

Tragedy at home and homeless: between politics and aesthetics

Book or Report Section

Published Version

Creative Commons: Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY)

Open Access

Goff, B. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0598-2843> (2020) Tragedy at home and homeless: between politics and aesthetics. In: Il teatro della 'polis' tra intrattenimento e politica. Nuove interpretazioni del dramma greco antico - Atti del convegno internazionale, Pisa 2019. Frammenti sulla Scena, 1 (2). Università degli Studi di Torino, pp. 1-24. doi: 10.13135/2612-3908/5707 (Volume speciale - Il teatro della 'polis' tra intrattenimento e politica - Atti del convegno internazionale (Pisa 2019)) Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/97541/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Identification Number/DOI: 10.13135/2612-3908/5707
<<https://doi.org/10.13135/2612-3908%2F5707>>

Publisher: Università degli Studi di Torino

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

TRAGEDY AT HOME AND HOMELESS: BETWEEN POLITICS AND AESTHETICS*

BARBARA GOFF

UNIVERSITY OF READING

b.e.goff@reading.ac.uk

The conference which generated this volume suggested that tragedy might be situated “between entertainment and politics” – a provocative collocation. For this paper I shall take the “entertainment” dimension as aligning with the aesthetic; although entertainment and aesthetics are not identical, they may both productively be contrasted with the political. Here I take a look at ways of coordinating politics and entertainment, or aesthetics and politics, as they have been used to construct ancient tragedy as a means to the good society. In my title this aspect of tragedy is identified as “home”, to indicate tragedy’s preoccupation with community. This is a note repeatedly struck in discourse about tragedy, both by the earliest commentators and by those negotiating the development of the nation-state, and of political reform, in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This essay thus first considers some of the different ways in which tragedy has been associated with the goal of the good community. The essay will then contrastingly explore tragedy’s “homelessness”, the ways in which it uproots its characters and sets them in restless motion. These latter reflections are prompted by recent receptions of tragedy that have responded to the global migrant crisis, and that are thus in dialogue with earlier critical understandings of tragedy which were more

* I was immensely honoured to be invited to give a keynote at the conference, and I thoroughly enjoyed both the intellectual exchanges and the hospitality of the Department and colleagues in Pisa. I would like to record here my gratitude to my hosts, especially Dr Giannotti. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewer for many improvements to this paper.

likely to foreground a sense of civic identity associated with the polis. The new focus is born of and gives voice to new global realities.

Tragedy at home

In pursuit of the good society, commentators have brought politics and aesthetics together, and separated them, in a variety of ways. It is clear in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, for instance, that the aesthetic and the political leak into each other, because the critiques of tragedy encompass both with equally insouciant ridicule. In the discussion in Plato's *Republic* of Kallipolis, the ideal city, politics and aesthetics are regrettably separate. Thus the first and rather rhetorical question posed to Homer by an imaginary enquirer is about his influence in politics. Evidence of his statesmanship will prove that the aesthetic power of his poetry is matched by his usefulness to his fellow-citizens (*Resp.* X. 599e):¹

...tell us which state has been better governed because of you, as Lacedaemon was by Lycurgus and many states large and small were by many others? What state gives you the credit of having been a good lawgiver and having benefited it?

Here there is a working assumption that poetry can be important to the community and contribute to its success, but Homer's Socratic interlocutors cannot find evidence of this kind of usefulness.

The Platonic discussion of Kallipolis is brought to reject poetry, and especially tragic theatre, precisely because its aesthetic, or "entertainment", dimensions are not necessarily harnessed to political goods. What is enjoyable about tragic theatre may not be what is beneficial to that theatre's society. As is well known, the *Republic* is also suspicious of the ontological distance which separates all poetry from truth, and which means that Homer cannot really benefit his society in the ways that might at first appear plausible. But the aesthetic dimensions of dramatic poetry are perhaps even more threatening to the benign order of the city. These aesthetic dimensions include, for my purposes, the spectacular element but also, crucially, the emotionally-charged pleasure about which the text is very explicit. It is the pleasure in the experience of poetry which means that poetry can undermine even "the best of us", who are perhaps the philosophers (*Resp.* X. 605d), and *a fortiori* can be detrimental to ordinary people. This point is made in both the *Republic's* discussions of poetry, in Book III and again in Book X. Book III organises the exile of poetry from the city while acknowledging its affective power (*Resp.* III. 401 d-e): μάλιστα καταδύεται εἰς τὸ ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ὃ τε ῥυθμὸς καὶ ἁρμονία, καὶ ἐρρωμενέστατα ἄπτεται αὐτῆς ("Rhythm and harmony penetrate to the interior of the soul and most powerfully affect it"). In Book X the issue is revisited and here there is, as

¹ Translations are taken from the Loeb editions except where noted.

Halliwell has discussed², a certain amount of backsliding on the part of the philosophers. Socrates acknowledges that he, like everyone else, is swept away by tragic poetry (*Resp.* X. 605d):

Listen to this and think about it: you see the best of us, I imagine, listen to Homer and any of the other tragic poets representing the grief of one of the heroes as they pour forth a long speech in their lamentation, even singing and beating their breasts, and, you know, we enjoy it, we surrender ourselves to it and suffer along with the characters as we follow and eagerly applaud whoever thus affects us in this way the most as a good poet.

Although poetry has been shown to be inimical to the good community, in Book X Socrates and his friends, in their passion for poetry, dream of a reconciliation, and perhaps to some extent act one out. They freely acknowledge that they would welcome poetry's comeback (*Resp.* X. 607c-d):

Nevertheless, let it be said that as far as we're concerned, if poetry written for pleasure and imitation has any defense to put forward that she should exist in a well-run state, we'd welcome her gladly, as we're aware that we're beguiled by her ourselves.

Thus poetry is invited to defend "herself" in her characteristically emotional and appealing metre, even if lovers of poetry, φιλοποιηταί, can only speak of her in prose (ἄνευ μέτρου, literally "without metre") (*Resp.* X. 607d-e):

So it's right for her to return from exile when she has defended herself in lyric (ἐν μέλει) or some other meter?

Absolutely.

And I'm sure we'd grant her champions, not those who are actual poets, but lovers of poetry, the right to make a defense on her behalf in prose on the grounds that she is not only pleasing but also beneficial to political systems and human life, and we'll listen to her kindly...

The speaker goes on to explain that he and his friends will not only listen to poetry, but, because poetry is so powerful, they will set up a counter-discourse to mitigate her power over them. Crucially, however, this discourse is itself infused with the characteristics of poetry (*Resp.* X. 608a):

καὶ ἡμεῖς οὕτως, διὰ τὸν ἐγγεγονότα μὲν ἔρωτα τῆς τοιαύτης ποιήσεως ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν καλῶν πολιτειῶν τροφῆς, εὖνοι μὲν ἐσόμεθα φανῆναι αὐτὴν ὡς βελτίστην καὶ ἀληθεστάτην, ἕως δ' ἂν μὴ οἶα τ' ἢ ἀπολογήσασθαι, ἀκροσαόμεθ' αὐτῆς ἐπάδοντες

² Cf. HALLIWELL 2012.

ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὃν λέγομεν, καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐπωδὴν, εὐλαβούμενοι
 πάλιν ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς τὸν παιδικὸν τε καὶ τὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἔρωτα.

...we too, on account of our passion for such poetry nurtured in us by the upbringing of
 our fine political systems, will be well disposed toward her, to have her appear the best
 and truest possible. Yet as long as she cannot defend herself, while we listen to her we will
 use the argument we are now making to charm ourselves against her spell, taking care not
 to fall back into our childish ways and the passion of the majority.

