attempt of Charles Willink (1966: 46-50) to fill in the gap, with the dual aim of keeping our additions to a minimum, while also reflecting our understanding of Dionysus' motivation for what he does to Thebes. Our additions read thus: "I am here.[29] And I am truly a god. Perhaps you understand that at last, now that I have inflicted just punishment on you, just as I said I would. You wouldn't listen to me and now you have got exactly what you deserve. Agave, you of all people insulted your own sister, my mother, by saying that not Zeus, but some mortal man was her lover. Cadmus – at first, you treated me with more respect, but even you were corrupted by their lies in the end [cf. Eur. *Ba.* 333-6]. And you, Pentheus – I gave you every opportunity to change your mind and worship me, but in the end I had to make an example of you. (*Indicating Pentheus' remains*) Pentheus' sufferings are over. Here he lies, bloody and torn. (*Turning to Cadmus and Agave*). But your punishment is not over yet. Agave, you must go into exile immediately: a mother who murdered her own son must not pollute her own town".

One important lesson learned from the previous production is the importance of negotiating between the Greek and the modern.[30] As translators, we consciously attempted to mediate between the fifth century BCE text and the twenty-first century audience, but inevitably, we looked behind us more often than we looked in front. For the director and cast, the fifth century was distant from their vision of the play. I, and to some degree my translators, had to lay aside our fifth-century-centred view of what the play should be, once the translation was out of our hands and in theirs.

[28] For example, Eur. *Ba.* 1024-6 reads: ὦ δῶμ' ὃ πρίν ποτ' εὐτύχεις ἀν' Ἑλλάδα,/ Σιδωνίου γέροντος, ὃς τὸ γηγενὲς/ δράκοντος ἔσπειρ' Ὄφεος ἐν γαίᾳ θέρος, translated literally as "Home of the Sidonian old man who sowed the earth-born crop of the serpent Ophis in the earth, you who were once happy in the sight of Greece". Our final version read, "Oh, Theban house, until today you were fortunate throughout all of Greece".

[29] Repeating our translation of the first word of this play, ἥκω.

[30] For Eco (2003), the heart of translation is negotiation.

In retrospect, it is clear that we came to the play with some unspoken assumptions about authenticity, based on our shared understanding of fifth-century Athenian theatrical practice, of which director and cast were relatively free. But had I been asked as the production began, about how important it was to reflect fifth-century BCE performance conventions in the performance, I would certainly have responded that a contemporary production in English should be free of such concerns. It never occurred to us, after all, to expect an all-male, masked cast, and we were content and even excited that the costumes and set would have so many modern refinements. But two pieces of news disturbed our insouciance about the importance of authenticity: first, the director had divided the role of Dionysus into two distinct characters, one the actual god and the other his mortal representative for most of the play; second, the latter Dionysus was to be played by a woman. For me, at first hearing, somehow those innovations seemed too much, inauthentic, and unnecessary. And some people who came to the play with no knowledge of the story did find its beginning confusing, as the divine (male) Dionysus spoke half the prologue before handing it over to the female Dionysus.[31] Following my policy of trust in the director, however, I said nothing and kept an open mind.

In fact, these elements turned out generally very well. The male actor who played the divine Dionysus brought a degree of beautiful and menacing power to his role while the woman who played Dionysus formed an outstanding collaboration with the actor who played Pentheus in the chemistry that developed between their two roles. Perhaps *because* she did not have a classical background, she had fewer preconceptions about her role and could make it her own without self-conscious concerns about authenticity. Her performance even created a new and unforeseen thread in the web of collaboration by adding a few of her own ad libs to our text, which heightened the text's unsettling mixture of humour and horror.[32] For example, in the scene between the crazed Pentheus and Dionysus (912-76), our script's stage directions had already imagined the tone of some of Dionysus' words to Pentheus as resembling a parent humouring a little child, in our attempt to mingle the humorous and the sinister, and she amplified this aspect of them. So to Dionysus' warning, "We don't want to destroy the shrines of the Nymphs and the groves where Pan has his pipes" (*Ba.* 951-2) our Dionysus added, "You know how he gets about his forests!". Again, the parent-child dynamic was expanded at the end of the scene. After Pentheus states, "I will get what I deserve" (ἀξίων μὲν ἅπτομαι, 970) and exits, the next line of the text that we had translated from Euri-

[31] After the production was over, one translator/actor commented: "Dividing Dionysus into two parts and giving the mortal Dionysus role to a woman made the attraction between Dionysus and Pentheus more heteronormative, and made it difficult to combine the mortal and divine versions of Dionysus. Dionysus is a god of contradiction and duality, and I feel like we weren't able to emphasize that enough with the way we split the character and [staged] everything. Had we [arranged] the show in such a way that only one Dionysus was on stage at any time, and we were able to do transitions in which one Dionysus steps behind something on the set and the other Dionysus walks out, that would have helped to emphasize the gender fluidity and duality of Dionysus, rather than to confuse it. More traditionally, we also could have stuck to a single Dionysus, avoiding dividing his duality entirely".

[32] Edney (1996: 231-2) discusses some modern theatrical examples of actors' contributions to a translated text.

pides was Dionysus' comment, "Extraordinary. You will suffer extraordinarily and find fame towering to heaven . . ." (*Ba.* 971-2). Instead, however, after Pentheus' prophetic statement, our Dionysus spoke to Pentheus like an encouraging parent – "Bacchae? Wanna go see the Bacchae?" – and at Pentheus' gleeful assent, the pair ran off, while the divine (male) Dionysus entered and spoke his final speech. Our translators are currently revising our text for potential publication, and we are considering whether or not to include some of these 'extras' as part of our script. To what extent would additions created for one specific production of the play by one specific actor close the door to other, very different styles of *Bacchae*?

Conclusion: Pedagogical Positives and Negatives

The 'Crocker-Harris method' of construing is arguably unavoidable in the Classics classroom. Indeed, it is necessary and desirable, at least in a less austere form. If students are to be truly successful, they must acquire, with each successive course in Greek, a linguistic competence and comfort that can most efficiently be gained from a focused emphasis on Greek syntax and morphology. The time constraints inherent in creating a translation for performance in a half-semester of eight weeks or so mean that traditional elements of testing students' grammatical competence through tests and quizzes may be under-emphasized, so that this kind of exercise cannot be applied universally to advanced Greek translation courses. Yet the Crocker-Harris method also keeps Greek imprisoned in our classrooms in the triangle of text, learner and instructor discussed at the beginning of this article, and students purely as pupils, laying little emphasis on the critical thinking and close engagement with the meaning of a text that is necessary if their translation is to be offered to an audience beyond the classroom. Through the choices, sacrifices and compromises students are forced to make in translating for performance, they are encouraged to reflect on the incompleteness and imperfection of every translation and the essentially contingent nature of translation, an important corrective to beginners' courses in Greek which will naturally, if misleadingly, have concentrated on learning grammar and vocabulary as a process of more literal one-to-one equivalents between Greek and English.

In more traditional classes, we typically work through a text and rarely if ever return to passages translated earlier to reconsider their meaning and the best way to render it in English. In the kind of class I have described in this article, continuous re-reading and re-drafting is central: students are not always enthusiastic about revisiting their work to improve upon it, but the prospect of offering it to an audience of several hundred people has been a powerful stimulus for focused work and has often brought out creativity that I would not have imagined from some of their previous work. Some students are more gifted as linguists than others, but everybody in these classes has been able to make improvements to successive versions of the translation to make it sound 'right' within their chosen idiom.

The value of experiential learning is increasingly recognized both in the schools from which our students come and in contemporary higher education (Kolb and Kolb 2005; Kuh 2008). In a time when the discipline of Classics, and especially an-

cient Greek, is vulnerable in the academy, the acquisition of knowledge through 'applied' ancient Greek, creating a translation for performance and collaborating with actors, director and an audience gives students a greater sense of mastery in their discipline, and also the sense that they are doing something special, as the inheritors of a long literary and cultural tradition, through the possession of an increasingly rare kind of knowledge in which they can take pride. My students care about winning my approval for the translations they make in the classroom, but this can hardly compare with the excitement of seeing their hard-won knowledge of a taxing and arcane language bring a text to life and engage audiences. The quotations I have chosen from student reflections throughout this article are full of this excitement and the last word should go to one translator/actor in 2016's *Bacchae*: "There is something very different about collaborating with Euripides by performing his work and attempting to bring his vision to life . . . It's like when we read it out loud in Greek as opposed to just reading it in Greek. There's a power and a magic to spoken language that I felt very profoundly sitting on the floor in a circle with the Bacchae holding hands with our eyes locked on the person across from us chanting the metrical stanzas. And there was a sense of accomplishment and amazement that we made that magic; that those were our words creating this power in the air and transporting the listeners into the story of Dionysus and the Maenads".

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Minor Characters in the NT *Medea*

Abstract

This article considers contemporary trends in classical theatre and performance through the lens of the 2014 National Theatre London version of Euripides' *Medea* directed by Carrie Cracknell and adapted by British writer and dramaturg Ben Power. The production team included Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin, who created a radical physicality for the Chorus of Corinthian Women, to a soundtrack composed by electronic pop duo Goldfrapp. As the audience enters it sees two young boys lying on the floor eating crisps and playing a video game while the Nurse looks on. Dressed in modern trainers, wide-legged high-waisted navy cotton pants and a pale blue sleeveless top, she is elegant, professional and in charge. Marketed as the NT *Medea*, the production was also transmitted through the National Theatre's global live broadcast service to cinemas allowing many thousands of people to view the performance in their own cities and towns. When she speaks to the contemporary audience about the Argos, the fleece and blood, her words cross several time frames and spatial locations from Colchis to ancient Corinth to classical Athens, contemporary London and global cinemas, her words refer us to past and present places of private and civil unrest. This article considers the bringing together of the contemporary and the classical in a contemporary setting and behind that the question of theatre, its classical heritage and continuing cultural force.

Keywords: Minor characters, Chorus, Nurse, states, National Theatre, *Medea*

In 2014, the National Theatre London presented the ancient tragedy of Euripides' *Medea* (first staged in 431 BC) in a new version by British writer and dramaturg Ben Power, in a modern production directed by Carrie Cracknell. The production team included Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin, who created a radical physicality for the Chorus of Corinthian Women to a soundtrack composed by electronic duo Goldfrapp. Tom Scutt designed the stunning split-level set. The creative team collaborated during the rehearsal period in a way that ensured that text, stage direction, scenography, dance, and live music, that is, the elements of theatre, and theatricality, would combine to re-tell the story. The relationship of the parts to the whole would therefore provide additional interest for the ways in which they interrogated and responded to the ancient tragedy.

