



## Awry Crowns: Queenship and Its Discontents

Edited by Rosy Colombo

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MONICA CENTANNI – *The Queen on Stage. Female Figures of Regality in Aeschylus*

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# S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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**6:1 2020**

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SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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*Founded by Guido Avezzi, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri*

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Published in June 2020

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ISSN 2421-4353

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SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies

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Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzi

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Published in June 2020

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ISSN 2421-4353

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## Introduction

### 1. The Queen's Two Bodies<sup>1</sup>

Recent scholarship has highlighted the response of early modern theatre – particularly Shakespeare's – to the Greek dramatic tradition, either as self-conscious engagement, or as a departure from it.<sup>2</sup> In these studies, queenly rule, obviously on account of Elizabeth's issues with identity (especially with regard to her illegitimate, 'bastard' birth and unmarried state) has proved a paradigmatic focus of interest: compared with "the hollow crown" of kings "all murdered" (*Richard II* 3.2.156),<sup>3</sup> a dangling, "awry" crown is tested as a signifier of the dynamics of queenship: denoting an unstable position between being subjected to and being the subject of,<sup>4</sup> between power and authority. Not only a stage prop suggesting a title (with its complementary trappings) but a character *per se*, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*: the last act of this play being a case in point of queenship represented and conceived as a spectacle ("Show me, my women, like a queen" (5.2.223, emphasis mine). The ancient and the early modern stage host a number of queens fashioned as tragic icons of violence both suffered and inflicted, often with the victims turned into killers, in a pattern of horrors displayed in a dual, anamorphic perspective. An oblique vision of queenship runs from the Greek repertoire to Shakespeare's production which

<sup>1</sup> This volume is a follow-up to the insightful issue on "Kin(g)ship and Power" edited by Eric Nicholson (*Skenè* 4:2, 2018). My heartfelt thanks to Silvia Bigliuzzi for trusting me with this engaging theme, and to Guido Avezzi for his competent and friendly support in my 'return to the Mothers' from a lifetime spent elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> As Catherine Belsey states (2015: 63): "It's what he changes that throws into relief what makes him Shakespeare".

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare are from Shakespeare 2016.

<sup>4</sup> A fascinating portrait of Elizabeth I's anxiety about her awry crown is in Nadia Fusini 2009. A compelling investigation into this issue is also in Continisio and Del Villano 2018.

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puts to the test – and challenges – Seneca’s revision, retrieved among others and recast in a modern light. A network of Didonian intertextuality haunts the imaginary of the Renaissance, newly engrafted in Marlowe’s dramatic form: an episode, however compelling, functional to the (cultural) foundation myth of Rome, narrated in Books 2 and 4 of the *Aeneid*, whose spinoff sees Dido as the protagonist of an independent play in her own name, *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*, a self-contained tragedy of queenship and its discontents (see Ziosi 2015). A similar transference of female rulers from the liturgy of myth to the lexicon of dramaturgical invention, in fact a departure from their merely functional role in plots which transcend them to transform them into full-fledged characters conceived as protagonists in their own right with a pervading presence onstage, had started with Aeschylus, who turns the *Oresteia* epic saga into a dramatic version, with Clytaemnestra as the main character of the plot (see Monica Centanni’s essay in the current issue). Such a formal and cultural dynamics is at the core of the representation of queenship tackled in some of the essays of the current issue of *Skenè*: as tragic characters Jocasta and Medea, Phaedra and Electra (with Hecuba looming in the background as a fundamental intermediary figure) cease to be a mystery to be endorsed and become a problem, calling for interpretation.

All the more true since tragic form, based on dialogue, can give voice to the reasons and the grief of the Other, a stranger in terms of both gender and birthplace – a task that Greek tragedy takes upon itself, making room for barbaric queens alien to Athens’ dominant culture, but also an engaging venture undertaken by Shakespeare in multiple ways, arranged in a prismatic pattern: in the shocking scenario of Gothic Tamora (in *Titus Andronicus*) and of the French queen Margaret (a pervasive character in the first tetralogy), in the distressing trial against Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* (“The Emperor of Russia was my father”, 3.2.116; “You speak a language that I understand not”, 3.2.76), and of course in the glorious, impenetrable portrait of the “gypsy” queen/quean of Egypt (see Holdsworth 2018), an icon of gender and cultural interaction – the stranger *par excellence*. Marked as monstrous hybrids because of their virile connotation (see Michael Neill’s essay in the current issue), these queens could however be later transformed by an exotic touch, bent into the shape of reassuring objects of consumption, as in Dryden’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* in terms of a sheer, self-contained tragedy of love (*All for Love. Or the World Well Lost*, 1677). Less reassuring, on the other hand, is Dryden and Lee’s ‘unveiling’ of Jocasta’s incestuous passion for Oedipus, bestowing upon the queen of Thebes a larger room onstage than in the ancient Greek versions of Sophocles and Euripides (*Phoenissae*), with an expansion into criminal agency (see Marisa Sestito’s essay): another story altogether.

In early modernity the stage treatment of female rule is inscribed within the dialectics of ‘the Queen’s two bodies’, a metaphor denoting an interdependence between the queen’s natural body, smacking of mortality, and a symbolic body fashioned by an actor in performance. In Shakespeare’s history plays, such a paradigm takes over the medieval paradigm of the ‘King’s two bodies’ (see Kantorowicz 2016): the body politic connoted as holy according to a theological code is de-sacralised by the dramatic form, the crown turned from holy to hollow,<sup>5</sup> and replaced by a theatrical body, an aesthetic one, a *persona*. A shadow, yet not destitute of power, rather endowed with a sort of authority: the energy to signify an emotion through a skilful handling of verbal and body language, in other words the power of rhetoric, able to shape the “airy nothing” of the imaginary. It is this power that will prove a central theme in Shakespeare’s production, in tune with the issue of the poet’s airy identity extolled in Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4.55-96), in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, (5.1.7-17) or with the Actor’s commitment to Hecuba as an icon of absence in *Hamlet* (2.2.451-4):

Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit – and all for nothing –  
For Hecuba.

Hamlet’s metatheatrical vision of Hecuba as an actor as well as a character must be read against this metamorphosised version of royalty, consistent with the reciprocal dependence of throne and stage claimed by Elizabeth (and emphatically taken over by James I).<sup>6</sup> Consistent, too, with the feminised version of myth fashioned by Euripides and exploited by Shakespeare – who was certainly familiar with the Greek playwright<sup>7</sup> – in a number of plays. Interestingly, Silvia Bigliuzzi has emphasised the modelling role of

<sup>5</sup> “For within the hollow crown / That rounds the mortal temples of a king / Keeps Death Its court” (*Richard II* 3.2.156-9).

<sup>6</sup> See respectively: “We princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world”; “A king is as one set on a stage”, quoted and discussed in Orgel 1975: 42. See also Mary Axton’s introductory motto to her *The Queen’s Two Bodies. Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (1977): “Since your sacred Majestie / In gracious hands the regal Sceptre held / All Tragedies are fled from state, to stadge (sic)”. However, in spite of the analogy with the title of my argument, Axton’s issue concerns rather the legal side of English national identity.

<sup>7</sup> Recent studies have highlighted Euripides’s popularity in early modern England, from Erasmus’ Latin translation of *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Paris 1506, newly published the following year by Aldo Manuzio) to George Peele’s vernacular translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* (about 1582); see next note.

the queen of Troy on the entire course of Shakespeare's production – from *The Rape of Lucrece* to *Titus Andronicus*, *Coriolanus* and *Cymbeline* – under the sign of a 'feminisation' of revenge (see Bigliuzzi 2019).<sup>8</sup> And this is also a leading concern in the current issue of *Skenè*.

## 2. Staging Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays

Coming to terms with the foundations of the original national heritage is a necessity that the English drama of the last decades of the sixteenth century shares with ancient Greek drama of the fifth century BC. In both cases, the stage develops opportunities for a reassessment of the past – on the one hand myth, on the other history; a revival not lacking in critical vision. The dramatic stance of Shakespeare's two tetralogies on a century of English history parallels the revision of classical myth turned into tragic form by Aeschylus, who in the *Oresteia* had set this model for future playwrights. The revision takes its cue from ideological concerns with national identity: in Athens the rise of democracy and of its related idea of justice, the latter largely endorsed by Aeschylus (*Eumenides*), and ambiguously supported by Euripides; in England the achievement of peace with the firm establishment of the Tudor monarchy (and related dawn of the imperial theme)<sup>9</sup> after a chain of violence and bloodshed stirred by dynastic conflicts and contradictions. That Shakespeare took his cue from narrative sources (Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed's chronicles) can hardly be refuted; however some scholars, going against the grain – among them Giorgio Melchiori (see Shakespeare 1979) – have spotted intimations of theatricality in a number of episodes and events in the sources, pinpointing in the narrative fabric scenes of rich dramatic intensity when queenship is at stake.<sup>10</sup> In his turn, Christopher Marlowe could take from the epic structure of the *Aeneid* a number of cues for a dramaturgical swerve of the plot: some studies by Antonio Ziosi, like the one published in this issue, argue that the *Tragedy of Dido* not only stems from the plot of Virgil's epic, but actually develops a number of theatrical linguistic traces encapsulated in the narrative; first and foremost the eloquent pair of tragic boots (*cothurni*) worn by Venus when first meeting in disguise her son Aeneas on the

<sup>8</sup> See also Bigliuzzi 2018, Pollard 2012, and Tassi 2011.

<sup>9</sup> The reference is to Wilson Knight 1951. The English imperial ambition is of course an issue in Shakespeare's Roman plays (with Rome as a metaphor of England) once English power was established on the firm basis of Tudor and Stuart monarchy – an aftermath of the histories.

<sup>10</sup> For a synthetic treatment of queens as performers of their grim past see Melchiori's *Introduction to Richard III* (Shakespeare 1979: 2.823-37).

shore of Carthage (Book 2),<sup>11</sup> leading to the tragic outcome in Book 4. Just like Virgil had grafted the memory of Troy anew onto the cultural roots of Rome, Marlowe's haunting memory of Dido and Helen makes fragments of myth 'immortal' to legitimise the classical foundations of Renaissance England. After all, in the intricate maze of historical ancestors of the country's identity (from William the Conqueror onwards) a mythical Brutus, grandson of Aeneas, was supposed to have been a founder of the English lineage.

Although, in the chronicles, kingship is the main object of contention, four queens are given ample room in Shakespeare's early staging of the English medieval past – the memorable sequence of dynastic wars fought by the 'roses' of York and Lancaster, as well as by the rival nations of France and England. Blood runs from open battlefields to dark interiors: castles, palaces, and of course prisons – fit locations for the performance of such criminal events as treasons and murders, appropriations and expropriations of the crown. And fit locations, too, to store a character turning his own gaze upon himself, as in Richard II's acknowledgment of the path of ambition and humiliation which has led to the undoing of his royal body and the loss of its divine symbols (Acts 4 and 5). It so happened that a 'feminised' Richard II could be set forth as the shadow of Queen Elizabeth, the stage holding up a mirror to both of them.

It is worth stressing the point that in the dramatic invention of the histories, the marginality of female agency in the comprehensive kingship plot undergoes a shift into a powerful, disturbing presence on stage. Characters of queens-to-be and no-longer queens succeed one another, mostly with negative connotations: malicious and ambitious, cunning or superficial, erotically charged or "unsexed" (Lady Macbeth looms in the distance).

Strategically, three of them are brought together in *Richard III* 4.4, as *dramatis personae* in a sort of pageant at the centre of the play: a play-within-the-play of kingship, a sort of transcription of the Chorus of ancient Greek theatre, in the guise of Erinyes "hungry for revenge" (61).<sup>12</sup>

Enter, in sequence:

- Queen Margaret, the French queen, a mix of Joan of Arc's arrogance and Helen of Troy's erotic appeal, a strong character with a prominent role in the script of *2Henry VI* and subsequently in *3Henry VI*<sup>13</sup>;

<sup>11</sup> See Antonio Ziosi's comment, and relevant bibliographical footnote on p. 114 of this issue.

<sup>12</sup> For obviously intentional dramaturgical reasons, Queen Anne Neville, whose title, conferred on her by the killer of her husband, had lasted for a short time, has disappeared.

<sup>13</sup> "Not only did the playwright stretch her character over the four plays of his first tetralogy – a unique instance –, but he also took liberties with the historical sources in

- The Duchess of York, the earliest of them, queen and not-queen: since she was never granted the title she deserved, being the widow of the founder of the York dynasty;
- Queen Elizabeth of York, ambitious and easily manipulated, a poor instrument in the plot of Richard of Gloucester (“relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!”, 431).

They hate each other; consider Margaret’s words to Elizabeth (using a theatrical vocabulary):

I called thee . . . poor shadow, painted queen  
 . . .  
 A queen in jest, only to fill the scene,  
 . . .  
 For queen, a very caitiff crowned with care.  
 (83-101)

However, as wives and mothers they share a consuming despair. Widowhood and wounded maternity (another trace of Hecuba?) are their hallmark, foregrounding lack as the symbol of a ghostly identity, the paradigm of a constitutive alienation.

And yet they own the power of words – the same displayed by Richard III in his evil plottings, but ‘feminised’ by grief. They voice such power in a range of rhetorical modes, according to the tradition of queens in classical drama: like Hecuba, running from lamentation to curse and to persuasion (*peitho*)<sup>14</sup>. As Giorgio Melchiori argues: “This scene marks a genuine dramaturgical revolution”, in a play which represents “a fundamental step in the founding process of modern playwriting wrought by Shakespeare and culminating in *Hamlet* with the overturning of the essential function of theatre: from the representation of a conflict to the investigation into an existential condition” (Shakespeare 1979: 3.828, translation mine). Once again, the suffering of these queens on stage appears as the suffering of the Other (see Cacciari 2010). As *Hamlet* shows, it is a step the roots of which stretch back in time.

Shakespeare worked on the two tetralogies in the last decade of the sixteenth century; the first stretching from *Henry VI* plays to *Richard III* (1592-1594); the second from *Richard II* to *Henry V* (1594-1599).<sup>15</sup>

her portrayal . . . the theatrical Margaret was largely invented by Shakespeare.” (Stevanato 2018: 67).

<sup>14</sup> For a thorough investigation into Hecuba’s rhetoric, both in *Hecuba* and in *The Trojan Women*, see Avezzù 2019 and Billing 2007.

<sup>15</sup> According to Giorgio Melchiori’s chronology, *The First Part of King Henry the Sixth* (1588-92), *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* (1588-92), *The Third Part of King*

In 1613, having retired to Stratford, the playwright took a further, final step into the issue of queenship in British history at the end of his career with *Henry VIII*, yet again a radical invention of historical events, and actually a remake of a previous drama by Samuel Rowley (*When You See Me You Know Me*, 1604), which it deliberately challenged, starting from the title *All is True*, or, *King Henry VIII*. The play was also the last of his entire production. A move into a more recent past, in a changed perspective from Rowley's gross manipulation of the chronicle, and also a big change in style; a prominent dramaturgical shift – with Fletcher's collaboration – into the contemporary mode of masques and spectacular performances. *Henry VIII* is in fact the most spectacular of his *corpus*, arranged in a sequence of pageants constituting the pattern of the most relevant scenes concerning queenship as an issue: from the divorce trial in court of Queen Katherine, to be deposed – thus joining her unwedded, “unqueened” state (4.2.172) with that of a “stranger” (“I am a most poor woman, and a stranger / born out of your dominions”, 2.4.13-14), and the decay of her body politic with that of her old natural body (“I am old, my lords”, 3.1.118) – to the glorious coronation of Anne Bullen wed by her master to her noble title. The former – once “a queen and a daughter to a king” (4.2.172), now sick and “kneeling”, the latter – a handmaid “lowly born” (2.3.19) made queen despite herself,<sup>16</sup> “in a rich chair of state”, in royal robes, “with all the royal makings of a queen, / As holy oil, Edward Confessor's crown, / The rod, and bird of peace, and all such emblems / Laid nobly on her” (4.1.90-2). One enraptured in ecstasy by a spiritual vision of angels, the other showing herself as a vision of beauty (“opposing freely / The beauty of her person to the people” (69-70). Yet, of the two, the widowed queen has the more powerful presence onstage, filling the scene with noble and humble speeches.

The fall of Katherine in Act 2 takes up the largest span of the time of the performance (23,5%, 660 lines) against the rise of Anne Bullen in Act 4 (about 10% of the time, 290 lines), silent in the solemn scene of her coronation, depicted by means of a report given by two spectators onstage. A triumphal scene which is also a triumph of dramatic irony, counting on the point of view of the spectators offstage, certainly aware of the queen's imminent tragic destiny. And it is worth noting that in “The Epilogue” the appeal to the audience calls attention to the ladies' entertainment:

*Henry the Sixth* (1588-1592), and *The Life and Death of Richard the Third* (1591-1594) constitute the first tetralogy; the second tetralogy includes *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second* (1594-1595), *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth* (1596-1597), *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth* (1597-1599), and *The Life of King Henry the Fifth* (1599).

<sup>16</sup> “I swear, I would not be a queen / For all the world” (2.3.45-6). Katherine of Aragon was, again, daughter to the king of Spain.

For this play at this time is only in  
 The merciful construction of good women,  
 For such a one we showed 'em . . .  
 (The Epilogue, 9-11)

No representation of queenship could be more different from the 'awry crown'-scenario of female rule met "with base infection" (Sonnet 94, l. 11) in the past, now happily concluded with the celebration of baby Elizabeth, just born to incarnate the needs of English national identity.

And yet the dramatic irony on her mother's glorious coronation could not escape the audience, aware of the violence later done to Anne Bullen, in this play hidden by all that is not said: after all the rival queens of the play share a common lot of *Vanitas*.

In this light, the ethical strain of the morality play conflates with the memory of the chronicles and with the magic of spectacular pageants, a fusion consistent with the needs of an English national identity which has expressed its own *Bildung* by means of the shapes and metaphors of the theatre. For a decade, Shakespeare had been the great interpreter of the process, but at the close of the Elizabethan age, staging memory with a view to fashioning an identity had become redundant. With the 'I' taking centre stage, a great reversal had occurred in the function of theatre, a shift towards the representation of an interior struggle of divided selves. In 1613, *Henry VIII* is rather an off-season fruit (see Shakespeare 1979: 3.697).

### 3. Displacement

At the outset of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, a beacon signal on the hill hanging over Argos advertises the end of a lengthy war, and the return of a king long absent from his canonical residence of power, transferred in the interval to "*basileia*" Clytaemnestra, whose title is legitimised by the absence of her royal husband.<sup>17</sup> The war has however released its constitutive violence into another setting, not only geographical (from Troy to the palace of Argos) but also literary, from the epic narrative of military actions to the tragic form of a *genos* conflict. It seems as if the past could never end; it could only repeat itself, although not mechanically, since the transference into a domestic setting has shifted the corpus of ancient Greek tragedy from male heroes to female protagonists: wives and (step)mothers, daughters and sisters. The *Oresteia* trilogy sets the tune subsequently followed by the works

<sup>17</sup> For an interesting comment on the play's incipit – also in terms of gender rhetoric in Clytaemnestra's discourse, intersecting female and virile codes of communication – see Goldhill 1984: 8-98.

of Sophocles and Euripides. In *Hecuba*, *Medea* and *Phaedra*, the female protagonists are so central to the dramatic action that the plays are called after them. “Troy is no more” (Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 99-100, translation mine), but the fire that had consumed Ilium is not completely extinguished. It still burns in the flame spotted by an excited Chorus, and is metaphorically transferred onto the red carpet laid down by the adulterous queen as the sign of a pretended solemn celebration of the king’s entrance into the palace, in fact depicting a symbolic transference of blood – also erotically connoted – from the multiple Trojan scene to an interior setting. From a distant armed conflict and the offstage altar of Iphigenia’s ritual sacrifice, violence has intruded upon the domestic sphere onstage, with the queen at the centre: director as well as agent of a renovated plot of lust, blood and revenge, like the one at the origin of the Trojan War. A renovated plot that in *Coephoroi* will involve her children Electra and Orestes: an endless repetition in a nightmare from which tragedy is trying to awake.

Recently, in an engaging online lecture organised by the University of Siena, Franco Moretti has claimed that tragic form takes its cue from war, arguing about its liminal presence in *Antigone* and *Macbeth*.<sup>18</sup> Moretti’s thesis can be fruitfully applied to the majority of Greek and Shakespearean productions – from Aeschylus’ *The Persians* (here tackled by Monica Centanni) to Euripides’ *Hecuba*, located at the gates of Troy, but also from *Hamlet* to the subsequent major tragedies. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is paradigmatic: from the brutal war offstage (“What bloody man is that?” *Macbeth*, 1.2.1) the Weird Sisters herald a transit of violence to the criminal plans performed at Inverness castle, where, amongst others, a tragedy of queenship is consumed.

Myth is by definition undefinable, in constant transformation, allowing for unforeseeable and infinite metamorphosis, which is mostly effected by its transmigration to the stage, often through radical reinterpretations and remakes.<sup>19</sup> This is the main theme of this issue: Marisa Sestito delves into Jocasta’s metamorphosis from a marginal, ineffective agency in Sophocles’ *Oedipus rex* to its displacement into a character of no importance in Corneille’s manipulation, refashioned by Dryden and Lee into a full pres-

<sup>18</sup> “Uccidere con le parole”, May 6, 2020; forthcoming in *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* 8 (2021).

<sup>19</sup> Of course, displacement is not in the mode of a variant, or a simple adaptation of previous texts, practically an editing practice, but rather of a remake, according to the creative freedom of the author. If Cleopatra’s pageant on the Cydnus to meet Mark Antony is a case of grafting fresh meaning into Plutarch’s source, the noble and tender character of Queen Isabel in *Richard II* 3.4 and 4.1 (incidentally a stranger, native of France) is completely invented with respect to the previous *Woodstock*, an evidence of Shakespeare’s dramaturgical focus on queenship when reinterpreting the sources of his plays.

ence in command of the plot, to the point of leaving no space for a dramaturgical future to the Laius dynasty; one and a thousand Jocastas like the one and a thousand Medeas presented by Nadia Fusini, up to the character's transmigration into a Pasolini film. Then comes Phaedra (see Anton Bierl's essay), shaped like Medea, and like her stepson Hippolytus initiated into a plot of double violence, both practised and received, in the dramaturgical and metatheatrical perspective of fatal mothers, including Agave in Thebes ("the worst crime, in Thebes, is the love of a mother"),<sup>20</sup> as well as the denied maternity of Lady Macbeth. Guido Avezù carries out an engaging argument on the dramaturgical chain of the Electra story, each play a reprise of the previous one, from the Greeks to the twentieth century. A multiple intercultural scenario of a thousand Didos is provided by Antonio Ziosi, intersecting her symbolic imagery of wounds and flames with the figurative language of her past and future 'sisters'. Finally, Michael Neill analyses the 'monstrous' identity of Cleopatra, escaping to be captured in its essence, and only lending itself to semiotic and semantic displacement from Plutarch's source as it comes to a final transmigration into the aesthetic sphere, with the 'strange' incarnation of queenship into a work of art in her play's last scene. Taking our cue from Roland Barthes (1977), we might be tempted to say "many authors, no author", 'difference' being the main feature in the map of an "écriture infinie". Each of the plays explored in this volume is indeed a palimpsest (see Genette 1982); in tune with the multifarious, plural nature of myth, perhaps perpetual remake is the DNA of Attic and Shakespearean drama.<sup>21</sup>

Such a moveable feast calls for an anamorphic perspective. When queenship is the issue, the focus on the crown as key symbol of the royal status, conferring legitimacy on power, takes an "awry" turn. As a signifier, the crown questions the relation between power and authority: in a gender code, it cannot be grasped simultaneously with the signified; there is always a gap between them. In *Henry VIII*, Katherine no longer has the power she thought she had, but the spectator is fully aware of her authority from the noble content and length of her speech. Similarly, Cleopatra's display of regal authority in her final *mise en scène* covering the last, most important act of the play occurs when she is no longer queen of Egypt. Not only has she lost political power, but she has even gone to the extreme of despising it:

<sup>20</sup> Seneca, *Oedipus* 629-30: *maximum Thebis scelus / maternus amor est* (translation mine).

<sup>21</sup> Due to the function and length of this introduction, I had to make some ruthless and painful choices, omitting references to Seneca's and Ovid's important roles as mediators between classical and Renaissance drama.

'Tis paltry to be Caesar  
 Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,  
 A minister of her will.  
 (5.2.2-4)

A blank is shown to be a crucial element in the signifying process.

#### 4. Absence

As Michael Neill reminds us (p. 158), conventionally the word queen suggested an incomplete identity. It denoted not a ruler but the wife of a king, it was derivative rather than properly authoritative. With the exception of Cleopatra ("as I am queen of Egypt", 1.1.29; "Hear me, queen", 1.3.42), it denoted a ruler in office, not one in power; a function of regality. However, in the absence of a husband – whether dead or engaged elsewhere (like Aeschylus' Agamemnon, or Theseus in Euripides' *Hippolytus*) – the title of queen took on a connotation of authority. This hybrid of absence and power, and the consequent contamination of female and male codes of discourse,<sup>22</sup> lies behind Clytaemnestra's criminal plotting, but it also subsequently accounts for Elizabeth I's determination to stay unmarried, anchoring her absolute independence on the construction of a virgin *persona*.

On the other hand, absence also involves loss and dispossession, encoding mourning and curses as paradigmatic codes of expression in the revenge rhetoric of a queen. In this context, Euripides' "unqueen" stands out as an icon of all possible metaphors of absence both in the play bearing her name and in *The Trojan Women*: the loss of her husband, her children, her wealth, deprived as she is of the crown and other symbols of sovereignty; her body humiliated by age, pain and grief. She enters the stage destitute, a slave, and she exits doomed to exile; in short, nullified, an allegory of the "nothing" that haunts Hamlet's vision of an actor in performance (see Bigliuzzi 2008).

Yet absence is also a function of desire. Euripides' Phaedra tragically incarnates this apparent contradiction, as does Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Yes, of course, Cleopatra exercises power on her own account, but in so far as she makes herself both the subject and object of desire. Within the play's maze of passionate yearning for *eros*, political dominion, beauty, she is also the incarnation of a death wish. In Enobarbus' narrative, which reports of her *persona* floating in a royal barge along the Cydnus waters, a life, rather than a body, is shown; exactly the opposite of her rival, Roman Octavia,

<sup>22</sup> On the play of difference between male/female, saying/showing, signifier/signified in *Agamemnon*, see Goldhill 1984, 8-98.

in the messenger's report ("She shows a body, rather than a life", 3.3.20). No wonder that her love story with Antony stems from her absence, since the very fact that she is hidden from Antony's sight, in the first chapter of their affair, fans the flames of his longing.

Cleopatra's desire takes on different forms, such as the dream of Antony in the shape of a hero unleashed by his loss ("I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony", 5.2.75) or even a maternal fancy – a projection of her instinct onto the agent of her death ("Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?", 5.2.297-8). The climax comes however at the end, when Cleopatra projects herself into the empty space of the stage,<sup>23</sup> which she fills with her longest speech (5.2. 269-302) in pursuit of the queenly status that she has lost and is about to be ridiculed in Caesar's triumphant return to Rome. Cleopatra's triumph lies in this play-within-the-play challenge. But an awry crown prevents the play from coming to a close ("what should I stay –", 5.2.302) and leaves the shadow of her royal status incomplete.

In a perceptive essay inspired by the themes explored in this issue, Guido Avezù highlights the etymology of Electra's name, stressing the meaning of *alektros*, 'excluded from the marriage bed' (*lektron*). He argues that the princess's 'unwedded' destiny is etched in her name, claiming that a double absence hangs over her character: lack of leadership in her *genos*, and lack of an origin in the epic tradition: "Electra is primarily a character belonging to tragedy".<sup>24</sup>

Her myth is a creation of tragedy, which Avezù explores in a variety of reprises and displacements from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, to the two plays on Electra respectively by Sophocles and Euripides, up to twentieth century remakes, focusing on her frustrated will to incarnate her royal dynasty only in the role of an attendant to her father's memory.

Electra's revenge tragedy against the murder of her father and her subsequent matricide is focused on her being an orphan, and a virgin: both features involving a condition of loss. On the one hand, loss provides her with an energy and will-power that make her a stronger character than her brother Orestes; on the other hand, it frustrates her desire for a crown: she perceives herself as a 'slave in the palace', dressed meanly, conscious of a doom in her ethical choice to stay a virgin, excluding her from motherhood and from family inheritance (p. 95): "In Sophocles, too . . . the virgin-

<sup>23</sup> The reference is of course to Brook 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Avezù makes a point of Electra being absent in the epic tradition. However, as a tragic creation, the character undergoes a process of mythicisation in a variety of interpretations.

al state and the exclusion from the family inheritance (ploutos) are one and the same thing”.

And yet, at least in Euripides’ version, she is “the only one among the Electras of the ‘Oresteiai’ to have left an inheritance”, that of an “unequivocal, though frustrated, idea of sovereignty” (p. 110).

The tragical repertoire of queenship and its discontents extends – at least in the plays examined in this issue – from an offstage Troy (a ghost ever looming in the background: even *Hecuba’s* and *The Trojan Women’s* plots unfold in the Greek camp outside the gates of Ilium) to a number of meta-theatrical cities: in classical productions it spreads from the palace of the Persian capital Susa (*The Persians*) to Argos (*Agamemnon*), to Colonos, to the Mycenaean acropolis (Sophocles’ *Electra*), to Thebes (*Oedipus Rex*, *The Bacchae*); from Corinth (*Medea*) to Troezen (*Hippolytus*, *Phaedra*); in early modernity it reaches Carthage (*Dido*, *Queen of Carthage*) and Alexandria (*Antony and Cleopatra*); Rome (*Titus Andronicus*) and London (Shakespeare’s histories).

One city is missing – Athens. Theseus rules in Athens, but the conflict does not take place in Athens. No conflict is staged in the city that in the fifth century BC had established her hegemony over the whole of Greece. On-stage Athens is the city where conflicts, if any, are not to be seen, only resolved. Not a site of royal palaces, but of a court of justice<sup>25</sup> and a place of democratic, rational dialogue. The dialogic space of tragedy lies elsewhere.

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<sup>25</sup> On the challenging topic – and lexicon - of justice as practised in a historical-mythical past in comparison with the idea of justice in the democratic *polis* see the rich Introduction in Euripides 2018: 1-28.

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## The Queen on Stage. Female Figures of Regality in Aeschylus

### Abstract

The figure of the Queen is the protagonist of two Aeschylean tragedies: *Persians* and *Oresteia*. The staging of *Persians*, which took place in 472 BCE in Athens, probably caused shock among the Greek spectators of the tragedy at the Theatre of Dionysus, on the slopes of the Acropolis, and in particular among Athenians. In particular, the main character that stands out at the centre of the dramatic composition is the Queen: a mother that is anguished for the fate of her son Xerxes, justifying his errors and presenting him as a disturbed and neurotic being, striving to emulate his father, and moreover misled by bad companies that – the Mother says – have instigated him to perform the insane military campaign against Greece. The dramatic emphasis is on the royal figure of the Queen mother, on her care for the image of power, for the dignity of the king's body, up to her concern for the integrity of the garment of her son Xerxes, torn after the defeat of Salamis. On the set of the early theatre, the second, superb, figure of royalty is Clytaemnestra. Before Aeschylus, the saga of Orestes, as we can reconstruct from literary and iconographic sources, was a traditional story, an epic saga in which the main characters were all male: Agamemnon, the king; Aegisthus, the tyrant; Orestes, the young hero who avenges the murder of the legitimate king – the king-father – and regains the throne. The tradition of this story is interrupted by Aeschylus' dramaturgical invention. His new *Oresteia* does not focus on Orestes' glorious enterprises. Its protagonist is now Clytaemnestra. She is the main character of the plot and is at the centre of the representation: alongside her, there is the usurper, her lover, Aegisthus. Echoing Ernst Kantorowicz's seminal study *The King's Two Bodies*, under the guise of the King, Clytaemnestra unveils her body: yet, hers is not the king's double body – the natural king's corpse doubled in a symbolic regal body – but a female one, the body of a mother, the body of the Queen. The male gendered epic – the saga – ends precisely at this turning point and *incipit tragoedia*.

KEYWORDS: Aeschylus' *Persians*; Aeschylus' *Oresteia*; Clytaemnestra; actors' character

### 1. *Mythos and Ethos*

Among the six composite elements of the tragedy that Aristotle identifies – μῦθος, ἦθος, λέξις, διάνοια, ὄψις, μελοποιία, that is: plot, character, style,

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thought, spectacle, and music (Arist. *Po.* 1450a10) – the most important is the *mythos*, the plot consisting of the invention and composition of the facts (1450a23).

On defining how the playwright must preventively select and compose his plot, Aristotle recalls the importance of choosing the beginning and end of the story, its duration, and the proportion among its parts: the example that the philosopher proposes is the harmony of living bodies in which one member must not be too small or too large compared to the others, and not lose the harmonious vision of the entirety of the body which must always be “embraceable with the gaze”. Thus, even the articulation of the myth and the duration of the performance chosen by the playwright must allow the spectator to always have an overview, even if the time of the performance responds to its logic and internal proportion.

On the quality and potential of the *mythos* that provides the skeleton to the drama, there is a general consideration: the fact that, unlike the historian who represents the facts “that happened once”, the poet presents reality in all its possible forms; the poet makes reality happen, he gives it access to expression. Taking Aristotle’s reflection to the extreme, we could say that for this reason, poetry – in particular tragic poetry – is not only “more serious and more philosophical than history” (*Po.* 1452b15), but it goes deeper in the multifarious sense of reality, in the multiple and variable manifestations of its becoming. Tragic poetry is more ‘true’ than history in the sense that theatre is an augmented reality; one that delves deeply into the folds of infinite possible, engaging a version of ‘reality’ and bringing it to expression.

In the hierarchy of the compositional ingredients of tragedy, the second place is held by the characters:

The most important of these elements is the plot. Tragedy is, in fact, not a representation of men but of an action. Figures do not therefore act to represent characters, but their character is gained through the action. It follows that the actions and the plot are both the end to which tragedy aims. In fact, you cannot have a tragedy without action, but you can have one without characters.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after the predominance of *mythos*/plot comes the construction of characters, which must however be consequent, dependent on the – primary, and most important – construction of the *mythos*. Furthermore, *ēthos* must never be predominant over the development of the plot; indeed,

<sup>1</sup> 1450a15-25: μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις. ἡ γὰρ τραγωδία μίμησις ἐστὶν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου . . . οὐκ οὐκ ὅπως τὰ ἦθη μιμήσονται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἦθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις ὥστε τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆς τραγωδίας . . . ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγωδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἠθῶν γένοιτ’ ἄν.

a character “will have to acquire his profile through action” (1450a20).

Therefore, character is not already predefined by the prejudice of its ‘univocal’ mythical profile, or by a typed characterization, as will be true for the characters of the New Comedy. It is the playwright who chooses which traits to confer to the character and which role – usually unexpected compared to the pre-existing knowledge of the audience about the myth – the character will play in the tragedy.

In this contribution, I will try to probe how Aeschylus chooses the *mythos* for the plot of *Persians* and *Oresteia*, and how he grafts, on the fabric of the plot, the character of the Queen, whom he puts at the centre of his dramaturgical montage.

## 2. *Persians*: The Queen, the Son’s Body, the King’s Body

Beside the choice of a shred of *mythos* for his drama, the playwright is called to construct a plot, arbitrarily putting himself (and the plot) at a point of a story – which is not yet ‘History’ – that the spectators presume to know very well. In the case of *Persians*, Aeschylus chooses an unexpected perspective both in a chronological and in a spatial sense. Indeed, from a chronological point of view, in the succession of events leading to the Greek victory against the Persians, the focus on the Battle of Salamis – chosen as the main theme of the drama – is neither at the beginning nor at the end of the ‘Persian Wars’; it is not the last or final sequence of Greek victories (Marathon / Salamis / Platea).

Actually, from a dramaturgic point of view, Aeschylus chose to focus the core of his drama on the central battle of the war. That is to say, on the best one, from various perspectives. First of all, from the perspective of Athenian propaganda, the battle of Salamis is the most appropriate point to stage the all-Athenian glory of the naval victory. It is the midpoint of the splendid victory of the fleet of 307 triremes (armed by Athens in the stretch of sea in front of the city) against the 1207 heavy Persian ships. Secondly, from a dramaturgical point of view, it reveals itself as a most strategic choice because it allows connecting the present tense of the drama to the double prophecy brought on stage by the Shadow, the Ghost of Darius: prophecy of the past (opaque re-enactment of Marathon), and prophecy of the future (prefiguration of the final battle of Platea). From both points of view – relating to the montage and to the need to recapitulate the series of Greek victories before the audience of the Great Dionysia, putting the Athenian victory at the centre – the choice of the plot cut proves perfect.

As Aristotle said, they are not predefined characters, but profiles that emerge from the very plot of the drama directly in the scene. So it is for the

Queen, the first ‘character’ to appear in the first preserved tragedy.

After the *parodos* – a choral triumphal march – full of pride for the vision of the admirable army that had departed towards the West, and already interwoven with the Chorus’ anxieties, the Queen appears on stage:

But look, here is a light like  
the eyes of the god, the mother of our king,  
my Queen. I bow low before her.  
It is fitting also that we all address her  
with words of salutation.  
(150-4)<sup>2</sup>

As in an aura, light and majesty envelop the Queen. She comes out of the palace door. It is the palace of Susa, the scenic backdrop of the tragedy. She solemnly proceeds on a royal chariot wearing regal robes – as can be evinced from what she says at the time of her second appearance on stage (607-9). The Chorus members break the dance formation of the opening choral number of the drama and, with a concentric movement, prostrate themselves as a sign of homage.

We see the profile of the Persian sovereign: Queen of the entire world, addressed by the Chorus of Persian Elders with homage and ritual prostration. She is the lady of the Elsewhere, abstracted from everything, to everything superior, who, from the centre of her empire, from the sumptuous palace of Susa, does not even know where Athens is. Indeed, she asks the Chorus: “Where did my son go? Athens? And where would this Athens be?” (230).

But the Queen does not only bring her majestic nature to the scene. Anxieties and omens of ruin prevail as she tells her prophetic dream: two women, Greece and Persia, ‘blood sisters;’ the son Xerxes on a chariot drawn by the two allegorical figures; Greece, the rebel sister, and her son thrown from the wagon which breaks in half:

Two women appeared to me: they were beautiful and in beautiful clothes. One in Persian garb, the other in Dorian attire: they appeared before my eyes, both far more striking in stature than the women of our time and flawless in beauty. They were sisters of the same family. As for the lands in which they dwelt, to one had been assigned the land of Hellas, to the other that of the Barbarians. The two, as I imagined it, seemed to provoke

<sup>2</sup> Ἄλλ’ ἤδε θεῶν ἴσον ὀφθαλμοῖς φάος ὀρμάται / μήτηρ βασιλέως, βασίλεια δ’ ἐμή, προσπίντω / καὶ προσφθόγγοις δὲ χρεῶν αὐτήν / πάντας μύθοισι προσαιδᾶν. The reference for the greek text is το West 1998, along with the preparatory studies by the same author (West 1990). For the translation and commentary of the excerpts, see Centanni 2003: 707-62, 961-1133; for the analysis of the dramaturgic structure of each tragedy, see Taplin 1977.

each other to a mutual feud: my son, when he had become aware of this, attempted to restrain and placate them: now . . . He yoked them both to his car; now . . . he placed the collar-straps upon their necks. One bore herself proudly in these trappings and kept her mouth obedient to the rein; the other struggled. Now . . . with her hands she tore apart the harness of the car; now, she dragged it violently along with her and snapped the yoke in two. My son was hurled to the ground, and his father Darius stood by his side filled with pity. But Xerxes, catching sight of him, tore the garments covering his body. (181-99)

“My son was hurled to the ground, and his father Darius stood by his side filled with pity. But Xerxes, catching sight of him, tore the garments covering his body”.<sup>3</sup> These are the images of Xerxes’ loss of composure, thrown to the ground by the rebellious movement of the ‘Greek’ woman. Even in the Queen’s vision/dream, the humiliation of the young King was aggravated by the fact that his father witnessed the scene.

Following the recount of the dream – and a new, anguishing song by the Chorus – the Messenger arrives on stage reporting the news of the actual Persian defeat in the battle of Salamis.

With the *ēthos* of the first, grandiose, female character of the tragic scene, Aeschylus does not only create the profile of the great and detached Queen of the most powerful empire in the world, but he also qualifies the character with the care and affection of a mother.

Already in the first exchange with the Messenger, the Queen abandons herself to an outburst that is both maternal and royal at the same time. After the first – synthetic and terrible – news of the defeat, the mother’s heart jolts:

QUEEN Who is there that is not dead? Whom of our leaders must we bewail? Who, appointed to wield command, by death left his post empty, without its chief?

MESSENGER Xerxes, himself, lives! And beholds the light of the sun.

QUEEN The words you utter bring a great light of joy into my house; a bright day after the darkest night!

(296-301)

“The Persian Empire no longer exists”, says the Messenger. “All Persians are dead”. But among the many myriads of dead, Xerxes, the King, the Queen’s son, is alive. We see the mother reacting with an uncontrollable jolt to the news that her son is alive.

Later in the drama, we hear her psychological justifications for her child’s insane act: Xerxes led the Persian army into the disastrous expe-

<sup>3</sup> 197-9: πίπτει δ’ ἐμὸς παῖς, καὶ πατήρ παρίσταται / Δαρεῖος οἰκτεῖρων σφε. τὸν δ’ ὄπωξ ὄρα / Ξέρξης, πέπλους ρήγνυσιν ἀμφὶ σώματι.

dition across the sea, committing the impious act of *hybris*, of tightening a yoke around Poseidon's neck. All this because he was instigated by 'bad companies', because he did not want to feel inferior – in wealth and in power – to his father.

GHOST OF DARIUS How was this possible? Madness must have hit my son!  
And I now fear that anybody, the first to arrive, will prey on the immense treasures that I have conquered

...

QUEEN But this lesson, you must know, the impetuous Xerxes has learned through conversation with evil men: they kept telling him that you won plentiful treasures for your children by your spear; whereas he – on his part, through lack of manly spirit – played the warrior at home and did not increase his father's wealth. Evil counsellors taunted him, many a time, and he listened to them: finally, one day, he planned this armed expedition against Hellas.

(750-8)

Now, the main character that stands out at the centre of the dramatic composition presents itself as a mother that is anguished for the fate of her son Xerxes, justifying his errors and presenting him as a disturbed and neurotic being, striving to emulate his father, and moreover misled by bad companies that – the Mother says – have instigated him to perform the military campaign against Greece. "This lesson impetuous Xerxes [my son] learned through conversation with evil men, for they kept telling him that you won plentiful treasures for your children by your spear; whereas he – on his part, through lack of manly spirit – played the warrior at home and did not increase his father's wealth".

Rarely does Aeschylus indulge in psychology in the construction of his characters. But in this case, the envy of the son for the glorious father, and the mother's intention to find a mitigating factor for his deeds, is not only an extraordinary dramaturgical invention that gives the character roundness and depth, but it is a trait that is both incredibly human and at the same time profoundly poetic.

"A bright day after the darkest night!":<sup>4</sup> the Queen's voice expresses the egoistic, exclusive, care for the fate of the body of her son. But it does not concern only her son's body – because that body is also the King's body. "As long as he is alive . . .", as long as the king is alive – the rest does not matter. Therefore, the Queen's accents are maternal accents: the irrepressible (and somewhat incongruous) joy of the mother who only cares that her child be alive.

In the meantime, through a powerful ritual staged during the Chorus'

<sup>4</sup> 300-1: . . . φάος μέγα / καὶ λευκὸν ἡμᾶρ νυκτὸς ἐκ μελαγχίμου.

*stasimon*, the Queen successfully provokes the appearance of the Phantom of Darius. We are in the central episode of the drama, focused on the brilliant Aeschylean invention of the first appearance on the theatrical stage of a ghost: the father of Xerxes, who is presented as the figure of a just and wise king, who immediately recognizes the *hybris* of his son as the first reason for the disaster that struck the Persians – a disaster that is presented as immense, memorable, and irreversible.

GHOST OF DARIUS And as for you, beloved and venerable mother of Xerxes, withdraw to the palace, pick up the most beautiful attire, and prepare to meet your son: for the pain of all his misfortunes, he tore his splendid clothes that now hang in shreds on his body!

QUEEN O God, how much grief assails me! But, most of all, this sorrow storms my heart: to hear of the shameful clothes which are now worn by my son! But I will depart now, and when I have brought appropriate garments from the palace, I will make attempt to meet my son; for I love him most, and I will not forsake him in his affliction.

(832-51)

“He tore his splendid clothes that now hang in shreds on his body! . . . Most of all, this sorrow storms my heart: to hear of the shameful clothes which are now worn by my son!”.<sup>5</sup>

This image – Xerxes in his torn dress – punctuates the *opsis*, the actual and metaphorical imagery of the drama. Even the last image of the Queen’s prophetic dream portrayed Xerxes tearing his clothes, humiliated by the fall from the chariot. Now, the Phantom of Darius suggests that the Queen welcome her son by covering him with a new dress, and his recommendation finds a ready listener: now, the care of Xerxes’ royal robe seems to be the Queen’s greatest concern (845-51). And this care – the care of the survival of the King’s body, the same body protected by the Persian body-guard of ten Thousand Immortals – is one of the notes that makes up the symphony of the tragedy; the formal, symbolic, ideological landscape reproduced by Aeschylus, distinguishing the values of the Persian Empire from ‘our’ values.

The joyful voice of the Queen learning of the survival of her son from the Messenger is not only the relieved voice of a mother. It is the voice of a royalty in which only one – the King – is worth something; everyone else is worth nothing, even if they are – in the first vision of the Chorus – the magnificent leaders of an army gathered from all of Asia to march against Greece.

<sup>5</sup> 834-48: . . . πάντα γὰρ / κακῶν ὑπ’ ἄλγους λακίδες ἀμφὶ σώματι / στημορραγοῦσι ποικίλων ἐσθημάτων. . . . / μάλιστα δ’ ἦδε συμφορὰ δάκνει, / ἀτιμίαν γε παιδὸς ἀμφὶ σώματι / ἐσθημάτων κλύουσαν, ἢ νιν ἀμπέχει.

The (very formal and symbolic) concern is oriented toward the intangibility of Xerxes' body. This is one of the *Leitmotive* of the tragedy: Xerxes' robe in rags, the royal garment to be restored and re-integrated. But at this point, in a very strategic representation staged by Aeschylus, there is no margin for any re-integration. Indeed, in *Persians*, the Queen does not appear again on stage with the 'new guise' for the Son-King; the intangibility of the royal body is compromised forever.

That is why the formal degradation of the King, of his image, of his bearing, will reappear in the final *kommos*, led by Xerxes in the role of *ex-archos chorou*. And this is the final image of the tragedy: the King presented as a naked character, torn, without the royal casing.

XERXES Do you see this remnant of my royal robe?

CHORUS Yes, I do indeed!

...

XERXES And I tore my robe at the sight of such a disastrous event.

...

I am naked now: I lack my followers!

(1017-36)<sup>6</sup>

Now the King – as Kantorowicz would have it – is on stage without his “two bodies”. Aeschylus invents the way of theatrically representing the body of the King as a symbolic figure of the Asian form of power, against which Greece claims its own style of freedom. That body is exhibited on the stage as a humiliated and undressed body. In the exodus of the tragedy, it is Xerxes himself, who leads his own funeral procession. Xerxes is alone, and the King's body is only the degraded one we see on stage. Through error, through *Atē*, through the fault of the *daimōn*, due to his own *hybris*, the King has lost his own majestic royalty.

As Shakespeare's Richard II, Xerxes also tears the royal clothes of which his own form consisted, outlining his figure. In the scenic expression of the *skhisis* (division), the King's mortal body is vulnerable – naked, scratched, degraded; the Great King is nothing but flesh stripped of its form. However, now naked, he awaits a new garment (as the Queen had promised) that should reinstate his royal status. In *Persians*, Aeschylus does not only stage the defeat of the powerful enemy who had invaded Greece, driven back East by the value of the citizens of the Greek *poleis*; he stages the actual collapse of the Kingship, in the mortification of the body and of the King's robe. The shreds and rags dangling from the King, as residual traces

<sup>6</sup> Ὅρᾳς τὸ λοιπὸν τόδε τᾶς ἐμᾶς στολᾶς;/ ὀρῶ ὀρῶ./ . . . / πέπλον δ' ἐπέρρηξ' ἐπὶ συμφορᾷ κακοῦ./ . . . / γυμνός εἰμι προπομπῶν.

of the mystical casing of royalty, are symbolically and concretely adherent to Xerxes' degraded body.

The Queen-mother is not able to coat the body of the King, of her son. Nor can she do it.

### 3. *Oresteia*: The Queen's Two Bodies

According to the scheme proposed by Aristotle, even in the case of the *Oresteia* we must ask ourselves what dramaturgical cut was chosen by Aeschylus, as well as what character profiles and, in particular, what the design for the main character, Clytaemnestra, was.

My first question is: what was the myth of the *Oresteia* before the tragic version that Aeschylus performed at the theatre of Dionysus in Athens in 458 BC? Before this date, what was the story that the audience knew? And how did Aeschylus change the mythical story in performing his trilogy? This is the main question, the core of my reading.

The myth they knew before the Aeschylean version was a traditional story: an epic saga in which a king (Agamemnon) went to war, and his cousin (Aegisthus) occupied his throne, marrying the queen. The king returned from war, sat back on his throne, and was killed by the usurper (Aegisthus).<sup>7</sup> This is a conventional scene of regicide and, in this way, it is represented by a fixed *schēma* in vase painting: an adult bearded male (Aegisthus) killing an adult bearded king.<sup>8</sup> Then, in the myth, the king's son Orestes, who was far away, returned to avenge his father, killing the usurper.

This is a typical, traditional, male story and from the literary and iconographic sources, it is possible to deduce that, in this mythical version, the matricide by Orestes happens accidentally. In vase paintings, Orestes is assisted in the murder of Aegisthus by his friend, Pylades. Sometimes we also see a young woman entering the stage: she is Electra in the cases in which she is offering help to Orestes; however, when she is offering help to Aegisthus, she is Erigone, daughter of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra in other versions of the myth.

Sometimes, Clytaemnestra is also shown entering the stage with her arm stretched, trying to stop Orestes from killing her lover. She holds an

<sup>7</sup> On the scope of the Aeschylean innovation, compared to the role of Clytaemnestra in previous sources, especially Stesichorus, see Zeitlin 1978; Käppel 1998; McClure 1999: 70-111; Komar 2003; Goldhill 2004; McNeil 2005; Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2010; Medda 2017; Montanari 2018.

<sup>8</sup> On the relationship between iconography and drama, see Bordignon 2015 and in particular for Clytaemnestra, Viret Bernal 1997; Carpino 2011.

axe or a stool – always makeshift weapons – and intervenes at the edge of the main action. This tyrannicidal scene is almost exactly like the first regicidal scene acted by Aegisthus against Agamemnon. The only difference is that the murderer is now a younger unbearded man.

On an important krater of the fifth century BCE – the Boston *Oresteia* Krater<sup>9</sup> – we see both scenes on its two sides: regicide and tyrannicide. Aegisthus plays a *barbitos*, an instrument which was frequently painted in images representing the all-male symposium. It is a completely and perfectly male story. An all-male story. The lost *Oresteia* by Stesichorus (sixth century) was also an epic poem in which we hear the *kleos* of Orestes – the glorious song of the young hero avenging the king-father. There is a unique paradigm that contains the first scene of regicide and the second avenging scene. In this *schēma*, all the female characters – Clytaemnestra, Electra, Erigone or Chrysothemis – hold secondary roles: they are all marginal to the main myth acted by Agamemnon, Aegisthus or by Orestes. These female characters hold a similar role to that of Electra in *Libation Bearers*: while assisting her brother in the preparation of the murder, she is not an active player in the drama; she is little more than a *feminine coryphaeus*.

The traditional plot is interrupted by the mythical change that is Aeschylus' dramaturgical invention; in the new *Oresteia*, the audience does not see a performance of Orestes' *kleos*, but the focus and the centre of representation – the main character of the plot – is now Clytaemnestra.

In the prologue, Clytaemnestra is represented as the Sovereign, the actual 'King' of Argos. She has a wilful character that is expressed by the oxymoronic phrase "man-will heart of the Lady".<sup>10</sup> The personality of the protagonist is presented from the start in all its complexity and ambiguity: male and female genders living together, in the heart, body, intentions, and hopes of the Lady who exercises power. In fact, she performs conventional gender roles. Aeschylus does not describe the virile character of Clytaemnestra: he invents it and presents it right here, at the start of the trilogy, and for this reason he often underlines the male profile of the character. Clytaemnestra is the 'King' of the city, the director of the drama that she herself is constructing. She prepares the plot herself, and we know that before the beginning of the tragedy (at the time of Agamemnon's departure to Troy – we can surmise) she had already instructed the chain of sentinels to light the fires from mountain top to mountain top, from Asia to Greece, to announce the victory of Achaean army in Troy.

From the start of the tragedy, the Chorus – citizens of Argos – seems to

<sup>9</sup> Attic red-figures calyx-krater by the Dokimasia Painter, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 63.1246.

<sup>10</sup> Ag. 11: γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον . . . κέαρ.

be accustomed to recognizing the power of the Lady. “The power is yours, Clytaemnestra” (258: ἦκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμήστρα, κράτος – by a *tmesis*, the name of the Queen is in the centre). And the Chorus also recalls that, in Argos, Clytaemnestra is the only bulwark for the whole city. It underlines that the mind and words of Clytaemnestra are those of a male gender: “My lady, you speak, you reason, like a man”.<sup>11</sup>

After the first episode, the Messenger confirms that the lights from the fires had been truthful, answering the doubts of the Chorus. However, Clytaemnestra herself had had no doubts to begin with. She proves deeper knowledge and better lucidity than anyone else. She has greater factual consciousness than the Messenger himself, who witnessed the fall of Troy. Clytaemnestra, the real director of the drama, controls the past, the present, and – above all – the future. Her words are full of authority and – whilst seen to be false – are in fact a conscious and true wordplay.

In the scene of the dialogue with Agamemnon, the words of the Lady are very persuasive, presenting herself as a wife, alone for so many years and as faithful as a female dog. She organizes the scene of the return of the king in detail, with a long red carpet on which she orders Agamemnon to put his feet. Agamemnon denounces the attitude of his wife and highlights the virile quality of Clytaemnestra’s desire: she loves to fight and in the expression at 940, οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἰμείρειν μάχης, there is a semantic cross between her erotic desire and her aggressive instinct. Instead, Clytaemnestra treats him like a female and for this reason – as he does not want to appear like a woman – he does not want to walk on the red carpet she has prepared for his regal entry into the Palace.

Clytaemnestra wins the rhetorical fight and finally the King gets out of the chariot, puts his foot on the long red strip, and walks until he reaches the Palace door and the death she has perfectly prepared inside. The only character that resists Clytaemnestra’s power is Cassandra, the prophetess of Apollo, who cannot be captured in the web of the Lady. Thanks to Apollo, the ill-fated girl wins the game, the *agōn* of knowledge, because she is the only one who knows – better but more obscurely than the Queen – the past, the present, and the near future. The wisdom of Priamus’ miserable daughter is the paradigm of prophetic wisdom, the deepest but most ineffective and useless kind of wisdom.

After the murder, Clytaemnestra exits the Palace and claims the power of her metaphorical imagery, which has just proved its actual capacity: the figure of the web<sup>12</sup> – the inescapable trap she equipped for the King – has

<sup>11</sup> 351: γύναι, κατ’ ἄνδρα σώφρον’ εὐφρόνως λέγεις.

<sup>12</sup> 1382-3: ἄπειρον ἀμίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων, / περιστοιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἴματος κακόν.

materialized itself in the actual net in which the king's body is enclosed. A strange, close-woven, spider web<sup>13</sup> that Aegisthus identifies as a "peplus of Erinyes".<sup>14</sup>

Reconstructing the crime scene, Clytaemnestra declares that the King fell at the third sword-stroke by her own hand as tribute to Hades (1387 – maybe a reference, symbolically reversed, to the third toast to Zeus given by Iphigenia for the fortune of her father, quoted at 246-7).<sup>15</sup> The last physical contact between the King and his wife is a spurt of blood from Agamemnon's body that hits her (1390). The Queen unashamedly claims the deep, strong, intense pleasure she felt when the bloody dew sprang out (1391-2); the similarity of the bloody pleasure of the Lady and male ejaculation is patently displayed, and the sexual image is confirmed by the metaphor of the sowed earth furrows that receive pleasure from the rain of Zeus (*ibidem*).

Just as she shamelessly disclosed her great joy at the homecoming of her husband (856: οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι), now Clytaemnestra shamelessly reveals the deepest reasons for her act (1373: οὐκ ἐπαισχυνθήσομαι). She strips herself of the clothes of a poor woman left alone by her husband for many years. She no longer pretends to be a defenceless female; on the contrary, she scolds the Chorus for treating her like a stupid woman (1401). She claims she is not a witch – as instead the Chorus accuses her – but rather that Agamemnon was a bad sorcerer, since he sacrificed their daughter to bewitch the Thracian winds (1417-18: ἐπωδὸν Θρηκίων ἀημάτων). In reference to their murdered daughter – Iphigenia – Clytaemnestra claims the direction of the posthumous funeral rites in the underworld; she invites the dead daughter to run, meet, and embrace her father when he arrives at the Waste Land of Death (1555-9).

Returning to the crime scene, Aeschylus represents the Queen alone in performing the king's murder. Clytaemnestra does not mention the presence of Aegisthus; on the contrary, she proudly admits the whole responsibility of the action: "I stand where I dealt the blow; I stand in front of my action. Thus have I done the deed; deny it I will not".<sup>16</sup> The Chorus blames Aegisthus for not taking part in the murder, and Aegisthus himself admits to leaving the execution of the murder to the woman (1636-7). This is the great invention of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Many details let us hypothesize that, in Aeschylus' version, Aegisthus was not inside the Palace at the time

<sup>13</sup> 1492: ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶδ[ε].

<sup>14</sup> 1580: ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις Ἐρινύων.

<sup>15</sup> On Agamemnon killing modes, sword or ax, cf. Fraenkel 1950: app. B, 806-9; Davies 1987; Prag 1985: 82-3; Prag 1991.

<sup>16</sup> 1379-80, ἔστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις. / οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι; see also 1551-3.

of the regicide. Aeschylus wants the audience to believe that the presence of the cousin in the Palace could arise suspicion on the part of Agamemnon, and for this reason Aegisthus does not enter the stage from the door of the Palace, but most likely from an external space, from one of the *parodoi*: as Taplin highlights, line 1608 says “Faraway though I was, I laid my hand upon my enemy”.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, the character of Aegisthus is reduced to a subordinate role. Upon his entrance on stage, the Chorus expresses its contempt for him, calling him a female; and although Aegisthus proudly calls himself the tyrant of Argos, as a “woman” (1625: γύναι) he was unable to kill the king with his own hands (1635-43). He produces a tactical justification for his absence, but it is not enough to defend himself from the accusation of female cowardice. This is another confirmation of the symbolic reversal between feminine and masculine that is one of the core themes of the drama. Against the accusations of the Chorus, Clytaemnestra assumes a role of Executioner of Justice and claims the presence of Dike and Themis – the two Greek names of justice – at her side as assistants in the regicide (1396ff.). Clytaemnestra proposes a macabre toast to death, declaring the absolute justice of her act at l. 1396. The male heart of the Queen recites the formula of the crime, presenting her right hand as guilty. Aegisthus too invokes justice on his side. For him, this day is “the day of justice”.<sup>18</sup> Dike appears leading Agamemnon by the hand into the house, as if he were a bride (911). Justice reappears again in another allegorical picture: now Dike brings Aegisthus as if he too were a bride (1607). The last words of the Chorus against Aegisthus are injurious expressions: he is like a cockerel beside the Lady. We know very well – and the Greek audience knew even better – that Aegisthus’ own reasons for his revenge against Agamemnon have mythical roots: his brothers were killed, cut up, cooked, and served up at a banquet by Atreus, Agamemnon’s father, to Thiestes, Aegisthus’ father. But these reasons are obscured in the Aeschylean version, marginalised by Clytaemnestra’s deeper and more important reasons.

At the end of the first act of the trilogy, Clytaemnestra is at the height of her power: she is the manager of the situation and stops Aegisthus’ arrogance against the Chorus. She is in command of the situation and she imposes her authority, against the Chorus and against Aegisthus, as she prohibits his violence on the citizens of Argos. She stops the killing. She stops the bloodshed:

No, my dearest, let’s not do more damage  
We have already reaped enough unhappy harvest;

<sup>17</sup> Καὶ τοῦδε τᾶνδρὸς ἡψάμην θυραῖος ὤν.

<sup>18</sup> 1577: ὦ φέγγος εὐφρον ἡμέρας δικηφόρου.

let's not have yet further bloodshed.

...

That is my woman's words  
for those who condescend to hear them.

(1656-62)<sup>19</sup>

These are the Ladies' words, the "words of a woman for those who condescend to hear them". These are the last words of the character in the drama, and these words are now the words of a king.

The importance and centrality of Clytaemnestra in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is confirmed by her role in the second act of the trilogy, *Libation Bearers*. In the mythical saga, as we have seen, Orestes is the young hero who becomes the Avenger of the Father, dethroned and killed by the cousin Aegisthus. In the Aeschylean version, Orestes performs a new role: the greater figure of the Matricide.<sup>20</sup> The first, strongest image of the tragedy is that of the allegorical nightmare of the mother, dreaming of a snake that is sucking a blood clot from her breast. The horrible, prophetic dream triggers the drama, because Clytaemnestra – due to her nightmare – sends her daughter Electra to the tomb to appease the soul of Agamemnon by sacrifice. At the tomb, Electra meets her brother and together they plan revenge.

Indeed, in the Aeschylean version, revenge is not the rightful *nemesis* acted by the young prince against the usurper of the father's throne. Orestes returns home and his first aim is no longer to kill Aegisthus but Clytaemnestra. Revenge is now the rightful justice that the children – both the children, but Orestes by his own hands – dispense toward their mother, the murderer. Actually, in *Libation Bearers*, Aegisthus' murder (the main, canonical, scene of the tyrannicide in the versions of the myth before Aeschylus), is only a corollary of the execution of the true culprit for the death of the king-father: Clytaemnestra. Indeed, the accusation of matricide, not the lawful revenge of Orestes, is the main point at the centre of the whole action of the third act of the trilogy, *Eumenides*. In the third act of the trilogy, Orestes is not the Young Hero, the Avenger of the Father: he is the Matricide (and many years later, in Euripides' *Andromache*, he will introduce himself with the words "I am the Matricide".)

The principal scene of the drama coincides with the matricide, the scene in which Clytaemnestra's nightmare proves true. In this scene – in Italy, the principal scene in a drama is defined as 'the mother-scene'! – Clytaemnestra bares her breast to Orestes to dissuade him from the crime. In this

<sup>19</sup> Μηδαμῶς, ὧ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, ἄλλα δράσωμεν κακά. / ἄλλα καὶ τὰδ' ἐξαμῆσαι πολλά, δύστηνον θέρος. / πημονῆς δ' ἄλις γ' ὑπάρχει: μηδὲν αἰματώμεθα. / . . . ὧδ' ἔχει λόγος γυναικός, εἴ τις ἀξιοῖ μαθεῖν.

<sup>20</sup> On the character of Orestes, see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2007: 127, 185, 216-21, 223.

‘mother-scene,’ the Queen, to whom Aeschylus assigns the role of ‘King’ by putting her at the centre of his trilogy, strips off her regal robes – the symbolical king’s body, as Kantorowicz suggests – and in her last performance, unmasks her physical, carnal body, in a final, desperate, attempt to move her son: she unveils a female body, the feminine and maternal body of the Other, under the body of the ‘King’ that she herself had usurped. But the gender game is now at its end and the final performance of Clytaemnestra is doomed to fail.

Orestes hits Clytaemnestra in the breast and kills her. But in doing so, he also kills the character that had held – in the extremely innovative construction of this plot – the king’s throne. In Aeschylus’ version, the death of the Queen is not only the death of the mother: it is the death of the whole body of archaic royalty, of the ‘demon’ who had soaked the Atreides’ palace with blood. For Aeschylus – as is clear in the third act of the trilogy and in the happy ending with contemporary democratic Athens – it is the end of the monarchic principle of power that precedes, and allows, the opening of the horizon of the *polis*.

#### 4. Bodies and Phantoms of Regality: A Play of Ghosts

The role of the Queen’s character is crucial in the composition of Aeschylus’ tragedies in which Phantom/Ghost figures appear,<sup>21</sup> and so much so that it is the key feature in three out of his seven tragedies on the matter.<sup>22</sup> Darius’ ghost appears on stage in *Persians*; the Phantom of Agamemnon does not appear but is evoked in *Libation Bearers*; and the unexpected Phantom of Clytaemnestra appears in *Eumenides*. In all three tragedies, the figure of the Phantom has an important role, and it is precisely the dramaturgical use of the figure of the Phantom that confirms the centrality that Aeschylus gives to the character of the Queen.

In the central scene of *Persians*, the Queen approaches Darius’ tomb as a *choēphoros*, a “libation bearer” (609-10: χοὰς φέρουσα[α]). Before the Messenger’s announcement, the coryphaeus advises her to officiate a propitiatory sacrifice to the dead, addressed to Earth and to all its Dead. The liquid

<sup>21</sup> An extended version of the content of this chapter is in Centanni 2016.

<sup>22</sup> On ghost apparitions in the surviving Aeschylean tragedies you may find enlightening notes in the various comments to the tragedies of Aeschylus, starting from the fundamental Wilamowitz 1914, and following with Sommerstein 2010. In particular, on the Aeschylean invention of ghosts as a *persona dramatis*, and the intertextual relations between the spectres in Aeschylus, you may find important ideas in the following essays: Bickel 1942; Rose 1950; Jouan 1981; Rosenmeyer 1982, in particular 257ff.; Padel 1992; Käppel 1998; Barone – Faggi 2001; Frontisi-Ducroux 2007: 165-76.

offerings of the Queen must reach Darius, so as to ingratiate him and flatter and attract the Shadow to the surface.

Therefore, the Queen urges the Chorus to accompany the acts of the ritual she is preparing. She asks the Persian Elders to accompany her propitiatory ritual gestures with their song (619-22). The Chorus positively responds to the Queen's order, confirming the different roles that must be assumed – both by the Queen and by the Chorus itself – for a successful ritual.

The lyrics are designed as a prayer to propitiate the appearance of the Shadow (627-72). As announced by herself and confirmed by the Chorus, the Queen remains on stage during the song, and while the Elders sing and dance the psychagogic anthem, she performs the material part of the rite (658-66).

The Shadow gradually emerges from the mound on which the Queen is officiating and around which the Chorus is dancing, and Darius appears at the centre of the stage. The concert summoning ritual of Queen and Chorus is successful. The progressive appearance of Darius is indicated in the text with the mention of the reverse order of appearance of his regal clothes, from bottom to top, shoes to crown. More importantly, besides the spectacular character invention of the Queen, Aeschylus also invents a character for the Ghost: the Phantom of the King appears on the scene declaring that he had to make a tremendous effort to escape Hades, even if only for a short time. Having just emerged from Darkness, Darius asks the Elders to account for their groans and cries, for their distressed accents, and for the alarming presence of the Queen on his grave. The Shadow tells of all the trouble and discomfort he had to endure on the way, and then urges the Chorus to make haste (692).

The Phantom on stage is the Phantom of the Father with whom the Son must deal. This is the first Ghost in theatre history, that tells a truth designed to stand in the symbolic imaginary and has his shadow reverberate in the history of Western thought: the Father's Ghost says that the Son is inept, inadequate in his role. However, Aeschylus plays meta-theatrically with his own dramas and, in his surviving tragedies, there is also another Phantom of the Father: an impotent ghost, who is unable to rise from Hades and appear in the light.

Aeschylus opens the second act of his *Oresteia* with a scene connoting a strong ritualistic atmosphere. At the centre of the stage, Agamemnon's tomb stands out "as an altar" (*Cho.* 106). Entering the scene, Orestes turns to the gods of the Underworld and speaks (1-19).

Orestes came to Argos from his exile in Phocis, accompanied by his friend Pylades. The son of Agamemnon invokes his father for a sort of 'second' rite, not having been able to honour him properly during the im-

promptu and humiliating funeral performed by his murderous mother: he cuts his hair for the second time, after having already cut it a first time in the rite of passage from *ephēbeia* to youth. The act of Orestes is, therefore, both a ritual of homage to his dead father (which echoes Achilles' homage to Patroclus in the *Iliad*), and a repetition of the rite of passage that entrenches the full maturity of the protagonist.

Orestes and his friend Pylades take refuge behind the funerary stele, sheltered from the view of a procession of women coming from the Palace towards the tomb (*Cho.* 16ff.) Electra presents herself as a member of the Chorus, albeit the most prominent one, composed of Trojan slaves. Orestes then sees his sister: he does not report a difference in her role, but only in her demeanour. Having arrived at the tomb, Electra begins her ritual, pouring libations onto Earth (165-6, 124-51).

The ritual involving the pouring of liquid offerings onto the land – performed by the Chorus and Electra in the role of coryphaea – begins. It is a “paean of the dead”, with which the Chorus accompanies the sacrifice (157-8).

The scene is quite similar to that performed by the Chorus and the Queen in *Persians* (609ff.). Even in this case, the actor – the Queen in *Persians*, Electra here – officiates the rite at the king's tomb – Darius in *Persians* (621-2, 624); *Agamemnon* here (164) – pouring liquid offerings onto the land; even in *Persians*, the Chorus is expressly invited to sing a “hymn” to the genius of the Dead (*Pe.* 619-21).

Furthermore, in *Libation Bearers*, as in *Persians*, an impressive allegorical dream of the Queen had opened the way to the dramatic action, the apotropaic rite in particular. The thematic, lexical, and dramatic proximity between the scene at the tomb of Agamemnon and the scene of the invocation of Darius is an Aeschylean self-quotation, but it also contributes, in this context, to making a major impact on the spectators. Aeschylus plays, meta-theatrically, with the ghosts. In fact, the summoning ritual in *Persians* is successful and, at the end of the song, Darius' Shadow appears from the tomb. Because of the analogy of the dramatic situation, dramatic suspense is triggered even in *Libation Bearers*: the audience expects the Shadow of Agamemnon to appear.

However, the second invocation of Agamemnon's Shadow by Electra (the first having been by Orestes) is interrupted by Electra herself, surprised at seeing the marks left by her brother on and around the tomb (164-211). At this point, instead of her Father's Ghost, it is Orestes who appears: he comes out of hiding and urges Electra to be confident in the signals that attest to his identity, introducing the recognition scene (*anagnōrisis*) between the siblings who have long been separated by Orestes' exile in Phocis. The third invocation of the Shadow, the most intense, can now begin: in a long lyric *amoibaioi*, the voices of the children and the Chorus alternate and

blend in a piece of poetic virtuosity (306-477): the song is the longest *kommos* in all of the surviving tragedies and is very elaborate in terms of metrics and composition.

The Chorus stages the entire repertoire of the funeral ritual gestures: head pounding, hair pulling, face scratching (425-7), and oriental funeral melodies that the Trojans carry as dowry of their native heritage (423-4; on oriental rhythms typical of funeral lamentation, also see *Pe.* 121). It is a *thrēnos*, a funerary song (as defined both by Electra and the Chorus): the rhythmic writing and performance confirms the mournful tone of the song that also has the function of staging a posthumous funeral for Agamemnon, celebrated late in respect to the first dishonourable burial carried out by his assassin bride. But the primary intention of the song is the invocation of their father's Shadow (315-496).

The siblings try to capture Agamemnon's Shadow with the effective use of impressive words: their bond of affection may cause the king to come to the rescue "of his beloved ones" (355). But the rhetorical strategy used to draw the Shadow from Hades also uses the obsessive re-call to *atimia*, the dishonour that struck the king: the lack of honour and the funeral rites that were denied him by his murderers; death by treachery, unworthy of a Sovereign (479); the dishonourable end that procures a status of lowered prestige, even among the Dead, for Agamemnon. The Chorus itself contribute to provoking the Shadow, recalling the massacre inflicted on the king's body (especially the degrading rite of *maschalismos*, amputation of the limbs) as the ultimate form of dishonour (444).

The rhythmic *crescendo* of the three-voice song prepares for the apparition of Agamemnon's Shadow. The scene has the effect of triggering an expectation that combines the hope of the children with the spectators' own investment in the spectacular scenic event they are awaiting themselves. But even this rite fails, though the song is very long and rhetorically orchestrated: not satisfying the expectations of a public that cannot forget the impressive appearance of Darius' ghost in *Persians* (see the specific references to the ritual invocation, in particular that of the headpiece that rose from Darius' tomb), no ghost raises its head from this tomb. The children are now alone.

At this point, the purpose of the song shifts. The father denies his children the epiphany of his *eidolon* and Orestes, consequently, conceives another plan:

ORESTES My father, brought low in a manner so unfitting for a king, grant my request to be the master of your heritage . . . Send Justice as an ally to your friend; or give us strength to get a grip as strong as theirs, if after your defeat, you want to wrest back victory.  
(479-99)

The instance of a physical appearance of his father by his side is unrealized, and therefore Orestes diverts this invocation in another direction to attract Agamemnon's power and enlist his father in the revenge party. Agamemnon is called to emerge from Hades, not as a ghost-like presence, but as inspiration and support in his son's undertaking.

Now Agamemnon's son is no longer "the helpless little Eagle-chick", curled up on his father's grave as if to seek shelter in the nest. The non-appearance of the ghost convinces Orestes that he is now the hero and protagonist of the drama: he has to be ready for action. And it is only at this point that Orestes urges the Chorus to report the contents of Clytaemnestra's dream. The Queen's night-terror is finally revealed in detail: the allegorical nightmare woke the terrified Queen, but she did not quite realize its prophetic potential.

The dream is promptly interpreted by Orestes as a vision of his plan for revenge. It is Clytaemnestra, with her nightmare, who tells her child that it will be him – and no other – that kills her. Orestes recognizes himself as the monstrous serpent that appeared in the dream, sucking a blood clot from his mother's breast. And, recognizing himself as the beast of the allegorical dream, Orestes transforms into that serpent. The metamorphosis takes place in a symbolic scene, in which Orestes utters the fatal formula of auto-identification with the snake: "Behold! I am that dragon". The women of the Chorus hound Orestes not to waste time and to follow his words with action. Finally, Orestes does formalize his decision: as preached by the Chorus, Orestes does not surrender to the pain, as he "has learned from his anger" and is ready for action.

The father's ghost does not make an appearance. But, thanks to his non-appearance, Agamemnon's son has now actually come home. He is a son who has grown up and who claims his father's throne for himself. Orestes is alone and is now the director of his undertaking, the undisputed protagonist of the dramatic action of an 'Oresteia': a tragic saga that no longer has the father at its core, but the son of the king.

The weakness of the King – in the guise of a Phantom and in parallel to the power of the Queen – is confirmed by the unexpected appearance of the Phantom of Clytaemnestra in the *Eumenides*.

It should be noted that in *Eumenides*, from a dramaturgical point of view, the act of the Phantom of Clytaemnestra is not instrumentally necessary. Again, it is a big *coup de théâtre* from the point of view of the *opsis*; whereas, from the point of view of the strict need for the development of the plot, the inclusion of this scene could be defined as almost accessory. In the drama, the role of the Phantom of the Mother is the appearance of a powerful demon, as a phantasmatic incarnation of the spirit of the Erinyes. However, the scene is justified by an urgent and precise emotional motive: Clytaem-

nestra must awaken the demons from their lazy sleep, to rile them against their prey – Orestes, the son who fled Delphi in the direction of Athens.

At the beginning of the third part of *Oresteia*, the Pythia, after introducing herself, runs away in horror at the sight of the sleeping Furies who surround the *omphalos*, onto which Orestes, the matricide, is clinging to.

Clytaemnestra's *eidolon* suddenly appears, rising perhaps from the trap-room under the scene. Indeed, the hypothesis of an appearance of the Shadow *e machina* from the Earth seems impossible by the reference to a sudden apparition, which differentiates this scenic entrance from the slow and progressive appearance of Darius' Shadow in *Persians* (661ff.); see, on the other hand, the non-appearance of the ghost of Agamemnon in *Libation Bearers*, which should have been progressive (*Cho.* 479ff.: "Do you not lift your head?"). All of the hideous Furies – "decrepit old girls" (as Apollo describes them in *Eum.* 69-72) who live in the shadows of Tartarus and whom no one, neither man nor beast nor god, ever approached – are the demonic mask of the Mother. The character profile of Clytaemnestra is also defined by Aeschylus in a brilliant way. The Shadow claims to come from the world of the Dead in which she is wandering, vilified and disgraced. In Hades, between the weak *eidōla* of the Dead, the value of honour and dishonour still maintain their power: Electra and Orestes complain of the *atimia* Agamemnon suffers among the Dead (*Cho.* 96, 409, 434ff.), and the ghost of Clytaemnestra rebukes the demons for the pain she suffers, dishonoured and adrift in Hades (*Eum.* 95ff.), echoing the reprimand of Patroclus' Phantom that reminds Achilles of his wandering, because he too is yet without a funeral rite (*Iliad* 23.65ff.).

Clytaemnestra blames the Furies for their ingratitude, reminding them of the sacrifices that she used to officiate at night; the evocation of the image of the Queen engaged in nocturnal rites with demons adds blood to the scene, and lends a murky and witch-like colouring to the character of Clytaemnestra's Shadow (*Eum.* 106-9).

The Shadow urgently needs to perform her task, and rouses the demons: her wounds, on display, are a jolt that shakes the demons to their core. Clytaemnestra reaffirms the link that once bound her to her son, but now she only sees Orestes as her murderer, the matricide against whom she demands revenge. The power of the Furies sleeps, in a deep slumber, and from that sleep – which neutralizes their evil virtues – the Ghost of Clytaemnestra tries to wake them. Finally, we hear the moans of the demons that begin to wake up, urged to resume the hunt by the Phantom. Once they are awake, the Phantom of the mother can return to the Shadow. The Furies, in her place and on her behalf, are ready to return to hunting the matricide.

In the seven preserved tragedies by Aeschylus, we have three ghosts – one of which is absent, for Agamemnon fails the occasion of his epiphany.

Darius' spectre was able to weave past and future in the form of a prophecy. In *Persians*, the Phantom's voice is deep and wise but totally ineffective in the course of events: in actual fact, it resonates as a symbol of the failure of his son, Xerxes. The absence of Agamemnon's ghost suggests that it is time for his son to take his place because the 'truth' is now all in the drama: the role that Orestes can now occupy in his father's absence. Only if the Father's Ghost remains in the Shadow can the son finally – tragically – embark upon his own undertaking. Alone, without his paternal spectre to incite him and project his old resentments on his young will, Orestes can act out his drama without losing himself – at least for now – in any Hamletic hesitations: straight to the heart of the drama, to matricide.