The words ἐπᾶδοντες and ἐπωδὴν, the “charm” and the “spell”, come straight from that
 Greek discourse about poetry which stresses its enchanting qualities³, so that Socrates and his
 friends have been transformed into poets. The “argument”, λόγος, which is also part of the
 Socratic armoury, struggles for mastery of the situation with the “charm” and “spell”. Poetry
 may thus return to the city if she conciliates the philosophers, which given their poetic speech,
 she seems to have done. There is a further hint in this passage that all is not lost for the con-
 nection between tragedy and the good community. The Socratic speaker acknowledges that
 his love of poetry derives in part at least from τῆς τῶν καλῶν πολιτειῶν τροφῆς (“the up-
 bringing of our fine political systems”). Halliwell notes the irony of this phrase⁴, which is re-
 inforced by the rejection of τὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἔρωτα (“the passion of the majority”) at the end
 of the sentence. But it is the unsatisfactory democracy which has produced Socrates, and he
 expresses a “democratic” sentiment when he acknowledges how philosophers share with or-
 dinary people their passion for poetry. Poetry’s parting gift to the Kallipolis is not to leave, but
 to persist in compromising the Socratics who desire her ouster.

Although my discussion cannot go into all the desirable detail, we can conclude that the
 relationship between poetry and the city in the *Republic* is not as straightforwardly hostile as
 sometimes appears. Aristotle’s *Poetics* is also very upfront about the pleasure of tragedy and
 its strong effects on the emotions, but does not follow the *Republic* in the consequent moral or
 ontological unease. That there is the ontological gap between poetry and its objects is not a
 problem for the *Poetics*, because imitation, mimesis, is itself not problematic; mimesis is inher-
 ent in the nature of the human, and moreover a respectable and indeed inescapable route to
 learning (*Po.* 1448b5-9):

τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι
 τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τίς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς
 πράξεις, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας.

For it is an instinct of human beings, from childhood, to engage in mimesis (indeed, this
 distinguishes them from other animals: man is the most mimetic of all, and it is through

³ Cf. WALSH 1984.

⁴ HALLIWELL 2012, 197.

mimesis that he develops his earliest understanding); and equally natural that everyone enjoys mimetic objects.

The ontological gap between poetry and truth is thus constantly bridged by the appropriate cognitive activity of identifying objects (*Po.* 1448b15-17): διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον ("This is why people enjoy looking at images, because through contemplating them it comes about that they understand and infer what each element means"). The text notes that the desire to learn even links the philosophers to the majority, as it is ἡδιστον ("very sweet" or "very pleasurable") to all (*Po.* 1448b 13-14): μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἡδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως ("understanding gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too, to learn is most sweet not only to philosophers but to the others alike," my translation). This may be seen to connect up with the various Socratic admissions in the *Republic* that we have just considered. Nor are the emotions provoked by tragedy necessarily deleterious to the human community. As is notorious, the *Poetics* does not define what happens to the emotions in the process of "catharsis"⁵ which is said to be part of the definition of tragedy, and the various understandings as "cleansing", "purifying" or "purging" all have limitations. In the model suggested by Halliwell, strong emotions engage the audience in recognising and understanding the patterns of human life and suffering which tragic plots produce, and to this extent, such emotions can bear positively on the collective life.⁶ Although the *Poetics* famously omits any reference to the polis,⁷ the collective is frequently present, and its proper functioning is not undermined by the spectacles and strong emotions that accompany tragedy, since the collective is as ready to learn from poetic mimesis as are the philosophers. Tragedy thus no longer has to be counted as inimical to the good society.

The earliest commentators, then, disagree about whether tragedy has the potential to contribute to the good society, but they are in agreement that tragedy provokes strong emotions among a large public. In the democratic context, this large audience is also more or less equivalent to the citizen body. For the Platonic text these emotions among these people were likely to weaken the individual and the community, despite some indications of tragedy's lasting power over the speakers of the dialogue, whereas for Aristotle these emotions among these people are part of the proper workings of tragedy towards greater understanding of human life. Subsequent commentators rework the concern with the negotiation between politics and aesthetics in different forms that are nonetheless recognisably connected. The political framework familiar from fifth-century Athens was not important to much of the post-classical life of tragedy, because the societies into which it emerged after the Renaissance were not run on democratic lines. But this dimension of tragedy did become important again after the French

⁵ Aristot. *Po.* 1449b29.

⁶ Cf. HALLIWELL 2012, 258; cf. also MCCOY 2013, 200-202.

⁷ Cf. HALL 1996, HEATH 2009.

Revolution, when numerous strands of thought had to grapple with new ideas about human freedom and autonomy.

Friedrich Schlegel's hugely influential *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* was delivered in 1808, and published in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic wars. These lectures explicitly projected ancient Greece as the home of the good community, via the drama. As was typical of the period, the Greeks were described, early on in the work, as perfect beings (1815, 11-12):

The formation of the Greeks was a natural education in its utmost perfection. Of a beautiful and noble race, endowed with susceptible senses and a clear understanding, placed beneath a mild heaven, they lived and bloomed in the full health of existence; and, under a singular coincidence of favourable circumstances, performed all of which our circumscribed nature is capable. The whole of their art and poetry is expressive of the consciousness of this harmony of all their faculties.

Given that the Greeks were of this elevated and fortunate nature, their tragedy was, as Schlegel's text puts it, ideal. By this the lectures do not mean simply perfect; instead, the idealism referred to here means that the important parts of the art and poetry are not tied to real life but to human capacity for creativity and imagination, which can transcend real life. Tragedy is ideal thus not in the sense of complete and perfect, but of striving for perfection; in this context, we might note that the Greeks are the product of a "singular coincidence of favourable circumstances", indicating that their success is never likely to be reproduced, and was itself highly precarious. Within this tenuous conjunction, the hallmark of Greek tragedy was an impulse to grapple with the consequences of freedom. Tragedy was constituted, the lectures suggest, by a relation between "inward liberty and external necessity"⁸. The human is naturally set up to exceed its limits as much as it can, via the inward liberty. The limits of external necessity, on the other hand, might lie in nature, but also in the unknown workings of a universe that often seems to be fundamentally hostile to the human. "The desire for what is infinite, which dwells in our being, is thwarted by the limits of the finite by which we are fettered"⁹. Lecture II has a long disquisition on this tragic quality of human life (1815, 42):

There is no bond of love without separation, no enjoyment without grief for its loss. - When we contemplate however the relations of our existence to the extreme limit of possibilities: when we reflect on its entire dependence on an endless chain of causes and effects: when we consider that we are exposed in our weak and helpless state to struggle with the immeasurable powers of nature, and with conflicting desires on the shores of an unknown world, and in danger of shipwreck at our very birth; that we are subject to all manner of errors and deceptions, every one of which is capable of undoing us... then every mind which is not dead to feeling must be overpowered by an inexpressible melancholy, against

⁸ SCHLEGEL 1815, 73.

⁹ SCHLEGEL 1815, 41.

which there is no other protection than the consciousness of a destiny soaring above this earthly life.

The compromises and limitations on action within tragedy throw into relief the freedom, the “desire for what is infinite”, that is its chief preoccupation.

The text further investigates the implications of the freedom that is dramatised in the theatre when it considers the role of the chorus. Although we are probably all familiar with the way in which Schlegel’s text types the chorus as the “ideal spectator”¹⁰ – much to the puzzlement of subsequent students – there are more interesting and radical suggestions about the chorus elsewhere in the text. In particular, the chorus is shown to be part of the drama’s striving for the good community. The freedom of tragic poetry will be guaranteed by the so-called “republican” publicity that the chorus affords. “Publicity, according to the republican notion of the Greeks, was essential to a grave and important transaction”¹¹. Therefore (1815, 78):

they gave a certain republican cast to the families of their heroes, by carrying on the action either in presence of the elders of the people, or those persons whose characters entitled them to respect...both in the costume and the mythology, the dramatic poetry generally displayed a spirit of independence and conscious liberty.

The chorus too is thus conceived of in explicitly political terms, their liberty making them part of the good community.