In many ways the NT *Medea,* as I shall refer to it throughout this article, is part of that which Margherita Laera refers to as the "new wave" of Greek theatre that began in the late twentieth century and continues into the early decades of the twenty-first (2013: 31). Noting the frequency of their appearance in mainstream theatres, Laera writes that "Translations and adaptations of Greek tragedy make for a significant part of theatre repertoires and international festival programmes both in

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state-funded and in experimental venues, suggesting that Greek tragedy still manages to attract large audiences" (ibid.). The large-scale state-funded NT production reached a further global audience through the National Theatre Live program (see NTLive 2014) that spawned further reviews of its local cinema screenings (Craven 2014). The London season not only attracted large audiences but its enthusiastic reviews created additional publicity. Charles Spencer's review for the London *Telegraph* gushed: "At the end of this thrilling and merciless production you leave the theatre feeling both appalled and strangely elated – the sure sign that a tragedy has hit its mark" (Spencer 2014). Critic Michael Billington, however, was less convinced about the effectiveness of the design and choreography, hinting at a discordant performance that was more troubling than pleasing (Billington 2014). Billington's criticism of the lack of aesthetic coherence in the production inadvertently highlights what is most interesting and disturbing – that discord at the thematic level becomes creative rupture within the theatrical composition. These elements will be given consideration in the discussion of the performance that follows.

The NT *Medea* will probably not join the select group that Edith Hall and Stephe Harrop refer to as the "'canon' of path breaking productions" of the play (2013: 2). This category might include: Heiner Müller's Cold War era version *Medeamaterial* (1982) (see Müller 1984; Campbell 2008; Michelakis 2013); Deborah Warner's with Fiona Shaw as Medea for the National Theatre, Dublin in 2000 (see Monks 2003); or Wesley Enoch's retelling of the Medea myth from an Australian Indigenous perspective in *Black Medea* (2002) (see Monaghan 2013). I argue here that the *NT Medea* is not groundbreaking in this way but it warrants close attention for the way it restructures the hierarchy of classical theatre and develops a new way of engaging with contemporary audiences. This is not to claim universal relevance for the production but its opposite – it is finely attuned to a contemporary audience, while mindful of past productions (Winship 2014). In cynical postpolitical times, the production somewhat naively, perhaps idealistically, attempts to engage contemporary audiences on matters of social and political importance, while leaving open the question of its possible referents both near and far. The performance hints at the social upheaval of wars brought about by the reckless behaviour of autocrats and despots apply. But it also applies, as Hans-Thies Lehmann puts it, to modern societies which face "the abyss gaping just beneath everyday reality: the rivalry of all against all" (2016: 113), which we understand as the battle for power and wealth at any cost.

This study of the NT *Medea* is from the perspective of Theatre Studies, one of the two academic disciplines, with Classical Studies, that as Hall and Harrop put it, were "born at the meeting-place" of ancient Greek and Roman drama (2013: 2). Of the methodological tools available to Theatre Studies, the approach taken here is to focus on the theatricalized language of the new version of Euripides' tragedy; the vocal, gestural and bodily performativity of the actors; and the materiality of the stage objects. It engages throughout with the activity of interpreting and critiquing the production in relation to its contemporary setting. The close reading of the play in performance then considers its status as a contemporary adaptation of a classical play and arrives at the proposition that what sets this version of *Medea* apart from other recent versions, and enables it to stand up to close critical analysis, is the way it effectively takes the tragedy away from its mythical heroes and redistributes the affects

of pity, fear, and horror among mortal beings. The lesser or minor characters emerge from within the framework of tragedy as embodied subjects, whose social and psychic lives are profoundly disturbed by the events they witness.

The interest is not therefore in how emotive Helen McCrory is as Medea, or how distraught Danny Sapani makes his Jason. Rather the question that concerns this article is about the suffering of others, which is powerfully voiced by the Nurse and danced and sung by the Chorus. By these means, as the argument hopes to conclude, audience attention is hailed by the performance of the lesser or minor characters, that is, by the empathetic Nurse, the embodied suffering of the Chorus, the innocence of Creon's daughter, Kreusa, and the children. The argument is that there is a coherent approach to the NT staging of the mythical characters – Medea, Jason, Creon, and Aegeus – that presents them as aristocrats and sycophants, motivated by self-interest and devoid of moral character. Jason's claim that his marriage to Kreusa is for the benefit of Medea and the children drops like a weight onto the shreds of his moral authority. The aristocrats have power and material wealth, but in this production their neglect of the moral obligations that are supposed to keep city-states reasonably well run is highlighted. Looking beyond the time of performance, the shift of the tragic perspective from the affairs of leaders onto its impact on the everyday resonates for the duration of the live performance and perhaps beyond, with life outside the theatre.

1. A Claim for Attention

The NT *Medea* begins, as does Euripides' text, at Jason's house in Corinth. In this production, the modern interpretation of the play announces itself as the audience enters to see a set that depicts a modern house in the contemporary era. The stage lighting is soft and picks out reflective surfaces, suggestive of a hyperrealist rather than realist picture. The fourth wall of the house is absent to expose the interior of the split-level house set upstage. The ground floor is a once chic but now neglected house with glass doors leading into a verdant garden. Two empty swings are visible through the glass doors, setting an ominous signifier of the absence to come. An upper mezzanine level of the house will double as the streets of Corinth, and Creon's palace so that the stage picture resembles an oddly distorted vertically layered streetscape with the palace above and Medea's house below. An angled staircase, at stage left, connects the two levels (see NTLive 2014). As the audience enters, the Nurse sits on the staircase watching and waiting. She is a young contemporary black woman with short cropped hair, dressed in modern trainers, wide-legged high-waisted navy cotton pants, and a pale blue sleeveless top. She appears elegant, professional, and waiting to speak. Tom Scutt's design uses the contours of the curved Olivier Theatre stage to suggest the classical orchestra on which are placed items of domestic furniture suggestive of a modern family room. Two young boys lie on the floor eating crisps and playing a video game under the watchful gaze of the Nurse. At this stage of the production, the audience sees an all-black cast bringing the inter-racial dimension to the play to the surface for the spectator's additional consideration. At lights down, the Nurse commences an ad-

dress to the audience in a strong voice that simultaneously addresses present danger and the past in which these well-known events have already taken place and will be shortly repeated for the audience.

Nurse Listen.
There's a story that has to be told.
You who've come here today
Have come here for this.
Listen.
(Euripides 2014: 3)

With these opening lines, the new version of the play reveals its anti-Aristotelian stance, breaking the unity of time and place by positioning the Nurse, and the audience, in the here and now of both real and mythical story time. The theatre establishes the 'here' and 'this' – but the Nurse and, to an extent the audience, are both inside and outside the dramatic frame meaning that the present adheres to and tempers the drama. This contrasts with Philip Vellacott's translation for the Penguin Classics edition, for example, which has the Nurse speak from within a story that has already begun before the play commences and continues uninterrupted. Here she adheres to the fiction from inside its dramaturgically closed system:

Nurse If only they had never gone! If the Argo's hull
Never had winged out through the grey-blue jaws of rock
And on towards Colchis! . . .
(Euripides 1963: 17)

The use of the second person plural in Power's adaptation (2014) is a radical departure from this translation along the lines of Bertolt Brecht's interruptions of tragedy's closed dramatic structure in the name of epic theatre and critical spectatorship. The NT *Medea*'s transtemporal *mise en scène* adds to this distancing effect. It flows from modern gestural systems to mythic text. The Nurse sits in an informal gestural mode with her arms resting on her knees while she narrates the events, now deeply regretted, that precede the performance. She speaks of the Argos, the fleece and blood, Colchis, ancient Corinth and Athens, indicating that she has taken the journey with Medea, and is also a foreigner:

This land is not our home.
I wish to the burning earth beneath my feet
We'd never come here.
I wish that ship, the *Argo,*
Had never sailed to our town.
They came to find a fleece
A thing of myth
And they brought destruction.
Real, leaking blood.
(Euripides 2014: 3)

She continues to narrate the story of Jason, the Golden Fleece (disdainfully as a "thing of myth"), Medea's love for Jason, her murder of family, betrayal of country, and marriage and exile in Corinth. Then how "the wheel turns" (4) with Jason's betrayal, Medea's grief, rage, and banishment. She characterizes Medea's love for Jason as not "mad" as in the Vellacott translation but horrible: "Medea / Fell horribly in love" (3). The modern setting creates a distancing effect that asks the spectator to view her as a figuration in an apocryphal story that takes the responsibility of story-telling, of unleashing such a tale, seriously. She finishes the opening speech with a quiet, solemn appeal to the audience before preparing the space for the entrance of Medea, whose wails are heard below stage:

I ask you
Who watch in darkness
Can there be any ending but this?
We are all of us trapped in this pain.
There is nothing for us
But this story
In this place
For ever.
(6)

The spoken text is in contemporary free verse and apart from smatterings of "rivers of woe", "broken hearts" and "deadly passion" (5), there are few figures of speech. The Nurse knows what will happen, as does the audience, and no amount of embellishment will change the ending. The language appears transparent leading us to a theme embedded in the language that also flows through the stage and set design that features see-through walls into Creon's palace as well as the glass patio doors of Medea's house. The voice of the minor character speaks with clarity and authority. Thinking about the efficacy of tragedy on the bourgeois stage, Hans-Thies Lehmann affirms a role for "voices, individual voices, in a space where I see and hear" (2013: 89). The NT *Medea* expands the role of the Nurse giving her vocal powers to address the spectator while the scenography, including the on stage representation of the wedding party, reveals the tragedy to those who watch "in darkness", although it stops short of showing the killing of the children.