In *Libation Bearers* the appearance of Agamemnon's ghost – promised by a summoning ritual made by his children on the tomb – did not occur, and the public was directed by Aeschylus toward investing not in the resentment of the spirit of the hero-father, but rather in the new heroism of his son Orestes.

In the calibrated, thoughtful design of the plot of *Oresteia*, Aeschylus shows that the paternal spirit is unable to access scenic reality, but instead it is the mother's spirit that generates ghosts. Indeed, in *Eumenides*, Aeschylus stages an unexpected twist referred to as a meta-theatrical double play with *Libation Bearers*, and with the significant precedent of a great figure, invented by himself: the first Phantom figure in *Persians*. Now, it is the Shadow of the murdered mother that appears; the absence of the Father-King's ghost is offset by the dramatic weight of the fantastic scene of the Queen-Mother's apparition.

By composing the plot for his tragedies – *mythos* – unedited with respect to the repertoire of 'stories' shared with his audience, and by profiling new characters – *ēthē* – that take on colour and thickness through the unfolding of the same plot, Aeschylus decides to put the grandiose figure of the Queen with her doubled body at the centre of his dramaturgical design: a double icon of motherhood and regality in *Persians*, and a double icon of monarchic authority and female power in the *Oresteia*. The male gendered epic – the saga – ends precisely at this turning point and *Incipit tragoedia*.

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## One, Two, Many Medeas

### Abstract

Has a woman like Medea ever existed? Will a woman like Medea ever exist? If such a woman has existed, were there to be such a woman, of what would her passionate energy be made? Love? Hate? Will it ever be possible in that *mélange* of drives intermediate between body and psyche – those impulses which according to Plato belong to the irrational sphere of the mind – and to extinguish which would mean severing the nerves of the psyche and cutting off the strings of the bow that assure the energy (cf. Plato, *Republic* 3.411b); will it ever be possible, in that *mélange*, to distinguish the drive of hate from that of love? Does Medea love? Yes, she does. She also hates. She moves from hate to love and back again as though on a Möbius strip. This essay follows Medea from her appearance in the tragedy of Euripides and on through Seneca to her reincarnation as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, to her final apparition as Maria Callas in Pasolini's film in 1969. The argument being that Medea remains contemporary.

KEYWORDS: Euripides; Seneca; Shakespeare; Lady Macbeth; Pasolini; Maria Callas

### Medea 1

Has there ever existed, will there ever exist such a woman? A woman such as Medea? If she exists, of what substance is her vital energy? And on what passionate substance does she feed? Love? Hate? Will it ever be possible in the *mélange* of intermediate impulses between body and psyche – those impulses which according to Plato belong to the irrational sphere of the mind, and to extinguish which would be tantamount, again according to Plato, to severing the nerves of the soul, and thus cutting the harp strings of energy (cf. Plato, *Republic* 3.411b)<sup>1</sup> – will it ever be possible in such a *mélange* to distinguish the urge to hate, which divides, from the urge to love, which unites?

<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see Vegetti 1993.

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In a synthetic definitive judgement, Schopenhauer (*Parerga und Paralipomena*, 1851, chap. 21) reminds us that we are all, men and women alike, porcupines: if too close we prick each other, if too distant we feel the cold. This is to say that a relationship of love alone will be so close as to exclude identity, while a relationship of pure hate will cause such repulsion as to allow for no connection. Finding the right balance is an aim most human, so human in fact that often, if not always, it is scotched. Does Medea love? Yes, she does. And she also hates. Or, rather, she slips from love to hate, as on a Möbius strip. As though, on either side, the passions were identical.

I am searching here for Medea's different faces, or sides. On her first appearance – the first we can read, at least<sup>2</sup> – Medea is the protagonist in Euripides' tragedy named for her. She reappears on stage in Seneca. And in Shakespeare, since he too creates his own Medea whom he calls Lady Macbeth. And lastly, she invades the screen with the face of Maria Callas in Pasolini's 1969 film bearing her name.

So, yes, Medea exists, has existed. The origin of Euripides' character is a legend vouched for by Pausanias in his *Description of Hellas* on his arrival at Corinth, where the woman from the Orient is supposed to have lived (see Bettini and Pucci 2017). Euripides is fascinated by the story of *Medea*, and tries telling it several times over. When, in 431 BC, he finally stages Medea in Corinth, with Jason, he presents a version of the myth entirely his own. No, Medea has not killed her children unwittingly because she wants them to become immortal but gets it wrong. Nor are her innocent children stoned by the women of Corinth, unconscious tools in the cruel hands of the mother who has killed Jason's new bride, a princess of Corinth. Nor, in her flight from Corinth after killing Creon, does Medea abandon her children in the hands of the King's angry relatives, who vent their fury on them and then accuse their mother. No, Medea kills her children to punish Jason who has betrayed her.

In no legend of the time was infanticide by a mother ever mentioned. But this is the act at the core of Euripides' drama. And after him, tradition gives us the inhuman face of a Medea who murders her own children, a vindictive lover, a woman who has turned 'antagonist' through suffering; absolutely, totally dedicated to destroying those she has loved; ready, unhesitatingly, to 'punish' her lover; in the end, even resorting to the inhuman act of destroying those she herself has generated.

Playing with etymology, one might say that Medea is 'anta-gonist', 'an-

<sup>2</sup> Euripides staged for the first time Medea as a sorceress and as a murderer of King Pelias in 455 (*Pelias' Daughters*); Sophocles as a sorceress in his *The Root-Cutters*, also known in antiquity as Sophocles' *Medea* – see Mastronarde 2002, 48-9 (as for Neophron's *Medea*, see *ibid.* 57-64).

ti-gonal'. Medea goes 'against the born', 'against those who are born'; she goes 'against nature'. In this sense she is a 'warrior'. She is the hero who fights, the woman-hero who is not afraid of using the mortal, deathly violence of conflict to the bitter end. She betrays her father, kills her brother, kills Pelias, abandons her homeland, makes Jason her homeland, cleaves to Jason, and does everything for Jason. But why? Since she loves him? Is this the sign of love? Does she who loves put herself at the total, dedicated service of the loved, the lover? Is it this, love? Is this Eros, this kind of love?

And how does Jason repay her? By betrayal. Once in Corinth, it behoves him to organise his life by arranging a political marriage for himself. He no longer needs the foreigner from Colchis. Pitiless, he consigns her to exile. But he will keep the children: he is their father. At this point Medea's fury is unleashed: when Euripides' tragedy opens, Medea is hidden from view inside the house from which she can be heard howling. Her fury is the other face of the passion of outraged love. A violent passion, absolute.

Up to this point Medea has conceived love as absolute dedication to the other – abnegation of self, negation of homeland, father, brother. Medea loves as she herself says, 'on the front line'. Ready for the clash of love, it is for love that Medea fights. Medea is heroic: she shows daring, the courage typical of a male hero. Euripides uses such terms as *tolma* (394), daring; *thrasos* (856), courage.<sup>3</sup>

But when she discovers she has been betrayed, Medea slides down the Möbius strip in a state of passionate wrath, *orge* (176). She feels rage, *cholos* (94). She experiences the passionate energy peculiar to a hero, *heros*. Even of a *theos*. She is *deine* (44), terrible, powerful. And *mone* (513), alone; *moria* (457), *mad*. She is an animal, a female bull (92), a lioness (187). She has the inflexible will of a hero. She is entirely the fury of annihilation.

Yes, where she cannot love, Medea hates. Either she loves another and annihilates herself, or she hates and annihilates the other, and by so doing she loses part of herself, something her own. A consequence of the hate she feels is in fact self-mutilation. Because her revenge deprives her of that which is her own, her children.

Medea accepts this law unhesitatingly, a rule, or rather, a fact: love and hate are two sides of the same ferocious attachment, and whoever feels this will always, in all cases, lose personal identity. Proof that there is in any case violence in love; and in love always hate.

Reciprocity in love is rare indeed, Medea reveals. Ferocity and cruelty are often the truth of love. The existence of the woman Medea is the experience of this *eros*, this love-desire manifest in the urge to close adherence, absolute contact with the other, to complete the sacred moment of

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Euripides' *Medea* refer to Diggle 1984.

embrace, when lover and loved one are locked together in the confusion of each other and in each other. It happened to her: she moved towards Jason; for him she tore herself from her home, she entered the Symplegades, the horrid rocks at the entrance to Pontus closing in on the ship that penetrates them in a fatal embrace. It is a very powerful symbolic image, that of the great rocks, the colour of blue lapis lazuli which crash together, choking the entrance to the Bosphorus for anyone wishing to pass through so that it seems the way closes in the wake of the stern, while in front, beyond the prow, there is only danger. An image valid not only for ships, but which infuses the life of our heroes with lugubrious prophetic meanings of life and death: for Medea, Jason's arms are the Symplegades, they open for her, not to hold her, but to swallow her. Which is, if you like, a metaphor for the erotic scene *par excellence*, that of sexual *jouissance*. Is this not exactly what happens to Medea with Jason? Does she not thrust against him, encircle him; does he not take her, then open his arms and drop her?

When Euripides' play opens, Jason has effectively abandoned Medea. He no longer needs her. Medea is a foreigner, but she understands. Medea is indeed the barbarian, the oriental woman used to kneel before despots, the more inclined to obedience the more brutal their power. But she is also a woman who has intelligence of love and hate, is able to understand with perfect lucidity the lot meted out to women in the most civilised city in Greece, which is Athens (where the play is staged, although set in Corinth). To the chorus lamenting her lot, Medea speaks quietly. When she leaves the house where she had despaired and howled and comes on stage, turning to the women, her friends, she speaks firmly, coherently. Not at all madly.

With marriage, she says in her famous monologue (ll. 230-65), women bind their own happiness, honour and reputation to a man, – a man who will do as he pleases with the bond. The very act – marriage – will have different names for the man and the woman: for Jason it will be called 'choice', the exercise of his own 'freedom', to the point that if it serves his purpose to contract a new marriage, he is free to do so. But she will pay for his freedom with repudiation. For Medea, Jason's freedom means rejection, abandonment, exile, solitude. When she chooses a husband, a woman chooses a master, Medea firmly concludes. Hence her wrath: the logical result of her lucid understanding that the wrong she has undergone requires vengeance. It is in the name of justice that she seeks revenge. On vengeance Medea concentrates as on the act to which the injustice of her own misfortune corresponds, caused not by metaphysical reasoning, but calculated in concrete terms by a man for his personal political advantage. And it is vengeance, terrible vengeance, which makes of Medea that which she effectively becomes: an icon of terrible motherhood, the assassin of her own offspring. Medea's act is the scandal of scandals for all eternity.

## Medea 2

And now, I am going to take a leap. I call up Seneca's Medea, point to this brazen character who in Seneca's version is yet more dazzling, more blinding. Such brazenness is clearly spelled out in the peremptory assertion Seneca gives her in line 910. When Medea is finally ready for her criminal infanticide, Seneca has her declare openly "Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis" (910),<sup>4</sup> "Now I am Medea. My genius has grown through evils" (translation mine).

In this new version, that is the *punctum*, as Barthes (1980) would have said. This is the detail which gives away not only the emotional complex, but the content of truth which surprises and disconcerts us. It is in the line: this is how Medea *becomes* what she *is*, as Freud and Nietzsche have so masterfully taught us.

Note that the two Medeas, the Greek and the Latin, even though from such different epochs and in different languages, in fact both confirm the murder of the children as the point at which power to give life becomes power to give death. What Medea takes from her children, life, is what she gave them.

But then, if we think about it, what was that which she gave them, life, if not a way into the world? A deadly experience in itself, for the way into the world has never and will never mean other than progress towards death. Is this then the mother's gift—Death? In Euripides' Medea first, then in Seneca's, they appear as anti-Ariadnes; they do not liberate, but lead the new-born back into the labyrinth of the Underworld. Thanks to an act that is not at all evil. But it is rather a sacred act of theft. "My genius has grown through evils."

## Medea 3

This truth – another leap – is evident in Pasolini's hieratic film dedicated to Medea, with the absolutely brilliant idea of giving Medea the face of Maria Callas, who is above all else a voice; thus, that which for everyone is voice, here becomes sight.

It is thus that Pasolini pinpoints another decisive *punctum* of the myth. The infanticide is no sacrilege. On the contrary, Pasolini restores its pious character to the action, presented in slow time, which in itself distances any crime from the act. Thanks to the way in which the image is presented to our visual perception, the act is associated with the sweetness of sleep

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from Seneca's *Medea* refer to Giardina 1987.

with which their mother endows her children. It is evident that Medea loves her own children. If she kills them, it is because she 'must'. The sense of things cannot consist in their purely and simply continuing to exist; as if we lived merely to safeguard what we were given at birth.

But above all: when Jason thinks he is going to reduce Medea from woman to wife and mother, the mother merely existing to forge children, Medea rebels. Birth is an act of power which Medea claims for herself entirely, and so, as if she were one of the Parcae, she decides that as she has spun it, so now of her own accord she will sever the thread of life. And by doing so she is a Goddess. As a Mother, that is, she regains her divine character, creative, creating; and if there is violence in the act, it is because violence is innate in every act that inaugurates a beginning or decrees an end.

This is what Medea communicates through her action. In Pasolini's film it is absolutely not desperation, nor yet anger that drives Medea to commit the deed. Neither spouse betrayed, nor mother turned murderess for vengeance as a wife, Medea approaches her act objectively, impartially, like someone administering justice. She does what is necessary. She invokes the sacred name of Dike: the need for a Measure to reduce the ruthless pride of those who do not recognise love as a religion. Cruelty, intransigence, are the reverse side of love. This is the side, not particularly archaic, but absolute, universal, that Pasolini illuminates in Medea; not a soul tormented and distraught, but the lover who loves and judges and gives and takes and loves and punishes, and the mother who loves and sacrifices. As at the beginning she killed her brother, now at the end Medea kills her children. It is a sacrifice she makes, in the dual sense of rite and sacrifice. With his children's death the continuity of the line of descent that Jason wants is broken: the prosperity of the house, as men understand it. It utterly breaks the power of the male, it leaves him impotent, deprived of offspring and wife, without a future. For love of him Medea had abandoned her world, she had betrayed it. Now she redeems betrayal through her crime which, by damaging the power of generation in the male, eliminates the fruit of the cross-breed to which she had stooped.

But in the act she loses part of herself. She sacrifices her own fruit. By doing so she shows that passions cause suffering. They cannot simply be enjoyed. Or rather, the enjoyment also bears deathly fruit. Allowing passion means entering a universe where Eros embraces Ananke. Suffering for the act that she herself perpetrates, Medea brings to the scene not only her wrath, but uncontrollable fury, demonic passion, the justice of Dike, the law of Themis. Already in Euripides the tearful hysterics of the woman Medea, who wept for love and raved against injustice, were resolved in a final apotheosis. Here then is the face of Medea: Medea is *Theos* – reintegrated in her divine prerogative, in contact with the Sun and with Fire, tremendous,

in the end she rises above Jason, and escapes him. Jason is defeated. And in a kind of transfiguration the scandalous mother regains divine distance, sovereign authority, which will also impose a commemorative cult on the city. Medea wins, Medea, I repeat, is *Theos* – she is more than a woman, she is a god. The pages Bernard Knox devotes to Medea in *The Heroic Temper* are wonderful (1964: 5ff.). Not only is Medea presented to us as a hero – in the manner of the heroes of Sophocles – but she appears to us at the end precisely as a *Theos*.

This is her scandal. After having abased herself in contact with the male, after having emptied herself by creating, she now withdraws her fruit, turns back on herself and wraps herself in her solitude. And decrees the end, the end of the entire world. By eliminating her children, the mother withdraws the very possibility of the world. Her children dead, the world of man ends, the human world, the created world exists in so far as it is the world of children. Where a mother dominates, there are only children, but if the mother withdraws that to which she has given birth, what world can exist? This is the nightmare shown through Medea.

#### Medea 4

Echoes of the mythical Medea reappear in Shakespeare. Like any other Elizabethan schoolboy, Shakespeare learned the ethical paradox running: “Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor”, i.e. I see good and approve, but follow evil. Thus, Medea reflects perplexed in one of Shakespeare’s favourite books, the *Metamorphoses*, Book 7, ll. 20-1. This passage in particular is constantly transmitted in Elizabethan culture and misrepresented – for example by the Calvinists, as also by Anglicans and Puritans. The theme is heard from every pulpit, used to comment on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (7:5), an absolutely basic text for Calvin and his English followers. The theme is free will, an obsessive theme, a dominant worry in the thought of English Protestants.

Other than Ovid, in creating the courageous, audacious Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare uses the 1566 translation of Seneca’s *Medea* by John Studley, a translation included in Thomas Newton’s 1581 collection of *Ten Tragedies* by Seneca. Of course, Shakespeare may have read Seneca in the original, he knew Latin. But the echoes of Studley’s English version ring particularly clearly in *Macbeth*. A good example is “pelle femineos metus” (43), which in Studley’s English becomes “Exile all foolysh female feare, and pity from thy mynde” (120v.) – lines Shakespeare uses wholesale in his construction of her character.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> About this complex net of references, see the pages on *Macbeth* in Fusini 2010:

Now, in the chronicles (particularly Holinshed) used by Shakespeare to source the plot for his play, the figure of Lady Macbeth is drawn on the model of an ambitious wife who forces and perverts her wavering husband to committing regicide. It is she who is audacious – she who incarnates the audacity of the crime. Those terms essential to the tragic lexicon of Euripides in the first place (*tolma, thrasos*) and then of Seneca (*ira, furor*), – terms essential to the hero protagonist of the criminal action in both Euripides and Seneca, here too in Shakespeare are reserved for the woman-hero: ‘woman-hero’, not heroine – because the term ‘heroine’ betrays the very concept of ‘heroic’.

In Shakespeare’s play, of the two protagonists she, the lady, is the first to yield to the metamorphosis leading whoever undergoes it to the commission of the crime: she, daring above all others. It is the lady, who in a solo both wonderful and tremendous explicitly recites her mantra to the spirits of evil, even invoking sexual metamorphosis which, by unsexing her in a sort of sublimation in reverse, a trans-descent, abolishes the common, generic, general, universal man-woman distinction, throwing it into a sort of monstrous, demoniacal degeneration. Or divine?

This is the sense of the famous monologue in 1.5, “Unsex me here” (41),<sup>6</sup> when Lady Macbeth invokes the evil spirits to perform a transgender operation, to change her sex, and they recognise her true nature, which is fulfilled in the deed. Woman no longer, in the commission of her transgressive act she is the hero, female masculinity is the power to which she gives herself as the means.

Similarly, in the opening scene of Seneca’s play, Medea invokes Hecate, the goddess of night, of Hell, she calls upon the chaos of eternal night, the spirits of evil, the Furies, Pluto, Proserpine – to help her achieve revenge against Jason. She thinks first of seeking revenge against his new wife: “Est coniunx”, she thought. “In hanc ferrum exigatur” – but will it be enough? “Hoc meis satis est malis?” (125-6). She thinks not. Here then is the woman-hero ready to look into her own bowels for ‘the way to revenge’, the greatest revenge.

Ready for the impossible, through her children Medea offers the fatal, poisoned gift to Jason’s wife, but like a frenzied maenad, given up entirely to her rage, she abandons herself to a mad, violent, savage love of evil (“amore saevo”, 850). She says it herself: her identity matures in evil, in crime. “Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis” – Now I am Medea, she says: she becomes Medea when she gives herself up to crime. It is through murder, the criminal act, that she is fulfilled.

357-450, esp. 384-6.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations from *Macbeth* refer to Muir 1984.

It might be said that every act is in its way a step towards the act, and every step towards the act a transport of Es towards Ego. Or, more philosophically, it is a transit from power to act. The identity of the Ego is produced in the act – this is the *punctum*, the flash of intelligence of the heroic psyche, which shines in the new incarnation of Medea in Lady Macbeth. Precisely: *Lady Macbeth nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis*. The profound sense of these words is already clear to us.

In Studley's translation, taken up by Shakespeare, Medea's discourse is enriched with touches that out-Seneca Seneca: Studley invents and Shakespeare follows suit, for example, when Medea dips her already gory hands more deeply in blood; this is not in Seneca. Studley sees Medea, or suggests to Medea "In bloud to bath thy bloody handes and traytrous lyues to wast" (120v.) – an action Lady Macbeth repeats. And if in Seneca's Medea we witness the maenad's action as she sinks the dagger in her breast, her own naked flesh, to make the blood flow and lave the altar on which she is soon to sacrifice her children; in order that her hand may learn to grasp the sword with which she is about to kill her children, shedding their blood, Studley and Shakespeare dwell on images of 'flesh flogged and beaten'; crushed, which reappear in the paroxysm of violence in Shakespeare's maenad, who is Lady Macbeth.

In terms of the plot and emotions underpinning *Macbeth* and *Medea*, the two plays could not be more different. But in a certain sense they also form a knot, the noose they both tighten round an idea of Eros obsessed with power, and their plot in which character and soul are exchanged. With a difference: the Medeas of Euripides and Seneca are mother and wife, each of whom kills her husband, the father of her children, for 'just' revenge. The Shakespearean lady does not really perform at all: she witnesses, though not passively - witnesses as an assistant at a birth, she is the midwife. She even becomes mother to her man Macbeth. She loves thus, it is she who gives birth to the man she wants and desires. It is not she who kills Duncan. She would be unable to, she confesses: he's too like my father, she says – a touch of extraordinarily sensitive intelligence in Shakespeare - she does not sacrifice the children she has not got, or at any rate who do not appear on stage. But she would do so, just as Seneca's Medea is ready to "scour her entrails". She is ready to pluck her new born babe from her breast and dash his brains out. She is an out and out mother and murderer. And above all she is a 'heroic woman', who believes in the act. And she manages to have her man commit the deed. She persuades, convinces, quells Macbeth's perplexity, she orients him. She, a woman of daring, makes of her man a hatchet man. She employs him as a hitman. Go, kill, return, drop the knives.

It is Lady Macbeth who re-motivates Macbeth's flagging desire – waver-

ing, uncertain, perplexed; she who maintains vigour, a turgid desire which at a certain point collapses, because men are like that, as is explained by the porter of the castle where the two Macbeths live; the tumescence of Eros invades, upsets and transforms the male body: the member swells, but then it also deflates. Erection and deflation, tumescence and de-tumescence, this is the rhythm of the male man's libido. This is the rhythm of male desire. How can Lady Macbeth – as woman-hero – ever love her man except by making herself the lynchpin of this rhythm, tuning herself to it, in support? As an erectile caryatid?

### **Medea 1, 2, 3, 4**

Medea did what she did for Jason, she supported him in the struggle, wanted, desired with him, when he desired the Golden Fleece. Medea loved like that: she loved her desire for him, she loved desire 'for the other'. In the same way Lady Macbeth supports her man when he wavers. Only she cannot manage it, not entirely: she cannot, she does not know, she is unable – what is the right formulation? Perhaps she cannot because it is a strength possessed by no-one "of woman born" (4.1.79). Perhaps it is something that can only be named in impersonal terms, which is to say: there is no-one able to support the desire. This is the crushing disappointment that Lady Macbeth in particular has to bear.

In fact, in this new guise, our Lady Macbeth is a totally modern woman. Or, at any rate, hers is an early modern *eros*. She is already suffering the unease of this civilisation. It is no chance that Shakespeare brings a doctor on stage with his useless drugs. Lady Macbeth falls ill and no-one can cure her.

I am not a literary historian, I do not read literature for confirmation or lack of it in certain passages of history; I am a scholar of literature and comparative studies and I note and note down the recurrence of certain figures in our literary tradition and in our culture and in our imagination. And I note that there is never really true repetition. Always in their reappearance there are noticeable differences which do indeed indicate clearly, if we are able to read, how material history, the material conditions of life in history, count, and transform thought and imagination.

I add that I firmly believe in the interlace of material life with thought, of reality with imagination, a tight interlace of complex knots which if properly perceived and well illumined yield deep awareness of our historical existence. And yes, of course, in the Medea of Euripides as in that of Seneca, contemporary reality is reflected in each, and yes, of course, how can one not perceive in the *Medea* of Euripides the intellectual ferment in

Athens at the end of the 5th century? So it is indeed a fact that precisely the role of women in society and in the family is in question – and the same is true of Seneca.

And yes, of course, these texts speak of men and women who live in their own times, the texts reflect those times. But certainly the greatest – and I call to mind Euripides, Seneca, Shakespeare, do not merely reflect; they use, dramatize, work with the thoughts and feelings of their times. For in 5th-century Athens these are not the same as in Seneca's Rome, or Shakespeare's London – not that I would swear to the magnificent progressive destinies of the change.

I would say, rather, that if in all three cases the subordination of women certainly existed, in spite of the obvious fact that women of talent are now, were then, successful in numerous fields, this subordination, which – surprise! – still exists today, could both then and now be read as an impasse pushing us into a blind alley which is a Gordian knot binding love and hate together. Between man and woman. This is why Medea is still contemporary.

Even though we modern women are no longer Medea, alas, we speak too much of rights, I am afraid. In order to become individuals both rational and aware, capable of self-determination, responsible for ourselves and the future of our families, of which our modern reality speaks to us, have we perhaps really had to become 'true' men? "Unsex me here"? Has Lady Macbeth's demand of the evil spirits been granted by the spirit of the time? Is this what has happened to us modern women? Have we changed sex?

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ANTON BIERL\*

## **Phaedra: a Tragic Queen in Turmoil Between Violent Love and Its Chaste Suppression. An Interpretation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* in Initiatory Terms**

Abstract

Phaedra is an unusual queen. As the second wife of famous King Theseus, a notorious womanizer and often involved in problematic affairs, she seems to stand entirely aside from power and politics in Athens. She is obviously much younger than her husband and strangely detached from him, basically reduced to live alone in the palace. Aphrodite chooses her as her victim and instrument in her stratagem to bring Phaedra's stepson Hippolytus to fall. When the young man was once visiting the mysteries in Attica, the queen sees him from the Acropolis and falls immediately in love with him. And when Theseus decides to go into a one-year exile to atone for the murder of the sons of Pallas, they move to Trozen into the household where Phaedra's stepson is living. Like a Homeric hero she fights for her honor as queen, vehemently refusing to play the role in Aphrodite's mean drama, though finally becoming a collateral damage in it. The spectators witness a queen in the heroic fight to suppress her love manifesting itself as maniac disease (*nosos*). Her behavior is not only motivated by her will of maintaining her honor in a patriarchic society but also by reason of state. But the Nurse, an alter ego of Aphrodite, will bring Phaedra's erotic frenzy and true feeling to the fore. In their total focus on purity Hippolytus and Phaedra are tragically intertwined with each other. In his poetics of breaches and fissures Euripides models both his protagonists as paradoxical beings full of contradictions. The Id, the suppressed erotic desire, breaks through the surface of the Ego built on the social norms and values fueled by the Super-Ego. And both meet in a specific Artemis constellation: The woman in her extreme emotional state is shown as if in a disease of the womb and pains of menstruation, falling under the domain of Artemis as goddess of midwifery as well. According to ancient medical concepts the female chorus thus envisages Phaedra in a hysterical state, when the uterus wanders to seek watering and impregnation. In these terms Phaedra notionally returns to the status of the maiden in the realm of Artemis. The chorus regards women in their deficient nature as a *dystropos harmonia*, a musical harmony that turns out ill-conditioned. This self-referential comment summarizes Phaedra's paradox between Aphrodite and Artemis, unveiling and veiling, erotic frenzy and chaste purity, *nosos* and sanity, mania and rationality, maenadic and Artemisian huntress and queen full of self-control. Under the circumstances of a shame culture, as soon as her love is revealed to her stepson, her only exit remains suicide. To hide her feelings from the public and maintain the façade of an honorable wife and responsible queen she nits the knot of a complicated intrigue that culminates in binding the knot

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of the rope to hang herself and attaching a written message to her dead body, accusing Hippolytus of a sexual attack on her chaste purity.

KEYWORDS: Phaedra; Euripides; Hippolytus; queen; aristocratic values; shame culture; literacy

Phaedra is an extraordinary woman.<sup>1</sup> As the second wife of Theseus, a notorious ‘womanizer’ and a king often involved in problematic affairs, she seems to stand entirely aside from power and politics in Athens. Theseus had kidnapped Phaedra after abandoning her sister Ariadne in Crete. She is obviously much younger than her husband and appears strangely detached from him, basically reduced to living alone in the palace. Whereas she apparently inherited a comparatively high degree of power in Crete, she cannot exercise it in her new role as wife of a dominant ruler in Athens. Since the notoriously active Attic king is often abroad on political, heroic and ritual missions, the young queen is left alone at home. There she does not carry out even representative functions. At this point, she is reduced to being simply an aristocratic woman full of emotions who develops strong erotic feelings for her stepson Hippolytus, the substitute for her husband. In the gendered and socially ideal seclusion in the house that corresponds to her inner soul, dangerous passions arise (Cairns 1993: 327-8). Accordingly, Aphrodite chooses Phaedra as her victim and instrument in her perfidious stratagem to cause Hippolytus to fall as he refuses to pay tribute to her. Originating from a maniacally erotic royal family in Crete – Pasiphae, her mother, fell madly in love with a bull – and furnished with a strong will for power as well as with aristocratic intelligence and a heroic feeling of honour, she is Aphrodite’s ideal tool. When the young man was once visiting the mysteries in Attica, the queen saw him from the Acropolis and fell immediately in love with him. And when Theseus decided to go into a one-year exile to atone for the murder of the sons of Pallas, the royal couple moved from Athens to Troezen into the household where Phaedra’s stepson, her object of infatuation, was living. In this palace the drama is destined to evolve.

<sup>1</sup> This contribution uses parts of Bierl 2019a, rewriting and developing it further in regard to the topic of this issue. I thank Petra Saner for a draft translation of these parts and Rosy Colombo for encouraging me to compose this contribution, for editing it carefully and improving my English. The Greek text is based on Diggle 1984, the translation on Kovacs 1995. On Phaedra, see Fitzgerald 1973: 23-6; Kovacs 1981; Michelini 1987: 297-304; Kovacs 1987; Goff 1990; Zeitlin 1996; Craik 1998; Roisman 1999: esp. 47-107; Mills 2002: 53-61, 95-101; Susanetti 2007: 60-79; Roth 2015: 56-60; Ebbott 2017: 111-13.

All in all, Euripides' *Hippolytus* is so captivating because everything revolves around erotic passion and sexuality as well as their rejection (Kokkini 2013), and a woman is positioned at the centre of attention, who strives hard to suppress her erotic feeling. Having grown up in a shame culture, the young queen will use her power and feminine nous to defend her female reputation, her *time*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, like a Homeric hero, she will fight with her own female means and will not even shrink from suicide which, moreover, causes the death of the young man who rejects her and is responsible for the loss of her public honour. Only with her death will she assume heroic status. All in all, *Hippolytus* is characterised by a poetics of love while mainly assuming a female perspective.

In the Greek world, love is not associated with romantic ideas of happiness and fulfilment, but rather with malady (*nosos*) and suffering (Calame 1999: esp. 14-38, 51-6). A feminine *eros* in Greek literature before tragedy is predominantly found in the poems of the early Greek poet Sappho. One could argue that Euripides dramatises Sappho's lyric snapshots. Stylised as a Homeric heroine, the female ego's unsuccessful struggle against Aphrodite can best be illustrated with the recently discovered Sapphic Kypris song (P. Sapph. Obbink, lines 1-12) (Bierl 2016):

πῶς κε δὴ τις οὐ θαμέως ἄσαιτο,  
 Κύπρι, δέσποιν', ὄττινα [δ]ῆ φίλ[ησι,]  
 [κωὺ] θέλοι μάλιστα πάθαι χάλ[ασσαι]  
 [ταις] ὀνέχησθα;  
 [σὺν] σάλουσι μ' ἄλεμάτωσ δαίσδ[ης] 5  
 [ιμέ]ρω<ι> λύ[ισαντι γόν' ωμε-[ x  
 [. . .]. α. α. . . [. . .] αμμ' οὐ προ[ο-3]. ερησ[  
 [- ∪] νεερ. [. .] αι  
 [ c.8 ] . . . [. .] σέ, θέλω[ ∪ - x  
 [- ∪ - x τοῦ] το πάθη[ν ∪ - x 10  
 [- ∪ - x -] . αν, ἔγω δ' ἐμ' αὔται  
 τοῦτο σύνοιδα

...

[How could one not be hurt over and over again, Mistress Kypris, by anybody, whomever one really loves, and not, above all, want release from the passions that you sustain? You tear me apart pointlessly with shakes (5) through desire that loosens my knees? . . . not . . . you, I wish . . . to suffer this . . . (10) . . . , but I am conscious of this for my own self. . . (Trans. by Anton Bierl)]

<sup>2</sup> Dodds 1951: 28-63 argues for a development "from shame-culture to guilt-culture". Cairns 1993: 47 and Williams 2008: 91-5 see that shame and guilt overlap, since *aidos* covers both concepts. Phaedra too feels guilt to some extent.

### 1. *Hippolytus* as Master Drama – A Special Case?

Before going into a detailed analysis of *Phaedra*, I would like to address some general points. *Hippolytus* belongs to the Euripidean tragedies, which have been considered the best since the Alexandrians and which were then destined for school reading since the Byzantines at the latest. Dated 428 BC, *Hippolytus* in particular is ascribed to the so-called master dramas (alongside *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Alcestis* and *Heracles*),<sup>3</sup> which have received the most attention throughout the ages and until today due to their artistic composition and captivating drama (Latacz 2003: 280-318, esp. 281, 301-5; Michelini 1987: 277-320). By way of distinction, it has received the epithet *Stephanias* (also *Stephanophoros*), that is ‘the wreath-bearer’, because the title character initially offers a wreath to the goddess Artemis, whom he worships in an excessive and solipsistic manner without venerating the other gods in the polytheistic system. The first *Hippolytus* was called *Kalyptomenos*, ‘he who veils himself’, and is only fragmentally preserved today (*TrGF* 5.428-47) (Barrett 1964: 10-45; see also Lesky 1972: 314-15; Roisman 1999: 1-24; Avezzù 2003: 152-7; Roth 2015: 34-9). Here Hippolytus, Theseus’ son from his first marriage with an Amazon, is the object of sexual advances on the part of Phaedra, his stepmother and Theseus’ second wife. As a consequence, she became the epitome of a whore in comedy (Aristoph. *Ran.* 1043). Ashamed of these advances, her chaste stepson veils his head. It appears that the audience was displeased with the indecent play, so for this reason, and perhaps also for the intellectual pleasure of dialectical variation, Euripides wrote a second version shortly afterwards. In this version, he turns Phaedra into a chaste woman, heroically repressing her forbidden love, and as an expression of her nature she modestly covers her head with a cloth as was customary.

In many ways, its diptych structure and dramaturgical composition call to mind Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* (probably performed after 438 BC), which also broaches the issue of a woman in love, namely Hercules’ wife Deianeira.<sup>4</sup> Because of this, *Hippolytus*, in particular, has been considered an exception by several critics (Latacz 2003: 281, 301; Michelini 1987: 277-320, esp. 277-80), avowing a similarity with Sophoclean tones and features. According to them, the characteristic of an exalted and contradictory poetics by Euripides as a sceptic anti-traditionalist (Kovacs 1987: ix-x and 1-21; Michelini 1987: 38-51 [overview of opinions]; 52-94) does not apply here. In-

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes of Byzantium counts the *Hippolytus* in the last words of hypothesis II (Diggle 1984) among the best dramas: τὸ δὲ δρᾶμα τῶν πρώτων.

<sup>4</sup> Janka 2004 argues that *Hippolytus* is in dialogue with Sophocles’ *Trachinians*.

deed, in *Hippolytus*, Euripides allegedly adheres to the classic model almost perfectly. This judgement, however, relies on aesthetic presuppositions and does not stand up to closer inspection. For even in this play – especially alongside the intellectual play of contrasts with the first edition – the aesthetics of Heraclitus' *palintropos harmonia*,<sup>5</sup> of the 'harmony turning back, that is changing to the contrary', full of diametrically opposed tensions (fr. 51 DK), harmonious cracks and ruptures as well as fissures and breaches is present, induced by the ups and downs of dualisms, ambivalences and mutual tensions.

## 2. Opening the Scene

Both Phaedra and Hippolytus are excessively chaste, though the sexual drive structure beneath the surface of both soon becomes apparent. Phaedra as an aristocratic young queen is stylised as a Homeric heroine who fights against her sexual desire and for the preservation of her honour. Willing to die for this cause, the queen thus seeks to receive 'undying glory' (*kleos aphthiton*). And yet the myth is designed in order to make her reveal herself to the object of her desire in some way. The Nurse, who represents Aphrodite on earth in many respects, subsequently turns out to be a mediator. Hippolytus has devoted himself completely and one-sidedly to Artemis, the goddess of hunting and virginity. In doing so, he forgets to pay his homage to Aphrodite, the goddess complementary to Artemis in the polytheistic system.

In general, no character stands out as particularly drama-defining. Alongside Hippolytus, to whom the play owes its title, and Phaedra, who undoubtedly leaves the greatest impression, the Nurse shows some analogy to Theseus, who enters the play in the last third. All characters are assigned approximately the same number of lines (Hippolytus 271, Phaedra and Theseus 187 each, the Nurse 216) (Mills 2002: 88). The play is framed by the two appearances of the goddesses, who do not merely symbolise and hypostatise the human world of emotions (Lesky 1971: 421-2; Knox 1985: 325; Kovacs 1987: 32). Rather, since the majority of the audience believes in the Olympians, they are to a certain extent real and they interfere (Mills 2002: 105), as they do in Homer. Tragedians can build whole plays on this anthropological perception that is based on popular belief and literary representation. Despite their nature as dramatic constructs that are 'good to think with', gods in tragedy are not just fictional inventions with-

<sup>5</sup> Frischer 1970 designates the design of the play as *discordia concors*. See also Mills 2002: 48-53.

out any relationship to the cultic reality of the polis (thus Mikalson 1991); their portrayals must be grounded in the experiences of Athens' lived religion, otherwise the audience would not have been able to understand their involvement in the play. Since Aphrodite as well as Artemis appear on the *theologeion*, the spectators associate them with their functions in the polytheistic system and their Athenian cultic presence. In short: Aphrodite is responsible for love and sexuality between adults, while Artemis is the tutelary deity of adolescents, especially young chaste maidens, before and during their status transition to maturity. Hence, in *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite and Artemis become known as goddesses who pursue their own interests – in terms of making humans fall in love or, respectively, of keeping them in their in-between state of puberty, socially experienced in rites of passage – and act according to their sensitivities (Lesky 1972: 323; Köhnken 1972; Luschnig 1980; Mills: 2002: 77-9; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 330-1; Roth 2015: 62-6). Despite the clear predetermination of the action, the humans are not mere marionettes of the gods, but do in fact bear the responsibility for their actions which are the result of their own decisions.

Aphrodite is offended by Hippolytus' particularly close and exclusive attachment to Artemis, whereas she herself is censured by the young man. He is opposed to any love relationship, and categorically rejects matrimony even more so. Aphrodite intends to punish her adversary for his hubris with death (10-23), as she states in the prologue. Hippolytus is to perish in an evil web of desire spun by her long since. While growing up in his great-grandfather Pittheus' house in Troezen, Hippolytus once went to Athens to be initiated into the famous Eleusinian Mysteries. Love is always engendered in the eyes; and as Aphrodite had cunningly planned, Theseus' second wife Phaedra caught sight of him and was immediately ensnared (24-8). In his honour, she caused a small temple to be built for Aphrodite. It was situated close to the Acropolis Hill, a position that allowed any arrival to be watched from above. She named this shrine the *Hippolyteion*: where Aphrodite has her temple (29-33) Ἴππολύτῳ δ' ἔπι (32), 'for Hippolytus'. This name may, in anticipation of events, suggest the fact that the tomb was erected as a compensation (*epi*) for the death which Hippolytus is to suffer so that he may rise to the status of the goddess' cult hero (Nagy 2013: 545-53).

Aphrodite does not take revenge on him personally nor does she entrust someone else with the killing, but herself contrives an elaborate plan. In an erotic experimental design, Phaedra, the lonely queen, thus becomes the medium of love. Normally, the one evading love is the one to perish from it directly, as we can see in Sappho or in the Greek love novel, such as for example Habrocomas in Xenophon of Ephesus. In this case, however, Hippolytus only suffers indirectly through Phaedra, who in this sec-

ond version, despite the vehement love for her stepson, does not offer herself to him, but even manages to resist revealing her emotions. Theseus is burdened by blood guilt incurred for the murder of the Pallantidae. He thus goes into a year-long exile in Troezen with his wife, and with her beloved in the same household, she finds herself confronted with him every day. On her own accord and in consideration of her honour, her behaviour does not entirely coincide with Aphrodite's plans at first, which is why Phaedra is to pay with her own life following the logic of Eros – as 'collateral damage', in a sense. Most notably, Aphrodite must ensure Theseus' discovery of the affair for he is to become the perpetrator. By using an open wish granted him by Poseidon, Theseus is to avenge Hippolytus' alleged sexual assault on Phaedra by making him pay with his life (35-40) (Barrett 1964: 39-42).

Nearly everything is disclosed in the prologue, but some details concerning the execution of the plan stay hidden. However, it is still unclear how both Hippolytus and Phaedra are drawn into the web of revenge even though they both vehemently resist love. Phaedra's love becomes obvious thanks to the Nurse. With her own honour still in mind, Phaedra devises a stratagem which ensures that Hippolytus is charged with sexual assault upon her. To ensure this accusation, she attaches a written message to her dead body (856-86). By committing suicide, she is able to evade any further accusations herself, which is why Theseus becomes her supposedly rightful avenger. It is only when this innocent young man is almost completely dishonoured and is standing on the brink of death that Artemis, as *dea ex machina*, has to restore justice, at least for Hippolytus' sake. He receives a cult (1423-30) and subsequently forgives his father before he succumbs to his severe wounds. Even at first glance, it becomes obvious how much the cracks, ruptures and frictions between individual positions are played off in a series of diametrical opposites; that is, in particular, purity/impurity, chastity/sexuality. These oppositions are further potentiated even when compared with the first *Hippolytus* located in Athens, perhaps also compared intertextually with Sophocles' *Phaedra* (Barrett 1964: 12; Roth 2015: 31-4), provided that the lost drama is to be dated before 428 BC (Barrett 1964: 10-45; Roth 2015: 31-9).

As we have seen, the play is framed by two cult installations (29-33, 1423-30).<sup>6</sup> The aetiologies are based on cultic incidents in Athens as well as in Troezen (Nagy 2013: 542-71; Roth 2015: 26-9). The glance down from the hill (κατόψιον, 30) that triggers the love in Athens (24-8) matches Aphro-

<sup>6</sup> On the fictional status of the hair-offerings and hymns by Troezenian maidens as premarital rites, see Scullion 1999-2000: 225. On the contrary, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003: 329-31 argues that Euripides uses the actual cult of Troezen for "religious problematization" (330).

dite's epithet *Kataskopia*, 'she who watches from above', in Troezen. Pausanias gives an account of a stadium in Troezen named after Hippolytus. Looking down from Aphrodite *Kataskopia*'s sanctuary, Phaedra catches sight of the naked young man who is exercising in this stadium, and falls hopelessly in love with him. In her desperation, she pierces the leaves of a myrtle bush (Paus. 1.22.2), which is closely associated with love. The bush is located near Phaedra's grave, as is a remembrance stone for Hippolytus (Paus. 2.32.3-4). The latter also has a sanctuary that hosts an annual ritual: to mourn his death in a chariot, the virgins offer the sacrifice of their hair before their wedding (Paus. 2.32.1-2) (Nagy 2013: 548-51, 557-9).

### 3. Hippolytus' and Phaedra's Stories as Initiation Myths and Cultic Background

Initiatory approaches have been applied to Greek literature since the 1970s. They found particular success in the field of Greek drama (Bierl 2007: 23-7; e.g. Padilla 1999; Bierl 1994; Bierl 2009: esp. 196-244), even though sceptical voices warned against an uncritical and excessive use of the too general model of the rite of passage (Dodd and Faraone 2003). In Greek drama, the model was also widened to include possible distortions of the cultural pattern and failures of complying with it. *Hippolytus* has served as an example of such a reading. However, critics confined their arguments and analytical sophistication in this sense to the figure of Hippolytus. This essay will be an important contribution to this interpretation in initiatory terms in so far as it extends it to Phaedra as well. We will see that Euripides shifts the married wife of Theseus, queen of Athens, back toward her status as a young maiden in her *rite de passage* and thus under the influence of Artemis. This paradoxical and anti-naturalistic characterisation of Phaedra is highlighted in particular by the female chorus who themselves feature a striking instability in age-consistency, oscillating here again between women and girls. The play is thus based on patterns of both male and female initiation paradoxically interweaving Hippolytus and Phaedra. The latter is notionally re-projected back to her own rite of passage. The impression, however, that Phaedra's initiatory component sits uneasily with her totally different ambitions in terms of an almost Homeric heroine and strong woman fighting to fulfil her aristocratic values is actually a deceptive one. Rather, as shown above, it fits well into Euripides' radical poetics of breaches and fissures. Euripides thus aims at displaying both Phaedra and Hippolytus as tragically intertwined with each other in their total focus on purity as paradoxical beings full of contradictions. In this sense, the apparent lack of a political significance, as the play seems to revolve around the pri-

vate sphere and *eros*, is supplemented by a different political commitment, as young men and young aristocratic women have a role in the polis. This applies even more in the case of the son of a king and Theseus' wife, the queen of Athens.

The initiatory basis in its specific interaction of male and female aspects – even the gender identity of both Phaedra and Hippolytus becomes destabilised – is reflected also in the ritual and mythic scenarios and in the cultic realia that are constitutive of the play. Hippolytus is the initiate who misses the rite of passage of a regular *ephebeia* or rather suffers the initiation death to complete his change of status that renders him a man (Mitchell-Boyask 1999; also Nagy 2013: 542-4), which Apollo is responsible for most of all (Bierl 1994). Conversely, close to the shrine of Apollo Epibaterios in Troezen, there is also a temple dedicated to his sister Artemis (Paus. 2.31.4), who carries the epithet Lykeia, 'the wolfish', and who is responsible for young girls' change of status. The epithet 'wolfish' points towards the danger on the Outside, where young people live secluded from society in an in-between state. The exemplary bridegroom dies as an idolised young man who had reached marriageable age. The young man in transition busies himself primarily with physical exercise, chariot racing, and hunting. The young girls' sacrificial hair ritual mentioned by Pausanias (2.32.1) exactly corresponds to the aetiology of the cult that Artemis institutes for her beloved at the end of *Hippolytus* (1423-30):

σοὶ δ', ὃ ταλαίπωρ', ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν κακῶν τιμὰς μεγίστας ἐν πόλει Τροζηνίᾳ δώσω· κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος κόμας κεροῦνταὶ σοι, δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ πένθη μέγιστα δακρῶν καρπουμένῳ· αἰὶ δὲ μουσσοποιοὺς ἕς σὲ παρθένων ἔσται μέριμνα, κοῦκ ἀνώνυμος πεσῶν ἔρως ὁ Φαίδρας ἕς σὲ σιγηθήσεται.	1425       1430
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[To you, unhappy man, I shall grant, in recompense for these sorrows, supreme honours (1425) in the land of Troezen. For unmarried girls before their marriage will cut their hair for you, and over the length of ages you will harvest the deep mourning of their tears. The practiced skill of poetry sung by maidens will for ever make you its theme, and Phaedra's love for you (1430) shall not fall nameless and unsung. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

In addition to the expression of grief, choral songs are mentioned in this passage, which the girls sing in honour of their exemplary betrothed (1429-30), just as the real chorus sings his praises in the play. Wedding songs and lamentation melodies go hand in hand in many cultures, for in myth, the bridegroom dies in his transition in order to be reborn in a new phase

of life (Nagy 2013: 559-60). According to Pausanias, Asclepius is associated with this resurrection from the dead in nearby Epidaurus (2.27.3-4; cf. Schol. Pi. P. 3.54). All in all, Troezen and Athens, where the first *Hippolytus* is located, independently present a similar mythic-ritual scenario regarding this legend. Moreover, it has become obvious that the play is based on patterns of both male and female initiation, paradoxically interweaving Hippolytus and Phaedra, who is notionally re-projected to her own rite of passage.

It is on this culturally real and psychosocial as well as socio-anthropological basis, which the Athenian audience understood as a matter of course, that the play's sense is revealed. In myth, there is a tendency to create negative scenarios and catastrophes for the hero; as "anti-ephebe" (Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 59), Hippolytus is Aphrodite's antagonist, whereas in the world of the counterbalancing ritual, he is profoundly connected with the goddess. If Hippolytus were to take the side of Artemis in the drama and did not want anything to do with Aphrodite, love and marriage, this would necessarily entail the refusal to attain manhood on the part of a youth who does not want to grow up (Mitchell-Boyask 1999: esp. 59-61). Aphrodite cannot allow this, since every young man is destined to procreate through sexual intercourse with the female sex, thus guaranteeing the community's continued existence. From being a hunter on the Outside, operating on the margins (Vidal-Naquet 1986), he has to become a full member of the warrior community. As Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990: 29-77) among others rightly points out, war on the part of men complements giving birth to offspring on the part of women: "Marriage is for the girl what war is for the boy" (Vernant 1990: 34). Artemis is not only responsible for young girls' transition to womanhood, but she also assists women as a midwife; on the male side, she is the tutelary deity of hunting, war and battle (Vernant 1991: 198-204). According to the logic of natural maturation, Aphrodite must triumph, and Artemis must submit. An insistence on an exclusive and particularly intimate relationship with Artemis must necessarily entail Hippolytus' premature death. The desire he expresses before her to reach his life's end like a charioteer, just as he began it (87), implies the circularity of an eternal run around the marker instead of a straight track leading directly towards the finishing line (Nagy 2013: 543-4; Zeitlin 1996: 233). Simultaneously, the sentence poetically conveys his own death wish with tragic irony. Both fixating on purity, Phaedra and Hippolytus appear entangled. Furthermore, both main characters appear highly contradictory, because underneath the surface of the ego, which is formed by social norms and the superego's values, the repressed id, that is erotic desire, is pushing for a breakthrough. Ultimately, Phaedra and Hippolytus meet in a specific Artemis constellation: according to the ancient conception, the woman is de-

picted in a state of hysteria in her suffering of the uterus and in menstrual pain (121-372, esp. 161-9), which also fall within the competence of Artemis. As was stated above, Phaedra, in a certain sense, returns to the status of a girl. And even the young man, who remains in the intermediate state of the *rite de passage* also assumes the traits of a virgin (Goff 1990; Mitchell-Boyask 1999), just as ephebes occasionally put on female clothing in cult (Bierl 2009: 196-244).

In the following close reading, we will trace the development of the interaction of male and female initiatory motifs and the mutual entanglements of sexual desire induced by Aphrodite, and the bitter resistance to it, whereby concealment and exposure as well as veiling and unveiling will be key motifs (Segal 1988; Zeitlin 1996: 243-57, 264-78; Goff 1990: 12-20; Holmes 2010: 254-6). The goddess stages a tragedy where a young man and the male spectators are confronted with the feminine while the play is heavily focused on the female body (Zeitlin 1996: 234-57). As Froma Zeitlin (1996: 224) aptly says:

Aphrodite's power will prove to be consonant with the power of theater itself: as regards, for example, the structure and functions of the plot, the representation of the body and its sensory faculties, relations between inside and outside and between seen and unseen, types and modes of communication, role playing and reversal of roles, the interaction of actors and spectators, and the general mimetic properties of dramatic art.

Although Phaedra is a high-born queen she becomes both the victim of a theatrical experiment on the part of Aphrodite and its instrument, too, and during this experiment she will be turned inside out. Her female body and psychic state will be revealed while the spectators observe her in her vehement struggle against this invasion following the male-induced, patriarchal values of the polis. This conflict is precisely what first binds then loosens the knot of the tragic plot – see Aristotle's *desis* and *lysis* in his analysis as given in his *Poetics* (1455b24-9) – that is, visually concentrated in the theatrical objects, the noose and the letter, through which the concatenation of deaths is put in practice (Zeitlin 1996: 225-34).

#### 4. The Ups and Downs in Aphrodite's Web of Desire

After Aphrodite's prologue (1-57), Hippolytus appears with his hunting companions, who form a side-chorus and sing a brief hymn to Artemis, the fairest of the Olympian virgins (58-72, esp. 61-72) (Calame 2017: 152-4). Hippolytus then brings his plaited garland from the virgin meadow. This *locus amoenus* in the Outside is a place of purity, of the unmixed. At the same time, just as in Sappho's fr. 2 V., it is an erotically charged site, where

young girls in segregation who are just about to reach sexual maturation are prepared for marriage (Bierl 2019b; cf. Calame 1999: 165-70). In myth, they are ideally snatched away by a man while picking flowers. Kore, the mythic representation of all girls, experiences this when she is kidnapped by Hades in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The abduction simultaneously marks the girl's initiation death while the act of picking is itself often associated with defloration. The bee as a sacred animal of chastity which flies from one flower to another on the meadow (77) is later on infused with a more aggressive sexuality owing to its sting (563-4) (Frischer 1970: 89). The consecration of a plaited garland as a headband boldly stands for circular binding. The object symbolises the exclusive attachment to Artemis; this worship has some really sexual undertones (73-87) (Zeitlin 1996: 234-5; Hunter 2009; Calame 2017: 153-4). At the same time, Hippolytus brusquely rejects the admonition of a servant to include Aphrodite in his worship. Nonetheless, the horses are prepared for hunting and chariot races (88-120).

At this point, the chorus of women from Troezen appears (121-69). As the drama takes its course, it becomes evident that the chorus' identity is just as unstable as Phaedra's. Accordingly, the chorus of women is interchangeable with one consisting of young girls. While doing the washing, the women hear of their mistress's suffering on the sickbed; she then chastely covers her blonde head to signify her affliction (133-4). In contrast with Hippolytus, who veiled his head in the first version because he was ashamed of Phaedra's advances, Phaedra is now the one who covers herself. And yet, she is to unveil herself soon (201-2). She refuses to eat intending to starve herself to death. The chorus already addresses Phaedra as a girl (κούρα, 141). They ask if Pan, Hecate, the Corybants and the mountain mother Rhea, who is often attended by them with wild Dionysian music and dancing, are responsible for her irrational behaviour (141-4). Alternatively, the chorus assumes that an omitted sacrifice to Dictynna, the Cretan goddess of the wild beasts, who is equated with Artemis, is to blame (145-7), especially since she is also powerful in Troezen (148-50). This would correspond with Hippolytus' disregard for Aphrodite, but in a mirror-inverted manner. And indeed, it is a possible motive: in a sense, Phaedra is all Aphrodite, since the young queen is destined to play her erotic role and simultaneously becomes Aphrodite's victim in the plot. At the same time, in her suppression of love and her consequent chastity, in her madness she paradoxically moves towards the role of both a young girl and Artemis. Some possible reasons for Phaedra's lingering illness such as her husband's infidelity or news from her home island Crete are briefly taken into consideration (151-60). Finally, the chorus touches upon one more condition associated with Artemis (161-9).

φιλεῖ δὲ τᾶ δυστρόπῳ γυναικῶν  
 ἄρμονία κακὰ  
 δύστανος ἀμηχανία συνοικεῖν  
 ὠδίνων τε καὶ ἀφροσύνας.  
 δι' ἐμᾶς ἦξέν ποτε νηδύος ἄδ' 165  
 αὔρα· τὰν δ' εὐλοχον οὐρανιαν  
 τόξων μεδέουσαν ἄτευν  
 Ἄρτεμιν, καί μοι πολυζήλωτος αἰεὶ  
 σὺν θεοῖσι φοιτᾶ.

[Women's nature is an uneasy harmony, and with it is wont to dwell the slack unhappy helplessness of birth-pangs and their folly. (165) Through my womb also has this breath darted. But I called on the heavenly easer of travail, Artemis, mistress of arrows, and she is always – the gods be praised – my much-envied visitor. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

The women wonder whether all this could be caused by a gynaecological disorder. They obviously consider hysteria as a possible diagnosis. Phaedra's indisposition could be caused by the lack of watering the uterus, which consequently wanders about in the body, longing for sexual fulfilment (Holmes 2010: 185-7). Labour pains, menstrual pain and gynaecological complaints are mentioned as possible links to Artemis' field of competence, that is childbirth (161-9). The women in the chorus know from their own experiences that Artemis protects them against these grievances in her function as midwife. A *dystropos harmonia* (cf. 161-2) is strikingly attributed to women as deficient beings, a chord in musical harmony which is paradoxically and unhappily altered (Zeitlin 1996: 237-41, 247-8; Holmes 2010: 261; Nagy 2013: 564). The chorus unconsciously uses the oxymoron of a 'discordant harmony', which simultaneously refers to the tragic chorus' own musical dimension, that of badly modulated tuning, and to the fatal effects of the whole drama set in aesthetic forms. The women of the chorus thus address the helplessness and lack of orientation of the young queen in love. In her sexual distress, Phaedra identifies with Artemis, the goddess who triggers madness (*mania*), so that the queen may bridge the spatial gap dividing her from the erotic object, at least in her imagination.

In the first *episodion* (170-524), the Nurse enters and performs her caregiving service to Phaedra, who is carried onstage on a daybed. Just like a midwife – one calls to mind the Socratic maieutics – she is to deliver Phaedra's secret. The chorus has already sensed the mania and thus anticipates the next scene. Phaedra asks for her body to be propped up as her limbs are unstrung (198-9), because limb-melting (*lysimeles*, cf. Hes. *Th.* 911, Alcman 3.61 PMG) Eros has taken possession of her. At the same time, she asks for her heavy headdress to be removed so that her tresses can be spread on her shoulders (200-2). This is equivalent to the erotic gesture *par excellence*,

the detachment from the bond of chastity. She calls for clear springs, cool groves, and wants to go hunting and for a walk to the racetrack; essentially, she wants to go to Hippolytus (208-31).

ΦΑ. αἰαῖ·

πῶς ἂν δροσερᾶς ἀπὸ κρηνίδος  
καθαρῶν ὑδάτων πῶμ' ἄρυσαιμαν,  
ὑπὸ τ' αἰγείροις ἔν τε κομήτη  
λειμῶνι κλιθεῖς' ἀναπαυσαίμαν; 210

ΤΡ. ὦ παῖ, τί θροεῖς;

οὐ μὴ παρ' ὄχλῳ τάδε γηρύση,  
μανίας ἔποχον ρίπτουσα λόγον;

ΦΑ. πέμπετέ μ' εἰς ὄρος· εἴμι πρὸς ὕλαν 215

καὶ παρὰ πεύκας, ἵνα θηροφόνοι  
στεῖβουσι κύνες

βαλιαῖς ἐλάφοις ἐγχιρμπτόμεναι.

πρὸς θεῶν· ἔραμαι κυσὶ θωύξαι

καὶ παρὰ χαίταν ξανθὰν ρίψαι 220

Θεσσαλὸν ὄρπακ', ἐπίλογχον ἔχουσ'  
ἐν χειρὶ βέλος.

ΤΡ. τί ποτ', ὦ τέκνον, τάδε κηραίνεις;

τί κυνηγεσίῳ καὶ σοὶ μελέτη;

τί δὲ κρηναίων νασμῶν ἔρασαι;

πάρα γὰρ δροσερὰ πύργους συνεχῆς. 225

κλειτύς, ὅθεν σοὶ πῶμα γένοιτ' ἄν.

ΦΑ. δέσποιν' ἄλιας Ἄρτεμι Λίμνας

καὶ γυμνασίῳ τῶν ἵπποκρότων,

εἶθε γενοίμαν ἐν σοῖς δαπέδοις 230

πῶλους Ἐνετάς δαμαλιζόμενα.

[PHAEDRA Oh, oh! How I long to draw a drink of pure water from a dewy spring (210) and to take my rest lying under the poplar trees and in the uncut meadow! NURSE My child, what are these words of yours? Won't you stop saying such things before the crowd, hurling wild words that are mounted on madness? PHA. (215) Take me to the mountain: I mean to go to the wood, to the pine-wood, where hounds that kill wild beasts tread, running close after the dappled deer! By the gods, how I want to shout to the hounds (220) and to let fly past my golden hair a javelin of Thessaly, to hold in my hand the sharp-pointed weapon! NU. Why, my child, these fevered thoughts? Why concern yourself with hunting? (225) Why do you long for water from a flowing spring? For hard by the city wall is a dewy slope from which you might have a drink. PHA. Mistress of the Salt Lake, Artemis, mistress of the coursing-ground for horses, (230) oh that I might find myself on your ground taming Enetic horses! (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

Phaedra wishes to be sent to the mountains (215), like the cultic Bacchantes who temporarily leave their homes. The longed-for moisture is correlat-

ed with her being too dry, which the Nurse instinctively interprets as madness. Phaedra desires to tame colts (231) (Glenn 1976). At the same time, as an imaginative girl in transition, she actually sees herself as a foal in transition (cf. 546), eagerly awaiting her yoke (Calame 1997: 238-44, esp. 241). This image corresponds to the female wedding in Greek culture. She calls upon Artemis, the mistress of the Salt Lake, gymnasia and coursing grounds (228-9). Above all, she desires to be close to Hippolytus and imagines herself in the role of a second Artemis who appears on the hunt with golden hair waving in the wind, spear in hand and accompanied by hounds (219-22) (Nagy 2013: 568). In her mad state, this gesture of revealing herself erotically as Artemis simultaneously opens her id. But now the confused questions of the Nurse (232-8) stimulate the ego, which conflicts with her instincts and wants to suppress everything again, prompting Phaedra to ask for her head to be covered again (239-49). Veiling and covering in response to shame are also concentrated in the Nurse's reply. It would be for the best, the servant wishes in her despair, if death were to cover her own body (250-1). At the same time, the Nurse instinctively pinpoints the truth with her shrewd opinion that one should only engage in temperate friendships and that one ought not to be consumed by limb-melting desires like labour pains. Instead, one ought to be one's own master over any binding and releasing. The Nurse recommends the Apollonian maxim of moderation and of 'not-too-much' in an almost philosophical manner (252-66). Subsequently, the Nurse repeatedly attempts to elicit the truth from Phaedra in dialogue, using Socratic midwifery. Finally, with her appeal not to betray her own sons to the bastard and stepson (304-10), she gets to the heart of the matter: only the name causes Phaedra pain. By using ritual *hiketeia* (325-6), the Nurse tries to force her to reveal the cause of her malady. Phaedra resists since she is "plotting to win credit" out of shame (331). Honour in death is her goal.

Following the supplication ritual, Phaedra begins to carefully reveal the true circumstances. First she speaks of her notoriously erotic mother in Crete, Pasiphae, who fell in love with a bull (Reckford 1974). Then she mentions her famous sister Ariadne, who became the wife of Dionysus, he who dissolves all order, and she feels herself to be the third in the series (337-41). The Nurse still fails to understand (342-6), since Phaedra makes only enigmatic allusions to the truth. Now Phaedra finally makes it clear that it is all about love (347), of which the Nurse knows – again based loosely Sappho fr. 130 V. – and that it is bittersweet (*glykypikron*), "at once . . . great pleasure and great pain" (348). The Nurse now enquires about the man of her desire (350). When Phaedra finally reveals that Hippolytus is the object of her love, the Nurse is completely shocked (353-61). The chorus (362-72) mirrors her horror, calling the woman in love "Cretan child" (372), as a young girl

just before her status transition, thus bringing Phaedra closer to the eternal ‘child’ and boy Hippolytus.<sup>7</sup> And even the chorus, generally presented by ephebes in Athens, will re-enact this change of status from woman to girl in its function as emotional amplifier and mediator of empathy.

At this point, everything is laid out in plain sight: Kypris works behind the scenes, as we know from the beginning. And yet it is a perfectly human feeling that Phaedra, now in her role of responsible queen, wants to continue to suppress. In contrast to her emotional outburst and her ritually forced confession, Phaedra subsequently offers an intellectual analysis (373-430) of which I would like to cite the famous beginning (373-90):

Τροζήνιαι γυναῖκες, αἱ τόδ’ ἔσχατον  
οἰκεῖτε χώρας Πελοπίας προνώπιον,  
ἤδη ποτ’ ἄλλως νυκτὸς ἐν μακρῶι χρόνῳ 375  
θνητῶν ἐφρόντισ’ ἢ διέφθαρται βίος.  
καὶ μοι δοκοῦσιν οὐ κατὰ γνώμης φύσιν  
πράσσειν κακίον· ἔστι γὰρ τό γ’ εὖ φρονεῖν  
πολλοῖσιν· ἀλλὰ τῆδ’ ἀθρητέον τόδε·  
τὰ χρῆστ’ ἐπιστάμεσθα καὶ γιγνώσκομεν, 380  
οὐκ ἐκπονοῦμεν δ’, οἱ μὲν ἀργίας ὑπο,  
οἱ δ’ ἡδονὴν προθέντες ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ  
ἄλλην τιν’· εἰσὶ δ’ ἡδοναὶ πολλαὶ βίου,  
μακρὰ τε λέσχει καὶ σχολή, τερπνὸν κακόν,  
αἰδῶς τε· δισσαὶ δ’ εἰσὶν, ἡ μὲν οὐ κακή, 385  
ἡ δ’ ἄχθος οἴκων· εἰ δ’ ὁ καιρὸς ἦν σαφής,  
οὐκ ἂν δύο ἦσθην ταῦτ’ ἔχοντε γράμματα.  
ταῦτ’ οὖν ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνω φρονοῦσ’ ἐγώ,  
οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὁποῖω φαρμάκῳ διαφθερεῖν  
ἔμελλον, ὥστε τοῦμπαλιν πεσεῖν φρενῶν. 390

[Women of Troezen, dwellers in this extreme forecourt to the land of Pelops, (375) I have pondered before now in other circumstances in the night’s long watches how it is that the lives of mortals are in ruins. I think that it is not owing to the nature of their wits that they fare worse than they might, since many people possess good sense. Rather, one must look at it this way: (380) we know and understand what is noble but do not bring it to completion. Some fail from laziness, others because they give precedence to some other pleasure than being honourable. Life’s pleasures are many, long leisurely talks – a pleasant evil – (385) and the sense of awe. Yet they are of two sorts, one pleasure being no bad thing, another a burden upon houses. If propriety were always clear, there would not be two things designated by the same letters. Since these are the views I happen to have arrived at beforehand, there is no drug could make me (390) pervert them and reverse my opinion. (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

<sup>7</sup> On the fluctuating designation of Hippolytus as ἀνήρ (‘man’), παῖς or τέκνον (‘child’), see Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 53-9.

In fully rational clarity, she opposes Socrates' optimism regarding the knowledge of virtue (377-9; see Pl. *Prt.* 352d) (Dodds 1925: 103; Lesky 1972: 420). It is laziness, not lack of good sense, that is responsible for people's giving precedence to indulgence for the beautiful, the noble and the honourable. It is the pleasures that count for the most (380-4). The ambivalence in naming is also partly to blame (385-7):<sup>8</sup> shame, *aidos*, denotes the sense of honour and veneration in a positive context; in a negative context, however, it signifies both shame itself as well as shamelessness in a sexual scandal, which permits the urge to be acted out (Mills 2002: 55-8, 95-101). For this reason, Phaedra has been fighting against it. Considering the disgrace, she is left only with the option of death in order to evade public condemnation in a shame culture. The *aidos* which "ruins houses" (386) is also the feeling of shame that forces Phaedra to kill herself, as Sophie Mills argues, because the rest of the speech provides the explanation of why it is necessary for her to preserve her good reputation (2002: 57-8).<sup>9</sup> As a queen, Phaedra finds herself in a double-bind situation. She knows that her suicide will bring the royal family to the brink of catastrophe. However, she is well aware that, in this case, the disclosure of her defiled name would endanger the reputation of her husband and children to an even greater extent. The fight against her feeling of love is a vain one. All her attempts to conceal it, to bear the madness nobly or to overcome it by self-control (*sophrosyne*) have failed (393-9). Victory in the struggle against Aphrodite or Eros is an illusion (Holmes 2010: 256-7). Therefore, one can only succumb to them (400-1), as we know from Helen in *Iliad* 3.399-420 and Sappho. That is why Phaedra has made the decision to die (401-2). As far as her aristocratic self-conception based on the value of *time*, honour and dignity is concerned, it is most revealing when she states that evil for the female sex originates from aristocratic nobility (409-10). As a queen, she has a special responsibility for *eukleia*. She concludes that suicide is the only way to prevent her from being detected, and thus bringing shame to her husband or to her own children. Only by eliminating herself can they live a glorious life as free citizens with the best reputation (420-3). At the very end of her reasoning, she summarises everything with this accurate image (428-30):

κακούς δὲ θνητῶν ἐξέφην' ὅταν τύχη,

<sup>8</sup> On the linguistic problems, see Mills 2002: 98-9. On the problem of a double *aidos*, see Lesky 1972: 324; Barrett 1964: 230-1 ad 385-6, 386-7; Roth 2015: 139, 141 ad 385-7; on *aidos* as pleasure, see Kovacs 1981; on *aidos* as sex, see Craik 1998; Roisman 1999: 79-106.

<sup>9</sup> For other opinions, see Mills 2002: 96-101. Craik 1993 and Roisman 1999: 47-107 argue for ambiguity and the discrepancy between virtue and appearance; Luschnig 1988: 42 believes that Phaedra speaks from the perspective of one who failed; Kovacs 1981: 291, on the contrary, pleads that Phaedra is confident that she will succeed.

προθεῖς κάτοπτρον ὥστε παρθένω νέα,  
 χρόνος· παρ' οἷσι μήποτ' ὀφθείην ἐγώ.

430

[But as for the base among mortals, they are exposed, late or soon, by Time, who holds up to them, as to a young girl, (430) a mirror. In their number may I never be found! (Trans. by Kovacs 1995)]

As though looking in a mirror to perceive her erotic self as well as the way she is erotically perceived by others – full of vanity, she wants to see herself as attractive as possible – she knows that bad character is discovered over time (Barrett 1964: 237-8 *ad* 428-30; Luschnig 1988; Goff 1990: 23-4).<sup>10</sup> Phaedra is the young girl whose infatuation now becomes evident. On stage, she has shown her id due to a decreasing tension on the part of her ego. Before her husband, who is still absent on a ritual mission, finds out everything, only death can preserve her honour as queen, wife and mother, as is dictated by her superego.

The dizzying alternation of opposing emotions and positions in an innovative poetics of fissures and ruptures continues. The Nurse, who has just appeared to be completely horrified, now becomes a mediator of love; in a sense, she is Aphrodite's representative on earth (433-524), whereas in the scene before she represented Artemis in her functions of chastity and midwifery, as well. She stresses that it is perfectly normal to love, even gods do this (437-58). If Phaedra resists it, she ultimately turns against the polytheistic system of belief (459-61). It is only a matter of hiding the ugly, she says; as a human being one has to be modest in one's demands and can consider oneself fortunate if one possesses at least a small surplus of good (462-72). Everything else is hubris. Phaedra ought to take courage for love (τόλμα δ' ἐρῶσα, 473; see 473-5). The Nurse then tries to find a cure for love sickness. Love magic, incantations and spells (εἰσὶν δ' ἐπωδαὶ καὶ λόγοι θελκτήριοι, 478) may aid in attracting the lover and making him compliant (476-9). Ultimately, however, the remedy above all others (as later propagated in romantic novels) is that love can only be cured with love.<sup>11</sup>

Women have their contrivances (*mechanai*, 481) to eliminate their disorientation and helplessness (*a-mechania*; cf. 162). Euripides is known for these kinds of clever solutions. After the Nurse's failure, Phaedra is bound to find a new one (688). Here, the Nurse proves to be a pragmatist (490-512). It is a matter of life and death. Phaedra does not need the noble-sounding words which she utters in her attempt to suppress

<sup>10</sup> See also Zeitlin 1996: 269-78, linking time, the mirror and the virgin; according to her, Phaedra provides the mirror image through which Hippolytus, the other maiden, can recognise the divided self. The view through the mirror corresponds to the theatre itself, in which illusion, deception and mimetic processes are operative.

<sup>11</sup> See Chariton, *Callirhoe* 6.7.3; Philetas in Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 2.7.7.

her feelings: what she needs is simply this man, Hippolytus (οὐ λόγων εὐσχημόνων / δεῖ σ' ἀλλὰ τάνδρός, 490-1). To the objection that all this is vile and disgusting (498-9), she replies that to yield to her feelings and be open to love is, if this saves her, better than to preserve her reputation (500-2), and, in any case, she has already embarked upon the path of sin. Now she ought to simply give way to love (507-8). Once again, the Nurse pretends to have a love philtre (φίλτρα μοι θελκτήρια ἔρωτος, 509-10) in the house in order to impress and seduce Phaedra (509-12) (Holmes 2010: 258-9). The Nurse pretends to need a token from the desired man, a word or a piece of clothing to unite them (512-15). It is another trick. The Nurse is already implicitly prefiguring her true intention. She has never planned on performing love magic with remedies, ointments, or drinks (χριστὸν ἢ ποτὸν τὸ φάρμακον, 516), but as a rational servant she intends to confront Hippolytus with the truth by use of semiotics, that is simply by words (Susanetti 2007: 72).<sup>12</sup> Phaedra is afraid of exactly this, which is why the Nurse adopts the pretext of the magic device and reassures her, saying that she will arrange this business indoors (516-24).

Time is bridged by the first *stasimon* (525-64), a song to Eros, a god who is represented as not being worshipped enough (525-44). The women then sing of two unfortunate status transitions (545-64): the first belongs to Iole, whom we know from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*; in Oechalia, Aphrodite drove the filly, that is the maiden not yet harnessed to the yoke of marriage (πῶλον ἄζυγα λέκτρων, 546), away from the house as though she were a Nymph or a Bacchant, and gave her to Hercules in an unhappy marriage (545-54). Likewise, Phaedra wished to tame even the Venetian fillies and to stay among them in her hysterical fit (230-1, 235) (Calame 1997: 241). In this way she had expressed her perceived return to the state of a girl before the wedding which she wishes to enter with Hippolytus. The *rite de passage* of Semele had ended in a similarly dramatic manner (555-64); as Zeus' lover, she perished in lightning and thunder, and begot Bacchus, the god of tragedy and of total dissolution. Kypris is a mighty power that rushes everywhere, so this includes towards Phaedra, too; Aphrodite flies like a bee (563). As we may recall, the bee of Hippolytus had been mentioned as a sign of chastity in Artemis' field of competence (77). Now it becomes the dangerous insect that can make everyone feel the sting of love. As is well known, Aphrodite uses Phaedra's raging love in order to cause Hippolytus' downfall.

Next we witness an eavesdropped conversation (565-600). Phaedra re-

<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the conjecture πλόκον ('curl') by Reiske in line 514, that was taken up by Diggle 1984 and Roth 2015: 164-5, instead of the transmitted λόγον ('word') should be rejected.

ports to the chorus that Hippolytus has been reviling the Nurse (581-2). Phaedra realises that the Nurse, as she had feared, simply told him everything, and that therein lay the cure. Suicide is now her last resort (596-600). The Nurse and Hippolytus appear from offstage in a *coup de théâtre* (601-15) (Zeitlin 1996: 261). He is aghast; she begs him to remain silent and reminds him of his oath to her (611). The exceedingly righteous young man surprises the spectators with a sophistic differentiation, which Aristophanes (*Ran.* 1471; cf. also 101-2; *Thesm.* 275) likened to parody: “My tongue swore, but my mind is not on oath” (612). The Nurse warns him against the consequences, but he counters her warning with a misogynous tirade against women (616-68). Clever women are the worst of all (640-3). He seeks purification (651-5) and ultimately feels himself bound by oath nonetheless (656-63).

Phaedra’s inner life is revealed. As a clever and powerful woman, she herself searches for a “craft” and the right words to “undo the noose” (τίν’ ἢ νῦν τέχνην ἔχομεν ἢ λόγον / σφαλεῖσαι κάθαρμα λύειν λόγου, 670-1). Hence, Phaedra herself weaves the complex intrigue and plot, culminating in her tying the noose for her own suicide, and has fastened a tablet with a written message to her body before the act, accusing Hippolytus of attacking her chastity (Zeitlin 1996: 225-32). Beforehand, however, she scolds the Nurse for having divulged everything, against her order (682-94). To die simply to preserve her honour no longer suffices. She requires a “new plan” (ἀλλὰ δεῖ με δὴ καινῶν λόγων, 688), because her imagined glory as ideal woman after death would be lost otherwise. The Nurse defends herself, saying that she had looked for a remedy (*pharmakon*) against the malady but had not found it. Her reasoning had been too simple and not wise enough. Again, she offers her help to save her queen (695-705). However, Phaedra has had enough of her, especially since she has a very clever plan herself (706-9).

To ensure its success, she binds the chorus, which is increasingly assuming the identity of some girls of Troezen, to an oath of silence, typically enough sworn on the name of Artemis (710-14). These various oaths, devised by Phaedra’s intelligence, sworn in opposite tensions, as ritual acts of religiosity, will ultimately ensure the success of Aphrodite’s insidious plan. In order to bridge time and transfer the pathos to the audience, the chorus project themselves to other realms in the second stasimon (732-75). The female dancers would prefer to escape reality as birds and be catapulted to the Adriatic shore, where the Heliades, tellingly enough as though in a second chorus, mourn the death of another young man called Phaethon, who is also a failed charioteer (732-41) (Nagy 2013: 569-71). After some references to the ultimate bounds of the sea (742-51), the chorus revert to the vessel that had once brought Phaedra from Crete to Athens and to the marital

chamber. Already burdened with excessive love for her family, she has become another victim of Aphrodite, and by committing suicide with a noose, she chooses honour (752-75).

### 5. Dead Characters Hanging from a Dead Body Versus Living Orality

At this point, the events in the second *epeisodion* follow in rapid succession (776-1101). Theseus, who has just returned home from a ritual mission as *theoros* (792), discovers his wife's suicide and finds her letter with the false accusation attached to her body (856-65, 874-86). The tablet, called *deltos*, which also denotes the female uterus (Zeitlin 1996: 245-7), contains a written message that tells of a false violence, which Theseus no longer wants to keep hidden (882-4).<sup>13</sup> In his proclamation, the message becomes fact by way of its verbal utterance.<sup>14</sup> Thus, a most chaste worshipper of Artemis, who has never even intended to touch a woman, becomes the rapist of his father's wife. At the same time, the subconsciously present erotic potential apparently emerges as almost true. In turn, the manic erotic woman, who has unceasingly fought against her urges, assumes the status of a victim and, furthermore also in a way loses her purity because of the accusation. That is the reason why her suicide is motivated on a surface level. For the people unaware of the real circumstances, the high-born queen preserves her good reputation. But, at the same time, for the spectators, the letter is also a means to perpetrate a bitter revenge for a woman who had been confronted with erotic rejection. She had suffered emotional distress and was hurt so much in her self-esteem that she felt sanctioned to kill the young man, the source of her pain and fractured ego. With this decision, the aristocratic lady of the royal household re-establishes her honour and name, also in respect of the kingdom. Furthermore, through the utterance of the written message, Hippolytus becomes his own father's sexual rival, which causes Theseus to call on his father Poseidon and appeal to the three curses the god had once promised him (887-90): may the god destroy Hippolytus. Theseus then thinks it is enough to drive his son out of the country. Aphrodite's plan works out since she knew exactly the character and emotional constitution of queen Phaedra.

