



8:2 2022

Nutrix

Edited by Rosy Colombo

ROSY COLOMBO – *Foreword*

NANCY FELSON – *Eurycleia: The Odyssey's Best Supporting Character*

ANNA BELTRAMETTI – *The Nurse from Narrative to Drama: Euripides and the Tragic Deviations of an Ancient Anthropological Figure*

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Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

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Published in December 2022

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ISSN 2421-4353

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SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies

<https://skenejournal.skeneproject.it>

info@skeneproject.it

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

P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138, Verona (I)

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ROSY COLOMBO*

Foreword

The eleven essays collected in this issue, spanning from Homer (Nancy Felson) to Derek Walcott (Madeleine Scherer) through Attic tragedy (mainly Euripides: Anna Beltrametti, Ronald Blankenborg, and Francesco Puccio), Seneca (Ivan Spurio Venarucci and Puccio) and the Italian Renaissance drama (Matteo Bosisio and Annalisa Perrotta), Shakespeare and early modern English drama (Terri Bourus and Katarzyna Burzyńska), Racine's *Phèdre* (Delia Gambelli) and Marina Cvetaeva (Puccio) are unified by the presence of one important, easily overlooked go-between character: the figure of the nurse who bridges the gap of cultures and literary genres, especially epic narrative and the stage, as Blankenborg shows with regard to Euripides' *Medea*.

The meaning of the English noun "nurse" has changed over time as the social role it defined became obsolete. Originally a borrowing from the French "nourrice", the word signified the woman who provided nourishment and nurture to babies she had not given birth to. It is in this sense that it was most often used up to the nineteenth century, both denotatively and metaphorically. See, for instance, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, referring to the asp as the "baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 5.2.304-5). Specifically, the wet nurse, defined as "A woman who is hired to suckle and nurse another woman's child" (*OED*), was opposed to the dry nurse, "A woman who takes care of and attends to a child but does not suckle it" (*OED*). As the social role of the wet nurse disappeared, the term by extension came to refer broadly to "a person (historically usually a woman) who cares for the sick or infirm" (*OED*) and now is understood to define principally a professional role in medical care. The connection to nourishment has been lost. We decided to use the word "nurse" throughout this publication

* Sapienza University of Rome - rosamariacolombosmith@gmail.com

to preserve the etymological meaning of nurture and nourishment which it implies, as do the Greek *trophòs* and the Latin *nutrix*.

In Greek literature, from Homer to Euripides, the Nurse is a central figure of authority. As Karydas first pointed out (1998),¹ its roots may be traced in the models of female hierarchy in early choral lyric performances, and the poetics of female *paideia* as can be found in those performances were later appropriated and reshaped in epic and tragedy. Nancy Felson's article focuses on the archetype of Eurycleia, the paradigmatic nurse in the *Odyssey*, who, although a servant, is not devoid of authority. As Anna Beltrametti argues in this issue, not only does Eurycleia perform the famous recognition scene through Odysseus's scar in Book 19 which attracted the critical attention of Erich Auerbach in his survey of the origin of realism in Western literature, but her role also continues through the whole poem, and when she acts she has a crucial impact on the plot. Eurycleia epitomizes the distinguishing features that make the nurse a relevant figure in Homeric society, thus establishing an archetype for the nurses in Attic tragic drama. These nurses are different from one another, each being characterized by one predominant function and/or feature: substitute mother, guardian/educator, confidante, bestowed with rational or psychological insight, sometimes a simple witness, sometimes a sort of chorus, capable, as Tiresias, of *seeing* and foretelling. They are endowed with wisdom and intelligence, they feel a sense of belonging to the household they serve; their intimacy is grounded in the nourishment and care of the babies with whom they are in direct physical contact, and as the children grow up they assume a right to admonish, and can develop an unswerving loyalty. They are the embodiment of common sense while they have no difficulty in transgressing behavioural and linguistic codes. The prismatic quality of the *nutrix* may affect the dramaturgical structure of the play, for instance providing tragedies with a comic element tinged with a whole variety of inflections, from irony to malice, exposing unnecessary sentimentalism. If, on the one hand, the bond with the female heroines is grounded on sympathy and shared secrets, often verging on complicity, on the other hand, reason and duty allow the nurse to detect what is wrong in the behaviour of her child (*Romeo and Juliet*) or mistress (*Medea, Phèdre*). A telling example of such insight and understanding is Cilissa's, Orestes's nurse, who in Aeschylus's *Libation-Bearers*, as Beltrametti notices, is the first to spot and reveal to the women of the Chorus Clytemnestra's deceitful reaction to her son's return home.

Moreover, (not) naming the nurse is an issue: Homer's Eurycleia and

¹ Examining Nurse figures in ancient Greek epic and drama, Helen Pournara Karydas focuses on the verbal manifestations of the Nurse's authority-advice, approval, disapproval, directions and orders.

Aeschylus's Cilissa, together with Shakespeare's Angelica (commented upon by Terri Bourus) and Racine's Enone (analyzed by Delia Gambelli) are the only nurses to have a name, in line with being characters and not stereotypes, in contrast to a wider sequence of anonymous nurses.² The lack of a name is usually considered as evidence of lack of status. Our interpretation is generally different, proposing that on the contrary namelessness may be viewed as a constitutive trait of the nurse's complex, prismatic quality mentioned above, rooted in her physical bond with the child and care for it as the basis of the category of the maternal. As Bourus writes, mothers are notoriously rare in Shakespeare's plays, but maternal care is a dimension Shakespeare explored in a number of ways: in the Senecan tragic light of *Titus Andronicus*, in the linguistic unruliness of Juliet's nurse, and even with the challenge of its gender connotation in *The Tempest* in Prospero's maternal function grafted onto his paternal guidance during the upbringing of Miranda. Finally, and more compellingly, Cleopatra transcends a conventional maternal connotation in the performance of her own death: with the asp as a baby sucking the nurse asleep, darkly subverting the idea itself of nurturing – a maternal paradox.

Another facet of the prismatic quality of the nurse is the ethics of care which may be viewed from a postmodern perspective, as Katarzyna Burzyńska does in dealing with several early modern English plays, where she detects analogies between nurses and contemporary "dependency workers" in a system that provides them with a function, but not with power. The same politicization occurs, according to Madeleine Scherer, in Derek Walcott's version of a Eurycleia strongly tied to Egypt, within a context of references to Afrocentric literature and Caribbean rituals: a political adaptation to global culture and memory.

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² Another exception is Aeneas's nurse Caieta, whose name is ritually handed over to the location of her funeral in *Aeneid*, 7.1-4.

NANCY FELSON*

Eurycleia: *The Odyssey's* Best Supporting Character¹

Abstract

Homer's *Odyssey* provides enough detail for us, as interpreters, to piece together a coherent character under the proper name "Eurycleia". To establish who she is in the poem and what roles she fills, I first examine all her appearances in the poem and all her interactions with the main characters of the family that rules Ithaca (Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus) and with the other servants ("small people") in the poem: Eumaeus the swineherd, Eurynome Penelope's chambermaid, and Melantho the traitorous handmaid. Eurycleia is especially loyal to three generations of males in the family and is dedicated to ensuring the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus – in part as a foundation for her security. In the homecoming drama, she plays the critical role of matchmaker who helps (re)unite the couple. Her first two attempts as matchmaker fail, but in her final appearance the silent Eurycleia is Penelope's unwitting accomplice in tricking Odysseus into revealing his knowledge of the marriage bed he built and thus his true identity. In my Epilogue, I offer seven potential stagings that spotlight Eurycleia, including her final silent role, in which I imagine her starting to obey Penelope's command to move the unmovable bed to the hall.

KEYWORDS: *The Odyssey*; Eurycleia; wet nurse; loyal slave; confidante; matchmaker; arbiter of justice

In his famous first chapter of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach describes the housekeeper Eurycleia as having no life of her own, no feelings of her own: "she has only the life and feelings of her master" (2003, 21). In fact, the opposite is true. Despite limited appearances, Eurycleia has deep emotional connections to Telemachus and Odysseus, and she plays an important role at critical, dramatic moments in their lives. Though a minor character – one of the "small people" in the world of the text – she is multi-faceted and consequential.

Homer, as I shall call the poet-narrator, invites us to piece together a

¹ I would like to thank friends and colleagues for reading drafts of this paper and discussing interpretive matters: Rosy Colombo (the editor of this monographic section), Emanuel Stelzer (managing editor), Seth Schein, Richard Seltzer, Laura Slatkin, Gregory Thalmann, and Susan Wiltshire. I am indebted to Grace Blaxill, undergraduate Classics major at Yale University, for cheerful, efficient, and helpful library and editorial assistance. I quote throughout from Lattimore's 1965 translation of the *Odyssey*, with which I take occasional liberties for the sake of precision and modern idiom.

* University of Georgia - felsonnancy@gmail.com

coherent personality for Eurycleia from the fragments dispersed in Books 1, 2, 4 and 14-23. All her appearances take place in the palace of Odysseus. As their former nurse and nanny, she has loving relations with Telemachus and (once she recognizes him in Book 19) with the stranger who turns out to be Odysseus. Eurycleia is an indexical sign of the palace that she inhabits and runs, which in turn stands, by synecdoche, for the entire οἶκος [household] of Odysseus.² Consequently, for Odysseus to regain control over the οἶκος, he needs the full support and cooperation of his old nurse. Eurycleia. He needs to be sure that she is in line with the hierarchic structure that underlies his aristocratic way of life. Of course, she is already firmly on his side. Like Athena, she doesn't resist the patriarchal structure; she supports it. The basic social unit of a royal or aristocratic οἶκος in Homeric society consists of a male head, his family, and their dwelling place. It also includes the farmland and herds, dependent workers, and slaves. All these, taken together, plus stored up luxury goods (κειμήλια), constitute their wealth.³ These goods can be booty gained in war as tokens of excellence, goods handed down within the family, bride-price wealth (in exchange for daughters), and gifts acquired in travels abroad as tokens of guest-friendship with the elite of other communities. The non-elite characters attached to this οἶκος – slaves and other dependents – are acquired in diverse ways: by purchase, inheritance, gift exchange or as war booty. These male and female characters supply the labor that supports the family's leisured aristocratic way of life, with its feasts and sacrifices, hospitality, and gift exchanges. As subordinates, they depend on their master for sustenance and livelihood and for the smooth running of the household, and the master and mistress depend on their skills and expertise.⁴

Eurycleia, the nurse to two successive princes, Odysseus and Telemachus, now holds the keys to the palace and manages the staff of maidservants whom she has trained. She is trusted for her judgment and knowledge of what needs to be done and how. Though her title of ταμίη (housekeeper)⁵

² An indexical sign is based on contiguity between the sign-image and its object, in contrast to an iconic sign, based on similarity. For an overview of semiotic terms, see Felson 1983, "Introduction" and "Glossary," with references.

³ Vernant (1965, 104-26), makes a fundamental distinction between inside (female) and outside (male): κειμήλια (< κειμαι [to lie]) belong to the fixed space of the house's interior, while πρόβατα (things that move forward, flocks) belong to the more fluid exterior,

⁴ For an excellent overview of the Homeric οἶκος, with extensive analysis of the secondary literature and an understanding of the need to be mindful of coincidences and dissonances between the values and institutions of Homer's world and of our own, see Thalmann (1998, 49-107).

⁵ The term ταμίη, derived from τέμνω (cut), seems to refer to the one who divides

is a general term shared by other maidservants, she is clearly in charge. Though a slave herself, she operates at a higher level than the others, like a member of the royal family, and she guides those under her as to how to endure their own slavery (22.423: δουλοσύνην ἀνέχεσθαι). Her interests are those of her master, but she understands the work that needs to be done for the household to run smoothly. She is intelligent,⁶ an aristocrat by birth who fell into servitude. In recognition of her aristocratic background, she is known not just by her personal name, but also by the thrice mentioned names of her father Ops and grandfather Peisenor (1.429, 2.347 and 20.148). Her grandfather's name may have aristocratic implications.

Orderliness and predictability in the palace are important to Eurycleia, yet this οἶκος is virtually under siege. For more than three years, 108 unruly suitors have undermined the household's day-to-day routines and drained its resources. Odysseus' long absence provided the conditions for such disarray.⁷ Eurycleia does not have the authority to deny hospitality to the suitors, nor is she able to control the behavior of all fifty handmaids who are supposed to answer to her.

Odysseus, when he left for Troy, entrusted his entire οἶκος to his companion Mentor (2.225), who blames his fellow Ithacans for not restraining the unruly suitors (2.229-41), but he cannot persuade these fellow townsmen to intervene. In his parting words, Odysseus left the palace under the care of Penelope (18.266). But twelve of the handmaids whom Penelope and Eurycleia supervise sleep with the suitors. Moreover, the suitors chafe under Penelope's effort to control them. They claim that she sends messages to each,

up and distributes goods – a female servant's task.

⁶ Eurycleia shares Penelope's epithet *περίφρων* (circumspect, thinking all around) twice in the narrator's description (19.491 and 20.134) and twice when a character addresses her: Penelope at 19.357 and the swineherd Eumaius at 21.381. Similarly, she shares one term with Odysseus: the narrator describes her as caring for the storeroom "in the wisdom of her mind" (2.346: νόου πολυῦδρείησιν) and Penelope calls her "very astute" (23.82: πολυῦδριν); five lines earlier, at 23.77, Eurycleia describes Odysseus as acting "in the great wisdom of his mind" (*πολυκερδίησι νόοιο*). For an overview of all references to Eurycleia's intelligence by the narrator and by characters, see Karydos (1998, 60-1).

⁷ The neglected hunting dog Argos signals the disarray of the οἶκος in the master's absence. Odysseus' compliment to Penelope contradicts that state of affairs. In a reverse gender simile, he compares her to a blameless and god-fearing king whose land and flocks prosper under his good leadership, and whose people prosper (19.109-14). Here Odysseus uses the compliment as a strategic ploy to win favor, as when he compares Nausicaa to a goddess and to young palm tree he once saw in Delos (6.149-69).

Penelope deflects his praise. She emphasizes the disarray: how the suitors wear her house out and how she wastes away longing for Odysseus (19.124-36).

giving each one hope. Antinous at 2.92 (addressing Telemachus) and Athena at 13.381 (addressing Odysseus) add the phrase “while her mind is set on other things”.⁸ As proof that Penelope is deceiving them and has no intention to remarry, suitors quote her request that they wait, though eager to marry her, until she finishes weaving the shroud for Laertes. They then expose her deceitful ploy of unraveling by night what she wove by day (2.96-102, 19.141-7, 24.131-7).⁹ The fact that no one is willing or able to restore order in the οἶκος in Odysseus’ absence leaves Eurycleia in an impossible situation.

Characters in Homeric epic do not unfold in an orderly, linear fashion. Members of the audience (whether listening or reading) who are familiar with the poetic tradition may reconstruct the stories and reorder their elements as the epic moves forward. In presenting Eurycleia, Homer includes isolated and descriptive “character indicators”.¹⁰ The character’s proper name enables the interpreter to construct that character from the assemblage of textual elements. Dispersed as these are throughout the text, they can be assembled into an illusion of fullness, as they must have been in Homer’s time by members of his live audiences.¹¹

Constructing Eurycleia’s character from the scattered clues in the text

⁸ ἤδη γὰρ τρίτον ἐστὶν ἔτος, τάχα δ’ εἴσι τέταρτον / ἐξ οὗ ἀτέμβει θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν. / πάντας μὲν ῥ’ ἔλπει καὶ ὑπίσχηται ἀνδρὶ ἐκάστῳ / ἀγγελίας προῖεῖσα, νόος δὲ οἱ ἄλλα μενοινᾶ (And now it is the third year, and will be the fourth year presently, / since she has been denying the desires of the Achaeans. / For she holds out hope to all, and makes promises to each man, / sending us messages, but her mind is intent on other things, 2.89-92). After Antinous blames Penelope for leading the suitors on, he quotes her, as she urged her suitors to be patient, though eager to marry, while she completed the weaving of Laertes’ shroud (2.96-102). Penelope herself quotes these very words to the stranger (Odysseus) in the interview at the hearth (19.141-7), as does the shade of Amphimedon in his complaint at 24.124-5, when he recounts the suitors’ version of the slaughter. Though Penelope at the interview omits the details of giving hope and sending messages to each suitor, Athena confirms that detail at 13.379-81, though without the quote. Penelope’s public words function almost like an edict, reproducible in fixed, formulaic language.

⁹ Telemachus makes the same complaint to Athena-Mentes: ἡ δ’ οὐτ’ ἀρνείται στυγερόν γάμον οὔτε τελευτήν / ποιῆσαι δύναται (“my mother does not refuse the hateful marriage, nor is she able/ to make an end of the matter”, 1.249-50). What motivates Penelope to give the suitors encouragement is never explained; in Felson (1994) I suggest that she enjoys being much-wooed.

¹⁰ On “character-indicators” see Rimmon-Kenan (1983, 59-70).

¹¹ This effect is enhanced if the proper name is delayed, as in the case of Odysseus, who is first named in Book 1, line 21, after his circumstances have been described. My approach to character follows Bal (1987, 107-8) and Barthes (1974, 94); cf. Felson (1994, 126-8).

involves making sense of her psychologically in all her complexity. Narratologically, it requires that we note her physical presence at critical events, examine her impact on other characters as the plot advances, and capture her focalization of events as they unfold.

Eurycleia has close ties to the male line of the Ithacan royal family. Her connection began when Laertes, father of Odysseus, bought her from her father for a price comparable to a bride-price. In a brief back-story situated within her first appearance,¹² we learn:

Εὐρύκλει', Ὕπος θυγάτηρ Πεισηνορίδαο
 τὴν ποτε Λαέρτης πρίατο κτεάτεσσιν ἑοῖσι
 πρωθήβην ἔτ' ἐοῦσαν, ἕικοσάβοια δ' ἔδωκεν,
 ἴσα δέ μιν κεδνῇ ἀλόχῳ τίεν ἐν μεγάροισιν,
 εὐνῇ δ' οὐ ποτ' ἔμικτο, χόλον δ' ἀλέεινε γυναικός
 (1.429-33)

[She was the daughter of Ops the son of Peisenor, / and Laertes had purchased her long ago with his own possessions / when she was still in her first youth (πρωθήβην), and gave twenty oxen for her,¹³ / and he honored her in his house as much as his own devoted / wife, but never slept with her, for fear of his wife's anger]

We do not know why Laertes paid such a high price for the young Eurycleia. We can speculate that he was captivated by her beauty and that he expected to take her to bed. But Laertes declined to do so, instead, honoring the wishes of his jealous wife, even though to sleep with a slave was an accepted social practice.¹⁴ I speculate that Laertes made Eurycleia the nurse to his son and heir as a way of honoring her for her sexual attractiveness and her high birth without making her his bedmate. Although Homer does not expand on Eurycleia's subsequent relations with Anticleia, the complementarity of their names is striking: "Widespread Glory" and "Opposed to Glory".¹⁵

We also do not know what motivated Ops to sell his daughter. Perhaps she was secretly pregnant¹⁶ or had otherwise earned her father's disapproval.

¹² On Homeric treatments of first appearances, see Race (1993).

¹³ Cf. *Iliad* 23.704-5, where a skilled slave-woman is worth four oxen.

¹⁴ The Ithacan lead family was unique in having a line of only sons. This underscores Laertes' decision not to sleep with a slave-woman, in fear of his wife's anger. Contrast the indifference to his wife's feelings of Heracles, when he introduces the captive Iole into their bedchamber in Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, and of Agamemnon, when he brings Cassandra home as his war-prize in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Pedrick (1994, 97-118) discusses these situational parallels.

¹⁵ On Eurycleia as a doublet for Anticleia, especially in the naming scene of Book 19, see Murnaghan (1987, 40-1) and Peradotto (1990, 138).

¹⁶ The fact that Eurycleia became the wet nurse of Odysseus implies that she

al, or perhaps he had fallen on hard times and needed the payment to enhance his wealth.

When Odysseus was growing up, both his nurse and his mother acted maternally toward Odysseus. Later, both suffered from his absence in the Trojan War: Anticleia died of longing for him (11.202) and Eurycleia still sorely laments his absence.

After Anticleia dies, the aged and despondent Laertes does not turn to Eurycleia. He retires to the countryside and is looked after by an aged Sicilian servant. Eurycleia remains at the palace and is dedicated to its protection and perpetuation. But she still empathizes with her old master and wants to protect him from further anxiety and grief. She urges Penelope not to inform him about the suitors' plot against his grandson, but instead to pray to Athena (4.734-41 and 752-4).

When we first encounter Eurycleia, she is an old woman. Both Odysseus and Telemachus still address her as "dear nurse" or "dear *μαῖα*" ("good mother"), and she still treats them both as if they were still children under her care.¹⁷ They talk to her lovingly, but, at times of urgency, they simply give her orders, as her superiors, and expect her to obey. She expresses herself freely to them, not holding back, trying to convince them to do what she believes to be best. But when pressed, she loyally obeys their commands.

1. Eurycleia and Telemachus

Eurycleia is caring and maternal to Telemachus. They first appear together at the end of Book 1, when Telemachus goes off to bed (1.424-44), soon after Athena (in the guise of Mentès) has prompted him to search for his father. His heart is troubled. Devoted Eurycleia, who of all the servants especially would tend to him (435: *φιλέεσκε*), having been his nurse since he was a little boy, escorts him to his bedchamber off the courtyard and carries the flaring torches. Once there, she folds his soft tunic and hangs it on a peg, treating him like a child.

When Telemachus asks Eurycleia for help in preparing for his journey, her ambivalence is evident. On the one hand, she is apprehensive about his taking risks; on the other, she senses that it is time for him to come of age

had been pregnant, since a young virgin would not lactate.

¹⁷ When Eurycleia first recognizes Odysseus, she exclaims: ἦ μάλ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι, φίλον τέκος: οὐδέ σ' ἐγώ γε / πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἀνακτ' ἐμὸν ἀμφαφάσθαι ("Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you / before; not until I had touched you all over", 19.474-5). Then, shocked that he would physically harm her, she cries out: τέκνον ἐμὸν, ποῖόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων. ("My child, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier?", 19.492).

and act for himself. The two meet up near the storeroom εὐρύον, ὅθι νητὸς χρυσὸς καὶ χαλκὸς ἔκειτο / ἐσθῆς τ' ἐν χηλοῖσιν ἄλις τ' εὐώδες ἔλαιον: / ἐν δὲ πίθοι οἴνοιο παλαιοῦ ἠδυπότοιο / ἔστασαν, ἄκρητον θεῖον ποτὸν ἐντὸς ἔχοντες ("where gold and bronze were lying piled, / and abundant clothing in the bins, and fragrant olive oil, / and in it jars of wine, sweet to drink, aged, / were standing, keeping the unmixed divine drink inside them" 2.338-41). The woman in charge of this storeroom is Eurycleia, who watched over all this night and day with much shrewdness of mind (2.345-7).¹⁸ This description of her role implies that she is protecting the wealth of the οἶκος from the suitors and those who serve them. There Telemachus asks her, as the one in charge, to supply him with provisions for his journey – sweet wine in twelve handled jars with covers and twenty measures of the choice of milled barley poured into leather bags. He will pick up the supplies in the evening, after his mother goes to bed (2.349-58). Then he tells her his plan, to go to Sparta and Pylos "to ask after my dear father's homecoming, if I might hear something" (2.359-60).

At first, wanting to keep him safe, Eurycleia cries out, bitterly lamenting, and tries to persuade him to stay and guard his possessions. She asks him why he, an only and beloved (ἀγαπητός) child, wishes to wander over much land and suffer hardships on the barren wide sea (2.363-70). Telemachus' determination overrides her qualms. Reassured that the plan was made with a god's will, she swears an oath not to inform his beloved mother of the trip until the eleventh or twelfth day, or until she misses him herself or hears he is absent. Then she prepares the provisions, as directed. And, when he boards the ship, he tells his crew that only one serving woman knows the story. That one is, of course, Eurycleia.

In a matching scene, Eurycleia is by far the first to see Telemachus when he returns from the swineherd's hut to the palace, having completed his journey to the Peloponnesus and having escaped the suitors' ambush. She weeps with joy and the other maids surround Telemachus and kiss his head and shoulders in loving welcome (17.31-5). Later, she will weep again when she discovers that the stranger is her master (19.471-2) and the loyal maids will kiss his head and shoulders after the slaughter (22.497-500).¹⁹

¹⁸ This description by the narrator captures Telemachus' focalization as he enters the storeroom and sees the wealth. Cf. the awe that he and Peisistratus, son of Nestor, experience when they see the glorious wealth at Menelaus' palace (4.43-6), which he compares to the court of Olympian Zeus (4.71-5).

¹⁹ I see "welcoming the returning hero" an epic "type-scene," an arrival scene focalized by the welcomers. (Other type-scenes describe visits, embassies, sacrifice, dreams, boat and wagon journeys, arming and dressing, sleep, meetings, oaths, and baths). A type-scene expresses a regular sequence of action in formulaic language. It is an "oft repeated block of words and phrases arranged in a characteristic se-

Eurycleia's presence in critical scenes accentuates the parallels between the life-stories of Odysseus and Telemachus. Her emotional engagement at the departure and return of Telemachus and at the return of Odysseus mark her as a "threshold" or "boundary figure". In the case of Telemachus, she sends the inexperienced youth off on his journey, equipped with what he needs from the storeroom. Later, when he returns, she is the first to welcome him to the palace. The pattern is not quite so marked for Odysseus when he returns from Parnassus and from Troy.

There are parallels between Eurycleia and the loyal swineherd Eumaeus, who is a generation younger than she. When Anticleia raised Eumaeus in the palace alongside her daughter Ktimene (15.363), Eurycleia probably would have played a role. As Eumaeus represents the care of Odysseus' livestock, Eurycleia stands for the care of the palace itself. As Eumaeus functions as a surrogate father for Telemachus, Eurycleia is his surrogate ("as if") mother, even though Penelope is present. For example, she is complicit in Telemachus' maturation journey (and thus keenly aware of his absence), in sharp contrast to Penelope. Both servants ease Telemachus' transition from sheltered youth to adulthood. Both enable him even though both (like all parents) might want to keep him in the "nest", young and dependent on them.²⁰

2. Odysseus and Eurycleia

Eurycleia has had a similar intimacy with the young Odysseus. She raised him from infancy to adulthood and still addresses him as "child". She nursed him at her breast (19.482-3) and played an active role in his naming. Just after Anticleia had given birth to him, her father Autolycus paid a visit. The young nurse laid the child she was holding on his grandfather's knees and said: *Αὐτόλυκ', αὐτὸς νῦν ὄνομ' εὔρεο ὅττι κε θῆαι / παιδὸς παιδὶ φίλω: πολυάρητος δέ τοί ἐστιν* ("Autolycus, now find yourself that name you will bestow / on your own child's dear child, for you have prayed much to have

quence that describes a commonly occurring activity in Homer" (Finkelberg 2011, 905-7). On "type-scenes" in Homeric epic, see Finkelberg 2011, with citations to Arnd 1933, who introduced the term, and to Parry, Lord, Fenik 1968, and Edwards 1980, 1987: 72-4, and 1997, and others. The welcoming type-scene recurs at 23.203-4 when Penelope kisses Odysseus' head and shoulders.

²⁰ Penelope, though present at the palace throughout Telemachus' life-stages, is less of a day-to-day presence than Eurycleia. She only notices her son's absence when Medon the herald informs her of the suitors' nefarious plot. Pedrick (1994) makes the interesting point that Eurycleia and Penelope must occupy different parts of the palace.

him", 19.403-4).²¹

In a break with tradition, Autolycus, prodded by Eurycleia, determines what the name will be. Normally the father and mother chose the name of their child. He tells Laertes and Anticleia: τίθεσθ' ὄνομ' ὅτι κεν εἴπω: / πολλοῖσιν γάρ ἐγὼ γε ὀδυσσάμενος τόδ' ἰκάνω, / ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναῖξιν ἀνὰ χθόνα πουλυβότειραν: / τῷ δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ὄνομ' ἔστω ἐπώνυμον ("Give him the name I tell you, the name Odysseus, he that is hated / he that brings trouble, since I have come to this place hateful to and causing pain to (ὀδυσσάμενος) many,²² women and men alike on the prospering earth", 19.406-9).

Autolycus proposes the journey his grandson will make when he comes of age:

ὀππότε ἂν ἠβήσας μητρῷον ἐς μέγα δῶμα
 ἔλθῃ Παρνησόνδ', ὅθι ποῦ μοι κτήματ' ἔασι,
 τῶν οἱ ἐγὼ δώσω καὶ μιν χαίροντ' ἀποπέμψω.
 (19.410-12)

[Then when he grows up (ἠβήσας), / and comes to the great house of his mother's line, and Parnassus, / where there are possessions that are called mine, I will give him / freely of these to make him happy and send him back to you.]

Eurycleia witnessed all this: the naming and the invitation to visit, with the promise of a transfer of wealth. At these pivotal junctures, as at Odysseus' return and "re-marriage" to Penelope, the dear nurse plays a role.

The narrative structure in which the naming ceremony is embedded is three-layered. The outer layer is the frame story: Eurycleia, as she washes the stranger's feet, feels the scar (19.393) and recognizes that this is Odysseus.²³ But her full reaction is deferred by the long flashback or analepsis at the second layer, an account of the youth's maturation journey where he got that scar. Within that 53-line analepsis, at the third layer, is the story of Autolycus' choice of a name for Odysseus.

The scar (οὐλήν) is a visual image that Eurycleia and her master notice or think of at almost the same moment. Odysseus, when he thought of it in his heart (19.390 κατὰ θυμὸν οἴσατο), turned toward the shadows, lest the

²¹ Eurycleia seems to be proposing the name Πολυάρητος ("long prayed for") for the child, as if she were the mother. Polyaretus is a not uncommon Greek name (Dimock 1995, 265n8). Normally, the parents would name their offspring.

²² Cf. Dimock (1995: vol.1, on 1.62) interprets ὀδυσσάμενος as "being hated" and "bringing trouble to." For insightful studies of the active and passive aspects of Odysseus' name, see Dimock 1956 and Peradotto 1990.

²³ Eurycleia is the only one who recognizes Odysseus on her own, without his first revealing himself, as he did to Telemachus.

old nurse might recognize the scar as she handled it and expose his identity. Going near her lord, Eurycleia immediately recognized the scar. The relative pronoun “which” (τήν) is the gateway to the second level analepsis: τήν ποτέ μιν σῦς ἤλασεν λευκῶ ὀδόντι / Παρνησόνδ’ ἐλθόντα μετ’ Αὐτόλυκόν τε καὶ υἱᾶς (“which once the boar with his white tusk had inflicted / on him, when he went to Parnassus, to Autolycus and his children”, 19.393-4).

The entire account of the journey to Mt. Parnassus and back, told by the narrator, is focalized by Eurycleia, as de Jong argues. Handling the scar triggers her memory of how the young Odysseus acquired that scar on a boar hunt with his maternal uncles (de Jong, 1985, 393-466).

Odysseus’ maturation tale ends happily. When he returns to Ithaca, his parents are the welcomers, though Eurycleia may be present in the background:

τὸν μὲν ἄρ’ Αὐτόλυκός τε καὶ υἱέες Αὐτολύκοιο
 εὖ ἰησάμενοι ἠδ’ ἀγλαὰ δῶρα πορόντες
 καρπαλίμως χαίροντα φίλην ἐς πατρίδ’ ἔπεμπον
 εἰς Ἰθάκην. τῷ μὲν ῥα πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
 χαῖρον νοστήσαντι καὶ ἐξερέεινον ἕκαστα,
 οὐλήν ὅττι πάθοι: ὁ δ’ ἄρα σφίσιν εὖ κατέλεξεν
 ὡς μιν θηρεύοντ’ ἔλασεν σῦς λευκῶ ὀδόντι,
 Παρνησόνδ’ ἐλθόντα σὺν υἱάσιν Αὐτολύκοιο.
 (19.459-66)

[Autolycus and the sons of Autolycus, / healing him well and giving him shining presents, sent him / speedily back rejoicing to his own beloved country / in Ithaca, and there his father and queenly mother / were glad in his homecoming, and asked about all that had happened, / and how he came by his wound, and he told well his story, / how in the hunt the boar with his white tusk had wounded him / as he went up to Parnassus with the sons of Autolycus.]

The long digression postpones the description of Eurycleia’s emotional outburst and Odysseus’ violent response. When the frame story resumes, the old nurse recognizes the scar through her tactile familiarity with his body. She lets go of his foot, causing the water basin to tip over. Then she reacts with spontaneous pain and joy:

τήν δ’ ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἔλε φρένα, τῷ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
 δακρυόφι πλησθεν, θαλερῆ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
 ἄψαμένη δὲ γενείου Ὀδυσσῆα προσέειπεν:
 ἦ μάλ’ Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι, φίλον τέκος: οὐδέ σ’ ἐγὼ γε
 πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἄνακτ’ ἐμὸν ἀμφαφάασθαι.
 (19.471-5)

[Pain and joy seized her at once, and both eyes / filled with tears, and the

blossoming voice (θαλαρῆ . . . φωνή) was held within her. / She took the beard of Odysseus in her hands and spoke to him: / "Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you / before; not until I had touched my lord all over."]

Eurycleia turns her eyes toward Penelope, "wishing to indicate to her her beloved husband's presence". She wants to share the good news with her mistress and to point to the scar as proof.²⁴ Odysseus intervenes. But Odysseus, forewarned by Agamemnon's shade and by Athena that wives can be treacherous, still wants to test Penelope. And he must not reveal his identity too soon, since his plot to entrap and slaughter the suitors depends on secrecy and surprise. Thus, before Eurycleia can expose his identity to Penelope, who is sitting nearby, or to any maidservants in the vicinity, Odysseus grabs the nurse's throat and pulls her to him. This is one of the rare occasions when Odysseus loses his composure, as later when he thinks the marriage-bed has been moved. His vehemence with his nurse foreshadows his state of mind when he and his three allies slaughter the suitors and later, when he orders the death of the disloyal handmaids. In his threat, he associates Eurycleia with them, should she speak out and not keep silent:

μαῖα, τίη μ' ἐθέλεις ὀλέσαι; σὺ δέ μ' ἔτρεφες αὐτῇ
 τῷ σῶ ἐπὶ μαζῶ: νῦν δ' ἄλγεα πολλὰ μογήσας
 ἦλυθον εἰκοστῶ ἔτει ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.
 ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐφράσθης καὶ τοι θεὸς ἔμβαλε θυμῶ,
 σίγα, μὴ τίς τ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πύθηται.
 ὦδε γὰρ ἐξερῶ, καὶ μὴν τετελεσμένον ἔσται:
 εἴ χ' ὑπ' ἐμοί γε θεὸς δαμάσῃ μνηστῆρας ἀγαυούς,
 οὐδὲ τροφοῦ οὔσης σεῦ ἀφέξομαι, ὅππότε' ἂν ἄλλας
 δμῶας ἐν μεγάροισιν ἐμοῖς κτείνωμι γυναῖκας.
 (19.482-90)

[Nurse, why are you trying to kill me? You yourself suckled me / at your breast; and now at last after suffering / much, I have come, in the twentieth year, back to my own country. / But now that you have learned who I am, and the god put it into / your mind, hush, let nobody else in the palace know of it. / For so I tell you straight out, and it will be a thing accomplished. / If you do, and by my hands the god beats down the arrogant / suitors, nurse of mine though you are, I will not spare you / when I kill the rest of the serving maids in my palace.]

Meanwhile, Athena helps Odysseus keep his identity secret. She causes Penelope to avert her eyes so she won't see Eurycleia's joyous surprise and Od-

²⁴ This is Eurycleia's first attempt to play matchmaker, as she tries to inform her mistress of the stranger's identity (19.386-93 and 467-94).

ysseus' violent reaction. This is a crucial and fully staged dramatic moment.

Eurycleia plays a minor but crucial role in Odysseus' encounters with the suitors. At 21.381-7, before Odysseus takes his turn at stringing his bow, Eumaeus orders Eurycleia to bar the double doors to the megaron to prevent any suitors from escaping. He tells her to keep the handmaids in the women's quarters and to work in silence, ignoring whatever outcry they might hear from the megaron.

After the slaughter, Eurycleia performs several tasks at Odysseus' command. She identifies which handmaids are guilty and which ones are innocent (22.419-29), information that she had earlier tried to share (19.495-502). Then she summons the twelve disloyal ones and orders them to cleanse the megaron of the gore of battle (22.479-501). She knows that they will soon be led out into the courtyard to be executed. Next she brings her master the fire and sulfur he needs to purify the megaron. And finally, she gets his permission to awaken Penelope and tell her of his return.

3. Eurycleia and Penelope (19.1-84)

In the world of Homer's *Odyssey*, where servants are divided into two groups, the loyal and the treacherous, Eurycleia, like the two loyal herdsmen, is unequivocally loyal. She is strongly committed to Telemachus' safety and to Odysseus' reasserting his position in the household and the community. But while she is attached to the royal family emotionally, she is also aware of the risks she faces as an individual and of her dependency on the patrilineal succession for her personal security. The fact that she was purchased by Laertes means that she is severed from her own family and her own community. In several possible scenarios, she would likely lose her position of authority: if Telemachus were to lose his inheritance, or if Odysseus were to be killed in the battle, or if Penelope were to marry one of the suitors who could then become ἄναξ of the οἶκος and βασιλεύς of Ithaca and the surrounding islands.

From the moment Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus by his boar-hunt scar (19.467-8), she sees that her goals can be realized. She wants, first, to help him restore order in the οἶκος (by eliminating the suitors and the guilty handmaids). Second, she hopes to reunite him with her mistress.²⁵ For her position as keeper of the palace to be secure, there must be harmony between the husband and the wife. Odysseus earlier articulated that principle to the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa when he was wishing her a marriage based on like-mindedness:

²⁵ Eumaeus too plays a mediating role when he negotiates a time and place for Penelope and the disguised Odysseus to meet (17.542-88).

σοὶ δὲ θεοὶ τόσα δοῖεν ὅσα φρεσὶ σῆσι μενοινᾶς,
 ἄνδρα τε καὶ οἶκον, καὶ ὁμοφροσύνην ὀπάσειαν
 ἐσθλήν: οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον,
 ἢ ὄθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχρητον
 ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή: πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι,
 χάρματα δ' εὐμενέτησι, μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί.
 (6.180-5)

[nothing is better than this, more steadfast / than when two people, a man and his wife, keep a harmonious / household (ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχρητον); a thing that brings much distress to / the people who hate them / and pleasure to their well-wishers, and for them the best reputation.]

Eurycleia is forced to reconcile conflicting loyalties. Telemachus had forced her to swear not to tell anyone, including his mother, of his journey. Keeping these secrets from Penelope may strain their connection, but in both instances, Eurycleia had no choice. Slaves in the patriarchal world of Homeric ultimately have to align themselves with their master. Yet Eurycleia feels the need to explain herself and to set things right with her mistress.

In Book 4, Penelope learns from Medon the herald that her son has gone on a potentially dangerous trip without letting her know, and that now the suitors are lying in wait to ambush him in the harbor. Eurycleia, using hyperbole, confesses that she knew of his trip all along:

ἄνυμφα φίλη, σὺ μὲν ἄρ με κατάκτανε νηλεὶ χαλκῷ
 ἢ ἔα ἐν μεγάρω: μῦθον δέ τοι οὐκ ἐπικεύσω.
 ἦδε' ἐγὼ τάδε πάντα, πόρον δέ οἱ ὅσσ' ἐκέλευε,
 σῖτον καὶ μέθυ ἠδύ: ἐμεῦ δ' ἔλετο μέγαν ὄρκον
 μὴ πρὶν σοὶ ἐρέειν, πρὶν δωδεκάτην γε γενέσθαι
 ἢ σ' αὐτὴν ποθέσαι καὶ ἀφορμηθέντος ἀκοῦσαι,
 ὡς ἂν μὴ κλαίουσα κατὰ χροῶν καλὸν ἰάπτῃς.
 (4.744-9)

[My dear bride, kill me then, with the pitiless bronze,²⁶ or else / let me be in the halls. I will not hide the story from you. / I did know all these things, and I gave him all that he asked for, / both bread and sweet wine, but he took a great oath from me / never to tell you of it until it came to the twelfth day, / or

²⁶ The hyperbolic expression “kill me” in Eurycleia’s second apology, as in her earlier apology for not informing Penelope of Telemachus’ journey (4.743), has rhetorical force as a threat that achieves its purpose. It presupposes the master’s control over the bodies of his slaves, echoing the violent diction of Odysseus’s threat at 19.489-90. Though an integral part of the family, the slaves’ status is precarious: they can be killed, should they displease their master – an aspect of the social structure that the *Odyssey* plays down.

until you might miss him yourself or hear he was absent, / so that you might not ruin your lovely skin with weeping.]

Yet even in this scene the two use φίλη (“dear”) when they address one another, indicating their family-like relationship.²⁷

Once the suitors have been slaughtered and there is no need for secrecy, Eurycleia tries to set things right with Penelope. Only then does she confess that she saw the scar while washing the stranger’s feet and wanted to tell her about it, εἰπέμεν: ἀλλά με κείνος ἐλὼν ἐπὶ μάστακα χερσὶν / οὐκ ἔα εἰπέμεναι πολυϊδρείησι νόοιο (“but he stopped my mouth with his hands, would not / let me speak, for his mind sought every advantage”, 23.76-7).

These two instances of keeping important information from Penelope illustrate the difficulty of Eurycleia’s position. It is impossible for her to keep secrets for Telemachus and Odysseus and at the same time be truthful to Penelope. This tension of loyalties points to a less than seamless harmony in the οἶκος and the potential for tensions between genders. It comes after the two women have kept the palace running for the twenty years of Odysseus’ absence. Interestingly, it is slaves who reflect and reveal this tension.²⁸

Meanwhile, after the slaughter of the suitors and the execution of the treacherous handmaids and the disloyal goatherd Melanthus, Eurycleia helps Odysseus get the palace back to order. The megaron where the slaughter took place is cleansed and purified. The loyal handmaids welcome Odysseus and he greets them warmly. Finally, after several requests, he grants his dear nurse permission to awaken Penelope and inform her that he is home.

This leads to the richest and most revealing scene between Eurycleia and Penelope (23.1-85), as Eurycleia tries to convince her mistress that the stranger is indeed Odysseus. Laughing, she ascends to Penelope’s upper bedchamber. In the exchange that follows, they use tender, familiar forms of address: Eurycleia calls Penelope φίλον τέκος (dear child) and φίλη νύμφα (dear bride), and Penelope calls Eurycleia μαῖα φίλη (dear good mother) and τροφός φίλη (dear nurse).²⁹ The emotions that permeate this conversation may be seen as a compressed version of how the two have related to one

²⁷ See Table I-III in Karydos (1998, 59-63), which provide a thorough assemblage of the Eurycleia scenes and of the forms of address between Eurycleia and members of Odysseus’s family.

²⁸ After the reunion, Eurycleia and Eurynome join forces as they make up the marriage-bed (23.289-90). This joint action by a servant from Odysseus’s family and a servant from Penelope’s symbolizes the reunion of husband and wife in their richly symbolic marriage bed.

²⁹ Eurycleia uses the same forms of address with Telemachus and Odysseus, and they with her; cf. Karydos (1998). When Eurycleia calls Penelope φίλη νύμφα (dear bride), she reveals that she is thinking of her as she was when she married Odysseus.

another during Odysseus' long absence.

The question of whether Odysseus will return was resolved at the Council on Olympus in Book 1. Now the question for Penelope is whether the stranger is in fact Odysseus, or an imposter, human or divine. Penelope wants a guarantee that he is the real Odysseus, her Odysseus, the one she has remembered all these years. Audiences know, of course, that Eurycleia's report is accurate; their narrative desire is for Penelope to believe Eurycleia's words. Eurycleia thinks that the problems are all over. The stranger is clearly Odysseus (not just a matter of identity but also of prowess: no one else could have accomplished such feats against such odds).

After the nurse delivers her simple message, Penelope at first expresses disbelief. She accuses Eurycleia of being mad and of insulting her. In a veiled threat, she tells her that only her age has saved her from repercussions. Eurycleia replies that she is not insulting her mistress, and she reiterates that Odysseus is indeed in the house: "He is that stranger-guest, whom all in the house were abusing". Now Penelope responds as Eurycleia had hoped and expected: she springs up from the bed in her joy and embraces the old woman, her eyes streaming tears (23.32-34). Then the dear nurse gives a synopsis of what she ear- and eye-witnessed, stressing how Penelope would have been cheered to see Odysseus triumphant:

οὐκ ἴδον, οὐ πυθόμην, ἀλλὰ στόνον οἶον ἄκουσα
 κτεινομένων: ἡμεῖς δὲ μυχῶ θαλάμων εὐπήκτων
 ἤμεθ' ἀτυζόμεναι, σανίδες δ' ἔχον εὖ ἀραρυῖαι,
 πρὶν γ' ὅτε δή με σὸς υἱὸς ἀπὸ μεγάροιο κάλεσσε
 Τηλέμαχος: τὸν γάρ ῥα πατήρ προέηκε καλέσσαι.
 εὔρον ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσῆα μετὰ κταμένοισι νέκυσσιν
 ἑσταόθ': οἱ δέ μιν ἄμφι, κραταίπεδον οὔδας ἔχοντες,
 κείατ' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν: ἰδοῦσά κε θυμὸν ἰάνθης.
 νῦν δ' οἱ μὲν δὴ πάντες ἐπ' αὐλείησι θύρησιν
 ἄθροοι, αὐτὰρ ὁ δῶμα θεειοῦται περικαλλές,
 πῦρ μέγα κηάμενος: σὲ δέ με προέηκε καλέσσαι.
 (23. 40-51)

[I did not see, I was not told, but I heard the outcry / of them being killed; we, hidden away in the strong built storerooms, / sat there terrified, and the closed doors held us prisoner, / until from inside the great hall your son Telemachus / summoned me, because his father told him to do it. / There I found Odysseus standing among the dead men / he had killed, and they covered the hardened earth, lying / piled on each other around him. You would have been cheered to see him, / splattered over with gore and battle filth, like a lion. / Now they lie all together, by the doors of the courtyard, / while he is burning a great fire, and cleaning the beautiful / house with brimstone. He has sent me on to summon you.]

Eurycleia mentions the outcry that she herself heard from the storeroom and what she saw once she entered the megaron. But she does not describe her cry of celebration nor Odysseus' response (22.401-16). And she stops short of telling Penelope about her role as Odysseus' helper (22.420-34 and 480-501).³⁰ Her assertion, "You would have warmed your θυμός seeing . . .", shows a character-narrator representing the focalization of her interlocutor whom she thereby transports vicariously to the scene in question, where Penelope herself would see Odysseus befouled with blood and the corpses lying atop one another. She uses such vivid detail, hoping to convince Penelope that she is telling the truth.³¹

But Penelope suddenly pulls back and denies the revelation. She offers her own brief explanation for the slaughter. Her self-protective denial is reminiscent of her reaction in Book 19, when she heard the stranger's interpretation of her dream of the geese and the eagle.

By the end of the scene Penelope knows it is her husband: the narrator-focalizer gives us a glimpse of her private thoughts when he describes her descending the stairs to the megaron and debating how to greet "her husband" (23.86). But Penelope still needs to test him, to find out if he has been changed by war and twenty years of absence or if this is still the man she married.

Penelope's final test of Odysseus' identity and character – the ruse of the marriage-bed – involves Eurycleia as a silent character and unwitting helper. Eurycleia is present when Odysseus comes from the bath and, looking like an immortal, rejoins Penelope in the megaron and sits opposite her. He complains of her stubborn heart and orders Eurycleia to make up a bed. Penelope replies. "I know very well what you looked like / when you went in the ship with the sweeping oars, from Ithaca", Then she issues her own order, refining his:

ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
 ἐκτὸς ἐϋσταθέος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει:
 ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
 κώεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα.
 (23.177-80)

[Come then, Eurycleia, and make up a firm bed for him / outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself / built. Put the firm bed here

³⁰ After the slaughter, Eurycleia plays her part by separate the guilty from the innocent handmaidens, summoning the wicked ones, bringing Odysseus sulfur to purify the halls, summoning the 38 loyal handmadens, and informing Penelope.

³¹ Two lines in Eurycleia's account to Penelope of what she found when she entered the megaron match two in the narrator's description: 23.45 = 22.401 and 23.48 = 22 402 (some editors omit 23.48).

outside for him, and cover it / over with fleeces and blankets and with shining coverlets.]

Eurycleia, who is not privy to the secret of the construction of the marriage bed, is silent. But we can imagine moving toward the bedchamber as she starts to obey this command. Her hopes, that Penelope would joyfully embrace Odysseus, and the story would have a fairy-tale ending, have been dashed. They will sleep in separate rooms, in separate beds. She will have to move the marriage-bed out of the bedchamber as she makes it up. Eurynome would have known it was immovable, that it was constructed from a tree trunk still anchored to the ground. Presumably, she would have balked at such a command.

Hearing those words (and perhaps seeing Eurycleia's innocent reaction), Odysseus explodes with anger and interrupts any action Eurycleia might have begun to take. Deeply shaken, he describes how he himself made the bed from an olive tree and used the trunk as a bedpost (23.189-201). He concludes:

οὕτω τοι τόδε σῆμα πιφάυσκομαι: οὐδέ τι οἶδα,
ἦ μοι ἔτ' ἔμπεδόν ἐστι, γύναϊ, λέχος, ἢέ τις ἦδη
ἀνδρῶν ἄλλοσε θῆκε, ταμῶν ὑπο πυθμέν' ἐλαίης.
(23.202-4)

[There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now, / dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man / has cut underneath the stump of the olive and moved it elsewhere.]

At this, Penelope's τῆς δ' αὐτοῦ λύτο γούνατα καὶ φίλον ἦτορ, / σήματ' ἀναγνούση τά οἱ ἔμπεδα πέφραδ' Ὀδυσσεύς: / δακρύσασα δ' ἔπειτ' ἰθὺς δράμεν, ἀμφὶ δὲ χεῖρας / δειρῆ βάλλ' Ὀδυσῆϊ, κάρη δ' ἔκυσ' ("knees and the heart within her went slack, / as she recognized the clear proofs that Odysseus had given; / but then she burst into tears and ran straight to him, throwing / her arms around the neck of Odysseus, and kissed his head", 2.205-9).³²

4. Epilogue: Eurycleia on Stage

Here I consider seven examples of how Eurycleia might be portrayed on the stage. As the wide range of possibilities illustrates, and contrary to Auerbach's assertion, she does have a life of her own and feelings of her own. She is much more complex than the typical supporting character.

³² On the symbolism of the marriage-bed, see the excellent essay by Zeitlin (1996, 117-52).

1. One could stage a soliloquy in which Eurycleia gives her account of dealing with the 108 unwelcome guests and the twelve disobedient handmaids for over three years. Like the shade of the suitor Amphimedon in Book 24,³³ she could recount her own version of the return of Odysseus, based on what she knew and when she knew it. She could include her private speculation on whether (and if so, when) Penelope guessed the identity of the stranger before she trapped him into self-revelation with her marriage-bed lie. She might exaggerate her own role in the reunion, taking credit for reuniting the couple and thereby stabilizing the household. And she might conclude the soliloquy by articulating what kind of future she expects: would Odysseus reward her for her loyalty, as he promises to the loyal herdsmen? And if he leaves for an extended period on his journey inland, according to Tiresias' prophecy, will she even be among the living at his final return?

2. One could stage a conversation among Eurycleia, the handmaids, and other dependents of the royal family. Such a scene might address the servant-master relationships and the status hierarchy among servants, as among servants in such television series as "Downton Abbey" and "Upstairs Downstairs." In the series, they are employees, not slaves; but some of them strive for a better lot in life. Often their narratives intersect meaningfully with the lives of their superiors; at other times, they have stories all their own, as part of a community with its own hierarchies and emotional upheavals.

For example, Eurycleia and Eumaeus might talk about the behavior of servants when their masters are away. The scene could build on Eumaeus' comments on slavery and the life of a slave. For example, in explaining to the stranger why Odysseus' dog, Argos, is in such a sorry state, Eumaeus generalizes about the impact of slavery on the virtue (*ἀρετή*) of the servants:

δμῶες δ' εὐτ' ἂν μηκέτ' ἐπικρατέωσιν ἄνακτες,
οὐκέτ' ἔπειτ' ἐθέλουσιν ἐναίσια ἐργάζεσθαι:
ἦμισυ γάρ τ' ἀρετῆς ἀποαίνυται εὐρύσπα Ζεὺς
ἄνερως, εὐτ' ἂν μιν κατὰ δούλιον ἦμαρ ἔλησιν.
(17.320-3)

[His [Argos'] master, far from his country, / has perished, and the women are careless, and do not look after him; / and serving men, when their masters are no longer about, to make them / work, are no longer willing to do their rightful duties. / For Zeus of the wide brows takes away one half of the virtue / from a man, once the day of slavery closes upon him.]

³³ From the perspective of the slain suitor, Amphimedon, when he tells Agamemnon's shade how Odysseus returned and slaughter them in his halls (24.121-90), Penelope participated actively in the vengeance plot. She recognized Odysseus early on and helped plan their demise.

Eurycleia could engage with Eumaeus about the plight of slaves in general, and of privileged slaves in Odysseus' household. She could defend herself against his generalization about what slaves do in their master's absence. And if she overheard Eumaeus using the neglect of Argos as a metaphor for the disarray of the household, with its implication that she might be responsible, she might respond by blaming the bad character and suitors and disloyal servants.

In addition, Eurycleia could comment on Eumaeus' great expectations when he speculates on what his master would have done for him, if he had grown old in Ithaca (14.63-7). Would she anticipate comparable perks, comparable rewards for loyalty?

Finally, a fictionalized, staged Eurycleia and a fictionalized, staged Eumaeus might discuss the economic aspects of slavery, or the issue of looking out for yourself, if you are the property of another. Would she ever purchase a slave of her own, as Eumaeus once did, when he bought Mesaulius from the Taphians with his own possessions, when aged Laertes was away (14.449-53)? Has she too stored up wealth of her own?

3. Another scene could pit Eurycleia against Eurynome (Actoris, daughter of Actor). This servant, as Penelope reminds Odysseus, used to guard their bedchamber. She alone of the servants knows the secret construction of the marriage bed (23.225-9).³⁴ She came to Ithaca with Penelope at the time of her marriage to Odysseus and seems to be her mistress' confidante. Perhaps she was Penelope's nurse in Icarus' οἶκος. She is more aligned with Penelope, in contrast to Eurycleia, who is aligned with Odysseus. Eurynome might explain why she encouraged Penelope to remarry, ἔρχεαι, ἐπεὶ κάκιον πενήθειαι ἄκριτον αἰεὶ. / ἤδη μὲν γάρ τοι παῖς τηλικός, ὃν σὺ μάλιστα / ἦρῶ ἀθανάτοισι γενεΐσαντα ιδέσθαι ("now that your son is come of age, and you know you always / prayed the immortals, beyond all else, to see him bearded", 18.174-6). And Eurycleia, out of allegiance to her master, even in his absence, and also out of self-interest, would want her mistress to continue to delay. Both servants would know of her ruse of the loom and understand it as a delaying tactic. They may even know which of the maidservants betrayed her trick to the suitors. They would probably have different takes on Penelope's motives for encouraging individual suitors. Was either of them a carrier of her secret messages to the suitors?

4. Another soliloquy could feature the blatantly disloyal handmaid Melantho, daughter of the loyal slave Dolius and sister of the insolent and

³⁴ Phaeacian servants have a similar division of labor. Nausicaa's nurse, Eury-medousa ("Wise Counselor"), is "mistress of the chamber" (θαλαμηπόλος) for the virgin princess (7.7-13). The θαλαμηπόλος Eurynome attends Penelope (23.291-5); we don't know if she was once her nurse.

treacherous goatherd Melanthius. Though Penelope reared her from girlhood, cared for her like a daughter, and cheered her with gifts, Melantho betrayed Penelope by regularly sleeping with one of the leading suitors, Eurymachus. She is also the most likely informer on Penelope for her trickery with the loom.³⁵

Melantho might justify her actions and plead for leniency before the brutal hanging in the courtyard. Or, afterwards as a shade, she could bitterly complain about the cruelty of Odysseus and Telemachus.

As an alternative, Eurycleia and Eurynome might join Melantho onstage to rebut her self-defense. Such a scene could draw on the language that Penelope and Odysseus used when chiding the young handmaid for her rude behavior (18.338-9, 19.81-8, and 90-5).

Melantho's defense could echo the language in Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*, where the shades of the disloyal maidservants express their outrage at the severity of their punishment. Melantho's attitude toward her lot in life and toward Penelope (though based on little in the text itself) could make compelling theater.

5. The scene of Eurycleia's discovery of her master's identity when she washes the feet of the stranger could be staged with no changes. The text sets out the scene in great detail. Penelope would be seated at an angle and at a distance so that Athena's can distract her, so she doesn't witness the dramatic encounter between Odysseus and his nurse.

6. One could stage the dialogue between Eurycleia and Penelope at the beginning of Book 23 (lines 1-84) in the upper bedchamber. Penelope rises from the bed, irritable at being awakened by Eurycleia, who had simply wanted to share her good news. Penelope resists at first but, after Eurycleia's vivid description of what she heard and saw, she melts and embraces the dear nurse. Then, abruptly, she pulls back, regaining her reserve. Finally, she decides to go to see her son and to look upon the scene of the slaughter. She no longer doubts that the stranger – who killed the suitors – is her husband: the narrator describes her heart as “pondering much, whether to keep away and question her dear husband, / or to go up to him and kiss his head and take his hands” (23.85-7). This line sets forth her private thoughts. But once she steps over the threshold of the megaron, she sits apart from him, silent, still needing to test him in her own way.

Eurycleia would be on stage, watching, waiting, hoping her mistress would not remain hard-hearted.

7. Staging the marriage-bed scene would shine a spotlight on Eurycleia's silent but crucial role. This is her last appearance in the poem. Eurycleia is present when Odysseus comes from the bath and, looking like an immortal,

³⁵ Cf. Winkler (1990, 149-50) on Melantho's betrayal.

sits opposite Penelope in the megaron. She refutes his complaint, that her heart is stubborn. Then she springs her trap. She turns to the nurse and, as already seen, says:

ἀλλ' ἄγε οἱ στόρεσον πυκινὸν λέχος, Εὐρύκλεια,
 ἐκτὸς εὖσταθῆος θαλάμου, τὸν ῥ' αὐτὸς ἐποίει:
 ἔνθα οἱ ἐκθεῖσαι πυκινὸν λέχος ἐμβάλετ' εὐνήν,
 κῶεα καὶ χλαίνας καὶ ῥήγεα σιγαλόεντα.
 (23.177-80)

[Come then, Eurycleia, and make up a firm bed for him / outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself / built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it / over with fleeces and blankets, and with shining coverlets.]

Because she knows nothing of the secret construction of the marriage bed, Eurycleia starts to obey this command, as if moving the bed would be a simple matter (Eurynome would have known it was immovable, that it was constructed from a tree trunk still anchored to the ground).

Odysseus' angry outburst stops Eurycleia in her tracks. With passion, he describes how he himself made the bed from an olive tree and used the trunk as a bedpost (23.183-204) and concludes:

οὕτω τοι τόδε σῆμα πιφάυσκομαι: οὐδέ τι οἶδα,
 ἢ μοι ἔτ' ἔμπεδόν ἐστι, γύναι, λέχος, ἢέ τις ἦδη
 ἀνδρῶν ἄλλοσε θῆκε, ταμῶν ὕπο πυθμέν' ἐλαίης.
 (23.202-4)

[There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now, / dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man / has cut underneath the stump of the olive and moved it elsewhere.]

This scene could call attention to Eurycleia's body language. Her ignorance of the nature of the marriage bed means she acts naturally, without hesitation. Her gestures and facial expressions authenticate Penelope's trick, allowing Odysseus to leap to the wrong conclusions. She became Penelope's unwitting accomplice. Caught off guard, Odysseus reveals his intimate knowledge of the secret the couple shared, in all its symbolic force. This leads Penelope to embrace him as her husband (23.205-8). At this point, Eurycleia witnesses what she had long hoped for and what she had twice before tried to make happen. Unwittingly and silently, she fulfills the role of matchmaker. With the husband and wife in harmony, the future of the royal family and their οἶκος (including all the dependents) is secure, at least for now.

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ANNA BELTRAMETTI*

The Nurse from Narrative to Drama: Euripides and the Tragic Deviations of an Ancient Anthropological Figure

Abstract

The essay investigates some figures of nurses in Greek tragedy, highlighting their difference in order to elicit the transformations required by the dramatic reshaping of the ancient folkloric and epic figure of the character. Starting from Eurycleia, the archetypal figure of the nurse in the *Odyssey*, the study first focuses on Cilissa, the nurse of Orestes in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, then analyzes the very different Euripidean figures of Medea's Nurse, of Phaedra's Nurse in *Hippolytus* and of Hermione's Nurse in *Andromache*, highlighting their noble or high origin in contrast with a conventional line of study that classifies them among the humble characters of tragedy. Minor though not humble characters, the tragic nurses interpret from time to time the strong distinctive features of the Homeric Eurycleia: a good substitute mother is Cilissa, in conflict with the bad natural mother of Orestes in Aeschylus; the critical intelligence, almost a dramatic split of the protagonist, is the dominant trait of Medea's nurse; the self-denial of unrequited maternal love connotes Phaedra's nurse; the ambivalence bordering on servile duplicity distinguishes Hermione's nurse. Introducing into tragedy now the language of feelings and bodies, now the voice of the shared and collective ethos in contrast with the passions of the main characters, the Nurses incarnate in the great texts the feminine dimension and, better than the Pedagogues, recall the common feeling with its principles and its *gnomai*, often overcome or transgressed for political reasons.

KEYWORDS: humble characters vs minor ones; body language; critical intelligence; Homer; Aeschylus; Euripides

1. In the Beginning There Was Eurycleia, the Bride *Manquée*

We all know Eurycleia. She has been in our imagination and repertoire of ancient female figures since school days. Then we met her again as an incipitary figure in Erich Auerbach's famous introductory essay in *Mimesis* devoted to the comparison between Odysseus' recognition scene in Book 19 of the *Odyssey* – the archetypal scene of Western realism, according to Auerbach – and the biblical scene of the sacrifice of Isaac in *Genesis* 22.1-18 – the latter a paradigm of the symbolic tale for Auerbach, not built on realistic details and not aimed at reality, but at

* University of Pavia - annabelt@unipv.it

truth (1956, 3-29). For us, Eurycleia is still the emblematic figure of that recognition scene, originating in a mark on the body, in the scar that her hero received as a teenager during a boar hunt and marked the beginning of his heroic path. A connection based on a deep and long-standing physical intimacy, on a shared belonging rooted in the senses and in the immediate perception of the resemblance of the bodies and the voice, on skin contact, on the memory of nourishment given and received. It is a newly rediscovered bond which blocks Eurycleia's speech, an emotion which only emerges through body language and which the old nurse shares only with the old dog Argos. Eurycleia becomes paralysed – she lets Odysseus' foot fall into the basin – and Argos lets himself go – wagging his tail and lowering his ears, reassured and happy that he has found his master again.

ὥς οἱ μὲν τοιαῦτα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀγόρευον·
 ἄν δὲ κύων κεφαλὴν τε καὶ οὔατα κείμενος ἔσχεν,
 Ἄργος, Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρονος, ὃν ῥά ποτ' αὐτὸς
 θρέψε μὲν, οὐδ' ἀπόνητο, πάρος δ' εἰς Ἴλιον ἰρήν
 ὦχετο. τὸν δὲ πάροιθεν ἀγίνεσκον νέοι ἄνδρες
 αἴγας ἐπ' ἀγροτέρας ἠδὲ πρόκας ἠδὲ λαγούσ·
 δὴ τότε κεῖτ' ἀπόθεστος ἀποιχομένοιο ἄνακτος,
 ἐν πολλῇ κόπρῳ, ἧ οἱ προπάροιθε θυράων
 ἡμίονων τε βοῶν τε ἄλις κέχυτ', ὄφρ' ἂν ἄγοιεν
 δμῶες Ὀδυσσῆος τέμενος μέγα κοπρήσοντες·
 ἔνθα κύων κεῖτ' Ἄργος, ἐνίπλευς κυνοραιστέων.
 δὴ τότε γ', ὡς ἐνόησεν Ὀδυσσέα ἐγγὺς ἐόντα,
 οὐρῆ μὲν ῥ' ὃ γ' ἔσηνε καὶ οὔατα κάββαλεν ἄμφω,
 ἄσσον δ' οὐκέτ' ἔπειτα δυνήσατο οἷο ἄνακτος
 ἐλθέμεν·
 (17.290-304)

[Thus they spoke to one another. And a dog that lay there raised his head and pricked up his ears, Argus, steadfast Odysseus' dog, whom of old he had himself bred, but had no joy of him, for before that he went to sacred Ilium. In days past the young men were accustomed to take the dog to hunt the wild goats, and deers, and hares; but now he lay neglected, his master gone, in the deep dung of mules and cattle, which lay in heaps before the doors, till the slaves of Odysseus should take it away to manure his wide lands. There lay the dog Argus, full of dog ticks. But now, when he became aware that Odysseus was near, he wagged his tail and dropped both ears, but nearer to his master he had no longer strength to move.]¹

ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν ἀνσταῖσα, περίφρων Εὐρύκλεια,
 νίψον σοῖο ἄνακτος ὀμήλικα· καί που Ὀδυσσεὺς
 ἦδη τοιόσδ' ἐστὶ πόδας τοιόσδε τε χεῖρας·

¹ All quotations from *The Odyssey* refer to Homer 1995.

αἶψα γὰρ ἐν κακότητι βροτοὶ καταγηράσκουσιν.
ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη, γρηῦς δὲ κατέσχετο χερσὶ πρόσωπα,
δάκρυα δ' ἔκβαλε θερμά, ἔπος δ' ὀλοφυδνὸν ἔειπεν·

...
τῷ σε πόδας νίψω ἅμα τ' αὐτῆς Πηνελοπείης
καὶ σέθεν εἵνεκ', ἐπεὶ μοι ὀρώρεται ἔνδοθι θυμὸς
κῆδεσιν. ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν ξυνίει ἔπος, ὅττι κεν εἴπω·
πολλοὶ δὴ ξεῖνοι ταλαπεῖριοι ἐνθάδ' ἴκοντο,
ἀλλ' οὐ πῶ τινά φημι εἰκότα ὧδε ιδέσθαι
ὥς σὺ δέμας φωνήν τε πόδας τ' Ὀδυσσῆι ἔοικας.

...
ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη, γρηῦς δὲ λέβηθ' ἔλε παμφανόωντα
τοῦ πόδας ἐξαπένιζεν, ὕδωρ δ' ἐνεχεύατο πουλὺ
ψυχρόν, ἔπειτα δὲ θερμὸν ἐπήφυσεν

...
νίξε δ' ἄρ' ἄσσον ἰοῦσα ἄναχθ' ἐόν· αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνω
οὐλήν, τὴν ποτέ μιν σῦς ἤλασε λευκῶ ὀδόντι
Παρνησόνδ' ἐλθόντα μετ' Αὐτόλυκόν τε καὶ υἴας,
μητρὸς ἑῆς πάτερ' ἐσθλόν
(19.357-95)

[“Come now, wise Eurycleia, arise and wash the feet of your master’s agemate. Just such as his are now no doubt the feet of Odysseus, and such his hands, for quickly do men grow old in evil fortune.” So she spoke, and the old woman hid her face in her hands, and let fall hot tears, uttering words of lamentation . . . “Therefore I will wash your feet both for Penelope’s own sake and for yours, for the heart within me is stirred with sorrow. But come now, hear the word that I shall speak. Many sore-tried strangers have come here, but I declare that never yet have I seen any man so like another as you in form, and in voice, and in feet are like Odysseus.” . . . So he spoke, and the old woman took the shining cauldron from which she was about to wash his feet, and poured in cold water in plenty, and then added the hot . . . So she drew near and began to wash her lord; at once she recognized the scar of the wound which long ago a boar had dealt him with his white tusk, when Odysseus had gone to Parnassus to visit Autolycus, his mother’s noble father.]

τὴν γρηῦς χεῖρεςσι καταπρηνέσσι λαβοῦσα
γνῶ ῥ' ἐπιμασσαμένη, πόδα δὲ προέηκε φέρεσθαι·
ἐν δὲ λέβητι πέσε κνήμη, κανάχησε δὲ χαλκός,
ἄψ δ' ἐτέρωσ' ἐκλίθη· τὸ δ' ἐπὶ χθονὸς ἐξέχυθ' ὕδωρ.
τὴν δ' ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἔλε φρένα, τῷ δὲ οἱ ὄσσε
δακρυόφι πλησθεν, θαλερῆ δὲ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
ἀψαμένη δὲ γενείου Ὀδυσσῆα προσέειπεν·
ἦ μάλ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι, φίλον τέκος· οὐδέ σ' ἐγώ γε
πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἄνακτ' ἐμὸν ἀμφαφάσθαι.

ἦ καὶ Πηνελόπειαν ἐσέδρακεν ὀφθαλμοῖσι,
 πεφραδέειν ἐθέλουσα φίλον πόσιν ἔνδον ἔοντα.
 ἦ δ' οὔτ' ἀθρήσαι δύνατ' ἀντίη οὔτε νοῆσαι·
 τῆ γὰρ Ἀθηναίη νόον ἔτραπεν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
 χεῖρ' ἐπιμασσάμενος φάρυγος λάβε δεξιτερῆφι,
 τῆ δ' ἐτέρῃ ἔθεν ἄσσον ἐρύσσατο φώνησέν τε·
 μαῖα, τίη μ' ἐθέλεις ὀλέσαι; σὺ δέ μ' ἔτρεφες αὐτῆ
 τῷ σῶ ἐπὶ μαζῶ·
 (19.443-67)

[This scar the old woman, when she had taken his leg in the flat of her hands, remembered when she felt it, and she let his leg fall. Into the basin his lower leg fell, and the bronze rang. It tipped over, and the water was spilled on the ground. Then upon her heart came joy and grief at the same moment, and her eyes were filled with tears and her voice caught in her throat. She touched the chin of Odysseus, and said: "Surely you are Odysseus, dear child, and I did not know you, until I had handled all the body of my master". She spoke, and with her eyes looked toward Penelope, wanting to show her that her dear husband was at home. But Penelope could not meet her glance nor understand, for Athene had turned her thoughts aside. But Odysseus, feeling for the woman's throat, seized it with his right hand, and with the other drew her closer to him, and said: "Mother, why will you destroy me? You yourself nursed me at this your own breast."]

But Eurycleia does not inhabit that famous recognition scene only. Her character appears throughout the whole poem – she shows up in Book 1, 2, 4, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 – and, when she acts, she is crucial for determining the events in the palace as well as the plot. Eurycleia, rather than Penelope, is the confidant and accomplice of young Telemachus: she keeps the secret of his journey to find his father and helps him get started, she warns him that the suitors will steal his wealth in his absence, she prepares the gifts of wine and cheese for the hosts who will receive him (*Od.* 2.337-412); she is the first to welcome him on his return (*Od.* 17.31-5). She provides the young prince of Ithaca with the same care and affection she had devoted to her first prince, the new-born baby whom she had welcomed in her arms when she was young (*Od.* 19.354-5) and whom she had placed on the knees of Autolycus, who had come to Ithaca just after his birth to give him a name and mark his identity (*Od.* 19.399-412).² Since before Odysseus' birth up until his return,

² Eurycleia's act of placing the child on the knees of his maternal grandfather for the imposition of the name – in the name of his nephew, Ὀδυσσεύς, the grandfather asks for the perpetuation of the hatred, ὀδυσσαμένοσ, he feels for many men and women – has no parallel in Greek literature. The nurse's act, however, recalls the ritual of *Amphidromia*, attested at Athens (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 160 E), in which the father, preceded by two nurses, quickly leads the newborn around the domestic fireplace, *hestia*, and inte-

after ten years at war and ten years of endless travels, she has remained an integral part of the house that she knows and supervises, the house she had entered with the honour due to a young bride, bought by Laertes for the price of twenty oxen, according to the traditional rule of bridal gifts (*hedna*)³ given by the bridegroom to the bride's father or tutor.

Τηλέμαχος δ', ὅθι οἱ θάλαμος περικαλλέος ἀύλης
 ὑψηλὸς δέδμητο περισκέπτῳ ἐνὶ χώρῳ,
 ἔνθ' ἔβη εἰς εὐνήν πολλὰ φρεσὶ μερμηρίζων.
 τῷ δ' ἄρ' ἄμ' αἰθομένας δαΐδας φέρε κεδνὰ ἰδυῖα
 Εὐρύκλει', Ὡπος θυγάτηρ Πεισηνορίδαο,
 τήν ποτε Λαέρτης πρίατο κτεάτεσσιν ἐοῖσιν
 πρωθήβην ἔτ' εὐῶσαν, ἔεικοσάβωια δ' ἔδωκεν,
 ἴσα δέ μιν κεδνῇ ἀλόχῳ τίεν ἐν μεγάροισιν,
 εὐνή δ' οὐ ποτ' ἔμικτο, χόλον δ' ἀλέεινε γυναικός·
 ἦ οἱ ἄμ' αἰθομένας δαΐδας φέρε, καὶ ἐ μάλιστα
 δμῳάων φιλέεσκε, καὶ ἔτρεφε τυτθὸν ἔοντα.
 ὦϊξεν δὲ θύρας θαλάμιου πύκα ποιητοῖο,
 ἔζετο δ' ἐν λέκτρῳ, μαλακὸν δ' ἔκδυε χιτῶνα·
 καὶ τὸν μὲν γραίης πυκιμηδέος ἔμβαλε χερσίν.
 ἦ μὲν τὸν πτύξασα καὶ ἀσκήσασα χιτῶνα,
 πασσάλῳ ἀγκρεμάσασα παρὰ τρητοῖσι λέχεσσι
 βῆ ῥ' ἴμεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο, θύρην δ' ἐπέρυσσε κορώνῃ
 ἀργυρῆν, ἐπὶ δὲ κληῖδ' ἐτάνυσσεν ἱμάντι.
 ἔνθ' ὃ γε παννύχιος, κεκαλυμμένος οἰὸς ἄωτῳ,
 βούλευε φρεσὶν ἦσιν ὁδὸν τὴν πέφραδ' Ἀθήνη.
 (1.425-44)

[But Telemachus, where his chamber was built in the beautiful court, high, in a place with a surrounding view, there he went to his bed, pondering many things in his mind; and with him, bearing blazing torches, went true-hearted Eurycleia, daughter of Ops, son of Peisenor. Her long ago Laertes had bought

grates him into the household, giving him a name and a social identity. Eurycleia's assumption of Odysseus' social recognition, a role historically entrusted to the father, confirms the nurse's privileged relationship with the father of the child, who chooses her and immediately gives her the new-born, as specified also by Cilissa, Orestes' nurse, in *Libation-Bearers*, 762. On the *Amphidromia* ceremony, see Burkert 2003, 464-5.

³ The Chorus of the Oceanids refers to the ἔδνα offered by the bridegroom in order to win the bride in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* 559. The word recurs several times in Euripides' *Andromache* and always means an exchange of marriage gifts (2, 153, 873), though here in the sense of a female dowry given by fathers to the bridegrooms' families on the occasion of Andromache's wedding with Hector and Hermione's wedding with Neoptolemus.

with his wealth, when she was in her first youth, and gave for her the price of twenty oxen; and he honored her even as he honored his faithful wife in his halls, but he never lay with her in love, for he avoided the wrath of his wife. She it was who bore for Telemachus the blazing torches; for she of all the handmaids loved him most, and had nursed him when he was a child. He opened the doors of the well-built chamber, sat down on the bed, and took off his soft tunic and laid it in the wise old woman's hands. And she folded and smoothed the tunic and hung it on a peg beside the corded bedstead, and then went forth from the chamber, drawing the door to by its silver handle, and driving the bolt home with the thong. So there, the night through, wrapped in a fleece of wool, he pondered in his mind the journey that Athene had shown him.]

In the poem which survives, in a scene of the first book no less accurate and no less rich in realistic details than the more famous recognition scene, Eurycleia is already there to set the story in motion with her noble name suggesting 'wide fame', as a strong and distinctive presence in Ithaca's palace. The bard specifies her origins and social status, mentioning the name of her father and that of the father of her father. Although she plays a servile role in the palace, Eurycleia is introduced by the narrator not as a slave but as a chosen bride and a bride *manquée*: Laertes does not share his bed with her, but he entrusts her with the task of feeding and caring for the new-born, choosing her as a surrogate, symbolic mother to the future lord of Ithaca.⁴ Moreover, in her constant role as a mother, a crucial figure for the transmission of power from father to son in theogonic myths⁵ and for legitimacy in aristocratic societies, Eurycleia participates in the decisions, conflicts and preparations for Odysseus' revenge, taking care, when the deed has been done, to inform Penelope, who is excluded from the knowledge of the plot. It is she who comforts Penelope about her son's secret voyage in search of his father; it is she who urges Penelope to spare old Laertes the news of Telemachus' absence and thus an additional grief (*Od.* 4.742-57); it is she who announces to Penelope the return of her husband (*Od.* 23.1-84), though only after sharing and supporting Odysseus' plan to exterminate the suitors and kill the unfaithful maids (*Od.* 19.485-502) after closing, according to Telemachus' order, the doors leading to the halls chosen for the contest of the bow and the massacre (*Od.* 20, 21 and 22). Finally, she is the one who acts as an intermediary between the men's hall and the women's apartments, between lords and servants.

⁴ In Eurycleia's dialogues with Telemachus and Odysseus there are many appellations for son, τέκνον, φίλον τέκος, and nurse, μαιῖα.

⁵ According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Kronos, with the aid of his mother Gaia, castrates his father Ouranos and usurps his throne (137-82). Then Zeus, thanks to his mother Rhea, is saved from his father Kronos, who had swallowed his other children; he kills him and assumes kingship (453-506).

Wisdom, cleverness, elective belonging to the household she serves, physical intimacy rooted in the nourishment and care of the children who have grown into men, in the direct contact with their bodies, ability to admonish, trust and complicit loyalty: throughout the narrative Eurycleia epitomises and interprets the distinguishing features that make the nurse a relevant figure in Homeric society⁶ and the archetype of the tragic nurses of Attic drama. The latter are all better than Eurycleia, different one from another, each constructed on the dominance of one feature over others; one in particular, Hermione's nurse in Euripides' *Andromache*, is characterised by conflicting and strongly innovative features, namely disapproval of and ill-concealed detachment from the princess, violence against Andromache and her coward father Menelaus.

2. "She put on a sorrowful face-concealing the laughter that is underneath":⁷ the Good and the Evil Mother

Thus Cilissa, Orestes' nurse, exposes her protégé's mother while addressing the women of the Chorus: Clytemnestra, who, with the aid of her lover Aegisthus, killed her bridegroom Agamemnon after his victory at Troy, lives in dread of her son's revenge and rejoices in relief at the news of his death. It is the climax of *The Libation-Bearers*, the central play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. It is also the emotional peak of the trilogy, when tension is overwhelming at the peak of the tension. Orestes and Pylades arrive at the palace in Argos, Orestes pays homage to his father's tomb, the Electra-Orestes recognition takes place, with Electra informing him during the *kommos* about her unfortunate fate as an outcast and about the triumph of the two usurping assassins, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Pretending to be strangers who had come to bring the news of Orestes' death, Orestes and Pylades had entered the palace through deception to commit matricide and avenge Agamemnon; while Clytemnestra feigns despair, Cilissa, Orestes' good substitute mother, exposes her duplicity by revealing to the women of the Chorus the ill-concealed joy that shone in the queen's eyes behind her grief-stricken façade:

ΚΙΛΙΣΣΑ

Αἴγισθον ἢ κρατοῦσα τοῖς ξένοις καλεῖν
ὅπως τάχιστα ἄνωγεν, ὡς σαφέστερον
ἀνήρ ἀπ' ἀνδρὸς τὴν νεάγγελτον φάτιν

⁶ Although stratified and poetically composite (Snodgrass 1974), Homeric society maintains some constants in the palatial environments and in the recurring figures, by definition long-lasting components.

⁷ Nurse: Πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας / θέτο σκυθρωπὸν ὄμμα, τὸν γ' ἐντὸς γέλων / κεύθουσ' (*Libation-Bearers* 737-9).

ἐλθῶν πύθηται τήνδε. πρὸς μὲν οἰκέτας
 θέτο σκυθρωπὸν ὄμμα, τόν γ' ἐντὸς γέλων
 κεύθουσ' ἐπ' ἔργοις διαπεπραγμένοις καλῶς
 κείνη, δόμοις δὲ τοῖσδε παγκάκως ἔχει
 φήμης ὕφ' ἧς ἤγγειλαν οἱ ξένοι τορῶς.
 ἦ δὴ κλυὼν ἐκεῖνος εὐφρανεῖ νόον,
 εὔτ' ἂν πύθηται μῦθον. ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ·
 ὥς μοι τὰ μὲν παλαιὰ συγκεκραμένα
 ἄλγη δύσοιστα τοῖσδ' ἐν Ἀτρέως δόμοις
 τυχόντ' ἐμὴν ἤλγυνεν ἐν στέρνοις φρένα,
 ἀλλ' οὐ τί πω τοιόνδε πῆμ' ἀνεσχόμην.
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα τλημόνως ἦντλον κακά·
 φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
 ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,
 καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων

...

καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλητ' ἐμοὶ
 τλάσῃ· τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερεὶ βοτὸν
 τρέφειν ἀνάγκη - πῶς γὰρ οὐ; - τροφοῦ φρενί·
 οὐ γὰρ τι φωνεῖ παῖς ἐτ' ὦν ἐν σπαργάνοις
 εἰ λιμός, ἢ δίψη τις, ἢ λιψουρία
 ἔχει· νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρχης τέκνων.
 τούτων πρόμαντις οὔσα, πολλὰ δ' οἶομαι
 ψευσθεῖσα, παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια,
 κναφεὺς τροφεὺς τε ταυτὸν εἰχέτην τέλος.
 ἐγὼ διπλᾶς δὴ τάσδε χειρωναξίας
 ἔχουσ' Ὀρέστην ἐξεθρεψάμην πατρί·
 τεθνηκότος δὲ νῦν τάλαινα πεύθομαι.
 (734-65)

[The mistress has ordered me to summon Aegisthus as quickly as possible to see the visitors, so that he can come and learn about this newly-reported information more clearly, man from man. In front of the servants she put on a sorrowful face-concealing the laughter that is underneath on account of the event that has come to pass, which is good thing for her, but for this house things are thoroughly bad, as a result of the news that the visitors have reported very plainly . . . O wretched me! For I found the old griefs that have happened in this house of Atreus hard enough to bear, all mixed together as they were, and they pained my heart within my breast; but I have never yet had to endure a sorrow like this. Under the other troubles I patiently bore up. But dear Orestes, who wore away my life with toil, whom I reared after receiving him straight from his mother's womb! (Over and over again I heard) his shrill, imperative cries, which forced me to wander around at night (and perform) many disagreeable tasks which I had to endure and which did me no good. A child without intelligence must needs be reared like an animal –

how could it be otherwise? – by the intelligence of his nurse; when he’s still an infant in swaddling clothes he can’t speak all if he’s in the grip of hunger or thirst, say, or of an urge to make water – and the immature bowel of small children is its own master. I had to divine these things in advance, and often, I fancy, I was mistaken, and as a cleaner of the baby’s wrappings – well, a launderer and a caterer were holding the same post. Practising both these two crafts, I reared up Orestes for his father; and now, to my misery, I lean that he is dead! And I am going for the man who has abused and wrecked this house – and this is news he’ll be pleased to learn.]⁸

The first tragic figure of *trophos* known to us does not contradict the epic model of Eurycleia at all. However, unlike Eurycleia, who has a name that suggests high lineage and stands beside the lords of Ithaca with the authority of a bride *manquée* and an elective mother more influential than any legitimate wife, Cilissa, who bears a name indicating a stranger or maybe a prisoner of war, is only an extraneous witness to the crimes committed at the palace. She has suffered the horror of these crimes, even though she never played any direct part in them. Unlike Eurycleia, the lady of affections and intrigues, Cilissa has no ties with Agamemnon’s house except with Orestes, whom she nurtured and cared for.