The adaptation adheres to the tragic events and the ending brings about the expected closure. In the final moments, Helen McCrory's white Medea exits on foot lugging the bodies of her dead sons. Without the intervention of the *deus ex machina,* she heads to Athens and the sanctuary offered to her by Aegeus. However the last words are given to the Nurse and not the Chorus in a further re-allocation of speaking parts. In the Vellacott translation, the Chorus expresses its collective acceptance of the will and power of the gods:

Many are the Fates which Zeus in Olympus dispenses;
Many matters the gods bring to surprising ends.
The things we thought would happen do not happen;
The unexpected God makes possible;
And such is the conclusion of this story.
(1963: 61)

The classical ending offers a philosophically compromised or reduced proposition in favour of reinforcing the hierarchical relationship between gods and men. In Power's version, the Nurse replaces the Chorus to bring the play to its close. In a speech that is uttered from the same space as the opening address, she returns to her earlier themes for closing remarks. Here as elsewhere in the play, the NT *Medea* redistributes the role of the mediator from the Chorus to the Nurse, and gives her agency as a thinking subject. Her final speech is both longer and more political than the Chorus cited above. She states:

> We are not subject to our own wills
> Our own desires
> But to the fates and fortunes
> That the gods hand to us.
>
> The future is turned
> Before our eyes
> Into wrenching heartache.
> Turned to ashes
> And to splinters.
>
> From today I know
> That truly
> Hope is dead.
> I ask you again
> You who watch.
> How can there ever be any ending but this?
> First silence.
> Then darkness.
>
> *The Chorus are with her. The lights fade.*
> (Euripides 2014: 61)

The emphasis is again on the 'you' repeated throughout and thereby collectively embracing the audience as sentient beings engaged at the end of the performance in processing the tragic experience and perhaps relating it to the present. Here the combination of tragedy and theatre is reaffirmed as complex reflections that take place 'before our eyes'. Hans-Thies Lehmann in his recent study of tragedy and theatre finds a continuing role for tragic theatre in contemporary culture as a reminder that our world is hardly a triumph of rationality and moderation. He writes:

> Belief that one might discard tragedy in an age where matters are negotiated in learned discussion amounts to a fallacy, with ruinous effects in social and aesthetic terms (to say nothing of the theory of the theatre). (2016: 7)

Without suggesting that the creative team began with this proposition as a starting point, the interplay between the Nurse's measured reflections and the Chorus' violent absorption of the Jason and Medea conflict suggests its concerns

are with the "ruinous effects" of personal and public warfare. The following section traces the ways in which the NT *Medea* manoeuvres its interpretation of the play for the contemporary period around the figure of the Nurse and the Chorus.

2. *Medea* on Stage

There have been significant new versions of *Medea* in the last two decades and in this respect Cracknell and Power follow the trend in theatre adaptation, in which a company commissions a new version of a classical or modern text rather than a more conventional or faithful translation. Cracknell is also known for her acclaimed direction of *A Doll's House* at the Young Vic in an adaptation of Ibsen's modern classic by playwright Simon Stephens.

Medea is notably a play about a woman – a foreigner, a victim of her husband's infidelity, a marginalized and maligned figure – who passionately refuses to submit to patriarchal power and authority and commits the unspeakable act of infanticide. One of the most notable productions of *Medea* in the last fifteen years is the Warner/Shaw version, directed by Deborah Warner with Fiona Shaw as Medea, first performed at the National Theatre, Dublin, in May 2000, followed by tours to the UK and US. Maurya Wickstrom wrote about Shaw's Medea as a terrorist figure with the capacity to "ignite the theatre world", and whose non-compliance with the world of Jason and Creon represented a "new source of energy and courage" in a global condition in which "there is absolutely no outside position" (Wickstrom 2004: 183). Wickstrom's logic is derived from her reading of Hardt and Negri's theory of Empire which she understands as:

> a definitively new form of political, social, and productive organization, one for which there is absolutely no outside position, one that is corporeal, cellular, and biological in the reach of its power effects, and therefore called by Hardt and Negri "biopower". (177)

Wickstrom writes that when Shaw's Medea sends the poisoned dress to the Princess, she effectively "explodes the pain of the other, the marginal, into the heart of power" (183). Medea here is the main protagonist, who draws attention to herself through difference that turns to extremism. But reflecting on that performance ten years later, there is also a sense in which the Shaw/Warner Medea is bourgeois, white, and privileged; is she less marginalized than she is emotionally wounded? Aside from the affective power of Shaw's Medea, and the direction and staging that supports it, the Warner/Shaw performance can be said to operate within a conservative hierarchy of characterization. Aside from the children, who are given prominence, reviews pay scant attention to the Nurse, the Chorus or the Messenger. Now having ignited the theatre world, her extremism might have exhausted the character's potential, and our interest in her.

The NT performance pivots towards Helen McCrory's critically acclaimed white Medea, the protagonist and star attraction, who as one critic claimed "gives the performance of her career as Medea" (Spencer 2014). Michaela Coel's Nurse, on the other hand, hardly rates a mention in most reviews despite the fact that she,

along with the Chorus, is on stage for the greater part of the performance. Spencer's review focuses entirely on Medea describing how she "paces the stage like a caged and goaded animal, desperately dragging on roll-up cigarettes" (ibid.). Another critic comments on her "scorching emotional power and searching psychological acuity" (Taylor 2014). The NT *Medea* warrants all these descriptions but like Fiona Shaw's white and well-dressed Medea, McCrory's character's marginality is relinquished in favour of assimilation into modern bourgeois society. With that she loses some of the mitigating circumstances, such as her vulnerability as a foreigner and her low status, becoming instead a woman who takes revenge on her husband by killing their children in a 'tragic' act of family violence. As a tragic figure, Medea is accorded more *gravitas* than this reductive account admits, but her appearance creates a productive dissonance with her words directing attention away from her towards more sympathetic and vulnerable figures such as the Nurse, the Chorus, and the children, including Creon's daughter, who is traded in marriage to Jason and who never speaks. McCrory's Medea is unsympathetically portrayed as casual in cargo pants and singlet top, then with whisky in hand to meet important visitors, such as Aegeus, she is elegant in the pale chiffon gown that she also wears to kill her children. In doing so, she arguably kills the children as an elegant Corinthian woman rather a fugitive from Colchis.

The argument is that the major characters, especially the biracial couple, Medea and Jason, are represented as a bourgeois couple with social aspirations, who are in fact rivals. Jason gets the advantage when, some time prior to the dramatic time of the play, he makes an agreement with Creon for an advantageous marriage. There is a note of truth in Jason's triumphant claim that his forthcoming union with Kreusa is a good investment:

JASON Think what you like!
I am marrying Kreusa to ensure our safety,
Yours and mine and the boys'.
(Euripides 2014: 23)

Pleased that his patriarchal obligation to his first family will be honoured, he criticizes Medea for ruining his plan, for being so ill-disciplined and envious that she has made it impossible for herself – "You could have stayed here / You could have been happy again" (ibid.). Reminding Medea of how he raised her from barbarian to bourgeois, he states:

JASON I civilized you!
You'd never known law or justice,
You were nothing when I found you,
Now you talk with kings and cry to gods.
(22)

This tense marital dialogue drips with Jason's hypocrisy and Medea's scorn – he is, she replies, "the most callous, the most sick-hearted of men" (23) as he stands rationalizing his behaviour to her. The language is stripped of its poetic embellishments in the Power's version, giving it an air of business-like efficiency, heightened intensity, and pace. Lehmann's recent reflections on dialogue and spectator-

ship in theatre offer an insight into the wider conflict that plays out in this scene. He notes, "dialogue is only the shadow of conflict; we must infer what cast it" (Lehmann 2016: 217). In the theatre, the *mise en scène* works indexically to infer the material origins of the conflict. In the NT *Medea,* it is the aspirational impulse of modern life that aspires for more power and more wealth in a way that mimics the aristocrats and tyrants that preceded it. Creon is the representative of this figure and his daughter is the means to it.

McCrory and Sapani work hard, night after night, to convince the audience of the truth of their deeds but there is also the impression that there is not a lot more we can learn from this tragedy from the point of view of its major characters. It is difficult, as many scholars from George Steiner to Hans-Thies Lehmann have noted, to do tragedy in the modern era. As Helene Foley puts it, tragedy can "slide into soap opera", or comedy, citing examples of audiences laughing at Deborah Warner and Fiona Shaw's *Medea* in the United States during its 2002 tour (Foley 2013: 138, 144). Or are the roles "too enmeshed in negativity (both philosophically and theatrically)" for the contemporary era's taste, as Olga Taxidou asks (2017: 49). Violence and negativity are the physical and affective dimensions of tragedy but laughter threatens its undoing. This discussion leaves Jason and Medea at this point to consider those who listen to and observe the tragedy, the minor characters: Jason's Attendant, the Nurse, the Chorus, and the audience.

3. Minor Characters

The argument here is that to look away from Medea to the other characters on stage is to enter the dramatic world of the minor characters. After Medea persuades Creon to let her stay one more day, and Jason that she is reconciled, Cracknell and Guerin use the split level stage to show the wedding party with Jason and his young bride on the balcony of the palace. She twirls in his arms in a yellow frock. A live band is visible through the glass doors as the Chorus stands awkwardly clapping to the music. Creon's daughter, dancing seductively, is a lamb to the slaughter; Jason appears immobile in his suit, and awkward with the young princess in the palace. Meanwhile, the audience watches Medea prepare the poisoned gift.

In this instance, the stage picture highlights two features: the Chorus of women gathered as a collective on the upper level, and the Nurse attending to Medea on the ground level. In this way, the major characters are shadowed and doubled by the minor characters, who are involuntarily implicated in the catastrophe to come. Those on stage and in the auditorium witness the combined effects of Medea first wailing and throwing herself on the stage floor, then preparing and executing four murders, and of Jason partying and then losing everything. These onlookers perform "the spectating function", which as Lehmann writes, is inscribed into the *mise en scène* as a consequence of the production team's "thinking reflection about the relationship between the stage and the audience" (2016: 216). The dual concept of "thinking reflection" refers to the idea that in making the theatrical work, the creative team thinks about how the stage appears from the spectator's point of view and how she or he

might then reflect on what was seen and heard. Michaela Coel's Nurse, together with the insistent movement of the Chorus, animated by choreographer Lucy Guerin, attract an attentive spectatorial gaze. The minor spectacle in the production is their appropriation of dramatic space beyond that usually accorded to the lower social ranks. As Creon, Jason and Medea's social inferiors, their vocal and performative interventions raise their importance, inviting a politically inflected analysis of theatre's engagement with gender, race, public speaking and embodied subjects. I suggest they do not constrain Medea so much as frame her, claiming the first and last words on stage, leaving us with thoughts beyond action.