In the following direct confrontation between father and son, Hippolytus declares his innocence (903-1101). Shocked and bewildered at the unbelievable accusation, which even evokes shame in his youthful soul, he seems to cover his face at first in a productive reference to *Hippolytus Ka-*

<sup>13</sup> On the *deltos* as a theatrical object endowed with agency, see Mueller 2016: 163-78.

<sup>14</sup> On signs and letters, see Segal 1992: esp. 425-44.

*lyptomenos* (946-7). Theseus, however, becomes increasingly furious, recalling the alleged self-righteousness of the ascetic sectarian who had abused his religion for sexual promiscuity (948-61):

σὺ δὴ θεοῖσιν ὡς περισσὸς ὢν ἀνὴρ  
 ξύνει; σὺ σῶφρων καὶ κακῶν ἀκήρατος;  
 οὐκ ἂν πιθοίμην τοῖσι σοῖς κόμποις ἐγὼ 950  
 θεοῖσι προσθεῖς ἀμαθίαν φρονεῖν κακῶς.  
 ἤδη νυν αὖχει καὶ δι' ἀψύχου βορᾶς  
 σίτοις καπήλευ' Ὀρφέα τ' ἄνακτ' ἔχων  
 βᾶκχευε πολλῶν γραμμάτων τιμῶν καπνούς·  
 ἐπεὶ γ' ἐλήφθης. τοὺς δὲ τοιούτους ἐγὼ 955  
 φεύγειν προφωνῶ πᾶσι· θηρεύουσι γὰρ  
 σεμνοῖς λόγοισιν, αἰσχρὰ μηχανώμενοι.  
 τέθνηκεν ἦδε· τοῦτό σ' ἐκώσωσιν δοκεῖς;  
 ἐν τῷδ' ἀλίσκη πλεῖστον, ὧ κάκιστε σύ·  
 ποῖοι γὰρ ὄρκοι κρείσσονες, τίνες λόγοι 960  
 τῆσδ' ἂν γένοιεντ' ἂν, ὥστε σ' αἰτίαν φυγεῖν;

[Are you, then, the companion of the gods, as a man beyond the common? Are you the chaste one, untouched by evil? (950) I will never be persuaded by your vauntings, never be so unintelligent as to impute folly to the gods. Continue then your confident boasting, take up a diet of greens and play the showman with your food, make Orpheus your lord and engage in mystic rites, holding the vapourings of many books in honour. (955) For you have been found out. To all I give the warning: avoid men like this. For they make you their prey with their high-holy-sounding words while they contrive deeds of shame. She is dead. Do you think this will save you? This is the fact that most serves to convict you, villainous man. (960) For what oaths, what arguments, could be more powerful than she is, to win you acquittal on the charge? (Trans. Kovacs 1995)]

In the poetics of fractions and contrasts, the traditionalist blindly trusts language as recorded in writing, even though he ought to rely on orality. This becomes evident when he accuses his own son of being a follower of the Orphics, who fostered the book culture that was emerging at that time. Much of this calls to mind an inverse image of Plato's famous criticism of literacy in *Phaedrus* (275a-6a), who once again made a plea in favour of orality one generation after Euripides (Szlezák 1985: 7-23). Plato argues that graphic characters are dead, whereas in oral conversation the interlocutor can speak in support of his argument upon request (275d-6a).<sup>15</sup> The dead characters now hang from her dead body, and Theseus takes them at face value. It is owing to these that he decides in haste and in anger to irrev-

<sup>15</sup> See Segal 1992: 436-41; on writing and the written word as “disembodied voice”, see Torrance 2013: 146-52; see also Susanetti 2007: 76-7.

ocably take revenge on his son without further trial and despite Hippolytus' oaths and protestations of innocence. In order to put this plan in practice, Theseus recurs to his father Poseidon who has promised to grant him three wishes (1025-31). Apparently, the inhumanity of another god close to the Attic king must be motivated by his being bound by a promise. A web of oaths covers the persons acting. Hippolytus, who at first does not feel bound by the oaths made to the Nurse (603-15), will thus, in exaggerated piety, keep them (cf. 656-8) and therefore go to his death. He even thinks of a disengagement from this vow, as he is now being destroyed by the gods (1060-1). But he realises that his revocation would be without success with Theseus (1062-3), since the latter puts his trust exclusively in the written word. An overly pure man is not to be trusted.

Hippolytus' cruel death, described in a long messenger speech in detail (1173-254) portrays the character of Poseidon, whom Aphrodite has designated to do the job for her. He is the god of horses and brings a giant wave within which the bull sacred to him is concealed (1212-14). We remember that Phaedra's mother had fallen in love with a bull in Crete and that horses symbolise the emotional part of the sexualised soul to be tamed. The horses of the charioteer shy away from the monster that stands for wild sexuality. The chariot is smashed to pieces on the beach and Hippolytus, "entangled in the reins, bound in a bond not easy to untie, was dragged along, smashing his head against the rocks and rending his flesh" (1236-9). His name (*Hippo-lytos*) becomes a program of action, since he is 'unbound, dissolved and destroyed by horses'. The messenger ends his speech by asserting that the young and noble man cannot be guilty, "not even if the whole female sex should hang themselves and fill with writing all the pine-wood that grows upon Mount Ida" (1250-4). At this point Artemis interferes as *dea ex machina* and explains the true circumstances (1283-312). Theseus should have prayed to Poseidon to reverse his former wish. But Aphrodite's will in regard of the young man is stronger, since he must fulfil his function and complete his *rite de passage*. According to this logic, Artemis must yield to Aphrodite.

## 6. Conclusion

Aphrodite has reached her goal. As the goddess of love, she knows everything about the emotional, erotic and social constitution of her victims, Hippolytus and Phaedra. The queen serves as her medium and instrument to take revenge on the young man who is totally attached to Artemis and refuses to pay any attention to Aphrodite. Phaedra as Aphrodite's tool in the plot is a perfect mixture of manic love and social control. In pur-

suit of his highly intellectual program and his dramatic poetics of fissures, ruptures and cracks, Euripides highlights opposing positions and attitudes and plays out their tensions in a *palintropos harmonia*. Therefore, Euripides makes use of this fundamental tension between erotic frenzy and aristocratic self-control in this second version of the myth. He weaves these conflicting elements into a perfect plot in an ingenious concatenation. As a notorious lover, Phaedra simultaneously struggles against revealing her emotions while at the same time counteracting her *sophrosyne* which she implements according to the social norms in terms of class and gender. Thus, in fighting against her emotions, she also longs for the person she loves. It is as if the id broke through the ego-control that is constituted by the norms of the superego. Under the circumstances of a shame culture, as soon as her love is revealed to her stepson, her only exit is suicide. To hide her feelings from the public and maintain the façade of an honourable wife and a responsible queen, she weaves a complicated intrigue that culminates in binding the noose to hang herself and attaching a written message to her dead body, accusing Hippolytus of a sexual attack on her chaste purity. The graphic, 'dead' signs will cause his death, as they obviate a debate and a test. They serve as a new form of proof that destroys true evidence.

In this highly intellectual program, the antithetic oppositions collapse, and the spectators witness a contrived drama into whose eddy of emotions they are sucked. Thus, it becomes evident that a partial avowal of sympathy for either Phaedra as a proto-feminist heroine, or one for Hippolytus as a pure religious devotee are hardly productive. Euripides did not plan to bring naturalistic portraits of characters on stage or to dictate ways of living, but rather to display figures of psychological depth in contrived and highly exaggerated constructions of action with their suffering on stage.

The culturally real and psychosocial as well as socio-anthropological basis of this tragedy is the artful concatenation of two figures who are involved in male and female rites of passage. Under these scenarios of betwixt and between, both Phaedra and Hippolytus are shown as problematic and excessive figures. For a long time, critics have uttered statements in favour or against them, biased by Christian-puritanical or feminist ideas. However, Euripides makes hypersexuality and asexuality, hubris and noble ideas, drive and repression meet and collapse on stage. In this tragedy, all is radically modern and highly innovative. Therefore, Euripides' Phaedra became the model of the modern woman in her constitution of *dystropos harmonia*, torn apart by various constraints, social demands or standards and her own desires as well as her will of self-realisation.

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GUIDO AVEZZÙ\*

## The (Frustrated?) Regality of Electra

Abstract

The story of Electra, the ‘unwedded’ princess – *alektros*: ‘excluded from the marriage-bed (*lektron*)’ – is symptomatic of a sort of inversion of the dynastic schemes: she is not destined to ensure the continuation of her own or of any other dynasty, but to cherish the memory of her father. Yet, according to Pausanias (second century CE), she becomes the custodian of the sceptre that was the sign of Agamemnon’s kingship, an object that implies a complex symbolism, in the first place dynastic but also, in Sophocles’ *Electra*, sexual and generative. However, while the Sophoclean Electra was excluded from dynastic schemes, Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi* and Euripides’ *Electra* variously focused on the preservation of kingship and its transmission to the legitimate heir. In the earlier of these two tragedies Electra suggests, albeit indirectly, a vision of her role that does not fit in with the irrelevance to which she seems confined; but when we come to Euripides’ play we can actually see the failure of the dynastic expectations with which she burdens her brother. This essay will be concerned with Electra not so much as a mythical heroine but rather as a tragic character, and will consider those elements not always in agreement with the most time-honoured conception of this character, or those that are at least considered problematic – elements which in the various ‘Oresteiai’ and particularly in Aeschylus’ and Euripides’ enable us to discern the distinguishing features of the various Electras and their expectations about the restoration of legitimate kingship.

Keywords: Electra; Orestes; kingship; *Oresteia*; Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*; Sophocles’ *Electra*; Euripides’ *Electra*

### 1. The Princess and the Palace

In the interpretative tradition concerning the ‘Oresteiai’ (for practical reasons I have adopted this term for the three fifth-century BCE tragedies centred on the revenge of Orestes: Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*, and the two *Electras* by Sophocles and Euripides),<sup>1</sup> and particularly concerning the character of Electra, it is taken for granted that Agamemnon’s daughter is sustained by

<sup>1</sup> Following the evidence in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* 1124, Aeschylus’ tragedy may actually have been called *Oresteia*, a title then given to the whole trilogy. Regarding the possible meanings of this testimony see Kenneth Dover (Aristophanes 1993: 332).

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a twofold purpose, long before she is able to make any move to achieve it: this is her revenge against the usurpers and the salvage of dynastic legitimacy. She is seen as the depository of the memories of her ancestors and their lineage, and, at the same time, it is taken for granted that her participation in the murder of her mother, different accounts of which are given in all three plays, moderates Orestes' guilt, inversely proportional to how far she was involved, and therefore greatest in Aeschylus.<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly, "[t]he interpretation that views Orestes as decisive axiomatically makes Electra weak and unimportant" (Auer 2006: 251); but regarding this, it is remarkable that Sophocles' tragedy, in which Electra is, so to say, expropriated from her role as avenger, is the very one where her part is much bigger than in the others.<sup>3</sup> In the other two 'Oresteiai', those by Aeschylus and Euripides, it is possible to observe that the interaction between the brother and sister takes on specific characteristics almost imperceptibly involving the problem of kingship, at a level which is both personal and also dynastic, not to say genealogical. This suggests that we should refrain from postulating an all-inclusive 'mythic' narration. To a 'horizontal' appraisal that places side by side indiscriminately the 'witnesses' offered by the verbal mimesis implemented in different dramatic texts and in the various situations presented in each one, we should prefer an analysis of the functional interaction between the words of the discourse on power and its legitimation in a 'vertical' dimension, that is to say both within the dramatic sequence of the individual plays and in the successive reprises of the same story. Thus I intend to consider how, thanks to staging and dialogue, the Athenian audience was able to perceive Electra's attitude towards regality, something which had been legitimate in her father's case, and would also be so in her brother's, while now, usurped by two adulterous regicides, has been overturned by a crisis of legitimacy. Such a concept of Electra's mindset is difficult to reconcile with the stereotypical idea of this character, and also highlights, in this respect as well, her frustrated desire for protagonism in the *Choephoroi*, in which her role in the revenge is more marginal. This surmise, albeit a tentative one, is centred particularly on Aeschylus and Euripides, and has its roots in the epic tradition – with which the audience was completely *au fait* – considered in conjunction with the distinctive features of the individual plays which were sinking in, entrenching themselves and, in various different ways, being reshaped in people's theatre-going, during the recurring religious festivals. To refer to a well-known example, the quality of the relationship between Electra and the

<sup>2</sup> As Ormand has opportunely observed (1999: 60-1).

<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus assigns her about 15% of spoken lines and Euripides roughly 33%, but Sophocles gives her more than 40%.

royal palace is immediately evident to the spectator simply from the scenography: in the *Choephoroi* (458 BCE) she declares herself to be “what a slave is” (135: ἀντίδουλος); words that albeit they are symptomatic of the distress caused by feeling she has been “purchased” (πεπραμέν[η]), nonetheless confirm her status in the context of the Palace, in comparison with the condition of her brother, “outcast from his properties” (135-6: ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων / φεύγων).<sup>4</sup> In the Palace her role is made clear in the celebration which opens the tragedy, when she presides over the funeral rites desired by her mother to exorcise her own nightmares, and Orestes’ plan of vengeance will show that she can still move easily about the Palace.<sup>5</sup> Her brother is already able to recognise her as soon as she appears, even if he hesitates very slightly at first: “[s]urely, *I think I see* / Electra, my own sister” (16-17).<sup>6</sup> In the context of the performance it is irrelevant that as she is in mourning attire, “she is not distinct from the group because of any special features”, and so we are not able to deduce, with Madeleine Jones, that “she is differentiated because [Orestes] differentiates her, and by virtue of this recognition he sets her apart” (2012: 137). Instead the factor effectively determining her recognition, by Orestes and the audience, is the leadership she assumes in the ritual itself, when she initiates the celebration with the appropriate emphasis: “Attendant women . . . / What shall I say, as I pour out these outpourings / of sorrow?” (84-7).<sup>7</sup> These are spoken lines (not chanted or sung), and in the same way she will speak her opening words in Euripides’ *Oresteia*, though differently from how she does in Spohocles’, and yet they possess the same characteristics as the openings of hymns, isolating her from the rest of the group. As Janette Auer has noted,

in this important passage of character composition, it is not inexperience and innocence that we are meant to see in Electra. The error of the critics is to equate a question with hesitation, and this is an unjustified simplification. . . . Electra’s address to the chorus contains aspects of ritual prayer and rhetorical leading questions. The “What am I to say?” or “What prayer shall

<sup>4</sup> Electra underlines this motif in her lament in Euripides’ play, 130-5.

<sup>5</sup> 554-5: “Simple to tell them. My sister here must go inside. / I charge her to keep secret what we have agreed” (ἀπλοῦς ὁ μῦθος. τήνδε μὲν στείχειν ἔσω· / αἰνῶ δὲ κρύπτειν τάσδε συνθήκας ἐμάς), and 579-80: “Electra, keep a careful eye on all within / the house, so that our plans will hold together” (νῦν οὖν σὺ μὲν φύλασσε τὰν οἴκῳ καλῶς, / ὅπως ἂν ἀρτίκολλα συμβαίῃ τάδε). For Aeschylus I follow the text edited by Denys L. Page (Aeschylus 1972), also adopted in Alexander F. Garvie’s edition of the *Choephoroi* (Aeschylus 1986). The translations are those of Richmond Lattimore (Aeschylus 2013), with occasional slight modifications which I indicate.

<sup>6</sup> Καὶ γὰρ Ἥλέκτραν δοκῶ / στείχειν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμήν (emphases, here and in the translation, are mine).

<sup>7</sup> Διμοαὶ γυναῖκες . . . / τί φῶ χέουσα τάσδε κηδεῖους χοάς;

I make?" formula in literary prayers . . . often used as a self-addressed question is here used dramatically as a series of questions posed to the chorus rather than to herself, and has its origin in the Greek concern with making the right prayer in the correct language. (2006: 254)

In Sophocles, however, she leads the life of an indigent (dressed meanly, eating with the slaves). She leaves the palace at 78 avoiding Aegisthus' surveillance,<sup>8</sup> and does not return except for the brief interval of the third choral *stasimon* (1383-97), but for almost the whole play stays on the threshold,<sup>9</sup> from where she interacts at a distance with her brother during the matricide. Sophocles' 'Oresteia' does not end with the conventional *exeunt omnes*, and even the finale contributes, perhaps crucially, to the delineation of her character.<sup>10</sup> Hofmannsthal fully understood this and developed it in his *Elektra* "freely adapted from Sophocles", as is attested in his *Aufzeichnung* dated 17 July, 1904:

This Electra suddenly transformed into a different character. Suddenly I conceived the ending too; she cannot live longer, after the blow has been struck, her life and bowels must overflow, just as life and bowels overflow from the drone, together with his fertilising spine, as soon as he has fertilised the queen bee.<sup>11</sup>

The mysterious finale is one of the several signs that Sophocles' *Electra* is really a 'tragedy of Electra' – perhaps the only one? – and not an 'Oresteia'.

However, as is well-known, it is Euripides who offers the extreme solution. His *Electra* lives on the heights of the Argolis, in a hut before which the whole of the action unfolds. As Enrico Medda observes, this "mental scenography" means that *Electra* "perceives her condition as being one of actual 'exile from her father's house' fully comparable to that suffered by her brother" (2013: 97-101). The three situations configure distinct proxemic degrees of relationship regarding the distance of the character from the Palace and its inhabitants, from the Chorus and from Orestes, who returns

<sup>8</sup> As her mother admonishes her: 516-18.

<sup>9</sup> On her relationship with the Palace and its interior, which has frequently been discussed, see Medda 2013: 85-8, with bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> In the finale "Electra's movements cannot be recovered with certainty" (so writes Patrick Finglass, Sophocles 2007: 549; see Francis Dunn's commentary in Sophocles 2019: 363 and, above all, the discussion in Medda 2013: 96, with bibliography).

<sup>11</sup> "Sogleich verwandelte sich die Gestalt dieser Electra in eine andere. Auch das Ende stand sogleich da: daß sie nicht mehr weiterleben kann, daß, wenn der Streich gefallen ist, ihr Leben und ihr Eingeweide ihr entstürzen muß, wie der Drohne, wen sie die Königin befruchtet hat, mit dem befruchtenden Stachel zugleich Eingeweide und Leben entstürzen" (Hofmannsthal 1980: 452; my translation). See Jan Marten Bremer's excellent paper (1991), unfortunately ignored by most.

to the Palace in Aeschylus and in Sophocles, but in Euripides prudently chooses to keep his distance.<sup>12</sup> Another gradual semantic movement regarding the distribution of stage, back-stage and off-stage spaces concerns Agamemnon's tomb. In the *Choephoroi* it is front-stage and close to the Palace, in Sophocles<sup>13</sup> it is off-stage but nearby, in Euripides it is far from the stage and probably from the Palace, too; and in any case Electra only visits it in the *Choephoroi*. Every genetic hypothesis must always be carefully considered;<sup>14</sup> it is, however, legitimate to postulate that these variations conferred differing tonalities on the role played by the character in each of the plays.

## 2. The Unwedded Princess

An ancient and fanciful etymology avers that the name Electra (Ἠλέκτρα ~ ἄλεκτρος, that is, excluded from the marriage-bed, λέκτρον) conveys the situation of this 'unwedded' royal daughter.<sup>15</sup> In the poetic tradition (Pindar and the three major tragedians) her destiny will actually be that of marrying her cousin, Pylades, Orestes' comrade and brother-in-arms. However, the mythographers, usually so generous with their information, make no mention of any children they may have had. Electra, who in Aeschylus aspires to be "more temperate / of heart (*sophonestera*) than [her] mother" (*Cho.* 140-1), and for this very reason openly blames her mother for her behaviour, and especially for her sexual proclivities, in Sophocles is pitied by her brother, who has not yet recognized her, since she is "without husband (*anympfos*) and ill-fated" (*El.* 1183). Here she is aware of the destiny of old maids who are excluded from their family heritage, which will be her

<sup>12</sup> After paying homage at his father's tomb, "evading the tyrants who now rule this land" Orestes proposes not to set foot "inside the city walls, but [has] come with two joint aims to this land's borders": to meet [his] sister but above all "to escape to another region should anyone look at [him] and recognize [him]" (93-7: λαθῶν τυράννους οἱ κρατοῦσι τῆσδε γῆς. / καὶ τειχέων μὲν ἐντὸς οὐ βαίνω πόδα, / δυοῖν δ' ἄμιλλαν ξυντιθεὶς ἀφικόμην / πρὸς τέρμονας γῆς τῆσδ', ἴν' ἐκβάλω πόδα / ἄλλην ἐπ' αἴαν εἰ μέ τις γνοίη σκοπῶν . . .). For the text and the translation of Euripides' *Electra* I follow Martin Cropp (Euripides 2013).

<sup>13</sup> See Medda 2013: 83-5.

<sup>14</sup> For example, as is the case of Aeschylus dependence on Stesichorus regarding Agamemnon's tomb (March 1987: 91, taken up again by Swift 2015). The number of these relationships is remarked upon shrewdly by Eduard Fraenkel à propos of Electra's very first entrance in Sophocles: "It is as if Sophocles were saying, 'I haven't forgotten the *Coephoroe*, but I'm doing things differently'" (1962: 221).

<sup>15</sup> More probably the name has its origins in the word 'amber' (ἤλεκτρον) and 'beaming sun, fire' (ἠλέκτωρ; see Condello 2010: 16n21), but this etymon has had no effect on the three major tragedians.

own fate and that of her sister, Chrysothemis, if their father's death is not avenged (959-62):

ΕΛΗΚΤΡΑ ἦ πάρεστι μὲν στένειν  
 πλούτου πατρῷου κτῆσιν ἔστερημένη,  
 πάρεστι δ' ἀλγεῖν ἐς τοσόνδε τοῦ χρόνου  
 ἄλεκτρα γηράσκουσαν ἀνυμέναιά τε.

[El. Now you must sorrow that you have been deprived / of our father's wealth; and you must grieve also / that you are growing older, to this point, / without a marriage (lit.: suffering a life without a husband, *alektra*, and without marriage, *anhymenaia*).]<sup>16</sup>

This awareness was already apparent in the *Choephoroi* (486-8; see below, p. 95). Instead, in Euripides' play, Electra has been wedded to a peasant, a *mésalliance* which has been forced on her to stop her from giving birth to claimants of "Tantalus' ancient sceptre" now possessed by Aegisthus (11-13). The social disparity between the Peasant and his wife means he feels a reverential shame towards the princess and their union is unfruitful, which however is not a cause for regret on Electra's part, for evident reasons of status (43-9). If we relinquish the idea of frequenting the less conventional realms of psychology, we are prevented from following Hendrike Freud who is of the opinion that "[Electra] disparages her husband (according to Euripides)" and that she "cuts her hair as if, in her fantasy, she is a man" (2010: 65). We must be aware that Electra's many and various appearances on the stage, before different audiences and in different situations, generates a wide range of impressions; however, in front of the Athenian public, Euripidean Electra finds her husband to be "equal to the gods for [his] friendship" (67: ἴσο[ς] θεοῖσιν φίλο[ς]), the "healer of [her] evil plight" (69-70: συμφορᾶς κακῆς ἰατρό[ς]).<sup>17</sup> In the following lines, Electra never refers to herself as a wife nor to the Peasant as her husband – before taking his leave, it is he who reminds her with veiled reproof what wonders a careful "wife" (422: γυνή) can perform, and this will be the only time this role is mentioned with reference to Electra. But, while testifying to the partnership between the couple which has contributed to gaining for this *Electra* the reductive definition of bourgeois drama, it draws attention to a personal, freely chosen reinterpretation of *philia*, in spite of Aegisthus' hav-

<sup>16</sup> For Sophocles' text and translation I follow H. Lloyd Jones, Sophocles 1994.

<sup>17</sup> Roisman and Luschnig rightly comment that "Electra's enthusiasms are always too strong" (Euripides 2011: 101). Here we find a variation on the theme of the human who saves, in the same way as Zeus *soter*; in comparison to the *loci paralleli* which are commonly appended (Hom. *Od.* 8.467-8, Eur. *HF* 521-2, *IA* 973-4), Sophocles' *OT* 31 (the Priest to Oedipus) is much more pertinent: "it is not because [I] rank you with the gods" etc. (θεοῖσι μὲν νυν οὐκ ἰσοῦμένον σ' ἐγὼ κτλ.; trans. Lloyd Jones, Sophocles 1994).

ing enforced the match (71-6). She is definitely *not* a man, she shows this on at least two occasions: she is jealous of the children Clytaemnestra has had with Aegisthus (62), and sets a trap for her mother by pretending to have given birth, thus showing she is competing with her. Besides, at the height of her diatribe over Aegisthus' corpse, after listing his crimes towards Agamemnon and his children, she recalls the dead man's amatory feats, making him seem guilty towards Clytaemnestra too, and at the same time exhibiting her aversion to them.<sup>18</sup> The idea of an Electra who is ambiguously challenging her mother for Aegisthus' attention, like that of a Clytaemnestra leading a life punctuated by petty infidelities both committed and endured, so that she no longer even recalls what binds her to Aegisthus, are modern developments, from Suarès to O'Neill and Jean-Pierre Giraudoux, from Yourcenar to Varoujean;<sup>19</sup> but it cannot be denied that Euripides' Electra transposes on to her mother's new husband the accusations that Clytaemnestra herself had uttered against Agamemnon, immediately after she had killed him, that is, to have been "the soother of all the Chryseids under the walls of Ilium" (Ag. 1439: Χρυσηίδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ' Ἴλιῳ [my translation]). Electra's "similarity to Clytaemnestra", suggested by Jean-Pierre Vernant in support of his theory that "she is the mother – in truth the only mother – of Orestes" (2006: 168), pertains to the Sophoclean Electra, rather than the Euripidean.<sup>20</sup> In Euripides' tragedy the conflict between the two characters may be seen, more problematically, as part of Electra's profound unease at sustaining the part of a married woman: as she is still a virgin she feels out of place among the women of the Chorus who first try to involve her in the celebrations for Hera, and then in their rejoicing for the murder of Aegisthus (respectively at 167-21, and 859-799). She criticizes her mother for her devotion to her husband Aegisthus instead of to her children,<sup>21</sup> but this reproof is not so much an expression of jealousy as the

<sup>18</sup> "[A] subject unseemly for a maiden to mention" (945-6: παρθένῳ γὰρ οὐ καλὸν λέγειν). "Is she bitter about her status", wonder Roisman and Luschignig, "or is she being prissy in her moral superiority to her fallen enemy?" (Euripides 2011: 204).

<sup>19</sup> I am referring to André Suarès, *La tragédie d'Électre et d'Oreste* (1905), Eugene O'Neill, *Mourning becomes Electra* (1931), Jean-Pierre Giraudoux, *Électre* (1965; the revision of *Électre* by his father Jean, 1935), Marguerite Yourcenar, *Électre ou La chute des masques* (1954), Jean-Jacques Varoujean, *La ville en haut de la colline* (1969); but the list could easily be added to. On these plays see, individually and in order, Condello 2010: 121-2, 117-21, 142-3, 129-31, 143-4.

<sup>20</sup> Concerning the maternal role Electra plays regarding her brother cf. Soph. *El.* 1145-8; for the affinities between the characters of mother and daughter Vernant refers appropriately to Soph. *El.* 351, 397, 401, 983, 997, 1019-20 (2006: 445nn49-50).

<sup>21</sup> 265: "Women are friends to their *men* . . . not their children" (γυναῖκες ἀνδρῶν . . . οὐ παίδων φίλαι). I prefer to translate this *andres* as "men", rather than "husbands" with Cropp; at 1036 and 1052, in contexts connotated as matrimonial, Euripides has re-

perception of something she is not yet able to understand. Her mother will have no success when she tries to gain her daughter's sympathy for the point of view of a married woman, as she does, for example, at 1013-14 and 1032-40:

Κλ. λέξω δέ· καίτοι δόξ' ὅταν λάβῃ κακὴ  
 γυναῖκα, γλώσση πικρότης ἔνεστί τις·  
 (1013-14)

[Cl. Mind you, when bad repute takes hold of a woman, people tend to find her speaking offensive. But that in my opinion is not as it should be.]

ἐπὶ τοῖσδε τοίνυν καίπερ ἠδίκημένη  
 οὐκ ἠγριώμην οὐδ' ἄν ἔκτανον πόσιν.  
 ἀλλ' ἦλθ' ἔχων μοι μαινάδ' ἔνθεον κόρη  
 λέκτροις τ' ἐπεισέφρηκε, καὶ νύμφα δύο  
 ἐν τοῖσιν αὐτοῖς δώμασιν κατεῖχ' ὁμοῦ.  
 μῶρον μὲν οὖν γυναῖκες, οὐκ ἄλλως λέγω· 1035  
 ὅταν δ', ὑπόντος τοῦδ', ἀμαρτάνη πόσις  
 τᾶνδον παρώσας λέκτρα, μιμῆσθαι θέλει  
 γυνὴ τὸν ἄνδρα χᾶτερον κτᾶσθαι φίλον.  
 κᾶπειτ' ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ ψόγος λαμπρύνεται,  
 οἱ δ' αἴτιοι τῶνδ' οὐ κλύουσ' ἄνδρες κακῶς. 1040  
 (1032-40)

[Cl. Although I have been wronged (*scil.*: by Iphigenia's killing) I did not turn savage nor would I have killed my husband. But he came back with a raving god-possessed girl, imported her to our bed, and tried to keep two brides together in the same house! Now women are a foolish lot, I don't deny it; but when, that being the case, a husband errs and rejects his wedded wife, the woman is apt to follow his pattern and take another partner. And then the censure of it makes us notorious, while the men responsible for it don't get a bad name.]

It is not fortuitous that the Chorus leader steals the march, as it were, from Electra: even before Electra has begun her accusatory harangue, it will be she who liquidates Clytaemnestra with a peremptory condemnation motivated by the common experience of the Women of the Chorus (1051-4):

Χο. δίκαι' ἔλεξας, ἡ δίκη δ' αἰσχρῶς ἔχει.  
 γυναῖκα γὰρ χρὴ πάντα συγχωρεῖν πόσει,  
 ἥτις φρενήρης· ἧ δὲ μὴ δοκεῖ τάδε,  
 οὐδ' εἰς ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐμῶν ἦκει λόγων.

[Cho. There's justice in what you've said, but the justice is shameful. A

course to the term *posis*, which more commonly identifies a legitimate husband.

woman should go along with her husband (*posis*) in everything, if she's sensible; one who does not think so does not even count in my reckonings.]

But it is more important that Electra's condition of *alektros* – inasmuch as in the *Choephoroi* it is implicit in her very name, in Sophocles' *Electra* for her consciousness of her own destiny,<sup>22</sup> and in Euripides' because she was forced into a sterile matrimony – engages her dynastic awareness to a different extent in each play, and influences her aspirations in this sphere accordingly. Euripides' Electra's desire to restore the ancient dynasty is much stronger than her brother's; this is the more conspicuous as she expresses a total repudiation of the court, execrates its lifestyle, and manipulates its practices and dynamics while plotting how to achieve her revenge.<sup>23</sup> This Electra has involved the Chorus in her heroic vision: she acknowledges her "courageous" brother, who would never have deigned to arrive in Argos in secret,<sup>24</sup> using the same adjective (526: εὐθαρσής, literally 'with good confidence')<sup>25</sup> with which Agamemnon defines himself in Aeschylus' *Ag.* 930: an epithet predicting the successful conclusion to an undertaking that, as far as Electra knows, has not yet begun and perhaps never will. Blinded by heroic prejudice, she stumbles into a sort of irony, relative to the dramatic intrigue. And into another irony she is followed by the Chorus. Electra's capacity to engage marginal subjects, such as the Peasant and the countrywomen of the Chorus, in heroic memories, is remarkable. From the women surrounding her she obtains animated replies, perfectly in line with her point of view, both in the *parodos* (432-86), a dazzling narrative song where Agamemnon's expedition is re-evoked,<sup>26</sup> and in the brief choric song of joy, after Orestes' recognition (585-95), in which intertextual links are recognizable both with the exordium of the *Agamemnon* and with the announcement by the Herald of Agamemnon's victorious arrival (*Ag.* 522-3). Thus, Euripides' Chorus:

ΧΟ. ἔμολες ἔμολες, ὦ, χρόνιος ἀμέρα,  
κατέλαμψας, ἔδειξας ἐμφανῆ  
πόλει πυρσόν . . .  
(583-7)

<sup>22</sup> See Ormand's chapter "Electra, never a bride" (1999: 60-78).

<sup>23</sup> A concise comparison of the revenge plots in the three 'Oresteiai', with bibliography, may be found in Avezzù 2016: 65-9, 84.

<sup>24</sup> It is the same (false) premise as that assumed by the Electra of the *Coephoroi*, not less mistaken here as there, because in order to avenge himself Orestes is in any case obliged to act in secret; indeed Sophocles makes him articulate this necessity: "I think, no word that brings you gain is bad" (*El.* 61: δοκῶ μὲν, οὐδὲν ῥῆμα σὺν κέρδει κακόν).

<sup>25</sup> Thus Fraenkel in Aeschylus 1950, vol. 1: 147.

<sup>26</sup> See Csapo 2009.

[CHO. You have come, O, you have come, long awaited *day*, / *you have shown bright and clear* / to our city *a beacon light* . . .]

and here are the Watchman and the Herald of *Agamemnon* (8-9, 22-3; and 522-3, respectively):

ΦΥΛΑΞ καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τὸ σύμβολον,  
 αὐγὴν πυρός . . .  
 . . .  
 ὦ χαῖρε λαμπτήρ νυκτός, ἡμερήσιον  
 φάος πιφάσκων . . .  
 (8-9, 22-3)

[WA. I wait; to read the meaning in that *beacon light*, / *a blaze of fire* (to carry out of Troy the rumor / and outcry of its capture) . . . / Oh hail, *blaze of the darkness*, *harbinger of day's* / *shining* . . .]

ΚΗΡΥΞ ἤκει γὰρ ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων  
 καὶ τοῖσδ' ἅπασιν κοινὸν Ἀγαμέμνων ἄναξ.  
 (522-3)

[HE. He comes, Lord *Agamemnon*, bearing *light in gloom* / to you, and to all that are assembled here.]<sup>27</sup>

It is a dual irony: the two Aeschylean loci, both bearing a high degree of symbolic meaning, referred to the victory over a foreign enemy, but in the intertextual reprise, in which they assume a lyrical tenor lacking in the original, they allude to the eventual success in a dynastic struggle; and the original message – ambiguous because the light heralding *Agamemnon's* arrival was part of *Clytaemnestra's* plot to kill him – is taken at its face value and inspires an exultation which is absent in the other two 'Oresteiai'. This last ironic overturning assigns to *Electra* something that in *Agamemnon*, ever-present in Euripides' memory, was related to the role of her mother. Besides, it has the result that the heroic idea, with which she has infected her rural interlocutors, is redirected towards the palace that is no longer of any relevance to her, just as she is no longer of any relevance to it.<sup>28</sup>

"No longer a virgin", only according to the rumours which have reached *Orestes* following her counterfeit wedding invented by the playwright (98-9), *Electra* repeatedly defines herself *parthenos* ('young girl, virgin') and

<sup>27</sup> Emphases in the Greek text and the translation are mine.

<sup>28</sup> From this point of view, Euripides' *Electra* is, of the three 'Oresteiai', the only one that right from the exordium (the first lines of the Peasant: 1-7) maximizes heroic memories which, absent in *Choephoroi*, in Sophocles are reduced to the minimum, appearing only when a proemial homage is paid to *Orestes* for his high-sounding heritage (1-2).

is said to be so by others as well.<sup>29</sup> Here and in the *Choephoroi*, her marital status is intertwined with her heritage; if the Euripidean Peasant can say he has married “the daughter of wealthy men”, and for this very reason is ashamed to abuse (*hybrizein*) her (45-6), the Aeschylean heroine, on the other hand, had complained of being excluded from her own dowry: immediately after the funeral lament she avows her intention to dedicate the first fruits of it on her father’s tomb (486-8):

ΕΛ. κἀγὼ χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας  
οἴσω πατρῶων ἐκ δόμων γαμηλίους,  
πάντων δὲ πρῶτον τόνδε πρεσβεύσω τάφον.

[EL. I too out of my own full dowry then shall bring / libations for my bridal from my father’s house. / Of all tombs, yours shall be the lordliest in my eyes.]

In Sophocles too – as has already been pointed out – the virginal state and the exclusion from the family inheritance (*ploutos*) are one and the same thing. But the Euripidean Electra shows no regret for her inheritance; from this point of view, her choice is the most drastic one – and we have already seen this. However, as she is *alektros* her life is not projected towards a dynastic future – either her own or that of her descendents, at Mykenae or elsewhere – but rather backwards to the past; that is, specifically, towards her father Agamemnon, the dead king, whose murder has violently interrupted the legitimate line of transmission of sovereignty. This, the poets and mythographers tell us, and the Athenian audience were well aware of it, will not go to Orestes, but to his son Tisamenus.<sup>30</sup> Clytaemnestra is that queen who in the *Agamemnon* the Chorus apostrophize as “βασίλεια” (84), wielding authority herself in person (κρατεῖ), and thus appropriating a male prerogative, as she is gifted with a “male strength of heart” (γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον . . . κέαρ);<sup>31</sup> Electra, her daughter, seems, on the contrary, to be destined to play a very secondary part, becoming the wife of her cousin Pylades, king of Krisa in Phocis, at the foot of Delphi. And yet as a tradition related by Pausanias (second century CE) would have it, Electra, following her husband, took the sceptre (or the spear) of Agamemnon with

<sup>29</sup> Eur. *El.* 44, 51, 311, 945.

<sup>30</sup> In the mythographic sources the mother of Tisamenos is either Hermione, the daughter of Menelaus and Helen, and thus a cousin to Orestes, or Erigone, daughter of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra, so in this way his half-sister. On this tangle of family relationships at the end of the line of Tantalus see Pseudo-Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.8.2-3, *Bibl. Epitome* of Book 4.6.28; Pausanias, *Graeciae Descriptio* 2.18.6-8, 3.1.5-6, 7.1.7; Hyginus *Fabulae* 124; for Erigone see Ps.-Apollod. 6.25; Paus. 2.18.6; Hyg. 122.

<sup>31</sup> Ag. 10-11.

her into the territory of Phocis.<sup>32</sup> The sceptre, that would have been discovered at Panopeus, on the border between Phocis and Boeotia, was identified with the one forged by Hephaistos for Zeus and given by the god to Pelops, then passed to Atreus, Thyestes, and finally to Agamemnon (up to this point *Ilias* 2.101-8), but stolen from the rightful king and his heirs by Aegisthus, who did not just take the sceptre<sup>33</sup> but everything else pertaining to the sovereignty of the murdered king: his throne,<sup>34</sup> his robes,<sup>35</sup> his chariot,<sup>36</sup> and his woman. This sceptre is at the heart of Clytaemnestra's nightmare in Sophocles' *Electra* (419-23): back from the underworld to unite once more with his wife, Agamemnon "plant[s]" (the verb is πῆγνυμι, also used when planting a sword or a spear in a living body) his "staff . . . beside the hearth (*ephestion*)", and it bursts into vigorous bloom, "and from it grew up a fruitful bough, which overshadowed all the land of the Mycenaeans".<sup>37</sup> As Jean-Pierre Vernant points out, "the sexual symbolism (Agamemnon planting the seed of the young shoot in Hestia's bosom, where it will sprout) is inseparable in this instance from the social symbolism".<sup>38</sup>

### 3. *Electra* and her Sisters.

"I have three daughters in my well-built palace: Chrysothemis, Laodike, and Iphianassa" – so says Agamemnon in the *Ilias*, when he proposes the wedding contract with which he wishes to resolve the conflict with Achilles.<sup>39</sup> *Electra*, destined to become the most celebrated of the daughters of the *lord of men* and *king of kings*, is unknown to Homer and to the *Cyprian Tales*.<sup>40</sup> She appears for the first time in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue*

<sup>32</sup> Paus. 9.40.11-12. That the spear is a symbol of power as much as the *skeptron*, besides being attested by Iustinus 43.3.3, can be inferred from the earliest depictions of the murder of Agamemnon (Prag 1985: tavv. 1 e 2a; Davies 1969: 228, 230; Finglass in Sophocles 2007: 217). Pausanias writes "the Chaeroneans say that it was found on the borders of their territory and of Panopeus in Phocis, . . . I am persuaded it was brought to Phocis by Electra, daughter of Agamemnon." ([Χαιρωνεῖς] φασι δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ὄροις αὐτῶν καὶ Πανοπέων τῶν ἐν τῇ Φωκίδι εὔρεθῆναι . . . κομισθῆναι δὲ αὐτὸ ἐς τὴν Φωκίδα ὑπὸ Ἠλέκτρας τῆς Ἀγαμέμνονος πείθομαι: trans. Frazer, Pausanias 1898: 496-7)

<sup>33</sup> Soph. *El.* 421; Eur. *El.* 11-12, 321-2.

<sup>34</sup> *Cho.* 572; Soph. *El.* 267-9.

<sup>35</sup> Soph., *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Eur. *El.* 320.

<sup>37</sup> 421-3: ἐκ δὲ τοῦδ' ἄνω / βλαστεῖν βρούοντα θαλλόν, ᾗ κατάσκιον / πᾶσαν γενέσθαι τὴν Μυκηναίων χθόνα.

<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of this "tendency toward introversion" of the *oikos* see 2006: 165-70, here quoted from 166.

<sup>39</sup> 9.144-5, repeated by one of his intermediaries, Phoenix, to Achilles at 286-7.

<sup>40</sup> In the *Cyprian Tales* there are four daughters: the three named in the *Ilias* and

of Women, where Agamemnon has only two daughters: Electra “who contend[s] in beauty with the immortal goddesses”, and Iphimede, another name for the young girl who will be sacrificed to propitiate the expedition against Troy,<sup>41</sup> the same one who is instead called Iphigenia in Stesichorus’ *Oresteia* (first half of the sixth c. BCE) and Iphigone in Euripides’ *Electra*. At the beginning Electra (Ἠλέκτρα) seems to be only an epithet intended to specify the destiny of a heroine with an indistinct identity. For Xanthus, poet of the seventh century BCE, it is the name assumed by Laodike who is still “unmarried” after her father’s assassination.<sup>42</sup> In the stories about the family outlined by Electra at the beginning of Euripides’ *Orestes* (408 BCE) there are three sisters: Chrysothemis, Iphigenia and Electra herself (21-3). The different versions of family names may therefore be reduced to four identities: (a) Chrysothemis, (b) Iphigenia ~ Iphimede ~ Iphigone, (c) Laodike ~ Electra, and (d) Iphianassa; this last has however a quite different fate from the other ‘Iphi-’ sisters, and also in Sophocles’ *Electra*, as before in *Ilias* 9, is alive and resides at the Palace.<sup>43</sup> As for the name of the daughter who was sacrificed, Euripides will show no hesitation in his two *Iphigenias* (*among the Taurians* and *in Aulis*), both written in the last decade of his dramaturgical career.

Electra is primarily a character belonging to tragedy: “hers is one of the longest, most continuous stage presences in all of Athenian drama” and still survives today.<sup>44</sup> This does not necessarily imply that she was not also present in the vast amount of epic poetry that has not reached us; as Richard Hunter observes, “[t]he *Catalogue* opens up a whole network of heroic poetry which sometimes can seem like a giant system of cross-referencing to archaic epic” (2005: 252). However we cannot rule out the fact that both the author of the *Catalogue*, and Xanthus may have endowed Electra with a persona corresponding to their specific purposes. This will not be different for whoever (re)proposed the tragic Electra. In order to better assess the impression made by her repeated and variegated appearances on the theatrical stage perhaps it would be useful to begin from the *Catalogue*,

Iphigenia (*PEG* frag. 24, p. 58).

<sup>41</sup> *Catalogue*, frg. 19.15ff., trans. Glenn Most (Hesiod 2007: 68-9).

<sup>42</sup> *PMG* 700.

<sup>43</sup> 157-8; see the commentaries by Finglass (Sophocles 2007: 151), and Dunn (Sophocles 2019: 178).

<sup>44</sup> Ormand 1999: 60; she is present in the three ‘Oresteiai’, in Euripides’ *Orestes* and probably also in various other *Orestes* (or *Electra*) of the fifth and fourth century. As for the modern Electra plays see Condello 2010, who offers an exhaustive documentation (Bakogianni 2011 has many important omissions). Batya Casper has proposed “a gender sensitive study” of many Electra plays, from the *Choephoroi* to the 1984 Ophelia-Electra of Heiner Müller *Hamlet-Machine* (2019).

which places the sister who was cruelly sacrificed (Iphimede ~ Iphigenia) side by side with the one (Electra) who we know is destined to become a living sacrifice since she is dedicated to the memory of her father, who, in his turn, had sacrificed her sister. This is probably not a case of premeditated polarization, since “[in the] account of the sacrifice of Iphimede . . . responsible are the Achaians, with no role ascribed to Agamemnon and no mention of Agamemnon’s death or Clytaemnestra’s liaison with Aegisthus, although it does tell of Orestes’ killing of his father’s murderer and of his mother”.<sup>45</sup> Besides, it should be remembered that the *Catalogue* says nothing about Electra’s fate to stay unmarried, and that Iphimede is “very easily saved” by Artemis, who substitutes a “phantom” (εἶδωλον) for her.<sup>46</sup> Following the *Catalogue* the substitution of the *eidolon* for Iphigenia (but this is the name which became established in the post-tragic age) must have featured in the *Oresteia* by Stesichorus.<sup>47</sup> For tragic theatre, on the other hand, apart from Euripides’ *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (414) and *in Aulis* (posthumous), where the girl is replaced by a deer – but the passage in the second *Iphigenia* is most likely non-Euripidean – the murder of Iphigenia is a cruel and irreversible event, which Clytaemnestra accuses her husband of. In this houseful of little women the tragic Electra converses with Chrysothemis and is aware of the presence of Iphianassa (Sophocles) but minimizes, or actually keeps silent over Agamemnon’s guilt regarding Iphigenia ~ Iphimede ~ Iphigone (Euripides): she even seems to forget the sacrifice of her sister, which is, on the contrary, so evident a recurring argument in Clytaemnestra’s self-defence, from the *Agamemnon* to Euripides’ *Electra*. It would almost appear a deliberate omission on the part of the playwrights, with the intention of characterizing Electra’s position in the bosom of her family, and consequently, of recalibrating its dramatic weight. Among Agamemnon’s daughters both *Coephoris* and Euripides’ *Electra* only consider her and Iphigenia, as is the case in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.<sup>48</sup> In Euripides the sacrifice of Iphigenia (but, as we have pointed out above, Iphigone is the version of the name adopted here) is re-evoked by Clytaemnestra in her well-articulated self-defence (1018-45, cf. 1002), in the presence of an Electra who, during the whole play, never once mentions her sister. To conclude this inventory of omissions, it should be recalled that when in the *Coephoris* – where Electra goes inside the Palace at 484 and does not come back on stage – the Chorus at the conclusion list the three “storms” (χεμῶνες) that assailed the Atreidai, mention is made of the mur-

<sup>45</sup> Osborne 2005: 20.

<sup>46</sup> Fragments 19.21-4 and 20a (Hesiod 2007: 60-71).

<sup>47</sup> Frg. 215 *PMGF* = *Catalogue* frg. 19.17-22, 20b (Hesiod 2007: 68-71).

<sup>48</sup> See at 561-2, 811, and 913 (all in dialogues between Iphigenia and Orestes).

der of the children of Thyestes, that of Agamemnon, and, at the end, that of the usurpers, but the sacrifice of Iphigenia, decisive for the Aeschylean trilogy, is omitted (1065-74). In the wide range of acts of intraspecific violence, this entails a marked differentiation between those acts whose intent is directed towards the conquest of sovereignty, and any other form of these.

#### 4. I Am Pleased with You, My Faithful and Pious Brother

And yet it is in fact in the *Choephoroi*, 35-40 years before Euripides' *Electra*, that Electra recalls the sacrifice of her "pitilessly slaughtered sister"; even so, her speech fails to mention the murdered girl's name and also gives rise to other problems. These occur in lines 235-45, immediately following the moment the brother and sister recognize one another. Here, more obviously than anywhere else in the play, "Electra's function" is articulated in an unmistakable way; this, in the words of Anton Podlecki, entails "provid[ing] a link between the dead Agamemnon and the living Orestes, to create the contact and energizing charge which can begin to impel Orestes to take the decisive step" (1981: 39). This episode, also present in Euripides, is completely remodeled by Sophocles and confirms the absolute singularity of his *Electra*. But the Electra of the *Choephoroi* does something more complex than simply reminding her brother, explicitly or implicitly, of his duties towards the house to which they both belong: the link between their father and his heir has already been established in the first lines of the tragedy. In the prologue which, as we know, lacks its beginning,<sup>49</sup> Orestes attributes his late father with "powers" (πατρῶα . . . κράτη: 1): these, as Garvie evinces, "do not refer directly here to Agamemnon's former realm", because he, "though dead, is still a mighty power, and it is the attempt to enlist that power on the side of Orestes that forms the centrepiece of the play" (Aeschylus 1986: 49-50). The subtle ambiguity is underlined by Simon Goldhill: "[*krate*] . . . implies both the sense of political power . . . and the wider 'authority', 'influence', 'power'; and, in a more general sense, 'capability' – which is connected with the desire for control of events as well as control of the house." (1984: 103). Orestes' "desire for control" is based both on his father's authority and on a sovereignty that his father exercised while alive and which he now brings to bear in the afterlife (*Cho.* 354-62; cf. Aeschylus 1983: 137-8). As these powers are *patroïa*, that is, not only 'of his father', but also 'inherited through him', like the "ancestral sceptre of the house of Atreus descended from Zeus himself and

<sup>49</sup> The only manuscript is missing the first lines; we can read 'our' lines 1-3, 4-5 in Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1126-8, 1172-3; on the probable extent and contents of the lines preceding 1, see Brown 2015.

so *aphthiton* [imperishable]” in *Ilias* 2.46,<sup>50</sup> Orestes’ invocation with which the *Choephoroi* opens means that he is, at one and the same time, renewing both his bond with his father and that with the land from which he had fled.<sup>51</sup> Immediately after this, Orestes asks Hermes to “be [his] savior and stand by [his] claim” (σωτήρ γενοῦ ξύμμαχος τ’ αἰτουμένω: 2), and “in-voke[s his] father / to hear, to listen” (κηρύσσω πατρί / κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι: 4-5). In this context, the return of Orestes (note, at 3, “Here is my own soil that I walk. I have come home”: ἦκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι) configures his ephebic initiation in the name of the father, and in the framework of a “dynamics of misogyny” (Goldhill).<sup>52</sup>

As she comes on stage only at line 22 with the Chorus,<sup>53</sup> Electra could not have heard Orestes’ invocation of Hermes, and his request to the god to be an ally fighting alongside him (*xymmachos*). As soon as the recognition scene between the brother and sister is ending (211-32), Orestes’ final words (233) lead us to expect a struggle against the “nearest people (*philtatoi*)”, who “hate bitterly (*pikroi*)” the two of them (τοὺς φιλτάτους γὰρ οἶδα νῶν ὄντας πικρούς):<sup>54</sup> obviously their mother. As is often the habit of tragedians, the sister’s first words echo the last ones of her brother (235): ὃ φίλτατον μέλημα δώμασιν πατρός, literally “o dearest (*philtaton*) object of care (*melema*) of [our] father’s house”.<sup>55</sup> The dwelling (*domata*), deliberately signalled as being “of our father” (*patros*) and not of the dynasty, is personified – as it has already been in the *Agamemnon*; but if in the first play of the trilogy it was a sort of voraciously bloodthirsty organism, here it is presented as a subject animated by long-lasting “care” for her brother, who is the “hope of the seed of our salvation, wept for” (236: δακρυτὸς ἐλπίς σπέρματος σωτηρίου). This can only be Electra’s own private feeling. And its symme-

<sup>50</sup> Kirk 1985: 119. Here Agamemnon εἴλετο δὲ σκῆπτρον πατρῷον ἄφθιτον αἰεὶ (“took the sceptre inherited from his fathers and eternally imperishable”). Cf. *BK* 2010: 24.

<sup>51</sup> In the prologue of the *Choephoroi* the mention of the river Inachus is a synecdoche for the entire region; there could have been something more in the lost lines, but the river will have this same function in the prologue of Euripides’ *Electra*; instead, Sophocles’ tragedy opens by focussing on the abodes of power in Mycenae and of religious worship in Argos.

<sup>52</sup> For the motif of Orestes’ initiation see Zeitlin 1978: 161, and cf. Goldhill 1984: 193-5.

<sup>53</sup> She had been seen at a distance by Orestes and Pylades at line 16, but could not herself see them. They had thus had time to hide, undisturbed, at 20-1; see Taplin 1989: 234-5.

<sup>54</sup> “The paradox is a common one in tragedy” (Garvie, Aeschylus 1986: 103). *Pikros* is often said of something contrary to the expected lovability, cf. *LSJ*, III.1; *philtatoi* . . . *pikroi* = those who, belonging to the same family, are connected with the two of them by the strongest bonds, yet cruelly behave with them.

<sup>55</sup> Lattimore’s translation: “O dearest, treasured darling of my father’s house”.



to you. / *And as a born from the same womb (adelphos) you were faithful (pistos) and brought me reverence (sebas). / But may Force alone, and Right, / and Zeus almighty, third with them, be on my side.]*<sup>61</sup>

In these lines two distinct tonalities are immediately perceptible, at 239-42 and 243-5, respectively. At 239-42, Electra's words imitating the well-known Homeric locus crown the joyful sequence which begins at 224. Instead, 243-5 evince the fact that the special affection labelled at 241 as *stergethron*, which is often, not always correctly, translated as "love", reciprocates Orestes' faithfulness and "reverence" (*sebas*). With the help of Force (*Kratos*), Right (*Dike*), and Zeus, Electra founds the action of the play that is, revenge against the usurpers, on this reciprocity. However, the way in which Electra quotes Andromache's words is already suggestive not only of her personality, but also of the role she seems to intend to play. Her words offer two variants when compared to Homer, which we may imagine would have had quite an effect on the audience: (a) Andromache's father and brothers had been killed by the enemy (Achilles, see *Il.* 6.413-24), and her mother was also dead (6.425-8), whereas Electra's father had been murdered by his wife, who is still alive, and her sister had been sacrificed by their common father; (b) the *tournure* of the phrase, not "you are to me", as in Homer, but "I need to call you", which makes Electra the subject and focusses the attention on her. This focus is confirmed in line 243, in which Electra should define her brother's qualities, in this way corresponding to *Il.* 6.430, where Andromache had exalted her husband's reliable strength. But instead of extolling Orestes' loyalty to his *genos*, or, for instance, his strength, or indeed his dynastic ambition, Electra praises his faithfulness and reverence to her (*emoi*: 'to me'; the first singular person pronoun recurs at 243 and 245). Even more remarkable, Orestes is said to have been faithful and reverent *in the past*, with a "puzzling imperfect tense": "you *were* (ἦσθ[α]) my faithful brother, and

<sup>61</sup> I have made some changes to Lattimore's translation of 243-5 ("And now you were my steadfast brother after all. / You alone bring me honor; but may Force, and Right, / and Zeus almighty, third with them, be on your side"; Aeschylus 2013). At 244 he preferred the manuscript reading μόνος, referred to Orestes, to the correction μόνον that, referring to Force, sounds as a quasi-exclamative formula, "probably right" according to Garvie (Aeschylus 1986: 105). To these lines many other emendations have been made, from the repositioning of 237 after 243, to the postulate of a lacuna between 243 and 244, to the heavy correction of μοι to σοι (245), and to the improbable change of interlocutor, from Electra to Orestes, at 244 and not at 246. These interventions are described by Martin L. West (1990: 240-1), who adopted them in his edition (Aeschylus 1990), and they have also, in part, been espoused by Sommerstein (Aeschylus 2008). As already said, I follow the text established by Page (Aeschylus 1972), but at 240 I keep τε instead of the conjectural σε, "perhaps unnecessary" in the opinion of Garvie (Aeschylus 1986: 104).

brought me honor” (emphases are mine).<sup>62</sup> Even if this sentence has a vibrantly exclamatory tone, it seems to be constructed upon a strictly consequential relationship; we could perhaps reconstruct the general idea: “my *stergethron* (in a little while we shall have to consider this term more closely: often translated as ‘love’, it has very different implications from *philia*) towards my father and sister now lacks its objects, and my mother does not deserve it – but your return, Orestes, testifies that for all this time you were my faithful brother, who brought me his reverence; so it all turns to you”. However we interpret her thought, here Electra shows that she regards herself as the nucleus from which the family relationships radiate, as the tutelary entity of her house, recipient of the loyalty of its members (she herself, not the memory of her father nor the dynasty), and as the source of future action. The ascending line of the *genos* has been extinguished: this had been represented by Agamemnon and by Iphigenia: although she is never explicitly named, her sisterhood to Electra and her descent from the same father is confirmed when she is designated by the term *homosporos* (“from the same seed”). As for Orestes, however, Electra calls him *adelphos* (“from the same womb”);<sup>63</sup> the vagueness with which *adelphos* is often used is here redeemed by its complementarity with *homosporos*. The emphasis on the fact that they were both delivered from the same womb, that of a reprehensible woman, on the one hand endorses the necessity for him to share with her the quite awful loathing she feels for Clytemnestra, and on the other is compounded with the constraint of calling him *πατήρ*, and thus paradoxically redesigns the relationship.

It should be noted that here there is no hint of foreboding, as there is in Andromache’s supplication to her husband, or indeed in the reprise in Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Electra trusts that Force, Right and Zeus will permit Orestes to recapture the palace and possessions (237: cf. p. 15) of his father, and the audience knows only too well that Orestes is not destined to die like Hector and Ajax, but to kill. In any case, the sentiment that Electra nourishes towards her brother is not *philia*, neither as a sense of belonging to a community (so that superlative *philtatoi* at 234 is properly translated as “the nearest people”), nor as that “certain form of affection which

<sup>62</sup> On this imperfect and the significance of Orestes’ reverence Sommerstein rightly observed that “an explanation of the sense in which Orestes has ‘shown . . . respect’ to Electra is badly needed; despite the verb . . . it can hardly refer to the time of exile” (Aeschylus 2008: 243); see by Garvie a review of the diverse and totally unsatisfactory explanations of this passage (1986: 105). The attempts to break the deadlock at this point of the translation seem equally inadequate such as this, for instance: “and now you were my steadfast brother after all, you alone (μόνος) bring me honor” (Lattimore). Emphases are mine.

<sup>63</sup> Beekes 2010: 20 and Chantraine 1990: 18-19.



murdered father the love which would have been bestowed on her mother or on her sister, but she diverts it to her brother and makes him an *alter ego* of their father. Yet *stergethron* is not nostalgic *philia* for their father, and even less is it for their sister; perhaps we could assimilate it to “the love of a tutelary god for the people” (*LSJ*), like Athena’s for the Athenian jurors of the Areopagus (*Eum.* 911). It is in any case a sort of mutual satisfaction, motivated by something gratifying to the receiver (in this case the brother’s faithfulness and reverence for his sister), and which requires the receiver to reciprocate this, and in this way underwrite the bestower’s proposal (cf. *Eum.* 637 and 970). By addressing her brother as father Electra seems to prepare the ground for the regal legitimation Orestes will expressly demand of his father at the end of the long funeral lament: “Father, O King who died no kingly death, I ask / the gift of lordship (*kratos*) at your hands, to rule your house”.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, she extols her own position when she insists on her brother’s faithfulness (*pistos*, cf. *pistis*) and reverential awe (*sebas*), both allocated to her. In this instance too, far from being simply pertinent to family affection, *sebas* is a reverence usually addressed to a deceased divinity or sovereign, as is the case with Agamemnon in the choric song in *Choephoroi* at 157: “Hear me, oh hear, my lord, / majesty (*sebas*) hear me” (κλύε δέ μοι, σέβας, κλύ’ ὦ δέσποτ[α]).

To wind up this argument, it is in this very play, the *Choephoroi*, where she has an exiguous part in the actual assassination, and does not seem to appreciate her father’s regal and military reputation,<sup>68</sup> that Electra claims the tribute of faithful worship appropriate to a sovereign. And this indeed in her last speech of a certain length, and in a prominent position in the play, that is, immediately following the recognition scene when announcing – as proper to herself (245: *moi*) – the action that must be accomplished with the aid of Force, Right and Zeus.

## 5. Euripides’ Electra

Ελ. κάγώ χοάς σοι τῆς ἐμῆς παγκληρίας  
οἴσω πατρώων ἐκ δόμων γαμηλίους  
Aesch. *Cho.* 486-7

<sup>67</sup> *Cho.* 479-80: Πάτερ τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανών, / αἰτουμένω μοι δός κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων.

<sup>68</sup> About this we have to consider the long *kommos* at the tomb of Agamemnon and, in it, the symmetrical and contrasting stanzas of Orestes: “If only at Ilium, / father, . . . / you had gone down at the spear’s stroke” (345-53: εἰ γὰρ ὑπ’ Ἴλιω / . . . πάτερ, δορίτμητος κετηναρίσθης) and Electra: “No, but not under Troy’s / ramparts, father, should you have died, / nor . . . / have found your grave” (363-71: μηδ’ ὑπὸ Τρωιάς / τείχεσι φθίμενος, πάτερ / . . . τεθάφθαι).

[El. I too out of my own full dowry then shall bring / libations *from my father's house at the time of my wedding.*]<sup>69</sup>

The Aeschylean Electra is fully aware that she may only recover her inheritance and dedicate the requisite libations to her father if the revenge plot succeeds. The dialogue between the two siblings which crowns the long funeral lament has just evinced that the “customary” (*ennomoi*) mourning rites,<sup>70</sup> as different from the apotropaic version of the ritual desired by Clytaemnestra, may only be celebrated after the *kratos* has passed to Orestes.<sup>71</sup> However she will leave the stage at 584 – like Pylades never to return for the rest of the trilogy – and nothing further will be heard of her wedding.<sup>72</sup> The ‘disappearance’ of the Sophoclean Electra has already been discussed. So it is even more singular that Euripides foresees for his Electra two separate marriages: the childless one with the Peasant and then the one with Pylades. This last is mentioned by Castor at the conclusion of the tragedy, in the context of a detailed exposition of the future awaiting the three characters (Orestes, Electra and the Peasant), but he does not mention the likelihood of any progeny. In the prologue, whose mouthpiece is the Peasant, Euripides realistically outlines the dynastic tangle of kinship with which the fifth-century audience was faced whenever they were going to attend an ‘Oresteia’. The spectators were aware that Electra was not destined to be the mother of kings, and that Orestes was not going to inherit his father’s throne (cf. above p. 95 and n30), and this shared knowledge regulated the horizon of their expectations. Nonetheless, as soon as they have learned of Aegisthus’ murder, the Chorus of this *Electra* exult for the return of the dynasty: the “beloved kings of old” (not Orestes and Electra, but more probably Orestes and his descendants) “shall *rightfully* rule over [the] land since they have destroyed the *unrighteous!*”<sup>73</sup> Up to this point only Aegisthus has been elim-

<sup>69</sup> I prefer Sommerstein’s translation (Aeschylus 2008), in italics, to Lattimore’s (“for my bridal from my father’s house”).

<sup>70</sup> “The feasts that men honor in custom” (483: δαῖτες ἔννομοι βροτῶν).

<sup>71</sup> In Orestes’ words: “Father . . . I ask / the gift of lordship at your hands, to rule your house” (479-80; quoted at p. 105). And it is probable that in her turn Electra affirms at 482, unluckily a very corrupt line, that the death of Aegisthus will enable her to marry: “a wish for marriage . . . seems highly likely in view of 487” (Sommerstein in Aeschylus 2008: 273n104).

<sup>72</sup> One of the discrepancies in the plot woven by Orestes lies in the fact that we never know if and how great a part his sister played “inside” (554: ἔσω), or what in fact is meant by her “keep[ing] a careful eye on all within the house” (584: φύλασσε τὰν οἴκω καλῶς). For the inconsistencies between revenge plot and action in the *Choephoroi* see Dawe 1963 and Avezzi 2016: 65-8.

<sup>73</sup> Emphases are mine; 876-7: νῦν οἱ πάρος ἀμέτεροι / γαίης τυραννεύσουσι φίλοι

inated, and the restoration of the legitimate dynasty – as the brother and sister are well aware, but the Chorus seem to have forgotten – may only take place if Clytaemnestra is destroyed. While the abyss of a primordial guilt begins to yawn, the matricide reiterates the conflict between he who wields a *kratos* obtained through violence and he who intends to re-establish the right of succession, but in order to achieve this must commit another act of violence, this too within the *genos*. This new act of violence, in its turn, is distinguished from all those already perpetrated for dynastic ends because it is no longer committed within the line of male descent (Atreus on the sons of Thyestes; Aegisthus, son and grandson of Thyestes, with the aid of Clytaemnestra on Agamemnon). The *kratos* which Clytaemnestra, precisely because of her “male strength of heart” (Ag. 10-11), has appropriated for herself, in a certain sense ‘displaces’ her into the male line, which is the one traditionally deputed to ensure legitimate sovereignty. If we have recourse to the categories established by Jean-Pierre Vernant, we are obliged to reckon with the conflict between genealogical transmission, linked to the *oikos* and its hearth (deified as Hestia),<sup>74</sup> and the accomplishment by means of deception perpetrated by an outsider, sanctioned by Hermes. The social symbolism of Clytaemnestra’s dream in Sophocles lies in its restoration of the “correct” lineage – male seed, female vessel – claimed by Apollo in *Eumenides* 657-61. But in the meantime, and, perhaps, for good, the Queen has overturned the canon; to reestablish it is, at best, wishful thinking, upon which Sophocles prudently lets down the curtain, but both Aeschylus and Euripides explicitly open prospects, the first of a different idea of the state, the second of a centrifugal scattering which annihilates the *genos*.

Euripides’ ‘Oresteia’, however, is missing both Hestia and Hermes. This is the only play in which the Palace is not to be seen looming over both the characters and the audience. We must realize that the court represents a scenographic equivalent of the family (*oikos*) which is only to be relinquished with the intention of realizing a radical innovation, as is the case here in Euripides. Even modern remakes retain it as a symbolic presence, from the Mannons’ grey colonial-style house in O’Neill, to the long, dark wall emphasized by Miklós Jancsó’s sequence shots in his *Electra, My Love* (Szerelmem *Electra*, 1974); to the point that Jean Giraudoux, another

βασιλῆς / δικαίως τοὺς δ’ ἀδίκους καθελόντες. I prefer to maintain in the translation the correspondence δικαίως . . . ἀδίκους of the original (“in justice . . . wicked” trans. Cropp).

<sup>74</sup> When discussing Clytaemnestra’s nightmare (Soph. *El.* 419-23, see above p. 11), Vernant observes “The dream could not say more clearly that Agamemnon in fact begot Orestes beyond the person of Clytaemnestra, in his own hearth, which roots the royal house of Mykenae” (2006: 161).

er who is influenced by Euripides, also includes the concept of the “palace that laughs and cries” (Act I, scene 1: “en ce moment le palais rit et pleure à la fois”). The *hestia*, repository of memories and dynastic legitimacy, has been excluded, even simply as an idea, from the stage of Euripides’ *Electra*. It cannot be replaced either by the Peasant’s hut, which, at the very most, could epitomize the degree zero of conjugal solidarity, or by the offstage *locus amoenus* where Aegisthus, that irreproachable guest, is murdered. Deprived of Hestia, the manifestation of continuity is lacking, but at the same time Hermes, too, is absent, he who in the other ‘Oresteiai’ is the guarantor of the decided, unequivocal intention of Orestes. Here Orestes does not declare that he has come back to avenge himself and to reclaim supremacy, as he did in the *Choephoroi*, neither does he expound, as in Sophocles, the particulars of his plan, which is deceitful (*dolos*) and for this reason under the sign of Hermes. Terribly alone, with only the unsettling silence of Pylades by his side, he does not seek help from his father, as he did in Aeschylus, with a ritual invocation governed by Hermes, and he does not even have an active accomplice to whom he may confide the terms of his deceit; like the Old Slave in Sophocles. Hermes who, “as the god of travellers, is naturally associated with the completing of a situation”,<sup>75</sup> is a helpful presence in overseeing the dynastic upheaval in the other two ‘Oresteiai’. Developing the idea of the Aeschylean Hermes who, chthonian and nocturnal, supervises the mortal game standing beside those who ask for justice,<sup>76</sup> Sophocles, in his *Electra*, even more explicitly than his predecessor, makes him the lord of the *dolos*, of intrigue, of discourse that “brings profit” (61, cf. 37), gifted with the ambiguous virtue of “insidious Persuasion (*Peitho doliā*)”, the deity to whom the Chorus had addressed its prayer in *Cho.* 726-7. Invoked by the Sophoclean Electra as propitiator of vengeance (with the epithet of *chthonios*, the same as before in Aeschylus, at 111), Maia’s son will finally be associated by the Chorus, in the second stanza of the brief fourth *stasimon*, with Orestes “stealthy of foot” (*doliopous*; 1391-2). Instead, Hermes plays no part in Euripides’ *Electra*, where he is only an icon on Achilles’ shield, in a sort of artificial overlapping between the shield in the *Iliad* and the aegis of Zeus and Athena.<sup>77</sup>

As the Palace is missing, the two opposing forces, Hestia and Hermes, have nowhere to work out their function. We are witnessing, in its stead, a sort of diffraction of the two principles. Electra’s expectations, deeply rooted as they are in the *oikos* and in the heroic figure of her father, emerge clearly both in the blindness with which she disputes the Old Man’s tale – an ep-

<sup>75</sup> Dunn, Sophocles 2019: 348.

<sup>76</sup> *Cho.* 727-9 and 812-13.

<sup>77</sup> First *stasimon*: 462.

isode which provides information on the character of this Electra and is not simply a vain attack against Aeschylus on Euripides' part.<sup>78</sup> To give voice to her sentiments, she involves the Chorus, who are not slaves of the Palace (as in the *Choephoroi*), not Argive maidens (as in Sophocles' *Electra*), but mature countrywomen – the social class from which we would least expect such a sophisticated involvement in the epic dimension (the kind we witness in the first *stasimon*, 432-86). But her brother stays outside of this; having appeared almost unwillingly,<sup>79</sup> he is devoid of any apparent plan and goes along, passively as her “only ally” (*symmachos* . . . *monos*; 581), with his sister's plot, thought up with the help of the Old Man.<sup>80</sup> This Orestes, a “fugitive” who does not have Hermes beside him, is only too aware of the risks he runs in his attempt at “foul play” (*dolos*).<sup>81</sup> Electra is left alone to uphold the restitution, at any price, of legitimacy – right up to the point of the material execution of the matricide. This is understood perfectly by the Messenger, who, before telling her of the murder of Aegisthus, feels it his duty to reassure her of her brother's intentions, by spelling out a thought that Orestes has not expressed: “my master prayed . . . , not voicing the words, to regain his ancestral home” (808-10: δεσπότης δ' ἔμους / . . . ηὔχετ', οὐ γεγωνίσκων λόγους, / λαβεῖν πατρῶα δώματ[α]). However the objective and, even more so, the strength of purpose of Orestes remain unuttered – only to be conjectured by the Messenger and saved for the ears of Electra.

This Electra who, as different from the one of the other ‘Oresteiai’, takes leave of the audience with the other characters (Orestes, the divine uncles Castor and Polydeuces, and the Chorus), will in the end in great sorrow be forced to leave her fatherland (*patria ge*) for Phocis, to follow Pylades. At

<sup>78</sup> If putting textual criticism on trial had any longer a *raison d'être*, it would be interesting to subject this scene of the Euripidean *Electra* to a thorough close analysis: the innate prejudice against the attack on Aeschylus has caused, through time, a quantity of hostile *atheteses*. In his “Notes” on this *Electra*, deemed to be not fully philologically correct, a verdict which probably owes a lot to the well-known judgement (and/or, in my opinion, political prejudice) of T.S. Eliot on his qualities as a translator, Gilbert Murray reminds us that the theory of an attack on Aeschylus – “a very weak and undignified attack”, he adds – has the result of saddling Euripides with the responsibility of “such an artistically ruinous proceeding . . . [for which] no parallel is quoted from any Greek tragedy” (Euripides 1908: 89-90). We are at liberty not to share Murray's thesis that Electra's words were dictated by “a sort of nervous terror”, however we can be certain that this scene and its counterparts in the works of other tragedians should be interpreted using more complex and refined critical tools.

<sup>79</sup> See 93-7; he recognises his sister at 115, yet does not reveal himself until 579.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Avezzi 2016: 68-69, and 84.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. the words of Orestes to Aegisthus (834-5): “so, you fear foul play (*dolos*) from a fugitive – you, the lord of the city?” (φυγάδος δῆτα δαιμαίνεις δόλον, / πόλεως ἀνάσσων);

this point she will exclaim regretfully: “what other griefs are greater / than to leave *the confines* of one’s ancestral land?” (emphasis is mine; 1314-15: καὶ τίνες ἄλλαι στοναχαὶ μείζους / ἢ γῆς πατρίας ὄρον ἐκλείπειν;) – and these confines designate her fatherland not simply as an object of affection, but also as the seat where sovereignty is exercised. We do not know if and in what measure this conclusion could have influenced the birth of the tradition about the Atreidic *skeptron*, known to Pausanias. Without doubt, however, this is the only one among the Electras of the three ‘Oresteiai’ to have left the inheritance of an unequivocal, though frustrated, idea of sovereignty.

*Translation by Susan Payne*

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## Wounds and Flames: Dido and Her Sisters<sup>†</sup>

Abstract

This paper explores how the symbolic use of the recurrent metaphors of the wound and the flame not only shapes Virgil's story of Dido (and her book in the *Aeneid*) but also the history of the reception of the queen of Carthage. Virgil had subtly exploited these metaphors (and their 'realisation') to deftly allude to the pre-Virgilian Dido – and to Dido's intertextual sisters. The way in which later poets and artists engage in acknowledging and representing this metaphorical play also defines their functional reading of Virgil's poetry.

KEYWORDS: Virgil; Dido; *Aeneid*; tragedy; imagery; metaphors; reception

*At regina graui iam dudum saucia cura / uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni* (Verg. *Aen.* 4.1f.: "But the queen had long since been suffering from love's deadly wound, feeding it with her blood and being consumed by its hidden fire").<sup>1</sup> *Vulnus* and *ignis*: the first proper 'action' (or indeed movement) of the 'tragedy of Dido' in Book 4 of the *Aeneid* is a rhetorical one. It is a trope.<sup>2</sup> The metaphors of the wound and the flame thus enter the dramatic imagery of the *Didobuch* from its very opening lines. But far from being a mere customary homage to the topic vocabulary of erotic poetry,<sup>3</sup> this Virgilian use of the imagery acquires a pivotal role in the structural and properly dramatic unfolding of the story in Book 4, becoming fundamental for the entire epic poem and its reception.

<sup>†</sup> I am grateful to Damien Nelis, Patrick Finglass, Francesco Citti, James Kierstead and the anonymous referee for their help and suggestions. I am particularly grateful to Philip Hardie for his illuminating comments.

<sup>1</sup> The critical text used for all quotations from the *Aeneid* is Mynors 1969. The English prose translation, here and henceforth, is by West 2003.

<sup>2</sup> On the *tropus* as a "turn" and a "movement" away from the *puritas* (of the *verbum proprium*) and the *perspicuitas* (of the *verbum univocum*) see Lausberg 1949: §§ 168 and 174.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pease 1935: 84-7 and Pichon 1902: 150, 302.

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The queen of Carthage had entered the poem in a sort of tragic prologue (1.338-368), where a disguised Venus, wearing a pair of very eloquent “tragic boots” (*cothurni*),<sup>4</sup> tells her son Aeneas how Dido had fled Tyre after her brother, Pygmalion, had killed her beloved husband, Sychaeus, and how she then founded a “new city” (hence the Punic origin of the name *Karthago*) on the coasts of Africa, leading – she, a woman (*dux femina facti*, *Aen.* 1.364) – a band of followers and then becoming their new queen. The ‘real’ tragedy is of course encapsulated in Book 4, and begins on the dawn that follows the banquet offered by the queen to the shipwrecked Trojan refugees at the end of Book 1. During this banquet “the doomed Dido”, already struck by Cupid’s power, while “drawing out the night with all manner of talk, drinking long draughts of love” (*Aen.* 1.748-49: *nec non et uario noctem sermone trahebat / infelix Dido longumque bibebat amorem*), asks her guest to narrate “the treachery of the Greeks and the fall of Troy, and his wanderings at sea” (*Aen.* 1.753-56); as a new, Odysseus-like, epic narrator, Aeneas will unfold his tale in Books 2 and 3 of the poem. Finally, after Dido’s death, the hero’s meeting with her in the Underworld (6.450-476) provides a dramatic epilogue to the story. There, for the first time in the poem, Aeneas dares confess his heartache in his unwilling departure from the African shores and shows true pity for the queen, in spite of his *pietas* (his sense of obedience to the epic will of Fate).<sup>5</sup> Like her Homeric model, the shade of Ajax in *Odyssey* 11, Dido only replies with a scornful silence.

Poets, scholars, critics and commentators have debated about the tragic status of Book 4 since classical antiquity (e.g. Martial, Servius, Macrobius). The *Didobuch* has indeed the tragic structure of an Attic play, according to Aristotelian dramatic dynamics, and a wealth of textual allusions to proper Greek and (as far as we can tell from the extant fragments) Latin tragedies. Yet another specific characteristic of the tragic genre becomes central – like a subtler underflow, in an almost contrapuntal way, underneath the narrative – in the course of Book 4: the recursive, meaningful, and ‘proleptic’ use of the imagery. Some of the most innovative and penetrating critical works on the *Aeneid* in the 20th century (e.g. Pöschl 1962, Otis 1963, Putnam 1988, Hardie 1986, Lyne 1987 and 1989) have shown how the intricately woven imagistic frames of the epic *ornatus* – similes, metaphors, *ekphraseis* – establish “multiple correspondences” (West 1969) with the encompassing narrative; they reinforce the structure and, at times, even enable the narra-

<sup>4</sup> See Harrison 1972. On Dido, in the *Aeneid* and in previous mythological accounts, and on Dido and tragedy, see Heinze 1993: 95-120; Pease 1935: 3-79; La Penna 1985; Wlosok 1976, Fernandelli 2002 and Ziosi 2017 (with further bibliography: 327-32). On tragedy and the *Aeneid*: Heinze 1993: 251-8, 370-3; Conte 2007: 150-69; Hardie 2019.