From the complex character of Eurycleia, the paradigmatic Nurse, Cilissa only inherits the maternal protective function, thanks to breast-feeding, which in the ancients’ imagination is much more binding than actual pregnancy.⁹ And it is through breast-feeding and nourishment that the alien Cilissa is endowed by Aeschylus with strong tragic hues and placed at the core of the conflicts contaminating the basic structures of kinship and birth ties. Her opposition to Clytemnestra dramatises, perhaps for the first time in Western drama and literature, the ambivalence of motherhood. The two women living under the same roof embody the first, conflicting images of the good and the evil mother. Clytemnestra and Cilissa are both related to milk, which in the nurse is associated with life and nurture, although in the mother it takes the colour of blood and death. Cilissa, to whom Agamemnon entrusted his son at the moment of birth, remembers the child she nourished, cleaned and nurtured with genuine

⁸ All quotations from this play refer to Aeschylus 2009.

⁹ Vilatte (1991, 10-13) believes, even against lexical evidence, that in Ancient Greece breast-feeding was an exclusive task of mothers, claiming that the young virginal age or old age of the Greek nurses known to us was incompatible to breast-feeding. Pedrucci (2015, 36 and 37-43), on the basis of literary and medical texts, both Greek and Roman, takes a more cautious view, embracing the hypothesis of the co-existence of maternal nursing and wet-nursing also in Greece where wet-nursing was less common, but where kinship based on breast milk, regarded by Hippocratic doctors and Aristotle as equivalent to blood and male sperm, was acknowledged. On the strong symbolic meaning of the breasts compared with that of the womb, see Castellaneta 2013.

fondness in spite of not being his biological mother. Instead, Clytemnestra, sent offerings to Agamemnon's tomb in the throes of a scary nightmare in which she gives birth to a snake which sucks clots of blood together with her milk (523-33). Then, when she is about to be killed, she reiterates the maternal gesture *par excellence*:¹⁰ she bares her breast and begs Orestes for mercy, but he cannot remember the sweet act of suckling; he only remembers the shame of being sent away and left to wretchedness when he was a child (900-13).

In her brief speech, Cilissa presents herself as a figure of compensation: by looking after the child ousted from Clytemnestra's womb, she replaces the mother who killed the father of her children in order to conquer the throne and the royal bed, who justified uxoricide as a revenge for the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia and yet did not hesitate to push her surviving children away – this is what Electra screams in the *kommos* (444-5), before Orestes holds it against her while stabbing her to death – one who disowned her children and obliged them to play second fiddle to her own well-being, one who killed them at least in a symbolic way.

The second and central play of the *Oresteia*, constructed on the disintegration of the deepest blood and family bonds, culminates in the extreme crime of matricide while exposing the process of corruption of motherhood in the queen, who combines and confuses maternity and power, political lie and crime. At the same time it deconstructs the mother; as in a mirror structure it provides the character of the Nurse with the features of tenderness, reliability and authenticity of emotions. Cilissa, the nurse who outclasses the mother-stepmother, suggests that elective relations are surpassing family relations as a new order in society and affections is about to emerge, at the dawn of the 'modern' world ushered and founded by Athena on the social and political pact at the end of *Eumenides*.¹¹

3. "Everyone had voice, the woman and the slave and the master . . . Mine was a democratic theatre"¹²

Thus, according to Aristophanes, Euripides defends his drama in the deba-

¹⁰ This *topos* can be traced back to Homer (*Il.* 22.82-3), to the image of Hecuba exposing her breast to Hector, as she implores him to have respect for and perhaps also awe, αἶδεο, of it, and desist from fighting Achilles. As Lanza observes (1995, 35), the reference to the Homeric passage in the *The Libation-Bearers* (896-7) is made clear precisely through Clytemnestra's use of the same untranslatable verb, while, with the same gesture, she tries to prevent her son from stabbing her to death, τόνδε αἶδεσαι, τέκνον, μαστόν. On the repetition of this motif see also Euripides, *Electra* 1206-7, and *Orestes* 526-7 and 839-43.

¹¹ On the new order established by Athena. see Nikolai (2009-2010).

¹² Euripides: ἄλλ' ἔλεγεν ἡ γυνή τε μοι χῶ δοῦλος οὐδὲν ἦττον / χῶ δεσπότης . . . δημοκρατικὸν γὰρ αὐτ' ἔδρων (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 949-52).

te with Aeschylus in the *Frogs* (948-52), the sensational comedy of 406 BC which employs the play within the play device and weaves together poetry and politics. The line is surprising and has been interpreted in several ways. A number of commentators and interpreters still anachronistically project the features of inclusion and openness which, at least theoretically, belong to modern democracies, onto Athenian democracy and in so doing they miss Euripides' contradiction. This interpretation is confirmed by the long-standing *lectio facillior* which ascribes to Euripides a theatre of the humble, which includes nurses and pedagogues, in line with an enlarged political system.¹³ However, as Edith Hall rightly argues in her seminal 1997 study on the sociology of tragedy, Athenian democracy was not inclusive at all, not even in the radical forms of the post-Periclean demagogues. Women, slaves – precisely the categories mentioned by Euripides – and foreigners, including richmetics, were not granted full political rights. So how should we interpret the line attributed to Euripides by Aristophanes? Can we agree with Hall (1997, 125) in recognising the comic poet's insight that tragic theatre, and especially Euripidean drama, tended to anticipate historical democracy by deploying and representing those voices as yet excluded from public debate?

In the light of historiography and of what remains of the Euripidean production, the line is not only contradictory but also heavily antiphrastic and provocative. Euripides does not stage the humble, but rather the disgraced and the marginalised of Athenian democracy.¹⁴ The nurses we know from Homer are neither humble nor socially low. In the archaic *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the titular goddess was a magic and terrible nurse when, disguised as an old woman who had recently lost her own child, she entered the palace of the king of Eleusis as a nurse for his son Demophoon, whom she had tried to make immortal by nightly immersing him into the fire.¹⁵ Both Eurycleia's name and patronymic prove her noble origins. But also her opposite, the evil nurse who had sold young prince Eumaeus into slavery, condemning him to become a servant working in a pigsty in Ithaca, was a princess. Eumaeus tells Odysseus her story, which is in part his own story, before recognising him: some Phoenician merchants had come to the house of his rich father, the king of the prosperous island of Syria, and one of them had seduced his nurse, the beautiful woman from Sidon who when a girl had been kidnapped by Taphian pirates and sold to Syrian lords. She had been promised by the merchants that they would take her back to her home town and, in turn, she

¹³ On the 'humility' of minor characters and their elemental wisdom, see Grillone 1979 and Castagna 2007.

¹⁴ On the so-called realism of Euripides, see Sonnino 2021.

¹⁵ On the ambivalence of the nurse often endowed with magical thinking, see Menacacci 1995.

had secretly vowed to give them all the gold and the most precious treasure she could steal from the palace, the young Eumaeus, who had been entrusted to her care by the king and who in turn would be sold to Laertes (*Od.* 15.403-53). Even Hypsipyle from the homonymous Euripidean tragedy, the nurse to the little Opheltes in the palace of Lycurgus at Nemea, had been queen of Lemnos. Neither are the pedagogues who take care of many generations of the same family, moving from fathers to sons and from the role of tutors to that of faithful advisors of their pupils, of humble origins.¹⁶

Euripides' nurses and pedagogues, just like the peasant farmer, ἀντουργός, the husband of Electra in the eponymous tragedy and the one who addresses the assembly in *Orestes* (917-22), one who seldom "visits the city and the circle of the *agora*", cannot be mistaken as voices of democracy.¹⁷ Rather, they are the voices of dissent or of the lack of moderation due to unscrupulous political experiments that frequently escalate into infighting.

Those voices repeatedly classified by the critical tradition as the voices of the 'humble' in the Euripidean drama recirculate an ancient knowledge, a conservative and in many ways regressive – though still widely shared – *ethos*. A subdued common and current wisdom which coincides neither with the aristocratic maximalism of the heroic code nor with political democratic extremism. It rather agrees with the arguments of Aristophanes' farmers, nostalgic for peace, celebrations and the marketplace, less bound to the city than to traditions and the soil, extraneous and averse to the passions of heroes and demagogues, mainly concerned with the material wealth wrecked by war. These are the voices which Euripides intercepts together with his contemporary Aristophanes, who represents them in a comic and parodic way, both anticipating the *Oeconomicus* of the pro-Spartan Xenophon, with its praise of rural lords, very good at managing their own property, the *kalokagathoi* to whom it would be appropriate to entrust also the management of public goods. Whether family property or inheritance, figures of memory or of critical consciousness within families, in the mode of mentors or al-

¹⁶ Such is the pedagogue who, through different dramatic strategies, allows for the Electra-Orestes recognition in both Euripides' and Sophocles' *Electra*, such is the pedagogue of Creusa in *Ion* and the one in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, who accompanies Clytemnestra to Agamemnon's house at the request of her father. On the continuity and contiguity between the figure of the nurse and that of the pedagogue that converge in the novel, see Alaux and Létoublon 2001.

¹⁷ *Electra* 1-53: the farmer tells the backstory in the Prologue and welcomes the two strangers, 341-431. Electra says that he is poor, πένης, but noble and respectful, γενναῖος καὶ εὐσεβής. The dialogue with him gives Orestes the opportunity, just before the recognition scene between brother and sister, to make a long speech, 367-400, about the main features of these free men excluded from politics, endowed with autonomy of thought and an underrated ability to moderate. On the potentialities – also political – of small farmers in opposition to demagogues, see Di Benedetto 1971, 205-11.

lies of princes and princesses, whom they almost always support with unconditioned dedication in the attempt to protect them against dangers and mitigate their excesses and *hybris*, nurses and pedagogues frequently recur in Euripidean drama. However, despite the stability of their function, they enter the drama carrying with them different dramatic values and meanings, speaking different languages with diverse emotional tones, characterised in gender terms as male or female. What changes in the nurses whose function and meaning we can better understand and who come from the same period of Euripides' career, the years between 431 and 425-424 BC, during the first stage of the Peloponnesian War? How do Medea's nurse, Phaedra's nurse in *Hippolytus* and Hermione's nurse in *Andromache* relate to each other?

4. "I know her and fear her":¹⁸ Intelligence and Doubling

This is line 39 in *Medea's* Prologue, a melodramatic overture, highly crafted both metrically and lexically, on which anapaests for alternating voices are seamlessly grafted, taking the place of the *parodos*, the traditional recitative or chorus's entry. The Nurse is the dominant and connective figure of this score: the slow movement opens with the Nurse's soliloquy in iambic trimetres, the metre most akin to everyday language (1-48). This turns into a dialogue when the old Pedagogue arrives on stage with Medea's children (49-95); then it becomes more agitated with the anapaestic exchange initiated by Medea's lyrical lamentations (96-7 and 111-14) heard from within the palace, to which the Nurse replies by trying to restrain her queen with a slower and more gnomic recitative (98-110 and 115-30). When the Chorus of Corinthian women enters the scene, it explodes into a desperate chant with the alternating voices of the Chorus, the Nurse and Medea, who casts curses and invokes death from off-stage (131-210). The Nurse moves from scene to scene through spoken lines to recitative (see Cerbo 1997, 116n33), a technically difficult role that Euripides may have attributed to the leading actor. Starting with the first episode and after the Nurse's final exit, he would probably take on the role of Medea, the tragedy's absolute protagonist.¹⁹

¹⁸ . . . ἐγὼ δα τήνδε, δευμαίνω τέ νιν (*Medea* 39).

¹⁹ Di Benedetto-Medda (1997, 223) recommend the role of Medea for the first actor and that of the Nurse for the second actor, relying on the co-presence of Medea, as a voice from backstage which interacts on stage with the Nurse starting from the prologue and the *parodos*. However, taking into account the scarceness of Medea's interventions (2 and 4 lines in the prologue, 4+8 lines in the *parodos*) and the different changes that the voice could assume while reaching the audience from the interior of the palace, it is highly probable that the character of the protagonist was played at the beginning by the second actor and then, starting from the first episode, by the first actor who had been busy with the very dynamic role of the Nurse.

But who was Medea's Nurse? Where did this character, whom Euripides employs to start such an accurate and vivid drama, even shocking to his contemporaries and all future spectators, come from? There is something contradictory and surprising in Medea's Nurse, the only character who calls her by the appellation of "daughter" or "my child" while she addresses Medea's children as "children" with a blend of tenderness and anguish (89, 98, 118). There is something that tells her apart from other Euripidean nurses, inextricably bound to the women they raised and therefore totally empathetic towards the events concerning their ladies, their desires, fears, passions, even when they did not approve them.

In the opening monologue, the Nurse confirms a deep knowledge of Medea, her "lady" (6). In the first 15 lines, with a counterfactual invocation (Mastrorarde 2002, 161) meant to nullify the queen's choices and subvert the story of her union with Jason and her journey to Greece, she summarises the backstory of the ongoing conflict, analyses its causes and even goes as far as to predict its dreadful consequences in light of what she knows about the protagonist, her temperament and her past. When he comes onto stage, the old Pedagogue, her "fellow slave" (σύνδουλος, 65), addresses her as "old household slave of my mistress" (παλαιὸν οἴκων κτῆμα δεσποίνης ἐμῆς, 49), while conversely, almost to highlight their different conditions, he is addressed as "old servant of Jason's children, τέκνων ὅπαδὲ πρέσβυ τῶν Ἰάσονος" (53) and thus separated from the childhood and youth of his master. The Pedagogue also asks why Medea wants to be left alone, without her Nurse (52, πῶς σοῦ μόνη Μήδεια λείπεσθαι θέλει;).

No doubt, Euripides hints at a long-standing habit existing between the Nurse and Medea. He allows us to imagine that the Nurse too comes from Colchis and that she followed Medea in her long journey riddled with dangers and transgressions (31-5), but he makes her speak in Greek. Not only because he endows her, according to the general tragic code, with an excellent and poetic Attic dialect with interwoven figures of speech and sound, but above all because he attributes to her an ethos totally in line with the Greek common sense, which emerges especially in the frequent *gnomai* used as comments on the events.

The Nurse shares Medea's grief and cries it out to Heaven and Earth (56-7); she condemns Jason's betrayal and reveals it to the children (82-4), although she provides a negative image of Medea. Harrowed by the tragedy she senses about to explode and to crush the whole family, including herself, the Nurse describes Medea as being prostrated, weak, ἄσιτος (24) and yet dreadful, δεινὴ (44), in the throes of a pain which transforms her: into a stone or a sea wave, into a beast with the eyes of a bull or a lioness just unburdened (91-2 and 187-9). Then, from the moment she hears the feral cries of the lady inside the palace, with a sequence of imperatives she tries to

protect the children, to keep them away from her (100-5) and her wild temperament, from the hideous nature of a mind which knows no limit (ἄγριον ἦθος στυγεράν τε φύσιν φρενὸς ἀύθαδοῦς, 103-4), from an implacable viscerality (μεγαλόσπλαγχνος δυσκατάπαυστος ψυχὴ δηχθεῖσα κακοῖσιν, 109-10) which, if offended, might explode in unpredictable ways. Finally, after Medea curses her children and their father (100-14), the Nurse concludes the anapestic contrast with a condemnation of the 'tyrannical' desires which do not metabolise anger and with an appeal to moderation scattered with echoes of the most traditional Delphian and Socratic principles, the best antidotes to the most serious disasters caused by excess.

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ

ἰὼ μοί μοι, ἰὼ τλήμων.

τί δέ σοι παῖδες πατρός ἀμπλακίας

μετέχουσι; τί τούσδ' ἔχθεις; οἴμοι,

τέκνα, μή τι πάθηθ' ὡς ὑπεραλγῶ.

δεινὰ τυράννων λήματα καί πως

ὀλίγ' ἀρχόμενοι, πολλὰ κρατοῦντες

χαλεπῶς ὀργὰς μεταβάλλουσιν.

τὸ γὰρ εἰθίσθαι ζῆν ἐπ' ἴσοισιν

κρεῖσσον· ἐμοὶ γοῦν ἐπὶ μὴ μεγάλοις

ὄχυρῶς τ' εἶη καταγηράσκειν.

τῶν γὰρ μετρίων πρῶτα μὲν εἰπεῖν

τοῦνομα νικᾶ, χρῆσθαι τε μακρῶ

λῶστα βροτοῖσιν· τὰ δ' ὑπερβάλλοντ'

οὐδένα καιρὸν δύναται θνητοῖς,

μείζους δ' ἄτας, ὅταν ὀργισθῆ

δαίμων οἴκοις, ἀπέδωκεν.

(115-30)

[Oh, woe is me! Why do you make the children sharers in their father's sin? Why do you hate them? O children, how terrified I am that you may come to harm. The minds of royalty are dangerous: since they often command and seldom obey, they lay aside their angry moods with difficulty. It is better to be accustomed to live on terms of equality. At any rate, may I be able to grow old in modest state and with security. For moderate fortune has a name that is fairest on the tongue, and in practice it is by far the most beneficial thing for mortals. But excessive riches mean no advantage for mortals, and when a god is angry at a house, they make the ruin greater.]²⁰

With excellent dramatic vision, Euripides creates a version of the Nurse who avoids assuming maternal tones towards her lady in order to adopt them only towards her children, who never resorts to the motif of nourishment

²⁰ All quotations from this play refer to Euripides 1994.

and milk kinship; the semantic field of *τρέφειν* never recurs in her lines. This Nurse is never an expansion of the queen and her will, she is never her accomplice and never her antagonist. Between the two characters there seems to be a subtler and more refined game, a relationship which Euripides might have perfected also by employing the first actor for the two consecutive roles of Nurse and Medea, the protagonist who dominates the scene until the exodus. United by the same tone of voice, the most important channel of ancient acting – the habit of using heavy masks and costumes hindered the use of facial mimicry and limited the actors' gestures – the two women can be imagined by the spectators as two faces of the same split character anticipating the conflict between passion and reason, *θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων* (1079), with which Medea's famous monologue ends and which over the centuries would become the hallmark of her indelible style (1019-80).

Probably arrived from the same elsewhere, both the Nurse and Medea tried to adapt themselves to the Greek common feeling and Medea, while helping Jason, also tried to appease the Corinthian people who had welcomed her (*ἀνδάνουσα ὧν ἀφίκετο χθόνα . . . πάντα συμφέρουσ' Ἴάσον*, 11-13). Then the two characters diverge, the Nurse becomes the spokesperson of Greek reason and the principle of moderation while Medea, in confronting Jason, proudly claims her complete and irreducible diversity (*Ἦ πολλὰ πολλοῖς εἰμι διάφορος βροτῶν*, 579). Two women who interact with the children with the same heart-wrenching affection, but with a different capacity to rule their passions? Only one broken woman? A conflict between two viewpoints, one that, at moments of extreme difficulty clings to a sort of delirium of omnipotence, and another reflecting common sense? Two temperaments or one single flow of consciousness, torn to shreds by moments of doubt, disapproval and paranoiac assertiveness sustained by the same unmistakable voice?

5. "I fed you and I love you":²¹ Abnegation and Life

With this statement of maternal affection which exists eternally and will not be broken, not even by Phaedra's reproaches and curses, the role of the old Nurse in the drama comes to an end (695-701 and 704-5). Feeling betrayed by her breaking the vow of silence and secrecy, Phaedra wishes her to die and rudely sends her away (*ἀλλ' ἐκποδῶν ἄπελθε καὶ σαυτῆς πέρι φρόντιζε*, 708-9), just before announcing to the Chorus her death, which will mark the triumph of Cypris but will also drag someone else – Hippolytus, whose

²¹ *Ἐθρεψά σ' εὔνουσ τ' εἰμί* (*Hippolytus* 698).

name Phaedra never pronounces – into ruin at the end of the second episode (724-31).

The two tragedies, *Medea* of 431 BC and *Hippolytus* of 428 BC, are chronologically close and both revolve around the important theme of irreducible diversity, which can never be entirely conformable to the order of the democratic city and its political dynamics. *Medea*, who according to her Nurse had tried to adapt herself to the Greek world, in the course of the story declares, through words and through gestures, her diversity, which is not only ethnic but also individual. As she reveals in her long speech to the women of the Chorus (373-430), Phaedra had tried in many ways to adapt herself to the city of her husband Theseus and to the Athenian rule of decency, discretion, αἰδώς,²² as well as of feminine honesty, σωφροσύνη: she had initially denied being lovesick, νόσος, withholding and hiding it, she had then tried to defeat madness, ἄνοια, through self-control. Eventually, unable to dominate that shameful and insane passion, νόσον δυσκλεᾶ (405), for her stepson Hippolytus, she had decided to die to avoid embarrassing her husband and children, in order to preserve their freedom of thought and speech in Athens. Phaedra understood something that she had already made clear in the disjointed and reticent revelation that had shocked the Nurse: in a jumble of words and ghosts that spoke the unspeakable, she had revealed that her illicit and ruinous love had a distant origin, in Crete, where her mother had fallen in love with the bull, the beast, and her sister Ariadne had married the god Dionysus (337-41). Unlike Phaedra, Hippolytus, the Amazon's son, does not complain about his non-conformity, but instead shows himself proud of it, through the rules of a life lived in woods and unspoiled meadows, remembering his mother and worshipping the chaste Artemis, as well as through words, such as when he responds to the Nurse's revelation that Phaedra loves him and to the accusations made by his father, who had believed in the false accusation written by Phaedra on a tablet tied to her wrist before her suicide by hanging. Speaking to the nurse, Hippolytus gives vent to his hatred of women, the bane of mankind; he wishes that children could be bought by bringing offerings to the temples rather than begetting them with women (616-24); he confirms to his father that he has a pure soul (παρθένον ψυχὴν ἔχων, 1006) and that he is totally extraneous to sexual pleasure – he knows sexuality only by hearsay and images – as well as to the rationale of power and of the polis (983-1045).²³

²² On the plot and the juxtaposition of the semantic fields of αἰδώς and ἔρωσ, see Beltrametti 2002.

²³ His father, Theseus, had accused him of having dishonoured his bed and wife, despite the fact that he had led people to believe that he was a superior man, in communion with the gods, honest, viceless, puritan; a vegetarian follower of Orpheus, exalted by the cult of his books (943-56).

However, unlike Medea's Nurse, who had coped with diversity from both the point of view of a stranger seeking shelter and the point of view of a welcoming and suspicious community, Phaedra's Nurse does not engage with the main theme, despite being a more present, complex and influential character within the plot.²⁴ She is rather captivated by the theme of forbidden love, attracted to desire and its metamorphoses.

"Old woman, faithful nurse of the queen", Γύναι γεραιά, βασιλίδος πιστή τροφέ, the Coryphaeus calls her (267), when she appears on stage besides Phaedra, carried out from the palace on the rotating trolley and in full prostration. This is the image provided by the Nurse in the dialogue with Phaedra just ended, a fast-paced and exhausting dialogue in anapaestic dimetres (176-266) in which she concentrates all words and gestures on the sick queen, in an attempt to satisfy all her needs and extort the secret of her disease from her apparently contradictory and meaningless broken phrases, from the constantly changing objects of her desire, from her slips. This Nurse does not know anything and does not predict anything, her language is not that of knowledge, let alone foresight, like that of Medea's nurse, but that of affections, care, nourishment, all-out defence of her queen. Taking on the main distinctive features of Eurycleia and Cilissa, the Nurse speaks the language of the good and confiding substitute mother. Her dialogues with Phaedra, no matter the tone and register, are filled with vocatives which appeal to the "daughter" (τέκνον, 203, 340, 350, 353, 517, 705), to the "beloved daughter" (παῖ, φίλη παῖ, 212, 218, 223, 288, 297, 316, 346, 521).²⁵ From the moment she arrives on stage and again when she is about to leave it after being sent away with insults and curses by Phaedra, the Nurse seems willing to bring the queen back to her childhood and innocence, to the trust and total submissiveness to her nurse. Only on two highly marked occasions the Nurse's address is directed to the Lady, δέσποινα: this occurs at the beginning of her first and only long speech (433-81), her answer to Phaedra's unexpected confession to the women of Troezen, in which she revealed her insane passion and her choice of death as the only solution to her failure (373-430). It occurs again in her penultimate utterance (695-701), delivered in the desperate attempt to restore trust with Phaedra by recalling the nourishment, the giving of herself and of her body through milk, the love of the 'good mother' which persists although it is no longer reciprocated.

On both occasions, the address to the Lady marks a shift in communi-

²⁴ The Nurse has 223 lines in total, more than Phaedra and more than Theseus, including also the lines in which off-stage she announces Phaedra's death by hanging (776-8, 780-1, 786-7) while the audience only hears her voice.

²⁵ The Nurse addresses Hippolytus by the same appellations and begs him not to reveal the secret she had just disclosed to him (παῖ, 603 and 611; τέκνον, 611 and 615).

cation. If in the final line there is the bitter awareness of an interrupted connection and the attempt to restore it, in the speech of the *remedia amoris* (433-81) the shift in tone and register marks the Nurse's willingness to take on a new role, an authority independent of familiarity. It is the transition from a familiar communication in which words comment on gestures and aching bodies to a rhetorical exercise of persuasion interwoven with conventional gnomic knowledge about the invincibility of amorous passion, Cypris or Eros, illustrated by "stories which are well known by those who own the writings of the ancient and who themselves are interested in poetry."²⁶ It is the proud surrender of the role and language of mother and her taking over the part of a rhetorician in order to discuss the magical solution of charms, filters and evil spells, which – as Phaedra claims – are rejected by common sense as shameful and hideous practices, αἰσχρά.²⁷

From the moment the Nurse understands that the love and abnegation of those who take care of a sick person to the point of suffering even more than that person, in fact suffering twice (186-7, 257-8) is not enough to save Phaedra from her insane passion for Hippolytus, that not even the topic of the protection of the children from the alleged demands of Hippolytus, "the bastard, νόθος" (305-10), is enough, all ethical restraints are loosened and rhetoric takes on sophistic and unscrupulous tones. Even the search for perfection and strenuous resistance to passion, the Nurse explains, are forms of *hybris*, of arrogance and illusory omnipotence; solemn words are useless when Phaedra needs him, not to seek pleasure, but as an existential matter of life and death (467-76, 490-7). The Nurse, who had suggested to ask the help of physicians when Phaedra was in the grip of inertia, asthenia, aphasia and apathy, a sort of anticipation of death she used to control desire, now advocates in a modern way in favour of ancient knowledge and ancient practices which in post-plague Athens seemed not only regressive and archaic but also dangerous:²⁸ "We will need to get some token from the man you love, either a lock of hair or something from his garments, and join together one delight from two".²⁹

²⁶ ὅσοι μὲν οὖν γραφάς τε τῶν παλαιτέρων / ἔχουσιν αὐτοὶ τ'εῖσιν ἐν μούσαις ἀεὶ / ἴσασι . . . (*Hippolytus* 451-8)

²⁷ The motif of shame, αἰσχρά, αἰσχίστους λόγους, insistently recurs in the lines that follow the Nurse's argument, four times in lines 498-506.

²⁸ The themes of magical practices, their dangers and their legitimacy were especially important in the Athens of the post-plague years, after the failures of professional physicians. These themes are also addressed by Deianira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, a tragedy which can probably be dated to 426 BC, therefore very close to Euripides' *Hippolytus*: Deianira smears Hercules' tunic with the blood of Nessus and is immediately assailed by the fear she had dared too much (*Trachiniae* 663-4).

²⁹ Δεῖ δ'ἔξ ἐκείνου δὴ τι τοῦ ποθουμένου / σημείον, ἢ πλόκον τιν'ἢ πέπλων ἄπο, /

The Nurse does not limit herself to recommend the use of magic to defeat adversity, but also shows her knowledge of the main principles of magical thinking and practices, namely the sign-symbol standing for the subject, the part standing for the whole, the contagion by continuity and contiguity, making one out of two. Shifting from words to deeds, in a scene of extraordinary delicacy (565-731) following the Chorus's prayer to Eros, the Nurse, perceiving herself as Phaedra's shadow, approaches Hippolytus off-stage (565-600). A very harsh confrontation ensues, which Phaedra, standing by the door of the palace, hears and reports to the Chorus and the audience - who can only hear a vague noise - and then enacts on stage (601-68), where Hippolytus is replaced by Phaedra who, after a heart-wrenching lament over her own downfall, banishes her in the course of their final dialogue (669-731).

In the ultimate attempt to establish the fatal connection between Phaedra and Hippolytus, the magical arts on which the Nurse had relied fail to work (680-1) and lead to the downfall and expulsion of the character, who becomes the target of the invectives of Hippolytus, who - as Phaedra reports, calls her a procurer of obscenity and false wife (589-90) - and of Phaedra, who feels sullied by her revelations and, in an emotional climax, curses and banishes her.

Euripides appears to have deployed his full arsenal of dramatic strategies in order to draw the figure of the Nurse. Whereas the other characters of the tragedy - Hippolytus, the protagonist, Phaedra, the stepmother in love with him, and Theseus, Hippolytus' father and king of Athens - do not deviate from their constitutive traits in spite of nuances depending on their interlocutors and their actions' status, the character of the Nurse is continuously reshaped by situations and in her repeated attempts to change the state of things. In the first two episodes, the Nurse assimilates events and in turns generates new events, transforming herself, taking on different points of view, languages and registers:³⁰ at first, she is worried about Phaedra's health, then she becomes suspicious and curious, then she turns into a bold advisor guided by a strong sense of reality and imminent downfall and by the concern for the queen's children, then she is overwhelmed by the scandalous truth and the approaching catastrophe (353-61). Finally, immediately after Phaedra's speech, she is ready to overcome shame and supports the illicit love of her child and lady by any necessary means, including magical filters. Eventually, she supplicates Hippolytus, begging him to keep his oath of silence, and begs Phaedra, but to no avail.

Euripides counters the heroic steadiness of the *aristoi*, who never turn

λαβεῖν, συνάψαι τ' ἐκ δυοῖν μίαν χάριν (*Hippolytus* 513-15).

³⁰ The lines 291, 298, 433-435 precisely mark the Nurse's emotional and rational outbursts.

back and never renounce their honour and reputation, with a female figure of unknown origins who, by analogy with other nurse figures, can be interpreted as a disgraced woman. An old woman who amid difficulties learned the necessity of compromise and who sees rigour as a form of excess and presumption, as *hybris* – “It is said that exacting conduct in life brings about more falls than delight and is at war more with health. So I praise excessiveness less than ‘nothing in excess’; and the wise will agree with me”³¹ – an old woman willing to submit in order to protect the child she had breastfed. This Nurse provides an ode to life and the right to happiness, which costed her the exclusion from the sphere of those who matter and, above all, Phaedra’s death.

6. “For him you are the daughter of an eminent man, a bride with a rich dowry”:³² Flattery

In Attican tragedy there are no other examples of Nurse figures endowed with the same intensity as Phaedra’s Nurse. In the fourth episode of *Andromache*, the Nurse of Hermione, daughter of Helen and Menelaus and sterile bride of Neoptolemus (Achilles’ son), comes out of the palace and speaks about the princess, who is giving way to despair and threatens to kill herself, barely prevented from doing so by her slaves (802-19). Hermione offended and threatened to kill Andromache, her husband’s Trojan concubine, and the child born of their union. Her father, Menelaus, came to visit her and is verbally assaulted by old Peleus because of the unfairness of the power he boasts about and because of his cowardly behaviour towards Helen and his aggressiveness against Andromache and her child. He left Phthia without granting any protection for his daughter and the princess is struck with terror. She fears her husband’s return and the punishment which he will inflict on her for plotting the murder of the innocent.

The last nurse of Euripides’ theatre does not have the same ability to analyse and understand conflict as Medea’s Nurse, or rather her double. She does not show the same absolute loveliness in which Phaedra’s Nurse annihilates herself to the point of justifying and supporting the queen’s illicit passion. The main feature of this nurse is the helpful lie, or perhaps the servile hypocrisy which induces her at first to realistically explain to the

³¹ βίотου δ’ ἀτρεκεῖς ἐπιτηδεύσεις / φασι σφάλλειν πλέον ἢ τέρπειν / τῆ θ’ ὑγεία μαῖλλον πολεμῖν / οὕτω τὸ λίαν ἦσσον ἐπαινῶ / τοῦ μηδὲν ἄγαν· / καὶ ξυμφήσουσι σοφοί μοι (*Hippolytus* 261-6). To the Nurse, Phaedra’s pretence of self-control seems again to elude the rules of this world, 459-77.

³² Nurse: οὐ γάρ τί σ’ αἰχμάλωτον ἐκ Τροίας ἔχει, ἀλλ’ ἀνδρὸς ἐσθλοῦ παῖδα σὺν πολλοῖς λαβῶν ἔδνοισι, πόλεώς τ’ οὐ μέσως εὐδαίμονος (*Andromache* 872-3).

Chorus the condition of Hermione, guilty of unacceptable excesses against the innocent and the defenceless, and then to deny herself in the attempt to comfort the princess, who arrives on stage in a state of extreme agitation. In a duet with Hermione, the nurse lies about her hybris with some ambiguity and contradicts the information previously given to the Chorus: she says that her father will not abandon her and that her husband will not believe the cheap lies of his barbarous concubine because Hermione is not a war booty, but a bride with a rich dowry.

The continuous reconfiguration of the character to pursue the good through changes and twists which are the distinctive traits of Phaedra's Nurse, here becomes the compassionate and opportunistic dissimulation of someone who wants to prevent the princess from collapsing in order to avoid falling into the same abyss. The scene in which Hermione bares her breasts and the Nurse tries to pull her gown together to cover them recalls the motif of the veil incessantly requested and removed in the first scene between Phaedra and her Nurse in *Hippolytus*. However, this Nurse shows neither care nor tenderness. She only shows a resolute will to stop the princess from making a spectacle of herself and prevent news of her insanity from spreading outside the palace, thus exposing the family to public mockery.

Free from a predestined fate and from the prejudices that stem from names and family ties, the minor (but not humble) characters of Euripides' theatre provide evidence that society was changing, capturing the playwrights' attention. In these characters, poetry and politics blend and intertwine in more obvious ways than in the major characters of the great myths. The perspectives on mythological events and the historical themes that permeate them multiply points of view and continue to surprise.

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RONALD BLANKENBORG*

Bridging the Gap with Epic: the Nurse in Euripides' *Medea*

Abstract

This paper argues for a deliberately epic role for the nurse in Euripides' tragedies, especially in his *Medea*.¹ In that specific play, the nurse's influencing of events resembles the omniscient characters familiar from narrative epic like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In Homer's *Odyssey*, as in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the nurse tends to align either with the household norms, generally labelled patriarchal, or with the lady of the house left behind. In *Choephoroi* 748-62, the task, duties, and responsibilities of the nurse are sufficiently presented. In Aeschylean and Sophoclean drama, nurses act and speak within the limits of these duties and responsibilities, while in Euripidean drama, however, the nurse's role changes. Acknowledging the special position of the nurse's contribution in Euripides' *Medea* as discussed in Ian Ruffell's "The Nurse's Tale", I link the changing and changed role of the wet nurse to the characteristics of epic behaviour: a certain amount of providence, combined with typically human indifference, and, ultimately, helplessness. She is the only one who, in lines 36-7 and 89-95, foresees the event that must have been a great unpleasant surprise (if not shock) for the audience: infanticide. It has been suggested that the nurse's "epic" behaviour, speech, and foreknowledge develop in the context of the societal circumstances in 421 BCE; in other (lost) plays by Euripides, nurses are allegedly involved in the psycho-sexual problems of their mistresses. In *Medea*, however, the issue is infanticide. The level of transgression in *Medea*'s planned behaviour, I argue, is mirrored in the level of "epic" as shown in the nurse's self-importance and presumptuousness. Her speech in the prologue equals prologues spoken by omniscient and influencing characters, e.g. Dionysus in *Bacchae* and Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*, as does her self-reflection in the course of the play.

KEYWORDS: nurses in Greek tragedy; prologuing characters; double motivation; tragic transgression

1. Introducing Transgression

Euripidean tragedy tends towards transgression (Reilly 2007; Thumiger 2007; Swift 2006, 2009; Lush 2015; Verheij 2016). Many characters involved, both on the human and the divine level, display a behaviour that transgresses

¹ I thank the editor Rosy Colombo and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions.

* Radboud University - ronald.blankenborg@ru.nl

the values of society as well as the conventions of the tragic genre (Steiner 2004, 10-11). Aeschylus confronts man with the gods, even in a fellow human being.² In Sophocles, man is confronted with himself, and the rare appearance of a god only serves to underline the characters' correct balancing of what seem to be incompatible, but equally accepted, norms and ethical guidelines.³ Euripides was (in)famous for his lavish use of the *deus ex machina* to put an end to tragic suffering and lack of prospect.⁴ In his plays, man falls victim to his own shortcomings, the inevitable outcome of human nature. Thus, the *deus ex machina* proves to be a necessary and merciful safeguard for humankind in the face of man's fallibility, and his inborn impulse towards transgression.⁵ Transgression may be presented as a side-effect of what is in principle a rational and well-balanced decision,⁶ especially in Aeschylean and Sophoclean drama.⁷ In Euripidean tragedy, transgression is more frequently resulting from character flaws; not a side-

² The suffering Persian court in *Persae* (first produced in 472 BCE) recognises the divine hand in the unexpected defeat at the hands of the Greeks, as do the survivors in *Septem* (467 BCE). In *Prometheus Vincit* the mortal hero Heracles is the instrument of Zeus, even for an immortal protagonist. The *Oresteia* (457 BCE) concludes with introducing the gods to the human stage to bring a solution for irresolvable and contradictory complexities. While in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* humans err and act with reference to divine order or justification, in *Eumenides* the gods appear in person to take responsibility for apparently unjustifiable moral behaviour; they demand retribution, and finally solve the inherently inhuman dilemma (Fletcher 2014).

³ Cf. e.g. Lawrence 2005 for the *Ajax*. In the play named after him, Philoctetes, as another example, accepts Heracles' confirmation that both he and the bow need to return to Troy despite the Greeks' low trick to try and rob him from it, and possibly from his livelihood, through deceit (Tessitore 2003).

⁴ Cf. Worthington 1990 on the *deus ex machina* in Eur. *Med. vis-à-vis* Aristotle's criticism of the scene in *Poet.* 1454a37-b2, and his general criticism of the feature in *Poet.* 1454b2-5.

⁵ According to Aristotle's analysis of tragedy in *Poetics*, this is the essence of tragedy as a genre, and as a type of mimesis of reality: the tragic character, of sufficiently high class to emphasise the discrepancy between societal privilege and depravation but nonetheless relatable for a democratic audience, is subjected to suffering and loss as the result of a *hamartia*, a personal mistake that does not stem from character, but rather from misinterpreting the possible reactions to very specific, demanding circumstances (Taylor 2008, 269-72; Kim 2010, 38-46).

⁶ As a form of 'corruption', e.g. of ritual, cf. Lush 2015.

⁷ Sophoclean characters like Creon, Antigone, and Oedipus show transgression as a result of a deliberate decision even more poignantly: their considerations count as rational, but once decided upon their actions and words tend to be harsher than initially required, and meant to enforce the path chosen rather than to allow for any more criticism, reconsideration, or reflection. Creon resorts to torture instead of milder punitive action; Antigone to suicide rather than being content to fulfil her filial duties (discussed as transgression of gender norms in Penrose 2020, 31-2).

effect but rather the execution of *hamartia*.⁸ Divine intervention is thus a remedy to balance human imperfection.⁹

In several instances, however, human transgression in Euripides is not just man's shortcoming; it may be divinely ordained, predicted, exploited, instrumentalised (Hamilton 1978; Sypniewski and MacMaster 2010). In the latter case, the *hamartia* from which it stems or which it entails is equally not a *human* shortcoming: it is a deliberate action, orchestrated by a prologuing god, to exercise influence, power, or vengeance in the mortal domain.¹⁰ It is therefore a divine transgression.¹¹

Such morality, if it may be called so, is reminiscent of epic poetry rather than of the Attic drama as it is found in Aeschylus and Sophocles (Sypniewski and MacMaster 2010). The double motivation, with human decision-making as the effectuation of the gods' setting-in-motion of fate, resembles the Iliadic "will of Zeus", and the "decision by the gods to have Odysseus return to Ithaca" in the *Odyssey*. In tragedy, similar patterning becomes tangible in the plays that do not allow for options and choice (however wrong or misgiven) by the human protagonist(s), due to divine direction (Hamilton 1978). The *deus ex machina* nullifies characters' psychology through the wisdom of hindsight;¹²

⁸ Cf. Verheij 2014, 190-95 on the cohesiveness of Medea's motivation to commit infanticide.

⁹ In Sophocles, the "care of the gods" (*Phil.* 196) (Pucci 1994, 17-21). Papadimitropoulos 2011, 501 (on Apollo's epiphany in *Eur. Or.*): "The god imposes order in a disorderly state of affairs and manages to reconcile the opposites by bringing about peace in a situation consistently dominated by strife".

¹⁰ Examples from Euripidean tragedy are *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*. Both plays feature a god delivering the prologue in which they proclaim they will get someone into trouble and subsequently punish him or her.

¹¹ Allan 2013, 593 argues for the efficacy of revenge through violence in Attic drama: "tit-for-tat violence is characterized as problematic from the earliest Greek literature onwards, but also stresses the continuing importance of anger, honour, and revenge in classical Athenian attitudes to punishment and justice. With these continuities in mind, it analyses the new process by which punishment and justice were achieved in Athens, and argues that the Athenians' emphasis on the authority of their laws is central to understanding tragedy's portrayal of personalized vengeance and the chaos that ensues from it. Though (for reasons of space) it focuses on only a selection of plays in detail (*Aesch. Eum.*, *Soph. El.*, *Eur. El.*, *Or.*), the article adduces further examples to show that the same socio-historical developments are central to the portrayal of retaliatory violence throughout the genre, and ends by considering how tragedy, in depicting revenge as problematic, offers a more positive alternative to such violence which does justice to the emotional and social needs of its audience".

¹² Cf. the standardised choral ending, as in *Med.* 1415-19: πολλῶν ταμίᾳς Ζεὺς ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ, / πολλὰ δ' ἄελπτως κραίνουσι θεοὶ / καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη, / τῶν δ' ἀδοκῆτων πόρον ἦρε θεός / τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πράγμα ("Olympian Zeus has many things in his treasury, and the gods accomplish many things contrary to expectation.

the *deus in prologo* does so from the start, with only horrible consequences to be expected by the audience.

In this contribution, I argue that, next to the *dei in prologo*, there are other signallers of similar “epic” reminiscences with regard to a higher level of transgression expectancy in Euripidean drama. Particularly interesting is the role of the *nutrix in prologo* in *Medea*; with reference to *nutrices* in other plays by the same author, I will show that the epic predecessors of *Medea*’s *nutrix* paved the way for the decisive influence she exerts on the irreversibly destructive behaviour of her mistress.

2. *Nutrices priores*

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, a nurse figures prominently in the character of Eurycleia, who nursed both Odysseus and his son Telemachus. The epic is explicit about Eurycleia’s provenance and the nurse’s working circumstances. She works in the Ithacan royal household as a slave:¹³

Εὐρύκλει, Ἰσπος θυγάτηρ Πεισηνορίδαο,
τὴν ποτε Λαέρτης πρίατο κτεάτεσσιν ἑοῖσιν
πρωθήβην ἔτ’ ἐοῦσαν, ἔεικοσάβοια δ’ ἔδωκεν,
ἴσα δέ μιν κεδνῇ ἀλόχῳ τίεν ἐν μεγάροισιν,
εὐνῇ δ’ οὐ ποτ’ ἔμικτο, χόλον δ’ ἀλέεινε γυναικός
(*Od.* 1.429-33)

[Eurycleia, daughter of Ops son of Pisenor, whom Laertes once bought with his wealth when she was still in her first youth. For her he gave the price of twenty oxen. He cherished her on a par with his spouse inside, but he never slept with her – and thus he shunned the wrath of his wife.]

Though the *Odyssey* does not explicitly state that Odysseus’ father was already married when he invested in a slave girl, apparently Eurycleia, herself of good family given the naming of her father and grandfather,¹⁴ has been bought with the prospect of replacing Laertes’ lawfully wedded wife Anticleia as a mistress, as a housekeeper, and as a mother. The latter only in the sense of a foster mother, as Laertes never shared her bed: whether or not married at the time of the purchase, Laertes explicitly reserved sexual contact and motherhood in the royal family for Anticleia (Marshall 2017,

What was expected did not come to pass, but for the unexpected a god found a way. In such fashion was the completion of this play”).

¹³ Editions from which passages have been cited are in the references. All translations are by the author.

¹⁴ Like Eumaius (*Od.* 15.403) and his Sidonian nursemaid (*Od.* 15.427), Eurycleia was presumably kidnapped by pirates, cf. Heubeck, West and Hainsworth 1988, 126.

188-90). Nonetheless, he bought Eurycleia at a very young age and against a high price,¹⁵ suggestive of the exploitation of her breeding potential. The underlying assumption seems to be that in general young girls were added to the affluent household to serve as housekeepers, sex slaves, and breeders of bastards, with the buyers only refraining from the latter usability for reasons of discretion and intermarital respect and restraint. Replacing the biological mother with a nurse, however, was not considered an infringement on marriage and, instead, one of the main tasks of the acquired female servant (cf. *Od.* 19.482-3).

The *Odyssey* does not comment on the relationship between Anticleia and Eurycleia.¹⁶ The latter did, however, acquire a solid position in the palace: next to breastfeeding baby Odysseus, she was tasked with supervising the provisions and the wine cellar. When Odysseus' son Telemachus leaves for Pylos and Sparta, he acknowledges her overview of the household's provisions, as well as her ability to manage and to distribute the stock.¹⁷ In addition, he beseeches her secrecy: when Eurycleia protests and warns him not to leave the house, Telemachus urges her to swear not to tell his mother that he left for at least eleven or twelve days. And so she does (*Od.* 2.377-8). This is not the only occasion in the *Odyssey* where the nurse Eurycleia is approached as a confidant: both Penelope and Odysseus confide in her, even when her position as an intimate threatens one's safety. Once recognised despite his disguise as a beggar (*Od.* 19.392-3, 467-8), Odysseus has to prevent Eurycleia from shouting out to Penelope through smothering her and

¹⁵ Names like Ἀλφειβόια, Ἐρίβόια, and Πολύβόια similarly suggest cattle as a standard of value, but rather with regard to marriage-prospects than trade (Heubeck, West & Hainsworth 1988, 126). A similar amount, 20 oxen, is suggested as compensation for Odysseus per suitor (*Od.* 22.57). The *Iliad* provides comparison for the high value: 4 oxen for a skilled labour woman (*Il.* 23.705), 100 oxen for a set of golden armour (*Il.* 6.236), a male prisoner (*Il.* 21.79), 12 oxen for a tripod (*Il.* 23.703), 9 oxen for a set of bronze armour (*Il.* 6.236), and 1 ox for a cauldron (*Il.* 23.885).

¹⁶ Cf. *Od.* 11.155-62, 181-203, 216-24.

¹⁷ μαῖ', ἄγε δὴ μοι οἶνον ἐν ἀμφιφορεῦσιν ἄφυσσον / ἡδύν, ὅτις μετὰ τὸν λαρώτατος ὄν σὺ φυλάσσεις / κείνον οἰομένη τὸν κάμμορον, εἴ ποθεν ἔλθοι / διογενὴς Ὀδυσσεὺς θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξας. / δώδεκα δ' ἐμπλησον καὶ πάμασιν ἄρσον ἅπαντας. / ἐν δέ μοι ἄλφιτα χεῦον ἐῦρραφέεσσι δοροῖσιν· / εἴκοσι δ' ἔστω μέτρα μληφάτου ἀλφίτου ἀκτῆς. / αὐτὴ δ' οἴη ἴσθι· τὰ δ' ἀθρόα πάντα τετύχθω· / ἐσπέριος γὰρ ἐγὼν αἰρήσομαι, ὅπποτε κεν δὴ / μήτηρ εἰς ὑπερῶ' ἀναβῆ κοίτου τε μέδεται. (*Od.* 2.349-58; "Mother, pour me sweet wine in vessels, the second best, right after the one you guard, always pondering on that wretched man, if godlike Odysseus may from somewhere return, having escaped death and fate. Fill me twelve of them and close them all carefully with covers. Pour me barley meal into well-sewn skins: there should be twenty measures of ground barley meal in each. You must be the only one to know: make sure all this is brought together. For I will come to collect it in the evening, when my mother will retreat to her chambers and mind her rest").

making her swear an oath not to divulge his identity: if she betrays him, she is like a mother causing the death of her own child.¹⁸ Upon Odysseus' return, Eurycleia's loyalty to him outdoes her loyalty to Penelope.¹⁹ For twenty years, she was her support and protector as well, tending to the household and to Telemachus (*Od.* 17.31-5, 23.289-92), and serving as Penelope's eyes and ears throughout the palace.²⁰ At several occasions, the nurse functions as an advisor and instigator,²¹ suggesting that the nurse's role may well exceed the limitations of replacing motherhood.

In Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy, nurses feature prominently. There, too, they tend to align with the household norms, generally labelled patriarchal, or with the lady of the house left behind. In *Choephoroi* 743b-65, the task, duties, and responsibilities of the nurse are sufficiently presented. Answering the worries of the chorus in response to the message of Orestes' alleged passing, Orestes' nurse Cilissa comments on her position:

ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ·
 ὡς μοι τὰ μὲν παλαιὰ συγκεκραμένα
 ἄλγη δύσοιστα τοῖσδ' ἐν Ἀτρέως δόμοις
 τυχόντ' ἐμὴν ἦλγυνεν ἐν στέρνοις φρένα.
 ἀλλ' οὔτι πω τοιόνδε πῆμ' ἀνεσχόμην·
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλα τλημόνως ἦντλον κακά·
 φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
 ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,—
 κάκ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων
 καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλῃτ' ἐμοὶ
 τλάσῃ· - τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερὶ βοτὸν

¹⁸ τῆ γὰρ Ἀθηναίη νόον ἔτραπεν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς / χεῖρ' ἐπιμασσάμενος φάρυγος
 λάβε δεξιτερῆφι, / τῆ δ' ἐτέρῃ ἔθεν ἄσσον ἐρύσσατο φώνησέν τε. / μαῖα, τίη μ' ἐθέλεις
 ὀλέσαι; σὺ δέ μ' ἔτρεφες αὐτῆ / τῷ σῶ ἐπὶ μαζῶ· νῦν δ' ἄλγεα πολλὰ μογήσας /
 ἦλυθον εἰκοστῶ ἔτει ἐς πατρίδα γαίαν. / ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἐφράσθησ καὶ τοι θεὸς ἔμβαλε
 θυμῶ, / σίγα, μή τίς τ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισι πύθηται (*Od.* 19.479-86; "Athena had
 diverted Penelope's attention. But Odysseus grabbed her by the throat with his right
 hand, and with his left he pulled her closer and said: 'Mother, why do you want to
 ruin me? You fed me yourself at your breast. Now, after suffering many woes, I have
 returned to my native country in the twentieth year. Now, since you discovered me and
 a god somehow allowed you to find me out, keep your silence, lest anyone else in the
 house finds me out, too.'").

¹⁹ Cf. Eurycleia's consolation of Penelope in *Od.* 4.742ff.

²⁰ Following the slaughter of the suitors, Eurycleia brings the message of Odysseus' return to Penelope (*Od.* 23.1-84). As long as he had to maintain his disguise, Odysseus was secretly informed by her as well, cf. *Od.* 22.417ff.

²¹ Eurycleia keeps the maid servants locked up when the weapons are removed from the great hall (*Od.* 19.15-30) and during the slaughter of the suitors (*Od.* 21.38off., *Od.* 23.41ff.). Afterwards, she oversees the cleaning of the hall (*Od.* 22.48off.).

τρέφειν ἀνάγκη, πῶς γὰρ οὐ; τρόπῳ φρενός·
 οὐ γάρ τι φωνεῖ παῖς ἔτ' ὢν ἐν σπαργάνοις,
 εἰ λιμός, ἢ δίψη τις, ἢ λιψουρία
 ἔχει· νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων.
 τούτων πρόμαντις οὔσα, πολλὰ δ', οἴομαι,
 ψευθεῖσα παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια,
 γναφεὺς τροφεὺς τε ταῦτόν εἰχέτην τέλος.
 ἐγὼ διπλᾶς δὲ τάσδε χειρωναξίας
 ἔχουσ' Ὀρέστην ἐξεδεξάμην πατρί·
 τεθνηκότος δὲ νῦν τάλαινα πεύθομαι.
 στεῖχῳ δ' ἐπ' ἄνδρα τῶνδε λυμαντήριον
 οἴκων, θέλων δὲ τόνδε πεύσεται λόγον.
 (743b-62)

[Wretched me! How the old unbearable troubles, one heaped on top of the other, in this palace of Atreus continuously caused pain for my heart in my breast! But never did I sustain a blow like this: all other troubles I withstood patiently, but now my beloved Orestes, my soul's only care, whom I got handed over from his mother and nursed, and from the loud cries in broken nights both many and troublesome failures for me despite my efforts – for one must nurse the unthinking thing like an animal, what else? You just follow your instincts. The child does not yet speak while still in swaddling clothes, not when hungry or thirsty, or in need: the young children's lower body follows its own rules. I tried to anticipate such, but often, I reckon, became the baby-linen's washer as I was mistaken; laundress and nurse had the same aim. I had these same two handicrafts when I received Orestes for his father. And now I, wretched one, hear that he is dead. I will go to the man who brings destruction over this house, and he will hear the news he has been hoping for.]

Both the service as a replacement mother and the confidentiality *vis-à-vis* the keepers of the household norms become apparent in her speech. As the nurse in other Aeschylean and Sophoclean plays, Cilissa speaks and acts within the limitations of her position as a servant and as a woman.²²

3. *Nutrix Euripidea*

The nurse's role changes in Euripides where she appears in *Medea* (431 BCE), *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), and *Andromache* (ca. 425 BCE). Actually, it is extended to encompass active influencing of protagonists and of the play's plot. Euripidean nurses are still concerned with their *protégés* and with the

²² Though speaking from her own thoughts and judgements, cf. Van Emde Boas 2018, 328.

daily care for the household, but, unlike their predecessors, they exercise a strong and steering influence on their adoptive child – always female – in especially the aspects of adult life in which she replaces them as a τροφός: motherhood, childcare, role as a (threatened and abandoned) spouse, and sexuality. As a rule, nurses assume this role when they are taken in on their *protégé*'s despair as an ultimate confidant: in their attempt to replace their *protégé* psychologically as well as physically, they contribute to the psycho-sexual stress of the mistress, and actively steer her – and the plot – to death and disaster.

In *Andromache*, the Nurse steps in (802) once her mistress sees no way out: jealous of her potential rival Andromache (Torrance 2005, 45-50), Neoptolemus' share of Troy's spoils, Hermione, herself childless, planned to make use of her husband's absence to murder Andromache and her child. In the play's first half, she found a willing accomplice in her father Menelaus, but he was stopped from committing the crime through the timely intervention of Peleus, Neoptolemus' grandfather and master of the house in his grandson's absence. Now that her scheme failed and her father Menelaus left Phthia, Hermione fears her husband's homecoming: with rope and sword she tried to end her life,²³ but servants prevented her suicide. Urging her mistress to face her husband Neoptolemus, the Nurse comments on Hermione's sexuality, and steps in as the guardian of her mistress' proper behaviour in public.²⁴ The Nurse equally comments on Hermione's position as a potentially abandoned spouse, but downplays the risk that presented itself so readily: Neoptolemus lending his ear to Andromache does not imply the end of his and Hermione's marriage.²⁵ Further discussion of this issue, the threat to Hermione's marriage constituted by Neoptolemus' spoil of war

²³ The attempt to commit suicide by hanging confirms Hermione's interpretation of her misdeed against Andromache as sexually motivated. In *Andr.* 930-38a, Andromache admits having succumbed to other women's scorn of her sexual-competitive position against Andromache.

²⁴ Έρ. ἰὼ μοί μοι· σπάραγμα κόμας ὀνύχων τε / δάι' ἀμύγματα θήσομαι. / Τρ. ὦ παῖ, τί δράσεις; σῶμα σὸν καταικιῆ; / Έρ. αἰαῖ αἰαῖ· / ἔρρ' αἰθέριον πλοκάμων ἐμῶν ἄπο, / λεπτόμιτον φάρος. / Τρ. τέκνον, κάλυπτε στέρνα, σύνδησον πέπλους . . . ἀλλ' εἴσθ' εἴσω μηδὲ φαντάζου δόμων / πάροιθε τῶνδε, μή τιν' αἰσχύνῃ λάβῃς / [πρόσθεν μελάθρων τῶνδ' ὀρωμένη, τέκνον] (Eur. *Andr.* 825-32, 876-8; "HERMIONE Oh no, I will tear out my hair and horribly scratch myself with my nails. NURSE What will you do, my child? Maim your own body? HERMIONE Please, no, away from my braids into the sky, you, lightly-woven cloth. NURSE Cover your chest, child, and close your garments . . . Come on, come inside and do not show yourself outside this house, lest you load some shame onto yourself (when you are seen in front of this palace, child)").

²⁵ Τρ. οὐχ ὧδε κῆδος σὸν διώσεται πόσις / φαύλοις γυναικὸς βαρβάρου πεισθεὶς λόγοις (Eur. *Andr.* 869-70; "NURSE Your husband will not undo your marriage like that, won over by the idle reasoning of a foreign woman").

Andromache, is delegated to Orestes who happens to run into Hermione and her Nurse, and chooses words that resemble Aegeus' in *Medea*. Orestes also addresses Hermione's childlessness, and thus adds to the interference by her Nurse: whereas the Nurse thought of her mistress' replacement as a spouse, Orestes makes Hermione speak explicitly about her replacement as a mother.²⁶

In *Hippolytus*, the Nurse is much more proactive as a dramatic character: she acts independently in order to further the plot as a tool of divine will.²⁷ Like her counterpart in *Andromache*, she steps in when her mistress Phaedra seems to be ill (176, 205, cf. the chorus in 269). Initially, she does not know what befell her mistress, though her complaint that mortals “appear to be problematically in love” (193, δυσέρωτες δὴ φαινόμεθ' ὄντες) foreshadows what is wrong. She duly corrects Phaedra's incomprehensible utterances about “hunting in the mountains”, with the chorus as her witness (286, ὡς ἂν παροῦσα καὶ σύ μοι ξυμμαρτυρῆς “as you, since you are present, may testify to as well”), but notices that Phaedra responds to the mention of Hippolytus (310). In her lead-in to mentioning his name, she has also touched on Phaedra's role as a mother: giving in to her illness, Phaedra will bring Theseus' bastard Hippolytus in a favourable position when compared to her own children by Theseus.²⁸ Phaedra's response to the mention of her stepson's name appears at first sight to be the Nurse's finally successful attempt to break through her mistress' defences.

What seems to be an issue of inheritance, however, quickly turns out to be a matter of forbidden love, a confession extracted from Phaedra²⁹ by her

²⁶ Ὅρ. τίς οὖν ἂν εἶη μὴ πεφυκότων γέ πω / παίδων γυνακί συμφορὰ πλὴν εἰς λέχος; / Ἐρ. τοῦτ' αὐτὸ καὶ νοσοῦμεν· εὐ μ' ὑπηγάγου. / Ὅρ. ἄλλην τιν' εὐνὴν ἀντί σοῦ στέργει πόσις; / Ἐρ. τὴν αἰχμάλωτον Ἑκτορος ξυνευνέτιν. / Ὅρ. κακόν γ' ἔλεξας, ἄνδρα δίσις· ἔχειν λέχη. / Ἐρ. τοιαῦτα ταῦτα. κἄτ' ἔγωγ' ἡμυνάμην (Eur. *Andr.* 904-910; “ORESTES What trouble can there be for a woman other than her marriage, as long as there are no children yet? HERMIONE Exactly that is where we suffer; you sharply see my soft spot. ORESTES Does your husband long for another to replace you? HERMIONE The wife of Hector, won by the spear. ORESTES You mentioned something shameful: a man having two wives. HERMIONE Exactly that – but I took countermeasures.”)

²⁷ As she rightfully acknowledges in 359a-61.

²⁸ Τρ. ἀλλ' ἴσθι μέντοι – πρὸς τὰδ' ἀυθαδεστέρα / γγνου θαλάσσης – εἰ θανῆ, προδοῦσα σοῦς / παίδας, πατρῶων μὴ μεθέξοντας δόμων (Eur. *Hipp.* 304-6; “NURSE But know this, and as far as I am concerned you remain more stubborn than the sea in this regard: if you die, you have betrayed your children, for they will not share in their father's wealth”.)

²⁹ Φα. τί τοῦθ' ὃ δὴ λέγουσιν ἀνθρώπους ἐρᾶν; / Τρ. ἡδιστον, ὃ παῖ, ταῦτον ἀλγεινόν θ' ἄμα. / Φα. ἡμεῖς ἂν εἶμεν θατέρω κεχρημένοι. / Τρ. τί φῆς; ἐρᾶς, ὃ τέκνον; ἀνθρώπων τίνος; / Φα. ὅστις ποθ' οὗτός ἐσθ', ὃ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος . . . / Τρ. Ἴππόλυτον αὐδᾶς; / Φα. σοῦ τὰδ', οὐκ ἐμοῦ κλύεις. / Τρ. οἴμοι, τί λέξεις, τέκνον; ὡς μ' ἀπόλεσας.

Nurse³⁰ to her own demise: nurse and protégé go down together (Castrucci 2015, 416-18). In this case, however, the Nurse does not support her mistress' self-constraint; on the contrary, she rapidly shifts side to, unknowingly, join Aphrodite in convincing Phaedra to accept – and yield to – her longing. Instead of actively protecting her mistress' private peace of mind and public appearance (as did the Nurse in *Andromache*), she encourages Phaedra to be sexually proactive in order to “save her life”.³¹ The arguments she mentions in the process are to be considered indicative of the character of the Nurse herself: preference of impulse and instant pleasure over thoughtfulness and reputation, eagerness to take sexual initiative, overstatement of personal suffering, lack of self-restraint. The Nurse promises Phaedra not to betray her to Hippolytus (521), but soon enough she proves to have done just that: in addition to being a nurse, she has now become a matchmaker (589-90). She tries to downplay her betrayal of Phaedra with Hippolytus, only enticing the latter to his famous speech on the analogy between trouble and women (616-68). Phaedra realises that the Nurse's actions will cause her death, and curses her. After the Nurse is dismissed and has left the stage, Phaedra announces that she will take Hippolytus with her in her downfall, thus paying her debt to Aphrodite. The Nurse has no further role to play than to find her mistress hanged.

(Eur. *Hipp.* 347-53; “PHAEDRA Men call it ‘being in love’: what does it mean? NURSE The sweetest thing, my child, and at the same time the most painful. PHAEDRA I can only make use of the latter. NURSE I beg your pardon: are you in love, my child? With whom? PHAEDRA Whoever he is, the son of the Amazon . . . NURSE Hippolytus, you mean? PHAEDRA Those are your words; you do not hear me say such. NURSE O dear, what are you about to say? How you have ruined me!”).

³⁰ Presumably not present in the first, failed version of *Hippolytus* (Hutchinson 2004), where Phaedra delivered the incriminating letter confessing her passion for Hippolytus herself.

³¹ Τρ. οὐ γὰρ περισσὸν οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἔξω λόγου / πέπονθας, ὄργαι δ' ἐς σ' ἀπέσκηψαν θεᾶς. / ἐρᾶς· τί τοῦτο θαῦμα; σὺν πολλοῖς βροτῶν. / κᾶπειτ' ἔρωτος οὐνεκα ψυχὴν ὀλεῖς; / . . . τί σεμνομυθεῖς; οὐ λόγων εὐσχημόνων / δεῖ σ', ἀλλὰ τάνδρός. ὡς τάχος διστέον, / τὸν εὐθὺν ἐξειπόντας ἀμφὶ σοῦ λόγον. / εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦν σοι μὴ 'πί συμφοραῖς βίος / τοιαῖσδε, σώφρων δ' οὐσ' ἐτύγχανες γυνή, / οὐκ ἂν ποτ' εὐνῆς οὐνεχ' ἡδονῆς τε σῆς / προῆγον ἂν σε δεῦρο· νῦν δ' ἀγῶν μέγας / σώσαι βίον σόν, κοῦκ ἐπίφθονον τόδε (Eur. *Hipp.* 437-40, 490-7; “NURSE You do not experience something extraordinary or beyond explanation: you have simply been struck by the goddess' anger. You are in love – what is so extraordinary about that? It happens to many people. And now you plan to destroy your life because of love? . . . No more solemn words! You do not need well-arranged arguments – you need the man! We must make it clear as soon as possible how things truly stand with you by making it explicit. If your life were not in such perils as it is now, and if you were a self-controlled woman, then I would never guide you in this direction for the mere pleasure of sex. Now, however, the stakes are higher, saving your life, and there is nothing reproachable in that!”).

The Nurse's developing and changing role in *Hippolytus* – from caring for her mistress to acting independently with a certain amount of providence and indifference for her protégé's interest, to utter helplessness with regard to the destructive outcome of her initiatives – is, of course, instrumental to the divine will that determines the play from the start. In her prologue, Aphrodite explicitly states the purpose of the play (Danek 1992): to demonstrate that individual gods destroy hubristic humans through using other humans as defenceless pawns – in this case, to show that she will bring down Hippolytus through sacrificing Phaedra.³² The Nurse's considerations and actions in *Hippolytus* represent the double motivation familiar from epic: the mirroring of divine council, will, and decision through human deliberation, consultation, and determination. Human protagonists seemingly act on their own accord, but whatever they do or say proves to have been prepared and fated on the level of the gods. At times, humans in epic are vaguely or painfully aware of this, as is the Nurse in *Hippolytus*. Nonetheless, her behaviour is transgressive, as is the goddess' motivation and execution: the downfall of tragic protagonists is not primarily the result of their Aristotelian *hamartia* within or before the play's plot, but rather a premeditated and highly personal divine vendetta. An audience can hardly feel engaged with the undeservedly non-productive exertions of the tragic character and experience fear and pity accordingly; they remain rather detached from identification with a protagonist who is from the outset condemned by an outside higher force and whose suffering within the play, like that of the divine pawns, is both the reason for, and the result of, transgression.

³² Ἄφρ. σφάλλω δ' ὅσοι φρονοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς μέγα. / ἔνεστι γὰρ διὴ κὰν θεῶν γένοι τόδε· / τιμῶμενοι χαίρουσιν ἀνθρώπων ὑπο. / δεῖξω δὲ μύθων τῶνδ' ἀλήθειαν τάχα . . . / ἄ δ' εἰς ἔμ' ἡμάρτηκε τιμωρήσομαι / Ἴππόλυτον ἐν τῇδ' ἡμέρᾳ· τὰ πολλὰ δὲ / πάλαι προκόψασ', οὐ πόνου πολλοῦ με δεῖ . . . / ἰδοῦσα Φαίδρα καρδίαν κατέσχετο / ἔρωτι δεινῷ τοῖς ἔμοις βουλευμάσιν . . . / ζῦνοιδε δ' οὔτις οἰκετῶν νόσον. / ἀλλ' οὔτι ταύτη τόνδ' ἔρωτα χρῆ πεσεῖν, / δεῖξω δὲ Θησεῖ πρᾶγμα κάκφανήσεται. / καὶ τὸν μὲν ἡμῖν πολέμιον νεανίαν / κτενεῖ πατήρ ἀραΐσιν . . . / ἡ δ' εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἀλλ' ὅμως ἀπόλλυται Φαίδρα· τὸ γὰρ τῆσδ' οὐ προτιμήσω κακὸν / τὸ μὴ οὐ παρασχεῖν τοὺς ἔμοις ἐχθροὺς ἔμοι / δίκην τοσαύτην ὥστ' ἔμοι καλῶς ἔχειν (Eur. *Hipp.* 6-9, 21-3, 27-8, 40-4a, 47-50; "APHRODITE I will bring down those who do not respect me. For within the race of gods the following applies: they enjoy being worshipped by men. I will swiftly demonstrate the truth of these words . . . for what he did me wrong I will punish Hippolytus today. I have prepared many things in advance – it will be an easy game to play for me . . . when she saw Hippolytus Phaedra was captured by a terrifying passion; all that was my doing . . . among the palace personnel no one knows of her affliction. But her love may not end like that: I will show Theseus the entire matter and everything will come to light. The father will kill this young man, so hostile to me, with his curses . . . she will keep her good reputation but she has to die anyway – Phaedra. I will not value the evil that befalls her higher than the prospect of not punishing my enemies to an extent that satisfies me").

Both Aphrodite's and the Nurse's transgression in *Hippolytus* is thus comparable to divinely instigated transgression in similar situations, like Dionysus' and Pentheus' in Euripides' *Bacchae* (405 BCE, staged posthumously). In this play, as in *Hippolytus*, a god uses the prologue to explain the play as a demonstration of divine revenge (Allan 2013, 601-2): Dionysus chooses to introduce his worship in Thebes, as the first city in Greece, to take revenge for the treatment of his mother by her sisters and to punish the already condemned king Pentheus, his cousin, for not acknowledging his divinity.³³ Dionysus' condemnation of Pentheus, as well as the latter's predestined and mechanically staged downfall within the play, are reminiscent of the divinely ordained, supervised, and executed destruction of the epic hero, as it is found in the treatment of, for example, Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Hector in the *Iliad*, or the suitors in the *Odyssey* (Allan 2013, 593-5). The 'epic' combination of being the instrument of divine will made explicit, and, at the same time, acknowledging that what appears to be one's own free will is actually predestined thought and action, characterises secondary characters in the plays of Euripides. Determinant prologuing, as in *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*, makes for characters' behaviour that is as unpredictable, or implausible, as the playwright's heavily criticised *ex machina*.

4. *Medea: nutrix epica*

A particularly remarkable instance of a determinant prologue is Euripides'

³³ Δι. πρώτας δὲ Θήβας τῆσδε γῆς Ἑλληνίδος / ἀνωλόλυξα, νεβρίδ' ἐξάψας χροὸς / θύρσον τε δοῦς ἐς χεῖρα, κίσσινον βέλος· / ἐπεὶ μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἄς ἤκιστα χρῆν, / Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῦναι Διός, / Σεμέλην δὲ νυμφευθεῖσαν ἐκ θνητοῦ τινος / ἐς Ζῆν' ἀναφέρειν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν λέχους, / Κάδμου σοφίσμαθ', ὧν νιν οὐνεκα κτανεῖν / Ζῆν' ἐξεκαυχῶνθ', ὅτι γάμους ἐψεύσατο. / τοιγάρ νιν αὐτὰς ἐκ δόμων ᾤστρησ' ἐγὼ / μανίαις, ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι παράκοποι φρενῶν . . . / Κάδμος μὲν οὖν γέρας τε καὶ τυραννίδα / Πενθεῖ δίδωσι θυγατρὸς ἐκπεφυκῶτι, / ὃς θεομαχεῖ τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ σπονδῶν ἄπο / ὠθεῖ μ', ἐν εὐχαῖς τ' οὐδαμοῦ μνείαν ἔχει. / ὧν οὐνεκ' αὐτῷ θεὸς γεγώς ἐνδείξομαι / πᾶσιν τε Θηβαίοισιν (Eur. *Bacch.* 23-33, 43-8a; "DIONYSUS As the first city in Greece I have caused Thebes to shout out loud, covering them in deer skins, and handing them the thyrsus, a weapon topped with ivy. Without being provoked to do so at all, my mother's sisters openly proclaimed that I, Dionysus, was not the child of Zeus, and that Semele was deflowered by a mere mortal and put the blame for her pregnancy on Zeus. A clever scheme conjured by Cadmus, for which Zeus allegedly burned her to death, as she lied about the affair. As punishment I have driven them out of their houses in madness, and now they camp on the mountain, insane . . . Cadmus leaves privilege and kingship to his daughter's son Pentheus, who opposes my divinity and worship, keeps me at bay from sacrifices, and never mentions me once in prayers. In retaliation, I will show myself in my full capacity as a god to him and to all of Thebes").

Boedeker 1991; Mueller 2001; Levett 2010). On the other hand, the Nurse speaks against inequality “on a democratic basis”, going “beyond what is realistic in having the nurse articulate these thoughts”. He observes that there is something peculiar in the nurse’s role at the time of *Medea*’s first staging:

The most obvious points of comparison for the nurse in *Medea* are the parallel characters in the series of plays that were picked upon by Aristophanes as examples of Euripides’ unhealthy interest in women and in sexual morality – or immorality. In *Frogs*, the Aristophanic Aeschylus claims that Euripides’ women, who explored sexual desire, such as Stheneboea and Phaedra, were notorious (1043-4). These scandalous women all belong to plays of roughly the same time as *Medea*, and all seem to have been accompanied by a nurse, who was speaking and a very active character, and deeply impacted in the psychosexual problems of their mistresses. The nurse of *Medea*, I suggest, is not only parallel to these but actively *draws upon* their example. Or, to put it another way, audience expectations would have been framed by this cluster of Euripidean interest. (Ruffell 2014, 70)

Let me add that the Nurse’s providence equally frames the audience expectations. While *Medea* herself speaks of suicide (145-7), then of killing Jason and the rest of the royal family (163-5), then again of suicide while taking the boys with her (111-18), the Nurse fathomed the danger to *Medea*’s sons much earlier (Papi 1991, 294-5).³⁵ She knows that her mistress is a dangerous woman when enraged, and having noticed that she gazes at her children the way she looks at enemies, the Nurse actively moves to keep the boys at a safe distance from their mother. Her presentiment, however, proves to turn out correct, of course. In my view, the combination of the Nurse’s “heroic” language and her role in the prologue confirm as a “further possibility” Ruffell’s observation “that the Nurse is ultimately . . . the one who most helps *Medea* bring about the destruction of Creon’s family and the murder of her children” (2014, 79-80). For him “this suggestion turns on whether the nurse returns with *Medea* at 214 and stays on stage to be

³⁵ Τρ. στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας οὐδ’ ὀρώσ’ εὐφραίνεται. / δέδοικα δ’ αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλευσῆ νέον . . . / ἴτ’, εὖ γὰρ ἔσται, δωμάτων ἔσω, τέκνα. / σὺ δ’ ὡς μάλιστα τοῦσδ’ ἐρημώσας ἔχε / καὶ μὴ πέλαζε μητρὶ δυσθυμουμένη. / ἤδη γὰρ εἶδον ὄμμα νιν ταυρουμένην / τοῖσδ’, ὡς τι δρασεῖουσιν· οὐδὲ παύσεται / χόλου, σάφ’ οἶδα, πρὶν κατασκηψαί τινι. / ἐχθροὺς γε μέντοι, μὴ φίλους, δράσειέ τι (Eur. *Med.* 36-7, 89-95; “NURSE She loathes her children, and does not rejoice seeing them. I fear her, lest she devices something unheard of . . . Come now, it’ll be alright, boys. You, tutor, keep them as far from her as you can and do not let them near their despairing mother. I already saw her throwing them that savage bull-like look, as if she might do something to them. She will not stop her anger, that I know for sure, until she had her way with someone. I only hope she moves against enemies, and not against her near and dear”).

brought into the plan at 820-3, and exits with the children at 1076 to take them to their death" (80).

I argue, in addition, that the nurse's steering influence on the plot and on Medea's unforeseen decision to murder her own children rather stems from the comparison with similar epic-like prologuing characters (Hopman 2008). Like the prologuing Dionysus in *Bacchae* and Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*, each presenting the protagonists' acts and decisions as predetermined and hence severely inhibiting the capacity of the audience to identify with *Bacchae*'s Pentheus and Cadmus as well as with *Hippolytus*' Phaedra and her Wet Nurse, in the same way the prologuing nurse of *Medea* sets the stage for the inevitability of unspeakable acts by Medea (cf. Sypniewski and MacMaster 2010). Whereas pre-Euripidean versions of the Medea-story commonly presented the heroine as taking her revenge for Jason's betrayal on him, his wife, and the further royal family (cf. 374-5; Graf 1997), Euripides was probably the first playwright to have her kill her own sons with Jason (Micheline 1989, 120-4; cf. Boedecker 1997). The ominous words of the Nurse in 36-7 and 89-95, prepare the audience as irrevocably as Dionysus' in *Bacchae* 23-33, 43-8a and Aphrodite's in *Hippolytus* 6-9, 21-3, 27-8, 40-4a, and 47-50. She actively keeps the boys from going to their mother,³⁶ but foresees, in response to Medea's wish for her sons to die with their father³⁷ that an evil outcome may not be averted.³⁸

For some running time, still, the possibility remains that the play may have another outcome: not until the fortuitous but very useful meeting with the Athenian king Aegeus, stopping by on his way from Delphi to Troezen and unknowingly offering Medea the opportunity to execute her horrifying plan with a change of escape (Sfyrouras 1994; Blankenborg forthcoming), does the Nurse's announcement of the children's fate resurface in Medea's words:

ΜΗ. νῦν ἐλπὶς ἐχθροῦς τοὺς ἐμοὺς τείσειν δίκην.
οὗτος γὰρ ἀνήρ ἢ μάλιστ' ἐκάμνομεν
λιμὴν πέφανται τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων.
ἐκ τοῦδ' ἀναψόμεσθα πρυμνήτην κάλων,

³⁶ ΤΡ. σπεύδετε θάσσον δώματος εἴσω / καὶ μὴ πελάσῃτ' ὄμματος ἐγγύς / μηδὲ προσέλθῃτ' (Eur. *Med.* 100-2a; "NURSE Hurry, quickly, into the house, and do not go into her view, do not come near her").

³⁷ ΜΗ. ὦ κατάραιοι / παῖδες ὄλοισθε στυγεράς ματρός / σὺν πατρί, καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι (Eur. *Med.* 112b-14; "MEDEA Cursed children of a wretched mother – wish that you would die together with your father").

³⁸ ΤΡ. τί δέ σοι παῖδες πατρός ἀμπλακίας / μετέχουσι; τί τούσδ' ἔχθεις; οἴμοι, / τέκνα, μὴ τι πάθῃθ' ὡς ὑπεραλγῶ (Eur. *Med.* 116-18; "NURSE What part do your sons have in their father's wrongdoing? What do you hate them for? Oh, boys, I am so afraid that you may suffer some consequence").

μολόντες ἄστῃ καὶ πόλισμα Παλλάδος.
ἤδη δὲ πάντα τάμα σοι βουλευμάτα
λέξω

...
ἀλλ' ὡς δόλοισι παῖδα βασιλέως κτάνω

...
κακῶς ὀλεῖται πᾶς θ' ὅς ἂν θίγη κόρης

...
ἐνταῦθα μέντοι τόνδ' ἀπαλλάσσω λόγον.
ῶμωξα δ' οἶον ἔργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον
τοῦντεῦθεν ἡμῖν· τέκνα γὰρ κατακτενῶ
τάμ'· οὕτως ἔστιν ὅστις ἐξαιρήσεται
(Eur. *Med.* 767-73a, 783, 788, 790-3)

[MEDEA Now there is hope that my enemies will be punished. In my moment of need this man has appeared as a safe haven for what I plan to do. I will securely moor with him, once I have reached the city and stronghold of Athena. Finally, the moment to tell you all that I have planned to do has come . . . yes, I plan to kill the king's daughter through trickery . . . and everyone touching her will die a gruesome death . . . but from this point I do not so readily continue speaking of my plan – I have cried over the task that I have to perform next: I will kill the children, my own boys. No one will ever take them from me.]

With or without the Nurse attending the scenes as a silent character, from this point on Medea is herself helpless against her own predestined resolve to murder her sons, echoed by the chorus in 976-1001. Feigning against Jason to want only what is best for their sons, she cannot hide her true emotions from him:³⁹ she knows that his wish for “long lives” will be in vain. In lines 894-976 the children are on stage, probably together with a supervisor, either the Nurse or the *paedagogus*. The reappearance of the latter together with the children in 1002 suggests that he was also accompanying them in the previous scene; the Nurse does not get an explicit second staging. After a final moment of hesitation, Medea confirms her resolve with reference to a force stronger than her own plans:⁴⁰ emotions overpower reason. Having heard the death of the princess, she confirms her resolve again, in 1236-40: speaking to the chorus she argues that others will kill her children if she

³⁹ ἸΑ. τί δὴ, τάλαινα, τοῖσδ' ἐπιστένεις τέκνοις; / ΜΗ. ἔτικτον αὐτούς· ζῆν δ' ὄτ' ἐξηύχου τέκνα, / ἐσηλθέ μ' οἶκος εἰ γενήσεται τάδε (Eur. *Med.* 929-31; “JASON Why then, poor woman, do you cry for these boys? / MEDEA I bore them. When you just prayed that they may live long lives, I felt a sudden stroke of pity – will this be the case for them?”).

⁴⁰ ΜΗ. θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσω τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων, / ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς (Eur. *Med.* 1079-80; “MEDEA Irrationality is stronger than my plans – it is the main reason behind mortals' misery”).

does not.⁴¹ Having killed the Corinthian king and his daughter she can only hope to save her own life.

And so she proceeds; she kills the boys as the Nurse predicted, against her better judgement. In the play's final scene, Medea appears as the revengeful goddess, reminiscent again of Dionysus and Aphrodite, thus combining aspects of the prologuing Nurse's providence and plot-steering, as well as of the spiteful divinities who got their way as they themselves announced. Medea appears as a *deus ex machina*, standing on the chariot of her grandfather the Sun God, her children with her. From here, she makes clear that she will take care of them *alone*, thus replacing the nurse and arranging a proper funeral well outside the mortal realm (Holland 2008). The prospect sketched by the Nurse in the prologue is brought to the foresaid conclusion by Medea as goddess.

5. Conclusion: an Epic Ring

In *Medea*, the Nurse and Medea constitute a pattern of words and acts that corresponds to the double motivation of epic and its narrative predestination. More than in the extant plays that better conform to Aristotle's analysis of tragedy as *mimesis* through acting out (Murhaghan 1995), but in ways similar to Euripides' 'divinely-determinant' plays like *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, the presentation of the plot and its performance have much in common with the Aristotelean description of epic as *mimesis* through narration. At the play's start, the Nurse, in line with epic diction and concepts, speaks with self-importance and presumptuousness, regularly showing signs of a character using a democratic stance in a pre-democratic society, like the mythological (and, possibly, in the view of contemporary Athenians [Lloyd 2006]) Corinth. More importantly, she displays a level of omniscience and foresight in her – correct – prediction of the murdering of Medea's sons by their mother, a plot development that was an innovation by Euripides.⁴² Her subsequent reflections and comments, as Ruffell shows, not only prepare the audience for what is to come, but also help Medea develop into the infanticide she is destined to become. Helpless against what has been ordained in the play's

⁴¹ ΜΗ. φίλοι, δέδοκται τοῦργον ὡς τάχιστα μοι / παῖδας κτανούσῃ τῆσδ' ἀφορμᾶσθαι χθονός, / καὶ μὴ σχολὴν ἄγουσαν ἐκδοῦναι τέκνα / ἄλλῃ φονεῦσαι δυσμενεστέρῃ χερὶ. / πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη καθθανεῖν (Eur. *Med.* 1236-40; "MEDEA Dear friends, my decision has been made to murder the children as soon as possible and then flee from this land, so as to not by doing nothing extradite them to be killed by another, more hostile, hand. They must die in any case").

⁴² Holland 2003 argues that infanticide was already a feature of Aeolus' pedigree.

prologue, and defenceless against the potentially destructive irrationality that incites an unprecedented indifference towards human suffering in tragedy, Medea gradually changes into the entity responsible and accountable for all the protagonists' transgressive behaviour. On a par with goddesses she transcends the human level, both in claiming responsibility for what has happened, and for the replacement of the Nurse in taking care of the children's dead bodies. Clearly the Nurse, built from the many models of nurse-behaviour predating Euripides, particularly from the epic tradition, and considered a character fitting for prologuing a 'determinant' plot, could not bring such a play to completion. Such a task befalls to larger-than-human characters alone: Artemis in *Hippolytos*, Dionysus in *Bacchae*, Medea in *Medea*. For the Nurse as a tragic character, this unique 'epic' performance resulted in a return to the more common use of the character,⁴³ as a confidant in the psycho-sexual problems of their mistresses, be it with an undeniable propensity to arbitrariness and transgression from now on.

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⁴³ Ypsilanti 2008, 162-8 points out that the nurse's position remains rather influential in contrast with the "silence" of the chorus, due to their inability to enter the palace. Whereas the nurse exercises influence on the main character(s) and the plot, the chorus' role is restricted to consolatory poetry (Fabbro 2020).