4. The Nurse Speaks

Ian Ruffell's study of the role of the Nurse in Greek tragedy and *Medea* in particular provides a useful point of comparison for an assessment of the Nurse in the *NT Medea.* As he points out, the use of the Nurse in Euripides play is unusual:

> This is not the first (and will not be the last) time that such low status figures were used in Greek tragedy, but their role in *Medea* in setting up the plot is striking, not only for their sole occupation of the stage for such a long time and the extent to which the play is set up from their point of view, but in terms of its set of associations which they bring. (Ruffell 2014: 65)

The Nurse is also, as he points out, a moral agent whose conflicting loyalties and dilemmas constitute "the moral centre of the play" (81) and continue to do so for modern audiences. These questions hinge, as Ruffel also suggests, on the direction of the play in performance. Considering Michaela Coel's young, well-dressed and outspoken Nurse, it is also apparent how she differs from the elderly servant imagined as the companion to Medea and carer of the children. There is also the question of when she exits the stage. In Euripides' text, as translated by Vellacott, the Nurse exits the play at l. 821, shortly after she observes Medea's meeting with Aegeus, and it is unclear if she returns at all. As Ruffell writes, she may be morally complicit, but:

> This suggestion turns on whether the nurse returns with Medea at 214 and stays on stage to be brought into the plan at 820–3, and exits with the children at 1076 to take them to their death (and perhaps fetches Jason at 866, and is involved with the gifts for Creusa at 951). (80)

In the NT *Medea,* in between the Nurse's speaking position at the beginning of the play and her additional speech at the end after Medea exits with the dead children, her non-speaking and subordinate position in the performance is on view. She is present on stage in her delimited role as servant. She watches, listens, comes forward when her Mistress calls, fetches and helps wrap the poisoned gift, brings the sons in from the garden, and takes them to the palace. Failing to acknowledge her interrelationship with the minor characters, Medea instructs the Nurse in an imperious way using the pejorative term "girl", hence, "You, girl, go with them / And bring them safely home" (Euripides 2014: 41). The Nurse then brings the sons back from the palace and is ordered to prepare a bath for them. Feeling the Nurse's

fear, Medea commands: “Do not speak to me”, thus denying her moral agency (44). The Nurse then exits. The Chorus witnesses Medea leave the stage to perform the murders and the Nurse re-enter “*covered with blood*” (54). The Nurse is not only present at key scenes in the performance, but cruelly brought into Medea’s plans, yet she also decentres Medea’s self-presumed centrality, indicating and embodying the spectator’s function.

The rhetorical arc of the opening and closing speeches sets out the role of theatre as a space of gathering, narrative and witness, and marks its ontological limitations. These limitations are to do with theatre’s incapacity to enact change, bestow agency or sustain life beyond the opening and closing of the ‘curtain’. The Nurse is no exception but what she is offered in the NT *Medea* is an expanded political role in a coda. Her final lines “Hope is dead”, “First silence” and “Then darkness” describe the aftermath of the catastrophe (61). Three time frames have come into play: European antiquity to which Medea and Jason belong; the Hellenistic period of the play’s first performance in which a restricted democracy co-exists with wars between feuding cities and states; and a troubled Western democracy set within a globalized world in which the performance takes place.

5. The Chorus of Corinthian Women

The production team included Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin. She creates a radical physicality for the Chorus of Corinthian Women, who speak the text, sing original music composed by Goldfrapp, and perform Guerin’s choreography (Williams 2014). Conspicuous on a modern stage for their massed entrances in matching dresses, like bridesmaids, the Chorus (comprised of wives, sisters, daughters, mothers) enters after the Nurse’s first speech “*carrying preparations for a wedding*” (Euripides 2014: 6). These preparations are interpreted on stage as floral dresses draped over arms, signifying they will attend Jason’s wedding. They initially disapprove of Medea’s “morbid self-pity” (7), but are won over by the case she makes about women’s condition, the “fate of a wife”, their being “without agency”, and “subject to his [their husband’s] will” and their eventual “abandonment” (9). Solidarity is established between the Women and Medea, on the basis of empathy: “We’ll keep silent for you, You wretched woman” (11). Gradually the dignity and vocal elegance of the Chorus, expressed in spoken word and song, gives way to Guerin’s a-rhythmic, asymmetrical choreography. Having finished with Medea, the Chorus moves to the upper stage level and can be seen behind the glass patio doors at the wedding party. Rather than offstage as convention dictates, Jason’s wedding is made visible in a transparent gesture that contrasts with Medea’s misery below. Later, the scene in which the sons arrive with the gift and its fatal consequences is played out for the spectator to witness:

> *As the Chorus speak, we see the wedding banquet. Medea watches her Sons present Kreusa with the package. The wedding party begins. Medea watches.* (41)

As Medea’s ultimate plan takes shape, the women of the Chorus descend the staircase to create a critical mass around Medea. They dance a pounding, discord-

ant, possessed series of movements that disrupt the unity of not only the Chorus as an ensemble, but the individual bodies of its members. Arms, legs, and torsos flail in different directions as if a sovereign self no longer controls them. They form a composite image of disjunction, rupture and dissonance. Here the Chorus invites the audience to think about dance and its role in the performance. Michael Billington for *The Guardian* found the Chorus an "oddity" in the play (along with Scutt's set design), rejecting how they seemed to "move strangely from being straitlaced women in print frocks to quivering members of a seemingly avant-garde dance troupe" (Billington 2014). But thinking about the minor characters rather than Medea, the Chorus members do not reflect her state of mind so much as it protests against what takes place in their city and its effect on the collective psyche of its people: the terror they feel at the dissolution of the state. The dance gives material embodied form and shape to the shock, panic and trepidation of the many – women, slaves, and foreigners – at the actions of the one, here Medea. When at the end of the play Jason returns to the house and the mayhem, the Chorus dances again. They are still in their frocks but thick bands of mud line the hems, resonating with their view that in Corinth "the very soil is cursed" pulling everyone into its dark moral spaces (Euripides 2014: 55). The dance movements flip the attention from major to minor characters, from Jason's anguish to the Women of Corinth's contamination by the events. The remonstrations of the body here gesture powerfully about what happens to a powerless civilian population in times of political upheaval. With the death of Creon and the emotional implosion of Jason, governance of the city has broken down. This socio-political reading of the play is made possible by the production's elevated role of the minor characters. It represents a shift in the performance of the play from a psycho-emotional revenge tragedy, as it is most often played, to a more political, democratic, focus on citizens rather than leaders. The Chorus, whose asymmetrical gestures seem to effect "an *explosion* of the suffocated interior being into an unrepresentable, fragmentary, symptomatic form", expresses affective responses to the violence at hand (Woloch 2003: 24).

Cracknell has said she was drawn to dance for its non-narrative quality, but more particularly, she was drawn to "the muscularity, physicality and depth of meaning in Lucy's work" (Winship 2014). Guerin has said of her role in the production, "We don't want a translation of text through movement" asserting instead that, "Dance is not as pointy, not as direct a medium as theatre" (ibid.). For Cracknell, "Dance is interesting because it makes you very active as an audience member. You're being asked to make sense of it, to find meaning in it. It's not literal, it's not tied down to narrative" (ibid.). The use of dance, especially the choreography of Lucy Guerin, contributes to the democratization of the classical *Medea*: the chorus of women performs a double movement of witness and protest. In doing so they gesture towards a democratic and feminist protest against what happens to Medea, to Creon and Kreusa, and at what Medea is threatening to do and does.

I have suggested that a theme of transparency guides the translation and design and shows the terrible effects of secrecy and betrayal. The Chorus demonstrates the embodied states of disorder and upheaval that effect civic life when those holding executive power take matters into their own hands.

6. Tyrants and the People Who Suffer

There is a sense in which the Nurse's speeches are deeply melancholic expressing not the desire for a better future but its loss. This "temporal orientation", to use Hall's phrase (2013: 24), is towards the past and future from the point of view of the present. This multiple temporality draws productively on the contingency of live theatre, that is, its capacity to bring events before an audience in the present, as in the "you" and "here" that the Nurse indicates in her opening speech. The implied pastness of the events are the actions re-performed on stage night after night, and the future the audience occupies in relation to that past, aware that the world is not run by "learned discussion" (Lehmann 2016: 7). That is, the performance holds the view that 'we' continue to live in a world in which tyrants, oligarchs and the amorally ambitious cause people to suffer. In elevating the position of the Nurse and the Chorus as the representatives of the people or publics, the performance foregrounds conflict, disagreement, dispute, betrayal, and broken promises. I am suggesting that NT *Medea* asserts its continuing existence and laments its limited capacity to alter the fates and fortunes of modern life.

The question of whether the Nurse and the mode of direct address to the audience achieve some kind of "direct intervention in the political sphere" of the democratic state remains to be considered (Lehmann 2013: 87). In asking this question, I apply Lehmann's question about the efficacy of new creative practices in the face of political upheavals in many parts of the world. I want to suggest that the Nurse straddles what Lehmann also refers to as "the curious twilight zone between political activism and aesthetic practice" (ibid.). Sitting on the staircase, a twilight in-between space neither on one floor nor the other, she speaks as a narrator reflecting on the action on the ground. The stairs as a place of speech evokes a Brechtian distancing effect, her female form, speaks back to the patriarchs of democracy past and present. As dramatic characters, the Nurse and the Chorus, all women, participate in, witness and judge events as citizens. What is more, despite the Nurse's sense that the story is never ending, the performance delivers a sliver of hope for the spectator in bestowing a degree of agency on her as an independent speaker both inside and outside the dramatic narrative.

In conclusion, I suggest that the performance invites comparisons between Creon, Jason, and Medea, as a ruling family with an elite entourage and the power to command, with failed regimes in which people suffer dispossession and are forced into exile as refugees. Lucy Guerin's choreography is a locus for the bodily displacement that follows rupture at the level of the state and its insistent presence marks this adaptation as a distinctive approach to the tragedy. The bringing together of the contemporary and the classical in a contemporary setting sets up the question of theatre today, its classical heritage and its continuing cultural force. These larger questions are not so much imposed on the performance but raised by the *gravitas* and ambition of the National Theatre's first performance of the play. These elements suggest the lines of thought that mediate the relationship between major and minor character, the relationship between audience and character, and the suggested reorientation from the major to the minor character at the point at which connection between the stage and the auditorium takes place. Cracknell and

Power's elevation of the minor character, especially the Nurse resonates with critical commentaries on the Nurse figure in classical and Shakespearean drama.

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Carlo Vareschi*

The Discreet Charm of Apocalypse: Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* at the Royal Court

Abstract

Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in January 2016 under the direction of James Macdonald, and was revived, at the same venue and with the same cast, between 25 January and 11 February 2017, before going on tour in the UK and USA. After a brief overview of Churchill's latest production, I will focus on her preference for short theatrical forms as well as for environmental and eschatological themes. *Escaped Alone* will be briefly introduced in this frame, with a particular attention to its kinship with *Far Away*. The February 8 2017 performance will then be reviewed with regard to the text, the acting, and the stage design. Macdonald's choices will be discussed, stressing the difficulties and the advantages of staging a play with minimal stage direction; Churchill's relationship with the director, and her role in rehearsal and in the *mise en scène* will be considered too. Finally, I will suggest that Churchill, in her experimenting with theatrical language, has been distancing herself from her social-realistic works of the Seventies and Eighties, going towards a theatre reminiscent of Absurdist theatre in general, and Samuel Beckett in particular.