<sup>5</sup> On *pietas* in the *Aeneid* see Traina 1988.

tive to proceed through images. Very often, like leitmotifs in music (Pöschl 1962: 13; Otis 1963: 76), they mirror and recall each other within the structure of the work, in order to set up “an internal abstract system of correspondences and contrasts . . . , so that individual passages only emerge in full relief when related to other passages, often separated by a considerable gap” (Hardie 1986: 167). When this play (of internal rhetorical allusion and tragic anticipation) revolves on the figurative language, its effects are even more astonishing. As far as metaphors are concerned, in fact, Virgil often seems to exploit the passage from the *verbum improprium* to the *verbum proprium*, or indeed the ‘realisation’, in the course of the narrative, of images and facts that are first introduced in a figurative way. The practice of realising the tropes in Virgil’s poetry, along with the sustained and meaningful resonance of linked motifs in the epic imagery, has two significant literary antecedents. The first is Lucretius’ poem *De rerum natura* and its frequent reliance on the “poeticized use of scientific analogy” (Hardie 1986: 223);<sup>6</sup> the other model is tragedy itself,<sup>7</sup> where motifs of the imagery are subtly used (repeated and reverberated) as anticipation of real events in the course – or indeed at the end – of a play.<sup>8</sup>

Book 4, to be sure the most ‘dramatic’ and self-contained section of the poem, provides the most revealing examples, in the whole of the *Aeneid*, of this proleptic strategy in the use of the imagery. The metaphors of the fire and the wound, from the opening lines, are often alluded to in the course of the narrative, in a relentless progression towards the real, literal, wound that will kill Dido on the real flames of her sacrificial pyre at the end of the book.<sup>9</sup> The reverberation at first occurs in the poetic vocabulary, with the abundance of verbs meaning “to burn” or “kindle”, like *ardere*, *urere*, *flam-*

<sup>6</sup> On this characteristic of Lucretian imagery see Schiesaro 1990; Hardie 1986: 158-67, 220-237; Traina 2003; Dionigi 2005: 85f.; Pieri 2011: 87-125; Landolfi 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See Hardie 1991; Hardie 1998: 90-4; Lyne 1987: 193; Knox 1950: 400 (“[Virgil’s] use of the sustained metaphor, a power which he shares with Aeschylus and Shakespeare”).

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Hardie 1991: 34: “The apparently innocent introduction of the hunting motif near the beginning of *Aeneid* 1, to be developed in most unexpected ways later on, is reminiscent of the Aeschylean practice of introducing themes and images at the beginning of the trilogy [of the *Oresteia*] to be fully unfolded or unpacked later on: Lebeck [1971: 63ff.] speaks of prolepsis, i.e. ‘a brief initial statement of several major themes *en bloc*’. The full development toward which each repetition builds may not occur for several hundred lines: compare for example Viktor Pöschl’s analysis of the first three hundred lines of the *Aeneid* as ‘symbolic anticipation of the whole poem’ [1962: 13ff.]. On the fundamental theme of the hunt in Book 4, see pp. 130-2.

<sup>9</sup> See Hardie 1986: 232f. Brooks Otis (1963: 70) significantly resorts to *Aen.* 4.1f. to exemplify his conclusion that, in the *Aeneid*, “every incident, epithet, simile, motif, &c., is embedded in a coherent structure of motifs: their effect is thus cumulative since one ‘recalls’ the other in an intricately reciprocal arrangement”.

*mare, accendere, incendere, collucere*<sup>10</sup> (all referred to Dido); through nouns like *flamma, ignis, fax, ardor, roigus, pyra* (“flame, fire, torch, burning, funeral pile, pyre”);<sup>11</sup> and likewise *uulnus* (“wound”, along with the all-important adjective *saucius*, “wounded, hurt”), *telum, ensis, ferrum* (“shaft, sword”)<sup>12</sup> and *figere, conicere* (“pierce”, “throw” darts);<sup>13</sup> but then also through other elements of the *ornatus*, like the famous wounded doe simile at 4.68-73.<sup>14</sup>

Not just the dramatic, proleptic effect of this use of the imagery is exploited by Virgil however. The tapestry of images in Book 4 seems to point to a very meaningful allusive and poetic action: not only does the imagery shape the narrative, it also gives form to the Dido-character and, in fact, to the Virgilian version of the story of the queen of Carthage. In other words, the metaphors of the wound and the flames, in their sustained play, selectively allude to the many other literary (and, at times, historical) characters that concur to form the figure of Dido in the *Aeneid*. And since Dido is, as it were, Virgil’s most “intertextual heroine”,<sup>15</sup> this turns out to be a metaphorical story of many intertextual sisters (and a few brothers too). And Dido’s pyre is not the end of the story. There are other intertextual sisters in the ‘afterlife’ of the queen of Carthage, and even ‘different’ Didos, as some acute readers of the *Aeneid* exploit (and even take to a different figurative level) the same metaphorical play, thus enabling us to sharpen our reading of the intricate Virgilian pattern. As is often the case, certain episodes of the two-millennia long story of the reception of the *Aeneid* shed light on our understanding of Virgil’s text itself.

### 1. Medea’s Fires (and Gadflies) and Phaedra’s Pangs

The most important literary model for Virgil’s Dido in *Aeneid* 4 is Me-

<sup>10</sup> E.g. *ardo*: 4.101, 262, 281, 482; *uro*: 4.68; *flammo*: 4.54; *accendo*: 4.203, 232, 364, 697; *incendo*: 4.54 (reading of the M codex, Mediceus Laurentianus plut. 39.1, also in Servius and Tiberius Claudius Donatus), 197, 300, 360, 376; *colluceo*: 4.567.

<sup>11</sup> *Flamma*: 4.23, 66, 567, 605, 607, 640, 670; *ignis*: 4.2, 167, 200, 209, 352, 384, 661, 676; *fax*: 4.472, 567, 604, 626; *ardor*: 4.581; *roigus*: 4.640, 646 (in M and Tiberius Claudius Donatus), 676; *pyra*: 4.494, 504.

<sup>12</sup> *Vulnus*: 4.2, 67, 683, 689; *saucius*: 4.1; *telum*: 4.71, 149; *ensis*: 4.507, 579, 646, 664; *ferrum*: 4.71, 131, 547, 601, 626, 663, 679.

<sup>13</sup> *Figo*: 4.70; *conicio*: 4.69.

<sup>14</sup> For a thorough analysis of the vocabulary of this imagery in *Aen.* 4, see Ferguson 1970. Cf. also Newton 1957.

<sup>15</sup> For the phrase, cf. Hinds 1993. In the Virgilian construction of the character of Dido one can detect intertextual echoes of Circe, Nausicaa, Calypso, Penelope, Medea (in Euripides and in Apollonius), Hypsipyle, Phillis, Ariadne, Ajax, Tecmessa, Phaedra, Deianira, Alcestis, Semiramis, Cleopatra; cf. Fowler 1997: 17; Hardie 2014a: 52; Lyne 1987: 100-144; Ziosi 2017; Finglass 2020a.

dea.<sup>16</sup> Both Euripides' tragic heroine, who endows Dido with the vocabulary and the symptoms of frantic passion for the 'Lucretian' theme of love as *furor* (and even with the plans for devising tragic plots),<sup>17</sup> and, as already remarked by Macrobius (*Sat.* 5.17.4) and Servius (*ad Aen.* 4.1), Apollonius' young Medea in love from *Argonautica* 3, almost a blueprint for the description of Dido's erotic imagery and for her subtle psychological progression towards destructive love. Virgil deftly combines these two Medeas – through the intratextual "window reference"<sup>18</sup> of *Eclogue* 8 – in the magic scene at 4.478-521.<sup>19</sup>

Somehow unexpectedly, however, Medea (and, with an allusive movement that already gestures towards tragic irony, both the young Colchian in love and the ruthless sorceress of tragedy) lurks already in the very first lines of Book 4, and precisely in the "wound" and in the "fire": *at regina graui iamdudum saucia cura / uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni*. And, as is often the case with Virgil's poetry, in multiple layers of allusion.

First, Apollonius. *Apollonius Argonautica scripsit et in tertio inducit amantem Medeam: inde totus hic liber translatus est* ("Apollonius wrote the *Argonautica* and in the third book he introduced Medea in love: from that the entire book [*Aen.* 4] is 'transferred'"): so writes Servius (*ad Aen.* 4.1), at the beginning of his commentary to Book 4. But, *pace* Servius' exaggeration, Virgil really opens the book with a patent allusion to the text of the *Argonautica*; and, very revealingly, to the imagery that portrays Medea's falling in love in the Hellenistic epic poem, in a crucial passage for the figurative use of the "pangs and flames". As Arthur Pease (1935: 84f.)<sup>20</sup> noticed for the adjective *saucia* ("wounded" – a true and multiple allusive fulcrum for the entire Book) in *Aen.* 4.1f., "there . . . appears a double result of Cupid's weapon and fire" as in *Arg.* 3.286f. and 3.291-8:

βέλος δ' ἐνεδαίετο κούρη  
νέρθεν ὑπὸ κραδίῃ, φλογὶ εἴκελον·  
...  
ὥς δὲ γυνὴ μαλερῶ περι κάρφεια χεῦατο δαλῶ  
χερνήτις, τῆπερ ταλασήια ἔργα μέμηλεν,  
ὥς κεν ὑπώροφιον νύκτωρ σέλας ἐντύναίτο,  
ἄγχι μάλ' ἐγρομένη· τὸ δ' ἀθέσφατον ἐξ ὀλίγοιο  
δαλοῦ ἀνεγρόμενον σὺν κάρφεια πάντ' ἀμαθύνει·  
τοῖος ὑπὸ κραδίῃ εἰλυμένος αἶθετο λάθρη  
οὔλος Ἔρωσ· ἀπαλάς δὲ μετετροπᾶτο παρειᾶς

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<sup>16</sup> See Pease 1935: 13f.; Otis 1963: 62-96; Schiesaro 2008; Nelis 2001: 125-85; Ziosi 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Which reach their allusive climax at 4.600-02.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Thomas 1986: 88f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Pease 1935: 388-98; Ziosi 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See also Nelis 2001: 130f.

ἐς χλόον, ἄλλοτ' ἔρευθος, ἀκηδείησι νόοιο.

[And the bolt burnt deep down in the maiden's heart like a flame . . . . And as a poor woman heaps dry twigs round a blazing brand – a daughter of toil, whose task is the spinning of wool, that she may kindle a blaze at night beneath her roof, when she has waked very early – and the flame waxing wondrous great from the small brand consumes all the twigs together; so, coiling round her heart, burnt secretly Love the destroyer; and the hue of her soft cheeks went and came, now pale, now red, in her soul's distraction. (trans. Seaton 1912)]

At this point of the story Medea has just been pierced by Eros' arrow, and the shaft that wounds her heart “burns” like a “flame”. Significantly, in addition to the figurative shift (from the wound to the burning fire) in the vocabulary of love, Apollonius depicts the effects of the love wound with a crucial simile that introduces the image of the fire smouldering, secretly (λάθρη, 3.296), under the ashes. This image of the secrecy and concealment,<sup>21</sup> or in fact “invisibility”, of the fire of love is allusively condensed by Virgil in the important (and much discussed) adjective *caecus* (*Aen.* 4.2 *et caeco carpitur igni*), through the powerful filter of Lucretius (4.1120 *incerti tabescunt uulnere caeco*, “in such deep doubt they waste beneath their secret wound”, Bailey 1947, with reference to the effects of the furious burning of passion, described as a disease)<sup>22</sup> and Catullus (67.25 *caeco flagrabat amore*): Dido is consumed by an invisible fire. For this seems to be the proper meaning of *caecus* here: “a passive sense, meaning not ‘blind’ but ‘invisible’” (Pease 1935: 86), confirmed by *Aen.* 1.688: *occultum inspiras ignem fallasque ueneno*.<sup>23</sup> The context of these “fire and poison” is crucial too, as it ‘transfers’ in the Carthaginian banquet the Eros passage that, in the *Argonautica*, immediately precedes Medea's burning wound and the smouldering fire simile. At the

<sup>21</sup> A value that already appears in the first occurrence of the topos of the smouldering fire in Hom. *Od.* 5.488-91.

<sup>22</sup> See also Lucr. 4.925-28 *quippe ubi nulla latens animai pars remaneret / in membris, cinere ut multa latet obrutus ignis, / unde reconflari sensus per membra repente / posset, ut ex igni caeco consurgere flamma?* (“for indeed, when no part of the soul stayed behind hidden in the limbs, as fire is hidden when choked beneath much ashes, whence could sense on a sudden be kindled again through the limbs, as flame can rise again from a secret fire?” Bailey 1947). An all-important Virgilian variation of the topos will be of course *Aen.* 4.23 *agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae* (“I sense the return of the old fires”). See also *infra* pp. 124-30. The image of fire smouldering under the ashes is rather frequent in Hellenistic poetry; see e.g. Call. *Ep.* 44 Pf. (*A.P.* 12.139), Mel. *A.P.* 12.80 (also important for the love wound), Theoc. *Id.* 11.51.

<sup>23</sup> Literally: “(to) breathe into her a hidden fire and deceive her with your poison”; West 1990 exegetically translates: “you can then breathe fire and poison into her and she will not know”.

end of *Aeneid* 1, Venus, for the sake of her son, decides to deceive the queen of Carthage and to “surround her with fire” (*capere ante dolis et cingere flamma / reginam meditor*, 1.673f.) so that she be in the grip of a great love for Aeneas (*magno Aeneae mecum teneatur amore*, 1.675), and then commands her (other) son Cupid to put on Ascanius’ looks for one night and, during the banquet, as we have just seen, to “breathe a hidden fire” into her and entrap her with the poison of love (683-8). This act suddenly eradicates Dido’s memory of her murdered husband (717-22) and, after the most famous sleepless night in Latin literature, drives us directly to the opening of Book 4. The Apollonian hypotext for Cupid’s action in *Aeneid* 1 is crucial to understanding the origin of Dido’s wound and fire; then to strengthening even further the allusive Dido-Medea relationship; and, finally, on a linguistic level, to confirming the proper meaning of *caecus*. In addition to that, and somehow unexpectedly, the same hypotext also introduces to the ‘stage’ another tragic intertextual sister for the queen of Carthage. The passage is in *Argonautica* 3.275-7 (just before the smouldering fire simile):

τόφρα δ' Ἔρως πολιοῖο δι' ἠέρος ἴξεν ἄφαντος,  
 τετρηχῶς, οἷόν τε νέαις ἐπὶ φορβάσιν οἴστρος  
 τέλλεται, ὄν τε μύωπα βοῶν κλείουσι νομῆες

[meantime Eros passed unseen through the grey mist, causing confusion, as when against grazing heifers rises the gadfly, which oxherds call the breeze. (trans. Seaton 1912)]

Besides being a model for Cupid’s agency during the Carthaginian banquet, this description of Eros’ arrival and the ensuing simile are also very significant for the development of Virgilian imagery and for the play on the reification of tropes discussed earlier.

“Invisible love” and *caecus ignis*. Eros who comes to Medea is ‘really’ invisible (3.275: ἄφαντος, predicative adjective from the verb φαίνω). Richard Hunter (1993: 128) notes the Platonic model for the topos of Love’s hidden and stealthy attack (*Symposium* 196a);<sup>24</sup> and the idea of secrecy is reinforced, a few lines later (3.296), in the aforementioned simile, by the adverb λάθρη (“secretly, by stealth”), connoting Love, that “burns secretly, hidden deep the heart”. Along with λάθρη and lines 3.296f. then, ἄφαντος and *Arg.* 3.275-7 become fundamental<sup>25</sup> to explaining the *caecus* (then certainly ‘passive’) *ignis* of *Aen.* 4.2.

<sup>24</sup> This is Agathon’s view in *Symposium* 196a (“If Eros were not a supple being, he would be unable completely to enfold one’s whole soul and both to enter and leave one without being noticed”), cf. Hunter 1989: *ad* 275-98. But possibly more important for Apollonius is Call. *Ep.* 44 Pf. (*A.P.* 12.139); see also Philodemus *A.P.* 5.124 with Sider 1997: 119-22.

<sup>25</sup> And, as far as I can gather, not noticed by commentators.



δηχθεῖσα κέντροις παιδὸς ἠράσθη σέθεν.  
(1298-303)

[But it was for this purpose that I came, to make plain that your son's heart is guiltless so that he may die with a good name, make plain, too, the maddened frenzy of your wife or, in some sort, her nobility. For she was stung by the goad of that goddess most hated by us who take pleasure in virginity and fell in love with your son. (trans. Kovacs 1995)]

In this Euripidean passage, the image of the figurative gadfly is then glossed by the description of Aphrodite's agency: Phaedra was "stung" by love's "goad". Here οἷστρος ("gadfly", used metaphorically as "stimulus, goad") is thus explained by the literalising κέντρον (properly "goad, sting", still used figuratively), in a poetic progression from the *verbum improprium* to the *verbum proprium*. This movement of the imagery turns out to be pivotal for the whole play: it really encapsulates Phaedra's tragic plot, as, in the prologue (38-40), Aphrodite (with the same words and metaphors recalled by Artemis at the end, in a sort of divine frame to the action)<sup>30</sup> had informed the audience that:

ἐνταῦθα δὴ στένουσα κάκπεπληγμένη  
κέντροις ἔρωτος ἢ τάλαιν' ἀπόλλυται  
σιγῇ, ξύνοιδε δ' οὔτις οἰκετῶν νόσον.  
(38-40)

[from this point on the poor woman, groaning and struck senseless by the goad of love, means to die (or, literally, "perishes/is consumed") in silence, and none of her household knows of her malady. (trans. Kovacs 1995)]

To close the circle, the fact that both Apollonius' simile on the gadfly (*Arg.* 3.275-7, which links Medea to Io) and Euripides' metaphorical play on gadflies and goads (*Hipp.* 38-40, 1298-303) – and, ultimately, that both Medea and Phaedra – are fundamental in the building of Virgil's imagery of the 'pangs of love that burn invisibly (and in silence)' is eventually confirmed, in an intricate and very Alexandrian multiplication of mirroring references, by a pivotal passage (that we have briefly mentioned above) in Book 3 of the *Georgics*. A famous locus (146-50) that treats of the destructive effects of love and passion on the animals patently alludes to Apollonius' gadfly simile (*Arg.* 3.275-7),<sup>31</sup> and to the ensuing learned Alexandrian onomastic polemics on the name of the fly:

Est lucos Silari circa ilicibusque uirentem

<sup>30</sup> See Janka 2004: 223; Pieri 2011: 105.

<sup>31</sup> "Meantime Eros passed unseen through the grey mist, causing confusion, as when against grazing heifers rises the gadfly, which oxherds call the breese".

plurimus Alburnum uolitans, cui nomen asilo  
 Romanum est, oestrus Grai uertere uocantes,  
 asper, acerba sonans, quo tota exterrita siluis  
 diffugiunt armenta  
 (3.146-50)

[Round the groves of Silarus and the green holm-oaks of Alburnus swarms a fly, whose Roman name is asilus, but the Greeks have called it in their speech *oestrus*. Fierce it is, and sharp of note; before it whole herds scatter in terror through the woods. (trans. Fairclough 1916)]

In this learned and “difficult reference” (Thomas 1988: *ad* 3.147f.),<sup>32</sup> not only does Virgil recall Apollonius in a very Alexandrian fashion (mentioning, like him, two different names for the gadfly, *oestrus*, an obvious calque from οἴστρος, and *asilus*, archaic and rarer than the common *tabanus*),<sup>33</sup> he also discloses (at *Georg.* 3.152f.)<sup>34</sup> the hidden mythological reference to the heifer Io (which is, in Apollonius, a metaphorical hypostasis of Medea’s love wound), and then, in a progression from the imagery to the real, goes on to describe (in a didactic manner) the effects of the “goads” of love on ‘real’ cattle (3.209-85). This is how this famous section of *Georg.* 3 revealingly begins:

Sed non ulla magis uiris industria firmat  
 quam Venerem et caeci stimulos auertere amoris  
 (3.209f.)

[But no care so strengthens their powers as to keep from them the desire and the stings of secret passion. (trans. Fairclough 1916)]

In this passage, with the “stings/goads of hidden/secret passion/love” (*caeci stimuli amoris*), through the usual and utterly meaningful linguistic filter of Lucretius (3.873f. *atque subesse / caecum aliquem cordi stimulum*, “and that deep in his heart lies some secret pangs” Bailey 1947),<sup>35</sup> Virgil is indeed re-

<sup>32</sup> See also Thomas 1982; Hunter 1989: 129 and Aesch. *Suppl.* 306ff., Call. *Hec. fr.* 301 Pf.

<sup>33</sup> The two words have an interesting Romance development: from *asilus* derive the (mainly) ‘figurative’ Italian “assillo” (“worry, obsession”), whereas from *tabanus* the ‘concrete’ “tafano” (Italian), “tábano” (Spanish), “taon” (French, from *tabo*, Late Latin from the classical *tabanus*).

<sup>34</sup> *Hoc quondam monstro horribilis exercuit iras / Inachiae Iuno pestem meditata iuuencae.*

<sup>35</sup> Where Lucretius describes the ‘pangs of fear’, cf. Kenney 2014: 189; Pieri 2011: 100; but see also the all-important (aforementioned) 4.1120 *incerti tabescunt uulnere caeco* for the passive value of *caecus* and for the relevance of the alluded context: it is said of “those afflicted by love” (cf. Thomas 1988: *ad* 3.210). For the topos in Lucretius (and the same play on the passage from the real to the figurative) see also 5.1074f. (and Campbell 2003: *ad loc.*) *inter equas ubi equus florenti aetate iuuenus / pinnigeri saeuit calcaribus ictus amoris* (“when a young stallion in the flower of his years rages among the mares, pricked by the spur of winged love”, Bailey 1947), recalled by *Aen.* 6.100f. *ea fre-*

calling the tragic *locus classicus* for the metaphor of the goads of love: precisely the passage from the prologue of Euripides' *Hipp.* (38-40) that we discussed earlier (see p. 121).<sup>36</sup>

To be sure, the imagery, in the same book of the *Georgics*, had already prepared us (e.g. at 3.146-53, see pp. 121ff.), with the literary memory of Apollonius' Medea, both for the topos of the stings of love and for the metaphorical anticipation (i.e. the gadfly) of a real erotic stimulus; an even 'more real' one in the context of *Georg.* 3, as the metaphor here, with a bolder rhetorical trick, "stings" real "heifers", which are presumably familiar with real "goads" (and real gadflies). The gadfly (of *Georg.* 3.147f.) is definitely there *pour cause*.<sup>37</sup> In a very symbolic and Virgilian fashion then, the elements of the imagery (and significantly, Apollonius' image of the gadfly, sustained and reverberated in *Georg.* 3, is culled indeed from a simile!)<sup>38</sup> precede and – in a literal way – are proleptic to the metaphorical description of the *caeci stimuli amoris* in the all-important section that describes the destructive effects of *amor* and sexual passion on animals (3.209-85).

But this is not the end of the story, nor of the multiple correspondences: it is actually the beginning of Dido's tragedy. Because the *caeci stimuli amoris* (of *Georg.* 3.210) are clearly evoked<sup>39</sup> in the opening lines of *Aen.* 4: *at regina graui iamdudum saucia cura / uulnus alit uenis et caeco carpitur igni*. At the very outset of the book, then, along with Medea's "dart" and "smouldering flame" simile (*Arg.* 3.286-98), there allusively resounds the whole metaphorical play of *Arg.* 3 (275-7), of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (38f., 1298-303) and of *Georg.* 3 (146-50, 209f.). In Dido's *caecus ignis* (*Aen.* 4.2) there appear thus multiple allusions to Medea, and there already lurks Phaedra's looming shadow too. All the more so since, like Medea's "invisible" (ἄφαντος) gadfly (from *Arg.* 3.275), and like Eros, who "burns in silence" (λάθρη) in Medea's heart (at *Arg.* 3.296f.), in Euripides, the stimulus "consumes" Phaedra "in silence" (*Hipp.* 39f. ἀπόλλυται / σιγῆ). An invisible and hidden silence that does remind us indeed of Dido, who is *caeco carpitur igni* (4.2), where the verb (*carpo*) mirrors the other verb (ἀπόλλυμι) and the adjective (the pivotal *caecus*)<sup>40</sup> the adverb (σιγῆ).

*na furenti / concutit et stimulos sub pectore uertit Apollo* ("while Apollo shook the reins upon her in her frenzy and dug the spurs into her flanks") said of the Sybil, goaded to inspired excitement by Apollo.

<sup>36</sup> See also Plato *Rep.* 573a7 and Campbell 2003: 317 who links *Hipp.* 30f. and *Georg.* 3.209f. with Lucr. 5.1075f. Cf. also Halleran 1995: *ad* 38f. and Pieri 2011: 105.

<sup>37</sup> See Thomas 1982: 85; Ross 1987: 157-67; Pieri 2011: 106.

<sup>38</sup> *Arg.* 3.275-7.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Thomas 1988 *ad* 3.210 Pease 1935: *ad* 4.2. On *caecus* though see also Traina 2003: 47.

<sup>40</sup> In *caeco* one might even detect a reflexive signal: all these allusions are working

To conclude on the “pangs of love”, this allusive detour makes of the Apollonian and Euripidean imagery in *Georgics* 3 (146-50, 209f.) an ultimate and compelling example of window reference for the whole of *Aeneid* 4 as it discloses how deeply Medea and Phaedra are menacingly ingrained in the Dido tragedy from its very outset. It also proves extremely functional as a rhetorical model, because this section of *Georg.* 3 also works as a blueprint for the sustained use of corresponding images that, in the shift from the figurative to the real, generate sense and anticipate the narrative in *Aen.* 4. If we follow this sort of allusive counterpoint woven by the imagery, we can start to truly fathom the whole significance of the allusion to Apollonius in *Aen.* 4.2 and to predict how the images of the wound and the flame can tragically develop – and become real – from the start to the end of the story. And this happens, as in Euripides, in a sort of metaphoric frame of tragic anticipation: as we have seen, this play on the real and figurative sense (working as an actual prolepsis to the tragic end) is precisely Euripides’ strategy with Phaedra’s “pangs of love” in *Hipp.* (from 38-40 to 1298-303). With the wound and the flame then, Medea and Phaedra’s tragic destinies are already nestled with Dido from the very beginning of her tragedy. Because it is precisely this ‘tragic’ use of the imagery that marks a substantial ‘epic’ difference between the poems of Apollonius and Virgil.<sup>41</sup> In the *Aeneid* the same Apollonian imagery of the wound and the flame is not just an ornamental homage to the epic genre: as in tragedy, it is meaningfully developed, revisited and reverberated throughout the Dido book.

## 2. Old Flames and New Medeas

This first happens only some twenty lines later in the book, in the almost proverbial<sup>42</sup> *agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae* (“I sense the return of the old fires”, 4.23), indeed Dido’s first powerful ‘variation’<sup>43</sup> of Apollonius’ smoul-

away under the surface, invisibly, until they are revealed.

<sup>41</sup> As Brooks Otis (1963: 72) remarks: “Apollonius has no further use for the *wound* and the *flame*. His subsequent description of Medea’s love is not in the least mythological but quite realistic. The simile of the spinning woman has no relation to any recurrent motif. Indeed, all Apollonius’ similes simply explicate the immediate theme or action. They do not forebode the future, indicate a contrast with or a reinforcement of a recurrent motif”.

<sup>42</sup> To the point that Dante, when Beatrice (indeed a rather unexpected sister of Dido’s) finally appears to him in *Purgatory* 30.48, will exclaim: “conosco i segni dell’antica fiamma” (which, significantly, are in fact Dante’s very last words to Virgil, who has silently left the poem). The quotation from *Aen.* 4.23 is anticipated by a ‘literalising’ rendering: “d’antico amor senti la gran potenza” (*Purg.* 30.39).

<sup>43</sup> Again via Lucretius: 4.925-28 *Quippe ubi nulla latens animai pars remaneret / in*

dering fire simile, where *agnosco*, *ueteris*, and *uestigia* can all be read, allusively, as ‘Alexandrian footnotes’. Dido’s interiorised metaphor marks a subtle change to the imagery of *Arg.* 3.286-98, a progression that Ovid – as always Virgil’s finest reader – does not fail to notice when portraying his ‘Apollonian’ Medea in the *Metamorphoses*. The love symptoms of Ovid’s young Medea, in fact, cleverly combine Apollonius’ simile and Dido’s “old flame” at *Aen.* 4.23:<sup>44</sup>

et iam fortis erat pulsusque recesserat ardor,  
cum uidet Aesoniden exstinctaque flamma reluxit.  
erubuere genae totoque recanduit ore,  
utque solet uentis alimenta adsumere quaeque  
parua sub inducta latuit scintilla fauilla  
crescere et in ueteres agitata resurgere uires,  
sic iam lenis amor, iam quem languere putares,  
ut uidit iuuenem, specie praesentis inarsit.  
(*Met.* 7.76-83)

80

[And now she was strong and her passion, now conquered, had ebbed, when she saw the son of Aeson and the flame, that was dead, relit. Her cheeks flushed, and then her whole face became pallid. Just as a tiny spark that lies buried under the ashes, takes life from a breath of air, and grows and, living, regains its previous strength, so now her calmed passion, that you would have thought had dulled, when she saw the young hero, flared up at his visible presence. (trans. Kline 2004)]

Medea’s book in the *Metamorphoses*, like Dido’s, had in fact started under the spell of the fire-metaphor: *concipit interea ualidos Aetias ignes* (*Met.* 7.9 “Medea, the daughter of the king, conceived an overwhelming passion”, Kline 2004).<sup>45</sup> This fire becomes a fundamental metaphor for the entire first part of Book 7, and then gives way to one of Ovid’s most daring ‘pyrotechnical’ resemanticisation of the erotic topos. At first, fire becomes the image of the incurable love sickness – in the crucial elegiac polarity *eros / nosos*<sup>46</sup> – but then, in the second part of the book, with a very Lucretian and didactic reification, the same fire/disease metaphor is ‘metamorphosed’ into a real plague; which, unexpectedly, turns out to be the most important metamor-

*membris, cinere ut multa latet obrutus ignis, / unde reconflari sensus per membra repente / posset, ut ex igni caeco consurgere flamma?* (“For indeed, when no part of the soul stayed behind hidden in the limbs, as fire is hidden when choked beneath much ashes, whence could sense on a sudden be kindled again throughout the limbs, as flame can rise again from a secret fire?” Bailey 1947).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ziosi 2016, 71f.

<sup>45</sup> This time, through the filter of yet another crucial older sister of Dido’s, Catullus’ Ariadne (whom we shall meet again soon): *concepit corpore flammam* (64.92).

<sup>46</sup> See Conte 1989.

phosis in Book 7: a rhetorical one.<sup>47</sup>

The same metaphorical progression, from the same fire of Apollonius' 3.286-298 and *Aen.* 4.23 to the incurable love fire of Latin elegy, had occurred in the other extant Ovidian account of Medea. At the beginning of her letter, ironically quoting *Aen.* 4.23, Medea from the *Heroides*, plays with "not known" fires (12.33 *Et uidi et perii nec notis ignibus arsi*, "I saw you, and I was undone; nor did I kindle with ordinary – literally "known" – fires", Showerman 1914). Then, at 12.137-49,<sup>48</sup> she deliberately alludes to the "marriage torches" of Dido's *coniugium* in the cave (*Aen.* 4.165-70: one of the most evocative and ambiguously ominous reworking of the imagery of fire in Book 4).<sup>49</sup> Finally, in an exquisitely elegiac paradox (12.165f. *quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes, / non ualeo flammam effugere ipsa meas*, "I, who could beat back fierce fire with wise drugs, have not the power to escape my own passion", Showerman 1914) Medea, like Dido but *contrario motu*, becomes a rhetorical victim of the passage from the real epic fires (mastered by her magic when Jason tamed the fire-breathing bulls, *Arg.* 3.1047-49) to the figurative elegiac flames of love. But since this Medea is also aware of the ending of her Euripidean tragedy, she 'transforms' – with a literalisation of the metaphor that, again, recalls Dido's flames in *Aen.* 4 – the same love fire into the flames that will, literally, burn Jason's new wife Creusa: *flebit et ardores uincet adusta meos* (12.180: "she shall weep, and the flames that consume her will surpass my own", Showerman 1914).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> See Ziosi 2016.

<sup>48</sup> *Vt subito nostras Hymen cantatus ad aures / uenit et accenso lampades igne micant / tibique effundit socialia carmina uobis, / at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba* ("when, all suddenly, there came to my ears the chant of Hymen, and to my eyes the gleam of blazing torches, and the pipe poured forth its notes, for you a wedding-strain, but for me a strain more tearful than the funeral trump", Showerman 1914).

<sup>49</sup> 4.165-70: *Speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem / deueniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno / dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether / conubiis summoque ularunt uertice Nymphae. / ille dies primus leti primusque malorum / causa fuit* ("Dido and the leader of the Trojans took refuge together in the same cave. The sign was first given by Earth, and by Juno as a matron of honour. Fires flashed and the heavens were witness to the marriage while nymphs wailed on the mountain tops. This day was the beginning of her death, the first cause of all her sufferings") and cf. Pease 1935: *ad loc.* See also Ovid's 'unambiguous' version of the same story in *Her.* 7.93-96: *illa dies nocuit, qua nos decliue sub antrum / caeruleus subitis compulit imber aquis. / audieram uocem; nymphas ululasse putauit: / Eumenides fatis signa dedere meis.* "That dreadful day was my ruin, when sudden downpour of rain from the deep-blue heaven drove us to shelter in the lofty grot. I had heard a voice; I thought it a cry of the nymphs – 'twas the Eumenides sounding the signal of my doom", Showerman 1914.

<sup>50</sup> See Bessone 1997: *ad loc.*; Rosati 1989: 246f. "il consueto concettismo che gioca sul significato proprio e metaforico del fuoco (quello dei tori domati grazie a Medea e quello della sua passione) si inserisce in un campo semantico dominante per tutta l'episto-

As it happens, all Latin Medeas written ‘after Dido’ share in fact an even stronger and, as it were, multiplied bond with Virgil’s intertextual heroine.<sup>51</sup> Like Ovid, Seneca, in his *Medea*,<sup>52</sup> alludes to Virgil’s imagery and develops new metaphors for the same “old fire”. After the all-important second chorus of the tragedy (301-79), the *nutrix* thus marks the point in which Medea starts to conceive her revenge on Jason:

se uincet: irae nouimus ueteris notas.  
 magnum aliquid instat, efferum immane impium:  
 uultum Furoris cerno  
 (393-96)

[she will outdo herself. I know the hallmarks of her old anger. Something great is looming, savage, monstrous, unnatural. I see the face of Rage. (trans. Fitch 2018, as henceforth for Seneca)]

Line 394 is particularly noteworthy: an almost word-for-word quotation of *agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae* of *Aen.* 4.23, with a most significant substitution. Instead of the fire there stands out *ira*, “wrath, anger”, to be sure the most important word (and passion) in Seneca’s *Medea*.<sup>53</sup> And indeed a byword, along with *furor*, for the ‘tragic Medea’ model for Dido in *Aen.* 4. With this substitution in the *uariatio in imitando* Seneca thus couples, in one line, and in ‘one’ Medea, the ‘two’ different Medeas (Apollonius’ Medea, or the ‘love flame’, and Euripides’ Medea, or *furor*) who, as we have seen, more than any other literary character, allusively shape Virgil’s Dido.<sup>54</sup> But with the advantages of hindsight reading provided by intertextu-

la (il fuoco è il segno di Medea, nipote del sole), prelundendo all’immagine della vendetta su Creusa e Creonte, che moriranno tra le fiamme”.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Schiesaro 2008: 222.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Hardie 2014a: 72: “The impress of *Aeneid* 4 is clearly visible in the tragedies of Seneca the Younger. In the *Medea* and the *Phaedra* Seneca chooses protagonists whose careers in previous tragedies had been part of the intertextual mix out of which Virgil had forged his Dido. Tragic aspects of Dido return, as it were, to their original owners in Seneca’s plays.”

<sup>53</sup> An important passage in Lucretius’ psychology (in the analysis of the effects of the four elements on the soul) already combines fire and anger: anger is fiery in the soul of lions. See *Lucr.* 3.294-8 (*sed calidi plus est illis quibus acria corda / iracundaque mens facile efferuescit in ira, / quo genere in primis uis est uiolenta leonum, / pectora qui fremitu rumpunt plerumque gementes / nec capere irarum fluctus in pectore possunt*): a significant intertext for Virgil (in *Aen.* 12.527f. *fluctuat ira intus, rumpuntur nescia uinci / pectora*), cf. Bailey 1947: *ad* 3.297.

<sup>54</sup> This most meaningful union of *amor* and *ira* is then led to extreme consequences by Seneca’s Medea and is thus described by the fourth chorus (866-9): *Frenare nescit iras / Medea, non amores; / nunc ira amorque causam / iunxere: / quid sequetur?* (“Medea cannot rein in / her feelings of love or anger. / Now anger and love have joined / their

ality, Seneca's union of the two Medeas in this allusion to Dido also makes us look at the beginning of Book 4 in a more tragic light: from its very first symptoms, Dido's love is already meant to turn into proper destructive folly.<sup>55</sup> Finally, if there were any doubts left about the intertextual origin of Medea's fire turning into fury, the following passage<sup>56</sup> from the third chorus of Seneca's *Medea* would suffice to dispel them:

caecus est ignis stimulatus ira  
 nec regi curat patiturue frenos  
 aut timet mortem: cupit ire in ipsos  
 obuius enses.  
 (591-4)

[Blind is the fire whipped up by anger, / careless of control, impatient of curbs, / fearless of death, longing to attack / straight against swords.]

This time Medea's merging of fire and rage allusively<sup>57</sup> represents a four-line compendium of the whole imagery of *Aen.* 4, from the *caecus ignis* (and its long history)<sup>58</sup> of 4.2 to the all-important sword – as we shall see soon – that kills Dido at the end of the book. Moreover, like Dido on her pyre (and Ovid's Medea in *Her.* 12.180), Seneca's Medea has learnt how to literalise her metaphors. In her final revenge, the 'fire of her anger' becomes the real fire that destroys Creusa and Creon (a fire, *ignis*, that, most significantly, like Dido's *caecus ignis*, is *clusus* and *latet obscurus*):

Tu nunc uestes tinge Creusae,  
 quas cum primum sumpserit, imas  
 urat serpens flamma medullas.  
 Ignis fuluo clusus in auro  
 latet obscurus  
 (817-21)

forces: what will follow?"].

<sup>55</sup> After all, fire (of love) and *furor* were already coupled in a crucial passage (on which our analysis will hinge in the next paragraph) in *Aen.* 4.66-9: *est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus. / uritur infelix Dido totaque uagatur / urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerua sagitta* ("the flame was eating the soft marrow of her bones and the wound lived quietly under her breast. Dido was on fire with love and wandered all over the city in her misery and madness like a wounded doe").

<sup>56</sup> Just preceded by a most revealing verbal *iunctura* (*ardet et odit*) in this crucial lines (579-82): *nulla uis flammae tumidiue uenti / tanta, nec teli metuenda torti, / quanta cum coniunx uiduata taedis / ardet et odit* ("No violence of flame or swelling wind, / no fearful violence of a whirling spear, / matches a wife bereft of her marriage, / burning and hating").

<sup>57</sup> See Boyle 2014 *ad* 591-4; Hine 2000 *ad* 579 and 591; Biondi 1984: 147-9.

<sup>58</sup> See above pp. 116-24.

[(to Nurse) You must now tincture the clothes for Creusa, / so the moment she wears them, crawling flame / may burn its way deep into her bones. / Enclosed and lurking in the tawny gold / is shrouded fire]

Once again, the allusion to Dido's flame in *Aen.* 4.66f. is patent:<sup>59</sup>

est mollis flamma medullas  
interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus.

[the flame was eating the soft marrow of her bones and the wound lived quietly under her breast].

Furthermore, as Medea had announced at 147f.,<sup>60</sup> this fire operates a significant change to the ending of her tragedy. In Euripides (*Med.* 378-83) Medea considers – but then rejects – the idea of setting fire to the bridal chamber; Seneca's Medea realises the “fire of her anger”, and, along with Creusa and Creon, the entire royal palace is burnt and collapses:<sup>61</sup>

Auidus per omnem regiae partem furit  
immissus ignis: iam domus tota occidit,  
urbi timetur.  
(885-7)

<sup>59</sup> As far as hermeneutics is assisted by allusion and reception, here Seneca with *serpens* (*Med.* 819), “crawling / creeping along, imperceptibly” (reading of the E codex; *serpens* in the other family) seems to interpret the much debated Virgilian *mollis* as nominative (and not accusative, agreeing with *medullas*, as in David West's translation provided here), thus meaning “subtle” and modifying *flamma* (cf. Pease 1935: 143): a further and very meaningful variation on the crucial “hidden”, *caecus*, character of Dido's flame. For the vocabulary of the topos see also Catull. 100.7 *torreret flamma medullas*.

<sup>60</sup> 147-9 *alto cinere cumulabo domum; / uidebit atrum uerticem flammis agi / Malea longas nauibus flectens moras* (“I shall bury his home in deep ash; the black plume raised by the flames will be seen at Malea, the turning point in ships' long detours”). See Boyle 2014: *ad* 147-9; Hine 2000: *ad* 147; Némethi 2003: 173 and cf. Ov. *Met.* 7.394f. For the image of the fire/pyre seen from the sea, cf. *Aen.* 4.661f. (*hauriat hunc oculis ignem crudelis ab alto / Dardanus, et nostrae secum ferat omina mortis*, “let the Trojan who knows no pity gaze his fill upon this fire from the high seas and take with him the omen of my death”) which are, significantly, dying Dido's very last words in the poem, and *Aen.* 5.3f. Also, the sacrificial preparation of Medea's avenging fire (577f. *sacra letifica appara: / statuuntur arae, flamma iam tectis sonet*, “prepare the deadly rites. An altar must be set up, and flames must sound in the house”) is modelled on Dido's instruction (in her *Trugrede*, see p. 134) to her sister Anna at *Aen.* 4.494f.

<sup>61</sup> And the same fire seems about to destroy the whole city (*urbi timetur*, 887) thus further literalising Dido's imagery: *Aen.* 4.669-71 *non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis / Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes / culmina perque hominum uoluantur perque deorum* (“it was as though the enemy were within the gates and the whole city of Carthage or old Tyre were falling with flames raging and rolling over the roofs of man and gods”). See *infra* pp. 142-5 for further implications of this simile.

[The greedy fire rages through every part of the palace as if under orders; already the building has collapsed completely, and they fear for the city.]

### 3. Another Tragic Medea, Ariadne, a Hunted Doe, and Phaedra's Darts

Tragic Medeas do not allude to Dido's imagery only from hindsight. If we go back, once again, to the opening line of Book 4 (*At regina graui iam-dudum saucia cura*), behind the crucial adjective *saucia* ("wounded, smitten")<sup>62</sup> there emerges another Medea. As is known, "the queen" is not simply "wounded by a grievous love pang". She is precisely "smitten" again like Medea, and this time a Medea from tragedy, Ennius' lost *Medea exul* (254 V.<sup>2</sup> = 216 J.): *Medea animo aegro amore saeuo saucia* ("sick at heart, smitten with savage love", Clausen 2002: 75). Again through Lucretius, and, significantly, from *DRN* 4, the 'Book of love', in a passage where the "mind is wounded by love" (*mens unde est saucia amore* 1048f.) from the fierce passion (*dira libido*) for a desired body.<sup>63</sup> But the *iunctura* at the end of the line (*Aen.* 4.1), *saucia cura* ("wounded by the pain of love"), discloses another extremely powerful allusion to another intertextual sister of Dido's, with unmistakable implications of tragic irony.<sup>64</sup> Ariadne, from Catullus' *carmen* 64, who, like Medea and Dido, is 'seduced and then abandoned' by a foreign hero:<sup>65</sup>

Quae tum prospectans cedentem maesta carinam  
multiplices animo uoluebat saucia curas  
(249-50)

[Then, gazing sadly after the receding sail, she revolved a multitude of sorrows in her wounded heart. (Clausen 2002)]

Alongside her 'tragedy of love' – ominously evoked by Apollonius' Medea and Euripides' Phaedra, Dido's 'tragedy of *furor*' and Dido's 'tragedy of abandonment' are then inscribed in the very first lines of Book 4.

The first and most important realisation of Dido's wound – this time still in the imagery: yet an amplified prolepsis of the real and final wound

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Pease 1935: 85; Clausen 2002: 75f.

<sup>63</sup> The metaphor conveyed by the adjective (*saucia*) is then significantly reified by Lucretius in the next line (4.1049): *namque omnes plerumque cadunt in uulnus* ("for as a rule all men fall towards the wound" Bailey 1947). Cf. Clausen 2002: 76; Traina 1991.

<sup>64</sup> Clausen 2002: 76.

<sup>65</sup> The two 'heroines' had already been ominously paired in the all-important Book 3 of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (997-1006); cf. Hunter 1989: 207f. For Dido and Ariadne see e.g. La Penna 1985.

on the pyre – is portrayed by Virgil in the famous wounded doe simile at 4.66-73:

est mollis flamma medullas  
 interea et tacitum uiuit sub pectore uulnus.  
 uritur infelix Dido totaque uagatur  
 urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerua sagitta,  
 quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit  
 pastor agens telis liquitque uolatile ferrum  
 nescius: illa fuga siluas saltusque peragrat  
 Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo.

[the flame was eating the soft marrow of her bones and the wound lived quietly under her breast. Dido was on fire with love and wandered all over the city in her misery and madness like a wounded doe which a shepherd hunting in the woods of Crete has caught off guard, striking her from long range with steel-tipped shaft; the arrow flies and is left in her body without knowing it; she runs away all over the wooded slopes of Mount Dicte, and sticking in her side is the arrow that will bring her death.]

Virgil's strategy here develops the premises outlined, as we have seen, at the beginning of the embroidery of the Dido-imagery (*Aen.* 4.1f.). Again, the direct epic intertext for this simile brings back Medea: *Argonautica* 4.12f., where the young Colchian, afraid of her father, is compared to a doe hunted by dogs,<sup>66</sup> but, in the *Aeneid*, the simile is intertwined in a coherent net of mirroring images, all working in a tragic sense towards the heroine's fatal destiny (and its real image). Besides, this all-important hunt imagery even crosses the borders of Book 4 and plays a fundamental contrapuntal theme in the whole poem.<sup>67</sup>

Apart from anticipating, in a tragic mode, "Love's hunting down of Dido" (Hardie 1991, 34), this simile joins, through the rhetoric of the comparison, the images of the wound and the flame (4.68f. *uritur . . . uagatur / qualis coniecta cerua sagitta*, literally "Dido is on fire and wonders like a doe

<sup>66</sup> The epic origin of the simile is again Homeric: in *Iliad* 11.473-81 Odysseus, pursued by the Trojans, is compared to a wounded deer pursued by jackals.

<sup>67</sup> Descriptions of real, and yet highly symbolic, hunts in the poem (Aeneas' deer hunt at 1.184-94, Dido and Aeneas' fatal hunt in 4.160-72, Ascanius' war-triggering hunt in 7.475-502) are in fact recalled and mirrored by a very rich hunt imagery that forms a sort of contrapuntal plot to the narrative that often anticipates the real 'tragic' end of the events: e.g. Venus, Penthesilea and Dido's attires (1.314-20, 1.490-3, 4.137-9), the predatory wolves simile in the battle of Troy (2.355-60), our crucial wounded doe simile (4.68-73), the hunting-dog simile of 12.749-57 (that anticipates Aeneas' hunting down of Turnus and the end of the poem). See Fenik 1959; Pöschl 1962: 62-79; Otis 1963: 72-4; Harrison 1972; Ferguson 1970: 62f.; Hornsby 1970: 2f.; Clausen 2002: 78f.; Lyne 1989: 77-9; Hardie 1991: 33f.; Perutelli 2000: 90f.

wounded by an arrow”), with the same daring conceits of Apollonius’ Medea, whose “arrow burns like a flame” (βέλος δ’ ἐνεδαίετο. . . φλογὶ εἴκελον, *Arg.* 3.386f.) in the first Apollonian simile that we considered. And it is precisely this wounded doe simile that, for the first time, ‘represents’, albeit in an image, the passage from the figurative (the love wound) to the real (*sagitta*) in *Aen.* 4. As for the darts in the simile (*sagitta*, *Aen.* 4.68, and *tela*, 71), they too bring back – in a further allusive layer – Dido’s imagery to Apollonius’ Medea (βέλος, *Arg.* 3.386). And, from there, to tragedy, to the other Medea and to Phaedra, as the image of Cupid’s (and even Aphrodite’s) darts becomes topical in the erotic discourse with Euripides, and precisely with Medea (*Med.* 530f.; 632-5) and Phaedra (*Hipp.* 530-4).<sup>68</sup> The Euripidean image of the love arrow thus strengthen even further the tragic bond between Dido, Medea and Phaedra: with their erotic metaphors, both tragic heroines intertwine their destinies with Dido’s in a more and more inextricable way. As a result, tragic irony hides deeper and deeper in the imagery that opens Dido’s book.<sup>69</sup>

But how does Medea and Phaedra’s figurative shaft become Dido’s actual sword?<sup>70</sup> Again, through tragedy.

#### 4. From Phaedra’s Darts to Ajax’s Sword: Lucretia and the ‘Other’ Dido

Quin morere, ut merita es, ferroque auerte dolorem.

...

interiora domus inrumpit limina et altos  
conscendit furibunda rogos ensemque recludit  
Dardanium, non hos quaesitum munus in usus.

...

dixerat, atque illam media inter talia ferro  
conlapsam aspiciunt comites, ensemque cruore  
spumantem sparsasque manus.

(*Aen.* 4. 547, 645-7, 663-5)

<sup>68</sup> A passage (*Hipp.* 530-2: οὔτε γὰρ πυρὸς οὔτ’ ἄστρων ὑπέρτερον βέλος, / οἶον τὸ τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας ἦσιν ἐκ χειρῶν / Ἔρωσ ὁ Διὸς παῖς, “For the shafts neither of fire nor of the stars exceed the shaft of Aphrodite, which Eros, Zeus’s son, hurls forth from his hand”) in a tragedy definitely important (besides the gadfly image) for Apollonius’ Medea (cf. *Arg.* 3.286ff.). After Euripides (see also *IA* 548f.) the image of the love darts becomes very common in Hellenistic poetry and then in comedy, cf. Zagagi 1980: 129, Preston 1916: 48 and Pichon 1902: 258.

<sup>69</sup> For Dido’s *sagitta* – in the usual Virgilian multiple-allusion strategy – the ‘usual’ didactic Lucretian imagery is also fundamental: cf. *tela Veneris* at *DRN* 4.1052 and *sagittae Veneris* at 4.1278; see Pieri 2011: 97.

<sup>70</sup> Significantly, Seneca’s Phaedra – unlike her Euripidean counterpart – through Dido’s example will literalise Phaedra’s βέλος (*Hipp.* 530) as well. See pp. 138f.

[No, you must die. That is what you have deserved. Let the sword be the cure for your suffering. . . . She climbed the high pyre in a frenzy and unsheathed the Trojan sword for which she had asked – though not for this purpose. . . . So she spoke and while speaking she fell upon the sword. Her attendants saw her fall. They saw the blood foaming on the blade and staining her hands.]

Aeneas' sword, with which Dido kills herself on the pyre (deceitfully built as a means for a *remedium amoris*) becomes the final and definitive realisation of the initial wound (4.1f.) and of the arrows of the doe simile (4.68-73). A sword and a pyre that pierce and consume the abandoned queen only when she realises that – since she has finally yielded to the “power of the old flame” – she has broken the oath of faith to the memory of her first husband Sychaeus, thus dissolving her *pudor* and blemishing her former *fama*:<sup>71</sup> hence Dido's proper Aristotelian tragic *culpa*, and the real motive of her suicide in Book 4 (cf. Heinze 1993: 104f., 118; Pease 1935: *ad* 475).

But there was no sword – nor Aeneas – in the original Dido legend. There was fire and there was chastity. Dido's elder sister was in fact ‘another’ Dido, the ‘same’ queen of Carthage who had come from Tyre after the murder of her husband, but who threw herself in a sacrificial fire (here too prepared to mislead her subjects and to conceal her real intentions) in the manner of the Carthaginian ritual suicides, in order ‘not’ to be forced to get married again (with a local king who had convinced the Carthaginian peers).<sup>72</sup> Dido's flames, originally, enshrined her marital chastity.<sup>73</sup>

The sword – a gift from Aeneas, “sought not for this purpose” – with which Dido pierces herself in Book 4 represents therefore a further, and extremely meaningful, allusive gesture. A fundamental Virgilian innovation that will also become a sort of allusive objective correlative for future allusions and rewritings of the Dido tragedy and a sort of polemic watershed that conceals adherence or an attack to Virgil's story (and authority). If the pyre, in Virgil's multiple allusive texture, relates the literalised flame of

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *Aen.* 4.24-9, 320-3; for the central (and allusive) role of *pudor* (a term and a concept with a long history, from heroic epic to tragedy and love poetry, with multiple meanings and difficult to translate: in Book 4, approximately, “the inner consciousness of the respect due to the chaste memory of the first husband”). For *pudor* in the ‘tragedy of Dido’ see Ziosi 2013; for *fama* see Hardie 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Timaeus of Tauromenius, *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 566F82; Servius, *Ad Aeneidem* 4.36, 335, 674; Justinus, *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus* 18.4, 3-6, 8. See La Penna 1985; Ziosi 2017: 10-14; Hardie 2014a: 52-5; Quint 2018: 67-81. For the medieval ‘dialogue’ of the ‘two Didos’ see Desmond 1994: 24-33, 55-73.

<sup>73</sup> With the pivotal role of *pudor* in Book 4 – especially as a tragic motif – Virgil certainly alludes to the tragic faithfulness (to the memory of the murdered husband) of the ‘historical’ Dido; cf. Heinze 1993: 99.



[Could you but see now the face of her who writes these words! I write, and the Trojan's blade is ready in my lap. Over my cheeks the tears roll, and fall upon the drawn steel – which soon shall be stained with blood instead of tears. How fitting is your gift in my hour of fate! You furnish forth my death at a cost but slight. Nor does my heart now for the first time feel a weapon's thrust; it already bears the wound of cruel love. (trans. Showerman 1914)]

After dissolving in the mere space of a couplet (189f.) – with the usual, and highly ironic, didactic naivety – the metaphoric architecture that sustains Book 4 from its initial to its final lines, Ovid's Dido brings the sword to the fore again, in the prominent position of the final distich of the letter, Dido's self-epitaph:<sup>78</sup>

nec consumpta rogis inscribar Elissa Sychaei,  
 hoc tantum in tumuli marmore carmen erit:  
 PRAEBUIT AENEAS ET CAUSAM MORTIS ET ENSEM;  
 IPSA SUA DIDO CONCIDIT USA MANU  
 (193-6)

[Nor when I have been consumed upon the pyre, shall my inscription read: Elissa, wife of Sychaeus; yet there shall be on the marble of my tomb these lines: from Aeneas came the cause of her death, and from him the blade; from the hand of Dido herself came the stroke by which she fell. (trans. Showerman 1914)]

Here the sword almost becomes a “metonymic representation” of the beloved and an “instrument of *Liebestod* for the betrayed lover” (Piazzini 2007: 293; Knox 1995: *ad* 184, 195f).<sup>79</sup> But the emphasis given by the daring syllepsis (*causam mortis et ensem*) also suggests that much more is at stake in the last couplet: there Dido's fires and wounds point at the tendentious (scholars have called them ‘Augustan’) choices of Virgil's “epische Technik” as Ovid's enters (or indeed inaugurates) the controversy on the ‘other Dido’ (but also on the ‘other *Aeneid*’, see Knox 1995: 202), and, more broadly, on the value and the limits of poetry. What the epitaph – with its meta-literary play on the conventions of writing (*inscribar*, 7.194) – really means is (as usual, in Ovid) a different story: when she will be consumed by the fire, she will be written down in history not as Elissa (her original Punic name),

<sup>78</sup> A couplet much loved by Ovid, who reuses it (for Dido) in *Fasti* 3.549f. and paraphrases it in *Ars* 3.39f. and *Amores* 2.18.25. With a slight variation, in *Her.* 2.147f., the self-epitaph before the suicide pairs (again) Dido and Phillis (see Barchiesi 1992: 180-2). The sword has a prominent role also in Ovid's famous four-line summary of the entire Aeneadic Dido story (cf. Casali 1995: 66-70; Hardie 2015: 383f.) in *Met.* 14.78-81: *excipit Aenean illic animoque domoque / non bene discidium Phrygii latura mariti / Sidonis; inque pyra sacri sub imagine facta / incubuit ferro deceptaque decipit omnes.*

<sup>79</sup> On Dido's wedding-as-funeral in *Aen.* 4.495-97 see also Nelis 2001: 169-72.

the wife of Sychaeus (i.e. the historical Dido); rather, the *carmen* (tellingly, “poem”) on her tomb will proclaim that, yes, she killed herself with her hands, but Aeneas (and therefore Virgil) provided the reason (i.e. love: a denial of the original Dido’s chastity) and the sword (twice ‘alien’ to her story: *ensis* is the elevated form for “sword” that belongs to the epic genre and not to elegy, the ‘language’ that Ovid’s Dido is ‘speaking’ here).

From this letter and this epitaph onwards, Aeneas’ sword becomes a sort of Freudian watershed in Dido’s afterlife and in the future allusions to her story, a further ‘phallic’<sup>80</sup> reification of Phaedra and Medea’s βέλος, through Dido’s *uulnus* and Ajax’s sword.

### 5. And Finally, Phaedra (and Procris): The Danger of Dido’s Metaphors

In an apparently paradoxical way Virgil seems to confirm this ‘Ovidian version’ of the story in the epilogue of the Dido tragedy in the *Aeneid*. When Aeneas meets Dido’s shade in the Underworld, his questions at *Aen.* 6.456-8 (*infelix Dido, uerus mihi nuntius ergo / uenerat exstinctam ferroque extrema secutam? / funeris heu tibi causa fui?*, “so the news that they brought me was true, unhappy Dido? They told me you were dead and had ended your life with the sword. Alas! Alas! Was I the cause of your dying?”) seem to be waiting precisely for the answer given by Dido’s epitaph in *Her.* 7.195f.<sup>81</sup> But at a closer look they even seem to question Virgil’s ‘au-

<sup>80</sup> See Fowler 2000: 156-67 and Segal 1986: 129 for the phallic symbolism of Aeneas’ sword; Desmond 1994: 70-3, 120-7 for medieval reading (and iconography) of such Freudian implications.

<sup>81</sup> In a refined intertextual play of questions and answers, Alessandro Barchiesi (1992: 181) discloses the Homeric hypotext for this question, Odysseus’ words to Ajax (as seen, a fundamental ‘brother’ for Virgil’s Dido) in *Odyssey* 11.558f. οὐδέ τις ἄλλος / αἴτιος, ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς Δαναῶν στρατὸν αἰχμητῶν / ἐκπάγλως ἤχθηρε, τὲν δ’ ἐπὶ μοῖραν ἔθηκεν, “yet no other is to blame but Zeus (literally “no one else is the cause, but Zeus”), who bore terrible hatred against the host of Danaan spearmen, and brought on thee thy doom” (Murray 1919). Interestingly (but with little likelihood) Eduard Norden (1957: *ad* 458) on the basis of Ovid’s quotation of *Aen.* 6.458 in *Her.* 18 (*Leander Heroni*) et ‘mortis,’ dices, ‘huic ego causa fui!’ (18.200, “and you will say: ‘Of the death he met, I was the cause”, Showerman 1914) had posited, as a source for both passages, a lost Hellenistic epyllion on the unhappy love of Hero and Leander: the couple of ‘star-crossed lovers’ used as a primary paradigmatic ‘human’ *exemplum* by Virgil precisely in the section of *Georg.* 3 on the effects of the pangs of love (*caeci stimuli amoris* 3.210) that we analysed earlier, and, again, and more importantly, with a vocabulary (intratextually) very familiar to Dido: *quid iuuenis, magnum cui uersat in ossibus ignem / durus amor? nempe abruptis turbata procellis / nocte natat caeca serus freta, quem super ingens / porta tonat caeli, et scopulis inlisa reclamant / aequora; nec miseri possunt reuocare parentes, / nec moritura super crudeli funere uirgo* (258-63, “What of the youth, in whose marrow fierce Love fans the mighty flame? Lo!

thorised version' of the Dido story, and namely the authority of the 'tragedy of *pudor*' (see Austin 1977: 162; Ziosi 2017: 26f.). The landscape of Virgil's Underworld and Dido's company in the *lugentes campi* are in fact equally eloquent in that respect:

nec procul hinc partem fusi monstrantur in omnem 440  
 Lugentes campi; sic illos nomine dicunt.  
 hic quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit  
 secreti celant calles et myrtea circum  
 silua tegit; curae non ipsa in morte relinquunt.  
 his Phaedram Procrinque locis maestamque Eriphylen 445  
 crudelis nati monstrantem uulnera cernit,  
 Euadnenque et Pasiphaen; his Laodamia  
 it comes et iuuenis quondam, nunc femina, Caeneus  
 rursus et in ueterem fato reuoluta figuram.  
 inter quas Phoenissa recens a uulnere Dido 450  
 errabat silua in magna  
 (*Aen.* 6.440-51)

[Not far from here could be seen what they call the Mourning Plains, stretching away in every direction. Here are the victims of unhappy love, consumed by that cruel wasting sickness, hidden in the lonely byways of an encircling wood of myrtle trees, and their suffering does not leave them even in death. Here Aeneas saw Phaedra, and Procris, and Eriphyle in tears as she displayed the wounds her cruel son had given her. Here he saw Evadne and Pasiphae with Laodamia walking by their side, and Caeneus, once a young man, but now a woman restored by destiny to her former shape. Wandering among them in that great wood was Phoenician Dido with her wound still fresh]

In this account, that brings to an end the imagery of her love wound, Dido rests in the place that hosts those who, literally, "were consumed by the cruel plague of harsh love" (thus confirming and literalising *Aen.* 4.66: *est mollis flamma medullas*) and in the company of a 'catalogue' of women, all victims of *durus amor*.<sup>82</sup> From this 'infernal' perspective, Dido's story is

in the turmoil of bursting storms, late in the black night, he swims the straits. Above him thunders Heaven's mighty portal, and the billows, dashing on the cliffs, echo the cry; yet neither his hapless parents can call him back, nor thought of the maid who in cruel fate must die withal." Fairclough 1916), cf. Virgil's intratextual references at *Aen.* 4.101, 6.442, 4.308 and Thomas 1988: *ad Georg.* 3.259.

<sup>82</sup> This 'epic catalogue' has Homeric origins, and again from the Underworld of *Odyssey* 11: Φαίδρην τε Πρόκριν τε ἴδον καλήν τ' Ἀριάδην . . . Μαΐράν τε Κλυμένην τε ἴδον στυγερὴν τ' Ἐριφύλην (321, 326). On Phaedra from Homer to Attic tragedy see Fin-glass 2020b. For the unresolved coherence of Virgil's catalogue of women see Norden 1957: *ad* 445ff.; Austin 1977: *ad* 449.

definitely more a ‘tragedy of *amor*’ than a ‘tragedy of *pudor*’.<sup>83</sup>

The first two heroines mentioned in the catalogue are quite important for our discourse on how Dido’s imagery shapes the (future) story or her ‘older’ literary sisters. We have argued that Phaedra (Eur. *Hipp.* 530) is fundamental in the formation of the crucial image and the topos of the love shaft. But if, in Euripides (*Hipp.* 770f., 776-83), Phaedra kills herself according to the more customary way of female suicide in classical tragedy, namely hanging (cf. Fraenkel 1932; Loraux 1985: 31ff.; Heinze 1993: 102), Seneca’s Phaedra, thus marking a fundamental difference from her Euripidean fate (cf. Segal 1986: 129-33, 208; Schiesaro 2003: 221), kills herself (*Phae.* 1197), like Dido, with the sword of her beloved (714).<sup>84</sup> Moreover, this sword becomes pivotal in the tragic dynamics of Phaedra’s *Liebestod*.<sup>85</sup>

A woman already consumed by love grief and unable to sleep (*Phae.* 99-103 and Boyle 1987: *ad loc.*)<sup>86</sup> in the manner of Dido (in *Aen.* 4.2-5 and 4.522-32) and devoured by Dido’s same ‘flames of love’,<sup>87</sup> when she decides to die (*Phae.* 258-61 and Casamento 2011: *ad loc.*) Phaedra ‘quotes’ *Aen.* 4.475 (*decreuitque mori*) and even debates with herself, in a clearly allusive metaliterary way, about the most appropriate ‘literary’ suicidal model:

Decreta mors est: quaeritur fati genus.  
laqueone uitam finiam an ferro incubem?  
an missa praeceps arce Palladia cadam?  
proin castitatis uindictam armemus manum.  
(258-61)

[Death is resolved; the question is how to die. Shall I end my life with a rope, or fall on a sword, or jump and fall headlong from Pallas’ citadel? So I must arm my hands to defend my chastity]

<sup>83</sup> In *Inferno* 5.61f. Dante manages to blend both ‘tragedies’ of Dido in a single tercet: “L’altra è colei che s’ancise amorosa / e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo”, thus referring both to *Aen.* 6.440-74 (Dido in the *lugentes campi*) and to 4.52 *non seruata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo* (Dido’s ‘tragedy of *pudor*’).

<sup>84</sup> The same change in the manner of death, in Senecan drama, takes place also for Jocasta in *Oed.* 1028-32.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Boyle 1987: *ad* 706 and 711f.; Segal 1986: 129.

<sup>86</sup> Sen. *Phae.* 99-103: *Sed maior alius incubat maestae dolor. / non me quies nocturna, non altus sopor / soluere curis: alitur et crescit malum / et ardet intus qualis Aetnaeo uapor / exundat antro* (“But another, greater pain weighs on my distress. No nightly rest, no deep sleep releases me from my cares. My trouble feeds and grows and burns within me, like the heat that pours from Etna’s cavern”).

<sup>87</sup> On Phaedra and Dido’s flames see *Phae.* 360-6 with Boyle 1987: *ad* 362. See also the first choral ode on the universal power of sexual love (Boyle 1987: 154), especially 274-80 for the union of flames and love shafts (*flammis simul et sagittis* 276) and the Virgilian filter for the use of this imagery (Casamento 2011: 166f.).

The Ovidian window reference (*Met.* 14.81 *incubuit ferro*, Dido in the *parua Aeneis*' four-line résumé of Book 4) reveals the origin of Phaedra's sword in Seneca, and anticipates her final choice.<sup>88</sup> In a relentless progression (e.g. *Phae.* 713f., 725-30, 866, 1157, 1176-8) the sword becomes more and more important in the tragic dynamics, to the point that, almost personified, it really takes the centre of the stage as a proper character, driving the plot to its tragic conclusion:

PH. Hic dicet ensis, quem tumultu territus  
liquit stuprator ciuium accursum timens.  
(896f-7)

[This sword will tell you: frightened by the outcry the rapist left it, fearing that citizens would gather.]

Until the climax of Phaedra's very last words and *Liebestod* on the sword of the beloved (1197-8):

mucrone pectus impium iusto patet  
cruorque sancto soluit inferias uiro.

[My unnatural breast is justly opened by the sword (literally, "by a just sword"), and my blood pays funeral offerings to a righteous man.]

Not just *res* but *verba* as well: Dido lends Seneca's Phaedra not only her sword, but her rhetorical strategy as well. If we follow the, now familiar, multiple allusive threads of Dido's imagery, there appears that, exactly like Dido in *Aen.* 4, Phaedra too, in Seneca's tragedy, is killed by a dangerous rhetorical passage from the figurative to the real. Yet, with a more daring intertextual movement, Phaedra's figurative 'sword' is not at the beginning of her Senecan tragedy, but comes from Euripides: it is in fact the all-important βέλος from *Hipp.* 530, the actual tragic archetype of the metaphorical "love shaft", the same image that, as we saw, through Apollonius' Medea (*Arg.* 3.386) had come to Dido in *Aen.* 4.<sup>89</sup> Seneca's Phaedra finally literalises (Euripides') Phaedra's metaphors.

The same metaphorical play is fatal for yet another sister of Dido's, Procris, the second heroine of the 'catalogue of women' in the *lugentes campi* (*Aen.* 6.445) and Phaedra's first companion in the Homeric catalogue of *Od-*

<sup>88</sup> And adds Thisbe (at *Met.* 4.163 *dixit et aptato pectus mucrone sub imum / incubuit ferro, quod adhuc a caede tepebat*) – another example of *Liebestod* – to our catalogue.

<sup>89</sup> To further entangle this intertextual skein, Seneca's Medea too (becoming more and more like Dido: cf. Boyle 2014 *ad* 136, *saeuit infelix amor*) 'plays' with Dido's sword in the progression towards her revenge and the killing of her children (cf. 166f., 970, 1006, 550). Phaedra and Dido (*Elissa*) are also paired in a new catalogue by Ausonius in *Epigr.* 103.12.

yssey 11.321. It is precisely Dido's proleptic imagery, and namely the incapacity of distinguishing the real from the figurative meaning in the erotic discourse, that kills Procris in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7, 'coincidentally' the book in which Medea has lost herself, enmeshed in the metaphors of Dido's incurable disease.<sup>90</sup> In rewriting the story of the woman accidentally killed by the javelin (that she had given as a gift to his husband, the hunter Cephalus) Ovid relies once again on Dido's model.

Exploiting a tangible reification (that turns out to be a tragic prolepsis) of the ominous imagery that we are now familiar with, Ovid begins his account of the story of Cephalus and Procris (*Met.* 7.661-8.5)<sup>91</sup> with an important and unexpected protagonist: a shaft, as Cephalus is induced to tell his sad story of love and death after a question on his magic javelin (7.675-82, 794), a gift from his lost wife Procris (7.756). Following this cue, two are the most important variations worth considering in the Ovidian rewriting of the myth in the *Metamorphoses*. The first concerns Procris' 'rhetorical tragedy'. Compared to the Greek sources of this myth of mutual and fatal jealousy and seduction, with Ovid this story becomes in fact a proper tragedy of rhetorical equivocation, as Procris is killed by Cephalus' javelin because she cannot 'read' the figurative language of his song to *Aurora*: unexpectedly, and lethally, she identifies the *verbum proprium* with the *verbum improprium* of the conventions of the elegiac erotic discourse (Rosati 2016: 97-100; Labate 1975: 126f.). Which, again, can be read as another very daring Ovidian condensation of the metaphorical dynamics that sustain the entire *Didobuch* from 4.1f. to the final sword and pyre. But that Dido is the real key – here the second, allusive, Ovidian innovation – to understand Procris' tragedy is truly confirmed by the lines that portray her fatal wound when Cephalus discovers that his real shaft has accidentally pierced his wife (7.842-47):

Procris erat medioque tenens in pectore uulnus  
 'ei mihi' conclamat! uox est ubi cognita fidae  
 coniugis, ad uocem praeceps amensque cucurri.  
 semianimem et sparsas foedantem sanguine uestes  
 et sua (me miserum!) de uulnere dona trahentem  
 inuenio

[It was Procris. Clasp[ing] the wound in her breast she cried out 'Ah, me!' Recognising it as the voice of my faithful wife, I ran headlong and frantic towards that voice. I found her half-alive, her clothes sprinkled with drops

<sup>90</sup> See above pp. 124-30 and Ziosi 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Also used as an *exemplum* in *Ars* 3.683-746. On Ovid's Cephalus and Procris see Pöschl 1959; Segal 1978; Otis 1970: 176-82; Tarrant 1995; Galasso 2000: 1119-24; Kenney 2011: 290.

of blood, and (what misery!) trying to pull this spear, her gift to me, from the wound. (trans. Kline 2004)].

With the same ‘dramatic’ movement (and almost the same syntax and words: *semianimem et sparsas foedantem sanguine uestes*, *Met.* 7.845) of Dido’s maidens in *Aen.* 4.663-5 (*atque illam media inter talia ferro / conlapsam aspiciunt comites, ensemque cruore / spumantem sparsasque manus*, “[she] fell upon the sword. Her attendant saw her fall. They saw the blood foaming on the blade and staining her hands”) and of Anna, Dido’s sister, in *Aen.* 4.686f. (*semianimemque sinu germanam amplexa fouebat / cum gemitu atque atros siccat ueste cruores*, “[she] was now holding her dying sister to her breast and cherishing her, sobbing as she dried the dark blood with her own dress”), Cephalus finds his wife dying, struggling to pull the shaft from the wound in her breast (*in pectore uulnus*, *Met.* 7.842). A real wound, whose intertextuality takes us back directly to Dido’s real wound at the very moment of her death (*Aen.* 4.689): *infixum stridit sub pectore uulnus* (“the wound hissed round the sword beneath her breast”, cf. Segal 1978: 188; Hejduk 2011: 295f.) and, even more importantly and with the same words, to Dido’s figurative wound in *Aen.* 4.67: the crucial metaphorical *uulnus*, immediately followed by the all-important wounded doe simile (4.68-73; see pp. 130-2). From the perspective of *Metamorphoses* 7 then, Dido’s wounded doe simile seems precisely to announce the ‘metamorphosis’ of Procris’ story in Ovid, where Dido’s imagery becomes real . . . and lethal.<sup>92</sup> Because these ‘younger sisters’ of Dido’s learn something more than mere intertextuality: they are already wont to play with the figurative meaning of her imagery. And as Seneca’s Phaedra literalises – through Dido – the topical shaft of her Euripidean ‘original’, thus Procris – through Dido’s words – brings to ‘life’ Dido’s most dangerous (and prophetic) simile: the hunted doe accidentally killed by the shaft shot by a *nescius* hunter/lover. But this realisation of the imagery also performs an exquisite Ovidian rhetorical trick, as in the *Metamorphoses* similes often work, in a proleptic way, as a real anticipation of a true metamorphosis:<sup>93</sup> yet here, with an acrobatic intertextual gap, the simile comes from Dido’s imagery in the *Aeneid*. In the moment of her death, Procris becomes Dido.

## 6. The ‘Removal’ of the Shaft

The attempt of removing the Freudian stigma of the sword (and Aene-

<sup>92</sup> To confirm the Dido-Procris identification, Procris’ dying words (*Met.* 7.852-6) are a paraphrase (via *Her.* 7.177) of Dido’s most moving prayer to Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.314-19; see Segal 1978; Kenney 2011: *ad* 7.854; Pease 1935: *ad* 314).

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Barkan 1986: 20.

as too) from the story of the queen of Carthage will grip the Apologists and the Fathers of the Church (at times with a hint of nationalistic pride, as many of them were of African origin). And with a new powerful Christian resemanticisation of the fire imagery (cf. Ziosi 2017: 40-54). Tertullian, for example, in *Ad nationes*, while unleashing a real battle against the fictional falsehood of (Virgil's) poetry, posits the 'real' Dido who throws herself in the fire (with no sword) as an *exemplum* of pre-Christian chaste martyrdom. In *De exhortatione castitatis* (and then in many other works) Dido is praised – along with Lucretia – as an exemplar (and pagan) model of monogamy because she preferred to, literally, burn rather than marry. This new metaphorical play with fire unexpectedly combines, in a paradoxical way, Virgil's imagery with the New Testament as this time Dido's death 'literalises', in *contrario motu*, St Paul's advice in 1 *Corinthians* 7.8f: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (King James Bible). These 'new flames' will burn again, in the same way, in Jerome (*Against Jovinian* 1 and in *Epistula* 123) and from there the chaste example of Dido will shine in Petrarch (*Triumphus pudicitie*; *Africa* 3.420-3; *Secretum* 3; *Familiares* 2.15.2; *Epistulae sine nomine* 5; *Seniles* 4.5) and Boccaccio (*De casibus virorum illustrium* 2.10-11; *De mulieribus claris* 42; *Genealogia deorum gentilium* 2.60).

## 7. Helen: Burning Cities

Perhaps Dido's most unexpected sister lurks in the flames of her pyre (*Aen.* 4.463-71):

dixerat, atque illam media inter talia ferro  
 conlapsam aspiciunt comites, ensemque cruore  
 spumantem sparsasque manus. it clamor ad alta  
 atria: concussam bacchatur Fama per urbem. 665  
 lamentis gemituque et femineo ululatu  
 tecta fremunt, resonat magnis plangoribus aether,  
 non aliter quam si immissis ruat hostibus omnis  
 Karthago aut antiqua Tyros, flammaeque furentes 670  
 culmina perque hominum uoluantur perque deorum.

[So she spoke and while speaking fell upon the sword. Her attendant saw her fall. They saw the blood foaming on the blade and staining her hands, and filled the high walls of the palace with their screaming. Rumour ran raving like a Bacchant through the stricken city. The palace rang with lamentations and groaning and the wailing of women and the heavens gave back the sound of mourning. It was as though the enemy were within the gates and the whole of Carthage or old Tyre were falling with flames raging

and rolling over the roofs of men and gods.]

The simile at 4.669-71 takes the literalisation of Dido's imagery to a further level as the flames of Dido's pyre here seem to turn into the flames that destroy a sieged city, conquered and sacked by the enemies (see Hardie 1986: 282-5). But here too Virgil relies on allusion to amplify the power of Dido's imagery in the usual passage from the figurative (*Aen.* 4.1f.) to the literal (4.663-5), then back to the figurative (4.669-71) and, as we shall see, back again to a 'future' historical literal. The epic model for this acrobatic expansion of the imagery is here Lucretius with the description of Paris' love for Helen: a burning passion that will eventually kindle the flames of war and lead to the actual burning of the city of Troy. "The development of the erotic image of flame into the real flames of the funeral pyre and of the sack of the city", in *Aen.* 4.669-71,<sup>94</sup> "is paralleled at *De Rerum Natura* 1.473ff." (Hardie 1986: 232):

numquam Tyndaridis forma conflatus amore  
 ignis Alexandri Phrygio sub pectore gliscens  
 clara accendisset saeui certamina belli  
 nec clam durateus Troianis Pergama partu  
 inflammasset equos nocturno Graiugenarum  
 (473-7)

[Never would the flames have been fired by love through the beauty of Tyndaris, nor swelling deep in the Phrygian heart of Alexander have kindled the blazing battles of savage war, nor unknown of the Trojans would the timber horse have set Pergama aflame at dead of night, when the sons of the Greeks issued from its womb. (trans. Bailey 1947)]

Such daring conceit could not fail to entice Ovid, who exploits these 'love-flames burning cities' in *Her.* 16 (*Paris Helenae*). In his passionate letter to Helen, Paris, starting with a bold rhetorical interpretation of his mother Hecuba's prophetic dream of fire, with naivety (all the more ironically tragic) discloses the 'Lucretian' figurative meaning of his love metaphors: so powerful is the "torch of his heart" that it can kindle the flames that, as foreseen, shall burn, for real, the city of Troy (cf. Rosati 1989: 296f.):

arsurum Paridis uates canit Ilion igni  
 pectoris, ut nunc est, fax fuit illa mei!  
 (16.49-50)

[one of the seers sang that Ilion would burn with the fire of Paris – that was the torch of my heart, as now has come to pass! (trans. Showerman 1914, as

<sup>94</sup> The intertext of the simile at *Aen.* 4.669-71 already pairs Carthage with Troy: *Iliad* 22.410f., cf. Pease 1935: *ad* 669.

below)]

Finally, with an ominous promise to Helen, Paris closes the circle of this acrobatic play on the figurative and literal value of his flames with a reference to Dido's final love fire/pyre:<sup>95</sup>

Da modo te, quae sit Paridis constantia, nosces;  
 flamma rogi flammas finiet una meas.  
 (16.163-4)

[Only give yourself to me, and you shall know of Paris' constancy; the flame of the pyre alone will end the flames of my love]

From tragedy to epos and back to tragedy. We considered, especially through Euripidean examples, the tragic origin of the proleptic use of Virgil's imagery. A most striking Renaissance example shows that this very use of the imagery, and the ironic play on the literal and the figurative meaning of metaphors, can sustain a proper dramatic plot. In his first tragedy, *Dido Queen of Cartage*, the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe,<sup>96</sup> with his very Ovidian reading of the *Aeneid*, manages to acknowledge – in an astonishingly elaborate way – the very subtle (and 'Lucretian') meaning of Virgil's imagery and then develops Dido's metaphors into new very powerful conceits that properly 'generate' the dramatic action.