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IVAN SPURIO VENARUCCI*

One, None and a Hundred-Thousand. The *Nutrix* in Seneca's *Phaedra*: a Blend of Roles and Literary Genres

Abstract

Among the *dramatis personae* of Seneca's *Phaedra*, the Nurse is perhaps the most complex and multifaceted. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* the Nurse does not lack a central role and three-dimensional stance, especially because of her oratory skills, but she does not differ excessively from the stereotyped character of tragedy. On the other hand, the role and function of the Nurse are expanded by Seneca. She does not simply embody the 'voice of reason' (however imbued with Stoic philosophy) against *Phaedra*'s *furor*: she is the moving force of the tragedy. She takes up an authorial role akin to that of Plautus' slave; she turns into a comic *lena* in order to lead Hippolytus to the realms of Venus; she improvises as a priestess while delivering a prayer to Diana; she is also a skilled philosopher and declaimer. Nevertheless, she does not truly fulfill any of these roles and ends up being the humble servant of her queen. Each of her transformations is a failure; but, on closer examination, they are a failure from *Phaedra*'s perspective. Resigning her authorial role, *de facto* the Nurse becomes an instrument of the real 'author' of the drama, that is, Nature. *Phaedra* is a tragedy of Nature and the limits it imposes on human beings. Through her apparently disastrous choices, the Nurse helps Nature establish its undisputed dominion.

KEYWORDS: Nurse; Seneca; *Phaedra*; Nature; Roman tragedy; authorial role; metatheatre

*Etiam nunc optas quod tibi optavit
nutrix tua aut paedagogus aut
mater? nondum intellegis quantum
mali optaverint?*
(Sen. *Epist.* 60.1)

The Nurse is a recurrent character of ancient myth. Her archetype can be traced back to Eurykleia, Telemachos' Nurse, in the *Odyssey*; but it is in Greek tragedy that she gains an increasingly prominent, albeit subsidiary, role. Among the extant examples, we can number Kilissa, Orestes' Nurse in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, and Deianeira's Nurse in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*. But it is Euripides who confers a significant and conspicuous role upon her: the Nurses in *Andromache*, *Medea*, and *Hippolytus* stand

* Sapienza University of Rome - ivan.spuriovenarucci@uniroma1.it

out as the fruit of a well-established tradition. The Nurse is an old woman characterised by an unshakable and selfless loyalty to her master/mistress; faithful to the point of risking her own life in order to be a good servant. She usually takes up the role of confidant and advisor; she is also the 'voice of reason' that tries to turn the heroes and heroines away from a tragic course of events, relying on the authority she exercises on her pupil. Needless to say, her efforts to avoid tragedy always fail.¹

The Nurse figure, perfected by Euripides, is taken over by Roman tragedy – that is, by Seneca, the only Latin dramatist whose tragedies have survived in their entirety. She has a prominent role in *Medea*, *Phaedra*, and *Hercules Oetaeus*, as in their Attic models; a Nurse appears as a major character in Seneca's *Agamemnon* as well. The Latin dramatist builds on a traditional and well-defined character; however, he incorporates his own touch into the Nurse figure, assigning her a more complex and nuanced role than his Attic forerunners.

In this paper, I will focus on the play *Phaedra*, as I believe the Nurse of this tragedy best encapsulates Seneca's authorial innovations in the function of the character. I will argue that Seneca inherits from Euripides the Nurse figure as an 'authorial' character meant to lead the protagonists to catastrophe, but on the other hand, he contaminates her with other figures (philosopher, declaimer, Plautine servant, *lena*, priestess, elegiac poetess), drawn from other genres than tragedy. Far from being an inconsistent and unsuccessful character (as argued by Garbarino 2008, 662-3), the Nurse's metamorphoses are, from a dramatic perspective, functional to the development of the plot and to the fulfilment of the tragedy. All her transformations are disastrous, but, at the end of the play, she contributes to establishing the dominion of Nature, the ultimate, whimsical, and ever-transforming authorial force pulling the strings of the tragedy. First, I will analyze the manifold roles *Phaedra's* Nurse takes up in the Senecan tragedy in comparison to the Euripidean model in order to highlight how all of her transformations fail to achieve their goals; then, I will reflect on how all these failures are a catastrophe from the main characters' points of view, while they mark the triumph of Nature over Hippolytus' and *Phaedra's* aberrations.

1. The Downfall of Wisdom

The standard role assigned to the Nurse by the tragedians is the voice of

¹ Karydas (1998) and Castrucci (2017) offer extensive studies on the Nurse figures in Greek tragedies; see also Gill 1990, 87-8; Yoon 2012, 13-21, 86-92.

reason. As to dramatic action, she attempts to oppose the impulses and the decisions of the main characters, which she is aware will lead to a tragic outcome. The function of this character is the creation of tension between a doomed course of events, which will drag the main characters into a catastrophe, and a force of opposite sign, also destined to be swept away. This is particularly true of *Hippolytus*' Nurse:

of all the anonymous figures in extant tragedy, she has the strongest claim to 'moral agency'; she describes a distinct ethical framework, and the disaster stems from her strong sense of expediency and her failure to understand the sincerity and nobility of Phaedra's resolve to die. (Yoon 2012, 87)²

The Nurse of Seneca's *Phaedra* is no exception. She shares this trait with Euripides' Nurse, who initially tries to divert her mistress from giving in to her passion. The Nurse quotes the Delphic saying "nothing in excess" (μηδὲν ἄγαν, 265) and states that all the sages will agree with her (ξυμφήσουσι σοφοί μοι, 266). Later on, she acknowledges Phaedra's helplessness against Aphrodite and hatches a plan to heal her; Phaedra is afraid the Nurse may seem "too wise" (δέδοιχ' ὅπως μοι μὴ λίαν φανῆς σοφή, 519).

As in the Euripidean paradigm, Seneca's Nurse is a wise character. She reproaches Phaedra for her illegitimate lust and does her best to discourage her; when Phaedra threatens to kill herself (254), she tries to make Hippolytus give in to the power of love; finally, she works out the idea of blaming Hippolytus for using violence on Phaedra. In this regard, Seneca's Nurse is not just intelligent, but can be seen as more cunning than Euripides' character.³

However, as universally noted by scholars, she raises her role as 'voice of reason' to a higher, philosophical level. I will not discuss the complex problem of the extent to which Seneca's tragedies reflect, albeit in a distorted way, his thinking and worldview; *Phaedra* has already been studied from a philosophical perspective (Grimal 1965, 17-21; Lefèvre 1969; Leeman 1976; Giancotti 1986, 11-57; Schmidt 1995; Laurand 2012-2013; Mazzoli 2016, 85-97). I will just focus on the Nurse's philosophical traits, in order to show how Seneca construes her as a failed *sapiens*.⁴

² The dramatic potential of the Nurse in *Hippolytus* is also underlined by Coffey and Mayer (1990, 9).

³ Strikingly, in Euripides' tragedy, Artemis herself openly accuses the Nurse of Phaedra's suicide (1304-6). The Nurse is totally responsible for the whole tragedy, while none of it is Phaedra's fault (March 1990, 47). This choice may be due to Euripides' aim of redeeming himself after the heavy criticism of *Veiled Hippolytus*.

⁴ Her speech to Phaedra is characterised not only by wisdom, but also by *parrhêsia*: the failure of her plots stands not only for the failure of philosophy, but also for the de-

As mentioned, the Nurse's words and speeches are imbued with philosophical, namely Stoic, *topoi* (cf. Giomini 1955a, 50-4, 80-3; Giomini 1955b, 44-7, 58-61; Grimal 1965, 47-52, 55-8; Leeman 1976, 207; Giacotti 1986, 18, 21-7; Schmidt 1995; Casamento 2011, 152, 156-9, 180-1; Laurand 2012-2013). When the Nurse takes up the role of 'voice of wisdom', the tragic form is contaminated by philosophical prose. For instance, in her opinion, giving in to vice is a kind of voluntary slavery (134-5): this is a recurring theme in Seneca's prose works (e.g. *Brev.* 2.1-2, *Epist.* 22.9-11, 39.6, 47.17, 60.4, 77.15-7). She also claims to be free from fear and pain thanks to her closeness to death, that is, to freedom (138-9); again, the close association of death and freedom is typical of Seneca's philosophy, especially in *De providentia* and in the *Epistles* (e.g. *Prov.* 2.10, 6.7-9, *Ira* 3.15.3-4, *Epist.* 12.10, 26.10, 70.14, 70.19, 77.14-5). Another philosophical commonplace is that a guilty soul is punished by the very feeling of guilt (162-3; cf. *De ira* 3.5.6, 3.26.2, *Ben.* 3.17.3-4, *Epist.* 27.2, 42.2, 87.24-5, 97.14-6, 105.7-8, 115.16; Schmidt 1995, 279-80.). The idea that the gods were invented to justify vice and insanity (195-7) bears resemblances to some Epicurean thought,⁵ but it is also a commonplace of Stoic criticism of Epicureanism⁶. Generally speaking, the dialogue between Phaedra and the Nurse can be seen as a dramatic enactment of the opposition between fatalism and freedom (Giacotti 1986, 19-20; Mazzoli 2016, 87-8); that is, a philosophical diatribe in dramatic guise.

The Nurse's speech to Hippolytus incorporates philosophical stock themes as well. He who is bestowed with goods by Fortune but nevertheless chooses evil deserves to lose what he has (441-3). To persuade Hippolytus to give in to love, she employs the Stoic motto *sequere naturam* (481) (Grimal 1965, 90; Leeman 1976, 207; Coffey and Mayer 1990, 134; Casamento 2011, 180-5). The phrasing of the verse "follow nature as your life guide" (*vitae sequere naturam ducem*) bears a striking resemblance to Cic. *off.* 1.100: "if we follow nature as our guide, we will never go astray" (*naturam si sequeremur ducem, numquam aberrabimus*), but it reflects the widespread Stoic tenet of "living in accordance with nature" (ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, Diog. Laert. 7.87 = *SVF* 1:179). However, topics such as the necessity of love for the preservation of the universe and the exhortation to enjoy the pleasures of Venus recall Epicurean rather than Stoic tenets (Boyle 1987, 166; Schmidt 1995, 292).

feat of free speech in a monarchic (i.e. Imperial) context (Laurand 2012-2013).

⁵ See for instance Lucretius' criticism of *religio*, whose lies lead men to *scelerosa atque impia facta* (1.84).

⁶ According to some moralists, Epicureanism was used to justify a luxurious and hedonistic lifestyle. See for instance Cic. *Tusc.* 4.6-7, *fin.* 2.49-50, *Pis.* 68-9; Sen. *Const.* 15.4, *vit. Beat.* 12-13, *Ben.* 4.2, 4.13.1, *Epist.* 21.9-10, 79.15, 123.10-11; Epict. *diss.* 3.24.38-9. This kind of criticism is part of a wider reprimand against the *ineptiae poetarum* that lead to vice (Grimal 1965, 55, refers to *Brev.* 16.5 and *Vit. beat.* 26.6).

The Nurse may seem to deploy philosophical commonplaces in a rhetorical manner in order to persuade others and achieve her goals; she may be accused of intellectual dishonesty. Her speeches seem to reflect the early Imperial age trend of philosophical *declamatio* revolving around *quaestiones infinitae* (see below). Some modern scholars accuse her of using “good Stoic doctrine in a bad cause” (Coffey and Mayer 1990, 134) or point out that “she advocates Stoic principles in the service of a wrong cause. The principles are moral, but their application merely utilitarian” (Leeman 1976, 207). Nevertheless, she does her best to keep things in order and to prevent Phaedra from killing herself. Her role as *vox rationis* is certainly ambiguous, but cannot be wholly dismissed, at least in her primary aims: in fact, she exploits the power of *logos* (that is, reason and speech) to dominate events and prevent catastrophe.

The Nurse’s tragedy stands for the irreconcilable conflict between a *ratio* trying to master events and a sealed fate that human beings can only obey. This downfall of wisdom against Fortune was already stated by Euripides’ Nurse (700-1), but Seneca emphasises the philosophical aspects of the character (and, consequently, the failure of philosophy). Drama-wise, Seneca’s Nurse-Philosopher struggles to sort out the threads of her existence and that of the other characters into an orderly plot inspired by *ratio*, that is, philosophy; her struggle turns out to be a total failure.⁷ Nonetheless, the real and almighty author of the tragic development is Nature. Ironically enough, the Nurse urges Hippolytus to follow Nature, but she’s the one who tries to rebel against Fate (stoically coinciding with Nature) by blindly loving Phaedra and supporting her (admittedly) unnatural desire.⁸ In the end, the Nurse’s exaggerated affection for her mistress falls within the scope of *furor* as well, not *ratio* (Giancotti 1986, 18; Schmidt 1995, 283-4). The Nurse, Hippolytus, and Phaedra are all under the illusion that they know Nature and can dominate it, but in fact it will lead them into defeat or, as in the Nurse’s case, into a new natural order.⁹

2. Seneca the Elder’s *Phaedra*: Tragic *Declamatio*

As widely recognised by scholars, Seneca is a man of his own time as

⁷ The failure of the Nurse’s plots is examined by Schmidt 1995; Frangoulidis 2009; Laurand 2012-2013.

⁸ The Nurse herself had stated the ungodliness of Phaedra’s desire in the Act 1 (171-3); “she accepts herself the crime out of the weakness of her soul” (Grimal 1965, 16, translation mine)

⁹ On the concepts of nature and anti-nature in *Phaedra* see Mazzoli 2016, 88-96; cf. Boyle 1987, 18-24, 213-14; Mayer 2002, 37-9.

regards to rhetoric. Both his philosophical and dramatic production is strongly influenced by *declamatio*, that is, formal and artistic public speech generally practised as part of high-class education. The two main subgenres of *declamatio* were the *controversia*, in which the student acted as a *patronus* defending a cause, and the *suasoria*, a speech delivered to a mythical or historical character in order to persuade them to take, or dissuade them from taking, a certain action. Seneca the Elder notoriously collected fragments of Augustan rhetoricians' *controversiae* and *suasoriae* for his children's (and his audience's) education.

Seneca the Younger learnt the lesson from his father. The influence of *declamatio* upon his work is particularly observable in his *Phaedra* and in the Nurse's speeches.¹⁰ The dialogue between Phaedra and the Nurse in Act 1 can be viewed as a *controversia* between the two characters arguing whether sexual impulses can be dominated by reason. This kind of argument about general, if not philosophical, topics finds a parallel in the *quaestiones infinitae*, with which *declamationes* often deal. The two characters participate in a skillfully constructed debate, in which each speech or line by one character is balanced by another of equal length (Coffey and Mayer 1990, 19); but it is the Nurse who assaults Phaedra with her panoply of rhetorical weapons. In Act 2, she delivers a *suasoria* on a declamatory stock theme, *an uxor ducenda sit*; this kind of *declamatio* focuses on moralising themes rather than on dramatic exchange.¹¹

The Nurse's speeches in Act 1 employ the rhetorical technique of "point by point rebuttal" (Coffey and Mayer 1990, 109-10).¹² Phaedra had spoken about the divine power of love over *ratio* (184-5); the Nurse replies that the divinity of *amor* is a made-up lie (195-6). Phaedra describes *amor* (or, better, *furor*) as a flying (186, 194) and armed (193) creature; the Nurse makes fun of such attributes (198-201). This technique becomes more and more obvious as the debate goes on and the speeches get shorter and shorter, especially in the stichomythia and antilabe section (218-73).

Another rhetorical device widely used by the Nurse is *sententia*, a typical trait of Seneca's prose and dramatic works. In both genres, Seneca deploys moral maxims to express general human truths, in order to strengthen his arguments. This is exactly what the Nurse does in her

¹⁰ On the rhetorical elements in Seneca's *Phaedra*, see Giomini 1955b, 44-7; Coffey and Mayer 1990, 18-20; Mayer 2002, 71-3; cf. Giancotti 1986, 62-4, 104; Casamento 2011, 14-7, 19-21, 165, 180-1. Euripides' Nurse utters rhetorically constructed speeches as well, as an influence of contemporary sophistic usage (Castrucci 2017, 45-7).

¹¹ Coffey and Mayer 1990, 131; cf. Morelli 2004, 42-3. The existence of this *quaestio infinita* is attested by Quintilian (2.4.25, 3.5.8, 3.5.12-16).

¹² The dialogue between Phaedra and the Nurse has been analysed from a pragmatic perspective by Calabrese 2009, 27-43.

speeches. Just to quote the most notable ones:

if one feeds the evil with sweet caresses and flattering words, / submits to the yoke, it becomes too late to resist (“qui blandiendo dulce nutrit malum, / sero recusat ferre quod subiit iugum”, 134-5; trans. Wilson 2010, here and below); first: want the right things, no straying. / The second is knowing and setting a limit to one’s sins (“honesta primum est velle nec labi via, / pudor est secundus nosse peccandi modum”, 140-1); a person who delights in too much fortune, / who has too much already, always wants new things (“quisquis secundis rebus exultat nimis / fluitque luxu, semper insolita appetit”, 204-5); those who have too much power want no limits to their power (“quod non potest vult posse qui nimium potest”, 215; perhaps the most skillfully worked out).

The most remarkable *sententia* is uttered by the Nurse in her *suasoria* to Hippolytus: “follow nature” (*sequere naturam*, 481; see above).

To eradicate insanity from Phaedra’s soul, the Nurse utters a series of rhetorical questions, which confer a pounding pace on her speeches through the use of anaphora or polyptoton of interrogative pronouns (*quis*), adjectives (*qui*), and adverbs (*cur*).¹³ On the other hand, rhetorical questions are less frequent in the Nurse’s speech to Hippolytus. This makes her *suasoria* less powerful than her speeches to Phaedra: indeed, her attempt to make Hippolytus give in to love rapidly fails. The Nurse also makes use of *argumenta a fortiori*: for instance, to convince Phaedra that her *nefas* cannot stay hidden, the Nurse argues that if crimes cannot go unnoticed even by husbands and parents, all the more the Sun will discover and punish her (145-64). Again, this argument is strengthened by two *sententiae*: “parents are perceptive” (*sagax parentum cura est*, 152); and “women may sin unpunished, but never get off scot-free” (*scelus aliqua tutum, nulla securum tulit*, 164).

Seneca’s *Phaedra* is not just rhetoric; it is enacted rhetoric. That is, the *controversia* and the *suasoria* are not uttered by the authorial voice but by a character with authorial function. Seneca mixes the two genres, *declamatio* and tragedy, in order to confer a debate-like pace to the drama. Furthermore, such a confrontation between two opposing points

¹³ Some examples: “poor woman, what are you doing? Why make worse the shame of your house, / even outdoing your mother?”, (“quo, misera, pergis? quid domum infamem aggravas / superasque matrem?”, 142-3); “why are there not more monsters? Why is your brother’s palace empty?” (“cur monstra cessant? aula cur fratris vacat?”, 174); “why does this pestilence choose fancy, pretentious houses, / and not creep so often into moderate hearths? / Why does a holy Venus live under lowly roofs . . . ?” (“cur in penates rarius tenues subit / haec delicatas eligens pestis domos? / cur sancta parvis habitat in tectis Venus . . . ?”, 209-11).

of view is functional to the development of the plot. The Nurse deploys all her rhetorical skill first to dissuade Phaedra from her insane love, and then to persuade Hippolytus to embrace to love: both attempts fail. In particular, the Nurse's attempted *dissuasio* toward Phaedra fails from an argumentative point of view; she is compelled to change rhetorical strategy, relying more on emotion than on reason and abandoning her role of the 'voice of reason'.¹⁴ Once again, her rhetorical strategies have no effect: it is a "dialogue de sourds" (Laurand 2012-2013, 155). But it is the Nurse's very failure that activates the tragic plot, which will result in Nature's triumph over the two main character's unnatural excesses.

3. A Plautine Servant

As Stavros Frangoulidis argues (2009, but such a suggestion had already been made by Grimal 1965, 17), the role of Nurse in Seneca's *Phaedra* shares many traits with the *servus callidus* in Plautus' comedy. These analogies can be traced to the metatheatrical, authorial role of both characters (obviously in addition to the servile state of both figures). The close identification between the clever slave and the playwright's persona is a matter of general agreement among scholars:¹⁵ his plans to cheat his master, or to help him with his love affairs, entail a metatheatrical reflection on the comedy's plot and the work of the author. The most famous example of *servus callidus* is Pseudolus, who breaks the stage illusion to demonstrate his total mastery of the plot; he openly states his metatheatrical function at *Ps.* 399-405.

Metatheatre is a concept fruitfully applied to Seneca's tragedies as well, especially by Alessandro Schiesaro (2003, esp. 13-15; cf. also Boyle 2006, 208-18). In the broader sense of the term, Seneca does not use metatheatrical devices (e.g. characters talking to the audience) that break down the 'fourth wall'. On the other hand, Seneca's plays show how passions create tragedy not only as a catastrophe, but also as a play – this is what Schiesaro defines as metadrama, viewing *Thyestes* as poetic creation reflecting on the very act of creating.

The same metatheatrical, or metadramatic, function pinpointed in Plautus' *servus callidus* and in Seneca's *Thyestes* can be found in *Phaedra*'s

¹⁴ This is, of course, another rhetorical strategy, which characterises the Nurse even more as a skilled declaimer. Cf. Coffey and Mayer 1990, 14; Calabrese 2009, 39-40; Casamento 2011, 163.

¹⁵ On the significant role played by the *servus callidus* in Plautine comedy, see Fraenkel 1960, 223-41. The fundamental studies of the slave's metatheatrical role are Barchiesi 1969, Petrone 1983, and Slater 1985; see also Moore 1998; Sharrock 2009; 116-40; Christenson 2019.

Nurse as well. Relying on her psychological authority over Phaedra, she manages to manipulate her and her actions. Such dominance goes back to the Nurse figures of Aeschylus and Sophocles, while Euripides' Nurse is marked more by intimacy and confidence: rather it is Phaedra who exerts an authoritative role (Yoon 2012, 15-7).¹⁶ Stavros Frangoulidis focuses especially on the inset play performed by the Nurse, namely the making up of the rape by Hippolytus, comparing it to the inset plays performed by Plautus' scheming slaves, such as Palaestrio in *Miles gloriosus* and *Curculio*'s eponymous parasite (Frangoulidis 2009, 411 and n23). Furthermore, when confronted with Theseus' unexpected arrival, the Nurse acts exactly like the *servus callidus*, who takes advantage of unforeseen events to make the plot go forward, as Tranio does in *Mostellaria* at the arrival of Misargyrides (Frangoulidis 2009, 414 and n27). Again, the assumption of a new role by the Nurse is marked by an influence on the tragedy of a different genre.

The main difference between the two figures is in the outcome of their plots. The forces set in motion by the Plautine slave are in conformity with the development of the comedy's plot, while the Nurse's schemes run counter to the course of events shaped by Phaedra and Hippolytus, or rather events of which Phaedra and Hippolytus are instruments. In Plautine comedy, the carnivalesque subversion is followed by a restoration of the initial order at the hand of the slave; in *Phaedra*, the Nurse's plans will have a tragic outcome. But, as I will argue later, *Phaedra*'s ending also involves the creation of a new order, paradoxically thanks to the Nurse's actions.

4. A Tragicomic *Lena*

Phaedra's Nurse seems to share some traits with another comedy character, that is, the *lena*, the 'female pimp'. A *lena* is a woman who has been a prostitute and now teaches the job to other young women (who are generally her daughters from casual partners), expecting them to bring home money for her. The most famous *lenae* are Cleareta in the *Asinaria* and Melaenis and Lena in the *Cistellaria*; their presence is not limited to comedy, as they appear in elegy as well.¹⁷

The Nurse and the *lena* share some features as stock characters: they

¹⁶ Though of lower rank, the Nurse negotiates her position relative to Phaedra and gains an authoritative role over her mistress through a pragmatic use of language (Calabrese 2009, 27-43).

¹⁷ On the *lena* figure in comedy and other genres, see Myers 1996; Fayer 2013, 323-75; Augenti 2018, 61-75.

are both middle-aged or old women who exert a motherly, authoritative role over younger main female characters; they are both experienced and wise and give judicious advice to their pupils. But *Phaedra's* Nurse seems to be even closer to the role of procuress. In fact, she negotiates an affair between Phaedra and Hippolytus, in the way a *lena* tries to persuade, or deceive, a new client; a viable parallel is the old fruit seller in Petronius' *Satyricon*.¹⁸ Moreover, at some points the Nurse appears unsympathetic towards Phaedra.¹⁹ In Act 1, the Nurse makes no effort to understand Phaedra's passion and reproaches her harshly. When Phaedra declares her will to kill herself, the Nurse opposes her mistress' decision and accepts to negotiate with Hippolytus to keep Phaedra alive. This lack of empathy is also a common trait of comic *lenae*, whose only interest is in their young girls getting paid for their job. Being a slave acting as a pimp, her role is close to that of Scapha in Plautus' *Mostellaria*.²⁰

From a dramatic point of view, the function of the *lena* is to hamper the main plot of the comedy, that is, the love story between a boy and a prostitute, a relationship that she wants to be only occasional and remunerative. In *Phaedra's* Act 1, the Nurse seems to fulfil an analogous role: Phaedra is in love with Hippolytus but the Nurse tries to dissuade her; the main difference is that the Nurse obviously does not push Phaedra towards prostitution. Later, however, the Nurse takes up the role of the *lena* with the aim of promoting the love affair between Phaedra and Hippolytus. Nevertheless, she fails once again, and instead of creating a new love, she leads both characters to tragedy. On closer inspection, the Nurse's actions hamper the course of events desired by Phaedra, instead of fostering them: in this regard, the Nurse gets even closer to the comic role of the *lena*, conferring a tragicomic vibe on the play.

5. A(n Im)pious Priestess

At 406-30 there is a prayer to Diana. These verses are perhaps the most philologically tormented of the whole play. According to all manuscripts, it is the Nurse who delivers the prayer to the goddess, but this view has been challenged many times (see mainly Fantham 1993; Coffey and Mayer 1990, 127; Gamberale 2007). For reasons of space I cannot run through the whole

¹⁸ Petron. 7. When asked by Encolpius where his house is, this old lady replies "this should be your house", revealing herself as a *lena* hunting for clients. On her character, see Augenti 2018, 68-9.

¹⁹ The Nurse is already characterised as impatient and lacking sympathy by Euripides in his *Hippolytus* (Barrett 1964, 195-7).

²⁰ On Scapha, see Fayer 2013, 353-8.

issue in detail, but some observations are necessary. Among the arguments against the attribution of the prayer to the priestess is its alleged inappropriateness, if not impiety: calling on the goddess of chastity to make Hippolytus give in to erotic love has been seen as more appropriate to Phaedra's *furor* (Giomini 1955a, 76-7, who nevertheless attributes the prayer to the Nurse; Giomini 1955b, 58; Gamberale 2007, 67-8; La Bua 1999; 302-4; Mazzoli 2016, 290). Furthermore, the prayer seems to contradict the Nurse's requiring Phaedra to maintain her role as Hippolytus' stepmother (Gamberale 2007, 67). In my view, such incoherencies are consistent with the dramatic development of the Nurse's character.

From an intratextual perspective, Seneca depicts Diana as a goddess of chastity: this is the role that Seneca assigns to the deity and that sets the whole play in motion, generating the contrast with Phaedra's insane love. But, on closer inspection, this is how Hippolytus conceives Diana; he operates a selection of Diana's attributes according to his own beliefs and tendencies. So does the Nurse, who invokes the goddess in order to lead Hippolytus to erotic love. These two aspects are also present in Artemis/Diana from a broader historical-religious perspective, as her cult is related to marriage and childbirth as well.²¹ The Nurse's prayer is just and pious, as sex and marriage are not forbidden by the goddess, but encouraged as a natural function; she does not dictate life-long virginity. Such traits may suffice to justify the content of the prayer without appealing to Phaedra's *furor*.

The inconsistency of this prayer with the Nurse's speeches in Act 1 is paradoxically consistent with the proteiform character of the woman. She takes on different forms in order for her mistress not to suffer or die: such a sudden rethinking of Phaedra's erotic fantasy with Hippolytus fits perfectly with the numerous changes of mind and tactics of the Nurse. Since she is also responsible for *Phaedra's* genre contaminations (declamation, comedy, elegy), it is also consistent with the trend I am outlining in this paper: that through the Nurse Seneca touches on another literary genre, the cletic hymn.²² In this respect, the prayer is an important part of her polymorphous

²¹ Artemis/Diana is not just a goddess of virginity: her cult comprehends various feminine rites of passage related to puberty, marriage, and childbirth. In this respect, Artemis was worshipped as a goddess of fertility too. This is especially true for Artemis' cults at Brauron and Mounichia (Gioman 1999; Léger 2017, 6-7, 12-8, 83-90, 113). The many-breasted statue found at Ephesus is also generally interpreted as illustrating Artemis' role of goddess of fertility (Léger 2017: 45); even a Dionysian, orgiastic cult is attested at Brauron and Halai Araphenides (Gioman 1999, 153-6, 180-3). The main sources for such a cult are a scholion to Aristophanes (*Pax* 874-6) and the Suda lexicon (s.v. Βραυρών).

²² The typical hymnic elements of this prayer are pointed out by Giomini 1955a, 76; Boyle 1987, 163-5; La Bua 1999, 302-4; Gamberale 2007, 62-6. Elaine Fantham (1993) analyz-

authorial role in the tragedy.

Finally, the high solemnity of the prayer has been considered more appropriate to a queen than to a slave (Fantham 1993, 163; Gamberale 2007, 66-7). This observation must not be underestimated; nevertheless, given the versatile and skilled nature of the Nurse, I find no difficulty with her improvising a prayer following all the standards of a traditional cletic hymn. Furthermore, nurses' prayers are a *topos* of moralistic discourse (e.g. Hor. *Epist.* 1.4.8-11; Sen. *Epist.* 60.1; cf. Berno 2017): the image of a nurse praying for her pupil seems even more appropriate to the context of the play.

If it is the Nurse who delivers the prayer to Diana, is she an impious priestess? She may be, but only from Hippolytus' point of view: he envisages Diana as a goddess of chastity. The two prayers to Diana, the one delivered by Hippolytus (54-85) and that uttered by the Nurse, simply focus on complementary aspects of the goddess, suppressing other features (Segal 1986, 66-7). Furthermore, Hippolytus is led to his death by his complete refusal of the sexual sphere in the name of Nature, though this turns out to be against the latter's laws. Depending on the perspective, Hippolytus' prayer may be deemed more impious than the Nurse's.

The Nurse's prayer may also be a failure from Phaedra's perspective: instead of rousing love in the young boy, the Nurse strengthens his misogyny and repudiation of sexual desire. But, again, it is a matter of perspective. *De facto* the Nurse cooperates, albeit unconsciously, with Nature, the ultimate plot-maker of the tragedy. From Nature's point of view, the Nurse is truly pious.

6. The (Anti-)Elegy of Lady Nurse

The Nurse's speeches to Phaedra and Hippolytus rely on a number of *topoi* drawn from Roman elegy, mainly from Ovid. Thus she improvises as an elegiac poet: her role switches are signaled by the use of different genre conventions; she takes on a role in which she fails to fit. The general analogies between *Phaedra* and its elegiac model, Ovid's fourth *Heroid*, have already been analyzed (see esp. Morelli 2004, 42-64): I will focus on the speeches delivered by the Nurse.

In her first speech to Phaedra, the Nurse endeavors to divert her from her insanity. Dissuasion from painful love is the main topic of Ovid's *Remedia amoris*, an erotic-didascalical poem through which the

es the repetition of cletic elements to show that the prayer may be divided between Phaedra and the Nurse, in a sort of call and response chant.

poet teaches his audience how to recover from heartache. In this respect, the poem is an anti-elegy: the function of the genre is subverted from within by a (former) elegiac poet. The Nurse's speech to Phaedra bears many similarities with *Remedia amoris*, as noted by various scholars (e.g. Giomini 1955a, 50; Grimal 1965, 48; Giancotti 1986, 21-2; Coffey and Mayer 1990, 103-4; Mayer 2002, 70; Casamento 2011, 156, 160). The call to forsake love before it becomes unescapable (129-35) echoes a famous section of Ovid's poem (*rem.* 71-110): the Nurse's admonishments to "extinguish the flames", (*extingue flammās*, 131) and to "restrain the flames" (*compesce . . . flammās*, 165) echo *Ov. rem.* 53 (*extinguere flammās*) and 69 (*conpescite curas*); both texts describe love as a voluntary yoke to throw off, e.g. *Phaedr.* 135: "submits to the yoke, it becomes too late to resist", (*sero recusat ferre quod subiit iugum*; cf. *Ov. rem.* 91-2). The close association between a pathological love (*libido*) and wealth (*luxus*) expressed by the Nurse (204-8) is found again in the *Remedia amoris* (742-6: *luxoriosus amor*): not coincidentally, Ovid uses Phaedra as an example of such a love. The image of love creeping under the skin (*subit*) like subtle fire or illness is also typical of Roman elegy (e.g. *Ov. Am.* 1.2.6), as is the association between erotic and military language (the *topos* of the *militia amoris*).

The Second Act of the tragedy begins with the Nurse describing Phaedra's *furor*. Her speech, which echoes Phaedra's self-description of Act 1 (99-128),²³ owes a lot to the *topos* of love's symptomatology, consecrated by Sappho and Catullus, but rhetoricised by elegiac poets. Just to mention a few of these commonplaces: young lovers cannot sleep at night (*Tib.* 2.4.11; *Prop.* 1.1.33, 2.17.3-4, 4.3.29-42; *Ov. Am.* 1.2.1-4, *Ars* 1.735-6), refuse to eat (*Prop.* 4.3.27-8; *Ov. Ars* 1.735-6), and have a pale complexion (*Prop.* 4.3.27-8; *Ov. Ars* 1.729, *Her.* 13.23); Phaedra's lack of care for her hair and her wandering hither and thither resemble Laodameia's symptomatology in Ovid's thirteenth *Heroid* (31-4). The tears streaming down her face as on ice also find a close parallel in Ovid (*Am.* 1.7.57-8).

Finally, the Nurse's speech to Hippolytus bears a number of resemblances with elegiac poetry as well (Morelli 2004, 42-8). As the Nurse's dramatic role changes from opposer to assistant, literary models also change: if in Act 1 *Remedia amoris* is the main reference, now the Nurse takes up the role of a love teacher, such as that embodied by Ovid in his *Ars amatoria*. In this work, as in Roman elegy in general, urban life is the ideal setting for sane human love relationships: this is the kind of love that the Nurse invites Hippolytus to give in to (Casamento 2011, 20-1, 182-3). Nevertheless, the young boy rejects this urban and social world

²³ The Nurse's description does not only echo Phaedra's words but amplifies them (Schmidt 1995, 289-90).

for the sake of purity and chastity.²⁴ “Why do you sleep alone?” (*Cur in toro viduo iaces?*, 448) recalls the empty bed of Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus (*Ov. Her.* 5.106);²⁵ the exhortations to enjoy life and erotic love as a natural feature of youth is also a widespread *topos* in elegiac and erotic poetry, with Ovid inspired by Venus herself (*Ars* 3.59-100).²⁶ The scene can be understood as an attempt by an elegiac poetess to lure a reader (or better, a listener) into her world; but, again, this attempt fails. From an elegiac perspective, this strategy fails because such *topoi* are to be used by a man who tries to seduce a woman, not by an old lady who tries to lure a young boy (Morelli 2004, 44-6); the Nurse does not know how to employ her knowledge. Still, the main reason for the Nurse’s failure is that Hippolytus is too tightly tied to a perverse idea of Nature, which, in turn, will restore its laws and cause his death: again, the Nurse unconsciously cooperates with Nature.

7. Conclusion: the Nurse as Nature’s Dramatic Device

So far I have highlighted how the proteiform Senecan Nurse takes on many different roles in an effort to make herself the author of a drama, over which she ends up having no control. All of her transformations result in a failure and in a new detour from the course of events she covets. Whenever her role changes, Seneca diverts from the rules of tragedy, mixing it with different genres (philosophical diatribe, *declamatio*, comedy, elegy, cletic hymn), but in the end, tragedy turns up to be the main genre of the work. The Nurse’s authorial function is both asserted and denied.

Nonetheless I would like to conclude by casting a glimmer of positive light, however feeble, on the Nurse and the whole Senecan tragedy.²⁷ All of the Nurse’s actions are driven by her deep affection for Phaedra. However, she is perfectly conscious of the extent to which her mistress is a victim of irrational and unnatural impulses: though fighting against destiny, the

²⁴ In the opposition between *silvae* and *urbs* Giancarlo Mazzoli envisions a correspondent opposition between two literary genres, bucolic and elegiac (2016, 95-9).

²⁵ For the empty bed, compare also Prop. 3.6.23, 33.

²⁶ The analogies and differences between the two passages are listed by Morelli 2004, 43-8

²⁷ Francesco Giancotti (1986, 55-7) reads *Phaedra* in a positive, philosophically constructive light as well, but his inferences are quite different from, if not contrary to, mine. Giancotti envisions a lesson about human responsibility and free choice; I argue that Seneca’s lesson is about obeying Nature, that is, Fate. This is an unsolvable philosophical problem: suffice it to say that, in his philosophical works, Seneca overlaps freedom and determinism, for example in *Vit. beat.* 15.7 (“in regno sumus: deo parere libertas est”) and in *Epist.* 8.8 (hoc enim ipsum philosophiae servire libertas est”).

Nurse is aware, or at least suspects, that the tragedy is unavoidable. In the dramatic development carried out by the Nurse, the reader can see an irreconcilable conflict between *ratio* and *natura*. However, her stifled awareness betrays the existence of a second *ratio*, not in conflict but in accordance with the laws of Nature, coinciding stoically with Fate.

The Nurse employs a sort of titanic strength in opposing a tragedy that she knows is unavoidable. Hippolytus' false beliefs about Nature cause him to reject sexual energy, and this will cause his death; at the other extreme, Phaedra's uncontrolled erotic impulses stray from the ways of Nature, which will overwhelm her as well in the end. Perhaps the Nurse suspects from the beginning that all of this is inevitable, yet she chooses to side with those who act against Nature. The Nurse's agency contributes to Phaedra's and Hippolytus' tragedy, in fact cooperating with Nature; in turn Nature, to which the chorus chants a solemn ode (959-88), affirms its undisputed dominance through the Nurse (cf. Mazzoli 2016, 96). This is the truth about Nature: not an idyllic scenario, but one of violence, blood, and death (cf. Segal 1986, chaps. 3 and 4).

Perhaps consciously, surely reluctantly, the Nurse takes up an authorial role which is catastrophic from the point of view of the main characters, but absolutely effective from the point of view of Nature. The Nurse stands in between two polar *furores* opposing the regular course of Nature (Giancotti 1986, 27-8). Thanks to the Nurse, Nature restores its order, eliminating the disruptive forces represented by Hippolytus and Phaedra in the only possible way, their death.²⁸ Seneca's *Phaedra* is the tragedy of a plural Nature, in constant conflict with itself. Nevertheless it restores her unstable equilibrium at every step, in a process of homeostasis that nullifies the centrifugal forces produced by Nature herself.²⁹ Given the Nurse's authorial function, her role as advisor of a royal character as well as an instrument of higher forces, it is hard not to see Seneca himself lurking behind this character.³⁰

²⁸ "But the gap between the different conceptions of nature expressed by Phaedra and Hippolytus cannot truly be bridged . . . both die and it is nature to win and have the final word, destroying those . . . who have been unable to live in ὁμολογία with her universal and unitary laws" (Mantovanelli 2008, 979, translation mine); cf. Segal 1986, 96-7. One can argue that Phaedra's death is not natural, as she commits suicide. Nevertheless Seneca in his prose works endeavours to show that suicide is not an act against nature (e.g. in *De providentia* and *Letters* 12, 58, 70, 71, just to name the most famous passages).

²⁹ Cf. Boyle 1985, 1289-304; Boyle 1987, 24 ("the framework, the structure of things, *rerum natura*, remains constant"); Mazzoli 2016, 96 ("at the end of the tragedy, in fact, the anti-system has already reverted itself into the system", translation mine).

³⁰ See for instance Schmidt 1995, 290.

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ANNALISA PERROTTA*

“Speak; I will listen”. The Body and the Words in the Dialogue with the Nurse in Sixteenth-Century Italian Tragedy¹

Abstract

This essay examines the dialogue between the Nurse and the milk-daughter in a few Italian tragedies composed between 1514, when Gian Giorgio Trissino wrote *Sophonisba* and 1565, the year of Speroni's *Canace*. In the dialogues, the essay analyses the rhetorical construction of that common ground of communication that can be intimate, confiding, compassionate, or, at other times, modelling and prescriptive. Three nodes are at the centre of the investigation: 1. The relationship between Nurse and milk-daughter involves the body. The relationship's foundation is nourishment and care (many of the Nurse's interventions are due to her disposition to care). This bond is a product of male writers' imagination: which models drive the representation of such a visceral relationship between two women? The paper investigates how Renaissance authors used classical models to define the Nurse's role and function 2. The relationship between the Nurse and the protagonist is often indicative of the epistemological set-up of the tragedy: what does the Nurse know/understand about her dialogue partner? 3. The Nurse's role in unfolding the facts is crucial in evaluating her character in each work: she may be in line with the main diegetic thread or compete with it. Does the Nurse's advising construct an alternative narrative line to the unfolding tragedy, prefiguring another possible, non-tragic narrative world? The nurse character thus seems to associate the ancillary position with a symbolic and relational density only partially investigated so far.

KEYWORDS: Italian Renaissance tragedy; wet nurse; *Sophonisba*; *Rosmunda*; *Orbecche*; imitation; mother-daughter relationship

Introduction

This study analyses only a few texts within the variegated panorama of early 16th-century tragic production; however, it aims to provide an analysis of the Nurse's character easily extendable to other texts. I will focus on works that belong to the first decades of Neoclassical tragedy writing in Italy, par-

¹ “Orsù dite, che ascolto”. From Pietro Aretino, *La Orazia* (1546) 1.431 (translation mine).

* Sapienza University of Rome - annalisa.perrotta@uniroma1.it

ticularly representative in themselves as well as influential on the later tradition. The selection of works is in line with the sixteenth-century editorial workshop illustrated in the Prologue to Ludovico Dolce's *Ifigenia* (1551; Cremante 1988, ix-x): *Sophonisba*, *Rosmunda*, *Orbecche*, *Canace* will be the objects of inquiry in the following pages.

My main claims are the following: first, the relationship between the Nurse and the milk daughter is indicative of the epistemological set-up of the tragedy. The Nurse is a collateral character, supportive of and in dialogue with the main characters. Her presence in the scene elicits the female character's words, her narrative, or the expression of her feelings. Precisely because of her position in the tragedy, the degree of her involvement in the action, and her direct relationship with the milk daughter, the Nurse endows the tragic action with expectations, judgements, hopes and emotions. In some cases, the Nurse can catch aspects of the milk daughter hidden even to the latter. Sometimes she understands what is going on and can counsel wisely, as in Giovanni Rucellai's *Rosmunda* (1516). In other cases, biases and prescriptive intentions compromise her vision, as in the case of Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio's *Orbecche* (1545). In conformity with the classical models, the Nurse is entrusted with "a counter-singing function to the protagonist" (Cremante 1988, 185). The 'counter-song' may serve to reassure and console the main character (in Gian Giorgio Trissino's *Sophonisba*, 1514-15 and Speroni's *Canace*), to discuss her positions or decisions (in Rucellai's *Rosmunda*), thereby enabling the development and fulfilment, the expansion of the tragic character.

Second, I argue that the role of the Nurse in the events is crucial to assess her character. She may appear aligned with the main diegetic line, or she may be in competition with it: in that case, her advice/opinion constructs an alternative narrative line, thereby prefiguring another possible narrative world (in Speroni Speroni's *Canace*, 1541) the Nurse tries to save her milk daughter from condemnation and death, in Rucellai's *Rosmunda* the tragic and idealistic character is counter-balanced by a pragmatic and effective Nurse).

My third claim is that in Italian literary works from the first half of the sixteenth century, the Nurse is a character still in the process of being defined, and this condition gives a space to elaborate models of affectivity between women. The tragedies of the 16th century offer a seemingly stable representation of the character; however, despite this appearance, the Nurse's character can vary in her attitudes and functions both in the plot and the dialogue with the milk-daughter. At the outset, the character's relationship with the milk-daughter is firmly based on the physical bond, often translated in on-stage gestures. Later, the character develops a kind of intellectualization of her role and attitude in the play.

I also want to argue that adaptation of the ancient models to the new

audience could be labelled as a “returning interference”. In this interference, early Italian tragic models cooperate in adapting classical models to the target context. Italian tragedy in the 16th century is a form consisting of texts with a dense interdiscursive structure. It is composed of highly codified texts, which reproduce a sort of genre grammar involving the plot and the rhetorical composition. Despite the varying degrees of adherence to the models, the classical texts – the Greek tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides and those of Seneca – were the main benchmarks. Soon, however, the Italian tragedians also began to quote one another: the first tragedies became the reference point for the later works. Earlier Italian tragedians’ works, then, influenced the translations of the Greek classics. Early Italian tragedies functioned as a filter in the re-reading, translation, and adaptation, of ancient texts. A study on Italian Renaissance tragedy needs to consider this general framework, with all the complexities deriving from “the accumulation of super-significations, the interference of quotations, the incessant play of superimpositions, of memories, animating . . . a centrifugal movement that continuously complicates the structure of the tragedy” (Cremante 1988, 11).²

The classical models used for the nurses in Italian tragedy represent many kinds of relationships (male-female, or lovers, sister-sister, mother-daughter, nurse-milk-daughter). Due to the prestige of the reference texts, tradition has a modelling power. The models are those offered by tradition, and authors easily interpret the nurse-daughter relationship by applying the models of other relationships between women (mother-daughter, sisters) involving care, affection and bodily bonding. The way the playwright describes the bodily bond is a product of a male writers’ imagination: what models drive the representation of such a visceral relationship between two women? My last claim is that other types of relationships play a role in fashioning the bond, such as the relationship between sisters, Dido and Anna in the *Aeneid*, and between a mother and daughter, as in the case of Hecuba and Polyxena in Euripides’ *Hecuba*: the pair Hecuba-Polissena probably constituted a model for the physical representation of the mother (or nurse)-daughter pair. The use of ancient models overrides the consistency of the content choice of the model (the nurse is neither a sister nor a mother). There are elements, however, that function as a constant, allowing the transition from one figure to the other: nurturing (the sisters, of flesh or milk, were likely nourished together or from the same source); the availability of physical contact; and the profound bond that these two elements produce (e.g., expressed through the desire to die together). Another model, the heterosexual love bond, overlaps with the sisterly pair and the Nurse and milk-daughter pair. Textual expres-

² I use Cremante’s account of *Sophonisba* as a general description of the overall tradition of Renaissance Italian tragedy.

sions migrate from the general love context to the more specific context of the bond between women. This is another manifestation of the process of progressive shifts and adaptation from gestures and words borrowed from other relational contexts (as in the case of *Alcestis* and the *Inamoramento de Orlando* by Boiardo in *Sophonisba*, see below).

A couple of milk sisters, Sofonisba and Erminia in Trissino's *Sophonisba*, are at the start of our journey.

1. *Sophonisba* by Gian Giorgio Trissino

Gian Giorgio Trissino's *Sophonisba* is the first tragedy in the vernacular of explicit classical inspiration in early modern times.³ The author is counted among those labelled by Herrick "the Grecians" for their specific imitation of Greek models (Herrick 1965, 45); scholar, grammarian, critic, poet, dramatist and courtier, Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478-1550) is one of the most notable intellectuals of the first half of the 16th century. *Sophonisba* was probably conceived under the influence of the group of the Orti Oricellari, who at the time were cultivating the study of ancient Greek and already dedicated to rediscovering ancient theatre (Pieri 1980, 96-7; Cosentino 2003, 63-71). It was composed in Rome in 1514-1515, offered to Leo X in 1518, circulated in manuscript and published in Rome in July 1524 (Cremante 1988, 3; Gallo 2019).

Sophonisba presents a pair of milk sisters who take on many traits that, in tradition, are those of the Nurse-milk daughter pair; the two characters will become a model of that relationship in later Italian tragedies. Very different classical and Romance models contribute to constructing the dialogue between the two women: the Dido and Anna couple in the *Aeneid*, the Admetus-Alcestis couple in Euripides' *Alcestis*, but also the Tisbina and Iroldo couple in Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Inamoramento de Orlando*. The words indicating physical contact function as stage directions, and the corporeal bond is crucial, particularly in the staged death of the main character Sofonisba.

Written in unrhymed hendecasyllables, *Sophonisba* recounts an event which occurred during the Second Punic War. The young protagonist who gives her name to the tragedy is the daughter of the Carthaginian Hasdrubal and wife of Siface, king of the Massesilians, allied with Carthage. After the capture of her husband in the clash with the Romans, she fears falling into the hands of the enemy. Massinissa, the Numidian king, her former betrothed, is in love with her. He tries to save her by proposing marriage.

³ I quote from the selection of Italian tragedies edited by Renzo Cremante (Cremante 1988). I reproduce the text of Cremante's edition, Greek characters ε and ω excluded, which are in the original, and part of Trissino's proposal for spelling reform. Here and henceforth translations are mine.

However, the Romans oppose the plan: Massinissa himself supplies Sofonisba with poison, with which she commits suicide.⁴

There is no specific nurse among the characters, but a milk sister and sister-in-law, Erminia. Nonetheless, the character of Erminia and her relationship with Sophonisba are crucial to the later development of the nurse character, for the following reasons: firstly, according to Cremante, Erminia is modelled on the Nurse of classical tragedy (Cremante 1988, 36). The dialogue between the protagonist and her sister allows the character to explain her reasons, as in the dialogue between Medea and the Nurse in Euripides' *Medea*, in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (176ff.), where the dialogue is placed at the beginning of the stage action, and in Seneca's *Phaedra* (84ff., after Hippolytus' monologue). Secondly, in Appian 8.28, one of Trissino's sources, Sofonisba takes the poison in the presence of the Nurse (Cremante 1988, 36). Thirdly, the milk bond between Erminia and Sofonisba becomes stronger and stronger in the course of the tragedy, since Sofonisba, before her death, will entrust her little son to her. Erminia becomes a sort of nurse: "Mi sforzerò di far ciò che volete, / per rimaner nutrice al vostro filjo / Et a la madre serva, non che nuora" (Trissino, *Soph.* 1827-9; "I will strive to do what you want, / to be a nurse to your child / and servant and daughter-in-law to your mother"); and Sofonisba: "In questo meço a l'unico mio filio, / vivendo tu, non mancherà la madre" (Trissino, *Soph.* 1797-8; "At this time my only son, while you live, will not lack a mother"). Sharing milk is the first physical element that Erminia and Sofonisba mention in the opening dialogue - "sian nutrite insieme" (Trissino, *Soph.* 14; "we were fed together"). Fourthly, the opening of *Sophonisba* will serve as a model for many later tragedies, in which Erminia's place will be taken by the Nurse: the Sofonisba-Erminia couple provides an early example of the language of relationship, care and support that would be imitated and further developed in the following years.

In Erminia's presence, Sofonisba needs to pour out her heart - "si sfuoga ragionando il cuore" (Trissino, *Soph.* 21; "speaking, the heart pours out"). The need to speak opens the prologue, which works as a threshold of the tragic action and a technical tool for reconstructing the events that will lead to the tragic event. Sofonisba's words insist on the semantic area of pain: "molesta" ("harasses"), "dolor" ("sorrow"), "martiri" ("torments"). They also focus on the need to externalize - "disfogare" ("to vent"), "manifestando" ("expressing"), "narrando" ("telling you") - what is inside "cuor" ("heart"), "ingombra" ("occupies") (Trissino, *Soph.* 1-7). Conversely, Erminia's words insist on their bonding, both on a level of disparity and equality - "Regina" ("Queen"), "amor" ("love"), "sorella" ("sister"); on feelings - "v'ami" ("I love

⁴ The sources of the storyline are Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 30, 12-15 and Appian 8.10-28 (Cremante 1988, 8; Cosentino 2003, 140).

you”), “si dolja . . . de i vostri mali” (Trissino, *Soph.* 8-12; “grieves for your misfortunes”; and again on the act of bringing forth — “sfogate” (“vent”), “parlar” (“speak”). The occasion for narrating the antecedent is rooted in the relationship between the two women: Sofonisba seeks an outlet, but at the same time, she is also looking for a way to tidy up well-known unhappy facts — “[martiri] i quali ad uno ad un voljo narrarti” (Trissino, *Soph.* 7; “torments that I want to narrate to you one by one”): because you love me, she tells her, I want to reason more extensively with you, I will repeat things you already know because by reasoning, one’s heart receives relief.

In analysing the scene of Sophonisba’s suicide onstage, scholars have discussed the similarity between Dido’s and Sofonisba’s characters (Ferroni 1980, 183-4, and Cosentino 2003, 141-2). Modelled on the Dido-Anna couple, the physical bond between the two women only returns at the moment of the protagonist’s death: in the dialogue, during her agony (Trissino, *Soph.* 1723-979), Erminia is experiencing the grief as a sister, but she also lingers over the depth and physicality of the love bond that unites her to the dying Sofonisba. Erminia declares that she wants to die — “voljo venir, voljo venir anch’io / a star con voi sotterra” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1727-8; “I want to come, I want to come and be buried with you”). Sofonisba recalls the love that binds her to all the women who now accompany her in death. The women in the chorus guarantee the lustral rite of tears and the care of memory — “ond’orneren la vostra sepoltura / de le lacrime nostre e de’ capelli” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1748-9; “we shall adorn your burial with our tears and our hair”).⁵ When Sofonisba entrusts Erminia with the care of her little son, the task takes on a political implication: “fia forse ristauro a la sua gente” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1800; “will perhaps be a chance of salvation for his people”). Erminia laments her sister with words similar to those used in Virgil — “Tosto m’havete, tosto abbandonata!” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1910; “Quickly you have abandoned me!”); “Ben dovevate, ben chiamarmi allora, / crudel, quando il venen vi fu recato / . . . che morte insieme / allor saremmo in un medesimo punto / e gite in compagnia ne l’altra vita” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1772-6; “You should well have called me then, cruel one, when the poison was brought to you . . . Then we would have died together at the exact moment and would have gone to the next life together”). Just like Anna, Erminia clasps Sofonisba to her breast at the last moment: “SOPHONISBA Accostatevi a me, voljo appoggiarmi, / ch’io mi sento mancare . . . HERMINIA Appoggiatevi sopra ’l mio petto” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1893-6; “SOPHONISBA Come near me, I want to lean on you, because I feel I am dying . . . HERMINIA Lean on my breast”).⁶

⁵ For the meaning of the hair on the tomb, Cremante recalls Eur. *El.* 448-52 and *Alc.* 101-3, Cremante 1988, 143.

⁶ Anna reproaches Dido for having abandoned her (“quid primum deserta quaer-

Trissino also draws the words to describe affection and loss from an erotic context: in addition to the memory of Petrarch's *RVF* (which, however, is not a poetic model connected to a specific semantic area), the author also remembers the episode of Tisbina and Iroldo from Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Inamoramento de Orlando* (Cremante 1988, 143-4):

Dove è l'amor che me portavi, e dove
 È quel che spesso soleva iurare:
 Che se tu avesti un ciel, o tuti nove,
 Non vi potresti me senza habitare ?
 Hor te pensi de andar nelo Inferno,
 E me lasciar in terra in pianto eterno?
 (Boiardo, *InOr* I 12 53, 3-8)

[Where is that love you had, and where / is that which made you often swear / if you ruled one, or all nine spheres, you could not live without me there? Do you plan to go to hell / and leave me to lament eternally on earth? (Boiardo 2004)]

With similar words, Erminia asks Sofonisba:

Crudele, hor non sapete il nostro amore,
 E quante volte anchor m'havete detto
 Che se voi su nel ciel fossi Regina,
 Il starvi senza me vi saria noja?
 Hor vi pensate andare ad altra vita
 E me lasciare in un continuo pianto!
 (Trissino, *Soph.* 1764-9)

[Cruel one, you do not know our love, and how many times you have told me again that if you were Queen up in heaven, to be without me would be a grief to you? Now do you think of going to another life leaving me in a continuous weeping!]

The Euripides' Admetus-Alcestis dialogue is working underneath the Italian text, as well. The author interweaves the words of Tisbina with Admetus's words on the dying Alcestis, especially in the lines where Erminia imagines her life without Sofonisba. Erminia will speak with the shadow of Sophonisba (Trissino, *Soph.* 1835-8, Eur. *Alc.* 348-54). In *Alcestis*, Admetus fantasizes

ar?" *Aen.* 4.677) and for not choosing her as a companion in death ("comitemne sororem / sprevisti moriens?", *Aen.* 4.677-8): had she done so, the same pain at the same time would have torn them both from life ("idem ambas ferro dolor atque eadem hora tulisset", *Aen.* 4.679); yet, by killing herself, Anna tells her, Dido has also brought death to her sister ("Extinxti te meque, soror", *Aen.* 4.682). After washing the wounds, Anna focuses on Dido's mouth: she wants to catch with her lips one last breath of life ("extremus si quis super halitus errat / ore legam", *Aen.* 4.684-5). While uttering words of sorrow she clasps her sister to her breast ("semianimemque sinu germanam amplexa fovebat / cum gemitu", *Aen.* 4.686-7).

about embracing the statue of his wife on the nuptial bed; in both texts, it is “freddo conforto” (Trissino, *Sofon.* 1838) and “ψυχρὰν . . . τέρπσιν” (Eur. *Alc.* 353; “chill delight”, Euripides 1988, 91]; Erminia hopes Sofonisba will visit her in dreams, to console her: “Ch’elj’è piacere assai vedere in sogno / Cosa che s’ami e che ci sia negata” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1842-33; “it is a great pleasure to see in a dream something we love and that is denied to us”). Admetus also wished to see Alcestis in a dream for the same reason: “ἡδὺ γὰρ φίλους κὰν νυκτὶ λεύσσειν, ὄντιν’ ἄν παρῆι χρόνον” (Eur. *Alc.* 355-6; “for sweet it is, by night, to look on loved ones, for as long as they may stay”, Euripides 1988, 93). The erotic semantics is toned down but it still remains explicit. Erminia speaks of “nostro amore” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1764; “our love”), the beloved who took the poison only for herself is “crucele” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1773; “cruel”). She recalls when her friend told her that even if she had been Queen in heaven, it would have been painful for her to give up Erminia’s company (Trissino, *Soph.* 1765-7). Within this staged death, the representation of the affection between two milk-sisters amplifies the suffering and elicits the emotional involvement of the audience; the author describes the affection between the two women with the tools provided by literary tradition in expressing love between a man and a woman. A few more examples: to seal her persuasive speech to Sofonisba so that she won’t kill herself, Erminia says: “Perché, vivendo tu, non moro in tutto, / Anzi vive di me l’ottima parte (Trissino, *Soph.* 1817-18; “Because, if you live, I will not entirely die, / Indeed, the best part of me will live”); the line is taken from Petrarch *RVF* CCCXXXI 43-5, but the meaning is reversed: “Bello et dolce morire era allor quando, / morend’io, non moria mia vita in seme / anzi vivea di me l’ottima parte” (Petrarch 2001; “How nice and sweet if I had died then; when dying my life would not have died with me - rather, the best of me would have lived on”). Again, Sofonisba’s words: “Herminia mia, tu sola a questo tempo / Mi sei padre, fratel, sorella e madre” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1875-6; “My Herminia, only you now / are my father, brother, sister and mother”), are the words of Andromache to Hector (4.429-30), the words of a woman to a man.

These words indicating physical contact function as stage directions for the gestures of the two characters and they occur only at the moment of death: “Appoggiatevi pur sopra ’l mio petto” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1896; “Lean on my breast”) Erminia says to Sophonisba, at the last moment and “alzate il viso a questo che vi bacia” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1902; “lift your face to this one who kisses you”). Erminia’s pain is in her body: “corpo, a che non ti schianti?” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1956; “body, why don’t you crash?”); “Ma son di carne, e s’io fosse anco pietra, / penso che sentirei questo dolore” (Trissino, *Soph.* 1972-3; “But I am of flesh, and if I were of stone, I think I would feel this pain”).

The relationship between two women described and employed in the *Sophonisba* will become an essential model in the representation of the bond

between Nurse and milk-daughter and will be amplified by the interference from other sources. Later tragedies will also deepen the representation on stage, in words and gestures, of the profound symbolic meaning of the bodily bond linking Nurse and milk daughter.

2. *Rosmunda* by Giovanni Rucellai

Probably completed in 1516, *Rosmunda* by Giovanni Rucellai (1475-1543) was performed in the Orti Oricellari while Pope Leo X was in Florence (Simonetta 2017). It shares the metrical and significant structural innovations of the *Sophonisba*. Trissino and Rucellai probably collaborated on composing it (Herrick 1965, 57 calls Rucellai a “friendly rival of Trissino”; Ferroni 1980, 167-8, Cremante 1988, 165-6). This collaboration helped to create the rhetorical fabric of locutions, stylistic elements, quotations, and intertextual allusions characteristic of 16th-century vernacular tragedy. *Sophonisba* gradually became a recognised model for later tragedians, perceived at the same level of the classics (Cremante 1988, 167).

In *Rosmunda*, the Nurse has a counter-singing role that enacts a second diegetic line which contrasts with the one proposed by the tragic character Rosmunda: where Rosmunda is led by the reasons of her heart, first to give her father a proper burial and then to kill herself, the Nurse leads her, instead, towards life, the resolution of a political problem and revenge. In this conflictual relationship between the Nurse and the milk daughter, the latter mentions the profound and visceral bond with the Nurse. She activates a mechanism that will also be found in Giraldi Cinzio’s *Orbecche* and *Canace*: the contrastive overlapping of the two timelines of present and past, of the care given to the newborn and that given to the corpse after death (in this case only imagined). The antagonistic construction of the Nurse’s character makes it possible to stage a tragic character within a work with a happy ending.

A popular Longobard legend (appearing in many other texts, from Paolo Diacono’s *Historia longobardorum* to the novellas of Matteo Bandello) provided the storyline. Treated freely by the author (Cremante 1988, 171), the story tells of Rosmunda, daughter of the Gepid king Cunimondo, whose father was killed in a clash with the Longobard troops of King Alboin. While burying her father, Rosmunda is taken prisoner and then persuaded by her nurse to accept Alboin’s marriage proposal. In doing so, she has to face the brutality of the king, who forces her to drink from her father’s skull during the wedding feast. She faints on stage. In the meantime, the nurse makes Almachilde (Rosmunda’s former betrothed) dress up as a woman and enter Alboin’s chamber to behead him. The nurse personally lays the revenge plot, like the servant character in the comedies. This innovative role of the nurse

is a distinctive feature of this drama (see also Cosentino 2003, 146-7).

In the first scene, Rosmunda and the Nurse are on the battlefield, where the Longobards have just defeated the Gepids. Rosmunda's words open the nocturnal conversation, consistent with the solemn service she is about to perform: the burial to the body of her father who fell in battle.

Tempo è ormai, or che 'l profondo sonno,
 Vestitosi el sembiante de la morte,
 Di quiete e silenzio el mondo ingombra,
 Sciogliendo con dolcissimo riposo
 Dalle fatiche e da' pensier del giorno
 Ogni omo, ogni animal mite e selvaggio.
 (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 1-6)

[The time has come, now that deep sleep, / Clothed in the appearance of death, / Clothes the world in stillness and silence, / Dissolving with sweetest repose / Every man, every meek and wild animal / From the toils and thoughts of the day.]⁷

If the victorious enemies are experiencing a natural sleep, the bodies of those fallen in battle and cluttering up the field are in a very different rest, that of a non-metaphorical death. The juxtaposition of sleep and death amplifies the memory of *Aeneid* 4.522-8. As in Apollonius of Rhodes (*Apollonius Arg.* 3.744-50), the context in the *Aeneid* is erotic: in both texts, two women, respectively Medea and Dido, are unable to sleep when everyone is asleep, thinking of their beloved. On the other hand, in *Rosmunda*, Rosmunda wakes up driven by filial love to carry out her macabre task (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 15; "officio extremo"): for three nights in a row Rosmunda has been turning over the dead one by one, searching for her father's body (on the similarities between Rosmunda and Antigone, see Pieri 1980, 99-100).

Rosmunda urges the nurse to her task, calling her "nutrice e madre" (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 9; "nurse and mother") "infirmia e vecchia" (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 14; "infirm and old"). The Nurse has a guiding, rather than supporting, role, since she is the bearer of a different value system. Rosmunda understands the Nurse's arguments and submits to them; at the same time, idealistic reasons lead her to expose herself to danger or make her fantasize about suicide. This setup prevents the expression of the emotional bond in the dialogues. The Nurse's concern for Rosmunda's safety is based on political considerations (Pieri 1980, 100 calls it "practical wisdom"). The Nurse is clear about the significance and value of Rosmunda's body on the political stage: the queen is "unica speme al nostro regno" (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 16; "only hope for our kingdom"). She is a "fanciulla adorna e bella" (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 21; "ele-

⁷ All quotations are from Cremante 1988. All translations are mine.

gant and beautiful maiden”), in the prime of her life. For this reason, she is a tempting prey for enemies who might rape or kill her “per estinguer la tua famosa stirpe, / che ancora ne la tua vita si riserba” (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 29-30; “to extinguish your illustrious lineage that is still preserved in your being alive”). For the Nurse, Rosmunda’s body has a particular value since the lineage proceeds through her. She urges her to flee and find allies to avenge her father rather than continue trying to bury him: for her father’s shadow, she says, it is not so much important to be buried as to be avenged. In the Nurse’s speeches there is a reflection on political conduct, on the contrast between ideal and concrete, politically compelling motivations, which have prompted some scholars to talk of Rosmunda’s ‘protomachiavellism’.⁸

The only moment in the relationship between Rosmunda and the Nurse that is more physical coincides with the tragic climax of the play, just before Rosmunda faints (shortly before, she was forced to drink from her father’s skull during the wedding banquet). At this point, Rosmunda becomes a tragic heroine. She challenges the Nurse and gives vent to her anguish and rage at the offence she has received from the tyrant. She addresses the Nurse thus: “tu che col tuo seno mi nutristi” (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 1048; “you who with your breast fed me”) recalling the moment when she came out of her mother’s unhappy womb. Rosmunda says to the Nurse: “da’ sepulcro a chi già desti el lacte” (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 1052; “bury the one to whom you already gave milk”). Rosmunda’s words overlap two temporal lines, present and past. As in later Italian tragedies, e.g., in Giraldi Cinzio’s *Orbecche*, when the daughter’s life is in danger, the memory of the past relationship, when the daughter was a breast-fed baby, and the fear of death appears in their discourse, along with the fantasy about the destiny of the body after life. The present is tragic, while the memory of the past recalls care and initiation into life. In the present, Rosmunda is expecting to die and will need burial, whereas in the past the focus was on the Nurse’s loving care for the new-born child. Breastfeeding and burial, origin and end: the Nurse’s breast and hands are meant to manage both life and death.

In the tragedy, Rosmunda fails to die: she invokes death but faints on stage shortly before Almachilde’s arrival. The apparent death constitutes the possible tragic ending, the one that the character of Rosmunda (following in the footsteps of Trissino’s *Sophonisba*) had set and desired from the beginning. The winning course of action, however, is not tragic: through the intervention of the nurse, Almachilde kills the tyrant Alboin.

To emphasise the life/death contrast and the nurturing role of the nurse,

⁸ Bruscaagli 2011 uses the label referring to the character of Alboino. I think Rosmunda’s Nurse is another example, perhaps a more interesting one because it allows comparison of Sofonisba’s and Rosmunda-Nurse’s motivations for action.

the tragedy is constructed as a circle: at the beginning of the play Rosmunda is searching for the body of her father killed in battle, to give him burial; at the end, when shattered by grief, she asks for her own burial, and for her ashes to be collected in her father's skull "acciò che in quel medesimo loco / Abbin lor fine unde ebbon nascimento" (1058-9; "so that in that same place they may have their end where they were born").

Rosmunda, then, reverses the tragic message of *Sophonisba*. The hunted queen chooses death as an absolute value, a radical gesture of freedom; Rosmunda would like to do the same: faced with the tyrant's cruelty, she would like to break loose by committing suicide. However, the Nurse's intervention prevents her. The Nurse takes on the central role to provide contact with the concrete and rational aspects of life. Significantly, the tragic character Rosmunda mentions the corporeal bond with the Nurse: only the entirely tragic dimension seems to leave symbolic space to elaborate on the affective and existential meaning of such bond.

3. *Orbecche* by Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio

In five acts, performed in 1541 in the author's house in the presence of the Duke of Ferrara, Ercole II, and printed in 1543, *Orbecche* by Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio (1504-1573) was conceived in Ferrara, a few decades later than *Sophonisba* and *Rosmunda* (Cremante 1988, 263-4; Foà 2001). In this tragedy the physical relationship between the Nurse and the milk-daughter is most impressive.

Orbecche reaches the highest degree of physical involvement in the relationship between the Nurse and the milk daughter to activate the audience's empathy, particularly the female audience. In the description of the death of the protagonist on stage, the memory of Virgil's Dido and Sofonisba is present. The exceptional involvement of the body deepens the mechanism of the contrastive overlapping of the two timelines already seen in *Rosmunda*. At the same time, however, the Nurse who can console and grieves for her daughter's death is also particularly unable to empathise with the fears expressed by *Orbecche* as the tragedy unfolds. The tragic character stands alone in facing grief and death, and the function of the Nurse remains that of reacting to what is an unexpected turn of events for her.

Orbecche originated under the banner of formal experimentalism: the author himself acknowledges the work's innovation due to the need to adapt the tragic genre to contemporary times, leaving Tragedy itself to speak at the end of the play:

. . . senza alcun biasimo lece
 Che da nova materia e novi nomi
 Nasca nova Tragedia.

. . . che ben pazzo fora
Colui il qual, per non por cosa in uso
Che non fosse in costume appo gli antichi,
Lasciasse quel che 'l loco e 'l tempo chiede
Senza disnor. E s'io non sono in tutto
Simile a quelle antiche, è ch'io son nata
Testé da padre giovane e non posso
Comparir se non giovane; ma forse
Potrà levare il dispiacer ch'avrai
Del mio grave dolor, la verde etade.
(Giraldi, *Orb.* 3174-90)

[. . . without any blame, it is allowed that from new matter and new names a new tragedy is born. . . because he would be a fool who would leave out what time and place require without dishonour, just so as not to put something into use that was not in the custom of the ancients. And if I am not in all things like the ancients, it is because I was born now of a young father and cannot appear but young; but perhaps green age may remove the sorrow of my grievous suffering.]⁹

Giraldi argued for the effectiveness of tragedy as an instrument of learning and a form of entertainment, despite the sorrowful subject matter of the play:

la Tragedia ha anco il suo diletto et in quel pianto si scuopre un nascoso piacere, che il fa dilettevole a chi l'ascolta et tragge gli animi alla attentione et gli empie di meraviglia; la quale gli fa bramosi di apparare col mezzo dell'horrore et della compassione quello che non fanno, cio è di fuggire il vizio et di seguir la virtù, oltre che la conformità c'ha l'essere humano col lagrimevole, gli induce a mirar voluntieri quello spettacolo che ci dà inditio della natura nostra, et fa che l'umanità che è in noi ci dà ampia materia di haver compassione alle miserie degli afflitti.
(Giraldi Cinzio 2002, 223-4)

[Tragedy also has its delight, and in that weeping, a hidden pleasure is discovered, which makes it delightful to those who listen to it, draws their minds to attention, and fills them with wonder; which makes them eager to learn through horror and compassion what they do not do, that is, to flee from evil and to follow virtue, as well as the correspondence of the human being with the mournful, induces them to willingly look at that spectacle that gives us an indication of our nature, and makes the humanity that is in us give us ample opportunity to have compassion for the wretchedness of the afflicted.]

Pleasure and learning pass through compassion. There is a quotation here, probably from the first words of Boccaccio's *Decameron*: "Umana cosa è

⁹ All quotations are from Cremante 1988. All translations are mine.

avere compassione degli afflitti” (“To take pity on people in distress is a human quality”), and the author takes particular care to amplify the effect and pathetic outcome of the tragic scenes. In *Orbecche* the Nurse has precisely this function: she is a ‘low’ character, and her low status makes her unsuitable, in Giraldi’s opinion, for a leading tragic role (Giraldi criticised Speroni’s *Canace* precisely for having the Nurse die, Bruscaagli 1983, 131); at the same time, her character is fundamental on stage precisely because it activates identification and emotional participation. As we shall see, representing physical relations (probably through gestures of affection on stage) is the primary tool for achieving this effect. The prologue of *Orbecche* opens with the word “wonder” (“Essere non vi dee di maraviglia”, Giraldi, *Orb.* 1) and gives special prominence to the female audience, who should be the first to leave the hall to keep away from the painful scenes contained in the tragedy:

Oimè, come potran le menti vostre
 Di pietà piene e d’amorosi affetti,
 E sovra tutti di voi, donne, avezze
 Ne’ giochi, ne’ dilette e ne’ solazzi
 E di natura dolci e dilicate,
 Non sentir aspra angoscia, a udir sì strani
 Infortunii, sì gravi e sì crudeli,
 Quai sono quei che deono avvenire oggi?
 Come potranno i vostri occhi, lucenti
 Più che raggi del sol, veder tai casi
 E così miserabili e sì tristi
 L’un sovra l’altro, e rattenere il pianto?
 (Giraldi, *Orb.* 37-48)

[Alas, how can your minds full of pity and loving affection, and especially you, women, accustomed to games, pleasures and amusements, and by nature sweet and delicate, not feel bitter anguish at hearing such strange, grave and cruel misfortunes as those that are to come today? How can your eyes, shining brighter than the sun’s rays, see such miserable and sad cases one upon another, and hold back tears?]

The audience of the tragedy “scuopre un nascoso piacere” (“discover a hidden pleasure”) in grieving; that’s why, in the words of Tragedy, the female audience appears to be the privileged vehicle of circulating emotions. Giraldi indirectly dedicates a tragedy with a female protagonist to women: the women “di natura dolci e dilicate” bring to mind the dedicatees of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* in the “Prologo”, “dilicate donne” who have “dilicati petti” (Boccaccio 1995, 68; “fragile breasts”). According to Franca Angelini, “theoretical accommodations always come after an experiment that has already been performed. Therefore, it occurs in reference to a practice of both writ-

ing and representation” (Angelini 1986, 84). The author can argue for the efficacy of tragedy and the role of the feminine as a vehicle of emotions, on the ground of his own experience and observation.

The story told in *Orbecche* concerns the daughter of Sulmone, king of Persia, Orbecche, who has secretly married Oronte, an officer of her father’s, and had two children by him. When the father discovers the marriage, he kills the husband and the children by a trick and offers the remains to the young bride as a wedding gift. She, in turn, kills her father and then takes her own life.

The dialogue between Orbecche and the Nurse opens the second act, the actual beginning of the stage action (in Senecan style, the first act is entrusted to the voices of Nemesis, the Fury, and the shadow of Selina, Sulmone’s wife, who narrate the antecedent). Trissino’s *Sophonisba* offers a model for the dialogue: the maiden complains of a terrible worry, which causes her to lament the instability of fortune and how “vicin al riso è sempre il pianto” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 385; “close to joy there is always weeping”). The Nurse urges her to reveal what is troubling her: the lamentations pierce her heart (Giraldi, *Orb.* 409) and make her “tremar . . . insino a l’ossa” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 415; “tremble . . . to the bone”). The maiden decides to speak:

Non perch’io spero al mio languir rimedio,
Ma perché il core pur respira alquanto
Ne l’isfogar le gravi angoscie interne,
Dirotti la cagion del mio gran male.
(Giraldi, *Orb.* 419-22)

[Not because I hope to have a remedy for my grieving but because my heart breathes a little in venting the grave internal anguish, I will tell you the cause of my great sorrow.]

The heart “breathes” like a living body, and the internal space of manifestation of pain is a pulsating cavity in the personification of the heart. ‘Venting’ the heart in front of the Nurse brings relief and justifies the narration of the previous events. Orbecche’s father proposes that his daughter should get married for political and dynastic reasons. He explains the need for Orbecche to marry “poi che piacque al re del cielo / in te sola serbare il seme nostro” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 440-1; “since it pleased the King of Heaven in you alone to hold our seed”). Orbecche, like Rosmunda, has value in part because of her procreative capacity.

Orbecche’s Nurse draws her reflections on the instability of fortune and the misery of the human condition from the Senecan nurses; the thoughtful attitude, however, leaves room for the expression of compassion towards Orbecche:

Ver è ben che mi duole insin al core
Vederla così afflitta e così trista.

E s'io potessi in me coglier gli affanni
 Che la trafigon così fieramente,
 Ella scarca saria già d'ogni doglia.
 (Giraldi, *Orb.* 648-52)

[It indeed pains me in my heart to see her so afflicted and so sad. And if I could gather the afflictions that pierce her with such force, she would already be discharged of all grief.]

The Nurse imagines herself as a sort of vessel that can collect all the afflictions of the girl, who would find herself “scarca” ‘drained’ of them: moral support takes the form of a physical ‘transfer’ of the afflictions. At the moment of the dream’s narration, when all but Orbecche believe in Sulmone’s forgiveness and a happy ending, the Nurse does not believe in the ominous omens but pronounces words filled with practical common sense: “Ditemi, che volete altro sognarvi / Ch’affanno e morti, se ’n affanni sempre / Vi state e v’opponete al piacer vostro?” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 2669-71; “Tell me, what else do you want to dream but toil and death, if you are always in affliction and oppose your pleasure?”), as if to say it is the bad thoughts of the day that create the dreams of the night: “Fate allegro viso!” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 2708; “be cheerful!”), she exhorts her, just before discovering the horror of the misdeed upon meeting Oronte. The cheerful countenance contrasts with what is to come: first, the discovery, then the killing and decapitation of Sulmone by Orbecche, who cuts off his head and hands, using the same knives that had killed her sons: Sulmone himself offers Orbecche the instruments of death, which are still piercing the corpses of her children. Finally, Orbecche turns the weapons against herself. The killing and decapitation of Oronte take place offstage and are narrated by a witness, whereas Orbecche’s suicide takes place before the eyes of the Nurse and of the audience: a mediation between Horatian dictates, Aristotelian views and the practice of Seneca (Colombo 2007).

In the relationship between the Nurse and the milk daughter, the body is mainly involved in the Nurse’s words of lament when she clutches Orbecche’s lifeless body to her chest. As in *Rosmunda*, the Nurse’s memory becomes the space of conjunction and contrast between the past (the tender and happy breastfeeding of the new-born) and the present dominated by death. The bodies are the same, as is the gesture of holding her daughter’s body in her arms (in a sort of *Pietà*), except that she has just pierced her heart. Like Erminia in *Sophonisba*, Orbecche’s Nurse reproaches her daughter for wanting to die without her: “E perché non chiamaste anco con voi / Questa infelice vecchia a morir vosco” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 3055-6; “And why did you not call this unhappy old woman to die with you”) so that nobody can say “Orbecche è morta e la Nodrice è viva?” (Giraldi, *Orb.* 3058; “Orbecche is dead and the Nurse is alive?”). In *Sophonisba* the lines are: “Perché non voljo mai che s’oda dire: /

Herminia è viva senza Sophonisba” (*Trissino, Soph.* 1779-80; “For I never want it to be said: / Herminia is alive without Sophonisba”). But *Orbecche* goes further, working on the contrast between past and present. In the Nurse’s role, physical contact is not only functional (give burial to the one to whom you gave milk); physical contact carries the memory of the past relationship. The Nurse holds *Orbecche*’s corpse, contemplates her facial features and her lips, and feels her weight on her arms; the words materialize into gestures as they invoke her eyes, her lips and the weight of her body:

O Signora, o Reina amata e cara,
Alzate gli occhi a la Nodrice vostra
E vedete il suo pianto; e a le parole
Risponda questa bocca da la quale
Uscian sì dolci e sì soavi accenti
Che potean di dolcezza ogni gran pianto
Condire, oimè!

...

O dolci e care labbra,
O labbra amate,
Che con tanta mia gioia già succiaste
Le poppe mie, com’or vi veggio essangui!

...

Peso già a me via più d’ogn’altro dolce,
Com’or mi sei via più d’ogn’altro amaro!
(Giraldi, *Orb.* 3085-91; 3095-8; 3112-3)

[Oh Lady, Oh beloved and dear Queen, lift your eyes to your Nurse and see her weeping; and respond to the words with this mouth from which such sweet and gentle sounds came forth, sounds that could flavour every great weeping with sweetness, oh alas! . . . Oh sweet and dear lips, Oh beloved lips, that with such joy did you already suck my breasts, how pale I see you now! . . . Weight already sweet to me far more than any other, how bitter you are to me now, far more than any other!]

The Nurse names the parts of *Orbecche*’s body that best represent their mutual bond based on the correspondence between the two women’s bodies: between *Orbecche*’s eyes and the weeping eyes of the Nurse; between the Nurse’s words and the memory of the sweet accents of the new-born; between *Orbecche*’s lips and the breasts (note the functional precision: the “poppe” are precisely the breasts that suckle). Emotions, especially joy, are connected to breastfeeding, and the once sweet weight of the milk-daughter now corresponds to the weight of her corpse. In this entirely physical dimension, one experiences the overlapping of two temporal planes. In the present time, the Nurse perceives the memory of the past relationship in contrast with sensa-

tions aroused by the current situation: baby's wails vs the silence of death, lips sucking milk vs bloodless lips. In this representation, the Nurse's physical relationship with the milk daughter reaches its highest expression.¹⁰

Orbecche is the only character in the tragedy who foretells the truth: the nurse's words are not enough to reassure her about her father's good intentions. The young woman viscerally knows that something unspeakable is brewing. This capacity for profound contact with the irrational (the dream, the baleful omen) is the character's hallmark and facilitates the bodily expression of emotions. The nurse takes charge of this aspect, from the beginning of the tragedy until its gory conclusion, from milk to blood.

4. *Canace* by Sperone Speroni

Canace by Sperone Speroni (1500-1588) was composed in 1541, read at the Accademia degl'Infiammati, and published in 1546 without the author's consent (Piantoni 2018). It is composed in short verses, mainly septenaries, and represents an alternative to the novelties of Giraldi's theatre.

Canace is a sort of starting point of the process leading to the intellectualisation of the Nurse. She can assist her milk daughter in childbirth and in the attempt to save her and the newborn child. However, the description of the physical relationship linked with nourishment is shifted exclusively to the dying mother's words to her child. In addition, the Nurse takes a critical stance towards the court and illustrates the reasons for her detachment. As a subordinate, she is stuck in a stalemate in which both obeying and disobeying constitute a danger. Indeed, she will be killed for her attempt to help her milk daughter.

The plot is drawn from Ovid (Ovid, *Her.* 11): Canace, daughter of Aeolus and Deiopeia, has an incestuous relationship with her twin brother Macareus. A child is born of the union, which is immediately discovered: Aeolus reacts by sending a sword and poison to kill his daughter and her Nurse,

¹⁰ The model of Anna rescuing her sister Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid* is here amplified: after washing the wounds, Anna focuses on Dido's mouth: she wants to catch with her lips one last breath of life ("extremus si quis super halitus errat / ore legam", *Aen.* 4.684-5). While uttering words of sorrow she clasps her sister to her breast ("semianimemque sinu germanam amplexa fovebat / cum gemitu", *Aen.* 4.686-7); in *Didone*, a tragedy drawn from Virgil's *Aeneid* Book 4, Giraldi Cinzio amplifies the scene of Anna's grief over Dido's body using features borrowed from his *Orbecche*: Dido's death happens almost entirely offstage: she is carried onto the stage at the very moment of her passing, and Anna's mourning concentrates on the lips, (Giraldi Cinzio 1583, 125-6; "Ahi, bocca cara, / bocca già di rubin via più vermiglia, / or pallida via più, che non è il busso, / manda a mia contentezza una parola"; "Alas, dear mouth, mouth once redder than ruby, now paler than boxwood, send a word to my contentment").

respectively (the punishment is modelled on Boccaccio's *Dec.* 5.7, Cremante 1986, 452), and the child's body thrown to the dogs; Macareus kills himself and Aeolus eventually repents (like Creon in *Antigone*, Cremante 1986, 452). In *Canace*, the Nurse plays a particularly active role in the development of the plot: thanks to her, Canace's pregnancy remains concealed; she supports Canace in labour and organises a plan to remove the baby from the court.