Keywords: Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, Royal Court, dystopia, environment, Absurdism

Four ladies, in their late middle age, sit and chat more or less cheerfully in a garden. Every now and then one of them leaves the group and directly faces the audience, assuming a Cassandra-like role and describing a chain of catastrophic events that humankind is due to face, supposedly in a near future; by her description, it is apparent that humanity has only itself to blame for these calamities. In a nutshell, this is what goes on in *Escaped Alone*, Caryl Churchill's latest play: yet this summary hardly does justice to the richness of the fifty minutes of (very little indeed) traffic on the stage of the Royal Court. *Escaped Alone* premiered at the same venue in January 2016, with the same cast and under the direction of James Macdonald, and is now revived for a two-week run before going on tour around the UK and then transferring to New York. The play was announced by Royal Court artistic director Vicki Featherstone as the curtain raiser to the theatre's sixtieth-year celebrations in 2016 in an interview (Brown 2015) published by *The Guardian* on 12 October 2015. In this interview, *Escaped Alone* was called "a full-length play".[1] This definition would sound quite off-mark for a fifty-minute play, if not in the context of Churchill's latest production. All through her career, Churchill has written shorter plays, especially for the radio, but in the last eighteen years (since *This is a Chair*,

[1] The phrase appears outside quotation marks, so it is probably a comment by the interviewer, not a statement by the interviewee.

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1999) this has become an established trait of her production, and she has never exceeded the one-hour limit since *Blue Heart* (1997a) and *Hotel* (1997b). The latest example of this concise playwriting was her 2015 play *Here We Go* that lasted some forty-five minutes, including a silent twenty-minute sequence (quite hard to bear for the audience, it has to be said) of an old man carrying out the routine of getting out of bed, dressing, undressing and going back to bed for three times, always with the help of a carer. This economy of expression is the most evident feature of Caryl Churchill's most recent plays, but there have been deeper changes in both thematic and theatrical form in her production. In introducing *Escaped Alone* I will show how, in this period, Churchill has shifted her focus from strictly political to environmental and eschatological themes. After reviewing the performance, I will argue that in her latest plays Churchill has adopted a style reminiscent of absurdist theatre, possibly opening a new path for political theatre.

"It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine)"[2]

As I have stated above, environmental issues are at the core of Churchill's latest production. This is not a novelty, since, for instance, as early as 1971 she wrote, and BBC broadcast, the radio play *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxigen* (see Churchill 2008). As suggested by the title, the play described a not too far future (the play is set in 2010) in which breathing air would become a commodity to be sold and bought. What is new in some of her latest plays is the focus on a sense of unavoidable catastrophe, both collective and individual. The already mentioned *Here We Go* reflected on individual death and physical decay, while *Far Away* (2000) dealt with a worldwide nightmarish future: incidentally, Michael Billington has assigned to this play top position among his five favourite dystopian dramas (Billington 2014).[3] Both *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone* present a situation in which Nature seems finally to rebel against humankind, with apocalyptic consequences. As the playwright Moira Buffini has stated, "I have heard *Far Away* described as the perfect play: the first scene is personal, the second societal, and the third universal. I think that's a bit neat. But it's weird and huge and damned brilliant" (2015). In *Far Away* the main character, Joan, moves from childhood to girlhood to womanhood in the three short acts into which the play is divided. In a sort of reversed *Bildungsroman*, she goes not so much from innocence to experience as from having ethic principles to completely losing them. What is fascinating, and distressing at the same time, is that *Far Away* portrays the 'banality of evil' at its simplest and purest. The reference to Hannah Arendt's report of Eichmann's trial is not casual, as in this play we see that human beings simply get used to evil, almost without being aware of it. As Mary Luckhurst has pointed out, "the actors performed Todd and Joan as classic examples of the banality of evil: as two workers just doing their jobs, which happen to involve the annihilation of other human beings" (2015: 150).

[2] Title of a song by the rock group R.E.M from their album *Document* (1987).

[3] As a matter of interest, the other plays are Alan Ayckbourn's *Henceforward…* (1987), the trilogy *The War Plays* (1985) by Edward Bond, Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* (1960), and Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920).

The sense of cosmic moral void is what links *Far Away* to *Escaped Alone*, as does the telling of catastrophic events going on outside the secluded space of the stage. Yet *Escaped Alone* opens on a quite different key. We initially see three women sitting in a garden. We hear distant noises of road traffic, birds chirping, children playing, while the blue background among the fence suggests a cloudless summer sky (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 – *Escaped Alone* by Caryl Churchill. Directed by James Macdonald (21 January-12 March 2016, Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court). Photo: Johan Persson. From left: Linda Bassett (Mrs Jarrett), Deborah Findlay (Sally), Kika Markham (Lena) and June Watson (Vi).

The atmosphere is familiar and relaxed, but we do not hear what they are saying; the first audible cue is Mrs Jarrett's, a fourth woman who joins the group saying: "I'm walking down the street and there's a door in the fence open and inside are three women I've seen before" (Churchill 2016: 5). It is soon apparent that the three women are life-long friends, while Mrs Jarrett is a newcomer both in the group and in the neighbourhood, and therefore her observations are cautious and restrained to the point of shyness, as we may expect from an outsider. The four women go on chatting for a few minutes about everyday topics such as family and furniture, with some boasting and gossiping about grandchildren. All of a sudden the lights black out, the garden disappears into darkness, and a double casing of pulsating, buzzing red light frames the proscenium: in this disquieting atmosphere Mrs Jarrett (played by Linda Bassett) steps forward and directly addresses the audience, delivering a vision of catastrophic events. Her speech is terrifying and farcical at the same time, mixing timeless fears ("Babies were born and quickly became blind", 8) and social satire ("Some groups lost their sexuality while others developed a new morality of constant fucking with any proximate body", ibid.). Another black out follows, and, when the lights are switched on again, conversation in the garden is resumed. This scene-switching is repeated seven times[4] during the play, alternating garden conversations and catastrophic

[4] Number seven is charged with biblical significance; moreover, it resonates throughout Churchill's production, as in *Seven Jewish Children* (2009) or *Love and Information* (2012), which is divided into seven sections, each including seven scenes (Gobert 2014: 188).

chronicles or prophecies. The evoked catastrophes have a distinct aura of biblical curses around them, as they involve rocks, floods, chemical contamination, famine, wind, poisonous food, fire. The title itself has a strong biblical resonance, being a quotation from the Book of Job. As the story goes, Job is the most pious of men, and the Lord allows Satan to test his faithfulness by taking away his earthly goods and family, before causing injuries to his body too. The aforementioned phrase is repeated by three different servants who, having escaped from the slaughter of Job's children and cattle by means of sword, wind, and fire, report the events to their master: "And I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Job 1:15).[5] The spectator is left wondering whether Mrs Jarrett, speaking in the past tense, describes past events, or prophesizes, or talks from an undefined future describing what is going on outside the garden (of Eden?) while the ladies chat. The above quotation appears as an epigraph to the printed edition, acknowledging both the Book of Job and *Moby Dick* as sources, thus reinforcing the idea that Mrs Jarrett's tale is the tale of a survivor. Yet, since most spectators do not read the script in advance, this sort of dedication is of no importance for the audience. Like the servant in the biblical story, Mrs Jarrett is but a trustworthy witness with no possibility or will either to prevent or interfere with the events. In the biblical tale, it is evident that also when the deeds are carried out by human beings (namely the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, who kill the servants and steal the cattle), they are but instruments of God's will. But in this case the messenger, that is, Mrs Jarrett, makes it very clear that the disasters she tells of are always caused by or linked to some human activity, even when they involve stones falling from the hill: "Four hundred thousand tons of rocks paid for by the senior executives split off the hillside to smash through the roof . . ." (Churchill 2016: 8). The not too covert message is that the catastrophic events are the surreal outcome of a deregulated economy: "The wind developed by property developers started as breezes on cheek and soon turned heads inside out" (28).

Between one vision and the other, in the 'garden' parts, the ladies go on free associating from one thought to the next and even enjoying moments of careless fun, as when they improvise an a cappella version of a hit from the Sixties, *Da Doo Ron Ron*; yet we gradually find out that their lives are not as smooth as they look. One of them, Vi, has killed her husband and even her friends are not sure if it was manslaughter, as was decided in court, or premeditated murder; another, Lena, suffers from a severe form of agoraphobia or depression, and meeting her friends in the garden seems the only social entertainment in a life of secluded isolation; the third, Sally, the landlady, is affected by an irrational and incapacitating fear and hatred of cats. In the course of the drama, each of them is given a longish monologue, interrupting the flow of the otherwise very quick dialogue characterized by short, unfinished alternating cues, in which she elaborates her particular problem or phobia. All the while, the fourth lady, Mrs Jarrett, i.e. Linda Bassett, seems to be tiptoeing among the others' problems, trying to avoid any sore subject, before offering her visions of doom. Her speeches are delivered in a rather plain, matter-of-fact tone which seems to exclude any judgement or involvement. Yet, she always succeeds in communicating to the audience a hint of irony not so much with her voice as with her relaxed body attitude, and with hardly perceptible changes in her facial expression, be they a slight arching of the corners of

[5] This quotation passed on as title of the Epilogue of *Moby Dick* (1851) by Herman Melville (1952: 583).

her lips or a twinkle in her eyes: whether this sort of metaphorical nudging is meant to highlight the implausibility of the described events or to suggest that the punishment humanity gets in the end is thoroughly deserved, it is left to the audience to decide. Andrzej Lukowski, in his review in the on-line edition of *Time Out*, underlines this coexistence of tragic and comic elements: "What makes 'Escaped Alone' a great play is that it is strangely euphoric: spiked with terrible, apocalyptic foreboding, yes, but Churchill's funniest since 'Serious Money', and with an incredible gift for spinning light out of the dark" (Lukowski 2016). "Euphoric" may seem, and in my opinion is, too far-fetched a term to be applied to an apocalyptic play; but surely *Escaped Alone* is, in its own strange way, quite entertaining and, in fact, the performance I attended was punctuated by laughs from the audience. Some of these reactions could be foreseen reading the script, but otherwise they came quite unexpectedly. This seems to have annoyed the *Daily Mail* critic Quentin Letts, who implied the presence of a claque or, at least, accused the Royal Court audience of lack of critical faculties: "The Royal Court audience, eager to love it, had a few determined cacklers who laughed showily at some words and phrases" (Letts 2016). Having said that this remark is part of a generally malevolent review, one has to wonder whether this kind of comic relief was intended by the author herself. Caryl Churchill does not give interviews, and so, in order to understand her intentions, we have to rely on the written text and, given the paucity of stage directions, this is only partially useful. Yet, given the standing of Caryl Churchill as, arguably, the greatest English living playwright, it is difficult to surmise that her latest drama could be staged in a way she would not approve of. Mark Lawson, in his preview of *Here We Go* and *Escaped Alone* in *The Guardian*, reports a statement of the director James Macdonald on Churchill's attitude to the *mise en scène* of her texts: "Churchill, especially in her later work, has, as her regular director James Macdonald puts it, 'almost dispensed with instructions altogether. The director and actors are granted extraordinary freedom'" (Lawson 2015). In the *Escaped Alone Resource Pack*, compiled by Romana Fiello and published by the Royal Court Theatre, the assistant director Roy Alexander Weise gives an interesting account of Churchill's and Macdonald's co-working:

> In rehearsals, she's very present as the playwright, she doesn't try to be invisible at all . . . because Caryl and James have worked together for such a long time they have a mutual understanding of the way that they work, I think negotiation is probably too strong a word to use, in terms of their relationship, it just sort of happens and they're very easy and comfortable about talking about things. It feels like they work like real creators together and not like a writer and a director in that very conventional sense . . . I think James is aware of Caryl's style, the things she does and doesn't like in theatre and the kind of work she likes to make as an artist and so he's aware of things that won't go down well as suggestions. Sometimes, Caryl gives acting notes and James is absolutely fine with that but it doesn't feel like it's very defined. . . . You really get that she trusts the actors. (Fiello 2016: 13)

There are quite a few points of interest in this statement. First of all, it sheds some light on Churchill's relationship with Macdonald, and directors in general: the cementing of strong working bonds seems to be the necessary precondition to achieve the above mentioned "mutual understanding". It is surely no accident that in the last twenty years Churchill has mostly collaborated with three directors: James Macdon-

ald (apart from *Escaped Alone*, *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You*, 2006; *Love and Information,* 2012), Dominic Cooke (*This is a Chair*, 1999; *Seven Jewish Children*, 2009; *Here We Go*, 2015) and Stephen Daldry (*Far away*, 2000; *A Number*, 2002). Secondly, Weise's remark is not entirely consistent with, or, at least, somehow mitigates Macdonald's assertion that the director and actors are granted absolute freedom. There is freedom, but Churchill is always, even if discretely, present, and she intervenes during rehearsals if necessary. Thirdly, it openly states that Churchill's trusting the actors seems to be an essential element in getting the best out of actresses and actors. As regards the last issue, the necessary premise is that the actresses performing in *Escaped Alone* are well-established names in British theatre and cinema, and therefore it came as no surprise that the acting in *Escaped Alone* was superb. I have already mentioned Linda Bassett. Susannah Clapp calls her "one of our greatest and least anointed actors" (2016), probably referring to her getting, both in theatre and in cinema, more parts as deuteragonist than as protagonist. Yet, her outstanding talent shows in Mrs Jarrett's role, keeping the difficult balance between tragedy and farce. Talking of established working relations, the collaboration between Churchill and Bassett dates back to 1983, when the latter was aggregated to Joint Stock for the staging of *Fen* (1983): a life-changing encounter for the then young unemployed Linda, who described the experience in an article published by *The Guardian* on 30 January 2014, entitled "Linda Bassett: sharing a fen cottage with Caryl Churchill changed my career". The other actresses are Kika Markham as Lena, Deborah Findlay as Sally, and June Watson as Vi. Kika Markham lends to Lena her luminous smile and physical frailty. Claire Allfree, in her review in *The Daily Telegraph*, calls her "fragile as a leaf" (2016), and the naivety of her responses makes her character endearingly childish, but never a simpleton: a masterful depiction of the quiet hell of depression. Findlay has probably the hardest task, and she successfully overcomes the difficulties of depicting a character seemingly at peace with herself and with the world, yet showing the underlying signs of neurosis. June Watson is the oldest of the four actresses, but her character, Vi, is the most aggressive and pugnacious, defiant in willingly concealing the details of her husband's death, and spiky when confronting her friends on any issue. Vi is not an agreeable character, as clearly asserted by Sally: "you just need to face . . . how unpleasant you can be (Churchill 2016: 15). Yet Watson's raspy voice and tight-lipped utterances make of this character such a complete challenge to the stereotype of the serene old dear as to make the audience overcome this trait of unpleasantness and sympathize with her: in fact she is the one getting more laughs with her lines. As regards the age of the characters, there is a precise direction following the *dramatis personae* in the published text: "*They are all at least seventy*" (4). Only Linda Basset is slightly younger than that, being born in 1950, so there is no need for heavy aging make-up, and the actresses look absolutely at ease in their parts. There is something liberating for the audience in the presence of four septuagenarians on stage who neither deny nor hide their age, yet escape its *clichés.* The moment in which this empathy is more evident is in the already mentioned rendition of *Da Doo Ron Ron*, a 1963 hit by the Crystals, an all-girl American group, describing the joys and heartbeats of teenage love: while singing it, the four elder ladies on stage regain all their girlish *joie de vivre.* The situation is thus described in the directions: "*All sing.* SALLY, VI *and* LENA *in harmony.* MRS JARRETT *joins in the melody. They are singing for themselves in the garden, not performing to the audience*" (28). As can be seen, there is no mention of which song should be performed, so this scene

can be considered a token example of how the collaboration between Macdonald and Churchill works. According to Weise, this choice was the result of research that took into account artistic but also down-to-earth matters: "We have been researching songs . . . that all these women would know, that don't make too much of a comment about the play and what it's talking about. Also you need to look at who wrote the songs and who is most likely to give us permission" (Fiello 2016: 14). But what is most meaningful in this direction is the "*singing for themselves*", and this is exactly the effect achieved in performance. It would be naive to assume that the characters on stage may ignore the presence of an audience; yet they look so absorbed, not so much in their own selves as in the song and in the group, to cut themselves off from the stage fiction into a separate reality. Their ensuing perceivable isolation, paradoxically, enhances the audience's empathy with the characters on stage, and this empathic feeling is all the more evident as the song is interposed, with no further action or cues, between two of the terrifying tales/prophecies. Due to the lack of dialogue, this is when the transition from apocalyptic tales to garden conversation and back is most abrupt, and consequently the feeling of estrangement more acute: here the audience arrive at questioning the basic assumption that what goes on in the garden is in the frame of reality and what Mrs Jarrett says is fantasy or prophecy. I have already mentioned the transformation undergone by the stage when Mrs Jarrett speaks directly to the audience: a completely dark space, encased by a double pattern of red light that faintly illuminates the speaker (see Fig. 2).

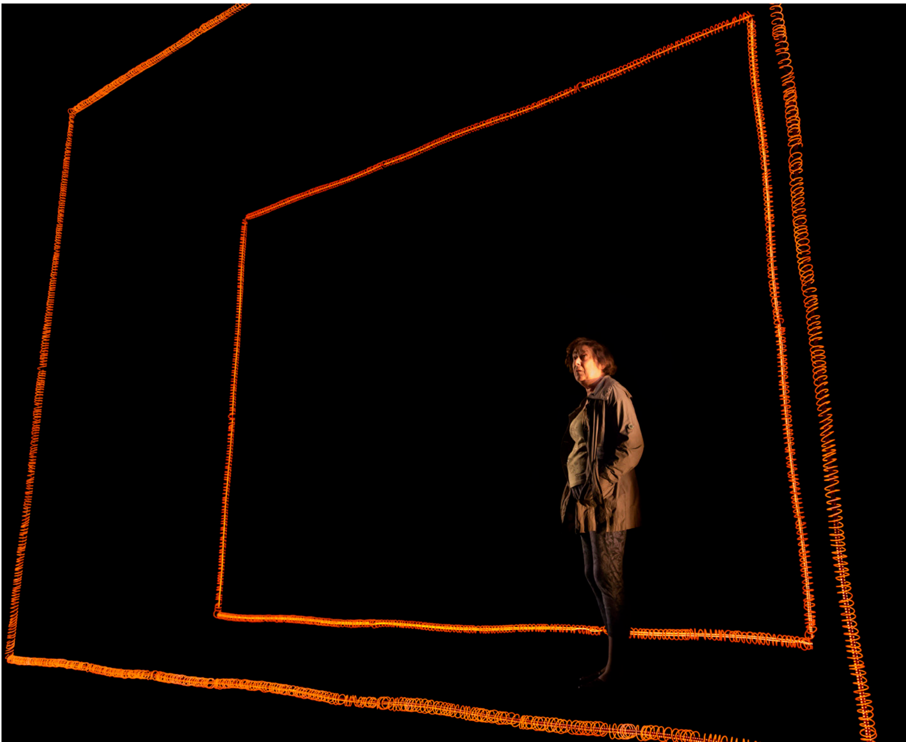

Fig. 2 – *Escaped Alone* by Caryl Churchill. Directed by James Macdonald (21 January-12 March 2016, Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court). Photo: Johan Persson. Linda Bassett (Mrs Jarrett).

The play text carries no direction as to how this delicate passage should be rendered on stage: Mrs Jarrett's visions appear on different pages to mark their separation from the garden speeches, with no further comment. So the choice of encasing the stage in a double red pattern is a creation of the director and his creative team:

> It was essential to the creative team that Mrs Jarrett's speeches take place in a different location to the garden. In order to achieve this, a proscenium has been built at the front of the stage, this is a square filament that you look through to see the action, when Mrs Jarrett steps out of the garden, the lights on this filament shine and "blind the audience" making the garden behind disappear. (Fiello 2016: 10)

The lighted frame solution, in its simplicity, is very effective in clearly marking the distinction between the two spaces, while the creaking sound that accompanies it, contributes to the nerve-wrecking atmosphere created by Mrs Jarrett's speeches. Susannah Clapp, in her review in *The Observer* (31 January 2016), gives full marks to the play at large, and foregrounds the role of the stage designer: "This is one of the mind spaces that Macdonald and designer Miriam Buether excel at creating" (Clapp 2016). This praise is echoed by David Jays in his survey of Buether's career in *The Guardian* (4 May 2017):

> Miriam Buether's stage designs always astonish audiences. . . . Born in Germany, Buether has made her name in Britain with audacious design for bold new writing. . . . You may be seated around a boxing ring. The stage floor may be in constant motion. The entire set may disappear without warning. (Jays 2017)

Buethen had already collaborated with Macdonald in staging Churchill's *Love and Information* in 2012, so she was familiar with their working method and demands. In *Escaped Alone* her creation is straightforward enough, if compared to others recalled by Jays. Of course this responds to a play in which the focus is on the main character, that is, Mrs Jarrett, and her narration. Yet I would add that this minimalistic stage design validates the idea that Churchill is experimenting with a theatrical form reminding of absurdist theatre, as I will further comment on in the next paragraph. A kinship to absurdist theatre is also suggested by the sometime disconcerting verbal flow, and the undeniable difficulty of attributing a definite meaning to the play is the issue that has caused some negative reactions from the critics. *The Daily Telegraph*'s Claire Allfree expressed some reservations in this respect in her review, whose title "Terrific cast with nowhere to go" (2016) clearly reflects her view. Similar doubts were voiced by Quentin Letts in the *Daily Mail* on 1 February 2016, in such an unpleasant way as to suggest personal and/or political dislike: "Towards the end Mrs Jarrett says 'terrible rage' 25 times in succession. . . . it did arouse in me a terrible rage that British workers, many on grotty wages, have had their taxes used to subsidise such posh tosh" (Letts 2016). In their different ways, both articles acknowledge Churchill's tendency to exceed the limits of naturalistic speech that has been manifest for some time, and requires further investigation.