By recovering Virgil's symbolic use of fire in Aeneas' account of the fall of Troy in *Aen.* 2,<sup>97</sup> Marlowe 'translates' for the stage the entire Book 2 of the *Aeneid* in the second act of *Dido Queen of Cartage* and transforms it into a huge metaphorical prolepsis of the real fire (without a sword!) that will burn Dido (inflamed by love) at the end of the play, thus turning Dido's simile of the burnt and sacked city (*Aen.* 4.669-71) into an entire dramatic act. Moreover, as in Lucretius (1.473-7) and in *Her.* 16, Helen, as a true hypostasis of the real burning of Troy, becomes the most powerful incarnation of the destructive power of love and desire in *Dido Queen of Carthage*, and, from there, in the whole of the Marlovian poetic imagery. In the hyperboles of her paradoxical desire, Marlowe's Dido even wishes, overtly, to become another Helen and thus to literalise, like Troy's, the figurative (in *Aen.* 4.669-71) destruction of Carthage:

<sup>95</sup> As we saw, at the end of her letter in the *Heroides* Dido is precisely *consumpta rogis* (7.193).

<sup>96</sup> In an age in which artists and poets are wont to allude to the royal status of the 'virgin queen' Elizabeth through Dido's original (and 'chaste') name, Elissa: see Ziosi 2015: 51-8, Hardie 2014a: 60-4.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Heinze 1993: 17f., 95f.; Fenik 1959, Pöschl 1962: 87; Lyne 1987: 18-20 and Ziosi 2015: 99-103.

Hast thou forgot how many neighbour kings  
 were up in arms, for making thee my love?  
 How Carthage did rebel, Iarbas storm,  
 and all the world calls me a second Helen,  
 for being entangled by a stranger's looks:  
 so thou wouldst prove as true as Paris did,  
 would, as faire Troy was, Carthage might be sacked,  
 and I be called a second Helena!  
 (*Dido Queen of Carthage* 5.1.141-8) <sup>98</sup>

Marlowe makes his dizzy intertextual game even more explicit in the 'Ovidian' ekphrasis on the temple of Venus in his poem *Hero and Leander* (an old Virgilian acquaintance of Dido's and of her *durus amor!* cf. *Georg.* 3.258-63, *Aen.* 6.442 and above, n81) as he uses the literalisation of Paris' flame as ultimate paradigm for the power of love: "Love kindling fire to burn such towns as Troy" (*Hero and Leander* 1.153, see Ziosi 2015: 86-91). And, finally, in one of the most celebrated passages of the entire Elizabethan theatre, Faustus resorts to the same image, intratextually quoting *Dido Queen of Carthage* (and, from afar, Virgil's metaphorical strategy), in the famous Helen of Troy monologue, where Helen is hyperbolically posited almost as a 'unity of measure'<sup>99</sup> for the destructive power of the realisation of love metaphors (cf. Ziosi 2015: 107-12):

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
 And burnt the topless Towers of Ilium?  
 ...  
 I will be Paris, and for love of thee,  
 Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked  
 (*Doctor Faustus* 5.1.1768f., 1775f.)

## 8. Hannibal and Cleopatra: Burnt Cities and the Wounds of (Roman) History

But some cities were burnt for real. As a final twist in the reading of Dido's imagery, in the simile of the 'burning cities' (*Aen.* 4.669-71) the passage from the figurative to the real is paralleled by the passage from the private to the public and, more broadly, from fiction to history.<sup>100</sup> As Brooks

<sup>98</sup> Marlowe's works' line count, as elsewhere, is from Bowers 1981.

<sup>99</sup> As is known, wittingly alluding to Marlowe's Helen of Troy monologue, Isaac Asimov is credited for the coining of a proper humorous unity of measure for beauty, the "milli-Hellen": "if Helen of Troy represents the amount to launch a thousand ships, a "milli-Helen" is the amount needed to launch just one" (Maguire 2009: 161).

<sup>100</sup> On Dido and Hannibal and Cleopatra (and yet another Medea) see Giusti 2018.

Otis (1963: 72) pointed out: “the wound and the flames that mark Dido’s end, and proleptically Carthage’s end as well (*flammae furentes*, 670), are thus the visible signs of an inner tragedy: the course of the book has developed Dido’s *private* wound and *private* conflagration into a *public* catastrophe, foreshadowing a greater one to come”. With the simile at 4.669-71 Virgil certainly also alludes, in fact, to the historical destruction of Carthage in 146 BCE. After all, one of the ‘Naevian’ functions of Dido in the *Aeneid* is to provide a mythological *aition* to the enmity between Rome and Carthage in the Punic Wars (cf. Pease 1935: 493f.; Hardie 1986: 282-85). What is more surprising is to find Dido’s imagery (here *face . . . ferro*, “torch” and “sword”) as Hannibal’s weapons<sup>101</sup> in Dido’s final curse (*Aen.* 4.622-9):

tum uos, o Tyrii, stirpem et genus omne futurum  
 exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nostro  
 munera. nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt.  
 exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor  
 qui face Dardanios ferroque sequare colonos,  
 nunc, olim, quocumque dabunt se tempore uires.  
 litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas  
 imprecor, arma armis: pugnent ipsique nepotesque.

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[As for you, my Tyrians, you must pursue with hatred the whole line of his descendants in time to come. Make that your offering to my shade. Let there be no love between our peoples and no treaties. Arise from my dead bones, O my unknown avenger, and harry the race of Dardanus with fire and sword wherever they may settle, now and in the future, whenever our strength allows it.]

Yet again, from Dido’s pyre another historical ‘sister’ emerges as well, and in a rather unexpected fashion. In a fundamental passage for the evolution of her imagery (and for her literary ‘life’), Dido is depicted by Virgil as *pallida morte futura*, “pale as she is about to die”:

at trepida et coeptis immanibus effera Dido  
 sanguineam uoluens aciem, maculisque tremantis  
 interfusa genas et pallida morte futura,  
 interiora domus inrumpit limina et altos  
 conscendit furibunda rogos ensemque recludit

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On the meaning of Dido (or the two Didos) for the opposition between Rome and Carthage see also Quint 2018: 67-81.

<sup>101</sup> But also with Dido’s ghost haunting Aeneas in *Aen.* 4.384-6: *sequar atris ignibus absens / et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus, / omnibus umbra locis adero* (“I shall follow you not in the flesh but in the black fires of death and when its cold hand takes the breath from my body, my shade will be with you wherever you may be”). Silius Italicus’ young Hannibal will remember Dido’s curse in his oath in *Punica* 1.114f.

Dardanium, non hos quaesitum munus in usus  
(*Aen.* 4.642-7)

[Dido (was) full of wild fears at the thought of what she was about to do. Her cheeks trembling and flecked with red, her bloodshot eyes rolling, she was pale with the pallor of approaching death. Rushing through the door into the inner courtyard, she climbed the high pyre in a frenzy and un-sheathed the Trojan sword for which she had asked – though not for this purpose.]

The same words<sup>102</sup> – and such intratextual links in Virgil’s poetic design are always meaningful – are used (in *Aen.* 8.709: *pallentem morte futura*) to define Cleopatra – whose dangerous historical destiny of African female menace for Rome’s hegemony is allegorically mirrored by Dido (Pease 1935: 24-28; La Penna 1985; Hardie 2014a: 57) – in the ekphrastic prophecy of the Battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas at the end of Book 8.

Significantly, and to conclude, the afterlife of the Dido-Cleopatra pair brings us back to the (initial) figurative meaning of Dido’s imagery, as in Dante’s *Inferno* Cleopatra, along with the same tercet, shares Dido’s love passion, and the same doom, amongst the Lustful, where the pair is significantly followed by Helen:

L’altra è colei che s’ancise amorosa,  
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;  
poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.  
Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo  
tempo si volse.  
(5.61-5)

[Lo! she that slew herself for love, untrue / to Sychaeus’ ashes. Lo! tost on the blast, / voluptuous Cleopatra, whom love slew. / Look, look on Helen, for whose sake rolled past / long evil years. (trans. Sayers 1949)]

After all the ‘afterlife’ seems to be a somehow soothing place in which to rewrite, with a happy ending, the destinies of both heroines. Or at least so does – in an unconscious metaliterary way? – Antony in the *Liebestod* of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (4.14.45-55):<sup>103</sup>

I will o’ertake thee, Cleopatra, and  
weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now  
all length is torture; since the torch is out,

<sup>102</sup> Only with a slightly more vivid brushstroke given by the present participle instead of the adjective.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Wilders 1995: 66f., 257; Hardie 2014a: 57; see also Pelling 1988: 17f. for the similarities between Antony and Cleopatra in Plutarch and Dido and Aeneas in Virgil.

lie down and stray no farther.

...

Eros! – I come, my queen. – Eros! – Stay for me.  
Where souls do couch on flowers we'll hand in hand,  
and with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.  
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops  
and all the haunt be ours.

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MICHAEL NEILL\*

## **“Monstruous Empire”: Queenly Power in *Anthony and Cleopatra***

Abstract

Taking its cue from John Knox’s famous diatribe against female rule, *The Monstruous Regiment of Women* (1558), this essay seeks to investigate Shakespeare’s vision of queenly power in *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Contrasting his Egyptian majesty with figures of female authority in a number of earlier plays, it reads Anthony’s teasing description of that “strange serpent” the crocodile as a key to the play’s treatment of Cleopatra, that “serpent of old Nile”. By virtue of their seeming beyond definition or satisfactory description, both creatures are rendered “strange” or “monstrous” – placed, as it were, outside the bourn of what seems “natural”. But where the monstrous normally incites disgust or horror, in Cleopatra’s case it invites admiration and amazement – a wonder that extends to the magic of theatre itself with its strange power to make real what it admits nevertheless “beggars all description”.

KEYWORDS: Amazon; monster; strange; power; triumph

In one of the more celebrated scenes from *Anthony and Cleopatra*, as the triumvirs, Caesar, Anthony, and Lepidus, feast with their rival, Pompey, Anthony entertains the company with exotic tales of Egypt. As he discourses upon the extraordinary fertility of the Nile’s “slime and ooze” (2.7.22),<sup>1</sup> Lepidus takes the opportunity to interrogate him about its other marvels: “You’ve strange serpents there”, he prompts, expressing peculiar fascination with the crocodile, which, like “your serpent of Egypt”, is said to be miraculously “bred . . . out of your mud by the operation of your sun” (24-6). Wine is flowing, and the conversation veers off towards the wonder of the pyramids, but Lepidus can’t help returning to this reptilian curiosity: “What manner o’thing is your crocodile?” he eagerly demands; but Anthony responds to his excitement with nothing more than a set of sardonic pleonasm:

<sup>1</sup> Citations from this play are to the Oxford edition, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

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It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates . . . [It is] of its own colour too . . . And the tears of it are wet.

(41-8)

“’Tis a strange serpent”, mutters the drunken Lepidus, subsiding into silent awe. Of course his bumbling repetition of “strange serpent” is meant satirically; moreover, “strange” is a word that has now become so worn with time that it is easy to miss its larger resonances. But in a play that is much concerned with forms of strangeness and estrangement, the rhetoric of wonder deserves closer attention: in early modern usage, the senses of “strange” included not just “foreign, alien” and “unknown, unfamiliar”, but “abnormal, queer, surprising, unaccountable” (*OED* adj. 1a, 6, 7, 10), and hence something close to “unnatural”. The adjective occurs no fewer than fourteen times in *Anthony and Cleopatra* – more often than in any other play from the canon except, significantly, *Macbeth*, where it is especially associated with the obscure, supernatural world of the “weird sisters”. Here, as Anthony’s mock zoology already suggests, it denotes a creature so far beyond the norms of Roman experience that it is literally indescribable – as though no language exists adequate to its foreign peculiarity.

Yet the play’s exotic bestiary includes other equally strange serpents, and perhaps the strangest of them is Cleopatra herself, the temptress whom Anthony has already called “my serpent of old Nile” (1.5.25), swearing his loyalty “by the fire / That quickens Nilus slime” (1.3.68-9). With uncanny aptness, her carefully orchestrated suicide involves the bite of another serpent, “the pretty worm / Of Nilus” that disappears as she dies, leaving its own stealthy trail of Nilotic “slime” in the Clown’s basket of figs (5.2.242-3, 350); and Cleopatra’s death is made to echo the way in which her self-identification as the “serpent of old Nile” leads into her first intimation of dying: “Now I feed myself / With most delicious poison” (1.5.25-7). Like Egypt’s other serpents, Cleopatra is presented as a kind of mysterious river creature: in Enobarbus’s famous evocation of her first encounter with Anthony, her magnificent gilded barge floats down the Cydnus, “burn[ing] on the water”, while “a strange invisible perfume hits the sense” (2.2.198-9, 219), in a spectacle that co-opts the very forces of nature – wind, fire, and water – to its erotic magic; and like the crocodile’s, the Queen’s own figure so far “out-work[s] nature” (208) as to “begga[r] all description” (8). Enobarbus’s verb sends us back to Anthony’s hyperbolic protestation in the opening scene, “There’s beggary in the love that can be reckoned” (1.1.15), with its pretence that his is a love so far beyond calculation that it lies outside the “bourn” of nature itself: “Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth” (17).

Strangeness had another face, however; since any being that appeared to lie beyond the boundaries of the natural order might appear less a wonder than a monster – as crocodiles themselves were in the popular imagination, and in those collections known as ‘cabinets of curiosities’.



Cabinet of curiosities, engraving from Ferrante Imperato, *Dell'Historia Naturale* (Naples, 1599). Printed in Venice 1962.

Enobarbus, indeed – immediately before launching into his lavish rhetorical evocation of the Cydnus pageant – refers to Cleopatra as just such a creature: following his account of “wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast”, he teases his audience with the prospect of “much more “monstruous” matter of feast, which worthily deserved noting” – a leering hint not lost on Maecenas, who responds: “She’s a most triumphant lady, if report be square to her” (2.2.185-92; emphasis added). Enobarbus’s adjective is largely playful, but, after their final defeat at Alexandria, Anthony himself will imagine his Egyptian Queen like some strange captive beast, displayed “most monster-like” in Caesar’s triumphal procession. Such language is necessarily coloured by a whole history of misogynistic denunciation involving the supposedly “unnatural” character of women in authority – a history into which the woman-serpent Cleopatra all too easily fits; and, of course, it also resonates with the Genesis story in which the association of woman and serpent was made responsible for the Fall of Mankind.

To many in the early modern world the very notion of queenly power constituted an uncomfortable paradox, since it appeared to run counter to the biblical insistence upon the proper subordination of womankind: “thy desire *shal be subiect* to thine husband”, the Almighty admonishes Eve after she has succumbed to the serpent’s guile, “and he shal rule ouer thee” (Genesis, 3.16).<sup>2</sup> No woman, then, should exercise power on her own account; so the word ‘queen’ most often denoted not a ruler but the wife of a king. Insofar as this was a powerful position, custom and law, as well as scripture, decreed that its power, like that of any household mistress, was derivative rather than properly authoritative. The rules of royal succession, however, meant that, in the absence of a male heir, a woman might nevertheless become queen in her own right; and England, for the second half of the sixteenth century, found itself governed by two female monarchs, the Catholic Mary I (who ruled independently of her husband, Philip II of Spain) and her Protestant sister, the determinedly unmarried Elizabeth I. The problematic nature of their authority was inevitably exploited in the conflicts of religious allegiance that pitched Mary against her Protestant subjects, and her Catholic subjects against Elizabeth – conflicts intensified by the latter’s quarrel with her Catholic rival, Mary, Queen of Scots. Hostility to the supposedly unnatural character of such rule had been famously proclaimed in the Scottish reformer John Knox’s treatise, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstruous Regiment of Women* (1558), a violent attack on the Catholic queens of England and Scotland, as well as upon Mary Stuart’s mother, Mary of Guise, who was acting as Regent of Scotland during her daughter’s minority. In his diatribe, Knox again and again declares the rule of women an affront to both God and nature, citing scripture, along with the opinions of theologians, and even pagan philosophers, in support of his misogynistic conviction that female rule was by definition a monstrous thing:

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any realme, nation or citie is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance, and finallie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice.

(9)

Women being the mortal source of Original Sin, God himself had decreed that they “shal be subject unto man, as the fleshe is unto the spirite” (20). As such they must be contained; and for Knox, women belonged so much

<sup>2</sup> Cited from *The Bible, that is, the Holy Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testament translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languages . . .* (London, 1606).

to the private sphere that even the power of speech should be denied them – at least in any public setting. Citing St Ambrose, he declared that

It is not permitted to women to speake, but to be in silence, as the lawe saith. What saith the lawe? Unto thy husband, shall thy conversion be, and he shall beare dominion over the. This is a speciall lawe (saith Ambrose) whose sentence, lest it shulde be violated, infirmed, or made weake, women are commanded to be in silence.

(22)

Extreme as Knox's opinions may sound, their proper silencing was of course the principal reason why women were forbidden to perform on the public stage. Cleopatra may be allowed the most eloquent voice in Shakespeare's tragedy, but only (as she herself complains in one of the play's wrier metadramatic moments) so long as there is "some squeaking Cleopatra [to] boy [her] greatness" on the public stage (5.2.220).

There was, it is true, a comic side to such prohibition: Knox's insistence upon the gagging of women has its satiric equivalent in the title-page engraving for Thomas Heywood's *A Curtaine Lecture* (London, 1637), where a domineering spouse subjects her powerless husband to two unrelenting hours of rebuke.

The harridan wife of this deplorable scene had earlier theatrical counterparts – notably in Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, where Petruchio finally quells Kate's "scolding tongue" (1.2.244) and "spirit to resist" (3.2.211), forcing her to proclaim to all woman-kind that "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign . . . Such duty as the subject owes the prince, / Even such a woman oweth to her husband" (5.1.158-68). Kate here is made to parrot the domestic pieties that are systematised in popular treatises like Robert Cleaver's *Godly Forme of Household Government* (1598), where households are imagined precisely as patriarchal kingdoms in little. Yet there is, of course, a hint of subversive contradiction (often exploited in recent



Frontispiece from Thomas Heywood's *A Curtaine Lecture* (London, 1637).  
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productions of the play) in the fact that it is Kate who is allowed to bring the action to a close with what is the longest speech in the play – twice as long as the soliloquy in which Petruchio has declared the beginning of his domestic “reign” in the previous act (4.1.162-81).

For Knox, to witness a woman exercising “rule . . . in the midst of men” was not simply an undoing of good governance but, by virtue of its affront to God’s decrees, an inversion of the natural order itself: the spectacle of a queen with “the royall crowne upon her head, the sword and sceptre borne before her, in signe that the administration of justice was in her power” was enough to suggest that “the hole worlde [had been] transformed in to Amazones”, thereby ensuring that all males were “changed from the wisdom, understanding, and courage of men, to the foolishne fondnes and cowardise of women” (10-11). The suggestion of supernatural evil in the description of humankind as “transformed” into Amazons is more than simply metaphorical: since women’s defiance of scriptural decree repeats the disobedience of Eve, it must necessarily be, for Knox, the work of the devil (see 18) and therefore involve a sinister kind of metamorphosis – one that resonates with his repeated insistence upon the “monstruous” character of female rule (see e.g. 13, 27, 48, 54); for in the early



Map illustrating Raleigh’s *Discoverie of . . . Guiana*, from Theodor de Bry, *America pars VIII* (Frankfurt, 1599). Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC.

modern imaginary, Amazons featured alongside those terrifyingly unnatural creatures thought to populate the remote margins of the world – as they do, for example, in Theodor de Bry's map illustrating Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana*, where the figure of an Amazon is posed alongside one of those monstrous "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" that Othello remembers from his own "travailous history" (*Oth.*, 1.3.139-40, 45).<sup>3</sup> It was, however, possible to think about the amazonian power of queens in a very different way. Samuel Purchas, for example, celebrated his late sovereign, Elizabeth, as "This Christian Amazon . . . our Debora", whose wars against "those Romish", like the battles of the Hebrew prophetess against the Canaanites, have stirred "the admiration of men, the joy of Angels, and acknowledgement in all of the sword of the Lord and of Gedeon, the power of the highest perfected in her weakness": Elizabeth is an admirable "virago" whose patronage of Drake's great voyage "first loosed the virgin zone of the earth" (1613, 34). Yet the very word "virago", denoting a man-like woman, could not altogether shake off its suggestion of unnaturalness; and the Queen herself could hardly remain impervious to the substantial portion of opinion that sympathised with Knox's opinions. The Virgin Queen's defence lay in the chameleon nature of her carefully constructed royal persona, which allowed her to appear superbly feminine or defiantly masculine, as occasion served. The glamorous cynosure of her male courtiers' adoration could transform herself at will into the virile sovereign of her Armada speech – the warlike figure in a breastplate who famously declared: "I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king". Spenser's celebratory epic *The Faerie Queene* is careful to pay tribute to Elizabeth's multiple personae: she is not merely its eponymous absent presence and the "Queene of loue" (*Faerie Queene*, 4, Proem, 4, 9), but the "piteous maiden" Una (1.6.6, 1),<sup>4</sup> the incarnation of religious truth, who is set against the Scottish Mary's Duessa, the embodiment of Catholic duplicity; she is not only the beautiful huntress, Belphoebe, but the female knight, Britomart, the personification of militant chastity. The masculine heroism of Britomart's role, however, is qualified by the revelation that all her chivalric questing is ultimately driven by a properly feminine desire to love and therefore to "submit [her] wayes" to the "will" of the "prowest knight", Sir Artegal (3.3.24, 7-8). It may have been in part Elizabeth's own failure to fulfil this ideal destiny that made it impossible for Spenser to complete his great poem. Indeed the difficulty for any writer

<sup>3</sup> Cited from the Oxford edition, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Citations from *The Faerie Queene* are to *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by James Cruickshanks Smith and Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

seeking to flatter the Queen was to evade the traps that might be hidden in too close an identification with any single persona, which is no doubt why Shakespeare himself took care to celebrate the escape of a “fair vestal thronèd by the west” from the amorous entanglements of his own fairy world in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,<sup>5</sup> where Cupid vainly shoots his love dart at this “imperial vot’ress”, as she passes from view unharmed, “In maiden meditation, fancy free” (2.1.158-64).

When Ben Jonson wrote his *Masque of Queens* (1609) for King James’s wife, Anne of Denmark, the business of queenly power must have seemed less contentious. Designed, as Jonson’s prefatory note explains, to be “A celebration of honourable, and true Fame, bred out of Vertue”, the masque introduces a “Spectacle of strangeness” involving “twelue Women, in the habit of Hags, or Witches”, who represent unnatural forms of female power, “the opposits to good Fame” (sig. A4); their leader is a demonic “Dame” whose hair is “folded with Vipers” (sig. B2). Followers of the “powerfull” goddess Hecate, who use their “powers” to make themselves “the scourge of Men” (sig. C3), they are set against twelve virtuous queens from the House of Fame, who are discovered “sitting vpon a Throne triumphal, erected in the forme of a Pyramide”, and whose fame and goodness are proclaimed, reassuringly enough, by the figure of “heroique, and masculine Vertue” (sig. D2). All of them warrior figures, they include “Penthesilea, the braue Amazon” (sig. D3), and the legendarily warlike British queen Voadicea (or Bunduca); but several, including Artemisia and Hypsicratea, are also distinguished by their properly feminine love of their husbands: the latter, indeed, as proof of her love, adopted “a Masculine habite” in order to be properly “assistant” to her husband in the “hazards of the warre” (sig. E2). Presiding over them is Bel-Anna (played by the Queen herself) who “alone / Possest all vertues, for which One by One / They were so fam’d” (sig. D3). Mounted in “three triumphant Chariots”, under Bel-Anna’s command, the Queens overcome the Hags whom they drive before them as they ride “triumphing about the Stage” in what the closing song presents as a formal Triumph of Fame (sig. E3v, F1-2). The vision of triumphant (but nevertheless implicitly subordinate) queenship celebrated in Jonson’s masque might almost be seen as a riposte to the very different queenly power celebrated in Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*, a play that makes its own use of Roman triumph.

In Shakespeare’s earlier work, by contrast, female rulers – as well as

<sup>5</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, citations from Shakespeare are to the RSC *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (New York: Modern Library, 2007). Significantly, the play’s first performance seems to have occurred shortly after the publication of Spenser’s first four books in January 1596.

warrior women more generally – tend to have more in common with Jonson's Hags than with his Queens: they are, at the least, dangerously ambiguous figures. When the Pucelle in *1 Henry VI* overcomes the French Dauphin, Charles sees her as a virtuous "Amazon", one who (like Purchas's Elizabeth) seems to fight with the sword of Deborah (1.2.104-5); but from the point of view of the English this "sorceress condemned to burn" (5.4.1) is more Duessa than Britomart, and when in *3 Henry VI*, the "She-wolf" (1.4.111), Queen Margaret, "play[s] the Amazon" (4.1.105), it is her monstrous nature that, to her enemies at least, stands exposed: "How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex / To triumph, like an Amazonian trull" (1.4.114-15) – just as in *Macbeth*, the murder of Duncan reveals the Lady Macbeth as a "fiend-like Queen", both "monstrous" and "unnatural" (5.7.114; 3.6.8; 5.1.545); whilst in *King Lear* Goneril and Regan, as they prepare to levy war against their own father, appear to Albany "most degenerate", falling away from their own kind to become "like monsters of the deep" (Q. passage, 4.2.150, 156), and to Lear himself as equally monstrous "Centaur[s]" (4.5.131). The vicious, manipulative Queen of *Cymbeline*, denounced as a "tyrant" by her step-daughter, Innogen (1.95), is not herself an Amazon, but it is she who goads her husband into war against Rome, and schemes to have the "placing of the British crown" upon the head of her son, Cloten (3.5.78). More playful and nuanced in their treatment of female belligerence are the two plays in which actual Amazons appear: the opening scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* both focus upon Theseus's conquest of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, and both look forward to the celebration of a marriage that will conclusively shrink this captive "into / The bound [she was] o'erflowing" (*The Two Noble Kinsmen*; 1.1.89-90).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Athenian ruler boasts to his prospective bride that "I woo'd thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries" (1.1.17-18). Hippolyta's defeat will have its supernatural counterpart in the Fairy King's victory over his own insubordinate Queen, whose rebellion has brought disorder to the entire natural world (2.1.8). Adding to that chaos are the ridiculous fallings-out that afflict the four young lovers of the main plot, as they become "wood [i.e. mad] within this wood" (2.1.196) – confusions that are themselves an unlucky consequence of the fairy dispute whose misprisions they mirror. The "unnatural" character of Titania's rebelliousness is brought home by the prank that causes her to fall in love with a literal "monster", in the shape of the "monstrous" ass-headed Bottom (3.1.74, 3.2.6, 390) – a creature whose "translated" deformity (3.1.84) itself bodies forth the abnormal ugliness that a similar trick seems to reveal in Helena, from whom her beloved Lysander flees as though she too were "a monster" (2). The play's comic ending is only made possible by Titania's capitulation to Oberon's kingly authority (4.1)

and by the “blessèd power” of his magic (l. 65) – which also restores Bottom from his monstrous condition and brings the maddened young lovers to their senses. Now is the time that Puck has promised, when “every man should take his own . . . The man shall have his mare again, And all shall be well” (3.2.475-9); but something more than a simple restoration of the “natural” order of things is involved, as Bottom’s entranced memory of his “dream” (4.1.) suggests, since to be “translated” is in some profound sense to be “transfigured” – as, in Hippolyta’s eyes, the young lovers themselves appear to be (5.1.24). If the play ends in harmony (both literal and metaphorical), its final act is full of reminders of the paradoxical nature of what Theseus calls “the concord of this discord” (5.1.60) – something that characterises not only “the musical confusion / Of hounds and echo in conjunction” (4.1.109-10), but even the ridiculous generic mixture of the mechanicals’ play, with its “very tragical mirth” (5.1.57). The play’s last scene begins with repeated reminders of the “strange” character of what the audience have witnessed (5.1.1-2, 27); and if it concludes a display of harmonious accord as the reunited Oberon and Titania, with their fairy train, perform a masque-like ritual of blessing upon the marriage of four mortal couples, their dancing is not only parodied in advance by the mechanicals’ clumsy “Bergamask” (5.1.326), but ushered in by Puck’s strangely ominous prologue, which allows us to glimpse the possibility of a very different kind of ending:

Now the wasted brands do glow  
 Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,  
 Puts the wretch that lies in woe  
 In remembrance of a shroud.  
 Now it is the time of night  
 That the graves, all gaping wide,  
 Everyone lets forth his sprite  
 In the churchway paths to glide.  
 (5.1.345-52)

Puck, moreover, is allowed to round off the dancing with an epilogue that reminds the audience that mortal life itself is “No more yielding but a dream” (l. 398). As they retire to bed, the characters are left in a state of dream-like suspension, for even the weddings nominally celebrated here, with their confirmation of husbandly authority, have yet to be fully accomplished: “four days and nights”, we were informed at the beginning of the play, must pass before the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, but the action has allowed only a single night to elapse, leaving its proper resolution quietly (but a little unnervingly) suspended.

Oddly enough, at the beginning of what seems to have been his last play, written a decade later, Shakespeare chose to resume the story of (the

still unmarried) Theseus and Hippolyta.<sup>6</sup> In the collaborative *Two Noble Kinsmen*, the teasing generic incongruities of the earlier comedy are intensified to produce a work whose oxymoronic yoking of comic and tragic elements ensures an ending in which "the conquered triumphs" while "The victor has the loss" (5.4.129-30). Opening with its own masque-like episode – here presided over by the figure of the marriage-god, Hymen – the play reintroduces us to the impending union of Theseus and Hippolyta: as they approach the temple where their wedding will be sealed, their festivities are interrupted by the funereal entry of "three Queens in black, with veils stained, with imperial crowns" (1.1.23 SD). Rendered powerless by their widowhood, the mourning women prostrate themselves at the feet of the bridal party, appealing for the return of their husbands' bodies, slain in battle against the tyrant Creon of Thebes. Given its slender relationship to the main plot, the dramatic space accorded to this encounter and its sequel is striking, for it significantly enlarges on its equivalent in the play's principal source, Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale". There Theseus is confronted not by a mere trio of queens, but by an entire "compaignye of ladyes, tweye and tweye"<sup>7</sup> (898); yet their appeal, together with the ensuing war to retrieve the missing corpses, takes up less than a hundred lines, while in Shakespeare's version the initial encounter alone extends for over two hundred lines, and is followed by two further scenes (1.4 and 1.5), the second of which includes an elaborate funeral procession – a dark counterpart to the play's masque-like opening.<sup>8</sup> It is worth asking why Shakespeare should have decided to enlarge this part of his source in the way that he did.

Clearly, part of the answer has to do with elegantly symmetrical contrasts appropriate to the mixed form of tragicomedy. Even before the entry of the black-clad Queens, the pastoral song that accompanies the opening pageant includes among its flowers "Marigolds on deathbeds blowing" and among its singing birds the ill-omened caw of a "boding raven" (1.1.11, 20); and the scene's subsequent juxtaposition of wedding and mourning anticipates a final scene in which the tragic funeral of one of the play's protagonists will preface a comic "end" as Theseus commands the mourners to put on "The visages of bridegrooms" for the marriage of the other (5.4.142-3), as Palamon is wedded to Hippolyta's sister, Emilia. In contrast to Chaucer's

<sup>6</sup> While the play is the joint work of Shakespeare and his successor as principal dramatist to the King's Men, John Fletcher, Shakespeare is generally assumed to have been responsible for the first act, with which I am primarily concerned here.

<sup>7</sup> Cited from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 898.

<sup>8</sup> The disparity appears even more striking when it is realised that the play in its printed form (2222 lines) is almost exactly the same length as Chaucer's tale (2247 lines).

ending – where “certeyn yeres” (2967) must pass between Arcite’s death and Palamon’s wedding – here only “A day or two” (113) will elapse before a second Athenian will possess another Amazon bride.

There is a sense in which the wedding of two Athenians to Amazon women might seem particularly appropriate to the hybrid form of tragicomedy, since such female warriors represent an unstable, and sometimes “monstrous” hybridisation of male and female characteristics. If, as Linda Bamber has so persuasively argued (1982), tragedy and comedy were themselves profoundly gendered, then tragicomedy could be seen as a generic equivalent of amazonian monstrosity: indeed it was as “hermaphrodites” or “monsters of poetry” that classically minded critics were inclined to dismiss experiments in this mixed mode.<sup>9</sup> Insofar, then, as the weddings that frame *The Two Noble Kinsmen* seem to involve the proper subjugation of Amazon women to male authority they can be seen as representing the happy triumph of comic decorum.<sup>10</sup> But beyond this simple reflection of the paradoxes of tragicomic design, the encounter with the prostrate queens invites us to contemplate more contentious questions of female power and disempowerment. In contrast to the unnatural authority of Amazon queenhood, the three Queens represent a queenliness that is simply a function of proper kingly power. Their widowhood, however, by stripping them of all that their conspicuous “imperial crowns” might seem to stand for, threatens their very humanity:

for our crownèd heads we have no roof  
Save this which is the lion’s and the bear’s,  
And vault to everything.  
(1.1.51-3)

So laments the First Queen; yet the Second Queen’s plea to Hippolyta draws attention to the very different effect of Theseus’s victory: by defeating the efforts of this “Most dreaded Amazonian . . . to make the male / To thy sex captive” (1.1.84-7), Theseus has subdued the “force” of this “soldieress” (91), thus restoring the proper order of things; by winning the “affection” of his prisoner he has shown himself “Born to uphold creation in that honour / First nature styled it in” (91, 8-9). In the final scene, the sudden death of Arcite will restore to Palamon his original claim to possess Emilia, his “stolen jewel”, thereby reducing a second Amazon to the properly sub-

<sup>9</sup> See for example Francisco de Cascales, *Tablas de Poéticas* (1617) as cited in Kluge 2007: 297

<sup>10</sup> The same is true of the Amazons who threaten the European arrivals on one of the new-world islands of John Fletcher’s *The Sea-Voyage*, but who turn out to be shipwrecked Portuguese ladies whom the play’s ending restores to domestic propriety.

ordinate condition of a wife, whilst rescuing the bereaved Emilia herself from the kind of abject powerlessness embodied by the mourning Queens.

The problematic nature of the female power represented in the figure of the Amazon is itself suggested by Shakespeare's deliberately awkward-sounding coinage "soldieress". But *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as it strips its own Amazon Queen of her unnatural sway, returns her, in language that Knox would have understood, to her 'first nature', endowing her with another sort of power – one duly contained by the gendered norms separating the private from the public sphere. This is a power conferred by the "love" that, drawing on the language of chivalric romance, has rendered the lord of Athens himself "a servant / For the tenor of thy speech" (95-6). Theseus may warn that by becoming "sensually subdued", men may "lose [their] human title" (261-2); but the "dreaded Amazonian" Hippolyta will remind her sister that the very act of kneeling before Theseus to make her wedding vows will ensure her absolute possession of "The high throne in his heart" (1.3.108) – the only form of queenly power proper to her female kind.

Insofar as they lay claim to any larger power, Shakespeare's queens, as we have seen, are typically malign, vicious, and often murderous creatures. The one conspicuous exception – though she too can play the Amazon – is Cleopatra. The historical Queen of Egypt had been as ruthless as any male ruler, being responsible for the death of two of her own brothers, the pharaohs Ptolemy XIII (her former co-ruler, whom she defeated in civil war) and his successor Ptolemy XIV (whose murder she ordered). But Shakespeare's queen carries no such fratricidal taint. She is instead a figure whose mastery of performance – her histrionic command of both seductive female guile and triumphant masculinity – are sometimes reminiscent of that consummate royal actor, Elizabeth I. Written three or four years after Elizabeth's death, as nostalgia for the late queen had begun to set in, *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1607) belongs with a number of early seventeenth-century tragedies – among them Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), Middleton's *The Changeling* (1622) and *Women Beware Women* (c. 1623), and Ford's *The Broken Heart* (c. 1632) – that place a woman at the centre of their tragic action; but, more directly than any, it addresses contentious issues of female power. It was not, of course, the first play to deal with history's most famous lovers: a pair of late sixteenth-century closet dramas – the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Robert Garnier's *The Tragedy of Anthony* (1590), and complementary *Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594), written by the countess's protégé, Samuel Daniel – had treated the couple's ends separately. Shakespeare's title, however, like that of *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), insists on the intertwined nature of its protagonists' fates; but unlike his earlier tragedy it resolves this structur-

al rivalry in favour of the woman, devoting all of its long final scene to the Queen of Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

The boldness of this decision is easily dismissed as a simple consequence of the narrative sequence in Shakespeare's principal source, Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius*. But where in Plutarch the facts of Cleopatra's death are a matter of conjecture, being based upon various 'reports', Shakespeare chooses to dramatise her suicide, turning it into a last theatrically self-conscious exhibition of queenly power:

Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch  
My best attires.

...

Give me my robe, put on my crown – I have  
Immortal longings in me.  
(5.3.227-8, 279-80)

The contrast with the embarrassing anti-climax of Anthony's own botched suicide in the fourth act – marked as that is by a sadly miscalculated echo of his earlier erotic boast, "The nobleness of life / Is to do thus" (1.1.38-9) – could hardly be more striking:

Thrice nobler than myself,  
Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros . . .  
I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into't  
As to a lover's bed. Come then – and Eros  
Thy master dies thy scholar: 'to do thus'  
I learned of thee. (He falls on his sword.)  
How? Not dead? Not dead?  
(4.15.95-103; emphasis added)

The rhetoric that surrounds Anthony's actual end, with his insistence that "Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Anthony, / But Anthony's hath triumphed on itself" (4.16.16-17) partially redeems his suicide; but the "power" enabling this redemption belongs to Cleopatra, as she and her maids haul Anthony into her monument – even if the erotic "power" of her last

<sup>11</sup> Even a tragedy as female-centred as Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* consigns the death of its nominal hero, the Duchess, to the fourth act, allowing Bosola – a mere servant, but a man – to emerge as a rival protagonist in the slaughter at the end of Act 5. Anxiety about the breach of tragic decorum involved in giving the play's catastrophe to a woman is reflected in the way that so many productions of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century, chose to place Anthony's corpse beside Cleopatra in the final scene, as if to reassert his own claim to tragic centrality

kiss is not enough to quicken a dying man (35-6, 41). In a work where the military and political power celebrated in formal Roman triumphs becomes a recurrent motif, Anthony's use of "triumphed", like Cleopatra's repetition of "power" is significant. At the play's very centre Shakespeare placed a scene which, because its relation to the plot seems obscure, is cut from most modern productions, though it is of significant thematic importance: it opens with a stage direction whose brevity belies the spectacular effect required: "*Enter Ventidius, as it were in triumph; the dead body of Paucorus borne before him*" (3.1 SD).<sup>12</sup> Clearly this entry is meant to imitate (as far as the Globe's resources would allow) one of those magnificent parades through the streets of Rome, the formal 'triumphs' that were accorded to victorious generals; and Silius is made to imagine Anthony granting Ventidius just such an honour: "So thy grand captain . . . / Shall set thee on triumphant chariots and / Put garlands on thy head" (9-11). Later, as we have seen, Anthony, in the fury that succeeds his defeat at Actium, will imagine both Cleopatra and himself as objects of display in Caesar's own "triumph":

Let him take thee,  
And hoist thee to the shouting plebeians  
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot  
Of all thy sex; most monster-like be shown . . .  
(4.13.33-6)

Eros,  
Wouldst thou be windowed in great Rome, and see  
Thy master thus with pleached arms, bending down  
His corrigible neck, his face subdued  
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheeled seat  
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded  
His baseness that ensued.  
(4.15.71-7)

No wonder that Caesar, when he learns of Anthony's death, should take comfort from the knowledge that Cleopatra's "life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph" (5.1.65-6); whilst it is the prospect of becoming just such a shameful property, "an Egyptian puppet" in a theatrical show of victory, that appears to determine the Queen's own suicide (5.2.109, 208).

Perhaps the nearest Egyptian equivalent to such displays of masculine power is to be found in Cleopatra's water pageant on the Cydnus, whose splendours are so famously evoked for by Enobarbus in 2.2. This may not be a triumph in the strict Roman sense, but in sixteenth-century usage the

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of this entry, see the Oxford edition, Introduction: 60-1, and the commentary note to 0.2 on p. 219.

meanings of the word were extended to include any form of “public festivity . . . celebration . . . spectacle or pageant” (*OED* n. 4), including not just royal entries, coronations, and weddings, but even funerals. Thus it’s possible to think of the lovers’ grand processional entry in the first scene as a visual counterpart to Ventidius’s Roman triumph, and to recognise another in the “great solemnity” that concludes the tragedy, as the Queen and her women are carried from her monument to begin the “solemn show” of her funeral (5.2.362-4). The stage direction for the protagonists’ opening entry (1.1.10) is deceptively brief, but with its annunciatory fanfare, its “train” of courtiers, attendant ladies and fanning eunuchs, it required Shakespeare’s company to draw on their full resources to produce a triumphal spectacle, while Philo’s contemptuous commentary invites the audience to Anthony as the emasculated prisoner of the Queen’s erotic wiles. In this their entry has some resemblances to that of Theseus and Hippolyta at the beginning of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where Hippolyta combines the roles of enemy captive and bride:

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,  
 And won they love doing thee injuries.  
 But I will wed thee in another key,  
 With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.  
 (1.1.16-19)

In the Egyptian court, however, it is the Queen who acts the part of conqueror while Anthony – reduced (like the “eunuchs fanning her”) to become “the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy’s lust” – is cast as her helpless captive, an object of sorry ridicule: “The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet’s fool” (1.1.9-10, 12-13). Where Theseus’ opening speech established his command over the scene, here it is Cleopatra who begins what emerges as a somewhat one-sided rhetorical contest, goading her opposite with a challenge that establishes her control of the ensuing dialogue: “If it be love indeed, tell me how much” (1.1.9-14). Undermining the swaggering hyperbole with which Anthony protests his devotion, she further unmans him with the mocking suggestion that not only is he in thrall to his absent wife (“Fulvia perchance is angry . . . thy cheek pays shame, / When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds”, 33-4), but that he has also become the powerless “homager” (13) of a mere boy: “Who knows / If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent / His powerful mandate to you” (21-3). The result is that when, as they exit, Anthony addresses her as “my queen”, there is a disconcerting ambiguity to the phrase: is she then consort or suzerain to the man whom his fellow Romans see as falling “short of that great property / Which still should go with Anthony” (60-1)?

This teasing reversal of proper gender roles continues into the follow-

ing scene, where Anthony mocks himself both as subject to the "power" of Fulvia's railing (1.107-9), and as a victim of the supernaturally "enchanted" powers of a queen whom he later calls "this great fairy", and "thou spell" (1.2.128, 4.9.12, 4.13.36). In an exhibition of thoroughly histrionic pathos, Cleopatra will again scorn his thralldom to "the married woman", "Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here – / I have no power upon you; hers you are" (1.3.20-3). Using the paradoxical language of courtly love, Anthony seeks to legitimise his subordination by declaring himself Cleopatra's "soldier-servant" (1.3.70), but in the eyes of Octavius Caesar his subservience is of a more degrading kind: "He hath given his empire [i.e. rule, power] / Up to a whore" (3.6.66-7). For Caesar, it is as if, by his erotic enslavement to Cleopatra, Anthony has simply undone his masculine identity, rendering himself "not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he" (1.4.5-7); while Pompey derides him as a man "tie[d] up" by the power of the his mistress's "witchcraft" (2.1.22-3) – a judgement that will be repeated by Anthony's own faithful officers. Bewailing his failure to capitalise on the material sources of his power, Camidius declares that "our leader's led, / And we are women's men" (3.8.69-70); while Scarrus laments his general's transformation into "the noble ruin of [Cleopatra's] magic" (3.10.17). "Unqualified" by the debacle of Actium, Anthony laments his subjection to a woman's "supremacy" that leaves his heart "tied by th' strings" to her rudder (3.12.43, 36-8): "You did know / How much you were my conqueror" (3.11.64-5).

In the build-up to this humiliating defeat, Enobarbus goads Cleopatra with the claim that "'tis said in Rome / That Photinus, an eunuch, and your maids / Manage this war" (3.7.13-5). But it is Anthony who is, implicitly at least, already stigmatised with eunuchism: Cleopatra may tease the "unseminared" Mardian with a reminder that she can "take no pleasure / In aught an eunuch has" (1.5.9-11); but ironically it is the eunuch's pathetic recollection of "What Venus did with Mars" (famously taming his masculine ferocity) that makes her think of Anthony: "O Charmian, / Where think'st thou he is now?" (18-19). Remembering Anthony's mythic ancestry, she may praise him as "this Herculean Roman" (1.3.84); but the audience are expected to recall that Hercules was famously unmanned by Omphale, who forced him to spin in women's robes, whilst she assumed his famous lion-skin and club – an episode of which the queen herself will remind the audience when she yearns nostalgically for the time when "I put my tires and mantles on him, / Whilst I wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.23-4); and her usurpation of that instrument of phallic power accords only too well with her boast that hers is a hand of power "that kings / Have trembled kissing" (29-30). After the surrender of their fleet at Alexandria, Anthony, convinced that Cleopatra has betrayed him "Unto an enemy's triumph", will convert that recollec-

tion of playfully exchanged roles, into a metaphor of decisive emasculation: "O, thy vile lady," he cries to the eunuch, Mardian, "she has robbed me of my sword!" (4.15.20, 22-3), and when, in that same scene, he hears the false news of Cleopatra's suicide, even her supposed death serves only as mortifying proof that he himself lacks "the courage of a woman" (4.15.60).

Of course this is not the only way in which the play invites us to look at Anthony: "Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon," says Cleopatra, invoking what might seem an oddly female type of serpent-headed monstrosity, "The other way's a Mars" (2.5.117-8). Her metaphor is borrowed from the fashionable taste for "perspectives" – ingenious pictorial images whose subject or meaning was determined by the angle from which they were viewed;<sup>13</sup> and while her invocation of the god of war may remind us of Mars's subjection to the goddess of love, it also sends us back to the Anthony remembered in Philo's opening speech, the warrior whose "goodly eyes . . . Have glowed like plated Mars" (1.1.2-4), and to Enobarbus's defiant general who can "speak as loud as Mars" (2.2.6). It is true that the reality of this figure is largely created by the poetry of nostalgia – by Caesar's invocation of Anthony's stoic heroism after the siege of Modena (1.4.55-71), or by Cleopatra's own magnificent elegy for the godlike figure whose "face was as the heavens . . . [whose] legs bestrid the ocean; [and] reared arm crested the world" (5.2.79-92). But if it is largely the persuasive force of such rhetoric that shapes the figure of an heroic Anthony, it is sufficiently underpinned by his courage in beating back the power of Caesar at Alexandria, and by his extraordinary magnanimity towards his followers, to make the contradictions of perspective seem persuasive. It is enough, after all, to break the heart of the cynical Enobarbus.

The case of Cleopatra, however, is a great deal more complicated, the source of her power more difficult to define, her nature beyond the reach of perspective's straightforward binaries. Whilst the play shows her exercising various kinds of power – including her irresistible sway over the imagination of others – these emerge as fleeting effects of a mastery of performance so far beggaring description that she begins to resemble that "strange serpent" which evokes Lepidus' wonderment by being shaped only "like itself". One of a trio of female rivals in the play, she is set first against Anthony's domineering first wife, the tireless female soldier Fulvia, and then against his second wife, the conventionally subservient and "most weak" Octavia, who appeals in vain to "Jove the god of power" (3.4.39-30), and whose anticlimactic return to Rome contrasts so humiliatingly with the triumphal entry planned by her brother:

<sup>13</sup> For an extended discussion of perspective as a key to the play's characterisation, see the Oxford introduction, 78-100.

Why have you stol'n upon us thus? You come not  
 Like Caesar's sister: the wife of Anthony  
 Should have an army for an usher

...

Nay, the dust  
 Should have ascended to the roof of heaven,  
 Raised by your populous troops.  
 (3.6.42-50)

Structurally we might expect Cleopatra to represent a mean between these opposites, but, as Octavia herself is made to remind us, this is a world that offers "No midway / 'Twixt . . . extremes at all" (3.4.19-20). Instead, Cleopatra chooses to outgo her rivals in both roles – at Actium defiantly insisting that "as the president of my kingdom [she] will / Appear there for a man" (3.7.17-18), and in her suicide, claiming a courage that affirms her true nuptial "title" as Anthony's real wife: "Husband, I come" (5.2.286). Considered together, these contrasting gestures might seem to present another version of the perspective that renders Anthony both Mars and Gorgon; but instead they belong to the gallery of theatrical personae whose "infinite variety" arouses wonder even in the unillusioned Enobarbus (2.2.242).

For the besotted Anthony of the opening scene, Cleopatra is the incarnation of love and beauty – a mortal Venus in whom "every passion fully strives / To make itself . . . fair and admired" (1.1.46, 52-3); but she herself – as if remembering Theseus's mockery of lovers who discover "Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt" (*MSND*, 5.1.1.) or the *Sonnets*' play with the seeming opposition of "black" and "fair"<sup>14</sup> – mocks her own African skin for being "with Phoebus amorous pinches black" (1.5.28). Lamenting that she is now "wrinkled deep in time", Cleopatra makes her erotic power, like Anthony's martial prowess, a matter of nostalgia – albeit of an ambivalent kind; for if she imagines her affair with "great Pompey" as the conquest of a man whom she made "die" with simply looking on beauty (31-4), her liaison with Julius Caesar reduces her to a "morsel for a monarch", a mere tit-bit served up for the pleasure of a powerful man – little different, it might seem, from the woman whom Roman propaganda dismisses as a "gypsy" and a "strumpet" (1.1.10, 13). It is characteristic of the play's technique, however, that no version of the queen is allowed to go unchallenged; so Cleopatra's ironic self-mockery is immediately displaced by Alexas's show of formal deference to her royal authority. "Sovereign of Egypt, hail" he greets her, as he delivers his master's tribute of an "orient pearl". Not just a familiar love-token, the pearl is also the symbol of Anthony's promise to "piece / Her opulent throne with kingdoms" that "All the East . . . shall call her mis-

<sup>14</sup> See e.g. *Sonnets* 127, 130, 131, and 132.

ress" (41, 45-7) – a vision of extraordinary royal power that is itself rendered slyly equivocal by its unavoidable play upon "mistress".

The fulfilment of Anthony's promise comes in 3.6, with the spectacle described by Caesar in which Cleopatra and Anthony "on a tribunal silvered . . . in chairs of gold / Were publicly enthroned", Cleopatra wearing "th'habiliments of the goddess Isis" as their children are proclaimed "the kings of kings" (3.6.3-17). But scarcely has Caesar evoked this splendid display than he is scorning her as the "whore" whose power consists only in her ability to "nod" her lover to her (3.6.66-7). Never, perhaps, does Cleopatra's queenly power appear more absolute than in Enobarbus's evocation of the scene on the Cydnus where her barge itself resembles a "burning throne" that bends nature itself to her display. Here, in Agrippa's phrase, the queen "appeared triumphantly indeed" (2.2.195); and if there is a hint of irony in "appeared", it is immediately annihilated by the evocative force of Enobarbus's rhetoric, which persuades the audience that her pageant was not just a piece of theatre, but itself an engine of power, since through it this "most triumphant lady . . . purs'd up [Anthony's] heart" (190-4). Agrippa may attempt to undercut the effect of her magic with a satiric reduction of her earlier Roman conquest:

Royal wench!

She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed,  
He ploughed her, and she cropped.  
(233-5)

But Enobarbus is ready with an answer that takes up the contemptuous implications of "wench", only to insist that in Cleopatra's case even her least regal gesture can be a source of its own paradoxical kind of dominion:

I saw her once

Hop forty paces through the public street;  
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,  
That she did make defect perfection  
And breathless, power breathe forth . . .

. . .

for vilest things

Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish.  
(235-47)

It is an odd kind of "power" that Enobarbus attributes to the queen at this point – utterly unlike the queenly power displayed on the Cydnus, even if the paradoxically breathless breathing of her power does seem to echo the fans of those "pretty dimpled boys" that seemed "To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool, / And what they undid did" (211-12); but what

above all links the two spectacles is their perfect mastery of contrasting styles of performance.

There are of course episodes in which Cleopatra lays claim to more orthodox forms of queenly power. Indeed the woman who defies Anthony by leading her own ships into battle at Actium may even seem to act like the amazonian queens of John Knox's nightmares; but her precipitate flight from the conflict almost immediately suggests that she does, after all, lack "the heart and stomach of a man". Wanting "great Juno's power", she is "no more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks" (4.16.36, 74-5). Despite this, however, she has stomach enough to stage a suicide "after the high Roman fashion" that not only trumps Anthony's messy end, but that shows her "conqueror of myself" (62), thereby claiming a kind of power that allows her to mock worldly greatness:

'Tis paltry to be Caesar –  
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave  
A minister of her will – and it is great  
To do that deed that ends all other deeds,  
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,  
Which sleeps and never palates more the dung  
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.  
(5.2.2-7)

The echo of her earlier teasing hyperbole, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned", might even seem to act as a measure of the moral distance she has travelled in response to Anthony's downfall – except that, almost in the next breath, she returns to the figure of beggary to mark her own kneeling subjection to Caesar himself ("If your master / Would have a queen his beggar . . . I hourly / Learn a doctrine of obedience", 6-17, 30-1); and in the exchanges with Proculeius, Dolabella, and Caesar – as well as in her calculated humiliation of her treasurer, Seleucus – it is never possible to know how seriously to take her efforts to negotiate with the man she repeatedly addresses as "My master and my lord!" (5.2.116, 136, 190), using a term of subordination ("my lord") formerly reserved for Anthony. The audience cannot be sure if Cleopatra really envisages another in her sequence of Roman conquests, or if this is all a charade designed to distract from her real intentions. It is not until Dolabella confirms Caesar's intention to send her with her children as prisoners to Rome, that we can feel certain her mind is made up. Even then, however, Cleopatra is made to remind the audience that all they actually see upon the stage is a mere simulacrum of her extraordinary power, in which yet another troupe of "quick comedians" are staging her story, "boying" her greatness. The sudden shifts of tone that

mark the play's closing sequence serve more than anything to demonstrate the power of theatrical performance, of Cleopatra's dazzling ability to shift from role to role. So the high poetry of her proud insistence that she has transcended her female changeability –

I have nothing  
Of woman in me – how from head to foot  
I am marble constant; now the fleeting moon  
No planet is of mine.  
(5.2.238-41)

– is immediately followed by her playful-sounding prose exchange with a Clown who bears a sly resemblance to the traditional figure of Death as a jester. That in turn gives way to the tragic magnificence of “Give me my robe, put on my crown – I have / Immortal longings in me” (279-80) in a succession of speeches whose tone then oscillates between defiant mockery of Caesar (283-6), wifely deference (286), tenderness towards her women, and erotic ecstasy (“The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch / that hurts and is desired”, 294-5) – between maternal reverie (“Dost thou not see my baby at my breast . . .”, 308), a sudden flash of her old vulgar jealousy (“If she first meet the curled Anthony, / He'll make demand of her”, 300-1), and the fierce satiric humour with which she harangues the asp:

Poor venomous fool,  
Be angry, and despatch, O, couldst thou speak  
That I might hear thee call great Caesar “Ass  
Unpolicied!”  
(304-7)

It is a sequence whose astonishing variety makes exceptional demands on the virtuosity of any actor – let alone on one of those squeaking boys whom Shakespeare imagined performing it. But it is perfectly contrived to remind us of the true nature of the queenly power that this play sets out to celebrate – one that, in an artful evasion of misogynistic pieties, belongs to the theatre alone. If Shakespeare's Cleopatra, like the serpent of Nile, is so much of her own shape and colour as to evade conventional description, the play openly deceives us into thinking it has nevertheless captured her. Anthony's crocodile “lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates” (2.7.43-4): *The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra* effects exactly that strange translation.

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## Unveiling Jocasta. The Brave Queen of Dryden and Lee

Abstract

To better appreciate the daring originality of Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus. A Tragedy*, it is useful to begin considering the three authors discussed by Dryden himself in the Preface to the play: Sophocles, Seneca and Corneille, whom he acknowledges to have used only as partial sources, while in more cases than one his reluctance to admit their true influence is evident. In this perspective it is perhaps even more interesting that Shakespeare, whose relevance is perceivable everywhere, is never mentioned. Looking closer at Dryden's critical attitude, there seems to be at work a peculiar consistency in passing over in silence not only trivial factors, but also the most innovative and subversive issues that identify the uniqueness of the play. As, for instance, the disruption of the Cadmean myth, which allows Dryden and Lee to empower Oedipus and Jocasta to be the ultimate protagonists of a long and ominous story, enabled in their suicide to paradoxically reconcile all tensions and assert their right to preserve their passionate bond, whatever that love may be.

KEYWORDS: Sophocles; Dryden and Lee; Oedipus; incest; irony; sight

In the long story which began with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and was handed down through the centuries by innumerable interpreters of the original myth (see Paduano 1994), Jocasta's identity keeps changing: determined by the function her character is called to fulfil on each occasion in the dramatic structure, she moves through diversified images of herself, often inert and ancillary, rarely involved and pre-eminent.

Since Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus. A Tragedy* is the object of the present investigation, decidedly relevant are three dramas in particular, focused on by Dryden himself in the Preface to the play: of their authors, Sophocles, Seneca and Corneille, he discusses merits and faults and indicates the quality of their partial influence, specifying his and Lee's modes of appropriation and reasons for rejection. Considering Jocasta's nature, a strong differentiating factor obviously depends on the position Oedipus occupies in the economy of each single text, and to get closer to the mother-wives one

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needs to inquire first who the son-husbands are. Very dissimilar figures indeed, whose characters, attitudes and values place them on very different levels in the scale of greatness – the cornerstone of tragedy, that is, both for the ancient founders and their seventeenth-century ‘imitators’.

### 1. The French version

Furthest away from the Sophoclean source, Pierre Corneille writes his *Edipe* (1658) preserving merely a general connection with the original story; in the dedication “Au Lecteur” (“to the Reader”)<sup>1</sup> he states the fact himself, specifying the reasons for the radical changes made in the plot. Considering the Greek and Latin productions from a seventeenth-century perspective, he mentions two points in particular that need to be modified: first comes Œdipe’s blinding, whose description would be offensive to the “délicatesse de nos dames qui composent la plus belle partie de notre auditoire” (Corneille 1987: 18-9; “delicacy of our ladies, who make up the nicest part of our audience”). Following, and again focused on the feminine, comes Corneille’s remark on the inadequacy of plots disregarding the amorous motif, and consequently depriving the stage of the female presence: both essential factors, “principaux ornements” (19, “principal ornaments”), to gaining public approval (cf. Avezù 2008).

Basing his work on these objections to the classics, and on a few further critical notes, Corneille overturns the keystones of the myth itself: displacing the tragic couple from its leading position, he constructs a system based on wholly different foundations. Parricide and incest are deprived of their tragic standing while Œdipe and Jocaste move to the background, unexpectedly replaced by the scenically dominant couple of Thésée and Dircé; on the one hand the mythical killer of monsters, on the other an alien female character – a figure relatively unknown in the mythical context<sup>2</sup> but crucial in Corneille’s revisited dramatic pattern. Supposed to be Laius and Jocaste’s firstborn, Dircé is actually Œdipe’s younger sister, and stepsister of Œdipe and Jocaste’s offspring: Antigone and Ismene, young women likely to get married in the near future; Eteocles and Polynice, young men already engaged in their fatal conflict.

Removing from centre stage the former protagonists and concentrating on the passions and values of the new ones, Corneille identifies a very suitable opportunity to gratify the *dames*, leading them along the genteel deli-

<sup>1</sup> All translations from the French are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Her mythical existence is vaguely associated with Thebes, since Dircé is King Lykos’ wife; punished for mistreating her niece Antiope, she is tied to a wild bull and torn limb from limb.

cacies of the *préciosité*. He strikes the keynote right from the beginning, allowing Thésée and Dircé the privilege to open the play with a passionate *tête-à-tête*, in which they mutually try to persuade their partner to fly from the plague devastating Thebes. The pre-eminence of their romantic attachment is constantly confirmed in the course of the play, and the distribution of the scenes underlines their lofty position in the dramatic hierarchy. Measuring the characters' presence on stage, that is, it is quite clear where the emphasis falls: Œdipe comes first with fifteen scenes, followed by Dircé with fourteen and Thésée with twelve; last comes Jocaste with a mere ten. Getting closer to the subjects discussed in the various situations, it is rather amazing that Œdipe and Jocaste are mostly concerned with the position of Dircé and Thésée, whose stubbornness and determination forcefully involve their own reactions and decisions.

For the younger couple the sentimental and political levels are strictly interdependent and crucial for the progression of the action. From the outset the issue of power shapes the conflicting relationship between Dircé and Œdipe: convinced she is Laius' only daughter and heir, Dircé is fiercely aggressive against the king for having usurped her throne and against her mother for having betrayed Laius' memory – and she is never inclined to relent, even if confronted with Jocaste's tenderness. A target of her hostility are also the Thebans, guilty of handing over the kingdom to the usurper of her rights – and vanquisher of the Sphinx. Interwoven with the theme of power is the sentimental motif, with Dircé again occupying the leading role, legitimized by her royal blood to aspire to the throne: Thésée, besides being the object of her love, as prince of Athens also embodies the ideal of a great and shareable sovereignty, which Dircé is nowise disposed to renounce. Therefore Œdipe's plan for her marriage with Jocaste's nephew Hémon is inevitably bound to be rejected, a plan that also serves to disclose the king's weakness: first of all because, since the plan is doomed to failure, it proves Dircé's supremacy over him, and then because it is a product, as Œdipe himself admits, of his fears. His anxiety in fact envisages Thésée's possible claims to the throne if married to the legitimate heir, while the inoffensive Hémon represents a definitely reassuring and encouraging choice.

It is unnecessary to go into further details to realize what Corneille is aiming at in *Œdipe*. Interestingly enough, he does not expand the dramatic framework applying the traditional method, i.e. including a subplot mirroring the main action – Dryden and Lee's mode. He subverts the original balance instead, reducing to a subplot the main action: a skilful strategy to deactivate the awful Sophoclean crescendo in the unveiling of parricide and incest, and to shove its feeble remains into a marginal area. The most neutralized item is quite obviously the couple's emotional involvement: no hint at sexuality occurs, and also love is very sparingly mentioned – and only

by Jocaste.<sup>3</sup> Given these premises, Dircé's remark in the fifth act does not sound particularly surprising: "Phorbas m'a tout dit en deux mots" (5.5.1791, "Phorbas told me everything in two words"). She does not apparently need more than two words to know the tragic events that occurred before.

Viewing Jocaste in Corneille's altered context, it is amazing how little of her previous existence survives. Looking closer at her presence on stage, it emerges clearly how consistently she is kept in the background: she appears late, in the fourth (penultimate) scene of the first act and is totally absent from the second; when allowed to the front, as in Acts 3 and 4, she is generally concerned with Dircé and Thésée's situation<sup>4</sup> much more than with her own ill-fated life. The fifth act, from which she is totally banished, is revealing: in accordance with the classical rules her suicide takes place offstage and is narrated to the young protagonists by her lady-in-waiting. But the words that accompany her act are worthy of notice, exclusively focused, as Nérine relates, on her daughter's glorious future in Athens. Her past with Œdipe is silenced, whom she is apparently bent on sweeping away from her thoughts, as the answer to Dircé's question clarifies, leaving no doubt in spectators and readers. The question regards her mother's last words for the king; Nérine answers that being afraid to fly away with the shameful memory ("la honteuse mémoire", 5.8.1951) and not daring to call him either son or husband, she devoted all the tenderness to her daughter.

The queen's quiet leaving is consistent with her subdued theatrical existence, while Œdipe – the supposed protagonist – is allowed to remain on stage as long as Act 5.6; he takes his leave after the mysteries have been unravelled and a fit ending has been predisposed. Once the dramatic tension has been displaced and the tragic core neutralized, in harmony with Corneille's plot the conclusion only vaguely recalls the ancient pain, and opens the way to a predictably prosperous future; significantly, all conflicts are silenced while Dircé and Thésée abruptly change their minds and honour Œdipe, turning to admiration their previous contempt. Œdipe himself leaves the scene announcing a visit to the queen ("Adieu: laissez-moi seul en consoler la Reine", "Farewell: leave me alone to comfort the Queen", 5.6.1878), a secret encounter ("secret entretien", 1879) to encourage her by showing his own strength; but the meeting does not take place, as the two culprits presumably need to be kept apart to exorcise their transgression. Not only is Jocaste forbidden to meet Œdipe: she is also, symbolically, ex-

<sup>3</sup> Only three times, once in 1.4 and twice in 4.5.

<sup>4</sup> The characters' thoughts and intentions derive from the response of the oracle, that makes the end of the plague dependent on the sacrifice of Laius' blood. Dircé is therefore determined to die, convinced she is the only person concerned, while Thésée, to save her, pretends to be Laius' surviving son and thence of Cadmean blood.

cluded from his final act, the self-inflicted blindness which he no longer effects with the golden brooches of her dress; to tear his eyes out he now relies on his hands only – like Seneca’s Oedipus. Removing the violating memory of his mother-wife, the king acquires the sacred healing power that enables him to defeat the plague; just a few drops of his blood suffice to save the dying Thebans and to bring them suddenly back to life. A glorious deed which cooperates in the restoration of order and eventually appeases Laius’ ghost, leaving the lovers to entrust their future to the gods.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Oedipus in London

Corneille, Dryden observes in his Preface to *Oedipus*, attributes the great success of his play to the “heureux épisode . . . de Thésée et de Dirce” (Corneille 1987: 19, “the felicitous episode . . . of Thésée and Dirce”), an approach that he finds simply wrong, as if the subplot could be the predominant feature of a play, to the detriment of the main action:

The truth is, he miserably fail’d in the Character of his Hero: if he desir’d that *Oedipus* should be pitied, he shou’d have made him a better man. He forgot that *Sophocles* had taken care to shew him in his first entrance, a just, a merciful, a successful, a Religious Prince, and in short, a Father of his Country: instead of these, he has drawn him suspicious, designing, more anxious of keeping the *Theban* Crown than solicitous for the safety of his People: Hector’d by *Theseus*, contemn’d by *Dirce*, and scarce maintaining a second part in his own Tragedie. (Dryden and Lee 1985: 115-16)

Despite the severity of this and other opinions on the French dramatists, during the 1660s Dryden’s theatrical production is unmistakably indebted to them: in particular his work on the heroic genre is mostly structured on the same dialectic of love and honour highlighted by Corneille in *Ædipe*. After emphatically exploring for some years the world of Indian Queens, Emperors, Conquests and Martyrs,<sup>6</sup> Dryden eventually lands on his last heroic experiment: *Aureng-Zebe* (1675), a play interesting for itself and maybe even more for the present discussion. The plot revolves in fact around the same crucial issues dealt with three years later in *Oedipus*, centred on incest;<sup>7</sup> a motif even amplified here, in the longed-for sexual transgression

<sup>5</sup> Gambelli 2013 interestingly details conventionalities and flaws in *Ædipe*, identifying relevant merits as well.

<sup>6</sup> From 1664 onward Dryden worked rather keenly on the heroic genre, with plays like *The Indian Queen*, *The Indian Emperor; or, the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards*, *Tyrannic Love; or, the Royal Martyr*, *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards*.

<sup>7</sup> Incest is also central in *The Spanish Friar; or, The Double Discovery* (1680), a comedy where the sexual relation of brother and sister is hindered in extremis, while it occurs

involving both the old Emperor yearning for his son Aureng-Zebe's betrothed, and his wife attempting to seduce the stepson, i.e. Aureng-Zebe himself. Neither is parricide missing, though again planned only and not carried out. Incidentally, it is worthwhile considering that the stepmother's attraction to her husband's son once more intersects the English and French dramaturgies, both engaged with the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus: it shapes the connection of Nourmahal and Aureng-Zebe, and becomes in two years' time Racine's subject for his *Phèdre* (1677). Again, although appreciating the neoclassical theories,<sup>8</sup> Dryden sharply criticises the French dramatists for their "nicety of manners" (Dryden 1991: 12) that undermines the plausibility of characters and the outcome of their plays, *Phèdre* included.<sup>9</sup>

Very probably, Dryden's sharpness derives from his changed critical attitude, already expressed in the Prologue to *Aureng-Zebe* in dismissing his "long-lov'd Mistris, Rhyme" and returning to blank verse and to "Shakespeare's sacred name" (Prol. 8, 14). The new perspective unfolds in 1677 in *All for Love* written "in Imitation of Shakespeare's Stile", as acknowledged on the title page of the play (Dryden 1985: 2). And although in his version of *Antony and Cleopatra* Dryden maintains some distinctive signs of the heroic experiment – such as the intricacies of love and honour – at this point, 'imitating' Shakespeare means most of all renouncing the reassurance of poetic justice and accepting the great tragic past, where injustice may triumph and not only villains are doomed to die (cf. Sestito 1999, 2008).

Nathaniel Lee's perception of the heroic genre is also peculiar, since it is progressively reshaped with a constant eye on the Elizabethans; like Dryden, in the late 1670s he spoils tragedies of peaceful outcomes and happy endings, and takes the love and honour motif along unfamiliar ways, disclosing the excess and darkness of human nature. And even if in many respects the two dramatists move on different grounds, the interplay of

in *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* (1689).

<sup>8</sup> Kramer 1994 convincingly shows that toward the French drama there is on the part of Dryden a very skilful – unacknowledged – appropriation technique.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the Preface to *All for Love*: "Their heroes are the most civil people breathing, but their good breeding seldom extends to a word of sense; all their wit is in their ceremony; they want the genius which animates our stage; and therefore 'tis but necessary, when they cannot please, that they should take care not to offend. But as the civilest man in the company is commonly the dullest, so these authors, while they are afraid to make you laugh or cry, out of pure good manners make you sleep. . . . Thus their Hippolytus is so scrupulous in point of decency that he will rather expose himself to death, than accuse his stepmother to his father. . . . Where the poet ought to have preserved the character as it was delivered to us by antiquity, . . . he has chosen to give him the turn of gallantry, sent him to travel from Athens to Paris, taught him to make love, and transformed the Hippolytus of Euripides into Monsieur Hippolyte" (Dryden 1991: 12-3).

their talents and projects produces fertile forms of cooperation. For instance, their common interest in inquiring into the variety of womanliness is stimulating, as well as in exploiting the female rivalry to reach the dramatic climax through the vehemence of jealousy. It occurs when Lee brings Roxana and Statira to fight for the affection of Alexander the Great;<sup>10</sup> it also occurs a few months later when Dryden – probably inspired by Lee – forces Cleopatra to confront Octavia, aggressively asserting her rights as wife and mother. Shortly afterwards, sharing views and purposes, Dryden and Lee compose *Oedipus*, radically reinterpreting the myth, and bringing their single contributions to merge in the stylistic harmony of the whole.

The method employed by Dryden in his Preface is worth considering: on the one hand quoting sources (Sophocles and Seneca) and possible competitors (Corneille), discussing merits and faults, and acknowledging borrowings;<sup>11</sup> on the other hand never, not one single time, mentioning Shakespeare, whose influence is perceivable everywhere and from the very beginning contributes in displaying the mastery of his ‘imitators’. In fact, considering their predecessors’ openings, Dryden and Lee’s difference is quite striking: both in Sophocles and Seneca it is Oedipus, i.e. the protagonist, who opens the play, and Corneille, as it were following the same course, reserves the first scene of his play to Dircé and Thésée, i.e. to ‘his’ protagonists. Dryden and Lee move along divergent lines delaying Oedipus’ entrance and reproducing memorable Shakespearean beginnings, where the protagonist comes onstage after other, usually minor, characters have introduced some of the main issues.

The Shakespearean influence is pervasive:<sup>12</sup> the presence of *Julius Caesar* is easily identifiable, in the fickleness of the people and the oratorical talents of the persuaders; of *Hamlet*, in the painful search for truth; of *Macbeth*, in the frequent visionary and dreamlike allusions. The figure of Richard III is also fundamental, whose physical deformity and moral depravity shapes the features of Creon. What Dryden and Lee attain in their play is to blend the legacy of the classics with the great English tradition, producing something new and daring: though deeply admiring Sophocles, Dryden leads the way to the free interpretations of his epigones. He asserts the relativity of taste that promotes differences and hinders intimidating ef-

<sup>10</sup> See *The Rival Queens; or, The Death of Alexander the Great*.

<sup>11</sup> Most admired is Sophocles, imitated “as close as possibly we cou’d” (Dryden and Lee 1985: 116); Seneca is refuted for his pomposity but considered useful for the episode of Tiresias raising the ghost of Lajus; Corneille, rejected for the predominance of Dircé and Thésée, is nonetheless followed in accepting the necessity of a subplot. The edition of *Oedipus I* refer to throughout is Dryden and Lee 1985.

<sup>12</sup> In particular for the influence of *Macbeth* and the construction of Creon, see Bigliuzzi 2014.

fects of the past, no matter how glorious: a way, that is, to allow boundless experimentation. Of their own play, Dryden anticipates very little, simply underlining the care in conceiving the subplot and in making it strictly dependent on the plot. Again, as with Shakespeare's concealed influence, he omits to mention the daring choices that render *Oedipus* unique, and allow Jocasta to play an exclusive role.

### 3. Iocaste, Iocasta, Jocasta

Widely different are the two Greek and Roman characters in terms of attitudes, reactions and actual presence on the scene. Sophocles' Iocaste enters the stage rather late, after fundamental issues have been introduced, such as Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx, the Oracle's response on the plague caused by Laius' unavenged death, and Oedipus' mistrust of Creon and Tiresias. But once there, she authoritatively shares the central part of the play (amounting to approximately one third of the whole), showing at once a sharp command of the situation: she succeeds in stopping Oedipus and Creon's dispute, comparing the pettiness of their private complaints with the ruin of the city devastated by the plague. Besides her determination, Iocaste also demonstrates sensitivity and emotions, first remembering the unfortunate son whom she supposes to have died in his infancy; and later, as the awful truth is gradually disclosed, trying to protect him from knowing himself and expressing her readiness to be the only sufferer. The stage is for Iocaste the place to express the care of a mother, while her sexual violation is removed offstage and entrusted to an external narrator; it is in fact the second messenger who relates, as far as he remembers and as far as he knows, what happened to the queen, after she rushed in desperation into the royal palace. His narration is partial, being limited to what he can hear behind the barred doors: it is her voice invoking Laius and cursing the nuptial bed and the awful births. As the narrator himself specifies, he does not know what happened next, and only at last, after Oedipus has thrown the doors open, can he see the queen hanging from a noose, and at that point follow in detail Oedipus' words, gestures and self-blinding.

Definitely dissimilar is Seneca's Iocasta, brought onstage thrice, but only for a reduced period of time. The dominant feature seems to be her mundane attitude, which she displays from the start in contrasting Oedipus' anguish over the havoc wreaked by the plague, and his fears to be somehow responsible for it; not capable of grasping his despair, she describes the ideal figure of the king, bound to be steady against adversities. With the same state of mind, she later briefly answers Oedipus' enquiries concerning Laius' death; and her poised manner does not change after the dawning of truth, when she exhorts him to keep a middle course between the public

good and his own, waiting quietly for the unravelling of fate. The tragic dimension abruptly and rather improbably becomes part of her experience only in the end, during her last dialogue with Oedipus, when she decides to stab herself in what she calls her too capacious womb.

Compared with the classical sources, a totally different Jocasta enters Dryden and Lee's stage, a leading figure granted an equal status with Oedipus; hers is a new and engrossing role, heightened by a sort of amplification of femininity, worth scrutinizing before analysing Jocasta in depth. Two other female figures reflect the queen's tragic core and expand the theme through striking incestuous nuances. The first is Eurydice, whose identity immediately associates her with Corneille's Dircé, and makes Dryden and Lee's borrowings seem easily discernible: Eurydice has a name that clearly recalls Dircé's, and like her is Lajus' supposed only daughter; her betrothed, Adrastus king of Argos, like Thésée, is a powerful prince, and both are the protagonists of the subplot. What actually happens, as often is the case with Dryden's 'quotations', seems to me to be the opposite, since Eurydice is endowed with an autonomous function that marks Dryden and Lee's difference. Thus, even if the two characters' γένοϋς is the same and their names sound similar, Eurydice is a refined choice, suggestive of an ironic overtone if referred to Sophocles' *Antigone*;<sup>13</sup> of a tragic allusion, if referred to the myth of Orpheus.

Far away from *délicatesse*, the subplot of *Oedipus* is structured on the principles discussed in the Preface: the dramatic hierarchy of main and under-plot is strictly preserved, and the links between the two levels are carefully developed. This means working on consistency and well-grounded connections, expressed by Dryden through the simile of the chambers all opening onto the same gallery: and this implies the substitution of Corneille's relief with Eurydice and Adrastus' tragic end, consistent with Jocasta and Oedipus' death. The same method applies to the incest motif, used to evoke Corneille's device in order to overturn its meaning: while Édipe tries to force Dircé into a consanguineous marriage with her cousin, Oedipus is horrified by the incestuous implications of Eurydice's possible marriage with her uncle, Jocasta's brother Creon.<sup>14</sup>

The second female figure introduced into the play is Manto, Tiresias' daughter, who performs on stage what in Seneca is reported only, helping to officiate the rites required for raising Lajus' Ghost, and lending her vision to the father's blind eyes. Blindness is the keynote resounding in the very first lines Tiresias speaks, and it spreads through the play eventually

<sup>13</sup> In *Antigone* she is Creon's wife, while in *Oedipus* she hates him, and the violence of her language constantly emphasizes it.