When the royal parents discover the child, the Nurse is punished together with the girl. According to the Ovidian source, she is the first to realise that Canace is in love (Ovid, *Her.* 11.34), and tries to procure her an abortion (Ovid, *Her.* 11.39-42); at the moment of childbirth, she presses her hand on Canace's mouth to prevent her from crying (Ovid, *Her.* 11, 49-52). In *Canace*, however, the Nurse does not fully adhere to her role, as we have seen in the previous examples: in her first monologue, she curses the fate that, after the death of her husband and son, prompted her parents to send her into the service of the royal household

Dalla pace alla guerra,
Dal riposo agli affanni,
Dal sicuro del porto
A' sospetti dell' onde,
Da una vita innocente
Alla infamia, alla pena
Degli altrui mancamenti,
Fui per sempre una volta
Senza mia colpa tolta.
(Speroni, *Can.* 718-26)¹¹

[From peace to war, from rest to affliction, from safe harbour to perilous waves, from an innocent life to infamy, to the punishment of others' failings, I was once forever taken away through no fault of my own.]

The soliloquy contains a generic criticism of life in the courts, which is corrupt and dangerous, but also accounts for the inner situation of the Nurse, torn between dissent and love, fear and loyalty. The poor servant's life is double-edged:

Lo star fermo, il fuggire,
La difesa, l'offesa,
Il parlare, il tacere,
Lo scoprire, il coprire,
È una istessa rovina.
(Speroni, *Can.* 748-52)

[Standing still, fleeing, defending, offending, speaking, keeping silent, reveal-

¹¹ All quotations are from Cremante 1988.

ing, concealing, procure the same ruin.]

In the first dialogue between Canace and the Nurse, the young girl, in the throes of labour pains, wishes to die. The Nurse, however, in addition to defending her milk daughter's life, according to her duty, well understands that if Canace lives, her honour is also safe. If she dies, the reasons that led her to commit suicide would quickly come to light. The preservation of Canace's honour is only possible if the incest and its fruit remain secret, and the Nurse is working to obtain this result, for Canace's sake but also for herself:

Io per molte paure,
Per diversi perigli,
Non pur tuoi, ma miei,
Lungamente ho condotto
La tua vita e il tuo onore
Verso la sua salute.
(Speroni, *Can.* 925-30)

[Through many fears, through many perils, not yours but mine, I have long led your life and honour to salvation.]

The Nurse also runs dangers in this situation: managing her milk daughter's body by guiding and protecting it is still a Nurse's responsibility in adult life on matters such as sexuality and procreation: a young girl is not entitled to act independently, especially if incest is at stake.

Although the nurse and the milk daughter are united in destiny, their words do not point to their bodily bond. Being in charge of managing the consequences of Canace's illicit love, the Nurse is more oriented towards acting rather than consoling, while Canace exhibits a physical relationship with the infant with strategies similar to those already enacted in *Orbecche*. Having just given birth to a child, the young girl connects within herself the role of mother, nurse and heroine doomed to death. In addressing her baby as in *Heroides*, 111-20 (but the archetype is also Andromache speaking to her son in Euripides' *Trojan Women* 740-79), she mentions milk and blood, again with a contrasting effect, not between the present and the past (as in *Rosmunda* and *Orbecche*), but between the two different issues of her breast: it is not milk that will nourish the new-born, but the blood of the mother who is about to stab herself.

. . . baciando il volto
Del figliuolo innocente:
Questo, disse, è quel latte
Che ti pò dare il petto
Di tua madre infelice, e trappassata
Del pugnai di suo padre,

Ogni cosa lavando del suo sangue,
Finì sua vita.
(Speroni, *Can.* 1799-806)

[Kissing the innocent son's face: "This" she said "is the milk that your unhappy mother's breast can give you", and pierced by her father's dagger, everything washed with her blood, she ended her life and I for pity's sake remained dead and exsanguinated.]

Then, in the face of death, the emotional, bodily relationship between the two women, or between a woman and her child, takes on similar connotations. The similarities surface when the lament over death is uttered by a milk daughter or by a nurse, whether it is the mother who says goodbye to the child with the view that one of them is doomed to die.

5. Some Comments on Aretino's *Orazia* and Dolce's *Marianna*

In the following Italian tragic tradition, the Nurse's character stabilises into a model with more intellectual functions, providing guidance, moral support, and wise counselling. At the same time, the reference to the body tends to disappear from the dialogue. In Pietro Aretino's *Orazia* (1546), the Nurse has given "milk" and "doctrine" to the milk daughter. The female protagonist Celia addresses her as "madre" (Aretino, *Or.* 456; "mother"), or "saputa mia nutrice, ottima donna" (Aretino, *Or.* 505; "wise my Nurse, excellent woman")¹². However, even in Celia's death at her brother's hand, the Nurse does not intervene: together with the handmaid, who acts as narrator, she witnesses the scene. Even if the nurse comments "anch'io voglio i dì miei finir co i suoi" (Aretino, *Or.* 1570; "I too want my days to end with hers"), she does not follow up on her words. Instead, she becomes the narrator of the handmaid's death (hanged with a rope made from her plaits, "per l'amore / ch'ella portava ismesurato a Clelia"; Aretino, *Or.* 2350-1; "for the boundless love she bore to Clelia").

Similar but more interesting is the case of Ludovico Dolce's *Marianna* (1565), in which Nurse Berenice declares it impossible to outlive her lady, after the example of *Sophonisba's* Erminia (Trissino, *Soph.* 1779-80): "Non sarà giamai che senza te, che come figlia amai, / restare un giorno in vita", (Dolce, *Mar.* 2892-4; "It will never happen that without you, whom I loved as a daughter, I will remain one day alive"); the fantasy, which had been Rosmunda's (Rucellai, *Rosm.* 1045-7), of mixing her own ashes with those of her father who gave her life, is transferred to the Nurse's fantasy of dying with her lady and being buried in the same urn:

¹² All quotations from Aretino's *Orazia* and Dolce's *Marianna* are from Cremante 1988.

. . . si come io teco vissi
 Sempre, dal giorno ch'io
 Fanciulletta ti diedi il latte primo,
 Così una sepoltura
 Ambe noi rinchiudesse;
 E 'nsieme con la tua si mescolasse
 La mia cenere ancora.
 Che, se bene è diverso
 Tra noi lo stato, però che tu forse
 Reina, io sono ancella,
 Eguale fu tra noi sempre l'amore:
 E come questo mi te fe' figliuola,
 Tu m'avessi per madre!
 (Dolce, *Mar.* 2896-908)

[. . . just as I have always lived with you, from the day I gave my first milk to you as a little girl, so let us both be buried together in one burial. Let my ashes be mingled with yours, for although our condition is different, though you were a queen and I a maid, the love between us was always the same: and as this has made you a daughter to me, may you also consider me a mother!]

Lactation, the transference of milk from one body to another, allows for similarity: we were 'mixed' when you were a child – the Nurse might say – in the same way we can now mix our ashes. The relationship between bodies allows for social levelling, in the name of motherly love.

Conclusion

The model of the Nurse gets its form during the first decades of Italian tragic production, in a sort of laboratory where authors dealt with the heroine's character (Cosentino 2006). Later, it is replaced by a more intellectual, collateral, philosophical nurse. Tasso's *Torrismondo's* Nurse, who knows what the protagonist Alvida will gradually discover, uses her function as a counter-singer to prevent or slow down the course of events: but her action does not go beyond reacting to the milk daughter's words and reasoning. Her space of autonomy, one might say, is considerably reduced.

The physical link between Nurse and milk daughter is most evident when the relationship between the two women is primarily affective. On the other hand, when the Nurse enters the scene with an active role, the representation of the body (being a 'nurse') disappears in their discourse, or it shifts to something else (the mother-child relationship, for example).

Adaptation processes has an influence on the perception of classical literature: the new interpretation, the new model, filter the new readings and it

is unavoidable within a compositional adaptation movement. Analysing the figure of the nurse at a time of instability in the tradition has allowed to appreciate the scope and influence of filters of this kind. It is henceforth essential to consider them in any study of an evolution of modern literature from ancient literature.

There are two aspects of the character of the Nurse, outlined in the preceding pages. One is the counter-song: the Nurse is in a dialectical position with respect to the milk daughter, consoling but also countering her fears and lines of action. This attitude can only have an emotional content – as in the case of the sister Erminia or the Nurse in *Orbecche*. Alternatively, it can be more active, as in *Rosmunda* or *Canace*.

The systematic study of the Nurse made here, dealing with the development of the heroine's character in Italian tragedy (a character with its chiaroscuro and ambiguities), could provide new insights on how female agency finds space in tragedy. One thing is sure: the study of the nurse-daughter pair, i.e., the study of the relationship between their characters may provide interesting data that shed light on the heroine's character and on the general meaning of the specific tragedies here considered. From the margin, as it were, one can see more and better than from the centre.

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Abbreviations

- Apollonius, *Arg.* = Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautika*
Boiardo, *IO* = Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Inamoramento de Orlando*.
Dolce, *Hec.* = Ludovico Dolce, *La Hecuba*.
Dolce, *Mar.* = Ludovico Dolce, *Marianna*.
Dolce, *Or.* = Ludovico Dolce, *Orazia*.
Eur. *Alc.* = Euripides, *Alcestis*.
Eur. *El.* = Euripides, *Electra*.
Giraldi, *Orb.* = Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinzio, *Orbecche*.
Petrarca, *RVF* = Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*.
Rucellai, *Rosm.* = Giovanni Rucellai, *Rosmunda*.
Speroni, *Can.* = Sperone Speroni, *Canace*.
Trissino, *Soph.* = Gian Giorgio Trissino, *Sophonisba*.

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MATTEO BOSISIO*

When the Nurse Dies¹

Abstract

The article discusses the Old Nurse in Sperone Speroni's *Canace* (1542). Strong-willed and unscrupulous, she is very different from the minor figures in classical and vernacular tragedies; the innovations are mainly connected to the casual use of sources and the original way in which she expresses herself. The paper also considers Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinthio's objections to the tragedy in 1550, as well as the replies of Speroni (1554-1558), Felice Paciotto (1581) and Faustino Summo (1590).

KEYWORDS: Sperone Speroni; Giovan Battista Giraldi Cinthio; *Canace*; nurse; Renaissance tragedy; Ovid

1.

By the time Sperone Speroni wrote *Canace* between 9 January and 9 March 1542, the debate on tragedy in Italy had come of age.² The vast availability of Greek and Latin works, as well as editions of Aristotle's *Poetics* marked a turning-point for Italian tragedy.³ Gradually and not without difficulty, misunderstanding and controversy, the writers took over a long-neglected literary genre⁴ so that its noble values, powerful ideological implications, the prestige of the models adopted, and its stylistic and linguistic difficulties constituted a demanding and fascinating challenge that often led to discussion and public readings.⁵ Indeed, Trissino's *Sophonisba* was conceived and written in the various intellectual circles of Leo X's Rome (1514) (Ariani

¹ I thank Richard Bates very sincerely for the translation of the article. Finally, I express my deep gratitude to Rosy Colombo.

² On this, see Mastrocola 1998.

³ In the early sixteenth century the following original and translated versions of classical tragedy were published: one by Aeschylus (1518); three by Sophocles (1502, 1518, 1522); two by Euripides (1503, 1534); and seven by Seneca (1503, 1505, 1506, 1510, 1513, 1517, 1522). The *Poetics* was printed in 1504, 1508, 1515 and 1536 (two editions in the same year).

⁴ Dionisotti 1967, 247 rightly refers to "a literary avant-garde . . . eager to elbow its way into the future" (translation mine).

⁵ The contributions of Pieri 1989; Canova 2002; Cosentino 2003 and Gallo 2005 are of fundamental importance.

* University of Milan - mttbosisio@gmail.com

1974, 15-39). Rucellai's *Rosmunda* (1516) and Martelli's *Tullia* (circa 1530) emerged from the pro-republican circle of the Orti Oricellari,⁶ while Giraldi Cinthio's *Orbecche*, performed in Ferrara in 1541, took shape in the sparkling atmosphere of the court of Ercole II and the Estense University (Cosentino 2003, 73-102). After them, *Canace* was the subject of much commentary at the Accademia degli Inflammati in Padua.⁷

It is no surprise, then, that experimentation with tragedy became so complex and sophisticated as to involve even minor characters and their meeting-clash with the protagonists; in particular, the status of the nurses was often reworked and modified. Already in the classical period the nurses were no longer secondary figures in tragedy and were sometimes called on to provide ethical advice, intervene or take a stand.⁸ Greta Castrucci identifies various typologies, which were often taken up and adapted in sixteenth-century works: for example, Cilissa in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and Hermione's Nurse in Euripides' *Andromache* prove to be pathetic, humble figures who suffer and despair on stage, while Phaedra's Nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus* draws on traditional wisdom: her advice, though loving and caring, is superficial and fails to reach the deep distress that is alarming her mistress. Finally, in Euripides' *Medea* – and in Seneca's plays too⁹ – the Old Nurse is unable to help, as the mistrust that separates the two women prevents any useful discussion.

Although the nurse's role can be quite important in the plays, the minor figures risk assuming a fixed, monotonous pose, and so the more alert writers in the early sixteenth century modelled the nurses with two fundamental questions in mind. On the one hand, the Aristotelian rules were to be followed for 'intermediate' figures, who should be neither excessively good nor evil (*Poet* 1452b - 1453a) (Villari 2013, 401-25). On the other, satisfying current aesthetic taste meant including in the play surprising figures, psychologically developed while also respecting the principle of *imitatio*.¹⁰

The first significant intuition on the subject can be seen in *Sophonisba*,

⁶ Cosentino 2003, 73-102.

⁷ Bruni 1967, 24-71; Tomasi 2012, 148-76 and Oberto 2017, 59-97.

⁸ On this, see Castrucci 2017.

⁹ See Tarantino's analysis 1984-1985, 53-68.

¹⁰ The link between *imitazione* ('imitation') and *diletto* ('pleasure') is explained by Speroni in his *Apologia* (Roaf 1982a, 189) in these terms: "volle egli [*scil.* the author of *Canace*] primieramente . . . che fosse antica la sua materia, acciò che, venendo in scena sì come istoria già nota, non altrimenti ci diletasse che la pittura di quelle cose che conosciamo e amiamo" ("he [the author of *Canace*] wanted above all . . . his material to be from the classics, so that, coming to the stage as a familiar story, it might please us in the same way as the painting of those things that we know and love"). All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

in which the “personaggio convenzionale e stereotipo della Nutrice” (“the conventional, stereotyped figure of the Nurse”) is replaced with “quello affettuoso e dolente di Erminia” (“the affectionate, grieving Erminia”; Cremante 2019, 40). Trissino thus seems to overcome the problem of the distance – in age and culture – between the two women, as Sofonisba’s maid is not an old nurse, but a young woman of the same age as her (“siàn nutrite insieme”, “we are nourished together”, 14).¹¹ Erminia may receive the most intimate, secret confessions of her mistress by virtue of the close relation binding her to the princess (“per amor sorella”, “sister through love”, 9), but her words of comfort are not based on shared experience and friendship, as she expresses herself like a classical nurse, dispensing wise thoughts through a sententious, very vague language. See 150-60, that draw on a passage of Sophocles from the *Trachiniae* (126-31) and, in particular, the famous dialogue between Achilles and Priam in Homer (*Il* 24.525-35):

Questa vita mortale
 non si può trappassar senza dolore:
 che così piacque a la giustizia eterna.
 Nè sciolta d’ogni male
 del bel ventre maternò usciste fuore:
 che ’n statò buonò o reò nessun s’eterna.
 Di quel sommò fattor, che ’l ciel gòverna
 appressò ciascun piede un vafò sorge;
 l’un pien di male e l’altro è pien di bene,
 e d’indi or gioja, hor pene
 trae mescolandò insieme e a noi le porge.
 (150-60)

[This mortal life / cannot be passed through without pain: / as that is what eternal justice wanted. / Nor can it be freed of all the evil / of the fair maternal womb it emerged from: / for no one enters eternity merely good or bad. / That great maker, who governs the heavens / has an urn beside each foot: / one full of ills and the other full of good, / and hence now joy, now sorrow / he extracts, mixing them together, and offers them to us.]

Rucellai’s Nurse follows another trajectory, which gives the character an innovative appearance: at first, Queen Rosmunda’s confidante seems distant from the heroine, so much so that the young woman’s forceful ardour is contrasted with the fearful attitude of the woman. Just as Ismene, in the prologue to Sophocles’ *Antigone*, begs her sister to respect Creon’s orders and refrain from seeking Polynices’ corpse (1-99), so the Nurse tries to dis-

¹¹ All quotations from *La Sofonisba*, *Rosmunda*, and *Orbecche* are from Cremante 1988.

suade the queen from retrieving the body of her father, who has been killed by Alboino. Expressions such as “unica speme al nostro regno” (“only hope of our kingdom”), “pietose man” (“piteous hands”), “fanciulla adorna e bella” (“beautiful, elegant girl”), “andar soletta” (“go alone”) give the idea of a simple, humble figure, genuinely concerned for her mistress (16, 19, 21, 23), though she can still sometimes express dissent (681): “a me non piacque questa tua risposta” (“I did not like your answer”). She destabilizes our expectations, however, through a decisive diegetic switch: at the end of the play, the character abandons her apprehensive demeanour, becoming astute and enterprising. In fact – when Rosmunda loses consciousness and clearly cannot react to Alboino’s coerciveness – she suggests Almachilde “far presto e bene queste due cose: / uccider lui e poi salvar te stesso” (1099-100, “do these two things quickly and well: / kill him and then save yourself”). Further, she does all she can to ensure the maids bring the queen help without the court becoming aware of the conspiracy against the tyrant.¹²

Orbecche is conceived along more orthodox lines: Giraldo Cinthio depicts a pathetic figure who expresses herself through constant rhetorical questions and emphatic utterances, laden with emotion and rapture (e.g. 409, 412, 415: “mi trafigete il cor”, “you pierce my heart”; “oimè misera”, “woe is me”; “tremar mi fate insino a l’ossa”, “you make me tremble to my very bones”). The Nurse does not seem wilful; often, indeed, she is unaware of what is happening on stage. The second scene of Act 5 is emblematic: though events have now taken a grim turn, she declares confidently (2587-94): “dar bando al duolo, a le querele, a i pianti. / Nel tempo più seren temete pioggia / e nel più queto mar cruda tempesta. / Gli altri nel male istesso speran bene / e con la speme si mantengon: voi / quanto più avete ben, peggio temete. / Deh piacciavi che dubbia e inutil tema / non turbi certa gioia e ver riposo” (“banish grief, lamentation and tears. / You fear rain in the fairest weather / and fierce storm in the calmest sea. / Others hope for good in evil itself / and sustain themselves with hope: you / when you have the best, fear the worst. / Come, let not such a doubtful and futile subject / disturb certain joy and true repose”). By contrast, Martelli’s *Tullia* examines the bond between nurse and heroine: the latter meditates killing her parents to assuage her furious longing for vengeance. The Nurse, as in Seneca’s tragedies, cannot thwart the queen, but in some disturbing passages seems willing to assist her.¹³

¹² The writer’s choice seems genuinely significant, as the sources – Paolo Diacono (*Historia Langobardorum*) and Boccaccio (*De casibus virorum illustrium*), for example – attribute the plan to Rosmunda. On the main strategies, see Pieri 1980, 96-113; Cosentino 2003 and Gallo 2005, 67-97.

¹³ For example, 759-70, quoted from Spera 1998 are representative: “Tullia, io ’l farò per contentarti; voi / tacete. O Dio, chi vive ha pur talora / ond’ei molto paventi, et ogni etate / ha pur qualche valore. A pena credo / ch’io potessi altro far che questo, ond’io

2.

Speroni was well aware of all these antecedents (ancient and vernacular) when he wrote the part of the Nurse in *Canace*. We should first note that the nurse is fully part of Speroni's project of renewing tragedy:¹⁴ as we know, *Canace's* bold solutions prompted the heart-felt criticism of Giraldi Cinthio (*Giudizio*, dated 1543, but printed in 1550);¹⁵ Speroni defended himself in his *Apologia* (unfinished and revised several times in the period up to 1554) and in the *Lezioni* he held at the Accademia degli Elevati in 1558.¹⁶ The debate between the two poets did not abate, still less die away:¹⁷ in support of Speroni were the voices of the philosopher Felice Paciotto in his *Risposta* – the long missive was sent to the dramatist in 1581¹⁸ – and Faustino Summo's *Discorso* (published in 1590),¹⁹ while Giraldi's accusations were backed up in 1558 by the *Epistola latina*.²⁰ In the following sections, then, we shall analyse the central, *sui generis* figure of the nurse in *Canace*, who stands out so markedly from the minor characters of his previous works; Speroni's innovations not only involved diegesis, but also the casual use of sources and style with which the old woman expresses herself. We shall also examine Giraldi's objections and the replies of Speroni, Paciotto and Summo.

The nurse is not the only servant in the work, as the play also figures the maidservant of Deiopea (mother of the protagonists *Canace* and *Macareo*).

/ consolassi costei con molta offesa / de la madre e del padre. Or perché deggio / negar questo a colei che più che figlia / è da me amata, e ch'io spero ch'un giorno / sia degli affanni miei dolce riposo, / ov'or son serva? Ahi, questa servitute / i giovin forti inaspra e i vecchi stanca" ("Tullia, I'll do it to satisfy you; / be silent. Oh God, in life we sometimes have / cause for great fear, and every age / has some value too. I hardly believe / I could do other than this, whereby / I might console her, so much offended / by her mother and father. Now why must I / deny this to her who more than a daughter / is loved by me, and whom I hope one day / may be a sweet resting place for my labours, / where now I am a servant? Ah, this servitute / sharpens the young and strong and tires the old").

¹⁴ On *Canace* see especially, Canova 2002, 53-98; Ventricelli 2007, 53-76; Lavocat 2008, 45-57, and Maslanka Soro 2010, 35-44.

¹⁵ Quoted from Roaf 1982c, 95-159.

¹⁶ They are published in Roaf 1982a, 183-99, and Roaf 1982b, 207-46.

¹⁷ For a detailed reconstruction, see Weinberg 1961, 912-53; Roaf 1989, 169-91, and Jossa 1996, 23-138.

¹⁸ Paciotti was in the service of Emanuele Filiberto of Savoia and corresponded with Bernardo and Torquato Tasso. I quote the *Risposta* from Dalle Laste and Forcellini 1740a, 226-33.

¹⁹ For the biography of Summo, a scholar of rhetoric and poetics, see Selmi 2001, 505-34, and 2007, 185-202. The *Discorso* is quoted from Dalle Laste and Forcellini 1740b, 234-73.

²⁰ On the *Epistola* see Gallo 2019a, 233-63.

She gives adamant expression to traditional morality: much of her monologue in 510-46 takes up that of the nurse in *Orbecche* (552-663), interwoven with many gnomic references. The maidservant, who considers her mistress's dream carefully, is then able to calm the queen with her resolute, rhetorically incisive speech (Ruggirello 2005, 385-7). She displays, for example, notable awareness, and glosses Deiopea's errors of judgment thus ("ciò proprio sarebbe / voler farvi infelice / senza infelicitade", "that would really mean / wanting to make you unhappy / without unhappiness", 484-6).²¹ Nevertheless, the maid prefers to keep some dark omens to herself, so as to save the queen further worry (543-6): "né son senza paura / che 'l suo strano temer fuor di ragione / sia quasi come augurio / d'alcuna rea ventura" ("nor am I unafraid / that his strange, irrational fear / is almost an augury / of some guilty destiny"). The female figure seems empathetic, in tune with her mistress: she does not deny the reasons for Deiopea's dismay, but still tries to circumvent them to prevent her suffering. Also, the argumentative rigour she demonstrates is only a reflection of her experience: her real thoughts are communicated in soliloquy during which we discover a multi-faceted, changing personality.

Despite this, the most innovative features concern the nurse, who in 659-708 is intent on talking to Macareo for the first time. The woman is not seeking an unspeakable secret, not is she trying to console her master or interpret his nightmares, as she seems aware of the intrigue: the nurse knows, that is, that Macareo and Canace, the children of Eolo and Deiopea, have long been enjoying an incestuous relationship; in addition, she takes on the task of helping her mistress, "trafitta" ("pierced") by labour pains and anguished at the thought of being unable to hide the birth (665). Indeed, the traditional role of the nurse as the diligent and naturally subordinate confidante seems inverted: it is the woman who asks Macareo's aid and not the opposite (661). In addition, the nurse does not have the usual task of restraining the protagonist's ardour in seeking to reach a bold and noble goal: on the contrary, she vigorously urges her master not to seem "dolente a sconsigliato" ("remorseful and rash") and "vile" ("mean"), and not to be conditioned by "vergogna" ("shame"; 663, 670, 676). Canace needs her brother, who neglects his duties as husband and future father.²² The "speme stanca" ("tired hope") described by the nurse depicts an insecure figure who spends his days "sospirando" ("sighing"; 669, 671). Yet, while the nurse does "tutto ciò" ("everything") in her power to solve the complicated situation, Macareo by contrast seems impotent (678). His passivity – not the incest – is the "col-

²¹ All quotations from Speroni's *Canace* are from Cremante 1988.

²² Note that in Epistle 11 of Ovid's *Heroides*, Speroni's main source, Macareus flees his father's palace in panic.

pa” (“fault”) that could even bring about Canace’s death (676). His response sounds naive and unrealistic, as he wants to confess the truth to his father Eolo and then take his own life: the nurse brings out the selfish nature of the character, who is not thinking about his sister at all. Canace would be ready to kill herself if Macareo died, and he does not consider her authentic, boundless love for him; the proof is incisively provided in 704-8 (“sol per piacerti / contra ’l proprio piacere uccider volse / quella santa onestade / di cui qual donna è priva / né donna è più né viva”; “only to please you / against her own pleasure she wanted to kill / that sacred virtue / without which no woman / is either woman or alive”).²³

This is followed by the nurse’s long monologue (709-60), which displays the character’s psychology in great detail. Left alone after the premature deaths of her husband and son (713-15), she has served the royal family for years. Though attached to Macareo and Canace, she can still call them “sciocchi” (“fools”) and “nemici” (“enemies”) (709). Her emotions are ambiguous, piercing, full of passion (722-4): “da una vita innocente / alla infamia / degli altrui mancamenti”; (“from an innocent life / to the infamy of the failings of others”). Though torn and divided between her love for the brother and sister (728-9: “pietade / della miseria extrema”, “pity for extreme misery”) and her duties to Eolo, she does not indulge in invoking a cruel fate or in moralistic judgments: this is what perplexed some of the audience, who found themselves watching a tragedy that breaks the moral code, but whose protagonists – though “scellerati” (“wicked”) and “malvagi” (“evil”) – are presented with sympathy.²⁴ Nor is the nurse the voice of Christian morality or

²³ This sententious passage is recalled in *Il libro della bella donna* by Federico Luigini (1554). In the treatise a company of Friulian nobles describe over three days the characteristics of the perfect woman. I quote from Zonta 1913, 283: “primieramente adunque le sarà in cura ed in protezione, vie più che cosa del mondo, il suo onore e la sua castità, altissimo e singolarissimo pregio di ciascheduna donna, della quale qualunque per mala sua sorte priva resta, né donna è più, né viva, si come ci avisa Laura nel sonetto “Cara la vita”, e la nutrice di Macareo presso allo Sperone nella tragedia intitolata *Canace*” (“first, then, she will take care to protect, more than anything else in the world, her honour and chastity, the highest and most singular treasure of any woman, as Laura tells us in the sonnet “Cara la vita” and Macareo’s nurse in Speroni’s tragedy entitled *Canace*”).

²⁴ See Giraldi Cinthio’s judgments in Roaf 1982c, 98: “se bene la Tragedia è di cose terribili e miserabili, non deve però essere introdotta in essa persona scelerata su la quale debba nascere l’orrore e la commiserazione. Perché qual misericordia può nascere nell’animo delli spettatori da una persona scelerata, la quale per sua malvagità incorra nelle infelicitadi e nelle miserie?” (“though Tragedy deals with terrible, wretched events, it should not include an evil character who ought to arouse a sense of horror and commiseration. For what pity can arise in the soul of the audience for an evil person, whose wickedness leads to unhappiness and misery?”).

the loyal representative of Eolo's *Realpolitik*. Of course, Macareo and Canace are "inonesti" ("morally wrong", 737); but "lor verde etade" ("their callow youth") mitigates any judgment (731). Aware of the serious risks she runs, she comments on the affair with composure:

Lo star fermo, il fuggire,
 la difesa, l'offesa,
 il parlare, il tacere,
 lo scoprire, il coprire,
 è una istessa rovina.
 Dunque faccia a suo modo
 di me e di suoi figli
 Eolo padre e signore:
 ferma sono io di fare
 del mio debito amore e della fede,
 che io porto al mio signore e alla mia donna,
 quanto arò di potere e di consiglio,
 lor vita e lor onore.
 (748-60)

[Remaining, fleeing, / defence, offence, / speech, silence, / revealing, concealing, / all lead to ruin. / So do as you please / with me and your children / Eolo father and lord: / I am resolved to use / of the proper love and loyalty / that I bear my lord and my lady, / what power and wisdom I have, / for their life and their honour.]

The syncopated rhythm of the *settenari* (verses with the main stress on the sixth syllable), the frequent internal and middle rhymes, the rhythmical pauses, alliteration and consonance are the basis of a significant melic and Petrarchian reform of the metrics of tragedy.²⁵ The nurse's artificial, polished *elocutio* describes a woman in conflict with herself, but, at the same time, ready to face her destiny. Remarkably, the constant use of rhyme, bringing "dolcezza" ("sweetness") and "armonia" ("harmony"), and the *settenario* – suited to "piacevolezza" ("pleasantness") according to the greatest Renaissance scholars²⁶ – aims at a more subtle form, mediated by *gravitas*: the nurse's language is not solemn, yet the thinness of her speech – broken, suspended, deferred – can dig down into the intimate depths of a fragile, dramatically split inner life.²⁷ The desire to provoke, breaking with Trissino's

²⁵ On this aspect, see Ariani 1977, 79-140; Cremante 2003a, 201-13; 2003b, 123-59 and Huss 2019, 55-104.

²⁶ Roaf 1982c, 135 and 132. On the subject, see Afribo 2002.

²⁷ Stylistically, the effect is also guaranteed by the repeated use of antithesis, on which see this passage from Speroni's *Dialogo della retorica*, printed in Pozzi 1978a, 666: "ma veramente quella [scil. 'antitesi' in Petrarca] era cosa maravigliosa, e degna cer-

and Giraldi's unrhymed hendecasyllables, seems self-evident:²⁸ calm, austere characters are replaced by troubled, unsettling figures. We can also glimpse in the background a different conception of tragedy and literature: while Giraldi Cinthio aimed at instruction of the audience and catharsis – guaranteed by immersion in the work (Roaf 1982c, 98) – Speroni prefers to move the reader to compassion.²⁹

3.

The nurse returns to the stage after Canace's soliloquy: her exchange with her mistress is so close-packed (801-968) that Giraldi commented sarcastically and contemptuously on the scene.³⁰ Actually, though objectively the confrontation goes on too long, it reveals certain significant aspects of the nurse's character. Once again, the epithets used in 801-2 about Canace ("meschina", "wretched"; "furia", "fury") to describe her conduct ("sciocchezza",

to di dovere essere con diligenza osservata, che tai contrarii e tai voci, quasi fila della sua tela, in tessendo la orazione sono ordite in maniera che né aspre per la strettezza né troppo molli o allargate, ma salde, piane e eguali per ogni parte stanno insieme le sue iunture: il che è tanto maggior virtù, quanto men della prosa i nostri versi volgari, alle lor rime legati, son tenuti di adoprarla" ("but truly it ['antithesis' in Petrarch] was a wonderful thing, and certainly worth having diligently observed, for these contraries and these words, almost threads of its web, in weaving the speech they are planned so that they are neither harsh for their concision nor too soft or extended, but their combinations hold firm together and equal in every part: which is all the greater a virtue, as our vernacular verses, tied to their rhymes, are less obliged to adopt it than prose").

²⁸ Speroni in Roaf 1982a, 195: "in ogni lingua quello di tutti i versi dovrebbe esser più tragico che più è atto a imitare i nostri alterni ragionamenti, ché ciò è il proprio della tragedia: e quello a ciò fare è più atto, il quale in favellando a vicenda, spesse fiato, senza alcun studio, formiamo, quasi all'uomo sia naturale la testura di cotal verso. E tale è il giambo e l'eptassillabo, quello in Grecia, questo in Italia, e non l'esametro e l'endecasillabo" ("in every language, the most tragic meter should be the one most fitted to imitate our varying reasonings, for that is the one natural to tragedy: and the one most fitted to do this, the one we often formulate speaking to each other, without preparation, almost as if the texture of this verse is natural to man. And such is the iamb and the heptasyllable, and not the hexameter and the hendecasyllable").

²⁹ Cosentino 2019, 140: "starting from Speroni's *Canace* and going back to its model in Euripides, onto which is grafted, let us remember, the powerful voice of Ovid's *Heroides*, Renaissance tragedy gradually makes the world of feelings and passions its own: traditional catharsis is thus replaced with a painful and involved *compassio* that, in the end, can only recognize the desperate power of *eros*" (translation mine).

³⁰ Roaf 1982c, 121: "la nutrice la [*scil.* Canace] tiene tanto in chiacchiera su la scena ch'avria potuto partorire un uomo armato" ("the nurse keeps her [Canace] talking so long onstage that she could have given birth to an armed man").

“folly”) are not a moral judgment, but a criticism of her action, as the heroine has rashly left her quarters. After Canace’s recriminations, the nurse incites her to trust to “conforti veri” (“true sources of consolation”, 836), but her argument does not rest on theoretical advice detached from specific problems, which would be typical of many traditional confidantes (notably *Orbecche*). On the contrary, she shows that Canace must remain clearheaded, as the old woman has taken the situation in hand. Just as the nurse in Rucellai, when Rosmunda faints, organizes the plan to eliminate Alboino, so Canace’s nurse takes the place of her mistress during her pregnancy. The woman’s responsibility is total (837-8): “il partito che io presi / di celare il tuo parto” (“the decision I took / to conceal your childbirth”). The contrast between ‘I’ and ‘you’ encapsulates the nurse’s absolute freedom of manoeuvre as she handles a delicate and dangerous situation alone and working wholly on her own initiative: so, the character never seems distant from her mistress or vice versa. Often in ancient and vernacular tragedies there is an underlying lack of communication, a conflict between the young heroines and the nurses: but in *Canace* the nurse seems so dynamic that she compensates the princess’s weaknesses and limitations. The two figures complete and reflect each other in a single tragic dimension.

The nurse bases her argument on tangible experience that justifies a deductive, reassuring approach (839-45): “or se per mio consiglio nello spazio / di diece mesi interi / della tua gravidezza / non sono accorti ancora uomini o dei, / perché sperar non dèi / che io possa altrui coprire / l’ora del partorire?” (“now if, following my advice, in the course / of ten whole months, / your pregnancy / neither men nor gods have yet noticed, / why should you not hope / that I can cover / the hour of another’s childbirth?”). Not only does the nurse insist on her formidable capacity to dominate the scene, but also – with a touch of vainglory – on the wiles she has deployed. Further, Canace’s resignation, fearing Eolo’s vengeance, is countered by the nurse’s unprincipled insistence. The balsam to soothe her mistress’s pain will come from the “face amorosa” (“loving torch”) and the “fiamme onnipotenti” (“all-powerful flames”), which can even force themselves “oltre il giusto e l’onesto / d’ogni legge e costume” (“beyond what is right and honest / in every law and custom”, 856, 859, 863-4). The incestuous feeling, which was unacceptably depraved for some contemporary readers, becomes a call to action, a wholly permissible expression of vitality.³¹ The nurse’s choice of sides proves both

³¹ The objections of the *Giudizio* (“Canace si chiama tante volte da sé scelerata, degna di morte, e ella stessa narra il congiugnimento disonesto con suo fratello con sì poca vergogna, che basterebbe questo a porla in odio e in dispetto a tutto il mondo? Che terribile puote quindi o per morte o per altro caso venire? Che pietà? Che maraviglioso? In che parte muovere compassione?”; “Canace calls herself wicked and worthy of death many times, and she herself describes the shameful union with her brother with so lit-

understandable and disturbing: her reproaches to brother and sister now dissolve into a sort of benediction of their tie. The feeling seems irrepressible and necessary, to the point of being put on the same level in the *Apologia* as that of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno* 5 and the protagonists of the 4th day of the *Decameron*.³²

Canace's worries are not exhausted; and so the nurse advances further considerations, drawing on an iron, objective logic. Her mistress, ready to kill herself before the birth of her child so as to preserve her honour, does not think that Eolo would in any case discover her pregnancy.³³ The challenging proposal, which anticipates later developments (894: "moriàn secretamente", "we will die in secret") reveals how much the heroine's fate depends on that of her confidante. Fear, then, needs to be turned into a stimulus – paradox-

tle shame, that would not this alone be enough to make her loathed and despised by the whole world? What else more terrible, then, can befall her either through death or some other event? What pity? What wonder? Where does it move our compassion?), are answered in the *Apologia*: "gli errori degli amanti non sono sceleratezze, ma si debbano chiamar umani, perché l'uomo ama come ragionevole e perciò umanamente pecca; e se così è che l'error de gli innamorati sia umano, adonque noi semo nella particola di Aristotele dove dice che persone tragiche sono quelle che *non per dedecus et pravitatem sed humano quodam errore in infelicitatem lapsi sunt*"; ("the lovers' errors are not wickedness, but should be called human, as it is reasonable for a man to love and so, humanly, sin; and if the lovers' error is thus human, then we are in Aristotle's category where he says that tragic figures are those who *non per dedecus et pravitatem sed humano quodam errore in infelicitatem lapsi sunt*"). I quote from Roaf 1982c, 121 and 1982b, 228.

³² This strained interpretation is underlined by Faustino Summo, though he supports the innovations of *Canace* (Dalle Laste and Forcellini 1740b, 251, 267, 272): "in vero molto debilmente, benché con qualche verità, fu provato dall'opponente nel suo *Giudicio*, che le persone dei due fratelli introdotti siano scelerate. . . In Dante poi quel caso di Paolo e Francesca è veramente caso amoroso imprudentemente accaduto per occasione di quella lettura, tra solo e sola, e tra lontani di sangue, benché cugnati tra di loro. Perché la sceleraggine nel peccato della carne non ha luogo, se non tra padre e figliuola, tra figliuolo e madre e tra fratello e sorella. . . Alle autorità del Boccaccio con gran facilità si risponde, che tutti quei delitti son lontani da sceleraggine, e tutti dependono da imprudenzia, e son fatti per umano errore, e sono peccati d'incontinenzia e d'amore e tutti tragici" ("it was proved by his opponent in his *Giudicio*, actually very weakly, though with a little truth, that the figures of the brother and sister introduced are wicked. . . And in Dante the example of Paolo and Francesca is really an example of love, which imprudently happened during that reading, with no other person present, between two people distantly related though also brother- and sister-in-law. . . Boccaccio's authority is easily answered, for all those crimes are far removed from wickedness, and all depend on imprudence, and are done through human error, and are sins of incontinence and love and all of them tragic").

³³ Note that their suicidal intentions – counterproductive and impulsive – suggest two immature, feckless personalities.

ical but decisive – to overcome the terrible impasse (900): “voglio che ami la morte” (“I want you to love death”). After all, the nurse’s certainties seem broadly solid and beyond discussion (905, 907-9): “sono io ben certa di dover fuggire” (“I am fully certain I must flee”) and “col mio consiglio / se a me credevi, avea fatto sicuri / te, il fratello e il figlio” (“with my advice / if you believed me, you would have made safe / yourself, your brother and your son”). The following lines emphasize the nurse’s certainty: “speme” (“hope”) and, especially, “ragione” (“reason”) are the only tools for outdoing adversity (922). In addition, the modest support that nurses often give to tragedies seems decisive in *Canace*: she claims to have long safeguarded the young woman’s “vita” (“life”) and “onore” (“honour”, 929), and, proud and intrepid, asserts that her advice “non han fallito” (“has not failed”) and nor “falliran” (“will it fail”, 932-3). The heroine – lethargic, only half herself, as little astute as Macareo – seems inseparable from the nurse: the limitations of brother and sister are made up for by the woman’s vigour and energy,³⁴ rejecting Canace’s reiterated protests, to whom she promises (958-9): “disperata o sicura, / son certa di salvarti” / “desperate or safe, / I am certain to save you”).

4.

In the following scene the nurse is still at the centre of the drama: we should underline that the incestuous relation of the protagonists is prior to the action – recalled at the outset by the Shade in 2-5 – while brother and sister make no significant choices in the heart of the tragedy. Far from being a marginal figure, who simply converses with her masters while remaining in her place, the old woman is constantly taking action, crossing the confines of her traditional status. In effect, the development of the story becomes wholly her responsibility, as she convinces the characters to carry out her carefully conceived plans. Later, shown talking to Deiopea, she advances her strategy using her natural talents for feigning and dissembling. The queen calls her “fedele” (“loyal”) at 974,³⁵ emphasizing the author’s antiphrastic intention, throwing light on the figure’s untrustworthy, calculating nature. The mistress notes that the nurse is carrying a basket, in which Canace’s child

³⁴ This aspect is part of Speroni’s strategy to mitigate the atypical nature of the protagonists. Their love is not intentional, but the result of Venus’ vendetta against Eolo, who is guilty of having thwarted Aeneas’ voyage (20-9). *Canace*’s detractors criticize this piece of mythological *combinatio* (Roaf 1982c, 107-9): in fact, the story derives partly from Ovid and partly from Virgil (*Aen.* 1.50-80).

³⁵ Note that at the outset of *Canace* Deiopea uses no positive epithet to refer to the maidservant.

will later be hidden. The nurse seems unembarrassed by Deiopea's questions about the basket, pretending she wants to fill it with flowers to offer to Juno.

It is worth noting that the nurse already played a considerable part in Speroni's source: in the eleventh epistle of the *Heroides* the nurse realizes that Canace loves her brother ("prima malum nutrix animo praesensit anili, / prima mihi nutrix 'Aeoli, – dixit, – 'amas!'", 35-6).³⁶ She then tries in vain to bring on an abortion for her mistress through unguents and medical procedures (41-6). Later, she prevents Canace from telling her parents the truth in an intense passage ("nec tenui vocem. 'Quid, – ait, tua crimina prodis?' / Oraque clamantis conscia pressit anus. / Quid faciam infelix? Gemitus dolor edere cogit, / sed timor et nutrix et pudor ipse vetant. / Contineo gemitus elapsaque verba represso / et cogor lacrimas combibere ipsa meas", 51-6). These episodes are not part of the tragedy as they take place in a phase preceding the beginning of the *fabula*; Speroni retrieves and enhances the nurse's unusual character, but imagines a very different scenario for her.

This is confirmed in the monologue, where the nurse is again centre-stage:

Queste secrete imprese, onde dipende
la salute e l'onore
delle donne gentili, da non molti
vogliono essere intese e a consumarle
pochi non son bastanti.
Però sempre son piene
di perigli diversi e di fatiche,
di paure e di pene.
Or per nullo accidente
non mi dovrei partire
da questa poverella
che già è in partorire.
Ma perciò che io son sola et è mestieri
che io provegga per tutto,
qui sono et ad un tempo
gli occhi volgo alla strada e ad ogni suono
che quinci entro si sente
porgo l'orecchie intente.
(1013-30)

[The health and honour / of gentlewomen, are not to be known of / by many
and to perform them / few are insufficient. / But they are always full / of
various dangers and labours, / fears and pains. / Now no incident / will make
me leave / this poor woman / who is now about to give birth. / But as I am

³⁶ I quote from Bornecque 1928. The tragic weight of the epistle is examined by Williams 1992, 201-9; Philippides 1996, 426-39, and Casali 1998, 700-10.

alone and it is my duty / to take care of everything, / here I am and at times /
I turn my eyes to the road and at every sound / that is heard in here / I bend
my straining ears.]

One is astonished how casually she first tries to reduce the story of Canace and Macareo to an incident – delicate, but not rare – in court life, only to go on to praise her diplomatic offensive. Her swift work in protecting her masters from imminent danger seems extraordinary.³⁷ She may be on her own (“pochi non son bastanti”, “few are insufficient”), “io son sola” (“I am alone”), “io provegga per tutto” (“it is my duty / to take care of everything”) but she has a reckless, titanic strength (“perigli diversi”, “various dangers”; “fatiche”, “labours”; “paure”, “fears”; “pene”, “pains”). One might almost think from this passage that the real tragic hero of *Canace* is the nurse. This would not be a mere impression, as it is supported mathematically: the nurse is given 256 lines out of a total of 2069, equal to 12%; Macareo has 217, and Canace 108 (plus 45 of a speech reported by the minister in the last act). The only character given more is Eolo (395). To which one might add that the work is divided in two essential parts: in the first the nurse has 24% of the lines (1-1074); the second is dominated by the tyrannical figure of Eolo, who has 25% of the lines (1075-2069). And if we count the words used by the nurse the result is interesting: out of more than 500 lexemes the most frequent are “onore” (“honour”, 7 times), “vita” (“life”, 7), “parto” (“childbirth”, 6), “amor” and “amore” (“love”, 5), “porto” (“refuge”, 5), “salute” (“health”, 5), “core” (“heart”, 4), “morte” (“death”, 4) and “timore” (“fear”, 4). It is almost as if in the Nurse’s speech the watchwords of the tragic heroes are made to react with the domestic, everyday vocabulary of the servants.

The unusual mixture of passion and protectiveness emerges in the nurse’s dialogue with the servant: the expressions in 1044-6 “tu m’empierai [*scil.* la cesta]” (“you will fill [the basket] for me”), “e piena” (“it is full”), “quanto più tosto pòi” (“as soon as possible”), delineate a vigorous, impatient figure. Her impulsiveness, however, is tempered by her blind faith in her abilities: “in nissuna altra guisa / posso sicuramente / trarre il parto futuro / della sua cameretta” (“in no other way / can I safely / take the future birth / from its room”, 1058-61). As soon as the servant is left alone on the stage he praises the nurse’s stratagem, which enables her to nonchalantly conceal “con poca fatica . . . / un immenso errore” (“with little effort . . . a huge error”, 1096-7). Note that Speroni himself in his *Apologia* underlines the nurse’s cunning;³⁸

³⁷ The passage is innovative as often in the monologues the nurses and maids openly state what they cannot confide to their mistresses.

³⁸ Roaf 1982a, 190: “l famiglio di Macareo, con sua grandissima meraviglia, loda lei [*scil.* la balia] che facilmente trovasse un modo non più pensato onde ascondesse quel parto, che ’l celarlo lunga fiata parve a lui e al patrone impossibile” (“Macareo’s ser-

he comments on the episode directly, defending himself from Giraldu's criticism of the implausibility of the expedient of the basket (Roaf 1982c, 120). Actually, Speroni took it from Ovid (69-71), though Eolo's discovery of the deception is different: in the *Heroides* it all happens very quickly ("iam prope limen erat; patrias vagitus ad auris / venit et indicio proditur ille suo. / Eripit infantem mentitaque sacra revelat / Aeolus; insana regia voce sonat", 73-6), while *Canace* abounds in dramatic details, designed to raise narrative tension: the nurse at first seems to be succeeding in removing the basket with the baby from the palace, until Eolo calls her to him so as to admire the flowers. The nurse – described by the servant with increasing touches of *pàthos* ("infelice", "wretched"; "poverella, vinta dal timore / tal si fe' nell'aspetto, / quale ella era nel core", "poor woman, overcome by fear / showed in her face, / what she was in her heart"; "nel viso / una lunga tragedia", "in her face / a long tragedy", 1200, 1205-7, 1211-12) – resists her master's insistent requests, but is at last forced to give way in a scene throbbing with excited feeling, which should be read in full:

Giunta davanti al re, pur ebbe tanto
 di vigore e d'ardire
 che ella gli poteo dire,
 pregando umilmente, che nissuno
 non toccasse o movesse alcuna cosa
 di quel sacro presente, in cotal modo
 dalle vergini mani di Canace
 formato e consecrato
 all'alma dea Giunone.
 Così guardato alquanto e comendato
 il presente e la figlia
 da Eolo e Deiopea,
 la nutrice infelice con licenzia
 d'ambidue lor levossi; et apprestata
 per tornar verso me, quel miserello
 che giacea nella cesta e insin allora
 forse aveva dormito, alzò un gran strido,
 forte piangendo. A questo
 la dolente reina,
 trista e certa indovina
 di quel che era e di quel che esser dovea,
 perduta ogni virtute, nelle braccia
 del suo fiero marito

vant, to his great surprise, praises her [the nurse] who easily found an unthought-of way of hiding the birth, for it seemed to him and his master impossible to conceal it for so long").

rimase trammortita.
 Egli primeramente,
 muto dallo stupore,
 Mirava or la reina
 che era meno venuta, or la nutrice
 peggio che morta, pallida e tremante
 e che avea non di donna
 ma di sasso semiante.
 Ma poi che lo stupore,
 lo qual da gli alti cor tosto si parte,
 diede luogo al furore
 e il viso, che pareva
 cener, si fe' di foco,
 scordato della sua divinitade
 e del reale stato,
 sospinta la reina
 che gli era in braccio e presa per le trecchie
 la nutrice con l'una,
 con l'altra man la cesta,
 corse alla cameretta
 della figliuola: quivi
 con lor si riserrò, lasciando piena
 la sala di persone e le persone
 ripiene di dolore,
 di stupore e d'orrore
 (1214-61)

[When she came before the king, she had such / energy and boldness / that
 she could tell him, / humbly begging, that no one / should touch or move any-
 thing / of that sacred present, in such a way / from the virgin hands of Canace
 / formed and consecrated / to the great goddess Juno. / When the present and
 their daughter / had been looked at much and praised / by Eolo and Deiopea,
 / the wretched nurse with permission / of both took it from them; and about
 / to come back to me, the poor wretch / that lay in the basket and till then
 / perhaps had slept, raised a great cry, / sobbing loudly. At this / the woeful
 queen, / sad and certain guessed / what it was and what it must be, / losing
 all her strength, in the arms / of her imperious husband / was stunned. / He
 at first, / dumb with wonder, / gazed now at the queen / who had fainted, now
 at the nurse / worse than dead, pale and trembling / and that seemed not a
 woman / but a stone to resemble. / But since wonder, / which quickly leaves
 noble hearts, / gave way to fury / and the face, that seemed / ashen, became
 enflamed, / forgotten his divinity / and his kingship, / he pushed aside the
 queen / who was in his arms and taking by her locks / the nurse with one
 hand, / with the other hand the basket, / ran to the room / of his daughter:

here / he locked himself in with them, leaving full / the hall with people and
the people / filled with grief, / with wonder and with horror.]

The account is genuinely involving, as the audience follows the agitated reactions of the protagonists through the servant's incredulous eyes, which shift from one figure to the other. The broken, rhyming versification expresses the characters' confusion in the face of an unexpected event. Equally, the complex rhyme system links the lines to each other in a dramatic, disconcerting sing-song. The nurse's "vigore" ("energy") and "ardire" ("boldness") are again balanced with the humble prayers to her masters: her confident, respectful manner seems to get the better of the sovereigns' demands. Nevertheless, the baby's crying brings her plan to nought: in the course of a few lines Deiopea's dismay at her husband's initial helplessness leads on to the servant's surrender, for the first time seeming impotent and terrified. The tone becomes darker and grimmer: Eolo's *furor* bursts out suddenly in all its vehemence against the nurse, there is a physical clash between the two characters, while Macareo and Canace – figures far removed from the typical characteristics of the just, innocent hero opposing a bloody tyrant – kill themselves without ever making direct contact with their father. Our attention finally turns to the courtiers: their confusion is fully shared by the reader and suspends for a moment the narrative flow, raising the level of suspense.

5.

The king's cruel revenge, which is already evident from his dragging the nurse by the hair into Canace's rooms, is not long coming. Eolo orders the counsellor to strangle his grandchild and to bring his daughter and the nurse a knife and poison with which they can do away with themselves (1367-99).³⁹

³⁹ The passage may draw on *Decameron* 5.7. Though based on Ovid, the tale has a happy ending: Messer Amerigo is "salito in furore" ("filled with rage") and "fiero" ("furious") when he discovers his daughter Violante has given birth to a child. His wife plays the part of the nurse and tries in vain to hide the baby, whereupon Amerigo orders a servant (§ 30): "va' . . . alla Violante e sì le dì da mia parte che prestamente prenda qual vuole l'una di queste due morti, o del veleno o del ferro . . . e fatto questo, piglierai il figliuolo pochi dì fa da lei partorito e, percossogli il capo al muro, il gitta a mangiare a' cani" (go . . . to Violante and tell her from, me that she take at once one of these two ways to die as she prefers, either poison or the sword . . . and when you have done this, you are to take the child she bore a few days ago and, when you have dashed its head against the wall, throw it to the dogs to eat"). I quote from Quondam, Alfano and Fiorilla 2013, 905.

Thus, Canace and the nurse both deserve to die as equally guilty: the two women (and the baby) share a single fate. Eolo himself, after all, repeats the idea at 1559-61: “in tanto la nutrice, / sua fedel consiglieria, e quel suo figlio / le faran compagnia” (“meanwhile the nurse, / her faithful counseller, and her child / will keep her company”). The symbiosis between the characters, now crystal clear, is continued right up to the dual suicide, which the minister describes in detail to Macareo:

Quale arrivi,
 tale ti aspettava io; ma se di questo
 mio figliuolo innocente,
 che altri mai non offese se non forse
 me meschina e sé stesso,
 vieni a prender vendetta, per pietade
 piacciati d'indugiarla
 almen fin che io sia morta,
 sì che mi passi il core
 quel tuo coltello e non questo dolore.
 Vòlta alla sua nutrice,
 levata a lamentarsi:
 fede, disse, et amor di cotai doni
 non soleano esser degni
 né son per aventura.
 Par così al re: e se così gli pare,
 moriamo volentieri,
 tu per esser fedele, io per amare.
 (1756-73)

[Whatever may happen, / I expected it from you; but if this / innocent child of mine, / who never harmed others, if not perhaps / my wretched self and himself, / you come to avenge yourself on, for pity's sake / may it please you to delay it / at least until I am dead, / so that sword of yours / may cut my heart, but not this grief. / She turned to her nurse, / who had risen to lament: / loyalty, she said, and love of such gifts / are not usually worthy / nor are they so by chance. / For the king it is so: and if that is so for him, / let us die willingly, / you for your loyalty, I for my love.]

We should add that Giraldi himself recognizes how good this scene is,⁴⁰ with

⁴⁰ Roaf 1982c, 156: “egli è vero che quelle parole che fa Canace prima che s’uccida (non considerata la qualità della persona che le dice) potrian lasciare un poco di affetto nel cuore di chi l’udisse, che sono tolte da buon luoco e da chi sapeo che cosa era muovere a pietade e a compassione” (“it is true that those words Canace utters before killing herself (without regard to the quality of the person speaking) may leave some feeling in the listener’s heart, for they come from a good place and from one who knew

its extremely moving female sensibility.⁴¹ Her love for her child, as immense as it is despairing, becomes a very touching protective impulse that reminds the modern reader of the episode, in some ways similar, of Cecilia's mother in *I Promessi sposi* (chap. 34). In addition, the bond with the nurse is condensed into the apodictic phrase with which Canace seems to instil courage in the nurse on the basis of the shared fate they must face;⁴² thus, even death cannot separate the two women, bound together by an imperishable tie. According to Giraldi, the literary problem of the passage consists, if anything, in the nurse's disappearance, out of keeping with sixteenth-century aesthetic taste:

è indegna per la sua bassezza di morire in Tragedia; nella quale non avvengono se non morti di gran maestri, non di servi o di serve, o d'umili famigliari; il che potete giudicare dall'esempio de' Greci e de' Latini e dalla stessa diffinizione della Tragedia che voi avete da Aristotile. Né importa qui che non sia riferita in scena la morte della nutrice, perché molte volte appresso i Tragici si accennan sol le morti de' scelerati, di maniera che, senza che della lor morte più si ragioni, ponno comprendere gli spettatori che son morti. E di ciò n'avete l'esempio da Euripide nell'*Eraclide*, nella morte di Euristeo. E

what it was to arouse pity and compassion"). In support of this, see the thought in the *Lezioni* (Roaf 1982b, 234-5): "un'altra circostanza fa sopra gli scelerati cadere la compassione e il terrore, e questa dal luogo dove non meritano d'esser puniti. E che dal luogo si mova la pietà Virgilio nel quarto dell'*Eneida* lo dà a vedere in Didone, facendola morir sul letto dove con Enea avea auti tanti piaceri dell'amor suo . . . Questo eziandio si fa nella tragedia nostra dove Canace si dà la morte sopra il letto nel quale avea giaciuto col fratello" ("another circumstance makes us feel compassion and terror for the wicked, and this from the place where they do not deserve punishment. And Virgil arouses pity from the place in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, and he shows it in Dido, having her die on the bed where she enjoyed so many pleasures of her love for Aeneas . . . This is also done in our tragedy where Canace brings about her death on the bed in which she had lain with her brother").

⁴¹ We should bear in mind that Speroni often reflects on the condition of women: for example, he wrote the unfinished *Dialogo della dignità delle donne*. Drafted between 1529 and 1542, it can be found in Pozzi 1978b, 565-84.

⁴² Note that the scene is the first and only one in which Canace is given seems an authentic protagonist. Her rather weak and uncertain status is reinforced by the presence of the nurse, while Macareo's death, described by the servant, seems somewhat half-hearted (1973-82): "Re, il mio signor, che già fu vostro figlio, / oggi è morto due volte: / l'una con la novella della morte / della sorella; l'altra / con questa spada / calda ancor del suo sangue: ove ei la mise / con la sua propria man sì volentieri / che la seconda morte / pareva che gli rendesse quella vita / che la prima gli tolse" ("Sire, my lord, he who once was your son, / today is dead twice over: / once with the news of the death / of his sister; the other / with this sword / still warm with her blood: where he placed it / with his own hand so willingly / that the second death / seemed to give him that life / that the first took from him").

è degno di molta considerazione in questa parte l'antivedere di questo felice ingegno, perché egli, per far nascere questa sconvenevol morte, si parte da Ovidio. E ove egli fa che Eolo sol manda la spada a Canace, costui vi fa anche mandare il veneno, perché con esso la nutrice si dia la morte.

[her low estate makes her unworthy to die in Tragedy; in which only the deaths of great masters take place, not of servants or serving-women, or humble domestics; which you can judge from the example of the Greeks and Latin and from the very definition of Tragedy that you have from Aristotle. Nor does it matter here that the nurse's death is not described onstage, as many times Tragic writers only hint at the deaths of the wicked, so that, without our thinking more on their death, they let the audience understand they are dead. And you have an example of this in Euripides' *Heracleidae*, in the death of Eurystheus. And the way the clever trick in this part is presaged is well worth considering, because he starts from Ovid to bring about this unseemly death. And where Ovid has Aeolus only send the sword to Canace, he also has him send the poison, as the nurse may kill herself with it.]

The questions raised in the *Giudizio* are fundamental for understanding *Canace*. First, the nurse, theoretically, is indeed on a somewhat low level on the social scale; yet her actual role in the tragedy is not secondary, since it crosses the limits imposed by *convenientia*. The deepest gulf separating Giraldi from Speroni is in the field of *inventio*: “si confrontano due concezioni opposte della letteratura, l'una retorica, proiettata verso il pubblico, realistica, didattica e morale, l'altra poetica, rivolta verso il testo, i suoi meccanismi di costruzione e funzionamento, allegorica e edonistica” (“two opposing conceptions of literature are contrasted, one rhetorical, projected toward the audience, realistic, didactic and moral, the other poetic, directed toward the text, its mechanisms of construction and functioning, allegorical and hedonistic”, Jossa 1996, 23). Really, Speroni's nurse is not a mediocre or humble figure who does no more than support the protagonists, as in some cases she even stands in for them. While Canace and Macareo recognize the error of their tie and are racked by remorse, the nurse justifies her masters' behaviour with heterodox arguments. Her behaviour stems from this ideological position which is at the antipodes of the ethical canons of sixteenth-century society and Christian tradition, es. *Leviticus* 18, 6: “omnis homo ad proximam sanguinis sui non accedet, ut revelet turpitudinem eius” (“None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness”, KJV).⁴³

In addition, the protagonists' inexperience and repeated hesitations contrast with the old woman's readiness, openly challenging Eolo in the absorbing scene of the basket. In short, whether she is *scellerata* (“wicked”), follow-

⁴³ I quote from Weber and Fischer 1980.

ing Giraldi's interpretative categories, or merely *mezzana* ("intermediate"), the nurse takes her own life because she is at the centre of the drama, not on its fringes.⁴⁴ The writer thus saturates the potential of the minor tragic figure and strains Aristotelian theory to breaking point.⁴⁵ The joint suicide of Canace and the nurse seems strange, as often in tragedy the isolated, solemn death of the heroine discloses an *exemplum* of rectitude, or indicates the brutality of the oppressor who orders her elimination.⁴⁶ In *Canace*, instead, we have a death that the sharing of a mutual existential progress takes to its extreme consequences. Giraldi's pedagogic view of catharsis thus gave way to compassion, which disoriented the audience and the disturbing story seemed to implicate them. Speroni's disrespect of tradition was explained by Felice Paciotto by the restricted, elite audience of *Canace*.⁴⁷ While Giraldi wanted edifying, consoling tragedies that would educate a large number of spectators ("idioti", "the ignorants"), Speroni wrote an avant-garde work for a learned audience of "virtuosi" ("connoisseurs") and "studiosi dell'antica poesia" ("scholars of ancient poetry", Dalle Laste and Forcellini 1740a, 232).

Finally, we should add a missing link in the chain of the *inventio* of Speroni's nurse: there is another model for her in Myrrha's servant in the *Metamorphoses* (10.298-502): Speroni himself in the *Apologia* mentions several times yet another Ovidian source with the aim of justifying the disconcerting nature of Canace as well as his casual way of reworking the classics.⁴⁸ In addition, Myrrha's nurse is called a "buona femmina" ("good woman") because "assai fece per delivarla di quello amore scelerato, alla perfine, perché vivesse, le fe' godere degli abbracciamenti del padre" ("she did much to deliver her from that wicked love, and in the end, let her enjoy her father's embraces so that she might live", Roaf 1982a, 191). In Ovid she is devoted to the protagonist, whom she saves miraculously from a suicide attempt: after a detailed discussion, the nurse discovers that Myrrha is in love with her father Cinyras. She does not try to stop her mistress, but encourages and supports her - "vive, ait haec, 'potiere tuo' - et non ausa 'parente' / dice-

⁴⁴ Sunno's argument is apt (Dalle Laste and Forcellini 1740b, 254): "le persone introdotte dal Sperone non han patito cosa o difficile o impossibile da sostenersi da uomo: ma piuttosto han operato cosa, che per non la fare dovean esporsi ad ogni danno e ruina ed anco morire" ("the characters introduced by Sperone have not suffered anything difficult or impossible for a man to bear: but they have rather done something, which not doing would leave them open to all kinds of harm and ruin and even death").

⁴⁵ The most innovative nurse in antiquity is that in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*: in the second episode of the first stasimon she ignores Clytemnestra's advice and, convinced by the maidservants, goes to Aegisthus, telling him to return home without his armed escort. On this, see Margon 1983, 286-97.

⁴⁶ See the discussions of Ventricelli 2009, 31-7 and Gallo 2019b, 45-64.

⁴⁷ On Speroni's polymorphic classicism, see Fournel 1990 and Katinis 2018.

⁴⁸ On this, see Cotugno 2018.

re, conticuit, promissaque numine firmat” (“‘Live then’ said the other, ‘have your’ — she did not dare say ‘father’; she said no more, calling on Heaven to confirm her promises”, 429-30).⁴⁹ The plan hatched by the nurse is described by Ovid in detail: as soon as the stratagem succeeds, the *mala sedula nutrix* bursts out in a resounding “gaude mea . . . alumna: / vicimus!” (“Rejoice, my child, we win”, 438, 442-3); she then accompanies Myrrha inside her father’s bedroom and encourages her mistress not to hesitate - “cunctantem longae-va manu deducit, et alto / admotam lecto cum traderet ‘Accipe’, dixit, / ‘ista tua est, Cinyra’, devotaque corpora iunxit” (“leads her by the hand to the side of the high bed and, delivering her over, says: ‘Take her, Cinyras, she is yours’; and leaves the doomed pair together”, 462-4).⁵⁰

Ovid’s nurses are actively involved in the intrigue, but are not killed, as their death cannot obscure Canace’s guilt-ridden dejection or the anguished transformation of Myrrha. In Speroni, by contrast, the nurse kills herself out of diegetic coherence: the shadow heroine of the tragedy – now complementing the protagonists, now supplementing them – dies alongside her mistress, because jointly responsible in the drama. She does not merely facilitate the incest of brother and sister, but – whereas Macareo’s and Canace’s love is Venus’ sadistic punishment – seems the real guilty party against whom Eolo’s fury is turned.

Translation by Richard Bates

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⁴⁹ All quotations from Ovid are from Anderson 1977. All translations from Ovid are from Miller 1916.

⁵⁰ This passage in Ovid is discussed by Scaffai 1999, 371-87 and Schmitz 2015, 245-83.

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KATARZYNA BURZYŃSKA*

Wet Nurses' (In)visible Presences. Ethics of Care and Dependency Critique in Selected Early Modern English Dramas¹

Abstract

Although recent scrutiny of the power dynamics in early modern birthing chambers paints a complex portrait of varied (inter)dependencies, the belief in a potentially disruptive and unruly midwife as well as a spectre of a threatening maternal influence lingers in analyses of early modern English drama. Relatively less attention is devoted to wetnurses, who, as I argue, constitute 'invisible presences' in dramas of Shakespeare's era. Wetnurses' fundamental role in infants' development is only scantily alluded to or erased. In this paper I look at wetnurses' erasures in Shakespeare's early tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, late romance *The Winter's Tale* and Middleton's city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Inspired by Eva Feder Kittay's "dependency critique", I wish to argue that nurses in early modern English drama function similarly to modern-day "dependency workers" whose role grows out of fundamental dependency; a fact of human existence obfuscated by the cult of human individualism and self-sufficiency that has historically served only the privileged select of (white) males. Depictions of wetnurses both reflect the necessity for 'dispersed' maternal care and simultaneously unveil the failings of a care-taking system that refuses to valorise their work. If early modern English drama reflects tangible realities of early modern women's lives it also illustrates a systemic failure to accommodate for dependents; labouring women and their infants.

KEYWORDS: wet-nursing in early modern drama; dependency work; dependency critique; pregnancy and maternity in Shakespeare; pregnancy and maternity in Middleton

In her ground-breaking midwifery manual *The Midwife's Book, or The Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* (1671), Jane Sharp writes: "The usual way for rich people is to put forth their children to nurse, but that is a remedy that needs a remedy, if it might be had; because it changeth the natural disposition of the child, and oftentimes exposeth the infant to many hazards, if great care be not taken in the choice of the nurse" (1999, 259). Sharp man-

¹This paper is part of a research project "Sir, she came in great with child, and long-ing": Phenomenology of Pregnancy in Early Modern English Drama (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.96)" funded by The National Science Centre, Poland within OPUS 14 framework (No. UMO-2017/27/B/HS2/00089).

*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań; kasia86@adu.edu.pl

ages to bring together several essential aspects of wet-nursing “as a social institution”.² Firstly, she acknowledges breastfeeding as fundamental in any child’s survival and healthy development. Secondly, she lends credence to the pervasive early modern anxiety of wetnurses’ potentially perilous influence on the babies in their care and, finally, she acknowledges wet-nursing as an elitist service accessible only to the privileged. Although Sharp writes extensively about the desirable qualities wetnurses should possess, she solely focuses on the baby and its parents’ needs. Like previous male authors, Sharp’s narrative instrumentalizes and objectifies wetnurses. One is caught in a double bind; although fundamental and even potentially threatening, wet-nurses are almost solely reduced to the commodified liquid their body produces. Their health and well-being is only important as far as it serves the well-being of another family. Their necessary work and care transpires in the infants’ growth but they - as carers and nurturers - remain largely invisible.

Wetnurses’ invisibility, I argue, is part of a larger cultural blind spot regarding the clash between nascent early modern ideals of self-sufficient, independent subjectivity and inescapable dependency inscribed in homo sapiens’ mammalian existence. In the early modern period newly-emergent notions of subjectivity and budding individualism were in flux. On the one hand, pre-Harveyesque “humoral subjectivity” was “open, penetrable, fluid, and extended”, while human affective humoral make-up was believed to be shared with non-human animals (Paster 2004, 137). On the other, early modern humoralism was clearly gendered and required “the strategic containment of female appetite and reproduction and the strategic promotion of male potency” (Paster 1993, 58). Despite seemingly high regard for maternity, “the ideology of motherhood” was subservient to patriarchy and helped maintain the status quo (Crawford 2013, 5-6). Women, as both subjects and objects of reproduction, occupied an uncomfortable position; suspended between human and non-human, being often animalized and vilified for their reproductive and maternal roles.³

Early modern English drama reflects this tenuous state of knowledge on reproduction and the sex-gender system under pressure. Independent

² The phrase “wet nursing as a social institution” comes from Fildes 1986, 152.

³ For instance, midwifery books maintain an ancient belief that the female womb was an animal capable of movement and intention. Both infertility and an abnormal pregnancy could be seen as punishment for sin or a consequence of female “monstrous imagination” (Huet 1993, 13-35). A healthy pregnancy is seen as a tenuous condition, bordering on disease, during which a woman is expected to avoid any “excess” that may result in a miscarriage (Rösslin and Raynalde 2009, 136-8). On the limitations placed on pregnant women, see Pollock 2013, 50-1. On the womb as an animal, see Crawford 2013, 6.

masculine identity is fashioned through the brutal severing of mother-child bonds and maternal erasure or containment.⁴ Nevertheless, human babies just like other mammals can only thrive in conditions of dependency; a fact of existence either ignored or violently repressed in the drama of the period. In this paper I am interested in other, less critically scrutinized 'maternal figures'. In what follows, I investigate the role of wetnurses in three, generically different dramas; Shakespeare's early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1593), Shakespeare's romance *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and Middleton's most acclaimed city comedy *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (ca. 1613).

Research on early modern labour and lying-in has often underscored the exclusivity of female spaces and the central role of the midwife in paternity-naming narratives in the otherwise male-dominant culture. Labour and lying-in have been read as power reversal sites with the labouring women emerging as a "woman-on-top".⁵ Although more recent scrutiny of the power dynamics in early modern birthing chambers paints a somewhat more complex portrait of varied (inter)dependencies, the belief in a potentially disruptive and unruly midwife as well as a spectre of threatening maternal influence lingers in analyses of English early modern drama.⁶ In reality, in the dramas where such 'mysterious' powers are attributed to birthing communities, female characters are most vulnerable to the attacks on their bodily autonomy. Unruly, pregnant Tamora is only safe until the burden of her secret remains safely tucked in her womb. Once the baby is born neither she nor the baby are safe. The unknowability of Hermione's pregnancy mobilizes shocking injustices that befall her. Paulina, a paternity-naming midwife, can do little to protect her or the baby. Mrs Allwit may be safe only because her husband is greedy enough to be a willing cuckold, while her lover ready to pay for the upkeep of their child. Had Allwit wanted to

⁴ Kahn argues that maternal erasure in *King Lear* demonstrates "a patriarchal conception of the family in which children owe their existence to their fathers alone" (1992, 95). Adelman investigates "a masculinity that can read in the full maternal body only the signs of its own loss" (1992, 222). Rose traces the trope of a "dead" or "dying mother" in canonical literary texts where the mother's authority grounded in paternity knowledge neither empowers or makes her secure (2017, 3, 5).

⁵ See Zemon-Davis's classic article "Women on Top" (1975). Zemon-Davis' argumentation has inspired various historical and literary readings of the birthing ritual, in which both the midwife and the labouring woman, at least temporarily, have the upper hand over their husbands e.g. Wilson 2002, 132-4; Wilson 2013, 72-83. For more on paternity dependence on women's words and women's authority see Bicks 2000, 52; Bicks 2003, 11-21; Luttfriing 2019, 1-22.

⁶ As Gowing argues, women's relationships in the birthing process have been "idealized" to see "birthrooms as havens of female support" and "midwives as heroines", whereas in fact women played important roles enabling the continuance of early modern patriarchy (2013, 6).

expose his unfaithful wife or Sir Walter got bored of his lover and decided to withhold funds, Mrs Allwit would have found herself in a parallel situation to the anonymous Wench who was forced to abandon her baby because of her unmarried status and penury. In each case, pregnancy and/or maternity diminish (in comedies or romances) or utterly annihilate (in tragedies) maternal figures. The care over the children left or abandoned remains a lingering, uncomfortable question.

In this sense, severance or suspension of mother-child bonds may open up some limited space for an investigation of alternative nursing and care-taking systems beyond biological mothering. Yet, in none of the plays wetnurses emerge as well-rounded characters. In *Titus*, Shakespeare collapses the role of a paternity-naming midwife, birth attendant and wetnurse into one character referred to plainly as Nurse. Although *The Winter's Tale* is steeped in maternal imagery, while pregnancy and labour constitute the play's nexus, a wetnurse is a barely visible spectre. In Middleton's city comedy, both a dry and wet nurse accompany Mrs Allwit in her sumptuous lying-in. However, both these characters are reduced to a bare minimum. In each play gestation, labour and early maternity are central to the dramas' key conflicts. If maternal presences are strategically removed, contained or mocked in these plays, care-takers like wetnurses are devalorised even further. As I argue, the fact that "pregnancy plays"⁷ of various genres erase or minimize nurses in equal measure speaks to a wider cultural oversight of "dependency work" and "dependency workers". This cultural blind spot is a historical legacy that unfortunately lingers in modern culture that seemingly espouses equality.

Hence, my argument revolves around glaring absences of those in whose arms children spent crucial, formative early months or years of their lives.⁸ Following, Eva Feder Kittay's "dependency critique", I wish to argue that nurses in English early modern drama function similarly to modern-day "dependency workers" whose role grows out of fundamental dependency; a fact of human existence obfuscated by the cult of human individualism and self-sufficiency that has historically served only the privileged select of (white) males. Kittay's acclaimed *Love's Labour: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* has provocatively interrogated modern liberal ideals of

⁷ I am using Thiel's term "pregnancy play" to point to the dramas that feature a pregnant character, whose pregnancy drives the central conflict in the play (2018, 144-5).

⁸ One exception may be the character of Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* as she is Juliet's 'alternative' mother. Still, with her talkativeness and bawdy humour she is a comic character who, in a way, contributes to the mockery of female care-givers in a similar vein to Middleton's birth attendants in the grotesque post-christening scenes. My reference to the nurse in *R&J* comes from an unpublished paper by Elizabeth Ann Mackey presented at SAA 2022.

equality as exclusive rather than inclusive and poignantly drawn attention to the necessity of including conditions of dependency in all human social projects. As Kittay argues: “the presumption of equality obscured the expense to which many of our societal interactions are not between persons symmetrically suited, even when they are between individuals who might otherwise be autonomous. Moral, political common social theories have left us with a moral, and often legal, vacuum in domains where women are likely to be at one end of the asymmetry” (2019, 19). Kittay outlines various inescapable conditions of dependency such as childhood, old age, disability, temporary incapacitation, disease etc., which require the performance of dependency work. This type of work has been historically assigned to women. It has often been unpaid or badly paid and as such has excluded many women from the competition over goods and social status. Modern equality conceptualization, as she argues, “which uses white middle class men as the measure, improves the lives of some women at the cost of a greater degree of inequality for other women” (Kittay 2019, 22). As many middle-class privileged women have the means to employ “dependency workers” to aid them in their everyday struggles in their careers, the dependency workers themselves are excluded from the ‘fruits’ of equality.

Gaard argues that in modern culture “breast milk and women’s labor are part of the gift economy that is simultaneously invisible, unmonetized, and appropriated in national and international economic systems” (2017, 94). In early modern culture wet-nursing was a recognized form of paid labour, but, still, it was “possibly demeaning” (Paster 1993, 215). Although early modern drama grows out of a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist context, Sharp’s commentary on the rich people hiring wetnurses for their children, with which I started, illustrates a parallel phenomenon to the modern treatment of “dependency workers”. Sharp talks about a purchasing power that enables to buy another woman’s bodily resources. As I argue, the employment of a wet-nurse in the early modern context further disembodies and inferiorises both privileged and less-privileged women. It serves a systemic erasure of dependency work, which in selected dramas has disastrous consequences for everyone involved. Depictions of wetnurses both reflect the necessity for ‘dispersed’ maternal care and simultaneously unveil the failings of a care-taking system that refuses to valorise their work. It is the withholding of fundamental tactile bonds that drives conflicts in the dramas. Simultaneously, these failures underscore the necessity for “tactile sociality”⁹ necessary for stable social development. If English early modern drama indeed reflects tangible

⁹ I am borrowing the term “tactile sociality” from Willet 1995, 31. For an insightful and multi-layered analysis of touch in the early modern context, see the collection edited by Harvey 2016a.

realities of early modern women's lives it also captures a systemic failure to accommodate for 'dependents'; labouring women and their infants.

"I'll make you feed on berries and on roots": Nursing in *Titus Andronicus* (4.2.179)

In *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora, Queen of the Goths and Empress of Rome, gives birth to a black baby; a fruit of her extramarital affair with Aaron, the Moor, her servant and lover. Because Aaron's "seal be stamped in his face", the baby-boy is promptly sent away to his father so that he should "christen [him] with the dagger's point" (*Titus* 4.2.129 and 72). Although dictated by the necessity to survive, Tamora's attempted infanticide is an ultimate act of brutality meant to fossilize the audiences' reception of her as a monstrous and 'unnatural' mother, while Aaron's elaborate plan to save his son partly saves him from a label of an incorrigible villain without any moral qualms. Aaron's overriding of Tamora's 'maternal' authority also contributes to the reestablishment of the fathers' rule in the play where matriarchal and patriarchal family models clash.¹⁰ In 4.2. at the centre of this power struggle there is a character of a nurse with the hapless baby in her arms. The nurse is introduced as Tamora's birth attendant or 'gossip', whereas in fact she functions as a paternity-naming midwife¹¹ and a messenger relying Tamora's command. As swiftly as she arrives, she is brutally murdered by Aaron who heralds his rash act as a "deed of policy" (*Titus*, 4.2.150). Getting rid of a "long-tongued, babbling gossip", he proceeds with his plan to exchange his black baby for his countryman's son who happened to be born white (*Titus*, 4.2.152). The swiftness with which Aaron acts unveils the birthing community's vulnerability as well as an uncomfortable realization that women-nurseries are easily exchangeable. Yet, the nurse's momentary presence raises numerous issues regarding the immediate care of Aaron's son.

In line with the tragedy's patriarchal orientation, the nurse in *Titus* emerges as a liminal and threatening presence. The birthing ritual seemingly follows proscribed scripts but, because of Tamora's unorthodox sexual conduct, her labour and its aftermath reverses expected codes of behaviour. In early modern rituals, once the baby was born it would be handed to the nurse

¹⁰ On the questions of maternal and paternal authority in *Titus*, see Detmer-Goebel 2015, 111-15. On the clash between matriarchy and patriarchy as well as the association of Tamora with unruly "wilderness", see Carter 2010, 38; Wynne-Davies 1991, 137. On the alternative familial arrangements and the "redeeming" of Aaron, see Brown 2019, loc. 2459-515.

¹¹ On the role of midwives in confirming patriarchal paternity scripts, see Bicks 2000, 52; Bicks 2003, 33-4.

to be washed and swaddled, while the midwife would offer her full attention to the mother (Gélis 1996, 178). In *Titus*, like in other pregnancy plays, labour and lying-in are pushed off-stage, confirming the “unrepresentable” nature of pregnancy and birth in Western culture.¹² Aaron, Demetrius and Chiron, excluded from the birthing chamber, are shown on stage awaiting the news of the Emperor’s son, while Tamora is “in her unrest” (*Titus* 4.2.31). Possibly, because the baby is born black it is the nurse, not the midwife Cornelia, who is tasked with the delivering of the message to Aaron. Since Tamora decides that the baby must die the regular paternity-bestowing act is transferred to the nurse, clearly a less authoritative figure than the midwife. In this particular case there is also nothing to gain from this otherwise prestigious job.¹³ This way, Shakespeare subtly signals the dubious moral standards and cowardice that Cornelia the midwife might exhibit, which align her with the stereotype of the incompetent and greedy midwife mocked in numerous early modern texts.¹⁴

The Nurse in *Titus Andronicus* is also associated with the inferiorised birthing community, accused of dishonesty and untrustworthiness.¹⁵ The nurse’s loyalty lies in-between her allegiance to the labouring woman and subservience to the woman’s husband, in this case the Emperor. She decides to follow her mistress’s command. Although she follows through with Tamora’s plan, she is presented as a fearful and spineless woman, whose misgivings are dismissed by Aaron as “caterwauling” (*Titus*, 4.2.58). Jane Sharp in *The Midwife’s Book* imagines a perfect candidate for a wetnurse in the following words: “Such a woman is sociable, not subject to melancholy, not be angry of fretful; nor peevish and passionate; but jovial, and will Sing

¹² For more on the aesthetics of birth and the taboo on the presentation of labour in art and culture, see Brand and Granger 2012, 216, 220-5.

¹³ In *Henry VIII* by Shakespeare and Fletcher the Old Lady, functioning as a paternity-bestowing midwife, is clearly driven by greed and her ambitions of gaining favour at court. She is visibly disgruntled by the meagre wages that she had been given by Henry.

¹⁴ As I argue elsewhere: “Male fears surrounding the midwife’s incompetence or her greed find their reflection in the midwife’s oath, in which she is sworn not to abandon a poorer woman for the sake of a richer one or to deputise her tasks to a less experienced or incompetent woman” (Burzyńska 2022, 35). Evenden provides the midwife’s oath from 1713 in Appendix C (2000, 208). For the whole midwife’s oath, see Cressy 1999, 64-6. The “incompetent midwife” theme may be found in popular literature and male-authored midwifery books which dismiss the midwives’ experience. Even Culpeper’s *Directory for Midwives*, despite its otherwise ambitious goals, undermines midwives’ authority (Fissell 2004, 143).

¹⁵ The nurse is referred to as a “gossip”; a term that initially used to denote a godparent. Later it became associated with women and their “unruliness and mindless chatter” (Bicks 2003, 27).

and Dance, taking great delight in children; and therefore is the most fit to Nurse them” (1999, 266-7). Shakespeare’s scant characterization of the Nurse in *Titus* makes her nothing like the woman Sharp outlines. Although she is presented on stage with the baby in her arms as is captured by Aaron’s question: “What dost thou wrap and fumble in thy arms?”, she emerges as grotesque mockery of a nurturing wetnurse (*Titus* 4.2.59).

Through her mouth the most disturbing prejudices against racialized bodies are uttered;

A joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue.
Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad
Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime.
(*Titus*, 4.2.68-70)

As a fruit of miscegenation, Aaron and Tamora’s baby is framed as a monster.¹⁶ Nevertheless, as LaPerle argues “Aaron mounts an inspired argument for the constancy and vigour of the black body” (2019, loc. 3047-8). Shakespeare allows a relatively minor character to express his period’s lingering anxieties revolving racial difference and miscegenation. However, by putting these words into the lips of a woman who should feel responsible for the baby’s welfare, he aligns the Nurse with the maligned, animalized and monstrous Tamora and, by extension, the whole female birthing community. Through the reversal of maternal expectations, he manages to stage an ultimate social threat; assisted maternal infanticide. It is this move that allows the villain Aaron to be partially redeemed, while Tamora to be ‘denaturalized’ and ‘animalized’.