That good community is perhaps most clearly figured, in Schlegel’s text, by the experience of the audience. If the dramatic poet is properly skilled, and if the audience too is properly attuned – as the Greek one must necessarily have been, as far as the lectures are concerned, because of all of its other perfections – the emotions experienced by the audience of tragedy will unite them in a shared intensity of feeling which produces the image of a unified, harmonious society. The emotional, aesthetic dimension of tragedy is thus intricately tied to its politics, in that both conduce to the good of the community. Schlegel’s text is strikingly explicit on the experience of being in an audience when moved (1815, 34):

When they [orators and dramatists] transport their hearers to such scenes of mental agitation, that their external signs break involuntarily forth, every man perceives in those around him the same degree of emotion, and those who before were strangers to one another, become in a moment intimately acquainted. The tears which the orator or the dramatic poet compels them to shed for persecuted innocence, or a dying hero, make friends and brothers of them all. The effect produced by seeing a number of others share in the same emotions, on an intense feeling which usually retires into solitude, or only opens itself to the confidence of friendship is astonishingly powerful. The belief in the justness of

¹⁰ SCHLEGEL 1815, 78.

¹¹ SCHLEGEL 1815, 55.

the feeling becomes unshaken from its diffusion; we feel ourselves strong among so many associates, and the minds of all flow together in one great and overflowing stream.

Thus dramatic poetry may solve, at least partially, the problems not only of humanity's meta-physical yearnings but also of its political differences. In that strong emotions experienced in a collective bind people together, the near-perfect Greeks elaborate in tragic performances ways to consolidate the near-perfect community.

Other idealist commentators offered models of how the aesthetic dimension of tragedy can produce viable political consequences. In Hegel's construction the tragic conflict, by destroying both parties, points the way to a higher-order reconciliation among competing claims which implicitly conduces to a better society. During the long nineteenth century, the powers of tragedy expanded from fostering the good of the city to establishing the nation-state. A focus on the audience at a performance could suggest that the audience would be remade by their aesthetic unity, in the image of perfected and harmonious Greeks. This political vision of the collective at a theatrical performance could be a powerful antidote to the social alienation that characterised the industrialised European states. One recent study claims that the "aspiration for a public of ordinary people, brought together to watch drama enjoyed and understood by all, haunted the nineteenth century"¹². In Greece, in the period directly after independence from the Ottoman empire, ancient tragedy was pressed into this kind of service. Gonda van Steen has recently detailed how ancient drama

could build rich reserves of international goodwill and support for the Greek revolt...scholarly discussions of the long nineteenth century focused on how to use the extraordinary corpus of surviving tragedies to support Greece's nation-building project.¹³

But the same impulse to nation-building via tragedy is discernible in other countries, whose connection to Greek tragedy is not mediated by a continuity of national identity as it is for Greeks. In 1875 the Italian diva Adelaide Ristori toured a production of *Medea* to several cities and towns in Australia, in a move that was heralded as "a moral and social coming of age as a cultivated nation"¹⁴. In the case of Australia, the nation-building via tragedy continued into the mid-twentieth century. As national theatrical institutions were founded after the end of the Second World War, so in 1955 another high-profile production of *Medea*, with the renowned actor Judith Anderson in the title role, toured all over the country. It was understood as part of consolidating the nation via the development of a national theatre movement, both a landmark production and a "project of nation-building"¹⁵.

¹² DUDOUYT 2016, 246.

¹³ GONDA VAN STEEN 2016, 203, 205.

¹⁴ MONAGHAN 2016, 423, quoting MITCHELL 1995, 181.

¹⁵ MONAGHAN 201, 427, GREGORY 2006, 109.

In other postcolonies, adaptations of Greek tragedy worked in similar ways to celebrate, or interrogate, the foundations of newly independent states. As has been repeatedly discussed, writers in Nigeria and Ghana, on the eve or in the aftermath of independence, mobilised figures from Greek tragedy to help examine the issues confronting their societies¹⁶. In South America, Moira Fradinger has suggested that *Antigone* has become the “national” play of Argentina, constructing its own tradition of political commentary in what she notes are “two centuries of national debates” when the play has been invoked at critical moments in social development:

Antigone's Argentine presence may be thought of almost as a ‘national tradition’ that dramatizes the political foundations of the nation This national ‘tradition’ has appropriated *Antigone* at foundational moments in which violence sealed tragic and unstable pacts of national unification.¹⁷

In these examples of nation-building, communities see themselves engaging in social definition and renewal via tragedy, in the same way as Schlegel and other critics deploy tragedy to help imagine perfect communities.

Yet there is an unavoidable paradox in imagining viable community with the savagely destructive materials of tragedy – the death, betrayal, incest, enslavement and exploitation. Many different traditions of scholarship address this contradiction, of course, but I should like briefly to examine the Anglophone Marxist tradition of criticism, both because it has recently attracted renewed attention and because it can be seen to adumbrate the challenging phenomenon of global migration with which I shall end this essay¹⁸. Within the Anglophone Marxist tradition, tragedy is likely to project the ideal community because it shows up the faults of the one that we actually do inhabit. Persistent social tensions, writ large in tragic conflict, drive the audience to envisage a desirable alternative.

In *Modern Tragedy* Raymond Williams associates tragedy with revolution, but he uses revolution in an extended sense; he names as “revolution” everything which strives for a better society. Although his work points towards actual historical revolutions, he also includes in the term all the ways in which societies have to work through situations in which there is inequality. The word “revolution” can thus be used to name all the struggles which attend divided and unequal societies. So he concludes that revolution remains necessary

in all societies in which there are, for example, subordinate racial groups, landless land-workers, hired hands, the unemployed, and suppressed or discriminate minorities of any kind. Revolution remains necessary, in these circumstances, not only because some men

¹⁶ There is much work on this topic; cf. GOFF 2016; VAN WEYENBERG 2013; VAN ZYL SMIT 2007; BUDELMANN 2005.

¹⁷ FRADINGER 2011, 68.

¹⁸ On the renewed attention to Marxist criticism cf. LEONARD 2015, IOANNIDOU 2017.

desire it, but because there can be no acceptable human order while the full humanity of any class of men is in practice denied.¹⁹

Tragedy is the condition of the world in which such social evils can only be redressed by struggles which target not simply gods, or institutions, but other humans. So the striving for a better society is tragic because it also necessarily involves violence and destruction. But the term “tragedy” also, and perhaps even more strikingly, describes the situation in which we collude in the social evils, fearing that to recognise the humanity of others is to imperil our own. Williams suggests that “the disorder is so widespread and intolerable that in action and reaction it must work its way through our lives, wherever we may be” and that “on any probable estimate, we understand the process so little that we continually contribute to the disorder”²⁰. We are thus always implicated in the tragedies of others, because we are caught up in a disordered world. Because we cannot be determined to resolve the disorder of the world, we are therefore caught in a tragic bind:

any such resolution would mean changing ourselves, in fundamental ways, and our unwillingness to do this, the certainty of disturbance, the probability of secondary and unforeseen disorder, put the question, inevitably, into a tragic form... we all erect our defences against so tragic a recognition.²¹

To improve the world would cost, and that cost we decline to pay, and perhaps even cannot understand how we could pay. So the tragedies that we lament must continue. Williams points to the mid-twentieth-century tragedies of “Korea, Suez, the Congo, Cuba, Vietnam”²² but we could all too easily supply twenty-first-century analogues.

Terry Eagleton in his book *Sweet Violence* offers a more positive account of the relations between tragedy and the desirable society. In his discussion, one way in which we might unite in the face of human suffering, making the tragic conducive to the good society, is via a recognition of our shared bodily vulnerability. This notion of the body emerges into prominence in the last chapter of *Sweet Violence*, which focusses on the *pharmakos*. The *pharmakos* or scapegoat is the excremental, inarticulate, bestial version of the human, which paradoxically has the power to transform society because it has the least investment in it, and indeed must be repressed for society to function at all²³. Eagleton posits that canonical tragedies, like *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, work around the figure of the *pharmakos*, and this is because the *pharmakos* reminds us of our creatureliness and thus of our dependence, which, he claims, provides the ground for our freedom: “To acknowledge one’s creatureliness is to recognize one’s

¹⁹ WILLIAMS 1979, 77.