<sup>14</sup> See 1.1.546-59.

landing in Act 5 on Oedipus' fearful loss:

TIRESIAS A little farther; yet a little farther,  
 Thou wretched Daughter of a dark old man,  
 Conduct my weary steps: and thou who seest  
 For me and for thy self...  
 (1.1. 192-5)

Tiresias' words are part of a far-reaching process, that extends the map of blindness, weaving similes and metaphors into the text and beyond it; the blind prophet's lines powerfully evoke other rueful lines in transparently quoting blind Milton's blind Samson asking for help:<sup>15</sup> "A little onward lend thy guiding hand / To these dark steps, a little farther on" (Milton 2007: 1-2). The opening words of *Samson Agonistes* are addressed to an anonymous guide, while Tiresias speaks to his daughter. Introducing Manto, Dryden and Lee bring another actress onstage, i.e. a welcome female body to look at; but most of all, they have the chance to involve a third couple in the perturbing net of incestuous allusions. Manto plays diversified roles: she is a silent presence in Act 1 when Tiresias faces Creon manipulating the people against Oedipus; she is absent from the whole of Act 4, as if were leaving her father alone, and reappears in the last act just to lead him away. She is present during the raising of the Ghost in Act 3, and briefly intervenes to describe the sudden darkness fallen on the grove of the Furies. The most important occurrence is however in Act 2 when Tiresias, requested by Oedipus to reveal Lajus' killer, asks his daughter to ingratiate Apollo with her song.

The juxtaposition of Tiresias' words and Manto's song is difficult to decipher: it apparently manifests a strange tension between father and daughter, which could somehow reproduce, reversing it, the disturbed relation of mother and son. Captivating and bewildering is the picture Tiresias draws of himself, of his body transformed by the simile into a tree, shaken by the god growing within and fighting to surface. The cleaving of the trunk, its releasing of what is constrained inside, seems to imply an allusion to Tiresias' mythical female nature, enabling him to bring forth new forms of life – both letting the god emerge and allowing his own self to be reborn in a young body:

I feel him now,  
 Like a strong Spirit Charm'd into a Tree,  
 That leaps, and moves the Wood without a Wind:

<sup>15</sup> See Sestito 2010 for a discussion on the unexpected relation of Dryden and Milton. Given the direct relationship with Milton, it is more than likely that the quotation of Samson's words is ascribable to Dryden alone.

The rouzed God, as all this while he lay  
 Intomb'd alive, starts and dilates himself;  
 He struggles, and he tears my aged Trunk  
 With holy Fury; my old Arteries burst,  
 My rivell'd skin,  
 Like Parchment, crackles at the hallow'd fire;  
 I shall be young again. *Manto*, my Daughter,  
 Thou hast a voice that might have sav'd . . .  
 (2.1.135-45)

And yet the metamorphosis seems too painful and Tiresias invokes Manto's enchanting voice to "Charm this God, this Fury in my bosom . . . / Sooth the unruly God-head to be mild" (2.1.148, 151), apparently giving up the vision of rebirth and youth. But images and metaphors open up again to ambiguous hypotheses bordering on incest, when Tiresias asks Manto, his "lovely child", to "lull" the god, echoing Jocasta's profession of love: "when I have you in my arms, methinks / I lull my child asleep" (1.1.535-6). And Manto does not help to dissolve ambiguities: instead of appeasing Apollo, in the last part of her song she spurs him on to inflict pain to bring forth the prophecy – and maybe also her father's youth:

With Chariots and Horses all o' fire awake him,  
 Convulsions, and Furies, and Prophecies shake him:  
 Let him tell it in groans, tho' he bend with the load,  
 Tho' he burst with the weight of the terrible God.  
 (2.1.165-8)

A further step might be taken remembering the excruciating metamorphosis of incestuous, pregnant Myrrha, transformed into the myrrh tree and enabled to give birth to Adonis through the portentous splitting of her trunk.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Trespassing

Incest, vaguely introduced into Eurydice's envisaged future with Creon, and obscurely alluded to in the attachment of Tiresias and Manto, is implied from the beginning in Oedipus and Jocasta's relationship. The first to step on the dangerous ground is Creon, sarcastically commenting on his sister's attraction to a young and vigorous partner, and her reluctance to sleep in her solitary bed: "The Queen my Sister . . . / Fear'd to lye single;

<sup>16</sup> Dryden translated Ovid's account of Myrrha in *Fables, Ancient and Modern*, his collection of translations of classical and medieval poetry, published in 1700, two months before his death.



what Lajus was like, *Jocasta's* description again startlingly ends on their perfect likeness: "bate but his years, / You are his picture" (3.1.537-8).

As the play unfolds, the reader's doubt on the possibly naïf use of irony is progressively removed as *Oedipus* and *Jocasta's* passion, whatever it may be, incessantly reveals its strength, thus elevating their mutual devotion over all the rest. Unlike the characters that have preceded her, 'this' *Jocasta*, present on stage whenever possible, is passionate, endearing and careful. When *Oedipus* conceives the idea of sacrificing his life to save Thebes from the plague, her passion evokes *Niobe* and the slaughter of her children:

Her stiff'ning grief

...

Was dull to mine: Methinks I should have made  
My bosom bare against the armed God,  
To save my *Oedipus*!  
(2.1.96, 98-100)

And later: "Consume whole years in care, so now and then / I may have leave to feed my famish'd eyes / With one short passing glance, and sigh my vows" (284-6). She soothes and consoles, implying a possible falseness of the oracle and confirming her belief that a band of criminals murdered Lajus; eventually, blissful and overjoyed in reassuring him, she wants to be the one to announce to *Oedipus* the death of his Corinthian 'father'. And in the end, when she suddenly realizes the truth, ready to take all the pain on herself, she desperately tries to stop *Oedipus* from encountering *Phorbas* and knowing who he is:

once more, by the Gods,

I beg, my *Oedipus*, my Lord, my Life,  
My love, my all, my only utmost hope,  
I beg you banish *Phorbas*: O, the Gods,  
I kneel, that you may grant this first request.

...

O, *Oedipus*, yet send,

And stop their entrance, e're it be too late:  
Unless you wish to see *Jocasta* rent  
With Furies, slain out-right with meer distraction,  
Keep from your eyes and mine the dreadful *Phorbas*.

...

Prepare then, wretched Prince, prepare to hear  
A story, that shall turn thee into Stone.  
(4.1.401-5, 412-6, 422-3)

Throughout the play *Jocasta* is *Oedipus's* anchor, and their bed is the fortress that defies prodigies ravaging the earth and ghosts hovering in the air:

JOCASTA Oh my love, my Lord, support me!  
 OEDIPUS Call louder, till you burst your airy Forms!  
     Rest on my hand. Thus, arm'd with innocence,  
     I'll face these babbling *Daemons* of the air:  
     In spite of Ghosts, I'll on.  
     Tho' round my Bed the Furies plant their Charms;  
     I'll break 'em, with Jocasta in my arms:  
     Clasp'd in the folds of love, I'll wait my doom;  
     And act my joys, tho' Thunder shake the room.  
 (2.1.420-8).

More than the incest taboo other grounds set irony to work; the process is particularly marked in the gradual disclosure of the cruel wrong suffered by Oedipus, whose rectitude and valour are paradoxically the best proof of his innocence. The intentional obscurity of Apollo's oracle is misleading as it favours unawareness of his origin and misunderstanding of his future. Even more so, considering that his experience seems to be cut off from 'inherited' faults: no mention is made of the crimes committed by Lajus – either the rape of Chrysippus, or the conception of Oedipus in drunkenness – and the chain of blood and hate crossing the Theban generations since the foundation myth of Cadmus is also passed over in silence. But since an external cause for Oedipus' suffering is not provided – such as the sins of the fathers visited upon the sons –, the injustice of his fate is even more glaring: persuaded as he is of his innocence, he cannot call to mind in his whole life “a Crime by me committed, / For which the awful Gods should doom my death” (2.1.84-5).

Dramatic irony emphasizes the oracle's arcane words, and moreover prevents Oedipus and Jocasta from seeing and interpreting the signs scattered on their path. If perceived, the prodigies in Act 2 would be revealing: they both contemplate the majestic figures in the sky as long as a cloud veils their heads; but when it dissolves and the names of Jocasta and Oedipus drawn upon them identify the apparitions, other courtiers read and comment while the royal couple falls silent, probably looking elsewhere. And yet their prodigious doubles enact the enigma of their existence, the tragic births described but not deciphered by Oedipus:

Why from the bleeding Womb of monstrous Night,  
 Burst forth such Miriads of abortive Stars?  
 . . .  
 She's all o're Blood!  
 . . .  
 A vast Eclipse darkens the labouring Planet.  
 . . .  
 And beat a thousand Drums to help her Labour.  
 (2.1.35-6, 39, 41, 44)

Visions and dreams do not help him to understand: Oedipus' nightmare – with Merope melting into Jocasta: “I dreamt, *Jocasta*, that thou wert my Mother” (388) – is terrifying but unprofitable in furthering his knowledge. Neither does Jocasta's answer help: disregarding the dream, she focuses on the grievous difficulties Oedipus has to face – presumably considered by her the causes of the nightmare.<sup>17</sup> His incomprehensible “fears in pleasure” (80), the “unusual chillness” (292) that transform the sexual act in violation remain startling but ineffectual.

The use of irony is pervasive in the figures of speech, in similes and metaphors that weave a net of perturbing images around the protagonists: the idea of disorder and confusion spreads through the play, and Oedipus more and more works out the figure of monstrosity eventually landing on his own self: the blind monster infected by sin, gazed at by onlookers, confronted by the horrible “Medley of Creation” that are his and Jocasta's children (5.1.155). The existence of the royal progeny offers Dryden and Lee the occasion to exert their creativity, and to thoroughly reshape the myth, representing an unexpected form of motherhood embodied by Jocasta. True and loving mother to Oedipus, she is a rather oblivious mother to his and her other, unnamed and unmentioned children; significantly, neither is the number of sons and daughters specified nor are their names uttered. Their ‘invisibility’ again favours a refined use of dramatic irony; while some characters intentionally refer to the royal progeny,<sup>18</sup> Oedipus and Jocasta do it as well but unknowingly: as Oedipus when cursing the children of Lajus' killer, or quoting the response of the oracle. Only after their death in Act 5 is their existence acknowledged, when a Captain describes the little victims of Jocasta's violence, the girls hanged and the boys stabbed: female and male bodies, deprived of their names – Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, Polynices.

Discussing the radical refiguring of the mythical events, the main question regards Jocasta and her awful deed: what impulse drives her, one wonders, after leaving Oedipus and rushing to their bedroom “swift and wild, / As a robb'd Tygress [of her son?] bounding o're the Woods” (5.1.402-3). Gone insane out of terror at the appearance of Lajus' Ghost, it is likely that in killing she pursues the suppression of the most palpable evidence of incest, thus executing the Ghost's implicit will: more than anything else, in fact, it is Oedipus and Jocasta's sexuality that provokes Lajus' unrelenting hate against his son. In this sense the anxious description of his under-

<sup>17</sup> Sophocles' Jocasta reassures Oedipus worried by the prophecy of incest, considering that men frequently dream of lying with their mothers.

<sup>18</sup> Like Creon's supporter Diocles (1.1.53), Tiresias (3.1.438) and Oedipus (1.1.498, 4.1.306).



And Oedipus, in a way, helps, manifesting in death a consonance reflecting their closeness in life. In the last words of both of them neither contrition nor remorse resound; they are paradoxically at peace with what has gone before, with acts inflicted first by the cruelty of fate, and in the end chosen and craved. *Jocasta*, seeing *Oedipus* above, at a window:

Mount, mount, my soul;  
 I'll wrap thy shivering Spirit in Lambent Flames!  
 And so we'll sail.  
 But see! we're landed on the happy Coast;  
 And all the Golden Strands are cover'd o're  
 With glorious Gods, that come to try our Cause:  
*Jove, Jove*, whose Majesty now sinks me down,  
 He who himself burns in unlawful fires,  
 Shall judge, and shall acquit us. O, 'tis done;  
 'Tis fixt by Fate, upon Record Divine:  
 And *Oedipus* shall now be ever mine.

(*Dyes*)

(428-38)

Oedipus answers:

*Jocasta!* lo, I come.  
 O *Lajus, Labdacus*, and all you Spirits  
 Of the *Cadmean* Race, prepare to meet me,  
 All weeping rang'd along the gloomy Shore:  
 Extend your Arms t' embrace me; for I come.  
 May all the Gods too from their Battlements  
 Behold, and wonder at a Mortals daring;  
 And, when I knock the Goal of dreadful death,  
 Shout and applaud me with a clap of Thunder.  
 Once more, thus wing'd by horrid Fate, I come  
 Swift as a falling Meteor; lo, I flye,  
 And thus go downwards, to the darker Sky.

(*Thunder. He flings himself from the Window*)

(450-61)

In a sort of metaphysical theatre *Oedipus* entwines present and past, enclosing mother-wife, father and *Cadmean* ancestry in the same visionary sphere: it is a dimension where *Jocasta* embodies her dual identity of mother and lover, and he can proudly proclaim his legitimacy and right as descendant of the *Theban* kings. In his lofty theatre, *Oedipus* erases guilt and hate, establishing alliance in place of anger and pain; it is an ambitious performance whose spectators are the gods, urged by *Oedipus* to applaud his final glorious act. Flying down to "the darker Sky" he reaches *Jocasta*, sanctioning the end of the *Labdacids* tradition, and cancelling the future: *Oedipus'* wanderings to *Colonus* or *Antigone's* defiance of *Creon* are no longer

feasible. In the two bodies lying close to each other, joined in death as they were in life, all stories end.

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## “What is expected has not been accomplished”. A Historical Materialist Approach to Attic Tragedy

Abstract

In this essay I propose a materialist approach to interpreting and contextualizing tragedies that draws on a materialist strand of anthropological theory. A close analysis of seemingly disparate readings of Greek tragedies allows me to articulate the following unconscious proposition shared by these interpretations: encounters with a tragedy are modelled on the basis of a silent, contemplative, reflexive reading that presupposes the cultural formation of the Transcendental subject. I then proceed to show that the *Bacchae* offers both a criticism of a rationalist formulation of a detached viewing of any event, and key images to perceive tragic encounters in a material-sensual manner. In order to theorize this, I use Michael Taussig’s theory of mimesis, which is an idiosyncratic development of Walter Benjamin’s concept of the mimetic faculty. This enables me to see Pentheus as a double of post-Enlightenment interpreters and Dionysus as the mimetic, sensorial force that enables and destabilizes rationalist certainties. I then interpret the encounter between Pentheus and the Bacchantes on Mount Kithairon as an imageric *ur-scene* that is repeated in the act of viewing a tragedy and in a further displacement of a scholarly approach to a tragedy. This enables me to enact in these events the always already present necessity to demystify the disinterested, intellectualizing and objectifying gaze. Any engagement in this world is an interplay of at least two dimensions – ideational and sensorial – that cannot be untangled to such a degree as to become stable. This understanding of humans as mimetically adept subsequently leads to the de-centering of a de-historicized subject placing him/her on the same level as the engaged material.

KEYWORDS: Bacchantes; Euripides; materialism; mimesis; Walter Benjamin; Michael Taussig

The magic of mimesis lies in the transformation wrought on reality by rendering its image.

Taussig 1991: 134

### Transformations

Reading through the vast literature dealing with ancient Athenian tragedy, one is not only often struck by its sophistication, but also by its disre-

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gard for the sensual dimensions of life. The physiological situation an ancient Greek spectator might have found himself (or seemingly more rarely herself) in while attending the annual festival in the honour of Dionysus receives fleeting attention at best. One might be tempted to claim that such considerations are inaccessible or even irrelevant, and I concede that for creative interpretations of tragedies as literature any inquiry into modes of sensual perception might be considered marginal. Nonetheless for an alleged understanding of tragedy not as a written play akin to literature, but as a living tradition staged for sensual apprehension with social impact and significance, posing such questions is indispensable.

Our own cultural conventions and unquestioned assumptions about thinking both the world and tragic encounters reveal themselves above all in works about the social and ideological dimension of tragedy.<sup>1</sup> To put it in other words, what I am after is replacing an (unconscious) image of thought based on solitary reading, which organizes even accounts that engage with the staging of tragedies, with an image of thought sourced from participative presence in the performance of tragedy. A central aim of this article is to introduce a different image of thought into the discourse on Attic tragedy, which furthermore can be proved to have been present in ancient Athenian imagination, at the very least in Euripides' *Bacchae*. For the purposes of this paper, I take the writings of Richard Buxton and Rainer Friedrich as representative of many of these common fallacies. Buxton's (2013) questioning of the ideology of tragedy consists of close readings of tragic texts, while ignoring the context within which tragedies could and would have been perceived. By quite evidently modelling his view of a spectator on the Transcendental subject, he fails to take into account the possible effects ideological dimensions of the tragic texts might at all attain. Summarizing others before him, Buxton follows the narrative and the character types present in tragic texts to uncover their subtexts. He begins his argument with the (assumed) "uncontentious assumption that tragedies often echo ideological assumptions embedded in the life of the *polis*" (152). Yet it seems that the relationship between the ideology in life as lived

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I am drawing mostly on work by Buxton 2013, Friedrich 1996, Goldhill 1986 and Segal 1985. While it is above all Goldhill who manages to verbally (re)create a vivid sense of the audience in ancient Athens and attempts to rethink ways of how to read tragedy, he nevertheless – according to my reading of him – never goes as far as to question residual aesthetic assumptions in post-Enlightenment thought about the act of viewing tragedy. The same holds, for that matter, for Seaford's critique of Friedrich (1996), which retains a 'contemplative' imagination of ritual and tragedy, i.e. the tensions between myth, ritual, tragedy and the Dionysiac are argued for conceptually-narratively, without taking into account the material conditions for the effectivity of whatever a scholar is considering.

and life as (re)presented<sup>2</sup> is more than an echoing. For example, in claiming, without any further contextualization, that those slaves who appear in tragedies “do not themselves experience a tragic reversal of fortune, or commit suicide – that is reserved for the free and noble” (153), he seems to argue that those attending tragedies may identify merely with their own represented social roles, while this identification is as smooth as it is total. The author does not feel the need to explain how different social roles within and outside of the tragedy align. Audience response is not one that can contest, explicitly or implicitly, what is (re)presented. Again, an image of thought which takes the material conditions as simply transparent delineates the limits of how ideology and its echoing are being employed in analysis. The audience’s participation is not thought as one of fleeting and varied attention. The ideological ramifications of a tragic narrative appear as a duplicate, a photocopy of the life narratives of humans making up Athenian society. These in turn seem to be a direct impression of such tragic narratives. Yet, for all we can know, the tragedies enacted at the Great Dionysia were attended to by a varied crowd. Perhaps then a more diversified understanding of the audience and thus of the workings of ideology is needed. When Buxton contends that “any talk of a tragedy’s straightforwardly ‘confirming’ or ‘subverting’ the ideology of the *polis* is likely to be wildly simplistic” (156), he presents the example of Apollo’s speech in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, which has at least two differing interpretations in scholarly literature. Differing interpretations are not interpreted as the result of both an openness of the text and a varied reception, but only as the former. A shift towards integrating studies in reception is never achieved.

Ideology here can only be questioned ‘narratively’ in order for it to be undermined.<sup>3</sup> The only locus of criticism and thus of plurality is the text itself in its closed narrative totality. The enraptured spectator among an enormous crowd is nowhere to be seen. Neither are the scores of academics offering various interpretations. Buxton concludes his analysis keeping the ramifications of this paradigm in stating that “ideology in tragedy . . . is fluid, subtle, informing the drama in numerous ways and at numerous levels” (160). Ideology then is in tragedy, not in the interaction between the crea-

<sup>2</sup> I write (re)presentation here, for a representation is always also a presentation. And I am much more concerned with the presentation, its material-aesthetic effects than with representation as something that stands in for something else, which is the apparently uninterrogated assumption behind even the most recent interventions on thinking tragedy (cf. Lämmle and Scheidegger Lämmle 2012-13).

<sup>3</sup> While the examples may change with every academic interpreter, there is one that is and seemingly always has been considered as paradigmatic: *Medea*. In this ‘feminist’ tragedy “. . . any preconceived ideas about the automatic rightness of Greek husband against barbarian wife are rendered highly problematic by the play” (Buxton 2013: 153).

tors, the text of the performance, the spectators, and the culturally conditioned horizon of interpretation. What readings such as these do not consider is the significant intellectual effort that goes into all such interpretations of a text. To demonstrate how a text questions its own premises, or even bluntly offers a textual performance of social criticism is after all no small feat even for academics, less so for a spectator at a messy event.

Approaches that attempt to incorporate the spectator can be found among those that criticize deconstructive readings such as the above. Rainer Friedrich, for example, works with an anthropological model that should activate the spectator (1996). After demonstrating that deconstructive readings are inappropriate, because anything can be deconstructed and shown to be “subversive of *polis*-ethics” (267), he goes on to state that (at least Sophoclean) tragedy expresses “how the concern for the *oikos* can become the vehicle for the assertion of an independent individuality against the totalizing claims of the *polis*” (277). Greek tragedy then is shaped exclusively within civic discourse and “articulates, and reflects upon, the tenets and presuppositions of the ethical life of the *polis*” (264). For Friedrich, the ancient Athenian discursive space is dominated by the unsolvable contradiction between individual freedom and civic duty. Such concerns find their expression in tragedies. This liberal notion of a rational encounter within a civic discourse imagines those constituting it as rational and free agents who remain outside the discursive formation they perform. Such individuals apprehend clearly and level-headedly the narrative of a performance in its intricacies, while abstracting from imageric specificities in order to reflect upon the dramatizations of their own conflicts. Rainer Friedrich’s anthropology creates its individual as free as he (for hardly can a she remain a she in this type of discourse) is identical to all others, for all of Athens is obsessed with the dilemma of a very specific understanding of freedom and duty.<sup>4</sup> A type of freedom and duty that to a surprising degree resembles current articulations of the individual in relation to public space.

Now, I do not desire to entirely discount such readings of tragic texts. After all, these readings are based on the textual material. Why then could such interpretations not have been possible (as some among many) in an-

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the Platonic anti-mimetic legacy shows itself in its most naked form. Halliwell (2002: 114) reminds his readers that Plato wanted to keep at bay “the inevitability of ‘infection’ between our imaginative responses to tragic characters and the place of emotion in our own lives, there is an explicit appreciation that such responses represent no ordinary frame of mind but a heightened receptiveness, commensurate with the idea of ‘surrender’ (*Resp.* 10.605d3), to the dramatic projection of feeling (*Resp.* 10.606a7-b8)”. While Plato, as a quasi-Pentheus, consciously formulated his anti-mimetic/anti-representational stance, post-Enlightenment authors only rarely show any awareness of the infectious power of representation.

cient Athens? My intention is rather to present an alternative model for thinking about ancient Athenian tragedy so as to destabilize the all too common assumption of a very rational, intellectually sophisticated, yet nevertheless passive spectator that unites the above-mentioned interpretations, one that surprisingly resembles all too closely the image of a disinterested researcher gazing at the world from an ivory tower. The memory of Cartesian dualism thus seems to haunt several attempts at grasping other realities – even those claiming to be cautious of “the possibility of projecting our modern constructions onto ancient phenomena” (257). For being cautious of such a possibility still implies a hanging onto the basic anthropological model that performs a seemingly ahistorical subject. One merely tainted by history, but not historical. This dehistoricized Transcendental subject is intimately tied up with the basic metaphor of contemplative, socially isolated reading. It is this situation that is projected onto ancient spectators (readers!) whose reactions can then be safely discarded and who, because constructed ahistorically, are identical themselves and in relation to us.<sup>5</sup> This unifying and decontextualizing basic orientation is hardly self-evident, legitimate or even probable in a situation characterized “by the substantial size and mixed character of Athenian audiences, the attested explicitness of their reactions (both positive and negative) to performances of tragedy” (Halliwell 2002: 100).

Michael Taussig, drawing on Walter Benjamin’s essay on the mimetic faculty, wherein the latter theorizes a sensual encounter between historically situated humans and a mimetic apprehension of their world, offers an alternative basis for a philosophical anthropology, an alternative image of thought which enables to organize knowledge differently. And I would like to stress here that it is the ‘mimetic faculty’ I am concerned with and not simply ‘mimesis’.<sup>6</sup> This materialist theory enables the integration of both ideational and sensual components of human existence. To be clear, the conception of materiality I work with here is a performative

<sup>5</sup> Consider this felicitous slip of tongue by the post-structuralist Goldhill: “The self-reflexive theatrical devices of Euripidean drama also function to challenge the reader’s awareness of his self” (Goldhill 1986: 264).

<sup>6</sup> It is not that the (reconstructed) changing of meanings of the term ‘mimesis’ from the archaic to the classical period, as argued by Nagy (1996) does not play a role. It is rather that reenactment and imitation both draw on the human (and non-human animal) mimetic faculty of sensing and producing similarity, which in a genetic account precedes them. This holds true for all of Nagy’s work, probably because of the lack of experience with ethnographic fieldwork by classics scholars, which is precisely the constitutive experience that opens up the space where Taussig locates his research as well as the necessity to come up with different images of thought in order to relate varied human activities within a received intellectual tradition.

one, in that it is both constructed and constructive: it has effects. It is not just the subject, identity, language and gender to act performatively (Butler 1990), but all materiality. Typical performative approaches, such as that in Bierl (2013), are limited in that they are not concerned with how any performance would be a concrete, materially limited one, where difference is produced through the need to solve very concrete problems and varying economies of attention. They still rely, ever so slightly, on an image drawn on the contemplative reader who easily accesses content. Consider, for instance, the following statement: “On the stage this manifestation is necessarily achieved by theatrical and performative means, that is, by ritual equipment, paraphernalia, and props, which distinguish the group on the visual level, and moreover by music, noise, and rhythm as well as by ecstatic movement” (215). All of this is fine and well, but it is a very abstract, idealist description, which says very little about the whole situation apart from generalities. The aim would be to fill or rather combine these generalities with concrete imagery, as if ‘from below’ these general concepts, whether self-consciously drawn from ancient sources or not.

The materialist background from which I write is based on an ontology where the separation between human and non-human, between where a human (in whatever way it may be constituted) ends and the non-human begins is never simply given (Haraway 1991).<sup>7</sup> This is not incompatible with performative approaches, as Bierl (2013: 218) notes: “[m]ankind and the surrounding space merge in the execution of *choreia*, whose ecstatic, performative form becomes the determining feature of this song and the entire play”. Dionysus, a figure I work with extensively here, is explicitly linked to the chorus. Thus, such work does not only support the part of my thesis which claims that a performative historical materialist approach can be formulated with images in the *Bacchae*, but it also differs only in that such unfolding continues to be an outside to performative subjectivity, while what I propose is an image of a human of which such openness is always already a part. This difference is noticeable in that “the chorus supplied by the polis collectively represents the actual citizens who, in the here and now, worship Dionysos in the Athenian theater of Dionysos” (212), while this collective representation is just taken to work miraculously, much like in the case of the authors discussed above. And yet, we are sentient beings and sensual (pre-intellectual) apprehension of our surroundings is constitu-

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of materialist performativity, especially as developed within science studies, see e.g. Barad 2003. Furthermore, first-generation Frankfurt School materialism was always already performative insofar as it presupposed concepts having an effect on the world, which can often be noticed in the anything but analytical writing styles of Benjamin and Adorno (for a discussion on the performativity of writing, see Jakešová 2019); for an explicit discussion, see Daddario et Gritzner (2014).

tive of our being in the world and is as such folded into our constitution. It is also the tragic life of Pentheus that offers images to help us break free of the strictures of the (post-)Kantian Transcendental subject dominantly forming our post-Enlightenment conventions, (intellectual) habits, minds and senses. While “Kant is clear that the judging, independent human ultimately overcomes this [sensual] experience and stands over and against the awesome powers of nature” (Plate 2005: 21), he may have been less clear on this particular point had he engaged in massively socialized activities. Pentheus too thought his rationality so natural that he did not see the aesthetic pull of performative reality. It is the same Pentheus, who, after all, is a descendant of a (probably not particularly rationalist) dragon. The image of the king as the ideal passive spectator up on Mount Kithairon being pulled into the chaotic activity of the world is an imageric *ur*-scene repeated in tragic performances. By thinking both in terms of the modern formulation of the mimetic faculty and alongside Euripides’ *Bacchae*, I want to offer a different basic metaphorical image of such this-worldly encounters. By performing an interpretation not of tragedy, but ‘through’ tragedy – *dia tragoidion* – I propose an approach that differs from common academic studies of tragedies, for the Greeks too knew two or three things about (not only) their way of appropriating reality. Such a procedure also draws on the by now common ethnographic practices of letting the objects of study speak for themselves together with the researcher, allowing for the re-emergence of a previously suppressed subjectivity of people, animals, plants, and objects. The ancient Greeks, as emerges from contemporary discourses, compared the power of images and of the visual arts to those of poetry and rhetoric, ascribing great importance to the sensual dimensions of existence. After all, “visual art, like poetry, engaged in *mimesis*, ‘representation’; the poet and painter were equally *eikonopoioi*, ‘makers of images’” (Castriota 1992: 10). Studying tragedy should also tell us something about our own conventions, for those are the ones with which we are acquainted and which we reproduce, unknowingly. What we might know about tragedies depends as much on narratives and images from the ancient world as from our own.

### The *Bacchae* as Tragedy of Mimesis

πρέπεις δὲ Κάδμου θυγατέρων μορφήν μιᾷ  
 [Thy shape, methinks, is like to one / Of Cadmus’ royal maids!]  
 Euripides, *Bacchae* 917 (Translation Buckley 1850)

The arrival of Dionysus, he who “changed shape from god to man” (Eur. *Ba.* 4-5), in the city of Thebes is the start of an epidemic. Those that come in-

to contact with him imitate his strange behaviour in their own ways and leave the structured world of the city for nature. For the city, with all its walls and binding (354-6), with the tradition of male-dominated hierarchies, is associated with Pentheus. Dionysus meanwhile is less than enthusiastic about the ways by which such conventions are upheld (200-9). Up high in these woods of Mount Kithairon, where the Bacchae perform their inversions and changes, away from the familiar shapes of the castle of Thebes, is where Pentheus was compelled to follow Dionysus. Here, mid-play, is where the barriers of habitual appropriation begin breaking down, where the followers of Dionysus shed their seemingly clear identities and dance the frenzied dance of the god of wine. It is a (non-)space that “lies *beyond* familiar limits, the limits of civic space, social norms, the familiar boundaries, personality, energy, perception” (Segal 1997: 12). But this is not merely a geographical, objective space as our habits of appropriation lead us to think about reality. Here, humans face an ever-shifting space in which the god’s frenzy becomes reified in the sensual uncertainty of the woods. In these woods the economy of performance among sentient beings knows no cultural boundaries. It is an alchemical kitchen of the mimetic, of the “nature that culture uses to make second nature” (Taussig 1993: xiii). A sensual space, where the certainty of the cultured symbolic system collapses. Any stability becomes perceivably transient, as “in a moment this scene will disperse and everything will recombine in a new and very different formation” (Wohl 2005: 149). After all, “*Bakhai* is dominated by changes of form, and many of these concern the god himself” (Buxton 2013: 229). Dionysus’ realm is one where even perception is changed. Segal too stresses that “the play, along with Dionysus in the play, diffuses our sense of self” (1997: 346), though he does not describe how this happens, as he moves in symbolic and conceptual realms, as is evident in his formulation of reality, “that system of logical correspondences through which we find, or make, coherence in our world and in our ever-changing selves.” (ibid.). However, in the approach I work with here, the point is that there is no simple correspondence between concepts and the world, the former being somehow fully immaterial and transparent. Thus, reading a tragedy is a fundamentally different thing from attending one, each performance will also differ, especially through time and space, as social conventions and materiality itself change. Here, there is no nature before culture, as both are always already enmeshed (Buck-Morss 1977). Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics* (1973), demonstrates how the two can never unite into anything coherent. The image of thought he works with is a displaced inverse of researchers like Segal; it is not merely one that begins in materiality (understood of course as already constituted conceptually, and as such already conditioned by this gap), but also one that never adds up to this stability mentioned

above. Stability, coherence is already a fiction. The sensual is this realm in between, where perception and materiality meet, without ever fully coinciding. Perception is sensual, it is not an intellectual reflection of symbolic structures, it co-constitutes and accompanies them, even as it is formed by them. Dionysus' power is much more radical than symbolic inversions, it deals with *aisthesis*, the sensual.

But Dionysus is after all a god and a mimic, who can continue to become other, while remaining Dionysus. Indeed his birth is a series of transformations, both physiological (birth, thunderbolt) and social (from Athena to Zeus, perfected by the Fates) (Eur. *Ba.* 90-105). He, "like all of us, has a double origin, born somehow from both a father and a mother" (Wohl 2005: 148). For we humans too are both physiological and social copies of our forebears, originating from two, resembling both and none at the same time. Epistemic uncertainty is further figurally associated with Dionysus via the *thyrsos*, formed by inserting a bunch of ivy leaves in the hollow tip of a fennel rod, and used as missile (Eur. *Ba.* 762, 1099). It is thus a copy of an idea made up of two separate material parts, while both parts and the whole have unstable functional existences. Representation however is not a mere standing in for something else, it is becoming something else. The act of representing renders changes onto reality. For the people up on the mountain come not only to represent animals, they become animals. Such representation is not a sign of falseness. Dionysus not only mimes the appearance of a youth from the East, he becomes this youth. But Dionysus can intentionally change form. His appearance is mimicking the expectations of locals about how somebody associated with Bacchic ecstasy and the barbaric East could look like. The blond youth arriving in Thebes is a copy of the city-dwellers' expectations. These expectations are themselves copies of his possible appearances. Appearance here is everything, it sutures the unstable material basis of existence. Pentheus cannot understand or acknowledge this. He forcefully clings to stability, yet is easily betrayed by his rationalist apprehension of sense-perception: "Where is he? He is not visible to my eyes" (501). Pentheus cannot see Dionysus despite literally staring at and conversing with him. It is Dionysus who is in (touch with) his senses here (504). Meanwhile Pentheus cannot even imagine the acts of the Bacchantes beyond his own safely structured conventions. His imagination is a copy of his conventions. The sensual encounter with the 'real' Bacchantes then presents him with bodies, acts, images, and sounds that press close to him and make him enact these too. He has to change his appearance by miming what comes from Dionysus in order to even arrive at Kithairon (823), finding himself in unfathomable nature without any structures to support his masculine subjugation of the world. Now, considering that Pentheus' actions are reported by a messenger, what I do here is to

think with the images he vividly presents verbally.

The king becomes other even before arriving at this transgressive Space of Change. Yet there, on the mountain, he encounters even more radical sensualities and modes of behaviour. Indeed he is compelled to engage in the activity, pressed out of his position of the curious, yet passive onlooker. He becomes part of the scene and changes profoundly. Still, he remains part of nature, of spaces, objects, and forms.<sup>8</sup> In the closing passages Dionysus decrees to those that leave the Space of Change in their previous figural integrity what they will do. While the uncontrolled whirlwind of unstructured mimetic activity has been subdued after leaving the mountain, these sobered minds will nevertheless visibly change yet again (1330-50). But what of Pentheus? He was joined into the mimetic dance of the othered Bacchae to such a degree that he is taken outside himself so far that he cannot return. For our conventional physiognomic categories he has indeed become a 'total other'. It is only for Dionysus to become almost entirely other over and over again. In the tragedy this becomes evident "as the action unfolds, changes in the god's perceived form multiply" (Buxton 2013: 229). For a human individual, this total crisis in conventional representation is as final as the total negation of one's own mimetic adeptness, since "the reason that represses mimesis is not merely its opposite. It is itself mimesis: of death" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 44). Still, in his representation within the play, Pentheus lingers on. He is as present there, as is the god Dionysus.<sup>9</sup> Thus in figural forms Pentheus too multiplies, both literally and metaphorically. He is multiplied by being torn apart and by being (repeatedly) represented. It is precisely here that transgression shows itself to be a generative force relating to both death and life.

For Michael Taussig, these issues of copy and contact are common to all life and representations. If one proceeds to imagine only a performed tragedy's surface, questions of mimesis come to the fore immediately. Imagine sitting in an audience of 10,000 viewers, who are drunk, loud, and tired. Imagine sitting there day after day for three whole days (Goldhill 1986: 75-6). The staging of the event is furthermore, as life in general, I want to add, multisensory, and ritual and mythical forms become blurred (Bierl 2013:

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin noticed the following: "Children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic codes of behavior, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher, but also a windmill or a train" (Benjamin 1999: 720).

<sup>9</sup> I believe the play supports interest in questions of representation and presence due to the fact that it is exceptional in the narrative presence and importance of a god. For, in a sense, the copy takes on the power of the represented. Dionysus the performed character in a concrete instantiated tragic performance takes his power from the 'real' Dionysus.

212).<sup>10</sup> Of course, such slippage between spheres is, as I will show, common in research too, and one begins to ponder when, if ever, it is that anybody encounters myth and ritual separately. Thinking about categories as always already multimodal might be more efficacious.<sup>11</sup> This, and I deliberately exaggerate, is clearly not a place for peaceful and lonely contemplation upon the meaning of an enacted narrative. Its intellectual meanings might come forth in discussions, but what one will likely perceive then and there are the surface appearances, the wit of the actors and their (in)ability to perform (that is, adhere to conventionalized forms of tragic behaviour). But appearances can have many effects on an audience, just like Dionysus' many appearances transform those that come into contact with him in differing ways. (Re)presentations may indeed be read as types unworthy of emulation, but at the same time by virtue of being performed these types enable the very modes of behaviour they ought to criticize. They are representations and presentations at the same time. The bodily presence of actors is non-neutral, it does not merely signify and efface itself in the process. Presentation, which in a performance presents modes of behaviour, is always already a part of representation, or better yet, its prerequisite. Pentheus could but imagine very tame and chauvinistic visions of the Bacchae, yet once he arrived at the scene to spy on their acts, he was drawn into whirl of changing appearances, unable to clearly separate from them. He had forgotten about the present(ational) dimension of any performance. For a conceptual reiteration of tragedy this vision of Pentheus on Mount Kithairon might prove to be a useful metaphor.

### **The Comedy of Becoming Other**

Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man's. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.

Benjamin 1999: 720

This mimetic faculty is "the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore differences, yield

<sup>10</sup> I want to stress that the space I try to open up pertains to what I see as the implicit, unquestioned expectation of an immediate convertibility of myth to ritual, or vice versa, as the way rituals or tragedies, or recitations for that matter, are performed, conditions what can be apprehended.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, what Mitchell (2005) writes about visual media, namely that they are never pure, pertains to myth and ritual too.

into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (Taussig 1993: xiii). One of the important points being that the difference between original and copy is destabilized to such a degree that it becomes moot. Any original is just an arbitrary cut in chains of transformations, which for our situation here include, among others, my own work on and with the tragedy. A Dionysus on-stage draws his power from the purported original Dionysus performing his transgressive mischief. Dionysus as born at the crossroads of essence (nature and physiology) and construction (culture and society). Such copying, drawing on the power of the original is a process realized by and through the senses, that is through sensual contact. It cuts through established cultural categories and boundaries, as it presupposes sense perception, not intellect. And it is at such crossroads that "the mimetic faculty comes most forcefully into play. It sutures nature to artifice and bringing sensuousness to sense by means of what was once called sympathetic magic, granting the copy the character and power of the original, the representation the power of the represented" (Taussig 1993: xvii). The epistemic (non-)places stitched together by mimesis have something Dionysiac to them, as "the strange thing about this silly if not desperate place between the real and the really made-up is that it appears to be where most of us spend most of our time as epistemically correct, socially created, and occasionally creative beings. We dissimulate. We act and have to act as if mischief were not afoot in the kingdom of the real and that all around the ground lay firm" (Taussig 1993: xvii). The lines between categories lose their clarity and appear muddled, uncertain. In places where hermeneutic certainties decompose it might even happen that a mother perceives what would be her son differently. Her common sense is destabilized and revealed as mere habit. Where nature and culture interact freely, the senses go hog-wild, for they too are cultured. They are the "second nature" created by culture. Sentient beings produce similarities, (re)presentations. It is what we do. The Space of Change on Mount Kithairon is dominated by Dionysus, where the stable similarities produced within common culture tip into a different realm from that of convention. Through the senses we apprehend seemingly stable "outer forms" of phenomena, yet in the Dionysiac Space, the workings of senses are laid bare in their constructedness. For what is mimetically apprehended goes far beyond convention and entails radical change.

The realm of the sensual, of the "outer forms", is where academics too are playing. For is writing not in a sense an attempt to press close to an object, transforming itself by translation of the object into words? For Walter Benjamin it surely was (Taussig 1993: 2). Words are thus not mere symbols

standing in for something else in an unending line of deferred meanings. They also have a surface, i.e. aesthetic materiality, as has by now been a longterm topic in media studies. The reason we can use words, despite their apparent meaninglessness is because (conventionally) they appear to mimic the objects they refer to. This is what habit does to us. In studying words that give themselves to the reader seemingly directly one must not forget their sensual dimensions. When we read, we follow forms which have for us acquired such a close connection to meanings they seemingly refer to so as to appear transparent. But it is in reading too that a subject encounters at first an outer form that is then ideationally imitated<sup>12</sup> so as to grasp its non-material meaning. Even the spoken word is in a sense material form insofar as sounds are waves being carried by air only to impress themselves onto our senses. And images, perhaps more straightforwardly for people of our times, where the “individual finds the *abstract form ready made*” (Taussig 1993: 45), are encountered and understood through their sensual component.<sup>13</sup> This understanding takes us outside ourselves, only to be returned again. We are the same, yet changed. We are similar. For Walter Benjamin, imagining the locus of the sensual as located in a body’s outer ends, for example where sense-perception appears to happen, the sense of being taken outside ourselves is even stronger (Taussig 1993: 38). It is the whole enterprise of ethnography (of writing the *ethnos*) that is in a sense ‘making a model to capture the original’. “In other words, can’t we say that to give *an example, to instantiate, to be concrete*, are all examples of the magic of mimesis wherein the replication, the copy, acquires the power of the represented?” (Taussig 1993: 16). Both writing and reading are closely tied to vision, perception and imagery. In a sense they are a type of magic: “I want to . . . puzzle over the capacity of the imagination to be lifted through representational media, such as marks on a page, into other worlds” (ibid.). A textual encounter with tragedy is not of necessity an essentially different experience from a theatrical or ritual encounter. Neither is it and can it be identical. The material, sensual quality of a performance affects sentient beings more strongly than a textual encounter. An interplay between aesthetic surface and immaterial imagination play a role in all encounters, what will differ is the specific mix of these elements and the imagery through which the aesthetic, which points beyond itself towards the ideational,

<sup>12</sup> Taussig, following Freud, calls our tendency to lose ourselves in our environment “ideational mimetics”. Here “even ideational activity, not only perception, involves . . . embodying” (Taussig 1993: 46).

<sup>13</sup> For a useful discussion of the modern “ready-made” reality and its Platonic character, see e.g. Boon 2010: 18-24. The specific way our reality is constructed nourishes certain naive tacit assumptions that draw on post-Enlightenment rationalist thought, supported up by a material organization of reality that make these assumptions cogent.

will be apprehended. A further difference lies in the intellectual narratives that dialectically shape us, our world and our ways of being in the world. Hence, even if it were possible to stage an ‘exact copy in the same space with the same paraphernalia and body techniques’ of the *Bacchae*, it would still be something different in general and among each participant, as we are formed differently. This is one of the reasons for which it is difficult for us to perceive the mimetic aspects of ideational worlds. One of the reasons for the mis-perception of certain modes of writing as neutral or objective.

The mimetic faculty then is crucial in that it involves a two-layered notion of mimesis – a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived” (Taussig 1993: 21). Dionysus does not bring alterity from a distance, his travels take him to come into contact with Pentheus. The alterity involved in mimesis is “a lot more performative and physical, a lot more realist yet fanciful, than implied in the way ‘othering’ is alluded to in discussions today” (33). What indeed could be more performative and physical, more realist yet fanciful than the activities up on Mount Kithairon! This is central to the mimetic work of tragedy as (re)presentational performance. This was not lost on the Greeks, as “from an early stage, when applied to poetry, visual art, music, dance, and the like, mimesis amounts to a concept (or family of concepts) of representation, which in this context can be broadly construed as the use of an artistic medium (words, sounds, physical images) to signify and communicate certain hypothesized realities. But because *hypothesized realities are imagined possibilities of experience* [my emphasis], the Greek tradition, both before and after Plato, is greatly interested in the effects of mimetic artworks on their viewers or hearers, and repeatedly attempts to characterize the kinds of recognition, understanding, emotional response, and evaluation that such artworks can or should elicit in their audiences” (Halliwell 2002: 16).<sup>14</sup> One goes to tragedy and becomes other. Transformed, yet same. Similar.

Mimetic power, like Dionysus, is ambiguous. In the power to represent the world lies also the power to falsify, mask and pose. “The two powers are inseparable” (Taussig 1993: 43). Ethnography testifies to “an almost drug-like addiction to mime, to merge, to become other – a process in which not only images chase images in a vast, perhaps infinitely extended chain of images, but one also becomes a marrer” (43). Rey Chow in trying

<sup>14</sup> Importantly, I am concerned with Platonism, and not Plato, whose specific writings are at best marginally relevant for the tragic context, given they came later. What I term Platonism is the implicit models of thought that have become culturalized within the general unconscious and appear as historical and not ontological only through critical interaction with a cultural ‘other’, noticeable especially in anthropological discourse.

to go beyond the structuralist intellectual heritage notes the “programmatically rejection of the mimetic as such” (2002: 101). A rejection that stems from Plato’s distrust of the mimetic. For him “the consideration of mimesis was bound up with an implicit visuality – with the image it produces” (ibid.). The problem for him is the duplicitous nature of the act of copying, for it confuses reality and falsehood. The Western philosophical tradition mistrusts the objectified image, but Rey Chow stresses that this iconophobia is “subordinate to the phobia about imitation itself” (ibid.). The act of copying is the problem, for it unsettles boundaries, truths, and power relations. While the mimetic faculty is always present<sup>15</sup> in sentient beings, as cultural beings we are habitualized into reified boundaries of the world we inhabit, constructed by our forebears. So it is with Pentheus and his stubborn refusal to acknowledge the arbitrariness of rationality. Performing (re)presentation means the performance of an identity that is always already undermined by the mimetic act of representation.

(Re)presentation contains both identity and difference. The Western Platonic tradition sought to establish philosophy as primary representation and art as secondary. It established a never actual, yet still potent rupture between truth and representation. “In the broadest terms, Plato’s legacy to the history of mimeticism can be described as a combination of philosophical gravitas (mimesis cannot be divorced from the biggest, most serious problems that confront philosophy) with the disquieting, though inconclusive, suggestion that philosophy and art may be somehow at odds with one another and even perhaps ultimately irreconcilable. It would be hard to overstate the consequences of this legacy” (Halliwell 2002: 37-8). It is on the suppression of the sensual, aesthetic aspect of mimesis that the majority of Western thought rests, right down to the implicit imaginings of the socio-aesthetic encounter with tragedy. Pentheus, ever the proto-Kantian, was eager to imagine himself as beyond the ambiguous power of mimesis too. He forgot that his seemingly stable world is built on provisional suppression of the impossibility of identity and essential stability.

A copy cannot be more than a partial, because cultured imitation of an original (which in itself is always non-original, that is a copy), therein lies its fidelity and illusion. Behind this lies the material impossibility of identity. Identity as such is merely a metaphor. A (re)presentation, created by way of contact and copy, does more than just represent, it opens up new possibilities, for it is similar (without being similar to) but also different. This is essential to interpreting Athenian tragedy in its context. Those pres-

<sup>15</sup> Or, according to the Frankfurt School, it is resurfacing in capitalist modernity, after its suppression by the Enlightenment. “Capitalist man” could nevertheless be characterized as accustomed to severely less penetrable boundaries than ancient Greeks.

ent at all the unique stagings of tragedies would see and hear the surface of the performance, as well as presumably an outline of the plot. While the plot may carry a clear ideological message (as well as its deconstruction), it must nevertheless be enacted, performed. While many plots are demonstrations of where inadequate behaviour leads, the artistic performance of these builds on a depiction of such behaviour. This sensual performance exceeds any directly intended narrative and ideological ramifications, by virtue of the ambiguity of the mimetic. A physical performance may have many meanings on a connotative symbolic level, however on a sensual level it enables, perhaps even ratifies the exact same behaviour it purports to criticize. What more, any plot, story, image, performance is already a copy of what was known to a culture as implicit social knowledge. Tragedies, even in their textual dimension, are made up of images and forms too. "We can see such images are created by the author but are also already formed, or half-formed, so to speak, latent in the world of the popular imagination" (Taussig 1991: 370). Dionysus, perhaps as sort of "dialectical imagician", wields the images inherent in a society to act upon that same society. He keeps changing his image for he is aware that he, even as a (re)maker of images, his control over images diminishes once they (re-)enter society. For that he does not cling to figural forms. He draws from society's half-conscious imageric wealth to sneak past its purported outer boundaries. Yet as evidenced by the differing reactions to his multiple forms by Agaué, Pentheus, Kadmus, and others, the forms he appropriates are anything but unambiguous. Dionysus 'knows' he is both subject (acting upon society via his image) and object (being perceived through his image by society). And if I never define what Dionysus is, then it is precisely because of the figure's relational multivalence that I want to keep, as any attempt at a clear definition would perform not the alternative I propose but the image of thought I seek to evade.

This sort of uncertain being in the world is what the tragedy of Pentheus presents. And what I present is not a "metatragedy", in that it thematizes the staging of tragedy itself, as critically analyzed by Radke (2003: 256ff.). Indeed, Radke (270) critiques approaches that look at the 'surface' of the tragedy, at the expense of the 'content', which is precisely what I seek to affirm, but pointing out that the conditions of staging tragedy in Athens would have made a thorough narrative engagement impossible. Radke's exhaustingly argued book follows precisely, if unconsciously, the image of thought implicit in post-Enlightenment thought I want to present an alternative to, for he seeks to drive a wedge between content and surface, while wanting to magically access the content prior to any surface. This is possible for armchair academics within a capitalist empire, where the fiction of the rationally apprehending solitary individual is to a large extent made

fact. Yet, in Ancient times reality was different, there was not the extensive system of global exploitation necessary to create the conditions of armchair researchers: the overrational ruler who attempts to contain the mimetic powers of Dionysus cannot resist its power. He misperceives himself as being in control of appearances, even as he too is being changed by them. Encountering the world is always a sensual, aesthetic encountering. Studying tragedy based on the metaphor of textual, contemplative encounter is making the mistake of projecting a historically highly specific (self-)image onto a historical situation. The concept of aesthetic as an autonomous and “disinterested” realm of experience “came into being partly as a secularized derivative of much older (originally Platonic, later Christian) ideas of the disinterested contemplation of transcendent (that is, divine) beauty and goodness. Although Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which sharply distinguishes the judgments of ‘taste’ from the operations of both pure (intellectual) and practical (ethical) reason, was a powerful landmark in the codification of this trend of thought, a doctrine of autonomy and self-sufficiency of ‘the aesthetic’ had grown steadily over the preceding decades” (Halliwell 2002: 9). Pentheus too expects the aesthetic to be autonomous, for in his desire to voyeuristically engage in Bacchic orgies lies his oblivion to the impossibility of a clear subject-object distinction. He even has to rely on the mimetic faculty so that he can realize his rationalist utopia. At the very least, he has to mimic conventions and appearances of the world he deems stable. Any tragedy aiming at a unified ideological effect entails the enactment of what is to be criticized.

### Whither Thou, Tragedy?

πολλὰ μορφὰι τῶν δαμονίων,  
πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί·  
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,  
τῶν δ' ἀδοκίτων πόρον ἦϋρε θεός.  
τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.

[Many are the forms of divine things, and the gods bring to pass many things unexpectedly; what is expected has not been accomplished, but the god has found out a means for doing things unthought of.]

Euripides, *Bacchae* 1388-92 (Translation Buckley 1850)

Tragedy, even in a textual encounter, will not merely be a passive object whose meaning is extracted by a (Transcendental) subject. Tragedy speaks back to us. Not in its totality, but in the chaos of repeated images it performatively evokes. We are changed by engaging with them. Even if, due to the legacy of bodily repression, our mimetic faculty may have reced-

ed – by becoming accustomed to ‘dead objects’ we have forgotten that we yield to them (Taussig 1993: 46) – reading a tragedy continues to be an existential-sensorial encounter, the effect of which one would have to consciously work against to overcome. Still, the historical encounter with tragedy of an individual in Ancient Athens differs in many ways from the silent (re)reading of a text in offices or homes.<sup>16</sup> But it is a question of degree not essence. Dionysus in his mimetic dance thus wreaks not only havoc on the ideological intentions of the Athenian *polis*, he becomes present in our times as well. He opens up new possibilities, while retaining parts of the old. He works upon similarities. Pentheus’ ignorant attempt at repression of the mimetic leads both to his (physiological) demise and his continuing representational existence.<sup>17</sup> He deems his rational world in which seemingly given ideas are realized in materiality to be anchored in stability. But even hypothesized realities based in the realms of ideas are structured according to the imageric possibilities of their culture and are in effect a copy (with its always inherent variations) of existent conventions. Mimetic/representational work is persuasively vivid. “It involves the creation of something that, through its sense of life, can affect the viewer or hearer emotionally too: in the case of the hymn, it is a matter of the power to ‘bewitch’ and ‘enchant’ (*thelgein*), a metaphor (if it is one) well embedded in the Homeric epic[s] . . .” (Halliwell 2002: 21).

This is not to say that ideology is not communicable. Tragedy (much like other narratives, be they explicitly mythological or other) is efficacious in transforming those attending. What I intend to question with this mimetic theorization is the possibility of total dominance of any structure, as is tacitly presumed in many readings such as those analyzed at the beginning of this text. In these analyses images of rational encounters between active subjects and passive objects continue to be employed uncritically, and they thus retain too strong a fixation on a dichotomy between structure (and dominance) and anti-structure (subversion). What gets lost are the translational processes of reception, or at the very least their historical conditioning. The tragic encounter can serve both integration and destabilization, as my materialist reading demonstrates. To study tragedy (or anything else, really) not as (post-Enlightenment) text, but as a lived tradition drawing on deeply embedded, yet historically contingent imagery and con-

<sup>16</sup> A fitting existential-sensorial metaphor could be the attendance to a festival in popular music through which to think an encounter with tragedy in its Golden Age.

<sup>17</sup> It is of central importance to note that approaches to death are culturally variable. Following Foucault, Chow (2002) demonstrates the post-Enlightenment obsession with life and the deathly havoc it often wreaks on those that are other. Pentheus’ symbolic and physiological death should thus not be easily equated with death as we are accustomed to perceiving it today.

ventions in the quotidian sensualist encounter probably far removed from rationalist textual reiterations, implies the need to yield to a different sub-consciously effective imagery than a modern academic subject might be used to. This imagery is partly embedded in the engaged textual sources, wherefore it is important to think with a text and not about it. To do so however needs thorough work in reconstructing the life-worlds within which tragedies are received, be that in ancient Athens, in today's academia or anywhere else.

For both text and those encountering it exist historically and in a material world. Only by destabilizing one's own ontological and perceptual certainties may fallacious imaginings be elided. As I tried to present on the previous pages, the *Bacchae* shows today's interpreter the pitfalls of ignoring the power of the sensual and the mimetic. By taking such 'dead texts' as if they were alive and looking for what they can tell us about ourselves, we may perhaps even come closer to what they may have been to their various contemporaries. Even if my concern here lies more with implicit images of thought in contemporary research practices than with whatever might have been. For any account of an 'other' is at least a two-way street: the construction of the other through which one constructs one's own world.

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## Prophetic Deception: The Narrative of the Chariot Race in Sophocles' *Electra*

Abstract

Towards the midpoint of Sophocles' *Electra*, the Paedagogus uses a speech of eighty-four lines to convince Clytemnestra and Electra that Orestes has met his death while competing in the chariot race at the Pythian games (680-763). Scholars have increasingly recognised that the length and vividness of this false narrative requires explanation; some interpretations focus on the effect of the speech on the two women, while others explore the thematic significance of the events described by the Paedagogus. The central claim of this article is that the narrative symbolically foreshadows what is to happen after Orestes kills Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, though the play itself ends with the latter still alive: the disaster in the fictional chariot race is a sign to the audience that a reversal of fortune lies in store for the real Orestes (and their first thought is likely to be of the pursuit by the Erinyes). The audience have been prepared for this possibility by Orestes' insistence in the prologue that, though it is considered inauspicious to be spoken of as dead while still alive, in this case he has nothing to fear (59-66). When the Paedagogus later conveys the false news, further clues that point to the ominous import of the narrative include its two-part structure, with initial success in the games followed by disaster, and the intra- and intertextual resonances of the chariot race itself. Prophecy is a major theme of *Electra*, and in this scene the audience are challenged to identify and interpret an omen which none of the characters are in a position to perceive as such.

KEYWORDS: Sophocles; *Electra*; Paedagogus; chariot race; omen; prophecy; Erinyes

Early on in Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes entrusts the Paedagogus with the task of announcing the false news of his death to those inside the royal palace of Mycenae, urging the old slave to do so "when the right moment leads you inside" (39: ὅταν σε καιρὸς εἰσάγη).<sup>1</sup> In the event, the Paedagogus comes upon Clytemnestra, Electra and the chorus outside the palace, and his timing is exquisite. Clytemnestra has just ended an extended prayer to Apollo by alluding to unspoken desires she hopes the god will bring to

<sup>1</sup> Timeliness is a key motif of this first scene; the word καιρὸς appears also in lines 22, 31 and 85 (cf. Schein 1982: 71-2).

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fulfilment (657-9), and it requires little imagination to infer that the demise of her own son is foremost among them. If from Clytemnestra's perspective the announcement that soon follows suggests that her prayer has been answered, the audience have very different grounds for attributing the slave's opportune entrance to Apollo's influence.<sup>2</sup> In the opening scene Orestes had revealed that the proclamation of the Pythian oracle was that he should kill his father's murderers "by deceit" (37: δόλοισι) rather than through force of arms, and the Paedagogus' tale is of course an essential part of the scheme devised by Orestes in response to the prophecy.

The Paedagogus' brief is to say that Orestes died by falling from his chariot while competing in the Pythian games (47-50), but what the audience have not been prepared for is the scale of the narrative that he proceeds to elaborate: in a speech of eighty-four lines (680-763), the Paedagogus begins by describing the successes of the fictional Orestes on the first day of the games before recounting in vivid detail the chariot race that took place "on another day" (698) and culminated in Orestes' death. In the past, the speech was often applauded for its brilliance and then largely passed over (cf. Finglass 2007: 300), but in recent decades scholars have increasingly recognised that its dramatic prominence requires explanation.<sup>3</sup> What is so remarkable is not simply the length of this false narrative but the fact that it follows the conventions of a tragic messenger speech (cf. Lloyd 2005: 67-69; Marshall 2006: 203). The expansiveness and attention to detail characteristic of such set pieces reflects their dramaturgical importance as a means of bringing to life events that, though integral to the action, were impossible (or at least very difficult) to portray on the tragic stage (cf. Bremer 1976). In the case of the Paedagogus' speech, by contrast, the spectators are well aware that, however much they may feel gripped by the twists and turns of the narrative and perhaps even moved by its conclusion, it does not correspond to any real sequence of events in the world of the drama.<sup>4</sup> Thus, unless we are willing to accept that the dramatic economy so characteristic of Sophoclean tragedy has for once been set aside, the challenge is to explain

<sup>2</sup> On the ironies here, cf. Finglass 2007: 288: "The immediate entry of the Paedagogus will seem like the god's answer to her prayer: indeed he has been sent on his way by the god, but to bring Clytemnestra's destruction".

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. Lloyd 2005: 66: "It is a major problem in the play why Sophocles should have devoted so much space to a long and exciting speech in which there is apparently not a word of truth". For overviews of the scholarship on the speech, see MacLeod 2001: 107-10; Finglass 2007: 300-4.

<sup>4</sup> This tension between the speech's dramatic power and (from the audience's perspective) transparent falsity has been the starting point for a number of metatheatrical readings; see Batchelder 1995, ch. 3; Ringer 1998: 161-72; Barrett 2002, ch. 4; Marshall 2006.

why, in this central scene, a shorter account of Orestes' death could not have fulfilled more or less the same dramatic purpose.

One approach is to focus on the effect that the speech has on Electra and Clytemnestra, who lack the crucial information possessed by the audience.<sup>5</sup> The thoroughness of the Paedagogus' report is certainly an important factor in convincing both women of his trustworthiness; after he has finished, Clytemnestra refers to the "definite proofs" of Orestes' death (774: *πίστα . . . τεκμήρια*) that he has provided, and Electra is so convinced that she can later dismiss without hesitation Chrysothemis' suggestion that the lock of hair newly placed by Agamemnon's tomb offers clear evidence (885-6: *σαφή / σημεῖα*) of their brother's return. It is also true that the time we are given to imagine the turmoil Electra must be experiencing as she listens adds greatly to the tension of the scene (cf. Finglass 2007: 300-1). It is far from obvious, however, that a considerably shorter speech could not have achieved a similar level of verisimilitude (cf. MacLeod 2001: 108; Lloyd 2005: 66) or offered the spectators ample opportunity to wonder what effect the Paedagogus' words might be having on his listeners.

A different way of meeting the challenge is to explore the thematic significance of the events described by the Paedagogus. If the narrative offers a glimpse of the qualities that make the real Orestes a worthy son of the former commander-in-chief at Troy, by the same token it brings to light a troubling disjunction between his actions in that alternative reality and the murderous dissimulation of the dramatic present (cf. Segal 1981: 281-2; Blundell 1989: 173-4.). It is hard to believe, moreover, that there is simply an accidental connection between the setting for Orestes' fictional death and the events of family history evoked in the epode of the first stasimon (502-15), where the chorus allude to the chariot-race victory that allowed Pelops to claim Hippodamia as his bride, and the subsequent murder of Myrtilus, thrown into the sea from Pelops' chariot.<sup>6</sup> Yet even when scholars acknowledge the pertinence of the connection, interpretations of its significance differ. Thomson appears to have in mind the curse which the dying Myrtilus is supposed to have called down upon the house of Pelops when he argues that the Paedagogus' speech makes us realise that Orestes is "doomed" (1941: 357). For Finglass, on the other hand, the reappearance of the chariot theme is better understood as "an indication of how Orestes has broken free from his family's troubled history"; Orestes' death, after all, is "only a fiction" (2007: 302).

Both types of approach have their merits, and my intention in what fol-

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of interpretations along these lines, see MacLeod 2001: 109-10.

<sup>6</sup> For a partial list of readings that draw this connection, see MacLeod 2001: 109n10 (to which can be added e.g. Schein 1982: 76).

lows is certainly not to invalidate them. The first group of scholars rightly emphasise the contribution of the immediate context to the speech's dramatic power, but my proposal is that a further important source of tension in the scene concerns the implications of the narrative for Orestes' own mission. Various clues, both earlier in the play and in the speech itself, raise the possibility that the speech has a prophetic import of which neither Orestes nor the Paedagogus are aware. More specifically, the disaster in the chariot race points ahead to a possible reversal of fortune for Orestes following the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the first thought of many of the spectators, I shall suggest, would have been of the pursuit by the Erinyes. The speech, in other words, has proleptic force, symbolically anticipating events which, it will emerge, fall outside the main action of the play,<sup>7</sup> and it is only when seen in this light that the full relevance of the aspects of the narrative explored by the second group of scholars becomes clear.

The first section of the essay focuses on some lines from the prologue in which Orestes insists that, though it is generally considered inauspicious to be described as dead while still alive, in this case he has nothing to fear (59-66), a passage which, I argue, prepares the audience for the possibility that the Paedagogus' tale will indeed have ominous significance. In the second section I propose that the startling length and vividness of the narrative gives substance to this hint from the prologue, and that the pursuit by the Erinyes is the turn of events most likely to occur to a spectator who interprets the speech as an omen of the future. The argument of the third section is that the two-part structure of the speech, with initial success in the games followed by the disastrous chariot race, reinforces the impression that the narrative is foreshadowing what is to follow the killing of the ruling couple. In the fourth section I consider the symbolism of the chariot race itself, and, building on Thomson's brief discussion, argue that it is only when Orestes' fictional death is understood as anticipating the pursuit by the Erinyes that we can fully appreciate the link between the manner of his death and the events of the past involving Myrtilus and Pelops, as well as the intertextual relationship between the Paedagogus' narrative and a set of athletic metaphors in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. The fifth section, finally, aims to contextualise this reading of the speech; prophecy is a major theme of *Electra*, and in this scene the onus is placed on the audience to identify and interpret an omen which none of the characters are in a position to perceive as such.

<sup>7</sup> De Jong (2007: 276, 285) argues that, because a play is not a narrative, 'prolepsis' is not the right term in this context; in the terminology she favours, the speech can instead be described as an external prospective narrative ('external' because the events it anticipates are subsequent to the action of the play).

### 1. To be Reported Dead While Still Alive

Once the Paedagogus has been given his instructions, Orestes explains that in the meantime he and Pylades will perform at Agamemnon's tomb the ceremonies specified by Apollo, before returning with an urn supposedly containing his own ashes that will provide confirmation of the happy news of his death (51-8). Orestes gives the impression that the plan is not one he is entirely comfortable with, however, devoting a whole eight lines to justifying the decision to have his death reported while he is still alive (59-66):<sup>8</sup>

ΟΡ. τί γάρ με λυπεῖ τοῦθ', ὅταν λόγῳ θανῶν  
 ἔργοισι σωθῶ κάξενέγκωμαι κλέος; 60  
 δοκῶ μέν, οὐδὲν ῥήμα σὺν κέρδει κακόν.  
 ἤδη γάρ εἶδον πολλάκις καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς  
 λόγῳ μάτην θνήσκοντας· εἶθ', ὅταν δόμους  
 ἔλθωσιν αὐθις, ἐκτετίμηνται πλέον·  
 ὡς κάμ' ἐπαυχῶ τῆσδε τῆς φήμης ἄπο 65  
 δεδορκότ' ἐχθροῖς ἄστρον ὡς λάμψειν ἔτι.

[OR. How can it harm me when, though reported dead, I in fact achieve safety and win renown? My view is that no word is ill-omened when it brings gain. Indeed many times before now I have learned of clever men falsely described as dead; then, when they return home, all the greater is the honour bestowed on them. In the same way, I trust that with the help of this report I too shall be revealed as alive, shining like a star on my enemies.]

For some critics, Orestes' defensiveness in this passage points to the moral dubiousness of the deception plot (e.g. Schein 1982: 72) or indeed of the matricide itself (e.g. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 236), but Finglass is right to argue that what is at issue is the violation of the taboo of not speaking of oneself, or allowing oneself to be spoken of, as already dead (2007: 109-10). A further question, though, is why Orestes is made to lay such stress on the apparently ill-omened nature of the false report even as he strives to downplay it; we can accept that Orestes is attempting "to avert the power of the taboo by challenging it" (Finglass 2007: 109), and still wonder why eight lines need to be set aside for this purpose.

I referred earlier to Thomson's remark that the link between the choice of fictional disaster in the Paedagogus' narrative and the chariot-race victory of Pelops makes us realise that Orestes is "doomed". Winnington-Ingram is one of the few scholars to have responded positively to this observation, and his suggestion is that the seemingly "gratuitous" length of

<sup>8</sup> Here and elsewhere (unless otherwise indicated) I quote from the Greek text of Finglass 2007; translations are my own.

this section of Orestes' speech in the prologue is an early sign that there is something sinister about Orestes' mission (1980: 236). Winnington-Ingram's understanding of *Electra* – about which I have more to say in the second and fourth sections – overlaps in many respects with my own, but Winnington-Ingram denies that the future fate of Orestes is a major concern of the play: “it is not what the Furies may do when the play is over that matters, but what they have done and do before and during the play” (1980: 227). From this perspective, Orestes can be seen as a victim of the Erinyes as well as their agent already before the play has finished, and that is because in taking the vengeance demanded by justice he is forced to commit an act of matricide. When Winnington-Ingram turns to the Paedagogus' speech, therefore, the question that interests him is whether the narrative suggests “that Orestes really did suffer disaster through his Pythian associations” (237). In other words, he takes the false story to point *backwards* in time to Orestes' initial decision to pursue the course of action advised by Apollo; after suffering the “disaster” of adopting this plan, Orestes then “rises from the dead . . . to play a chthonian role as the avenger of his dead father” (*ibid.*).

Winnington-Ingram's interpretation of Orestes and Electra as simultaneously victims and agents of the Erinyes is in many ways compelling, but his assumption that the play is not concerned with what the Erinyes might do to Orestes after the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus – except as a “possibility inherent in the system of justice Orestes has successfully applied. So much and no more” (227) – causes him to pass over what seems to me a much more natural way of construing the ironic overtones of these eight lines from Orestes' speech. According to the logic of ill-omened speech, the danger is that the false news of Orestes' death might point *forwards*, and, despite his insistence to the contrary, presage a turn of events that is not part of his plans and which, unlike the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Orestes would view in wholly negative terms. Peradotto notes that “[to] believe that the word is capable of evoking the deed is basic to cledonancy” (1969: 11), and although Orestes denies that this principle applies when the words in question are the means towards a beneficial end, the vehemence of the denial is a hint to the audience that the story may indeed serve as an omen of the future.

Stinton raises the following objection to the idea that the Paedagogus' narrative makes us realise Orestes is “doomed”:

Orestes is not doomed; not at least in the sense we might forebode: he does not die. To be sure, pursuit by Furies is a frightful thing, but even in Aeschylus he does not fall victim to them: he is acquitted and freed. Critics who think that pursuit by Furies is portended in Sophocles seem to forget this. (1990: 476)

A symbolic death need not foreshadow an actual death, however, and in the next part of his speech in the prologue, Sophocles' Orestes makes it clear how calamitous an outcome it would be, from his perspective, to be forced away from Mycenae. Addressing his native land, the local gods, and his own ancestral home, Orestes asks not to be sent away from Mycenae in dishonour (*El.* 71: ἄτιμον) but to take control of his wealth and restore the royal house to its former standing. More will be said about the relationship between Sophocles' play and other treatments of the story in the next section, but for the moment it is enough to note that it is the first of these outcomes that initially comes to pass in versions that include the pursuit by the Erinyes. Towards the end of *Choephoroi*, even before the Erinyes have appeared to him, Orestes declares that the matricide leaves him with no choice but to wander from place to place, banished from his native land (*Cho.* 1042: ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος). Sophocles' audience are in no position to assume, especially at such an early point in the play, that the same fate is in store for this Orestes, but his prayer to avoid exile is nevertheless a subtle reminder of the immediate consequences of the matricide in versions that do include the pursuit by the Erinyes.

In fact, the prayer of Sophocles' Orestes already points to an important difference between this version and that of Aeschylus. The Aeschylean Orestes, we discover in the course of *Choephoroi*, has been given information by Apollo's oracle both about the sufferings that will ensue if he fails to avenge his father's murder (*Cho.* 269-96) and what he must do once he has committed the matricide (i.e. make his way to Apollo's temple at Delphi; *Cho.* 1038-9). His Sophoclean counterpart, by contrast, gives no indication that he has received any information from the oracle beyond the instruction to use deceit in carrying out the "just slaughters" (*El.* 37: ἐνδίκους σφαγᾶς) of his father's murders,<sup>9</sup> or that he has even properly considered the possibility that his actions might have (even temporary) negative consequences. Thus, by the time Sophocles' Orestes hears Electra's voice some lines later and leaves the stage along with the Paedagogus and Pylades, the audience have been given grounds to suspect that, despite Orestes' protestations, the false tale may indeed prove inauspicious, and that this is not a possibility for which he is remotely prepared.

## 2. The Erinyes

When the Paedagogus eventually relays the false news to Clytemnestra and Electra, it quickly becomes apparent that the taboo on speaking of the

<sup>9</sup> I follow the manuscript reading here, rather than adopting Lange's ἐνδίκου (favoured by Finglass); cf. n19.

living as dead has not induced him to give an evasive or cursory account of the circumstances of Orestes' death. From the Paedagogus' perspective, of course, the comprehensiveness of the narrative serves to increase its believability, but especially in light of the reminder in the prologue that such a report would conventionally be considered ill omened, the audience have grounds to feel troubled by his adoption of the role of tragic messenger in this context.<sup>10</sup> And the longer the speech continues and the more detailed the narrative becomes as it reaches its conclusion, the more the impression is bolstered that the Paedagogus is tempting fate by defying the taboo so flagrantly. Indeed a significant part of the dramatic tension of the scene, I suggest, stems from this disjunction between the Paedagogus' willingness to prolong the narrative and the audience's awareness of its sinister overtones.

It should be stressed immediately that, though I am speaking here of 'the audience' as if it were a uniform entity, there would certainly have been scope for a variety of possible responses to the speech, including simple obliviousness to its prophetic import. Nevertheless, the use of an extended messenger speech as the vehicle of misinformation is a strikingly innovative dramaturgical move,<sup>11</sup> and even a spectator unreceptive to the hints of foreboding in the lines from Orestes' speech in the prologue might be tempted to wonder – as it becomes apparent how detailed a description of the fictional death is to be offered – whether there is more to the narrative than meets the eye. We shall turn in the next two sections to clues within the narrative that allow for a further splintering of responses among the audience, but it is worth pausing at this point to consider what a spectator struck by the possibility that the speech has ominous significance might take it to be foreshadowing.

Sophocles had a rich and varied tradition to draw on in adapting the story of Electra,<sup>12</sup> and an Athenian audience would have positively expected a new treatment to engage with, and diverge (in more or less signifi-

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of some of the conventions of the tragic messenger adopted by the Paedagogus (including those that help him to drag out the story), see Marshall 2006: 213–18.

<sup>11</sup> As Lowe points out, tragedy is a "medium of far stricter narrative economy" than epic (2000: 162), one symptom of which is the contrasting treatment of messengers in both genres; while in Homer they are used "only to report to a character information already narrated to the audience", in tragedy "messengers have become not a supplement for primary action, but a richly functional *substitute*" (167; Lowe's emphasis). It is precisely this convention that is flouted by the Paedagogus' false narrative.

<sup>12</sup> For overviews of the pre-Aeschylean tradition, see e.g. Garvie 1986: ix–xxvi; Sommerstein 2010: 136–45.

cant ways) from, previous versions of the myth.<sup>13</sup> In the *Odyssey*, the various references to Orestes' vengeance give the impression that he suffered no negative consequences for his actions,<sup>14</sup> and some scholars have argued in favour of seeing Sophocles' play as a 'Homeric' version of the story.<sup>15</sup> The *Odyssey* is notoriously evasive about the circumstances of Clytemnestra's death, however, a feature of the poem that reflects Orestes' role as a paradigm for Telemachus (cf. Alden 2017: 84, with further references). Stesichorus' *Oresteia* is the earliest version we know of to contain the pursuit by the Erinyes, and scholars have drawn from this the reasonable inference that his poem did not shy away from exploring the moral issues raised by the matricide (Davies and Finglass 2014: 488-91). That the works of Stesichorus had an important influence on the tragic poets has long been recognised, and fifth-century audiences seem to have had a reasonable level of familiarity with his poetry (cf. Swift 2015; Finglass 2018). As Stinson notes, however, by the late fifth century it is above all thanks to the "authority" of the *Oresteia* that "the 'pursuit' version may reasonably be accounted standard" (1990: 465).<sup>16</sup> The classic status of Aeschylus' trilogy by itself offers strong grounds for supposing that the pursuit by the Erinyes is likely to have been the first scenario to occur to a spectator who suspected that the Paedagogus' speech had ominous significance, but a further consideration is the fact that, already by this point in Sophocles' play, the audience have more than once been reminded of that aspect of the Aeschylean version of the story.

Winnington-Ingram's influential reading of *Electra* sets out to show that the "theme of Erinyes is developed by Sophocles in close relation to the thought of Aeschylus and . . . is of fundamental importance in the interpretation of his play" (1980: 218). The word 'Erinys' itself, he notes, makes four appearances in *Electra*, each of them significant (112, 276, 491, 1080), and Winnington-Ingram also has an eye for passages that point more oblique-

<sup>13</sup> Equally, a play might tantalise an audience with the prospect of significant innovations which it fails to deliver; for a detailed analysis of *Electra* along these lines, see Sommerstein 1997.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent discussion of these passages, see Alden 2017, ch. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jebb 1894: xli: "Sophocles seems to say to his audience, 'I give you, modified for drama, the story that Homer tells; . . . regard the act of Orestes under the light in which the *Odyssey* presents it'". Support for this 'Homeric' reading has waned considerably since around the midpoint of the twentieth century; on its intellectual context (and relation to the 'optimistic' reading of the play more generally), see Davies 1999 (esp. 127-8).

<sup>16</sup> Stinton goes on to deny that the pursuit by the Erinyes is foreshadowed in Sophocles' play. For the classic status of the *Oresteia* already in the fifth century, see e.g. East-erling 2005 (on *Agamemnon* in particular); Torrance 2013, ch. 1 (on allusions to the trilogy in three Euripidean plays).

ly to the Aeschylean background. For example, when Electra asks Clytemnestra by what sort of law (579: ποίῳ νόμῳ) she killed Agamemnon and warns her that she will be in line for the same treatment if the law of retaliation is to be accepted as a general principle (580-3), the question is subtly raised of whether the same would apply to Electra and Orestes if they were to be responsible for the deaths of the ruling couple (1980: 221). It is important to stress, as Winnington-Ingram fails to do sufficiently, that there are also many marked differences between the two versions,<sup>17</sup> and a spectator who entertained the possibility that the Paedagogus' narrative might foreshadow the pursuit by the Erinyes would have had to be prepared to reconsider this interpretation in the light of subsequent developments. It is also true that our limited knowledge of pre-Aeschylean treatments of the story means that for the most part we can do no more than speculate about the play's engagement with other versions (which included the epic *Nostoi* and a poem by the obscure figure Xanthus), and it may be that if new fragments of Stesichorus' *Oresteia* came to light it would turn out that some of the motifs I shall refer to as Aeschylean would be better described as Stesichorean. Nevertheless, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the *Oresteia* would be understood by many in the audience to be a particularly important model for Sophocles' play, and that such spectators felt free – and indeed at times actively encouraged – to use their knowledge of the Aeschylean version to inform their (flexible) expectations of how the action of Sophocles' play might develop.

For many scholars, the strongest argument against seeing any foreshadowing of the pursuit by the Erinyes in *Electra* is that the killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra is in accordance with justice and thus not vulnerable to retribution (cf. Bowra 1944: 258-9; Stinton 1990: 473). This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the moral status of the matricide,<sup>18</sup> but it may be helpful to end this section with a brief statement of where I stand on this question. One of the strongest arguments against an 'affirmative' interpretation of the killing of Clytemnestra, as Lloyd notes, is that "matricide is such an inherently problematic act that the failure in the play to ad-

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of some of the key similarities and differences, see Finglass 2007: 4-8; Finglass notes that a "prevailing fault" of Winnington-Ingram's discussion "is its emphasis on the Aeschylean character of Sophocles' play with little attention to the real and significant differences between the two dramas" (6n6).