The incidence of wet-nursing in early modern England was steadily growing, while more and more parents hired wetnurses from the poorest sections of society (Fildes 1986, 156). Badinter argues that a widespread practice of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French mothers of sending their babies to overworked and incompetent wetnurses was a masked form of infanticide (1998, 101). Wet-nursing in early modern France was prevalent across all social strata and resulted in staggering death rates among infants (Badinter 1998, 98). The withholding of nursing of one’s own baby resulted in “maternal indifference” (62-8). Sharp in her midwifery manual confirms that the early moderns were aware of the emotional bonds forming between

¹⁶ Loomba (2002, loc. 664-5) famously comments on the baby: “By bringing this baby on stage, Shakespeare was doing something entirely unprecedented, but it was also a scene he never repeated. Aaron’s son is the only child of an interracial couple that we actually see on the early modern stage in England”. For more on the contentious nature of interracial relationships, see Loomba 1989, 52; Loomba 2002, loc. 547-9. For more on the fears of miscegenation in the period, see Royster 2000, 432 and 449.

a nursing mother and her baby: "for doubtless the mothers milk is commonly best agreeing with the child; and if the mother do not nurse her own Child, it is a question whether she will ever love it so well as she doth that proves the Nurse to it as well as Mother: and without doubt the child will be much alienated in his affections by sucking of strange Milk, and that may be one great cause of Childrens proving so undutiful to their parents" (1999, 265). In *Titus*, Tamora promptly sends her baby away, preventing any maternal feelings to be stirred. Hence, Shakespeare paints an extreme portrait of an infanticidal mother who is assisted in her project by a nurse whose primary concern should be to nurse and nurture the baby and not assist in its death. Once the nurse's compromised priorities are unveiled, her brutal murder at the hands of Aaron is, in a way, justified. She, like Tamora, is animalized in death as Aaron announces: "Wheak, wheak! – so cries a pig prepared for the spit" (*Titus* 4.2.148).

However one looks at the conflicted relations within Tamora's birthing chamber, Aaron's proactive murders of the nurse and, presumably, the midwife Cornelia, do not resolve the issues of his sons' safety and nurturance. As it transpires, Aaron is never capable of delivering the baby to his countryman where his son could be nursed by the man's newly-delivered wife. Standing over the nurse's dead body, he presents his absurd vision of feeding an infant "berries" and "roots" as well as "curds and whey" (*Titus* 4.2.179-80). In a fantasy reminiscent of Romulus and Remus, who were nursed by a she-wolf, Aaron sees his son "sucking" a goat and growing up to be a warrior (*Titus* 4.2.180-1). Aaron's paternal intervention saves his son's life but it also communicates an uncomfortable realization that women as nurturers are invisible and dispensable, while warrior-like masculinity needs to be fashioned independently of maternal, corrupting influence.

Eventually, Aaron's crimes catch up with him and he is captured. Ironically, Aaron's hiding place is uncovered by a Goth soldier who "heard a child cry underneath a wall" (*Titus* 5.1.24). Aaron may have been caught, then, because of his parental inaptness or his biological limitation. He may be a doating father but he is not a nurse who could provide his son with vital nourishment – breast milk – which is a condition for the baby's survival. In the end, Aaron decides to divulge all his secrets in exchange for his son's life. At the closing of the play, Aaron's son lives but the question who becomes his care-taker and nourisher is an open-ended one. Given infants' high mortality in the period the baby's survival is by no means guaranteed. What is clear is the annihilation and erasure of all possibilities for female nurturance. The play closes with the reinstatement of the rule of the Andronici, with whom the vicious cycle of violence and brutality started in the first place. Rather than a cathartic fresh start, one is left with a vision of "beasts and prey" feeding on the maternal body (*Titus* 5.3.197).

“Give me the boy. I am glad you did not nurse him”: Nursing in *The Winter’s Tale* (2.1.56)

Similarly to *Titus*, Shakespeare’s romance *The Winter’s Tale* is visibly indebted to maternal imagery, while the events surrounding Hermione’s pregnancy, labour and the lying-in constitute the nexus of tragic events in this seemingly ‘happy’ play. Numerous critics record Leontes’s nervous flight from the body and the anxieties that Hermione’s pregnant body stirs “as a symptom of a deeply entrenched – though not necessary or inevitable – collusion between the representational and libidinal economies of patriarchal culture” (Enterline 2000, 221).¹⁷ Although Hermione is not a transgressive mother like Tamora, her pregnant body, by default, inspires the shocking injustices that befall her once Leontes harbours suspicions of her infidelity. Not only is Hermione a victim but also both her children are deprived of the necessary nurturance. *The Winter’s Tale* emerges as a play haunted by maternal absences and failures of alternative care-taking networks. Along with maternal banishment, Shakespeare stages the wetnurse’s erasure. Both Mamillius, whose very name points to his continued reliance on his nurse’s milk, and infant Perdita are deprived of the nurturing presence of their mother but also a wetnurse who would take her place.¹⁸

One of the most well-known scenes in which wet-nursing is alluded to but the wet-nursing agent and her work are made invisible is Leontes’ barging into an exclusively female space of Hermione’s imminent birthing chamber. In the spirit of Ruddick’s conceptualization of “maternal thinking” and “preservative love” (1995, 13, 65), in this touching and intimate scene, maternal care is dispersed and divided among other maternal figures as heavily pregnant Hermione appeals to her ladies for help in taking-care of over-energetic Mamillius; “Take the boy to you. He troubles me, / ’Tis past enduring” (*WT* 2.1.1-2). The women take turns in playing with the boy, giving Hermione a momentary respite.¹⁹ Leontes enters this site of collective care-taking and nurture and orders Mamillius to be taken away:

¹⁷ Hermione’s pregnant body has been read as stirring anxieties generated by pregnancy’s “closeness” to unreasonable, uncontrollable nature that opposes seemingly orderly patriarchy e.g. Erickson 1982, 819; Adelman 2003, 146; Cavell 2010, 128; Ephraim 2007, 48; Caporicci 2015, 42; McCandless 1990, 64. For more positive interpretations of mysterious maternal power implicit in the play, see Woodford 2001, 30; Karpinska 2010, 427, 440.

¹⁸ On the name’s etymology, see Woodford 2001, 31.

¹⁹ The scene has also been read in terms of the pleasures and powers implicit in the oral tradition of story-telling. As Lamb writes: “the fear which causes the boy’s violent removal from his mother’s presence . . . gives expression to a similar cultural fear of female influence evoked by oral tales enjoyed in childhood” (2010, 159).

Give me the boy. I am glad you did not nurse him.
 Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you
 Have too much blood in him.
 (WT 2.1.56-8)

Although, as Leontes observes, Hermione did not breastfeed their son, the boy still takes after her; an observation that causes his alarm. Leontes's words have been identified to point to maternal milk and its potentially perilous influence on the infant (Woodford 2007, 28). Leontes, violently removing Mamillius, may be vengefully staging a second maternal separation resulting from the conditions of the wet-nursing culture. In this sense, Leontes's rage grows out of his own maternal deprivation (Paster 1993, 197-208). Both these lines of interpretation point to a patriarchal culture bent on erasing female nurture; be it maternal or growing out of a wider female collective.

In line with early modern medical knowledge, breast milk may influence the infant's appearance or character. Sharp summarizes masculine anxieties of women's powers to shape and transform through nursing: "Many Physicians have troubled themselves and others with unnecessary directions, but the chiefest is to choose a nurse of a sanguine complexion, for that is most predominant in children; and therefore that is most agreeing to their age: but beware you choose not a woman that is crooked, or squint-eyed, nor with a misshapen Nose, or body, or with black Teeth, or with stinking breath, or with any notable depravation; for these are signs of ill manners that the child will partake of by sucking such ill qualified milk as such people yield; and the child will soon be squint-eyed by imitation, for that age is subject to represent, and take impression upon every occasion" (1999, 266). Sharp, a female midwife, partly dismisses male physicians' worries of wet-nurses' influence on the infants but she simultaneously acknowledges that children may inherit physical disabilities from their wetnurses or copy bad character qualities. Woodford argues that: "Though Leontes ruefully admits that he cannot control reproduction because there is 'no barricado for a belly' (1.2.204), he does create a barricado for the breast, and so is able to wrest back control over the influence and shaping of his children" (2007, 188). Yet, this control is evidently illusory as, by his own admission, his son still takes after the mother.

In Leontes's eyes the absent and unnamed wetnurse that breastfed Mamillius is dangerously aligned with the inferiorised maternal influence. Not only is her work synonymous with maternal values but so is her person utterly fused with the maternal figure. The direct violence resulting from Leontes's fury falls on Hermione, accused of adultery, but his fury is extended to the entire birthing and nursing community as he says:

. . . women say so,
 That will say anything. But were they false
 As o'erdyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false
 As dice are to be wished by one that fixes . . .
 (WT 1.2.130-3)

For Leontes all women involved in care networks are thus suspect and inherently false. One could dismiss Leontes's rage as ramblings of a single, momentarily insane man had it not resulted in a chain of tragic events to which Hermione, Mamillius and Perdita all fall victim to. What is even more disturbing in the suppression of the communal care-taking network is the fact that no one, except for Paulina, really takes Hermione's side. In 2.1. the men at court, express their misgivings but no one, except for Hermione's ladies, follows her. Once Hermione and her ladies are gone, Leontes severs any contacts between Mamillius and the female community, clearly without providing any alternative source of nurture for the boy. As is reported by the servant, the child dies of worry over his mother; "The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear / Of the queen's speed, is gone" (WT 3.2.141-2). Mamillius has not only been deprived of maternal presence, but any female nurture that could help him in dealing with the traumatic separation from his mother.

In *The Winter's Tale* the most wholesome scenes are the ones where maternal work is shared by women whose agency is visible and appreciated. The work of these women fuses tactile bonds with the verbal pleasure of story-telling. The women in 2.1, taking care of Mamillius, are not merely unnamed hands executing seemingly meaningless activities but individuals, whose job is to foster the child's healthy development. As Willett argues: "The caress between parent and child gives a pleasure that is — unless numbed by the alienating labor of patriarchal motherhood — immediately exchanged. It is, moreover, a pleasure easily overlooked" (1995, 39). When the women in 2.1 exchange kisses with Mamillius and invite him to share a story, they shape Mamillius's 'relational' identity but also form a supportive community. It is the importance of this "tactile sociality" that Leontes overlooks when he deprives his son of the contact with the 'dependence' community. On a certain level, he understands the fundamental role of touch in human relationships because his punishments all involve the severing of communal relations based on physical intimacy. On the other hand, Leontes takes every opportunity to mock tactile bonds. When he takes away Mamillius he says:

Bear the boy hence. He shall not come about her.
 Away with him, and let her sport herself
 With that she's big with.

(WT 2.1.59-61)

The worst punishment for Hermione is to take away her son, while simultaneously he maliciously mocks any consolation that she may find in her intimate relationship with the baby in her womb.

Leontes's banishment of his daughter Perdita amounts to the communal, tactile deprivation that Mamillius was also subject to. Similarly to the journey that Aaron makes to the Goth camp, Antigonus subjects infant Perdita to a gruelling sea voyage that stretches rules of probability. The question regarding who provides sustenance for Perdita remains open. Picking baby Perdita to carry her away to the ship Antigonus says:

Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses! Wolves and bears, they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity.

(WT 2.3.184-7)

Rather than foundational for the development of infant's subjectivity, the acts of nursing are limited here to the mere biological, animalized functions, whose agents are once again dispensable. In fact, they do not even have to be human as wolves and bears may as well serve as human children's nurturers. Who and how nurses Perdita when she is later raised in a male-exclusive Shepherd's house also remains a mystery. As Woodford poignantly summarizes: "While an early modern father could only choose between empowering his wife or empowering a wet-nurse with the shaping of his child through nursing, *The Winter's Tale* presents a more complete circumscription of female power. Perdita is removed not simply from the influence of her mother, but from the influence of any woman. Her upbringing is a fantasy of an exclusively male nurture" (2007, 188).

Similarly to *Titus*, *The Winter's Tale* enacts wetnurses' erasure. In his obsessions Leontes acknowledges the implicit power of wet-nursing in shaping well-rounded individuals. On the other hand, the ease with which he enforces the dissolution of care networks demonstrates systemic failures in the protection of early modern dependents and dependency workers. However, unlike *Titus*, *The Winter's Tale* gives one a glimpse into an intimate reality of female nurturers and their dependants. Given that Sicilia is turned into a hostile desert in the aftermath of Hermione's death and Perdita's banishment, while its King is consumed by guilt and remorse, one can safely assume that, ultimately, *The Winter's Tale* calls for a deepened appreciation of an ethic of care, grounded in the foundational relationship between carers and children. In its passing but weighty allusion to wet-nursing, the play confirms the foundations of human social identities; "The first social bond

occurs not through the dynamics of the gaze but in the mixing of the milky odors of the baby with the milky odors of the mother in skin-to-skin contact” (Willet 1995, 34).

“I call not you, I call the wet nurse hither”: Nursing in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (2.2.17)

Middleton’s *A Chaste Maid* is more immersed in the early modern birthing ritual than *Titus* or *The Winter’s Tale*. While in Shakespeare’s plays the ritual is alluded to but ultimately pushed off-stage, Middleton opens the doors to the birthing chamber to show the postpartum woman, her birth attendants and both a dry nurse and a wetnurse on stage.²⁰ Although the play has been read as “a carnivalesque attack on primogeniture, on the sanctity of bloodlines” (Altieri 1988, 182), while family has been identified as the “functional dramatic unit” and “focus of his comedy” (Chatterji 1965, 107), the female agents in the birthing ritual – mocked and ridiculed by Master Allwit – have more often been identified with Middleton’s misogyny. Paster famously argues that “the female characters of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* reproduce a virtual symptomatology of woman, which insists on the female body’s moisture, secretions, and productions as shameful tokens of uncontrol” (1993, 52). However, female “leakiness” is associated with rank and privilege. In this city comedy, set in an early-capitalist urban reality driven by greed and social ambitions,²¹ women are divided along class lines. Privilege determines “an emotional right of way”, according to which rich women are given leave to “express emotions in contrast to their maidservants whose job by and large is not to have individual emotions but instead to use their wits to solve their mistresses’ problems” (Paster 2012, 155). This phenomenon is observable in Middleton’s characterization of the dry and wetnurse in the play.

A Chaste Maid gives its audiences three nurses; a dry nurse, wetnurse and one referred to simply as nurse. They are all employed in Allwit’s household as helpers to newly-delivered Mrs Allwit. The famous over-the-top scenes have been identified as a parody of the lying-in of the Countess of Salisbury, wife of William Cecil, the second Earl of Salisbury and son of Robert Cecil (Jenstad 2004, 373). The Allwits’ ambitious social climbing reflects exuberant

²⁰ For a reading of the birthing ritual’s “exoticization” as an expression of anxiety over exclusively female spaces in *A Chaste Maid*, see Reynolds 2015, 30.

²¹ Marrotti believes that Middleton combines his previous interests in “materialism and avarice, bourgeois pretensions, aristocratic degeneracy, religious hypocrisy, libertinism and prodigality” with themes of sexuality and fertility (1969, 65). Following Newman, Anglin argues “for the emergence of an early modern urban subjectivity” (2012, 12).

spending of the new aristocracy in Middleton's mockery of both the urban and higher classes (Jenstad 2004, 394). Following this trail, the number of nurses employed by the Allwits reflects their seemingly limitless financial resources and high social standing. When in 2.3 Allwit calls for a Nurse only to correct himself and say; "I call not you, I call the wet nurse hither", the ensuing confusion highlights the family's overflowing exuberance, at the same time depersonalizing and objectifying both nurses who momentarily seem exchangeable (*Maid* 2.2.17). Yet, Allwit insists on seeing the wetnurse with Sir Walter's baby, unwittingly highlighting the indispensability of her role in the infant's care.

Although Allwit finds it hard to keep up with the work in the household and is confounded by each woman's function, the wetnurse is called into the room as an expert whose role is to confirm the patriarchal paternity narrative weaved by Allwit and Sir Walter. With her 'paternity-bestowing' function, she announces to Allwit: "You may be proud on't sir, / 'Tis the best piece of work that e'er you did" (*Maid* 2.2.21-2). The irony is that the child is Sir Walter's, not Allwit's, which undermines the supposed female power implicit in the birthing ritual. In her liminal position the wetnurse is taken advantage of and limited to her instrumental role of upholding the narratives written by men. Not only in his disgust of the birth attendants' voracity is Allwit demonstrative of his disrespect for female spaces, but he also vocatively distances himself from the work carried out by women;

Here's running to and fro - nurse upon nurse,
 Three charwomen, besides maids and neighbours' children!
 Fie, what a trouble have I rid my hands on;
 It makes me sweat to think on't.
 (*Maid* 2.2.7-10)

It is evident that the actual day-to-day care over the newly-delivered mother, her infant but also the whole household falls on the nurses who carry the burden of dependency work, additionally having to follow Allwit's whimsical demands and swallow his disrespect.

However, Middleton is by no means equivocal in his presentation of dependency workers. His biting irony is directed as much at the greedy gossips as at Allwit himself. After all, he is the miserly willing cuckold who prostitutes his own wife for financial gain. The nurses in 3.1 are presented as the only hard-working agents whose work is exploited. One may argue that rather than being merely instruments in the hands of patriarchal decision-makers, their presence enables to unveil injustices in contemporary care-networking systems. Their honest work underscores Mrs Allwit's privilege but also Allwit's greed and blindness to the importance of care work. When Allwit dares to act outside his purview and tells the nurse: "Here, take

her in, nurse; wipe her, and give her spoon-meat”, she snaps at him: “Wipe your mouth, sir” and promptly leaves (*Maid* 2.2.30, 31). She neither acknowledges his request nor denies it but treats Allwit as if he were a child in need of scolding. So, although Middleton divides his characters along the lines of privilege, the nurse is not entirely voiceless. On the contrary, she attempts to keep Allwit in line.

Early modern midwifery manuals place requirements on wet-nurses’ appearance, health, manners etc. Hardly anything is written of their needs. As Sharp argues, wet-nurses’ sole gratification is the child’s well-being and possibly the child’s gratitude when they grow up (1999, 267). The nurses in Middleton’s comedy are almost reduced to the hands that carry and feed the baby or bring in plates with food always ready to shout out: “At hand, forsooth.” – as the Nurse at the christening responds when called for (*Maid* 3.1.5). However, how indispensable their work really is may be glimpsed in the absurdist scene when the promoters pull out an abandoned baby from an intercepted basket, thinking it was “a lamb’s head” (*Maid* 2.1.178). Realizing the burden of an infant’s up-keep, the first promoter complains:

Half out getting must run in sugar-sops
 And nurses’ wages now, besides many a pound of soap
 And tallow; we have need to get loins of mutton still,
 To save suet to change for candles
 (*Maid* 2.2.174-7)

The baby’s presence calls for substantial funds; half of their wages would now go to the hire of a wetnurse whose support is essential. The promoters are more knowledgeable about the infant’s needs than privileged Allwit. Although the wet-nurse’s help would be crucial to feed the baby human milk, in their resolve to buy sugar-sops and candles the men seem resigned to get involved in the infant’s care first-hand.

Middleton’s mockery does not escape anyone in the play. The promoters are evidently greedy like the Allwits. However, although the scene is grotesque, it provides a striking contrast with the scenes of exuberance at the Allwits’ household, in a way subtly signalling a possibility of a dispersed and relational care-network where both women and men cooperate in their dependency work. Middleton’s comedy offers an array of female characters involved in the birthing process, including a wetnurse who is given voice to comment on her work. This voice seemingly serves the legitimization of a patriarchal narrative and yet Middleton’s presentation is open to various interpretations. Nevertheless, despite being given voice, the nurses in the play are instrumentalized and reduced to the activities they perform, while the care itself is not given any meaningful import. Rather care-taking is monetized and becomes a transactional commodity in a nascent capitalist reality;

a reality that would become a norm in the modern world.

Conclusion

“In the beginning is not the word; it is the touch”; Willet poignantly argues in her outline of maternal ethics (1995, 47). Writing about touch in early modern culture Harvey reminds us that: “Tactility, often despised, repudiated, forgotten, or subsumed into the other senses, is an insistent reminder of corporeality as the necessary condition of our humanity” (2016b, 21). Ethic of care philosophers have argued that touch is foundational for human subjectivity. Wholesome social subjects are first forged in the arms of their nurturers rather than merely in the disembodied socialization process. In early modern drama both maternal and non-maternal carers are often painfully reduced or erased altogether. Maternal figures like Tamora, Hermione or Mrs Allwit either are, or are believed to be, transgressive and therefore their maternal influence is minimized by patriarchal figures. However, the plays’ patriarchs are often faced with an uncomfortable realization that female nurturance is indispensable. So they cling to an illusory idea that agents of nurturance may be exchangeable. Thus, each play has patriarchal figures working hard to devalue human dependency in order to fashion a world in which independent subjects arise free from tactile bonds implicit in nursing. However, each play demonstrates a failure of such blindness to human dependency; with Tamora’s baby’s fate unknown, an emotional desert in the aftermath of Hermione’s death and Perdita’s abandonment, or a chillingly greedy reality of Middleton’s London where some babies are coveted while others are abandoned to their death. A world that fails to recognize the importance of dependency work and dependency workers such as wetnurses is essentially a world that fails dependents – labouring women and their children.

One may argue that wet-nursing in the plays is positioned in such a way as to support the patriarchal status quo; in its insistence on breaking the child-mother bond, wet-nursing presents an alternative that is even more instrumentalized and exploited. Wetnurses become employees in the nascent capitalist system that values neither maternal nor nurturer-child bonds and fails to see them as fundamental to human subjectivity. Kittay argues of modern culture: “The fact that women largely bear the burden of dependency work is a legacy of tradition of sexism, and of sexual taboo against men being involved in the intimate care of women’s bodies” (2019, x). Ultimately, numerous past texts testify to the devalorisation of human touch, which disfranchises both mothers and wet-nurses. This devalorisation is still prevalent in modern culture which fails to see dependency work as fundamental to society’s func-

tioning. Willett argues: “If society is not to consume itself in cycles of predation and sacrifice, ethical theory will have to begin with the tactile sensuality between nurturer and child” (1995, 42). It is crucial to look at how dependency work is presented in canonical texts in order to understand and deconstruct this long-standing tradition of devaluing dependency work and dependency workers, especially because the denial of “the rhythms and tonalities of the carress” (Willett 1995, 38) leads to ruinous consequences. It is high time we looked at dependency workers such as wetnurses in popular culture across the ages in order to accommodate dependency work in our future projects of social change.

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TERRI BOURUS*

“Speak’st thou from thy heart?”: Performing the Mother-Nurse and Clown-Servant in *Romeo and Juliet*¹

Abstract

Mothers are notoriously rare in Shakespeare. Juliet has a living, onstage mother, but the most important older woman and mother-figure in her life is the Nurse. Unlike any other Nurse in Shakespeare’s plays, such as the Nurse in *Titus Andronicus*, or, for that matter, any other Nurse character in early modern English plays, Juliet’s Nurse is a fully developed and emotionally complicated character. She has her own backstory, including the death of her own named child. She is given a remarkable idiolect along with a fully developed sexuality and corporeality. She is Juliet’s alternative mother, and as central to the plot and the emotional arc of *Romeo and Juliet* as Bottom is to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. And yet, she stands alone among Shakespeare’s servant-class characters, providing comic relief, dramatic interest and tension, and a deep and loving connection to the family she serves and the Italian community of which she is an integral part. This essay situates the character within widespread, normative medieval and early modern practices of wet-nursing and surrogate motherhood. It examines the uniqueness of Juliet’s Nurse in the context of other early modern ‘nurse’ characters and the long history of remarkable theatrical and cinematic interpretations of the role. It also specifically connects the Nurse to her companion servant in the Capulet household, Peter, played in the first performances by the great English clown, Will Kemp.

KEYWORDS: nurse; surrogate motherhood; *Romeo and Juliet*; clown; Shakespeare

How should we interpret, in reading or in performance, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*? If she was brought into the Capulet family as a wet-nurse, we might ask, what functions did a wet-nurse serve in sixteenth-century England or Italy? Juliet was weaned years ago, and the Nurse is no longer performing the duty that the noun implies. So is she now primarily just a servant in the household? If so, what kind of servant? Is her past as a wet-nurse less important than her present as a stereotypical comic servant, a

¹I am indebted to the invaluable knowledge, experience, and generosity of Labor & Delivery nurse Domenica Bourus, BSN, and Lactation Consultant Julie Meek, IBCLC. I also want to thank four readers of an earlier draft: Gary Taylor, Rosy Colombo, and the two anonymous peer-reviewers for the journal.

* Florida State University - terri.bourus@fsu.edu

theatrical clown? Or is she not a clown at all? Could she be, instead, an alternative mother? Could any wet-nurse, in such a rigid hierarchical system, become a substitute parent?

Tom Stoppard, in his 1998 Academy Award-winning *Shakespeare in Love*, addresses some of these questions by giving us two different Nurses.² Viola De Lesseps' unnamed Nurse, played with energetic comic perfection by Imelda Staunton, and the camp Nurse in the play-within-the-movie, acted in high Elizabethan style by Jim Carter, now better known for his role as the indomitable butler, Charles Carson, in *Downton Abbey* (and Staunton's real-life husband). Staunton and Carter shared, with ten other members of the cast, a well-earned Best Ensemble Award from the Screen Actors Guild.

The two nurses in *Shakespeare in Love* epitomize two very different ways of performing Shakespeare's single Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Staunton's Nurse is a servant in the fictional De Lessep household: we first hear her speak when she is alone with her charge, Viola, in Viola's bedroom, after they have both witnessed a performance at court of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The film adaptation introduces the nurse character by emphasizing her physical duties in the maintenance of a rich young woman's body: helping Viola undress, cleaning her ears, giving her a twig to brush her teeth with, and then holding a beaker of water and bowl for her to spit into (20-2). This emphasis continues throughout *Shakespeare in Love*, and corresponds to the practicality always evident in the Nurse's speeches. But such actions also establish the personal intimacy between the young rich mistress and her older, laboring servant. In Shakespeare's play, the Nurse initially speaks with Juliet's biological mother, and Juliet only joins them when the Nurse (at the mother's command) summons her. By contrast, Staunton's Nurse is alone with her mistress: the mother is not present at all, and there is no talk about Viola's birth, or the Nurse breast-feeding her, or weaning her, and nothing about the Nurse's own history, her dead child or dead husband. Although the film retains her identity as 'Nurse', in practice she is simply a personal servant, consistently loyal to Viola. Like everyone else in the film, she's funny, and Staunton's performance makes her continuously specific, sympathetic, and interesting. But unlike Shakespeare's Nurse, the film's Nurse is not verbally vulgar, she seems as asexual as a nun, and she does not, in any way, mix tragedy with comedy.

Jim Carter's Nurse is an entirely different animal. In the film, Carter is

² Stoppard 1998. In the film, the screenplay is credited to "Marc Norman & Tom Stoppard". Although Norman had the initial idea for the film, and is responsible for the first scene, Stoppard wrote almost everything else. "By the convention of credits, 'and,' as opposed to '&,' signals that the two writers have worked separately, one subsequently to the other, and not in collaboration" (Lee 2021, 444).

Ralph Bashford, a player in Alleyn's and Henslowe's acting company. We see Ralph repeatedly in the company of the other actors, on stage or backstage (juggling) and running lines, but also in a brothel/tavern with other theatre people. He refuses offered alcohol ("Never when I'm working!") and tries to impress a "pretty" young woman by summarizing the story of *Romeo and Juliet* in a way that makes it all about himself and the character he plays ("Well, there's this . . . Nurse").³ Throughout the film, Stoppard affectionately satirizes the theatre as an art-form, a business, and a community somehow formed ("it's a mystery") by professional narcissists. Ralph is part of that community. On stage, the big-bodied baritone, cross-dressed and with pale overdone make-up, Carter/Ralph consistently plays the Nurse for laughs. With such casting, the actor Ralph is 'real', but Ralph cannot possibly disappear into the character of the fictive Nurse: what we see and hear is a male actor comically playing, or mis-playing, a caricature of a woman. In contrast to the comedy of Staunton as the Nurse, the comedy of Carter's Nurse is fundamentally metatheatrical: we cannot ignore, but instead relish, the obvious misfit between actor and role. The film requires Staunton's Nurse to be a believable specific character; it requires Carter's Nurse to be a conspicuously theatrical parody of theatrical make-believe.

That dichotomy - between Staunton's Nurse and Carter's Nurse, between 'real' and 'metatheatrical' - can be seen in the long history of performed interpretations of Shakespeare's Nurse. But before looking at particular embodiments of the role from the Restoration to the present, it is worth calling attention to a fundamental difference in the Nurses of *Shakespeare in Love* and the Nurse of *Romeo and Juliet*. Staunton's Nurse and Carter's Nurse, or even both together, are smaller roles, less complex and less important to the story, than Shakespeare's singular Nurse.

1. Tracing the Role

The titular lovers have naturally been the focus of performances and commentaries on the play. But in the first extended analysis of Shakespeare by a major writer, John Dryden declared that "*Shakespear* show'd the best of his skill in his *Mercutio*" (Dryden 1978, 215), and in the centuries since 1672 critics and editors have paid more attention to *Mercutio* than to any of the other secondary characters. This male emphasis on *Mercutio* should surprise us.

³ Stoppard 1998, 104, 106. The screenplay has no ellipsis, or any other punctuation, between "this" and "Nurse", but in the film Carter conspicuously pauses between the two words, calling attention to the comic disparity between any summary of *Romeo and Juliet* that we might expect ("there's this feud" or "there's this young couple") and his own self-centered emphasis. The pause seems to be Carter's own contribution.

The Nurse speaks more than anyone but Romeo (4,677 words), Juliet (4,271), and Friar Lawrence (2,725). In the canonical text of *Romeo and Juliet*, first published in the second quarto edition (1599) and essentially reprinted in the 1623 Folio, Mercutio speaks 2,093 words, but the Nurse speaks 2,205. She also appears in more scenes, interacts with a greater range of characters, and remains important long after Mercutio's death. But what should be the most telling and surprising quantitative contrast with the Nurse is not Mercutio. Juliet's biological mother speaks only 874 words: less than 40% of what the Nurse speaks.⁴ The Nurse, though socially inferior to Juliet's mother, is more important to Juliet and more important to the play. None of the other nurse characters in Shakespeare come anywhere near the size of her role. The unnamed Nurse in *Titus Andronicus* speaks only 136 words, and Lychorida in *Pericles* only seventy-four (Spevack 1968, 331, 1457). The unnamed Nurse in *Henry the Sixth, Part Three* does not speak at all: she is specified in the opening stage direction of the play's final scene, where she apparently carries the infant Prince Edward, the Lancastrian dynasty's newborn heir. In all these other plays, the biological mothers (Tamora, Thaisa, Elizabeth) speak many more words, and spend more time on stage, than the nurses.

The importance of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* is not simply quantitative. Mothers are notoriously rare in Shakespeare, and yet Juliet has two. She has a living, talking, onstage, biological mother and, the most important older woman and mother-figure in her life, her Nurse. Like the play's other main characters - and unlike the servants Peter, Samson, Gregory, and Abraham - the Nurse has an Italian name, Angelica.⁵ When Capulet, her master, addresses her as "good Angelica", the name suggests both a guardian angel and a culinary herb; both senses emphasize her "nurturing, comforting role within the Capulet household" (Bate 1982, 336; Findlay 2010, 217). She has her own backstory, including the death of her own named child. She is given a remarkable idiolect along with a fully developed sexuality and corporeality. She is Juliet's alternative mother, and as central to the plot and the emotional arc of *Romeo and Juliet* as Bottom is to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Of all Shakespeare's comic characters, three stand out and are most familiar to audiences: Bottom in *Dream*, Falstaff in *Merry Wives* and *Henry IV*, and Juliet's Nurse. Like Falstaff to Hal, the Nurse is an alternative parent, but she is the *only* comic woman in this memorable triad. She stands alone among

⁴ These statistics come from Spevack 1968, 406-71. Weis mistakenly identifies Capulet as "the fourth-longest part in the play" (2012, 4), but Capulet speaks only 2121 words (Spevack, 410). That's more than Mercutio, and far more than Capulet's wife, but less than the Nurse.

⁵ Shakespeare 2016, 21, 5. All quotations from the play cite the New Oxford Shakespeare edition, which uses continuous scene numbering, rather than imposing eighteenth-century act divisions on the play.

Shakespeare's servant-class characters: like them, she often provides comic relief, but she also creates dramatic interest and tension, and displays a deep and loving connection to the family she serves and the Italian community of which she is an integral part. Stanley Wells calls her "the most complete character in the play" (Wells 1996, 13).

Consider the qualitative judgements of the Nurse by three exemplary, but very different, critics from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries:

The Nurse is one of the characters in which the author delighted: he has, with great subtilty of distinction, drawn her at once loquacious and secret, obsequious and insolent, trusty and dishonest. (Samuel Johnson)⁶

Were any man to attempt to paint in his mind all the qualities that could possibly belong to a nurse, he would find them there. . . . in the Nurse you had all the garrulity of old age, and all the fondness, which was one of the greatest consolations of humanity. . . . You had likewise the arrogance of ignorance, with the pride of real meanness at being connected with a great family; the grossness too . . . and, arising from that grossness, the little low vices belonging to it . . . (Samuel Coleridge)⁷

The Nurse, whatever her age, is a triumphant and complete achievement. She stands foursquare, and lives and breathes in her own right from the moment she appears. . . . [Shakespeare] will give us nothing completer till he gives us Falstaff. . . . You may, indeed, take any sentence the Nurse speaks throughout the play, and only she could speak it. . . . She is in everything inevitable. (Harley Granville-Barker)⁸

Or, from a very different perspective, consider responses to two famous London productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1882 at the Lyceum, the lovers were played by the most celebrated English actors of the Victorian age, Henry Irving (Romeo) and Ellen Terry (Juliet). But Mercutio and the Nurse "were the popular successes" of the show.⁹

⁶ Johnson 1968, 957. Notably, Johnson devoted only these three lines to the Nurse, after giving nineteen to Mercutio as an exemplar of "the conversation of gentlemen" (956).

⁷ Coleridge 1971, 79. Like Johnson, Coleridge discussed Mercutio before the Nurse.

⁸ Granville-Barker 1935, 42. He dedicates a subsection to the Nurse before any of the other "Characters", including Mercutio.

⁹ Rowell 1986, 89. For a photograph of Mrs. Stirling as the Nurse, when she reprised the role in the 1885 production, with Mary Anderson as Juliet, see "Mary Anne ('Fanny') Stirling . . . as the Nurse", *National Portrait Gallery Image Collection* 2014, NPGx38810.

The Nurse of Mrs. Stirling admits of nothing but praise; it simply could not be better. Her garrulity, her fondness for her child and her dinner, her endeavours to enter into Juliet's desires and her total failure to comprehend the point of view, her indifference to Romeo, as Romeo, her petulance, her dignity and her innocent little triumphs, are all there, and all overlaid with a film of good-nature, that makes the personification irresistible. One cannot help saying, "What a dear old woman!" and quite understanding why Juliet was so fond of her. (An. 1882, 326)

Ellen Terry herself praised Stirling as "the only Nurse that I have seen who did not play the part like a female pantaloons" (Terry 1908, 250). Another member of the 1882 company, the young Frank Benson, in his first professional role (Paris), recalled his own "old nurse, after seeing the play, trotting round to all her acquaintances asking everyone 'Did you see me on the stage at the Lyceum? Oh, I did laugh when I saw myself there with Miss Ellen Terry and Mr. Irving all so fine'" (Allen 1922, 8).

In 1935 at the New Theatre, in what is widely recognized as the first truly modern production of the play, John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier alternated the roles of Romeo and Mercutio, but there was "general agreement . . . that the Nurse of Edith Evans alone provides a sufficient reason for going to a theatre" (Cookman 1935, x2).

An earthy characterization, full of innuendo humour, a portrait of a coarse old confidant, it surprised many people. In lesser hands the Nurse can be a thundering old bore, prating on and on, but Edith's great achievement was that she found hidden meanings which disguised some of the more tedious aspects of the character. There was a quality of stillness about Edith's major performances that few, if any, equaled. She *used* silence, she listened, and this to my mind is one of the hallmarks of greatness in an actor. A great actor has an ear for the pause and can calculate its bearable duration with the exactness of a scientist . . . dropping the laugh line into the silence like a stone falling to the bottom of a well. (Forbes 1977, 149)

She was "the most real old woman you ever saw, earthy as a potato, slow as a carthorse, cunning as a badger" (Darlington 1935). She looked like a peasant woman from a Dutch painting, with her white head scarf and voluminous skirts (An. 1935). Other reviewers compared her Nurse to "the detailed solidity of a Durer drawing" or a portrait "that Vermeer would not have been ashamed to sign".¹⁰ "Whenever she was on the stage, reprimanding, soothing, or merely getting her breath, the lovers both seemed children, and it needed her magnificently vital presence to give their story depth." (Stonier, 1935).

¹⁰ For these and other accounts of her reprise of the role in 1961, see Jackson 2003, 63-4.

She had “the exact mixture of wheedling and impudence for Juliet’s nurse” (Shipley 1935, 24). Her Nurse “was satisfyingly complete—tetchy, worldly, gossipy, splendidly ancient” (Hall 1961, 253). Like Mrs. Stirling, Edith Evans was so successful in the role that she performed it in more than one production.

As these critics and performances attest, Juliet’s Nurse is a fully developed and emotionally complicated character—unlike any other member of this occupation in Shakespeare’s plays, or in any surviving plays written in English before the closing of the theaters in 1642.¹¹ For instance, the Nurse in George Peele’s *Edward I*, like the Nurse in *3 Henry VI*, never speaks. The Nurse in *Supposes* (George Gascoigne’s 1566 translation of Ludovico Ariosto’s 1509 comedy *I Suppositi*) does speak, but only in the play’s short first scene, where she helps supply necessary exposition. Not surprisingly, when Shakespeare adapted *Supposes* to create *The Taming of the Shrew*, Ariosto’s Nurse disappeared, along with her clumsy opening scene.

Why is the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* so profoundly different from all her dramatic contemporaries? And so different from Stoppard’s two Nurses, too? Or from the truncated clown-nurse in Baz Luhrman’s *Romeo + Juliet*?

2. Sixteenth-Century Nurses

In most early modern plays, the nurse conventionally functions as a living accompaniment of a newborn child (as in Shakespeare’s collaborative *Titus Andronicus*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Pericles*) or as a reliable witness to a past birth. An example of that second function is provided by the first Nurse in an extant native English play. The anonymous *Historie of Iacob and Esau* was printed in 1557, and perhaps performed as early as 1553; “Deborra the Nurse” is listed on the title page as one of the play’s ten characters (Wiggins 2012, #251). The wicked brother Esau insults the Nurse as an “old heg” (hag) and “witche”. Nevertheless, he commands her to tell him the “truth” about his birth and that of his virtuous fraternal twin Jacob:

ESAU. Is it true that when I and my brother were first borne,
 And I by Gods ordinaunce came forth him before,
 Iacob came forthwith, holding me fast by the heele?
 DEBORRA. It is true, I was there, and saw it very wele.¹²

This information about the twins’ birth comes from Genesis 25:26 (“And afterward came his brother out, and his hand held Esau by the heel”). But the

¹¹ For a complete list see Berger, Bradford, and Sondergard 1998, 73.

¹² White 1992, 124-5. Only a fragment of the first edition survives; I quote the first extant title page (1567).

Bible does not mention a nurse, let alone name her and give her a role in the story of the adult brothers. The playwright invented Deborra the Nurse as well as her exchange with Esau.

Wet-nurses in the pre-modern world were often present during the delivery of a child, because of the high rate of maternal mortality. If the mother died in childbirth, the child would only survive if another woman was on hand to nurse it. And even if the mother lived, it would have been wise to have a lactating woman available. The mother's milk might not let down properly, or a common infection such as mastitis could set in, or (like Shakespeare's wife Anne) a woman might give birth to twins, and suddenly need help to provide enough nourishment for two infants. Moreover, many upper-class women - especially if, like Lady Capulet, they were Roman Catholics - preferred to delegate the messy physical labor of nursing to a paid servant. The normal practice of nursing on demand also reduced fertility, and a key function of aristocratic women was to have multiple pregnancies in the hope of producing multiple heirs, thus increasing the chances that at least one would survive to adulthood, despite high infant mortality rates (Fildes 1986, 152-212). Thus, in the millennia before modern maternity hospitals and mass-produced commercial baby formula, an upper-class woman giving birth was often attended by a wet-nurse as well as a midwife (as is Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*). Both could - like Deborra in *Jacob and Esau* - serve as secondary legal witnesses of the event. (Which is why both are murdered in *Titus*).

Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (published in 1594 and performed by the Children of Paul's no later than 1590) contains another example of the Nurse as witness. That play's comic confusions are resolved by Vicinia, a wet-nurse, who does not appear until the play's last two scenes. Unlike Deborra, Vicinia's employment by the parents ended when she weaned their children. In the final minutes of the play, she needs to remind Memphio that she had nursed his now-adult son and to remind Stellio that she had nursed his now-adult daughter. She then confesses:

I had, at that time, two children of mine own, and, being poor, thought it better to change them than kill them. I imagined if, by device, I could thrust my children into your houses, they should be well enough brought up in their youth, and wisely provided for in their age. Nature wrought with me, and when they were weaned I sent home mine instead of yours, which hitherto you have kept tenderly, as yours. (Lyly 2010, 5.3.303-10)

Shakespeare was influenced by Lyly's comedies and might have read *Mother Bombie* before he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. But Lyly was here drawing upon the conventions of Roman comedy, and particularly of the plays of Terence, popular in humanist grammar schools.

Vicinia took the children she was wet-nursing to her own home, then returned them to their parents after they were weaned. That was a common, indeed normal, practice. But Deborra represents the alternative model, where, long after weaning a child, the nurse remained as a household servant, providing living continuity between the newborn and the young adult. This may seem implausible or unnatural to us, but “from wet-nursing through apprenticeship” sixteenth-century culture “widely employed surrogacy as the institutional model for parenting” (Paster 1993, 219). Elizabeth I quoted Saint Gregory: “We are more bound to them that bringeth us up well than to our parents, for our parents do that which is natural for them—that is, bring us into this world—but our bringers-up are a cause to make us live well in it.” This was certainly true in Elizabeth’s case: “the members of her household, not of her family, were . . . the principal influences upon her as a child and young woman” (Starkey 2001, 16). In fact, wet-nurses were often women who were already servants in the mother’s household; in early modern England the words “family” and “household” were used interchangeably, and servants, especially wet-nurses, “were also quite literally part of the family” (Campbell 1989, 363). The first spoken line of *Romeo and Juliet* promises us the story, not of two families, but of “Two households, both alike in dignity”.

Another dramatic representation of the importance of a nurse, rather than a biological family, is *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissil* (printed in 1569, and probably first performed in 1561).¹³ Grissil’s husband, testing his wife’s patience and obedience, declares that, for political reasons, he must have their new-born daughter executed. Grissil laments this decision, but decides that “This chance with patience I will sustain and bear”, then tells her husband, “My lord, the daughter is your own, with her attempt your will, / If it seem pleasant to thy heart, thy pleasure now fulfill”.¹⁴ But the Nurse intervenes, directly confronting the husband in an eleven-line speech beginning “Alas, my lord, be merciful, commit not such offence” (1097). When he dismisses her objections, she continues to argue with him in two more long speeches (1122-31, 1150-61), finally offering to take the child herself: “For I will feed and nourish her, and take her as mine own. / These breasts shall bring her up, these hands shall find her food” (1153-4). She is willing to be “clean exiled” herself, “for safeguard of thy child” (1160-1). The husband-father remains adamant, and one of his henchmen leaves with the infant, threatening to murder her; but the Nurse follows him offstage, promising, in

¹³ Wiggins 2012, #350. Wiggins argues that, because the play specifies that Grissil suckled her daughter herself, this servant is presumably “a dry-nurse”. But she may have been a supplementary wet-nurse: she offers to take the newborn and feed it with her own breasts.

¹⁴ Gildenhuis 1996, 1090-3. I cite line numbers rather than pages.

what may be an aside before her exit, "Perhaps my mournful petition / May cause him leave his sinful intention" (1172-3). During this long intervention, as the Nurse pleads for the child, the child's mother, Grissil, remains meekly and patiently silent on stage. Five scenes later, after Grissil has given birth to a second (male) child, the Nurse reappears, "*bearing the child in her arms*" (Sc. 13). Alone on stage, she cherishes the infant, noting "how prettily" it "can smile"; she joys "To dandle this sweet soul", promises "To rise early and sleep late . . . To cherish and love it", sings a long lullaby, and then promises to "lull" the "Sweet babe" and "rock" him "asleep" (1352-90). When the murderous henchman returns, threatening to murder this "brat" too, she fights to keep the child from him, but is physically overpowered; again, she pleads for the child's life, but he is not persuaded, and takes it away "to murder it in haste" (1427). Left alone on stage, the Nurse curses the "cruel father" in a long speech, and then decides to return to "poor Grissil" to comfort her and to "cry out" against the apparently infanticidal marquiss (1528-51).

What is remarkable about this theatrical incarnation of the Patient Griselda myth is that its Nurse is dramatically and conspicuously more maternal, in her care for someone else's children, in her willingness to sacrifice herself for them, than is their biological mother. Grissil's duty to acquiesce in patriarchal authority takes priority over a "natural" commitment to her children. We may regard this as a ludicrously extreme fiction, but in fact abused women still do sometimes sacrifice their children to the whims of a violent husband or boyfriend.

We have no evidence that Shakespeare had read or seen performed *Jacob and Esau*, or *Patient and Meek Grissil*, or *Mother Bombie*. Nevertheless, these plays illuminate a set of sixteenth-century cultural practices and assumptions that informed his portrayal of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. For instance, it might not have astonished early audiences or readers that the Nurse's bond with Juliet is stronger than her mother's. In all the extant early texts of Shakespeare's play, stage directions and speech-prefixes consistently identify Angelica with the generic noun "Nurse". By contrast, Juliet's birth mother is never given a personal name, and is identified in stage directions and speech prefixes with four different labels: "Wife" (most often), "Lady", "Old Lady", and "Mother". Of these, only "Mother" connects her to Juliet; "Wife" links her to her husband Capulet, "Lady" emphasizes her social status, "Old" prioritizes her age. This confusion of generic labels does not make her a more complex character, or a "bad mother" either. But the shifting labels do indicate that her relationship with Juliet is not primary or central to her identity. By contrast, "Nurse" monopolizes Angelica's identity.

When Capulet's Wife announces her husband's decision to marry Juliet to Paris "on Thursday morn", Juliet immediately and forcefully rejects the idea, asking her mother "to tell my lord and father" that "I will not marry

yet". Her mother replies, "Tell him so yourself". This might be played as brusque, sarcastic, or fearful, but it is certainly *not* supportive of Juliet. When Capulet, entering, asks his wife "Have you delivered to her our decree?", she replies, "she will none"—and then adds "I would the fool were married to her grave".¹⁵ Capulet, enraged, then threatens to "drag" his daughter "on a hurdle" to the church (in the way condemned traitors were dragged through the streets to their execution). After this outburst, his wife does say "Fie, fie, what, are you mad?" (17.157). But that does not stop Capulet; his next speech tells Juliet to marry Paris on Thursday "Or never after look me in the face" and says that his "fingers itch" (presumably to strike her). The Nurse then intervenes much more forcefully than Juliet's mother has done:

NURSE God in heaven bless her!
 You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so.
 CAPULET And why, my Lady Wisdom! Hold your tongue,
 Good Prudence. Smatter with your gossips, go!
 NURSE I speak no treason.
 CAPULET O God-i-good-e'en!
 NURSE May not one speak?
 CAPULET Peace, you mumbling fool.
 Utter your gravity o'er a gossip's bowl,
 For here we need it not.
 CAPULET'S WIFE You are too hot.
 (17.168-75)

The Nurse does not sound like a clown here. She is far more courageous and persistent than the Wife: she interrupts her abusive boss three times in a row, and explicitly blames him for berating his daughter. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Glover stood up to Capulet with "a sullen, half-checked fierceness. . . like the growl of an angry but wary dog when one attacks his mistress. Her attachment to Juliet was indeed a sort of animal instinct" (Marston 1888, 1.264). In Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film, the physically substantial Nurse (Pat Heywood) repeatedly inserts herself between a violent Capulet and his small teenage daughter, risking a beating herself to protect Juliet from one. By contrast, Juliet's mother here manages only four syllables. Capulet responds with his most violent speech (176-95), concluding that Juliet can "hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" if she disobeys him. He then exits, and Juliet turns to her mother: "O my sweet mother, cast me not away" - to which Capulet's Wife replies "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" (17.196-203). In performance, these twenty monosyllables are usually spoken "with shocking cold-

¹⁵ Shakespeare 2016, Sc. 17 (traditionally 3.5), lines 112-25.

ness”; at best, they can be given “hurriedly and distractedly as she is leaving to calm down her enraged husband” (Loehlin 2002, 202). However they are spoken, Juliet’s mother exits, pursuing a bear. Conspicuously, the Nurse does *not* exit; she remains with Juliet. Conspicuously, the Nurse does *not* command Juliet to be silent. The structure of the scene makes it clear that the Nurse is Juliet’s only remaining ally in the Capulet household. When Juliet begs the Nurse for “comfort” and “counsel”, the Nurse *does* “speak a word”. Her long reply (212-25) advises Juliet to marry Paris. That advice is rejected by Juliet and condemned by most critics as a betrayal. But no one should miss the difference in length, and tone, between the Wife’s speech and the Nurse’s speech. Fran Bennett, who played the Nurse in a 1993 production by the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company, explained that she was trying “to get [Juliet] to live in the real world” (Taylor 2005, 122). The Nurse is a servant, a subordinate: like most common women, she has had a lifetime of experience not getting her own way, having to adjust to circumstances beyond her control. And while both Juliet’s parents would rather see their daughter die than disobey them, the Nurse attempts to save Juliet’s life. Juliet’s rejection of the Nurse is, in fact, a rejection of life: her last words in the scene are “myself have power to die” (242). In her next scene, with the Friar, she grabs a knife and threatens to commit suicide then and there. She is dissuaded only when the Friar proposes an alternative solution. Before she takes the Friar’s potion, Juliet wonders whether it might kill her—but takes it anyway. When the Friar’s plan fails, in the play’s last scene, Juliet does commit suicide. The Nurse offers her life; she chooses death.

Shakespeare’s primary source for *Romeo and Juliet* does not even include the Nurse in this pivotal confrontation between Juliet, her mother, and her father. In Arthur Brooke’s *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* the Nurse does not speak to Juliet until three hundred lines after that family quarrel: after Juliet’s visit to the Friar and after Juliet returns home, apologizes to her parents, and agrees to marry Paris. “But Juliet, the whilst, her thoughts within her brest did locke”; because she has already lied to her mother, she does not think it a sin to also “bleare her nurces eye” (2288-92).¹⁶ Only then, after Juliet has apparently decided to obey her parents, does the poem give its “Nurce” a speech praising Paris. Thus, Brooke does not contrast a solicitous Nurse with a cold mother, as Shakespeare does. Brooke’s Juliet has already distanced herself from the Nurce before the Nurce comments on the arranged marriage to Paris. And Brooke’s Nurce provides a very different defense of the second marriage.

¹⁶ All references to *Romeus and Juliet* cite the text and line-numbering of the 1562 edition in Brooke 1957.

ROMEO Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the County.
(Shakespeare 2016, 17.216-17)

ROMEUS The pleasures past before, she must account as gayne,
But if he doe retorne, what then? For one she shall have twayne.
The one shall use her as his lawfull wedded wife,
In wanton love, with equal joy the other leade his lyfe.
And best shall she be sped of any townish dame,
Of husband and of paramour, to fynde her change of game.
These words and like, the nurce did speake, in hope to please,
But greatly did these wicked words the ladies mynde disease.
(Brooke 1957, 2303-10)

Shakespeare's Juliet rejects the Nurse's advice because it would involve breaking her marital vow; throughout his career, Shakespeare emphasized the sanctity of oaths and other "binding language" (Kerrigan 2016). In the play, Juliet has consummated her marriage, physically, but has done so only once. In contrast, in the poem Juliet's sexual relationship with Romeus has already lasted for months. With the salacious language of "use," "sped", and "game", Brooke's Nurce celebrates the proposed second marriage as pure sexual opportunity: at the worst, the "pleasures" of a premarital fling with Romeo followed by public marriage to Paris, but at best a permanent bigamy that offers Juliet a variety of "game", juggling "wanton love" with both husband and lover.

Shakespeare's transformation of his source in the episode where Juliet rebels against her father's determination to marry her immediately to Paris - strengthening the Nurse's emotional commitment to Juliet while weakening the relationship between mother and daughter - can also be seen earlier in that scene. In Brooke, after Tybalt's death, "The carefull mother marks" her daughter's continued sighing, weeping, sleeplessness, and lack of interest in her food and clothes; then "of her health afrayde", she speaks to Juliet, assuring her that she and her "loving father . . . love you more / Then our owne propre breth and life" (Brooke 1957, 1785-92). Juliet's answer confuses her: "The wofull mother knew not, what her daughter ment, / And loth to vex her childe by words" she leaves her in peace (1807-8). But as Juliet's condition continues to worsen, "without all measures, is" the mother's "hart tormented sore", and finally "She thought it good to tell the syre, how yll his childe did fare" (1813-15). She informs him, "If you marke our daughter well" (as she has done) he will see "That much in daunger standes her lyfe, except somme helpe we fynd" (1818, 1829):

ROMEUS For though with busy care, I have employed my wit,
And used all the ways I knew, to learne the truth of it,

Neither extremitie, ne gentle means could boote;
 She hydeth close within her brest, her secret sorrows roote.

(Brooke 1957, 1831-5)

Brooke describes a mother who knows her daughter well, notices that something is wrong, assures her of her parents' love, realizes that she is keeping a secret, and finally, in desperation, alerts her husband to the seriousness of the problem and the need for intervention. Brooke describes the actions of a mother whose attention to her daughter's welfare could hardly be bettered, then or now. But, like many mothers of teenagers, she mistakes the cause of her daughter's self-destructive behavior.

ROMEUS

And I doe beleve

The onely crop and roote of all my daughters payne,
 Is grudgeing envies faynt disease: perhaps she doth disdayne
 To see in wedlocke yoke the most part of her feeres,
 Whilst onely she unmarried, doth lose so many yerres.

(Brooke 1957, 1842-6)

She urges her husband, "take on your daughter ruth" and "Joyne her at once" in marriage to an appropriate suitor (1852-3). The mother's diagnosis is, readers know, disastrously mistaken, but it arises from her close attention to and real concern for her daughter. In Shakespeare's play, by contrast, it is the father who comes up with this solution (Sc.16, 3.4). Afterwards, following her husband's instructions, Capulet's Wife goes to tell her daughter the news. First, she unknowingly interrupts the last tender exchanges between Romeo and Juliet. Then she proceeds to berate her daughter for her weeping, apparently for Tybalt: "Some grief shows much of love, / But much of grief shows still some want of wit" (17.71-2). She curses and insults Romeo at length, promising to arrange for him to be murdered in Mantua. After this demonstration of the colossal emotional gap between mother and daughter, she announces "But now I'll tell thee joyful tidings, girl" (17.104). The tidings are, of course, anything but joyful to Juliet.

So far, I have been consistently quoting the canonical text of *Romeo and Juliet*, based on the 1599 quarto edition (Q2), which advertises itself on the title page as "Newly corrected, augmented, and amended". I have done so because that text has been the foundation of the play's modern editorial and theatrical history. But there are in fact two substantially different sixteenth-century texts of *Romeo and Juliet*. Steven Urkowitz has argued that in the 1597 quarto (Q1) Juliet, Lady Capulet, and the Nurse "generally support each other", but the 1599 text (Q2) "shows them instead as psychologically, emotionally, and even linguistically divided" (Urkowitz 2017, 185). In particular, he demonstrates that, in this scene (Sc.17; 3.5), "Q1 offers a pattern of

audience as someone who inhabits a social space between mother and nurse. The mother should want to be alone to “talk in secret” with her daughter about a profoundly intimate and life-changing matter, so she dismisses the Nurse. But almost immediately she realizes that she cannot comfortably play her maternal role without the ancillary intermediation of the nurse. When she addresses to the nurse a reference to Juliet’s age the mother allows, and indeed invokes, an issue where the nurse’s authority equals or exceeds her own.

Romeo and Juliet’s Nurse is performing a classical dramatic function when she recalls the circumstances of Juliet’s birth. “Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour” (4.12). Her precision establishes that she was physically present at the birth and remembers it well. But Shakespeare’s Nurse differs fundamentally from Vicinia, Deborra, and all their classical theatrical predecessors and early modern descendants. Juliet’s birth is never mentioned in the 3020 lines of *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. Her natal legitimacy is not an issue in the poem or the play. Instead, Juliet’s Nurse provides “the most detailed child’s biography of any character in Shakespeare” (Weis 2015, 296). But in fact her account of the birth is all about *her*: her *own* memory, her *own* life. What matters, in Shakespeare’s invented scene, is a revelation of the biography and personality of *the witness*, rather than the events being witnessed. This happens in what Barbara Everett calls “Shakespeare’s first greatly human verse speech”, which takes “Brooke’s sketch of a conventional character-type” and gives it “a dense human solidity” (130, 131).

Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
 Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls!—
 Were of an age. Well, Susan is with God,
 She was too good for me. But, as I said,
 On Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen,
 That shall she, marry, I remember it well.
 (4.18-23)

The Nurse’s dead child “Susan” is not in Shakespeare’s sources, and not necessary to the play’s plot. Lührman’s *Romeo + Juliet* omits all the Nurse’s reminiscences about her past. Indeed, the Nurse could be completely removed from this scene without affecting the tragedy’s narrative logic. Unlike the reminiscences of Deborra and Vicinia, this Nurse’s memories may not seem logically or narratively necessary. Stanley Wells has brilliantly analyzed this speech as an exemplar of “the uses of inconsequentiality” (Wells 1980). But Shakespeare’s audiences would have immediately understood the lived logic of the story this Nurse tells. She was able to nurse Juliet because she had just given birth herself, and her breasts were therefore producing milk - but her

own newborn had just died, presumably earlier that day.¹⁹ That explains her repeated emphasis on “*the hour*” of Juliet’s birth on “*Lammas Eve at night*” (my italics). She remembers the date (when both girls were born) but also the time (which separated the birth and death of Susan from the birth, shortly later, of Juliet, who is still alive).

For the Nurse, Juliet was, and has continued to be, a literal, physical, emotional replacement for Susan. I have characterized the Nurse as Juliet’s “substitute mother,” but Juliet is also the Nurse’s “substitute daughter.” The intense relationship between a newborn and its primary adult creates a mutual biological imprinting, recognized in early modern Europe as “ordained by God” (Scott 2018, 79). The Nurse’s first scene establishes that she bonded on Juliet as strongly as she would have on her own child Susan, if Susan had lived. In fact, because in a case like this the bond with the new child is connected, verbally and temporally, to the grief for a lost one, the connection to Juliet may well have been *more* powerful, for the Nurse, than the traditional mother-child bond. The rest of her speech provides further evidence for this conclusion:

’Tis since the earthquake now eleven years,
 And she was weaned – I never shall forget it –
 Of all the days of the year upon that day,
 For then I had laid wormwood to my dug,
 Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall.
 My lord and you were then at Mantua.
 (4.24-9)

It was the Nurse who raised Juliet, not her biological mother. Lord Capulet and his Lady were away – specifically in Mantua – on the day of the earthquake and the weaning. Theoretically, Juliet’s mother may have been present, physically and emotionally, every other day of Juliet’s childhood, but this is the only day we hear about, and the dramatic law of synecdoche means that we immediately take this day as typical.

When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
 Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
 To see it tetchy and fall out wi’th’ dug!
 . . .
 And since that time it is eleven years,
 For then she could stand high-lone.
 (4.31-3, 36-7)

¹⁹ Theoretically, the Nurse could have nursed both infants, and Susan could have died years later. But Susan is nowhere in the picture when Juliet was weaned, and the Nurse’s association of the two births is immediately followed by her memory of the death of Susan, a juxtaposition that encourages audiences to link them, too.

The Nurse was thus present for two key moments in Juliet's childhood: her birth and her weaning. She breast-fed Juliet for three years, an unusually long time, then as now (Fildes 1986, 352-6). Later in the scene, we learn that she was Juliet's "only nurse" (4.68), meaning that she monopolized that bond for the child's first three years. But she was also responsible for a crucial, and difficult, moment of individuation: the withdrawal of the breast, to the dismay of the child. This anticipates the moment, later in the play, when she tells Juliet that "I think it best you marry with the County" (17.217). In both cases, the most important adult in the child's world takes away something that the child wants, but cannot have. In both cases, the child responds negatively to being told "no".

The anecdote about Juliet's weaning continues, introducing the Nurse's husband:

Nay, by th'rood,
 She could have run and waddled all about,
 For even the day before she broke her brow,
 And then my husband — God be with his soul,
 A was a merry man! — took up the child.
 'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
 Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,
 Wilt thou not, Jule?' And, by my halidom,
 The pretty wretch left crying and said 'Ay'.
 (4.37-45)

Again, the Nurse associates Juliet with an important person in her own life, who has since died. Juliet is apparently all that is left of the Nurse's family: the girl is a substitute for her dead husband as well as her dead child. For Juliet, the Nurse's husband was a substitute father: he, rather than Capulet, played with Juliet as a child, comforted her physically and verbally, and had a nickname for her (used by no one else in the play). We hear about Juliet's prehistory with the Nurse's husband long before we see Juliet interact with her biological father: she and Capulet do not speak to each other until that much later scene when he violently threatens her if she disobeys him.

The Nurse's repetitive reminiscences in this scene end with her telling Juliet, "If I might live to see thee married once, / I have my wish" (4.62-3). This prompts Juliet's mother to raise the subject of marriage to Paris, a prospect that delights the Nurse. And Shakespeare gives the Nurse the last words in the scene (present in Q2 but not Q1): "Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days" (4.105). What Shakespeare's Nurse desires, in her first scene, is the happiness of her surrogate daughter, and that objective governs her actions throughout the play. Again, Shakespeare's portrait differs fundamentally from Brooke's. In the poem, Juliet uses "promest hyre" (the promise of

payment) to persuade her Nurce to keep secret her relationship with Romeo and to provide “her ayde” in communicating with him (623-30). That short transitional episode is immediately followed by the Nurce’s conversation with Romeo, arranging the wedding; their dialogue ends when Romeo gives the Nurce “vi. Crownes of gold”:

ROMEUS In seven yeres twise tolde she had not bowd so lowe,
Her crooked knees, as now they bowe, she sweares she will bestowe
Her crafty wit, her time, and all her busy payne,
To helpe him to his hoped blisse . . .

(Brooke 1957, 669-72)

She immediately returns to Juliet and gives her a complete account of her conversation with Romeo, omitting only one thing: “she forgot the taking of the golde” (692). She then encourages Juliet to marry Romeo as quickly as possible:

ROMEUS She that this morning could her mistres mynde diswade,
Is now become an Oratresse, her lady to perswade.
If any man be here, whom love hath clad with care,
To him I speake, if thou wilt spede, thy purse thou must not spare
. . .
For glittering gold is woont by kind to move the hart,
And often times a slight rewarde doth cause a more desart.
Ywritten have I red, I wot not in what booke,
There is no better way to fishe, then with a golden hooke.

(Brooke 1957, 703-6, 709-12)

Romeo has not given any money to Juliet, so the narrator is here commenting on the Nurce: she is being paid by both Romeo and Juliet, and she does not tell either of the rewards she is receiving from the other. There can be no doubt, in Brooke, of the Nurce’s mercenary motives. Shakespeare, by contrast, does not have Juliet bribe her Nurse, and her interaction with Romeo is much more ambiguous:

ROMEUS Here is for thy pains.

NURSE No, truly, sir, not a penny.

ROMEUS Go to, I say you shall.

NURSE This afternoon, sir. Well, she shall be there.

(Shakespeare 2016, 10.146-9)

In performance, Shakespeare’s Nurse almost always takes the money (comically), but none of the early texts explicitly directs her to do so. In any case, Shakespeare has the Nurse initially refuse, and he does not indicate the very large sum that Brooke specifies or indicate that Juliet has also promised her

a reward or attribute her change of heart to financial incentives.

But if Shakespeare's Nurse is not mercenary, another servant in the Capulet household is: Peter. In fact, when the Nurse refuses Romeo's money, it would be entirely in character for the clown-servant Peter to silently put out his own hand to take it.

3. Seventeenth-Century Nurses and Clowns

The first actor known to have played the role of Shakespeare's Nurse was James Nokes in the 1680 adaptation by Thomas Otway, *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*. (Otway's version continued to be revived until the 1760s). Otway shifted the play from Renaissance Verona to ancient Rome, with the quarrel between Montagues and Capulets translated into an episode of the civil wars between Marius and Sulla. The only two characters not given Roman names and identities are the Apothecary and the Nurse.

The Nurse's first appearance resembles her first scene in *Romeo and Juliet* (Sc. 4; traditionally 1.3), except that Juliet's father replaces her mother. Otway eliminated the mother completely, but he and his audiences could not dispense with the nurse. However, Otway's Nurse is not Shakespeare's, as demonstrated by the first mention of marriage in the two plays:

CAPULET'S WIFE How stands your dispositions to be married?
 JULIET It is an honour that I dream not of.
 NURSE An honour! Were not I thine only nurse
 I would say thou hadst sucked wisdom from thy teat.
 (Shakespeare 2016, 4.66-9)

METELLUS What think you then of marriage, my Lavinia?
 It was the subject that I came to treat of.
 LAVINIA It is a thing I have not dreamt of yet.
 NURSE Thing! The thing of Marriage? Were I not thy Nurse, I would swear
 thou hadst sucked thy Wisdom from thy Teat. The thing?
 (Otway 1680, C3)

Shakespeare's Nurse praises Juliet for recognizing that marriage is an honorable aspiration. Otway's Nurse, with her unsubtle repetition of the sexual slang "thing", instead belongs to Restoration comedy. This transformation fits with the casting of Nokes in the role. Professional actresses had taken over female roles since the early 1660s, and in *Caius Martius* Lavinia/Juliet was written for and performed by Elizabeth Barry, "the greatest actress of the Restoration" (Jones 2004). Opposite to the young, sensual, tragic Mrs. Barry, Nokes as the Nurse anticipates the Jim Carter/Ralph Bashford "Nurse" of *Shakespeare in Love*: a comic drag impersonation/parody of a woman by

a male clown. Nokes was London's leading comic actor from 1664 till his retirement in 1692, and by 1679 his name had become a noun: "a Nokes" was slang for "a fool" (*OED* nokes *n.*). Nokes had already played a comic Nurse seven years earlier, in Henry Nevil Payne's *The Fatal Jealousy* (1672). These transvestite roles were so successful that he acquired the nickname "Nurse Nokes" (Chernaik 2004).

Otway's revision of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* was clearly "Adapted . . . purposely for the Mouth of Mr. Nokes".²⁰ Colley Cibber wrote that Nokes "scarce ever made his first Entrance in a Play, but he was received with an involuntary Applause" and "a General Laughter, which the very sight of him provok'd" (Otway highlighted that first entrance by placing it at the start of Act 2). Cibber alerts us to the fact that the published text of a role played by Nokes underestimates the comedy of his performance, because "the ridiculous Solemnity of his Features were enough to have set a whole Bench of Bishops into a Titter". In particular, "what a copious, and distressful Harangue have I seen him make, with his Looks (while the House has been in one continued Roar, for several Minutes) before he could prevail with his Courage to speak a Word" (Cibber 1968, 83-4). It is easy to apply this account to Nokes's discovery that Lavinia/Juliet is, apparently, dead. Not surprisingly, Otway's adaptation eliminates the Nurse's most tragic moment in Shakespeare's play.

After her discovery that Juliet is, apparently, dead, she cries for help, and Juliet's mother enters—but the Nurse cannot bring herself to say the words.

CAPULET'S WIFE What noise is here?

NURSE O, lamentable day!

CAPULET'S WIFE What is the matter?

NURSE Look, look! O heavy day!

(21.45-6)

Otway's Nurse has no such difficulty communicating the news: "Your onely Daughter's dead: /As dead as a Herring, Stock-fish, or Door-nail" (Otway 1680, H4v-I1). And this is followed, three speeches later, by Nurse Nokes's final words in *Caius Marius*, alone on stage after the exit of the bereaved father:

It shall be done and done and overdone, as we are undone. And I will sigh, and cry till I am swell'd as big as a Pumkin. Nay, my poor Baby, I'll take care thou shalt not dy for nothing: for I will wash thee with my Tears, perfume thee with my Sighs, and stick a Flower in every part about thee. (Otway 1680, I1)

²⁰ Downes 1987, 62 (referring to the adaptation for Nokes of the title role in *Sir Martin Mar-All*).

The words themselves are ridiculous, and after all the other sexual innuendos in the role it is difficult *not* to put an obscene interpretation on the final phrase. Although we do not know exactly how Nokes performed this scene, Cibber gives us a clue, noting that

In the ludicrous Distresses, which by the Laws of Comedy, Folly is often involv'd in; [Nokes] sunk into such a mixture of piteous Pusillanimity, and a Consternation so rufully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you, to a Fatigue of Laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pity'd him. (Cibber 1968, 84)

Contrast Otway's text and Nokes's style with Mrs. Stirling's performance of Shakespeare's scene: "Her parrot scream when she found [Juliet] dead was horribly real and effective" (Terry 1908, 230). Edith Evans's "clumsy totter for help after finding Juliet's body" with "its accompanying jangle of speech" still "haunt[ed] the memory" of a spectator, almost thirty years later (Trewin 1964, 153). In 1919, Ellen Terry followed "a frantic shaking of the girl as she attempts to rouse her" with "a lifting of the eyelids and a great agonized cry" (Denham 1958, 90).

Some modern critics might dismiss the interpretations of this moment by Stirling (1882), Terry (1919) and Evans (1935) as sentimental. How can we know that the clowning of Nokes is less authentic than the tragic interpretations of this moment by veteran nineteenth and twentieth century actresses? Although the audience knows that Juliet is not actually dead, her parents, the Nurse, and Paris do not. Their shock and grief are real. The Nurse's reaction is given primacy, and in Adrian Noble's 1995 Royal Shakespeare Company production, the Nurse, before the others come onstage, finds and then conceals the "vial" containing the drug that Juliet had used to render herself unconscious (Loehlin 2002, 223). For the Nurse (played by Susan Brown), the vial was evidence that Juliet committed suicide — a damnable sin that would have prevented her from receiving a Christian burial, and would have made her death even more unbearable for her parents. In Noble's production, the Nurse kept this pain to herself. In all productions, neither Juliet nor the Friar gives a thought to the brutal emotional impact of their deception. And the audience knows - because the Prologue has told them - that Juliet and Romeo will die by the end of the play: both do, in fact, commit suicide. So the reactions here anticipate what we know is coming for these characters, soon enough. Indeed, it makes the play's ending even more heartbreaking, because they have to go through this trauma *twice*. For anyone who has experienced the unexpected death of a beloved child, there is nothing funny about the Nurse's response.

O woe! O woeful, woeful, woeful day!

Most lamentable day! Most woeful day
 That ever, ever, I did yet behold!
 O day, O day, O day, O hateful day.
 Never was seen so black a day as this!
 O woeful day, O woeful day!
 (21.77-82)

In Rondi Reed's "brilliant performance" as the Nurse at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in 2005, this "woeful day" speech stood out in "her achingly realistic grief" (Bourus 2005, 118). In one way, the speech recalls the repetitive style of the Nurse's first scene. There is no beautiful poetry here, no complexity of thought or feeling: just painful, obsessive, uncomprehending repetition. She tells us that Juliet's death is more unbearable than the death of her husband or her newborn infant Susan. She is stuck on the word "day", in a way that anticipates the philosopher Denise Riley's description of grief as "living in suddenly arrested time: that acute sensation of being cut off from any temporal flow that can grip you after the sudden death of your child" (Riley 2019, 13).

We do not know who played the Nurse in the 1590s, but we do know it was not the company's equivalent of Nokes. The only performer identified in early documents is Will Kemp. Kemp played Peter, a character who appears on stage with the Nurse in at least one scene (Sc. 10; 2.3), enters as she exits in another scene (Sc. 21; 4.4), and probably is the comical Capulet "Servant" who appears alongside her in Sc.4 (1.3) and Sc. 19 (4.2). As with other Kemp roles, Peter is a comic servant, but a very different *kind* of servant than the Nurse. His comedy is primarily physical and visual, and he never subordinates his theatrical identity (as Kemp, a famous clown) into a narrative identity required by the plot. In place of the stage direction "Enter Peter", the 1599 quarto has "Enter Will Kemp." The audience recognizes the performer, not the character. "Shakespeare built up the part, not around a 'characterization', or a name, or a precise household duty, but around a sequence of situations, and around on-going business with props" (Wiles 1987, 92). The stage clown was "a stand-up comic only moonlighting as an actor," and clowns like Kemp, when they appeared in plays, represented sites of contested authorship, with the autonomy of the clown in continual tension with the authority of the playwright, creating a built-in "collapse of fictional integrity" that audiences welcomed, because the clown was in some ways "an avatar of the audience" (Preiss 2014, 183, 23). Kemp was a clown. But the performer who first played the Nurse must have been what we would now call a character actor, capable of tragedy as well as comedy, but known above all for their ability to represent convincingly a fictional identity.

We can see this distinction between the servant-clown and the nurse-mother very clearly in another seventeenth-century adaptation, the

German *Romio und Julieta*, which survives in a manuscript of 1688. That text probably draws upon earlier performances and adaptations in the Germanic world, dating back to the early seventeenth century, and perhaps even to English actors touring on the continent in the 1590s. Unlike *Caius Marius*, *Romio und Julieta* keeps Capulet's Wife, but diminishes the role (for instance, omitting her from the scene that introduces Juliet and the Nurse). But it expands the role of Peter, transforming him into Pickleherring, a stock clown figure in seventeenth-century German drama (Erne and Seidler 2020). As in Shakespeare's play, both the Nurse and the clown appear in the scene where she brings news of Julieta's death to Capolet's Wife, but the German adaptation brings on the clown earlier, and expands the contrast between Nurse and Clown.

Enter Nurse

NURSE O gracious lady, what a calamity! Julieta lies dressed in her best clothes, stretched out and dead.

PICKLEHERRING That's a dirty lie! Because she's stretched out, I must go and see what the matter is with her, for I thoroughly understand stretched-out illnesses. *Exit*

CAPOLET'S WIFE Heaven preserve me! Nurse, how you frighten me!

NURSE Gracious lady, I wish it weren't as I said, but let my nose be cut off if Julieta is not dead. I know it's no joke to lie in bed fully dressed.

Enter Pickleherring

PICKLEHERRING O misery, O distress, O pity, O *mousericordia*! Julieta has died herself dead. O, horrifying news! She lies with hands and feet stretched out and is as stiff as a frozen stockfish.

(5.2.46-61)

Although the Nurse's obsession with Julieta's clothes is eccentric, "it's no joke", and she shares with Julieta's mother the grief and shock of this moment. Pickleherring first asserts his own superior judgment, suggests a prurient interest in a young woman stretched out in bed, then returns with a verbal mishmash that was almost certain to get a laugh—or, rather, a series of laughs.

Like *Romio und Julieta*, Shakespeare's play juxtaposes two comic servants in the Capulet household. But the German adaptation subordinates the Nurse to the Clown. Shakespeare did not: in Peter he incorporated Kemp's brand of anarchic populist comedy, but he subordinated it to his own capacity for comic characterization in the Nurse. But the marriage of those two kinds of comedy also enabled an element of early performances that later interpretations have not been able to reproduce. After the mourning for Juliet's apparent death, both the Nurse and Kemp/Peter disappear from the script. At the end of Brooke's poem, the Nurse "is banisht in her age" (2987-

90). Shakespeare omits this punishment. But curiously, Brooke immediately follows this final reference to the Nurse with a final reference to the servant “Peter”. Zeffirelli’s film does something similar: after the Prince’s “All are punished”, mourning characters walk toward us through an arched doorway in pairs, and one of those pairs unites the Nurse and Peter. But Shakespeare might have gone further than Zeffirelli.

In the 1590s, *Romeo and Juliet* would have been immediately followed by a jig, led by the company’s premiere writer and performer of jigs, William Kemp. David Wiles has argued that scripted roles for Kemp carved out “unfinished business” that could be satisfyingly enacted in the jig, in a way that “allows the audience to deconstruct the finale of the play”: Costard and Armado competing for Jacquenetta, Gobbo wedding his pregnant Moorish princess, Bottom dancing his Bergomask, Dogberry punishing Don John (Wiles 1987, 54-6). All these examples come from comedies, but jigs apparently followed tragedies too.

Can we imagine performances of *The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* ending with the clown-servant wooing, with music and dance, the widowed, lame, mourning nurse-mother?

What’s the play about?

Well, there’s this... Nurse.

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DELIA GAMBELLI*

The Nurse in Racine's *Phèdre*. Between Imitation and Innovation

Abstract

When attempting any mythological interpretation of Racine's tragedies, consultation of their sources is a necessity: in the case of *Phèdre* the first works to be examined must clearly be those of Euripides and Seneca. However, even a meticulously close comparative reading of the play with its Greek and Latin predecessors does not end with the identification and analysis of the variants introduced by Racine in this epitome of seventeenth-century French tragedy in relation to the works of the Anciens. The intention here is that of examining the underlying motifs and the play of signification which these variants instigate. One of the most significant elements in such an analysis here is undeniably the role of the Nurse, where Racine operates unexpected differences when compared to his models. Although he keeps the indispensable dramaturgical features already present in his sources, here the Nurse does not simply embody the function of confidante and then bad counsellor, but becomes a character in the round, with her own name, C enone, and with her own destiny. Above all it is the boundaries of her dialogue with Ph edre that change. Even allowing for the fact that in the first scene of Act I, during a sudden hesitation, the dialogue becomes a monologue, and that in the end Ph edre spurns C enone, accusing her of being a bribed courtesan and a flatterer, during most of the action their voices blend to the point of almost seeming an interior monologue. What is even more fascinating is the space dedicated to C enone's suicide and its proximity to that of Ph edre when these events are recounted by the other characters. In this way it is the figure of the Nurse which becomes the moving force of innovation when compared to the ancient versions while the inevitable fascination of these sources never slackens its hold on Racine's original project.

KEYWORDS: *Ph edre*; Racine; nurse; French drama; classical reception; tragedy

The dramatic production of seventeenth-century France always stages a challenge, motivated by the need to respond to the most difficult creative conditions possible in order to show off one's own talent. These of course were being constantly questioned during the frequent and at times violently impassioned *querelles* that studded the literary and dramatic history of the period, even before the dispute between the Ancients and the Moderns, when decreeing the superiority of one side over the other was the main thing at stake. In any case the elaboration (if not the invention) of the 'Aristotelian' rules had been carried out with the precise intention of defining the most

* Sapienza University of Rome - delia.gambelli@gmail.com

immovable obstacles and inflexible precepts that involved the respect of *vraisemblance* and of the *bienséances*, besides that of the three unities, all within an extremely rigid classification. One only has to call to mind rule of the unity of time, which fixed the duration of the play's action to fall within a more and more restricted interval, fluctuating between twenty-four and three hours.

It is not fortuitous that in the theory and practice of the poetics followed by the greatest writers of the period difficulty itself became the criterion upon which hung the success of a play. And if Molière considered it as proof of the superiority of comedy over tragedy, Racine adopts it with the purpose of succeeding in his aim to "*plaire et toucher*" and relies upon the strict observation of the rules to do so. An emblematic case in point is *Bérénice* where he achieves his ambition with a plot "made of nothing".

But with *Phèdre*¹ Racine responds to a twofold challenge: to reach the ultimate objective of tragedy, to please and to move, with a subject which is potentially capable of provoking a scandalized reaction both on the moral and on the rational front (given that the plot is centred on incestuous desire and the intervention of mythological monsters), and, an even greater difficulty, to transform the same plot into a tragedy exemplary for its representation of virtue. And all this without betraying the sources of the tale by surrendering, as did other authors (see Racine 1999, 1614), to the easy compromise of making Phaedra and Theseus betrothed but not married:

Ce que je puis assurer, c'est que je n'en ai point fait où la vertu soit plus mise en jour que dans celle-ci. Les moindres fautes y sont sévèrement punies. La seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même. Les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour de vraies faiblesses. Les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause. Et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la difformité. ("Preface", Racine 1999, 819)²

[But this I do say that I have written no play in which virtue has been more celebrated than in this one. The smallest faults are here severely punished; the mere idea of a crime is looked upon with as much horror as the crime itself; the weaknesses of those in love are treated as real weaknesses; passions are represented only to show all the disorder they occasion; and vice is everywhere painted in colours which render its deformity recognizable and hateful. (23)]

¹ Racine's play (whose original title was *Phèdre et Hippolyte*, changed in the second edition of 1687 to *Phèdre*) was staged by the Comédiens de la Troupe Royale on 1 January 1677 at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

² The translations of Racine's play are from Racine 1991.

The scrupulous observation of the original plots, almost a manifesto of poetics, is stated by Racine himself in the Preface, which immediately mentions Euripides and a few lines later, more obliquely, Seneca:³

Voici encore une Tragédie dont le sujet est pris d'Euripide. Quoique j'aie suivi une route un peu différente de celle de cet Auteur pour la conduite de l'Action, je n'ai pas laissé d'enrichir ma Pièce de tout ce qui m'a paru le plus éclatant dans la sienne . . . Hippolyte est accusé dans Euripide et dans Sénèque d'avoir en effet violé sa Belle-Mère: *Vim corpus tulit*. Mais il n'est ici accusé que d'en avoir eu le dessein . . . Je rapporte ces autorités parce que je me suis très scrupuleusement attaché à suivre la Fable. (817)

[Here is another tragedy whose subject is derived from Euripides. Although I have taken, for the conduct of the action, a path a little different from the one chosen by this author, I have not neglected to enrich my play with everything I judged most dazzling in his. . . Hippolytus is accused, in Euripides, and in Seneca, of having in fact violated his stepmother: *vim corpus tulit*. But here he is only accused of having had the intention . . . I mention these authorities because it has been my scrupulous intention to follow the Legend. (19-21)]

In point of fact a reading of his tragedy necessitates a constant comparison with Euripides' *Hippolytus* and with Seneca's *Phaedra*.⁴ In particular because, only in this way, through the variations introduced, may be discerned the concealed intentions of a text which paradoxically demonstrates that it is in the course of imitation that totally original results are produced.

This process has been brilliantly observed and documented by Francesco Orlando who shows that in this play all the possible symbolic negations typical of the "repression/repressed" model of Freudian *Verneinung* have

³ Racine's debts to Seneca are much more important than the French playwright acknowledges: the eminent scholar Ronald Tobin, one of the most distinguished authorities on Racine, has dedicated his essay, "Racine, Sénèque et l'Académie Lamoignon" (Tobin 2020, 31-42), to this matter; see also Tobin (1971), in particular 130-50. It is something alas, typical of many other playwrights, not only French ones. See in particular on this point Paduano 2020, 77: "Seneca's tragedies may be seen as an example of a glaring contradiction: no other playwright during the whole of the history of the theatre has been more greatly neglected, but not one has enjoyed a more significant historic and cultural role than he has. His work stands at the creative crossroads of modernity, and it is he who transported the repertory inherited from the Greeks . . . considered as a body of theatrical situations, to the same point". All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

⁴ Forestier specifies well-documented cases not only of borrowings from the texts of Euripides and Seneca but also from Ovid, Virgil and earlier French versions of these in "Notes et variantes" (Racine 1999, 1645-59) when discussing what he terms "imitation créatrice" and claiming "tout le génie racinien est dans l'art de l'imitation" (lii-liii).

been activated, from the reluctance of the protagonist to come on stage to the scene where Theseus invokes oblivion on the tragic myth of Phaedra (Orlando 1990). Moral scandal and rational scandal overlap one another and Theseus, although he manages to remove mythological monsters, ends up by resuscitating monsters of the mind.