²⁰ WILLIAMS 1979, 80.

²¹ WILLIAMS 1979, 81.

²² WILLIAMS 1979, 80.

²³ EAGLETON 2003, 280.

dependence. Human dependency is prior to freedom, and must provide the ground of it"²⁴. Moreover, Eagleton's version of the *pharmakos* unifies society, not in the image of the perfected and harmonious Greeks, but because, he argues, we are all *pharmakoi* now. His point is that:

In the current preoccupation with minorities, one vital insight is in danger of being obscured. The astonishing fact about global capitalism is that it is the majority who are dispossessed.... the mind-shaking truth of a class analysis is that social orders have always invisibly shut out the majority.

This means that:

a system entranced by its success is in fact a miserable failure; and that there is more than enough of this failure for it to convert itself into power. The classical *pharmakos* can be thrust out of the city because its rulers have no need of it...but the modern-day scapegoat is essential to the workings of the very polis which shuts it out. It is not a matter of a few hired beggars or gaolbirds, but of whole sweated uprooted populations.²⁵

Tragedy can thus offer a vision of a good community because by forcing a recognition of society's failures, the *pharmakos* provokes a desire for its success.

Ancient tragedy has thus been invoked as a sign of the good community in various ways. It maintains an equivocal position within the Kallipolis of Plato's *Republic*, but is compatible with the flourishing of the audience in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Post-Revolution, the idealisation of the Greeks by the early nineteenth century saw various efforts at remaking the nation-state via tragedy, working out the possibilities of freedom and autonomy in more or less democratic contexts. With the twentieth century came more critical ways of thinking about tragedy, in postcolonial contexts and elsewhere, that seemed to project the good community beyond what tragedy can represent, as something not yet realised and perhaps not even realisable.

The twentieth century also saw a corrective focus on the political dimensions of tragedy, understood not as delineating an ideal but as responding to the very specific historical conditions of fifth-century Athens. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, in their influential writings²⁶, situated the historical moment of tragedy in the historical city, with all its dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, its uneasy coordination of myth and rhetoric, of legal discourse and epic heroic tradition. Subsequent commentators have gone on to suggest that Athens stages not only versions of itself but also of other cities, such as Thebes and Argos, as part of a self-reflective discourse on its own identity. Much crucial work has built on these perspectives to draw out very important qualities of tragedy in its Athenian manifestations, and scholars have thus become accustomed to reading tragedy in terms of Athenian identity, tying its debates to the parameters of Athenian politics and culture. Even criticism that does not think tragedy is

²⁴ EAGLETON 2003, 286.

²⁵ EAGLETON 2003, 296.

²⁶ Cf. VERNANT/VIDAL-NAQUET 1988.

necessarily “democratic” will suggest that tragedy is centred on the idea of the polis²⁷. Within such work, the good community does not appear as a transhistorical ideal, but as a version of Athens itself, constructed by tragedy or alternatively shown by tragedy to be persistently difficult of construction.

In a form of reaction to this scholarly consensus, there have also been recent moves to review the ways in which tragedy is not bound to the contours of the city. There is space to consider instead how un-Athenian tragedy is, and specifically how its attention can fix on the spaces between cities. Different scholars have invited us to consider the figures who are a-polis, without a city, and the ways in which tragedy builds intersections among cities or dispenses with the city entirely²⁸. Tragedy is rooted in the Athenian polis, but constantly looks outwards to other communities and brings figures from elsewhere on stage, to variously detrimental effect, and it is as fascinated by the workings of exile and migration as it is by the necessity of commitment to one stable point. Tragedy itself migrated, to Sicily and Macedonia in the fifth century, as well as throughout the Greek world in later antiquity²⁹. Focus on these “homeless” dimensions of tragedy is partly produced by a new understanding of the contemporary world which the readers and audiences of the early twenty-first century inhabit. The world has been brought together and made smaller over the past three decades or so by the forces of globalisation. It has subsequently been brought together in a very different way as forced migration from the global south – the largest involuntary movement of people since the end of the second world war – generates political challenges that acutely tax current systems. When we look at tragedy now, we may see exile and migration as much as we see community.

Tragedy homeless

Sometimes it is reasonable to argue that exile and migration are deployed on the tragic stage in order to bolster the idea of Athens. Supplication is one driver of migration in tragedy, and plays of supplication, like *Oedipus at Colonus* or *The Children of Herakles*, where exiles and refugees obtain assistance from Athens, have attracted renewed attention. Supplication has been tied to Athenian imperial ambitions in the major study by Angeliki Tzanetou, which suggests that such plays help to manufacture consent to Athenian rule³⁰. Sara Forsdyke has argued that exile, including exile in tragedy, works to demonstrate the superiority of democracy to other political systems³¹, and Rush Rehm also ties tragedy’s interest in exile and expatriation to its focus on Athens and the land of Attica³². But focus on exile and migration in Greek tragedy

²⁷ On the question of tragedy’s connection with democracy some central statements include GOLDHILL 1987, GRIFFIN 1998, GOLDHILL 2000, RHODES 2003.

²⁸ REHM 2002, TZANETOU 2012.

²⁹ The bibliography on this issue is a growth area. See CARTER 2011, BOSHER 2012, CSAPO/WILSON 2015, STEWART 2017, BRAUND/HALL/WYLES (edd.), 2019, CSAPO/WILSON 2020.

³⁰ Cf. TZANETOU 2002.

³¹ Cf. FORSDYKE 2005.

³² Cf. REHM 2002.

speaks to us more clearly as our own geopolitical context undergoes sinister mutations. The figure of Oedipus, who arguably dominated thinking about tragedy in the early twentieth century, is one who is at home nowhere, especially not where he most thinks he is at home; although there are many conclusions which we could draw from his commanding position in the collective imaginary, the essential homelessness of the human subject might be one³³. The figure of Dionysos, who has arguably dominated thinking about tragedy since mid-twentieth century, is forever on the move, arriving at places and being rejected; again we could draw many conclusions from this dynamic, but its inescapable territorial instability would be of a piece with many of them³⁴.

If we move away from these iconic figures, we can register anew how many other displaced persons there are in the tragic corpus. Some of them are captive slaves in forced mobility, such as Cassandra in *Agamemnon* and Andromache in her eponymous play, and the choruses of the *Libation Bearers*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and *Helen*. In *Hekabe* and *Trojan Women* the choruses are slaves who are similarly on the point of leaving their homelands. The suppliant women of both Aeschylus and Euripides have to travel in order to make their supplication, as do the children of Heracles, and with them come Danaus and Adrastus, Iolaus and Alcmene. Other choruses travel of their own free will but are then caught up in conflicts which prevent them from arriving anywhere, such as the Phoenician Women in their eponymous play, and, to an extent, the Asian women of the *Bacchae*. A list of others whose home is not assured would include Aegisthus, who was exiled as a child, Orestes in his plays, Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Philoctetes, while Ion in his play is doubtful about his home in Athens, and Theseus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, safely ensconced in Athens, nonetheless identifies with the exiles from Thebes because, as he points out, he was himself an exile once³⁵. These centrifugal tendencies of tragedy mean that exile in one form or another constitutes the end of several plays such as *Heracles Mad*, *Bacchae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Euripides's *Electra*. Even plays which seem focussed on domestic relationships within a tightly-knit family, such as *Hippolytus* or the *Women of Trachis*, are themselves displaced. Theseus in *Hippolytus* is in exile in Troezen, and the wife and children of Herakles are similarly guests in Trachis; towards the end of *The Women of Trachis* Herakles is distressed to discover that his mother and other family members are elsewhere³⁶. Of the thirty-one plays which we can still read in their entirety, exile features in twenty-three, and there are more signs of exile and displacement in the fragments. Rootlessness is as much a preoccupation of Athenian tragedy as is the rootedness of the household or city. And for good dramatic reasons: exile tests the individuals concerned sometimes to destruction, while also requiring that they put on performances for the host community, in acts of supplication, integration, or perhaps deception; and it subjects the political decisions of the host community to a similarly rigorous scrutiny.