From Daughter of Brecht to Daughter of Beckett

In order to explain Churchill's shift from a strictly political form of theatre, Max Stafford-Clark remarked that Churchill had "developed her own response to a political agenda which she has discovered she cannot effectively address any more" (qtd in Roberts 2008: 146). Stafford-Clark referred to *Far Away* (2000), yet this observation has not lost its relevance nowadays. Of course, the use of dystopia in order to make a political point is not a particularly original solution: examples abound, also in English, in the twentieth century, especially in the Seventies, both on the right (Stoppard's *Jumpers*, 1972) and on the left (Brenton's *The Churchill Play*, 1974) of the political spectrum. What is new in twenty-first-century politics and economics is that, since free-market economy has risen to the status of absolute, God-given entity, dystopia seems the only effective way of challenging it, of showing its human, transient nature. The consequence is the abandonment of the so-called social realism and the embracing of a theatrical form that is reminiscent of absurdist theatre. In Churchill's plays the uncompleted lines and the uncertain time frame of *Escaped Alone*, the decomposed language of *Blue Heart* (1997a)[6] or the symbolically charged dialogue in *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You* (2006)[7] are clear examples of this experimental language. In this respect, *The Skriker* (1994) was the turning point. In this drama, the eponymous character is a fairy, connected to English traditional folklore, that haunts two teenage mothers of the present time. She speaks in a broken language that Churchill describes in this way: "A bit like someone with schizophrenia or a stroke, where the sense is constantly interrupted by the other associations of words" (qtd in Gobert 2014: 20). I will quote a few examples, considering their relevance in connection to *Escaped Alone*:

> Heard her boast beast a roast beef eater, daughter could spin span spick and spun the lowest form of wheat straw into gold, raw into roar, golden lion and lyonesse under the sea, dungeonesse under the castle for bad mad sad adders and takers away. Never marry a king size well beloved . . . Eating a plum in the enchanted orchard, cherry orchid, charted orchestra was my undoing my doing my dying my undying love for you. (Churchill 1998: 243, 245)

As can be seen, the speech progresses through both phonic and semantic associations, often adding an element of estrangement in the general fairy tale atmosphere (". . . for bad mad sad adders and takers away. Never marry a king size well beloved"). A similar technique of foregrounding economic terms in an estranging context is employed by Churchill in *Escaped Alone* with the transparent intent of satirizing financial jargon: ". . . lifebelts and upturned umbrellas, swimming instructors and lilos, rubber ducks and pumice stone floated on the stock market" (Churchill 2016: 12). In *The Skriker*, environmental preoccupations were expressed in terms of nostalgia for the ancient times, when fairies were feared and respected: "Now

[6] In the second part of the play, every word is increasingly substituted by "blue" and "kettle": "I am getting a horrible kettle from this situation, Derek. I think you need to blue us what's kettle on" (Churchill 1997a: 66).

[7] The play stages the relationship between the USA and the UK through the dialogue of two characters, Sam (USA) and Guy (UK).

they hate us and hurt hurtle faster and master. They poison me in my rivers of blood poisoning makes my arm swelter" (Churchill 1998: 246); "Poison in the food chain saw massacre" (271).[8] The same preoccupations are presented in *Escaped Alone* in the neutral language of journalistic report, highlighting the increasingly thin divide between truth and invention: "The illness started when children drank sugar developed from monkeys" (Churchill 2016: 29).

Moira Buffini thus synthesizes this evolution in Churchill's playwriting:

> Churchill, who in the 70s and 80s was the daughter of Brecht, has become the daughter of Beckett. Her writing is distilled to its very essence. She has the epic sweep of the former: the alienation (your emotions never manipulated); the bare bones of the theatre constantly visible. And she has the distillation, the humour of the latter: the human condition writhing on a pin. (Buffini 2015)

That absurdist forms may be used in a somehow socialist perspective is utterly paradoxical, considering that epic or social realistic and absurdist theatre have been considered competing forces in the race for the attention of British audiences from the late Fifties to the early Nineties, as John Bull argued in his *Stage Right* (1994). This antithesis has always been considered an irreconcilable one, at least in Great Britain;[9] it goes as far back as 1958, when Eugene Ionesco and Kenneth Tynan were involved in an acrimonious confrontation on the pages of *The Observer*, as reported by Martin Esslin in his seminal *The Theatre of the Absurd*, on the respective merits of politically engaged drama and 'theatre for theatre's sake', so to speak (Esslin 1974: 100-1). To attribute this reconciliation between contrasting approaches to theatre to the fall of the Berlin Wall would probably mean to stretch the point too far. Yet economical and financial issues replacing ideological contraposition in public life is a hardly questionable fact: and this results in an increasing difficulty in interpreting reality. For example, on 11 April 2017, the bus carrying the Borussia Dortmund football team to a match was subjected to a bombing attack; at first the act was attributed to Muslim terrorism, but further investigations found out that the attack was meant to depreciate Borussia Dortmund's shares. On 21 April 2017 *The Guardian*, reporting on the investigations, titled "Dortmund attack: man arrested on suspicion of share dealing plot", which is only marginally more believable than Churchill's "Four-hundred-thousand tons of rocks paid for by the senior executives . . . " (Churchill 2016: 28). It is tempting to assert that life has overdone its imitation of art. On a more serious note, in a world in which traditional social and political oppositions (capital and labour, right and left) seem to be outdated, dystopian theatre, in shifting its focus from day-to-day politics to human condition, regardless of time and space, is probably the most powerful development of political drama.

[8] In 1994, when *The Skriker* was written and staged, Great Britain was in the midst of the Mad Cow Desease crisis, caused by herbivores being fed with products of animal origin.

[9] Absurdist theatrical forms have been employed in the countries of the pre-'89 Eastern Block as a way of effectively satirizing the Communist bureaucracy. See Vaclav Havel's plays, dealt with by Kenneth Tynan in relation to Tom Stoppard (Tynan 1979: 44-123).

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Marco Duranti*

Notes on *Ifigenia, Liberata* at the Piccolo Teatro

Abstract

The *Ifigenia, liberata* (*Iphigenia, Freed*), written by Carmelo Rifici and Angela Demattè and performed at the Piccolo Teatro Strehler in Milan from 27 April to 7 May 2017, is a challenging theatrical experiment on Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. This piece illustrates how the conceptual premises of the play are to be found in René Girard's theorization of human violence. In this light, Iphigenia's sacrifice becomes the means to placate the mimetic rivalries among the Greek warriors and eventually pursue the expedition against Troy. But Rifici and Demattè were also inspired by the Italian scholar Giuseppe Fornari, who argues that in *Iphigenia in Aulis* Euripides exposed the cruelty of the sacrifice and its sordid motivations, while being unable to oppose to it a new ethics. These stances intriguingly materialize in the re-working of the Euripidean play through the interaction of words, stage setting, and filmic images.

Keywords: *Iphigenia*, Rifici, Demattè, Euripides, Girard, sacrifice

The *Ifigenia, liberata* (*Iphigenia, Freed*) performed at the Piccolo Teatro Strehler in Milan from 27 April to 7 May 2017 (but first mounted in Lugano from 10 to 11 March, and then on 13-14 July in Spoleto) is a challenging theatrical experiment on Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, written by Carmelo Rifici, artistic director of LuganoInScena and director of the Luca Ronconi theatrical school at the Piccolo, together with Angela Demattè. The play stages a Dramatist (Mariangela Granelli) and a Director (Tindaro Granata) during rehearsals of the Euripidean tragedy. The stage represents a rehearsal room, enclosed on three sides by wooden walls: on the left, the spectators can see the technical equipment and a library; on the right, two armchairs. A water cooler and a security exit signal complete the picture of a usual performing room. On the background there open three exits; above the central exit there hangs a big screen. Both the Dramatist and the Director address the audience directly, explaining the premises of their work, as well as their dramaturgical choices; moreover, they direct the actors. This has an important bearing on the play. The spectators are not allowed to be fully absorbed in a world of dramatic illusion; on the contrary, they are constantly called back to their present reality, which they are invited to compare to the staged story against the backdrop of the entire cultural history of humanity.

This is indeed a learned play, relying upon a number of quotations from, and allusions to, different, if connected, texts. At the end of it, the screen shows a table, and upon it the scattered covers of the books which have been consulted for this show. Among them, especially relevant for the conceptual framework of the play is a classic from the 1970s, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) by the French scholar René

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Girard. At the core of Girard's understanding of human violence is the idea that the survival of every human community is endangered by the rivalries between its members. These rivalries are 'mimetic', that is, they result from the desire to achieve the same objectives or goods, which in turn is caused by emulation between the members of the community. Before the resulting hatred turns into an uncontrollable outburst of reciprocal violence, the community needs to find a victim outside – the scapegoat – on whom its members can convey this violence. As Girard writes, "[t]he victim is . . . a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from *its own* violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself. The elements of dissension scattered throughout the community are drawn to the person of the sacrificial victim and eliminated, at least temporarily, by its sacrifice" (1977: 8; author's emphasis). Once the victim has reconciled the community members through his/her own sacrifice, he/she is usually deified, and this final act covers up the hatred which the same community has felt against the scapegoat.