In actual fact, in both Euripides and Seneca, although in very different ways, it is the figure of the Nurse that has a strategically determining function as a means of communication between Hippolytus and Phaedra. Racine's play, which seems to limit itself to simply contaminating these two versions, offers, on the contrary, significant innovations in the relationship between the protagonist and the nurse herself. In the first place it is only in Racine that the Nurse has her own name: *Enone*. A name uttered for the first time on stage by Phaedra qualified by an adjective which is not neutral and which predicts a special relationship "*chère Enone*" (1.3.153). And the choice of the name is indeed extremely suggestive. *Enone* is the name of the nymph, expert in the arts of medicine who fell in love with Paris when he was only a humble shepherd. And most importantly, she is the protagonist of Ovid's fifth epistle of the *Heroides* in which she sends a letter to Paris (one of the most elegiac letters of the collection) that immediately follows Phaedra's letter to Hippolytus. This invests the name *Enone* with a highly significant connotation both on the sentimental and on the mythological level. Any relationship between the choice of this name on Racine's part and *Heroides V* is denied by Forestier (see Racine 1999, 1643), but in my opinion it is irrefutable, especially bearing in mind that in her letter to Paris *Enone* actually mentions Theseus (whose amorous feats are recalled right at the beginning of *Phèdre*) as Helen's first abductor. A detail which was crucial to Racine as in his *Iphigénie*, the tragedy with a happy ending which precedes *Phèdre*, he presents the key character of *Ériphile* as being Theseus' and Helen's daughter.

Although the choice of her name is not commented on by Racine, the special bond between Phaedra and her nurse is, as has already been noted, immediately made clear and the intimacy between them is inevitably emphasized by the absence of handmaids and a chorus. In Euripides, Phaedra's first words are addressed generically to her maids, and in Seneca she only speaks to her nurse ("Nurse") after a long tirade on how troubled she feels and after a long reply from the Nurse herself.

Instead, in Racine the revelation to her nurse of Phaedra's shameful passion is very similar to, indeed, lifted almost word for word from the version of Euripides where it finds one of its most intense moments, beginning with the protagonist's stage entrance:

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ αἴρετέ μου δέμας, ὀρθοῦτε κάρα·
 λέλυμαι μελέων σύνδεσμα φίλων.
 λάβετ' εὐπήχεις χεῖρας, πρόπολοι.
 βαρὺ μοι κεφαλῆς ἐπίκρανον ἔχειν·
 ἄφελ', ἀμπέτασον βόστρυχον ὦμοις.

(198-202)

[PHAEDRA Uplift ye my body, mine head upraise. / Friends, faint be my limbs, and unknit be their hands. / Hold, maidens, my rounded arms and mine hands, / Ah, the coif on mine head all heavily weighs: / Take it thence till mine hair o'er my shoulders strays! (Euripides 1928)]⁵

In point of fact Racine also clearly has in mind Seneca's tragedy (where, however, the Nurse knows all about Phaedra's infatuation from the very beginning), at the point where the awnings of the palace open and the queen is revealed lying on her golden bed:

PHAEDRA Removete, famulae, purpura atque auro inlitas
 vestes, procul sit muricis Tyrii rubor,
 quae fila ramis ultimi Seres legunt:
 brevis expeditos zona constringat sinus,
 cervix monili vacua, nec niveus lapis
 deducat auris, Indici donum maris;
 odore crinis sparsus Assyrio vacet,
 sic temere iactae. Colla perfundant comae
 umerosque summos, cursibus motae citis
 ventos sequantur.

(387-97)

[PHAEDRA Away, ye slaves, with robes bedecked with purple and with gold; away, scarlet of the Tyrian shell, the webs which the far-off Seres gather from the trees. Let a narrow girdle hold in my garments' unencumbering folds, let there be no necklace at my throat, let no snowy pearls, the gift of India's ocean, weigh down my ears, and let my hair hang loose, unscented by Assyrian nard. So, tossed at random, let my locks fall down upon my neck and shoulders and moved as a swift running, stream upon the wind. (Seneca 1938)]⁶

PHÈDRE Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent !
 Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces nœuds,
 A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?

⁵ The text of Euripides' *Hippolytus* quoted throughout this article refers to this edition.

⁶ The text of Seneca's *Phaedra* quoted throughout in this article refers to this edition.

Tout m'afflige, et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire.
(1.3.158-61)

[PHAEDRA Those useless ornaments, / These veils oppress me. What officious hands / Have taken care to knot upon my head / My heavy hair? How all conspires to hurt, / Hurt and afflict me. (39)]

But as he meticulously follows the Greek and Latin plots (“... it has been my scrupulous intention to follow the Legend”), Racine discovers unimagined pathways. Starting from Phaedra’s reluctance to show herself on stage (the figure of Tragedy’s hesitation to show herself to the public) which is in Racine and only in Racine: “N’allons pas plus avant. Demeurons, chère Œnone” (1.3.153; “No further, dear Œnone! Let us stay”).

No less unmistakable is the punctiliousness with which Racine adheres to his sources when crafting dialogue. However, yet again, from the manifest evidence of imitation there springs a decided variant when compared with the previous versions. Here, and only here the dialogue exhibits a suspension of three lines. I am thinking of the beginning of the scene at the moment when the protagonist’s mind is wandering:

PHÈDRE Dieux ! Que ne suis-je assise à l’ombre des forêts!
Quand pourrai-je au travers d’une noble poussière
Suivre de l’œil un char fuyant dans la carrière?
ŒNONE Quoi, Madame?
PHÈDRE Insensée! où suis-je? et qu’ai-je dit?
Où laissé-je égarer mes vœux, et mon esprit?
(1.3.176-80)

[PHAEDRA Oh why am I not sitting in the shade / Of forests? When may I follow with my eyes / That racing chariot flying down the course / Through glorious dust? / ŒNONE Madam? / PHAEDRA Where am I? Mad? / What have I said? Where, where have I let stray / My longings, and my self-control? (41)]

The three lines, when Phaedra yearns grieving for the sight of a chariot racing through the “glorious” dust of the plain, cause a hesitation in the dialogic exchange, while assuming rather the sound and sense of a more inward lament. This is confirmed by the nurse’s reaction of surprise and incomprehension: “Quoi?”. Indeed, the protagonist herself wonders, as if waking from a stupor, where she is and what she might have said, as if returning to the subject of an interrupted conversation: “Insensée, Où suis-je et qu’ai-je dit?”. (“Where am I? Mad? / What have I said?”).

Instead, in the *Hippolytus* the Nurse follows Phaedra’s frenzied remarks logically, asks her for an explanation and is even worried that others might have heard her crazed wanderings:

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ αἰαῖ·

πῶς ἄν δροσερᾶς ἀπὸ κρηνίδος
καθαρῶν ὑδάτων πῶμ' ἄρυσαιμαν,
ὑπὸ τ' αἰγείροις ἔν τε κομήτη
λειμῶνι κλιθεῖσ' ἀναπαυσαιμαν;

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ ὦ παῖ, τί θροεῖς;

οὐ μὴ παρ' ὄχλω τάδε γηρύση
μανίας ἔποχον ῥίπτουσα λόγον;

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ πέμπετέ μ' εἰς ὄρος; εἶμι πρὸς ὕλαν

καὶ παρὰ πεύκας, ἵνα θηροφόνοι
στείβουσι κύνες
βαλιαῖς ἐλάφοις ἐγχιμπτόμεναι.
πρὸς θεῶν, ἔραμαι κυσὶ θωύξαι
καὶ παρὰ χαίταν ξανθὰν ῥίψαι
Θεσσαλὸν ὄρπακ', ἐπίλογχον ἔχουσ'
ἐν χειρὶ βέλος.

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ τί ποτ', ὦ τέκνον, τάδε κηραίνεις;

τί κυνηγεσίων καὶ σοι μελέτη;
τί δὲ κρηναίων νασμῶν ἔρασαι;
πάρα γὰρ δροσερὰ πύργους συνεχῆς
κλειτύς, ὅθεν σοι πῶμα γένοιτ' ἄν.

(208-25)

[PHAEDRA Oh but to quaff, where the spray-veil drifteth / O'er taintless fountains, the dear cool stream! Oh to lie in the mead where the soft wind lifteth / Its trees – 'neath poplars to lie and dream! / NURSE My child, my child, what is this thou hast cried? / Ah, speak not thus, with a throng at thy side, / Wild words that on wings of madness ride! / PHAEDRA Let me hence to the mountain afar – I will hie me / To the forest, the pines where the staghounds follow / Hard after the fleet dappled hinds as they fly me! / Oh, I long to cheer them with hunter's hollo, – / Ah God, were I there! – / And to grasp the Thessalian shaft steel-gleaming, / And to swing it on high by my hair outstreaming – / My golden hair! / NURSE What wouldst thou, my darling, of suchlike things? / Will naught save the hunt and the hounds content? / And why art thou yearning for fountain-springs? / Lo, nigh to thy towers is a soft-sloped bent / With streams for thy drinking dew-besprent.]

In Seneca's version, which is just as evocative, the Nurse does not even comment on Phaedra's delirious rant:

PHAEDRA Laeva se pharetrae dabit,

hastile vibret dextra Thessalicum manus.

talis severi mater Hippolyti fuit.

qualis relictis frigidi Ponti plagis

egit catervas Atticum pulsans solum

Tanaitis aut Maeotis et nodo comas
coegit emitque. lunata latus
protecta pelta: talis in silvas ferar.

(396-403)

[PHAEDRA My left hand shall be busied with the quiver and my right wield a Thessalian spear. In such guise as the dweller by Tanaïs or Maeotis, leaving cold Pontus' tract behind, led her hordes, treading Athenian soil, and, binding her locks in a knot, let them flow free, her side protected by a crescent shield; so will I betake me to the woods.]

Both in *Hippolytus* and in *Phèdre* the text dwells upon the Nurse's urgent insistence for her to be let in on the secret⁷, dictated by her sincere love for Phaedra. She calls her "my child", "my daughter", and later "my lady" and finally "my dear child" (in *Hippolytus*) or "Madame" (in *Phèdre*). At the cardinal point of this scene, at the moment the name of Hippolytus is uttered, Racine's version follows the Greek source completely:

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ τί φήεις; ἐρᾶς, ὦ τέκνον; ἀνθρώπων τίνος;

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ ὅστις ποθ' οὐτός ἐσθ', ὁ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος...

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ Ἰππόλυτον ἀυδῶς;

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ σοῦ τάδ', οὐκ ἐμοῦ κλύεις.

(350-3)

[NURSE What say'st thou? - child, thou lovest - oh, what man? / PHAEDRA What'er his name - 'tis he - the Amazon's - NURSE: Hippolytus! / PHAEDRA Thou sayest it, not I.]

ŒNONE Aimez-vous?

PHÈDRE De l'amour j'ai toutes les fureurs.

ŒNONE Pour qui ?

PHÈDRE Tu vas ouïr le comble des horreurs.

J'aime... à ce nom fatal, je tremble, je frissonne.

J'aime...

ŒNONE Qui?

⁷ In Pierre Champion's opinion this insistence is dictated above all simply by curiosity – the need to know the secret – which is in its turn the an active passion leading to the realisation of the tragic action: "C'est que sa curiosité n'est pas satisfaite par l'aveu que Phèdre lui fait ici. Cela vient du fait que, comme on l'a dit plus haut, le secret n'est pas une chose ni un fait à connaître; la curiosité n'est donc pas apaisée par la révélation de ce fait ou de cette chose. Décidément, le secret n'est rien d'autre que l'avenir lui-même, l'issue fatale de cette affaire, en tant qu'ils seront dérobés jusqu'à leur complète réalisation; la curiosité n'est donc bien que la passion active qui ne poursuit que la réalisation, activement, de l'action tragique. Celle-ci, selon la formule d'Aristote, a un début, une continuation et une fin: la curiosité est donc, en fait, la passion même du héros tragique, c'est-à-dire le principe du mouvement de la tragédie" (Champion 1991, 29).

PHÈDRE Tu connais ce Fils de l'Amazone,
Ce Prince si longtemps par moi-même opprimé.
ÆNONE Hippolyte? Grands Dieux!
PHÈDRE C'est toi qui l'as nommé.
(1.3.259-64)

[ÆNONE Are you in love? / PHAEDRA I feel / All love's wild ecstasies. / ÆNONE For whom? / PHAEDRA Now here / The crowning horror. Yes, I love - I shake... / I tremble at his very name - / I love... / ÆNONE Whom? / PHAEDRA You know him, son of the Amazon, / That Prince whom I myself have for so long / Oppressed. / ÆNONE Hippolytus! Great Gods! / PHAEDRA It's you have named him! (49-51)]

But immediately after this Ænone's behaviour changes entirely. In Euripides, after being so frightened by the confession that she wants to die, after a few lines the Nurse excuses Phaedra and encourages her to submit to her passion. In Seneca after voicing a few moralizing judgements ("Deum esse amorem turpis et vitio favens / Finxit libido . . . Quisquis secundis rebus exultat nimis / fluitque luxu, semper insolita appetit", 195-205: "'Tis base and sin-mad lust that has made love into a god . . . Whoever rejoices in overmuch prosperity and abounds in luxury is ever seeking unaccustomed joys", Seneca 1938), she gives in, sanctions the legitimacy of all love and even offers to speak to Hippolytus herself in an attempt to bend his fierce spirit and wild nature. Instead Racine's Ænone expresses her dismay in a four-line lament and then falls silent:

ÆNONE Juste Ciel! tout mon sang dans mes veines se glace.
Ô désespoir! Ô crime! Ô déplorable Race!
Voyage infortuné! Rivage malheureux,
Fallait-il approcher de tes bords dangereux?⁸
(1.3.265-8)

[ÆNONE Oh despair! Great Heavens, my blood / Now freezes in my veins! Oh cursed race! / Oh crime! Unhappy land, reached at the end / Of what ill-fated voyage! Why were we / Doomed ever to approach your dangerous shores! (51)]

Only after the announcement of Theseus' death in the following scene does Phaedra find the courage to follow her desire which will now no longer give rise to scandal: "Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire" (1.5.350; "Your love becomes an ordinary love", 57).

⁸ The action takes place at Troezen where Phaedra had come having sailed from her father Minos' kingdom of Crete. Racine is following Euripides here as Seneca places the tragedy in Athens.

Phaedra's changed status into that of an apparent widow complies with the intention to render the protagonist as free of guilt as possible thanks to the *mise-en-scène* of extremely efficacious symbolic negations and thanks also to choices regarding the plot itself.⁹ But the (false) tidings of Theseus' death provides Cœnone too with moral justification, as her encouragement also becomes, in a way, "ordinaire". In any case, in the Preface Racine himself, when mentioning the hateful calumny that will soon be launched towards Hippolytus, underlines the fact that he had indeed attributed this "underhandedness" to the nurse, but immediately finds an attenuating circumstance:

J'ai même pris soin de la [Phèdre] rendre un peu moins odieuse qu'elle n'est dans les Tragédies des Anciens, où elle se résout d'elle-même à accuser Hippolyte. J'ai cru que la Calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une Princesse, qui a d'ailleurs des sentiments si nobles et si vertueux. Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une Nourrice, qui pouvait avoir des inclinations plus serviles et *qui néanmoins n'entreprend cette fausse accusation que pour sauver la vie et l'honneur de sa Maîtresse* ("Preface", Racine 1999, 817-18, emphasis mine).

[I have even taken the trouble to make her a little less hateful than she is in the ancient versions of this tragedy, in which she herself resolves to accuse Hippolytus. I judged that calumny had about it something too base and too black to be put into the mouth of a Princess who for most of the time is only noble and virtuous. This depravity seemed to me more appropriate to the character of a nurse, whose inclinations might be supposed to be more servile, but *who, nevertheless, only takes upon herself the responsibility for this false accusation in order to save the life and honour of her mistress.* (19)]

If it is true that this moral defence which has been extended to Cœnone was dictated by the desire to present the tragedy as the most virtuous version ever written ("I do say that I have written no play in which virtue has been more celebrated than in this one"), the consequences of such a choice are myriad even if almost imperceptible, as a sort of solidarity between Cœnone and Phaedra is created and then is rendered more and more evident as the action proceeds.

In Euripides, on the contrary, the sudden distance between the two characters is striking: the Nurse, after suggesting that they have recourse to

⁹ In Seneca too Theseus is far away and Phaedra, as a partial justification, thinks that "fortis per altas invii retro lacus / vadit tenebras miles audacis proci, / solio ut revulsam regis inferni abstrahat; / pergit furoris socius, haud illum timor / pudorque tenuit"; "Through the deep shades of the pool which none recrosses he is faring, this brave recruit of a madcap suitor, that from the very throne of the infernal king he may rob and bear away his wife. He hurries on, a partner in mad folly" (93-7).

magic potions, takes it upon herself to speak to Hippolytus.

Phaedra, on hearing from outside the furious cries of Hippolytus when he hears of his stepmother's incestuous passion for him, comes into the palace to hang herself, after calling down the punishment of Zeus upon the Nurse:

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ ὦ παγκακίστη καὶ φίλων διαφθορεῦ,
 οἷ' εἰργάσω με. Ζεὺς σε γεννήτωρ ἐμὸς
 πρόρριζον ἐκτρίψειεν οὐτάσας πυρί.
 οὐκ εἶπον - οὐ σῆς προυνοησάμην φρενός; -
 σιγᾶν ἐφ' οἷσι νῦν ἐγὼ κακύνομαι;

(682-6)

[PHAEDRA Vilest of vile! destroyer of thy friends! / How hast thou ruined me!
 May Zeus my sire / Smite thee with flame, blast thee to nothingness! / Did I
 not tell thee — not divine thy purpose? / To speak not that whereby I am now
 dishonoured?]

She also leaves, on her own initiative, a written accusation that Hippolytus had raped her – a reaction to Hippolytus' frenzied outburst after the Nurse's revelation full of his injured pride and his scorn for all women – as she is sure that he will reveal everything to her father. It is the Nurse who discovers Phaedra's body after she has hanged herself and it is she who announces this to the Chorus before she disappears for ever from the stage and from the dialogue, never to be mentioned again. In Seneca too the Nurse addresses Hippolytus and not Phaedra who is absent. But here it is simply to explore his state of mind and to try – in vain – to dissuade him from leaving his bed empty and from choosing a life without marriage. Phaedra's own declaration to her stepson at the beginning is extremely ambiguous, as Hippolytus himself points out ("Ambigua voce verba perplexa iacis; / effare aperte", 639-40. "Words of doubtful meaning thou utterest with riddling lips. Speak out and plainly", 639-40); but when the situation becomes clear to him he is overcome by terror and disgust and flees, leaving his sword behind. Phaedra, at the Nurse's suggestion, then accuses him of rape (720-1)¹⁰ and exhibits as proof of this that very sword with which, when she hears of Hippolytus death, she will kill herself on stage, immediately after revealing the truth¹¹. The Nurse appears for the last time when she announces to Theseus that his wife wants to kill herself; then is never heard again.

Enone's behaviour is very different from that of her source figures in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides and the *Phaedra* of Seneca: the contact between her

¹⁰ But in point of fact Phaedra decides to accuse Hippolytus openly only when Theseus threatens to torture the Nurse if she refuses to speak (882-5).

¹¹ The self-accusations that the protagonists express publicly at the end of the play both in Seneca and in Racine attain heroic and sublime qualities.

and Phaedra, her mistress, is prolonged and above all is deepened so that the resulting effects are different.

Her advice, which here is to be distinguished for its affectionate quality, is always characterized by a strong dose of logical rationality and moral credibility and the speech uttered in scene five of the first act is a particularly good example of this. Here, once she is assured of Phaedra's new status as a widow, Cœnone exhorts her to live and to allow her passion to emanate from 'noble' motivations:

Votre fortune change et prend une autre face.
 Le Roi n'est plus, Madame, il faut prendre sa place.
 Sa mort vous laisse un Fils à qui vous devez,
 Esclave, s'il vous perd, et Roi, si vous vivez.
 Sur qui dans son malheur voulez-vous qu'il s'appuie?
 Ses larmes n'auront plus de main qui les essuie.
 Et ses cris innocents portés jusques aux Dieux,
 Iront contre sa Mère irriter ses Aïeux.
 Vivez, vous n'avez plus de reproche à vous faire.
 Votre flamme devient une flamme ordinaire.
 Thésée en expirant vient de rompre les nœuds,
 Qui faisaient tout le crime et l'horreur de vos feux.
 Hippolyte pour vous devient moins redoutable,
 Et vous pouvez le voir sans vous rendre coupable.
 Peut-être convaincu de votre aversion
 Il va donner un Chef à la sédition.
 Détrompez son erreur, fléchissez son courage.
 Roi de ces bords heureux, Trézène est son partage.
 Mais il sait que les lois donnent à votre Fils
 Les superbes Remparts que Minerve a bâtis.
 Vous avez l'un et l'autre une juste Ennemie.
 Unissez-vous tous deux pour combattre Aricie.
 (1.5.341-62)

[Your fortune changes, shows a different face. / The King is dead. My Lady, you must take / His place. His death leaves you a son, to whom / You owe yourself: slave, if he loses you; / King, if you live! / On whom do you suppose / Could he, in such misfortune, lean? No hand / Would wipe away his tears. His innocent cries, / Mounting to Heav'n will irritate the Gods, / His ancestors, against his mother. Live! / Madam, you need no more reproach yourself. / Your love becomes an ordinary love! / By Theseus' death all knots have been untied / Which made your love a horror and a crime. / You need no longer fear Hippolytus; / And you may see him now without reproach. / Perhaps, convinced you are his enemy / He means to lead the rebels. Change his mind! / Show him his error. Soften his intent. / King of these fertile shores indeed he is; / Troezen is his undoubted heritage, / But well he knows the law gives

to your son / The ramparts of Minerva's citadel. / You justly share a common enemy! / Unite! Take hands the two of you fight / Aricia. (57-9)]

She begins by reminding Phaedra that she has a mother's duty towards her son and focusses immediately on the political perspective of this duty which should guarantee the succession to the respective legitimate heirs: the throne of Athens to Phaedra's own son, whose recognition is threatened by the supporters of Aricia¹² and the throne of Troezen to Hippolytus. The implicit reference to her relationship with her stepson, no longer a guilty one after Theseus' death, becomes an exhortation to include him in the plan to fight the enemy, Aricia. The fact that she knows nothing of the love between Aricia and Hippolytus in no way diminishes the almost epic afflatus of her encouragement¹³. The reference to a happy ending even for the love story peeps through the meshes of her speech, but only briefly, veiled as it is by the insistence on cancelling guilt and excluding the term "passion" in favour of the two metaphorical images which replace it in the *pièce* "flamme" (flame) and "feux" (fires).

Not by chance Phaedra begins her proposal to Hippolytus, which is very similar to the corresponding scene in Seneca, by mentioning her own son and in this way following the nurse's heartfelt plea ("Souvenez-vous d'un Fils qui n'espère qu'en vous" 2.5.583; "Remember a Son who only hopes in you"), which had been uttered in the preceding line.

After her stepson's scandalized reaction and his flight, the nurse first of all reminds Phaedra of her political obligations:

ÆNONE Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux, digne sang de Minos,
 Dans de plus nobles soins chercher votre repos,
 Contre un Ingrat qui plaît recourir à la fuite,
 Régner, et de l'État embrasser la conduite!
 (3.1755-8)

¹² Aricia is the daughter of Pallas who together with all his sons (the Pallantids) had fought Theseus when he was nominated king of Athens by Aegeus whose adoptive son Theseus probably was. Theseus killed them all and had ordered Aricia their sister, who was his prisoner, never to marry and give birth to heirs. In this way Pallas' daughter could be considered the legitimate heiress of the throne of Athens. This opinion was shared more and more strongly by Hippolytus who was secretly in love with her.

¹³ "Par un raffinement d'ironie l'éthique dramatique de la gloire est confiée à une âme d'esclave". For Marc Fumaroli, who takes no notice of the source texts, and therefore does not notice the importance of the variants in Racine and the consequences deriving from the text's dwelling upon her death, Ænone is a mouth-piece for an extravagant idealism, a flat conformity that is simply mimicking Corneille's idiom of spiritual greatness with which she is continually tempting Phaedra (Fumaroli 1980, 195-200).

[ÆNONE Would it not be more worthy of the blood / Of Minos to find peace
in nobler cares? / Resort to flight from such a wretch's charm / Embrace the
conduct of the State and reign (93)]

Then she has recourse to advising Phaedra – who ignores her completely – to run away from this place (“Fuyez”, 763: “Fly ”); and finally reminds her of the need to preserve her dignity in the face of a refusal from such a hateful being as Hippolytus (“Que son farouche orgueil le rendait odieux! / Que Phèdre en ce moment n'avait-elle mes yeux!”; “How hateful then his savage pride appeared, / Why did you not then see him with my eyes?”, 779-80). Instead of heeding these suggestions, Phaedra asks Ænone to go to Hippolytus and try to persuade him to marry her with the offer of the throne (3.1) – thus adopting a strategy more typical of her servant than of a “noble” Princess. More and more evidently the behaviour of the two women is becoming similar, almost as if Phaedra and Ænone are embodying two instances of the inner attitude of a single character.

The return of Theseus once again disrupts the parameters of the tragedy and intensifies Phaedra's guilty conscience, which is now redoubled by the inevitable shame. Driven by an utterly pitiless self-analysis of her situation, she gives voice to her most devastating monologue, a sort of lucid nightmare during which it seems to her that even the walls and the archways of the palace are only waiting for the arrival of Theseus to accuse her. Faced with her charge's unbearable anguish, Ænone suggests to her not only to accuse Hippolytus, although at the same time she appears to have keen scruples against this, but she proposes to carry out the delivery of the calumny herself instead of Phaedra:

ÆNONE Mon zèle n'a besoin que de votre silence.
Tremblante comme vous j'en sens quelques remords.
Vous me verriez plus prompte à affronter mille morts.
Mais puisque je vous perds sans ce triste remède,
Votre vie est pour moi d'un prix à qui tout cède
(3.3.894-8)

[ÆNONE I would have you do nothing but keep quiet! / My passionate devotion to you needs / Nothing from you but silence. I, like you, / Am trembling, and indeed I feel remorse. / You'd see, I'd rather face a thousand deaths: / But since, without this bitter remedy, / I'd lose you, and to me your life outweighs / All else, I'll speak (105-7)]

However, it cannot be ignored that when Ænone passes on the damning accusation to Theseus the text manages to “cover up” this action, the lowest of all, by putting the two characters on stage after the calumny has been delivered, when the nurse has already shown Hippolytus' sword to his father

and is now justifying the fact that Phaedra has kept silent:

ŒNONE Phèdre mourait, Seigneur, et sa main meurtrière
Éteignait de ses yeux l'innocente lumière.
J'ai vu lever le bras, j'ai couru la sauver.
Moi seule à votre amour j'ai su la conserver
(4.1.1017-20)

[ŒNONE She would have died, my Lord. / By her own murderous hand the innocent / Light was to be extinguished from her eyes. / I saw her raise her arm. I ran to help. / Alone I saved her for your Majesty. (117)]

It cannot be denied that her words lend themselves to a double reading and are on the verge of being hypocritical. In this way they echo Phaedra's mindset and there is a sort of oscillation between two voices as Phaedra herself had implicitly and premeditatedly condoned the accusation with remarks which were just as ambiguous:

PHÈDRE Je ne mérite plus ces doux empressements . . .
Indigne de vous plaire, et de vous approcher,
Je ne dois désormais songer qu'à me cacher.
(3.4.916; 919-20)

[PHAEDRA To me, unworthy now to bear [the words of such a gentle greeting] . . . Unfit / To please— or even to approach you now— / I must seek only where to hide myself. (109)]

Her plea to Theseus to save his son as she does not want to feel responsible for its horror is just as equivocal:

PHÈDRE S'il en est temps encore, épargnez votre Race.
Respectez votre sang, j'ose vous en prier.
Sauvez-moi de l'horreur de l'entendre crier.
Ne me préparez point la douleur éternelle
De l'avoir fait répandre à la main paternelle.
(4.4.170-4)

[PHAEDRA Oh, if there still is time, spare your own child. / Have mercy on your race and blood I pray. / Save me the horror of the sound of that / Blood crying from the ground. Do not prepare / For me the everlasting misery / Of having caused his father's hand to shed it. (131)]

But here the insistence on the personal pronoun (“Sauvez-moi . . . Ne me préparez”) signals the beginning of the process of unmasking the truth. In the next monologue Phaedra herself, as she emphasizes her distance from her nurse's initiative (“Je volais toute entière au secours de son Fils: / Et m'arrachant des bras d' Œnone épouvantée / Je cédaï au remords dont

j'étais tourmentée", 4.5.1196-8; "I flew here / With one intent - to save his son - when I / Tore off the frightened grasp of poor Cœnone / And yielded to my torments of remorse", 133), is a testimony of the strength of the guilt to which she was about to yield. This feeling - and the resulting action - was frustrated however, as the use of the imperfect shows, as soon as Theseus informed her of the love of Hippolytus for the imprisoned princess Aricia ("Ah douleur non encore éprouvée!", 4.6.1225; "Oh grief yet unfelt") tidings as shocking to her as they were unbearable. Now, the prey of raging jealousy, she goes as far even to imagine obtaining a severe punishment from Theseus for her rival. But it is precisely in the scene where she reveals the name of Aricia to Cœnone (the name is first uttered by Phaedra and then echoed by the nurse) that their special bond is broken for ever, just as it was first forged when the name of Hippolytus rang in a room in the palace. And just as she did in the first meeting with her nurse Phaedra isolates herself in delirious monologue (a very long one as it is dictated by jealousy, the fiercest passion in Racinian theatre) that this time explicitly foresees Cœnone's involvement:

PHÈDRE Non, je ne puis souffrir un bonheur qui m'outrage,
 Cœnone. Prends pitié de ma jalouse rage.
 Il faut perdre Aricie. Il faut de mon Époux
 Contre un sang odieux réveiller le courroux
 Qu'il ne se borne pas à des peines légères.
 Le crime de la Sœur passe celui des Frères.
 Dans mes jaloux transports je le veux implorer.

(4.6.1257-63)

[PHAEDRA Oh no! / I cannot bear their happiness, Cœnone. / It is an insult to me, drives me mad. / Pity my jealousy! Aricia / Must be destroyed. My husband's former wrath / Against a hateful stock must be revived. / Nor must he stop at a light punishment. / Her guilt surpasses all her brothers' guilt. / I will implore him in my jealous rage. (139)]

But Phaedra now suddenly awakes from this "jealous rage" into a state of desperate amazement ("Que fais-je? Où ma raison se va-t-elle égarer?" 1264: "What am I doing? My mind has lost its way", 139), analogous to that she experienced at the end of her first delirious outburst during the first act ("Insensée! où suis-je? et qu'ai-je dit? Où laissé-je égarer mes vœux et mon esprit?"; "Where am I? Mad? / What have I said? Where, where have I let stray / My longings, and my self-control?", 41). Here Phaedra's self-awareness and her guilty conscience reach their acme and simultaneously her innate and impotent *virtù* is revealed. In point of fact Phaedra would soon have confessed her lies had she not been devastated by the news of the love between Hippolytus and Aricia. Besides, as soon as she had recovered from that unbearable pain, a pain she had never experienced before, she

had hurried to reveal the truth. And it is just at this point that Œnone's behaviour, for the first (and last) time conforms to her conventional role as (evil) counsellor, by adopting arguments similar to those of the Nurses in Euripides and Seneca. Without delay she advises Phaedra to give herself up to her passion despite the fact that it is adulterous and incestuous. But Phaedra, confronted by her nurse's final attempt to distract her attention from the thought of death, rejects her, after cursing her for trying to stop her from killing herself, for meeting Hippolytus and for endorsing her calumny, and finally dubs her "monster". This is indeed a keyword of the tragedy, that Phaedra first attributes to her stepbrother, the Minotaur and then – in a moral sense – to herself, to Hippolytus who has repudiated her and lastly to her nurse (thus evoking yet another trait they have in common, this time inspired by contempt). Phaedra then leaves the stage and her nurse, in the space of a distich (just long enough to complain of her charge's ingratitude and to recognise sarcastically that she had asked for it), is left alone on the stage, perhaps as a tribute to her last appearance.

However, to repair the peculiar effect of assimilation between the two characters there intervenes at this point an event which is completely absent in the Greek and Latin versions of the play: Œnone's death. The text, in this manner, furnishes her not only with a name but also with a destiny. It is Panope, one of Phaedra's handmaids who announces her death and she even gives details of this: Œnone commits suicide, by throwing herself off high rocks into the sea. The nurse has made a choice which is rare in ancient drama and which is thus quite surprising, unless a reference could be found to the words of Seneca's Phaedra where, in her first exchange with the Nurse, she considers three possible ways of committing suicide:

Decreta mors est: quaeritur fati genus.
 laqueone vitam finiam an ferro incubem?
 an missa praeceps arce Palladia cadam?
 (258-60)

[I am resolved on death; I seek but the manner of my fate. With the noose shall I end my life, or fall upon the sword? or shall I leap headlong from Pallas' citadel?]

But whatever the reasons are for this choice, her death sanctions the possibility of a degree of assimilation between the actions of the two female figures as they are both suicides. And all the more so when after sending Œnone away (4.6), Phaedra disappears from the stage, to reappear only at the end of the final scene, already moribund after taking poison brought to her from Athens by her cousin Medea.¹⁴ Just as in Seneca, her words now

¹⁴ After escaping from the rage of the people of Corinth after she had killed their

sound clear, transparent, as she unequivocally admits her guilt. Contrary to the case in Seneca, however, her last words involve Œnone and violently accuse her of a great deal of the blame. These words are worlds apart from her first ones to her nurse “chère Œnone” (repeated again at the moment when she tells her about the love between Hippolytus and Aricia: “Chère Œnone, sais-tu ce que je viens d’apprendre?”, 4.6.1214; “Dear Nurse, do you know what I have just learned?”, 133). However, the undeniable importance of the presence to whom she dedicates seven whole lines of the twenty-three of her final speech, returns us to their timid inclination to mingle and correspond:

Le Ciel mit dans mon sein une flamme funeste.
 La détestable Œnone a conduit tout le reste.
 Elle a craint qu’Hippolyte instruit de ma fureur
 Ne découvrit un feu qui lui faisait horreur.
 La Perfide abusant de ma faiblesse extrême
 S’est hâtée à vos yeux de l’accuser lui-même.
 (5.7.1625-30)

[Heaven in my heart kindled the fatal flame / Detestable Œnone did the rest.
 / She must have feared that he, Hippolytus, / Knowing my madness might
 reveal my love / Which he refused with horror. So she took / Perfidious
 advantage of my state / Of deathly weakness and made haste to you / To
 accuse him first. (167-9)]

Phaedra goes on to announce her decision to poison herself, a death which is slower and implicitly more painful, and compares this with the alternatives, the sword (the choice of Seneca’s protagonist) and above all Œnone’s choice which she judges too easy because so quick. In this way, although she demonstrates that the means of suicide are different she creates yet another link between their destinies as she comments on the nurse’s death by drowning while her own is actually happening:

Elle s’en est punie, et fuyant mon courroux
 A cherché dans les flots un supplice trop doux.
 Le fer aurait déjà tranché ma destinée.
 Mais je laissais gémir la Vertu soupçonnée.

king, his daughter and her own children, Medea had been taken in by Aegeus, king of Athens. Here she had tried to poison Theseus. She was the cousin of both Ariadne and Phaedra as Pasiphae their mother and Aeëtes, Medea’s father, were the children of Helios (the sun). But in this case the evocation of her name is rather to be linked to Corneille’s tragedy *Médée* (1635), the first and only tragedy in which its author openly defends the autonomy of art as regards religious ethics almost boasting of the play’s many ‘evil’ characters. This opinion was later reversed by Corneille. See below.

J'ai voulu, devant vous exposant mes remords,
 Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez les Morts.
 J'ai pris, j'ai fait couler dans mes brûlantes veines
 Un poison que Médée apporta dans Athènes¹⁵.
 Déjà jusqu'à mon cœur le venin parvenu
 Dans ce cœur expirant jette un froid inconnu,
 Déjà je ne vois plus qu'à travers un nuage
 Et le Ciel, et l'Époux que ma présence outrage.
 Et la Mort à mes yeux déroband la clarté
 Rend au jour, qu'ils souillaient, toute sa pureté.
 (5.7.1631-44)

[She soon / Punished herself, and, seeking to escape / My wrath, she sought
 and found beneath the waves / A far too gentle execution. / By now the
 sword would have cut short my life, / But that would have left virtue crying
 out / For justice. I resolved to tell you first / All my remorse, and by a slower
 path / Descend to death. Wait. I have taken / And through all my burning
 veins now runs / A poison brought to Athens by Medea. / Already has the
 venom reached my heart; / This dying heart is filled with - icy cold! / Already
 only through a mist I see / The Heavens and the husband unto whom / My
 presence is an outrage. Death removes / The light from eyes which have
 defiled it, so - / restores to daylight all its purity. (169)]

But Phaedra is not alone in granting herself an unexpected place in *Œnone's* death and especially in juxtaposing their suicides so that they almost overlap. Panope's and Theseus' words on the subject are no less surprising. When Panope tells the king about *Œnone's* suicide she prefaces the news with a mention of Phaedra's deadly pallor:

PANOPE Un mortel désespoir sur son visage est peint.
 La pâleur de la mort est déjà sur son teint.
 Déjà de sa présence avec honte chassée
 Dans la profonde mer *Œnone* s'est lancée.
 On ne sait pas d'où part ce dessein furieux.
 Et les flots pour jamais l'ont ravie à nos yeux.
 (5.5.1463-8)

[PANOPE Mortal despair is painted on her face / Death's pallor is already on
 her, Sire! / *Œnone*, driven from her sight in shame, / Has thrown herself into
 the deep sea. Why? / No one knows why she did a thing so mad, / But now
 the waves hide her from us forever. (155)]

¹⁵ In this way we have come full circle: with the reference to Corneille's *Médée*, Racinian tragedy of which *Phèdre* is a mirror and an allegory, sanctions its own abdication before Christian morality and meditates on its own suicide (Fumaroli 1980, in particular 184 and 198-1).

Theseus' exclamation is even more significant. In a single line he accommodates the two destinies: "Ô Ciel! Œnone est morte, et Phèdre veut mourir?" (5.5.1480): "Oh Heaven! / Œnone dead, and Phaedra bent on death!" (157). Thus the treatment reserved for their end insinuates a sort of equalizing movement just before the epilogue. The foregrounding of Œnone's death is even more evident if the final comments made by Panope and Theseus are considered. Phaedra's death is the subject of only two alexandrines, one and a half of which simply express the hope that the memory of Phaedra may be lost:

PANOPE Elle expire, Seigneur.
 THÉSÉE D'une action si noire
 Que ne peut avec elle expirer la mémoire!
 (5.7.1645-6)

[PANOPE She's dying, my Lord! / THESEUS I wish the memory / Of her black deed could perish so with her. (169)]

Finally another element retrospectively lends a strongly dramatic contour to Œnone's death. During the first long dialogue with Phaedra, faced with the protagonist's obstinate decision to die, the nurse had prophesied her own end with extreme precision about its time and manner:

PHÈDRE Je meurs, pour ne point faire un aveu si funeste.
 ŒNONE Mourez donc, et gardez un silence inhumain.
 Mais pour fermer vos yeux cherchez une autre main.
 Quoiqu'il vous reste à peine une faible lumière,
 Mon âme chez les morts descendra la première.
 Mille chemins ouverts y conduisent toujours
 Et ma juste douleur choisira les plus courts.
 (1.3.226-32)

[PHAEDRA I die - to keep the fatal words unsaid. / ŒNONE Die then and keep a silence so inhuman! / Seek some other hand to close your eyes. / Although only a feeble ray of life / Remains with you, yet sure I will forestall / Your voyage to the dead and get there first. / Always a thousand paths are open to us, / And my righteous grief shall show me how / To find the shortest cut! (45)]

And the allusion to her own death returns time and again in Œnone's words: when she links it indissolubly with her mistress's eventual end at the beginning of the already mentioned tirade following the news of the death of Theseus ("Madame, je cessais de vous presser de vivre. / Déjà même au tombeau je songeais à vous suivre", 1.5.337-8; "Madame, I ceased to urge that you should live; / I thought to follow you into the grave ", 57). And when she

plans the calumny and affirms: "Tremblante comme vous j'en sens quelques remords. / Vous me verriez plus prompte à affronter mille morts" (3.3.895; "I, like you, / Am trembling, and indeed I feel remorse. / You'd see, I'd rather face a thousand deaths", 107) – this last declaration expanding the image of her own death almost to infinity.

In a dramaturgic strategy – according to a paradigm that belongs to all the masterpieces of the century of the Sun King – founded on the rigorous coherence that underlies every scene, every line and requires that everything down to the smallest detail must be necessary, motivated and motivating, the fact that the text lingers upon Œnone's death and the way in which it comes about cannot be taken as fortuitous. Neither can this be true of the insistence in the alexandrines cited above, on the "flots, on the waves of the sea into which Œnone's body disappears - Panope: "Dans la profonde mer Œnone s'est lancée . . . Et *les flots* pour jamais l'ont ravie à nos yeux" ("Œnone . . . / Has thrown herself into the deep sea . . . : And now *the waves* hide her from us forever"); Phèdre: ". . . A cherché *dans les flots* un supplice trop doux" ("she sought and found beneath the waves / A far too gentle execution") (*italics mine*). By throwing herself into the sea the nurse effects a distancing of herself from the shore, even if only symbolically, also because the waves that submerge her do not allow the distance to be calculated.

Œnone had mentioned that shore herself, as soon as she had been informed of the cause of Phaedra's misery, as she deprecated their unlucky voyage and their approach to Troezen, the place where her mistress's incestuous passion had its origin: "Voyage infortuné! Rivage malheureux . . .". The very term "rivage" (shore) returns in the last scene, when Theseus, who is still ignorant of the truth, at the news of the death of his son tells Phaedra of his decision to leave. This is a fascinating allusion, especially as the two couplets express the same close connection between their misfortunes and those shores that Œnone regrets ever having approached, and from which Theseus is eager to depart.

Laissez-moi, loin de vous, et loin de ce Rivage
De mon Fils déchiré fuir la sanglante image.
(5.7.1605-6)

[Let me, far from this shore, and far from you / Escape the image of my mangled son. (167)]

The escape planned by Theseus is the last example of the desire to get away which appears in the text with surprising frequency. This is the desire which most defines Hippolytus; his actions always derive from attempts to break away or to cut and run and are caused by different situations. But these bids for freedom are always foiled or given up and therefore unsuccessful

in saving him from his fate in Troezen. From this point of view the incipit of the play, his announcement that he is planning to leave immediately, is emblematic:

HIPPOLYTE Le dessein en est pris, je pars, cher Théràmène,
Et quitte le séjour de l'aimable Trézène.

(1.1.1-2)

[My mind's made up. I go, dear Theramenes: / I can no longer stay in beautiful / Troezen (27)]

This decision is repeated once again at the end of the first scene: "Théràmène, je pars, et vais chercher mon Père" (1.1.138; "Theramenes, I go to find my father", 37).

The announcement of departure becomes an actual leitmotif for him and it is reiterated in the second act with a certain indecision between two routes: either towards foreign shores to seek for his father, which becomes more urgent after his stepmother's confession ("Théràmène, fuyons"), or towards Athens ("Partons", 2.6.717, 735) to put Aricia on the throne as he thinks she is the legitimate heir, whereas the Athenians are choosing Phaedra's son to be their king.

The return of Theseus tangles the threads of the plot, but it does not change Hippolytus' plan. He gives his father two reasons for this and with the first he only makes a mysterious reference to Phaedra ("Phèdre peut seule expliquer ce mystère", 3.5.922; "Only she, Phaedra, can solve this mystery", 109). The second reason he gives refers to his need to emulate his father's heroic deeds and struggle with monsters, supposing there are any left.

In the following act it is his father who, after listening to CEnone's accusation, orders him three times to get from out of his sight so that he may avoid a punishment he has inflicted many times to other scoundrels:

THÉSÉE Fuis, Traître . . . Fuis . . .

Fuis, dis-je, et sans retour précipitant tes pas . . .

(421053, 1059, 1064)

[Fly, traitor! . . . Fly . . . Fly, I say fly! Without a backward look, / With steps precipitate" (121)]

Hippolytus' final attempt to flee is in the fifth act and presents another change of destination that this time involves Aricia. The young man asks her to leave with him for Argos and Sparta to search for allies to defend themselves and support them, stopping only at the temple on the outside the city gates to celebrate their marriage.

But death awaits him on the shore through the fault of his beloved horses, either because they had been frightened by a sea monster (an irrational

and unreal cause) or, they were unaccustomed to obey the voice of this Hippolytus, in love and no longer interested disciplining in them (a rational and real alternative). His body is thrown from the chariot, tangled in the reins and dragged to the ground where the rocks tear him limb from limb.

In the case of Hippolytus, the failed departure is clearly linked to respect for the 'Aristotelian' rule of the unity of place. The main factor of Racine's theatre is precisely his rigorous observance of all the current rules. Their application, however, has the aim of representing the tragic condition of the characters and foregrounding their powerlessness to control their fate by means of a web of semantic and symbolic instances of overdetermination. To take one example: the unity of place stages the failure of any plan to leave places with a sinister, ominous atmosphere and in this way to save oneself from the catastrophe¹⁶. Even though the event is only mentioned briefly, and cannot be considered as an exception to the rule of unity of place, Œnone's deliberate "departure" from the shore makes her the only character who appears on stage (Theseus is away in the first two acts and *returns* to Troezen) who at least manages to separate herself from the boundaries of the staged space: and in this way to reaffirm the complexity of her enigmatic figure – not only because the text lingers on her suicide.

What makes Œnone a key character in the deep strategies of the tragedy is that diverse linguistic and lexical elements are involved here. Let us consider for example the lexeme "bords", almost a "commonplace" that may indicate many places geographically far away or near at hand (countries where Theramenes searches for Theseus, the coast of Troezen, the shores of the island where Ariadne was abandoned and where she died, the beaches of Crete, or even the world of the dead), and in doing so emphasizes in contrast the constriction of the unity of place. The lexeme is repeated by all the characters (Theramenes, Hippolytus, Phaedra, Œnone, Ismene, Aricia). It is only Theseus who, as we have seen, prefers the synonym "rivage" (shore). Phaedra, who only chooses to use "rivage" once, uses "bords" (borders) four times, and three of these are in her meeting with Hippolytus, once, here, alluding to the underworld. In this last acceptance, and only in this, Ismene and Aricia use it too when wondering what has happened to Theseus. Of particular interest, then, is the case of Œnone, who uses the lexeme twice to indicate the same place but with a profound difference in connotation between the two occurrences. The first time she uses "bords" it is in the anguished and despairing context of a couplet quoted several times above ("Voyage infortuné! Rivage malheureux, / Fallait-il approcher de tes bords dangereux?"), and that now, in the light of these observations, acquires

¹⁶ See on this subject Francesco Orlando's exceptional essay: "Su tre versi dell' *Andromaque*" (Orlando 1983, 115-32).

an extraordinary poetic strength: for the presence of both the lexemes mentioned (“bords”, “rivage”), all the more because they are preceded by the term “voyage” which best of all others signifies displacement, and therefore predicts the tragic interweaving of the threads of the plot, founded on either the impossibility or the fatal postponement of a journey (for Phaedra towards death, for Hippolytus towards salvation, for Theseus as far removed as possible from the image of the mangled body of his son).

The second and final appearance of the lexeme uttered by CEnone takes on a euphoric connotation when it is met with in the long and heartfelt speech during the fifth scene of the first act, already quoted and commented on above. This is an extremely articulate speech, during which CEnone, after she has emphasized the radical change that Theseus death brings to the situation, envisages the possibility of Phaedra’s union with Hippolytus:

Hippolyte pour vous devient moins redoutable,
 Et vous pouvez le voir sans vous rendre coupable.
 Peut-être, convaincu de votre aversion,
 Il va donner un Chef à la sédition:
 Détrompez son erreur, fléchissez son courage.
 Roi de ces bords heureux, Trézène est son partage.
 (1.5.353-8)

At this point the phrase containing “bords heureux” is particularly significant as it totally contradicts the “bords dangereux” of a few scenes back. It skews the discourse completely from the premonitory wish never to have alighted at Troezen and triggers a metamorphosis of the image of a menacing coastline into a place of perfection, that represents the frontiers protecting the vision of a passion that is by now innocent, having become indeed the condition and the guarantee of peace and harmony between two families and two kingdoms. In this way it suggests, with great coherence, a dramaturgical system reaching a happy ending, contrary to the one prescribed.

Of no less interest is Phaedra’s use of “bords”. The first time she uses the word to evoke the death of her sister Ariadne, the second time she means to describe her attempts to send Hippolytus away in the hope of forgetting him and the third has the function of confirming to her stepson the fact that his father is dead. But the fourth and last time, the most suggestive, “rewinds” the action, turning back time and creating another story which elects Hippolytus instead of Theseus as the hero and begins on the coast of Crete:

Pourquoi trop jeune encore ne pûtes-vous alors
 Entrer dans le Vaisseau qui le mit sur nos bords?

Par vous aurait péri le Monstre de la Crête
Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite.
. . . C'est moi, Prince, c'est moi, dont l'utile secours
Vous eût du Labyrinthe enseigné les détours.
Que de soins m'eût coûtés cette Tête charmante!
Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre Amante.
Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher,
Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher,
Et Phèdre au Labyrinthe avec vous descendue,
Se serait avec vous retrouvée, ou perdue.
(2.5.647-50 and 655-62)

[Oh why were you too young to have embarked / Within the ship that brought him to our shores? / You would have been the monster's killer then, / in spite of all the windings of his maze. / . . . And I it would have been, Prince, I, whose aid / Had taught you all the Labyrinth's crooked ways. / Oh, how I should have cared for this dear head! / A single thread would not have been enough / To satisfy your lover's fears for you. / I would myself have wished to lead the way, / and share the perils you were bound to face. / Phaedra, into the Labyrinth, with you / would have descended, and with you returned / To safety, or with you have perished. (83-5)]

Examined closely both CEnone's long speech and, although in a less obvious way, Phaedra's too, both express the dream of weaving another web, of telling, and being in, another story. A story in which the frontier between incestuous passion and "ordinary flame" is signalled by a variable factor: the presence or absence of Theseus, at the arrival in Crete and then at Troezen after the news of his death. In the very same way, once again, the figure of CEnone and her relationship with the protagonist shows up as an extraordinarily innovative moment in Racine's creativity.

At the same time, the light shed by the words of these two characters on clandestine plotlines for the story allows unpredictable associations with fragments of distant enigmas to surface, enigmas which had never been resolved before. Even in Greek and Latin tragedy similar examples may be glimpsed, not in the remarks of the Nurses (whose advice is always unreliable, vague and generic) but in what the protagonists say.

The first compelling words that Phaedra utters to the Nurse in Euripides come to mind (in a scene closely adhered to, as already observed above, both by Seneca and by Racine). Here Phaedra mentally transports herself to another landscape, where she has another role: one of the most seductive moments of the tragedy, with the image of the huntress whose long blond hair is streaming back in the wind:

ΦΑΙΔΡΑ πέμπτετέ μ' εἰς ὄρος: εἶμι πρὸς ὕλαν

καὶ παρὰ πεύκας, ἵνα θηροφόνοι
 στειβουσι κύνες
 βαλιαῖς ἐλάφοις ἐγχιρμιπτόμεναι.
 πρὸς θεῶν, ἔραμαι κυσὶ θωύξαι
 καὶ παρὰ χαίταν ξανθὰν ρίψαι
 Θεσσαλὸν ὄρπακ', ἐπίλογχον ἔχουσ'
 ἐν χειρὶ βέλος.
 (215-22)

[Let me hence to mountain afar — I will hie me / To the forest, the pines
 where the stag-hounds follow / Hard after the fleet dappled hinds as they fly
 me! / Oh, I long to cheer them with hunter's hollo, — / Ah God, were I there!
 — / And to grasp the Thessalian shaft steel-gleaming, / And to swing it on
 high by my hair outstreaming — / My golden hair!]

Again, the echo of the final ominous words pronounced Phaedra in Seneca, which evoke the eternal lasting of passion in another story and above all in another place – beyond the world of the living: “Non licuit animos iungere, at certe licet / iunxisse fata” (1183-4; “It was not ours to be joined in life, but surely 'tis ours to be joined in death”): a harsh cry and at the same time a challenge that remains indelibly stamped within the labyrinth of a text and of a mind (Paduano 2020, 87). (For the spectator Racine, perfect scholar both of Greek and Latin, and not for him alone, a further special effect could be posited. As if on the stage of the Hôtel de Bourgogne the words of Phaedra and Cœnone are accompanied here and there by a background whisper of ancient voices hymning the fascination exerted by the unquenchable flame).

It is not fortuitous that both for *Phèdre* and for the Senecan Fedra Guido Paduano's enlightening reading of the *Hippolytus* is extremely pertinent. Paduano considers Euripides' play as

one of the masterpieces of great literature in which the transgressive propensity is most clearly articulated: thanks above all to a paradoxical result of the very rigidity of the process of censorship . . . the tribute that desire pays here to the ethical norm is really a Trojan horse . . . the figures of euphemism, reticence, aposiopesis avert, of course, the contents of the instinctual drive, but at the same time they attract on to themselves an ominous and fascinating attention. (2000, 7-8)

The Trojan horse, besides a seductive if gloomy fascination, provides an imaginary way of escape which seems to challenge the prescribed frontiers of tragedy. Not only to intensify passion, but also and perhaps principally, to finally reveal, beyond commiseration, the unspeakable desire to absolve the protagonist from all guilt and to bear witness to her genuine, primordial innocence, pitilessly undermined by the caprices of the gods, by the ghost of

predestination and by the hazards of the human condition for which in any case Phaedra herself (as do her forerunners) claims full responsibility.

We may be sure that for Racine the theatre will never be the same as it was before *Phèdre*.¹⁷ Almost as if, as he advanced along already beaten tracks which however had never been properly explored, he had vaguely perceived in the myth of Phaedra other frontiers regarding the relationship between text and world, between the ghosts inhabiting the silence and the shadows of the stage.

Certainly it is a well-known fact that immediately after *Phèdre* Racine together with Boileau received from Louis XIV the position of court historiographer and therefore the duty to follow him in his military campaigns. But such a sudden and drastic abandonment of his theatrical writing, at least of secular plays could be seen to have its roots in the belated realization that his play had frustrated his desire to bring the theatre closer to his Jansenist masters and to all the other detractors of (his) theatre, as it blatantly contradicted the claim, formulated in his "Préface", to write the most virtuous of tragedies¹⁸. Until he made his *Phèdre* into something unexpected, disconcerting, even monstrous.

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¹⁷ Rather like what was supposed about Corneille's *Œdipe* (see Gambelli 2013, 238-9).

¹⁸ On this matter see Tobin 2020, 229-40. Marc Fumaroli's hypothesis that Racine, as he had always been aware that his art was 'criminal', had planned his symbolic and public "suicide" to coincide with that of his protagonist and had already thought of this at the same time as he chose the subject, although it is fascinating and full of intriguing insights does not seem to me to be acceptable (Fumaroli 1980). Apart from the fact that were this true the "Préface" would be an example of incredible hypocrisy, the possibility appears more plausible to me, and more in keeping with the destiny of every authentic literary masterpiece, that the original project had been invalidated, even only in part, by the intentions, never totally controllable, of the text itself.

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FRANCESCO PUCCIO*

In the Shadow of Phaedra. The Nurse on Stage between Euripides, Seneca and Marina Cvetaeva

Abstract

In Euripides' *Crowned Hippolytus*, a tragedy in which Phaedra does not openly declare her feelings for Theseus' son, allowing herself to be consumed by pain, the protagonist, in a close dialogue with the Nurse, asks what the essence of love is for humans (τί τοῦθ' ὃ δὴ λέγουσιν ἀνθρώπους ἐρᾶν, 347). And the answer seems almost a prophecy anticipating what is to come (ἥδιστον, ὦ παῖ, ταῦτόν ἀλγεινόν θ' ἄμα, 348; a very pleasant thing, daughter, but which is painful at the same time).¹ Only in a second moment, Phaedra will really confide in her, pushing her, under the illusion that this could be useful, to break the promise not to tell Hippolytus anything. Thus, in Euripides' text, the Nurse assumes an essential dramaturgical role, as it happens in Seneca's *Phaedra* in which, however, the heroine, having put aside her silence, seeks an immediate remedy for her lovesickness by means of a revealing word. Also in this case the Nurse, far from being an ancillary character, plays a key role: although she does not reveal directly to Hippolytus that her stepmother is in love with him, since it will be Phaedra herself who will confess the truth to her beloved, she will become her accomplice in deceiving Theseus with the story of a rape that never happened. The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the character of the Nurse, both linguistically and scenically, in Euripides' *Crowned Hippolytus*, Seneca's *Phaedra* and, in the perspective of the story's reception on the modern stage, in Marina Cvetaeva's *Phaedra* (1928). The Russian poetess shows a Phaedra not unlike the classical models, mad with love, who nevertheless does not want to admit that she loves Hippolytus. But, what is particularly interesting in this tragedy, is the character of the Nurse who tries, through Phaedra's passion, to experience those emotions that life denied her in youth, dividing herself between love for the queen and hatred for Hippolytus.

KEYWORDS: Nurse; Euripides' *Crowned Hippolytus*; Seneca's *Phaedra*; Cvetaeva's *Phaedra*; ancient drama

1. A Non-Protagonist, but not Secondary Character

The history of the Attic tragic theatre is full of characters – servants, messengers, guards – who, even though cannot be defined as protagonists in

¹ All translations in this essay are mine.

* University of Padua - francesco.puccio@unipd.it

the strict sense of the word, take on an essential role in the unfolding of the events and mechanisms that contribute to the construction of the plots. Far from being faded sidekicks of the heroes and heroines of the myth, whose fixity of action sometimes tends to place them in a form of immense loneliness, projecting them in a mode of thought and action without real contradictions, they often adopt a variety of behaviours. This aspect makes them, both from the dramaturgical point of view and from the scenic one, equally interesting for the spectator and, we like to imagine, also for the actor who had lent them his body and voice. In this category it is possible to include the character of the Nurse, whose archetype recalls Homeric Eurycleia, the woman bought by Laertes as a slave so that the baby Odysseus could be entrusted to her care and to the milk of her breast. She will represent for some of her specific traits, in fact, a model for the subsequent characterisations.²

The old nurse becomes, thus, the indirect protagonist of the second part of the nineteenth book of the *Odyssey*, when during the washing of the for-eigner's feet who in disguise has come to Ithaca, she recognises the master Odysseus from an old scar still clearly visible in his thigh:

τὴν δ' ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἔλε φρένα, τῷ δέ οἱ ὄσσε
 δακρυόφιν πλήσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή.
 ἀψαμένη δὲ γενείου Ὀδυσσῆα προσέειπεν·
 ἦ μάλ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ἔσσι, φίλον τέκος· οὐδέ σ' ἐγὼ γε
 πρὶν ἔγνω, πρὶν πάντα ἄνακτ' ἐμὸν ἀμφαφάσθαι.
 (471-5)

[Joy and sorrow, at the same time, took possession of her heart, her eyes filled with tears, her voice failed. After touching the chin of Odysseus, she said: "You are Odysseus, my beloved son; I did not recognise you, my lord, before I touched you in every part."]

In a number of tragic texts, albeit with different meanings and in contexts not always overlapping, such as Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, in which the old nurse gives advice to a Deianira who is increasingly unsure of her husband's love, or Euripides' *Medea*, *Andromache* and *Hippolytus*, the Nurse appears as a decisive character, often able to modify and

² The character of Eurycleia is closely connected with the events of the house of Odysseus since the beginning of the poem, as evidenced by the episode in which Telemachus, revealing a certain intimacy with the Nurse, asks her to prepare twelve amphorae of wine in view of the journey that he is going to make to Sparta and Pylos in search of news of his father (*Od.* 2.349-70). For a reflection on the character of the Nurse from the *Odyssey* to the tragedies of Seneca, see Castagna 2009. More generally, on the concept of 'realism' characterising this scene of Odysseus' recognition by Eurycleia, thanks to the scar on the hero's thigh, see Auerbach 2000, 3-29.

condition the events characterising the relationships on the stage.³ However, if we imagine that, among the tragic texts, we can identify a sort of gradual level of participation of our character in the events of the protagonists, it is precisely *Hippolytus* that represents an exemplary reference, since it is in this play that the Nurse triggers a series of determining scenic mechanisms in the overall architecture.⁴

In *Hippolytus*, a tragedy in which Phaedra does not openly declare her feelings for Theseus' son, allowing herself to be consumed by grief, the protagonist, in a close dialogue with the Nurse, asks what the essence of love is for humans. And the answer seems almost like a prophecy anticipating what will happen next:

ΦΑ. τί τοῦθ' ὃ δὴ λέγουσιν ἀνθρώπους ἐρᾶν;
 ΝΡ. ἡδιστον, ὦ παῖ, ταῦτόν ἀλγεινόν θ' ἄμα.
 (347-8)

[PHAEDRA What is it, then, that humans call love? NURSE A very sweet thing, daughter, but which can be painful at the same time.]

It is only later that Phaedra really confides in her, prompting her, under the illusion that it will help, to break the promise not to reveal anything to

³ In *Coephoroi*, the woman who remembers having brought up Orestes as a son delivered to her by his mother (μητρόθεν), limits herself to carrying out the orders of the Chorus so that everything turns out for the best (*Ch.* 767-82); in *Trachiniai*, her task seems to be reduced rather to that of a handmaid who uses a long *rhesis* in which she expounds the steps that led Deianira, victim of an incurable grief for having caused the death of Heracles, to kill herself (*Tr.* 899-946); also in *Medea*, because of the exceptional dramaturgical stature of the protagonist her role assumes a minor weight (*Med.* 185-203), while perhaps it is in *Andromache* that the Nurse is placed in a dialectical position equal to her lady Hermione (*Andr.* 866-78).

⁴ The Nurse of Euripides' *Hippolytus* constitutes one of the most significant cases, within the entire tragic production, of that bond of confidence existing between a wet nurse and the infant entrusted to her care, to the point of being made explicit also on a linguistic level with the distinction between τροφός and μαῖα, as Arata 2009, 936-7, rightly points out: "The relationship of confidence that is established over time between nurse and cared-for child is manifested by this word felt in etymological connection with μητήρ: μαῖα, in fact, in many cases where it means wet nurse, appears in dialogic contexts. Thus it must have a special meaning, an affectionate connotation that a stranger cannot afford: both in *Od.* 2.349ff. and in 19.16ff. when Homer has to refer to Eurycleia, he does not call her μαῖα, but τροφός, which must have sounded more official, denoting her social *status* without adding a note of tenderness". In *Hippolytus* the two terms are used in different contexts: if the Chorus addresses the Nurse using the term τροφός (*Hipp.* 267), Phaedra, on two other occasions when the torment that devours her has reached a certain intensity (*Hipp.* 243, 311), chooses instead the term μαῖα, as if to emphasise the need to establish with the old nurse a relationship of exclusive affection in which she can find refuge and protection.

Hippolytus. Thus, in Euripides' text, the Nurse embodies an essential dramaturgical function, as it also happens in Seneca's *Phaedra*; in which, however, the heroine, having put aside her silence, seeks an immediate remedy for her lovesickness by means of a revealing word. In this case too, the woman, far from being an ancillary character, plays a key role, giving a decisive impulse to the unfolding of the story: although she does not reveal directly to Hippolytus that the stepmother is in love with him, since it will be Phaedra herself who will confess the truth to her beloved, she will nevertheless become her accomplice in deceiving Theseus with the story of a rape that never took place.⁵

The aim of this paper is, therefore, an enquiry into the character of the Nurse on a linguistic and scenic level in Euripides' *Hippolytus*,⁶ in Seneca's *Phaedra* and, in a perspective of the reception of the story on the modern stage,⁷ in Marina Cvetaeva's twentieth-century *Phaedra*. The Russian poetess depicts a Phaedra who only partly recalls the classical models. Although enveloped in the spiral of a desperate passion, she has never been a mother – she had no children with Theseus – nor has she ever acted as a stepmother to Hippolytus. She is above all a young woman, alone, far from homeland, who has never been able to share her marriage with an older husband, constantly engaged in an enterprise to be carried out in some remote corner of the world, and who suddenly discovers, at the first sight of Hippolytus, the strength and beauty of love as an absolute, yet innocent, pure feeling. And

⁵ Even in Racine's famous rewriting of the story in 1677, it is the Nurse who accuses Hippolytus with the silent complicity of her lady, choosing a perspective that the author himself explains in the preface to the tragedy as a dramaturgical necessity that could, from his point of view, make the character more credible: "J'ai cru que la calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une princesse qui a d'ailleurs des sentiments si nobles et si vertueux. Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une nourrice, qui pouvait avoir des inclinations plus serviles, et qui néanmoins n'entreprend cette fausse accusation que pour sauver la vie et l'honneur de sa maîtresse" ("I thought that there was something too low and too black in the slander to put it in the mouth of a princess who has such noble and virtuous feelings. This baseness seemed to me more appropriate to a nurse, who could have more servile inclinations, and who nevertheless only undertakes this false accusation to save the life and honour of her mistress"), Racine 1995, 30.

⁶ For an investigation into the role of the Nurse as an autonomous character, yet strongly interrelated with the others who act in the drama, and characterised by a relevant scenic and linguistic specificity within Euripides' text, see: Calvani 1966, 71-94; Blitgen 1969, 85-6; Turato 1976, 159-83; Mendes De Castro 1983, 79-88; Paduano 1984, 45-66; Martina 1988-1989, 87-132; Deforest 1989, 71-6, who even suggests that the Nurse might be Aphrodite in disguise.

⁷ For an account of the reception of Phaedra's story beyond the specific character of the Nurse, see, among the numerous studies, the most recent ones: Burian 1997, 228-83; Mayer 2002; Degl'Innocenti Pierini et al. 2007; Rubino 2008.

a further reason for interest in this tragedy is the character of the Nurse, a woman who tries to experience, through the passion of her lady, those emotions that life denied her in youth, torn between love for the queen and hatred for Hippolytus.

2. The Character of the Nurse in Euripides' *Crowned Hippolytus*

The story of the *Crowned Hippolytus*, so defined thanks to the precious scenic indication in l. 73 in which the character appears adorned with a crown (πλεκτὸν στέφανον), is set in Troezen, where Theseus had been sent into exile for a year because of the murder of Pallas' sons. This version followed, in 428 BC, the unfortunate staging of an earlier *Veiled Hippolytus*,⁸ censored by the Athenian audience because of Phaedra's explicit revelation of her pathological passion to her stepson.⁹ The tragedy opens with a prologue recited by the goddess Aphrodite, who recounts the offence that Theseus' son had caused her by refusing her, since the guy, in the name of a form of religious fanaticism that had turned into a real *hybris*, preferred to honour Artemis and spend his time hunting in the woods, in constant pursuit of an ideal of purity irreconcilable with the world of Cyprus.¹⁰

Anticipating the plot of the events that will unfold on the stage and stirred by the desire to take revenge on the too chaste Hippolytus, the goddess introduces the main characters to the audience and almost highlights

⁸ See, in this regard, Méridier 1973, 13 (f.n. 2): "The first *Hippolytus* . . . bears the title of καλυπτόμενος from Pollux, *Onom.* 9, 50 and Stobaeus 12, 10, of κατακαλυπτόμενος from the *scholia* to l. 10 of Theocritus' idyll II. These epithets must be attributed to grammarians or actors rather than to poets. In spite of the discussions and the sometimes strange hypotheses which they have given rise to, their meaning does not seem doubtful. Στεφανίας and στεφανηφόρος allude to the crown which Hippolytus offers to Artemis in the preserved drama (l.73 ff.)".

⁹ A circumstance that seems to come from a passage in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (*Ra.* 1043-4), in which, in the famous underworld dispute between Aeschylus and Euripides, the old poet reproaches the younger tragedian that only a woman as depraved as Phaedra could have acted in such an improper way on stage: Ἄλλ' οὐ μὰ Δί' οὐ Φαίδρας ἐποίουν πόρνας οὐδὲ Σθενεβοίας, / οὐδ' οἶδ' οὐδεὶς ἦντιν' ἐρώσαν πώποτ' ἐποίησα γυναῖκα ("But, for God, I have never made whores like Phaedra and Stheneboea, no one has ever seen a woman in love written by me").

¹⁰ Hippolytus' continued rejection of the adult world and the condition of virility that pertains to it, embodied in his non-acceptance of Aphrodite, conveys his insistence on remaining in the adolescent sphere, with all that this entails, such as lingering over hunting practices and wanting to dangerously expand the perimeter of an age now over. In this regard, see Zeitlin 1985, 52-111. On the nature of the feeling of purity animating Hippolytus' behaviour, see also Segal 1970, 278-99. By the same author, on Seneca's *Phaedra*, see also 1986.

Phaedra's substantial otherness to the disaster that is about to befall. It is by divine will, therefore, that the queen has been struck by the insane love for her stepson, described by Aphrodite as a yearning lived in silence and beware of revelation:

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

[The wretch suffers, tormented by the stings of Eros, wearing herself out in silence, with no one in the royal palace knowing the cause of her illness.]

We can almost imagine, with a sort of paradox that leads us to reflect on the outcome of the story itself, that without the Nurse's intervention – and in the absence of her revelatory function played by the incautious confession made to Hippolytus, in the deceptive illusion that this would not have provoked fatal consequences, but a peaceful resolution of the matter – Euripides' Phaedra would perhaps not have triggered any tragic mechanism and would have preserved for herself, in the intimate and silent pain of a soliloquy, the most atrocious of sufferings.¹¹

It is only later, in fact, when the queen confides in the Nurse, that the real dramatic action begins. She declares what is really happening to her and shows a degree of upheaval that cannot be resolved by the interlocutor's arguments, however inspired by the common sense and the lived experience, exemplified in the generic maxim uttered in 207, according to which it is inevitable that humans suffer (μοχθεῖν δὲ βροτοῖσιν ἀνάγκη). In this way, the Cretan queen shows all her emotional exposure to the pain of love, the vulnerability of a soul in turmoil reverberating, at the same time and not less strongly, in the restlessness of a worn-out and exhausted body.¹²

There is no doubt that Phaedra dominates the scene until the end of the second episode, while waiting for Hippolytus, whose essential characteristics

¹¹ It is the whole dramaturgical system of the four main characters, namely Phaedra, Nurse, Hippolytus and Theseus, that is built on the dialectical relationship between the word and the silence, so that the choice of one is opposed to the use of the other, according to a skilful balance that well organises the scenic tension. See, in this regard, for a reflection on the role of the Nurse, rather than on her scenic autonomy, Knox 1952, 3-31.

¹² The Nurse's behaviour seems to recall, both physically and verbally, the persuasive mode of pleading, as Longo 1989, 57, appropriately observes: "Phaedra reveals herself to the Nurse because the Nurse uses a coercive practice, both verbal and gestural, a practice which for the Greeks possessed an exceptional coercive force: supplication. The Nurse forces Phaedra to speak by means of the ritualised gesture of the supplicant: she bends at her feet, grasps her hand, hugs her knees".

are preliminarily defined, to come to life as a crucial character, around whom the substance of the tragic story can be built, but it is the Nurse who has the task of leading the game and moving the threads of the drama. From a strictly scenic point of view, her desire to push Phaedra to confess, clearly emerges from the need to establish a physical relationship with her, to translate the zeal of a faithful servant into a familiar and immediate contact, capable of cancelling the distances of age and, above all, of social condition, so as to place the two women, both the young and irrational queen and the more adult and prudent nurse, on the same level of discussion.¹³ And even though Phaedra seems almost to perceive all this as a prevarication, a subterranean forcing, she is unable to reject the Nurse and to escape her insistent demands, to the point that the supplicant's hand,¹⁴ becoming as it were sacred, cannot be expelled or removed, nor is it possible to find a form of conciliation or an alternative resolution:

ΦΑ. τί δρᾶις; βιάζηι, χειρὸς ἔξαρτωμένη;
 ΝΡ. καὶ σῶν γε γονάτων, κού μεθήσομαί ποτε.
 ΦΑ. κάκ' ὦ τάλαινά σοι τάδ', εἰ πεύσηι, κακά.
 ΝΡ. μειζρον γὰρ ἢ σου μὴ τυχεῖν τί μοι κακόν;
 ΦΑ. ὄλῃι. τὸ μέντοι πρᾶγμα' ἔμοι τιμὴν φέρει.
 ΝΡ. κάπειτα κρύπτεις, χρήσθ' ἰκνουμένης ἔμοῦ;
 ΦΑ. ἐκ τῶν γὰρ αἰσχυρῶν ἐσθλὰ μηχανώμεθα.
 ΝΡ. οὐκουν λέγουσα τιμιωτέρα φανῆι;
 ΦΑ. ἄπελθε πρὸς θεῶν δεξιάν τ' ἐμὴν μέθεις.
 ΝΡ. οὐ δῆτ', ἐπεὶ μοι δῶρον οὐ δίδως ὃ χρῆν.
 ΦΑ. δώσω· σέβας γὰρ χειρὸς αἰδοῦμαι τὸ σόν.
 (325-35)

[PHAEDRA What are you doing? You're hurting me if you shake my hand. NURSE My knees too, and I won't leave you. PHAEDRA Bad for you too, unfortunate one, bad if you learn of these things. NURSE What evil would be greater for me than not being able to persuade you? PHAEDRA You will die of it. Yet this situation brings me honour. NURSE And so you hide it, while begging for your own good? PHAEDRA I intend to make good out of this shameful affair. NURSE Then speaking, would you not appear more noble? PHAEDRA Go away, by the gods, and leave my hand. NURSE No, since you haven't given me the necessary gift. PHAEDRA I will. I have respect, indeed, for your suppliant hand.]

¹³ For an analysis of the character of the Nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, in the perspective of a re-evaluation of a non-marginal role going beyond the boundaries of the simple confidant, see Grillone 1972-1973, 67-88.

¹⁴ On the meaning of the pleading as a ritual expression of reciprocity regarding a universally recognised value, see Gould 1973, 74-103.

The Nurse, incarnation of a world that cannot understand the origin and meaning of certain extreme passions, typical of heroes and heroines – animated by the sympathy and the conviction that any action dictated by the intemperance is doomed to failure, as it will happen to Hippolytus himself – tries to lead her lady on a much more conventional path, hoping that this will dispose her mind to a calm reasoning, governed by the common sense and the experience of life. Her attempt to use the supplicant's linguistic and gestural code to undermine her lady's reluctance gets the required effect. Phaedra, therefore, tormented not only by Hippolytus' desire but also by the Nurse's prayers, gives in and reveals the origin of the evil:¹⁵

Δέσποιν', ἐμοί τοι συμφορὰ μὲν ἀρτίως
 ἢ σὴ παρέσχε δεινὸν ἐξαίφνης φόβον·
 νῦν δ' ἐννοοῦμαι φαῦλος οὖσα, κὰν βροτοῖς
 αἰ δεύτεραί πως φροντίδες σοφώτεραι.
 οὐ γὰρ περισσὸν οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἔξω λόγου
 πέπονθας, ὄργαι δ' ἐς σ' ἀπέσκηψαν θεᾶς.
 ἐρᾶις (τί τοῦτο θαῦμα;) σὺν πολλοῖς βροτῶν·
 κᾶπειτ' ἔρωτος οὐνεκα ψυχὴν ὀλεῖς;
 οὐ τᾶρα λύει τοῖς ἐρώσι τῶν πέλας,
 ὅσοι τε μέλλουσ', εἰ θανεῖν αὐτοῦς χρεῶν.
 (433-42)

[My lady, a little while ago, your condition suddenly gave me a terrible sense of fear. Now I understand that I am a poor woman, and I realise that, for mortals, thinking things over allows us to understand them more clearly. You have not suffered any extraordinary or strange situation: the wrath of a goddess has fallen upon you. You are in love, why should you be surprised? After all, it is a condition you share with many human beings. Don't you want to die for love? It would certainly be an interesting fact if those who love someone now were to die later!]

When she hears the name of Theseus' young son as the object of desire the Nurse is shocked, but she does not really understand the agony hidden in Phaedra, nor can she share a heroic gesture that would lead to an extreme outcome. So, in response to the lady's intention to kill herself, she tries to counteract a maternal instinct of protection, as if she were still a child, and

¹⁵ On the dramaturgical dialectic between humble and powerful characters in Euripides' early tragedies, see Grillone 1979, 124-9. For a reflection on the reevaluation of this typology of characters in Euripides' production, see Brandt 1973. Moreover, as Daitz 1971, 217-26, observes with regard to the concept of freedom and slavery in *Hecuba*, Euripides tried several times in his texts to stimulate the spectator to a less partial and prejudiced reading of people's moral qualities, placing them in a framework that did not take into account the social condition they belonged to.

appeals to an expedient that, besides avoiding a scandal, might force the reluctant Hippolytus to yield: a love potion. Phaedra accepts, but perhaps understands, or at least perceives, that this is not a magic potion; only an indirect attempt at confession:

ΦΑ. πότερα δὲ χριστὸν ἢ ποτὸν τὸ φάρμακον;
 ΤΡ. οὐκ οἶδ'· ὀνάσθαι, μὴ μαθεῖν βούλου, τέκνον.
 ΦΑ. δέδοιχ' ὅπως μοι μὴ λίαν φανῆις σοφή.
 ΤΡ. πάντ' ἄν φοβηθεῖς ἴσθι· δευμαίνεις δὲ τί;
 (516-19)

[PHAEDRA Is this medicine for spreading or drinking? NURSE I don't know. Don't want to know, my daughter, but think about taking advantage of it. PHAEDRA I'm afraid you're too clever. NURSE Then you should fear everything. But what are you afraid of?]

Although Phaedra is urged to speak and to accept her condition as a “love-sick woman”, in the distinction between what can also be revealed to men and what can only be communicated within a female context, she has actually used a relative, partial word, invoking a silence that comes to life within a system in which role and environment show a clear distinction. The tragedy thus highlights with greater clarity, from this moment onwards, the two opposing conceptions that animate the scene: on the one hand Phaedra, with the violent image of a subjection to the force of existence that ends up suppressing the dimension of spirituality; on the other one Hippolytus, with corporeality's rejection through the exaltation of an isolation that, similarly, brings no benefit to those who are its staunch supporters.

The Nurse, therefore, in the name of an immediate action that translates on a real level, not only a verbal one, the opportunity of a final solution to the suffering of her beloved lady, runs away in search of Hippolytus.¹⁶ The revelation of the woman, who now presents herself in the guise of a procuress, takes place in the backstage area, as if it were not to be heard directly by the spectator and by the addressee of the confession himself, still immersed in the presumed innocence of an Edenic and guiltless world. But the reaction of Hippolytus, on whose knees the woman throws herself, as she had done with Phaedra, although with a different motivation, is equally violent and full of disgust at the words he has been forced to hear, to the point that the devotee of Artemis would like to immerse his ears in a mirror

¹⁶ The Nurse proves to be expert in using differentiated rhetorical and gestural techniques and, as Longo 1989, 58, notes again: “To protect herself from the possible consequences of this revelation, just as with Phaedra she had resorted to the expedient of the coercive entreaty to make her speak, the fearsome maid resorted with Hippolytus to another form of coercion, the binding oath, in order to silence him”.

of pure spring water:

ὥς καὶ σύ γ' ἡμῖν πατρός, ὃ κακὸν κάρρα,
 λέκτρων ἀθίκτων ἦλθες ἐς συναλλαγάς·
 ἀγὼ ῥυτοῖς νασμοῖσιν ἐξομόρξομαι,
 ἐς ὧτα κλύζων. πῶς ἂν οὖν εἶην κακός,
 ὃς οὐδ' ἀκούσας τοιάδ' ἀγνεύειν δοκῶ;
 (651-5)

[And you, cursed one, have come to offer me my father's inviolable bed! I will purify myself with running waters, pouring them on my ears. How could I be so impious, I who believe I am defiled merely by hearing such words?]

The guy flees the city indignantly, promising to return only when his father will come back, although he is bitterly aware that nothing will allow him to recover his lost innocence, since the shameful and guilty word, now revealed, can no longer be forgotten.

As the Nurse's word, in fact, has managed to give physicality to the evil until it became real, vivid and tangible, so the absence of the word would have represented the only possible antidote to the disease, the only real *pharmakon* to be taken, in spite of alleged filters and deceptive potions. But the power of madness imposed by Aphrodite at the beginning of the story is more effective than that of silence: forced to resort to other remedies, Phaedra tries to exercise her virtue: but this expedient is ineffective too.

In order to regain her lost honour, she has no choice but to kill herself, but not before devising a plan of revenge against Hippolytus: in a letter to be delivered to Theseus after her death, the guy is accused by the stepmother of having inflicted violence on her. For her suicide, Phaedra will choose a noose tied around the neck, unlike Hippolytus' sword used in Seneca's drama, almost metaphorically sanctioning the desire for an eternal union. At the end, Artemis appears on stage as *dea ex machina*, revealing the truth to Theseus and, with the attribution to Hippolytus of great honours (τιμὰς μεγίστας) to be celebrated at Troezen, the tragedy ends as it began: with the epiphany of a divinity, although this time it is not Aphrodite, but a goddess opposed to her.

3. The Nurse in Seneca's *Phaedra*: a *mens bona* Vainly Struggling against the Madness of Love

In the Latin reception of the story there are some rather significant changes in the overall composition, and the Nurse herself takes on a different function from the Greek model. Actually, in the tragedy which Seneca chooses to set in Athens, Phaedra is in love with her stepson Hippolytus; recalling elements

already found in Euripides, he refuses the love of women in favour of hunting and life in the woods. Despite the Nurse's initial attempts to dissuade her, Phaedra decides to confess her love to the guy, but Hippolytus, horrified, flees the palace. The queen then wants to take revenge and, when Theseus returns from his venture into the underworld with Pirithous, she tells him in a lie that Hippolytus has tried to rape her.

Enraged, Theseus curses his son, tearing his body to pieces in a horrible death. As soon as Hippolytus' body is brought back to the palace, Phaedra confesses her crime to Theseus and kills herself. The old king has no choice but to mourn his fate and reassemble the body of his son, after ordering the servants to throw Phaedra's into a pit.

The tragedy, which opened with the song of Hippolytus inviting his companions to hunt, ends, in a sort of metaphorical contrast, with the frantic search for his remains, to which the servants are called as if he was an animal killed in a hunting context. Diana's faithful "husband" becomes the object of the search; his beauty, trampled by the outrage of the dispersal of his limbs, is shattered before the belligerence of love. The painful end of the guy thus demonstrates the unpredictable ways of fate, which, because of a divine injustice, grants its gifts with a blind hand, favouring the worst and letting innocence be overcome by arbitrariness.

In comparison with Euripides' text, Seneca gives Oenone, the Nurse – who appears very early on the stage – a role almost equal to that of her lady. It is as if the ancillary condition of which she is the bearer *kata physin*, should not represent an obstacle to the affirmation of certain general principles on the danger of an extreme passion and its consequences, but a privileged perspective from which to observe the intricate tangle of the human soul and, from there, to dispense useful advice.¹⁷ She is therefore the driving force of the dramaturgical mechanism, revealing herself to be an acute and sincere observer, endowed with a lucid and pragmatic intelligence, devoid of tearful excesses and useless *pathos*, even when she calls for help the citizens of Athens so that they may take part in Hippolytus' violent act ("Adeste, Athenae! Fida famulorum manus, / fer opem", 725-6; "Hurry, citizens of Athens! Trusted host of servants, bring us help").

In this way the dialogue between the two women takes on the usual mode of a contrast between two antithetical visions in Seneca's dramas: the first one, embodied in this case by Phaedra, which has the aspects proper

¹⁷ On the relationship between Phaedra and her Nurse, see Heldmann 1968, 88-117. For a specific reflection on the dramaturgical aspects of Seneca's *Phaedra*, which is appropriately considered a text rich in multiple theatrical perspectives that can be followed during its staging, given the particular evidence of the visual aspects characterising it, see Albini 1985, 133-9. For an overall reading on the representability of Seneca's plays, see Sutton 1986.

to *furor* and is consumed in a *dolor* without resolution, almost a monster that progressively feeds on the body in which it dwells (“alitur et crescit malum / et ardet intus”, 101-2; “evil feeds and grows, and burns within”); the second one, embodied instead by the Nurse, which is expressed through the moral light of a *mens bona* guided by an all-human *ratio*, but able to spot misfortunes and beware of them:

Thesea coniunx, clara progenies Iovis,
 nefanda casto pectore exturba ocus,
 extingue flammam neve te dirae spei
 praebe obsequentem: quisquis in primo obstitit
 pepulitque amorem, tutus ac victor fuit;
 qui blandiendo dulce nutrit malum,
 sero recusat ferre quod subiit iugum.
 Nec me fugit, quam durus et veri insolens
 ad recta flecti regius nolit tumor,
 quemcumque dederit exitum casus feram:
 fortem facit vicina libertas senem.
 (129-39)

[Wife of Theseus, bright race of Jupiter, pluck from your pure heart all wickedness, extinguish the flames and do not show yourself a follower of a cursed hope. Whoever from the beginning opposed it and drove away the passion, was safe and victorious; whoever nourished that evil by gently flattering it, later refuses to bear the yoke to which he submitted. Nor does it escape me how the royal pride, intransigent and contemptuous of truth, does not want to be bent to righteousness. Whatever the outcome of the case may be, I will endure it: the near freedom makes the old strong.]