<sup>18</sup> For a summary of the main arguments on both sides of this debate, see Lloyd 2005, ch. 6. An extreme version of the 'pessimistic' or 'ironic' interpretation was first influentially articulated by Sheppard (esp. Sheppard 1918 and 1927), and defended in greater detail in Kells 1973. Prominent advocates of an 'optimistic' position since the publication of Sheppard's studies include Bowra 1944, ch. 6; Whitman 1951, ch. 8; and, more recently, March 2001.

dress this fact is inevitably significant" (2005: 102). That is not to say that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus do not deserve to die for murdering Agamemnon or that Apollo's oracle is wrong to declare that Orestes' hand will achieve "just slaughters" (*El.* 37: ἐνδίκους σφάγας) when he kills them. That their deaths are demanded by justice, however, does not entail that Orestes' action itself is (wholly) just.<sup>19</sup> In the *Oresteia*, it seems that both of the options facing Orestes would leave him vulnerable to the anger of the Erinyes; Clytemnestra tells him to beware the "wrathful hounds of his mother", and Orestes' response is to ask how he can escape his father's hounds if he fails to kill her (*Cho.* 924-5). Whether he spares his mother's life or kills her, Aeschylus' Orestes will be acting contrary to the principle that children ought to show reverence for their parents (cf. *Eum.* 545). A good reason to suspect that, despite committing "just slaughters", Sophocles' Orestes, too, will leave himself exposed to the divinely sanctioned retribution that comes from acting unjustly is the fact that this possibility is never properly explored, let alone refuted, in *Electra*.

### 3. The Structure of the Narrative

For those spectators alert to the tension between the length and vividness of the Paedagogus' speech and the ill-omened nature of the lie he has been instructed to tell, the two-part structure of the narrative plays a crucial role in giving substance to this intuition. The length of time that the Paedagogus dwells on Orestes' extraordinary feats on the first day of the games (*El.* 681-96) is in fact an early sign of his expansiveness. After making an immediate impression with the brilliance of his appearance, he tells his listeners, Orestes was victorious in every event that the judges announced, an achievement without parallel as far as the Paedagogus is aware. The rest of the narrative is then devoted to the events of "another day" (698), and the Paedagogus marks the transition by noting that "when one of the gods causes harm, not even a person of great strength can escape" (696-7: ὅταν δέ τις θεῶν / βλάβη, δύναται ἄν οὐδ' ἄν ἰσχύων φυγεῖν). Although the gruesome conclusion of the chariot race is postponed for another fifty lines or so, the audience already know that this is the competition in which the fictional Orestes is to lose his life.

This clear division in the narrative allows for a loose mapping between, on the one hand, the two days of contrasting fortune for Orestes at the games, and, on the other, the basic sequence of events that lies in store for

<sup>19</sup> The emendation of ἐνδίκους to ἐνδίκου in *El.* 37 (so that it agrees with χειρός) is therefore not as innocent as it may seem.

Orestes in the dramatic reality if he is indeed to be pursued by the Erinyes. In the first place, Orestes' initial success points ahead to the confrontations that will result in the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. There are obvious correspondences between the spheres of athletic competition and violent combat,<sup>20</sup> and the two other appearances of the word ἄγων after the Paedagogus' speech – where it refers first to the Pythian games (682), and then to the chariot race itself (699) – are in connection with the encounter between Orestes and Aegisthus (1441, 1492). Given that the action of the *Oresteia* is dominated by a series of such clashes, it is unsurprising that the sphere of athletics is a productive source of metaphors throughout Aeschylus' trilogy, and in two memorable passages in *Choephoroi* Orestes' mission of vengeance is explicitly cast in athletic terms.<sup>21</sup> First he is an orphaned colt, yoked to a chariot, that with Zeus' help will reach the end of the course (*Cho.* 794-9), and then a wrestler about to take on two opponents by himself (*Cho.* 866-8).<sup>22</sup> In the passage from the prologue of *Electra* examined in the last section, Orestes makes it clear that he expects to win renown (60: κλέος) from the acts of vengeance he is shortly to commit. The acclaim that greets the exploits of the fictional Orestes on the first day of the Pythian games thus mirrors the outcome desired by his real counterpart, and such renown is precisely what the Orestes of the *Odyssey* succeeds in achieving: have you heard, Athena asks Telemachus, what *kleos* Orestes has gained among all people (πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους) by killing his father's murderer (1.298-300)?

If I am right that the division of the narrative into consecutive days and the athletic setting encourage the audience to treat the speech as an omen both of the initial success of the revenge plot and of Orestes' subsequent sufferings, the sequence of events in the fictional narrative also serves as an ironic contrast to the reversal of fortune being foreshadowed for Orestes. The Paedagogus presents what happened to the fictional Orestes on the second day of the games as a paradigmatic case of undeserved misfortune; the transitional gnome quoted above (*El.* 696-7) alludes to the familiar idea that extraordinary success incurs divine resentment,<sup>23</sup> and the Paedagogus

<sup>20</sup> On the "common culture of athletics and war" in Classical Athens, see Pritchard 2013, ch. 5 (quotation taken from title of chapter).

<sup>21</sup> For a survey of passages in *Choephoroi* that contribute to the portrayal of Orestes as an athlete, see Petrounias 1976: 167-72 (some examples are more persuasive than others).

<sup>22</sup> The conceit of Orestes as athlete plays a particularly prominent role in Euripides' *Electra*; cf. Swift 2010: 156-72 (which also discusses the athletic imagery of the *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Electra*).

<sup>23</sup> Finglass 2007: 310 notes the prominence of this theme in the epinician poetry of Pindar.

later stresses the grief and pity felt by those who witnessed Orestes being dragged to his death by the reins. What stimulated their pity was the fact that someone who had performed such deeds could be rewarded with such misfortune (751: οἱ ἔργα δράσας οἷα λαγγάνει κακά), and the Paedagogus' choice of phrasing underlines the disparity between Orestes' glorious actions and the horror of his demise; the state of the bloodied corpse was such, the Paedagogus exclaims shortly afterwards, that a friend of Orestes would not have been able to recognise him (755-6).

In the *Oresteia*, on the other hand, far from being the victim of divine forces resentful of his success and working from a distance, Orestes incurs the hostility of identifiable divinities by committing an act that is morally problematic to say the least (even if commanded by Apollo's oracle). In Aeschylus' trilogy, moreover, the type of parallel phrasing used by the Paedagogus in line 751 to emphasise the scale of the reversal instead tends to draw attention to the cyclical pattern of violence following violence: having done things deserving of punishment, Agamemnon is suffering the punishment he deserves, Clytemnestra claims (*Ag.* 1527: ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχω); the words being shouted by Justice, according to the chorus of *Choephoroi*, are "for a bloody stroke let a bloody stroke be paid" (*Cho.* 312-13: ἀντί δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν / πληγὴν τινέτω).<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of a spectator comparing the events of the fictional narrative in *Electra* to the events they seem to be foreshadowing, therefore, what is striking is as much the *mirroring* of success and failure – with athletic competition the forum for both – as the extent of Orestes' fall from grace. The aim of the next section is to look more closely at the means (both intra- and intertextual) by which the Paedagogus' narrative symbolically portrays Orestes as first perpetuator and then victim of the cyclical violence that has beset the royal family for generations.

#### 4. The Symbolism of the Chariot Race

As mentioned earlier, the chariot race of the false narrative is not the only one to be called to mind in the course of *Electra*. In the epode of the first stasimon, the chorus refer obliquely to an episode in the history of the royal family that saw Pelops race against King Oenomaus of Elis in an effort to win the hand of Hippodamia, Oenomaus' daughter (504-15):

Χο. ὦ Πέλοπος ἄ πρόσθεν

<sup>24</sup> On the use in the *Oresteia* of "form-parallelism" as a way to express "the seemingly inevitable continuation of reciprocal violence", see Seaford 2012: 230-3 (quotation from 232).

πολύπονος ἰππεία,	505
ὡς ἔμολες αἰανῆς	
τῶδε γᾶ.	
εὔτε γὰρ ὁ ποντισθεῖς	
Μυρτίλος ἐκοιμάθη,	
παγχρύσων δίφρων	510
δυστάνοις ἀκείαις	
πρόρριζος ἐκριφθεῖς,	
οὐ τί πω	
ἔλιπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου	
πολύπονος ἀκεία.	515

[CHO. Chariot ride of Pelops from long ago, bringer of much suffering, with what disastrous consequences for this land did you arrive! From the time that Myrtilus found repose in the sea, hurled to annihilation from the golden chariot with shameful brutality, never yet has brutal violence, bringer of much suffering, left this house.]

In Thomson's brief discussion of the false narrative in *Electra* he refers to these events from a previous generation simply as "the story . . . of the race of Pelops at Olympia" (1941: 357), but the key to appreciating the full significance of the links between the real and fictional chariot races is to see that this story, too, falls into two distinct parts. Pelops' victory in the chariot race came about because Myrtilus, Oenomaus' charioteer, had tampered with his master's chariot, and in one version Oenomaus died by becoming entangled in the reins when the chariot broke apart.<sup>25</sup> In the second part of the story, Myrtilus was transformed from accomplice to victim: Pelops hurled him into the sea from his chariot drawn by winged horses – different reasons for this turn of events can be found in the tradition (cf. Finglass 2007: 247-8) – and Myrtilus cursed Pelops before dying.

Thus, like the fictional Orestes, Pelops achieved glory in an athletic context, but his victory was the result of deceit, which is precisely the means that the real Orestes is relying on in order to achieve the success symbolically anticipated by the first part of the Paedagogus' narrative. In the second part of the story of Pelops, Myrtilus died in circumstances that recalled the fate he helped to contrive for Oenomaus, and the fictional Orestes too, of course, dies by falling from his chariot. These correspondences not only reinforce the sense that the Paedagogus' words have ominous significance, but imply that what is soon to happen to Orestes is part of the same cycle of success followed by disaster which, as the chorus note at the end of the epode of the first stasimon, has maintained its hold on the royal family ever

<sup>25</sup> This is the first version given by Apollodorus, who then says that according to others Oenomaus was subsequently killed by Pelops (*Epit.* 2.7).

since the death of Myrtilus. Pelops' descendants rather than Pelops himself were the victims of Myrtilus' curse, but it is symptomatic of the nature of the troubles that have afflicted the family since then that it now has to be one and the same individual who triumphs before coming to grief: Orestes is the equivalent first of Pelops and then of Myrtilus because fulfilling his objective requires him to commit a crime against a family member.

In the last section I suggested that, once we realise that the false narrative symbolically anticipates the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the consequences of the matricide for Orestes, the fact that Orestes both achieves success and loses his life while engaged in athletic competition can be seen to point to an important symmetry in the two sets of events foreshadowed by the story. Orestes' role may change from aggressor to victim, but both 'contests' are instances of retributive justice in action. The tendency of bloodshed to engender more bloodshed is one of the dominant themes of the *Oresteia*, and in *Choephoroi* the athletic imagery helps to draw attention to the resemblance between Orestes' fate and that which he has just meted out to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. We saw in the last section that the Aeschylean Orestes is described both as a colt taking part in a chariot race and as a wrestler, and towards the end of *Choephoroi*, when Orestes begins to realise that he is losing control of his mental faculties, he uses a metaphor that recalls in striking fashion the first of those two metaphors in particular (*Cho.* 1021-5):<sup>26</sup>

ΟΡ. οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ,  
ὥσπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἠνιοστροφῶν δρόμου  
ἔξωτέρω· φέρουσι γὰρ νικῶμενον  
φρένες δύσαρκτοι . . .

1025

[OR. I am at a loss as to how this will end, careering off the track as I am, like a charioteer with a team of horses: my unruly senses have overcome me and are carrying me along.]

Orestes is now involved in a new contest that seems certain to end badly, and the evocation of a chariot race in both passages helps to bring out the starkness of the symmetry. Scholars have occasionally remarked on the overlap in subject matter between this metaphor in *Choephoroi* and the circumstances of Orestes' death in the false narrative of *Electra* (cf. Easterling 1985: 8),<sup>27</sup> but it is only when we understand the speech as an omen of the

<sup>26</sup> I follow the text of Sommerstein 2008 here, which accepts Weil's emendation ἠνιοστροφῶν.

<sup>27</sup> Thomson notes in reference to the false narrative of the chariot race in *Electra* that "[t]his is the mystical charioteer of the *Choephoroi*, who again runs his race under the direction of Apollo" (1941: 357). Judging by the cross reference he provides, howev-

future that the full relevance of the intertext becomes apparent. The symptoms of madness Orestes is feeling in the passage from *Choephoroi* are of course the first indication of the influence of the Erinyes, whose sudden appearance to Orestes some lines later will drive him from the stage. According to my argument, the pursuit by the Erinyes is precisely what the disaster in the fictional chariot race is foreshadowing, and for members of Sophocles' audience able to recall this Aeschylean passage, the intertextual link is thus one more indication that the narrative has a prophetic significance of which the Paedagogus is oblivious.

### 5. Omen and Interpretation

The response of scholars who deny that the spectators are expected to flesh out their understanding of Sophocles' play in the light of their knowledge of the Aeschylean version is to argue that the allusions would be more emphatic and explicit if that were the case. Stinton, for example, claims in relation to the pursuit by the Erinyes that "the dramatist could not risk leaving such an important matter to the alertness of otherwise of his audience and had nothing to gain by ambiguity" (1990: 479). Given that my argument too has largely relied on hints and intimations, I may seem vulnerable to the same objection, especially as I am taking a more categorical position than Winnington-Ingram on what can be inferred about Orestes' fate after the play finishes. To address this issue adequately would require a comprehensive discussion of the dramaturgy of *Electra*, and the aim of this final section is simply to offer a sketch of what seems to me the most promising line of response. My contention, in short, is that these hints pose a challenge to the audience in a way that more explicit references to the future would not: by forcing the spectators to work out for themselves whether an utterance has greater significance than the speaker realises, the hints and allusions lead to a narrowing of the gap between the audience and the characters on stage. In this way, the spectators are offered a vivid insight into what it might be like to see things from the limited, partisan perspective of individuals caught up in such circumstances, but because the gap separating them from the characters is not completely closed, they at the same time have the opportunity to consider how subsequent developments might cast a very different light on the events they are witnessing. In a discussion of irony in Sophocles, Lloyd helpfully distinguishes between "relatively 'stable' irony, where the audience is confidently aware of

er, Thomson seems to be thinking primarily of the passage where Orestes is described as an orphaned colt (*Cho.* 794-9).

truth hidden from the characters” and “more complex and ‘unstable’ irony which unsettles any feelings of certainty we may have about the real meaning of events” (2012: 577), and my suggestion is that the chariot-race narrative, along with many of the other passages examined by Winnington-Ingram, serves as an instance of the second type.

The most emphatic hint of what awaits Orestes after the murder of Aegisthus – and the passage that scholars who take a sceptical position have most trouble with – comes towards the end of the play.<sup>28</sup> Orestes wishes Aegisthus to die in the very place where Agamemnon was killed and orders him to go inside (*El.* 1495-6). When Aegisthus asks whether it is necessary for the palace to see the “present and future troubles of the Pelopids” (1498: τὰ τ’ ὄντα καὶ μέλλοντα Πελοπιδῶν κακὰ), Orestes answers that it will see Aegisthus’ at least; on this topic he has confidence in his own powers of prophecy (1499: τὰ γοῦν σ’ ἐγὼ σοι μάντις εἰμί τῶνδ’ ἄκρος). Aegisthus responds by noting that the skill Orestes is boasting of is not one he inherited from his father (1500: ἀλλ’ οὐ πατρώαν τὴν τέχνην ἐκόμπασας), with the implication being that, like Agamemnon before he was killed, Orestes’ grasp on the future may be less firm than he realises. Some scholars have argued otherwise (e.g. Bowra 1944: 258; Stinton 1990: 478-9), but the particle γοῦν in 1499 surely has limitative force (cf. Lloyd 2005: 107; Finglass 2007: 543), so that Orestes is identifying the present troubles mentioned by Aegisthus with *both* the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus’ imminent demise. Unlike Orestes, the audience have reason to expect that he will shortly be faced with a calamity that he has indeed failed to prophesy, and they can therefore appreciate the insightfulness of the doomed man’s premonition that the royal family’s woes are not at an end.<sup>29</sup>

Taplin claims that, because Orestes enters the palace with Aegisthus at the end of *Electra*, this allows us to rule out the possibility that he will be driven into exile by the Erinyes (1983: 163; followed by Finglass 2007: 527). The unsettling sense of incompleteness with which the action concludes counts against Taplin’s argument, however; as Lloyd notes, “there is not the remotest parallel in extant tragedy for a play ending with something about to happen inside the *skēnē*” (2005: 114). Because Orestes enters the palace with the specific aim of killing Aegisthus in the place where his own father had been killed, this way of ending the play does not by itself justi-

<sup>28</sup> On ambiguity as a characteristic of Sophoclean endings, see Roberts 1988.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd suggests that a reason to take Aegisthus’ words seriously here is the topos that “[a] dying man has particular authority in predicting suffering for his killer” (2005: 108). Sometimes this belief is explicitly acknowledged (e.g. *Pl. Ap.* 39c), while elsewhere it seems to be taken for granted (e.g. Patroclus’ prediction to Hector at *Il.* 16.852-4 or Hector’s to Achilles at *Il.* 22.359-60); that Orestes dismisses Aegisthus’ prediction “with a taunt” is in keeping with this topos (109).

fy firm inferences about what is to happen after Aegisthus' death. For present purposes, however, what is particularly interesting in this exchange between Orestes and Aegisthus is the use of the language of prophecy. Orestes is able to see no further ahead than the killing of Aegisthus, but the hints which the audience have been offered in the course of the play, together with their knowledge of other versions of the story, have left them much better placed than Orestes to prophesy the future.

It is not only in this final scene that we find an association between prophecy and retribution. In the scene preceding the first stasimon, Electra and the chorus are told by Chrysothemis that the previous night Clytemnestra had dreamed that Agamemnon took his own sceptre and planted it by the hearth, and that it then sprouted, becoming a flourishing branch that overshadowed the whole land of Mycenae (417-23). The first stasimon begins shortly afterwards with the chorus hailing the imminent arrival of Justice, whose strength will ensure that Agamemnon's murder is avenged (472-7):

ΧΟ. εἰ μὴ ἔγω πάραφρων μάντις ἔφην  
καὶ γνώμας λειπομένα σοφᾶς,  
εἴσιν ἅ πρόμαντις  
Δίκαια, δίκαια φερομένα χεροῖν κράτη·  
μέτεισιν, ὧ τέκνον, οὐ μακροῦ χρόνου.

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[CHO. If I am not a prophet of unsound mind and deficient in wise judgement, Justice who has prophesied the outcome will come, carrying off the just supremacy achieved by the strength of her hands; it will not be long, my child, before she comes after them.]

The dream is not explicitly interpreted at any point in the play (cf. Bowman 1997: 134), but even before Electra hears its content, she reacts with excitement to the news that a nightmare has prompted Clytemnestra to send Chrysothemis to Agamemnon's tomb with libations (411), and in these opening lines of the first stasimon the chorus make it clear that they consider the dream a sign that justice will finally be fulfilled. Later in the ode they refer to it as a "portent" (497: *τέρας*),<sup>30</sup> and suggest that if what it foretells does not come to pass there will no longer be grounds to treat dreams and prophecies as sources of prophetic insight (498-501). Clytemnestra herself later refers to the dream as "ambiguous" (645: *δισσῶν ὀνειρώων*), but what gives the chorus such confidence is evidently that Orestes' return, triumph and reign over Mycenae – if that is what the dream portends – is the very outcome that would seem to be demanded by justice. It may be that

<sup>30</sup> Pace Finglass 2007: 246, who takes *τέρας* here to mean "monster" and understands a reference to the Erinys in line 491.

the chorus understand Justice to have sent the dream and refer to her as a prophet partly for that reason (Finglass 2007: 239), but what makes the epithet particularly appropriate in this context is that (from the chorus' perspective at least) the punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is something that, even without the omen of the dream, could be predicted in light of the workings of retributive justice.

In the antistrophe the chorus imagine the Erinyes waiting in ambush for the killers of Agamemnon and soon to reveal herself, before they turn in the epode, as we have seen, to the story of Pelops and Myrtilus. Some scholars have been puzzled by the suddenness of the shift in mood from the optimistic anticipation of these first two stanzas to the gloominess of the epode, ending, as it does, with the observation that since Myrtilus' death violence and suffering have never left the royal family (e.g. Goward 1999: 109-10). The connection of ideas is thoroughly Aeschylean, however (cf. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 218-19). In the *Oresteia*, the agency of the Erinyes is represented as integral to the system of justice that ensures that crime is eventually punished – an idea explored at particular length by the Erinyes themselves in the second stasimon of *Eumenides* (490-565) – and it is this agency that underpins the unending violence in the house of Atreus; Cassandra memorably speaks of a revel-band (κῶμος) of Erinyes which, emboldened by the human blood it has drunk, refuses to leave the palace (Ag. 1186-90). The change of tone in the first stasimon of *Electra* need not indicate that the chorus themselves suddenly realise that the deposition of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will not mark the end of the family's troubles; tragic choral song revels in the open-endedness of such abrupt transitions. Nevertheless, as Winnington-Ingram notes, the chorus' last words in the ode surely “prompt the question whether the succession of sorrows will stop now” (1980: 219). The inevitability of retribution – which, I have suggested, is reflected in the description in the strophe of Justice as a prophet – is precisely what has prevented the royal family from escaping the cycle of violence: why should Orestes' actions be any different?

I mentioned earlier that in the first part of the Paedagogus' narrative the fictional Orestes achieves the glory to which the real Orestes aspires. Those scholars who see *Electra* as a Homeric treatment of the story are certainly responding to something real in the play; Sophocles' Orestes acts as if he is the Homeric Orestes, and the question is whether that self-conception is to be borne out by what unfolds in the dramatic reality or – as happens to the fictional Orestes on the second day of the Pythian games – undermined.<sup>31</sup> If I am right, moreover, that we are encouraged to suspect that

<sup>31</sup> The Homeric echoes in the Paedagogus' speech (the chariot race of *Iliad* 23 is a particularly important model) assume fresh significance in this connection; on these

a turn of events lies in store for Orestes and Electra that neither of them have anticipated, the relative aloofness of Sophocles' Apollo in comparison to his Aeschylean counterpart makes him, in certain respects, an even more ambiguous figure.<sup>32</sup> One correspondence between false narrative and dramatic reality that I did not mention earlier concerns Apollo's role in both. The fictional Orestes triumphs and dies in games dedicated to, and overseen by, Apollo, while the murders that correspond to the first part of the Paedagogus' story will be carried out in accordance with Apollo's oracle. What about the events foreshadowed by the disastrous chariot race, however? If Orestes is to be pursued by the Erinyes, is it not safe to assume that Apollo is aware of this? In that case, why has Orestes not been offered information of the sort provided by Apollo in the *Oresteia*, where Orestes was told to flee to his temple at Delphi once the murders have been committed? When Orestes claims after the murder of Clytemnestra that "all is well in the house, if Apollo prophesied well" (*El.* 1424-5), this need not suggest any doubts on his part about the oracle, as some scholars who favour an 'ironic' interpretation of the play have suggested (e.g. Roberts 1984: 78). It does, though, raise the question of whether Orestes will be quite so sure that Apollo prophesied well once the full consequences of the matricide have been revealed.

On the view of *Electra* I am defending, then, there is a significant disparity between the understanding of Orestes and Electra and the 'true' meaning of events. The latter is not something of which the audience can ever feel they have a firm grasp, but the play is full of omens for anyone willing to assume the role of prophet.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, things are left unsaid that the audience are encouraged to supply; in the first stasimon the chorus do not mention the curse of Myrtilus or the possibility that the same principle of retributive justice that makes the punishment of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus inevitable may subsequently become applicable to Orestes and Electra, but that need not prevent such considerations from occurring to the spectators. The dream, on the other hand, is an example of something identified as an omen by a number of characters but not explicitly interpreted, and which raises questions for spectators familiar with other versions of the story that could not possibly occur to any of the characters. If we take the branch which overshadows all of Mycenae to represent the restoration of Agamemnon's line to its position of political supremacy (cf. Bow-

echoes, see e.g. Barrett 2002, ch. 4.

<sup>32</sup> On the ambiguity of Apollo already in the *Oresteia*, see Roberts 1984, ch. 3 (his portrayal in other tragedies, including Sophocles' *Electra*, is discussed in ch. 4).

<sup>33</sup> For a recent discussion of *Electra* that explores the relationship between the audiences on stage and the audience in the theatre in light of the ironies and ambiguities in the play's language, see Goldhill 2012: 47-52.

man 1997: 140-3), is the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus sufficient for that outcome to be fulfilled? Or would Orestes' capacity to rule over the land need first to be secure, as it is in the *Oresteia* only after his acquittal in Athens? And does that then imply that, if Sophocles' Orestes is indeed to be pursued by the Erinyes, he too will eventually escape their grasp? Here again we have the second type of irony identified by Lloyd, which only yields insight in combination with uncertainty.

In the case of the Paedagogus' speech, the audience have the extra challenge of needing to identify the narrative as an omen in the first place. Stinton is right to note that, on the sort of reading I favour, much depends on the alertness of the audience, but I hope it has also become apparent why the drama might gain from such allusive ambiguity. Those spectators who manage to see further ahead than the characters are at the same time given an insight into how difficult it can be for individuals caught up in such events to appreciate the partiality of their own perspective and be receptive to portents that contradict their hopes and expectations for the future. Orestes and *Electra* may not have given much thought to the possible consequences of their actions, but the spectators are encouraged to see the future as integral to the meaning of the events they are witnessing, and it is emblematic of that broader dramaturgical strategy that the prophetic false narrative is placed in such a prominent position at the centre of the play.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In the case of *Electra* at least, then, it is misleading to describe the future to which the play alludes simply as "another story", a phrase used by Roberts 1988 in a discussion of Sophoclean endings. Cf. the criticism of Lloyd 2005: 109-10.

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GHERARDO UGOLINI\*

## **“Man is a terrifying miracle”: Sophocles’ *Antigone* Staged by Massimiliano Civica. An Interview with the Director**

Abstract

Gherardo Ugolini interviews director Massimiliano Civica on his staging of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, produced by the Teatro Metastasio, Prato, and performed at the Teatro Arena del Sole, Bologna, 16 January 2020. Cast: Oscar De Summa (Creon), Monica Piseddu (*Antigone*), Monica Demuru (Ismene, Tiresias, Eurydice), Francesco Rotelli (Sentry, Haemon), Marcello Sambati (Coryphaeus).

KEYWORDS: Massimiliano Civica; Sophocles; *Antigone*; Creon; Polyneices; Ismene

### **1. Creon, Partisan Commander and *Antigone*, Haughty Aristocrat**

In a corner of the stage lies a fake dead body, the corpse of Polyneices abandoned without burial. Even before the play begins, the audience can see it as they take their places.<sup>1</sup> They can also see the way in which it is dressed: a black shirt, army boots and on its head a fez bearing the eagle badge. In this production, Polyneices is a fascist, and during the civil war, which has just ended, he was on the losing side. Oscar De Summa’s Creon, who proclaims the new order, founded on the public interest and which does away with the family-based privileges of the past, is a democratic commander, a partisan with a red bandana at his neck and a red star on his uniform. The paradigm of fascism and the war with the *partigiani*, as a counterpart to the civil war fought at Thebes, which has concluded with the deaths of both Eteocles and Polyneices, two brothers which have challenged one another from opposite sides, is certainly the most striking feature of the *Antigone* staged by Massimiliano Civica at the Teatro Metastasio in Prato in December 2019 and then in other locations (Turin, Bologna and Rome) at the beginning of 2020.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The presence of Polyneices’ body exposed onstage from the very beginning is an idea already to be found in Bertolt Brecht’s reworking of *Antigone*. For this and other analogies between Civica’s staging and the re-elaborated versions by Brecht and Anouilh see Fornaro 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Massimiliano Civica’s *Antigone* is a production of the Teatro Metastasio in Prato. Translation: Massimiliano Civica; lights: Gianni Staropoli; costumes: Daniela Salernitano; cast: Oscar De Summa (Creon), Monica Piseddu (*Antigone*), Monica Demuru (Ismene, Tiresias, Eurydice), Francesco Rotelli (Sentry, Haemon), Marcello Sambati (Coryphaeus). First performance at the Teatro Fabbricone in Prato, 3 December 2019.

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The scenery is basic: a bench at the back and a stool on the right. At the beginning the actors file silently onto the stage and sit down on the bench. In the darkness can be heard cries of combat and desperation: a few intense moments for which there is no indication in Sophocles' original text, and which serve to evoke the tremendous suffering that war, especially civil war, always causes and all that brings in its train during the aftermath. From this moment on, the director follows the *ductus* of Sophocles' play faithfully and consistently, with only a few unimportant cuts. The political colouring (fascism, *partigiani*) that the costumes and the hangings emphasise, is essentially obscured, in the sense that it does not affect the dramatic action. The actors, who are always on stage, move like shadows of the past, and their *agon* concerning values to defend and decisions to make is conducted simply by means of words, making no concession to music or any other performative aids.

Civica's production of *Antigone* offers many fascinating examples of his peripateticity. The first of these concerns the essential demythification of the protagonist Antigone (interpreted by Monica Piseddu), defined not as a positive heroine, wholly committed to *pietas* towards the dead, a courageous objector against an authoritarian and tyrannical power trampling on the unwritten rules of human coexistence. Clad in the elegant robes of a member of the royal family, Antigone is a contemptuous and supercilious aristocrat, driven by a formidable feeling of dynastic pride and determined to defend and maintain the privileges she enjoyed during the *ancien régime*, and which the new post-war civic order may do away with. Civica bases himself on an interpretative bias in the play, that sees in the so-called 'unwritten laws' invoked by Antigone in her famous *rhesis* (Soph. *Ant.* 450-70) and in name of which she challenges authority, a reference to the body of ancient, sacred laws whose administration, in 5th century Athens, was the prerogative of a small number of aristocratic dynasties such as the Kerykes and the Eumolpidai.<sup>3</sup> This is the reason why Antigone is fighting for her brother's right to burial: because he is her kin, he is noble, and he belongs to the royal house.

Another original interpretative angle appears when the idea surfaces that the first attempt to bury Polyneices' body, carried out secretly by night, is not the work of Antigone, as everyone seems to believe, but rather of her sister Ismene (Monica Demuru), who is certainly not being required to enact the part of a timorous coward. Such an interpretation, one which is not easy to come across among the various studies on this point (see Rouse 1911, Honig 2011, Kirkpatrick 2011), is developed by having the audience see the burial rites carried out twice, though only through stylised gestures. Ismene, indeed, avoids the cliché of a girl subjugated by male power and instead becomes a woman clearheaded and rational, practical and calculating, much more sensible than Antigone who, in her manic desire for vengeance, exposes herself to certain defeat and self-destruction. So it is that Ismene carries out the first burial (in secret, without letting anyone discover her), in the hope of saving her sister and preventing her from ruining herself.

<sup>3</sup> See, on this point, Cerri 1979 and 2010. Depriving someone of burial (*ἀταφία*), either absolutely or at least within the confines of Attica, was a punitive measure usually reserved for traitors and profaners. See, also, Ugolini 2000: 137-56.

The modality chosen for staging the chorus is also successful. As often happens in modern performances, Civica does without a variety of characters and voices and assigns the choral songs and the speeches by the coryphaeus to a single actor, Marcello Sambati: an elderly and wise councillor, strikingly elegant and mild-mannered, expressing himself with diplomacy, who encourages equanimity and is careful not to show any partiality either for Creon or for Antigone. Less successful is the scene with Tiresias, which, within the dramatic economy of the play, assumes the function of touchstone: he endorses Creon's downfall, undermining the categories of perception and judgement. The role of the seer is, though not for the first time, taken by a woman, Monica Demura, the same actress playing Ismene and Eurydice. Tiresias comes on stage alone, without the guidance of a boy, completely enveloped in a white veil, and from his lips emerges a harsh, unpleasant voice, not in any way appropriate for a prophet of truth (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Creon, Tiresias, and the coryphaeus. Photo Duccio Burberi.

The final *coup de théâtre* is kept for the play's conclusion. When Creon begs pardon for his mistakes he too late recognized, when the mighty commander understands that his authority has been emptied of every power of decision, when his mouth can utter nothing but sighs and lamentations because of the terrible suffering he is experiencing, at this very moment the coryphaeus spurs him on: "Now you must think of us! It is your duty! Now you can govern! Now you must govern!" These words are clearly an interpolation on Civica's part, without any reference to Sophocles' text. Indeed, they take on a strong symbolic significance: politics can never stop; even after downfall, the government of the *polis* must continue. The reassurance and optimism of this conclusion is however only a façade, bearing in mind that man is "a terrifying miracle" as Civica translates the Greek adjective δεινός, and as is often repeated during the course of the dramatic action.

This production of *Antigone* is not Massimiliano Civica's first experience in staging ancient theatre. The director, born in Rieti in 1974, with a degree in Histo-

ry of Theatre from La Sapienza University of Rome, had a fortunate theatrical career which, after his graduation from the Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica Silvio D'Amico, saw him gain the position of director at the Teatro della Tosse in Genoa and then the triumph of winning the prestigious UBU, the prize for the best production, three times (2008, 2015, 2016). Recently, he has staged Euripides' *Andromache* (2004) and *Alcestis* (2014); both times Civica managed to dig into the folds of the Greek text and bring to light the most deeply buried implications of the tragedies and transmit them to the audience in a seductive manner. He used the same strategy with *Antigone*, a task for which Civica has been preparing for years, translating the original Greek text *ex novo* and reading and analysing interpretations scholars have been offering over the last ten years. He wanted to avoid the most influential ideological banalities, such as the ubiquitous idea that Antigone is the positive heroine *par excellence*, that she acts rightly from beginning to end, and that she struggles heroically against a powerful and authoritative tyrant whose only desire is to do her wrong.

## 2. Interview with Massimiliano Civica

GU: In the theatre program there is a sort of declaration on your part: "Greek tragedy is political because it is antipolitical". This is an obvious paradox. What exactly do you mean by it?

MC: In my opinion, Greek tragedy is political in that it exceeds politics in a discourse that goes beyond it, not only when debating mankind, but also when it opens towards religion. It seems to me that here we have the same conviction (even if this may seem crazy) of historically significant figures as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, that "I must overcome the malice, the camouflaged violence between the black and the white, so that the instant I come to power I don't revert to vengeance, I don't fuel the rancour of my black brothers, but I say 'love your enemy'". I think that Sophocles, and Aeschylus as well, by means of the idea of the divine (just consider the result of the draw decreed by the Areopagus in the *Oresteia*, whose outcome is determined by the intervention of the goddess Athena), are trying to show mankind that there is something greater to be reckoned with, and when they reach it they must stop. I am totally convinced that this is the right approach: Greek tragedy is not politics, it is rather a sort of 'supra-politics', so that precisely at the moment of religious festivals the discourse of that moment must be as elevated as possible, and a reconciliation is attempted through an opening towards religion which, however, is never dogmatic. The basic sense is this: don't forget that you are human beings.

GU: This idea of yours clearly goes straight to the roots of tragic theatre, to its religious and ritual origins, a field which has been discussed at length and continues to be debated, although the greater part of modern directors tends to ignore it. Why is it so important to you?

MC: It seems to me that the operating mechanism of theatre is just this: at the moment of a theatrical performance the audience, as far as the stage and the ac-

tors are concerned, takes the place of God; that is, the audience is the only entity in possession of all the information: it knows the myth, it alone knows the whole story, even things some of the characters don't know. It's as if it had been taken up and put on the clouds, as if it had been made divine and from up above, omnisciently, it can see the human beings below like ants running around without knowing what they're doing. In this way, the spectator undergoes the experience of omniscience, but s/he knows only too well that when the show ends s/he will go back to being a wo/man again. The fact remains that the spectator has experienced the play by watching it all from far above, like a god, and as s/he does so has become aware of how partial human vision is and of how blind men are.

GU: To return to the political nature of Greek tragedy I have one more question. It's certainly true that, as you have said, tragedy goes beyond day-to-day politics and transports the situation on stage to the level of paradigms of an existential and universal character. But the question remains open: why do you actually consider it "anti-political"?

MC: For the very reason that it goes beyond the political bias and prefers a vertical discussion on mankind. In this sense it is anti-political, because it belongs to the sphere of a superior politics. Politics is always biased, in the sense that its duty is to dictate what is right and what is wrong. Besides this, politics is concerned with the present, the decisions to make today. I think that, on the contrary, theatre is concerned with what endures in human beings, so it extricates this in a way from political topicality and says: 'You must govern every day and you have to make decisions, but remember both what your limits are and what you are.'

GU: It's also true that in 5th-century Athens it was unthinkable for certain opinions to be voiced as publicly in the theatre as it was possible in civic assembly. If anyone had dared to threaten to bring down democracy, for example, he would have been struck down immediately and deprived of his civil rights.

MC: It's clear to me that the Greeks were thoroughly aware of the separation between the theatre and the Pnyx, that's to say between stage performance and political assembly. Theatre is elsewhere. And even Sophocles himself, with all his *pietas*, his religious sense, his appeasing spirit, whenever he held political office proved himself to be appallingly violent (I'm thinking of the punitive expedition against Samos in 441/40 BC, when Sophocles held the position of *strategos*). It's as if he were saying to himself: 'When we are at the theatre we reason about these problems but in politics things work differently'.

GU: An interesting aspect of your production is the symbolic characterisation of Creon as a commander of the *partigiani* and of Polyneices as a representative of fascism. This is a very innovative choice: it's courageous, risky, debatable, even considering the fact that it's extremely stylised. The allusion to the civil war in Thebes is clear to me (a fratricidal conflict between Eteocles and Polyneices), but don't you think it's rather a long shot that could be misleading?

MC: Although I made no attempt to render the translation of the text of contemporary significance, I did make the rather audacious choice to dress Creon as a

partisan. It seems to me that it's a satisfactory counterpart to Sophocles' working hypothesis, as if he were saying: 'I've got this conflict, this civil war, the closest in time to us'. The paradigm of fascism and of the partisan struggle are useful historical references to mirror the conflict between the old family clans in Athens and the new-born democratic institutions: it was a way of making the conflict explode once again.

GU: Antigone, like her sister Ismene, wears long evening dresses, the sumptuous apparel of a princess, which of course she is, and she noticeably distances herself with her costume from her interlocutors.

MC: If Antigone's costume had been that of the average Greek woman it would evidently induce the audience to think that she's right, considering that not to bury a dead body is something that horrifies us. Dressed in her expensive gowns she's indicating her position as a member of the royal family, belonging to the conservative tradition.

GU: Let's get to the theme of Polyneices' forbidden burial. How far can this be considered a grave offence on Creon's part? Episodes of violence carried out on the bodies of victims, of atrocities committed on the enemy *post mortem*, have been repeated throughout history and are still going on. How did you treat this crucial core theme in your production?

MC: If we read the play in the context of its time, we realize that the failure to bury enemy bodies was part of warfare. For this reason, I have tried to make it obvious that the period in which this play takes place is an exceptional one, a moment when the war had only ended a few hours previously, a time when to remain humane is difficult. If we place ourselves in the situation of the fascist regime and of what happened only a few days after its fall (the summary execution of Mussolini and the atrocities committed on his body at Piazzale Loreto), we may understand this better. These are borderline situations during which the dynamics of political action become atypical.

GU: I find the parallelism with fascism convincing. The Creon who speaks at the beginning of the play does seem to be a democrat, a *homo novus* who wants to create a regime founded on prevailing public interest rather than on ties of kinship, and to bring down the ancient privileges based on caste. And yet he is usually represented as a brutal tyrant.

MC: To my way of thinking Creon gives voice to exactly those concepts and slogans typical of the democracy of the time. I've never understood why in many productions he is represented as a fascist or a Nazi. The contradiction between this kind of characterisation and the sense of his proclamations on stage is blatant. Creon is often defined as a tyrant, but a tyrant always acts in his own interest, while he destroys himself simply in order to keep faith with the principle that community comes before family.

GU: This is one of those cases when an interpretative pattern imposes itself and ends by dominating all others, being repeated passively without the consideration of possible alternatives. During the course of the play, however, it seems to me

that Creon does in fact acquire some tyrannical traits, for example when he says that the city is his, that other people should fear his power, etc.

MC: The central problem is really that of the fragility of democracy. Creon isn't a tyrant but he becomes a tyrant, and this transformation should be understood as a sort of warning on Sophocles' part to Pericles and the democratic leaders: 'Careful, tyranny can originate from the populace.' The figure of the tyrant is a political perspective to be avoided or repressed for the whole Athenian democracy, but while for the aristocracy, tyranny actually derives from democracy, for the democrats the danger of tyranny is inherent in the tradition of aristocratic families.

GU: The tyrant in the Athens of the 5th-century BC is an imaginary bogeyman, that is brandished every time a public figure becomes in any way threatening; Pericles himself was targeted by the comic poets as a potential tyrant. But it's difficult to transpose this interpretative idea on to the stage. I was very impressed by the grave and thoughtful way in which Creon bears himself on stage, without ever indulging in extreme gestures or immoderate exclamations.

MC: In Sophocles' texts there are precise indications about this. You see, I'm talking as a theatre director; in the end I'm a colleague of Sophocles, just as an amateur painter is a colleague of Picasso. The distance is immense, but the craft is the same. As I was saying, in the text there are signals that help us to understand how fiercely Creon is struggling with himself. For example, when he asks the sentry if he is sure of what he has seen, if he is aware of what this will mean, and the sentry, just to satisfy him, replies: "Yes, yes I'm sure; I caught her in the act" (*Ant.* 405). Or when Creon goes on asking Antigone: "Was it you or wasn't it?" (*Ant.* 444). At a certain juncture, so as to be able to maintain his consistency in the sight of the Thebans, he finds himself forced to condemn family members to death, something he does not want to do at all. To understand Antigone we must understand above all that this is a family, that Creon is the uncle, the successor of the two dead youths (Eteocles and Polyneices). Usually when we are watching Antigone we don't pay enough attention to this aspect, as if Antigone and Creon are strangers to one another. Besides this, at a certain point Creon tells Ismene that Antigone has always acted like a madwoman, while she, Ismene, is someone who has always used her reason. This is a valuable indication of the private family life they have shared and also of the fact that Ismene talks to him as you would talk to an uncle. Creon is forced to destroy himself by the position he is in.

GU: I want to ask you a question about Ismene's role. In your production it is clear that she is responsible for the first burial, and not Antigone as is usually assumed. This hypothesis has been suggested by several scholars, but it has never had much following. I think that your production is the first one to accept this possibility. Why is this? What effect does it have at the dramaturgical level?

MC: In Sophocles' play there are two attempts at the burial of Polyneices' body, but it has been rightly observed that actually, on the plane of the dramatic action, two burials are not necessary. It's the second one that carries the story forward, the first could just as well not have happened. The interpretations that have been offered of the first burial are more or less impressionistic. For example, may-

be Antigone had not really made up her mind, so the first attempt at burial is unfinished, but then she decides to do it properly; or, Sophocles has not been meticulous enough, and the first burial is simply a textual imperfection. For this reason, I preferred to follow the clues contained in the text. The first clue appears in the prologue, during the first dialogue between the two sisters, when it becomes obvious that they have very different ideas about the burial of their brother: Ismene wants to act secretly, Antigone would prefer to be discovered (Fig. 2). Well, this difference of opinion seems to allude to the different modalities of the two burials: the first one takes place at night, very quickly and unobtrusively; the second, which corresponds to Antigone's express wish, happens at midday with libations and cries of mourning, and seems to be accomplished with the deliberate desire to be found out. I don't think there is any sense in thinking that the first burial was carried out by Antigone, because it would have been an action in complete contrast to her manifest struggle to attain her end.



Fig. 2: Antigone and Ismene. Photo Duccio Burberi.

The second clue is hidden in an intradiegetic stage direction in the tragedy itself: Creon, after listening to the sentry's report of how he had surprised Antigone, turns to his niece and asks her to lift her eyes. This means that Antigone, having learnt from the sentry's account that there has been a first attempt at burial, is surprised by a paroxysm of sorrow and has bent her head, because she has immediately understood that it was the action of her sister, and she fears a terrible death awaits Ismene. If credence is given to this interpretation, the third clue is also solved: the dialogue the two sisters have in front of Creon. When Ismene asks to share her sister's death, Antigone replies "Death knows who buried him: this is the only thing that matters". It would seem a totally senseless answer, but, in reality, it is a coded message which tries to assure Ismene, without Creon understanding, that Polyneices knows that she too wanted to offer him his funeral rites.

GU: But in the end, in your opinion, who is right, Antigone or Creon? Is it possible to make a case for good and bad in both characters? Or should we read the conflict according to the classical paradigm of Hegel, as the struggle between two sets of circumstances that are both founded on good reasons, but that are not self-sufficient by themselves and end up mutually destroying one another instead of integrating?

MC: When we see Sophocles' *Antigone*, we are inevitably influenced by the politically and ideologically orientated critical interpretations the work has been submitted to throughout the centuries. From the very beginning, we are all convinced that Antigone is right, that she is fighting against a cruel tyrant for a just and noble cause. But if this were true, we should be looking at a melodrama, not at a Greek tragedy. Tragedy always puts borderline situations on stage, where it's never clear what is right and what is wrong. Antigone and Creon are paying for an identical fault: the presumption of feeling that they are exceptional, of being the best, of being above the norm. It's their arrogant nature, their incapacity to listen to other people's reasons, that brings them to ruin. To be on one side or the other, for Antigone or for Creon, means not to be able to see the only thing of any importance, what they have in common.

GU: I think your translation of the celebrated incipit of the first stasimon is particularly apt: *πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ* (*Ant.* 354) as "man is a terrifying miracle"; especially as these words become an actual slogan, repeated several times during the play, and accompanied by the adjective *δεινός* in Sophocles' text. What is the reason for this choice? How do you interpret this song on human progress?

MC: The adjective *δεινός* is a keyword in the Sophoclean tragedy, and it is repeated several times as it expresses the deep meaning of the tragedy. As we said before, Sophocles does everything he can so as not to have to decide who, between Antigone and Creon, is the guilty party: the Chorus, at different moments, recognizes that both have merits and demerits. Well, the term *δεινός*, indicating the mixed feelings experienced in the face of whatever goes beyond moderation, is exactly what they have in common: they are both *δεινοί*, exceptional people, marvellous and frightening at one and the same time. They may do good, but they may also do evil.

GU: To stay on the subject of the translation, I was also struck favourably by the way you render the well-known speech in which Antigone defines herself as “born not to hate, but to love” (“οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφην”, *Ant.* 523). You translated this as “I was not born to hate, but to love those of my own blood” grasping the full meaning, in my opinion, of the Greek verb συμφιλεῖν. How do you explain this particular choice?

MC: This speech is Antigone’s reply to Creon’s affirmation that she cannot love the traitor Polyneices in the same way as she loves the patriot Eteocles. Creon, following his ‘logic of democracy’, asks Antigone to discriminate between her two brothers because of their different behaviour towards the *polis*. The problem here is that Sophocles does not use the usual Greek term φιλεῖν, whose meaning is of course ‘to love’; he coins a new term, never used before this: συμφιλεῖν. Nobody knows for certain how to translate this *hapax legomenon*, but surely, if Sophocles felt the need to invent a new word to describe Antigone’s love for her brothers, it can’t simply be translated as ‘to love’. The prefix συν- indicates union, fusion, being ‘naturally akin’; so I mean it as ‘to love whoever is of the same blood, of the same family’. Antigone can’t discriminate between her two brothers on a social/political basis: she was born to ‘love’ the males of her incestuous family unconditionally. She is unable to free herself from her original family circle, she can’t re-define herself by building a new family, her own, with Haemon.

GU: Your production reproduces Sophocles’ text very faithfully with only the slightest of cuts. To compensate this there are a few very significant additions. I find the final speech of particular relevance: the coryphaeus addresses Creon, at this point overcome by the accumulation of disasters and annihilated by grief. He says to him: “Now you must think of us. It is your duty. Now you can govern. Now you must govern”. What does this interpolation into the text mean?

MC: Yes, this is a deliberate addition of my own. After the downfall political life can’t stop. The necessity for government is something that persists and from failure we must start again. Creon would like to die but the coryphaeus exhorts him to consider the problem of the act of government. And Creon lifts the index finger of his right hand high in the air in the classic attitude of the politician who is going to make a speech, but he can’t manage to utter a word. From his mouth comes only a confused and incomprehensible stuttering. This is the manifestation of the impasse into which he has fallen, but from which he will inevitably have to emerge.

*Translation by Susan Payne*

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**Patrick Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War*,  
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019,  
pp. 308**

Abstract

Patrick Gray's *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* provides an orthodox Christian interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, chiefly *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with some discussion of *Coriolanus*. Gray argues that Shakespeare believed the Republic fell because of the insatiable will to power of its leaders, which led to destructive civil wars. As aggressive males, the Romans needed to embrace their feminine sides and learn compassion in order to live together peacefully. Gray approaches the Roman plays against a background of Augustinian theology and medieval mystery plays. In contrast to many critics, he rejects the possibility that Shakespeare admired his ancient Romans and presented them as tragic heroes. Gray objects to political interpretations of the Roman plays and favours a purely ethical approach. General readers will probably not profit from Gray's book, which sometimes gets bogged down in scholarly disputes. But Shakespeare scholars will learn from his careful analysis of particular scenes in the plays.

KEYWORDS: Patrick Gray; Shakespeare; Roman plays; Roman Republic

Near the end of Patrick Gray's *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, he writes: "in the final turn to the idea of God as other than I have called 'the last interpellation', as well as my emphasis throughout on one-to-one relationships between individuals, it may seem amiss that I do not invoke the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas" (271). If it will make Gray feel better, let me reassure him that it never once occurred to me to find anything amiss in his failure to bring up Lévinas in his book. Indeed, this moment felt to me like coming to the end of *Moby-Dick* and finding Ishmael wondering: "And did I forget to mention the minke whale?". Gray's reference to and subsequent brief discussion of Lévinas seem superfluous in a book in which he has already referred to a grand gallery of fashionable theorists: Althusser, Arendt, Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Lacan – the list goes on and on. As his book is coming to an end, Gray seems determined to drop one last name, in the hope that maybe then he will have covered all the bases.

Since Gray brings up Lévinas only to dismiss his usefulness to the project of this book, it really does seem as if Gray simply wants to show that he has read yet another modish Frenchman. But there is a method to Gray's madness for theorists. He needs to wrap his book in the mantle of all these contemporary theorists

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because his underlying argument is so old-fashioned. *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* is an orthodox Christian interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, especially *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with extended comments on *Coriolanus*. For Gray, the fundamental and irredeemable fault of Shakespeare's Romans is that they are pagans and not Christians. As aggressive males, they are doomed to irreconcilable conflicts with each other, which eventually must tear Rome apart in civil wars. The Romans need to embrace their feminine sides and learn to pity each other and thereby to live together in peace and harmony. Gray's Christianity is dogmatic; for him, any argument can be settled by a quotation from St Augustine. There is a kind of time-warp feel to reading this book. I felt as if I were going back half a century to a work like J.L. Simmons's *Shakespeare's Pagan World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973), which takes a similarly Augustinian approach to the Roman plays. Gray cites Simmons; he does not cite Roy Battenhouse, an even more prominent example of a critic who read the Roman plays in orthodox Christian terms. But overall *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* does not lack for citations, and the derivative character of Gray's work is evident. Only his use of trendy terms like "interpellation" drags his book into the twenty-first century.

It is difficult to argue with a dogmatic Christian; that is why we call them "dogmatic". Gray believes in the truth of Christianity and hence in the falseness of paganism. To the extent that Shakespeare gives an accurate representation of the ancient Roman world, Gray must view it as benighted, incapable of benefiting from Christian revelation. He does not entertain for a moment the possibility that Shakespeare might have admired something in the ancient Romans. For Gray, Brutus is a Stoic poseur, Antony is a self-deluded sensualist with aspirations to divinity, and Julius Caesar is a pompous tyrant. Gray has no feel for complexity and ambiguity – which is a serious failing in anyone trying to interpret Shakespeare's plays. Gray sees everything in black-or-white terms, with pagan as black and Christian as white. If Shakespeare embodies any failings in his characters, then they are damned and doomed; they cannot possibly possess redeeming virtues that might compensate for their vices. The history of the reception of the Roman plays, among theatrical audiences, readers, and critics, contradicts this view. People generally have had mixed reactions to Shakespeare's characters, finding both positive and negative elements in them. And what looks like a vice to one person, may appear to be a virtue to another. Many theatre-goers do not react to the plays in moral terms at all. Gray is unusually insistent that only moral terms should govern our analysis of the Roman plays. If Christian moral clarity were the chief criterion for evaluating drama, *Everyman* would be the greatest play ever written.

Gray does seem to have a soft spot in his heart for medieval drama. We can see his Christian dogmatism in his attempt to view Shakespeare's Roman plays through the lens of medieval mystery plays. In the process, he reduces the profound complexity and ambiguity of Shakespeare's works to the simplistic moralising of medieval drama. Following his colleague in dogmatism, John Cox, Gray thinks that Shakespeare's portrayal of Julius Caesar can be traced back to the portrayal of Herod in the Coventry Cycle and Caesar in the Chester Cycle:

Like the contrast between Christ and Caesar in the Gospels, or between Christ and a stage tyrant in a Corpus Christi pageant, Shakespeare's characterisation of Julius Caesar is designed to foreground the contrast between divine power and human vulnerability. The gulf between God and man is reconciled and overcome in the person of Christ. (170)

One has to be really steeped in Christian dogmatism to ignore the difference between the one-dimensional, almost cartoonish characters of medieval mystery plays and Shakespeare's multidimensional, fully realized characters in the Roman plays.

For Gray, Shakespeare had nothing but contempt for the ancient Roman world. He represented it in his Roman plays as a purely negative example, as a warning to show how the ancient Romans could only destroy themselves and their community. But I would counter that Shakespeare saw genuine greatness in ancient Rome. He understood that the ancient Romans had many faults, and he does not hesitate to portray those faults. But Shakespeare understood that the ancient Romans also had their virtues, and in many cases, they developed those virtues to heights of excellence that few other peoples have equalled. Moreover, as Friedrich Nietzsche showed, what Christians regard as vices in the ancient Romans, the Romans themselves regarded as virtues. Indeed, many other peoples in history have joined the ancient Romans in celebrating manliness, the martial spirit, and the warrior's discipline and heroism. Even in Christian societies, many people admire the warrior's virtues; the more threatened a society is by enemies, the more likely it is to look up to the kind of martial virtue that is necessary to defend it.

Judging by what Shakespeare chose to write about in his plays, he was fascinated by the martial virtues. In both his tragedies and his histories, his heroes are often soldiers and leaders of armies, and this is true even in the plays he set in the Christian world. Shakespeare may offer Henry V as a model of Christian piety, but he is also the victor on the battlefield of Agincourt and an exemplar of the martial spirit at its fiercest (think of his order to kill his French prisoners). Shakespeare consciously modelled Henry V on Roman examples, as the pedantic soldier Fluellen insists when he offers the "wars of Pompey the Great" as an object of emulation to his fellow warriors. For Shakespeare, ancient Rome represented the pinnacle of martial virtue and he wanted to explore what made that possible. In Shakespeare's portrayal, Rome is the unusual community in which "it is held / That valour is the chiefest virtue", as the consul Cominius says in *Coriolanus*. There is a connection between Rome's paganism – with its this-worldly orientation – and its development of martial heroism to a kind of peak. A community must focus on the martial virtues if they are to flourish in it.

This focus of course creates problems for any such community, and therefore Shakespeare portrays the Romans as profoundly tragic. No community can develop all the potential human virtues equally. To cultivate the aggressive virtues, a community may have to suppress the compassionate virtues, or at least to let them languish. A strictly Christian community would not face this problem because it would not acknowledge that there are aggressive virtues, but instead would damn them as vices. But any community that recognises that it may

at times be necessary to cultivate aggressive virtues may find it difficult to get its citizens to live together peacefully. This may well be the fundamental tragic insight in Shakespeare's works: the incompatibility between opposing forms of human excellence. Not all forms of human excellence are equally available in all communities, and sometimes competing forms of excellence come into conflict. For example, the virtues necessary in war time may clash with the virtues necessary in peace time. The situation of the soldier attempting to make the difficult transition from wartime to peacetime can be tragic, and it frequently recurs in Shakespeare's plays, with varying outcomes, from Richard III to Henry V to Othello to Macbeth to Coriolanus. Human life would be much easier if there were never any war, or, failing that, if men could make the transition smoothly and unproblematically from wartime to peacetime. But that is not the way the world we live in works. Shakespeare's recognition of that fundamental dilemma is at the core of his tragic vision of human life.

Many writers, Gray included, seem to forget that characters like Brutus, Antony, Julius Caesar, and Coriolanus are heroes, albeit tragic heroes. They are not morally perfect, especially not in Christian terms. And yet, for all their moral failings, Shakespeare's Romans embody forms of human excellence that have been much admired throughout history, among them courage, valour, ambition, public spiritedness, indomitable will, iron discipline – all of which can be invaluable to the very survival of a community confronted by enemies. Shakespeare did not write tragedies because he thought that happy outcomes are simply the norm in human life. The man who authored *King Lear* did not go to bed every night thinking "All's well with the world". Shakespeare viewed certain forms of heroism – particularly martial heroism – as deeply problematic and often leading to situations from which no simple happy outcome is possible. But that does not make this kind of heroism any less heroic – it just makes it tragic.

This was Hegel's central insight in formulating his theory of tragedy. Tragedy is not the simple or melodramatic conflict between good and evil; it is rather the conflict between two forms of good, two legitimate principles that tragically clash, such as Antigone's attachment to the family and Creon's to the city in Sophocles' famous play. The conflict between what might be called aggressive virtues and compassionate virtues – roughly between classical and Christian virtues – is often at the centre of Shakespearean tragedy.

Coriolanus is a good example of the complexity of a Shakespearean tragic hero. In a city in which "It is held / That valour is the chiefest virtue", he is virtuous, indeed the epitome of what Rome holds to be virtuous. He develops valour to a peak of perfection and ends up defeating a whole city almost single-handedly, and therefore he seems like a god to the ordinary human beings around him. But the excellence of his valour, which makes him tower over ordinary human beings on the battlefield, turns out to unfit him for domestic political life in Rome. His inability to make the compromises dictated by politics leads to his personal downfall and almost to the destruction of Rome itself. This tragic spectacle puzzles Shakespeare; in fact, it deeply disturbs him. Why should a man as remarkable as Coriolanus, who has done so much for his city, suffer so much for his distinctive kind of excellence? The events of Coriolanus do not unfold according to a simple mor-

al calculus. Shakespeare portrays Coriolanus' tragedy in all its depths, and in an authentic tragedy, a man's defeat and death do not refute what he stood for in his life. Coriolanus develops Romanness almost to perfection, and yet precisely that perfection makes it impossible for him to fit into the city that nurtured him and pointed him in the direction of a warlike life in the first place. As his friend Menenius says, "His nature is too noble for the world".

Gray's response would of course be the standard Christian one: Coriolanus' aggressiveness is just a vice and needs to be drummed out of him. The lion must become a lamb; the great Roman must be Christianised. Coriolanus must cultivate pity and compassion; he must learn how to fit peacefully into the Roman community. In short, Coriolanus must become nice. But a Christianised Coriolanus would no longer be Coriolanus; he would cease to be the gigantic specimen of humanity who can face down the plebeians by simply saying, "On fair ground / I could beat forty of them" (and he is probably correct in his numerical estimate). Shakespearean tragedy is an exploration of a range of extreme human possibilities. If you want to see the full development of what a great warrior can be – and it is a splendid sight as Shakespeare presents it – you had better be prepared for some trouble. But if you want people to herd comfortably together in a community, then you must forego the possibility of seeing the perfection of martial virtue.

That is why Shakespeare was attracted to ancient Rome as a subject. He realised that it was a community very different from what he could observe directly in his own world, and he wanted to explore imaginatively the different forms of human excellence ancient Rome made possible. He recognised how problematic and in fact dangerous those possibilities were, but he still wanted to make them visible on the stage, to broaden our sense of what human beings can become under extreme circumstances. Gray has a simple solution to the problem of heroic types like Coriolanus – just Christianise them. A community in which all human beings are genuinely Christian would be very peaceful (although it might have to worry that aggressive non-Christians might be lurking just beyond its borders).

The peculiar closing lines of Gray's book are revealing:

The possibility of this kind of intersubjective interpellation stands as a salutary check, especially, upon that drive for absolute autocracy or *imperium* that St Augustine describes as *libido dominandi*. Neither nor [sic] the self nor the other can ever entirely overwhelm and obliterate each other's subjectivity. The 'imperial self' cannot expand forever; cannot become self-sufficient and impassible. Instead, the best we can do is to make peace with the human condition as it is, 'grotesque', dependent, and vulnerable. (276)

The way this passage alternates between abstruse Christian theological vocabulary ("impassible") and impenetrable postmodern jargon ("intersubjective interpellation") is typical of Gray's book, as is, of course, his use of St Augustine as the closer in the argument. Gray's ultimate message is "the best we can do is to make peace with the human condition". But is that really the *best* we can do, or is it only a compromise, the acceptance of a second best? What Gray proposes would mean renouncing the possibility of heroism, of fighting against the debilitating limits of the human condition, of trying to transcend its ordinariness even at the

expense of one's life. Gray has in mind a humble Christian response, made all the subtler and more seductive by a Christian redefinition of heroism, one in which heroism would become passive – heroism as martyrdom, as accepting defeat, or rather transforming material defeat into some kind of spiritual victory.

By contrast, Shakespearean tragedy is a protest against the limitations of the human condition; it celebrates the heroic spirit in all its efforts to transcend human limits. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are ultimately defeated, and they typically must be defeated for the ordinary community around them to survive. But that does not change the fact that the community is ordinary or that the tragic hero is extraordinary. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not models of proper conduct for ordinary people to emulate in their daily lives. They are markers of human greatness, emblems of what the human spirit can accomplish when it refuses to abide by the conventional limits most people tamely accept. Shakespeare's tragic heroes live dangerously.

Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome because it revealed to him with a new clarity the tension between the ordinary community and the extraordinary hero. He genuinely valued ancient Rome, especially the Roman Republic, for all the great heroes it produced. Perhaps from his reading of Plutarch's *Lives*, he came to understand that the Roman Republic was a remarkable mechanism for generating heroes. Its constitution (what the Greeks would call its *politeia*) succeeded in encouraging and developing aggressiveness, and then channelling it to serve the city, by pitting one ambitious man's competitive spirit against another's. To be sure, in the end the Republican regime did in effect subvert itself when one-man rule re-emerged out of the savage contests of the patricians. Yet even – or precisely – in its dying days, the Republic produced one remarkable example of humanity after another, and Shakespeare portrays several of them in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*: Brutus, Cassius, Julius Caesar, Antony, and even to some extent Octavius. As was understood already in antiquity and recognised again in the Renaissance, Republican Rome was a school of heroic greatness – not of moral goodness in a Christian sense but of what Aristotle named as the crown of all the virtues in his *Nicomachean Ethics* – *megalopsychia* – magnanimity or greatness of soul. Aristotle provides a better guide to Shakespeare's Roman plays than St Augustine does.

To say the least, Gray does not share Shakespeare's respect for the Roman Republic. His book is about the fall of the Roman Republic and his basic response seems to be something like: "Good riddance; those pagans deserved it". Unlike Shakespeare, Gray seems to have no sense that anything was lost with the fall of the Republic. One reason is that he does not seem to understand what was distinctive about Rome as an aristocratic republic. He repeatedly confuses the Roman Republic with a liberal democracy, and his book keeps offering false parallels between ancient Rome and today's democratic world. Notice that he asks, "Would Shakespeare agree with Cicero that representative democracy, in the absence of a monarch, is the best form of government?" (9). Cicero never speaks of "representative democracy"; representative government was unknown in the ancient world; only direct democracy was practiced in cities like Athens. Cicero champions the classical mixed regime, which combines elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and

democracy (as in Sparta or the Roman Republic). Gray repeatedly rejects political interpretations of Shakespeare's Roman plays and wants to substitute an ethical approach (which for him is identical to a Christian approach). In the process, he demonstrates only his ignorance of ancient politics and political theory.

Although the Republic did not solve the perennial problem of ambition and aggressiveness in politics, it pioneered what has come to be one of the most widely used and successful methods of controlling ambitious people in politics – the system of divided government with checks and balances that ultimately led via thinkers like John Locke to the design of the United States Constitution. The Roman Republic did not invent and it certainly did not perfect the mixed regime, and yet it did make it work. By pitting one political figure against another to check the harmful effects of ambition, and channelling their energy into serving the public good, the Roman Republic flourished. That is the effect that the Republic's complex system of consuls, senators, and tribunes had – to balance and harmonise all the competing interests in the city. The result was that the Roman Republic became one of the longest-lasting and most successful regimes in human history.

Yet Gray finds nothing to speak well of in the Roman Republic:

Shakespeare recognises that political structures can shape historical change. Like St Augustine, however, as well as Cicero, he sees the collapse of Rome's traditional political institutions as more immediately the result of a flawed moral paradigm. The impassibility that the Roman characters tend to idealise is incompatible in the long run with a functioning civil society, because it leaves no room for compromise or concession. (222)

According to Gray, the Roman Republic was incompatible with a functioning civil society. This claim would sound odd to historians and political theorists. Indeed, for them, the Roman Republic has long served as a model of a functioning regime. Gray must have very high standards of "the long run". Depending on when exactly one dates its origin and its fall, the Roman Republic survived and generally prospered for roughly four and a half centuries. By comparison, the United States Constitution has survived just under two and a half centuries, and many today are worrying whether it can endure unchanged much longer. As for other nations in the modern world, some of them, like France, seem to have changed regime almost every generation in the past two centuries. By any normal standards of the "long run", the Roman Republic comes out very well. Despite the many internal and external threats it faced, it managed to survive for centuries and in the process it conquered the Mediterranean world. To read Gray, one would think that the Republic, incapable of functioning as a community, fell apart overnight. And yet the Republic's 'fall' in fact took several centuries, and Gray gives it no credit for its many triumphs along the way. Rome was the envy of the ancient world. To this day many people in the modern world are in awe of its military, political, architectural, artistic, and literary achievements.

Impressed by the Republic's durability, political thinkers like Polybius and Machiavelli posed for themselves the question: why did the Roman Republic last so long, when so many other regimes in the ancient world, including Athenian

democracy, had such short lives? Machiavelli's answer in his *Discourses on Livy* provided the foundation for the theory of checks and balances that informed the thinking of the Founding Fathers in the United States. Contrary to what Gray claims, the Roman Republic allowed for compromise and concession. Indeed, the Roman constitution itself was famously the product of compromise and concession. As Shakespeare shows in *Coriolanus*, the Republican constitution finally took shape only when the Roman patricians, faced with a rebellion of the plebeians, conceded to them the right to tribunes to speak up for their interests in the regime. More generally, the way Rome's constitution facilitated communication and negotiation between the patrician and plebeian parties allowed the Republic to function for centuries – not smoothly, but, as Machiavelli understood, the turbulence between the perpetually warring parties in Rome energised the regime and kept it from being overcome by its many enemies.

Shakespeare went out of his way to portray this process in *Coriolanus* in, for example, the productive interaction between the patrician Menenius and the plebeian tribunes. In fact, *Coriolanus* stands out in the play because he is the only Roman who is unwilling to compromise; his fellow patricians and his mother keep urging him to make concessions to the plebeians. Shakespeare shows that the genius of the Republic was precisely the general willingness of the patricians to make shrewd and prudent concessions to the plebeians. Shakespeare does not portray ancient Rome as some kind of political utopia, but he does show that the Republic managed to function, not despite the disputes between the patricians and the plebeians, but precisely because of them. In this, Shakespeare was true to the actual history of Rome and to the understanding of Rome in political philosophy, a long tradition that stretches at least from Polybius to Montesquieu.

In sum, Gray is left with the odd claim that the Roman Republic was so dysfunctional that it lasted a mere 450 years. By contrast, I would argue that Shakespeare respected Rome's achievement and regarded his exploration of the ancient city as a way of expanding his horizons. As with many figures of the Renaissance, the rediscovery of classical antiquity struck Shakespeare with the force of a revelation. Like a sculptor rediscovering the glory of the human form from viewing a long-buried Roman statue, Shakespeare found his sense of the range of human possibility opened up by his study of Roman history. Here were new specimens of humanity, and glorious ones at that. The ancients did not want simply to stamp out the aggressive and ambitious side of human nature; they looked for ways to make it flourish, to put it in the service of the common good, providing fuel for the highest political achievements.

Shakespeare understood full well that this understanding of human greatness was incompatible with the Christian understanding, and indeed it was the complete antithesis. Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome precisely because it offered an alternative to the Christian world. This does not mean that he embraced the pagan world, but it does mean that he sought to take it seriously, to consider whether it had any merits of its own and to assess its limitations and defects. Shakespeare's genius as a dramatist was a kind of philosophical impartiality, his refusal to take a partisan view of things and his openness to appreciating the merits of either side in any conflict. That is why Shakespeare's tragedies fit the Hege-

lian mold. The Renaissance, as an attempt to revive the ideals of classical antiquity within a largely Christian civilisation, offered Shakespeare a fertile field for tragic drama. Shakespeare's Roman plays, with his effort to recreate classical civilisation on the stage, are the pinnacle of everything the Renaissance stood for. He did not revive ancient Rome simply to vilify it, but to see what he could learn from it. As shown by Gray's attraction to medieval drama, he would like to think of Shakespeare as a man of the Middle Ages, not of the Renaissance. It sometimes seems as if Gray wishes that the Renaissance had never happened and we had all remained loyal to St Augustine and his medieval Christianity.

Understanding both the greatness and the defects of classical antiquity, Shakespeare used his Roman plays to portray the tragedies of people who pursued a conception of the human good antithetical to that of Christianity. Shakespeare's Romans are not Christian saints, but that does not mean, unless one is a dogmatic Christian, that they are not admirable human beings in their own right, pursuing certain distinct forms of human excellence, qualities such as courage and self-reliance that are still widely admired today (even among many Christians) in basic human activities from war to athletic competition. Shakespeare knew exactly what he was doing when he had Mark Antony speak eloquently in his final tribute to Brutus that Nature might say of him: "This was a man!". When Antony calls Brutus "the noblest Roman of them all", he speaks for Shakespeare in suggesting that there was a distinct form of Roman nobility. It is not the only form of human nobility, and it had many problematic aspects and often led to death and destruction. But still, if one is looking to understand the full range of human possibilities, the Roman option must be taken into account. That is the task Shakespeare set himself in his Roman plays. If medieval drama told the entire truth about ancient Rome, we would not need *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.

I reject the one-sidedness of Gray's book, rooted as it is in his Christian dogmatism. Shakespeare's plays are not Christian sermons, even if the sermonizing in Gray's book is reformulated in the liberal democratic terms of postmodern theorists. Nevertheless, I would recommend reading *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, at least to Shakespeare scholars. Gray does have many interesting observations to make about the individual Roman plays and about the ways they fit together and comment on each other. For example, he does an excellent job of analysing the contrast between the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Caesar*. He uncovers some possible sources in classical literature for the styles of rhetoric Shakespeare's Brutus and Antony employ, pointing to works by authors such as Cicero, Cleanthes, Zeno, and Chrysippus. As Gray observes, "Antony wins the people's hearts because Brutus, hindered by a peculiarly Stoic squeamishness, resolutely fails to pre-empt his rival's more persuasive appeal to pathos. His insistence on his own dry logic baffles his audience . . ." (61).

Gray goes on to develop an equally insightful analysis of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in Act 4 of *Julius Caesar*. Here he suggests as possible sources for this scene both Seneca's *De constantia* and Montaigne's "Of Books." Gray concentrates on the famous crux in this scene, the so-called "double revelation of Portia's death". After reviewing this scholarly controversy, Gray correctly (in my opinion) takes the side of those critics who view Brutus as putting on an act at

this moment, pretending to his fellow warriors that, like a good Stoic, he is unaffected by the news of his wife's death (which he actually has already received earlier). In passages such as these Gray recovers a sense of the complexity in Shakespeare's Roman plays that seems to elude him in his analysis of them as a whole.

Although I disagree with the use Gray makes of medieval drama in his interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, scholars will find his discussion of specific mystery plays interesting. It is useful to see how figures like Julius Caesar and Augustus were portrayed on the medieval stage. Gray offers some intriguing parallels to moments in Shakespeare's Roman plays. In the Chester cycle, Octavian says: "All this world, withowten were – / kinge, prynce, batchlere – / I may destroy in great dangere". Gray claims that these lines recall Shakespeare's Julius Caesar when he says, "Danger knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he". I hear a faint echo here, but, unlike Gray, I am struck more by the differences than by the similarities. It is typical of Gray that he works to assimilate Renaissance literature to medieval. I by contrast see Shakespeare as a Renaissance author making a marked advance beyond anything done in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Shakespeare's appreciation of the heroism of his Roman characters reflects precisely the essence of the Renaissance as a rediscovery of classical antiquity.

In any event, one has to respect the seriousness with which Gray approaches Shakespeare. He recognises that the plays have genuine intellectual content and that they are to be read for what Shakespeare has to say on his own, and not, as in much contemporary criticism, for some putative way in which he somehow speaks for material interests of one kind or another. Finally, in evaluating *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, one must remember that this is Gray's first book and he shows signs of being able to do better in the future. It is in fact too obvious that this book grows out of Gray's doctoral dissertation. It has too much of the kind of signposting one finds in graduate student prose. On page 69 alone, we see "As I explained in the previous section of this chapter", "In this section of the chapter, I outline a second such debate", and "In the next chapter . . . I address a third and final debate". The book cites too many critics, almost as if for Gray that were an end in itself. He engages in petty disputes with other critics; this might have been of interest to his dissertation committee but would not be to the general reader. And the book is repetitious. For example, on page 226, we read of Aristotle's "so-called *Magna moralia*, a treatise once thought to have been written by Aristotle, but whose authorship is now disputed." Then on the very next page, we read of "the *Magna moralia*, once thought to have been written by Aristotle, but now considered of dubious authenticity". Was this book copy edited? A lot could have been done to make Gray's prose flow more smoothly and to make his book a better reading experience. That is why I hesitate to recommend it to general readers. But I do think that Shakespeare scholars, who are more used to this kind of academic prose, could learn a lot from studying it. And I look forward to seeing Gray do better in his next book, even if it has nothing to say about Emmanuel Lévinas.

ELENA PELLONE\*

**Jaq Bessell, *Shakespeare in Action*, London and  
New York: Bloomsbury (The Arden Shakespeare),  
2019, pp. 213**

Abstract

Jaq Bessell's new Arden publication *Shakespeare in Action* is just that. Bessell collates a compendium of invaluable insights from practitioners in the United States and United Kingdom, working at major theatres to bring Shakespeare actively to life on stage. Bessell determines to give access to an understanding of the process, rather than simply the product, of Shakespeare production, interviewing actors and creatives from the major stakeholders of the Shakespeare theatre industry. Bessell intuitively gains a first-hand understanding from her expertise as head of the acting programme at Guilford School of acting, head of Globe research during Mark Rylance's tenure, teaching at the Shakespeare Institute and her extensive work on both sides of the Atlantic. An engaging resource for anyone with an interest in Shakespeare performance, the politics of who can speak Shakespeare, how to speak Shakespeare, whom Shakespeare belongs to, and the alchemic transformation from words on a page, to actions on a stage.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; Stanislavski; performance; actions; verse speaking; Globe; Royal Shakespeare Company; American Shakespeare Centre; Shakespeare directors; Shakespeare actors

Jaq Bessell's new Arden publication *Shakespeare in Action* is just that. Bessell collates a compendium of invaluable insights from practitioners in the United States and United Kingdom, working at major theatres to bring Shakespeare actively to life on stage. This book offers "new insights, and different ways of reading Shakespeare performance, from the inside out" (1). Written primarily for "non-practitioners with an academic interest" (1), but also availing a rich resource for creatives and students. Bessell determines to give access to an understanding of the process, rather than simply the product, of Shakespeare production, from the "major stakeholders in the Shakespeare 'industry'" (3). The interviews, with actors and creatives, are framed by an in-depth introduction on the provenance and premise of the book and an analytical conclusion correlating the "patterns in the wallpaper" (177) of Shakespeare theatre practice, with resources and suggestions for further reading. Bessell intuitively gains a first-hand understanding from her expertise as head of the acting programme at Guilford School of acting, head of Globe research during Mark Rylance's tenure, teaching at the Shakespeare Institute and her extensive work on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Bessell curates a representative range of experience, although predominately, as one would expect, from the perspective of actors and directors. The interviews are divided into two sections, "Cast" and "Creatives". The "Cast", primarily identified as actors, focuses on nuanced individual experience of process. The interviews are organised by various sub-headings, several re-occurring to give a sense of primary concern for text, voice, actions, verse speaking, character building and internal subtext. The "Creatives", a mixture of directors, designers, heads of music, dancers, a voice coach, choreographer and director of events, give a far more eclectic insight into the concerns of mounting a Shakespeare production. The subheadings are rarely repeated, allowing one particularly to appreciate the breadth of individual visions of directors, which make up a third of the "Creatives" section.

The interviews capture "informal, lively conversations" (9). Bessell wishes them to be a "conduit for an altogether more direct conversation between reader and respondent" (10), and they most certainly are. Each interview is a short vignette or an appetiser, and as a collection it both whets and appeases the curiosity to gaze within the creative process.

The overarching question given to each respondent is to "describe their 'action' in or on a Shakespeare play" (8). For Bessell "action" is the "lingua franca of the many creative processes" (8) and therefore a necessary tool in the evaluation of Shakespeare productions. It investigates the varied functions and manifestations of "action" in rehearsal. This gives the work a strong focus on the principle of "action", a Stanislavskian technique of "psycho-physical actions" (4) breaking down scenes into units of "what you are trying to do to the other person" (3) and what a character wants. It is notable from the outset that Stanislavski techniques appear invaluable to actor and directorial process, even though they were developed for a particular moment in theatrical history, trying to enhance naturalism and subtext in Russian theatre, particularly for Chekov's plays. This anachronistic approach to Shakespeare performance is the thrust of both the creative energy behind the book and also the work of main stage practitioners. The corollary is that Bessell proposes "[d]esigners and directors can give full consideration to the sequence of actions that make up the shape of a production as a whole, whereas performers necessarily concern themselves primarily with single actions and reactions" (4). This is a somewhat homogenised view of Shakespeare performance, although main stage productions are deeply entrenched in these late 19th century and early 20th century power structures and rehearsal processes. This book offers a wealth of first-person perspectives on this process, but at no point does it interrogate the value of this process and whether this approach to embodying Shakespearean text produces the strongest work. Indeed, Bessell acknowledges that, although it would be unthinkable for literary criticism to rely on a book written in 1936, the Stanislavski system focused on actions endures "and continues to have value in modern actor training" with its "proven ability to be adapted and applied in a diverse range of contexts" (6).