³³ Cf. MACINTOSH 2004.

³⁴ Cf. HALL/MACINTOSH/WRIGLEY 2004.

³⁵ Soph. OC. 562-566.

³⁶ Soph. *Trach.* 1151-56.

This dimension of the genre has elicited striking responses among recent developments in the reception of Greek tragedy. In 2011 the civil war in Syria put more than one million people on the move, joining other kinds of forced movement from Afghanistan, Iraq and other embattled countries. The political response to the refugee crisis has been found inadequate by many commentators³⁷; the aesthetic response has included versions of classical drama. Such dramas have moved audiences and provoked them, suggesting ways to reset our relationship to ancient tragedy.

In 2015 Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women* was staged in Syracuse, Sicily, itself one of the centres of the migrant crisis because Italy, along with Greece, is a landing-point for those who travel from North Africa. With a dramatic form that has been experienced as alien and forbidding, because so centred on the chorus, Aeschylus's play is rarely performed³⁸. But commentators were quick to see the renewed contemporary relevance of the ancient play, the uncanny way in which, having been typed as truly archaic for years, it now spoke urgently to twenty-first century concerns³⁹. These included gender-based violence and democratic practice as well as the central issue of the reception of migrants, so that "one of the world's most ancient plays turned out to be one of the world's most timely"⁴⁰. Critics were ready to make the connection: "The spectacle unfolding in Europe and the Middle East right now isn't something anomalous. The plot line has been with us from the start of our dramatic tradition"⁴¹. With an audience that included refugee groups, the production was deliberately designed to connect with the contemporary dilemma⁴².

Two years later, David Greig developed a new translation for the production that would initiate his tenure as Artistic Director of the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh. This production subsequently toured to Belfast, Newcastle, and London. In a newspaper interview, Greig shows that the Aeschylean *Suppliant Women* is timely not simply because it mobilises women who could be counted as refugees, but because it ties their demands to the demands that democracy makes on citizens, probing the democratic process of decision-making that follows on the refugees' arrival:

This play is primal, it's the very beginning of what drama is, it's a play from a year before democracy was invented in Athens ...To have theatre and democracy linked like that, I think is a really important and profound statement about what the role and purpose of theatre is.⁴³

³⁷ Cf. TRILLING 2019, HENLEY 2018, EVANS/BAUMAN 2016.

³⁸ Cf. PAPADOPOULOU 2011, 112.

³⁹ For discussion of the dating of *Suppliant Women* see most recently SOMMERSTEIN 2019, 40-44.

⁴⁰ ROWLAND 2015.

⁴¹ McNULTY 2015.

⁴² Cf. TAPLIN 2015, ROWLAND 2015.

⁴³ BROOKS 2016. Since we do not know the date of *Suppliant Women*, this is not an accurate statement, but Greig's point about the link is still relevant.

The democratic credentials of the production were also boosted by the fact that the chorus was played by fifty local volunteers, firstly women recruited in Edinburgh and subsequently, women from each city where the production toured. In each city, the play was closely tied to its locality as well as representing the stress of the migrant Egyptian women⁴⁴.

Democracy is arguably a source of disquiet as well as celebration in the play; although Pelasgus is represented as the paradoxically democratic monarch, the Danaids attribute sole power to him, and are not very convinced by his insistence otherwise⁴⁵. Pelasgus is very careful to say that he must share the decision to extend refuge to the women, consulting with the citizens because he does not rule as an autocrat but democratically (*Aesch. Supp.* 368-69, 398-99):

ἐγὼ δ' ἂν οὐ κραίνοιμι ὑπόσχεσιν πάρος,
ἄστοις δὲ πᾶσι τῶνδε κοινώσας πέρι.

I cannot make a binding promise beforehand, but only after making this matter known to the whole citizen body.

*

εἶπον δὲ καὶ πρὶν, οὐκ ἄνευ δήμου τόδε
πράξαίμι ἂν, οὐδέ περ κρατῶν,

I have already said I am not prepared to do this without the people's approval, even though I have the power.

Yet there is a slippage in the democratic practice when he coaches Danaus in what to say (καὶ σὸν διδάξω πατέρα ποῖα χρὴ λέγειν⁴⁶) and his discourse is later called by Danaus δημηγόρους... στροφὰς meaning something like "rhetorical twists and turns", as if it is not quite straightforward.⁴⁷ Sommerstein's recent study concludes that "Certain features of Danaus' speech may disturb a thoughtful listener" and goes on to point out that δημηγόρος is used for "orator", in later fifth-century texts, in pejorative contexts⁴⁸. The assembly votes unanimously, οὐ διχορρόπως, to offer refuge to the Egyptian women⁴⁹, and one might wonder if this unanimity is a celebration of democracy or perhaps, a wry acknowledgement that this could never happen – how could a democracy be completely united?⁵⁰ Given that Danaus reports the

⁴⁴ Cf. SIERZ 2017.

⁴⁵ *Aesch. Supp.* 370-375, PAPADOPOULOU 2011, 67-69.

⁴⁶ *Aesch. Supp.* 519.

⁴⁷ *Aesch. Supp.* 623. This seemingly innocuous line is quite complex, since different editions, disagreeing with the sole manuscript M, suggest different cases of the nouns and adjectives. In particular, there is disagreement about εὐπειθής and εὐπιθεῖς, i.e. whether the words are persuasive or the people are easily persuaded – even 'obedient'. See SOMMERSTEIN ad loc. 2019, 264.

⁴⁸ SOMMERSTEIN 2019, 257.

⁴⁹ *Aesch. Supp.* 605.

⁵⁰ Cf. RADER 2012, 39: "the fact that Pelasgus brings the matter before his people, usually attributed to democratic sensibility, suggests he might not be so single-minded. We can only imagine what he said to his people – surely

decision, and has a lot of skin in the game, can we even take the announcement at face value?⁵¹ It is very plausible, too, that the democracy of Argos is swiftly overturned in the next part of the trilogy,⁵² thereby undermining any cheerful assumption that it will be easy for democratic institutions to solve the problems generated by exiles and refugees.⁵³

The play thus poses sharp questions about its society and the audience who watches it, initially the democratic Athenians but, in the contemporary productions, those in Syracuse, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Belfast and London. The aesthetics meet the politics when the play turns outwards to scrutinise the audience in its collective decision-making⁵⁴. Together, these two European productions of *Suppliant Women* may be thought to ask “What is this continent about?”⁵⁵, but two years earlier another continent had asked related questions. A new ancient tragedy emerged from the heart of crisis in 2013. A group of over fifty Syrian women refugees, displaced to Jordan, responded to an invitation to take part in a production of Euripides’ *Trojan Women*. The company Refugee Productions, which was headed by filmmakers with degrees in Classics, found women for the play’s cast from UNHCR food queues and community centres⁵⁶. Despite never having acted before or, in some cases, visited the theatre, the women put on a production, with two leading Syrian theatre professionals, director Omar Abu Saada and playwright Mohammad Al Attar. The production was so well received that it became the subject of an award-winning documentary by Yasmin Fedda, called *Queens of Syria*, and it subsequently toured to Switzerland and the UK (under the direction of Zoe Lafferty). The actors were invited also to Georgetown University, but the United States government – somewhat ironically – refused them visas⁵⁷.

In the production, the women weave their own stories among the words and actions of Euripides’ drama, with part of the impulse being to communicate their experiences to audiences largely unaware of the nature of life as a refugee. In newspaper accounts and other media, the women appear persistently anxious to tell stories that show how normal their lives were before the Syrian civil war, in order to dispel myths about refugees being criminal, violent, or workshy⁵⁸. All such accounts make clear that the production was a very memorable

there must have been dissenters. Why is it that Danaus, who obviously has an interest in his daughters’ acceptance in Argos (he becomes king after Pelasgus’ death) announces the decision?”.