Seneca chooses to stage a situation of an already broken silence, eliminating the description of Phaedra’s silent torment of love and the whole part relating to the long, painful revelation to the Nurse of the true reason for that incurable illness, which assumes such importance in the elaboration of Euripides’ tragedy. If in the first scene of *Hippolytus* we see Phaedra’s torment, lacerated by the almost impossible choice between words and silence, in Seneca’s drama the queen reveals from the outset, in addition to the hatred for her own condition of suffering, inherited from the ancient sins of a mother protagonist of extreme nefariousness, the tormented, obscene love possessing her.

She is a woman who complains about Theseus’ absence and infidelities, ready to justify her *furor amoris* as the effect of a family perversion, since the same wild desire felt by the mother Pasiphae resurfaces as an inherited guilt. If there is a dilemma in her between speech and silence, it seems to have already been resolved in favour of speech, which ends up losing that

sacredness with which it had been covered in the Greek drama. From the beginning, *Phaedra* shows, in fact, this kind of awareness which, in her explanation, relates to the destiny of a perverted love, inherent in the lineage and already manifest in the house:

Quae memoras scio
 vera esse, nutrix; sed furor cogit sequi
 peiora, vadit animus in praeceps sciens
 remeatque frustra sana consilia appetens.
 sic cum gravatam navita adversa ratem
 propellit unda, cedit in vanum labor
 et victa prono puppis aufertur vado.
 quid ratio possit? vicit ac regnat furor
 potensque tota mente dominatur deus.
 (177-85)

[The things you remind me of, I know to be true, Nurse; but madness impels me to follow even worse evils. My mind wittingly plunges, trying in vain to retrace its steps in search of reasonable propositions. Thus, when the helmsman makes the ship advance, weighed down by the adverse waves, his attempts are useless, because, having been defeated, the ship is carried away by the tide that is pushing it. What could reason do? The madness wins and reigns, the strong god dominates all my mind.]

Seneca's *Phaedra* therefore has its own originality compared to Euripides' model, regardless of the variations on the myth and the interpretative developments, which have their own specific value. First of all, the origin of the love sickness is different: external in Euripides' *Phaedra*, who is the victim, as we have said, of Aphrodite's revenge; completely intimate in Seneca's one. This is not a marginal detail, if we consider that in the Latin tragedy the two goddesses are absent from the scene, whereas they had constituted an inescapable dramaturgical element in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, beyond the scenic function of framing the whole story.

In Euripides' tragedy the presence of Aphrodite and the vindictive nature of her action cast a veil of participation over *Phaedra*, establishing a condition of substantial guiltlessness which, on the contrary, does not seem to be associated to the protagonist of Seneca's drama, who presents herself, right from the start, without shame. This insanity of love is flaunted, before being suffered: a very careful diagnosis is made of it, almost as if it were, in the character's explicit denunciation, a sort of extension of her mother's wildness, an involuntary behaviour that should save her from guilt.

And the Nurse herself is very precise in giving an account of this phenomenology of amorous passion, in perceiving every change in *Phaedra*'s body and soul, and in attempting to raise a bank capable of containing

the storm that is brewing. But Oenone is progressively overwhelmed by the strength of her protégée's feelings, to the point that the alternation of the initial arguments, translated into a lively exchange of jokes well balanced in their respective motivations, is replaced, in the growing mutual incomprehension, by a sort of resigned monologue in which the old nurse can only conclude that nothing more can be done to save the queen:

Spes nulla tantum posse leniri malum,
 finisque flammis nullus insanus erit.
 torretur aestu tacito et inclusus quoque,
 quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor;
 erumpit oculis ignis et lassae genae
 lucem recusant, nil idem dubiae placet
 artusque varie iactat incertus dolor,
 nunc ut soluto labitur moriens gradu
 et vix labante sustinet collo caput,
 nunc se quieti reddit et, somni immemor,
 noctem querelis ducit.

(360-70)

[There is no hope from such great evil, and there will be no end to those insane flames. She is burned by a hidden fire, and although she is locked up, although she is covered up, the madness appears in her face: fire pours out of her eyes, yet her tired pupils refuse the light; she likes nothing, victim of doubt, and a pain coming from various parts weakens her limbs; now, like a dying woman, she staggers with an unnerved step, barely keeping the head on her neck that cannot stand, now she gives herself up to rest and, forgetting sleep, spends the night amidst lamentations.]

Even if the madness is lucid, because Phaedra knows how to identify the principle from which it arises, its epiphanies are contradictory and ambivalent. What in Euripides the queen tries in every way to hide, in Seneca is exhibited, almost ostentatiously, as a sign of discharge, a justification to be put forward as soon as possible. If in Euripides the suffering that afflicts her has to wait a long time before being defined in its origin, almost as if, despite the evident symptoms, its existence were to be denied, in Seneca it finds an incontrovertible proof of its original cause. Aphrodite is interiorised: her character disappears from the scene in the dramaturgical form of the prologue used by Euripides, to reappear in Seneca's text behind the metaphorical appearance of an inner conflict, where Phaedra conceives by herself, without any external intervention, the deadly passion for the young stepson.

If the innocent Euripidean heroine lives her drama in the absolute conviction that she must kill herself before the crime is committed or revealed, and believes it necessary to keep intact the good name to pass

on to her children, the protagonist of Seneca's drama, lacerated by *furor*, silences her rational side. As a result, at times she shows herself to be devoid of any form of modesty, not at all concerned for her children, anxious only to reveal the love to Hippolytus, at other times uncertain, longing for death, in an irremediable conflict taking place entirely within her soul. She lives a love dictated by madness and speaks in the first person, immediately declaring herself to be solely responsible and aware of the passion that devours her. As in Euripides' text it is Aphrodite who regulates the play of the parts, so in Seneca's one it is the protagonist herself who governs the drama, establishing its basic characteristics and defining, within the circumscribed spaces of her interiority, the origin, evolution and outcome of the story.

Even when the Nurse finds herself in the presence of Hippolytus, in an attempt to fulfil the same ancillary and supportive function played in Euripides – although in a sequence of little dramaturgical importance, since it will be from Phaedra's own mouth that the truth will emerge – she maintains her scenic quality, without dissolving into the faded role of a marginal character. The attempts to persuade Hippolytus to open up to female love are numerous, but the guy shows off his ecstatic yearnings for nature, abandoning himself to forms of moral preaching. Indifferent to power, luxury and any flattery of worldliness, he belongs to a world of purity and simplicity that seems to coincide in many points with Senecan morality. And so the Nurse, in front of such immovable obstinacy, has no choice but to leave the space for Phaedra's entrance, once again showing an immediate capacity for recognising danger:

Vt dura cautes undique intractabilis
 resistit undis et lacescentes aquas
 longe remittit, verba sic spernit mea.
 Sed Phaedra praeceps graditur, impatiens
 quo se dabit fortuna? quo verget furor?
 terrae repente corpus exanimum accidit
 et ora morti similis obduxit color,
 attolle vultus, dimove vocis moras:
 tuus en, alumna, temet Hippolytus tenet.
 (580-8)

[As a rock hard and unassailable on all sides stands against the waves and pushes away the waters that strike it, so he despises my words, but here Phaedra rushes in, eager for delay. But where will fate turn? And where the fury? Suddenly her lifeless body falls to the ground, and a death-like colour has covered her face, raise your eyes, remove the lingering of your voice: behold, it is your Hippolytus, my daughter, who holds you in his arms.]

And yet even the chaste Hippolytus, who would seem to represent a positive

force due to certain characteristics, is dominated by a sort of blind *furor*, as extreme as Phaedra's one, although of an opposite nature. In fact, his exasperated and stubborn misogyny and his unmotivated claim that one can do without women are a sign of lunacy, giving rise to a form of hatred that is by no means hidden. A true weaver of plots, the Nurse, having failed in all her attempts to convince Hippolytus – who turns out to be far too proud of his rustic nature, pursuer of an absolute feeling of uncontaminated purity, son of a natural world that will also represent, grotesquely and with a tragic irony, the place of his death – devises the final fatal plot:

Deprensa culpa est. anime, quid segnis stupes?
 regeramus ipsi crimen atque ultro impiam
 Venerem arguamus: scelere velandum est scelus:
 tutissimum est inferre, cum timeas, gradum.
 (719-22)

[The guilt has been discovered. My soul, why are you terrified? We charge him with the crime and accuse him of unholy love: villainy with villainy must be veiled. The safest thing is to attack, when you are afraid.]

It is perhaps in this lapidary *sententia* (724) that the Nurse, before the imminent arrival of Theseus, when all will be discovered and no secret can be concealed any longer, reveals the dramaturgical depth of her character. The intention to place the blame for what has happened on Hippolytus, spreading the *rumor* of a rape never happened, and the subsequent ambiguity with which she addresses the king, hiding the real reason for Phaedra's tears of woe, once again testify to the lucidity of reasoning of a very well thought-out character.

Far from being the passive repository of a simple confession of love, the Nurse's behaviour also seems to foreshadow, thanks to the multifaceted characterisation that distinguishes her, the dark ending of a story in which many passions intersect.

Unlike the Euripidean model, in fact, in which Hippolytus begs the father to veil his face in a conclusive, imaginary form of reconciliation (κρύψον δέ μου πρόσωπον ὡς τάχος πέπλοις [cover my face as soon as possible with peplums], 1458), in Seneca's *Phaedra* there seems to be no room for redemption or salvation: the fierce world of Theseus's palace, in which murky feelings and slanderous revelations have come to life, has swallowed up the shadows of its victims, and now only the silence of desolation remains in the background.

4. A Dark Schemer: the Nurse in Marina Cvetaeva's *Phaedra*

The first aspect that is particularly striking when reading Cvetaeva's

Phaedra,¹⁸ apart from the undoubted comparisons with a myth that retains its essential lines, is the characterisation of the Nurse, a well-constructed character on a dramaturgical level who occupies a prominent position in the drama and who stands alongside an equally unusual Phaedra, partly distant from the famous characters that preceded her.¹⁹

The tragedy, which consists of 1978 verses, is divided into four scenes: in the first, *The Stay*, which is based on the traditional image of the Amazon's young son, Hippolytus and his hunter friends appear on stage and together they pay homage to the goddess Artemis in the name of male brotherhood and friendship; in the second, *The Recognition*, in a long confrontation between Phaedra and the Nurse,²⁰ the woman's feelings of love emerge but, unlike previous models, they do not upset the old nurse at all:

ФЕДРА

Пролетишь на всем скаку,

Поклонюсь тебе с сука.

Тяжел плод тому суку,

Тяжел плод суку – тоска.

КОРМИЛИЦА

В собственном мозгу задорина –

Сук. Кровь с разумом повздорили –

Половина с половиною.

Ствол с больною сердцевиною.

¹⁸ Cvetaeva's *Phaedra* was published in Paris in 1928 and was the second drama of a trilogy, never completed, dedicated to the character of Theseus, which also included *Ariadne*, composed in Prague between 1923 and 1924, but which did not appear until 1927. In Italy, the tragedy was performed in its original language in June 1989, during the Intercity Festival, at the Teatro della Limonaia in Sesto Fiorentino, directed by Roman Viktjuk. What is surprising about this production, however, is the elimination of such an important character in the dramaturgical structure as the Nurse. In an attempt to summarise the text, in fact, the director "eliminates the important peasant character of the nurse, emblem of the earth and evil genius of the heroine. Evidently the director Roman Viktjuk is more interested in the funeral ritual of mourning that accompanies Phaedra's appearances and offers him ideas for recovering the image of Cvetaeva on stage", *Quadri* 1989, 26. On Cvetaeva's poetic path, see: Karlinsky 1985; Lossky 1988.

¹⁹ As De Nardis 1990, 11 points out, Cvetaeva's *Phaedra* is a woman "very different from the illustrious models, an 'innocent' Phaedra, despite her incestuous love, a Phaedra created for the first time by a woman's sensibility". For an overall reflection on Cvetaeva's *Phaedra*, see also Bazzarelli 1987, 31-61.

²⁰ On the stage presence of the Nurse, Thomson 1989, 340, appropriately remarks: "In Euripides, her part is second only to that of Hippolytus and it is almost as prominent in Seneca and Racine; in Tsvetaeva she speaks more lines than any other character. Thus the Nurse is an important element in the myth from the start and, as will be seen, she is central to Tsvetaeva's conception".

Стара песня, стара бaсеика.²¹

(485-94)

[PHAEDRA You will fly at a gallop, / I will bow to you from the branch. / Heavy is the fruit for that branch, / Heavy fruit for the branch is the anguish. NURSE It is in your brain the excrescence – / The branch. Blood and reason have quarrelled – / One half with the other. / The trunk with the diseased marrow. / Old is the song, old the refrain.]

In the third scene, *The Confession*, the story reaches its dramatic peak with Phaedra's revelation of her passion to Hippolytus and the consequent rejection that will lead the queen, immediately after his refusal, to hang herself from a myrtle branch;²² in the fourth, *The Little Tree*, Theseus, who traditionally occupies the final part of the story, makes his appearance. The Nurse, once again the protagonist, breaks into a false accusation that Hippolytus has raped Phaedra, imagining that this will safeguard the honour of her *protégée*. The king then, invoking Poseidon, curses his son, whose chariot is run over by a bull spilled from the waters, and only the discovery of a letter, in which Phaedra tells the truth about the facts, can exonerate, though late, the guy. After the Nurse has accused herself of the terrible plot, Theseus, identifying Aphrodite as responsible for everything because of the ancient guilt of abandoning Ariadne on the island of Naxos, orders that Phaedra and Hippolytus be buried together.

As can be seen from this rapid exposition of the plot, the tragedy's focal point revolves around the peculiarity of Phaedra's love, so pure that it is compared, at the moment of confession, to a joint death wish: only by dying together, Phaedra and Hippolytus could be united in an eternal bond.²³

²¹ The Russian verses of Cvetaeva's *Phaedra* (*Федра*), quoted in this contribution, are taken from De Nardis 1990.

²² It is worth remembering that, in Euripides, Phaedra hangs herself, not from a tree, but from a beam in the palace; furthermore, as we have said, it is she herself who accuses her stepson, having in her hand the letter containing the calumnies against him. On the other side, in Seneca's tragedy, the woman kills herself using Hippolytus' sword, since she recognises it as a sort of fetish object capable of reuniting her ideally with the beloved after death. On the myrtle plant in relation to Phaedra's story, see Paus. 1.22.2: μυρσίνη δέ ἐστι Τροϊζηνίους τὰ φύλλα διὰ πάσης ἔχουσα τετραπημένα: φύναι δὲ οὐκ ἐξ ἀρχῆς αὐτὴν λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔργον γεγενῆσθαι τῆς ἐς τὸν ἔρωτα ἄσης καὶ τῆς περόνης ἦν ἐπὶ ταῖς θριξίν εἶχεν ἡ Φαίδρα [There is a myrtle plant in Troezen that has its leaves pockmarked all over: it is said that in the beginning it was not born in this way, but that the fact derives from Phaedra's love torment and the pin in her hair.].

²³ The purity of the protagonist's feelings is the real novelty of this tragedy, since, as De Nardis writes in 1990, 10: "Cvetaeva wanted an absolutely positive character, what interested her most was the analysis of love passion: she therefore created a *Phae-*

Moreover, the suicide takes place so quickly that her love cannot be contaminated by the Nurse's subsequent lie: it can therefore remain intact in its sacredness and encourage a sort of authentic identification with the spectator.²⁴ In the context of this premise, therefore, it is possible to better understand the multifaceted richness of a character like the Nurse who, also on a linguistic level,²⁵ is coloured, unlike her chaste lady – whose adultery seems almost confined to a sort of distant vagueness –, by a torrid sexuality, repressed since the youth and now overbearingly re-emerging through her:

КОРМИЛИЦА
 Ложь!
 Оттого что лжешь
 Мне, себе, ему и людям.
 Я тебя вскормила грудью.
 Между нами речи лишни:
 Знаю, чую, вижу, слышу
 Все — всех бед твоих всю залежь! —
 То есть впятеро, чем знаешь
 Чуешь, видишь, слышишь, хочешь
 Знать.
 . . .
 Ты! Ведь мать тебе, ведь дочь мис!
 Кроме кровного — молочный
 Голос — млеку nokоримся! —
 Есть: второе материнство.

dra in which it is not so important that Phaedra falls in love with Hippolytus, it is important that Phaedra falls in love, with a desperate love, destined to end dramatically. If this Phaedra is to be compared to another female character in literature, this would be Puškin's splendid Tat'jana".

²⁴ Thomson 1989, 343, considers this condition of participation on the part of the spectator to be directly linked to this specific characterisation of the protagonist: "In other versions Phaedra has two sons by Theseus, who endangered by her love for Hippolytus, a detail that serves to brand her as a "bad mother"; in Tsvetaeva she is childless, and the Nurse reminds her that Theseus is old and perhaps even impotent. Thus Tsvetaeva manages to arouse some sympathy for Phaedra at a purely human level, though without thereby denigrating Theseus".

²⁵ The language used by Cvetaeva in this tragedy is overall rich, with a balanced alternation of an archaic and high lexicon, of which Phaedra and Hippolytus are the main interpreters, and a colloquial one full of neologisms and diminutives, of which the Nurse is the expression. As Karlinsky notes 1966, 149-50: "Cvetaeva's neologisms, are always based on existing lexical material, and their aim is to convey a definite meaning to the reader, rather than to evoke in the reader a vague and undefinable association. . . The most time-honored method of producing new words used by Cvetaeva is the Russian quasi-Homeric compound adjective".

(713-22; 745-8)

[NURSE Lies! / That you lie / To me, to yourself, to him and to the people. / I have fed you at my breast. / Between us words are superfluous: / I know, I sense, I see, I feel / Everything – every layer of all your sorrows! – / That is five times what you know, / You sense, you see, you hear, you want / To know . . . You! Yet I am your mother, yet you are my daughter! / Besides the voice of blood – the voice / Of milk – let us obey the milk! – / It exists: it is a second motherhood.]

Particularly effective from a dramaturgical point of view are the final verses just quoted, which show how the Nurse intends to replace the figure of Phaedra's mother and desperately tries to project onto her the sense of a pathological bond, to the point of a sort of perfect superimposition. It is not enough to evoke the mother's milk to recall an ancient belonging: it must even be mixed with blood.

In inducing the queen to reveal herself to Hippolytus, to confess to him the deep nature of her feelings, indicating the most suitable moment and prompting her to write a love letter, the woman shows herself to be a skilful schemer, although she cannot foresee everything, since Phaedra, upsetting the plans, will go even further and declare to her beloved that she is willing to die with him.

Cvetaeva's Nurse appears dynamic and resolute, capable, like a Shakespearean character, of constructing a dense network of deception, within which, however, Phaedra herself will end up being trapped.

And an impending *omen* of death will characterise the entire performance, reverberating in the fears of the queen who, convinced of the innocence of her love, will move as if lost on the stage, once again distancing herself from the models: in both Euripides (*Hypp.* 248-9) and Seneca (*Phaed.* 265-6), in fact, Phaedra had pursued a salvific and liberating death, able to erase a guilt and, at the same time, to put an end to her suffering.

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MADELEINE SCHERER*

Memories of Antiquity in Derek Walcott's *Odyssey: A Stage Version*. A Case Study of Eurycleia

Abstract

Derek Walcott's *Odyssey: A Stage Version* is a work of reception that remembers ancient Greek mythology as much as or more than it rewrites ancient sources. Walcott's references to the classics are at times immediately recognisable, at other times hidden behind layers of cumulative association, creating a unique experience for different members of his audience. Within Walcott's interweaving of untranslated oral references to ancient Greek with Jazz, Shango invocations, and quotations from Horace, we witness the workings of remembrance; deliberate triggers to his audience's memory of a transcultural tapestry of characters, narratives, and images, often without contextualising or expanding on his various allusions. In an adaptation of this type, the way in which one of the most pivotal female characters of Graeco-Roman epic, the nurse Eurycleia, is rewritten into the late twentieth century evokes a complex mode of reader-reception. In Walcott's rewriting, Eurycleia is deliberately and overtly tied to Egypt, which was in Homer associated with mysticism and magic. This emphasises her power over both the narrative and the Ithacan household, while feeding into a larger web of references to African, Afrocentric and Caribbean literature and scholarship in Walcott's *Odyssey*, including Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Caribbean religious rituals. This style of reception establishes a storyworld in which ancient Greek *topoi* are integrated with ideas and narratives from world history whereby Walcott performs a move away from an elite form of adaptation that prioritises knowledge of Graeco-Roman languages and contexts towards one that works through a wide and shifting set of global memories.

KEYWORDS: *Odyssey*; nurses; classical reception; memory; Derek Walcott

Prologue

In Derek Walcott's 1993 *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (OSV), Billy Blue, a bard and trickster figure, is introduced before the protagonist and focal point of the play, Odysseus.¹ For any critic or even a casual reader of the text, this im-

¹ Throughout his career, Walcott has adapted the works of other writers, including a variety of classical sources, in his 1990 *Omeros*, *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954), which he based on Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Joker of Seville* (1974) after *El Burlador de Sevilla* (by Tirso de Molina) (as discussed in Hamner, 2001). Simon Denith (1995, 95) has

* University of Warwick - madeleine.scherer@warwick.ac.uk

mediately signifies that this is not a straightforward adaptation of the play, and that with the addition of new names from different cultural spheres, the dynamics of the well-known ancient narrative may change.² Billy Blue introduces himself as a mixture of chorus and muse³ while also evoking the qualities of the blind seer Teiresias: “I’m Blind Billy Blue, my main man’s sea-smart Odysseus” (1), merging roles that in antiquity were separate.⁴ In his introduction to the play, he invents an epithet, “sea-smart”, that mirrors the ones that describe the heroes across Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and even includes an entire passage of untranslated Greek, taken straight from the beginning of the *Odyssey*: “Andra moi ennepe mousa polutropon hos mala pol-la” (1).⁵ These inclusions trigger an audience’s aural memory of a language and style that sounds archaic and foreign without their understanding being necessarily present.⁶ Detailed knowledge of the ‘original’ *Odyssey* is reward-

suggested that Walcott is especially drawn to Homer precisely due to the distance of language and historical context between himself and the ancient poet(s).

² This is particularly interesting given that, as Rachel Friedman has pointed out, the OSV is the first time that Walcott locates the Greek materials as a central point of inspiration, unlike his earlier works in which they take on a more implicit resonance (Friedman 2015, 65).

³ See also Friedman comparing him to both a bard and blues singer at the same time (2015, 65). Importantly, as she has argued, a blues singer reciting the first lines of the *Odyssey* performs the “kind of call and response across the ages that Walcott encourages in his theoretical discussion” (66). Therein, the blues singer is given the ability to offer both criticism and commentaries on the play itself, the “poet-outsider”, standing both inside and outside the storyworld (68).

⁴ Lorna Harwick has summarised Walcott’s own views on Billy Blue as “the most emblematic figure we have in the twentieth century – someone who contains a history of the race . . . , someone who sings ballads, the preserver of the cultural memory” (Hardwick 1997, 332).

⁵ This passage is also discussed by Robert D. Hamner, with reference to Walcott deliberately gesturing towards a sense of “geographic displacement” (2001, 376). More untranslated Greek can be found in the epithets that are chanted by the Surf Voices later in the play, taken from the original *Odyssey*: “Polumechanos, polutlas, polumetis, Odysseus / Polumechanos, polutlas, polumetis, Odysseus” (1993, 110). The oarsmen who accompany Telemachos on his flight from the suitors also count each stroke in transliterated Greek: “Ayis! Do-o! Trayis! Tetra! Pente! Ex!” (Reed 2018, 197).

⁶ For another instance of this, see the Martial Chorus’s off-screen chant: “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*” (60). Although a translation is provided a line earlier, the complex reception history of the line from Horace via Wilfred Owen would be missed by an audience unaware of the British poet’s ironic inversion of the line. The line appears again later when the Philosopher translates it as “What to the eye is best, the greatest glory? *Dulce et decorum est* – to die for a lie with zest – *Pro patria mori*.” (62). The deliberate mistranslation draws further attention to the decontextualised way in which ancient phrases are adapted in the OSV and elsewhere, hinting at Owen’s ironic engagement with the line but not exploring this part of the reception history in more detail.

ed, but the play moves on before it can become a condition for an audience's understanding of the plot. In an adaptation of this type, which lives and dies on the interplay of half-remembered, half-forgotten references, the way in which Walcott has rewritten one of the most pivotal female characters of Graeco-Roman epic, the nurse Eurycleia, into the late twentieth century performs a complex synchronic mode of reader- and/or audience-reception.

In the OSV, as will be shown in the following analysis, Walcott accumulates memories of Eurycleia and nurse characters from across ancient Greek tragedy. He streamlines their most positively connoted features through a distinctly political lens, whereby he most notably uses his play's framing of Eurycleia as a wise and compassionate Egyptian as an implicit comment on the *Black Athena* Debate that dominated scholarly discourse in the 1990s and early 2000s. Through intermixing references to classical sources like the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* with nods to other works of literature, works of scholarship, or even different religious traditions, Walcott attempts to make his play accessible to different portions of the play's audience and readership; both those with a classical education and those with experience and expertise in different areas. In this way, Walcott reinforces the memory-driven style of reception that is typical of his oeuvre. He both advocates and enforces an egalitarian type of adaptation in which a classical education is not necessary to enjoy or understand an adaptation of classical materials, and in which it is not a requirement to have read Homer "all the way through".⁷

The further the prologue of the OSV progresses, the more obscure and specialised the allusions to antiquity become, raising questions about the play's target audience. Billy Blue references "[t]he shuttle of the sea [that] moves back and forth on this line" (1), linking the acts of weaving ("shuttle") and sailing ("shuttle of the sea"), both of which served as meta-textual metaphors for the writing of poetry in the *Odyssey* (Friedman 2015, 72). Unless scholars of the ancient texts were present amongst the audience of OSV, it is unlikely that the implications of this line would have been fully unpacked in the moment, especially with the play continuously moving along, leaving little time for analytic reflection. Further allusions compound on the very same page, with references to "rosy fingers at dawn" that evoke the rose-fingered dawn from the *Iliad*, and a "swallow arrowing seaward like a messenger", which references Athena taking on the shape of birds at several points in Homer's *Odyssey*.⁸ These references are not limited to ancient materials, as Billy Blue

⁷ Quoting Walcott's long poem *Omeros* in which the narrator confesses that he never read Homer's poems in their entirety (Walcott 2002, 283).

⁸ Athena's appearances as birds in the *Odyssey* are discussed in Derek Collins, "Reading the Birds: Oionomanteia in Early Epic" (2002, 17-41). In *Omeros* the image of the swallow becomes emblematic of the theme of dislocation, travel and migration, as explored by scholars like Phillip Nanton (2018, 474), while the swift becomes a muse-

continues: “once Achilles was ashes, things sure fell apart”, invoking Chinua Achebe’s 1958 debut novel *Things Fall Apart* that details the deconstruction of the traditional way of life in Nigeria after the European invasion in the nineteenth century.⁹ This reference signals towards the Afrocentric interests that can be noted throughout the rest of Walcott’s OSV, and which will shortly be discussed in relation to the character of Eurycleia.¹⁰ But whereas an audience less familiar with the classics may not have caught the meaning of the Greek earlier in the prologue, an audience unfamiliar with African and black writers may be similarly unaware of Achebe’s work. Walcott here splits the kind of experience different sections of his audience would have so that not only those audience members who have a classical education would have the interpretative upper hand: his play is receptive also of twentieth century fascist rhetoric, Shango mysticism, and a wider literary canon that includes Wilfred Owen, thereby according transcultural knowledge equal value to specialist classical expertise. As the play’s Philosopher – who also takes on the role of “Socrates Aristotle Lucretius” (63) – claims: “With History erased, there’s just the present tense” (61),¹¹ whereby he echoes Walcott’s

like character that has “raveled and unraveled” “cities with shadowy spires stitched on a screen” (Friedman 2015, 292). See also Walcott’s “The Seasons of Phantasmal Peace” wherein he writes of “the nations of birds lifted together / the huge net of the shadows of this earth / in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues, / stitching and crossing it.” (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 113). Further decontextualized references abound on the first few pages of the OSV, including those to other mythological characters such as Hecuba who does not appear anywhere else in the play, and may therein be meaningless to at least a portion of Walcott’s audience: “Over the stones of her children, Hecuba wailing” (6).

⁹ Scattered references to famous literary works are not limited to an Afrocentric tradition. For instance, a possible reference to Tennyson’s wandering Odysseus towards the end of OSV: “PENELOPE: Will you miss the sea . . . ODYSSEUS: Yes.” (1993, 159). Others are discussed subsequently.

¹⁰ For the play’s inspiration by specifically Caribbean traditions, see Friedman’s reading of the play’s dialogue style as reminiscent of Picong in Trinidadian Calypso performance (2015, 67).

¹¹ Characters taking on multiple roles occur frequently across the play; as Peter Hamner points out: “mermaids who teased Odysseus on his raft before he washed ashore in Phaeacia become flirtatious kitchen servants in Ithaca; Nausicaa reappears as Penelope’s insolent maid Melantho; Polyphemos turns up again as the troublesome swineherd Arnaeus, to whom Odysseus gives the one-fingered ‘Cyclops salute’” (2001, 387). Telemachos is also explicitly linked to Elpenor on p.45. This intermixing of roles is reminiscent of fellow Caribbean writer Wilson Harris’s work in which the boundaries between characters are frequently blurred. In his 1993 novel *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, for instance, his characters take on the roles both of one another and of historical characters, creating an ahistoric and synchronous tapestry wherein “original” and reception context blend into one (1993, 172) As Irene Martyniuk outlines, this role-sharing practice is Walcott’s way of deconstructing the “typical European binaries” of heroes, mon-

writerly impetus to de-privilege a westernised classical tradition. Thus, Odysseus becomes a “homeless, wandering voice”, as described by Eumaeus (151), and the quick-fire listing of references from different cultural contexts serves as an equaliser for the audience’s level of understanding, de facto attempting to de-privilege the traditional cultural elite.¹²

This impetus creates an interesting interplay with the OSV’s production history. The play was initially produced in 1992 with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon in the United Kingdom. Scholars like Ethan Reed and Kevin Wetmore Jr. have proposed that its production history in England problematises the OSV’s identity as a “Caribbean play”, with white English actor Ron Cook playing Odysseus, alongside a predominantly white cast (Reed 2018, 194; Wetmore 2003, 224). In fact, the play was commissioned by director Greg Doran, with Walcott relaying that “[i]t certainly wasn’t m[y idea]. I wouldn’t have done it” (Burnett quoted in Reed 2018, 195). He expands: “I didn’t want to take on the idea of doing another – not a directly – Homeric thing like the book I’d just finished”.¹³ And as Irene Martyniuk has argued, the acceptance of the RSC commission “did not help [Walcott’s] Caribbean image” and put him under a critical microscope for his use of intertextuality and the play’s political implications (2005, 189). Thus, Walcott was forced to negotiate the politics of both the original poem and the ways in which his stage version would be interpreted, both by his primarily British audience in Stratford-upon-Avon as well as a wider, more international readership approaching the play after its initial performance. This explains, to a degree, his inclusion of a wide variety of different layers of interpretation available for consumption by different portions of his audience; ranging from incidental to accumulative, depending on how relevant any given allusion is to the overall mood and tone of a given scene.¹⁴ Such a wide-ranging reception strategy works towards separating the OSV from

sters, colonizers and colonized: “All of the characters shift fluidly in and around such specific distinctions, instead occupying positions on both sides and in other, third spaces” (2005, 188).

¹² Here, the storyworld and narrative voice of the OSV parallels that of Walcott’s 1990 *Omeros*, which offers, in Philip Nanton’s words, “a mosaic of journeys undertaken by different characters – Achille to Africa, the poet to North America, the character Plunkett to Holland and the desert and the poet once again to Istanbul, Athens and London” (2018, 473).

¹³ Walcott here refers to his completion of *Omeros* (Burnett 2000, 283).

¹⁴ In this context it is worth considering the perspective, as explored by Lorna Hardwick, that Walcott regards his own background as a “liberating factor in the face of pressures to conform with the stereotypes of race, gender, and class engagement expected from black and/or female writers. He considers that his background enables him to resist incorporation into the political expectations of any one tradition” (Hardwick 2002, 333).

any specific cultural context and attempts to dissolve the layers of expectations different factions amidst his audience might have of a play written by a Caribbean author staged at the RSC. And, indeed, both Walcott and Doran have insisted that the OSV is neither “a black play [n]or a Caribbean play that would have been a cheap way out” (sic; Levy 2016, 1). In this context, Justine McConnell has likewise made the claim that Walcott is “unusual [amidst postcolonial responses to the *Odyssey*] in his abandonment of race as a criterion for oppression: it is humanity, or inhumanity, that interests him”.¹⁵ Instead, his work has always focused more on doubling and erasures, figures held in an ambiguous periphery who “could be Odysseus”,¹⁶ “names in the sand/ which the sea erased again”.¹⁷

Perhaps rather tellingly, Walcott’s ‘*Odyssey*’ starts with the “Sound of surf” (1), which invokes the role of the sea across both OSV and Walcott’s masterpiece *Omeros* (1990), his modern “epic”¹⁸ in which he adapts a variety of classic and traditional texts (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, Dante’s *Inferno*, amongst others). In both texts, the sea takes on the role of cross-cultural communicator, carrying pieces of stories, images of characters, and fragmented voices from across time and space to the Caribbean islands, in which *Omeros* and OSV are (partially) set.¹⁹ The ever-moving waves once more gesture towards the type of adaptation the readers or audience experience in Walcott’s work, categorised less by a holistic or even deconstruc-

¹⁵ McConnell (2012, 50) proposes that Walcott’s response to Homer may be related to the demands of the postcolonial world of the late twentieth century, which includes a greater exploration of the commonalities between different groups of people as part of a kind of transcultural cosmopolitanism (53).

¹⁶ From Walcott’s poem “Sea Grapes” (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 111).

¹⁷ From Walcott’s poem “Names” (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 112).

¹⁸ *Omeros* follows epic conventions in terms of its style and poetic form, and while Walcott has acknowledged the influence of Graeco-Roman epic on *Omeros*, he has since claimed that it is not an epic. See Barnard (2014, 10) for a discussion of this.

¹⁹ For the OSV (1993,72), which locates the text in both the world of ancient myth and the Caribbean where plantains are a ubiquitous dish. This further establishes the simultaneous setting of the play as it bridges both historical and geographical contexts in a flurry of allusions and references. In this space, the sea becomes both eraser and communicator, as Walcott explores in his poem “Names”: “Behind us all the sky folded / as history folds over a fishline, / and the foam foreclosed / with nothing in our hands // but this stick / to trace our names on the sand / which the sea erased again, to our indifference” (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 112). For further references to the Caribbean setting of the OSV, see also the chorus’s chant of: “Calypso / Aeaea /Ai-ee-o / Bacchanal/ And carnival” (1993, 75). In this context, Odysseus’s home in the OSV has been read by Zargarzadeh and Gabriel as a colony that has been taken over by “suitor settlers” (Zargarzadeh-Sharmani 2020, 124). They read Odysseus’s confrontation of the suitors as an analogy of decolonisation which restores the hero’s “pride, dignity and authority” (128).

tive engagement with a classical “original” than by a fragmented mosaic of transcultural referents more evocative of T.S. Eliot or Wilson Harris. This sound of the ocean is a frequently returned to motif throughout the play, closing out its enigmatic underworld scene that is located in an underground train station and is reached by a *κατάβασις* facilitated by both the gods of antiquity as well as Caribbean and African pantheons.²⁰ Lorna Hardwick has called the ancient echoes in Walcott’s work “both compellingly present and puzzlingly distant” (2002, 329). Walcott’s *Odyssey* is perhaps more politically and narratively focused than the mosaic collections of references found in Eliot or Harris, but it is no less transcultural or trans-historical.

But, like when first reading *The Waste Land* or one of Harris’s famously esoteric texts, the audience is not expected to catch every reference or understand every allusion of the OSV, making Walcott’s play more accessible and less elite than other texts that work through a similar mode of reception. Odysseus’s first entrance follows Billy Blue’s monologue at the beginning of the play, which mirrors the way in which the invocation of the muses in ancient epic introduces the narrative and its main heroes. But unlike the promise of unequivocal truth implied by these types of openings, Odysseus’s entry mirrors the confusion many audience members may have felt at the plethora of references and allusions when he simply asks “What?” (2). As well as deconstructing the formal and culturally elite tone with which adaptations of ancient sources are often associated, this casual question meta-textually echoes the confusion some members of the audience may have experienced when watching an adaptation of the *Odyssey* that begins with a new character, includes untranslated Greek and references that, to some, may sound familiar but are likely to be too quick to unpack in the moment. Here, we are talking about the workings of memory, and the ways in which Walcott is deliberately trying to trigger memories of a transcultural tapestry of characters, narratives, and images by using a variety of different modes and methods. And in the following we will focus on the ways in which this style of adaptation has shaped the OSV’s version of Eurycleia, Odysseus’s nurse, “*dia gunaikôn* ‘noblest of women’ Eurycleia, the daughter of Ops, son

²⁰ The Celebrants chanting: “Shango / Zeus . . . Ogun / Erzulie . . . Erzulie / Athena / Maman d’l’Eau / River Daughter / Shango / Zeus / All who see us” (87-8); which Nanton refers to as “the gods of different pantheons to hold[ing] an intercultural party and mingle as they drink together” (2018, 473). The underworld in OSV features a number of references to different *katabatic* traditions, both to book 11 of the *Odyssey* (96) and the *Aeneid* as well as Dante’s *Inferno* (92). The gates of ivory and horn through which Aeneas escapes the underworld is also referenced by Odysseus and Penelope at the end of the OSV (134). Walcott’s underworld design as a train station is also reminiscent of Seamus Heaney’s poem “The Underground” as has been discussed in Scherer’s *Memories of the Classical Underworld* (De Gruyter 2021, 186ff.).

of Peisenor” (Karydas 1998, 147-8), who is remembered and re-remembered through a variety of lenses in Walcott’s stage version.²¹

Enter Eurycleia

In the OSV, Eurycleia appears as early as scene 2, marking her as an important character that contributes to shaping the remainder of the narrative; the “house’s foundation”, as she is later referred to by Penelope (18). Eurycleia has noticeable authority and presence on stage as a character of advanced age and experience, as suggested by her referring to both Telemachus and Odysseus as “boys” (9).²² She is present throughout the Ithaca plot in the second scene, making her the character who is onstage the longest – longer than Billy Blue, bard, narrator, and muse, and even Odysseus, the protagonist – and she refers to the ongoing events as a “family crisis” that involves her as much as the royal family (16). Her authority and presence in the OSV adapt, and in some way extend, her influential position in Homer’s *Odyssey*. In Homer, Eurycleia also raised both Odysseus and Telemachos, and Telemachos comes to her, not his mother Penelope, with his plans to pursue rumours of his father in Jones (2004, 2.348 and ff.).²³ This mirrors the authority and importance held by the figure of the nurse across the ancient Greek tradition, whereby she is able to give meaningful advice that shapes the development of the narrative. This is extensively discussed in Karydas’s seminal work on the nurse in ancient Greek texts, *Eurykleia and Her Successors*. Therein, Karydas outlines the authority of characters like Kilissa in

²¹ Interestingly, Walcott’s adaptation of Eurycleia does not engage with common perceptions of nursing during the writing of the play. In the 1990s, as a response to a nursing shortage in the late 1980s, a number of surveys were conducted on the ways in which nurses felt in their professions, whereby the most common issues listed were lack of support, difficulties in measuring accomplishments, lack of control, feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness, helplessness, frustration, feeling trapped, and poor wages. For relevant research on this see VanYperen, Buunk and Schaufeli (1992, 173-89); Mondez (1990); Jecker and Self (1991, 285-306); Erlen and Frost (1991, 397-407). As outlined below, this forms a significant contrast to the depiction of Eurycleia in the OSV and indicates that Walcott’s reception focuses mostly on interplays with the ancient Greek tradition as well as contemporary debates in Afrocentrism, most notably the *Black Athena* debate.

²² In the OSV the Scylla and Charybdis episode is collaboratively retold by Eurycleia and Billy Blue as a nursery rhyme, further reinforcing both her maternal role and her authority over the story and its progression (1993, 105-6).

²³ This is also discussed in Jensen Minna (2014, 92). This plotline is simultaneously, however, a reminder of Eurycleia’s *lack* of power; as Jones explores, “Eurykleia is also a slave, and so under Telemachos’ authority. His mother would be able to exert considerable emotional pressure to prevent his departure (373-6)” (2004, 25).

Aeschylus's *Libation-Bearers* (64 and ff.) who disobeys her mistress Klytaimnestra; the Nurse in Sophocles's *Women of Trachis* who advises Deianeira (82 and ff); Hermione's Nurse in Euripides's *Andromache* who gives advice to and voices disapproval regarding her mistress's actions (85 and ff.); and the Nurse in Euripides's *Hippolytus* who is responsible for much of the play's action until her mistress Phaedra's suicide (115 and ff.).

The role of the nurse is comparable to the male "*paidagogos*" in that it involves the education as well as the upbringing of children (1998, 2). By occupying this position Eurycleia is present for most of the crucial moments in her master's life and his *oikos*'s history.²⁴ Eurycleia's epithets in Homer further link her with a range of important and powerful characters in the epic; she shares the epithet *κεδνὰ ἰδυῖα*, "knowing caring feelings", "with affectionate feelings", and "devoted" with Penelope, and *πυκμηδής*, "with dense thoughts", and "shrewd in counsel" with Odysseus (1998, 11-3). It is particularly her intelligence that is emphasized throughout her epithets; including *νόου πολυῖδρεϊσι* . . . "with a mind which knows many things", "of many skills of the mind", *μήδεα* "thoughts", the fore-mentioned *πυκμηδής*, "with dense thoughts", and *πυκινὰ μήδεα ἔχουσα* "having dense thoughts" (17).²⁵ Her sharp mind therein allows her to face Odysseus in an agonistic speech during the recognition scene in 19, a verbal contest in which her answers to her master correspond to his own.²⁶

In addition to her intelligence, her power in the *Odyssey* is also constituted through her difference from other women in the ancient epics. Eurycleia is an old woman and therein not coded as beautiful, which as an attribute in Homeric literature often accompanies the vilification (or threatened vilification) of women.²⁷ Moreover, Laertes did not take her to bed as would have been typical for a servant in her position, setting her apart from other slave women.²⁸ "*Trophoi*", older women like Eurycleia who have cared for a

²⁴ See Karydas's discussion of Eurycleia's presence during Odysseus's boar hunt that marks his adolescence (1998, 17).

²⁵ For further exploration, as well as a more exhaustive list of the epithets associated with Eurycleia, see table II in Karydas (1998, 57).

²⁶ As Karydas explains: "Her rhetorical question in xix 492 is a response to Odysseus' rhetorical question in xix 482; xix 493-494, where she confirms her *menos*, is an answer to his request for silence in xix 482-486; xix 495 is her determined reaction to his announcement in xix 487; xix 496 is a repetition of xix 488; and xix 497-498 is her suggestion as an answer to his menace of xix 489-490" (1998, 31). See also Eurycleia's argument with Penelope towards the end of the epic, as discussed in Karydas (1998, 48).

²⁷ For a discussion of this see Hawley (1998, 40). It is worth mentioning, however, that in Homer the epithets most commonly associated with old age, *geras*, include "baneful" (*lygron*), "hated" (*stygeron*), "destructive" (*oloon*), "hard to bear" (*chalepon*), and "even-handed" (*homoion*) (Jensen 2014, 87).

²⁸ As discussed in Jones (2004, 17-18) with reference to *Odyssey* 1.428-35.

master since infancy, generally tend to be represented in a more individualised manner than the rest of the servants (Jensen 2014, 90).²⁹ Their old age carries connotations of wisdom and authority, whereby Eurycleia's association with the *trophoi* figure compounds with the power, intelligence and influence that already characterise her. The nurse's powerful position in the *Odyssey* has even led to suggestions of her being the leader of a "khoros" of the young female housemaids, which separates her, once more, from a more homogenous group of servants.³⁰

Her exceptional position, as compared to the other characters, is to an extent recreated in the OSV. Unlike many of the white cast of the stage production, Eurycleia's actress, Antigua-born Claire Benedict, uses a Caribbean vernacular, giving the character a unique voice amidst the cast and simultaneously distancing the play from the commonly perceived formality of ancient Greek and many of its translations. The oral invocation of Caribbean spaces expands on the audience's impression that this is a play that is both modern and transcultural. The soundscape of the Caribbean vernacular within the storyworld recreated out of the ancient Greek epic, similar to the jazz-like intermixing of voices and styles in poems like Eliot's *Waste Land*, creates the feeling of different voices coming together in Walcott's adaptation.³¹ Nonetheless, Eurycleia's speech arguably retains some minor interplay with the intricacies of ancient Greek. While Eurycleia refers to Odysseus as "Hodysseus" (8), the breathing marks on Ὀδυσσεύς in the original indicates that no "h" would be added to the pronunciation.³² This distinction would only be noticeable to a certain portion of the audience. As a typical Caribbean pronunciation of the name, it would go unquestioned by many, while others may assume that this is simply the way in which Odysseus's name would have been pronounced in antiquity. To deconstructive

²⁹ Karydas defines the *trophos* as an "essential member in the household of noble and wealthy Greek families since the earliest attestations. She is an old and trustful servant regarded as part of the family" (1998, 2).

³⁰ Karydas specifically references Eurycleia giving orders to the maids at *Odyssey* 20.147-156 (1998, 2.8). She also discusses how Odysseus calling Eurycleia "old woman" more frequently than "nurse", "*maia*", is a way of confirming her authority (43), and argues elsewhere that "[w]hen it comes to skills of the role of a nurse, she is referred to as nurse; when it comes to skills that require more judgement, intelligence, and wisdom, she is referred to as 'old woman'" (58).

³¹ This includes different languages, such as the Russian spoken by the Cyclops. This is done in a tongue in cheek way that makes use of the spoken word nature of theatre: "Not yet? Nyet" (64).

³² Hamner discusses this as typical for Caribbean pronunciations, deepening the interweaving of classical and modern postcolonial context that Walcott seeks to establish in the OSV (2001, 377). We can observe a similar shift in the expected pronunciation of Greek names in *Omeros*, which is discussed in Melas (2005, 158).

interplays such as this, Walcott adds decontextualised lines of ancient Greek, isolated epithets, sounds of jazz, modern slang, and phrases that imply deliberate anachronisms to the original context.³³ Walcott's *Odyssey* sounds both like and vastly different to the ancient "original", confirming the poet's intention to address audiences with varying levels of expertise on the classics.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Eurycleia is perhaps most famous for the scene in which she recognises the beggar to be Odysseus when washing his feet and spotting his scar, fitting into a long tradition of scenes in ancient Greek narratives wherein female characters recognise and verify the identity of men.³⁴ From this moment onwards, not only has Eurycleia been remembered as an important character in Odysseus's household – but also as a character associated with the processes of remembrance itself. In *Poetics* 16, for instance, Aristotle discusses the recognition scene as a kind of recognition through signs, *dia tōn sēmeiōn* . . . (1454b21–4). In such cases recognition is said to proceed through memory, *dia mnēmês* (1454b37) and to result from reasoning, *ek syllogismou* (1455a4) (Fortenbaugh 2020, 246–7). Eurycleia fits into a long line of Homeric characters prompted to remember the past, including Nestor's recollection of his way back from Troy, Menelaus' recounting of his adventures, Helen's untrustworthy memories of her time at Troy, Hector remembering his wife's past, and Demodocus recounting the events at Troy.³⁵ She also, once again, exerts power (or the threat of power) over the narrative, holding Odysseus's successful *nostos* in suspense as her recognition might thwart his plans of deceiving the suitors.³⁶ Indeed, much like Odysseus, Eurycleia demonstrates cunning in her ability to keep her master's secret, further underlining her importance for the household at Ithaca.³⁷

Interestingly, as Aristotle already noted, the recognition in Eurycleia's recognition scene in the *Odyssey* is negotiated via the presence of "*sema* / *semata*" (sign / signs). Jeffrey Beneker discusses the presence of *semata* in mythology and legends as a "common element", as incidences that that

³³ For some examples: "ODYSSEUS Sorry I'm late. (*Silence*) O lucky dead, who can't tell friends from enemies!" (3); "You should put something on. This is very awkward" (Nausicaa to Odysseus, 47); "Listen, buzz off!" (First Sailor, 60); "For God's sake, it's his burial mound. Let him rest" (Menelaus, 4). Some of these moments that are characterised by anachronistic styles also include self-conscious references to the characters' reception histories: "MENE LAUS [to Helen] Sorry, dear. / HELEN Men. They'll blame me for everything now" (31).

³⁴ Laura McClure's article (2015, 219–36) significantly focuses on Electra's recognition of Orestes, utilising both physical and material markers of identity.

³⁵ Many of these are already discussed in Rusu (2018, 281).

³⁶ As discussed with reference to Auerbach's reading of the scene ("Odysseus' Scar") in Scodel (2021, 55ff.).

³⁷ For a wider discussion of the use of secrecy amidst female characters in antiquity (including Medea, Phaedra and Eurydice), see Montiglio (2002).

“function as signs” (Beneker 2016, 34); items of places that “carry significance in their own right . . . because they trigger recollections of past experiences” (37). In this case, the scar on Odysseus’s leg functions as a symbol for his shared past with Eurycleia, which is unearthed through her narration.³⁸ Both on the level of text and the mode of reception, this episode gestures towards the process of remembering; the physical memorial gesturing towards both memories and the ways in which memories work associatively through memory triggers.³⁹ Meta-textually, the scar has taken on the status of an archetype or a trope, even before Erich Auerbach’s famous reading of the scene in his seminal *Mimesis* (Resvick 2019), and Eurycleia’s own name, “the one with the wide fame” further anticipates this long-reaching reception history (Karydas 1998, 11).⁴⁰ Walcott’s adaptation of this scene in the OSV recontextualises this mnemonic gesture within his own mosaic style of reception, itself so inextricable from remembrance. Rather than an oral poem remembered by way of its continuous performance, the OSV deliberately triggers a variety of transcultural memory contexts by way of decontextualised, brief and accumulating reference points. Within this style of reception, Eurycleia’s recognition of Odysseus becomes a meta-textual window of reflection to the audience, a singular sign stirring their own memories of the *Odyssey* and signalling towards the style of reception the audience members are currently immersed in.⁴¹

Walcott works accumulatively in OSV. By stacking multiple references to both ancient Greek as well as transcultural contexts, he underlines the asso-

³⁸ And it needs to be – as Melissa Mueller recognises; “the scar itself cannot speak. It needs a narrator, someone who also remembers Odysseus in connection with these key rites of passage” (2016, 2). Haun Saussy has described Odysseus’s scar as an “*epigraphê*, a scratch, a mark, a letter” (1996, 302).

³⁹ In fact, according to Mueller, this fits into a tradition of moments of touch triggering moments of flashbacks, *analepsis*, and recognition, *anagnorisis*: “prompted by touch, the recognition is verbally related by the bard, the missing links of *analepsis* supplied through a narrative digression (in the case of the Nurse’s recollection) or told proleptically (in the case of the history of Odysseus’s bow) as a biographical detail whose relevance becomes clear only later. Touch, then, pulls the narrative back into the past” (2016, 8-9). For the role of specifically women in such systems of memory and recognition, McClure (2015, 235), who identifies the ways in which women “maintain [and transmit] the knowledge of the past indispensable to the recovery and preservation of male identity within the *oikos* and important to the city as well”.

⁴⁰ Eurycleia has even been argued to obtain her own form of “*kleos*” (ibid.), usually reserved for the men in the Graeco-Roman heroic tradition.

⁴¹ Of course, Homer’s *Odyssey* likewise adapts a plethora of cultural traditions in ancient Greece, whereby individual performances of the poem may well have differed depending on where and by whom it was being performed. For a concise summary of this see Moran (2022, 33-4). What we see in Walcott is not necessarily a new style of adaptation, but a twentieth-century, postcolonial variant of it.

ciations he intends to invoke, where a single reference might not enough to convey his message to his audience. In this way, he highlights a number of qualities that characterised Eurycleia in Homer's *Odyssey* – her intelligence, authority, kindness, and uniqueness – within the storyworld of his stage version. At the same time, the references write back deconstructively to the context and connotations of the Homeric narrative. One of the clearest examples of this is Walcott's adaptation of Eurycleia's cry over the slain suitors after Odysseus has taken his revenge. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Eurycleia cries with joy upon seeing the dead bodies, but is rebuked for this by Odysseus who claims it is "unholy to boast over corpses".⁴² In this context, Jensen describes the nurse as a "scary, grim woman filled with hatred", her cry as a "triumphant howl, *ololyge*", and notes that "[a]t no point is it suggested that she might feel pity for . . . the suitors (21.380-7, 22.390-434, 480-501)", demonstrating her exultation over their death "in a far more blatant fashion than what any of her masters expresses".⁴³ Odysseus's rebuke of his nurse has been divisive amidst critics of the poem, but as Alexander C. Loney argues, probably the most popular perspective on his words has been that they express prudent restraint,⁴⁴ whereby Eurycleia delights in an explicitly evil act (Loney 2015, 67). In the OSV, however, Eurycleia's cries over the slain are framed as justified. When she enters after the battle with the suitors, Eumaus remarks to her that "[a] black howl of triumph for the slain is custom" (150). This reads like a direct response to the restraint Odysseus advises in the *Odyssey*, reframing Eurycleia's response to the slaughter as appropriate and customary rather than as exceptional. Later on, the same page, Billy Blue, narrator of the epic, also encourages the nurse to "[c]ry! Woman, your breath will unfurl their souls", after which the stage directions describe "*Rising wind, darkness. EURYCLEA crows herself, whirls, a long howl*". While the encroaching darkness carries implications of moral ambiguity, this may well refer to the violent acts themselves rather than Eurycleia's reaction to them. Likewise, the wording seems to indicate that as Eurycleia's breath unfurls, it produces a kind of release for the suitor's souls, perhaps invoking Hermes's role in guiding them to the underworld in *Odyssey* 24. Eurycleia's exclamation carries the connotations of a necessary, customary release following extreme violence.⁴⁵ This moment must also be read in the context of her try-

⁴² Fortenbaugh (2020, 247) referencing *Odyssey* 20.407ff.

⁴³ Jensen also makes the argument that Eurycleia may be seen as a double for Penelope, who stays innocent as she is asleep elsewhere, while Eurycleia takes on a more active, insidious function in the narrative, as she gets more directly involved in the suitors' and maids' slaughter (2014, 93-5).

⁴⁴ This is discussed in detail in Loney (2015, 52).

⁴⁵ Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors in the OSV has also been read as resonating with the experience of war veterans (McConnell 2012, 43).

ing to protect Melantho just moments after her cry over the suitors' bodies. The stage direction reads "(EURYCLEA *protects* MELANTHO)", and she asks her to "[s]ay you sorry, lickle mouse. Beg. Apologise" in an attempt to appease Odysseus's rage (155). In the OSV, then, Eurycleia is deliberately framed as a character who does not delight in violence and who is trying to prevent its spread. This indicates that rather than straightforwardly including those moments in Homer's *Odyssey* when her character was depicted as more morally ambiguous, Walcott deconstructs that ambiguity in favour of stressing Eurycleia's unequivocally positive qualities – her protective, nurturing nature, her role as guide, and her ability to argue with her master. Turning her into such a positive character who accumulates the best features from her trope's reception history, allows Eurycleia to take on a symbolic function, both within the OSV itself and within wider debates within classical, Afrocentric and black scholarship.

A particularly significant change Walcott makes in his adaptation of Eurycleia's character is in changing her birthplace to Egypt – Penelope assures the reader, for instance, that "no faith is surer than this old Egyptian's" (135). The reasons for this change are manifold, and have to a degree been discussed in articles like Peter Hamner's "Creolizing Homer for the Stage". He reminds us of Walcott's long-ranging interest in Egypt, which manifested already in the character of Ma Kilman, the healer woman in *Omeros*, whose practices are explicitly coded as African tribal. In his discussion of Eurycleia in the OSV, Hamner stresses the "essential African component of her re-vision", whereby she is able to impart a conflation of Greek and African influences onto her two charges Telemachos and Odysseus, emphasising the interwoven history between the two spheres in antiquity (Hamner 2001, 377).⁴⁶ Both Ethan Reed and Justine McConnell have briefly alluded to the idea that Walcott's Egyptian Eurycleia teaches, "in the spirit of Black Athena, that 'Is Egypt who cradle Greece till Greece mature'" (Reed 2018, 197).⁴⁷

"Black Athena" refers to Martin Bernal's publication of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, released in three volumes in 1987, 1991, and 2006 (Bernal 1987). Publication of the first volume caused a stir in the academic community at the time, wherein prominent scholars from a variety of disciplines publicly debated the validity of Bernal's claims. The primary argument of Bernal's *Black Athena* pertains to the impact of cultural spheres like Egypt on ancient Greece, which Bernal describes as the "Afroasiatic elements of Greek civilization" which are "analogous to those between Vietnam, Korea, or Japan to China" (Bernal 1989, 23). In particular, the book stresses the Levantine and North African contributions to Greek

⁴⁶ See also Burian 1999, 72, which is referenced by Hamner.

⁴⁷ Quoting OSV (9). See also McConnell, "Violence and Madness" (48).

culture (Field 2017). Alongside Edward Said's *Orientalism*, *Black Athena* has been named a "decisive starting point to reassess the Western philosophical tradition" (Peters 2014).

Many of the contemporary discussions of Bernal's work produced responses to specific as well as wider-ranging claims made in the books, from specific linguistic etymologies discussed in *Black Athena* to the question of when the prime period of contact between Egypt and the Aegean would have taken place.⁴⁸ The language that has characterised the responses to Bernal's work has, undoubtedly, contributed to the virality *Black Athena* attained both at its time of publication and in later discourses. Responses, such as those formulated by Paul O. Kristeller, have called *Black Athena* a work "full of gross errors of fact and interpretation", and "political prejudices", and have claimed that the work has "not received the sharp criticism which it deserves, obviously for political reasons" (Kristeller 1995, 125). And in his review of Martin Bernal and David Chioni Moore's *Black Athena Writes Back. Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics*, for instance, Paul Cartledge has claimed that "[i]t is rather remarkable that a reputable university press should have agreed to publish this mish-mash" (Cartledge 2003, 238). The language of the debate and responses to Bernal have tended to feature an invariably and heightened critical tone, and have often been characterised by an absolutist and polarising rhetoric, which has likely further escalated the way in which his work has been discussed in popular culture and scholarship alike.⁴⁹

In establishing a link between Afroasiatic spheres and the Aegean, *Black Athena* inevitably became part of conversations within the field of Black Studies, whereby the project has prompted a number of responses from critics considering the changing connotations around the concept of race from antiquity to the modern era.⁵⁰ The issue of race becoming a central point in the *Black Athena* debate has surely further contributed to its entering the popular mainstream at the time, as well as to the continuing influence it holds today. An upload from 2019 of the 1996 public discussion between John Henrik Clarke, Martin Bernal, Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, for instance, has almost one million views on YouTube and features over 4100

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Rendsburg (1989, 69; 80).

⁴⁹ For instance of this type of rhetoric: "It is false to claim, as does Bernal, that Western and especially German classical scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were unwilling, out of nationalistic or even racial prejudices, to recognize the value and importance of any non-Western culture and of any languages other than the Indo-European ones" (Kristeller 1995, 125). Here, the scholar offers personal anecdotes to support his claim. The controversies of the Black Athena debate are also usefully summarised in Burstein (1996, 3-4).

⁵⁰ For instance Keita (1993, 295-314).

comments.⁵¹ As scholars like Reed and McConnell have already recognised, the Black Athena debate especially in the 1990s seems to have shaped the representation and role of Egypt in the OSV. Egypt is a place that, while it may be physically far away, is on everyone's mind throughout the goings of the play. At the athletic competition in Alcinous's palace, for instance, the third courier casually mentions that the javelin Odysseus has hurled has "gone to Egypt", after which the fourth courier jokingly suggests that the second courier may "slip over to Egypt and bring it home" (52).

It is, in particular, Eurycleia's expanded role and her clear association with Egypt that creates the basis for the OSV's intertextual engagement with Bernal's *Black Athena*. As outlined above, in antiquity the character of the nurse as an "advocate of action" has long been marked by intelligent and convincing speech, as well as the prudent advice she is able to give to her masters. Not only in Homer's *Odyssey* but throughout the classical tradition, the nurse has thus become a diachronic *topos* carrying connotations of authority, action, and intelligence, from early choral performances to her winning unrestricted authority for action' in Euripides's *Hippolytus* (Karydas 1998, 161, 179). Creating such a clear link between Egypt and the OSV's Eurycleia, as she embodies clear power and influence over Odysseus's household at Ithaka, is a clear statement on Egypt's importance not only for the narrative but Greek culture more widely.

Eurycleia is not the only character associated with Egypt. Penelope calls the bard Demodocus an Egyptian (123), and Telemachus relates a tale that Eurycleia told him in which "Athena, the sea-eyed, is Egyptian" (8). Framing one of the most important Greek goddesses as originating from Egypt may be a direct commentary on Bernal's thesis on Egypt's impact on ancient Greek culture and religion (Bernal 2006, 8, 255, 371).⁵² Telemachus later also refers to an "Egyptian herb that my mother uses" (32), expanding on the divine and mythical associations of Egypt for the world of the OSV. The most famous reference to an Egyptian herb from the *Odyssey* is the drug Helen gives to Odysseus and Menelaus's court to help them repress the pain of their war memories and allow them to reminisce (4.243-51). This has an ostensibly positive effect, allowing stories of the past to be told in a communal setting (Doyle 2010, 7). This action of underhandedly administering the Egyptian drug, however, has led to Helen being associated with a Φαρμακίς, a sorceress, comparable to mythological women like Calypso and Circe whose powers threaten Odysseus's νόστος, the *Odyssey's* overarching goal (ibid.).

⁵¹ Reelblack. 2019. "Dr. John Henrik Clarke vs Mary Lefkowitz: The Great Debate (1996), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmei-hUQUWY>. (Accessed 25 May 2022).

⁵² Also: "the etymologies claimed in this chapter, however, indicate an intimate connection between Greek religion and those of Afroasiatic speakers" (451-2).

The element of forgetfulness implicit in the administration of the drug also contributes to the sense of unease produced by “fracturing and fragmenting of the truth” within these moments of reminiscence in book IV. This is felt particularly in Helen’s recounting of her own μῦθος of her implausible encounter with Odysseus (4.269-96), whereby the etymology of μῦθος does not carry the same truth value associated with λόγος, “verbal account or word” (Doyle 2010, 10-11). As A. Doyle argues, “Helen’s drug cocoons her audience from the fractures in her story while those of us unaffected by such sorcery start to question her ‘plausible truth’” (ibid.). In the OSV, however, the herb’s ownership is transferred from Helen to Penelope, granting the latter the same power and magic but without the negative connotations associated with them. The OSV does not feature a comparable scene to *Odyssey* 4 in which Penelope might use the Egyptian drug to control or even falsify narratives of the past to portray herself in a better light. In fact, there is no comparable scene at all, only a brief reference that Penelope uses the herb to help with her sleep (32). Associating the herb with Penelope, the one who remembers, who “weaves and . . . prays that he’ll one day come home” (135), is a clear way to deconstruct its Homeric associations with the dangers of forgetting.⁵³ Egypt remains a mystical and powerful presence in the play, but its connotations are altogether more positive, now solely associated with nurturing female characters such as Athena, Penelope and Eurycleia.

This reframing of Egypt has wider-reaching consequences on the politics of the OSV. Imagining Egypt as closer – geographically and culturally – and more influential in relation to the events of the OSV can be understood, especially at the time of the play’s publication, as an implicit endorsement of Bernal’s arguments as outlined in *Black Athena*. As I have outlined above, Walcott’s reception style tends to be mosaic and accumulative, both in the OSV and other works such as *Omeros*, wherein the wide-ranging and diverse quality of the references has often contributed to a sense of ambiguity associated with many of the characters and storylines. *Omeros*’s Achille, for instance, completes a quasi-epic κατάβασις journey of discovering his ancestral roots in West Africa. His storyline ends on a note of uncertainty wherein he is able to connect with aspects of the past, but experiences most of it as imagined and fragmented, and his own identity as a Caribbean man, named after a Greek hero, keeps him from connecting with vital parts of his identity.⁵⁴ His story ends with Helen, the mother of his child, refusing

⁵³ Penelope further disentangles her possible associations with Helen when she states “I’m not Menelaus’ whore” after Odysseus has killed the suitors (154).

⁵⁴ Achille’s conversation with his father Afolabe’s spirit: “AFOLABE Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten the one that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago. What does it mean? ACHILLE Well, I too have forgotten” (Walcott 2002, 137). This is discussed in detail in Scherer (2021, 168-86).

to give their baby an African name, a decision that becomes emblematic of the narrative's ambiguous outlook on the ways in which Achille's origins will continue to shape his life and that of his descendants (Walcott 2002, 72). Especially within this tradition of Walcott's mode of reception, his reframing of Egypt in the OSV is uncharacteristically and univocally positive, and thus worth taking note of.

Walcott's representation of Egypt accompanies the transcultural framework of the play, echoed within the narrative's references to both the environmental features, languages, music, and religions of the Caribbean as well as the play's wider allusions to African literature.⁵⁵ Interweaving retellings of ancient Greek narratives with Caribbean and African cultural referents, in conjunction with the allusions to Bernal's *Black Athena*, allows the OSV to make more than a neutral gesture to a current debate within scholarship. Walcott here declares allegiance to the spirit of Bernal's argument in outlining a mutually constitutive relationship between Greece, African, and Caribbean cultural spheres, which is reminiscent of the impact Bernal described Egypt as having on ancient Greek language and culture.⁵⁶ Although in isolation each allusion could be read as minimal and schematic, in conjunction they compound to Walcott taking a stance in a debate contemporary to the writing of his play, in describing Egypt and its influences as both nurturing and culturally significant.⁵⁷ This fits into the established pattern of Walcott's mode of reception: the ways in which singular references may be missed by an audience but even schematic audience memories can accumulate into an overall mood, idea, or message through the widespread distribution of diverse allusions throughout Walcott's texts. Walcott's reference to *Black Athena* may not be picked up by all members of his audience, but the Afrocentric message of the OSV is communicated through the heightened importance of Egypt across the play, Eurycleia's positive representation, as well

⁵⁵ The reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The potential intertextual relationship between the OSV's underworld scene has been compared by Scherer to Kamau Brathwaite's system of *tidalectics* (2021, 192ff.).

⁵⁶ For a similar line of argument, it is also worth considering Wole Soyinka's writings on the relationship between Greece and Africa.

⁵⁷ I disagree with Matryniuk and Burian, who argue that "Walcott sets up the convention not least to subvert it, by revealing Eurycleia as the bearer of an older culture and its wisdom . . . but the point is surely not to endorse 'Afrocentrism,' but rather to recognize the layered complexities that negotiate difference not only in terms of opposition but also of inclusion" (Martyniuk 2005, 193). While Walcott's style of reception creates complexities and, at times, contradictions in its interweaving of different cultural contexts and perspectives, references to Egypt are frequent and positive enough to make it likely that Walcott at least intended to create a positive quasi-representation of Bernal's line of argument in *Black Athena*.

as allusions to writers such as Chinua Achebe.⁵⁸ Within a sea of allusions, a core message is established through accumulation, even if core elements of the mosaic remain incomplete. An analogy for the play's type of reception may be found in Telemachus's conversation with Captain Mentès after his conversation with Nestor:

TELEMACHUS (*Aside to MENTES*)

What have I learned from this foam-haired philosopher?

CAPTAIN MENTES What the young should learn. Patience.

TELEMACHUS He's told me nothing.

CAPTAIN MENTES You heard what the young need to hear: old men suffer.

(28)

The complex interaction between Telemachus and Nestor is stripped down to a core message, a core feeling about the world: with time comes experience as well as, inevitably, immense suffering. It does not matter if the audience remembers or even understands every historical reference Nestor touches on in his conversation with Telemachus; as long as this core fact about the OSV's storyworld, this core aspect of its *Stimmung* is communicated, the play has achieved its aim. And as long as the audience has understood Eurycleia to be a positive – and most importantly, Egyptian – influence on the play's Greek *oikos*, it is likely to understand the OSV's intention to highlight the important relationship between Africa and Greece, even if it is unaware of either facet of the play's context: the Black Athena debate; the ways in which Caribbean literature has systematically been de-privileged in comparison with the European classical tradition; or Walcott's rewriting of Eurycleia's cry after the suitors' death, rendering her response more positive and less ambiguous than in Homer.

Eurycleia's influential position over the play's other characters and her unequivocally positive representation across the narrative works in accumulation with the OSV's other references to African literature and Caribbean landscapes, as well as its anti-colonial rhetoric. Together, all these strands of representation create an overall impression of Walcott's politics of cultural equality and envisaged simultaneity. This synchronous approach to reading Eurycleia does not undermine the impact of Walcott's diachronic engagements with ancient sources. The adaptation of Eurycleia's character in the OSV is detailed in its interactions with the nurse character's reception

⁵⁸ Justine McConnell has also outlined the influence of the Yoruba trickster figure, Ijapa the turtle, as well as the Ashanti Anansi the spider on the text (2012, 52). Meanwhile, Zargarzadeh and Gabriel have read Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors as influenced by Édouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon's ideas on the effects of violence (2020, 123).

history across classical literature and scholarship, but in the context of a fast-paced performance many of those interactions will remain unnoticed by the play's audience, especially those without a classical education. Instead, the OSV works through accumulative memory, relying on what an audience might remember or associate with Eurycleia as the narrative progresses. Therein, the fact that Eurycleia is a nurturing, intelligent, and compassionate figure in the play, fundamental to the wellbeing of the play's *oikos*, becomes inextricable from the fact that she is an Egyptian. References heaped upon references work together to create an impression of the play's storyworld and politics, and let all members of the audience come to their own conclusion on the question of whether or not the Graeco-Roman classics are separate from African traditions – even if they have never heard of the *Black Athena* debate.

Across his oeuvre, Walcott has created new meanings and messages out of an interwoven web of existing allusions and references. The diachronic mosaic of Homer, Dante, Joyce, and others with Caribbean influences and traditions allows *Omeros* to exist in a simultaneous liminality, wherein none of these allusions appear to be prioritised or hierarchical.⁵⁹ The same technique can be seen in Walcott's reception of Robinson Crusoe, who Norval Edwards refers to as "one of the 'inaugural figures' of the colonial encounter" and who becomes "simultaneously Adam, Columbus, God, missionary, beachcomber, pirate, and Daniel Defoe" (Edwards and Walcott 1996, 15-16). Thus, Walcott's Crusoe becomes representative of the artist's status in the modern Caribbean, immersed in a variety of traditions and yet strangely separate from them, "a castaway who . . . has to forge an art from the detritus of shipwreck, and the encounter with a new world" (*ibid.*). Edwards reads this accumulation of influences alongside Eliot's thesis around imitation and originality, wherein the artist as the "individual talent" interacts with a "monumental order of tradition" (Edwards and Walcott 1996, 25). I would contend, however, that Walcott's relationship to tradition is too complex to fit neatly into this model. Walcott's famous meta-textual claim that he never read Homer's work "all the way through" takes a deliberate step back from the ancient Greek – and Europeanised – "monumental" tradition of the classics (Walcott 2002, 283). As Natalie Melas has argued, he is performing a gesture of distancing, a "rhetoric of disavowal" (Melas 2005, 157). She names his form of reception "incidental", "detachable", existing "only in the most general way" (*ibid.*). What she is alluding to here is the schematic nature of Walcott's references, in which, despite their clear relationship to ancient characters and narratives, they are simultaneously decontextualised

⁵⁹ This already discussed this at length in the chapter on Walcott in Scherer's *Memories of the Classical Underworld* (152ff.).

from elements of their diachronic reception history that would contradict the overall tone, message, or intention of Walcott's adaptation. Eurycleia is thus adapted as a wise caretaker from Egypt, her moment of exclamation over the dead suitors is rewritten as justified in the OSV, and Helen's Egyptian memory drug is mysteriously turned into a sleeping aid.

Omeros offers another example for this type of adaptation. Walcott's protagonist, Achille, assumes the role of Odysseus as he enters an underworld through a sub-nautical κατάβασις and recovers fragments of his ancestral past. In Homer's *Odyssey* the κατάβασις – or νέκυια – occurs in book XI, in the midst of Odysseus's wanderings. Rather than also adapting other elements of Odysseus's travels that might counteract the postcolonial impetus of the work, such as the Greek hero's warmongering and plundering, this episode remains in many ways separate from its ancient inspirations, wherein the trope of the underworld descent remains but the rest of the *Odyssey* is lost as an influence on Achille's κατάβασις.⁶⁰

This is not necessarily an "incidental" form of reception. Many of the detailed implications that surround the κατάβασις in the *Odyssey* and its later reception history are adapted into the storyworld of *Omeros*. The failed embrace between Odysseus and his mother Anticleia, for instance, anticipates the fragmentary vision of Africa that Achille inhabits wherein he cannot touch nor change the history of enslavement and colonialism he later witnesses. Melas's claim that "[i]t is possible to write a great deal about *Omeros* without ever referring to Homer in any thoroughgoing way, or indeed mentioning him at all" nonetheless touches on an important aspect of Walcott's reception practices (Melas 2005, 157); a reader can understand the representation of the past in *Omeros* as fragmentary and incomplete without reading this through a Homeric lens. In Walcott's epic, Major Plunkett fails to write a history of the island, Achille does not remember his own ancestral name, and Helen sees her classical predecessor as a shadow that pursues her. All these are moments that accumulate to create the impression that the past is often inaccessible and must be restored through imagination, so that *Omeros*, in a meta-textual sense, may finally "enter that light beyond metaphor" (Walcott 2002, 271).

Walcott employs a radical form of memory-driven reception, throwing a wide net of allusions into his presumed transcultural pool of readership, and relying on audience members / readers of *Omeros* and the OSV to remember some of their associated characteristics. Those unfamiliar with classical

⁶⁰ Similarly, considering the *Aeneid* as an intertext of Walcott's *Omeros*, "Aeneas's forceful subjugation of the native inhabitants of Italy would, of course, violently clash with the anti-imperialist tone of *Omeros*", and is thus discarded from the adaptation (Scherer 2021, 167).

references may be familiar with the work of African writers like Chinua Achebe, and understand the destabilisation of Odysseus's Caribbean household as analogous to the impact of the European invasion on pre-colonial life in Nigeria. Walcott's allusions are schematic in that they adopt decontextualised versions of narratives and characters to fit into the *Stimmung* and intentions of his storyworld. All allusions are subordinated to this aim. Their acceptance by the audience relies on three factors: their brevity, which prevents its questioning changes to a perceived "original"; the deconstructive mode of the overall work, leading the audience to accept any perceived changes as intentional; and even possibly a presumption that the audience's memory may be incomplete, preventing them from noticing changes. Even within his rewriting of one of the most well-known classical epics in the OSV, more overt in its relationship to Homer than his "epic" *Omeros*, Walcott is gesturing towards a radical form of reception, his idea of "simultaneity",⁶¹ wherein each allusion is integrated into his work as a fluid and decontextualised memory rather than a tradition that may carry connotations that would not fit his intentions (Walcott 1993). It is an attempt at levelling a hierarchy in which the classical referents are seen as primary and constitutive of later forms of reception, wherein Caribbean culture is not a "second-rate Aegean" but instead part of a global sphere of simultaneous creation.⁶²

There is an undeniably political impetus behind this type of reception. Its impulse is egalitarian as it draws on a range of sources from across the globe while requiring only a fragmented, schematic and memory-driven understanding of a classical tradition that has often been locked behind an elite and Western education. It is unsurprising that the types of messages evoked through Walcott's work would be likewise politically charged: critiquing Fascism through the Cyclops episode, centring an anti-war message through Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors, and, finally, taking sides in the *Black Athena* debate that continued throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s. As shown above, the references to *Black Athena*, like many of the others in the play, are unspecific and decontextualised in their adaptation; however, they cannot be divorced from the play's overall political intentions. Walcott's references to Bernal's work are inextricably tied to his positive reframing of Eurycleia, to his references to other Caribbean and African myths and contexts, as well as to his vision of an egalitarian simultaneity, implicit in his style of reception. Likewise, it would be contentious to argue that Wal-

⁶¹ See Walcott 1993b and Hardwick (2002, 244).

⁶² Walcott's ironic statement on this: "What this does immediately is . . . say to the Caribbean sea. . . You must think yourself as a second-rate Aegean, or, on a good day, you can look like the Mediterranean" (1997, 232); quoted and discussed also in McConnell 2013, 122.

cott would not in any way be impacted by the racially charged discourse surrounding *Black Athena* or by the developing impacts of neocolonialism on St. Lucia. As Melas outlines, St. Lucia received 341,282 visitors in 1993, the year after *Omeros*'s publication, about 160,000 among them cruise ship passengers, in comparison with a native population of 135,000 people. As she phrases it, "Walcott awakens from the colonial nightmare of History to the global or neocolonial day-dream of tourism" (Melas 2005, 152). This is a context that has shaped the design of *Omeros* as well as the OSV, wherein the readers / audience members who consume these "Caribbean leisure spaces" and the "familiar colonial tropes – enchanted island, pre-lapsarian paradise, Robinsonnade and the romance of the shipwreck, the plantation fantasy" and others – become tourists in their own right (Melas 2005, 155). Walcott recreates the tourist experience of the Caribbean within his own storyworlds; but his adaptation is non-selective and also makes us tourists of ancient Greece, of Rome, of Dante, of Joyce, of America and elsewhere. And while many of the plays' interpretations can be gleaned from their most prominent reception contexts, the Graeco-Roman classics, those works do not carry the sole weight of the interpretative burden. Alone, they cannot gesture towards Walcott's message of equality between "original" and "adaptation" contexts and therein his way of advocating for social and cultural equality between Europe and Caribbean. By the same token, Walcott's Eurycleia cannot be read as a simple adaptation or deconstruction of her role in Homer; she has to simultaneously be understood within the various African and Caribbean traditions Walcott is immersed in. The positive aspects of the nurse are present in ancient epic and later tragedy, but they are politicised in Walcott through the framework of *Black Athena*, which then compounds with the play's wider politics of simultaneity, equality and social justice. After all, "[t]he classics can console. But not enough" (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 111).

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KEIR ELAM*

Maria Del Sapio Garbero. *Shakespeare's Ruins and Myth of Rome*¹

Abstract

Del Sapio's book reads Shakespeare's Rome as a multi-layered and palimpsestic cultural and historical entity, tackling issues of national identity and geopolitical expansion in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England. The author brings to this book a judiciously mixed methodological approach, that marries critical theory, cultural studies, historiography, rhetoric, and the history of art and archeology. The main texts discussed in this volume are all – in different ways and to varying degrees – 'Roman': *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Romanness in play is not merely geographic or temporal: Rome in Shakespeare's plays and poems is not so much a setting as an existential, moral and ideological condition. Del Sapio discusses the rhetoric of Shakespeare's Rome putting into performative action the multi-layered historical and literary compositional style of her subject in a pluri-perspectival critical discourse. The result is a critical palimpsest worthy of its topic.

KEYWORDS: myth of Rome; archaeology; anatomy; anthropology; Roman ruins

Nobody is better qualified than Maria del Sapio to write about Shakespeare's Rome, a subject to which she has dedicated a great deal of scholarly and critical attention, not to mention an international summer school. This excellent volume – part of the Anglo-Italian Renaissance series, edited by Michele Marapodi – is the crowning achievement in her long and fecund frequentation of Shakespeare's Roman plays and poems.

Del Sapio's book reads Shakespeare's Rome as a multi-layered and palimpsestic cultural and historical entity. It is the Rome of Titus and Caesar, but also the Rome of Renaissance excavations and philological reconstructions. At the same time, crucially, it is the noblest part of Britain's own historical and cultural heritage, as was testified to by the archeological discoveries taking place at the time Shakespeare composed his plays and poems. Thus to write about Rome from early modern London was not merely to commemorate a prestigious imperial past, but also to engage with the issues of national identity and geopolitical expansion that so occupied late Elizabethan and early Jacobean England.

¹ Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021. ISBN 9780367559106, pp. 404

* University of Bologna - keirdouglas.elam@unibo.it

Shakespeare's Rome was multiply overdetermined, passing through the filters of classical historiography, medieval and Renaissance philology, contemporary antiquarianism and the literature and drama that preceded Shakespeare's own. The author brings to this book a judiciously mixed methodological approach, that marries critical theory, cultural studies, historiography, rhetoric, and the history of art and archeology. Such transdisciplinary breadth allows her to range agilely from close textual analysis to theoretical pyrotechnics to historical and new historicist explorations.

The central theme of this book is a ghostly and disquieting presence shared by Renaissance Italy and early modern England alike, namely that of ancient Roman ruins. England could certainly not compete with Italy in the expanding field of archeological finds, but nevertheless the increasing quantity and prestige of what William Camden calls 'remains' underlined the fact that Rome was still actively present under the surface of Britannia. The ruins of Britain turned out to be in part ruins of Roman Britain: "As tangible fragments of a surviving past, ruins were discovered as temporally alien and geographically contemporary" (57). This gave added significance to the representation of Rome in Shakespeare's plays and poems, which are not merely the *mise en scène* of a historically and geographically distant elsewhere, but also the evocation of Britain's own, and still tangible, past. Between Shakespeare's London and Roman Londinium there may have been no chronological continuity, but there was at least a series of highly evocative discontinuities that gave added force to the Roman fictions being acted out onstage.

The main texts discussed in this volume are all – in different ways and to varying degrees – 'Roman': *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Romanness in play is not merely geographic or temporal: Rome in Shakespeare's plays and poems is not so much a setting as an existential, moral and ideological condition. This condition is not always met by the protagonists of the plays, since being Roman is a necessary but not sufficient criterion for the status of *Romanitas*; abundantly present in the figure of Julius Caesar, for example, it is less so in the case of Titus: "But what is lacking and dramatically debilitating in the production of an accomplished and hence persuasive tale is Titus's own public Roman body, the male oratorical body of a leader who is typically invested with *Romanitas* – *virtus* as well as grace, eloquence, authority" (99).

Del Sapio's critical enquiry hinges substantially on two A's: archaeology and anatomy. "[M]y volume aims", she affirms in the introduction, "at reassessing the myth and role of Rome in Shakespeare's world by adopting a critical perspective which is grounded on the 'wordly' new science of anatomy as well as on an emergent archaeological consciousness of the past" (14). Archeology, the paradoxically new science of antiquity, feeds into the volume's dominant discourse of the ruin, beginning with *Ruinorum Romae Descriptio* – the first book of Poggio Bracciolini's *De varietate fortunae* (1448) – which portrays a Rome denuded and fragmented: "The public and private edifices that were founded for

eternity, lie prostrate, naked and broken, like the limbs of a mighty giant" (17). Rome, in Poggio's perspective, "was tantamount to its ruins" (16). In modern times such an archaeological conception of the world falls under the aegis of Benjamin's angel of history ("Theses on the Philosophy of History").

Anatomy, instead, is especially foregrounded in the discussion of *The Rape of Lucrece* in Chapter 2 – "Lucrece's Pictorial Anatomy of Ruin" – and in particular of the long ekphrasis that the protagonist provides following her rape: "a vicarious exploration of the self through which, before putting an end to her life, she transforms her own face, by way of a fashioning *ars moriendi*, into a disquieting 'anatomy of ruin': a living and revengeful *tabula anatomica*, as I would like to call it" (136). Lucrece's post-rape assertion of identity through the discourse of anatomy represents a veritable cognitive revolution, underpinned, as it is, by "the new science of bodies", or by what Jonathan Sawday has called the new "culture of dissection" (137).