The book recognizes the tension between text driven (attention to textual clues, rhetorical tropes and verse speaking) and character driven (investing in a back story and inner emotional life) approaches to performance, and it is of interest to see varying levels of engagement with these processes in individual practitioners, with complimentary and contradictory claims. Almost immediately, however, we glean

how closed the circuit of this book is, many practitioners interviewed having influenced each other, contributors being referred to by other interviewees, and Bessell herself being acknowledged and thanked as an influence and teacher. The downside to it being a snapshot of a coterie of artists is that it can seem backward, rather than forward, looking, concerned mostly with a passing generation, and does not document any of Michelle Terry's new vision and work at the Globe, or Erica Whyman's at the RSC. This is finally not a limitation of the text, but rather an actualisation of the aims of the book, which has set out to capture a particular time, a particular focus on process, and an assemblage of practitioners and playhouses that cross over, collaborate and cross-pollinate.

The first interview is by actor Jade Anouka who begins her investigatory process into Shakespeare's text purely from her character's point of view. Anouka, following Stanislavskian principles, ascertains what her character says to and about others, and how her character relates to them, in order to determine who the other characters are. A director she worked with early in her career at the RSC, Tim Carroll (who also contributes an interview), imparted a valuable exercise on verse speaking—throwing up a ball on the last word of each verse line, to make sure the energy is sustained rather than dropped, disabusing an idea that observing iambic pentameter is difficult or cumbersome to an actor (21). With Phyllida Lloyd, Anouka has recently been working on minutely actioning the text—another Stanislavski technique (22).

The second contribution is from actor/dancer Ankur Bahl who comes to Shakespeare performance through a physical theatre tradition. Using the discipline of a dancer, she applies this to acquiring and consolidating acting techniques with Shakespeare: "a dancer starts his or her everyday life with an hour to an hour and a half of training . . . fine tuning your craft . . . being in rep at the RSC proved the perfect place to apply a dancer's approach to continual development"; working the muscularity of the text, the line endings, the punctuation, the pronouns, verbs, trusting that in performance the work would have embedded itself like a dancer's exercises in the morning (25).

Eve Best approaches Shakespeare from the words, using a technique taught to her by Ian McKellen at Oxford, a version of a Stanislavski exercise adapted by Mike Alfreds (who also contributes an interview), in which lists are compiled around what your character says about yourself, what your character says about other people, what other people say about you, what you say about the world, the weather, etc. (This character foraging must show limitations with Shakespeare's text where there are many incongruities and inconsistencies with time, weather, no naturalistic concept of teleological character development or backstory, and where early modern actors would have worked from cue scripts rather than full texts). Best places the words in her body by learning lines whilst stomping up country lanes, following the verse clues and "being directed very clearly, by the greatest writer of all time", discovering a verse that is like "real speech and real life" (29).

Sandy Grierson postpones doing character work and lists until she gets into the rehearsal room. Her approach in the early stages is to "read the play more generally" and begin with an "overall gist" (31). Grierson comes into the rehearsal room flexible, as interpretation depends on "who else is in there with you, who is in the

scene with you, what the director's vision is" (30). Her major influences and mentors are from a physical-based tradition of the Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor. She also draws on the work of academic Jan Kott. Grierson trusts her gut instincts, which are not gleaned from the text but "tend to work in a spatial sense" (34).

The American actor John Harrell, who has been in every one of Shakespeare's plays, begins by taking a stack of blank note cards and copying his cues on one side and lines on the other (36) (this is almost like making an early modern cue script). He uses this to "consider the sinew of the text in small detail" (36), investigate verse rhythms and anomalies, semantic and syntactic sense, learn his lines, clarify what he is saying and also to determine if any of it is funny. Harrell believes that "Shakespeare is under appreciated as a comic playwright" (37). In American theatre, the business of rehearsal is "often the identification of objectives (what a character wants) and actions (what she does to get what she wants)" (38), but Harrell does not have the same faith in Stanislavski. "This is a non-useless relic of abiding mid-century faith that the warp and weft of conflicting vectors of desire can constitute the fabric of a play. Some actors are more fundamentalist about this approach than others . . . believing that a single-minded pursuit of objectives is their best course" (38). Harrell does not take issue with this fundamentalism, but he does not share it, fearing that approaching each character as the hero of its own story may lead to intense but "not necessarily deeply textured performance" (38).

Alex Hassell, the actor who started the experimental company The Factory with director Tim Carroll, is passionate about verse, using the score as a key to performance, breaking at the end of each line and paying close attention to the irregularities of the iambic "pattern" (40-1). Nonetheless, Hassell does not believe the audience should register they are hearing verse, "they should just think they are hearing clear erudite thoughts", stipulating "there should be a barely perceptible difference" to prose (41). (This perhaps is incongruous with Shakespeare's deliberate textual shifts between verse and prose, although it has often been remarked that Shakespeare writes prose bordering on verse and verse bordering on prose. If we are to take a textual clue from *As You Like It*, early modern audiences would have aurally registered these two distinct forms – Jacques and Rosalind are conversing in prose when Orlando enters, greeting Rosalind in a single verse line. Jacques' immediate response: "Nay then, God be wi' you, an you talk in blank verse" (Shakespeare 2009, 4.1.34) as he leaves, suggests a resistance to the change in the mode of address which must strongly herald its differing function). For Hassell, it takes an "enormous amount of work to get really good at speaking verse" and it is important to evolve from delivering it sing-song, with formulaic emphasis, as if one is hitting it with a hammer. Only once you have worked past that point "can you really reveal and live up to the full profundity and weight and worth and value of Shakespeare" (41). The difficulty is that many actors cannot "bother doing all the work it takes" (42). Although Hassell uses the Stanislavski concept of actioning, he does this by carefully observing the verse, using specific clues as to "what you are trying to do to the other person" (43). The character is revealed through the play, and should not be hemmed in by rubbish that is your own invention, the only difference between being an actor and a normal human

being is that “as an actor your thoughts are being replaced by ones that have been pre-written by a genius” (45).

This segues smoothly into Amer Hlehel’s reflection on Shakespeare’s genius, not only as a great poet, but one who “knew about us . . . knew about humanity” (46). Hlehel’s first steps with a script is to understand the meaning and “how Shakespeare sees my character” (46). Using a different focus to Hassell, who resists a notion of character, Hlehel essentially reveals the same concern, to make Shakespeare’s character “rich in human experiences and conflicts, full of oppositions . . . to make it human” (46-7). He goes further than Hassell in that “what is brilliant about Shakespeare – any question that you want to know about your character exists in the script, but after that, it’s yours to do with as you wish” (48). Hlehel relies on his Stanislavski training, but believes there is “a missed part of Stanislavski’s theory” which is how to put the methods of what “you’re feeling, what you’re living, your thoughts” on to the stage (47). Hlehel does not “believe in *feeling* things . . . in *living* the character . . . With Stanislavski you need to see things . . . If you see things, your body will feel” (47-9).

Colin Hurley wishes to learn his lines before starting rehearsal, which frees him to be “looking up” (50). Hurley finds actioning useful: “‘Squash them’ or ‘Dazzle them’ with your words . . . that *is* helpful. It gives me something to *play*” (50). But he does not get too bogged down with Stanislavski’s approach, not wanting to show the audience his homework: “Tools not rules” (51). Hurley also uses the “Mike Alfred’s ‘lists’”. Tim Carroll is mentioned again, who Hurley states is “the most enabling director” he has worked with, teaching him to be on “‘Receive’ as well as ‘Transmit’” (51). Working with Mark Rylance at the Globe, the emphasis was on “actor-solutions” to the space, with Dominic Dromgoole it was on “design-solutions”, as directors tend to spend more time working with designers rather than actors (52). Whereas, “Tim’s work seems very much about getting out of the way of the play, to let the actors and the audience meet each other” (54).

T.R. Knight leans heavily on the crutches of his “well-loved *Shakespeare Lexicon* by Alexander Schmidt (1874) . . . volume A-M under one arm and N-Z under the other” (54).

Knight focuses on the small details of stresses in the verse lines, antitheses, ideas bouncing, giving clues to character’s emotional state and actions in the scene (55). For Knight the language then comes alive when approached from a physical level and for this he draws on the work of Rudolf Laban and Jerzy Grotowski (55). “Your responsibility to this audience is to take them along with you; when a 400-year-old text can feel like it was written yesterday, full of passionate longing or murderous rage, this journey can be genuinely thrilling” (55). Knight is grateful to have been taught by “Cicely Berry, John Barton and Jaq Bessell, who helped demystify language in such a humble and honest way” (56). Again, we hear from Knight that “Shakespeare is for everyone, to be spoken by everyone, no matter your education or dialect” (56).

Andrew Long again starts by considering rigidly the verse form: “You can hear the sense of the speech just by saying the first and last stress of each line” (60). For Long “the plays are hardy and sturdy and they can take almost anything that somebody wants to do with them” (56). Long takes us through working with the

great director Sam Mendes on *Richard III* at The Old Vic. Mendes “worked on text line by line”, he counted out the verse saying which words should be stressed for every single part (56). He works with all the rhetorical devices, but also with physicality, “where his gestures begin from or what shoes he has on” (58). His work is a symbiotic “combination of gut and technique” (58). Long has worked on a lot of the plays with large companies and in large houses but feels it would be exhilarating to tackle a play with a small company in a black box with the audience so close to you, freeing you to perform epic poetry even in a whisper (59).

Jonathan McGuinness uses the time before rehearsal to keep reminding himself “of the scope and the sense of the whole play, and what the story is”, for when you come to the rehearsal most of the work is about focusing “on your own character and your own scenes” (61). McGuinness describes a typical rehearsal process which begins with a read through, then a focus on design elements, and then a period of experimentation. McGuinness succinctly condenses the main framework of the book: “When it comes down to methods and processes, I think almost all modern actors have been influenced by Stanislavski . . . it’s ingrained through training and experience: we all ask, ‘Why am I doing this?’ and . . . play objectives in some way” (62-6). There does arise the issue of subtext, as Stanislavski is so interested in what is not being said, whereas in Shakespeare subtext generally does not exist (63). McGuinness does not really approach the language technically, and if someone is doing verse well, as Hassell says, he is not really aware of it, as “iambic pentameter is a very natural kind of rhythm” (64). “Shakespeare was an actor, writing for other actors who he knew. You can really tell that when you work on it” (64). For McGuinness “99 percent of rehearsal is about being in the moment with the other actor” (64).

The actor Pippa Nixon likes to have “an idea of a history of who that character might be”, going back to the original source, “before building upon someone’s conceptual ‘take’ on the piece” (66). Nixon refers to the joy she has in working with Hassell, both being “responsive and brave in the choices” they make: “So it is very playful and lots of discoveries are made through ‘play’” (67). For Nixon actions are not about playing a generic word, “it’s about connecting to words that are deeply rooted in the soul of the character. In her three seasons at the Globe she worked with the “wonderful” and “brilliant” Giles Block on verse rules, which she marks comprehensively through her script, but she is finally not a verse fundamentalist as it “has to be about the truth more than the technique” (68). She does not want to be “strictly obedient to the verse, at the expense of investing in the character” (68). Nixon also uses the Mike Alfreds lists, though she attributes them to Katie Mitchell, who must have also adapted this Stanislavski technique. “You do all this work in the rehearsal room, so that in the performance the words can have a life of their own . . . a magic happens where you are completely in ‘flow’ and in the moment . . . That’s what we are in the business for” (70).

Juliet Rylance embarks on “a journey of discovery, with only the script” as her map (71). A great challenge is Shakespeare’s masterful use of blank verse and prose, antitheses and metaphor. Rylance reminds herself that the iamb is the simple rhythm of a heartbeat – “Five heartbeats to a line” (72). Shakespeare’s text is a great symphony “a series of notes, pitches and rhythms” (72), and like musicians,

actors need to learn the score by “repetition with diligence and precision” and “painstaking practice” (72). Finally, “alchemy is created from the fusion of complete dedication and devotion to form, with a complete abandonment in the moment, whatever it may bring” (73). Rylance loved studying Stanislavski at RADA and it is integral to her process. Finally, she lists her teaching influences, including Jaq Bessell and Tim Carroll, again highlighting the coterie of artists that forms the nucleus of the book.

Jonathan Slinger makes sure he understands every syllable of the text in a “very rigorous, very ruthless” way, believing it is when an actor does not know what they are saying that leads to audiences feeling they do not understand Shakespeare. Greg Doran (who also contributes an interview) devotes the first two weeks of rehearsal to text work, “making sure everybody understands every single word” (77). Michael Boyd gets the scene up on its feet more quickly, but still is devoted to working out the intricacies of what the text means. Slinger does not routinely use actioning on every line, but he will turn to that method if something isn’t working. For him the actions, objectives and super-objectives are inherent “in a good piece of writing, and that’s why Shakespeare’s so great to play” (77). Slinger believes that working at the Globe reveals the importance of interaction with an audience and “is the only theatre in the UK which fosters that kind of immediate response” (80).

Emily Taaffe, reminiscent of the first interview, reads the play entirely from her character’s perspective. Feeling this is her responsibility to make the play “as much about my character as possible”, and that, if every actor does that, “all the various points of view join up together” (83). It is then “the director’s job to make sure all the strands come together in a harmonious way” (83). Taaffe also thinks about all the parts of the story that we don’t see. Playing Miranda to Slinger’s Prospero, they talked about what life was like on the island, how long ago the rape had happened and if it was a rape (83). Taaffe will often write a biography of her character and write out her backstory. She then uses Stanislavski’s technique of answering seven questions (like the Alfreds lists) – “Who am I? Where am I? What time is it? What do I want? Why do I want it? How will I get what I want? What must I overcome to get what I want?” (84). Taaffe believes “verse-work can be a really crippling thing if you become too focussed on it . . . because it’s not an academic exercise, it’s a living, breathing thing and I think if you become ‘wedded’ to *that* . . . you risk becoming a slave to it” (86).

The last contributor in the “Cast” section is Yolanda Vazquez, who is both an actor and director. Vazquez finds the visceral nature of the text in the body and mouth distinctive. She creates a vivid film of the play in her mind: “I read in pictures” (87). She goes through the whole text for meaning, then reads it several times to compile the “lists” for her character and any character closely associated to her character. This collation of “facts” helps to discover afresh what may have been inherited in a preconceived notion of the play. She does historical research and relies on techniques she learned at Drama Centre which has become a sort of hybrid and could be described as “Stanislavski via Yat Malmgren and Laban, with a pinch of Christopher Fettes. I also use large doses of Cicely Berry, Giles Block and Tim Carroll . . . added to this a strong fragrance of subversion from Robert David

MacDonald and Philip Prowse . . . all mixed in with my own imagination!" (88).

The first of the "Creatives" is Mike Alfreds, a director who has already been mentioned several times as highly influential. This is one of the longest interviews in the book and treats on how to perform and stage Shakespeare well. As a child he found performances of Shakespeare plays incomprehensible, so when he became a professional director, he steered clear of Shakespeare, not wishing to display his ignorance and stupidity (89). The irony is the *impenetrable* language is now the "fount and basis of the work from which all else springs" (91). This means looking closely at the words, discovering "the thoughts that bring them into existence" (91). But the torture of going to Shakespeare as a child has persisted into old age, and it is not because the text is incomprehensible, it is because "most actors playing Shakespeare don't really know what they are talking about" (92), and when they speak there is little evidence of them thinking. "They have failed to make Shakespeare's Language their own"; this is bad acting, and direction that is bent on imposing concepts that do not arise from the text (93). Shakespeare's characters "live on the word . . . For them language is tangible; it is dangerous, fleshy, corporeal" (94). Alfreds asserts there is virtually no subtext with verse in Shakespeare: "Characters say what they mean" (94). Again, he uses the idea of the iamb as a heartbeat. Prose, however, is used to dissemble: "Characters use prose to cover what they really intend" (94). (After criticising a lack in the industry of scrutinising language closely, this is an inaccurate generalisation: consider Shylock's "Hath a Jew not eyes"). Alfreds states Shakespeare's clowns and fools all speak in prose (94). (This is again inaccurate — the fool in *Lear*, for example, speaks in octosyllabic verse, tetrameter, and common meter. Here we see a characteristic of the book, which is capturing artists' thoughts, unnecessarily adulterated by adherence to academic fact.) Alfreds gives sound advice and in-depth analysis of how actors should speak verse and sustain thought through the enjambment, in a world increasingly reduced to sound bites and acronyms (95-9). Unlike the actors who intentionally try to make verse sound like prose, Alfreds states, "it's lazy and reductive to treat verse as if it were prose. Attempts to make the language sound natural by a sort of casual delivery remove its passion and its drive. The actor's job should be to convince us that a heightened form of speaking is utterly natural" (100). Alfreds concludes that it is hard work and specificity that will release the text: "working on Shakespeare requires immense rigour. Only through discipline can actors achieve any creative freedom. Approximation and generalization are deadly. Accuracy and specificity lead to life" (101).

The second interview in the "Creatives" section is director Tim Carroll, already mentioned many times as an inspiration and influence. Here he tells us in his own words how he approaches the text, imagining how it would be performed in the early modern period. The beauty of experimenting with original practice means "you find yourself picturing something completely different from any version of the play you've ever seen" (102). He finds it refreshing to read academics, such as Jan Knott and Northrop Frye, who are unpolled by the practical needs of staging in their analysis and can imagine things in "a very irresponsible way" (103). Carroll believes it is important to respect a distinction between a director of Shakespeare and a literary critic of Shakespeare, challenging "the assumption that literary crit-

ics of Shakespeare *need* to take performance into account” (102). Carroll works from the First Folio rather than the more problematic edited versions. He identifies as belonging to the “Peter Hall tradition and the Peter Brook tradition”; verse is fascistic and rigorous and rehearsal exercises are about spontaneity and playfulness (102). “Play’ is the word, that’s the whole point” (102). He does not get hung up on a misdirected notion of “suspension of disbelief” associated with Stanislavski, but simply permits an “emotional engagement to arise informally”, playing, as it were, the game of *Hamlet*, rehearsing or jamming like a troop of musicians (105). He does not give line readings but line instructions – do not stress a word not in a stressed position. Carroll has three simple rules for rehearsal: “1. We mustn’t ever go too long without practising the verse, like doing scales. 2. We mustn’t ever go too long without checking that we know what the language means. 3. We mustn’t ever go too long without talking about actions” (105). Inspired by Alfreds’ book *Different Every Night* Carroll set-up The Factory “which leaves the actors no choice but to do it differently . . . by responding to different ‘givens’ every night . . . The goal is to get better and better at playing whatever happens on that night, in whatever space, with whatever cast, with whatever objects the audience have brought with them. I think the way The Factory works may be unique” (107-8).

The third interview is from designer Bunny Christie, who finds the best thing about working with Shakespeare is “how free you can be”, and that in the UK “we can happily be quite irreverent” in a way that a Pinter, Beckett or new play would not support (109). You can design Shakespeare several times over without repetition. For design, the style of language does not make a specific difference to Christie’s process, but what is what’s being said does. Christie breaks down the play scene by scene and discusses with the director which world to set it in: “Often that’s contemporary” (109). He creates a model of the theatre in rough white card, with visual and mood references, concerned with working out how to get from scene to scene and “orchestrating the whole evening” (110). Christie also details how the director and design team spend months in development long before the rehearsals. This standard main-stage practice differs from the more experimental work of Carroll and Alfreds, concerned with immediacy and lack of conceptual technological design. Christie sees the role of designer as “production designer, leading on the whole visual look and effect of the piece” (110).

Geraldine Collinge, as director of events and exhibitions at the RSC, declares her job is about “change: changing the artists, audiences and communities the RSC welcomes and works with” (111). She is concerned with “animating the building”, making sure it “belongs at the heart of the town”, “as well as having a national and international profile” (111). Collinge uses the metaphors of the thrust stage and the online digital relationship with Shakespeare for “breaking down traditional barriers, bringing people closer to Shakespeare, changing people’s perceptions of Shakespeare and changing their relationship to Shakespeare (112). Her work is about access, but also changing the kind of artists commissioned, which will ultimately influence the work on the stage by “changing from within” (113). She notes that the “RSC’s history has been for the most part shaped by succession of famous artistic directors” and she wants “to do more projects like Open Stages” (113) (though at the time of writing this review it is difficult to see many of those chang-

es yet taking shape).

The next contribution is from Michael Corbridge, voice coach, who, after hearing so much on the importance of being technically capable of speaking Shakespeare's verse, gives a valuable insight into the process of training the vocal instrument. Corbridge makes a profile of each actor's physicality and how they make sound, working "specifically on an actors voice, colouring the tone, expanding the note range or reducing tension" (114). He has "one-to-one sessions structured into rehearsals" (115). Shakespeare "works with stunning soundscapes" and so Corbridge encourages actors in a "total freedom to investigate the sounds" where "each word becomes its own little architectural sound parcel" (115). For performance at the RSC Corbridge has to "power up the voice and find the stamina required to handle these big spaces" (116). He is careful not to use voice work as a way of directing the actor, he must encourage the voices to work for the benefit of the directorial vision (116). He ends his reflection on the pure magic of Shakespeare that is produced when "you trust the sounds, words, the language, and allow them in, fully and unconditionally" (117).

Gregory Doran, long time Artistic Director of the RSC, immediately launches into the tension between doing something with Shakespeare and simply doing Shakespeare. Having the confidence to trust the plays, Doran's starting point is not how to do them differently, but an exploration which will, by virtue of its being done by different actors and artists, always end up different (117-18). His methodology with text is to do a series of workshops, again considering the iambic pentameter as a heartbeat through the play. He spends a lot of time on text, the company reading around the table, getting each actor to translate their lines into their own words, ensuring personal and group clarity (122). The RSC allows the rehearsal time to explore the text and discover things collectively, permitting "those ideas to percolate over time, rather than having to rush those decisions into production" (122). Doran is sensitive to not restricting but releasing actors with different needs to realise their performance (123). There is a danger to chucking out a previous generation's work – Barton, Hall and Berry, who dug out politics and wit, violence and richness in the language. "I have learnt to allow the subject of the play to speak to you, and to trust it to do more work than you often allow it to do. Somehow when you get actors and an audience and you trust the language, it'll work" (122).

Polly Findlay takes us through her working on *As You Like It* to elucidate three things she would probably do when working on Shakespeare. Firstly, she distils the play into a single sentence: "a lonely Princess obsessed with self-control, then to let go, and in doing so makes the world a better place", which Findlay notes, laughingly, is actually the same plot as Disney's *Frozen* (124). Secondly, inspired by Rupert Gould, she finds a single adjective to describe the way she wants the audience to feel, walking out of the theatre: "delighted" (124). Thirdly, Findlay decides what the gesture of the play is, its social function at the time it was written, and how best to replicate that in contemporary context (126) (unlike Doran). Rather than replicating the conditions of original performance, Findlay attempts to replicate the "sensitivity", which "feels completely respectful of the original gesture" (127). In *As You Like It*, with its sketches of scenes, progression having to do with char-

acter rather than plot, she replicated the energy of a modern sketch show, splicing scenes and borrowing bits from other Shakespearean comedies, to “make the whole thing feel faster, funnier and quicker-cut” (127). Like Doran, Findlay gets her cast to paraphrase their text, which remediates “playing the poetry rather than the jaggedness of the thoughts underneath” (129).

Lindsay Kemp, born in 1938, lost his father in the war, and made his debut dancing for his neighbours in air-raid shelters. Kemp takes us through his theatrical roots, influences and early career breaks. He reminds us that actors these days are “rarely equipped with all the performer’s skills” that once saw Robert Helpman playing Hamlet in Stratford-upon-Avon and afterwards dancing it at Covent Garden (134). Kemp also laments that few performers seem interested in the history of their art form: “if you don’t explore what went before, and learn from that, the present lacks depth and perspective. We see so much today what is superficial, without roots in the heart, or passion. Shakespeare knew what had gone before, and how little human nature changes over the centuries” (134-5).

The American director, Ethan McSweeney, declares, like many of the contributors, that the “beauty of Shakespeare’s language is that it is so informative and so rich that it allows you to mine every line from multiple layers of meaning” (135). Theatre artists, by speaking the text multiple times, exceed the experience of the average member of the public, who only gets to perceive it on the page. McSweeney’s first job was as assistant director at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC, where, he discovered that “Shakespeare is a language” (136). McSweeney quotes the Romanian director Liviu Ciulei: “we have a lot to do, and very little time, so we must work slowly” (138). In rehearsal he slows down, working on the smallest units, “moment to moment”, “thought to thought” (137). He spends a week around the table interrogating the text (138). He takes his cue from Hamlet’s advice to the players to speak clearly, speak directly and do not do too much. Like Doran, he notes “there is a big difference between doing something *to* a play and doing something *with* a play” (139). McSweeney is like a conductor who brings out different elements of a symphony without needing a concept (139). In his experience touring his work internationally, Shakespeare truly is universal “and understands so much about our common humanity” (141). Most importantly, McSweeney recalls that Shakespeare was a man of the theatre, working to deadlines, trying to solve staging issues that we still grapple with, writing to the strengths of his company, aspiring for commercial success: “there’s a strong, beating heart of a really practical person confronting eminently practical problems . . . He was a human being, and that’s why you ultimately learn most about Shakespeare by looking within yourself” (143).

The next reflection is Bruce O’Neil’s, head of music at the RSC. Music is an extremely important topic since “Shakespeare plays are stuffed with music”. There is much diegetic, central music, but because of a contemporary accustomedness to cinematic underscoring, O’Neil discusses what “other music might be added by the overall directorial concept” (144). Sometimes form needs modifying, while the function remains the same, such as deciding a particular sound to herald in an army within the design. O’Neil discusses music’s “inductive quality” and how our “lizard brain” reacts to music in a way that “is purely about survival” (145-6), so af-

fecting the audience on a visceral level can be very useful for a director. O'Neil considers the philosophical and psychological aspects, remarking on the Renaissance faith in the music of the spheres, Pythagorean music theory, and how humans respond to the pentatonic scale and its harmonics. Sonnet 8 discusses how strings vibrate in sympathetic resonance, and for O'Neil this opens up many metaphors, resonating with the universe itself and it is why the plays are full of music "because it was a fascination of Shakespeare's, and could be seen as a kind of magic" (147-8).

The famed designer Tom Piper contributes the next interview. Piper begins by reading the play, trying to trick himself it is the first time, not getting bogged down by scholastic stuff, but being aware of prior knowledge from seminal productions "that one cannot escape consciousness of", sketching down moments that inspire him, often completely impractical, but planting "a seed that might bear practical fruit later on" (148). He is not interested in creating a giant expensive painting to be inhabited by actors, but using design as a sculptural medium and creating something that "fulfils its purpose based on the way the actors change it" (149). Piper discusses the big issue and how to set and stage a play and deciding period, collapsing the idea of differing camps: "No matter how you try to avoid it, basically every act of putting a Shakespeare play on stage is an interpretation, even if you decide that the actors are just going to stand there in the ordinary clothes" (150). He also exposes how our own time always infuses design, even if we are setting something historically, and if one is conscious of this, it is possible to play with these layers (151). Piper elucidates the challenges of working with the thrust space, which is less controllable than a proscenium arch, with differing perspectives, working like a sculptor, where part of your creation is the unknown element and variability of the audience who will make up part of what is looked at: "the design is in the community of the space that is one room and therefore, we can share it" (151-2). A policy he has inherited from Michael Boyd "is an avoidance of scene changes . . . in the plays one idea impacts on the next idea", the previous scene as a kind of lingering ghost (154). Piper's work developed by working with Peter Brook on *La Tempête*, seeing how the actors could inform design, and how they were always "running behind the imagination of the actors" (155). Brook always, even with his great experience, would distil an idea to its essence, to create something "much simpler and much more beautiful . . . an image that is witty, that is moving and, that actually is fulfilled by the actors". In all his work Piper tries to remember "that there is going to be an actor at the heart of it" (156).

The director Renato Rocha approaches Shakespeare by "identifying how this story is still relevant nowadays . . . finding the contemporary parallels in Shakespeare's works" (156). This is the only interview that strays out of the well-defined coterie, even though Rocha is working with them. It is slightly out of place, and either draws attention to a lot the book has to necessarily miss about different approaches to Shakespeare performance, or else it satisfies some need for a different voice, adding a dissonant note among the dominant ones. Rocha discusses the passing need to make real difference with art during the dictatorship in Brazil, but for Rocha this is still a burning question, not being preoccupied with being the best artist, but using art "to comment on people in society" (156). Rocha created a

theatre company in Brazil *Nôs do Morro*, where, like artists in Japan, there was no distinction between the different disciplines, defining them not as actors but artists (157). Cicely Berry invited *Nôs do Morro* to come to the UK to take part in the Complete Works festival. Deborah Shaw also invited Rocha to work with young people as part of the World Shakespeare Festival and the LIFT festival. He used “all media and all skills to actually create more accessible and universal piece of theatre that doesn’t concern itself so much with narrative”, doing something “that they really wanted to speak about, that they really connected with” (158) Rocha believes “an image on stage can touch someone more profoundly than a page of text”. Once he met Peter Brook who stated what Rocha continues to practice: “research needs to be tested in practice; how essential it is that our questions echo and reverberate fully, and overflow into an image of the wider world, making visible the invisible” (160).

Claire Van Kampen, senior research fellow and founding director of music at Shakespeare’s Globe, understands the needs of the spaces Shakespeare wrote for: “the music you write for a Shakespeare play has to be inclusive, and it has to be understood by the audience, on a deep, experiential level” (161). Kampen also opened the Sam Wanamaker theatre and found, even with a roof, the spaces were not all that different: “you’re not telling the audience something, you’re not showing them something, you’re not doing something *for* them, but doing something *with* them and experiencing the play together” (162). This is the reason Kampen is wary of doing anything that occludes Shakespeare’s text and makes sure the musical choices are grounded and understood by the audience (162). She tries to serve the play rather than the director. Music can help transition scenes simply, but “what you *don’t* need is a lot of emotional description. You don’t need *any* of that, in a play . . . ever!” (163) It causes some tension with directors wanting to underscore monologues, which, unlike O’Neil, Kampen thinks only creates generalities and emotional washes rather than “let[ting] the words do it” (163). Because of film culture, Kampen thinks music has been rendered too subservient or intrusive, and “has not yet been given its proper place in Shakespeare, as part of the narrative culture of the play” (165). Kampen knows there is no need “to slather on music all over the text in order to tell a modern audience what is going on”, and is concerned that we do not show more respect for the plays as written, but that we are stuck in culture of critics coming to see what will be done with a play. “Sadly, these conceits and interventions just put up barriers between actor and the audience . . . These days, my instincts are to have absolutely no music at all once the play has begun, other than what is specified in the texts themselves. Why would you need it?” (166).

The final contribution is from Sian Williams, a choreographer, who begins by working with a director to understand their vision of the play and what they want, ascertaining if dance within the play is conventional or something more modern. Working with Dominic Dromgoole on *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Williams enjoyed choreographing some evocative linking-scenes, which he wanted danced (this contrasts with Kampen’s resistance to superimposing unscripted music). At the end of every Globe production, based on a belief in its historical accuracy, there is a jig. Williams has worked on many of them, which provide a catharsis, a celebra-

tion, a crescendo, and “take in all of the audience and acknowledge them all, in this unique space” (170). She always works with her experience and ideas, in “line with what the director is hoping to see” (171). The actors do not need to look like experts, but it is crucial that “they own the dance they are doing . . . a gift that welcomes and inspires the audience” (172). The interview is concluded by Williams’ final sentiment, which fittingly summarises all the contributions, that whether with verse or with movement patterns, “using structure to find freedom is always exciting” (174).

In the conclusion Bessell wonders *if* the way we make Shakespeare today is changing, and how slow the evolution appears to be in the larger Shakespeare-producing houses (175). Although Bessell affirms that this does not imply stagnation, she reiterates that it does underpin the disjunction between literary analysis, which responds to plays read in “constantly changing political, cultural, social context”, and creative practice, which primarily maintains a Stanislavskian system (176). She summarises the two traditions of “heightened language” and “naturalism”, which came together with the John Barton legacy of “playing Shakespeare” (1984), and still holds popular sway, having established itself as a pedagogic standard in the industry. Bessell finally hopes the collection of interviews shows “the ‘living tradition’ of Shakespeare in action in a celebratory light” (196).

Bessell has composed the work carefully as a snapshot of contemporary practice, informative in the detailing of “compositional elements of Shakespearean performance” (7). Although the gaze is sometimes inward and backward looking, it is overall an enriching contribution to the academic study of a particular generation of Shakespearean theatrical practitioners. An engaging resource for anyone with an interest in Shakespeare performance, the politics of who can speak Shakespeare, how to speak Shakespeare, whom Shakespeare belongs to, and the alchemic transformation from words on a page, to actions on a stage.

Bessell very aptly concludes her introduction with the words of John Harrell:

I know nothing about Shakespeare. I think it’s important to reassert that every now and then, because humility in the face of such an artist totality is indispensable. What I believe about Shakespeare is always subject to revision. His plays continue to confound us all, which is why we continue to produce and to write about him (39-40).

Hear, hear!

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ROBERT SAWYER\*

## “Fine Young Cannibals”

**Review of *Eating Shakespeare: Cultural Anthropology as Global Methodology*, edited by Anne Sophie Refskou, Marcel Alvaro de Amorim, and Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho, London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, pp. 301**

### Abstract

Consistently interesting and excellently articulated, this volume of essays entitled *Eating Shakespeare* will reward scholars of Shakespeare time and again, specifically those who consider expansive global Shakespeares and ways of traversing the problematic ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ locales of Shakespearean performance. Fortunately, this form of critique also challenges the alleged divide between subaltern identity and more traditional, European forms of subjectivity. Most importantly, this collection of essays breaks new ground in ways to theorize, articulate, and put into practice innovative forms of Shakespearean appropriation using the notion of anthropophagy, or cannibalism, as a central metaphor. Whether one is a Shakespeare scholar, a theatre practitioner, a creative writer, or simply an anthropology enthusiast, this book contains enough nutrients to sustain multiple explorations not only from the alleged ‘periphery’ of Global Shakespeares but also productions closer to home in the ‘centre’ of Shakespeare studies.

KEYWORDS: Shakespeare; Cannibalist Manifesto; Oswald Andrade; Cultural Anthropophagy; subaltern identity; Global Shakespeare; Hamlet; Othello; Ophelia; Tribe Arts

In this time of global pandemic and food shortages, a book entitled *Eating Shakespeare* seems particularly apt. With keywords such as ‘digestion’, ‘nutrition’, ‘performance’, and ‘ritual’ scattered throughout, at first glance such a volume might appear in line with the revelry portrayed by Sir Toby Belch and others in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. However, the sustenance in this collection is not only more sustaining than a mere celebration consisting of cakes and ale, but the essays also break new ground in ways to theorize, articulate, and put into practice innovative forms of Shakespearean appropriation using the notion of anthropophagy, or cannibalism, as a central metaphor. Consistently interesting and excellently articulated, Shakespeare scholars will return to this book time and again to consider expansive global Shakespeares and ways of traversing the problematic ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ locales of Shakespearean performance; fortunately, this form of critique

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also challenges the alleged divide between subaltern identity and more traditional, European forms of subjectivity.

Following a forward by David Schalkwyk, and the splendid introduction by the editors, the book's twelve chapters (some called "Conversations") are carefully divided into four sections, "Shakespeare and Cultural Anthropophagy in practice"; "global conversations and intricate intersections"; "insiders and outsiders"; and "re-cultivating and re-disseminating Shakespeare beyond the institution"; Alfredo Michel Modenessi contributes a succinct afterword. While space limits me from considering and commenting on all the chapters, I want to highlight the essays (or interviews/conversations) I found most valuable.

The introduction should be required reading to anyone interested in Shakespearean appropriation more generally, or the topic of Brazilian modernist Shakespeare productions more specifically. Using Oswald de Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto", first published in 1928 as a starting point, the book employs his declaration "I am only concerned with what is not mine" as central to twentieth-century artistic output in Brazil. This "Manifesto", and this particular quote, as the editors point out, is "an approach which is taken up and explored repeatedly throughout" their book (6). Moreover, they explain how valuable such an approach can be in "negotiat[ing] a new cultural identity by celebrating" Brazil's "pre-colonial indigenous past" in a way that allows the cannibal to be transformed into a "newly heroic figure"; in other words, "European cultural elements and influences were not simply to be rejected but to be subsumed – eaten – self-consciously and irreverently while mixed with native and contemporary elements" (5). Such hybridity, of course has been explored by Homi Bhabha's notion of 'Third Space' (1994), but while his concern seems more spatially external, it's hard to imagine a more metaphorical internal image than that of 'consuming' or 'eating' as a revitalizing force for creativity and transformation, among other things.

Applying this idea more directly to Shakespeare, the editors point out references to or acts of eating one's own species – "like the banquet that accelerates the violence of *Titus*" or Othello's tales of "the cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi" (1.3.144-145)<sup>1</sup> – which Desdemona finds so fascinating, clearly present in Shakespeare's own world and work. The most prominent of these is found in the character of Caliban in *The Tempest*, whose name may or may not be an anagram of 'cannibal'. What we do know, however, is that when Michel de Montaigne wrote his famous essay "Of Cannibals", it was penned, according to Rogério Dudasz, when he "met three newly arrived" members of the Tupinambá tribe, a "branch of the Tupi [indigenous peoples] that was hostile to the Portuguese, who claimed ownership of the land" in Brazil, through their colonial exploits (Dudasz 2006: 1). Montaigne proclaimed that the tribe represented "the triumph of nature over art", in the form of the noble savage, and as a corollary, claimed that cannibalism "was motivated by a sort of noble revenge" (2). During the Brazilian *modernismo* movement of the 1920s, birthed in part by de Andrade's "Manifesto" but also incorporating elements of the Dada art movement, Brazilian artists used anthropophagy as a symbol of how they should not merely 'mimic' European modernists, but in-

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William (2006), *Othello*, ed. By Michael Neill, London: Oxford University Press.

stead should see their productions as 'a source of nutrients'; in short, the Brazilians could "devour what was useful in the [Western] civilization, while maintaining their natural 'primitive' state" (Budasz 2006: 2). In that sense, it comes as no surprise that one of the most cited lines in Andrade's proclamation is one which references both European and Brazilian culture with a parodic twist: "Tupi or not tupi, that is the question" (Andrade 1928: 38).

In "Chapter 1" entitled "We are all Cannibals", the Brazilian poet and translator Geraldo Carneiro describes Shakespeare as a fellow cannibal, whose writing complicates the notion of "origin and departure and instead serves as a link in a great chain of digestion and re-creation" (2). This "chain of digestion" of Shakespeare consists of many links, according to Carneiro: "Shakespeare probably preferred to concentrate his efforts on rewriting them with better words – words cannibalized from everything he saw and read", and then we as auditors "devoured Shakespeare in our own way, as he had always done with his forebears", meaning his literary predecessors (28). Indeed, as Carneiro argues, Caliban's speeches seem to "prefigure the anti-colonial attitude of the 'Cannibalist Manifesto' published over 300 years later, and the perspective of all the peripheries of empires since time immemorial" (35).

Cristiane Busato Smith's essay "Cannibalizing *Hamlet* in Brazil: Ophelia meets Oxum" (Chapter 4) is another important essay in the volume's first section. While Shakespeare scholars are all aware that "the lyrical images that Gertrude employs to describe the heroine's watery death", have inspired painters and poets "to promote Ophelia to the status of an archetypal model as well as a cult heroine" (93), Smith goes on to note that "Ophelia's beauty obliterates the horror of her death" and she concedes that A. C. Bradley made a similar observation at the dawn of the twentieth century (93). However, Smith also suggests that Ophelia's story mirrors the Brazilian goddess *Oxum*, "the Afro-Brazilian *orixá* of the waters", an original and interesting transformation of the *Hamlet* story.

Smith also marshals another Brazilian source when she quotes from Silvano Santiago's term "space in-between", which he used to describe the "Latin American cultural condition that legitimizes the incorporation of the hegemonic culture into Latin American art" a move which displaces "source and influence, original and copy" (95). Applying this idea to Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning, Smith convincingly argues that "[t]hrough her poetic words, Gertrude breaks the linearity of the revenge plot that structures Shakespeare's tragedy and opens up a singularly poetic space", one that connects the play's only two female characters (101). Not unlike the uniting of the Old World of Europe and the New World of Brazil, this process of assimilation and asymmetry could equally be considered an act of cultural anthropology.

Of the essays in Part Two, I found Marcel Alvaro De Amorim's "Devouring Shakespeare translocally" particularly intriguing since I have also considered local versus global Shakespeare (Sawyer 2019). Perhaps the central question de Amorim raises is the following: "How can the anthropophagic perspective be viewed as a means of conceiving Shakespeare as a translocal author, at once part and parcel of various natures?" (136). He suggests that we accept "the existence of many different Shakespeares, each one apprehended through/by the various centres of inten-

tionality that enact, translate and adapt the Bard by bringing their own uniqueness into the equation" (137).

De Amorim's reading relating to identity itself adds that "Cultural Anthropophagy performs a radical existential deconstruction: the 'I' and the 'Other' become recognizable not as a third, ontologically definable element", but one of hybridity and multiplicity (148). Even more specifically, this concept also applies to globalized performances: "a Shakespearean staging, translation or adaptation brought about within specific geographical, social and political spaced may be understood as part of an ontology of multiple interchangeable natures", which energizes rather than subdues the action on stage (146).

As de Amorim explains, "[w]hen we anthropophagically devour Shakespeare, we are in fact refusing the project of our own and the Other's autonomous existence; we are attempting to produce intelligibility about the point of intersection between the multiple natures that compose us" (148). Indeed, he continues, we need to strive to accomplish this deed, in part because Shakespeare "possess[es] such awe-inspiring qualities that it becomes necessary to capture and devour him", and, if done successfully, the final dramatic result is that "Shakespeare's qualities become an indistinguishable part of us, as we become parts of him" (148-149). In other words, in such productions, the local and global, the self and 'other' are collapsed and resist any attempt to impose a binary structure on identity or performance.

Anne Sophie Refskou's interview with Mark Thornton Burnett on the topic of "Past and present trajectories for 'Global Shakespeare'" in Chapter 7 continues this significant discussion. First Refskou questions Burnett about the "extent" that "Global Shakespeare has critically addressed globalization and globalization theories," including "economics and capitalism" (155). Burnett's response, I believe, is both crucial and cautionary: even though there is often "an assumption that Shakespeare is a non-fluctuating barometer of cultural capital", he begins, if one "drill[s] down a little into the various examples, a much more diffuse picture emerges" (156). "What this means", however, "is that whenever we are considering 'Global Shakespeare' we are dealing with an inevitably skewed and partial sample" (156). He, in fact, advocates for a position that is "less about locating Shakespearean cultural production in different parts of the world in order to describe and analyse it locally", insisting instead that we should focus more "on the economic and political links between locations" (157-158).

He also asserts that it is important to resist any assumption that Global Shakespeare is a type of 'other', so he, too, embraces Andrade's "Manifesto" (159), and specifically the ways in which anthropophagy "gesture[s] in multiple directions, both inwards and outwards, both locally and globally, both backwards in time and forwards in time" (160). A second point he concurs with in the "Manifesto" is that the adaptation process is symbiotic, particularly when it denounces "the sort of historical view that the New World was 'discovered' and has been trying to catch up ever since" (162).

A third way to critique or analyze Global Shakespeare, Burnett concludes, and one which seems particularly fruitful, is to emphasize the connection "between critics and creatives" (165). Perhaps, he continues, such a "mutual cannibalism of

cultural elements . . . can lead to a uniquely creative product or experience" (167). He also reminds us that "Global Shakespeare can be said to have begun as a creative practice and perhaps it needs to continue looking at itself from a very practical perspective to develop further" (165). One personal example demonstrates this concept. When I saw the Russian version of a *Midsummer Night's Dream* at the RSC in 2012, it veered far from the standard plot of Shakespeare's play, but was a comic production that the audience appreciated and applauded from start to finish. The genuine, and often boisterous, laughter in the Swan Theatre that night seems to me to be exactly the type of creative mischief Burnett promotes. As Refskou succinctly summarizes: Cultural Anthropophagy should "travel widely and make connections on the way: to free [these] way[s] of thinking about Shakespeare from overly specific local constraints" (169).

The first essay in "Part Three" expands notion that Cultural Anthropophagy should "travel widely", even in a reverse direction, to inhabitants of the Old World. After declaring that "the lack of attention given to Shakespeare produced by visible minorities in Britain is inadmissible" (177), Varsha Panjwani attempts to amend this by superbly weaving anthropophagical theory with interviews of Brasian (her term for British-Asians, which suggests an identity that is not "neatly separated with a gap" but one that "bleed[s] into each other") Shakespeare directors in the UK, an idea which certainly syncs with the notions of digestion, sustenance, and creative performance practices. In Chapter 8, titled, "'Tupi or not Tupi': conversations with Brasian Shakespeare directors" (175), she demonstrates how the study of Brasian Shakespeare also requires a theoretical model that, "instead of simplifying and distancing, allows for slipping between palimpsest of cultural identities" (179). And, more to the point, she argues that we must remember one of the most important distinctions in this book:

The cannibal does not wish to remain aloof and separated from the Other and instead strives to erase boundaries between self and the Other by devouring the Other. Thus, one of the advantages of this theoretical standpoint is that it allows for seeing modern cultures as based on encounters with each other rather than perceiving them as sealed off from one another. (180)

When Samir Bhamra, artistic director of the theatrical group *Phizzical*, explained to her how he had become "interested in exploring the relationship between a Catholic Romeo and a Muslim Laila" for his production of *Romeo and Juliet* (182), Panjwani observed that the company was "not trying to forcibly fuse things and signifiers; they are simply representing the way they think and this way of thinking, in turn, illuminates parallels between texts across cultures and countries" (187). Even more specifically, Bhamra refers to the performers in his troupe as possessing "layered identities", such as his own, which he details: "I've had to grow up being Kenyan, Indian, British Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, [and] Christian" (187-188). So his productions, he admits, may combine elements of "the indie Brit Pop scene, with Bollywood and *Friends*", the long-running U.S. sitcom.

In Panjwani's second interview, this time with Samran and Tajpal Rathore, the directors of the acting troupe *Tribe Arts*, they first explain how the name of their group suggests both "community and combativeness" (196). Their productions,

they point out, focus on a different type of hybridity, by “combin[ing] characters from different Shakespeare plays in a fictional space and let[ing] them have debates” on important issues (190). In one instance, for example, they combined elements of *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, and by locating these on the same stage, at the same time, the combination “added to [their] understanding of the connections between” the two dramas that are both “about brotherly bonds being broken for political power” (190); I would simply add that both plays also demonstrate ‘community’ and ‘combativeness’ inherent in the name of their troupe. “Eating Shakespeare aggressively”, Panjwani concludes, “allows these directors to rejuvenate both Shakespeare and Brasian culture”, by placing “canonical Shakespeare in a creative relationship with language, theatrical forms and literatures from around the world”, a move that may also “invigorate the practice and study of Global Shakespeare” (198).

In Chapter 9, “‘Not where he eats, but where he is eaten’: rethinking otherness in (British) Global Shakespeare”, Anne Sophie Refskou raises the question about how to “‘write back’ from within” (203), especially when an “artistic director’s multicultural ethos is not necessarily understood and appreciated by venue managers, marketers or critics as anything other than ‘novelty Shakespeare’” (qtd. in Islam 2017: 17) (204). Moreover, Refskou suggests that Cultural Anthropophagy “offers an alternative to the concept of multiculturalism – which has often been rightly criticized for ultimately furthering segregation – in part because performative strategies can be self-conscious and culturally affirmative, and in addition to mimicking the colonizer, they can self-mimic, self-positioning as an indigenous cannibal while simultaneously appropriating European cultural forms” (qtd in Islam 2011: 172). In fact, Refskou interestingly suggests that “this feature of Cultural Anthropophagy is not far removed from the notion that indigenous ‘performances’ of cannibalism [which were] designed to frighten colonial invaders” (207).

Eleine Ng considers similar transformative moments in Chapter 10, specifically ones that might occur on a stage in Singapore. As she points out, it is possible to see the “interstitial space a ‘cultural orphan’ occupies” as one which “engenders potential, as cultural rootlessness leads to the possible reinvention of new identities based on intercultural plurality”; always in motion and rarely static, such a position “transverses and resides both outside and within particularized cultural and theatrical localities” (225).

In Part Four of the book, we encounter two essays which consider the institutions of the nation state vis-a-vis Shakespeare. The first essay by Aimara da Cunha Resende (Chapter 11) shows how Shakespeare’s works can be consumed, “devoured”, and digested in ways that help children in a rural area of Brazil to become “more responsible, socially conscious future citizens” (262). While on the surface we might be suspicious of such political deployment of the Bard, none of us would contest her accomplishments in teaching “nutrition” to her students. Focusing on the scene in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where Bottom “declares he prefers oats and hay to honey”, Resende uses this moment as a jumping off point to emphasize the “importance of vegetables in one’s diet, and the easy way to cultivate them in one’s own orchard” (262), literally connecting the digestion of Shakespeare’s words to the children’s own physical digestion and nutrition. While

Chapter 12 seems to work in an opposite way, by focusing on the "deinstitutionalization" of Shakespeare, it mainly points out that we "should be careful about thinking of Shakespeare in fixed terms", particularly ones presented to us by theatre, universities, schools along with the "common constructions of everyday life in the English-speaking world" (278), something that Resende's work with children also does, despite what seem to be differences in the methods they employ. Viniçius Mariano de Carvalho references work with juvenile offenders enacting Shakespeare to make a similar case: "those incarcerated individuals, whom we want to see as a prisoner or offender, can take themselves and us somewhere else" (279); indeed they can, if only for the length of the play, become someone else.

Whether one is a Shakespeare scholar, a theatre practitioner, a creative writer, or simply an anthropology enthusiast, this book contains enough nutrients to sustain multiple explorations not only from the alleged 'periphery' of Global Shakespeares but also productions closer to home in the 'centre' of Shakespeare studies. Moreover, this volume is a refreshing counter to the current crisis of global 'McTheatre' (for example *Cats*, *The Lion King* and *Mama Mia!*) productions in which the standardization of each one diminishes its 'immediacy', its 'uniqueness', and its "ability to respond to place and time" (Rebellato 41-2). Fortunately, the essays in this book offer many spicy alternatives to the stale theatrical fare offered by McTheatre productions.

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BARRY ALLEN SPENCE\*

**Beckett, Decadence, and the Art of Revisioning**  
**Review of Stanley E. Gontarski, *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 320**

Abstract

The recent collection of occasional pieces by renowned Beckett scholar Stanley Gontarski situates the Irish Modernist's life and work within the broader historical context of the cultural and intellectual trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly those trends which ran counter to bourgeois values and expectations. Within that context, he explores, among other subjects, the complex and varied forms of rewriting and revisioning central to the writer's creative process, the most important of which are realised in the writer-cum-theatre director's close involvement staging his dramatic works, whether for the boards, radio, television or film. Gontarski's friendship with Beckett often imbues the collection with the authority of an eyewitness, a privileged proximity always kept in service to meticulous scholarship.

KEYWORDS: theatre; Samuel Beckett; decadence; Barney Rosset; revisioning

"He is a man of extreme modesty, in spite of the obscenities with which he freely sprinkles his books."

Paris bookseller Adrienne Monnier on Samuel Beckett  
(Gontarski 2018: 23)

With *Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn*, Stanley E. Gontarski, one of the preeminent voices in Beckett studies, has produced an omnibus, drawing together thirteen previously published essays, many of which originated as plenary talks or conference papers, spanning the years 1986 to 2017, the lion's share produced in the last two decades. As thirteen chapters distributed in three parts – "A Professional Life", "A Theatrical Life", and "A Philosophical Life" – along with a sweeping introduction that contextualises Beckett's work within the tradition of the "decadent turn" of the nineteenth century as it emerged as one ground of twentieth century Modernism, these pieces shine an oftentimes rigorous and always interesting light on various aspects of Beckett's creative work and life.

Gontarski, the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English at Florida State University, is the author or editor of a long list of important critical works

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on Beckett, among them, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Indiana UP, 1985), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Volume II: *Endgame* (Grove, Faber & Faber, 1993), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett*, Volume IV: *The Shorter Plays* (Grove, Faber & Faber, 1999), *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1928-1989* (Grove Press, 1995), *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett: A Reader's Guide to His Life, Works, and Thought*, edited with C. J. Ackerley (Grove Press, 2004), *Beckett after Beckett*, edited with Anthony Uhlmann (University Press of Florida, 2006), *The Edinburgh Companion to Samuel Beckett and the Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), *Creative Involution: Bergson, Beckett, Deleuze* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), *Beckett Matters: Essays on Beckett's Late Modernism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), and *Beckett's 'Happy Days': A Manuscript Study*, 2nd, revised edition (The Ohio State University Press, 2017). This is only a partial list of his far-reaching interventions. In addition, from 1989 to 2008 he served as editor of *The Journal of Beckett Studies*. His work at the intersection of Beckett studies, Modernist studies, and performance studies is reflected in his general editorship of four book series: *Crosscurrents: Comparative Studies in European Literature and Philosophy* (University Press of Florida), *Anthem Studies in Theatre and Performance* (Anthem Press, London), *Other Becketts* (Edinburgh University Press), and *Understanding Philosophy / Understanding Modernism* (with Paul Ardoin and Laci Mattison) (Bloomsbury). For the last series, he is a co-editor of *Understanding Bergson*, *Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury Books, 2013) and *Understanding Deleuze*, *Understanding Modernism* (Bloomsbury Books, 2014).

As the brief foreword by Anthony Uhlmann stresses, Gontarski is someone with “skin in the game” (Gontarski 2018: xi). Like a number of Beckett critics—Ruby Cohn, James Knowlson, Herbert Blau, and Martha Fehsenfeld, to name but a few—he was something of a friend and creative interlocutor, not just a scholar, of Beckett's. The point is illustrated with the well-known story of how, as he was preparing a conference at Ohio State University in honour of Beckett's seventy-fifth birthday in 1981, Gontarski wrote Beckett asking whether he had a new play that could be performed on the occasion. This prompted Beckett to write his late play *Ohio Impromptu*. The sense of critical scholarship informed and shaped by personal connection and creative drive is evident throughout this volume. As Uhlmann notes, Gontarski's work has been an essential part of the “ecosystem that allowed Samuel Beckett's works to emerge” and has helped them continue to thrive (2018: xi).

Gontarski's introduction centres the notion of a “decadent turn” in relation to Beckett. He offers a brief overview of the artistic and aesthetic trends and cultural shifts that marked the period in Europe from the mid nineteenth century up to the Second World War. While most of the book's chapters attend to Beckett's work and life in the second half of the twentieth century, the introduction recognises Beckett's work, his aesthetics, his critical and theoretical convictions as best understood as emerging from within this alternative, anti-bourgeois cultural tradition. He traces, for instance, the cultural rise of realism, that led to naturalism, that in turn led to the varieties of “distortive figuration” distinctive of Expressionism, Futurism, post-Impressionism, and Cubism, until figuration was abandoned altogether in the ascendancy of Abstract Expressionism (2018: 2). Given Beckett's well known aversion to realism and his late prose and theatre's strategies of stasis, ar-

rested movement, and expressive dismemberment, this act of historical contextualization seems unquestionably accurate.

The introduction gives a sense of those voices attempting to dictate cultural and aesthetic purity and correctness that assailed this rising countercultural tradition. He pays particular attention to the critical sway of Max Nordeau during this period, whose *Degeneration*, published in 1895, was, in the United States, already in its ninth edition by 1898. Gontarski quotes Nordeau:

Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes and lunatics; they are often authors and artists. These, however, manifest the same mental characteristics, and for the most part the same somatic features, as members of the above mentioned anthropological family, who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter, instead of with pen and pencil. (3)

Nordeau's moralizing crusade against what he saw as the rising decadence of cultural forms—attacking, for instance, Charles Baudelaire's embrace, in poems of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, of a "rejected, essentially seldom-seen world" (11), or the more general orientation, among Symbolists and others, against what Nordeau calls the "Ego-mania" of those who "see and use language as a non-referential medium" (4) – clearly did not find a sympathetic ear in Beckett. Gontarski indicates how Beckett's own attention to the polysemous power of language led him to mine Nordeau's *Degeneration* for words useful to his own fiction ("corporalalia", "cicis-bei", "obsidional", "Gedankenflucht", "aboulia", "echolalia", "precarious ipsissimosity") (5). This magpie approach to creative composition evokes in some measure, as Gontarski notes, the practice of Beckett's model and fellow countryman James Joyce, both of whom had a bricoleur's scrutiny for the found word or phrase. Beckett's culling, in this case, suggests a positioning within the *demimonde* as transgressive artist repurposing the pseudo-diagnostic language of the defender of received but misguided social values and moral rhetoric.

The introduction sketches, if in understandably glancing fashion, the historical context of the decadent turn of the *fin de siècle*, with its "rejection of neoclassicism" and "erosion of Enlightenment values", that then informs Beckett's development as an artist and thinker (6). One example of his engagement with cultural works deemed unacceptable, indecent by bourgeois standards, came in 1938 when Beckett tentatively committed to translating the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* for Jack Kahane's Obelisk Press, a work of which he commented in a letter to George Reavey, "The surface is of an unheard of obscenity & not 1 in 100 will find literature in the pornography, or beneath the pornography, let alone one of the capital works of the 18th century, which it is for me." (Beckett 2009: 604-5). The work would appear in English only in 1954, not from the publishing house of Kahane, but from his son Maurice Girodias's Olympia Press, translated by Austrin Wainhouse, rather than Beckett. About the same time, Girodias would publish Beckett's novels *Watt* and *Molloy*. While Beckett's wariness of how such a translation might endanger his literary prospects—a rare concern with careerism for the budding late Modernist—contributed to his decision not to go forward with the translation, Beckett's other translation work served not only to keep him afloat

but to further this so-called decadent culture targeted by Nordeau. This is evident in his extraordinary translation of Arthur Rimbaud's "Le Bateau ivre" (1871, translated in 1931) and Guillaume Apollinaire's "Zone" (1912, translation published 1950). Beckett also translated other representatives of those writers condemned by Nordeau's alarm bell: André Breton, Paul Eluard, Henri Michaux, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Alfred Jarry. Any sense of his having been too chary of the prospect of translating Sade must be tempered and subsumed within an understanding of Beckett's direct experience with censoring authority, since his own first collection of stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, had been banned in his home country in 1934. From our historical vantage point one might conceive the status of being banned a badge of honour, but it is clear that for Beckett it was something of a cause of discretion, if also of greater resolve, and for his family shame.

Gontarski's use of Nordeau as an example of one form the cultural tensions took at the onset of Modernism, his highlighting of Beckett's interest in Sade, and his foregrounding of the role of intrepid upstart publishers like Jack Kahane, Maurice Girodias, John Calder, and Barney Rosset (Grove Press)—all of whom would face legal battles of one sort or another for their part in furthering this modern turn in literature and art—as instrumental to the development of this broader cultural shift, sets the stage for the in-depth focus on Beckett in the chapters that follow. Importantly, Gontarski also situates Beckett's six-month tour of Germany between 1935 and 1936 as a significant factor in this narrative of his artistic development. As Gontarski describes it, "Such decadent or 'degenerate' art...such private ventilation of private secrets, emotions, dreams, fantasies and the conflicted ambiguities of desire, an art of the margins, was much of the driving impetus" (Gontarski 2018: 13) for Beckett's trip and effort to see

before much of it was removed, hidden or simply destroyed, German modernism, art that flourished under Weimar Germany, the work of Max Beckmann, Otto Dix and Georg Grosz, among others, art deemed, after Nordeau, culturally undesirable and so decadent by Weimar's successors, the regime in power during Beckett's tour, headed by Adolf Hitler. (ibid.)

His experience of this censorious authoritarianism, witnessed on the rise in Germany, would only further his resolve in the many battles, legal and otherwise, which Beckett successfully waged and endured in the production, publication, and exhibition of his fiction and theatre.

For Gontarski, these tensions "helped shape [Beckett's] understanding of what art is, what art does or what it might do" (14-15). Beckett's interest in this decadent art

suggest[s] a thinker willing if not eager to look beyond accepted values and not only to critique those values...but to search out, design, and express alternative values, literary and ethical, even (or especially) the value(s) of language itself, the issues or limits of its own possibilities, that is, to debunk the expectation of a neutral language expressing a stable reality, a reality prior to its linguistic expression. For Beckett there may be no 'reality' separate from an artistic expression. (19)

While this emphasis on the decadent turn pertains primarily to the cultural upheaval of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its effects on Beckett's developing artistic identity—a surely convincing argument but one which is not exactly revelatory, — the other propositional term in the book's title, "revisioning", carries a stronger multivalency. On the one hand, he calls on the reader to revision understanding of Beckett's life and work within this milieu, as an essential part and extension of that movement. On the other hand, he will explore the importance of the process of revisioning both to Beckett's compositional practice and in his nineteen-year directorial career in which he staged over twenty productions of his plays, in English, French, and German (172). Sometimes this revisioning is a matter of his gaining greater visualization through staging a play, which prompts textual adjustments, typically involving a paring down process; other times the term applies to the cuts and emendations necessary to receive the British Lord Chamberlain's license for performance. Conceptually, Gontarski's previous genetic work on Beckett's composition process as one of "undoing" (see his *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*, 1985) informs the arguments and methodology of a number of essays in this collection. The integrative element in this omnibus volume, beyond the positioning within the decadent culture that emerged as one ground of twentieth century Modernism, is this notion of revisioning, a concept that is fundamental to thinking about Beckett. Gontarski argues that Modernism is a "way of thinking" (14), not simply a historical period or movement, and that among Beckett's innovations as a late Modernist in this cultural flow of thought is his intensive and ongoing process of revisioning, whether in the "progressive disintegration of literary character" that Gontarski points to (249), or in the rhizomatic way his reading is grafted to his prose (264), or in numerous other instantiations in which he sharpens a work's realization through post-publication revisions. The extended, processual nature of Beckett's compositional practice is then central to the resulting picture Gontarski creates. As he quotes the narrator of *From an Abandoned Work*, "I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way" (249). The practice of revisioning is shown as central to Beckett's artistic labour, as it is to its cultural reception.

The first chapter, "Samuel Beckett and *Lace Curtain* Irish Modernisms", touches on the prescient power of Beckett's early essay review from 1934 "Recent Irish Poetry", which appeared in *The Bookman* under the pseudonym Andrew Belis. That essay fired a critical volley in the contentious struggle between the art of the traditionalist (nationalist) Celtic Twilight — "the antiquarians, delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the Ossianic goods" (Beckett 1984: 70) — and an emerging (cosmopolitan) Irish Modernism. Beckett's central charge is that the parochialism of the predominant Celtic poetry — including in his sweep such publicly sanctified figures as George Russell, James Stephens, and Austin Clarke — failed to address the "breakdown of the object" (70) and persisted in being "[un]aware of the vacuum which exists between the perceiver and the thing perceived" (Gontarski 2018: 38). Beckett trains the lens here on a concern that his prose and theatre will persistently close in upon through the remainder of his life, arguably the central and defining epistemological dilemma of the modern condition. Just as Beckett's essay sought, in the 1930s, to revise the educated notion of what is vital

in Irish poetry, so in the summer of 1971 the essay was republished in the fourth issue of the brief literary venture, the journal *The Lace Curtain: A Magazine of Poetry and Criticism* as a way of fortifying a renewed attack, by its editors, on this traditionalist Twilight poetry as recently exhibited in *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*. Both Beckett's original publication, which promoted a "home-grown Modernism", and the reissue of the essay in 1971 were occasion for a critique of "hermetic Irishness" and Hibernian anti-cosmopolitanism (51). The same fourth issue of 1971 also included another of Beckett's early essays, originally published in 1934 in *The Dublin Magazine* as "Humanistic Quietism", a review of his friend Thomas McGreevy's poetry which he notably begins: "All poetry, as discriminated from the various paradigms of prosody, is prayer" (Beckett 1984: 68). In these essays poets such as McGreevy, Denis Devlin, and Brian Coffey are heralded by Beckett as distinctly urban, bringing an antidote to the inward-looking celebration of the Irish cultural past. In this early stance on poetic values one can perceive qualities characteristic of his late work and which contribute to Gontarski including him "among the last humanist European authors" (Gontarski 2018: 255).

This first chapter – which originated as a keynote address to a meeting of the Flann O'Brien Society—uses the subject of the reissuing of Beckett's critical work of the 1930s in *The Lace Curtain* of the 1970s as a way of discussing connections between Beckett and O'Brien, another writer associated with Hibernian late Modernism, but one who chose to eschew exile and struggle and work within the "stifling ultraconservatism" (36) of the homeland, delivering the innovative word within, what Beckett called, the "sterile nation of the mind and apotheosis of the litter" (Beckett 1984: 87).

This is the first of three chapters under the topic "A Professional Life". All three position Beckett as an outsider to convention and approved cultural practice. The second essay, "Publishing in America: Sam and Barney", details the important relationship between Beckett and the American publisher Barney Rosset, taking note of the commonalities shared by the two principled decadents. In 1951, the bold, would-be publisher purchased a small reprint house, Grove Press, and set up shop in the bohemian enclave of Greenwich Village. In June 1953 he took on Beckett, then living in Paris and writing in French, and he would remain Beckett's American publisher well beyond the writer's death in December 22, 1989. Rosset's Grove would become "the most aggressive, innovative, audacious, politically active, and so sometimes reckless publishing concern in the United States for over three decades" (Gontarski 2018: 58). Rosset would encourage Beckett to return to writing in English, an encouragement that would result in the publication of Beckett's first radio play *All That Fall* and the play *Krapp's Last Tape*. As Gontarski points out, Rosset was one who recognised that the act of translation for Beckett was a vital facet of the creative process (67). More than just a champion of Beckett, he commissioned the film script that became Beckett's one foray into cinema, and he served as the writer's theatrical agent in the United States from 1957 until 1989. Gontarski's personal connection to both men deepens the portraiture here. The descriptive force of this personal connection is furthered by Gontarski's scholarship, in particular his familiarity with a wide range of consequential letters from Beckett that have not been included in the four volume collection *The Letters of Samu-*

*el Beckett*, recently published by Cambridge University Press (2009-16). Many times in the essays in this volume Gontarski fortifies his arguments with excerpts from Beckett's letters not easily available to the average reader. This is one of the clear services Gontarski performs, even as it might suggest questions about the selection criteria of the editors of the *Letters*.

Gontarski's relationship with Beckett and Rosset factors in as well to chapter three's focus on Beckett's first full-length play *Eleuthéria*, which was begun in January 1947. "*Eleuthéria: Samuel Beckett's Suppressed Bohemian Manifesto*" was originally published as Gontarski's introduction to the posthumous publication of the play in 1995 by Foxrock, Inc. The essay argues the multiple ways the early play—which was never staged during Beckett's lifetime — anticipates the innovations of his mature theatre. He also emphasises the central anti-bourgeois theme of the drama which presages Beckett's own exilic trajectory. Gontarski includes mention of his own role in the machinations surrounding the publication of the play, for instance, the fact that he made the first translation of it into English with his graduate students (85). He offers an eyewitness account of the evening of Beckett's eightieth birthday and the intimate gathering at La Coupole in Paris, during which Barney Rosset arrived to announce he had been sacked by the new owners of Grove. Giving Rosset the play for publication was one of Beckett's gestures intended to support Rosset during this downturn in personal fortunes, even if he thought better of it once he revisited the play. With this chapter Gontarski republishes an important assessment of this early, often critically neglected work's significance for his later theatre. When published in 1995, this essay amounted to a scholarly recuperation of a play Beckett had in later life reconsidered but decided was better abandoned. Gontarski situates it, quoting Carlton Lake, as a significant "transitional work," one that functions as a "sociological manifesto on the artistic as opposed to the middle-class life" (91-2).

The next six chapters, of which part two – "A Theatrical Life – is comprised, bring a revisioning focus on Beckett's theatre from *En attendant Godot* on. Gontarski's encyclopedic command of Beckett's oeuvre, works of criticism, prose fiction, theatre, radio, television, and film, affords him the sort of compass in his analyses that regularly produces insights on a fluid range of texts even as a single work is ostensibly considered. In "Textual Aberrations, Ghost Texts, and the British *Godot: A Saga of Censorship*", which originated as a keynote address at a Beckett conference in 2016, Gontarski gives a detailed study of the negotiations over the textual "modifications" (102), i.e. cuts and replacement language, needed in order to receive from the British Lord Chamberlain a license to stage the play in London's West End. Gontarski's assiduous scholarship is on display here as he catalogues the individual edits demanded by British censorship, including as well precise details of the various exchanges with the Lord Chamberlain's office (with two facsimiles), and the unrectified persistence of these edits in subsequent editions of the play published both in England and the United States. Gontarski identifies, in other authoritative sources, failures in accuracy and misinformation concerning this pivotal period, such as in the version of this history recounted by curators at the University of Texas Harry Ransom Center (citing in particular the 2006 web-published exhibition catalogue *Fathoms from Anywhere: A Samuel Beckett Centenary Exhi-*

biton) and in the *Letters of Samuel Beckett*. One source of this misinformation is traced to “an unexamined and under-researched error” in Deidre Bair’s 1990 biography of Beckett (112).

This matter of how *Waiting for Godot* violated the bounds of public decency, with in-depth tour of the particulars involved in placating the arbiters of good taste while maintaining artistic integrity, is followed in chapter five, “‘nothingness / in words enclose?’: *Waiting for Godot*”, with a brilliant study of the forms of meaning the play takes. This essay, which was first published in 1994 in a *Festschrift* for Yasunari Takahashi, offers one of the best brief readings of the play anywhere. The title is drawn from a short poem on old age which Beckett included as an “Addenda” in his novel *Watt*. It foregrounds the central issue of nothingness, which on the one hand recalls a favourite adage (“Nothing is more real than nothing”) from one of Beckett’s most quoted philosophers, Democritus the Abderite, the laughing philosopher (128). On the other, it echoes the play’s opening line, “Nothing to be done”—a play of which the critic Vivien Mercier observed “Nothing happens, twice” (127) – and the fact that in the play, as Gontarski argues, “reality... may be...an absence” (136). While the play is typically diagnosed as existential in its primary thematic thrust, for Gontarski, “Beckett’s play is about imprisonment and impotence, not about the power of the self to create itself” (140). He offers this summary takeaway from his analysis of the groundbreaking play: “Hope in Beckett, some cause for optimism, and these are words that admittedly one does not often use in regard to Beckett’s work, resides not within the systems man has traditionally used to order his life, religion, law, any political system, or even language itself, but in the formal, essential, transcending artwork” (142). Art mediates an absence. The assertion of the transcendent importance of art to Beckett’s worldview is in line with Gontarski’s arguments elsewhere in this volume, and in line as well with the notion of Beckett as a late Modernist, rather than postmodernist.

Chapter six, “An End to Endings: Samuel Beckett’s End Game(s)”, in its interpretative focus on *Endgame*, with special attention to issues of incompleteness, echoing, and cyclical time, complements well the previous chapter. Only a sprinkling of typographical errors mars the volume as a whole, but this chapter is one in which the reader might take notice (for example, “reconing closed and story ended” and “Hamm beins his story anew” (148)). First given as a keynote address at a Beckett conference in Tokyo in 2006, it saw subsequent publication twice before appearing here. Chapter seven, “Samuel Beckett’s Art of Self-Collaboration”, one of the strongest in the collection, focuses on the role that staging his plays had in Beckett’s creative process. Here again Gontarski makes extensive use of letters omitted from the *Letters of Samuel Beckett*. He includes discussion of *Krapp’s Last Tape*, a play that caused Beckett to realise “that the creation of a dramatic text was not a process that could be divorced from performance” (161-2), as well as *Play*, *Come and Go*, *Footfalls*, and *Quad*. Beckett’s commitment to realising his plays through the process of staging and performance is, in Gontarski’s estimate, the “single most significant element in Beckett’s evolution from playwright to complete theater artist, from writer to director” (174).

Part two of this volume is rounded out with two chapters that look at Beckett’s theatre from a more theoretical angle. In “Beckett’s Keyhole Art: Voyeurism,

*Schaulust*, and the Perversions of Theater” Gontarski looks at the role of scopophilia, voyeurism, and exhibitionism in Beckett’s late theatre as well as in what he calls the “closed space” (249) fictions, like “Imagine Dead Imagine” (184). In quoting Herbert Blau’s reading of Beckett, that “we are always looking at what, perhaps, should not be looked at” (187), he argues that Beckett’s theatre “explores the complementary drives of voyeurism and exhibitionism” as it “remains a site of resistance and concealment” (189). Chapter nine, “‘He wants to know if it hurts!’: The Body as Text in Samuel Beckett’s Theater”, shifts the argument to the importance of the body to Beckett’s work. In Gontarski’s view a primary innovation of his theatre results from Beckett “considering the body textually, the body in performance” (196). Beckett was, in his estimate, drawn to the theatre precisely because of the body and the way it shapes and forms the text in performance (195). He discusses here the theatre (*theatron*) as a space of looking, echoing arguments made in the previous chapter, and considers in particular Beckett’s exploration of the fear of being seen, which comes to the fore in works like *All That Fall* and *Film*. Gontarski focuses on the late Modernist’s preoccupation with “how to represent in language and stage images the incomplete being, the *être manqué*” (201). And he describes the last phase of Beckett’s creative life thus: “By 1976 Beckett continued his ontological exploration of being in narrative and finally being as narrative, producing in the body of the text the text as body” (202).

The term ‘chapter’ used in this review is arguably misleading, since it suggests the overarching homogeneity of focus usual with a monograph. But these essays have seen little in the way of smoothing out redundancies and overlap between these separate interventions from disparate occasions. One clear advantage to this is that the reader can enter the volume at any point and read the essays in any order. As has been said, the introduction draws on the common elements they share and unites them under the overarching themes concerning, on the one hand, the role of revisioning, and, on the other, Beckett’s perceived transgression of forms of bourgeois acceptability. The introduction succeeds in answering the question, why these essays together? But there is little that is inevitable about this grouping. This collection of occasional pieces offers important articulations of a piece with Gontarski’s sustained scholarship of over forty years. It is a compendium that offers numerous insights and interesting analyses largely accessible to the lay reader as well as to the Beckett scholar versed in Gontarski’s previous critical work.

Part three, “A Philosophical Life”, comprises four essays that deal more with the intersection between Beckett’s work, philosophy, and political thought, all while remaining keyed to the writer’s creative working methods. At roughly fifty pages, this is the shortest section of the three. It offers symmetrical balance to part one’s similar length, and both parts support the central part two, which is twice their length and includes perhaps the volume’s strongest essays. Certainly the more extensive focus on Beckett’s theatrical life is in order, but the notion of the writer’s philosophical life is important, given Beckett’s well-known period of tutoring himself in the history of Western philosophy, the fact of the way the lauded opacity of his fiction and theatre yields a consequent “universal relevance and force” (Feldman 2015: 19) that leads naturally to philosophical reflection, and, finally, given the regularity with which Beckett scholars have coupled the late Modern-

ist with various philosophers (the pre-Socratics, Schopenhauer, Arnold Geulincx, Fritz Mauthner, Wilhelm Windelband, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jacques Derrida, to name but an obvious few). The scope of these four brief essays is, however, understandably modest.

In “Theoretical and Theatrical Intersections: Samuel Beckett, Herbert Blau, Civil Rights, and the Politics of *Godot*” Gontarski brings together a number of elements in considering the political aspects of Beckett’s theatre. He discusses the Free Southern Theater group’s 1964 tour of *Waiting for Godot* through parts of the poor rural south, particularly Louisiana and Mississippi, with an all African-American cast in whiteface. He explores as well the role of American theatre director and performance theoretician Herbert Blau – a Beckett friend and collaborator who was involved in the 1957 San Quentin State Prison production of *Godot* – in the political evolution of theatre in the United States during the post-war period. Blau’s eventual “overt shift to the performing self on the *mise en scène* of the page[;] the shift of playing space from the boards to what Blau calls ‘the chamber drama of the *mise en scène* of the unconscious’” (Gontarski 2018: 218) resonates in many ways with the demonstrably performative nature of Beckett’s late closed space fictions.

“Beckett and the Revisioning of Modernism(s): *Molloy*” brings a quasi-philosophical perspective to looking at the ways Beckett revisioned Modernist storytelling practice for the late modern sensibility. Here, Gontarski takes the novel *Molloy* as “Beckett’s most deliberate undoing of the potential or perceived replication of Joyce in particular and of the Modernist text in general as it demarks a post-Joycean aesthetics” (233). While James Joyce is the obvious model against which Beckett situates his work, Gontarski includes both Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust among the Modernist models being re-written. The specific storytelling conventions that Beckett revisions are argued as three types of narrative: the journey or quest, the detective, and the oral tale. The subject of the traditional trope of the journey continues as one focus of “A Sense of Unending: Fictions for the End of Time”. In this essay the dominant concept of “unending” is seen in the tendency to “fragmentation, caesura, incompleteness” (247). The arguments range from Beckett’s fascination with Schopenhauer’s “intellectual justification of unhappiness” (248), to the “omnidolent characters” who evince the theme of the journey in novels from *Murphy* to *Watt* (249), to Beckett’s subsequent transformation of the journey theme away from a goal or destination orientation toward a state of just moving—“stories featuring stillness or some barely perceptible movement, at times just the breathing of a body or the trembling of a hand” (ibid.). We can see the results of this narrative revisioning in such plays as *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Play*, *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Quad*. The “closed space fictions” that embody this include “Still”, “Sounds”, “Afar a Bird”, “Company”, “Ill Seen Ill Said”, “Ping”, “Imagination Dead Imagine”, and “Worstward Ho” (249). Gontarski goes on to discuss the importance of the philosophical notion of apperception – “for Leibniz, Kant, and even Schopenhauer, apperception was the active process of the mind’s reflecting on itself” – to Beckett “even as his distrust grew of the synthetic unity of the perceiving subject, the ‘I’ to whom the field of immanence is ascribed” (251).

The final, lucky number – recall that Beckett was born on April 13 – thirteenth essay, “The Death of Style: Samuel Beckett’s Art of Repetition, Pastiche, and Cut-

ups”, concludes the volume with a brief exploration of how Beckett launched an assault against style itself (256). The writer’s elite education (both formal and autodidactic) and consummate erudition, which “even James Joyce envied”, contributed to the fact that the “humanist idea of authorship that Beckett both epitomized and simultaneously dismantled remained central to his creative makeup and output” (255). Gontarski to some extent anatomises this conscious dismantling through the idea of Beckett’s “development of pastiche” (265) and the important part played by what James Knowlson called his “grafting technique” (258), which might be thought of as the particular way his writing processes his reading. The similarities between Beckett’s and Joyce’s grafting techniques are duly noted. But whereas Joyce’s seems clearly in service to furthering his storytelling encyclopedism, Beckett’s arguably aided his liberation from style. As Gontarski says, “Despite his struggles to free himself from the prison house of style, much of Samuel Beckett’s writing is intimately, even inextricably, tied to his reading; that conclusion is one of the seminal developments of recent Beckett criticism and may define Beckett scholarship well into the new century” (258). Indeed, the archival turn in Beckett studies in recent decades is everywhere apparent in the literature, a seismic trend in which Stanley Gontarski remains a principal agent; witness this many-faceted, engaging collection.

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**25,00 €**

**ISSN 2421-4353**