⁵¹ SOMMERSTEIN suggests the contrary (2019, 257) but points out that Pelasgus has not been completely straight with his audience anyway, since he has not, in Danaus’ account, explicitly raised the possibility of war.

⁵² On Danaus’ elevation to or seizure of kingship in Argos Cf. SOMMERSTEIN 2019, 13, PAPADOPOULOU 2011, 26, 93 and GARVIE 2006, 199.

⁵³ Cf. SWIFT 2015 on the challenges to democratic practice thrown up by supplication; she focusses on Euripides’ *Children of Heracles* but could easily have discussed other plays.

⁵⁴ The aesthetics of the Sicilian production, in the sense of its language(s) and its music, might also be considered political; its mixed linguistic and musical registers can be described, positively, as a ‘contamination’ (ATTARDI 2015).

⁵⁵ Cf. ROWLAND 2015.

⁵⁶ Cf. EAGAR 2016.

⁵⁷ Cf. GOLDMAN 2014, 2015.

⁵⁸ Cf. MASTERS 2016.

experience for actors and audiences⁵⁹. Commentators focus on how moved the audiences were, and on the sense of immediate communication. Thus one woman on stage addresses the audience: “We are not here to entertain you! Or sing a song! I have an anger and a message to pass to you. We come from the Troy of this age . . .”⁶⁰. As Syria is Troy, without noticeable mediation, so the women connect directly with the audience. The political aim of the production is thus to create a community among audience and actors, and the “entertainment” dimension of theatre is explicitly rejected, although the emotional effect is clearly foregrounded. Significantly, the process itself of putting on the play was found to be therapeutic. The women discovered that by sharing their experiences with one another, each was validated, recognised, and strengthened; they created their own community, out of very little. “We came to a new society and we were isolated. Doing the play made us break the ice and we started to connect with others and make some friends”⁶¹.

Euripides’ *Trojan Women* is not the only play to have resonated with women refugees. Another production emerged from the refugee camp of Shatila, in Lebanon, which married women’s testimony to parts of the script of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. This play was first called *Antigone in Syria*, and was produced in Beirut in 2014; subsequently it was renamed *Antigone of Shatila* and was performed again in Beirut in 2015, touring to Europe in 2016. The same team of playwright and director was behind this play as collaborated on the *Trojan Women*, Mohammad Al Attar and Omar Abu Saada. Again the women who took part had no experience of theatre, and the playwright suggests in one interview that “au début, c’était difficile de les convaincre. Après ce qu’elles avaient vécu, le théâtre semblait bien futile” (“at first it was difficult to convince them. After what they had lived through, the theatre seemed thoroughly pointless”).⁶² But in the event the women responded to the play’s concerns, especially to the very direct notion of the unburied family member, which many had experienced themselves. The playwright suggests that the women seized the play as an opportunity to articulate their grief: “C’est instinctivement qu’elles ont ressenti que ce travail était une opportunité de faire le deuil et de donner à la tristesse le poids qu’elle mérite” (“They instinctively felt that the work was an opportunity to mourn, and to give sadness the weight which it deserves”) ⁶³.

While the *Trojan Women* is often thought of as an unmitigated cry of pain, *Antigone* is usually recognised as a complex play which invites a range of responses. For instance, some commentators were quick to suggest that Creon figures Assad, but the playwright notes that the tyrant in the lives of Syrian women could be any man, not just the political autocrat⁶⁴. Some of the women even identified with Creon while others found Ismene or Haimon the most

⁵⁹ Cf. SHILLING 2016; cf. ROTHE 2015.

⁶⁰ Quoted in EAGAR 2016.

⁶¹ Quoted in TRAN 2016.

⁶² Cf. BARBIER 2016. Translations from French and German newspapers are mine.

⁶³ Cf. SAADE 2016.

⁶⁴ Cf. ROSS 2014, ROSS 2014a, SAADE 2016.

engaging characters⁶⁵. Yet few women wanted to play these other characters – Antigone remained a compelling presence for them all, with several commentators remarking that the women found themselves in Antigone, a woman who emerges from the shadows and takes up resistance⁶⁶. One aspect of Antigone, however, was decisively rejected. The Antigone of Shatila was determined to go on living; Al Attar insists that “Aucune n’a envie de mourir en martyr ou en héroïne sacrificielle” (“not one of the women wanted to die as a martyr or a sacrificial heroine”)⁶⁷. Instead, an alternative ending seized the imagination:

The similarity between their stories and part of *Antigone*’s story did not inspire any of them to follow their tragic fate. “With time, I understood that the part of Antigone that is inside each of us was the stubborn part that wanted to live, not to die”, says Esraa, one of the actors, during the performance.⁶⁸

Moreover, it was important that Antigone’s story be repeated and thus shared. “Before we were introduced to Antigone’s story, we felt alone,” one woman is quoted as saying. “Then we realised these tragedies keep happening throughout history and it gave us the courage to speak out. Together we feel stronger and more confident”⁶⁹.

In all these reflections it is evident that the tragedy is providing a “home” for those who have been savagely uprooted. The note of friendship and community is struck repeatedly, not only in terms of the women brought together on stage, but also in terms of communication with the audience, however fraught, and identification over time and space with Antigone herself. This community is built on the articulation and sharing of emotions; the dramaturges are very clear, in their published statements, that theatre is therapeutic for the participants because it acknowledges the strength of emotions that may have been silenced, and offers a voice with which to articulate them⁷⁰. Although enabling the voices of hitherto unrepresented people is itself a political gesture, Al Attar is well aware that this refugee theatre is political in other ways which also implicate the audience. The production was first seen in Beirut, as above, but then moved to Marseille. In Marseille, Al Attar is quoted as saying, the audience was quite homogeneous, the “white middle class” (he uses the English term even though he is speaking in French). Thus, he concludes, the performance was a kind of encounter between the north coast of the Mediterranean and the south; the spectators met the migrants before the crossing, before they appeared in Europe as displaced victims of the long journey, or as drowned victims of the sea. “Pour une fois, ils les voient avant le parcours en soi, et non pas

⁶⁵ Cf. ROSS 2014, ROSS 2014a, SAADE 2016.

⁶⁶ Cf. FORDHAM 2014.

⁶⁷ Cf. SAADE 2016.

⁶⁸ Cf. AL ATTAR 2016.

⁶⁹ Cf. LANG 2015.

⁷⁰ Cf. BARBIER 2016, ARVERS 2016.

en tant que noyés ou arrivants. La salle était une confrontation entre la rive sud de la Méditerranée et la rive nord”⁷¹.

Again, this production of *Antigone* was so successful and moving that a documentary was made about it, titled *We are not Princesses*⁷². This is a remarkable film, full of striking anecdotes about the women’s earlier lives in Syria, about their lives as refugees, and about how the play came about. Although the subject matter is so sobering, the women laugh throughout the film. There is a running joke about the revolutionary implications of women smoking cigarettes, and one woman says that Antigone would definitely have taken up smoking, as an act of defiance towards convention. Some of the film reflects on how the women’s exile has been partly liberating. One woman remarks that she used to be Ismene, but has now had to learn to stand up for herself, thus becoming more like Antigone. Another much older woman identifies more with Creon as a ruler, searching for a way to bring order to chaos. Towards the end several women show resignation when they agree that they are not important – their lives were not important, and their deaths will not be either. Fordham quotes the sentiment from the performance: “ ‘We are not princesses,’ she says in a clear, light voice with more pathos than self-pity. ‘No one knows of us and no one would speak of us if we died’ ”⁷³. The long life of the Greek tragedy is here implicitly contrasted with the obscurity of the women’s lives. But the play also offers a way to counter this resignation; as Abu Saada says, “Contrairement à l’histoire d’Antigone dont on connaît la fin, leurs histoires se poursuivent et les derniers chapitres ne sont pas encore écrits. Elles sont toujours portées par leurs espoirs” (“Contrary to the history of Antigone whose end is known, their histories continue and the last chapters are not yet written. They are still lifted by their hopes”)⁷⁴. Here, the play is consigned to its lethal past, whereas the lives of the women are still unfolding.