To these two A's one might add a third, anthropology, to the extent that one of the main fields of enquiry – for example, in Chapter 4 on *Coriolanus* – is human behaviour viewed under the stress test of a precariously emerging civilization: "Shakespeare's intention in *Coriolanus* . . . seems to have been that of representing the predatory humanity of the age of iron" (226). Likewise in *Titus*, the dramatist's take on his subject (in Chapter 1, "Starting with the Debris of *Finis Imperii: Titus Andronicus*") is that of the anthropologist bricoleur: "In his first Roman play, Shakespeare deals with Rome as if he were invested in an endeavour similar to that of Lévi-Strauss—coping with an ungraspable referent" (79). On this anthropological horizon, the volume embodies what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz called thick description – or in our case thick critical discourse – that places the cultural object within its behavioural and interpretative context.

The author abundantly and generously acknowledges her debt to her predecessors in the field, among them Robert Miola, Janet Adelman, Stephen Greenblatt and Heather James. At the same time, the book enacts, as it were, its own subject, in the sheer eloquence with which Del Sapio discusses the rhetoric of Shakespeare's Rome, putting into performative action the multi-layered historical and literary compositional style of her subject, by means of her pluri-perspectival critical discourse, which brings together – in a horizontal and non-hierarchical fashion – Camden and Benjamin, Du Bellay and Foucault. The result is a critical palimpsest worthy of its topic. Perhaps her main historical guide is William Camden, whose *Britannia* ascribes to Julius Caesar "the merit of having inscribed Britain into history; or, in other words, of having written its first inhabitants into existence" (55).

The volume is endowed with a double introduction. The first part sets out from Shakespeare's pun on "Rome" and "ruin" (and thus on Roman ruins) in sonnet 64: "Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare", a verse that pithily summarizes what the author describes as "the Renaissance vision of Rome as a ruinous scenario (of texts and stones)" (29). The sonnets may not be the first texts that

come to mind when one ruminates on the ruins of Rome, and yet, surprisingly, “ancient Rome turns out to be the effaced but under-written text in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*” (32). Ruins are what become of gilded monuments, besmeared with sluttish time.

The second introduction is dedicated mainly to Camden, the connoisseur of the English ruin, who has no need to visit Rome in order to find material – and no longer merely legendary – traces of the Roman past: “Here, without travelling, Elizabethans were offered the vicarious experience of ‘strange things’ and temporal as well as geographical elsewheres . . . As tangible fragments of a surviving past, ruins were discovered as temporally alien and geographically contemporary. In fact, they pertained to a topography that the antiquarians increasingly disclosed as a layered field of visibility and spectrality” (57). The author cites the emblematic case of St. Paul’s Cathedral – once the site, according to Camden, of a temple dedicated to Diana – which disclosed an unimagined wealth of subterranean archeological finds, as if to show that the passage from pagan to Christian had brought about an ideological but not a functional change in the venue.

The first chapter proper, “Starting with the Debris of *Finis Imperii*”, is concerned with *Titus*, a tragedy that almost paradoxically inaugurates Shakespeare’s tragic dramaturgy by staging the end of the Empire: “Sacrifices as feasts or feasts as sacrifices open Shakespeare’s first Roman play, in a barbaric scenario of *finis imperii* characterized by an anxiety to reaffirm, by means of hostile bodies turned into communal food, a shared imperial sense of identity” (88-9). Not only does Shakespeare begin at the end; he starts at a point that is already beyond endings: “Shakespeare’s Rome is already a world of ‘remains’, mourning, and memorials, when he designs Titus’s opening triumph (*Aeneid*, Book 6 at hand) as mostly a burial of his own ancestry” (89). *Titus*, with its re-presentations of barbaric ritual, its indulgence in physical and political dismemberment, and its spectacular concluding act of cannibalism, is as far from the *civitas* of Augustan Rome as can be imagined. And yet it is just these extremes of violence and decadence that make the play exemplary within the ‘Roman’ subgenre: “a laboratory where more explicitly than in the ensuing Roman plays, but with a deep impact on them, I argue, he unfolds a sort of *manifesto* of how he intends to deal with inheritance and memory” (122).

Perhaps the richest and most spectacular chapter in the volume is – perhaps paradoxically – the one that is furthest removed from the stage itself, namely chapter 2, “Lucrece’s Pictorial Anatomy of Ruin”. Central to the discourse of this chapter is the heroine’s extraordinary post-rape ekphrasis, that Del Sapio describes as “a vicarious exploration of the self through which, before putting an end to her life, she transforms her own face, by way of a fashioning *ars moriendi*, into a disquieting ‘anatomy of ruin’: a living and revengeful *tabula anatomica*, as I would like to call it” (136). The anatomy is “living” thanks to a process of artistic and existential exchange between subject and picture that takes place through the mediation of Lucrece’s rhetorical power. The specific pictorial genre

evoked in this inter-artistic exchange is the *écorché*, a study of the human body that derived from the science of anatomy. More specifically, the “well-painted picture” of the despairing Hecuba described in the ekphrasis recalls the pencilled or chalked Renaissance *tratteggio* that leaves the subject’s face in a state of *non-finito*: “Shakespeare himself seems to refer us to such a state of ‘work in progress’ when he later elaborates on Hecuba’s figure as ‘pencil’d pensiveness and colour’d sorrow’ (1497): as if Hecuba’s figure had been left midway on its transformation from pencil to colour, abstraction to *mimesis*” (140).

Lucrece’s ekphrasis is not merely a multiply mimetic essay on anatomy; it becomes “the personification of *Anatomia* itself, a self-flaying and flaying deity whose symbols in early modern culture were the mirror and the knife, an iconography derived from the myth of Perseus and Medusa” (159). By the same paradoxical process of self-assertive auto-immolation, her suicide is at the same time a ritual act of liberation, “a patriarchally encoded gesture of self-cleansing” (162), whereby she is able to re-conquer, in the eyes of the community, the very ‘chastity’ that Tarquin’s act of violence and violation had publicly tarnished.

The science of anatomy is similarly posed in foreground in the third chapter, “Anatomizing the Body of a King”, where the anatomized monarch in question is *Julius Caesar*, but also, inter alia, James I, within the framework of the Augustan iconography that the monarch knowingly adopted (186). Here the Mannerist distortions and disproportions of Shakespeare’s Caesarean body – that recall the dicta of Giovanni Lomazzo’s *Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge*, in Richard Haydocke’s illustrated 1598 translation – ironically reflect the ideological position of the opponents of the ‘King’: “In Shakespeare’s play, the art of perspective and proportions, or anthropometry, seems to be turned into a heretical and dangerous knowledge. Indeed it is one with Cassius’s conspiratorial project. Caesar if figured as a giant straddling the Roman worldwide geography with his ‘huge legs’” (186). The play, with its reiterated onstage displaying of Caesar’s massacred corpse, literalizes the trope of the anatomy theatre, allowing the dramatist to participate in the “revolutionized cognitive paradigm” of the dissected body (178).

Chapter 4, on “*Coriolanus*’s Forgetful Humanism”, reflects on the issues of memory and hospitality. In Act 4, scenes 4 and 5, the protagonist is victim/perpetrator of an amnesiac lapsus, symptom of his ‘tired memory’: “. . . Coriolanus does not remember his host’s name. His poor host is left to his state of being merely caught sight of, his cry unanswered . . . Is Shakespeare elliptically foregrounding in this apparent marginal scene what leads his hero to the final disaster, that is, his difficulty to transfer himself from his patrician and solipsistic *virtus* to the much more complex sphere of social and civic virtues?” (232). The author aptly relates this incident to Derrida’s complex notions of hospitality and ‘hostipitality’ (hospitality/hostility; “Hostipitality”, 2000), whereby *Coriolanus*’s failure in etiquette and reciprocity – of the kind that Seneca addresses in his essay *De Beneficiis* – may also be read as an act of strategic but fatal forgetting.

The fifth chapter, “Caesar’s Wing”, on *Cymbeline*, addresses the hybrid and

anachronistic temporality of the play as a supreme example of Shakespeare's palimpsestic dealings with ancient (and not so ancient) Rome: "But it is in *Cymbeline's* Augustan time and in its hybrid spatial and generic context—half ancient Rome, half Renaissance Italy, half history, half fable . . . that [its relationship with the past] . . . was overtly addressed and accomplished by Shakespeare" (250). It is, in other words, precisely the overlapping of levels of historical time, together with the concurrent mixing of dramatic genres, that enables the playwright to develop a uniquely inclusive 'both/and' poetics that makes him simultaneously a contemporary of ancient and of modern Romans. And it is such contemporaneity that paradoxically transforms Augustan Rome into an ideal space for the representation of the growing early modern English sense of nationhood: "In *Cymbeline* the historical geography of Rome, the ruins of its declining values and its myth, served overtly as a world-scale stage on which to project the performance of the Tudors' and Jacobean's growing sense of national identity and their nascent imperial ambitions . . ." (280).

One of the more surprising cross-temporal presences in the 'Renaissance' scenes of *Cymbeline* (in 2.4) is the tapestry of Cleopatra purportedly discovered by Iachimo in Innogen's bedchamber. Iachimo performs an ekphrasis that, like the description of Hecuba in *Lucrece*, provides an inset *mise-en-abyme* that transcends both historical and artistic borders: "Shakespeare has stealthily furnished Innogen's northern bedchamber with some of what Hazlitt describes as Cleopatra's 'luxurious pomp and gorgeous extravagance'. He has classicized its interior with riches of incommensurable value and incalculable risk." (288). Del Sapio takes the episode – which testifies to Cleopatra's role as erotic myth and, at the same time, as ocular proof of Innogen's supposed 'Egyptian' infidelity – as an intertextual and inter-artistic lead-in to her final chapter (six), on "World and Ruin in *Antony and Cleopatra*", largely devoted to the theme of "The disintegration of Antony's heroic self" (318), through the disjointed and disarticulated *longue durée* of archaeological time. In this dilated temporal perspective, the tragic epos of Antony – and more specifically, of Cleopatra's Antony – is emblematic of the poetics of the ruin in the Roman plays as a whole: as Del Sapio observes in her concluding remarks, "Cleopatra's Antony is both ruin and myth: his broken name calls for sceptical hermeneutics (the work of passers-by, lovers, archaeologists, epigraphists, philologists) on one side, as well as desirous and transcending poetry on the other. In this Cleopatra is a figure of burial, melancholy, memory, and authorship as well as of unquenchable desire: the same which fuels the eroticism of her theatrical reunion with him" (334).

This is one of the more explicitly and insistently Derridean chapters in the volume. The play's extraordinary series of letters, messengers, envoys, dispatches, scrolls and the like recalls the French philosopher's *The Postcard*, whereby "the play's language flirts (as already in *Titus*) with the volatile condition of the 'envoy'" (305). The chapter likewise 'flirts' – not for the first time in the volume, as we have seen – with another Derridean theme, that of 'hostipitality', where the question "Who plays the host?" becomes central to the agential dynamics

of the tragedy. Del Sapio's outstanding study is itself hospitable, in its generous openness – at once learned, profound and playful – to multiple disciplinary discourses. To judge from this book, the myth of Rome is as powerful and as generative as ever.

SERENA GUARRACINO*

Michael Billington, *Affair of the Heart. British Theatre 1992 to 2020*¹

Abstract

This contribution offers a review of Michael Billington's *Affair of the Heart*, a collection of reviews by *The Guardian's* lead theatre critic from 1992 to 2020. The collection allows for a reflection on the role of theatre reviews in today's theatrical scene, while highlighting some pivotal moments in the recent history of British Theatre, from the consequences of Thatcher's austerity policy to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In its overall, the book shows how theatre reviews may help to build a more aware and informed spectatorship, and hence to keep theatre alive through ever-changing times.

KEYWORDS: Michael Billington; *The Guardian*; theatre review; contemporary theatre; British theatre

Theatre reviews are a weird lot, an ephemeral writing for an ephemeral art: they retain a trace of the transient experience offered by a theatrical performance to its audience, but they are in themselves doomed to become quickly outdated, as the shows they write about close to leave the stage to the next one, and the next, and the next. Written for newspapers more than for specialized journals – and today more and more often for the diversified and complex landscape of dedicated internet websites and blogs – reviews have the hard task of offering a surrogate theatrical experience, of praising and/or criticizing full productions and individual performances; with theatre having now become just one choice among a plethora of entertainment possibilities – from cinema to streaming platforms and online gaming – they may also work as a way to entice or, on the contrary, repulse audiences not only from a single show, but from theatre in the overall.

What is the point, then, of making such a transitory form permanent by collecting and publishing reviews in a book? Sometimes, as in the case of Edward Said's *Music at the Limits* (2009), which collects the Palestinian thinker's writing on music including many reviews on operas and concerts, it is to shed light on the broader intellectual effort of the author – especially, as in this case, when published posthumously. *Affair of the Heart* works rather differently: not only

¹ London - New York - Oxford - New Delhi - Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2022, ISBN 9781350214774, pp. 344

* University of L'Aquila - serena.guarracino@univaq.it

because the author, Michael Billington, is still among the living, but especially because he has devoted his whole career to these Cinderellas of writing, theatre reviews – although his have been written for a lead newspaper such as *The Guardian*. The book, which collects a selection of Billington's reviews from 1992 to 2020, the year of his retirement, actually follows a previous one, *One Night Stands*, published in 1993 and reprinted in a revised edition in 2001, including reviews from 1971 to 1992 together with occasional pieces commenting on different issues in British theatre. *Affair of the Heart* follows the same structure, with a varying number of reviews per year (roughly from three to seven) and an introduction to each decade summarizing the main events in terms of politics and management.

In doing so, this work may attract a number of readers, from the theatre aficionado to the newbie, including the theatre scholar. While reviews are, indeed, as short-lived as the shows that are their subject, they also play a pivotal role in theatre scholarship, witnessing performances as they happen. In the age of compulsive recording when material on performances is more available than in previous centuries, one may be tricked into thinking that watching the video of a performance is comparable to experiencing it live; reading reviews reminds one that it is not. And this is not true only of performances such as the revival of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* in 2016 at the National Theatre, directed by Katie Mitchell, which made some of the audience members faint – as Billington mentions in his review (244). Even when fainting is not the case, reviews manage to register the impact of performances at the moment of their happening and offer a precious occasion to assess the effect of time on the reception of what have become canonical works and historical productions.

Kane is an interesting case in this respect. The period with which *Affairs of the Heart* is concerned saw, among the many pivotal events in British theatre, the rise and fall, in a span of a few years, of a playwright who has become, albeit posthumously, one of the most discussed and studied of the last decades. However, knowing that her first play, *Blasted* (1995), was poorly received is rather different than reading Billington's opening statement of his own review: "I was simply left wondering how such naïve tosh managed to scrape past the Court's normally judicious play-selection committee" (38). However, if readers wonder how the author himself feels going back to such a miscalculated response to a play which was bound to take British theatre by storm, they will not be left wondering: Billington's review is followed by *Letters to the Editor* by Martin Crimp and others defending *Blasted* from Billington's harsh criticism. The vitality of the cultural debate *Blasted* ignited is thus offered to readers in as much an unmediated form as possible; and the section closes with a note by Billington himself who, from the vantage point of the present, admits having been "hopelessly wrong" about his first assessment of the play (although, he is keen to add, "I was not entirely alone") (41).

Such a read allows to appreciate the layered experience that theatre reception, and theatre studies more generally, need to be: always aware that the pass-

ing of time prevents access to texts and performances in the same way as when they first appeared on stage, and looking for sources, such as theatre reviews, that grant us to catch a glimpse of that irrecoverable past. Hence one can read how it felt to watch the premiere of Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* in 2000, one year after her suicide, and the struggle to separate an assessment of the play from the shock that her death had been for everyone involved in British theatre at the time: "Judging *4.48 Psychosis* is difficult. How on earth do you award aesthetic points to a 75-minute suicide note?" (87). Today one may be able to look at this play from a different angle; reading Billington, however, also highlights how biographism is still rampant in studies on Kane's work, as if time had not passed at all.

I am focusing on reviews of Kane's work because she is one of the foremost, and most discussed, personalities in British theatre from the time span included in *Affair of the Heart*; she has also been the focus of some of my work as a theatre scholar, so reception of her plays is inevitably of more interest to me than other material included in the book. This is, I believe, one of the characteristics of this collection, which is not best when read front to back. On the contrary, inflicting on oneself review after review of sometimes very different works, grouped together on strict chronological criteria, may be the worst service any reader may do to Billington's writing. *Affair of the Heart* is, indeed, a book to peruse, looking for the stories emerging from the pages. One may follow a single author, and witness the emergence of new playwrights such as Lucy Prebble or debbie tucker green, or relish in the mature work of titans such as Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill and Harold Pinter; follow the complex trends of Shakespearean stagings in the years which saw the opening of Shakespeare's Globe (1997) and more and more successful film adaptations by directors such as Zeffirelli and Branagh which made traditional productions in breeches obsolete and opened the way for new approaches to Shakespeare on stage by even the more time-honoured establishments such as the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Billington's reviews also register trends such as theatrical adaptations of novels and film, and their uneven results, as witnessed by the scorching reviews of the musical version of *Moby Dick* (1992) or of the theatre adaptation of *When Harry Meets Sally* (2004). That these reviews made their way in the final selection for the book is in itself intriguing: the collection thrives on negative reviews, not only of works which have eventually become canonical, such as the aforementioned *Blasted*, but also of those which, as in these last cases, have disappeared from the stage for good reason. This makes one aware that not all performances make theatre history, but all productions, good or bad, make the complex palette of theatre at any given time; it also allows readers to enjoy Billington's writing which, although generally a pleasure to read, reaches peaks of ironic prowess when highlighting the shortcomings of a production, with bouts of sheer fun as in the opening of the *Moby Dick* review: "*Moby Dick* is the latest nail to be driven into the glittering coffin of the West End musical" (13). The show might not have deserved to survive, but Billington's delightful prose surely does.

This is also true for the opinion pieces which, in a more sombre tone, comment on the current affairs of British theatre. Among many obituaries (John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Shalegh Delaney among others) and celebrations of pivotal figures from John Gielgud to Caryl Churchill, one reads about the legacy of the Thatcher administrations, the complexities of Black theatre, or the rising trend for 90-minute plays. Billington has also written regularly to push for restructuring and transformation in theatre as an institution, the most recent time in the form of a letter addressed to Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in the Johnson administration, in July 2020; at the time, the effects of the pandemic had already started to weigh on performance venues, which had been abruptly closed until further notice, and even long-standing institutions such as Covent Garden were struggling to keep afloat. Another, maybe the most poignant lesson emerges from these lines: the fragility and powerfulness of theatre practice, which minutely registers economic, social, and cultural movements, and returns them to the audience. Theatre reviews may not substitute for the experience of performance, but may help to build a more aware and informed spectatorship, and hence to keep theatre alive through ever-changing times.

DIONA ESPINOSA*

Acting the Private, Intimate, and Public Body of Cuba. Review of Bretton White's *Staging Discomfort: Performance and Queerness in Contemporary Cuba*¹

Abstract

This study offers an alternative viewpoint for understanding contemporary Cuba after the 2000s from a performance studies perspective. *Staging Discomfort: Performance and Queerness in Contemporary Cuba* by Bretton White discusses how performing queerness in contemporary Cuban theater can also promote a counternarrative that criticizes the state's failing rhetoric about socialism and revolution in Cuba. She concentrates on queer bodies to examine key concepts like race, sex, marginalization, citizenship, and the state. The book considers five plays by Cuban playwrights that have been judged subversive, or have been censored or met with minimal official recognition from state cultural institutions. From the title one can already appreciate the questioning of the official Cuban cultural archive and political agenda. This selection brings to light an absent and urgent topic in current Cuban performance studies. In addition, it evokes a practice of resistance through artistic expression, as theater-makers and even audiences refuse to be silenced, reprimanded, or forgotten from their right to live in an inclusive and democratic country.

KEYWORDS: performance; queerness; theatre; Cuban theater; identity; counternarrative

How are theatrical spaces created in Cuba considering limitations of expression? How do queer themes connect the bodies of actors and spectators? These are the main questions that *Staging Discomfort: Performance and Queerness in Contemporary Cuba* by Bretton White intends to answer. The book focuses on the bodies of actors and spectators and their proximity, which creates an intimate relationship vital to the theatrical representation – in this case, the contemporary Cuban stage. This title presents under the queerness discourse key terms like fluidity, subjectivity, intimacy, citizenship, state, censorship, racism, and sexism to propose an understanding of how the intervention of queer performances constitutes a critique of the state's failing socialism in Cuba.

¹ Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2020, ISBN 9781683401544, pp. 258

* University of Miami - dx290@miami.edu

Queerness is a wide topic of analysis in Cuba, but White concentrates on examining queer bodies and their new affective modes. The author finds in the Cuban stage the capacity of queerness to imagine new subjectivities that reshape different forms of citizen participation. She remarks that the main purpose is rethinking “the capabilities of queer sexual intimacies that are produced by sex, the possibility of sex, or the proximity to sex (or its suggestion) in spite of and because of their tension with the state’s ideologies” (3).

Thus, the study is interested in the discomfort produced by intimacy and sexualized bodies not only in relation to artistic expression, but also to political activism in Cuba. Queerness is understood in this context taking into consideration gay bodies and at the same time other alternative identities that rise in the face of the established system of power.

Homosexuality on the island and, more broadly, queerness, has been a topic with a particular space within the Cuban project. The Revolution imposed rigid conceptions about sexuality; indeed, the norm established was white masculine heteronormativity. The government instituted in 1959 imposed strict standards in the construction of a new masculinity and declared homosexuals to be depraved, perfidious, questionable, and unconvincing to the new moral socialist order. Homosexuality was even proclaimed as a foreign and imperialist import, that needed to be eradicated under the ideological, moral, and political program. According to a speech pronounced by Fidel Castro in 1963, homosexuals represented a threat exhibiting their depraved and even “elvispreslian” behaviors. Castro affirmed that:

Muchos de esos pepillos vagos, hijos de burgueses, andan por ahí con unos pantaloncitos demasiado estrechos; algunos de ellos con una guitarrita en actitudes “elvispreslianas”, y que han llevado su libertinaje a extremos de querer ir a algunos sitios de concurrencia pública a organizar sus shows feminoides por la libre . . . Que no confundan la serenidad de la Revolución y la ecuanimidad de la Revolución con debilidades de la Revolución. Porque nuestra sociedad no puede darles cabida a esas degeneraciones. La sociedad socialista no puede permitir ese tipo de degeneraciones. ¿Jovencitos aspirantes a eso? ¡No! “Árbol que creció torcido”... ya el remedio no es tan fácil . . .

[Many of those lazy *pepillos*, children of bourgeois parents, walk around with shorts that are too tight; some of them with a little guitar in “elvispreslian” attitudes, and who have taken their debauchery to the extreme of wanting to go to some places of public concurrence to organize their feminoid shows on their own . . . Do not confuse the serenity of the Revolution and the equanimity of the Revolution with weaknesses of the Revolution. Because our society cannot accommodate these degenerations. Socialist society cannot allow that kind of degeneration. Aspiring youngsters? Nope! “Tree that grew crooked”... the remedy is not so easy . . . (translation mine)]

The image of the Cuban Revolution was conceived and promoted mainly by

young white leaders like Fidel and Raúl Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, Ernesto Che Guevara, among others. The idea of the ‘macho’ who descended from the mountains of Sierra Maestra in Santiago de Cuba and became a victorious hero of the people created a mystical conception of a new man (*hombre nuevo*). These loyal, honorable, and courageous men were the ones able to fight, defend and reproduce the utopian prospect of the socialist project and the vision of the country and its population.

Consequently, the representations of queerness have been molded, coded, and articulated in a kind of soft visibility considering the pressure and control of power. The introduction of this book contextualizes the Cuban post-revolution stage and the role of the theater in times of crisis with performances that confront Cuba’s cultural system. In this first movement, *Staging Discomfort* underlines the challenge of queer representations, their visibility, and engagement via performance. Hence, the topic of queerness on the Cuban stage is also an examination of how bodies, and specifically queer bodies, possess a potentially political and subversive capital in modern Cuba. Queer bodies operate as alternative identities as against the official discourse, alternatives also to the established system of power.

Then, White reflects on what Judith Butler considers a certain kind of ‘appearance’ bound with her conception of gender as performative. If gender is “prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or other” (2009, 2), the reproduction of gender will be a negotiation with power, and therefore within the Cuban theatrical context will be a persistent and insistent counternarrative. White argues, using Butler’s terms, that she focuses on embodied presence:

her insistence on the plural repeatability of performance – as opposed to the unique, performed act – is related to how I envision the proliferation of intimacies. The spreading of discourse, performance, and intimacies undermines singularities and similarities by dispersing the sites where they take place . . . In my consideration of affect, I argue that discomfort, shame, frustration, longing, and failure can constitute affective bridges between bodies and can mobilize criticism. (18)

In particular, the book assesses five Cuban plays produced after 1959 that highlight the challenge of questioning the Cuban revolutionary model of masculine heteronormativity. The selection includes contemporary works from different theatrical directors, most of them located in Havana (*Las relaciones de Clara* directed by Carlos Díaz, Teatro El Público company; *Baños públicos, S.A* text by Esther Suarez Durán; *Pájaros de la playa*, directed by Nelda Castillo, El Ciervo Encantado company; *Chamaco* by Abel González Melo, directed by Carlos Celdrán, Argos Teatro company; *Perros que jamás ladraron* by Rogelio Orizondo, Teatro El Público company) which suggests that the most challenging, controversial, ‘visible’ and/ or knowable work occurs in the capital of the country. Chapters examine each of the plays critically, putting the original theatrical arguments and plots in dialogue with recent theoretical frameworks such as psychoanaly-

sis, behavioral theory, theater studies, and queer theory.

Chapter 1 “Instigating Intimacies: *Las relaciones de Clara* and Uncomfortable Closeness” analyzes a play directed by the Cuban director Carlos Díaz from Teatro El Público, an adaptation of the original German text by Dea Loher. The space of a colonial home is the context for *Las relaciones de Clara* (2007) and there appears an intimacy between actors and audience which generates an unpleasant, but warm shared space.

It is the concept of intimacy that has an important role in this analysis. Actors and spectators make a kind of involved association that recognizes during the performance the chance for an alternative Cuba. However, this nearness on both parts at the same time produces a liberty with discomfort, an awkward proximity that understands the necessity of the prostitution of bodies as the source of income. The idea of familiarity in the audience with the situations that Clara experiences, and the discomfort likewise, is what the author claims as queer sexual intimacies.

According to the queer theorist Leo Bersani and the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips in *Intimacies* (2008), there are limitations in the imagination of intimacy, the limit for example of psychological curiosity. These constraints create tension in the dynamic between the audience and performers, depending on whether one accepts the status of witness and accomplice in the intimacy of Clara and the possibility of sex. According to Bersani there is a

move from a hermeneutics of desire to the pleasure of bodies. Correlatively, there is a profound shift in registers of intimacy: from our heterosexual culture’s reserving the highest relational value for the couple to a communal model of impersonal. (2008, 42)

In other words, White argues that in the case of Cuba and, particularly this work by the director Carlos Díaz, the intimacies create

dynamic spaces that upset the state’s organized, harmonious view of its populace . . . by participating in the work, if only through sheer proximity to it as an audience member, Cuban spectators become complicit actors in intimacies that directly disrupt the unified image that the state holds for itself and its citizens. (29)

In this chapter, the author proposes the possibility of analyzing and adapting a foreign text which has been reinterpreted for presenting Cuban-ness. It is not new for Carlos Díaz to make versions of foreign dramatists and destabilize traditional roles with queer performances, however the political, provocative, and avant-garde dimension of *Las relaciones de Clara* is striking because of the unique and paradoxical way in which it critiques the status quo.

On the other hand, the author presents Chapter 2 “Sharing Shame: Reimagining Entrepreneurship in *Baños públicos, S.A.*”, an analysis of a text by Esther Suárez Durán. The piece *Baños públicos, S.A* is a representation of clandestine

sexual behaviors in the intimate space of a bathroom. Equally, it represents the connection between dignity and shame, a dialogue for “unhinging from homonormative behaviors and encouraging queer freedoms” (73) through the prism of the queer discourse about national identity.

White asserts in this essay that *Baños públicos, S.A.* plays with an intimate space like a bathroom that has become common use in a kind of queer experience. Identity and embarrassment are at the same level of the experience, because

what is specifically mentioned in *Baños* is the bathroom space as a place for evacuation, and Él’s [one of the characters] imagined glorification of that space as a sort of tourist destination of bathrooms. She sees the need for more bathrooms in Cuba, and for Él and Ella’s [one of the characters] need for capital. Furthermore, during the Special Period, the state’s change to allow certain kinds of private businesses (and to ignore others) signals a fortuitous historical moment of capitalist permissiveness from which Él can benefit financially. (77)

In the words of Eve Sedgwick, the stage promotes the spectacle of narcissism; there performers can speak, dramatizing the “hyperbole of its original cast” (Sedgwick 2003, 38). In *Baños públicos, S.A.* there is the force of queer pride, and dignity like “different interlinings of the same glove” (77). The theatrical performance also has a transformational shame because

[it] interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things. Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity. (ibid.)

Instead of restricting actions, shame triggers the expression of identity, thus,

shame, then, instead of being an affect that limits the body, like guilt, creates an aura of movement and performance held internally that is not easily touched by the state’s power machinations . . . This is shame’s connection with performance – its moment of transformation – that can create movement out from underneath guilt’s weighty bodily connection. (76)

Chapter 3 “Frustrating Futurity: Beauty and Pain in *Pájaros de la playa*” explores representations of queer bodies dying of AIDS, their pains, and beauty. The examined play is a theatrical adaptation by the group El Ciervo Encantado based on the Cuban author Severo Sarduy’s homonymous novel. White explains that the conception of Cuban identity and gay subjectivity destabilize “the unilateral, future-focused, and fantastical power structure organized by the state” (2020, 107) where the performance is decidedly non-textual. *Pájaros de la playa* is an opportunity to experience the discomfort and frustration of a painful situation like a disease, but at the same time pushes a feeling of desire for a new concep-

tion of knowing and living in the body.

This essay also moves towards the archive and the repertoire, in the terms of Diana Taylor, proposing that text and performance break down the hegemonic binary of writing and performance, which is also a suggestion that crosses the entire book. The traditional and controlled content and practices of archival knowledge is eroded by queerness. Performances, as Taylor asserts in her text *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2015), are acts for transferring social knowledge, memory, and identity. Therefore, its presence in the repertoire and archive becomes an act of power. However, what we have with *Pájaros de la playa* is the expression of a counter-hegemonic discourse as the original text belongs to an author censored and prohibited in Cuba.

For its part, Chapter 4, “Vexing Visibilities: Space and Queerness in *Chamaco*”, based on the analysis of a text by Abel González Melo, argues that “an aesthetics of cruising could provide a visual and bodily tool for problematizing the state’s aging heteronormative and antagonistic project, through circularities and darkness that work against linearities and knowing” (147). *Chamaco* is a play where the space has an important role; it is indeed this instance that brings the idea of the queer. In the most hidden and obscure corner of the architecture in a colonial building of old Havana occurs an explosion of intimacy, sex, and body expression. For the author of *Staging Discomfort*, spaces, the absence of the stage of the actual architecture, and the substitution for black areas make it possible to reconsider what can be done or found in our imagination,

making the invisible visible, but the visibility takes place not on stage so much as in our imaginations. The (lasting) relationality of the play is an architectural structure and the actions that take place there that is constructed piece by piece in the audience members’ minds. (142)

Lastly, Chapter 5 “Fronting Failure: Testing Continuity in *Perros que jamás ladraron*”, examines a play by Rogelio Orizondo which “tackles failure thematically in its representation of bodies and identities that do not conform to the revolutionary ideal of its national citizenry” (174). The play presents seven monologues contextualized in Cuba after the Special Period. *Perros que jamás ladraron* has a special emphasis on racial identity along with gender and sex. The monologues highlight the exploration of the grotesque in contrast with the model of national identity and put into question the historical ideal of Cuban citizens and revolutionaries. White states that:

layering of bodies and practices that do not work, both thematically and structurally, might signify the possibilities of failure as a theatrical strategy, if audience members can stay with the disruptive and discontinuous experience of seeing the piece because failure points away from but does not prescribe. Failure’s lack of direction, then, suggests new ways to imagine Cuban identity, as well as new ways to stage it. (174)

Overall, *Staging Discomfort* presents smart and elegant arguments about a theater dependent on state funding for its survival, giving sustenance to performing and queer bodies – artists who, however, criticize the pressures of censorship and are imprisoned or blacklisted when they rise against the official apparatus. As White argues:

these pressures on queer identity and on performing bodies make it difficult to imagine something so organized as a movement taking place on Cuban stages, especially considering the dependence that practicing performers have on the state to be recognized as official artists. Without that recognition, performing artists risk access to the material support that they need. (215)

This volume bridges a scholarly gap providing an analysis of queerness and contemporary Cuba that opens avenues for further and deeper critical academic thinking. The author takes as a corpus of analysis plays with a counternarrative by Cubans and for Cubans, for which original texts or performances in one or another case have been considered subversive, blacklisted, censored (mostly by the state), or with very low official recognition. However, *Staging Discomfort* offers a kind of unity in the constant call for reflection on art's subversive capacity and potential threat not only to the state but also to the normative understanding of national identity. On the other hand, the definition of queer has indeed adopted a non-normative identity, its non-homogeneous, but rather fluid nature underlining "how theater can reach, touch, and spread feelings" and "how queer intimacies can be elusive and omnipresent, but that they might be experienced but not articulated in the bodies of spectators" (24).

Furthermore, White's proposal is also an encouraging attempt to approach some strategies, subjectivities, and negotiations from a queer theorization and performance perspective, that stress relations with the Cuban State. This selection of plays brings to attention not only the absence of queerness in most of the revolutionary period, but also the contemporary characterizations of people who resist in many ways and forms of expression and are censured, marginalized, or forgotten from the public and governmental agenda.

What Bretton White took as a corpus of study related to theater and performance studies goes beyond that field, and *Staging Discomfort* could be an alternative text to understand many contemporary and critical themes in Cuba after the 2000s. However, a lot has changed on the island since the publication of this book in May 2020. On one hand, same-sex marriage was just approved with more than 66 percent by a referendum in September 2022. Nevertheless, the totalitarian regime still condemns performances, independent initiatives, and unofficial artistic productions, making it clear that queerness, and Cuba in general, is far from experiencing freedom of cultural expression. Censorship is nowadays harsher than ever before; the island is immersed in one of the darkest periods, which represents the context for works such as those presented by White. Further, in the current Cuban scenario, *Staging Discomfort: Performance and Queerness in Contemporary Cuba* investigates the queer archive, revolution-

ary rhetoric, and what frustrations, failures, and even hopes are recorded for staging future Cuba.

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GHERARDO UGOLINI*

The Ghost of Iphigenia and Oedipus on the Stairs: Ancient Theatre Festival - Syracuse 2022

Abstract

The programme of the 57th edition of the Ancient Theatre Festival at Syracuse (17 May – 12 July 2022) consisted of three Greek tragedies. The staging of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (the first part of the *Oresteia*) was directed by Davide Livermore in Walter Lapini's translation and was envisaged as taking place in the 1930s. The show was structured around a number of highly successful stage effects of great emotive impact, not least of which were the huge mirrors forming the backdrop in which the public could see themselves reflected throughout the course of the action. Besides this, the director introduces the ghost of Iphigenia into the action, a character who is absent in Aeschylus apart from the repeated re-evoking of her sacrifice before the war of the Greeks against the Trojans. The staging of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, directed by Robert Carsen in Francesco Morosi's translation, is in a style which is completely different from Livermore's *Agamemnon*, employing no special effects and instead totally focussing on the words and gestures of the actors. On the stage there towers an enormous staircase where the characters, and in particular King Oedipus, move up and down, their ascents and descents symbolically representing the rise and fall of the sovereign in a starkly 'existential' reading of Sophocles' play which sees in the figure of Oedipus the paradigm of the *condicio humana*. Finally Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, directed by Jacopo Gassman in Giorgio Ieranò's translation, locates the story in an abstract and atemporal space thus emphasizing the 'traumatized' personalities of the two protagonists (Iphigenia and Orestes), who only through a reciprocal recognition seem to be able to discover their own specific identity.

KEYWORDS: Aeschylus; Sophocles; Euripides; Syracuse; Greek tragedy; Davide Livermore; Robert Carsen; Jacopo Gassmann

With this production of *Agamemnon* the Turinese director Davide Livermore has concluded his staging of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse, adding the final missing piece to the trilogy (which in reality is the first play in the sequence).¹ During the last season of the National Institute of Ancient

¹ *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, director Davide Livermore, Italian translation Walter Lapini, scenic project Davide Livermore, Lorenzo Russo Rainaldi; costumes Gianluca Falaschi, music Mario Conte, lighting Antonio Castro, assistant director Giancarlo Judica Cordiglia, stage

* University of Verona - gherardo.ugolini@univr.it

Drama, Livermore, who is particularly distinguished for his staging of opera, had already presented *The Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* respectively the second and third parts of the work.

It should be immediately underlined that this production of *Agamemnon* is, as could not have been otherwise, in perfect accord with the other two plays of the preceding season. The same 'decadent' setting, that is the Thirties of the last century, the identical scenographic configuration with a black revolving platform at the centre, divan and armchairs in black leather, occasional tables with champagne bottles and glasses, a vintage gramophone, two pianos, a small mobile bar of the same period. The style of the costumes also reproduces the upper middle-class fashion of the times: Clytemnestra (Laura Marinoni) first in a lowcut black dress, and then, to welcome her husband returning from the war, in an elegant, flamboyant long dress of red chiffon with gold panels as a symbol of passionate decisiveness, Agamemnon (Sax Nicosia) in a grey double-breasted suit, tie and waistcoat, as indeed is his rival Aegisthus (Stefano Santospago).

An interesting novelty, in Livermore's expected style, is the presence of an outsize mirror at the back of the orchestra, where we might expect the palace of the Atrides. It consists of a mirror, 27m long and 8m high, in which the spectators, crowded onto the steps of the *cavea* (packed at last after the two years of reduced capacity owing to the pandemic) can see themselves reflected causing an effect of defamiliarization and producing the sensation of being simultaneously part of the public and part of the action on stage. The director's idea here for the huge mirror was "to integrate the public with what is happening on stage at a time in history when we are no longer used to being part of a community" so that everyone is forced to think that "what is happening on stage is our affair too, it is talking about us".² Next to the mirror the ledwall makes its appearance once again, the rotating sphere we had already seen in the *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides* on which a continuous alternation of symbolic and archetypal images are projected, marking out the passing of time and the progress of humanity (a butterfly beating its wings, the foaming of waves on the sea, atmospheric events, Classical statues) and offstage happenings in the play (fire announcing the fall of Troy, the return of Agamemnon from the war, with a plane landing and the king coming down the gangway with Cassandra, while the crowd greets

director Alberto Giolitti, Video design D-Wok, Head of tailoring Marcella Salvo, Head of make-up and hair Aldo Caldarella. Cast: Diego Mingolla and Stefania Visalli (musicians), Maria Grazia Solano (Watchman), Gaia Aprea (choir leader), Maria Laila Fernandez, Alice Giroladini, Marcello Gravina, Turi Moricca, Valentina Virando (chorus), Laura Marinoni (Clytemnestra), Olivia Manescalchi (Herald), Sax Nicosia (Agamemnon), Linda Gennari (Cassandra), Stefano Santospago (Aegisthus), Carlotta Maria Messina and Mariachiara Signorello (ghost of Iphigenia), Tonino Bellomo, Edoardo Lombardo, Massimo Marchese (old men of Argos), Giuseppe Fuscio (Orestes child), Margherita Vatti (Electra child). First performance: Syracuse, Greek Theatre, 17 Mai 2022. On stage at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse from 17 May to 9 July 2022.

² Interview with Davide Livermore in Di Caro 2022, 10.

them).

But Livermore's most successful novelty is without doubt the addition of a character who is not in Aeschylus' original play. This sort of retouching is often easily left open to objection and attack, but we are convinced that it falls completely within the rights of the director not only to modify the text but also the members of the *dramatis personae*. So much so that in Livermore's *Agamemnon*, right from the very beginning, we witness the appearance of the ghost of Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, whom her father sacrificed before his departure for Troy, on the advice of the seer Calcante, in order to ensure propitious winds for the voyage of the Achaean army (Aesch. Ag. 228-47). Now, it is true that in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, although Iphigenia does not appear as a character, her presence is frequently evoked.³ In the end it is precisely her daughter's assassination that is the motive force behind Clytemnestra's revenge. We are certain that Aeschylus – notorious for the use of εἰδῶλα (ghosts) in his plays (that of Darius in the *Persians*, that of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*) – would not have turned his nose up at this ingenious notion of a modern director.

It must be said however that in this case Iphigenia's ghost does not make an occasional appearance now and then but is the real *Leitmotiv* of the show. In the end, it could be said that this spectre, presented according to the canons of 'horror' as a young girl dressed in white with a long plait and terrible black circles round her eyes, is the true protagonist of the play. Besides which, Livermore doubles Iphigenia using two actors (Carlotta Maria Messina and Mariachiara Signorello, both pupils at the Accademia dell'INDA) so as to be able to make the uneasy ghost appear in more than one place at a time, or instead to make it disappear in one place and reappear immediately in another.

Iphigenia appears right from the beginning, even before the sentry (Maria Grazia Solano) begins the prologue from the palace roof. She runs here and there, terrified and panting, to the accompaniment of Bach's *Das musikalische Opfer* played by the pianists Diego Mingolla and Stefania Visalli; she picks up a paper boat and plays with it before disappearing and reappearing over and over again, especially at moments of particular tension, although she is neither seen nor heard by the other characters. She is the one who takes Agamemnon by the hand as he walks along the red tapestries (here transformed into carpets of rose-petals). It is she who vindictively proffers her mother the murder weapon to kill the king (Fig. 1).

³ See for example Ag. 1415-18, 1525-6, 1555-9.



Fig. 1: Clytemnestra (Laura Marinoni) kills Agamemnon (Sax Nicosia). Photo Pantano/AFI Siracusa

If it is indeed the case that the *Oresteia* was known in antiquity as a sort of “classic of *phobos*”,⁴ Iphigenia’s ghost is the very best way to give the public the sort of shivers caused by the uncanny. This is especially evident when she gets close to Cassandra (the excellent Linda Gennari), the only one of the characters “sensitive” enough to perceive her presence and to be shocked by it. During Cassandra’s long scene Livermore is canny enough to avoid portraying the moments of prophetic possession through the usual stereotypical approach, indulging in hysteria and fanatical ecstasy, and rather leaves Gennari to transmit, with great success, all her character’s frustration, crushed as she is by the tragedy of understanding the truth before it comes to pass but never being believed that she knows it (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Cassandra (Linda Gennari). Photo Centaro/AFI Siracusa

⁴ See the testimony of the Anonymous *Vita Aeschylī*: “Some say that during the performance of the *Eumenides*, when the chorus was made to enter haphazardly, it struck the public so greatly that children fainted and pregnant women miscarried” (τινὲς δὲ φασιν ἐν τῇ ἐπιδείξει τῶν Εὐμενίδων σποράδην εἰσαγάγοντα τὸν χορὸν τοσοῦτον ἐκπλήξει τὸν δῆμον ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψύξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι, *TrGF*, vol. 3, 34). On the theme of fear in Aeschylus see Golden 1976, Schnyder 1995, Bierl 2018, Giannotti 2018.

The part of the sentry is taken by the actor Maria Grazia Solano, following the by now almost inevitable and certainly unsurprising logic of gender-crossing. The messenger is also a woman (Olivia Manescalchi), wearing a deliberately detectable false beard, who announces Agamemnon's imminent return to Argos. The solution adopted for the presentation of the chorus is also both interesting and persuasive: the elders of Argos are three aged army officers (Tonino Bellomo, Edoardo Lombardo, and Massimo Marchese) arrayed in military uniform with a profusion of medals and stars, confined in wheelchairs and accompanied by nurses and medical attendants. They are quite obviously veterans of past wars, mutilated, tremulous and stuttering. The chaperone of this chorus is the excellent Gaia Aprea, severely clad in a grey suit, a "guardian of palace secrets and of the dynamics of power" (Barone 2022) who also appears in a short scene where she accompanies Orestes and Electra out of Argos to wait for better times for their family.

Marinoni gives us an extremely good Clytemnestra, simultaneously imperious, seductive, and Mephistophelian. A true "male-hearted woman" (γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον . . . κέαρ, 10), her performance of the part is aggressive, apart from the scene where she welcomes her husband returning from the war when she finally adopts a much more honeyed tone of voice. The climax of all this hypocrisy is reached when she kneels down to take her husband's shoes off and then kisses him passionately. But the neurosis caused by her devouring anxiety for vengeance manifests itself in the constant ingestion of glass after glass of champagne which are then thrown on the floor with little regard for the servants.

Agamemnon assumes the pose of a Thirties dictator, self-confident and satisfied with his success. The speech with which he greets his citizens after his return is made in a metallic voice in front of radio microphones. Aegisthus, departing from the Aeschylean model, remains silent on stage from the moment of Agamemnon's return home. He watches the double assassination carried out by Clytemnestra motionless and timorous save when he neurotically wreaks havoc on Agamemnon's corpse, by pointlessly discharging a hail of bullets towards it.

Staging *Agamemnon* is no easy task. Inevitably, Livermore has done so by following the dictates of his own aesthetic canon. The alternation of musical themes, from Bach to the electronic rock of the finale, successfully accompanies the show right to the end. To tell the truth the production errs on the side of a little too much elaboration, which could perhaps have been better contained. But the scenographic inventiveness is in general successful and of value to the show which achieves its aim of involving the public and maintaining their attention from beginning to end. This is also to the credit of Walter Lapini's excellent translation, the worthy successor of those before him – from Romagnoli and Manara Valgimigli to Pasolini – who have grappled with the translation of the play for the theatre of Syracuse, managing to capture and transform Aeschylus' lines into a fluent and comprehensible Italian without sacrificing an iota of their

consistency and depth of meaning.⁵

The only thing that is missing in this *Agamemnon* is the absence of a definite interpretative key. Livermore, in a discerning introductory note to the production, observes:

Giustizia è l'idea fondamentale della trilogia e attorno alla quale gira tutta la storia dell'uomo, una giustizia i cui labili confini vengono costantemente messi in discussione in un dramma che racconta il dibattersi dell'uomo e delle sue umane fragilità in una rete senza scampo. (2022, 18)

[Justice is the main idea of the trilogy and around this revolves all the history of humanity. The fragile borders of this justice are constantly being questioned and challenged in a play which tells of the struggle of human beings and their weaknesses caught in an indestructible net]

This observation is indeed pertinent and well-attested, but the *mise-en-scène* with its abundance of objects, situations and details causes us to lose sight of the central theme of justice and of the different forms this may take depending on the point of view of each of the characters and also of the historical context. In other words, the extremely spectacular nature of the staging with the continual whirl of visions, music and colours tends to obscure the dimension of civic and political engagement that a play such as *Agamemnon* had in Aeschylus' day and should still have now.

It was immediately evident that the Canadian director Robert Carsen had adopted a completely different style from Livermore's *Agamemnon* for his version of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.⁶ The king of Thebes, who had been called by

⁵ The translator's intentions are explained in Lapini 2022.

⁶ *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, director Robert Carsen, Italian translation Francesco Morosi, dramaturgy Ian Burton, scenes Radu Boruzescu, costumes Luis F. Carvalho, stage music Cosmin Nicolae, lighting Robert Carsen e Giuseppe Di Iorio, choreography Marco Berriel, assistant director Stefano Simone Pintor, stage director Carlotta Toninelli e Angelo Gullotta, choir direction Elena Polic Greco, Sound project Vincenzo Quadarella, Head of make-up and hair Aldo Caldarella. Cast: Giuseppe Sartori (Oedipus), Maddalena Crippa (Jocasta), Paolo Mazzarelli (Creon), Graziano Piazza (Tiresias), Massimo Cimaglia (first messenger), Dario Battaglia (second messenger), Antonello Cossia (servant of Laius), Rosario Tedesco (choir leader), Elena Polic Greco (choir leader), Giulia Acquasana, Caterina Alinari, Livia Allegri, Salvatore Amenta, Davide Arena, Maria Baio, Antonio Bandiera, Andrea Bassoli, Guido Bison, Victoria Blondeau, Cettina Bongiovanni, Flavia Bordone, Giuseppe Bordone, Vanda Bovo, Valentina Brancale, Alberto Carbone, Irasema Carpinteri, William Caruso, Michele Carvello, Giacomo Casali, Valentina Corrao, Gaia Cozzolino, Gabriele Crisafulli, Simone D'Acuti, Rosario D'Aniello, Sara De Lauretis, Carlo Alberto Denoyè, Matteo Di Girolamo, Irene Di Maria di Alleri, Corrado Drago, Carolina Eusebiotti, Lorenzo Ficara, Manuel Fichera, Caterina Fontana, Enrico Gabriele, Fabio Gambina, Enrica Graziano, Giorgia Greco, Carlo Guglielminetti, Marco Guidotti, Lorenzo Iacuzio, Ferdinando Iebba, Lucia Imprescia, Vincenzo Invernale, Althea Maria Luana Iorio, Elvio La Pira, Domenico Lamparelli, Federica Giovanna Leuci, Rosamaria Liistro, Giusi Lisi, Edoardo Lombardo, Emilio Lumastro, Matteo Magatti, Roberto Marra, Carlotta Maria Messina, Moreno Pio Mondì, Matteo Nigi, Giuseppe Orto, Salvatore Pappalardo, Marta Parpinel, Alice Pennino, Edoardo Pipitone, Gianvincenzo Piro, Bruno Prestigio, Maria Putignano, Riccardo Rizzo, Fran-

his citizens as the only possible saviour of the plague-ridden city (OT 31-4, 40-3, 46), appears on stage at the head of a huge white staircase – 8 metres high, 27 metres wide and with 31 steep steps – that reaches the highest point of the *cavea* so as to represent its mirror image. This is the most innovative and shocking of the version of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* staged at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse for the 57th season of the Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico. Carsen, a specialist in staging opera (last spring he directed the Hofmannsthal-Strauss *Elektra* in Paris), called for the first time to direct a Greek tragedy, decided to replace the traditional backdrop, the Labdacid palace, with this imposing scenic machine, in order to emphasize the distance between the powerful elite and the Theban masses. The members of the royal Labdacid *ghenos* Oedipus, Creon and Jocasta) are seen upon the stairway from which they do not move, simply going up and down upon it; on the other hand, the chorus of 80 actors, an unusually numerous one, stays mostly in the orchestra and only occasionally trespasses on to the stairs, the area of power. Not only this: the enormous vertical staircase leading from the public square of the city of Thebes to the Labdacid palace also takes on a symbolic significance as far as the career of the protagonist is concerned, mapping as it does his ascent and his dizzying fall.⁷

The scene is completely stylized and a-historic. Oedipus, interpreted by Giuseppe Sartori in a state of grace, enters wearing a white shirt and black jacket and tie, appearing as a an elegant, virile and charismatic leader (Fig.3).



Fig. 3: Oedipus (Giuseppe Sartori) and Jocasta (Maddalena Crippa). Photo Le Pera/AFI Siracusa

Creon (Paolo Mazzarelli) has just returned from Delphi, carrying an overnight case, accompanied by a retinue of servants in livery and white gloves. The other characters, too, are wearing modern-day dress with a clear emphasis on black and

cesco Ruggiero, Rosaria Salvatico, Jacopo Sarotti, Mariachiara Signorello, Flavia Testa, Sebastiano Tinè, Francesco Torre, Francesca Trianni, Gloria Trinci, Damiano Venuto, Maria Verdi, Federico Zini, Elisa Zucchetti (choir of Thebans). First performance: Syracuse, Greek Theatre, 18 May 2022. On stage at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse from 18 May to 3 July 2022.

⁷ On the scale of this scenic installation, which in the intention of the scenographer Radu Boruzescu alludes to a monolith and is inspired by the stylistic features of brutalist architecture, and also on the other scenographic aspects of the show, see the detailed analysis in Viccei 2022.

white. Indeed, this production of Sophocles' tragedy tends to avoid particularly strong colours and is notable for its simplicity and sobriety. It is a version which consciously shuns any concession to spectacle, preferring to point up the emotional dynamics released by the words of the protagonists. The representation is animated both by Sophocles' text, in Francesco Morosi's skillful translation, and also by the acting ability of the cast, who succeed admirably throughout the play in expressing themselves with a surprising artlessness, and with none of that annoyingly artificial declamatory emphasis so often met-with in productions of Greek tragedy. From the stylistic point of view of the direction Carsen's studied austerity appears as the exact opposite of Livermore's approach. This is the style of a director who repudiates any possible temptation towards self-gratification, who places himself completely at the service of the text and the theatre necessary to it, never thinking of himself.

What is striking from the outset is the voluntary and almost total renunciation of music, which for a long time has become a fundamental feature of the Syracuse productions by INDA. "Here the composer is Sophocles, the text is the music", Carsen has affirmed; in a director's note published in the programme of the show he underlines his agreement with a non-fatalistic reading of the story. Instead of humanity's necessity to accept an unjust fate he opts for a "celebration of the independence of the human spirit, that induces it to resist such a destiny and to fight it, however senseless or useless this may seem".⁸

One of the most successful features of the show is definitely the staging of the chorus. Not only, as has been mentioned, is it a very big one (it seems that it is the largest chorus to have played in any tragedy produced at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse), but the members, all in dark-coloured costumes, recite the songs as they move according to precisely stylized measures and in this way are seen to mime rituals of great visual and emotional impact, following the suggestive geometrically inspired movements – now circular, now triangular – of the choreographer Marco Berriel. For example, when the play opens, even before Oedipus speaks, a hauntingly powerful funeral ritual takes place, accompanied by relentless drum beats and the gradual diffusion of the smell of incense as we assist at a procession of all the citizens/chorus members, veiled in black, their noses and mouths covered by FFP2 face-masks (the sole reference to the Covid-19 pandemic) who deposit the bodies of their dead, symbolized by rags, upon the funeral pyres.

Graziano Piazza is an excellent Tiresias who performs with his eyes covered by special contact lenses which actually render him blind and which force him to move about touching the walls and to find his way by means of the beams of the spotlights. For once the old seer is represented in a traditional manner, an

⁸ Carsen 2022, 17. See, too, Carsen's reply to a journalist who asked him who were today's Oedipuses: "We are all Oedipus. He thinks he knows who he is, who his mother and father are. But, just like him, none of us know who we truly are. And we spend our whole life trying to find out" (Zangarini 2022, 49).

ancient with white hair and beard carrying a stick (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Tiresias (Graziano Piazza). Photo Ballarino/AFI Siracusa

The only thing missing is the boy-companion who guides him, but this is of little importance. Tiresias manages to grope his way along among the burning corpses. His quarrel with the king follows the Sophoclean text according to a perfect employment of mimicry and proxemics. When the *mantis* accuses him, “You are the impious being who contaminates this land” (*OT*353), Oedipus bursts into a fit of neurotic sobs which manifests the dawning of his uneasiness and fear.

Maddalena Crippa interprets Jocasta with an engagement which is both emotionally convincing and yet maintains a certain equilibrium. Clad in a long belted white tunic, the queen of Thebes presents herself as a authoritative and protective woman, but also shows her visceral love for Oedipus when they exchange passionate embraces. Her gestures and her tone of voice make us realize that the queen is trying to prompt the king’s actions without coercing him, in order to avoid the ultimate catastrophe.

The conclusion is the point at which the interpretative key guiding Carsen’s direction is completely revealed: Sophocles’ Oedipus as the image of the human condition, as a symbol of individuals who do not know who they are and who spend their lives in a desperate search for their own identity. After Jocasta’s suicide and his self-blinding, the king of Thebes displays himself on the stage at the very top of the staircase, completely naked, with his face and hands covered in blood. He then dons his mother/wife’s white garment and slowly descends the stairs in a movement symbolizing the loss of the power that was his, completely alone, staggering and falling several times on the way down. It is a touching image, a sort of ‘*ecce homo*’, full of *pathos*. Oedipus has reached the truth, has understood who he really is, has – literally – bared himself, descending into the hell of his own conscience. At this point he scales the stairway once more, desolate, to take up his life as an exile and a pariah. So that he can manage his new painful journey he leans on the staff that the seer Tiresias had left onstage and this the Theban ex-king picks up in a sort of ideal relay.⁹ The tapping of the

⁹ A similar idea can be seen in the film *Edipo re* (1967) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, where Oedi-

stick is the only sound to be heard in the theatre, as the astonished spectators watch King Oedipus walk away, finally deprived of all political power and of any intellectual credibility.

As an adjunct to this admirable production of *Oedipus the King* an exhibition was held in the Syracuse Regional Gallery in Palazzo Bellomo. *Edipo – lo sguardo in sé (Oedipus – the vision in/of the self)* is a show of works by twenty or so modern and contemporary artists, including Pomodoro, Paladino, Isgro, and Nitsch, where the ‘totemic’ figure of Oedipus is confronted in works produced especially for this occasion. It is fascinating to realise how many different cues for inspiration the subject of Oedipus provides for the artistic imagination: the search within one’s self, the discovery of truth, lack of awareness, being at the same time victim and protagonist of one’s fate, doubling, the enigma, divine will and individual will, plague and disease, desire and passion, incest, murder, fatherhood, power, tenacity, gaze and vision, self-punishment through blinding and more besides. To quote the words of Antonio Calbi, director of the INDA Foundation and curator of the exhibition:

Oedipus is the tragedy of vision, of the search for truth and of introspection. The act of seeing underlies every aesthetic and creative experience and to reflect upon the figure of Oedipus, on his inauspicious destiny, is, for the artists, a way of reflecting upon themselves and their own research. (2022)

The third tragedy on the programme for the 2022 season was *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Euripides,¹⁰ a work which is not often staged in the modern theatre, but which has had a series of fortunate versions and rewrites, both in the theatri-

pus (played by Sergio Citti), once he has blinded himself is given by the messenger (Ninetto Davoli) a flute identical to the one the audience saw being played by Tiresias (Julian Beck). This contrivance – absent in Sophocles – is adopted to underline a sort of continuity between the two characters: the blind Oedipus turns into a similar figure to Tiresias, a solitary artist, an outsider, able in this way to understand the sufferings of humanity.

¹⁰ *Iphigenia in Tauris* by Euripides, director Jacopo Gassmann, Italian translation Giorgio Ieranò, scenes Gregorio Zurla, costumes Gianluca Sbicca, visual designer Luca Brinchi, Daniele Spanò, sound design G.U.P. Alcaro, assistant director Mario Scandale, lighting Gianni Staropoli, light designer assistant Omar Scala, choir direction Bruno De Franceschi, choreography Marco Angelilli, Head of make-up and hair Aldo Caldarella. Cast: Anna Della Rosa (Iphigenia), Ivan Alovisio (Orestes), Massimo Nicolini (Pilades), Alessio Esposito (herdsman), Stefano Santospago (King Toas), Rosario Tedesco (servant), Anna Charlotte Barbera, Luisa Borini, Gloria Carovana, Brigida Cesareo, Caterina Filograno, Leda Kreider, Marta Cortellazzo Wiel, Roberta Crivelli, Giulia Mazzarino, Daniela Vitale (choir of Greek Slave Women), Guido Bison, Gabriele Crisafulli, Domenico Lamparelli, Matteo Magatti, Jacopo Sarotti, Damiano Venuto (choir of Taurians). First performance: Syracuse, Greek Theatre, 17 June 2022. On stage at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse from 17 June to 4 July 2022. The show was then put on in the Teatro Grande of Pompeii for “Pompeii Theatrum mundi” on the 15 and 16 July, and at the Roman Theatre in Verona for “Verona Summer Theatre” on the 14 and 15 September.

cal context (we only have to think of Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, and also of Racine, Pindemonte, Martello, Hauptmann etc.), and in the musical world (for example, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and then Scarlatti, Cherubini, Jommelli, Traetta etc.), not to mention its history in the world of painting (Tiepolo's fresco *Il Sacrificio d'Ifigenia* comes to mind). The director of this new staging of *Iphigenia Taurica* is Jacopo Gassmann, son of the famous actor and director Vittorio Gassmann (1922-2000), in his first experience with a Greek tragedy after having directed several productions of modern theatre.¹¹

Gassmann's staging focusses on a rather neutral setting which is completely decontextualized, with no apparent historical or geographical reference. His Tauris – a region corresponding to the present Crimea, which in the Greek imagination was a 'barbarous' land, that is to say totally uncivilized, characterized by violence and oppression and where human sacrifice was still the practice – is presented as a metaphysical moonscape, the predominant colour of which is white. In the background the Temple of Artemis is represented by three rectangular glass blocks placed so as to form a huge totemic monolith, apparently inaccessible. The barbaric nature of the place is suggested by the presence of stuffed animals (some left whole, others cut into pieces) which are enclosed within glass cases so as to seem part of a sort of zoological museum which is safeguarding archaeological relics of the past. The very deer that was sacrificed in Aulis instead of Iphigenia dominates the foreground of the stage for the whole duration of the play. But more than simply a terrifyingly savage place, the Tauris reconstructed by Gassmann and his scenographer Gregorio Zurla seems to be an environment full of ambiguity, where reality and appearance are confused and where nothing is what it seems to be. Gradually, to the animals in the glass cases everyday objects are added (microphones, gramophones, electric torches) which suggest they are 'fragments of life' elements in an enormous anthropological archive. Iphigenia, Orestes, Pilades, but also King Toas and in the end all the spectators as well are simply epigones of an endless tradition, crushed by the weight of heredity and unable to free themselves from it.

There can be no doubt that Jacopo Gassmann has worked seriously and in detail on the text of Euripides and has studied scholarly interpretations and all the implications that this text suggests. Perhaps it is this enormous task of critical study that has prevented the emergence of any original or insightful solutions. In a director's note entitled "Tragedy as perception" Gassmann writes:

Ifigenia in Tauride è infatti un testo intriso di domande e contraddizioni, a partire dalla sua natura stilisticamente ibrida. È una tragedia profondamente scura e inquieta che si trasforma improvvisamente in quella che la critica ha definito una "escape tragedy", una sorta di fuga rocambolesca da un posto dove apparentemente si compiono sacrifici umani ma che, a uno sguardo più

¹¹ In order to come across a former production of *Iphigenia in Tauris* at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse one has to go back thirty years to 1982 and the direction by Lamberto Puggelli, in the translation by Vincenzo Consolo and Dario del Corno.

approfondito, rivelerà una natura molto più ambigua. Ci troviamo infatti in un luogo dove niente è quel che sembra. Una terra fatta di doppi, di proiezioni fantasmatiche e improvvise apparizioni. I personaggi infatti sembrano appena usciti da un sogno, in quel preciso istante del dormiveglia in cui si tenta di ricomporlo, provando a rimetterne insieme i segni e le tracce. (2022, 17)

[*Iphigenia in Tauris* is indeed a text full of questions and contradictions, starting with its stylistically hybrid nature. It is a profoundly dark and disquieting tragedy that is suddenly transformed into what the critics have termed an “escape tragedy”, a sort of incredible getaway from a place where apparently human sacrifices are made but which, when examined more closely, reveals a much more ambiguous reality. We find ourselves in a place where nothing is what it seems. A land of doubling, of ghostly projection and of unexpected apparitions. The characters seem to have just emerged from a dream, at that very moment of drowsiness when one tries to capture the dream again and reconstruct its signals and its pathways.]

This interpretative key is without doubt the right one. To a ‘philosopher of the stage’ such as Euripides was considered to be, steeped in the teachings of Sophism, the theme of appearance and reality must have been totally congenial, especially during the last years of his Athenian output, before he left for Macedonia. It is indeed the identical premise that is to be found in the tragedy of *Helen*, 412 BCE, which is chronologically a close neighbour of *Iphigenia in Tauris*. However, in the present staging this problem does not seem to emerge in any clearly apprehensible or convincing manner. The attention is concentrated essentially on the figures of Iphigenia (Anna Della Rosa) and Orestes (Ivan Alovisio) the last descendants of a family that has eliminated itself in a series of acts of revenge and violence against one another. They are offspring without either father or mother, and in point of fact with a difficult relationship with the gods (Artemis and Apollo respectively) who direct their actions and protect them but at the same time condition their freedom of choice at every turn. On stage the brother and sister seem to be bewildered, lost, with no points of reference and unable to find the road to travel.

During the course of the action the two protagonists seem to be directed according to a psychoanalytic key of interpretation. This is most obvious in the case of Iphigenia, a fragile, indecisive girl, who has suffered a violent trauma (murdered by her father for “state reasons”), and who in the new reality in which she finds herself, in the role of a priestess in the temple of Artemis in Tauris, has not been able to find a way to get over her terrible childhood trauma. Her anguish is emblematically visualized by the mask of the deer that she wears at the beginning (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Iphigenia (Anna Della Rosa). Photo Centaro/AFI Siracusa

Her handmaidens, all dressed in black, are equally unable to help her in her suffering. She is, indeed, simultaneously dead and alive, a victim of sacrifice (as all the Greeks are convinced) and an escapee of sacrifice (as is the reality of Euripides' play). She feels terrible nostalgia for her homeland and her family, of which she knows practically nothing, but for which she nourishes sentiments of love and hatred ("The Greeks killed me", "My father killed me"). And she does not feel completely at ease in the role of a priestess who presides over bloody sacrifices ("I despise these rites"). Iphigenia's self is irremediably split and the division within her is the cause of neurosis and rage. Only when her brother Orestes recognizes her is the young woman able to initiate a self-liberating process.¹² As she gradually becomes aware of her past by retrieving information about her father, mother, brothers and sisters, Iphigenia succeeds in developing into a strong, cognisant woman, mistress of her fate. The change in her is aided in its articulation by the performance of Anna Della Rosa, which is at first weak and withdrawn and then increasingly more solid and confident. The plan of escape that Iphigenia elaborates to get away from the threats of King Toas (Stefano Santospago) and his soldiers represents the acme of her of her emancipation. Orestes, too, persecuted as he is by some of the Furies who have not submitted to the justice of Athena and the Areopagus, is represented as a psychotic figure, tormented by guilt for his mother's murder and prey to an agonizing inner conflict (Fig. 6).

¹² In chapter 14 of the *Poetics* Aristotle identified in the recognition scene of *Iphigenia in Tauris* the optimal solution to the problem of identifying the cusp between "to act" (πρᾶξιαι) and "to know" (ἀναγνωρίσαι) (*Poet.* 1454a 4-9).



Fig. 6: Orestes (Ivan Alovisio). Photo Centaro/AFI Siracusa

The conclusion of the play offers the suggestion of various interesting solutions. Gassmann is quite obviously aware that the finale is not a happy ending, as one may imagine. Iphigenia and Orestes both yearn to go home, but in the end Athena, appearing as a *dea ex machina*, does not fulfil their wishes. Orestes must go to Athens, and more precisely to the demos of Halai, to found a ritual symbolically recalling human sacrifice (*IT* 1446-61), while Iphigenia will have to live near Athens, in the village of Brauron as a priestess of the cult of Artemis (*IT* 1462-7). As a consequence the girl is condemned to be shackled to her destiny as a virgin priestess, a fate that she had never chosen.¹³ In this way the brother and sister “are more or less embalmed within their duties as initiators of holy rites” (Ieranò 2022, 69).

Upon these interpretative bases, Gassmann invents an epilogue which goes beyond the the final scene of the *dea ex machina*. After Athena’s speech, the glass blocks of the temple of Artemis unexpectedly open to show inside the red-upholstered seats of a modern theatre. Iphigenia, Orestes and Pylades re-appear sitting here while they watch the stage as spectators of themselves, reflecting upon what has happened. This is the only really innovative idea added to a representation otherwise completely faithful to Euripides’ text, and it is the key – almost worthy of Pirandello – that unveils the metatheatrical dimension characterizing the conception of the whole production. While the actors stand up to receive the applause, the melancholy, fatalistic notes of *Rock Bottom Riser* can be heard, the song by the singer and song-writer Bill Callahan (Smog) which recalls his love for his mother, father and sisters (“I love my mother, I love my father, I love my sisters too . . . I started rising, rising, rising”).

In an interesting interview with Anna Lanzani Gassmann explained:

Man mano che il testo procede, i personaggi sembrano davvero uscire da una grande ‘biblioteca borgesiana’ sono personaggi in sé, ma sono anche osservati dall’esterno. Ifigenia e Oreste, i due fratelli protagonisti, giocano con il pubblico, parlano di sé in terza persona, sanno che per la comunità sono già diventati dei

¹³ On the question of the happy ending of *Iphigenia in Tauris* see the end of Ieranò 2022, 68-9. An assessment of the interpretations may be found in Masaracchia 1984.

miti. Parlando del suo esilio, Oreste, ad esempio, arriva a dire: ‘ad Atene sono diventato un rito’. Sono personaggi consapevoli di essere scritti. E il salto è proprio questo: una volta presa coscienza di essere scritta, Ifigenia fa un altro salto e inizia a scrivere sé stessa. Prende in mano il suo destino. Non solo i due protagonisti sono personaggi che hanno bisogno di raccontarsi storie per continuare a esistere. Entrambi credevano che l’altro fosse morto, entrambi hanno punti del loro passato che non conoscono, che non possiedono. Quando si incontrano, si raccontano le rispettive storie. Sono storie terribili, siamo nel bel mezzo della tragedia greca, ma dal punto di vista psicoanalitico il momento in cui si appropriano del loro passato, per quanto duro e feroce possa essere, è il momento di elaborare il dolore, di andare avanti. Grazie alla parola, anche nel dolore più profondo, dicendosi che possono sopravvivere, esistere. (Lanzani 2022)

[As the play continues, the characters really seem to emerge from an enormous ‘Borgesian library’: they are characters in themselves but they are also seen from the outside. Iphigenia and Orestes, the brother and sister who are the protagonists, play with the spectators, they speak of themselves in the third person, they know that for the community they have already become myths. When mentioning his exile, Orestes, for example, actually says, “in Athens I have become a rite”. They are characters who are aware that they are written. And the jump is precisely this: once she realizes that she is written, Iphigenia makes another leap and begins to write herself. She takes her destiny in her own hands. Not only this – the two protagonists are characters who must tell stories to themselves in order to go on existing. Each of them thought the other was dead, both have moments in their past that the other ignores, that s/he does not possess. When they meet they tell one another their stories. They are terrible stories, we are in the very middle of Greek tragedy, but from a psychoanalytic point of view the moment they take possession of their past, however harsh and cruel it may be, that is the moment to elaborate the pain and to go forward. Thanks to the word, to speech, even during the deepest pain, telling themselves that they can survive, that they can exist.]

The staging of *Iphigenia in Tauris* directed by Jacopo Gassmann is definitely a successful one, thanks too to Giorgio Ieranò’s fluent and efficacious translation. The style is constantly of an elegant sobriety, even though sometimes it could be said that there is an excess of intellectualism and cold abstruseness which tends to slow down the dynamics of the dramatic action and muffle emotional involvement on the part of the public.

Translation by Susan Payne

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MARK BROWN*

From Auteur Directors to Mask Masters: Festival de Almada, 2022

Abstract

This article reviews the 2022 programme of Portugal's leading theatre showcase, Festival de Almada, which is held every summer in the city of Almada and, across the River Tagus, in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon. The review begins with German director Peter Kleinert's Portuguese-language production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*; before alighting on *Selvagem*, an anthropological work by Portuguese theatre-maker Marco Martins; *Hokuspokus* by German mask-theatre company Familie Flöz; American director Robert Wilson's *I Was Sitting On My Patio This Guy Appeared I Thought I Was Hallucinating*; and, finally, *Hands Do Not Touch Your Precious Me* by Belgian movement-theatre maker Wim Vandekeybus. In doing so, the review seeks to give a sense of the breadth and internationalism of the festival's programme.

KEYWORDS: auteur; Peter Kleinert; Marco Martins; mask-theatre; Familie Flöz; Robert Wilson; Wim Vandekeybus

Festival de Almada, Portugal's premier theatre festival, is, surely, one of a small number of such showcases that can boast that it did not miss an edition during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, keeping carefully to government public health guidance, and with the high profile support of the President of the Republic, the Minister for Culture and the Mayor of Almada, the festival went ahead, albeit with a reduced, largely Portuguese programme. The 2021 programme had more of an international dimension: although, ironically, the Covid-related rescheduling by airlines meant that international guests (including myself) were more likely to face late cancellations of their flights than was the case in 2020. By July 2022 the festival programme – which included work by the great American auteur director Robert Wilson, a new piece by acclaimed German mask-theatre company Familie Flöz, and a Portuguese Shakespeare production directed by German master Peter Kleinert – was back to full strength.

One could not help but reflect that Festival de Almada's successful navigation of the turbulent waters of the coronavirus pandemic would have been a source of immense pride to its founding director Joaquim Benite. It is now ten years since Benite's passing. In that time his legacy has been fostered with great care

* University of Lisbon - markbrown.teatro@gmail.com

and passion by Rodrigo Francisco (who had been Benite's assistant director of many years). Francisco has, with notable success, taken up the mantles of both director of Festival de Almada and artistic director of Companhia de Teatro de Almada, the company based in the superb theatre Benite created (which now bears the name Teatro Municipal Joaquim Benite). The determined and thoughtful manner in which Francisco has brought the festival through the public health crisis is, surely, his greatest achievement thus far.

In 2022, as before the pandemic, such was the scale of the festival programme, that it took place, not only in Almada, but also across the River Tagus in the beautiful Portuguese capital of Lisbon. However, the flagship production of the festival's opening days – a Portuguese-language staging of Shakespeare's great comedy *Twelfth Night* (in which Companhia de Teatro de Almada was directed by Peter Kleinert) – was presented in the 'Blue Theatre', as the beautifully appointed Teatro Municipal is known in Almada (on account of the azure-coloured tiles that cover the building's exterior).

A liberal adaptation of Shakespeare's drama, Kleinert's production – which works from a Portuguese text by António M. Feijó – takes its lead from the play's famous opening line, in which the aristocrat Orsino says: "If music be the food of love, play on" (1.1.1). The show includes an eclectic soundtrack of recorded and live music (provided by on-stage musician Ariel Rodriguez, who is incorporated into the action) from the twentieth and twenty-first century pop music canon. The piece is performed in over-the-top modern dress: even before he is tricked into donning his famous yellow stockings, João Cabral's necklace-wearing, ornate waistcoat-adorned Malvolio is as image-conscious as he is authoritarian.



Fig. 1 João Cabral (centre) as Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. Photo: Rui Mateus

In most productions of this comedy, Countess Olivia (who is in deep mourning for the death of her brother), is a reserved, even conservative figure. Here, by contrast, Kleinert's postmodern inclinations transform her into an energetic, narcissistic party animal. I am blessed to have seen numerous productions of what is, to my mind, Shakespeare's finest comedy, but I have never before wit-

nessed an Olivia who would have the inclination – let alone the confidence – to halt the action of the play (as Érica Rodrigues’s countess does in the Almada production) by exclaiming, à la The Supremes, “Stop, in the name of love!”.

The conflict between the play’s comic ‘conspirators’ – led by the Falstaffian rogue Sir Toby Belch – and the killjoy steward Malvolio is the beating heart of *Twelfth Night*. It is – surely undeniably – a far more rewarding plot strand than those involving the shipwrecked and separated twins Viola and Sebastian or Orsino’s relentless pursuit of Olivia. Kleinert certainly places a premium on the comic potential of the conspiracy, not least in the famous letter scene.

In this scene Malvolio finds a letter, written by the conspiratorial servant Maria in handwriting that impersonates that of Olivia. The note suggests that Olivia is in love with him, and, moreover, that she wishes him to be even loftier and more dismissive than usual in his dealings with her errant kinsman Sir Toby and his friends. Indeed, the missive informs Malvolio that the countess longs to see him dressed in yellow stockings with crossed garters (a style that, in actuality, she detests).

The stage directions for this scene point towards the author’s metatheatrical intent. Sir Toby, with his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the servant Fabian, hides in what is described as a “box-tree” (2.5.13). From there the three observe Malvolio as he deciphers the letter with ever greater excitement. As he does so, the conspirators exclaim their comical rage, rendering themselves both visible and audible to the audience, but not to Malvolio, despite the fact that they are, in fact, closer to the hapless steward than they are to us, the audience. There are few better examples in classical drama of a playwright playing with the conventions of theatre, dispensing with the fourth wall between actors and theatregoers, and drawing deeply upon the audience’s willingness to suspend its disbelief.

In the Almada production, Kleinert stretches the inherent playfulness of the scene as if it were an elastic band. His conspirators not only make themselves ludicrously visible and audible. They actually leave their hiding place, getting ever closer to Malvolio, until they are all around the absurdly oblivious steward, even to the point of emptying out his pockets. The German director’s playing of this scene is a hilarious example of the comic possibilities embedded within the text of *Twelfth Night*. It also marks the highpoint of Kleinert’s postmodern Portuguese production.

It is difficult to imagine a stage work more different from the German’s director’s take on the Shakespeare comedy than *Selvagem* (“Wild”), Portuguese theatre-maker Marco Martins’s fascinating piece of anthropological theatre. The work – which reflects on age old performative rituals from Portuguese rural communities – purports to be performed by people who still live off the land in the places that gave rise to the traditions that Martins is recreating on stage. Presented, like Kleinert’s production, on the main stage of Teatro Municipal Joaquim Benite, the show is contextualised by extraordinary, black and white documentary footage of the rituals as they were still being performed in the mid-twentieth century.

At the core of Martins's production is the role of masks in ritual. A series of characters represent such figures as the Wild Man, the Bear, the Goat and the Devil. Fascinatingly (and humorously), the documentary that precedes the stage performance shows us that – during the period of festival in rural communities – mask-wearing participants were entitled to drag unmasked men down to the village pub and require them to buy drinks for them.



Fig. 2 The Goat from *Selvagem*. Photo: Tiago Lopes

On stage, the piece seeks to avoid nostalgia. The performers wear their own workaday, contemporary attire, such as tracksuits and training shoes. The production is performed on a dusty stage that is akin to an outdoor rural playground. A somewhat sinister, low ceiling (looking like baked earth, with barely living trees protruding from it) slopes above the performers' heads, creating a slightly claustrophobic performance space. The soundtrack collides modern, electronic composition with noises and music that seem to have come down through the ages. These accompany physical rituals – from the evocation of the movement of a bull to the threatening, chastising appearance of a supernatural figure – that are captivatingly primordial. Certainly, they speak to a nature-oriented, European pantheism that predates the Abrahamic faiths and their monotheistic insistence on human mastery of nature.

The real beauty of the piece is that – brim full though it is with anthropological material – it is concerned, first-and-foremost, with ritual as living performance. Each element of the show – be it solo or collective – is presented with tremendous energy. As ever with mask performance, the covering of the face places great emphasis on the language of the body (an aspect of Martins's work that is amplified considerably by the experience of the Covid pandemic, during which the wearing of face coverings became commonplace for much of humanity). If the short biographies of the performers – which are given at the end of the production – are to be believed (and I see no reason why they should not be),

the piece is presented by people with such pastoral and artisanal employments as horse trainer and craft beer maker. It certainly seems unlikely that they are professional dancers.

Ultimately, *Selvagem* – rather than making hard-and-fast claims to historical or anthropological continuity – raises a series of interesting questions about the always dubious concept of cultural ‘authenticity’. In the process of doing so, however, it also creates a compelling work of theatre of masks, movement, sound and music.

Whether it was by coincidence or by design, the inclusion of *Hokuspokus*, by acclaimed German mask-theatre company Familie Flöz, in the same programme as Martins’s show, made for a fascinating and fruitful comparison. Whereas the narrative element in the ritualistic performances of *Selvagem* is minimal, the German company is renowned for the wordless storytelling of its work. Indeed, they are widely considered to be one of the finest exponents of the craft in contemporary world theatre, creating works that prove time and time again the popular understanding that a significant proportion of human communication is achieved through body language.

According to the famous formula developed by the great Armenian-Persian psychologist Albert Mehrabian,² only 7% of face-to-face human communication is achieved exclusively by words. Within the 55% of communication that is non-verbal, a considerable proportion is facial. Even in the Covid-era ‘new normal’ of increased communication by means of live video, we rely to a great degree on facial communication. However, theatrical communication is, for the most part, not face-to-face. In the theatre space – even that which is built around the speaking of words – the movement of the body takes on a far greater communicative responsibility than is the case in the day-to-day human interaction. If one adds to this – as, interestingly, the pandemic often did for many of us – the covering of much of the face, the importance of the physical gesture and movement is increased significantly. Cover the face completely and forbid speech, as much mask-theatre (including that of Familie Flöz) tends to do, and the body takes on an almost total responsibility for the expression of human experience, memory, emotions, psychology and sexuality.

The Familie Flöz masks are notably similar to each other. Exaggerations of archetypal features, their facial expression carefully indeterminate, the age of their associated characters is achieved only in small part by variations in the mask design. The addition of hair and accessories, such as glasses, also helps to identify the age and gender of the character. Costume, of course, plays a key role in assigning age and gender. However, the general personality and specific emotions of characters, from one moment to the next, are overwhelmingly conveyed by means of movement.

² According to Mehrabian: 55% of face-to-face human communication is achieved by nonverbal means, 38% is vocal, and only 7% is exclusively by words. Source: website of the University of Texas.



Fig. 3 A scene from *Hokuspokus*. Photo: Familie Flöz

In *Hokuspokus*, as so often in the company's work, we find the ancient methods of mask-theatre placed in a modern setting. The show (which was played in the outdoor auditorium at the D. António da Costa School in Almada) is a contemporary family drama, full of the heightened pathos, humour, conflict and sympathy that have always characterised Familie Flöz's work. Here, however, they choose, interestingly, to "show their workings". As the masked performers unfold their family drama – encompassing such human experiences as a young couple getting the keys to their new home, the birth of a first child, ageing and bereavement – the music and sound performers are on another part of the stage. The audience is free to witness the methods by which they provide, in Mehrabian's terms, nonlinguistic, but often verbal expression (including diverse, sometimes affectingly timeless song) to accompany and enhance the movement of the masked performers. To this on-stage juxtaposition of two sets of performers – one that is typically off-stage, the other the public, masked face of the company – is added unmasked performance and live drawing. The show's title, *Hokuspokus*, is a word associated with the illusions of magic. In this stage work, Familie Flöz open the toolbox of their ancient and modern art, allowing the audience a glimpse of the methods behind their brilliant aesthetics.

It speaks volumes to the stature of Festival de Almada that the productions discussed above jostled for audience attention in the 2022 programme with works by many other internationally renowned theatre artists. For example, Robert Wilson's intriguingly titled *I Was Sitting On My Patio This Guy Appeared I Thought I Was Hallucinating* (which is staged by the Parisian company Théâtre de la Ville) captivated audiences at Teatro Nacional D. Maria II in Lisbon. This highly distinctive piece boasts a combination of beautifully stylised, early-twentieth century visual aesthetics (including painted faces and lacquered hair that

give the actors doll-like appearances) and an exquisite, absurdist text that repeats and varies like a musical score by a modernist composer such as Webern or Schoenberg.



Fig. 4 Julie Shanahan in *I Was Sitting On My Patio This Guy Appeared I Thought I Was Hallucinating*. Photo: Lucie Janssch

In stark contrast to the exquisiteness of Wilson's piece, famous choreographer Wim Vandekeybus (working with Olivier de Sagazan and Charo Calvo) offered *Hands Do Not Touch Your Precious Me* (presented at Teatro Municipal Joaquim Benite by Vandekeybus's Brussels-based company *Ultima Vez*). Described by the company as "a hymn by the Sumerian High Priestess Enheduanna to the goddess Inanna . . . [A] mythical tale of confrontation and transformation, light and darkness, death and rebirth", the work's mythological, even spiritual intentions are expressed through an elemental imagery that is often extremely ugly and horrific, yet, to my taste, curiously banal. There is no questioning the technical brilliance of Vandekeybus's dancers, nor the memorable nature of some of the images (especially one in which very careful application of chemistry enables a performer to set fire to their own head). Yet, somewhere in the show's welter of ideas and virtuosity, in its violence and histrionics, its capacity to compel one emotionally and psychologically gets lost.



Fig. 5 A scene from *Hands Do Not Touch Your Precious Me*. Photo: Danny Willems

That said, if Vandekeybus's piece was spectacular, yet frustratingly disappointing, the same cannot be said of Festival de Almada 2022 as a whole. The programme was a remarkable and admirable success for director Francisco and his team, and further proof that this Portuguese and international festival is a major player among the world's theatre showcases.

Works Cited

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25,00 €

ISSN 2421-4353