When seen through the lens of Girard's theory, the sacrifice of Iphigenia becomes the means which allows to placate the tensions in the Greek army and the rivalries between its leaders. As Lorna Shaughnessy explains:

> *Iphigenia at Aulis* opens with mimetic rivals vying for possession of Helen: two kingdoms, Greek and Trojan. However, the tensions generated by this external conflict ignite internal divisions within the Greek camp, and in accordance with Girard's theory, mimetic rivalries proliferate. For example, who will control the information in the oracle? Who will maintain control of the restless Greek troops in the absence of wind as they anxiously anticipate departure for war? (2017: 382)

The tensions in the Greek army are amplified by the presence on stage of Odysseus (Igor Horvat), who in the Greek original did not appear. The hero voices the impatience of the Greek warriors, who look forward to conquering Troy, and therefore do not refrain from shedding the blood of an innocent. But Odysseus – and this marks an innovative turn in respect to the original play – also reminds Agamemnon that it is thanks to him that he has become a man by joining the Trojan expedition: if Agamemnon now called it off, he would lose that name. What he implies is that it is precisely the shedding of the human blood of this single victim that allows for the social compactness of the Greeks, at the same time controlling their bestial violence and safeguarding communal peace. More precisely, Odysseus suggests that it is because of the human sacrifice that they can channel their own violence towards a victim, thus checking mutual violence, saving the army, and finally conquering Troy. The sacrifice cancelled, their community would dissolve, and its members would regress to a subhuman condition.

Girard's theory provides the basis for the adjective "freed" in the title. As Rifici explains in the programme (Vasta 2017: 7), the concept of 'liberation' alludes to the revelation of the hypocrisy of Iphigenia's myth: it means to show that the story of her rescue by Artemis and substitution with a doe, before the final sacralization of the victim, conceals the responsibility of the Greek community, who have desired her death. In this respect, Rifici and Granata have taken inspiration from the work of the Italian scholar Giuseppe Fornari, who has recently contested Girard's under-

standing of Greek tragedy. According to Girard, the ancient pagan societies were unable to detect the mechanisms underlying the persecution of the scapegoat: "[p]ersecutors always believe in the excellence of their cause, but in reality *they hate without a cause*" (1986: 103; author's emphasis). On the contrary, both the Bible – especially in the Psalms – and the Gospels "discredit point by point all the characteristic illusions of mythologies" (ibid.) by presenting the perspective of the victim. Whereas Girard regarded tragic theatre as a way to symbolically represent the mechanism of sacrifice, with no awareness of its profound reasons, Fornari argues that the tragedians, and especially Euripides, revealed the atrocity of the sacrifice and the socio-political dynamics which it hides. In his view, *Iphigenia in Aulis* is the tragedy in which most clearly these implicit premises are exposed: here "the bloody sacrifice of the girl is fully shown alongside the baseness of the reasons behind it, ambition and desire for power".[1] And yet, the logic of sacrifice is not overcome:

> There seems to be here . . . a confused insight into the spiritual opportunities which only Christianity would develop, into the possibilities of expiation of the sacrifice which only Christianity would free by transforming them into redemptive manifestations of love.[2]

Euripides offers no alternative model to that of sacrifice and subsequent sanctification of the victim: after the courageous condemnation of the sacrifice, the play ends canonically with the sanctification of Iphigenia, substituted with a deer and ascending to the gods in heaven (1612). Iphigenia herself is infected with the community's lust for blood and violence: after trying to convince her father to desist from her own sacrifice, she offers herself for the glory of Greece. The Aristotelian criticism of Iphigenia's incoherence (*Poet.* 1454a31-3) is here reinterpreted through Fornari's words: "the character eventually imitates the only model and the only values which are left for the victim, those of her persecutors".[3] As we shall see, Rifici and Demattè try to overcome this impasse in the finale, reflecting on the possibility to find a new, entirely human way for communal life without the salvific intervention of God as testified to by the Gospels.

The reinterpretation of the character of Iphigenia through Girard's theory allows this play to hint at a possible incestuous relationship between Iphigenia and Agamemnon: incest is one of the moral biases which Girard (drawing for instance on the myth of Oedipus) lists as "characteristic of the way in which frenzied crowds conceive of their victims" (Girard 1986: 26). As Rifici explains (Vasta 2017: 8), this is a conscious manipulation of the Greek text, aimed at highlighting the absurdity of sacrificial rites. And yet, this manipulation is not sufficiently foregrounded on stage, so it can hardly be grasped by the audience, despite the play's general exhibition of self-reflexivity.

[1] My translation. ". . . il sacrificio cruento della ragazza è mostrato in tutto lo squallore delle sue motivazioni di ambizione e potere" (Fornari 2006: 636).

[2] My translation. "Sembra esserci qui . . . un'intuizione confusa delle possibilità spirituali che solo il cristianesimo avrebbe sviluppato, delle possibilità espiatorie del sacrificio che solo il cristianesimo avrebbe liberato, trasformandole in manifestazioni redentive d'amore" (Fornari 2006: 635-6).

[3] My translation. "[A]lla fine il personaggio imita l'unico modello e gli unici valori che restano alla vittima, quelli dei suoi carnefici" (Fornari 2006: 636).

From what has been said so far, it is clear that, through Girard and Fornari, Rifici and Dematté have transformed and expanded Iphigenia's story to encompass a broader reflection on the same reasons behind human violence, as well as on the fundamentals of human civilization. As Erika Fischer-Lichte reminds us, Girard's theory was elaborated as a response to the socio-political crisis of the 1960s, when "many Western countries faced serious challenges to the political, social and moral order established or re-established after World War II" (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 207). In those years, Western societies were confronted with an outburst of violence, "that was committed through assassinations, in the confrontation of demonstrators and police at riots, protests, marches etc., and even in a kind of civil war" (209). Almost fifty years later, Rifici and Dematté have turned once again to Girard in order to reflect upon the violence of our own times. His theory has enabled them to connect this new violence with man's endless inclination to aggressiveness and to point out that society as a whole is to blame for it: no one can claim to be innocent. In one of the most effective moments of the show, Granelli addresses the audience and asks: "isn't it true that we all want Iphigenia's death?". Our assumed solidarity with the victim is provocatively reversed into our own suggested identification with the persecutors.

All the media available to the director, from videos to books, are exploited in order to enlarge the idea of sacrifice to invest the whole sacrificial history of humanity. The Euripidean text is contaminated with excerpts from Homer, Heraclitus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, the Bible, and Nietzsche. The projected videos are instrumental in multiplying the possible perspectives on the history of civilization, hybridizing the story of *Iphigenia in Aulis* with other stories and kindred motifs. When a film is projected onto the screen, the actors themselves become spectators on stage, thus suggesting that actors and audience alike are part of a collective process of recollection of the human past; the role distinction is far less relevant than their participation in a common experience.

At the beginning of the performance the screen shows a couple of hominids, making the scene deeply reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: a Space Odyssey*. The play clearly means to outline a brief history of the human race, with the objective of understanding what distinguishes man from the other animals. The archetype of human civilization is found in the biblical episode of Cain and Abel, which Rifici and Dematté again read following Girard:

> The Bible offers us no background on the two brothers except the bare fact that Cain is a tiller of the soil who gives the fruits of his labor to God, whereas Abel is a shepherd who regularly sacrifices the first-born of his herds. One of the brothers kills the other, and the murderer is the one who does not have the violence-outlet of animal sacrifice at his disposal. (1977: 4)

The killing of Abel is the result of the fact that Cain has no other way to give vent to his aggressiveness, as he does not make sacrifices. His deed shows how deeply violence is rooted in humankind from its very beginning.

This rootedness of violence in the human race and its persistence across time are expressed through a number of verbal and visual images. The former is conveyed through the recurring phrase "we always get back there, to the bowels", referring to both human and animal bowels, as well to the rites of vaticination which

were carried out on the carcass of the sacrificed animals. This verbal image is connected to the visual one of the labyrinth, which is repeatedly projected onto the central screen. Rifici and Granata again follow Fornari in suggesting that archaic societies regarded the labyrinth as the architectonic transposition of the animal, or human, tangled viscera (Fornari 2006: 202). In addition to the labyrinth, circles symbolize the encirclement of the victim, as in the case of the sand circle surrounding Iphigenia asleep, herself curled up into the circular shape of her foetal position – an image at some point shown for a few minutes on the screen.

As regards the stage setting, scenographer Margherita Palli's intention was to suggest an anonymous and "aseptic" room for the theatrical experiment which was to be carried out; and yet, its reddish wooden walls suggested blood (2017: 15). Thus, through visual and spatial metaphors, the setting represents the double effect which this play is meant to elicit in the audience: on the one hand, an intellectual understanding of violence as a constant feature of human civilization, which is exposed and dissected in front of the audience; on the other, a disquieting feeling of sharing the psychological mechanisms exhibited on stage, arousing our own suspicion of partaking of the characters' own relish for human blood.

For sure, the two Calchidian women who form the chorus (Caterina Carpio and Francesca Porrini) share that relish. They constantly repeat "thinking is harmful. We, women of Calchis, are outspoken" while hula hooping – yet another symbolically circular prop. They speak as the representatives of the crowd, the people who keep to the logic of sacrifice and violence. Their infantile appearance contrasts most strikingly with their lust for war and blood, thus making clear that any individual at any level is intrinsically violent. On the one hand, these women give voice to the most traditional positions, glorifying the Trojan war and the Greek commanders, as the Greek chorus did (e.g. Eur. *IA* 1527-31). On the other hand, they also prove to be contemporary: not only do they state that they know the social networks, but they also voice the current fear of immigrants, thus implicitly suggesting that new forms of violence might ensue. This double face of the chorus members again confirms that the human proclivity towards violence is common to both the ancient and the modern world.

The chorus add yet another symbolic form to the circle mentioned above: the square. The two women play with little cubes showing on their faces the letters of the Greek alphabet. While the square usually suggests architectural order and stability, the women repeatedly destroy and rebuild the constructions they make out of the cubes. Thus, human *logos,* symbolized by the language of the cubes, turns out to be unable to oppose the chaos and unreasonableness of the world in which we live.

The play's finale emphasizes exactly the role of language in fostering our addiction to violence, but also, and conversely, in offering a fundamental instrument to create a new world. Mad violence bursts out when social interaction prevents dialogue; its locus is the crowds, a social dimension which does not allow for mutual understanding. A way out can only be found in the patient dialogue between two interlocutors. It is necessary to get back to an understanding of language in order to rediscover the meaning of words and their social potential: as Granata says, "we would have never feared the other, hated the other, if we had had the courage to

use words well, to take care of them".[4] The first two words to be re-employed are love and hope. As Rifici writes, "in fact the word *love* is pronounced by the Dramatist; the Director suggests *hope* as nearest to man, more possible".[5] Both are 'unspeakable' words, and yet humanity must tend towards them in order to save itself.

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[4] My translation. "[N]on saremmo mai arrivati alla paura dell'altro, all'odio, se avessimo avuto il coraggio di usare bene le parole, di prendercene cura" (qtd in Rinaldi 2017).

[5] My translation. "[I]n realtà la parola *amore* è pronunciata dalla Drammaturga; il regista suggerisce *speranza* come più vicina all'uomo, più possibile" (Vasta 2017: 10).

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