Abu Saada and Al Attar have most recently completed their new ancient trilogy by collaborating with women refugees on a production based on Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Aulis*. This was cast from refugees living in Berlin, and made explicit some issues which had already started to emerge with earlier productions, concerning the present lives of the women in their new homes rather than their mourning for the war. This production reworked Iphigeneia’s story along the lines of an audition for the role of Iphigeneia, with nine young women⁷⁵ who explain their own lives in terms of “war, familial obligation, love, passion and sacrifice”⁷⁶, mingling their words with the words of the Greek play. The first venue for the production, the disused Tempelhof airport outside Berlin, has most recently been used to house refugees, and the production addressed the women’s lives now, in their adopted country, rather than

⁷¹ Cf. SAADE 2016.

⁷² I was fortunate enough to see this film at a screening at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, Oxford. It has been shown at several film festivals, and as with *Queens of Syria*, trailers and other associated material remain online.

⁷³ Cf. FORDHAM 2014.

⁷⁴ Cf. ARVERS 2016, quoting Abu Saada.

⁷⁵ VOGEL 2017 notes that they are between 17 and 29.

⁷⁶ Cf. DAVIS 2018.

focussing on their earlier experiences in Syria.⁷⁷ While both dramaturges had earlier commented on the duration of the women's displacement outside Syria, and how their attitudes changed during the period⁷⁸, in this adaptation the note struck was often one of loneliness and disorientation⁷⁹. At the same time, there was increased emphasis on the young women's engagement with theatre and performance itself. Theatre can counter isolation because it is one of the few spaces where people can develop "ehrliche Reflexion über die Welt und das Austauschen von und Anteilnehmen an Erfahrungen", ("reflection on the world and exchange of, and sympathy with, experiences")⁸⁰. As with the previous two plays in the trilogy, the refugee actors speak of the community they develop in rehearsals for the production, and of how that helps them find their voice⁸¹.

This Middle Eastern "trilogy" of refugee tragedies is probably the most notable dramatic creation of the migrant crisis so far. The trilogy has itself migrated across the globe and occupied liminal spaces such as the abandoned airport. It has also, as noted above, offered a "home" to its actors in the sense of somewhere where they are valued, recognised and heard. The trilogy can also be seen to pose searching questions about the relation between aesthetics and politics, tragedy and entertainment⁸². In this essay I have considered a few theoretical positions on how the emotions produced by tragedy serve, or do not serve, to bind and nurture communities; but the theories rarely considered the possibility of acting by real-life refugees. Commentators are unanimous not only about the emotional reach of the performances, but also about the discomfort thus produced, as politics and entertainment are shockingly confounded⁸³. Like Schlegel's audience, all were moved together, and felt their emotions to be correct; but an alternative audience is that of Raymond Williams, unable and even unwilling to overcome the disorder of the world, and so complicit in further tragedy. This essay does not escape the uncomfortable dynamic. Greek tragedy, in all its modern manifestations, still turns on its audience and asks why they are there.

⁷⁷ Not coincidentally, Al Attar also now lives in Berlin, whereas Abu Saada continues to reside in Syria, and Al Attar has gone on record to reveal that he grapples with the same issues of displacement and belonging; cf. PETROWSKAJA 2017.

⁷⁸ Cf. ROSS 2014, and MASTERS 2016.

⁷⁹ Cf. VOGEL 2017 on "Einsamkeit" and "Verlorenheit", and cf. also DAVIS 2018.

⁸⁰ Cf. VOGEL 2017, quoting Al Attar.

⁸¹ Cf. DAVIS 2018.

⁸² Cf. SAADE 2016 in which Al Attar meditates on the relation of theatre to truth and the necessity for some detachment in order to represent and thus to think: "Le but n'est pas seulement de pleurer sur notre situation mais également de prendre de la distance vis-à-vis d'elle pour pouvoir la penser" ("the goal is not simply to weep over our situation but equally to take some distance from the situation so as to be able to think it").

⁸³ Cf. FORDHAM 2014 on audience shock; and SHILLING 2016 on the 'stark moment of self-recognition' for the audience. HEMMING 2016 notes that refugee suffering is now 'customary' in the media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AL ATTAR 2016 = Mohammad Al Attar, *While I was Waiting*, Kunsten Festival des Arts, 2016, <https://www.kfda.be/en/program/---2>. Consulted July 2020.
- ARVERS 2016 = Fabienne Arvers, *Dans Antigone of Shatila, Omar Abusaada donne la parole à des femmes réfugiées*, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 1 February 2016. <http://www.lesrencontresalechelle.com/festival/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Presse-Antigone-of-Shatila.pdf>. Consulted July 2020.
- ATTARDI 2015 = Giuseppe Attardi, *Le Supplici di Eschilo parlano siciliano Ovidia e Incudine sfidano i "puristi"*, *La Sicilia*, 26 April 2015.
- BARBIER 2016 = Marie-Eve Barbier, *Dix-sept réfugiées Syriennes revisitent Antigone*, *La Provence*, 29 Janvier 2016.
- BOSHER 2012 = Kathryn Boshier, *Theater Outside Athens: Drama in Greek Sicily and South Italy*, Cambridge 2012.
- BRAUND/HALL/WYLES 2019 = David Braund, Edith Hall, and Rosie Wyles (edd.), *Theatre and Performance Culture Around the Black Sea*, Cambridge 2019.
- BROOKS 2016 = Libby Brooks, "This play is primal": David Greig on an ancient drama more relevant than ever, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2016, www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/sep/06/david-greig-lyceum-theatre-aeschylus-the-suppliant-women. Consulted July 2020.
- BUDELMANN 2005 = Felix Budelmann, *Greek Tragedies in West African Adaptations*, in Barbara Goff ed., *Classics and Colonialism*, London 2005, 118-146.
- CARTER 2011 = David Carter, *Why Athens?: a reappraisal of tragic politics*, Oxford 2011.
- CSAPO/WILSON 2015 = Csapo, Eric and Peter Wilson, *Drama Outside Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC*, *Trends in Classics* 7.2 (2015), 316-395.
- CSAPO/WILSON 2020 = Eric Csapo and Peter Wilson, *Theatre Beyond Athens: Documents for a Social and Economic History of the Theatre to 300 BC*, Vol. II, Cambridge, 2020.
- DAVIS 2018 = Austin Davis, *A Greek Classic Resurfaces in Syrian Women's Voices*, *Al Fanar Media*, 28 January 2018.
- DUDOUYT 2016 = Cecile Dudouyt, *The Reception of Greek Theater in France since 1700*, in VAN ZYL SMIT 2016, 238-56.
- EAGAR 2016 = Charlotte Eagar, *A modern tragedy told by the "Queens of Syria"*, *FT Magazine*, 15 July 2016.
- EAGLETON 2003 = Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: the idea of the tragic*, Malden MA 2003.
- EVANS/BAUMAN 2016 = Brad Evans and Zygmunt Bauman, *The Refugee Crisis Is Humanity's Crisis*, *The Stone*, 2 May 2016.
- FORDHAM 2104 = Alice Fordham, *Syrian Women Displaced by War Make Tragedy of 'Antigone' Their Own*, *NPR Parallels*, December 13 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/12/12/370343232/syrian-women-displaced-by-war-make-tragedy-of-antigone-their-own>. Consulted July 2020.

- FORSDYKE 2005 = Sara Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism and Democracy: the politics of exclusion in Ancient Greece*, Princeton NJ 2005.
- FRADINGER 2011 = Moira Fradinger, *An Argentine Tradition*, in Erin Mee and Helene Foley (edd.), *Antigone on the Contemporary World Stage*, Oxford 2011, 76-89.
- GOFF 2016 = Barbara Goff, *The leopard-skin of Herakles: traditional wisdom and untraditional folly in a Ghanaian Alcestis*, in Poulheria Kyriakou and Antonios Rengakos (edd.), *Wisdom and Folly in Euripides: in honour of Danny Iakov*, Berlin 2016, 347-64.
- GOLDHILL 1987 = Simon Goldhill, *The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology*, "JHS" 107 (1987), 58-76.
- GOLDHILL 2000 = Simon Goldhill, *Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: the politics of Aeschylean tragedy, once again*, "JHS" 120 (2000), 34-56.
- GOLDMAN 2014 = Derek Goldman, *Listening for Unheard Voices – Syria The Trojan Women*, HowlRound Theatre Commons, 18 September 2014, <https://howlround.com/listening-unheard-voices-syria>. Consulted October 2019.
- GOLDMAN 2015 = Derek Goldman, *Livestreaming "Voices Unheard: The Syria: Trojan Women Summit" from Amman, Jordan & Washington DC*. HowlRound Theatre Commons, 19 September 2015. <http://howlround.com/livestreaming-voices-unheard-the-syria-trojan-women-summit-from-amman-jordan-washington-dc-fri-sept>. Consulted October 2019.
- GREGORY 2006 = Fiona Gregory, *High-Cultural Histrionics: Judith Anderson's 1955 Australian Tour*, *Australasian Drama Studies* St. Lucia 48 (2006), 99-114.
- GRIFFIN 1998 = Jasper Griffin, *The Social Function of Tragedy*, "CQ" 48.1 (1998), 39-61.
- HALL 1996 = Edith Hall, *Is there a Polis in Aristotle's Poetics?*, in M. Silk (ed). *Tragedy and the Tragic*, Oxford 1996, 295-309.
- HALL/MACINTOSH/WRIGLEY 2004 = Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Amanda Wrigley (edd.), *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Oxford 2004.
- HALLIWELL 2011 = Stephen Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: interpretations of Greek poetics from Homer to Longinus*, Oxford 2011.
- HEATH 2009 = M. Heath, *Should there have been a polis in Aristotle's Poetics?*, "CQ" 59.2 (2009), 468-485.
- HENLEY 2018 = Jon Henley, *EU migration crisis: what are the key issues?* *The Guardian*, 27 June 2018.
- IOANNIDOU 2017 = Eleftheria Ioannidou, *Greek fragments in postmodern frames: rewriting tragedy 1970-2005*, Oxford 2017.
- LANG 2015 = Kirsty Lang, *The tragedy giving hope to Syria's women*, *BBC Magazine*, 5 July 2015.
- LEONARD 2015 = Miriam Leonard, *Tragic Modernities*, Cambridge MA 2015.
- MCCOY 2013 = Marina Berzins McCoy, *Wounded Heroes: Vulnerability as a Virtue in Ancient Greek Literature and Philosophy*, Oxford 2013.
- MACINTOSH 2004 = Fiona Macintosh, *Oedipus in the East End: from Freud to Berkoff*, in Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Amanda Wrigley (edd.), *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Oxford 2004, 313-28.

- MASTERS 2016 = Tim Masters, *Queens of Syria gives modern twist to ancient tale*, *BBC News* 6 July 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-36711948. Consulted July 2020.
- MCNULTY 2015 = Charles McNulty, *What might Aeschylus say about the European refugee crisis?* *Los Angeles Times*, 10 September 2015.
- MITCHELL 1995 = Tony Mitchell, *Adelaide Ristori tours Australia 22 July-4 December 1875: Part One*, *Australasian Drama Studies* 26 (1995), 123-41.
- MONAGHAN 2016 = Paul Monaghan, *Greek Drama in Australia*, in VAN ZYL SMIT 2016, 422-45.
- PETROWSKAJA 2017 = Katja Petrowskaja, *What Does Theater Mean for the Revolution?*, *100 Years of Now*, *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, 21 September 2017, <https://journal.hkw.de/en/about>. Consulted July 2020.
- RADER 2012 = Richard Rader, *Review of T. Papadopoulou Aeschylus: Suppliants*. "CR" 62.1 (2012), 38-40.
- REHM 2002 = Rush Rehm, *The Play of Space: spatial transformation in Greek tragedy*, Princeton 2002.
- RHODES 2003 = P. J. Rhodes, *Nothing to Do with Democracy: Athenian drama and the polis*. "JHS" 123 (2003), 104-119.
- ROSS 2014 = Tabitha Ross, *Interview with Mohammad Al Attar, Antigone Dramaturg*, *OpenArt*, 24 October 2014. <https://www.openartfoundation.org/news/2014/11/5/interview-with-mohammad-al-attar-antigone-dramaturge>. Consulted July 2020.
- ROSS 2014a = Tabitha Ross, *Syrian refugee women in Lebanon take heart from Antigone – in pictures*, *The Guardian*, 10 December 2014.
- ROTHE 2015 = E. Nina Rothe, *Queens of Syria Extinguishes the Stereotypes Created by War*, *Huffpost*, 8 October 2015. <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/queens-of-syria-extinguishes-b-7964708>. Consulted July 2020.
- ROWLAND 2016 = Ingrid D. Rowland, *From Aeschylus to the EU*, *New York Review of Books*, 17 July 2015.
- SAADE 2016 = Tamara Saade, *Antigone de Syrie*, *Mouvement: magazine culturel indisciplinaire*, 9 March 2016, <http://www.mouvement.net/teteatete/entretiens/antigones-contemporaines>. Consulted July 2020.
- SCHLEGEL 1815 = August Wilhelm Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, Vol. I, trans. John Black, London 1815.
- SHILLING 2016 = Jane Shilling, *Queens of Syria: how to turn human tragedy into drama*, *The Telegraph*, 8 July 2016.
- SIERZ 2017 = Aleks Sierz, *The Suppliant Women at The Young Vic*, *The Theatre Times*, 25 November 2017, <https://thetheatretimes.com/suppliant-women-young-vic/>. Consulted July 2020.
- STEINMEYER 2007 = Elke Steinmeyer, *Post-Apartheid Electra: in the city of paradise*, in Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (edd.), *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, Oxford 2007, 102-118.
- STEWART 2017 = Edmund Stewart, *Greek Tragedy on the Move*, Oxford 2017.

- SWIFT 2015 = Laura Swift, *If only we could ask Euripides about refugees*, *The Conversation*, 2 October 2015,
<https://theconversation.com/if-only-we-could-ask-euripides-about-refugees-48352>.
 Consulted July 2020.
- TAPLIN 2015 = Oliver Taplin, *The strength and beauty of other cultures*, *Engramma*, Luglio/Agosto 2015, http://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=2438. Consulted July 2020.
- TRAN 2016 = Mark Tran, *Adaptation of Trojan Women starring Syrian refugees set for UK tour*, *The Guardian*, 20 April 2016.
- TRILLING 2019 = Daniel Trilling, *Lights in the Distance: exile and refuge at the borders of Europe*, London 2019.
- TZANETOU 2012 = Angeliki Tzanetou, *City of Suppliants: tragedy and the Athenian empire*, Austin TX, 2012.
- VAN STEEN 2016 = Gonda Van Steen, *Greece: a history of turns, traditions, and transformations*, in VAN ZYL SMIT 2016, 201-220.
- VAN ZYL SMIT 2007 = Betine Van Zyl Smit, *Multicultural Reception: Greek drama in South Africa in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries*, in Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (edd.), *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Oxford 2007, 373-85.
- VAN ZYL SMIT 2016 = Betine Van Zyl Smit (ed.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Greek Drama*, Chichester UK, 2016.
- VERNANT/VIDAL-NAQUET 1988 = J-P. Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York 1988.
- VOGEL 2017 = Elke Vogel, *Dercons Schauspiel-Premiere: Syrerinnen spielen «Iphigenie»*, *Amerika Woche*, 1 October 2017.
- WALSH 1984 = G. B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry*, Chapel Hill NC 1984.
- VAN WEYENBERG 2013 = Astrid Van Weyenberg, *The politics of adaptation: contemporary African drama and Greek tragedy*, Amsterdam 2013.
- WILLIAMS 1979 = Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, revised edition, London 1979.